



“Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives”
Group Exercise
Level: Beginner
Author: Michelle Caswell

Supplies needed:

- Copies of Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” available here:
<http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>
- Gigantic post-it notes
- Markers

Time: 1.5 hours

Activity:

1. Instructor/ Group Leader sets the tone by warning against displays of white fragility and defining white supremacy as a *structural* problem baked-into American institutions. They may quote Frances Lee Ansley in defining white supremacy as:

"...a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings."¹

Instructor should be clear that white supremacy is systemic and inherent in institutions and structures in the U.S. and not only the reserve of explicitly white supremacist hate groups.

2. Instructor passes out copies of Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Participants take turns reading the 50 privileges out loud.
3. Hang up the giant post-it notes around the room. Collectively generate areas of archival theory and practice to write at the top of each one. [Examples include: arrangement and description, access, preservation, appraisal, archival education, professional life, concepts, etc.]
4. Station volunteers at each post-it note. Collectively generate examples of white privilege/ white supremacy in archives under each category inspired by the McIntosh list. Volunteers write down the areas raised by participants.

¹ Frances Lee Ansley, "Stirring the Ashes: Race Class and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship." *Cornell L. Rev.* 74 (1988): 993.

5. After the group has generated lists of white privilege in archives, for each point listed, ask and answer the following questions: What concrete steps can we take to *change structures* to dismantle each privilege as humans and archivists?
6. After lists of white privileges and strategies for dismantling have been generated, instructor can lead group on a discussion about the interplay between structural change and personal action. Instructor can ask participants to commit to enacting the changes generated.
7. Instructor or participant should type up lists generated by the group and follow up by sending the list out to participants after the session.

For more information, read:

- Caswell, Michelle (with graphic design by Gracen Brilmyer). “Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in the Archives Classroom.” *Library Quarterly* 87(3) (2017), special issue “Aftermath: Libraries and the U.S. Election”: 222-235.

Posters available here:

[add link to Gracen’s website or this site if we upload it here.]