

White Supremacy Exercise Summary

How does white supremacy affect and interact with archival workflows? We looked at digitisation, access, description, acquisition, weeding and appraisal, engagement, education, disposal and deaccessioning, preservation.

Answers and solutions

- Access to profession through education (change ways to become archivists, different models of education)
- Job descriptions (change - do you need to have a qualification? value based frameworks)
- Workforce demographics (lack of accessible training options)
- Lack of representation within the profession - nobody looks like you/“seeing yourself” in the collections, in the reading room
- Structural racisms - lot more people of colour working elsewhere within organisation (security/ service workers)
- Implement targeting collecting, and allocated resources to specific collections which do represent people of colour
- Work globally to support archives under threat - postcolonial archives
- The nature of open access (assumes desire for this level of access) and interaction with record subjects
- Certain groups are legitimised through collecting
- “White knight” mentality - collecting to “rescue” non-white from being forgotten
- Acquisition to fill gaps in collections
- One archive to represent a whole culture or community
- Reductive perspective on black history and non-white archives
- Collecting policies - change to reflect different types of record
- Shortlisting practices for recruitment
- Self-perpetuating collecting - the way collecting is (in part) determined by what has been collected/what “fits” leads to self-reinforcement
- Archival work is always happening - no recognition of community’s own models of archiving
- Review access policies - who are we keeping records from?
- Engage with smaller/less funded/community archives
- Lack of recognition of the cultural uses of collections
- Deliberately obstructive performance of access
- Surveillance
- Active engagement with communities - bringing people in/reaching out
- Funding structures
- Language - “targets” and “hard to reach audiences”
- Wariness of “political activity”
- White fragility
- First impressions (intimidating)
- Reaching out - beyond London and globally
- Who has a say over what happens to records?
- Who gets paid for labour?
- Awareness of terms of engagement - power imbalance
- Archives alignment with state/legal frameworks
- Pictures in promotional materials - which people?
- The expectation that we can be heard in the sector
- Who archives are taught to
- Loans for education
- Education - an active role to disrupt “tired old narratives”
- Who we communicate to - echo chamber
- How to select what to digitise
- Fields in catalogue records
- System of choices
- Offensive language in catalogue descriptions

- Expectation to find records “about me”
- Nature of records - i.e. ephemera
- Institutional inertia
- Descriptions that ignore/gloss over issues of race
- Community description seen as an enhancement
- Lack of respect of different forms of knowing
- Centring own experiences in classification/structures of systems
- Paralysis of cultural sensitivity/individual and organisational risk
- Legacy descriptions allowed to remain
- Lack of explicitness about position towards legacy
- Unconscious shame/embarrassment
- Racist language
- Whiteness is “invisible” - not seen as some you need to describe
- “Difficult”/“sensitive” materials e.g. Nazi memorabilia
- Emotional labour put on archivists of colour - presumption of interests and experiences
- Stigmatisation of “diversity hiring”
- Leadership shifts/long term structural change vs short term individual actions
- Standing up/speaking out in organisations
- Prominence of written records - accepted nature of records
- Ownership and copyright (Western constructs of both)
- Targeted destruction/suppression/neglect of records (where do resources go?)
- Reflexivity and transparency
- Flexibility in practice
- Archives **literally** preserve colonialism
- Climate change.
- Training
- Decision making
- Representation
- Ethics of care - but who is around the table to make this?
- Commitment to ongoing learning/calling and responding better to call outs/processing