

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

Jonathan Furner

Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California,  
Los Angeles, 300 Young Drive North, Mailbox 951520, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1520 USA,  
<jfurner@ucla.edu>



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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**ABSTRACT:** Critical race theory is introduced as a potentially useful approach to the evaluation of bibliographic classification schemes. An overview is presented of the essential elements of critical race theory, including clarifications of the meanings of some important terms such as “race” and “social justice.” On the basis of a review of existing conceptions of the just and the antiracist library service, a rationale is presented for hypothesizing that critical race theory may be of use to the library and information sciences. The role of classification schemes as information institutions in their own right is established, and the *Dewey Decimal Classification* is introduced as the case to be studied. The challenges faced by classification-scheme designers in the construction and reconstruction of race-related categories are reviewed; and an analysis is presented of one sense in which it might be suggested that recent (2003) revisions in one of the *DDC*’s tables appear not to meet those challenges wholly successfully. An account is given of a further sense in which adoption of a critical race-theoretic approach has the more radical effect of calling into question a fundamental decision recently taken to “deracialize” the *DDC*. In conclusion, an assessment is made of critical race theory as a framework for evaluating library classification schemes.

## 1. Introduction and overview

With this paper, the primary objective is to introduce critical race theory as a potentially useful approach to the evaluation of bibliographic classification schemes. The goal of the theorists and activists who engage with critical race theory is to eradicate racial injustice, first by making plain its institutional nature, and sec-

ond by specifying and undertaking the radical action that is required to replace racist institutions with antiracist alternatives. In this paper, a widely-used library classification scheme—the *Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)*—is considered as an information institution. The challenges faced by classification-scheme designers in the construction and reconstruction of race-related categories are reviewed; the

changes that have recently been made in the *DDC*'s treatment of books relating to racially-defined populations are examined through the lens of critical race theory; and the utility of critical race theory in this context is evaluated. Since the evaluation is based on the results of a single case study of quite limited scope, the paper's content should be treated as the result of a preliminary exploration, conducted with the intention of stimulating further discussion, rather than as the product of any completed project.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with an overview of the essential elements of critical race theory, including clarifications of the meanings of some important terms such as "race" and "social justice." On the basis of a review of existing conceptions of the just and the antiracist library service, a rationale is presented for hypothesizing that critical race theory may be of use to the library and information sciences. The role of classification schemes as information institutions in their own right is then established, and *DDC* is introduced as the case to be studied. A variety of approaches on which one might draw in such a study, including some alternatives to critical race theory, are identified. The paper continues with an enumeration and discussion, informed by critical race theory, of the major challenges that face the designer of schemes for the classification of race-related topics, and an analysis of one sense in which it might be suggested that recent revisions in one of the *DDC*'s tables appear not to meet those challenges (nor, thus, to serve the library user) wholly successfully. An account is then given of a further sense in which adoption of a critical race-theoretic approach has the more radical effect of calling into question a fundamental decision recently taken to "deracialize" the *DDC*. The paper's conclusion is reached with an assessment of critical race theory as a framework for evaluating library classification schemes.

## 2. The Elements of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the late 1970s with the writings of legal scholars Derrick A. Bell, Jr., and Alan D. Freeman on the racist underpinnings of US law (see, e.g., Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Since that time, many descriptions and definitions of CRT have been recorded in the literature. A substantial proportion of this literature has been conveniently collected in a number of comprehensive readers (Crenshaw et al 1995; Delgado 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 1997 and 2000; Essed and Goldber

2002) . Bell, Freeman, Delgado, and scores of other authors who have contributed to CRT over the last quarter-century are represented in these volumes. Although many of these definitions share certain components, it is rare for two authors to emphasize precisely the same aspects to precisely the same extent. One potentially useful way to consider CRT would be to view it as the sum total of critical discourse (or writing, knowledge, or understanding) about theories of race and racism. Alternatively, and more specifically, it may be viewed as:

- a practical project, the goal of which is to eliminate social injustice;
- an argument providing a justification or rationale for embarking on such a project—an argument that may involve (i) description of existing structures, (ii) explanation of the processes that give rise to these structures, and (iii) articulation of distinctive ethical, methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions, preferences, or convictions (that collectively may be said to form a distinctive ideology, epistemology, conceptual framework, perspective, or worldview);
- a specification of the methods (approaches, techniques, mechanisms, instruments, or tools) by which observations may be made, analyses undertaken, conclusions drawn, explanations given, changes effected, and the project as a whole conducted successfully; or
- (most typically) some combination of all of these.

CRT as an argument tends to run along the following lines:

- description of the institutionalized, white, unchallenged nature of contemporary racism. Society in the US (and, by extension, Western society as a whole) is seen to be characterized by a pervasive set of power relations that systematically privilege the white population, and that generate a form of racism that is institutional, systemic, structural, everyday, and everywhere. Even though it is the white population whose supremacy is assured by this racism, the structure appears to most people (white and nonwhite) to be both just and natural.
- explanation of the persistence over time of this power structure. Such persistence is viewed as a function of (i) the white population's control of the policymaking and legislative processes, and the consequent ability of that population to make policies and laws whose cumulative effect is sim-

ply to reproduce the existing power structure, and (ii) the white population's control of public discourse about those processes, and the consequent ability of that population to effectively silence dissenting, marginal, and minority voices, and to obtain general acceptance of the truth of a description (actually inaccurate) of legislative decisions as "race-neutral" and "color-blind" rather than as racially discriminatory.

- an ethical commitment to social justice. Race-based power structures are seen to be undemocratic, inequitable, and unjust, in virtue of the variation in the extent to which members of different racially-defined populations are allowed to benefit from social, cultural, economic, and political opportunity, and social injustice of this kind should be challenged until it is eradicated.
- a methodological commitment to radical action of both an intellectual and a physical kind. Complete eradication of social injustice is viewed as unachievable unless (i) the realities of the nature and cause of contemporary racism are exposed, and (ii) the mechanisms for change are radical and revolutionary rather than piecemeal and reformative. Liberal policymakers and civil rights movements are controlled by white interests, and their actions ultimately benefit the white population; in any case, these groups have at their disposal no mechanisms for radical change.
- an epistemological commitment to the social construction of concepts such as race, combined with an ontological commitment to the reality of populations such as the races. One important implication of these for CRT method is that, since social reality is seen as only constructable through the communication of stories about individual situations, rather than discoverable through the apprehension of some universal, transcendent objectivity, the realities of racism can not be exposed until the voices and stories of members of oppressed, marginalized, and dispossessed populations are heard.

The goal of critical race theory as a practical project, then, is to effect a successful challenge to social injustice. The methods that are used by critical race theorists are essentially twofold:

- analysis of the social, economic, legal, and political relations among, and processes involving, individuals and groups of different racial identities, with a view to demonstrating the truth of the as-

sertions listed above—that is, (i) to uncover, expose, and highlight the discriminatory nature of race-based policy and practice; and (ii) to understand and explain the persistence and pervasiveness of this racism through the development of theory about the function and operation of race-based ideology and mythmaking. Such analysis is often conducted through the construction of stories or narratives that give a voice to those who offer alternative perspectives but who are typically silenced, rather than through any "scientific" method that inevitably privileges the contributions of the already powerful; and,

- calls to political and legal action of the kind that is required to eradicate racial injustice and to replace oppressive structures with truly democratic alternatives.

Why should we, as teachers, researchers, and practitioners of librarianship, be concerned with critical race theory? There are potentially two reasons. In the first place, it might be considered that we—or, at the very least, a significant number of us—happen to share the commitments made by the critical race theorist to certain principles of social justice. In the second place, it might be recognized that the argument of CRT is directly applicable to information institutions (such as libraries and information services), not just legal ones.

It is instructive in this respect to compare the work that has been done in developing a critical race theory of education. Interest in the application of CRT to an analysis of the racist structure of educational institutions grew in the mid-1990s with the publication of two influential introductions to the CRT approach in the literature of educational research (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995, Tate 1997). Special issues of the *International journal of qualitative studies in education* (Parker et al. 1998) and *Educational philosophy and theory* (Leonardo 2004) have subsequently been devoted to CRT themes, and much attention has been paid to CRT perspectives on the production and reproduction of racial injustice in schools, colleges, and universities. Critical race theorists have collected evidence to demonstrate, for instance, the role of curriculum in legitimizing dominant white voices and silencing others; the ways in which individual students of color, rather than any inadequacies in the instruction they receive, are blamed for their academic failings; the invalidity of traditional, culturally specific assessment measures for evaluating students' progress and achievement;

and the inequitable foundation of school funding on property taxation (see, e.g., Ladson-Billings 1998).

Just as legal and educational institutions may be seen to be infected with racism, so too may our information institutions. Consideration of the conclusions reached by educational researchers and listed above might prompt us correspondingly to surmise, for example, that the role of library classification schemes in legitimizing the ideology of dominant groups might be analogous to the role of curricula in schools; that the low levels of usage of library services among people of color might be explicable in terms of the low levels of quality of those services rather than the low levels of interest of those people in reading or learning; that current strategies for evaluating library services might be unable to produce valid and reliable assessments of the quality of service to diverse populations; or that the divide between the information-rich and information-poor might be a direct result of inequitable funding of libraries in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

These two motivations for librarians to take CRT seriously—the shared commitment to social justice, and the potential applicability of CRT to information institutions—are examined in more detail in two subsequent sections. Those sections are prefaced with necessary clarifications of the meanings, firstly, of “race” and “racism,” and secondly, of “social justice.” In so doing, the ontological, epistemological, ethical, and methodological commitments of CRT are themselves investigated in a little more depth.

### 3. Race and racism

It is worth noting that the concept of race is relatively complex in a way that many far less controversial concepts are too. Part of this complexity arises from the way in which the term “race” does double time as a property term (in the same sense in which “ethnicity,” for example, is a property term) and an object term (in the same sense in which “ethnic group,” for example, is an object term).

To illustrate this complexity, let us consider, as an example, an object that, for some reason, we wish to describe—that is, an object whose properties we wish to specify. Suppose that object is me. We may specify certain of my properties in the form of a set of attribute/value pairs. Each such pair consists of (i) a label for a given attribute, and (ii) a label for the value that I exhibit for that attribute. For instance, three of my properties could be specified as follows:

Attribute = “name” : Value = “Jonathan Furner”

Attribute = “age” : Value = “37”

Attribute = “race” : Value = “white”

The set of all instances (i.e., occurrences or tokens) of the attribute “race” comprise the attribute-type “race.” The set of all instances of “white” comprise the value-type “white.” The set of all value-types that may possibly be instantiated for the attribute-type “race” is a value-type set of which “white” is just one member. (Librarians may prefer to call an attribute-type set a “metadata element set,” and a value-type set a “controlled vocabulary.”)

The base complexity of the concept of race may be recognized if we consider that the term “race” (just like “name” and “age”) may be used to refer to any or all of the following things:

- an attribute-type. For example, we may ask “What is your race?”, meaning “What is the value that you exhibit for the attribute ‘race’?”
- any class of objects that share the same given value-type for the attribute-type “race”—e.g., the class of people sharing the value-type “white” (i.e., the white race); the class of people sharing the value-type “black” (i.e., the black race); and so on for each possible value-type; and,
- the set of value-types that may possibly be instantiated for the attribute-type “race”—for example, we might say that “white” and “black” (or “the white race” and “the black race”) are both members (instances) of the class (kind) “race.”

The ontological question arises: Are the races natural kinds, or are they nominal kinds? To answer this question, and to recognize why it is an important one, we need to understand the distinction between “natural” and “nominal” in this context (see, e.g., Schwartz 1977).

A natural kind is a kind whose members are naturally members of that kind, independently of whether it is perceived by any human being that they are or not. For example, we might say that water is a natural kind, because membership of that kind does not depend on whatever we say about what is water and what is not. A nominal kind, on the other hand, is a kind whose members are nominally (conventionally, artifactually, arbitrarily, synthetically) members of that kind, in the sense that they are members of that kind simply because a group of people has reached a consensus that they are. Whether an object is a member of a given nominal kind or not is determined arbi-

trarily by us: if enough of us agree that it is, then it is. Those people who are already in agreement may try to persuade others by appealing to the observation that the given object shares (or shares enough of) the same nominal essence, made up of a conjunction or cluster of superficial properties, that other objects have.

We may identify two main positions on the question of the existence of natural kinds. On the side of the naturalist, one might assert that there are at least some kinds that are natural and not merely nominal. (Some naturalists go further and claim that almost all kinds are natural.) On the nominalist (or conventionalist) side, one might instead claim that there are no kinds that are natural: all are nominal. Clearly, any nominalist would say that the races are not natural kinds, simply because there are no natural kinds. But one need not be a thoroughgoing nominalist to hold the view that races are not natural kinds. One might allow that there do exist some natural kinds (like water, for instance), but that the races are not natural kinds.

The naturalist is often an essentialist about natural kinds. In other words, she would typically argue that any object's membership of a given natural kind is determined by its having the same real essence—the same underlying atomic, biological, or chemical structure—as other members of that kind. Moreover, the essentialist about natural kinds is commonly a realist about science. The realist position is that it is possible for us to distinguish between natural and nominal kinds, even though real essences are unobservable, because science allows us to confirm the existence of unobservable entities.

The question “Are the races natural kinds?” has been answered by realist, essentialist, naturalists unequivocally in the negative. The results of scientific investigation into the biological structure of members of each race conclusively demonstrate that there is no essence that is common to all members of any given race. The *Statement on “Race”* adopted by the American Anthropological Association on May 17, 1998, is intended to represent “the contemporary thinking ... of a majority of anthropologists,” and reads (in part) as follows: “... With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century ... it has become clear that human populations are not ... biologically distinct groups. ... [A]ny attempt to establish lines of division among biological populations [is] both arbitrary and subjective.”

There is some confusion, nevertheless, over the application of the term “essentialism” in this con-

text. One may be an essentialist about natural kinds in the sense explained above, yet be an anti-essentialist about the races in the sense that one believes that the races are not natural kinds. The latter is the sense in which the term is usually used in the literature of CRT (see, e.g., Delgado and Stefancic 2001). The anti-essentialist about races is committed to the view, confirmed by science, that the races are nominal kinds of which membership is solely a matter of human convention.

In the common view, there are very many other kinds of entity that may be viewed as nominal kinds. It can easily be argued, for instance, that the concept “table” is just as much a nominal kind as “white person,” since there is no underlying atomic structure that is common to all tables. Of course, such an argument does not demonstrate the unreality of tables, any more than it demonstrates the unreality of white people. Nor does it demonstrate the unreality of that class known as the class of tables, any more than it demonstrates the unreality of that class known as the class (or race, or population) of white people. All it demonstrates is the nominality—the artificial, conventional nature—of those classes.

The nominality of nominal kinds is commonly expressed in the statement that they are socially constructed. In this way, the races are seen to be socially constructed because membership of any given race depends on the extent to which a consensus about the criteria for membership has been reached among the people who refer to that race. Again, a belief that the races—the concepts—are socially constructed commits us neither to the unreality of the members of those races, nor to the unreality of the races themselves. The races are indeed very real, especially (one might say) for those who self-identify as members of any race, and for those—all of us—who have been treated differently by others on account of our being perceived by those others to be members of any race.

The criteria that are commonly used in practice to justify individual decisions to treat a given person as a member of a given race are physiological characteristics, such as skin color and hair texture, and genealogical characteristics, such as descendancy from ancestors who were historically considered to be members of a given race. In contrast, cultural characteristics, such as language and religion, are the criteria that are commonly used to determine whether a given person is a member of a given ethnic group. However, in practice, the races are those populations whose members have been identified, by themselves or by others, as members of those races, and have

been treated accordingly. We might prefer to use a term such as “racially-defined populations” to refer to the races, but the meaning would be the same.

An act may be called racist if the outcome intended by the actor is the unjust treatment of another person on account of the actor’s perception that that other person is a member of a given race. It is possible to distinguish between individual racism, where the actor is effectively unconstrained in their activity by external forces, and institutional racism, where activity is at least partially prescribed by procedures embedded and formalized in the structures of institutions such as government agencies, schools, and libraries. Since the effect of either kind of racism is the production and continuous reproduction of a hierarchy of more-powerful and less-powerful races, where the dominant race controls the institutions of society, it is sometimes suggested that only members of the historically dominant race (i.e., whites) are logically capable of acts of institutional racism.

One tactic that is sometimes suggested as a potentially effective component of a strategy to eradicate racism is to encourage everyone to abandon the use of racial categories. Lee (1994) and Mosley (1997) provide evaluations of this tactic. The thinking is that, given the nonnatural character of those categories, it does not make sense to continue talking about the black race, white people, and so on. And if we abandon the use of such categories in our discourse, we thereby take a positive step towards color-blindness—a state in which racial characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and descendance are simply not recognized in our everyday interactions as significant features of people.

This argument is based on a particular reading of the scientific case that the races have no real essence—that there is no underlying biological structure common to all members of any race. The scientific case, of course, is very widely accepted today. However, it could be argued that the eliminativist position is one whose proponents choose to ignore the point that kinds do not have to be natural to be real. Rarely is it suggested that we should abandon the usage of terms for other nominal kinds; so where is the case for doing so with the races? Moreover, it would seem to be an empirical matter whether the elimination of racial terminology would be followed by the abandonment of racial thinking. The reverse process—obsolescence of terminology resulting from revisions in ideas—would seem to occur more frequently. Perhaps what is more urgently required is a renewed commitment to making concerted efforts to

reconstruct institutions on an antiracist, communitarian model, with the rights of groups such as the races held to the fore. This possibility is considered further in the next section.

#### 4. Theories of social justice

It was noted above that critical race theory is characterized by a commitment to social justice. By itself, the expression of a preference for social justice has little content. Few are moved to argue seriously in favor of the alternative—injustice—as a desirable state of affairs. To understand what is meant by any individual’s avowal of a commitment to social justice, therefore, we need to identify and examine that individual’s conception of the conditions that must be satisfied if social justice is to be attained.

Social (or distributive) justice is a property of distributions of goods and services among the members of a society. A theory of social justice comprises a specification of the principle by which those goods and services may be said to be justly distributed, together with a justification for choosing that principle above other candidates. Historically, the focus has been on the just distribution of goods and services of economic value, but more recent theories have been as concerned with the distribution of cultural benefits as with that of material wealth and income.

Some examples of the kinds of principle that have been suggested on various occasions by political philosophers in the Western liberal democratic tradition are as follows:

- A just distribution is one by which all individuals are rewarded equally;
- A just distribution is one by which all individuals are rewarded according to their due;
- A just distribution is one that results from an equal prior distribution among individuals of resources such as opportunities;
- A just distribution is one whose outcome is such that no individual is worse off than before;
- A just distribution is one whose outcome is such that the quantity of welfare (or utility, or satisfied preferences) in society is maximized.

Some theories may be characterized as contractarian in that, in justification of principles such as those listed above, their proponents make an appeal to a hypothetical contract, of the kind that rational individuals would choose to enter into if they were un-

aware of the nature of their personal talents, abilities, or productive potential (or those of others). Contemporary interest in contractarian theories can be traced primarily to the publication in 1971 of Rawls' massively influential *A Theory of Justice*, in which Rawls invoked the idea of a hypothetical contract to justify his principle—that a just distribution is one that is (a) made under conditions of equality of opportunity, and (b) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.

One problem for contractarian theories is their lack of concern with (and thus their implicit justification of) apparently unjust states of affairs that arise not through state intervention, but through the cumulative effect of individuals' free behavior in the private sphere. Such states of affairs include those that are characterized by the persistent monopolization of both economic and cultural goods by particular groups distinguished on the basis of class, race, gender, and so on. Alternative theories of social justice may be classified as communitarian in that their proponents seek to justify their principles not by appealing to some imaginary, universally accepted contract that ultimately allows institutions of the state to assume control over the distribution of goods, but instead by claiming that justice is a property of any distribution that does not violate the special rights or liberties of particular groups or communities and their members—especially minorities and other groups that have historically been oppressed by those in power (see, e.g., Shapiro and Kymlicka 2000). While the contractarian is concerned to uncover injustice that is the result of state institutions misapplying or failing to apply certain principles, the communitarian is concerned to expose injustice of the systemic kind that is claimed to be an inevitable consequence of the liberal democracies' pursuit of ideals of personal liberty and government neutrality. Whereas for the contractarian social justice is associated with notions of universality and personal freedom, for the communitarian it connotes diversity and group emancipation.

## 5. The Just Library Service

A version of the communitarian perspective has emerged as one of steady influence on the library profession over the last forty years. Its impact has been on conceptions of what the purpose of library service ought to be—in other words, on conceptions of the just distribution of cultural artifacts. Before we

can examine this impact a little more closely, some rough boundaries need to be drawn around a range of purposes, objectives, and goals that have at various times been attributed to information institutions.

The library provides access to, and thus enables the use of, cultural artifacts or resources (e.g., books) to which meaning may be assigned. The expectation of the library user is that through use (e.g., reading) of those resources, they will derive some value or experience some benefit. For example, their time may be spent enjoyably, they may come to a better understanding of the world, their character may become more virtuous, their motivation to carry out some activity may increase, or their opportunity to make a profit in the marketplace may be enhanced. The kinds of benefit or value that may be derived from the use of library resources may be classified broadly as follows:

- emotional value: contentment;
- intellectual value: knowledge;
- moral value: virtue;
- sociopolitical value: motivation;
- economic value: profit.

A correlation is sometimes drawn between these kinds of value and the kinds of “need” or goal that library users have. In such a context, it becomes a relatively simple matter to give an account of the function of the library in terms of the satisfaction of user needs. However, we should be careful to note at the outset that the goals of library users, those of library employees, and those of library managers, may well diverge, and that the “needs” that ultimately are satisfied by library use may not be those of users but those of employees or managers. The kinds of goal that may be pursued to a greater or lesser extent by any individual member of these latter groups include the following:

- user satisfaction: to enable library users to achieve their actual goals;
- patronage: to enable library users to achieve the goals that the library manager believes they ought to have;
- equality of opportunity: to provide all members of society with the same level of access to library resources;
- outreach: to serve as many people as possible;
- reward: to provide preferential service to an elite class of users;
- freedom of choice: to provide library users with access to as wide a range of kinds of resource rep-

- resenting as wide a range of points of view as possible;
- quality of recommendation: to make informed selections of the best resources (and thus protect the user from the worst);
  - accountability: to ensure that the library’s activities are accurately documented;
  - efficiency: to devise library procedures that are fast, cheap, and easy to implement;
  - diversity: to enable library users to positively self-identify with multiple cultural communities;
  - conformity: to assimilate library users to the cultural norms and standards of the dominant group in society;
  - emancipation: to fight racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression;
  - stability: to maintain the power structures currently prevailing in society.

Upon examining the history of public libraries in the United States, it is possible to distinguish two particular conceptions of the just library service that have enjoyed prominence in successive periods (see, e.g., Harris (1973) and Rogers (1984)):

1. **1850-1945.** From the time of the inauguration of the first public libraries in the mid-nineteenth century until the 1940s, the dominant ideology influencing library managers was authoritarianism. The emphasis was on the librarian’s responsibility to select the “best” books for an elite minority of middle-class scholars, while providing the masses with a harmless source of recreation and entertainment that would keep them too busy to harbor ideas of insurrection, and inculcating in new immigrants the morals of the American who is “sober, righteous, conservative, patient, devout” (Harris 1973, 2510). The public library was seen as a stabilizing agent that acted as “a deterrent to responsibility, intemperance, and rampant democracy” (Harris 1973, 2514), and a tool for the promotion of the interests of the ruling classes.
2. **1945-2000.** In the latter part of the twentieth century, with the growth and success of the civil rights movement, a more liberal conception has developed of the library as the guardian of the people’s rights to know and to choose, and thus as a bulwark of democracy. The ideal of freedom of access to all recorded knowledge for all people, provided by librarians who remain stoically neutral and indifferent to conflicting interests, has replaced earlier conceptions that were based on the

firm conviction that librarians know best what is “good” for their public.

The general trend, then, has been a move toward the evaluation of the library in terms of the degree to which the expressed needs of the individual user are satisfied, and the degree to which the equal rights and freedoms of the individual user are protected. The American Library Association (ALA 1996) adopted its *Library Bill of Rights* in 1948, formally establishing a commitment to the principles of equality of opportunity (Article I: “[L]ibrary resources should be provided for ... all people of the community the library serves”) and freedom of choice (Article II: “Libraries should provide materials ... presenting all points of view on current and historical issues”). The ALA’s action preceded the United Nations’ (1948) proclamation of its *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by a few months, and it is worth quoting at length from the latter document as further evidence of the mid-century codification of some of the core principles of liberalism that have guided librarians in the Western democracies.

- Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. ...
- Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. ...
- Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence ...
- Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought ...
- Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.
- Article 26. Everyone has the right to education. ...
- Article 27. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community ...
- Article 28. Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Articles 18 and 19 in the *Universal Declaration* together form the basis of the principle of intellectual freedom, also codified with precision in the *Library*

*Bill* (Article I: “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation;” Article II: “Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval;” Article III: “Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment;” and Article IV: “Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgement of free expression and free access to ideas”). A commitment to the protection of the rights of all individuals to freedom of thought and freedom of expression as well as freedom of choice (i.e., the “freedom to read”) has become a central component of the modern librarian’s credo, and is reflected most explicitly in the work of the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, established in 1967. (Boucher and Kelly (1998) and Lamont (2003) provide introductory discussions of theories of social justice.)

Yet, a more radical, more communitarian conception of the just library service has also emerged since the 1960s. Several groups of librarians who share this conception have been formed in recent decades: the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT; founded in 1968 (West and Litwin 2004)) of the American Library Association (ALA); the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG; founded in 1990 (Cushing 2004)); and the Social Responsibilities Discussion Group (SRDG (2001); founded 1997) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (See, e.g., Article 9 of the *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* (1978): “Special measures must be taken to ensure equality in dignity and rights for ... groups ... In this respect, particular attention should be paid to racial ... groups which are socially or economically disadvantaged, so as to afford them, on a completely equal footing ... the advantages of the social measures in force ....”)

The shared conception of these groups is one that results from a broad critique of the kind of power structure that may be identified as characteristic of contemporary Western liberal democracies—a structure that systematically creates and reproduces relations of domination and subordination among populations defined on the basis of class, sex, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Acceptance of the truth of this critique commits us to a prescription of the purpose of any public institution as being to enable the dismantling of the existing structure in which the privileging of certain groups is systematic and inevitable, and the construction in its place of a new social order in which institutional forms of racism, sex-

ism, and homophobia are eradicated. In this context, the just library is one whose resources are put to active, deliberate use in support of social change and in recognition of the special rights of oppressed groups. It is only in this way, so the argument goes, that the library can demonstrate a serious commitment to principles of social justice such as those found in the *Universal Declaration* (Article 2: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms ... without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex ... or other status”) and the *Library Bill of Rights* (Article V: “A person’s right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin ...”), and codified even more explicitly in documents such as the United Nations’ *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (1963), *Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice* (1978), and *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992).

## 6. The Antiracist Library Service

In the previous section, we noted evidence of a widespread commitment among library educators, researchers, and practitioners to principles of social justice of the kind that critical race theorists similarly imbue with significance. Turning now to the second of the reasons that earlier we suggested might persuade librarians of the value of the CRT perspective, we shall briefly enumerate some of the manifestations of institutional racism that have been observed in the provision of library service, and the kinds of recommendation for responsive action that have been made by concerned observers.

Instances of institutional racism in the library may be classified under the following broad headings (see Peterson 1996, St. Lifer and Nelson 1997, Wohlmuth and McCook 2004):

1. Refusal to accept that racism exists or is a problem;
2. Casual indifference to everyday racism in the library workplace;
3. Unequal representation of racial populations among library staff;
4. Inadequate provision of library resources and consequently low levels of user satisfaction among diverse local communities;
5. Low levels of usage of library services among diverse local communities; and,

6. Lack of procedures to guarantee the quality of library services to diverse local communities.

In combination, the phenomena falling under these categories produce a result of a general kind that is often referred to as a binary divide—a divide between the information-rich and the information-poor, between the information-literate and the information-illiterate, or simply between the white and nonwhite populations. (See Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2004 for a summary of factors contributing to the “digital divide” perceived to exist between those groups (the wealthy, the young, whites, urban dwellers) that enjoy high levels of access to information available via networked computers, and those (the poor, the old, nonwhites, rural dwellers) that do not.)

The kinds of action that are required to institutionalize diversity include the following, enumerated in the order in which the kinds of racism were listed above (see Durrani 1999, McCook 2001, Orange and Osborne 2004):

1. (a) Admission on the part of library managers that racism in libraries exists, and that it is an inevitable result of the power relations that are at once reproduced in and supported by the structure of the library institution, rather than a consequence of the supposed personal or professional shortcomings of racism’s victims; and (b) recognition that continued adherence to a policy of “neutrality” or “colorblindness” merely serves to preserve the status quo in which the interests of the currently dominant group are ministered to above all others;
2. Creation of a cooperative workplace environment in which people of color are guaranteed protection from injustices in the distribution of resources, reward, respect, or attention, perpetrated by management or by fellow workers;
3. Institution of affirmative action initiatives and scholarship programs directed toward (i) increasing the proportion of students of color in accredited library school programs, (ii) correcting the historical under-representation of people of color among library staff, and (iii) dismantling the invisible glass ceiling that inhibits promotion and instead produces a concentration of library workers of color in lower, non-decisionmaking positions;
4. (a) Construction, collection and analysis of narrative expressions of the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs of library users who identify with particular

racially-defined populations, and whose voices are seldom otherwise heard; (b) development of community information services tailored to the satisfaction of the special information needs of multiple diverse communities, providing access to information about social, economic, legal and political aspects of both their own communities’ culture and that of others, written in users’ native languages and employing visual images and verbal descriptions of people like themselves;

5. Implementation of proactive outreach strategies whose aims are (i) to identify and retain new library users among communities whose members have historically taken little advantage of library services, and (ii) to change the attitudes of those potential users who have low expectations of the ways in which they may benefit from library use because they see libraries as serving the needs of white culture and as instruments of white oppression;
6. Proclamation and adoption of (i) standard procedures for guaranteeing a minimum level and quality of service to diverse local communities, and (ii) standard criteria for evaluating that level and quality.

In general, engagement in activity of these kinds requires not only a personal belief in the positive value of social inclusion, but a professional commitment to social advocacy as one of the core purposes of library work. McIntosh (1998) identifies some of the privileges that she enjoys in her everyday life as a white person. These include the following:

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.

20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

Each of these privileges, of course, is mirrored by a corresponding injustice routinely experienced by the person of color. One way in which social advocacy may be defined is as the eradication of social injustices such as these. The duty of the socially responsible librarian, then, is to create an environment where all of us can expect to be treated with the respect, care, and attention that each of us equally deserves as a human being.

It may be noted that this account of racism and anti-racism in the library shares a great deal with the account provided by critical race theory of racism and anti-racism in legal and educational institutions. The description of the institutionalized, white, unchallenged nature of racism; the explanation for the persistence over time of unjust power structures; the ethical commitment to the eradication of racism; and the methodological commitment to radical action are all common to both accounts. It seems eminently plausible that CRT could provide a conceptual framework for the analysis of racism in library service. Indeed, given its applicability, it is surprising how few references to CRT have appeared in the library literature. (A search of Cambridge Scientific Abstracts' *Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA)* on September 6, 2004 for records containing the keywords "critical," "race," and "theory" retrieved a single article (Stefancic 1991)—an article that is more about legal scholarship than it is about librarianship.)

## 7. Library Classification Schemes as Information Institutions

Until this point in the paper, in looking at information institutions, we have primarily focused on libraries—the institutional providers of library services, and of access to library resources. This approach was taken in order to demonstrate the close relationship of CRT themes to some of the issues

that are perceived as important by many librarians. A central plank of the main argument to be made in this paper, however, is that it is furthermore possible and indeed useful to consider certain of the tools that are constructed by librarians also as information institutions in their own right. Such tools include the sets of standards, rules, and recommendations that are created to guide catalogers and classifiers in the process of organizing library resources—a process that is undertaken in order to allow library users to find those resources that are of interest to them, effectively, efficiently, and easily. A library (or bibliographic) classification scheme, for instance, is essentially a specification of an artificial language or code in which statements of the subjects of resources are expressible (see, e.g., Svenonius 2000). The intention is that classifiers and library users may use such a controlled language to communicate among one another with fewer ambiguities, errors, and redundancies than might occur if they were instead to use a natural language such as English.

The function of a classification scheme is thus to serve as a conceptual structure in which relationships among concepts are identified, fixed, and recorded. It is important to recognize that, in its fixity, every classification scheme is an objective representation of a subjective point of view—that of its human constructors, who share the perspectives and ideologies of those populations with which they identify. Almost necessarily, then, every classification scheme may be interpreted as being biased in some respect, where the bias is the inevitable reflection of designers' preferences. Moreover, it is possible (if not probable) that the interests of the population from which classification-scheme designers are drawn do not match the interests of the multiple populations whose members make use of the scheme, in which case the biases embedded in the scheme have the effect of making it more difficult for members of certain communities to retrieve library resources of the kind they desire—perhaps because the subjects in which they are interested are not represented at all in the scheme, or because those subjects are represented but are labeled using unfamiliar terminology, or because the relationships between those subjects and others are inappropriately represented (see Olson and Schlegl 2001, Olson 2002).

An understanding of the kind of approach taken by the theories of social justice discussed above may allow us to recognize that, just as legal and educational institutions may be evaluated on the basis of the extent to which their operations produce distri-

butions of goods and services that are fair and just, so too may classification schemes be evaluated if they are treated as generators of distributions of conceptual goods. In effect, the coordinate classes that make up a classification scheme are the equal-sized units to be distributed across the conceptual universe of subjects. All sorts of different distributions are possible, but only one such distribution is implemented by any given classification scheme. We may reasonably ask how fair each particular distribution is. For instance, we might ask: How just is the allocation of classes to subjects in the *DDC*? How fair would it be to allocate, say, 70% of available subclasses of the main “Religion” class to subjects related to Christianity?

The nature of our answers to questions of this kind would depend on our selection of a principle of justice, and the justification we provide for that selection. Would it be justified, for example, to assume that classes should be allocated to subjects on the basis of some notion of desert or (to use the term preferred in librarianship) “warrant,” such that those subjects that have been widely written about in the literature, or those that have been popular areas of interest for library users, are allocated more space in the scheme? Or would it be justified instead to assert that the distribution of classes should proceed on the basis of equity or equality of opportunity? If so, how exactly could such a distribution be produced, and what exactly would it look like?

Just as the conclusion of a critical race-theoretic examination of the distribution of library services is typically a call for radical reconstruction of the institution in control of that distribution so that the special rights of historically underserved groups are guaranteed, we might hypothesize that a CRT-based analysis of classification schemes would lead to a conclusion of a similar kind. In the latter half of this paper, a case study of the application of CRT to the *Dewey Decimal Classification* is described.

## 8. Changes to the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Dewey Decimal Classification*

Melvil Dewey (1851-1931) published the first edition of his classification scheme in 1876. Now, the scheme is in its 22nd edition (Mitchell et al. 2003), having long attained an unassailable position as the most well-known and widely-used library classification scheme in the world. The basic structure of Dewey’s scheme has remained remarkably stable

over the years. The capacity of the scheme, allowing ten main classes, a hundred divisions, and potentially a thousand sections; the method of arranging those classes hierarchically; the general order of classes; the correspondence of main classes to academic disciplines; the decimal notation; the provision of an alphabetical, “relative” index to subjects covered by the scheme; and, most importantly, the general principles underlying the designers’ choice of subjects, terminology, and arrangement—all these were in place with the first edition. Also firmly established at this time, of course, was the function of the scheme, as a system supporting the assignment of printed books to single classes, so that those books (or their records) may be arranged in a linear order on shelves or in a catalog.

Already by the time of the 2nd edition of 1885, the principle of number building had been formalized (Comaromi 1976). This principle allowed classifiers to assign classification codes that were not explicitly listed in the scheme itself, but that could be “built” by following the instructions given in the schedules. In this way, Dewey was pioneering the application of facet analysis many years before Ranganathan and his followers in the (British) Classification Research Group would develop its underlying theory to its full extent. An important step in the progress made by *DDC* toward formally faceted schedules was the incorporation, in the 18th edition (Custer 1971), of all seven of the auxiliary tables with which present-day users of the scheme will be familiar. Together with four other new tables, Table 5, “Racial, Ethnic, National Groups,” made its first appearance at this point.

For over a century, then, the *DDC* has guided classifiers in the assignment of books to subject classes. For several decades, it has guided the classification of books about topics relating to racial populations by means of instructions given in its Table 5. With the latest, 22nd edition (Mitchell et al. 2003) of *DDC*, important changes have been made to Table 5, including a change in its title simply to “Ethnic and National Groups.” Certain classes have been removed; others have been renamed and redefined. These revisions served as the catalyst for the study reported in the present paper.

Table 1, below, shows an extract from Table 5 in the 21st edition (Mitchell et al.) of 1996 (vol. 1, 446). The notations listed here (like those in the rest of the table and in fact in all of the *DDC*’s tables) are intended for use in number building, as extensions to base numbers rather than as base numbers them-

selves. The result for libraries that use the *DDC* to organize their collections is the scattering, across separate classes, of works that share a focus on a given racial population but that differ in the perspective adopted or aspect highlighted in the work.

|      |                                  |
|------|----------------------------------|
| -03  | Basic races                      |
| -034 | Caucasoids                       |
| -035 | Mongoloids                       |
| -036 | Negroids                         |
| -04  | Mixtures of basic races          |
| -042 | Caucasoids and Mongoloids        |
| -043 | Mongoloids and Negroids          |
| -044 | Negroids and Caucasoids          |
| -046 | Caucasoids, Mongoloids, Negroids |

Table 1. Extract from Table 5, "Racial, Ethnic, National Groups," *DDC 21st edition, 1996*.

We might infer from the vocabulary and structure of this portion of the classification scheme that the distinctions made here are based on assumptions of four kinds:

1. That people may be grouped according to some shared racial characteristic (or combination of such characteristics);
2. That some of the resulting populations or "races" are more "basic" than others;
3. That the races listed at -03 are *all* the basic ones; and,
4. That it is possible for a person to share or "mix" the racial characteristics of more than one race.

The vocabulary used at this point in the old Table 5 might strike readers as old-fashioned or scholastic at best, offensive at worse. We might prefer now to think of these categories as being labeled "Whites," "Asians," and "Blacks," rather than "Caucasoids," "Mongoloids," and "Negroids."

In any case, any criticism we might have of the validity of these assumptions is rendered somewhat irrelevant by several of the changes that were implemented in the 22nd edition of *DDC*. Table 5 (Mitchell et al. 2003, vol. 1, 660-681) is now simply called "Ethnic and National Groups," in order "to reflect the de-emphasis on race in current scholarship" (Mitchell 2003, 28). Class -03 disappears, because it is perceived to be "without meaning in context" (Mitchell et al. 2003, 661). In fact, with the new edition, it seems almost as if the human popula-

tions that are typically referred to as "races" are no longer available as subject matter for writers. Though the term "Racial groups" is retained in the *DDC*'s Relative Index, it now points, like the term "Ethnic groups," to classes -05 through -9. Among the prefatory notes to Table 5, it is observed (p. 660) that "A work that emphasizes race should be classed with the ethnic group that most closely matches the concept of race described in the work," as if races are definable on the same basis on which ethnic groups are. This note supplies a clear indication of the lack of value that is perceived by the designers of the *DDC* in classifying any given work according to authors' or readers' perceptions of the *racial* (i.e., physiological and/or genealogical) characteristics of the people treated in the work. The implication is that any population defined in the work by racial characteristics should be treated, for classification purposes, as a group whose commonality resides in their *ethnic* (i.e., sociocultural) heritage. Finally, class -04 (now -05 (p. 662) is not only renumbered but recast in very different terminology, as "Persons of mixed ancestry with ethnic origins from more than one continent," without using the word "race" at all.

We may ask: What is the value and significance of these changes? Are they, perhaps, good but also unimportant (and hence not really worth spending too much time on)? Or are they bad, and not only that but also importantly bad (in which case they are cause for further concern)? In particular, we may wish to ask such questions about two of the most radical moves toward the "deracialization" of *DDC*:

1. The removal of all references to the "basic" races; and
2. The reconceptualization of mixed race.

We may also need to ask: How can we assess the value and significance of these changes? What methods of evaluation do we have at our disposal? In the next section, a number of approaches are identified as having historically been useful in providing guidance in analysis of this kind. These approaches include some with origins or with canonical statements inside library and information science (LIS), and some with origins from beyond LIS.

## 9. Research Approaches: A Range of Alternatives

In one important sense, any study like the one reported in this paper is domain-analytic, in that the

chosen focus is on (i) the way in which documents are organized in a particular subject field or domain (that domain being comprised of topics relating to racial groups), and (ii) the unique issues that arise out of the particularity of that domain. Hjørland (2002) distinguishes among eleven domain-analytic methods for LIS. He lists the construction of special classifications as one of these approaches (p. 425), and calls both for further research on the problems of classification for special fields and (citing Bowker and Star 1999) for adoption of a more critical approach that “seriously considers the consequences of special classifications and their social and ideological embeddedness” (p. 428).

Bowker and Star develop the (now well-established) conception of classification systems as artifacts embedded in unique sociocultural contexts. As social constructions, such systems inevitably reflect the biases and prejudices typical of the context in which they are produced. Since A. C. Foskett’s (1971) introduction of the term “critical classification,” and Berman’s (1971) pioneering analysis of the biases inherent in the vocabulary and structure of the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, many authors in LIS have provided eloquent justifications of a critical approach in identifying bias wherever it occurs and in doing whatever can be done to reduce its impact (see, e.g., Olson 1998).

Another of Hjørland’s eleven categories of approaches to LIS is that of historical methods (2002, 436): “When it comes to understanding ... systems, ... historical methods are often able to provide a much deeper and more coherent ... perspective.” Inspired partly by Hjørland, Tennis (2002) uses the term “subject ontogeny” to refer to the development of a class in a classification system through time, and argues that to chart a subject’s ontogeny is to help to understand the “story” and “social life” (pp. 57-58) of a domain and its terminology.

Turning to fields outside of LIS, one may find inspiration in the sociology of race, where researchers have traced the sociohistorical processes by which racial categories have been created and maintained, by which meaning has been assigned to those categories, and by which social goods have been distributed in accordance with those categories (see, e.g., Omi and Winant 1994). Meanwhile, in the philosophy of race, explorations of the nature and construction of racial concepts and properties are continuing to improve our understanding of the distinctions between race and ethnicity, and of the ontological status of racial and ethnic categories (see,

e.g., Taylor 2004). Among the most contested concepts under ongoing analysis is that of mixed race (see, e.g., Zack 1993). Topics relating to racially mixed people have become of increasing interest to authors and readers over the last half-century, and the number of books published on such topics is increasing exponentially. Moreover, conceptions of the nature of “mixture” are interesting both from an ontological point of view and from a personal-identity perspective. The nature, origins, manifestations, and significance of personal mixed-race identity are explored in a number of recent monographs and collections of essays and first-person narratives (see, e.g., Root 1996b). Such works are typically (though not uncontroversially) classified under the broad headings of ethnic or cultural studies, although there is some evidence to suggest that “mixed race studies” is emerging as a distinct field in its own right (see, e.g., Ifekwunigwe 2004).

In the last years of the twentieth century, in both the U.S. and the U.K., the categorization of racially mixed people became a topic of highly charged public-policy debate at a national level (see, e.g., Snipp 2003, Aspinall 2003). An increase in the number of people self-identifying as mixed-race, and the perceived need to track such demographic change for policymaking purposes, prompted the census office in each country to change the set of categories offered for responses to the “race” question in the decennial censuses of 2000 (U.S.A.) and 2001 (England/Wales).

Finally, a radical perspective on the concept of “mixed race” and other racial issues is provided by critical race theory. We have already seen how CRT may be cast as a useful approach in assessing and explaining the extent to which information institutions are unjust. It might be argued that, if the field of knowledge organization is to retain its relevance and vitality in an age in which the true diversity and complexity of racial issues are increasingly apparent (and increasingly addressed in other fields of inquiry), it is of crucial importance to evaluate the potential usefulness of CRT as a tool for the analysis of bibliographic classification schemes.

## 10. A straw-man alternative to the DDC

The literatures in each of the areas enumerated above collectively form the broad context from which the present study emerges. It seems likely that it would be of interest, for example, to compare the histories

of (i) the categorization of race and ethnicity in national censuses and (ii) the bibliographic classification of documents about topics relating to racial populations. Although that particular comparison could be the subject only of a much longer paper, here the objective is at least roughly to locate the analysis of *DDC* in the context of the wider political debate.

|  |
|--|
| <u>Ethnicity</u> [may be of any race]  |
| Hispanic or Latino   |
| Not Hispanic or Latino   |
| <u>Race</u>  |
| <b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b> [+ write-in box for tribe(s)]                              |
| <b>Asian</b> [6 specified categories + write-in box for Other]                                     |
| <b>Black or African American</b>   |
| <b>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</b> [3 specified categories + write-in box for Other] |
| <b>White</b>   |
| <b>Some Other Race</b> [+ write-in box]  |

Table 2. *Ethnic and racial categories for self-identification in U.S. census, 2000*

For the purposes of comparison, Table 2 shows how racial categories are handled in the U.S. census—or at least how they were handled in the most recent national census of 2000 (Snipp 2003). Respondents were asked to select from a list of options including the six basic categories indicated in bold in the figure. Those who picked “Asian” were invited to select from a further list of six narrower categories; those who picked “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” were invited to select from a further list of three narrower categories. (The identification of Latino/as as members of an ethnic group and not of a race or of mixed race is interesting but is not an issue considered further in this paper.)

The 2000 census was notable for its allowing respondents to select more than one race in answer to the race question. Given the individual’s capability to select as few as one or as many as six basic categories, that means census analysts have 63 racial categories to track (where, for instance, someone checking just “Asian” falls in a separate category from someone checking both “Asian” and “White”). Alternatively, the 57 combinations of two or more races can be collapsed into a seventh “Mixed Race” category that is mutually exclusive from the other six. This categorization allows census analysts to track the number of racially mixed people in the U.S.

population—a number that is continuously increasing (Goldstein and Morning 2000).

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1    | American Indian or Alaska Native          |
| 2    | Asian                                     |
| 3    | Black or African American                 |
| 4    | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
| 5    | White                                     |
| 6    | Some Other Race                           |
| 7    | Racially Mixed                            |
| 712  | American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian   |
| 7256 | Asian; White; Some Other Race             |
|      | etc.                                      |

Table 3. *A simple classification scheme for topics relating to racial populations*

Taking our lead from the census categories, we might imagine a simple classification scheme for the organization of resources about racial populations looking something like that shown in Table 3. It would be hopelessly U.S.-centric, of course, but we might also imagine simple ways in which its scope could be extended globally. Here, five races are listed; a category for topics relating to “Some Other Race” is added; and a seventh category for topics related to racially mixed people is sub-divided into as many of the 57 possible combinations are deemed necessary.

One potentially useful way to proceed would be to set up a simple scheme such as that presented in Table 3 as a kind of straw man—one that allows us to consider several of the challenges facing the designers of such a scheme. Some of these challenges are well-known and familiar to designers of classification schemes in any field. A further set of challenges manifest themselves in particular ways in the current context. Challenges of both kinds, generic and specific, and considered in turn in the next two sections.

### 11. Challenges that are Generic to Bibliographic Classification

The first generic challenge is to satisfy what we might call the exhaustivity principle, which specifies that the scheme should be designed so that all documents may be assigned to existing classes, with minimal assignment to any category for items called “Other.” We may ask: Do our five basic categories truly exhaust the races existing in the country in

question, or indeed the world? Given that the races are nominal (as opposed to natural) kinds, we might wish to rephrase that question as follows: Do our five basic categories exhaustively represent the populations that are conventionally defined on the basis of perceived physiological and genealogical characteristics?

Similarly, the specificity principle specifies that it should be possible using our scheme for documents to be classed specifically, with minimal assignment to classes that are broader than the subjects of those documents. Again, we might ask of our simple scheme: Is it possible for the basic classes that we have identified to be divided into narrower subclasses, allowing for more specific classification? If so, what are the criteria that may be used to guide the direction and frequency of such division?

The answer to this kind of question that is implicitly supplied by our scheme and the census is that, yes, the basic classes may be subdivided—in the case of the census, in at least two ways. One kind of subdivision is that carried out in order to cater for people who are members of two or more populations—people who are “racially mixed.” The other kind, implemented in the census but not in our simple scheme as it currently stands, is that carried out in order to cater for people who specify their membership of a narrower population whose members are all also members of one of the broader populations. An interesting, possibly problematic, tendency is for these narrower populations to be defined on the basis of perceived ethnic (sociocultural) rather than perceived racial (physiological) characteristics.

A third generic challenge is to satisfy the nonlinearity principle, which specifies that classes should not be arranged in any order that connotes a ranking or hierarchy that does not correspond with reality. It is often considered that alphabetical order satisfies such a principle. A question that might arise in connection with our simple scheme is whether the “Racially mixed” should be separate from the primary alphabetical order, or indeed whether its subclasses should appear at a lower level of the hierarchy than the other main classes. In what sense, for instance, is the class of mixed white and Asian people at a lower level, in reality, than the class of white people? The difficulty is the implication that the mixed categories are somehow less important than the basic categories, that the “basic” races are in some sense more pure than any “mixtures.”

## 12. Challenges that are Specific to Racial Categorization

Turning now to some of the more specific challenges faced in the current context, the first we might identify is the commonly-stated and well-understood result of centuries of work in physical anthropology, which is that racial populations are not natural kinds. In other words, races cannot be defined in biological or genetic terms, but rather are social constructs based partly on individual perceptions of bodily appearance, and partly on the pursuit of group interests in preserving the structure of power relations in society that allow a dominant population (defined as white) to maintain control over other groups (defined as nonwhite). We routinely identify a given person as white (for example) not on the basis of any knowledge of his or her genetic structure, but on the basis of the way he or she looks, and how we perceive our interests to be served by such an identification. Such assignment is essentially subjective, and thus multiple equally valid specifications of the extensions (i.e., the memberships) of the races are possible. Indeed, many populations have been racialized differently at different times in history.

As we noted earlier, many social constructionists are also realists, however, or (if one prefers) radical constructionists, in the sense that they see no reason to conclude from this characterization of race that races do not exist. In the philosophical terminology, races, though ontologically subjective, are epistemically objective (cf. Taylor 2004, 91). They are human artifacts, but artifacts nonetheless, and are very real, especially for those people who self-identify with them or are allocated social goods on the basis of their membership of them.

A second specific challenge is the very complex intersectionality of personal attributes. A person's race is not the only social population of which he or she is a member—clearly there are an infinite number of such populations, defined on the basis of one's ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on, and it is difficult to imagine what it would mean to identify any one of these characteristics of division as generally more important than any other, outside specific situations.

A third challenge is the continuity of racial populations. In the real world, racial populations are not discrete classes with clearly marked boundaries. Nor is it clearly the case that those classes may be placed on a single spectrum with two poles, for example white and black. To illustrate the significance of this latter

point, consider a two-dimensional space like the one depicted in Figure 1, where each dimension is graded on a scale of 0 through 7. We might imagine that such a space may be used in the classification of people on the basis of their sexual orientation, where the  $x$ -axis represents the degree of the given person's attraction to other people of the same sex, and the  $y$ -axis represents the degree of attraction to people of the opposite sex. So homosexuals would be placed at bottom right, heterosexuals at top left, bisexuals at top right, and asexuals at bottom left. But the grading of the two scales would allow for finer distinctions to be made, for instance, among populations of homosexuals with slight heterosexual tendencies at  $\langle 6,1 \rangle$ , asexuals with slight homosexual tendencies at  $\langle 1,0 \rangle$ , and bisexuals with only moderate tendencies in both directions at  $\langle 3,4 \rangle$ . Such a space might allow for more specific classification of people by sexual orientation, but would be difficult to reduce to a one-dimensional linear scheme. Would  $n$ -dimensional spaces be useful for the classification of people by race? How many dimensions would we need? What would be the meaning of each dimension? Would a faceted scheme be a reasonable way of allowing for the representation of multiple dimensions? What kind of balance could we achieve between specificity and simplicity? These are all questions that any designer of a classification of racial populations is forced to address.

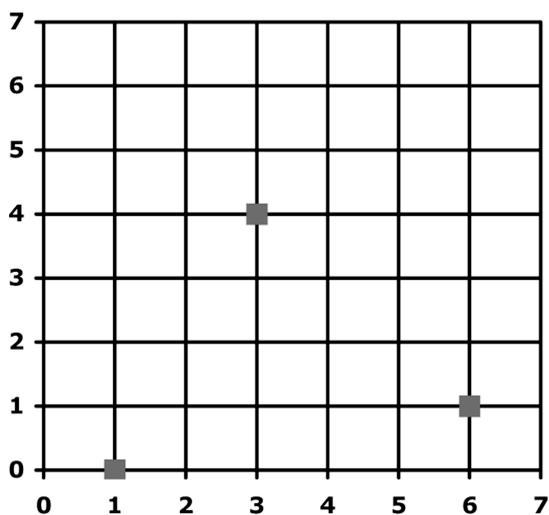


Figure 1. A two-dimensional space with each dimension graded on a scale of 0-7

Schemes like the *DDC*—essentially enumerative schemes with some supplementary faceting—typically handle challenges of all these kinds in simple, routine, standard ways, not always because these

ways are the best ways in terms either of correspondence with reality or effectiveness of retrieval, but because they are simple to implement and understand. For instance, given the fact of the ontological subjectivity of certain classes, bibliographic classification schemes typically make a selection, from the full range of alternative options, of a single one of those options. Given the extreme intersectionality of attributes, enumerative schemes prioritize those attributes in a certain way (for example, gender first, race second). Given the continuity of classes, bibliographic schemes simply ignore it and treat classes as discrete and mutually exclusive. These are the simple and efficient ways in which the challenges that we have considered are handled in this paper's Table 3, in the U.S. census, and in the *DDC*'s Table 5.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for designers of schemes relating to racial populations, however, is one that we have not yet explicitly addressed. This is the challenge of satisfying the self-identity principle, which specifies that a scheme should support its users in the retrieval of documents about topics relating to the populations with which they self-identify. So, for instance, a person self-identifying as black ought to be able to use the scheme in order to retrieve—easily, effectively, and efficiently—documents about topics relating to black people. The self-identity principle derives from a respect for the right of individuals to choose whether or not to self-identify with the population(s) of which they are perceived by others to be members. Necessarily, the principle of self-identity is no less important for people of mixed race than it is for others. In her statement of “A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People,” Root (1996) emphasizes the rights that a person of mixed race has to identify herself differently in different situations, to identify with more than one group of people, not to have to keep the races separate within herself, and to use the vocabulary that she prefers in communicating about being multiracial (Root 1996):

I have the right ...

not to justify my existence in this world  
 not to keep the races separate within me  
 not to be responsible for people's discomfort  
 with my physical ambiguity  
 not to justify my ethnic legitimacy  
 to identify myself differently than strangers  
 expect me to identify  
 to identify myself differently from how my  
 parents identify me

to identify myself differently from my brothers and sisters  
to identify myself differently in different situations  
to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial  
to change my identity over my lifetime—and more than once  
to have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people  
to freely choose whom I befriend and love.

The radical constructionist approach of the critical race theorist to ontological and epistemological questions about race and racial identity is one that allows both for a belief in the real existence of the races, and for a conviction that individuals have a right to choose their own identity. We may ask: Do library classification schemes like the *DDC* serve their users in ways that are acceptable to those holding such beliefs? In the next section, one potentially useful method of answering this question is described.

### 13. The Impact on Search Effectiveness of Responses to the Self-Identity Principle

In translating the right to self-identification to the context of document retrieval, it might be considered that designers of library catalogs and classification schemes have a responsibility to ensure both (i) that the terminology used to represent people of mixed race in the catalog and in the classification scheme reflects the terminology used by searchers of mixed race to identify themselves racially, and (ii) that it is possible for works about people of mixed race to be classed so that they are retrievable by searchers of mixed race who identify themselves in any of four ways, as follows:

1. with racially mixed people generally;
2. with racially mixed people particularly;
3. with several racial populations equally; or
4. with one racial population separately.

For example, a Métis from Canada might choose to identify with, and seek resources about,

1. racially mixed (Canadian) people in general—in which case, faced with the scheme presented in this paper's Table 3 (or, to be precise, an analogous scheme extended in its scope to cover Can-

- ada as well as the United States), she would look in class 7;
2. the Métis Nation in particular—in which case, she would look in class 715;
3. both First Nations people and white people—in which case she would look in classes 1 and 5; or
4. either First Nations people or white people—in which case she would look either in class 1 or 5.

When a person is seeking information, that person's self-identification translates into a hope, expectation, or assumption that works about people like the searcher will be collected at a single point on the shelves of a library or retrievable from a catalog using a single class label. We might ask: Why should a person of mixed race be forced to look in three separate main classes, perhaps widely separated on the shelves or in the catalog, simply in order to find resources about people she perceives to be like herself? And why should she be expected to be satisfied with a search in class 1, for instance, which would not retrieve relevant material classed in 715?

In an analysis of the revised Table 5, it is possible to imagine several kinds of search that might be conducted with a unsatisfactory result when evaluated in terms of two standard measures of retrieval effectiveness, viz. recall and precision. Recall is the ratio of the number of relevant works retrieved to the total number of relevant works; precision is the ratio of the number of relevant works retrieved to the total number of retrieved works. To follow up on the example introduced above: The notations that would be most appropriate for a Canadian citizen of mixed First Nations and white ancestry to use in locating works about people like herself, and the types of retrieval failure that may potentially be associated with a search on each notation, are listed in (this paper's) Table 4.

The recall failure at (1) is a result of the application of -05 notation only to works about people of mixed ancestry "with ethnic origins from more than one continent" (Mitchell et al. 2003, 662). If the searcher wishes to find works about other people of mixed ancestry, they will not be retrieved with this search; nor is there currently any easy way to specify the class of works that are missed. The recall failures at (3) and (4) stem from the classes for people of mixed First Nations and white ancestry (-05009097 and -0509097) not being sub-classes of either the class for people of First Nations ancestry (-97) or the class for people of white ancestry (-09). Searches at the latter two locations will therefore not retrieve works classed at the former two.

|   | ... globally             | ... in Canada                | Type of likely failure |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) People of mixed ancestry ...  | -05xz*                   | -05x071                      | Recall                 |
| (2) People of mixed First Nations and white ancestry ...                    | -05097009z and -0509097z | -05009097071 and -0509097071 | None                   |
| (3) Both people of First Nations ancestry and people of white ancestry ...  | -97z and -09z            | -97071 and -09071            | Recall                 |
| (4) Either people of First Nations ancestry or people of white ancestry ... | -97z or -09z             | -97071 or -09071             | Recall                 |

\* In this table and the next, x stands for notation from *DDC*'s Table 5, and z stands for notation from *DDC*'s Table 2, the "area" table.

Table 4. *DDC 22 notation to use in searching for works about people of mixed First Nations and white ancestry*

|  | ... globally                    | ... in Canada       | Type of likely failure |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| (1) People of mixed ancestry ...   | -05 <u>xz</u>                   | -05 <u>x</u> 071    | Recall                 |
| (2) People of mixed Chinese and Japanese ancestry ...                                  | -95 <u>z</u>                    | -95071              | Precision              |
| (3) <u>Both</u> people of Chinese ancestry <u>and</u> people of Japanese ancestry ...  | -951 <u>z</u> and -956 <u>z</u> | -951071 and -956071 | Recall                 |
| (4) <u>Either</u> people of Chinese ancestry <u>or</u> people of Japanese ancestry ... | -951 <u>z</u> or -956 <u>z</u>  | -951071 or -956071  | Recall                 |

Table 5. *DDC 22 notation to use in searching for works about people of mixed Chinese and Japanese ancestry.*

The situation is only slightly different for people of mixed ancestry with ethnic origins from one continent only. The notations that would be most appropriate for a Canadian citizen of mixed Chinese and Japanese ancestry to use in locating works about people like herself are listed in (this paper's) Table 5. The recall failure at (1) is again a result of the application of -05 notation only to works about people of mixed ancestry with ethnic origins from more than one continent. The precision failure at (2) is a result of the classification scheme making no specific provision for works about people of mixed Chinese and Japanese ancestry. The searcher's strategy of specifying the smallest broader class (-95) that has both Chinese people and Japanese people as subclasses will retrieve many irrelevant works as well as relevant ones. As in the previous example, the recall failures at (3) and (4) stem from the class for people of mixed Chinese and Japanese ancestry (-95) not being a sub-class of either the class for people of Chinese ancestry (-951) or the class for people of Japanese ancestry (-956). Searches at the latter two locations will therefore not retrieve works classed at the former one.

Fortunately, the impact of recall failures (at least) can be reduced through the implementation of a variety of devices such as "see also" references that guide the searcher to other useful classes. Further enhancement of recall can be achieved with the development of retrieval systems that take advantage of the implicitly faceted structure of the *DDC* by allowing searches on individual components of class numbers (Pollitt and Tinker 2000). The experimental development of such systems is ongoing, and the future prospects for increasingly effective searches on the *DDC*'s Table 5 notation look promising.

#### 14. The Deracialization of Table 5

It might be considered that the issues addressed in the previous section—those relating specifically to racially mixed people—are additionally indicative of some much broader issues that themselves seemed to be under-investigated. Essentially, the primary issue seems to be the eradication of most mentions of "race" from Table 5 in order "to reflect the de-emphasis on race in current scholarship" (Mitchell

2003, 28). From the perspective of critical race theory, the validity of this decision to deracialize Table 5 might be persuasively called into question. In examining the critical race-theoretic interpretation, it is instructive to take a brief overview of the development of race theory in modern times, moving from the classical race theory that originated in the eighteenth century, through the liberal perspective that emerged in the nineteenth century, to the critical theory of the late twentieth century.

The French physician François Bernier ([1684] 2000) was one of the first to express the classical race-theoretic notion that all the people in the world could be divided into four or five basic groups on the basis of physiological differences: he wrote that “there are four or five species or races of men ... whose difference is so remarkable that it may be made the basis for a new division of the Earth” (pp. 1-2). The Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (Carl von Linné), of course, is famous for his taxonomy of biological species (1758), in which *Homo sapiens* is divided into four varieties, defined primarily by geography but associated with the characteristics noted in our Table 6, below.

| Variety    | Color  | Temperament | Posture  | Ruled by ... |
|------------|--------|-------------|----------|--------------|
| Americanus | red    | angry       | upright  | habit        |
| Europeus   | white  | cheerful    | muscular | custom       |
| Asiaticus  | yellow | sad         | stiff    | belief       |
| Afer       | black  | sluggish    | relaxed  | caprice      |

Table 6. Characteristics associated by Linnaeus (1758) with four varieties of *Homo sapiens*

The German naturalist J. F. Blumenbach seems, at least in Stephen Jay Gould’s influential account (1966), to be the person responsible for the first classification of the world’s people specifically on the basis of bodily appearance (Blumenbach [1795] 2000). He was also the first to rank his groups, specifically on the basis of their physical beauty (see Figure 2). In later versions of classical race theory, this ranking would be extended to embrace the idea that moral, cognitive, and cultural characteristics are determined by physical traits, so that Asians and blacks, for instance, were considered not simply less beautiful than whites, but less intelligent, less hard-working, and so on.

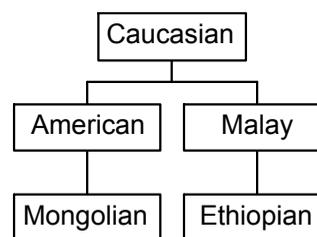


Figure 2. Blumenbach’s (1795) hierarchy of races

These, then, are the basic assumptions of classical race theory as it had emerged by the end of the eighteenth century (cf. Taylor 2004, 47-48):

- races are discrete and global;
- each race has a unique set of physiological traits;
- each cluster of physiological traits is associated with an equally distinct set of moral, cognitive, and cultural characteristics;
- races are rankable according to the value assigned to those characteristics; and
- these characteristics are heritable as some kind of racial essence.

Each one of these assumptions has, of course, long been called into question, with the result that most versions of contemporary liberal race theory may be characterized by their commitment to some kind of eliminativism—either a metaphysical eliminativism that denies the existence of races, or an ethical eliminativism that argues for the abolition of racial categories or abstention from racial discourse (Lee 1994, Mosley 1997, Taylor 2004). This mode of thinking appears to be the source of the recent decisions made by the DDC. The ethical eliminativist would no doubt approve of the removal of racial categories from Table 5, on the basis of an argument that continued retention of those categories would contribute to the oppression of those populations identified by the labels of those categories.

As we have seen, critical race theory, on the other hand, is characterized by a realism with respect to races, one that allows for the existence of races as human artifacts defined by convention. In this mode of thinking, the races are simply those specific populations that result from the operation of the processes of racial formation—the processes identified by Omi and Winant (1994) as racial “projects” that both assign meaning to human bodies and bloodlines, and distribute social goods along the lines suggested by the resulting systems of meaning. One’s racial identity is conceived as an individual’s self-assignment to a population defined in this way (cf. Taylor 2004, 85-86).

For the critical race theorist, again as we saw earlier, a belief in the realism of races is a necessary prerequisite for mounting an effective challenge to the racism that is considered to be persistent, endemic, and systemic in contemporary Western society. Racism of this kind is a characteristic of the structure of our social institutions (such as bibliographic classification schemes) rather than a quality of individuals, and can be fought only by radically reconstructing those institutions (cf. Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Furthermore, the critical race theorist rejects the rationalist's claim that it is possible to make value-neutral decisions when making laws, setting policies, or engaging in any kind of personal or professional practice (such as the design of classification schemes); for the critical race theorist, all such decisions are necessarily value judgments, and all are necessarily products of contextual structures that extend far beyond the immediate judge.

Through a critical race-theoretic lens, then, the implicit aim of bibliographic classification schemes to provide a value-neutral snapshot of an objective reality is revealed to be unattainable. Moreover, the kind of color-blindness that is encouraged by the liberal race-theoretic approach, and that is reflected in the latest version of the *DDC's* Table 5, is perceived to have the effect merely of sustaining the hegemonic status quo in which discrimination and economic and social inequities in favor of whites are institutionally maintained. From the critical perspective, and in correspondence with the methods for institutionalizing diversity enumerated in our earlier discussion of the antiracist library service, recommendations for action would likely be made along the following lines:

- admission on the part of designers that bias in classification schemes exists, and indeed is an inevitable result of the ways in which they are currently structured;
- recognition that adherence to a policy of neutrality will contribute little to eradication of that bias, and indeed can only extend its life;
- construction, collection and analysis of narrative expressions of the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs of classification-scheme users who identify with particular racially-defined populations;
- the development of classification schemes tailored to the special information needs of multiple diverse communities, allowing users to search for information about the lives, interests and activities of people like themselves or with whom they

self-identify, using search terms with which they are familiar and comfortable;

- the implementation of programs designed to change the attitudes of those potential users who have low expectations of classification schemes because those schemes are perceived to be unhelpful at best (and alienating or offensive at worse) given their special interests; and
- the adoption of standard procedures and criteria for evaluating the utility of classification schemes to members of diverse local communities.

### 15. Evaluating the applicability of CRT

How may critical race theory (or any of its instantiations or consequences) be evaluated? On the one hand, we have recourse to “internal” criteria that require no comparison of CRT to external reality. We might decide, for example, to assess CRT purely as an argument on the basis of its validity, its simplicity, its completeness, or its consistency. On the other hand, we might choose to assess that argument on “external” criteria that do require us explicitly to compare it with reality. In that case we would judge CRT according to its correctness, its reliability, its persuasiveness, its relevance, or its utility. Alternatively again, we could evaluate CRT as a practical project in terms of its effectiveness—that is, in terms of the extent to which critical race theorists are ultimately successful in achieving the goals they set themselves.

In the present context, we are interested primarily in the applicability of CRT as a tool for the evaluation of classification schemes. Whether the assumptions—epistemological, ontological, methodological, ethical—made by CRT are in any sense “correct” is a question whose answer lies beyond the scope of this paper. We might decide, then, that CRT is successful to the extent that it uncovers evidence in classification schemes of the systemic racism that lies (as CRT itself assumes) at the core of virtually every social institution in the Western world. Adopting a stricter criterion, perhaps, we might say that CRT is effective to the extent that racial prejudice, discrimination, and bias are eliminated from classification schemes. Somewhere in between, we might find a standpoint from which we could claim that CRT is useful to the extent that it improves our understanding of the factors influencing the processes by which classification schemes are designed and used, and opens up avenues along which further interesting re-

search might be pursued. It is in this last sense that I believe that CRT most obviously has value.

To take the study reported in this paper as a case: It would seem that any assessment of the revisions that have recently been made in *DDC*'s Table 5 must lie somewhere between two opposing poles. On the one hand, we might be convinced that those changes reflect quite an ingenious way of addressing the problems in the old Table 5 that were presumably seen by the editors—problems to do with the validity of engaging in racial discourse, reifying racial categories, using outdated terminology, etc. On this reading, there are a few technical issues to do with optimizing the effectiveness of retrieval that still await resolution, but on the whole this reading would be generally positive.

On the other hand, we might recognize that racial identity is actually incapable of expression through, or reduction to, ethnic identity in the manner in which the revisions to Table 5 attempt to finesse. We might recognize that this is so by definition, since racial identity results from interpretation of physiological attributes—bodily appearance and ancestry—whereas ethnic identity results from interpretation of cultural attributes—language, religion, and so on. Similarly, we might wish to maintain a distinction between physiology and geography; to insist that multi-racial ancestry is not reducible conceptually to multi-continental ancestry, since races are not defined geographically.

Moreover, and most importantly, we might consider that any decision taken to prevent classifiers and searchers from the use of racial categories is to ignore an everyday reality in which those categories are invoked not only in the distribution of social and political power, but also in individuals' self-identification by individuals with supportive communities. It remains far from clear what kind of effect the abolition of the language of oppression can possibly have on the pervasiveness of the processes of oppression. On these bases, we might argue that any attempt to elide conceptual distinctions in a quest to deracialize our discourse, as in the latest Table 5, will necessarily fail.

That an approach based on CRT has allowed us to consider the implications of what is likely to prove an important decision is sufficient evidence, it could be argued, to support a favorable assessment of the utility of CRT as an analytical tool. However, if the application of CRT is seen less as a matter of selection among tools than as the result of a deep personal commitment to the eradication of social injustice, then the

choice of utility as a criterion—rather than the extent to which the goal of justice is met—will be interpreted as wrongheaded. For many, critical race theory is simply the necessary response to the institutionalized racism that is to be found wherever one looks.

## 16. Conclusion

Bibliographic classification schemes like the *DDC* occupy an ambiguous territory between description and prescription, in that they are at once reflective of literary and user warrant, and projective of distinctive worldviews. On their designers is conferred a weighty responsibility: the moral obligation to do what can be done to eradicate the racism by which, simply as contemporary Western institutions, classification schemes are unarguably infected. Unfortunately, eradicating racism is not simply a matter of eradicating the terminology of "race": it requires, at the very least, recognition of the reality of races, and of the overarching significance of race as a social construct devised in order to exercise and maintain conditions of power, control, dominance, and oppression.

With this paper, my objectives have been to introduce critical race theory as a useful approach to the analysis of information institutions such as library classification schemes; to highlight the historical significance of some of the changes made in the recent edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification—changes that might otherwise have passed without substantial comment; to identify some of the issues that these changes raise; and to assess the potential of critical race theory as a framework for developing an understanding of those issues. The intention for the future is to complete a full subject ontogeny (Tennis 2002) of "race" in Dewey's system, using discourse and domain analysis to track the ways in which the scheme has dealt with race since its inception in 1876, and to analyze the context in which such changes occurred and on which they have had reciprocal impact.

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