Young, Black & Librarian
Navigating Challenges & Exploring Strategies for Supporting New & Mid-Career African-American Academic Librarians

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FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Fostering inclusive environments in our libraries involves valuing diversity as a distinctive asset, maintaining a sense of belonging and respect for all individuals, ensuring equity in accessing resources and opportunities, and empowering all members to contribute to the organization in meaningful ways. This section of the poster highlights some of the efforts of the University of Pittsburgh Library System (ULS) to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.

LIBRARY-WIDE ENGAGEMENT IN ANTI-RACIST ACTION

Promoting and maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion in libraries requires buy-in from all members of the organization, and all should be encouraged to contribute their unique perspective and skills to these efforts. In Fall 2020, the Library Management Team collected ideas from units across the ULS to brainstorm anti-racist actions that their unit and the Library as a whole could take toward racial equity in our workplace, collections, services, and spaces. In the Spring, these ideas were prioritized, and the newly-formed Diversity Committee was tasked with helping to implement the top 3-5 ideas for each unit.

FORMING A DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

After a 20-year lapse, the Diversity Committee at the ULS was resurrected in Summer 2021. A formal application process was conducted to select 10 committee members, in addition to the Coordinator of EDI and the Director of Administration. Many of the primary goals identified for the committee to coordinate are among the top ideas generated in the organization-wide brainstorming process described in the subsection above, including reviewing hiring practices, reviewing subject headings used in local bibliographic records, increasing accessibility on Library digital platforms and at events, including underrepresented students and communities in generative discussions, including inclusive and respectful language in communications, and expanding the public "dashboard" of ULS activities related to diversity. Additionally, the Diversity Committee is advocating for a full- or part-time position to assist the Coordinator of EDI, as coordinating organizational change requires professional expertise and concentrated time and effort.

RECRUITING & RETAINING BLACK LIBRARIANS

As members of a "visible minority," Black librarians want to work in a supportive environment where we can be our honest selves. Working in academic libraries can mean experiencing tokenism, microaggressions, and the "Black Tax." Education and applying knowledge can help to foster a safe environment for librarians of color:

- Develop a strategic plan for increasing DEI at your organization.
- Encourage and offer DEI training for all library staff and faculty.
- Participate in programs committed to DEI, such as the ACRL Diversity Alliance .
- Start a diversity residency program, or assess your existing residency program.

THE STATE OF BLACK LIBRARIANSHIP

All academic librarians serve our students, faculty, researchers, and surrounding communities. We teach and support academic services, provide access to our institutions' resources, and collaborate on new initiatives. However, Black academic librarians may face challenges unfamiliar to our non-BIPOC colleagues.

Only 7% of the estimated 119,000 librarians in the US are African American. This figure is smaller in academic libraries where African Americans account for only 5.4% of credentialed librarians.[1] African American librarians experience being the only person of color in their departments, libraries, or specializations. This can lead to microaggressions, impressions of incompetence, and tokenism.

Racial composition of Librarians vs US Population (2013, 2060)[2]
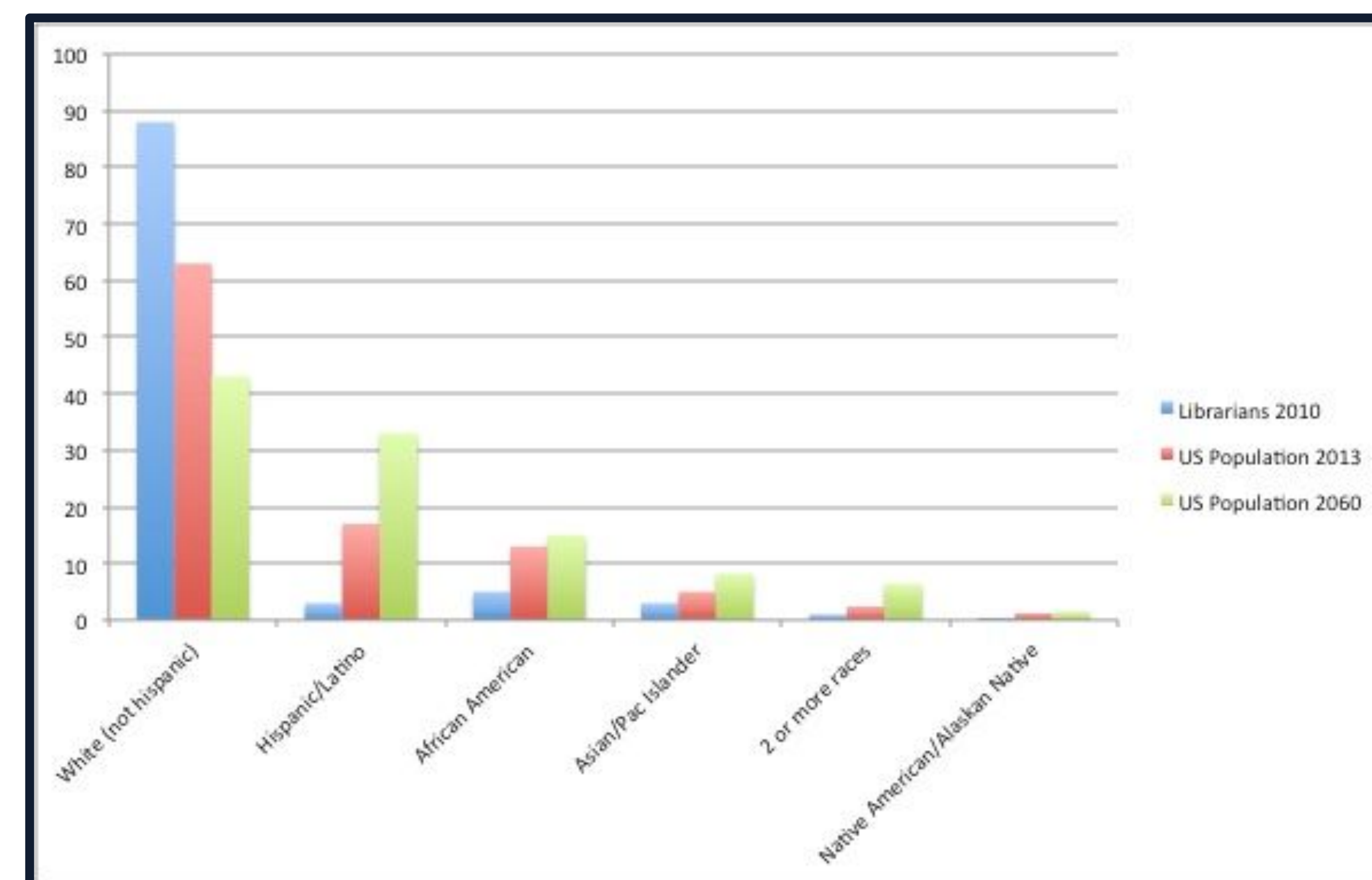
References

1. American Library Association. Diversity Counts 2012 Tables.
https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/divcounts

2. Bourg, Chris. 2014. "The unbearable whiteness of librarianship." Feral Librarian blog.
https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-librarianship/

For more information and a collection of resources on this topic, please visit our **Handout**.

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SELF-ADVOCACY FOR BLACK LIBRARIANS

As the library profession continues to suffer from a persistent lack of diversity that shows minimal signs of improvement, self-advocacy remains the best tool for librarians of color to not only survive, but thrive in the profession. Self-advocacy or self-care can mean insuring you do what is in your best interest by:

- Learning when to say, "No, I have enough going on."
- Taking time to develop your professional interests.
- Building a professional network through professional opportunities.
- Exploring mentoring opportunities, fellowships and scholarships to support your professional growth.
- Protecting your mental and physical well being.

This section of the poster spotlights lived experiences of black librarians and their advice and recommendations for how new librarians can advocate for themselves.

BLACK LEADERSHIP & ADVANCEMENT

Opportunities for leadership and professional growth can be difficult to come by in academic libraries. Being an active steward of your own growth and success will be crucial. As a new to mid-career librarian, you may not be looking to advance to a manager or supervisor role, so it is important to set manageable goals for your professional development and seek out leadership opportunities in the broader university and library communities.This may include:

- Running for a faculty assembly position at your university.
- Joining a national or regional committee or taskforce.
- Participating in trainings and professional development experiences both on campus and in the larger library ecosystem.

FOSTERING BLACK LIS COMMUNITIES

Working in an overwhelmingly white profession can often feel isolating for professionals of color. Creating formal and informal communities of BIPOC colleagues is a great way to foster belonging and to support each other. In early 2020, LaMonica founded the Pittsburgh Library Workers of Color, an informal group that brought colleagues from all types of libraries in the Pittsburgh metro area together for professional networking, mentoring and professional development. Black LIS communities such as this can help amplify black voices and lived experiences while advocating for better and just environments for both library workers and the patrons they serve.

Join communities/spaces for librarians of color.

- Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA)
- Coalition for Library Workers of Color
- we here
- WOC+lib

Follow accounts by and for librarians of color.

- @wherespace
- @wocandlib

Participate in conferences for librarians of color.

- Joint Council of Librarians of Color
- National African American Librarians Conference