



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 11, 2021

Cornell Librarian: Libraries are Predominantly White Fields

Racism seems to be lurking everywhere in American society, according to progressives who seem intent on tearing America apart.

Now even *libraries* and the Dewey Decimal System (DDC) are considered yet another example of “white supremacy.” At least that is the conclusion of Reanna Esmail, an outreach and engagement librarian at the Olin Library of Cornell University. Speaking last Friday at a discussion concerning alleged anti-Asian racism, Esmail said, “As a librarian, I see the ways in which my profession has the capacity to confront bias and misinformation in ways we approach and teach information and digital literacy.”



Uris Library at Cornell University/aimintang/iStock Getty Images Plus

Esmail continued, “Libraries are predominantly white fields, and Cornell is no exception in this regard. Libraries themselves also have a fraught history of being complicit in racism, and some cases, upholding and disseminating racist ideas.”

During the discussion, Esmail demanded that libraries should be held accountable for their role in reinforcing white supremacy. She offered as an example of the reinforcement of white supremacy the Dewey Decimal System, which has been used since the 19th century to make it easier for researchers to find books on the shelves. Melvil Dewey, an American librarian, created the system in 1876, which classifies books into 10 sections. Once so divided, the books can be divided further. Numbers, such as 850, for example are used for a broad area of books, with additional numbers added, after a decimal, to assign more specific areas of materials.

Esmail was incensed that more categories are assigned to the United States and western European nations, than those assigned to Africa and Asia. Another librarian, Jane Behre, posted on [hacklibrarianschool.com](#) in 2020 that libraries give an uneven focus on languages. While English, German, and Greek each have eight individual numbered sections dedicated to them, and French, Italian, Spanish, and Latin have seven sections dedicated to each of those languages, nine other languages found in east and southeast Asia, and in Africa, only have one classification code each. Code 496 covers all 2000 African languages found in 54 countries.

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Of course, all such classifications are subjective, as libraries have to be selective as to what books are placed and kept on the shelves, and what books are not. One would think that this decision would be based mainly upon the needs of academic research in the location of the library, and the type of library it is. A library in Oklahoma, for example, would most likely have more books — and the need for more specific classification of Oklahoma — than a library found in Scotland or Thailand. On the other hand, a library in Nigeria is not likely to have as much of a pressing need for books on Oklahoma or Texas. A



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library in a Christian school could be expected to include more books on John Calvin or Jacob Arminius than the library at Cornell, for example.

Esmail's remarks about bias in the library ring somewhat hollow to conservatives, who are quite used to fewer books on the shelves by conservative authors than those favored by progressives such as Esmail, an "outreach and engagement librarian." What is the job of an outreach and engagement librarian? According to one definition that I found, this person is supposed to "provide delivery of library services to all people through the development of programs, policies, practices, and behaviors which make the library available to all people."

It should be noted that the DDC is not static, and it can be revised to meet changes in the society served by the library. For example, at the time Dewey crafted his system — which was to make research easier for the researcher, not to advance "white supremacy" — the languages spoken in the United States, including English, were European, as that was the bulk of the peoples of the country. As immigrants came more from southern and eastern Europe, Japan, and China, no doubt those languages received more focus in the library. Dewey had no category for smart phones in the 19th century, for example.

This is not to say that political ideology plays no role in the library. We all know that libraries on modern college campuses are more likely to select books that promote a progressive viewpoint than not, unless the library is a private Christian school such as Hillsdale College in Michigan.

The subject of "homosexuality" used to be classified under "mental derangements," but in recent years it was moved to "sexual relations." This was clearly owing to changes in society's attitudes, not from some objective scientific assessment.

Today, the left-wingers who are driving the decisions on practically every college campus in America view anything that is not their view as "racist," or an example of "white supremacy." Of course, this is a calculated strategy to weaken any opposition to their agenda. After all, no one likes to be labeled as a racist. As such, most Americans keep their mouths shut as the leftist train heads on down the tracks toward a socialist future — a future in which their vision of America is to destroy the foundations of the country.

Perhaps Esmail should be asked this question: If America is such a horrible racist country, why do so many people want to come to a country that is going to oppress them?



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