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## Decolonising the academic library: reservations, fines and renewals

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## **Decolonising the academic library: reservations, fines and renewals.**

**Lorraine Jones and Marcia Wilson**

Advisory: this chapter contains an offensive term to identify a historical book title

‘In a 1930’s child psychology study USA, white children were tested on their perceptions of ‘race’ by being shown a picture of a library. After glancing at it they had to answer a number of questions, among them; ‘what was the Negro doing?’. In fact, there were no black people in the picture at all, but the answers all ran in a similar vein: ‘he is busy scrubbing the floor’. ‘He is dusting the bookcases’. As Pieterse points out, no child said ‘he is reading a book’ (Pieterse, 1992:11).

Our concern in this chapter is to develop our thinking through our personal history of racialisation, learning and working in white educational spaces in order to explore the call to decolonise academic libraries. Toni Morrison posits that higher education is an ‘unabashedly theological and consciously value-ridden and value-seeking moral project’ (cited in Law, 2004, 7). Much of western archival methodology is imbedded in colonialism and imperialism with a cultural bias towards Eurocentricity, Christian values and the Enlightenment and therefore libraries are not inherently neutral spaces. Libraries, we argue, as collectors and producers of white heteropatriarchal knowledge are culpable in legitimising and reproducing colonialist and racist ideologies. As nina de Jesus (2014) suggests,

‘realizing the emancipatory potential of the library as institution would require breaking and disrupting the system of intellectual property and other aspects of capitalism, especially the publishing industry. It would require disrupting the empire’s mechanisms for creating ‘knowledge’ by being more than a repository for imperial knowledge products. It would require supporting Indigenous resistance to the settler state and working towards dismantling anti-Blackness’. (de Jesus, 2014)

As Black educators in a Post ‘92 London institution (University of East London) we are committed to the decoloniality of education and the dismantling of institutional Whiteness. In the same way that there have been recent calls to decolonise the university curriculum, the university library must be considered along the same lines. It is not appropriate to attempt to decolonise one part of an institution but leave all others steeped in Whiteness.

### **Here is Peter. Here is Jane. I like Peter. I like Jane.**

Lorraine Jones: A child of Irish and Montserratian immigrant parents, I was born in Hackney, East London and along with all the other local catchment working class British and immigrant kids we went to London Fields Primary School. There, we learned to read and write from the Ladybird Key Word Reading scheme which was the British school reading scheme in the 1960’s and 70’s. (Wikipedia). The Ladybird books were first published in 1964 with 1950s nostalgic gendered illustrations reflecting the life of a nuclear white, middle-class heterosexual family which was alien to our own family experiences. My mum took my sister and me to the local library on a Saturday where my main memories are reading Miffy, Dr Seuss and Enid Blyton’s middle class books of the Famous Five and Malory Towers although I must admit I never read Agatha Christie’s popular tale of *Ten Little Niggers*. As I grew up, the library was always a special place for me - I have always ‘loved a

book'. It was a place of quiet contemplation, meeting my friend Jackie to talk about school and then our first jobs and boyfriends, 'sssshing' and reading about white histories for school (Tudors and Stuarts and Shakespeare) and white romance for love (Mills and Boon-Jackie, !). Regina Everitt, the Black Director of Library, Archives, and Learning Services (one of few in the UK) where I work at the University of East London wrote in a piece about the need for greater diversity in Higher Education (HE) libraries that 'in my teens, during long, hot summers in Philly, I sought refuge in the black literature section of my local library, devouring stories from writers from the Harlem Renaissance through to the Black Power movement' (Everitt, 2020). How envious I was at reading that!

I came to HE late as a divorced mother of four. Like so many other student mothers who have said the same to me over the years, I wanted to study to 'make something of myself' and 'be an example to my kids'. Growing up as a mixed heritage Black person in the UK, I have always had an emotional response to 'race' due to my experiences of racism and colourism. I did Psychosocial Studies and learned European male psychoanalytic and social theories. I did not question learning about these theories as I struggled with them; Eurocentricity was the norm.

However, it was when I came to the theories of 'race' in my second year of study that I began to learn and understand that education, indeed every Western and colonial institution, is based on a racial epistemological framework created, built and shaped by Whiteness. It was revelatory to me and has changed me in every way since. I reflected that my secondary school sports teams, headed up, of course, by white sports teachers were predominantly Black -rounders, netball, track and field. However, so few of these girls were taking subject exams, the lower Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) never mind the higher Ordinary Level (O Level). Although, we girls knew that this was 'how it was', I now understood *why* many of the Black girls at my secondary school did not take exams at 16. They were in the 'General Class' as the selection and separation into 'sets' was based on supposed 'natural' intelligence.

At university I was enlightened by Grenadian Bernard Coard's book '*How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*' (Coard, 1971). Writing in *The Guardian* in 2004 Coard said

'the issues raised in the book, however, applied to the plight of black children throughout the British school system, and not just to those sent to ESN schools. Racist policies, racist curricula, problems of low self-esteem and low teacher expectations, and so on, infected the entire school system. This had devastating consequences for the overall performance of black children throughout Britain' (Coard, 2004).

Coard made the further critical point on the contemporary educational crisis for many Black children that

'What is particularly important to note is that the children of the 1960's and 1970's whom the British education system failed are the parents and grandparents of today's children - large numbers of whom are being suspended and "excluded" from schools, or placed in "special units" or streams...The lesson to be learned for today's problems in the school system is that they were "hatched" decades ago, in the previous two generations'

(Coard, 2004).

It was as an adult in my second year of undergraduate study that I *understood* that my schooling and library experiences had been spaces of Whiteness -white teachers, white authors, white theories, white histories and white librarians. I never saw 'me' anywhere positively in education, in books, in

top jobs, in romance, hair, models, fashion-anywhere. I *knew* I was as clever as some of my white peers who were put forward for the '11 Plus'-a grammar school admissions exam. In the words of Rocky Balboa- 'I cudda been a contender'. The revelation was as devastating to me as it was enlightening.

Marcia Wilson: My early experiences are slightly different to the first author's but many are the same. Born in East London to Jamaican parents, my very early memories are of reading book after book, mostly 'Ladybird' books. My mother used to take me and my brother to the local library on a Saturday morning and I was excited to choose a handful of books that would be mine for a week or so until it was time to return them and select more. I do not recall seeing or reading any book that had images of characters who look like me. I grew up in a working-class home and although money was tight, we always had encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and grammar/punctuation books: reading and writing (the Queen's English) was regarded as important in my home. Being a teenager opened a whole new exciting world for me in relation to books. I always had a Saturday and / or Sunday job and willingly spent my money on cheap (but fashionable!) clothes from market stalls and on books. However, the books I read during my teenage years were very different from the ones I read when I was younger. I discovered books written by Black authors and I was a regular visitor to WH Smiths and Waterstones where they had a section entitled 'Black Writing' and I made a beeline for it. Later, I discovered Black owned bookshops that sold a huge range of the much-loved authors that I was reading such as Terri Macmillan, Bebe Moore Campbell, Toni Morrison (yes, I struggled and re-read each page multiple times but it was worth it), Richard Wright and the list goes on. The feeling of being in those shops was new and exhilarating as I felt a sense of community as I was with like-minded people who shared my passion for literature. I was feeling nourished after reading the books in a way that I never felt when studying my 'A' Level English literature. It was a thirst that could not be quenched as I discovered my blackness through literature and movies.

### **Here is Amahl. Here is Imani. I like Amahl. I like Imani.**

Marcia Wilson: For some, Whiteness can be normalised without even questioning it. I recall as a child watching films that featured majority white actors such as Shirley Temple, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Lassie, Black Beauty, etc. The only time I saw Black people in films was when they were being subservient to white people. Seeing Black people on TV was such a rarity that I used to shout out to my parents when I saw someone so that they could come into the living room and see for themselves. However, when *Babylon* (1980) and *Burning an Illusion* (1981) were released and then Spike Lee's work was a regular feature at the box office, I was hooked on films that had majority black actors. I knew that the curriculum in school was white but never questioned it. It was the norm and I catered for what was missing in my time and with my own money.

As I studied for my 'A' Levels, I knew the classics that were regarded as essential (Shakespeare, Chaucer, etc) but I was also developing a deep love for literature that included characters who looked like me and centralised Black people. It was almost like existing in two different spheres – learning what was deemed important knowledge in the school curriculum but also learning and embracing a different world of Black literature. Whiteness reigned supreme in the education system and therefore, in our school and local library. As a child, I looked at the library as the gateway to the opportunity to broaden my mind, learn about different cultures, and to go on imaginary journeys that transported me to places beyond the East End of London. It did all of that, but the destinations were always white spaces.

There have been many debates concerning the nature of the relationship between the power structure and education and some have documented persistent inequalities in Black childrens' education (Eggleston, 1986; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Wright et al., 2000; Wright, 2010; Wright, 2012). As a mother (first author), I vowed that my children would not have the same schooling experience as me in terms of 'seeing' themselves or being presumed intellectually inferior. As an educator specialising in 'race' I committed to anti-racist and decolonial practice and I have to say that every Black academic I have met thus far, regardless of their subject discipline, is engaged in the same not least because they are only too well aware they are one of the very few who have 'made it'. Indeed, as Ahmed draws attention to in her discussion of diversity practitioners' the institution can be experienced *as resistance*' (2012, 26). The somatic norm underlying the normality of Whiteness in academic libraries is brought to the fore in this chapter by discussing our own experiences of learning in the British school system and then working and studying in the white dominated sector of higher education (HE) where our presence enables us to highlight the synchronic relationship between racialised bodies and elite spaces in the body politic (Puwar, 2001).

### **We The People**

Having discussed the normality of Whiteness in education and our places as learners and academics within it, we now turn to Critical Race Theory (CRT) to explore this topic further. An important theme related to CRT is the development of experiential knowledge as a method to document experiences with racism in order to apply our own perspective to the situation. This point is crucial in informing and tackling racism. Arguably one of the best illustrations of this is by Chinua Achebe who said that 'Until the lion has its own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter'. Documenting experiences about Whiteness in the education system is a critical story to tell especially for white allies to know that Black peoples' experience was very different from theirs. (Anderson, 2015)

Originally developed in the US in the fields of law and radical feminism in the 1970's by Black activists and scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado and Kimberlé Crenshaw, CRT questions the fundamental principles on which a supposedly democratic United States was founded when 'race' was central to its foundations. CRT asserts that 'race' and therefore racism is central, permanent and an ordinary part of our society where Whiteness is 'the norm' and the dominant force of power in social roles and relationships in society. CRT offers an invaluable insight and tool to examine how 'race', although normalised in society, is a social construct, is hierarchical in its nature with societal resources distributed inequitably which Bonilla Silva asserts is 'a racialised social system' (2015). Many Black academics through their lived experiences of racialisation and racism engage with CRT as a theoretical and methodological framework to expose that institutions are underpinned and dominated by white supremacy. Joseph-Salisbury describes CRT 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 re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings' (2019). Invoking CRT, Cecile Wright's research into young Black students' aspirations and performance concurs with Rollock et al's (2011) study of Black middle class parents who used their own privileged positions in education through their access to economic, social and cultural capital to support their children's educational aspirations and attainment (Wright, 2013). Wright posits however that class or the inequalities of access to cultural and economic capital are not a determinant of aspiration for the next generation and that Black families have long persisted in their endeavours to improve their livelihoods via the education system. However, despite the unequal outcomes between white and black students in tertiary

schooling, black students are disproportionately more likely to go on to higher education (Wright, 2013). Recent statistics evidence however that universities are failing Black students in comparison to their white peers in degree award outcomes. As we have argued elsewhere, white students are 13.2% more likely to be awarded a good degree (1st or 2:1). Higher Education Statistics Agency data indicates similar outcomes for Black students with regard to retention on their degree programme, progression from one level of study to the next and graduate employability rates (Wilson & Jones, 2020).

Ahmed asks, 'if diversity is a way of viewing or even picturing an institution, then it might allow only *some* [emphasis added] things to come in to view' (Ahmed, 2012,14). What is not in view by senior leaders in educational institutions is the existence of structural and systemic racism which fails to recognise the power and influence, in this case that the academic library has. We have argued elsewhere it is time for leaders to perform a deep dive into examining the deficits of their institutions rather than their students and to be held accountable for the policies, practices and culture that may affect Black students' progression, retention and award outcomes (Wilson & Jones 2020).

As argued earlier regarding tertiary schooling and Coard's thesis, intellect becomes associated only with Whiteness, the Whiteness of academic thought becomes natural and logical, rather than racial (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019). Academic debates and enquiries as to why educational inequalities continue to persist in tertiary schooling for Black students in comparison to white peers have in more recent years also entered the HE spectrum as of course the children of today become the undergraduate students of tomorrow. Global movements such as #Rhodesmustfall, #whyismy curriculumwhite?, and 'Why Isn't My Professor Black?' demand that knowledge, artefacts, canons and praxis from the Global South are given equal importance to those of the Global North in HE institutions. Building on these movements, there is more recently a strong and urgent 'Decolonise The Curriculum' agenda impacting HE. Library Assistant Director Elizabeth Charles posits

In critically re-examining what is included in the curriculum -the voice, narratives and different sources of knowledge -education could be transformative of both the individual (staff and/or student) and the impact this might have on the subject discipline and society. It will not be an easy transition, but it is long overdue and must be addressed, as well as the lack of other representation and senior representation in the staff of HEIs, scholarly communication and the library and information sectors' (Charles, 2019).

A decolonial lens certainly focuses attention on the Whiteness of HE institutions as Joseph-Salisbury argues, it is the illusion that universities are racial meritocracies that acts to reaffirm the dominance of Whiteness; that dominance is understood merely as the proverbial cream rising to the top (2019). However, Doharty et al. argue that, 'despite the paradox of working under (what purports to be) a 'decolonial' agenda, widespread calls to decolonise our universities have further embedded rather than dismantled Whiteness, thus continuing to characterise the careers, wellbeing, and daily lives of faculty of colour' (2020). We can both speak of our HE experiences of having 'to do the work' in either taking on the burden or moving the decoloniality agenda forward because we feel we 'owe' poorly served Black students and we are 'experts'. Or, more insidiously, being *expected* by white colleagues to take on the burden of 'race issues' for the institution or even when a Black student has personal issues. We have both had many conversations with Black colleagues over the years about the extra pastoral work done willingly or otherwise to try to help students or institutional agendas in addition to normal workloads. Thus, one's career can be structured and limited by 'race' even if this is not a research or career interest and the emotional labour involved in the personal and institutional agendas can impact Black academics' wellbeing. As Rollock argues 'navigating this

inequitable terrain for BME staff can become mentally exhausting and taxing, subsequently impacting on aspects of professional performance within an uncompromising inequitable landscape' (Rollock, 2016).

In his discussion of academia and racism Les Back suggests that two 'antagonistic forces' are at play in HE those being 'a deep resistance in the academy to reckon with what might be called the sheer weight of whiteness' (2004, 1) and the second being multiculturalism (i.e., an increasing international and cosmopolitan student body) and white resistance and resentment to this force. Back posits that through Mission Statements universities claim to embrace Widening Participation and diversity without acknowledging the fallacies of impartiality and neutrality of institutions based on Eurocentric knowledge and values (ibid, 2004). Let's think about the academic library in this context, the lifeblood that runs through the veins of a university and intellectual life which must adjust to the needs, resources, information and interests of an increasingly diverse student body. 97% respondents in a 2015 survey by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the Archives and Records Association (ARA) of library and information professionals in the UK identified as white out of an approximate workforce of 86,000 (Everitt, 2020). That means that white staff, most of whom as Vaughan suggests 'control the language of categorization and control access to the information categorized within the system' (Vaughan, 2018) can be said to be culpable in legitimising and reproducing racism unless they are committed anti-racists. Derrida asserts that 'there is no political power without control of the archive' (1996, 4) which begs the question we ask 'are all members of CILIP and the ARA *active* anti-racists?'. Without library and archive staff having anti-racism training and understanding institutional Whiteness the project of decolonising education is a non-starter.

Many white liberals (which most academic staff are), perhaps not wanting to appear racist or feeling ill equipped to address the subject have operated on a 'colour blind' basis treating students with respect and good intentions but not according to student needs. CRT challenges dominant claims of colour blindness and equal opportunity which are particularly prevalent and standpoints in the UK. Well intentioned white people would probably be devastated to be labelled racist (Burke, 2018). However, many people have not found the tools to effectively discuss racism or have an appreciation of what it actually is, and this is evident in how different people explain and understand racism. In general, white people and Black people view racism differently. Some white people view racism as an attitudinal behaviour, meaning that a person does not like someone who is Black or Brown and treats that person unfavourably; whereas many Black people view racism as a systemic problem that impacts every area of society and institutions. Colour blind racism is built on the premise that equal opportunity exists, and inequality can be explained by individual or cultural differences (Burke, 2018). Bonilla-Silva (2010) proposed four frames to understand how colour blindness operates in different spheres. First, abstract liberalism relates to the ideas associated with political liberalism such as equal opportunity. The premise of this notion is that preferential treatment of certain groups is inappropriate, and individuals should attain positions without the assistance of initiatives such as positive action. There is no acknowledgement that society is not a level playing field and Black people are severely underrepresented in positions of power in all the major UK institutions.

Naturalisation is the second frame presented by Bonilla-Silva. This is based on the premise that inequalities in society are natural because people tend to gravitate towards those who they feel most comfortable with and identify with. The third frame is cultural racism and based on stereotypes of specific groups such as believing that the Black degree awarding gap is the result of deficits in Black people (e.g., laziness and lacking in academic skills). Finally, minimisation of racism to suggest

that our society is mostly post-racial and that racism is no longer the problem that it was many years ago. A prime example of this is when people point to success stories such as successful and wealthy sportspeople and singers as clear evidence that racism is no longer a problem in UK society because with hard work, these individuals were able to rise to the top of their chosen profession. Once again, this argument ignores where power resides in UK institutions.

## **White Allyship**

The concept of white allyship has gained prominence in the discussion of dismantling racism in recent years. However, the conversation has not been without its misgivings, misunderstandings and tensions. One of the issues that has arisen relates to the role of white people as 'saviours' of Black and Brown people. In other words, Black people are portrayed as victims or are positioned from a deficit perspective where they need looking after or are in charitable need (Endres & Gould, 2009). This paternalistic perspective was highlighted when a flurry of white celebrities (e.g., Madonna, Angelina Jolie, Stephen Spielberg, Tom Cruise & Nicole Kidman) adopted Black babies which led to the infants being known as the latest Hollywood trend 10 years ago (Fisher, 2009).

Spanierman and Smith (2017) provide a useful starting point for understanding what constitutes allyship. Probably one of the most important aspects is that being an ally involves continual work. It is important that white allies have a nuanced understanding of racism and white privilege and are engaged in an ongoing process of reflecting on their own positionality with respect to racism. Allies develop ways to use their privilege to promote racial equity and dismantle racist structures. It is important to note that the dismantling of these structures is key. Unfortunately, when allies see their role as one of mainly supporting Black and Brown people, this lends itself more to the paternalistic aspect and reinforces white privilege and supremacy (Endres & Gould, 2009).

True allies must seek ways to develop partnerships with other allies and people of colour and invariably throughout the process, encounter challenges and resistance from other people who believe that society is post-racial. Following the murder of George Floyd, there was an increase in white people wanting to know what role they could play in understanding and dismantling institutional racism. This was evidenced by the increase in anti-racist books by authors such as Reni Eddo-Lodge and Kendi X Ibrahim. Unfortunately, what has become apparent is that some 'allies' expect credit for the work they do and this can at times be seen via social media posts. This broadcasting of their role as an ally and inability to accept criticism from others, especially Black and Brown people, indicates that 'allyship' is not authentic and can clearly be questionable (Spanierman & Smith, 2017).

In addition to white allies being aware of institutional racism and white privilege, it can be argued that effective allies are aware of their racial identity. Although there are different models identifying the stages of racial identity (Hardiman, 1982; Ponterotto, 1988), Helms (1996) is arguably the most comprehensive. She identified six stages of development described as 1) Contact where there is a denial of racism or individuals argue that they operate on a colour-blind basis; 2) Disintegration where there is tension and conflict in choosing between one's ethnic group and greater humanity goals; 3) Reintegration where one resolves the tension by taking a racially superior stance. Individuals may justify this by aligning their thinking with stereotypes that exist about people from other ethnic groups; 4) Pseudo-independence where limited contact is made with people from other ethnic groups but those people are seen as acceptable and possibly like-minded; 5) Immersion / Emersion where there is an increased understanding of white privilege and institutional racism but

feelings of guilt may still be prevalent; and finally 6) where someone fully accepts their racial positioning, adopts an anti-racist perspective and values diversity. It can be argued that when allies are at the final stage of embracing their white identity, they are in a position to be more effective in dismantling institutional racism and feelings of guilt about Whiteness do not hamper the ability to do the work needed to progress towards equality.

As we drew attention to earlier, university libraries are not neutral spaces (Ferretti, 2018). They are gateways to knowledge and can provide avenues to enhance understanding about social justice issues. This was demonstrated by a decolonisation project at the University of East London (UEL) led by Librarian Ian Clark. Starting in 2017, UEL worked towards submission for the Advance HE's Race Equality Charter Mark. Clark's contribution was significant in that he organised a 'Decolonisation' exhibition at the entrance of the university library. Relevant informative journal articles were on display for library users to see and take away upon entrance to the building. In parallel, he worked with colleagues to undertake an audit of the key reading lists for the modules (unit) across the university. Without exception, over 90% of the key authors for the reading list were white males. Importantly, this information was shared with colleagues along with the importance of diversifying the reading list including suggestions for ways to do this. Clark's work is a prime example of effective allyship in that there is work actively focused on dismantling the Whiteness of the library. Clark argues that the library has a significant role in building 'connections and solidarity'. He argues that it is vital for white colleagues to understand the role of the library in decolonisation which isn't about traditional library work and it is not upholding or maintaining the status quo (Clark, 2019).

In May 2019 Marcia Wilson delivered a keynote at the M25 Library Consortium conference. The presentation was about racism in higher education and the audience was overwhelmingly white. There were fewer than 10 non-white people in attendance including the presenter and on reflection, some of the content discussed probably made uncomfortable listening. Marcia reflects: It was the first time that I have delivered a keynote and did not have many delegates wanting to discuss the issues raised after the session. I still think about that session and wonder how the librarians are committing to change in their institutions. It is my hope that out of the uncomfortableness came something to spark change. Why must it always be an event or incident that is traumatic and catastrophic for white people to recognise that inequalities exist in society and therefore in our institutions? It is deeply troubling that it was only after George Floyd was murdered in May 2020 at the hands of a white police officer that outrage was sparked across the globe. It was that traumatic event that was a catalyst for people to explore how to be an ally and ask questions about how they can use their privilege to generate change.

This is effectively illustrated by a graphical depiction of the lack of Black representation at the senior levels of more than 1000 senior posts in UK organisations in the Colour of Power Index (Tulsiani, 2017). Just 17 positions out of 1099 of the most senior roles within the UK's most powerful institutions are held by Black people. This lack of representation impacts on the power to engage in decision-making processes within organisations. Thus, it becomes normalised seeing majority white people in senior roles in every major institution in the UK. Furthermore, their status is often perceived as attained by meritocracy (Littler, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have been thinking through our personal histories of racialisation, learning and working in white educational spaces to explore the contemporary call to decolonise libraries. We concur that although there has been a positive change in British educational curricula from Early Childhood through to non-tertiary in terms of the inclusion of minoritised writers and educational

role models since our own experiences, we argue that not much has changed in tertiary education. Some of this curricula inertia (and what can be overlooked in discussions of decolonising the curriculum as most librarians are white) is how perhaps more stark inter-personal or institutional racism i.e. the lack of Black students at 'red brick' universities can get entangled with silent racism (Trepagnier, 2016) where neo-liberal librarians, unwilling to take risks with tight budgets collect and reproduce established white heteropatriarchal knowledge. DiTomaso's argument is useful to draw on here where she posits 'racial inequality is reproduced primarily by the advantage or favouritism whites provide to other whites more so than from the discrimination and racism of whites toward non-whites' (DiTomaso, 2015). Whilst DiTomaso's position has merit in terms of highlighting often white liberalist silent racism we draw on the strident principles of CRT to argue that libraries are not neutral places in Britain but rather are spaces of white epistemic totality (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p.197)

In an incredible paradox of publishing, on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the internet launch of lauded Bernard Coard's updated book *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*, the UK government's *Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* (CRED) report (known as the Sewell Report) was published. In the report's section on Education, the Commissioners (several of whom were Black and Global Majority) stated:

'Education is the single most emphatic success story of the British ethnic minority experience. Over the last half century, new arrivals to Britain have seized on the opportunities afforded by the state school system and access to university. The story for some ethnic groups has been one of remarkable social mobility, outperforming the national average and enabling them to attain success at the highest levels within a generation. Put simply we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities. The impediments and disparities do exist, they are varied, and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism. Too often 'racism' is the catch-all explanation and can be simply implicitly accepted rather than explicitly examined. The evidence shows that geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism' (The report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021).

Much applauded by Conservatives, one justification for its findings was that the people holding four senior positions in the government, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Business Secretary, the Home Secretary, and the Attorney General, are from an ethnic minority background. The CRED report was denigrated by Black and white academics, activists, institutions and intellectuals alike for presenting ideals from what seemed to many that of a parallel universe. As white Emeritus Professor Max Farrar pointed out '[the report]...chaired by Dr Tony Sewell, published on 31st March 2021, shows that poverty of analysis is not confined to white people' which is a searing truth. Furthermore, Farrar, in his critique of the CRED report's denial of institutional racism yet evidencing of the lack of Black Caribbean educational progression stated that 'somehow it didn't occur to Sewell and his people that the Windrush generation of Caribbean migrants put enormous emphasis on their children's education in the 1950s, 60s and 70s' (Farrar, 2021). In placing the lack of educational progression on individuals (and it is undeniable there are Black families and individuals who have no interest in or value education), the CRED's report is akin to the Ladybird books of 1950s nostalgia reflecting the idealised life of a nuclear white, middle-class heterosexual family which is still alien to most Black family experiences in Britain.

University libraries are an essential part of the educational experience. The benefits they offer the university community are immense. Good libraries can play a pivotal role in strengthening research

and developing researchers (Rasul & Singh, 2011; Research Information Network, 2011) as well as supporting learning and teaching activities (Hickman, 2017). The library could be regarded as the heart of the campus because this is the space that can be accessed by all regardless of whether that is physically or within the digital realm. It stands to reason, given the importance of libraries, that they could also be the most appropriate and fitting site that is central within institutions for resisting Whiteness and engaging in renewed calls to bring about change across the sector. Librarians have the power to decide whether they will contribute to decolonisation work or maintain the status quo. This decision is an important one because it also impacts on what kind of message is being sent to students about what constitutes knowledge and who the producers of knowledge are. The library, in all its power, will either work towards dismantling racist structures or reinforce them.

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## Social Mobility in Education

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<sup>i</sup> A note on terminology:

<sup>i</sup> We use Black with a capital B as explained here by Associated Press June 19 2020 'AP's style is now to capitalize Black in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense, conveying an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa. The lowercase black is a color, not a person' There is specificity in not using a capital W for 'white', Whiteness however has a capital W.