Conservation Is Not Neutral
(and neither are we)

Fletcher Durant,
Head of Conservation and Preservation, University of Florida Libraries
Shared Concerns and Shared Goals

Voices Within Conservation:

And Within GLAM Fields:
La Tanya S. Autry, Chris Bourg, Michelle Caswell, Emily Drabinski, Jarrett M Drake, April Hathcock, Ibram Kendi, Bethany Nowviskie, Nathan “Mudyi” Sentance, Lae’l Hughes Watkins

Further Readings
Social Justice & Museums Resource List
http://bit.ly/1rl1fuV

Archives & Social Justice Reading Group

#Critlib Reading List
https://www.zotero.org/groups/255376/critlib
Is Conservation Neutral?
Neutrality

“The primary goal of conservation professionals, individuals with extensive training and special expertise, is the preservation of cultural property.”

-Preamble to the AIC Code of Ethics

“Vocational awe” refers to the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique.

-Fobazi M. Ettarh (2018)
Firdos Square, Baghdad. April 9, 2003.

“While recognizing the right of society to make appropriate and respectful use of cultural property, the conservation professional shall serve as an advocate for the preservation of cultural property.”

-AIC Code of Conduct Principle III

Image credited to Goran Tomasevic/Reuters.

“All actions of the conservation professional must be governed by an informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance, and the people or person who created it.”

-AIC Code of Conduct Principle II

Final report of the Durham City-County Committee on Confederate Monuments and Memorials: https://bit.ly/2T1MJaj

Image credited to Casey Toth, The News & Observer.
“All policies, ideas, and people are either being racist or anti-racist. Racist policies yield racial inequity. Anti-racist policies yield equity.”

- Ibram Kendi (2018)

“In the last decade alone, American taxpayers have spent at least $40 million on Confederate monuments and groups that perpetuate racist ideology.”

-Palmer and Freed Wessler (2018)
Demographics
Archives

“Who gets to become an archivist, how archives get organized, and even what counts as an archive have a profound racial impact on what endures as valued historical research.”
-N.D.B. Connelly (2016)
“Since the conception of the modern American public library, librarianship has struggled with consistently standing against racial injustice. Instead, libraries have clung to a colorblind philosophy of neutrality that has allowed for disengagement from communities of color.”

-Gibson, et al. (2017)
“Museums exist within a self-perpetuating system of mutually reinforcing judgments that create informal consensus about the relative importance of a given artist or group of artists.”
- Susan E. Cahan (2016)
“It has become clear that it is time for the AIC to commit to these efforts [of diversity, equity, and inclusion] in a more systematic, proactive manner if meaningful progress is to be achieved.”
- AIC Equity and Inclusion Working Group (2018)

Decisions
Total AIC Publications Analyzed: 1429 Articles

- Native American: 59.5%
- Anglo-European: 35.6%
- African American: 27.0%
- Latinx: 2.7%
- Jewish: 2.7%
- Inuit: 2.7%
- Caribbean-American: 2.7%
- LGBTQ: 2.7%
- American Minority: 2.6%
“We are committed to the premise that the preservation of cultural heritage is inseparable from our belief that the creative achievements and histories of all peoples must be acknowledged and honored.”

- AIC Value of Equity and Inclusion

“Professionalism emphasizes “the work”—its completion, its evaluation, its perpetuity, etc.—without a meaningful critique of how “the work” mandates a replication of the patriarchy, oppression, and violence many in our world experience.”

- Jarrett Drake (2017)
“The task of prioritizing for conservation is always daunting...But for me, it’s critically important that we acknowledge our role as cultural workers who are players - either consciously or not - in the creation of the historical record and public memory.”

- Jan Paris (2000)

“An ethic of care is meant to reorient the practitioner’s understanding in two ways. The first is toward an appreciation of context, interdependence, and vulnerability... The second is...toward personal, worldly action and response.”

- Bethany Nowviskie (2015)
“The conservation professional shall recognize a responsibility for preventive conservation by endeavoring to limit damage or deterioration to cultural property, providing guidelines for continuing use and care, recommending appropriate environmental conditions for storage and exhibition, and encouraging proper procedures for handling, packing, and transport.”
- AIC Code of Ethics VIII

[Preventive conservation] “is as much situated in the dynamic social environment of the object as in the dynamic physical environment.”
- Miriam Clavir (1994)
Thank You

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Presentation:
http://ufdc.ufl.edu/l/IR00010800/00001

“Systemic change takes time, vision and nuanced leadership at every level, most especially among donors and museum boards. Selfless investment and fortitude are required. So is a willingness to endure discomfort. To move forward, the entire ecosystem must devote itself to a longer game.”

- Olga Viso (2018)