University of San Diego

Digital USD

Digital Initiatives Symposium

Apr 26th, 1:15 PM - 1:55 PM

Stepping Back to Move Toward a More Equitable Future for Digital Library Users and Workers

Jennifer Ferretti
Digital Library Federation

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Stepping Back to Move Toward a More Equitable Future for Digital Library Users and Workers

Presenter 1 Title
Digital Library Federation (DLF) Senior Program Officer at the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and as founder and principal of We Here LLC

Session Type
Event

Abstract

Libraries were actively set up to be inhospitable to racialized individuals including barring them from physical buildings, structuring rules and systems to value and uphold whiteness, and evidenced by the lack of racialized individuals in the library profession. Digital libraries, while comparatively newer, suffer from the legacy of these structural inequities and the same lopsided demographics. We need to take a step back and examine these legacies so that this avenue of library work has a chance to become more equitable. This discussion on examining the profession with race and power embedded is relevant for anyone in the profession whether you are a digital library practitioner, administrator, in a formal or informal leadership position, new to the field, or have been here for a while.

Comments

Jennifer A. Ferretti (she/her) is an artist and information professional whose work focuses on digital preservation and digital libraries, recognizing that the definition of these areas aren't solely technology-based, but people- and communities-based. She is a first-generation American Latina/Mestiza, and from this positionality is guided by critical praxis, not neutrality. Both her professional career as Digital Library Federation (DLF) Senior Program Officer at the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and as founder and principal of We Here LLC revolve around community building within library and archives professions and spaces. She's also the Creative Director of the publishing collective up//root: a we here publication. Read more about her work at https://www.jenniferferretti.com/.Jennifer A. Ferretti (she/her) is an artist and information professional whose work focuses on digital preservation and digital libraries, recognizing that the definition of these areas aren't solely technology-based, but people- and communities-based. She is a first-generation American Latina/Mestiza, and from this positionality is guided by critical praxis, not neutrality. Both her professional career as Digital Library Federation (DLF) Senior Program Officer at the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and as founder and principal of We Here LLC revolve around community building within library and archives professions and spaces. She's also the Creative Director of the publishing collective up//root: a we here publication. Read more about her work at https://www.jenniferferretti.com/.

Stepping Back to Move Toward a More Equitable Future for Digital Library Users and Workers

JENNIFER A. FERRETTI

Digital Library Federation (DLF) Senior Program Officer,
Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR)

We Here® Founder, Principal, Creative Director

<u>Who am I?</u>

She/her/hers pronouns

Latina/Mestiza

First-generation US-born

15+ years in the profession

Community organizer

Business owner, We Here®

My maternal grandmother, Mercedes Solórzano

<u>Whose land am I on?</u>

Susquehannock

Nentego (Nanticoke)

Piscataway

native-land.ca

Today's Flow →

Part 1: Context

Part 2: Digital Initiatives

Part 3: Leadership and accountability

Wrap Up + Q&A

Context →

The Racial Past and Present of Libraries

04

"Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of
Race in Library and Information Studies," 2005.

Todd Honma

Abstract:
The issue of race has been evaded in the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS) in the United States through an unquestioned system of white normativity and liberal multicultural discourse. To counteract these paradigms, this paper draws from various scholarly writings about race and racial formation in order to center race as the primary axis of analysis in the reinterpretation of major theoretical issues in LIS. Beginning with an analysis of the historical construction of libraries as an institution complicit in the production and maintenance of white racial privilege and then turning toward present-day discourses surrounding diversity and multiculturalism, this paper discusses at length the epistemological forms of racism that exist in LIS.

04

"By advocating a 'democratizing' mission for the public library, these Americanization programs only served those segments of the population granted access to U.S. citizenship. The purposeful exclusion of citizenship to people of color—the result of convergent racist histories of conquest and colonization of Native Americans and Chicanos, the enslavement of peoples of African descent, and importation of Asian immigrant labor who were legally branded as 'aliens ineligible for citizenship'— paints a very different type of historical narrative and illustrates the racial nature of U.S. citizenship projects, in general, and library Americanization programs, in particular."

— Todd Honma

Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies, 2005.

Abstract:
The issue of race has been evaded in the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS) in the United States through an unquestioned system of white normativity and liberal multicultural discourse. To counteract these paradigms, this paper draws from various scholarly writings about race and racial formation in order to center race as the primary axis of analysis in the reinterpretation of major theoretical issues in LIS. Beginning with an analysis of the historical construction of libraries as an institution complicit in the production and maintenance of white racial privilege and then turning toward present-day discourses surrounding diversity and multiculturalism, this paper discusses at length the epistemological forms of racism that exist in LIS.

The Tougaloo Nine

Still from news footage from the 1961 read-in at the Jackson Municipal Library. Geraldine Edwards talks with the library assistant.

"Libraries as institutions and the LIS profession have a historical legacy of complicity and participation in racism and segregation, but to attribute that solely to our history leads us to believe we are postdiscrimination. On the contrary, we are closely aligned with racism in the US, past and present. We may not have separate restrooms for People of Color and whites, but there are now other structural means of discrimination. We convince ourselves that because we have a *policy* and because we believe in *neutrality*, we are protected from being accused of discrimination. Yet, those very policies, written for subjective interpretation, give staff, library security, and police the opportunity to decide whether or not someone *appears* as if they are utilizing the library properly and the way it was *intended* to be used."

— Anastasia Chiu, Fobazi M. Ettarh, Jennifer A. Ferretti
Not the Shark, but the Water: How Neutrality and Vocational Awe Intertwine to Uphold White Supremacy, 2021.

KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE

Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory

edited by Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight

Who works in libraries?

Workers by race and ethnicity, 2017.

Racial breakdown in 2017, as reported by the American Library Association:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native: 1.20%
- Asian: 3.6%
- Black or African American: 4.4%
- Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 0.20%
- White: 86.7%
- Other: 4%

Other
4%

Asian
3.6%

Black or African American
4.4%

White
86.6%

Hispanic or Latino
4.7%

95.3%
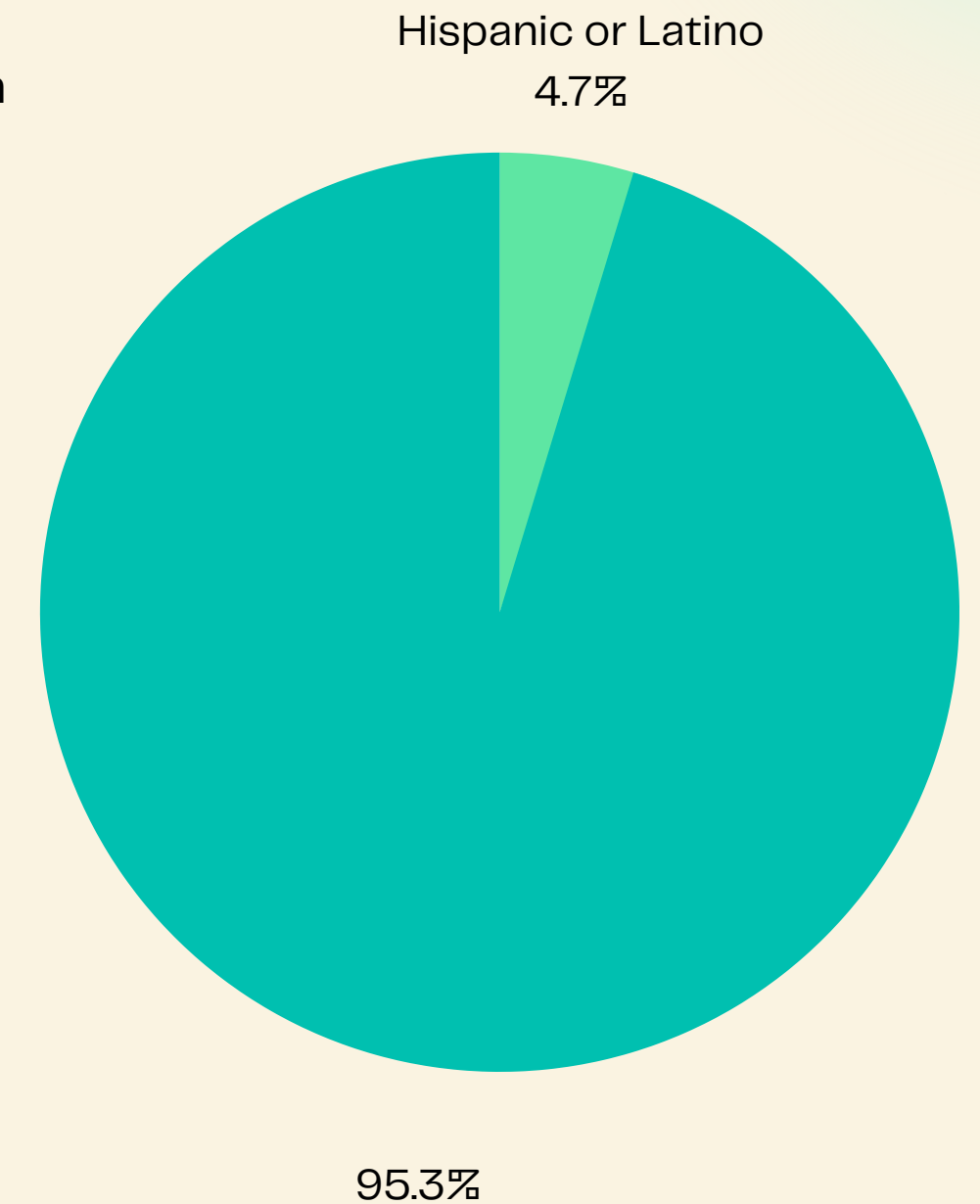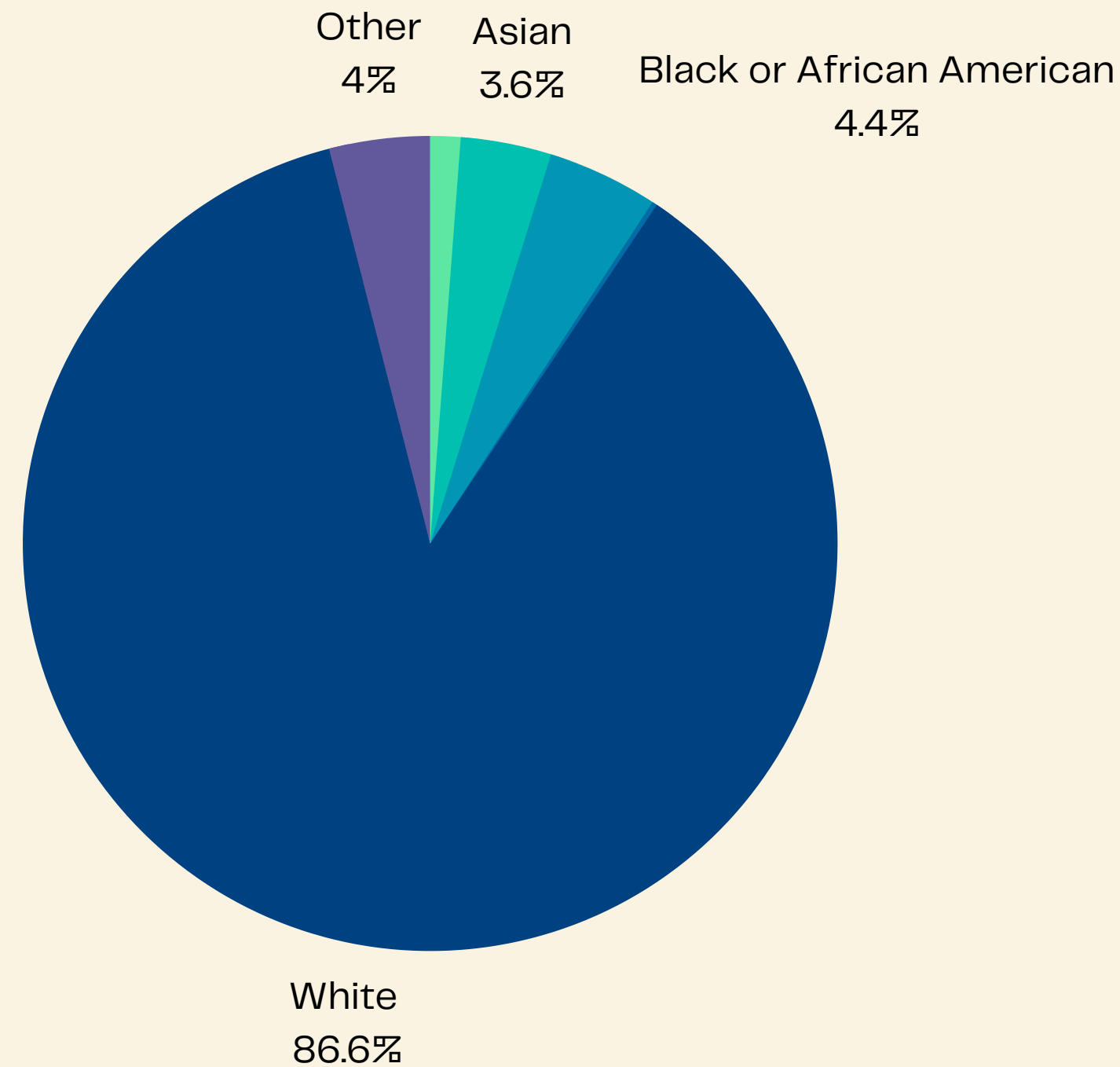
American Library Association, 2017.

Examples of barriers to entry

- Costly master's programs
- Lack of permanent jobs
- Free labor
- Biases in hiring practices

Inclusion and Equity in Digital Initiatives

Or, the lack thereof

What I'm talking about when I talk about Digital Initiatives

AREA	DESCRIPTION
Personnel	Recruitment, retention, promotion, support
Collections	What is collected, digitized, promoted, provided a budget, description, access
Scholarly communication	Politics of access, content creation, digital scholarship, life cycle of knowledge production

→

"What's Wrong with Digital Stewardship: Evaluating the Organization of Digital Preservation Programs from Practitioners' Perspectives," 2020.

Karl-Rainer Blumenthal, Peggy Griesinger, Julia Y. Kim, Shira Peltzman, and Vicky Steeves.

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What's Wrong with Digital Stewardship: Evaluating the Organization of Digital Preservation Programs from Practitioners' Perspectives

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"These cultures maintain discriminatory systems of privilege."

— Karl-Rainer Blumenthal, Peggy Griesinger, Julia Y. Kim, Shira Peltzman, and Vicky Steeves

What's Wrong with Digital Stewardship: Evaluating the Organization of Digital Preservation Programs from Practitioners' Perspectives, 2020.

"Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code," 2019.

Ruha Benjamin

"Why bother with broader structural changes in casting and media representation, when marketing gurus can make Black actors appear more visible than they really are in the actual film?"

— Ruha Benjamin

Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code, 2019.

RUHA BENJAMIN

RACE AFTER TECHNOLOGY

"If everything is digitized, regardless of metadata or image quality, the resulting hoard would solve a host of issues. Research discomfort in dealing with racially insensitive reading room staff? Solved. Physical awareness of marginalized status being the only Black person in the building? Solved. Criticisms that existing digital collections are too White? Immediately solved, with references. No longer would there need to be as heavy a focus on the White-supremacy inflicted structures of archival repositories - those issues can be fixed in their own time, and researchers can safely access content at home."

— Dorothy Berry

The House Archives Built, 2021.

NEW ON
up//root
The House
Archives Built
by Dorothy Berry
www.uproot.space

"Precarious Labor and Radical Care in Libraries and Digital Humanities"

in *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory*, 2020.

Anne Cong-Huyen and Kush Patel

KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE

Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory

edited by Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight
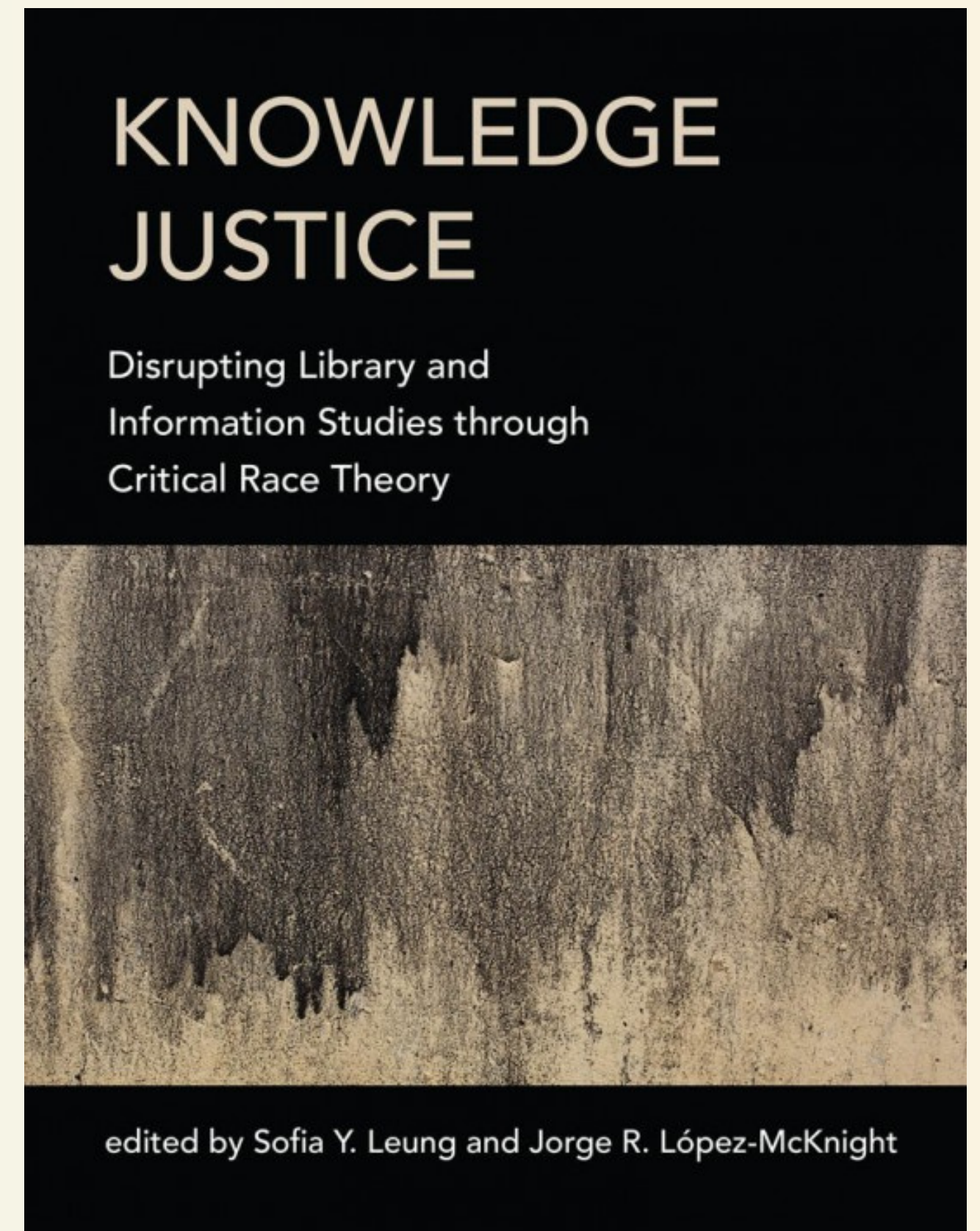
"These advances, however, are *in spite of*, not *because of* the evolution in digital humanities as a field."

— **Anne Cong-Huyen and Kush Patel**
Precarious Labor and Radical Care in Libraries and Digital Humanities

KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE

Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory

edited by Sofia Y. Leung and Jorge R. López-McKnight

Who works in scholarly publishing?

Workers by race and ethnicity, 2017.

Racial breakdown from late 2014 to early 2015 of approximately 6,121 scholarly publishing employees in 33 nations:

- White/Caucasian: 90.79%
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: 2.56%
- Asians: 2.69%
- Black African/Caribbean: 1.66%
- Hispanic/Latino: 0.77%
- Other: 1.53%

Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
2.6%

Asians
2.7%

Other
1.5%

White/Caucasian
90.8%
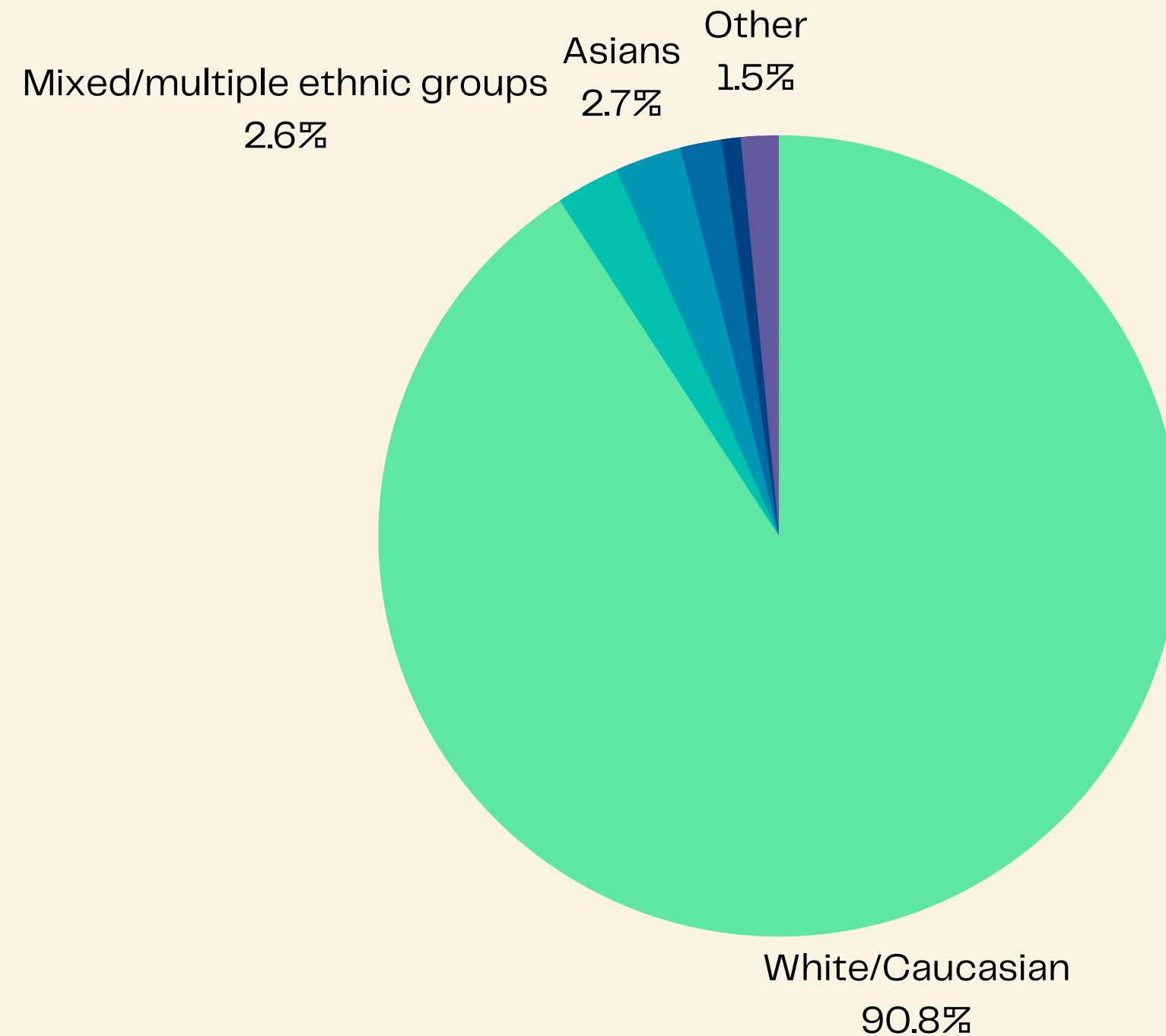
Greco et al, 2017.

"What are the consequences of this lack of diversity in publishing, librarianship, and faculty? We know already that privilege can bias access to material, which is part of why the open access movement exists, to alleviate the barriers that cost can create for researchers. However, one possible consequence is a feedback loop in scholarship that privileges and publishes the majority voice, which is often white and male."

— Charlotte Roh

Library publishing and diversity values: Changing scholarly publishing through policy and scholarly communication education, 2016.

"The lack of diversity in the scholarly record and the library profession's complicity in the problem cannot be resolved by a profession that is not representative of society. By purchasing and subscribing to the products of scholarly communication, by creating systems of classification and organization that readers rely on to find publications, and by educating users in all aspects of scholarly communication, librarians can have great influence on the methods and products of scholarly communication."

— Charlotte Roh and Harrison W. Inefuku

Agents of Diversity and Social Justice: Librarians and Scholarly Communication, 2016.

Leadership and accountability →

Small is all.

(The large is a reflection of the small.)

— **adrienne maree brown**
Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds

"…critiquing the dominance of white masculinity is not about decrying individual white men, but rather, questioning how the underlying power systems of imperialism, white supremacy and patriarchy have come to shape the theorizing and practice of leadership as the glorification of domination and control."

— Helena Liu

Redeeming Leadership: An Anti-Racist Feminist Intervention, 2021

Getting started with accountability

Start and continue working on yourself. What do you not know? What would you like to know?

01	Determine values and assessment plan.
02	Provide agency and empower your colleagues.
03	Build a critical culture, not just critical web copy.
04	Budget for equity and inclusion.

Getting started with accountability

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Wrap Up →

"At the individual level, the prescription for inequality is usually to inject our organizations with more women and people of colour. This superficial 'body count' fix is very often confined to an exercise of visible minority representation without any commitment to equality and justice.

— Helena Liu
Redeeming Leadership: An Anti-Racist Feminist Intervention, 2021

REDEEMING LEADERSHIP

AN ANTI-RACIST FEMINIST INTERVENTION

HELENA LIU
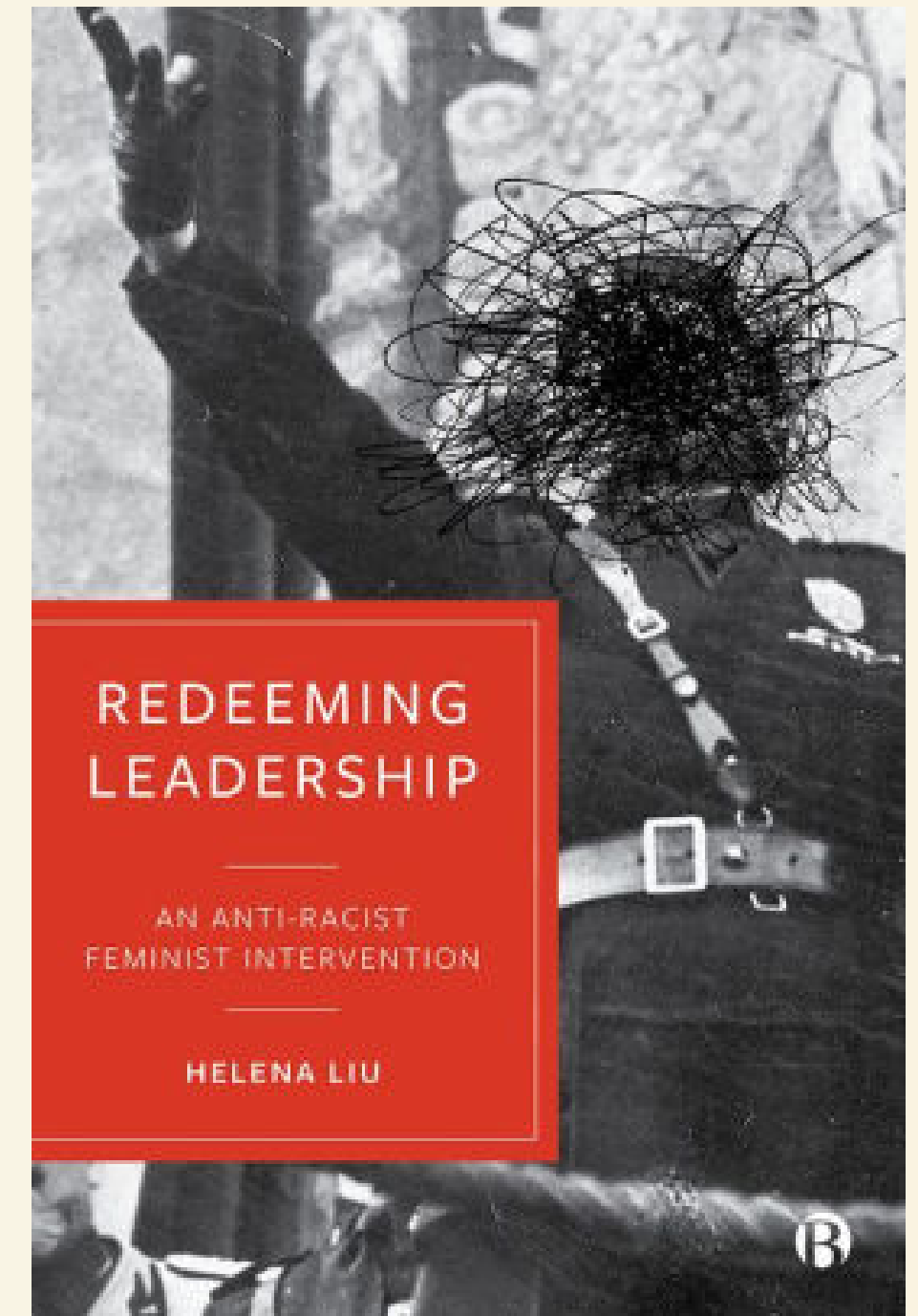
Thank You

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Works Cited

https://bit.ly/ferrettisteppingback