Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

An Incomplete List of White Privileges in Archives and Action Items for Dismantling Them*

*All of the following call for nuance, context, and an awareness that oppression is structural.

**APPRAISAL**

** PRIVILEGE**

I can be sure I can find materials representing people of my race/created by people of my race.

** ACTION**

- Implement policies to collect materials representing and created by people of color. Note that it will take time to build trust and change racist trajectories.
- Contact archivists at your local repository and tell them you want to use collections created by people of color.
- Institute participatory appraisal models that share appraisal decision-making power with communities of color.

** PRIVILEGE**

The objects I feel are valuable for my culture are also deemed valuable in archives.

** ACTION**

- Expand our cultural values to value materials created by communities of color.
- Educate yourself (continually, constantly) about what specific communities of color value. Don’t expect communities of color to do the work for you.
- Work collaboratively with communities of color as equal partners in appraisal decisions. Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can assume archives will be committed to the preservation of materials from my community.

** ACTION**

- Educate yourself about what specific communities of color value.
- Demonstrate commitment to those communities through relationship building and power sharing over time.
- Learn and honor culturally specific protocols for what should be preserved or destroyed.
- Train and hire archivists of color so they are making appraisal decisions.

** DESCRIPTION**

** PRIVILEGE**

When I look for materials from my community in archives, they will be described in the finding aid and catalog records using language we use to describe ourselves.

** ACTION**

- Train all archivists to have cultural humility and describe materials using anti-oppressive language.
- Educate yourself continually and constantly.
- Hire more archivists of color to describe Name it.
- Engage communities to ask how they wish to describe themselves.
- Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE**

When I look at descriptions of archival materials, I am not always bombarded by/ reminded of my otherness.

** ACTION**

- Train all archivists to have cultural humility and describe materials using anti-oppressive language.
- Educate yourself continually and constantly.
- Hire more archivists of color to describe Name it.
- Engage communities to ask how they wish to describe themselves.
- Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE**

Materials are described using my native language.

** ACTION**

- Hire multilingual people as archivists and translators and translate finding aids into appropriate languages.
- Encourage, value, and give credit for language courses in MLIS programs and as continuing education.
- Teach archivists to write and use terms that are respectful.
- Hire more archivists of color.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can use an archives without eliciting surveillance.

** ACTION**

- Fight like hell to maintain the privacy of users.
- Do not collect data that identifies users.
- Do not require users to show an ID to access collections.
- Do not treat users as thieves.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can be sure funders will see the value of my collections rather than designate them as "niche."

** ACTION**

- Communicate to funding agencies and allocators that their funding priorities often favor whiteness at the expense of people of color.
- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly "universal" projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can assume that when I attend an archival outreach or classroom instruction session, materials created by my community will be represented.

** ACTION**

- Disrupt white supremacy in archival education.
- Create syllabi that reflect authors and communities of color.
- Hold your professors accountable for disrupting white supremacy in the classroom.
- Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS and as continuing education.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can assume archives values communities of color.

** ACTION**

- Train staff at all levels to identify and disrupt white supremacist assumptions.
- Foster a nurturing environment for people of color in the reading room. Create displays and outreach materials that show your archives values communities of color.

** ACCESS/USE**

** PRIVILEGE**

People assume I’m unbiased because of my race.

** ACTION**

- Be center white in archival practice. Question assumptions about professionalism. Think critically about how those assumptions mask white supremacist values. Interrupt colleagues and users when they say racist things.
- Practice a phrase to have in your back pocket (such as “that’s racist!” or “would you say that about a white person?”) to disrupt racist comments.
- Stop perpetuating the myth of archival neutrality.

** PRIVILEGE**

People assume I behave “professionally” because of my race.

** ACTION**

- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly "universal" projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can be sure funders will see the value of my collections rather than designate them as "niche."

** ACTION**

- Communicate to funding agencies and allocators that their funding priorities often favor whiteness at the expense of people of color.
- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly "universal" projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.

** PRIVILEGE**

The objects I feel are valuable for my culture are also deemed valuable in archives.

** ACTION**

- Expand our cultural values to value materials created by communities of color.
- Educate yourself (continually, constantly) about what specific communities of color value. Don’t expect communities of color to do the work for you.
- Work collaboratively with communities of color as equal partners in appraisal decisions. Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can assume archives will be committed to the preservation of materials from my community.

** ACTION**

- Educate yourself about what specific communities of color value.
- Demonstrate commitment to those communities through relationship building and power sharing over time.
- Learn and honor culturally specific protocols for what should be preserved or destroyed.
- Train and hire archivists of color so they are making appraisal decisions.

** EDUCATION**

** PRIVILEGE**

I can assume that when I attend an archival outreach or classroom instruction session, materials created by my community will be represented.

** ACTION**

- Disrupt white supremacy in archival education.
- Create syllabi that reflect authors and communities of color.
- Hold your professors accountable for disrupting white supremacy in the classroom.
- Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS programs and as continuing education.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can be sure there will be other students of my race in my classes. I can be sure there will be instructors of my race.

** ACTION**

- Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS programs to train to be archivists.
- Encourage students of color to pursue PhDs and become archival studies faculty.
- Provide financial and moral support for MLIS & PhD students of color so that they complete their programs.
- Hire archival studies faculty of color.

** PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

** PRIVILEGE**

People assume I’m unbiased because of my race.

** ACTION**

- Be center white in archival practice. Question assumptions about professionalism. Think critically about how those assumptions mask white supremacist values. Interrupt colleagues and users when they say racist things.
- Practice a phrase to have in your back pocket (such as “that’s racist!” or “would you say that about a white person?”) to disrupt racist comments.
- Stop perpetuating the myth of archival neutrality.

** PRIVILEGE**

People assume I behave “professionally” because of my race.

** ACTION**

- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly "universal" projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can be sure funders will see the value of my collections rather than designate them as "niche."

** ACTION**

- Communicate to funding agencies and allocators that their funding priorities often favor whiteness at the expense of people of color.
- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly "universal" projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.

** PRIVILEGE**

The objects I feel are valuable for my culture are also deemed valuable in archives.

** ACTION**

- Expand our cultural values to value materials created by communities of color.
- Educate yourself (continually, constantly) about what specific communities of color value. Don’t expect communities of color to do the work for you.
- Work collaboratively with communities of color as equal partners in appraisal decisions. Compensate them for their labor.

** PRIVILEGE**

I can assume archives will be committed to the preservation of materials from my community.

** ACTION**

- Educate yourself about what specific communities of color value.
- Demonstrate commitment to those communities through relationship building and power sharing over time.
- Learn and honor culturally specific protocols for what should be preserved or destroyed.
- Train and hire archivists of color so they are making appraisal decisions.