

Deconstructing Whiteness in Archives

MARAC Newark 2017

Session agenda

Introduction (8-10 minutes)

Group exercises (10-12 minutes)

Breakout session: Story Circles (50 minutes)

Group debrief (20 minutes)

Session Description

This workshop session is geared towards archives professionals who want to critically and constructively examine how dynamics of whiteness affect their work. Organizers hope to provide a collaborative and engaging conversation that complements MARAC's ongoing efforts towards cultural competency, diversity, and inclusion. Participants will have an opportunity to critically examine their own experiences around whiteness in archives and engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues. Following a brief introduction to key concepts and definitions, trained facilitators will lead small groups in a workshop exercise based on Roadside Theater's "Story Circle" methodology. All attendees will be expected to participate in a Story Circle. It will not be possible to accommodate late arrivals or observers. Participants will be asked to respect strict confidentiality within their small groups.

Ground Rules

Recognize your communication style (verbal/nonverbal).

Expect to learn something about yourself and others.

Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing.

Participate honestly, openly, and to the fullest of your ability.

Engage in the process by actively listening as well as speaking.

Confidentiality, Curiosity & Charity.

Take responsibility for yourself and what you say.

Additional tips

- The goal is not necessarily to agree with each other, but to gain a deeper understanding.
- If you tend to be quiet in group settings, challenge yourself to share more.
- If you tend to speak up, challenge yourself to listen more.

What is... *White supremacy*?

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists* (2006)

...a “racialized social system” that “awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the people who became ‘white’) over non-Europeans (the people who became ‘nonwhite’)...”

UCLA School of Public Affairs, *Critical Race Theory*

“...racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture...these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color.”

What is... *White Privilege*?

Peggy McIntosh, *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (1989)

“As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage...I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.”

What is... *White Privilege?*

Southern Poverty Law Center, *Teaching Tolerance*

“White skin privilege is not something that white people necessarily do, create or enjoy on purpose. Unlike the more overt individual and institutional manifestations of racism described above, white skin privilege is a transparent preference for whiteness that saturates our society. White skin privilege serves several functions. First, it provides white people with “perks” that we do not earn and that people of color do not enjoy. Second, it creates real advantages for us. White people are immune to a lot of challenges. Finally, white privilege shapes the world in which we live —the way that we navigate and interact with one another and with the world.”

Corollary concept... *White fragility*

Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (2011)

“White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. “

Silent reflection

Temperature Taking

- How often do you talk about race in your courses, workplace, or professional community?
- How comfortable do you feel talking about race/racism in a professional context?
 - Where do you think you should be?
- How comfortable is the archival profession when it comes to talking about race/racism?
 - Where do you think the profession should be?

Breakout session: Story Circles

Introduction by facilitator (3-5 minutes)

Exercise (22-25 minutes)

Small group debrief (15-20 minutes)

Large group debrief

Circle facilitators report out

Popcorn comments

Wrap-up/closing thoughts