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# Critical Race Theory and the Recruitment, Retention and Promotion of a Librarian of Color: A Counterstory

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## *Chapter 6*

### **CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND PROMOTION OF A LIBRARIAN OF COLOR: A COUNTERSTORY**

**Shaundra Walker**

#### **Introduction**

Despite the proliferation of residency programs, institutes, and scholarships designed to increase the numbers of African American and other academic librarians of color, academic librarianship, in contrast to the American population, continues to lack racial diversity. According to the American Library Association's most recent *Diversity Counts* report, credentialed academic librarians are 86.1% white. African Americans make up 12.6% of the American population, but only account for 5.4% of credentialed academic librarians.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Origins of Current Diversity Efforts**

The current fight for diversity in the library profession has its roots in the American Civil Rights Movement. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, despite the gains of the Civil Rights movement, and much like

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1. Denise M. Davis and Tracie D. Hall, *Diversity Counts*, ([Arlington, VA]: American Library Association, 2007).

many members of their race as a whole, African American librarians were still experiencing racism in recruitment, retention, and promotion within the profession.<sup>2</sup> Frustrated with this embedded, institutionalized racism, a group of African American librarians, led by E.J. Josey, banded together in 1970 to form the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), the first of the ethnic library associations. Several other organizations for other librarians of color, including REFORMA, the Asian American Library Caucus, and the American Indian Library Association, were founded shortly thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, these organizations have played a central role in holding the library profession accountable not only for equity issues, but also for responding to a variety of social justice issues, such as access, in communities where African American librarians have been employed.<sup>4</sup>

### Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Because the calls for diversifying the library profession grew out of the frustrations of the American Civil Rights Movement, Critical Race Theory (CRT), a theoretical framework that challenges many of the assumptions of this movement, provides an appropriate lens through which these efforts might be analyzed. CRT is distinguished from other critical theories because it uses race as central point of analysis in examining the intersection of issues related to law and power. The theory emerged in the 1970's from another critical theory, critical legal studies, which challenged the neutrality and objectivity of the law. In developing the framework, several scholars, most notably Derrick Bell, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Alan Freeman, expanded on critical legal studies, arguing

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2. E.J. Josey, "Introduction," in *The Black Librarian in America*, ed. E.J. Josey (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1970), vii.

3. Tami Echavarría and Andrew B. Wetheimer, "Surveying the Role of Ethnic-American Library Associations," *Library Trends* 46, no. 3 (1997): 374.

4. Maurice B. Wheeler, "Averting a Crisis: Developing African American Librarians as Leaders," in *The Handbook of Black Librarianship*, eds. E.J. Josey and Marva DeLoach (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 176.

that both politics and “social situations” influence jurisprudence in the United States. Since the 1970s, CRT’s influence has expanded to other disciplines, including education, political science, and ethnic studies.<sup>5</sup>

Five major tenets form the basis of CRT that provide boundaries for the framework are: 1) the embedded and persistent nature of racism 2) a critique of liberalism, notions of color-blindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity 3) the value of the experiential knowledge of people of color 4) interest convergence, or the belief that the needs of the minority group are only accommodated when their interest intersect with those of the majority group, and 5) the breakdown of systemic racism. This essay will utilize several of these tenets to explore the problem.

### Critical Theory, CRT, and LIS

A review of the literature suggests that critical theory is no stranger to library and information science, as different strains of the body of theory have been used to explore a variety of issues within the field, such as technology and information literacy, among other areas. However, it appears that CRT as a specific critical theory is lesser known and underutilized. For example, a recent study to investigate librarians’ familiarity with critical theory and how it informs their professional practices found that while most librarians were familiar with critical theory in general, few were familiar with CRT and its associated theorists.<sup>6</sup>

Within the LIS literature, CRT as a specific critical theory has been used to examine areas such as representations in children’s and young adult literature, archives and cataloging. However, the use of the theory to explore the profession’s approach and success in diversifying its ranks is limited; only a few such works dealing with these issues within

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5. Floyd D. Beachum, “Critical Race Theory and Educational Leadership,” in *The Handbook of Educational Theories*, eds. Beverly J. Irby, Genevieve Brown, Rafael Lara-Alecio, and Shirley Jackson (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 923.

6. Robert Schroeder and Christopher V. Hollister, “Librarians’ Views of Critical Theories and Critical Practices,” *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* 33, no. 2 (2014): 16.

academic libraries, such as recent work by Demasco and Hodges<sup>7</sup> and Griffin,<sup>8</sup> appear in the literature. Much more popular in the LIS literature on this important topic are personal narratives,<sup>9</sup> descriptive narratives of diversity programs and their components,<sup>10</sup> and summaries of post-training evaluations. Critical approaches to examining diversity efforts, which have the potential to add value to the current narrative, are sorely lacking.

In the years since the founding of the ethnic caucuses, the profession has taken baby-steps toward addressing the lack of ethnic diversity among its ranks. Robert Wedgeworth, an African American, became ALA's first and only African American executive director in 1972. E.J. Josey was elected the first African American president of the American Library Association in 1984. Perhaps most notably, ALA established the Spectrum Scholarship Program in 1997. Other library organization and individual academic libraries have also developed diversity programs and residencies of their own. Yet despite these efforts, on the issue of racial diversity, it appears that only incremental improvements have been seen, resulting in a profession that remains overwhelmingly white. Librarians of color remain underrepresented in leadership positions; within the American Library Association, there have only been

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7. Ione T. Damasco and Dracine Hodges, "Tenure and Promotion Experiences of Academic Librarians of Color," *College and Research Libraries* 73, no.3 (2012): 279-301.

8. Karin L. Griffin, "Pursuing Tenure and Promotion in the Academy: A Librarian's Cautionary Tale," *Negro Educational Review* 64, no. 1-4 (2013): 77-96.

9. For personal narratives of the Minnesota Early Career Institute and the Spectrum Scholarship Program, respectively, see Mark A. Puente, "Leadership Training Programs and Institutes: Models for Learning to Lead," pp. 121-138; and Tamika M. Barnes and Iyanna Sims, "Tilling Fresh Ground: Cultivating Minority Librarians for Library Leadership through Programs and Initiatives," pp. 139-158, both in *Staff Development Strategies that Work! Stories and Strategies from New Librarians*, eds. Georgie L. Donovan and Miguel A. Figueroa (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2009).

10. For background information and descriptions of the Association of Research Libraries' various diversity programs, see Barbara I. Dewey, "The Imperative for Diversity: ARL's Progress and Role," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 9, no. 3 (2009): 355-361.

five African American presidents in the organizations 136 year history. Clearly, there appears to be a contradiction “between what people in the library profession say and what they do.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to the persistent lack of librarians of color in the profession and in library leadership roles, African American and other librarians of color continue to report discriminatory practices that impede their retention and promotion.

## Recruitment

Neely and Peterson state: “academic librarianship recruitment history cannot be divorced from the history of education and federal education policy in the United States.”<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, CRT requires a consideration of the impact of legislation and federal policy on the recruitment, retention, and advancement of librarians of color. Although *de jure* segregation is no longer the law of the land, an understanding of years of legally segregated and unequal educational systems adds perspective to the current discussion. Successful recruitment into library education programs, the gateway to increased numbers of African American and other librarians of color in academic librarianship, has always required navigation through the American secondary and higher education systems, both of which remain racially constructed. Because an undergraduate degree is a requirement for admission to LIS master’s programs, historical as well as current federal legislation and policy have the potential to impact the pool of African American undergraduates who are prepared to enter library education programs and eventually qualify for employment in academic libraries.

The low numbers of African American and other academic librarians of color is not a new phenomenon. For this reason, CRT is an appropriate framework, because it “extends beyond disciplinary boundaries

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11. Wheeler, “Averting a Crisis,” 170.

12. Teresa Neely and Lorna Peterson, *Achieving Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Academic and Research Librarians: The Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement of Librarians of Color* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007), p. 8.

to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts.”<sup>13</sup> Historically, the underrepresentation of African American librarians has been attributed to various factors, most of which are related to race and racism. One early explanation was offered in 1935 by Florence Rising Curtis, the first and only leader of the segregated library school at Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). Curtis stated that “the economic and educational conditions of the institutions which might command their services” was a factor in the lack of African American library school students, a thinly veiled reference to the underdevelopment of historically black colleges and universities and segregated public libraries.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, when questioned on the performance of African American library school students in 1939, one Northern library school explained its lack of African American students this way:

While we have every sympathy for the Negro woman student of course no prejudice, we discourage them for trying to enter the \_\_\_\_ School for Library Science or indeed any department of the University, because there is literally no satisfactory place for them to live in \_\_\_\_\_. We have had, therefore, no Negro graduates since 1936.<sup>15</sup>

Others have been more forthright, suggesting that African Americans’ slow entry into the profession was affected by their inability to attend southern colleges and universities, relegation to inferior public 1890 land grant colleges and inadequate preparation for higher education in segregated elementary and high schools<sup>16</sup>

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13. Tara J. Yosso, Laurence Parker, Daniel G. Solorzano, and Marvin Lynn, “From Jim Crow to Affirmative Action and Back Again: A Critical Race Discussion of Racialized Rationales and Access to Higher Education,” *Review of Research in Higher Education* 28 (2004): 4.

14. Florence Rising Curtis, “Librarianship as a Field for Negroes,” *Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 1 (1935): 94.

15. Tommie Dora Barker, Evalene Jackson, and the American Library Association Board of Education for Librarianship, “Memorandum on the Need in the South for a Library School or Schools for Negroes” (Chicago: American Library Association, 1939), 41.

16. Rosemary Ruhig Dumont, “The Educating of Black Librarians: An Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 26, no. 4 (1986): 233.

## African American Education, Law, and Legislation

The recruitment of African American librarians has been strongly influenced by the intersection of race, law, and federal policy and must be viewed within this larger context. Congressional acts, such as the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890, in addition to being credited with establishing public universities throughout the United States, are also responsible for establishing a dual, two-tiered, and racially stratified system of public higher education which persists into the present. Many public historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) were not established in the interest of providing much-needed education to this population, but to secure federal funding for white-land grants, to relegate African American education to vocational training, and to prevent them from attending White land grant institutions.<sup>17</sup> As late as 1917, only one of the 16 black land grants in existence at the time offered college courses. Between Reconstruction and the Great Depression, the bulk of African American higher education was provided through a network of private, African American liberal arts colleges.<sup>18</sup> The Higher Education Act states that the federal government discriminated against HBCUs in the allocation of land, and in the distribution of financial resources, such as grants and contracts, and other federal resources.<sup>19</sup> Recent research from the Association of Public Land Grant Institutions reveals that the underfunding of these institutions is a contemporary issue, finding that from 2010-2012, 68% of HBCU land grant institutions did not receive their state matching funds, totaling a loss of nearly \$57 million in funding.<sup>20</sup> The implications of federal legislation/policy

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17. Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri S. Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in American Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 27.

18. James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 235.

19. Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. 1060 § 321 (2013).

20. John Michael Lee, Jr., and Samaad Wes Keys, *Land-Grant but Unequal: State One-to-One Match Funding for 1890 Land-Grant Universities* (Washington, DC: Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 2013).

on HBCUs and the current issue of recruitment to the academic library profession is quite relevant when one considers that despite the fact they no longer monopolize African American education, HBCUs still contribute disproportionately the number of African Americans who earn undergraduate degrees. Whether enrolled at predominately white institutions or HBCUs, African American undergraduates' completion rates are influenced by other federal policy initiatives, such as changes in the PLUS Loan and Pell Grant programs. When policy changes negatively impact recruitment, retention, and progression at the undergraduate level, fewer African American and other students of color will be available for recruitment into library education programs and ultimately into work in academic libraries.

### **Library Education for African Americans and Interest Convergence**

Library education has also been racially constructed. African American library education was first offered, not within the halls of the academy, but at the Louisville Free Public Library's Western Colored Branch, where Thomas Fountain Blue, a graduate of Hampton Institute, began training library workers for service in segregated Southern libraries.<sup>21</sup> Prior to 1926 when a segregated library school at Hampton Institute, a private HBCU, was established, fewer than 70 African Americans had obtained professional library training.<sup>22</sup> Historically, two private historically Black colleges/universities, Hampton Institute and Atlanta University (now Clark-Atlanta University), with the support of several private foundations, concerned individuals, and the American Library Association, bore the brunt of preparing African Americans for work in academic libraries. History reveals that library education for African Americans was only accommodated when its provision converged with

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21. Lillian Taylor Wright, "Thomas Fountain Blue, Pioneer Librarian, 1866-1935" (master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1955), 34-35. <http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations/369>.

22. Curtis, "Librarianship as a Field", 95.

the interests of its benefactors, which varied from expanding public library services in the South, to supporting the accreditation and maintenance of segregated secondary and higher education. For these reasons, education for librarianship for African Americans has been perilous, vulnerable, and uneven. Once the benefactors ceased support or interests shifted, library education for African American librarians became uncertain. When Florence Rising Curtis announced her retirement from Hampton, one of the primary funders of the library program gradually withdrew its financial support. Lack of this support and Hampton Institute's inability to operate the library school independently ultimately forced it to close in May 1939.<sup>23</sup> For two years, there was no formal library education for African Americans in the South, other than a librarian-teacher training program that operated on the campus of four HBCUs.<sup>24</sup> The library education program at Atlanta University, which opened in 1941 and was perhaps the most significant supplier of African American librarians, faced a fate similar to Hampton. When the Georgia Board of Regents announced that it would open a publicly-supported library education program at Valdosta State University, a predominately white institution (PWI), the school's administrators became concerned that a state grant partially funding the program would cease.<sup>25</sup> Much like the program at Hampton Institute, this real or perceived dependence on external funding is considered a primary reason for the closure of the CAU program in 2005.<sup>26</sup> The impact of the closure of the Clark

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23. Arthur Clinton Gunn, "Early Training for Black Librarians in the U.S.: A History of the Hampton Institute Library School and the Establishment of the Atlanta University School of Library Service" (dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1986), 87.

24. Allison Sutton, "Bridging the Gap in Early Library Education History for African-Americans: The Negro Teacher-Librarian Training Program, (1936-1939)," *Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (2005): 138.

25. Paul Donsky, "Final Try to Save Library Program Too Late: Supporters Try, but Clark Atlanta Officials Say Decision Won't be Revisited," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 15, 2004.

26. Risa L. Mulligan, "The Closing of the Clark Atlanta University School of Library & Information Studies" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 15. <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:800b5b93-3710-4c5e-9a19-4a6fd54f9f1e>

Atlanta University library school remains unexplored, but considering its historical contribution, the fact that it no longer operates has certainly had an effect on the profession's diversity efforts.

### **Federal Policy and Support for African American Library Education**

In addition to legislative influence, the recruitment of African American and other librarians of color has also been shaped by federal policy. In the 1970s, the Title-II-B program made a significant contribution to the education of African American librarians through the provision of fellowships for library school attendance and funding to support minority outreach programs at various library schools. DeLoach states that "only when the federal government mandated that Title II-B funds be utilized to equalize opportunities for minorities did library schools show a commitment to recruitment of minorities."<sup>27</sup> Between 1970 and 1989, that support dwindled from \$2,986,000 to just \$277,600. The numbers of African American library degree recipients followed a similar trajectory, declining significantly.<sup>28</sup>

Federal investment in library education for future librarians of color has also come through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), which was established in 1996. IMLS was formed through a merger of the Institute of Museum Services and the Library Programs Office of the Department of Education.<sup>29</sup> Its signature recruitment

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27. Marva DeLoach, "The Higher Education Act of 1965, Title II-B : the fellowships/ traineeships for training in library and information science program : its impact on minority recruitment in library and information science education" (dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1980), 5.

28. Mary F. Lenox, "Reflections of a Dean" in *The Black Librarian in America Revisited*, ed. E.J. Josey (Meutchen, NJ, Scarecrow Press, 1994), 23.

29. Linda Smith, "From Foundation to Federal Funding: The Impact of Grants on Education for Library and Information Science," in *Influence of Funding on Advances in Librarianship*, eds. Danuta A. Nitecki and Eileen G. Abels (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishers, 2008), 153.

program is the Laura Bush 21st Century Grant Program, which provides financial support to projects that support the education of practicing librarians, LIS faculty and library leaders; the program also supports LIS research.<sup>30</sup> An analysis of the current and projected library workforce and the impact of federal funding concluded that while IMLS programs such as the Laura Bush 21st Century Grant Program had exceeded their projections for recruiting “diverse” and “non-traditional” students, the reliability of statistics on which this determination was based was unknown, because of inconsistencies in the way that diversity data was reported. Further complicating matters was the fact that the program used a very broad definition of diversity, which could include self-determined demographic characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, but could also include other aspects of diversity, such as underserved communities and special needs patrons, among others.<sup>31</sup>

Lorna Peterson, Associate Professor Library and Information Science at the State University at Buffalo, warns about the dangers of such broad definitions:

If policy language makes no distinction among differences, the legacy of segregation, discrimination, and oppression can be denied. If “quirkiness” (a term heard in workshops), knitting skills, and being African American are all measures of diversity, social injustice becomes an individual, not institutional, matter. Institutions can more easily maintain the status quo, because the well-intended multiculturalists have diluted racism into a happy-faced discussion of difference.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program,” accessed June 23, 2014, <http://www.imls.gov/applicants/detail.aspx?GrantId=9>.

31. Carlos A Manjarrez, Joyce Ray, and Karmen Bisher, “A Demographic Overview of the Current and Projected Library Workforce and the Impact of Federal Funding,” *Library Trends* 59 no. 1-2 (2010): 22.

32. Lorna Peterson, “Multiculturalism: Affirmative or Negative Action?” *Library Journal* 120, no. 12 (1995): 31.

## Retention

In addition to the persistent lack of minorities in the profession, among those African American and other librarians of color who ultimately gain employment in academic libraries, reports of discriminatory practices abound. Current scholarship indicates that despite the passage of time and the existence of various diversity initiatives, these experiences and practices continue. One participant in a recent study of the tenure and promotion experiences of librarians of color expressed her frustration as follows:

Mentoring programs and institutes targeted at librarians of color are not the answer. I believe they are making the situation in academic libraries worse. These programs imply that the problem is with the librarians of color, that librarians of color need to be taught to assimilate. The real problem is institutionalized racism in academic libraries. Instead of sending me to a program/institute, administrators...need to be sent to programs to raise their awareness about how their attitudes and behaviors are forms of discrimination and create barriers for librarians of color who are trying to obtain tenure and/or promotion.<sup>33</sup>

The promotion and tenure process is one area of academic librarianship where inequity can become institutionalized. The fact that this process is governed by institutional policy implies that it is color-blind, based on merit, and race-neutral; however the experiences of librarians of color suggest otherwise. The advancement of diversity initiatives and programs in academic libraries appears to be a double edged sword in some cases, as new librarians of color report feeling more likely than their White counterparts to be asked to serve on diversity committees and as liaisons to diversity-related campus groups.<sup>34</sup> New librarians of color also report being asked to serve on search committees for

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33. Demasco and Hodges, "Tenure and Promotion Experiences," 295.

34. Kawanna Bright, Pambanisha King, and Deborah Lilton, "When Diversity is Too Much: New Librarians of Color and Expectations for Involvement in Library Diversity Initiatives" (paper presented at the National Diversity in Libraries Conference, Louisville, KY, October 3, 2008).

diversity-related positions and being asked to work on “special projects that related to diverse, ethnic, racial or cultural issues” is also reported.<sup>35</sup> This work, however valuable, has the potential to result in a “hidden workload,” an unseen consequence of being a person of color. Such appointments raise particular concern when they impact the abilities of these librarians to focus on other areas of their tenure portfolios, such as research, which in some environments may have more value than committee work and service. Episodes such as these also have implications for annual performance evaluations in instances where performance expectations were not made clear, such as reported in the Damasco and Hodges study, or when librarians of color were asked to perform work for which they were assigned based on race instead of qualifications. One librarian reported being asked to serve as the library’s Hispanic collection coordinator, although he/she had no subject background, interest, or language proficiency in that area.<sup>36</sup> When librarians of color are forced to work under such conditions, their ability to not only achieve tenure but to remain in the institution is likely compromised.

## Promotion

One criticism of current library diversity efforts is their focus on recruiting new librarians instead of developing leaders. Indeed, positioning librarians of color in leadership roles has the potential to address retention issues, such as mentoring, valuing research that deals with diversity issues, and fairly applying promotion and tenure policies. Maurice Wheeler offers the following summary of the leadership diversity issue:

Nothing short of a rebellion will cause librarians, associations, and individuals to step forward and act upon the affirmation action and diversity rhetoric notion that the cream always rises to the top. Often adjustments have to be made in systems and cultures that encourage and support growth and development. Libraries and associations must acknowledge

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35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

that they, too, have a responsibility in eradicating the underrepresentation of people of color in leadership roles.<sup>37</sup>

### **Experiential Knowledge of People of Color as Translated through Counterstories**

With few exceptions, much of the literature on diversity and recruitment programs consists of program descriptions and anecdotal, mostly positive reflections from program participants. Aside from a small body of work that uses a critical lens, these reflections form a master narrative that virtually ignores the experiences of people of color who have not seen positive outcomes or reaped the benefits of the diversity initiatives. Monticenos warns of the dangers of such a narrative:

The use of a master narrative to represent a group is bound to provide a very narrow depiction of what it means to be Mexican-American, African-American, White, and so on...A master narrative essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group's cultural life...<sup>38</sup>

With this in mind, the use of a CRT framework, with its focus on counterstories and experiential knowledge of people of color, provides an opportunity to add a new and much-needed perspective to the discourse. According to Solorzano and Yosso:

[a] counter-story...is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race and further the struggle for racial reform.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Wheeler, "Averting a Crisis," 171.

38. Carmen Monticenos. "Culture as an Ongoing Dialogue: Implications for Multicultural Teacher Education," in *Multicultural Education, Critical Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 293.

39. Daniel G. Solorzano and Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 32.

Using CRT as a framework, the following counterstory will provide an alternative perspective on the recruitment, retention, and promotion of librarians of color.

## **My Family and Educational Background**

I was born in the decade following the Civil Rights movement. Though I never personally experienced the sting of legalized segregation, the days of Jim Crow's reign were not so much of distant memory for my parents, grandparents, and other elders in my community. As a child, my parents attempted to shelter me from the reality of racism and I wholeheartedly believed that such beliefs were relics of a bygone era. In my mind, racism wore a hood and sheet, rode around on a horse, and put burning crosses in black people's yards. Or, sometimes it wielded a fire hose and ferocious dogs. But I never saw those things in my community and so it was easy for me to believe that racism did not exist.

My baby-boomer parents were approaching first grade the year *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was decided, but to my surprise, they never attended desegregated or integrated schools. Schools in our hometown did not desegregate until 1970, well after my mother had graduated from college and my father had been honorably discharged from the armed forces; the schools never truly integrated. Like my parents and grandparents before me, I attended segregated schools at the secondary level. Although this segregation was not legally enforced, the separation was almost as distinct as during the days of segregation. The numbers of non-African American children gradually decreased, beginning in elementary school, to the point that by the time I entered high school, there were only a handful of White students, mostly those who were unable to afford tuition at one of the private academies in town. A flurry of White private schools opened when the desegregation order was enforced, so there were many options available. If *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) had as its goal to integrate the schools, it failed miserably, at least in my town. In addition to attending schools that mirrored the racial demographics of pre-Civil Rights movement era, I and

other African American children in my hometown, with few exceptions, attended school in the same segregation-era buildings where our parents were educated. My middle school, which was my mother's high school and which was constructed in 1959, still stands today, ill-equipped to meet the needs of 21st century learning.

My post-secondary education was also largely segregated. Even though there were numerous public universities within my home state where I would qualify for state merit-based financial aid, my family felt it was in my best interest to attend a private HBCU. I had always attended schools where most of the students and faculty members looked like me and I sought a similar experience at the collegiate level. Following graduation, I toyed with the idea of attending law school, but happened upon a job advertisement for an academic librarian position and changed my mind. I soon learned that professional library positions required a Masters of Library and Information Science degree. Upon doing some research, I learned that the closest option for this degree was at Clark-Atlanta University, just across the street from my undergraduate alma mater. I also discovered several of the library diversity initiatives that arose during this time, such as the Spectrum Scholarship Initiative and the various academic library residency programs. I was confident that I had found the right profession and believed strongly that the profession was eager to bring in minorities, buying into what CRT refers to as the myth of meritocracy, colorblindness, neutrality, and objectivity.

To complement my library school education, I decided to pursue employment within the library field while attending graduate school. I had no prior experience in the library field and I noticed that even entry level professional positions often preferred some library experience. My initial attempts to find library employment were challenging. One of my first applications was at a large urban university. I shall never forget the interview; instead of telling me about the benefits of the position or asking position-specific questions, the interviewer presented me with a list of negative attributes about the job to gauge my interest. I was peppered with questions/statements, such as "Can you handle dust? It's very dusty around here." "Are you allergic to mold? We sometimes

have problems with mold in the library.” “Can you function in the cold? It gets very cold in our library.” Puzzled, I answered affirmatively to the litany of questions/statements that I received. I left the interview and waited on a phone call that never came. After several additional attempts to find employment, I finally received a call back from a local public library system, where I had applied for a para-professional position. I wanted to gain experience in an academic library, but after so many letdowns, I accepted the position.

It was in this position that I began to notice some of the racial division within the library profession, an experience that directly contradicted my expectations. I noticed that most White librarians that I encountered had attended library school either at Emory or out of state; most African American librarians had attended Clark-Atlanta’s program. I observed a similar division when I attended the statewide library association conference where there were usually very few African American librarians in attendance. Only later would I learn about how library education had been segregated and how E.J. Josey had forcibly integrated the Georgia Library Association.

### **My Experience Obtaining an Internship**

I progressed through the coursework at Clark-Atlanta very smoothly. I ended up leaving the first para-professional library position that I obtained for a competitive paid summer internship program within an archive. My graduate program required an unpaid internship as a requirement to graduate. Through that experience, I learned a little more about the segregated history of library education, not only in Georgia, but throughout the southeast. In my experience, one of the residual effects of this dual, segregated system was a lack of interaction among librarians in the state. When it came time to find a site for my unpaid internship, my coordinator was at a loss for a site to place me. I needed an internship in my hometown, but when I discussed this with my internship coordinator, she told me that she did not know anyone professionally at any of the three colleges in my area. However, she

did know the library director at Fort Valley State University, a public, land-grant HBCU in the area. The library director there had attended Atlanta University and was a colleague of hers, so arrangements were made for me to complete my internship there. Through this experience, I learned a valuable lesson about the value of “social capital” and the implications when one does not possess it. The term is used to describe “social relations that have productive benefits.”<sup>40</sup> Social capital is very valuable, because it allows one to network and to gain access to resources that might not otherwise be available. These relationships are often built around common experiences, such as being alumni of the same institution, membership in social and civic organizations, or possessing common professional or personal associates. For academic librarians of color, social capital is often illusive.

After completing my internship at Fort Valley, which I believed would qualify me for an entry-level professional position in an academic library, I found the process of securing my first post-MLS position to be as or more challenging as my attempts to secure paraprofessional employment. My first application for a professional library position resulted in a telephone interview, which went very well, but did not result in the promised in-person interview. My second application for a professional position resulted in a face-to-face interview and a second, more informal interview, where I met with the Vice-President of Academic Affairs. In a very awkward exchange, he questioned me on the relevance of various databases to research needs. A short while later, I was offered the position, with conditions. Although the position was not tenure track, I told that my appointment would be a “visiting” position. I would receive a one-year contract, during which time I would be closely evaluated. If the library director found my performance to be satisfactory, I would then receive another one-year contract; after some time, if my evaluations were good enough, I might qualify for a three or five-year contract. Even though I was largely ignorant about the academic appointment

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40. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Social Capital,” accessed October 27, 2014, <http://www.ebscohost.com>.

system, I knew enough to be offended. I met the qualifications for the position, both in terms of education and experience. I had even secured the endorsement of one of the few African American faculty members at the college, who knew the library director personally. Yet, the combination of my education, work experience, and enthusiasm was not enough to get me over this initial hurdle. The college could not legally come out and state that they did not want to hire me because I was African American, so the visiting professor assignment was proffered as a subtle way to convey the intended insult. Clearly, there was no need to put me on visiting status, because the only type of contract that I could earn, even if I had regular faculty status, was one-year contract.

During my employment at that library, I experienced what are called racial micro-aggressions, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.”<sup>41</sup> The final straw came when the library director, quite casually and matter-of-factly, informed me that the person they made the initial offer to turned them down, so that’s how they had gotten me. Needless to say, I decided to pursue employment elsewhere.

My next library job was at a larger, better-funded public university. Unlike my first professional library position, my second professional position was a tenure-track position. By that time, I was familiar with tenure and knew that it was something that “teaching faculty” at my former employer enjoyed, but I knew little about the power, protection, and security that it provided. I liked my new job because the library was larger and more dynamic; even though I was the only librarian of color, there were more librarians and the environment was a bit more collegial. Still, I felt socially and culturally isolated. Just like at my first professional job, I made “black history” at my second professional job, too; as far as I was able to tell, I was the first professional librarian of color in the

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41. Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin. “Racial Micro-aggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice,” *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (2007): 273.

institution's history. Very often, when I went to non-library meetings, I was the only person of color in the room, "a fly in the buttermilk."<sup>42</sup> There was a network of African American faculty of color on campus, but even there, I felt awkward, because my work experiences and tenure and promotion expectations were very different.

The racial micro-aggressions continued at my second professional library job. Once, while attending a reception for a faculty member, I was approached by a White faculty member who assumed I was a domestic worker, and asked me where the coat check was. I informed her that I did not know where the coat check was located and that I was a faculty member, just like her. She stated, unapologetically, "Oh, I thought you worked here!" When I recounted my experience to another faculty member of color who was in attendance, she stated that the same faculty member had also approached her regarding the coat check. Another time, I encountered several White students at the reference desk, who refused to accept the information that I provided. They stated that they would return to the desk later, when the librarian was on duty or ask their professor for the information they needed. These experiences confirmed for me that even though I had received the necessary credentials, dressed the part, and assumed the position, my presence in the academy was still filtered through a colored lens.

In addition to my work in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), I have also worked at an HBCU, an experience that provided me with a framework to further explore and understand my prior work experiences. In the HBCU environment, I was able to leverage the social capital that I was sorely lacking when I worked in PWIs. Even though I was not well connected personally with colleagues across the campus, I was able to leverage other connections, such as my alumni network, participation in social and civic organizations, and even church affiliations. These

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42. Mitzi Davis, Yvonne Dias-Bowie, Katherine Greenberg, Gary Klukken, Howard R. Pollio, Sandra P. Thomas, and Charles L. Thompson, "A Fly in the Buttermilk?: Descriptions of University Life by Successful Black Undergraduate Students at a Predominately White Southeastern University," *Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 4 (2004): 420.

relationships allowed me access to critical information, resources, and other benefits. When I compared my experiences at the two types of institutions, I realized that the benefits that I enjoyed at the HBCU were probably already enjoyed by my White colleagues at other institutions. For the first time in my professional career, I was able to experience the equivalent of “white privilege” and it felt very comforting.

Quite often during my professional career, I have received comments from White colleagues that have not always felt complimentary. I have had individuals tell me that due to the fact that I am African American and female, I should have no problem advancing within the profession. These types of comments denigrate the well-rounded portfolio of education, experience, scholarship, and technical skill that I have developed during my career and suggest that my color and gender would give me a ticket wherever I wanted to go, no matter my accomplishments or ability. I have also been told on several occasions that I am very articulate and that I “speak well.” My admirers seem not to understand that these statements have double meaning for persons of color and suggest that by speaking well, I exceed the low expectations for African Americans and am somehow different from other members of my race.

Despite these challenges, I remain committed to working within the library field. I enjoy helping people and I enjoy learning something new every day. However, I often wonder how many potential and actual librarians of color will become frustrated along the way. Achieving real diversity within our profession will require a coordinated effort to address inequitable practices that impede the recruitment, retention, and progression of librarians of color. Very often these behaviors have become so ingrained that they are difficult to identify and even harder to rectify.

Changing the demographics of the academic library workforce will require new approaches for assessing progress. Traditionally, we have focused nearly exclusively on quantitative measurements that evaluate progress over short periods of time. Tackling this problem necessitates the consideration of new approaches. CRT, with its focus on the experiential knowledge of people of color, interdisciplinary approaches,

and the intersection of race, policy/law, and power, among other tenets, presents a lens through which many of our assumptions about the problem and how it might be solved could be further analyzed.

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