

Indaba on Conquering Racism April 27, 28, 29, 2018 at UIUC School of Information Sciences Kate Williams (chair of Diversity Committee and co-chair of Indaba) opening remarks

I want to explain why we are here, what we hope to do, and how the Indaba can help us in our work.

A great deal of American history is why we are here: slavery, colonialism, taking peoples land and lives, in short, genocide. But we don't have to reach back very far. Racist forces are marching again, killing a protester in Charlottesville, Virginia. Every 24 hours a Black person is killed by police or vigilantes and we barely see any indictments, let alone convictions. U.S. prisons are filled with Black and Brown men and women, way out of proportion to the population. Our president has labeled other countries "shitholes" and constantly describes Latinos as undesirables, criminals, and rapists. And more could be said.

In the elite spaces of graduate school and our professions—as democratic as the library professes to be, and is—the statistics align with these horrible realities:

While Native Americans, Hawaiians, Alaskans, Pacific Islanders, Latinas/os, and African Americans are 30% of the US population, they are:

- 17% of college graduates
- 17% of all students at library schools (the ischools do not keep statistics)
- 11% of graduate degrees awarded at library schools last year
- 8% of library school faculty
- 7% of credentialed librarians (with MLS)

And at our school:

- 13% of last year's graduates (35 people, reflecting a diversity bump two years ago)
- 9% of other faculty and staff (7 people)
- 8% of students (58 people) and
- 7% of the tenure system faculty (2 people)

Then to consider the climate of the school, we have seen two hate campaigns against faculty, one for studying racism and the other for teaching about it. And reports of unchallenged racist comments in class have come in twice this year, just as the diversity committee has begun to collect reports. (Bias response and

reporting also goes on at the university level, bart.illinois.edu is the website everyone should know.)

Finally to pull back the lens, all this is going on while Native Americans, Hawaiians, Alaskans, Pacific Islanders, Latinas/os, African Americans, and Asian Americans will be—in just two years—more than half of all the children and youth in the United States. So unless things change, a majority of people in the US will be subject to all this racism.

More to the point of our being here this weekend, there is a great divide between how oppressed people see the world and how so-called European-Americans see the world. Walking into a classroom filled with so-called white people is normal for some but unnerving for someone who has to wonder what indignity or racist slight might be ahead. Being in an institution with all or most people in authority being white while you are African American, Latinx, or a Native person means you always face a dynamic of powerful and powerless. Racism is a social norm, a structural norm, and a personal experience, even as white people remain mostly oblivious to it. And beneficiaries of this unacknowledged privilege. Faced over a lifetime, this ruthlessly drives people away from our school and our profession. We have to reverse this. We want to use this weekend to face this down.

So we organized this weekend with a critical mass of experts to tell us frankly what this situation has looked like to them, how they navigated it, and what recommendations they have for changing things. Our institutions, our collections, our curricula, our professions have to look like everyone to serve everyone. We have to understand this and implement this. On curriculum specifically, we are devoting Sunday to learning and practicing the latest approaches to transformation.

We are recording this, we are taking notes, and we are looking for practical ideas to turn into a plan.

So: Truth, like surgery, may hurt, but it also cures. Let's get to it.