



# Critical Cataloging and Critical Race Theory: Implications for Cataloging Practice



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# Advancing the Relationship between Critical Cataloging and Critical Race Theory

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# Dewey Deracialized: A Critical Race-Theoretic Perspective\*

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Jonathan Furner is an associate professor in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has a Ph.D. in information studies from the University of Sheffield, and an M.A. in philosophy and social theory from the University of Cambridge. He works on cultural informatics, and the history and philosophy of documentation. His current research includes studies of social tagging, art museum documentation, the history of classification theory, and the ontology of documents and their subjects. He is a former assistant editor of the *Dewey Decimal Classification*. The views expressed in this paper are his own, and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors of *DDC*, nor those of OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc.

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\* Portions of the work reported in this paper were presented by the author at the 8th International Conference of the International Society for Knowledge Organization, London, England, July 13-16, 2004, and by Anthony W. Dunbar at the 4th International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations, Los Angeles, CA, July 6-9, 2004. The author would like to thank Clara Chu and Tony Dunbar for their comments on previous versions of this paper.

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# Critical Cataloging

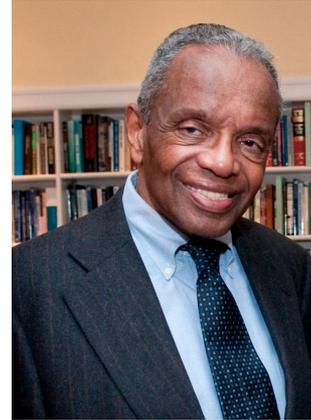


<https://surviveandthriveadvocacy.org/social-justice/>

- Social justice-oriented, part of critical librarianship - use of critical theory
- Deep examination of the history and evolution of cataloging standards and practices
- A framework for understanding and (ideally) changing systems that oppress or harm

# Critical Race Theory

- “Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that evolved from critical legal studies of the 1970s, which originally asserted that white supremacy is woven into most societal structures” (Snow & Dunbar, 2022, p. 646).
- Challenges idea that race should *not* be considered in efforts to combat inequality (“colorblindness”).



Derrick Bell



Kimberlé Crenshaw

- Focus *not* on individual failings and intent, but on outcomes - is the product of X system, standard, policy, etc. producing harm, regardless of intent?

# Critical Race Theory Tenets

- Permanence of Racism
- Whiteness as Property
- Critique of Liberalism
- Intersectionality
- Counter-Storytelling
- Interest Convergence

# Permanence of Racism

- Racism is embedded in social fabric of society/infrastructure
- Assumption of neutrality in cataloging standards, when in fact “Each standard and each category valorizes some point of view and silences another” (Bowker & Star, *Sorting Things Out*)

# Whiteness as Property

- A broadened sense of property that privileges whiteness and the right to exclude (whiteness as “natural” - universalization)
- Emphasis on standardization & efficiency as the ideal, which leads to “othering” anything that falls outside of pre-determined structures or complicates processes

# Counter-Storytelling

- Provides counter-positions of reality and alternative possibilities by resisting the status quo and necessitating the inclusion of voices from non-dominant groups
- Could include modification of existing standards (e.g., SACO African American Subject Funnel Project) or creating new standards (e.g., the Homosaurus) in collaboration with marginalized groups

# Transition points

Two major points to cover:

- Interest Convergence
  - ◆ The Justice/Authority Continuum
- In addition to the context of the paper: CRITical Race information Theory (CRiT)

# Interest Convergence & Justice/Authority Continuum

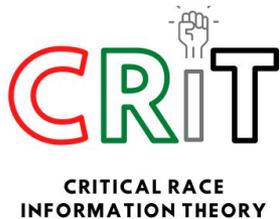
- Derrick Bell's original context and how it has evolved

Bell, Jr., Derrick A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93(3), 518.

- Connecting the premise to critical cataloging possibilities and the premise of a Justice/Authority Continuum

Costanza-Chock, S. (2020). Design justice: Community-led practices to build the worlds we need / Sasha Costanza-Chock. In *Design justice: Community-led practices to build the worlds we need*. The MIT Press.

- The imagination (design thinking) of applications and visual representation of the J/A continuum.



# TENETS & FRAMEWORK OF CRiT

## INFORMATION TENETS

Every aspect of information, including its form, use, structure, and infrastructure can be analyzed in order to understand the ways in which it reflects and represents the beliefs, values, practices, and politics of our society; and how in turn such dynamics affect individuals and groups that are traditionally positioned in society as marginalized or disenfranchised.

Every information context is an opportunity for a critical race discussion or analysis. Everywhere information engages society: CRiT is a viable lens to assess that engagement through.

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