

Chapter 15

WHAT'S IN A NAME? ARCHIVES FOR BLACK LIVES IN PHILADELPHIA AND THE IMPACT OF NAMES AND NAME AUTHORITIES IN ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION

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Introduction

Archivists, working within a profession that is 87.7% white, have historically been focused on the description and naming of mostly white, male records creators and subjects.¹ This is largely a reflection of collecting practices that privilege the history of those who wield power in society. Describing and naming Black people and other marginalized groups, whether as creators or subjects of records, has often been an afterthought and sometimes has been undertaken without the appropriate respect and consideration for the communities who created or are described in the records. Practically speaking, the sheer volume of legacy finding aids describing primary source collections written over the course of many decades, and held in nearly every paper-based and electronic form imaginable, leads to difficult-to-access descriptive language. For this reason, remediating outdated language or pulling names for further analysis or authority work are rarely undertaken. Meanwhile,

1. A*CENSUS, Society of American Archivists, 2005, <https://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/acensus-archival-census-education-needs-survey-in-the-united-states>.

practices in archival collecting, processing, and description continue to generate oppressive language.

Specifically, the ability to perform name authority control within archival description is hampered by one or more factors: insufficient name information in archival collections; lack of established names in national authority databases for those found within a collection; lack of training or ability among archivists to establish name authority records; and the privileging of certain creators and subjects by processing archivists because of archival practice or their own personal biases. The lack of name description and name authority work for Black people represented in archival collections hampers research access, creates false silences by obscuring the names—and by extension, the existences—of Black people, and ultimately leads to the ongoing erasure and dehumanization of Black lives in our society's cultural memory and conscience.

Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP) is a loose association of about fifty archivists (primarily white and female) from the Philadelphia area, united by a concern for issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement and a desire to contribute to professional conversations and actions related to combating racism in archives. In particular, A4BLiP approaches this work from the standpoint that it is white people's responsibility to fix the problems that they have created, and white archivists' responsibility to create an inclusive, equitable, and non-oppressive approach to archival work. The group has recently undertaken a racism audit project to provide guidance to white archivists on remediating harmful legacy description and creating inclusive, respectful, and equitable description moving forward. The authors of this article are two white women, both from the United States, who are members of A4BLiP. We attempt here to suggest an approach to name description that other archivists could use in making naming practices more equitable and inclusive.

This chapter begins with a literature review that explores the relationship between the archives and library professions' centering of whiteness and their implementation of description practices, including subject access, classification, and name authorities. It then introduces

the A4BLiP group and its past and current projects, and describes the major challenges to implementing inclusive and ethical name description and name authority work in archival description. It concludes with preliminary proposals for implementing an anti-racist approach to name authorities and name access, taken from A4BLiP's draft recommendations for anti-racist archival description.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship in both archival and library science has addressed the concept of whiteness and how it has shaped the profession in ways that are relevant to the issue of names in archival description. However, the bulk of the literature on library work focuses on issues of subject headings and classification, with fewer addressing issues of naming, while literature on archival work has all but ignored names and name authorities altogether.

April Hathcock defines whiteness as “the socio-cultural differential of power and privilege that results from categories of race and ethnicity; it also stands as a marker for the privilege and power that acts to reinforce itself through hegemonic cultural practice that excludes all who are different.”² Scholars and professionals in the field have examined the role of whiteness in shaping all aspects of the profession from how and why we acquire collections to the way we describe and provide access to them. Their critiques focus on the overwhelmingly white demographics of the archival and library professions, the lack of empathy for patrons who are people of color, the invisibility of people of color in our collections, and the traditional focus on ownership and acquisition by primarily white institutions over collaboration and partnership with communities of color. The most salient point of these critiques is that libraries and archives are far from being neutral spaces; instead they

2. April Hathcock, “White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, October 2015, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity>.

usually support and center whiteness as the default identity, thereby marginalizing all other communities.³

The largest body of literature on the effect of whiteness on metadata and descriptive language focuses on the role of classification and subject analysis in library cataloging, and to a lesser extent in archival description. This exploration goes back at least to Sanford Berman's early criticism of Library of Congress Subject Headings in 1971.⁴ More recent efforts to ameliorate the harmful legacy of practices influenced by colonialism and whiteness are the product of the years of ensuing research and practice to uncover structural racism in description and cataloging. Subject headings, in particular, continue to be problematic, not only because changes in outdated language are slow to appear,

3. Chris Bourg, "Debating y/our humanity, or Are Libraries Neutral?" *Feral Librarian* (blog), February 11, 2018, <https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2018/02/11/debating-y-our-humanity-or-are-libraries-neutral/>; Michelle Caswell, "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives," *Library Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (July 2017): 222-235, doi: 10.1086/692299; nina de jesus, "Locating the Library in Institutional Oppression," *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, September, 2014, <http://www.inthelibrary-withtheleadpipe.org/2014/locating-the-library-in-institutional-oppression/>; Anthony W. Dunbar, "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started," *Archival Science* 6, no. 1 (March 2006): 109-129; Livia Iacovino, "Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for records of Indigenous Australian Communities: A Participant Relationship Model of Rights and Responsibilities," *Archival Science* 10, no. 4 (December 2010): 353-372, doi: 10.1007/s10502-010-9120-3; Anna B. Loewenthal, "Comparing Representations of Race in Finding Aids Over Time" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015; Safiya Umoja Noble, "Google Search: Hyper-visibility as a Means of Rendering Black Women and Girls Invisible," *InVisible Culture* 19 (2013), <http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/google-search-hyper-visibility-as-a-means-of-rendering-black-women-and-girls-invisible/>; Nicole Pagowsky and Niamh Wallace, "Black Lives Matter! Shedding Library Neutrality Rhetoric for Social Justice," *College & Research Libraries News* 76, no. 4 (2015): 196-214, <http://crln.acl.org/index.php/crlnews/article/view/9293/10373>; Mario H. Ramirez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *American Archivist* 78, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 339-356. doi: 10.17723/0360-9081.78.2.339; Carrie Wade, "Whiteness and the Myth of Neutrality," *Library Barbarian* (blog), February 13, 2018; Kellee E. Warren, "We Need These Bodies, But Not Their Knowledge: Black Women in the Archival Science Professions and Their Connection to the Archives of Enslaved Black Women in the French Antilles," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 776-794, doi: 10.1353/lib.2016.0012.

4. Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1971).

but because the headings themselves appear to many as universal and unbiased.⁵

The literature on bias in subject classification generally focuses on the experiences of a single group or demographic, exploring the ways in which descriptive practices have “othered” people of color and other marginalized groups, and pushing for librarians and archivists to be explicit in their framing to dispel the myth of neutrality in the profession, make room for resources from outside the dominant culture, and create more inclusive description.⁶

5. Hope A. Olson, “The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs,” *Signs* 26, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 639–668.

6. Melissa Adler, “Case for Taxonomic Reparations,” *Knowledge Organization* 43, no. 8 (2016): 630–640; Melissa Adler, “Classification Along the Color Line: Excavating Racism in the Stacks,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 1–32, doi: 10.24242/jclis.v1i1.17; Elvia Arroyo-Ramírez, “Invisible Defaults and Perceived Limitations: Processing the Juan Gelman Files,” *On Archivy*, October 30, 2016, 2018, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/invisible-defaults-and-perceived-limitations-processing-the-juan-gelman-files-4187fdd36759>; Dorothy Berry, “Lost in Aggregation: Towards Inclusive Metadata and Descriptive Practices in Digital Collections” (working session at DPLA Fest, Chicago, Ill., April 21, 2017); Marisa Duarte and Miranda Belarde-Lewis, “Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies,” *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 5-6 (2015): 77–702, doi:10.1080/01639374.2015.1018396; Sharon Farnel, Sheila Laroque, Ian Bigelow, Denise Koufogiannakis, Anne Carr-Wiggin, Debbie Feisst, and Kayla Lar-Son, “Decolonizing Description: Changing Metadata in Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (presentation at Netspeed Library Technologies Conference, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, October 3, 2017), doi: 10.7939/R3MS3KF68; Sharon Farnel, Sheila Laroque, Ian Bigelow, Denise Koufogiannakis, Anne Carr-Wiggin, Debbie Feisst, and Kayla Lar-Son. “Unsettling Our Practices: Decolonizing Description at the University of Alberta Libraries” (poster at Diversity by Design Symposium in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, September 14, 2017), doi: 10.7939/R3794175M; Iacovino, “Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Records of Indigenous Australian Communities”; Sandra Littletree and Cheryl A. Metoyer, “Knowledge Organization from an Indigenous Perspective: The Mashantucket Pequot Thesaurus of American Indian Terminology Project,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53 (2015): 640–657; Kara Long, Santi Thompson, Sarah Potvin, and Monica Rivero, “The ‘Wicked Problem’ of Neutral Description: Toward a Documentation Approach to Metadata Standards,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2017): 107–128, doi: 10.1080/01639374.2016.1278419; Mx A. Matienzo, “To Hell With Good Intentions: Linked Data, Community and the Power to Name,” Mark A. Matienzo (website), February 11, 2016, <http://matienzo.org/2016/to-hell-with-good-intentions/>; K. J. Rawson, “Accessing Transgender // Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics,” *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 123–140, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13234/14552>; K. R. Roberto, “Inflexible Bodies: Metadata for Transgender

The past decade has seen increasingly active attempts to approach descriptive metadata in a non-oppressive fashion and to remediate legacy description. Anthony Dunbar was one of the earliest professionals to introduce critical race theory to the literature and to advocate for institutional policies that center trust and transparency and remedy past abuses.⁷ Many efforts to introduce critical race theory to library practice since then have followed a collaborative model. Jon Newman describes a project in the United Kingdom focused on the possibility that “the single, neutral, authoritative and unattributed voice of the archive catalogue might be expanded, amplified and interpenetrated with a range of other, attributed voices.”⁸ The collaborative and participatory approach has found success as a way to produce more inclusive description of Indigenous communities.⁹ Another approach is to create alternative taxonomies for classifying materials created by and about people of color, while the use of an intersectional approach has proved successful at the University of Texas at Austin.¹⁰

Identities,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 20, no. 2 (2011): 56–64; Catelynne Sahadath, “Classifying the Margins: Using Alternative Classification Schemes to Empower Diverse and Marginalized Users,” *Feliciter* 59, no. 3 (2013): 15.

7. Anthony Dunbar, “Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started,” *Archival Science* 6, no. 1 (2006): 109–129.

8. Jon Newman, “Revisiting Archive Collections: Developing Models for Participatory Cataloguing,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 33, no. 1 (2012): 58.

9. Iacovino, “Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Records of Indigenous Australian Communities,” Littletree and Metoyer, “Knowledge Organization from an Indigenous Perspective,” Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, “Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies,” “Decolonizing Descriptions: Finding, Naming and Changing the Relationship between Indigenous People, Libraries and Archives,” OCLC webinar, November 6, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4HGdWx2WY8>, Farnel, Laroque, Bigelow, Koufogiannakis, Carr-Wiggin, Feisst, and Lar-Son, “Decolonizing Description”; Farnel, Laroque, Bigelow, Koufogiannakis, Carr-Wiggin, Feisst, and Lar-Son. “Unsettling Our Practices.”; Raegan Swanson, “Adapting the Brian Deer Classification System for Aanischaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 5–6: *Indigenous Knowledge Organization* (2015): 568–579, doi: 10.1080/01639374.2015.009669

10. Molly O’Hagan Hardy, “The Practice of Everyday Cataloging: ‘Blacks as Authors’ and the Early American Bibliographic Record,” *Past is Present* (American Antiquarian Society blog), June 29, 2017, <http://pastispresent.org/2017/good-sources/the-practice-of-everyday-cataloging-black-bibliography-and-the-early-american-bibli->

While the issues of classification systems and subject analysis dominate most of the literature on how whiteness has shaped descriptive metadata in archives and libraries, the problem of naming in particular has also been explored. This body of literature, while smaller and more recent, has prompted LIS professionals to begin examining how name authorities can also center whiteness and “otherize” various marginalized communities. Heather Lea Moulaison describes a study examining a group of authority records to see which records contain the expanded attributes allowed and/or required under Resource Description & Access (RDA) rules—additional information such as gender, occupation, associated place, and language. She found that in fact few records made use of the RDA attributes, and those that did include expanded identity description tended to be records for “English-speakers, males, and those associated with universities in some way.”¹¹ Frank Exner, Little Bear examines North American Indian names, which often follow multiple naming conventions and often do not follow the Western naming format conventions most used in the Library of Congress Name Authority File (LCNAF); he notes that “North American Indian personal names require special attention in authority control and cataloging because they do not necessarily follow rules developed for European names.”¹²

As in general librarianship, archival work has traditionally viewed itself as ideally neutral and unbiased. Recent professional discussion has, however, thoroughly questioned the neutrality of archives and

ographic-record/, ALCTS Metadata Interest Group, “Diverse and Inclusive Metadata: Developing Cultural Competencies in Descriptive Practices” (presentation at the American Library Association Annual Conference, Orlando, Florida, June 2016), Kristen Hogan, “‘Breaking Secrets’ in the Catalog: Proposing the Black Queer Studies Collection at the University of Texas at Austin,” *Progressive Librarian* 34 (Fall 2010): 50–57, http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL/PL34_35.pdf. Adler, “Case for Taxonomic Reparations,” 632; Hogan, “‘Breaking Secrets’ in the Catalog.”

11. Heather Lea Moulaison, “Authors and Authorities in Post-RDA Library Systems: A Case Study,” (paper presented at IFLA WLIC 2014, Lyon, France, August 16–22, 2014), <http://codabox.org/147/2/086-moulaison-en.pdf>.

12. Frank Exner, Little Bear, “North American Indian Personal Names in National Bibliographies,” in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, ed. K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, April 2008), 150–164.

archivists. The works of Terry Cook, Wendy Duff and Verne Harris, Bergis Jules, Stacie Williams, Sam Winn, and Jennifer Douglas, among many others, have explored the ways in which records creation, acquisition, appraisal, and description are anything but neutral. Tradition is difficult to overcome, however, and the ideals of the unchanged archival collection left in its original order, objectively reflecting the recordkeeping practices of the creator, as well as the myth of the objective archivist whose work simply exposes records without impacting them, pervade much of archival work.

Sam Winn asserts the impossibility of neutrality in archival work, as archivists are unable—as all people are—to escape the societal biases in which they are steeped. The danger, she says, is when we leave these biases unexamined, and unquestioningly accept the hegemonic default.¹³ Sharon Larade and Johanne Pelletier raised the issue of the conscious use of language in archival description, exploring archivists' reluctance to change their practices, including linguistic practices—again, leaning heavily on the specter of neutrality—while recognizing the importance of non-exclusionary language.¹⁴

Bergis Jules explicitly links the whiteness of archival work to physical violence against Black people: “The work we do as archivists, as librarians, as digital preservationists, have [sic] real consequences for marginalized people because who is remembered and how they’re remembered dictates who gets violence perpetrated against them. Black bodies are either erased from the historical record or distorted in the historical record before we’re shot in the street like Rekia Boyd and Trayvon Martin. That’s partly what makes it ok to a large segment of the American public. That erasure from records, cultural spaces, and mass media are partly what allow people to accept absurd justifications

13. Sam Winn, “The Hubris of Neutrality in Archives,” *On Archivy*, April 24, 2017, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/the-hubris-of-neutrality-in-archives-8df6b523fe9f>.

14. Sharon P. Larade and Johanne M. Pelletier, “Mediating in a Neutral Environment: Gender-Inclusive or Neutral Language in Archival Descriptions,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 99–109, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11889/12842>.

for killing us.”¹⁵ Erasing or distorting the histories of Black people from the archival record, whether through collecting practices or descriptive practices, reinforces the dehumanization that leads to widespread anti-Black violence such as police killings, mass incarceration, and gentrification—each of which, in turn, have been the subject of analysis of their effects on Black people and the preservation of their histories.¹⁶

Emily Drabinski, while writing from a librarian’s perspective, identifies an issue closely related to archival practice. She notes the problematic nature of hierarchical classification, stating that hierarchies privilege a single aspect of a subject, while making that privilege appear logical and neutral.¹⁷ The same critique applies to archival description, as it is very intentionally hierarchical in nature, privileging the exposure of creators and collectors—those at the top of the hierarchical provenancial heap—over creators and subjects who fall for various reasons further down on the hierarchy. This is directly related to a core principle of archival work, that of provenance, described in the SAA Glossary as “a fundamental principle of archives, referring to the individual, family, or organization that created or received the items in a collection. The principle of provenance or the *respect des fonds* dictates that records of different

15. Bergis Jules, “Confronting Our Failure of Care Around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives,” *On Archivy*, November 11, 2016, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/confronting-our-failure-of-care-around-the-legacies-of-marginalized-people-in-the-archives-dc4180397280>.

16. Walidah Imarisha, “Keynote Address,” Liberated Archive Forum, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, Portland, OR, August 22, 2017, <http://www.walidah.com/blog/2017/8/22/transcript-of-walidahs-liberated-archives-keynote>; Teressa Raiford, “#ArchivesforBlackLives: Archivists Respond to Black Lives Matter” panel, Liberated Archive Forum, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, Portland, OR, August 22, 2017; Society of American Archivists, “Issue Brief: Police Mobile Camera Footage as a Public Record, November 2017,” <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/issue-brief-police-mobile-camera-footage-as-a-public-record>; Jarrett Drake and Stacie Williams, “Power to the People: Documenting Police Violence in Cleveland,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1-27; Jarrett M. Drake, “Insurgent Citizens: The Manufacture of Police Records in Post-Katrina New Orleans and Its Implications for Human Rights,” *Archival Science* 14, no. 3-4 (October 2014): 365-380.

17. Emily Drabinski, “Teaching the Radical Catalog,” in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, ed. K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, April 2008), 198–205, http://www.emilydrabinski.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/drabinski_radcat.pdf.

origins (provenance) be kept separate to preserve their context.”¹⁸ The provenance and context of records supplies much of their meaning, however, the concept of records-source-as-creator—who gets to be a collection creator/collector/main entry—determines whose names are deemed most important. Jarrett M. Drake questions the principle of provenance as a relic of colonialism and as a principle, asserting that the “patriarchal origins of provenance” embed themselves inevitably in archival description through the emphasis on the collection creator. Because of the legacy of colonialism inherent in the issues of who is able to generate, control, and transfer archival collections to archival repositories, the creators are more likely to be “wealthy, white, cisgendered and heterosexual men.” The resulting provenance-based description serves “to valorize and venerate white western masculinity.”¹⁹

The archives community is beginning to think beyond the traditional concept of provenance. The International Council on Archives’ new Records in Contexts Conceptual Model (RiC-CM), may eventually prove useful in bridging the divide between traditional provenance-based methods of understanding context and new, more expansive ideas. RiC-CM is designed to take advantage of the semantic web and allow archivists to move from multilevel to multidimensional description. The model notes “While almost all archivists accept the theoretical validity of Provenance, many have become increasingly self-conscious and self-critical about the role that archivists and the application of archival principles play in what is remembered and how it is remembered.”²⁰ RiC-CM provides a way to honor both the traditional application of provenance, while also using new communication technologies to accommodate new understandings

18. “Provenance,” SAA Glossary, <https://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/p/provenance>.

19. Jarrett M. Drake, “RadTech Meets RadArch: Towards a New Principle for Archives and Archival Description,” *On Archivy*, April 6, 2016, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/radtech-meets-radarch-towards-a-new-principle-for-archives-and-archival-description-568f133e4325#.6w1a50egi>.

20. International Council on Archives, *Records in Contexts*, September 2016, p. 6.

of archival context that represent the many contexts in which records are created and exist.

Little has been written about names in archival description, and even less on name authorities and archives. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), the primary descriptive standard used by archivists in the United States, contains a section on archival authority records. Here the importance of names to archival description is clearly stated: “The structure and content of archival materials cannot be completely understood without some knowledge of the context in which they were created.” Without knowing who created or otherwise contributed to a collection of archival materials, the records lose meaning.²¹

Additionally, a simple authorized form of name is not sufficient for archival description. DACS requires not only a name, but biographical or historical information to provide context to the persons, individuals, or families themselves. DACS also emphasizes the usefulness of authority records systems as co-equal with collection descriptions. The standard notes that the model provided by the International Council on Archives’ General International Standard for Archival Description (ISAD(G)) is the creation of standardized authority records maintained separately and embedded within archival description, rather than simply incorporating names as text strings into description. DACS declares that elements common to bibliographic authority records and archival authority records include a standardized access point, related or variant names, and information about the establishment and maintenance of the record. But DACS states that archival authority records must also include additional context and relationship information. Of course, with the implementation of RDA for the LCNAF and the increasing inclusion of name authorities from archival materials within the LCNAF, archival and bibliographic authorities are perhaps not so far apart.

One specific area of naming in archival description that has received attention is the issue of documenting names of enslaved people. In 1972,

21. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS), 2nd ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013), 87.

Carole Merritt interrogated the damaging idea that “the Black past is unknowable.” In her discussion of researching the history of enslaved people, she describes the types of records—census records, property and estate records, tax and court records—through which the lives of enslaved persons can be studied. She notes the issue of surnames of enslaved people, in that they often changed over time, and frequently (although not always) were the name of a current or former slave owner.²² David E. Paterson proposes a system to include slaves’ names in finding aids in the format: “[slaveholder last name, slaveholder first name] slave’s first name/last name”, i.e. “[Walter, Allen M.] Ginny Stamper,” regardless of whether the enslaved person used the slaveholder’s name in life. An exception would be allowed for “well known” slaves whose full names are well-documented.²³ This proposed solution dramatically and unfortunately reflects the tension between the archivist’s desire to provide access to under-documented people within historical records with the violence of inflicting the white slaveholder’s identity onto an enslaved person. It is this type of “solution” the authors of this chapter wish to avoid, instead seeking respectful and non-racist alternatives.

Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP)

Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP) was organized in August 2016. The group drew inspiration from the social justice work of many individuals in the field, including but not limited to Michelle Caswell, Stacie Williams, Bergis Jules, April Hathcock, Mario Ramirez, Samantha Winn, and Eira Tansey, but the main call to action came from Jarrett Drake’s talk at the June 2016 ALA Annual Conference. He called on archivists to confront their own complicity in upholding structural inequalities and to build trust with communities being documented based

22. Carole Merritt, “Slave Family Records: An Abundance of Material,” *Georgia Archive* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 16–21, https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/georgia_archive/vol6/iss1/12.

23. David E. Paterson, “A Perspective on Indexing Slaves’ Names,” *American Archivist* 64 (Spring/Summer 2001): 132–142, doi: 10.17723/aarc.64.1.th18g8t6282h4283.

on principles of allyship.²⁴ A4BLiP's name was derived from one of the hashtags Drake had created earlier in the year, #ArchivesForBlackLives.

More than a dozen archivists attended the initial A4BLiP meeting. As of February 2018, there are fifty-five members. Members are primarily white women, which reflects the demographics of the archival profession, as well as A4BLiP's belief that white archivists should actively do the work to create a more inclusive profession. Most members are employed at academic institutions rather than smaller cultural institutions or community archives.²⁵ The group began work by collaboratively creating a draft of an official position statement, via editing and comments within a Google Doc and feedback provided via email.

On January 9, 2017, the finalized statement was released on GitHub.²⁶ A4BLiP contacted formal and informal archivist groups to announce this initial document. The Concerned Archivists Alliance promoted the statement via social media, and in May, A4BLiP presented to Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCCL). A4BLiP requested that one local Philadelphia area organization, the Delaware Valley Archivists Group (DVAG), formally endorse the statement, but they declined to do so. They did link to the statement from their website, with a preface explaining, "A4BLiP is not affiliated with DVAG, although we do encourage our members to read their statement and consider the issues it raises." Later, both DVAG and PACSCCL agreed to fund refreshments for A4BLiP processing events. Although the overall reaction to the statement and to A4BLiP in general was positive, some

24. Jarrett M. Drake, "Expanding #ArchivesForBlackLives to Traditional Archival Repositories," *On Archivy*, June 27, 2016, <https://medium.com/on-archivy/expanding-archivesforblacklives-to-traditional-archival-repositories-b88641e2daf6>.

25. Rather than being a structured professional organization, A4BLiP is intentionally a loose affiliation of individuals who do most of their work remotely. Depending on inclination and availability, an archivist's involvement at any given time may wax or wane. The group's email list serves as a way to discuss issues of interest, including the race for Philadelphia District Attorney; conference and interest group announcements; discussions and formal talks about police body cameras, algorithm bias, and predictive policing; and a member's announcement of her addition of the "Black lives matter movement" heading to the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO).

26. Rappel110 A4BLiP repository, GitHub, <https://github.com/rappel110/A4BLiP>.

archivists were unsympathetic, disparaging the group's aims or objecting to archivists involving themselves in politics as archivists. An early draft of the statement allowed for anonymous commenting, and reactions included rejection of white archivists' role in enforcing white supremacy (and negative comments on the use of the term "white supremacy" in general), expressions of negativity toward the Black Lives Matter movement, and concern that the statement weakened archivists' role as "objective" actors on archival collections.

A session about A4BLiP was part of the programming for the Liberated Archives Forum at the July 2017 Society of American Archivists conference in Portland. The "#ArchivesForBlackLives: Archivists Respond to Black Lives Matter" session provided an opportunity to discuss not just the statement but also the process by which it was created. In keeping with the theme of the Forum, Terry Baxter facilitated the pairing of three A4BLiP archivists with a community member: Teresa Raiford, a prominent voice for #BlackLivesMatter and founder of Don't Shoot Portland, who spoke after the A4BLiP co-presenters. Later in the day, she delivered a powerful closing statement on the importance of community memory, access, and control of archives.²⁷

In August 2017, A4BLiP began discussing future goals. A poll of members indicated interest in two projects: partnering with community archives and conducting racism audits in repository catalogs and finding aids. A4BLiP created two working groups to focus on these areas. The community archives group's first project involved material collected by Rasheeda Phillips, an attorney, activist, and co-founder of the multidisciplinary Black Quantum Futurism Collective. Her collected material includes records of the Brewerytown Sharswood Community Civic Association (BSCCA), a one-month Community Futures Lab residency, and a zine library.²⁸ Phillips planned to donate the material to

27. An audio recording of the presentation, closing remarks, and the majority of conference sessions are available from SAA. <https://www.pathlms.com/saa/events/941>.

28. "Community Futurisms: Time & Memory in North Philly—Community Futures Lab." *Black Quantum Futurism* (website), <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/community-futurisms>.

the BSCCA in the hopes that it would serve as the kernel for an accessible community archives. In mid-December, four A4BLiP members visited the home of Rasheedah Phillips to survey the collection. They established that the collection could be collectively processed in a short amount of time. A “Processing Flash Mob” was scheduled for March 31, 2018, at the William Way LGBT Community Center, where volunteers began processing and the creation of a finding aid. In the fall of 2017, the racism audit group began work, which is described further below.

Names, Name Authorities, and Names of Black People in Archival Description

Working with names is a challenging aspect of archival description. The sheer number of names appearing in any given collection means that not every name can be included in higher-level description such as a biographical note, nor can they be made more prominent as a controlled access heading. Even knowing the names of those documented in archival collections is frequently difficult, as name forms are often partial, or undifferentiated, or must be transcribed as written. In addition to the practical difficulties of identifying names in archival collections, name authority work is hampered by a number of factors: the history of privileging published authors and subjects in name authority systems such as the LCNAF; barriers to archivists contributing to those systems; and issues of who is and who is not considered “important” to name within collection description, a factor often influenced by the archival principle of provenance.

The absence from name authority systems of the names of Black people represented in archival collections is a barrier to important research about the historical lives of Black people.²⁹ More diverse and

29. For one example, see April Armstrong’s blog post on Princeton University’s African American alumni in the 19th century. April C. Armstrong, “What Archival Silence Conceals—and Reveals. Recovering Princeton University’s 19th-Century African American Graduate Alumni,” *Mudd Manuscript Library Blog*, February 7, 2018, <https://blogs.princeton.edu/mudd/2018/02/what-archival-silence-conceals-and-reveals-recovering-princeton-universitys-19th-century-african-american-graduate-alumni>.

appropriate subject headings will do much to increase research access to a more accurate historical narrative, but individually naming people of color is also necessary to provide adequate access to records of marginalized communities. Those who are individually named are deemed important, and those whose names are established and controlled in authority systems such as SNAC³⁰ and the LCNAF are exponentially more visible and more easily researched than those who are not. Particularly in a discovery environment transitioning toward linked data, where an established name heading will connect to resources, entities, and relationships, those established headings vastly amplify the voices and stories of those whose names have been selected for inclusion. The lack of representation of Black people in name description and name authority systems skews the historical record toward white culture and people, effectively creating false silences. This silence and the privileging of certain names over others serves to reinforce the ongoing cultural erasure of Black lives, which in turn, as Bergis Jules states, enables the ongoing dehumanization of and violence against Black people.³¹

Armstrong explores how archives and archival description hid the existence of African American graduate students at Princeton during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She describes how, even though these students were listed in some University publications as well as the Board of Trustees minutes, they were difficult to find. Navigating the University's records required laborious searches of outside sources which frequently did not mention individuals' names. Thus, while many of these men are not completely lost to time, the archival record and the way it is described means that recovering their histories is difficult and requires extensive research.

30. The archival community has begun to explore the creation of name authority records via the Encoded Archival Context-Corporate bodies, Persons, and Families (EAC-CPF) standard and the Social Networks and Archival Contexts (SNAC) project. EAC-CPF is an international standard for encoding information about the creators of records. The SNAC project is a joint effort by the United States National Archives and Records Administration, the University of Virginia, and the California Digital Library to develop a cooperative program for maintaining information about the people, organizations, and families documented by records. Similar to the Library of Congress's NACO program, it is designed as a cooperative cataloging program that archivists at various institutions can contribute to after receiving training. Once records are added to the SNAC web portal, collections related to the individual, family, or organization are connected through the EAC-CPF records on the site.

31. Bergis Jules, "Confronting Our Failure of Care Around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives."

As described in the literature review above, librarians and archivists have been grappling with the issues of whiteness and neutrality (or lack thereof) in the profession. Whiteness—the socially constructed normalization and privileging of white culture—not only permeates all efforts to catalog and describe archival and library materials, but by its nature makes biases in that description difficult to see. The invisible imposition of whiteness on our work represents all identities not described above as “other,” setting them apart and, frequently, rendering them invisible. Archivists have long claimed the ability to be neutral, as a means to objectively provide access to collections without influencing them or skewing their interpretation. However, the very foundations of libraries and archives are based on a society steeped in whiteness, as are the librarians and archivists employed within. While much of the examination of whiteness and the biases in library and archives work within the professional literature has focused on collecting biases, classification, and subject analysis, there is room to examine specifically the role of name description and name authorities within archival work. Names are important. Those who are named are empowered, and those who remain nameless are at best marginalized, and at worst erased. The exclusion of people’s names from descriptions of historical records is not merely a barrier to scholarly research. Rather, it is both a symptom and cause of the violence of whiteness in our society.

There are several issues at work within archival description and name authority work that serve to privilege the naming of the white creators, collectors, and subjects over the naming of Black people represented in archival collections. One is the privileging of published authors and subjects of published works in the LCNAF. The history of who is published—as author or as subject—is, unsurprisingly, largely white and male. The historical emphasis on published works and their associated names privileges the types of people who have tended to publish works or have works published about them—white, male, wealthy and/or educated. People less likely to appear in published works, even if they frequently appear in unpublished primary source materials such as archival collections, are less likely to be included in the LCNAF. While

many people of color and members of other marginalized groups often appear as creators or subjects within archival collections, the unpublished nature of those materials means that their names have not been as readily contributed to the NAF. This is beginning to change as the NAF broadens its range of included names; however, as Moulaison's study demonstrates, the focus still remains white and male.³²

Archival collections provide a diverse pool of names for inclusion in the LCNAF. In fact, Moulaison notes that most current authority records contributed by NACO-trained librarians are created during the process of original cataloging, that is, cataloging of materials not already cataloged by another institution: "the materials they are cataloging are unique, otherwise there would be cataloging copy available."³³ For many libraries, the bulk of this material is likely to be special collection materials, including archival collections. However, few archivists are trained to contribute records to the NAF, and the differences between cataloging and archival processing—not to mention the many and increasing demands for archivists to do more with less—raises barriers for archivists who may wish to do so. Many archivists have little to no training in MARC or RDA, making the participation in NACO training a daunting proposition. Coordinating with NACO-trained cataloging staff to contribute names from archival collections can be one solution; however, this assumes a certain level of institutional staffing and willingness among staff to undertake this work, and most likely an academic setting.

The efforts of archivists to implement archives-centric name authority systems face similar problems. The initial contributors to the SNAC portal as well as the initial member institutions are mostly large research universities, national archives, and well-resourced museums and research institutes in Europe and North America.³⁴ With the exception of Howard

32. Moulaison, "Authors and Authorities in Post-RDA Library Systems."

33. Moulaison, "Authors and Authorities in Post-RDA Library Systems," 4.

34. "Data Contributors," *Social Networks and Archival Context* website, <http://snaccooperative.org/static/about/datacontrib.html>; "2015-2017 Member Institutions," *Social Networks and Archival Context* (website), http://snaccooperative.org/static/about/members_cooperative.html.

University, all of the initial contributors are institutions likely to center whiteness and white people in their collecting and description. Another way in which newer projects such as SNAC carry forward the biases within the structure of our profession is in the use of LC subject headings—as established above, often problematic—in many SNAC records, such as those that refer to Indigenous people in North America as Indians. This practice serves only to reinforce the racism and colonialism of name authorities. Additionally, the time, training, and staffing levels needed to contribute to SNAC make it difficult for smaller repositories with fewer staff and less funding to be active contributors. This can exclude community archives or smaller repositories which specifically collect records of marginalized groups, just as surely as it creates a focus on name authorities only for published authors and subjects. At this point in the development of the project, it's unclear whether SNAC's approach to cooperative archival name authorities will address the problems with racism in archival naming practices.

As mentioned in the literature review, archival practice itself creates barriers to increasing representation of people of color, particularly though the principle and practice of provenance. In archival work, the context of records is as important as the informational content of the records. Through maintaining provenance, archivists hope to allow the original context of records to be understood by patrons, which is crucial in archival research. For example, information about enslaved persons is often found in plantation records, but those records are described with a focus on the slaveholder, who was the creator. While this provides important context for understanding the records and information that appears within them, the archival emphasis on context can also obscure and erase the human beings described as subjects in those records. The narrative of the slaveholder is preserved by archival description, but the lived experience of the enslaved person may be hidden or erased.³⁵

35. Of course, provenance is not always straightforward. Records may have changed hands multiple times prior to arriving at an archival repository. Records may have been lost, or intentionally disposed of. Former owners may not have thought certain documents to be worth preserving—particularly those documenting marginalized people. In

The practical application of provenance in archival work results in an emphasis on the name of the originating source in both the collection title and as author/main entry. (One moderate exception to this is a group of records by one individual collected by another, which results in both names in the title: the Arthur Langley Searles Collection of H. P. Lovecraft Research Files, for example). It is important, however, to think about who has traditionally been empowered to collect archival materials, or create them, as well as whose materials have been collected. Just as published authors and those who have works published about them have traditionally been white and male, so too has it traditionally been white men whose papers have been collected, who have been at the head of organizations whose records have been preserved, and who have had the means and the sense of self-importance to create records of their activities in the first place.

The hierarchical nature of archival description places the name of the records originator or collector at the top of the descriptive pyramid, with all other names falling in layers underneath, with those who are least well-represented by the records in a collection at the bottom. Since the records are ideally maintained as the originator/creator left them, it is that person's or organization's biases and preferences that determine who has been documented and in what order. Description can do much to lift up the names of those who may not have originally been deemed important; however, this requires archivists to think closely about which names those might be, and how best to provide name access to those who according to traditional archival description would not have warranted naming.

A4BLiP Racism Audit Project

The racism audit group drew together members of A4BLiP interested in exploring racism against Black people inherent in archival description

these ways, provenance can sometimes be less illuminating than archivists might wish, while at the same time continuing to erase the history of marginalized people.

and the ways in which white archivists could develop anti-racist, inclusive description practices. The group began meeting regularly in the fall of 2017 via conference calls.

The group first created a bibliography of approximately eighty-two potentially relevant journal articles, blog posts, conference presentations, webinars, and bibliographies. They then focused on dividing up the resources to determine whether each resource was relevant, and, if it was, to create a brief abstract. This resulted in twelve resources being declared irrelevant or only somewhat relevant, leaving the group with seventy resources to draw on in developing best practices.

The initial bibliography was quite broad, addressing more than just description-related concerns. While many of the resources focused on name authorities, subject classification, and the process of archival description, others addressed the role of whiteness, white supremacy, and structural inequality in shaping the archival profession, as well as gender and sexuality issues. These wide-ranging readings helped provide a broad context for the work. By contextualizing the project in this way, the group is able to show how the work on anti-racist descriptive practices informs the project of creating a more ethical, inclusive, and anti-oppressive approach to archival description as a whole.

After completing the review of resources, the larger group divided into two smaller groups to work on best practices. One group focused on concerns related to archival theory about description, such as organizing collections by provenance. The other group focused on creating a recommended practices document for anti-racist archival description, addressing the specific language applied to Black people in finding aids, subject headings traditionally used to describe Black people and communities, and the use of name authorities as applied to Black people. While this document encompasses subject classification, language use, voice and style, titles, and collaboration with Black communities, several points focus specifically on names, including the following recommendations:

- Consider the extent to which describing a person by name is an act of affirming humanity.

- At the same time, when describing living creators or subjects, consider that description has the potential to put people from groups already subject to inordinate amounts of surveillance at greater risk.
- Revisit legacy description to provide better name access for Black people where possible, including names of subjects as well as creators of records.
- Acknowledge the limits of provenance-based description, and describe the subjects of collections documenting oppressed or marginalized peoples at least to the extent that you describe the creators or collectors of those collections.
- Recognize that the naming of enslaved persons within archival description has traditionally been ignored in favor of the naming of slave owners. If, for example, you have item-level description for a deed of purchase for an enslaved person and the seller and purchaser's names are included, include the name of the person being sold. Humanize these documents from all sides—not just from the side of the creator.
- Use terminology that Black people use to describe themselves, while recognizing that the Black community is not a monolith, and different people will have different and sometimes conflicting preferences.
- If you ask people from marginalized communities to help with description, be respectful of their time/labor and provide compensation. Do your homework first, and do not ask others to provide information you can easily find yourself. Pay them for their work.
- Stop writing flowery, valorizing biographical notes for predominantly white male collection creators. Remove and refrain from including evaluative terms like “preeminent,” “renowned,” or “genius” that serve to praise collection creators. Ask yourself: Does including this piece of information help users better understand the records? Evaluate existing biographical notes for aggrandizing language and remove it.

While A4BLiP's racism audit project is focused specifically on archives, many of the best practices could apply in other settings. Libraries and museums could benefit from some of the more general suggestions, such as considering referring to a person by name as affirming of his/her humanity and respecting the time and efforts of marginalized communities. Some of the more specific suggestions regarding how biographical notes are constructed may also prove helpful in other settings with modification to meet the needs of other types of organizations.

Once the racism audit group has finalized its recommendations for anti-racist archival description, the group plans to circulate the best practices to Black communities and Black archivists for feedback. Our goal with this practice is to ensure that any best practices we circulate to the wider community will truly advance the goal of anti-racist archival description, rather than reinforce the structural power of white archivists to determine standards for what anti-racist archival description should look like. We recognize that as white archivists, we have a responsibility to do this work, but also to avoid imposing our view of what qualifies as anti-racist description of affected communities without dialogue and collaboration. Additionally, A4BLiP is also planning to raise funds to compensate reviewers for their work, in compliance with the best practices. The group is currently discussing not only how we will raise the funds, but also how we will structure compensation and provide transparency about what we pay for and how much we pay for that work.

Conclusion

While name authorities, name access, and archival description have too often ignored and erased Black people from the archival record, the problem is not irreparable. The work of scholars and practitioners over the past two decades has helped illuminate the scope and contours of the problem. Naming practices and name authority work in archival description have traditionally been employed in an oppressive fashion that centers white people and their history; however, more recent work has begun to show how archival professionals can begin to overcome

this tradition. These strategies include remediation of racist legacy description and proactively working to make new description inclusive and anti-racist; cooperative description; and a rethinking and critical analysis of the concept of the influence of provenance on descriptive practices. Most importantly, perhaps, archivists should develop an empathetic approach to description that considers the harms inflicted on Black people in our use of naming practices. We should strive for a future in which the concerns, identities, and cultures of all communities are represented in our application of name authorities and name access with the same attention, respect, and care historically reserved for white people.

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