Mapping Racism, Charting Change: A Regional Approach to Incorporating the Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS Model

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on anti-racism efforts within library and information science, this reflective essay applies our recently introduced Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) model (Cooke and Williams, forthcoming) to examine geographies of racism in the United States. Our paper explores how regional distinctions—ranging from "Midwest nice" to "Southern hospitality" to "New England progressive whiteness"—both reflect and reinforce entrenched structures of racism in the US. With a reelected convicted felon in chief, the sociopolitical landscape has shifted even further toward fostering and incentivizing racism in various ways depending on geography. Through a thematic approach, we examine how racism manifests differently across regions by exploring these interconnected dynamics. We consider how the STAR model illustrates the geographic dimensions of racism and how individuals may feel out of place within these contexts. This approach highlights the contradictions and connections among different regional expressions of racial tension and shows how they both shape and are shaped by the political landscape of the US. We build on this analysis by considering how the STAR model informs the library and information science (LIS) profession, specifically by encouraging both reflection and action because of a deeper understanding of how regional and cultural biases influence library practices, policies, and user experiences. We conclude by suggesting mazeways, counter-storytelling, and broader disciplinary action as strategies for resistance and change. By applying this framework, LIS professionals can better understand and address how geographic and cultural contexts perpetuate racism within communities and how we can fight back.

Introduction

The 2024 election has cast a long and troubling shadow over the field of librarianship. In the aftermath of a deeply divisive presidential election, marked by the ascent of a convicted felon who weaponized hate, disinformation, and deceit, our profession finds itself grappling with profound challenges. As we process the implications of these events, we recognize the critical need to redouble our efforts as library and information professionals. The current

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political climate compels us to consider how libraries must stand firm in their values and reestablish support for these vital community institutions. Libraries and librarianship are at risk, and standing firm in our mission to serve and advocate for truth, equity, and intellectual freedom has never been more important.

Focusing specifically on anti-racism efforts within our profession, our paper uses our recently introduced striving towards anti-racism (STAR) model (Cooke and Williams, under review) to examine geographies of racism in the United States. Our paper compares how geographic differences—everything from "Midwest nice" to "Southern hospitality" to "New England progressive whiteness"—reflect and reinforce existing structures of racism in the US. The 2024 election has created a US landscape that promotes and rewards racism in a variety of ways based on geography. Our essay interrogates this phenomenon by examining regional manifestations of racism through a thematic lens. We explore how the STAR model illustrates the geographic dimensions of racism and how individuals may feel out of place within these contexts. This approach highlights the contradictions and connections among different regional expressions of racial tension, revealing how they both shape and are shaped by the political landscape of the US. We build on this analysis by considering how the STAR model informs the library and information science (LIS) profession, specifically by encouraging both reflection on and action as a result of a deeper understanding of how regional and cultural biases influence library practices, policies, and user experiences. We conclude by suggesting individual, regional, and broader implications of this discussion. By applying this framework, LIS professionals can better understand and address how geographic and cultural contexts perpetuate racism within communities.

The Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS Model

The Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS Model (Cooke and Williams, under review) draws inspiration from the Competent Humility Model (CHM) developed by Cooke (2025). The CHM integrates the principles of cultural competence and cultural humility and represents an ongoing, reflective journey of understanding, appreciating, and learning about diverse cultures and identities. Furthermore, the model transforms that understanding into meaningful action and advocacy through that journey. Like the CHM, the STAR model emphasizes that individuals may exist within a specific category, transition to another category, or find themselves in between. This process is continuous, nonlinear, and often uncomfortable, with the goal of fostering growth, advocacy, and action. Rather than following a fixed, linear progression, the model allows for dynamic movement across and within its categories, reflecting the fluid and context-dependent nature of the journey. The STAR model identifies six core categories (fig. 1):

- Strategic Harm is the willingness to do harm to others who are different from you and/or disagree with you if the figurative and/or literal price is right.
- Defiance and White Victimhood plays on the notion of reverse racism, where white people claim disadvantages because their *advantages* and privilege related to economics, class, and other characteristics are called into question and critically examined. Defiance and white victimhood are at the heart of the current political hellscape discussed earlier.
- Non-strategic Harm describes those who do not knowingly or purposefully engage in harmful behaviors (strategic harm) but reap the benefits of their priv-

ilege and power and that of other white people without considering or speaking out against the impact of said harm.

- Emergent Awareness and Growth occur when new cultural knowledge is acquired but is not yet acted upon.
- Allyship is "when a person of privilege works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalized group of people to help take down the systems that challenge that group's basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society" (Dickenson 2021). Allyship is situational, not necessarily a way of life.
- In contrast to an ally, an Accomplice is someone who uses the power and privilege they hold to challenge the systems and structures that oppress marginalized individuals or groups, often *risking* their time; physical, financial, or mental comfort; or social or professional position in the process. Being an accomplice is less situational and is a way of life.

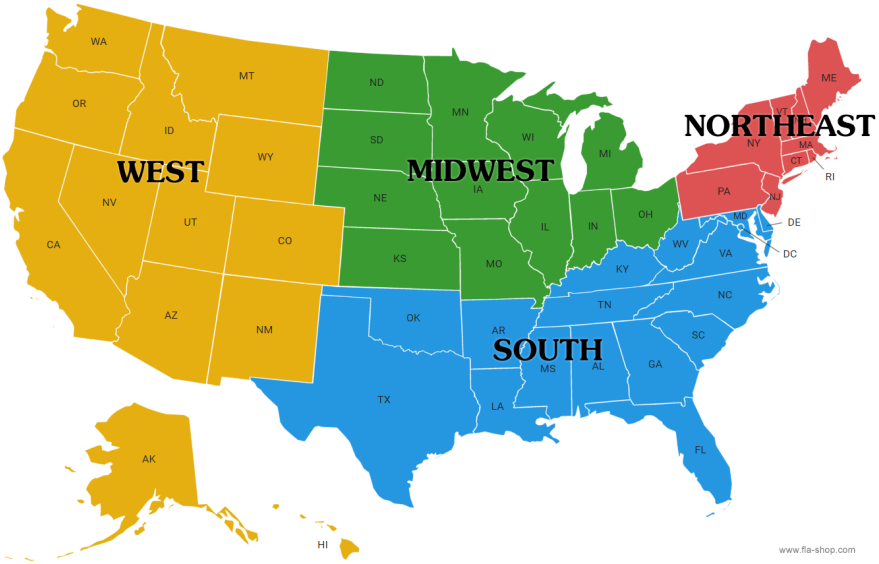
Figure 1. Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS model.

The Current Political Hellscape

On November 5, 2024, the United States reelected Donald Trump, a convicted felon and adjudicated sexual abuser, to a second presidential term. This development has catalyzed a new surge in anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion executive orders, related sentiment, and a marked increase in hate crimes reported across various states nationwide. Additionally, these election results have significant implications for the future of libraries and library professionals in the United States. Libraries faced legislative attacks, book bans, and violence even before the election—postelection, these are more rampant than ever before. As Albanese (2024) pointed out, voters "elected many politicians who have proposed defunding libraries and have targeted library workers." Trump's executive order "ending radical and wasteful government DEI programs and preferencing" ordered government offices to "terminate, to the maximum extent allowed by law, all DEI, DEIA, and 'environmental justice' offices and positions (including but not limited to 'Chief Diversity Officer' positions); all 'equity action plans,' 'equity' actions, initiatives, or programs, 'equity-related' grants or contracts; and all DEI or DEIA performance requirements for employees, contractors, or grantees" (Whitehouse.gov 2025). Many federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), have been decimated, not just in terms of their DEIA efforts but their existence as a whole. Similarly, as companies like Meta, Google, and Target roll back fact-checking and abandon EDI programs, we see an outward shift toward oppressing marginalized people to appease this new regime. In response to the election, the American Library Association (ALA) made a postelection statement reaffirming its commitment to intellectual freedom, access to information, and its core values and released a tool kit to help professionals "Show Up for Our Libraries" (2024). However, within the field, everything from microaggressions to blatant and continual racism is common, and the recent election only emboldens racist behaviors within the field (LIS Microaggressions 2025). The field continues to be predominantly white: In 2023, only 7 percent of all librarians identified as Black/African American, and 11 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino of any race (Department for Professional Employees 2024). Beyond statements reaffirming values comes a need for us as professionals to respond, particularly related to anti-racism. How can we counter this oppression and the resulting challenges to our values, funding, and, ultimately, our existence as a profession?

We posit approaching anti-racism efforts within library and information science (LIS) by examining how racism emerges and varies, especially postelection, in regions throughout the United States. The map below breaks the country into four regions, including the West, Midwest, South, and Northeast (fig. 2). While we approach this paper assuming these four geographic regions, we recognize that nuances exist and that some areas may operate more similarly to regions in which they aren't categorized (for example, southern Illinois may align more with the South, but Illinois as a whole is categorized as Midwest). While recognizing that these are broadly defined regions, this typology and characterization can be useful to tailor approaches to anti-racism efforts using the STAR model.

Figure 2. Map of 4 regions of the United States ("Regions of the United States" 2022).



In the subsequent sections, we work to map how racism operates in these four regions. It is worth noting that each of these regions is culturally rooted in a kind of nostalgia from which racism emerges. As Hopkins (2004) asserts, "[n]ostalgia distorts the past by idealizing it," covering over unpleasant or shameful memories, and this idealization has "moral consequences" (20). In the western United States, the region is perceived as a "bastion of liberalism" and democratic values (Williams 2021). This form of nostalgia, combined with the comforts of crushing whiteness for white people unwilling to address racism, characterizes the West and operates as a blanket permission slip for denial of racism in the region. The Midwest pairs colorblindness and erasure with a nostalgic embrace of "American values," constructing an idyllic, predominantly white regional identity that marginalizes diversity and denies the existence of racism. The South relies on charm and chivalry to obscure a racist legacy. Finally, the Northeast's nostalgia for colonialism celebrates American values and its history of slavery and colonization. Overall, this nostalgia functions as a sentimental and misleading story that shapes collective memory and the hellscape that is our present.

> White Americans have fostered techniques, such as false narratives that coerce others and themselves to remember the façade of manipulated historical events, all the while slowly forgetting or refusing to acknowledge the truth of the past. This is how the American collective memory functions, ebbing and flowing with events that have their meaning either altered or forgotten altogether. (Szczesiul 2017, 7)

We comfort illusion over the dark truths of racism, and the selective remembrance that emerges as a result of this nostalgia allows history not just to be rewritten but also forgotten.

Mapping Inequality: Tracing Regional Manifestations of Racism in Scholarship

While research specifically addressing the intersections of geographies, racism, and library and information science (LIS) remains sparse, adjacent disciplines offer a rich body of scholarship that examines how racism and whiteness manifest geographically. This literature gives attention to regional narratives, behaviors, and functions of whiteness and racism throughout the United States. The scholarship considered here spans education, psychology, sociology, and physiological anthropology and provides significant implications for the application of our STAR model in various regions throughout the United States.

Racism Everywhere: Regional and Cultural Geography

When considering how racism manifests geographically throughout the United States, we must first confront the reality that, unfortunately, racism is everywhere; that's just a fact. But it can manifest in different ways, in different places, around the world and across the United States. Racism is "in the air we breathe" (Woody 2023, 983). In order to interrogate racism in the smaller—and not-so-small—corners of the US, we must first look at the bigger picture, the larger context(s) that shape racism.

> Any meaningful comparison of mean levels across groups must take into account the range of variation within groups. In particular, cross-cultural comparisons must avoid … the uniformity assumption. That fallacy was at the heart of the classic but discredited concept of the modal personality, which assumed that all members of a culture had internalized the same ethos and thus shared the same distinctive personality. (Allik and McCrae 2004, 17)

All groups have intracultural variation in the form of subgroups that may show distinctive personality traits based on sex, age, social class, religion, etc. (the subgroup's culture). In simpler terms, while the United States endures systemic racism, that racism may be demonstrated in different ways in different places by different groups. Traits are further molded by people's worldviews and self-views, which are how people perceive and interact with the world.

> World-views, collective, and/or group personalities are how we are socialized; they are, taught by society for the purpose of maintaining its own standards are social values, concepts to which we attach the terms good or bad, right or wrong. They can also be defined as moral scruples, the basis for how we react to social situations. (Campbell 1968, 753)

Self-view, further derived from worldview, encompasses how an individual moves within the world. Wallace (1961) refers to this as a mental map or mazeway. A mazeway is a person's "total experience, his private picture of the world" (Campbell 1968, 750). A person's mazeway consists of their outlooks on life, "many of which he does not perceive as being his"

because of cultural and societal socialization. The person "interprets his daily experience with himself and with others; it is in terms of these attitudes that he evaluates his ability to cope with such experiences. These character traits not only determine how he sees the world but also how he responds to it" (750). A mazeway is to the individual what culture is to a group.

Race takes place, or permeates place, regardless of region. It is clear that regardless of place, people of color feel out of place, alone, underrepresented, and emotionally crushed by racism. Woody's (2023) interview study highlighted the experiences of one Black woman, a transplant from the South who had moved to Portland, Oregon. In comparing her experiences, she likened the Pacific Northwest to the underground railroad in the sense that one has to find the right channels and groups to find community. She contrasted this to her experiences in the South, where she was able to ask casual questions to get to know people and then more quickly became part of the community. These different feelings about the two places were both a result of racialized experiences she had felt, but they manifested very differently.

Additionally, it seems that all regions share a cultural dynamic where individuals may present themselves as liberal, progressive, and socially conscious. However, they struggle to confront the ingrained realities of white supremacy within their communities and themselves, often refusing to see it entirely. Articles addressing all regions describe a superficial friendliness and outward commitment to progressive ideals, which mask a deeper discomfort or resistance to self-examination regarding race and privilege. Whether it's colorblindness in the Midwest or defensiveness in New England, the result is that people of color feel alienated or dismissed, and oppressors face tensions when attempting to align their self-professed values with meaningful self-awareness and action against systemic racism.

"Midwest Nice": The Polite Facade of Whiteness and Racism

During a live recording of "Today, Explained" at South by Southwest, Tim Walz commented that "the racism is quieter, but meaner here. And that [breaks] my heart." This quiet racism can be attributed to a phenomenon referred to as "Midwest nice." Midwest nice encompasses the way in which whiteness perpetuates systemic racism through white innocence and victimhood. Midwest nice, or Minnesota nice, refers to a behavior where people go out of their way to be helpful, polite, and nonconfrontational, which can come off as passive or overly deferential with the goal of making others feel welcome (Dictionary.com 2024). This includes both white guilt and microaggressions that, while often subtle, reinforce exclusion and inequity. The Midwest embraces colorblindness by dismissing the realities of structural racism by framing racism as an individual responsibility where one's outcomes are the result of personal failures or poor decisions.

Much of the scholarship examining racism and education centers on the intersections of regional social norms, whiteness, and education, particularly within K–12 contexts in the Midwestern United States. Within the education literature are several themes, including the use of Midwestern niceness as a tool to obscure racism and uphold white supremacy, experiences of racialized educators, and efforts to construct anti-racist counternarratives and pedagogy.

Baker et al. (2024) provide a definition of Midwest nice, explaining that it is "the manifestation of pleasantries, in earnest or not, that attempts to negate, redirect, or mask difficult conversations or issues and/or avoid confrontations altogether. This definition of Midwest Nice explains how Midwesterners may engage or avoid controversial, complex issues, such as systemic racism, whiteness, and White fragility" (2). These "pleasantries" are not so pleas-

ant—they not only obscure racism but encourage it. Baker et al. (2024) further describe Midwest nice as "a race-evasive version of social and political politeness that only seems harmless," situating it within education by demonstrating how it perpetuates silence around systemic racism and white fragility (2). These work together, ensuring that white supremacy is maintained as a Midwestern value that guides K–12 education. Similarly, Vlach et al. (2022) argue that this veneer of civility derails equity initiatives in schools by "chilling hotly contested issues" and reinforcing whiteness (7).

Midwest nice also supports the idea of *public civility*, often framed positively as a concept describing social norms of respect, politeness, empathy, active listening, and decorum when interacting in public spaces (Washington 2024). Unfortunately, the public civility associated with Midwest niceness prioritizes surface-level politeness over substantive engagement and can suppress discussions about racism, framing such conversations as impolite, divisive, or inappropriate. Building on this idea, Drake and Rodriguez (2022) explain ways in which this regional culture creates barriers to anti-racism efforts, explaining that niceness uses public civility to prioritize comfort over disruption, thereby sustaining white mediocrity and villainy. As a result, microaggressions, implicit biases, and blatant racism persist unchallenged in this environment because anyone who speaks out risks being labeled disruptive or uncivil. They further highlight how whiteness is normalized in K–12 education. By maintaining "polite" discourse, one is also able to maintain the status quo, and "ineffective equity and diversity initiatives may be the result of Midwestern educational niceness" (Drake and Rodriguez 2024, 11).

Other scholars note the role of white fragility in maintaining Midwest niceness within education. As White et al. (2024) note, white fragility provides a "mantle of niceness" through which "we have become socialized to believe that discussions about race are impolite, unfair, or even offensive" (6). After describing the resistance they've faced as educators working to create more anti-racist pedagogy, the authors offer concrete recommendations for teachers seeking to decenter whiteness and challenge white liberalism. Furthermore, Miller (2024) critiques the intertwined roles of whiteness and niceness, explaining that both "frame racism as a problem of individual bias and bigotry" rather than a systemic one (3). This allows white individuals to maintain a sense of comfort and innocence while evading accountability for perpetuating racial inequities. Building on this, scholars such as Kenyon (2022) argue that we need to shift from "safe spaces" to "courageous spaces" in addressing whiteness in schools. Dismantling the "nice white lady box" that encapsulates many white educators in the Midwest is a vital step in engaging in more critical and transformative practices (Kenyon 2022). Midwest nice in K–12 education is designed to ensure public civility, white innocence, and white supremacy persist by positing racism as an individual, uncomfortable issue that needs to be erased rather than challenged.

Similar to K–12 contexts, educators in higher education encounter systemic racism that is reinforced by the Midwest region. For example, Sharma (2022) documented her experiences as a racialized female professor teaching multicultural education courses at a United States Midwestern university between 2017–19 during Trump's first presidency. She recounted fervor regarding Trump's recent inauguration, outright aggressions and microaggressions, including comments about her appearance and identity, and resistance to her anti-racist pedagogy. Sharma (2022) observed that racialized students were often discounted or silenced in the classroom, despite her efforts to include them and counter white students' beliefs with questions, evidence, and narratives. White students vehemently resisted discussions on systemic inequality by characterizing their white privilege as hard work and poverty

as laziness. Despite her efforts to facilitate dialogues that encouraged introspection on systemic and blatant racism and their cultural manifestations, she faced many challenges.

Sharma's reflection highlights how a region like the Midwest can influence how students respond to anti-racist pedagogy. Alderman (2021) challenges us to ask what a region is, explaining that "regions play a central role within popular and academic understandings of racial differences and identities and regional story-telling is envisioned as a way of bringing attention to the regional context of many popularly held ideas about race and racism" (187). Understanding how race takes place—for example, looking at erasure, how tools like *The Green Book* help racialized people navigate geographies, and the role of regional storytelling—can help us counter racism. Teaching nonracism or ignoring racism altogether may be common in the Midwest, but it's not enough, especially for white educators. The literature on K–12 classrooms and higher education underscores the importance of developing practices that disrupt the comfort of whiteness and foster courageous, anti-racist narratives. This shift requires educators to move beyond politeness and embrace transformative approaches that challenge "long unquestioned and state-sanctioned bodies of regional knowledge and [expose] how the power of racism undergirds the very questions we ask and answer about people and places" (Alderman 2021, 191).

Additional studies explore how racism in the Midwest presents in community life, particularly through studies of municipal government and life. Bohonos and Johnson's (2021) ethnographic study of a Midwest municipal government revealed ways in which Midwest niceness led to differential treatment of Black community members, pervasive microaggressions, resistance, and solidarity. The authors highlight the challenges Black community members face when navigating predominantly white spaces to access essential resources while recognizing that "obtaining local government resources often depended on a readiness to endure mistreatment in such spaces" (Harris, 1993, as cited in Bohonos and Johnson, 2021). Often a key department in municipal governments, public libraries are no exception here. While purported as welcoming spaces for all, they are often spaces of mistreatment and microaggressions at best and blatant racism as the norm.

As can be seen through examples of niceness in municipal government, avoiding direct conversations about racism is the mechanism through which it persists. This niceness creates the illusion that treating everyone politely is enough to camouflage racism. In local governments, including libraries, this mindset can lead to passive inclusion efforts that fail to address barriers marginalized communities face, such as a lack of diverse collections or unwelcoming environments. Surface-level kindness without evaluating policies, programming, and representation just creates spaces for racism to thrive.

New England's [Not] Nice: Where Kindness Meets Complacent Racism

It is considered a notoriously liberal region with kind, down-to-earth, progressive people and values. However, as a region, New England relies on a form of "progressive whiteness" that masks racism. The history of racism in New England runs deep. Smith's (2023) *Harvard Political Review* piece examined the racist roots of Boston's top universities and the role of the city as a hub of slavery in the 1600s. Unlike the South, where enslaved people formed a majority population, slavery in Boston was a part of the ingrained structural racism of the area and a "constant but unnoticeable truth" to outsiders (2). This visibility versus invisibility reflects harm that has been centuries in the making, a dynamic rooted in complacency that relies on an unwillingness to challenge racism. The area clings to an idealized self-image

of progressivism, reflecting the persisting "strangeness" of racism in politically blue areas, where its existence seems contradictory yet undeniably pervasive. Additionally, holding on to positive presentations of its colonial and racist history is used as a strategy to eschew challenges to this progressive whiteness. It is easy to claim to be anti-racist when you do not acknowledge the prevailing whiteness of your community or the contemporary segregation underlying it. By "cropping down" racism in New England and stripping it of its broader context and history, it is more difficult to fully confront (Greer & Reamer 2021). This complacency exists alongside alarming recent developments: White supremacist propaganda activity reached an all-time high in 2022, with a 96 percent increase from 2021. Groups promoting anti-Semitic, racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-LGBTQ+ messages have targeted spaces like bookstores, libraries, theaters, shelters, and hospitals across Boston, Cambridge, Providence, and Portsmouth (Anti-Defamation League 2023).

While there is limited scholarship examining racism in New England, recent media coverage highlights the ways in which existing in this region is fraught for people of color, many of whom navigate a sense of displacement. For example, the narrative of a Massachusetts woman who moved to northern New Hampshire and felt like a perpetual tourist in her community illustrates the hostility faced by people of color in the region (Beaupre 2011). She was not only ignored but also targeted—once, a white man flicked a cigarette at her while she was visibly pregnant. Beaupre described racism in the area as a chronic condition: treatable but incurable, flaring up unexpectedly and eventually becoming something that manages the individual. She also compared her experiences living in the South to living in New England. For her, the delineated racial lines in the South offered some small sense of belonging and anonymity that feels absent to her in New England, where whiteness dominates and people of color often feel out of place.

Others have faced attempts to dismiss or silence their lived experiences, for example, a Black man from Fall River, Massachusetts, who faced blatant racism by a "friend" who told him that white privilege has somehow been "taken away." Rather than addressing the issues he raised, he was labeled the problem for recounting his experiences with racism. He argued that it is important to "remain faithful to the truths about racism in our world, with no need for fillers or buffers" (Greer & Reamer 2021, 1). These incidents highlight the tension between New England's self-proclaimed progressivism and its reality as a predominantly white space that embraces complacency over meaningful change. The region's approach to social justice often centers on discussions of how to be "more progressive" while upholding white supremacy.

In contrast to Midwest Nice, New England is characterized by a pervasive, outwardly confrontational attitude that results in complacency. Confrontations have no meaning and go nowhere to allow individuals to refuse accountability. There is always someone else to blame for racism, even when that scapegoat is the person of color. Thus, on the one hand, in the Midwest, there is a failure to confront anything, and in New England, there is the leveraging of conflict as a smoke screen to hide complacency and lack of accountability.

Southern Hospitality? How About Southern Hostility!

"Southern hospitality, whether real or perceived, is a cultural stereotype tied to the Southern region of the United States" (Neill 2023, i), and "regions are largely rhetorical creations, shaped by the symbols that surround these places – the words that describe the area, the stories that are told, the images that are connected to the region." And in the Southern

United States, that rhetorical creation is Southern Hospitality (SoH). The South is known for its genteel citizens, porch sitting with cocktails, good food, and lots of friendly visits with family and friends. SoH depicts "a supportive environment; if we care for others, offer help and support, create a friendly and inviting atmosphere, give generously to strangers and friends alike, we open doors for others" (Atkins-Sayre 2023, 396). While this depiction is not untrue or disagreeable, it has become a single, contradictory, and stereotypical story, one that has been weaponized and used to erase history. As scholar Anjali Vats (2015) argues, SoH privileges a "romanticized view of the region," which ignores and sugarcoats "Southern hospitality's antebellum roots" and the role of capitalism, racism, and slavery.

> The problem with this stereotype of the South is that the familiarity of the construct eclipses its historical reliance on racial, economic, and gendered structures, and these structures have rendered Southern culture hypocritically exclusive, hostile to people whose embodiment deviates from the normative white, male, heterosexual, Christian subject. This stereotyped view of culture is rooted in a selective way of remembering the past, consequential for our present and our future. Appeals to Southern hospitality are often appeals to racial, economic, and gendered hierarchies with an air of nostalgia for the times when these hierarchies were more pronounced. The concept might seem benign, but it is laden with racist, classist, and sexist implications. (Ritter-Conn 2019, 278)

Neill (2023) concurs in his discussion of Southern hospitality actually being Southern *hostility*; they suggest that SoH can and is used to disguise racism, facilitate public posturing, and provide the "blurred lines" between genuine and performative actions (1). He says that "through White performance of hospitality, allyship, and victimization, individuals are able to act as if they have good intentions for Black White relations yet conceal their true intentions of White solidarity and power perpetuation" (2). SoH also relies on politeness, honor, and hierarchy (Cohen et al. 1999); that socialization, that honor must be defended and fought for, easily opens the door for violence and other measures used against interlopers and outsiders that threaten status and privilege. "Historically considered, then, southern hospitality has functioned primarily as a white mythology, produced by whites, directed to a white audience, and invested in the project of maintaining white status and privilege" (7). Southern Hostility is an extreme, but very real, antithesis to SoH.

Southern hospitality is a mask and a myth, especially within libraries and librarianship. Unmasking the myth reveals a terrifying truth regarding racism in the Southern United States. For example, Freeman (2024) shares his experiences as a Black librarian at the University of North Carolina, drawing parallels between civil rights activists and attempts to desegregate libraries and the realities of today's efforts to distort, censor, and weaponize information as a tool for oppression. Similarly, recent attacks on librarians center on banning books, including those focused on anti-racism. In 2023–24, 44 percent of banned books featured people and characters of color, and Florida has the most instances of book banning in the country (PEN America 2025).

West Coast Chill, "California Casual," or "Pacific Northwest Friendly"

In October 2024, library staff and community members responded to a hate crime in which a mural celebrating community diversity was defaced using racist slurs and white supremacist symbols at the South Tacoma branch of the Tacoma Public Library. City council member Jamika Scott stated, "We cannot deny the fact that racism continues to plague our community, just as it does in cities across our country" (Bsanti 2024). There is a dearth of research examining how racism manifests geographically on the West Coast, but one may hear phrases such as "West Coast chill," "California casual," or "Pacific Northwest friendly" to describe regional expressions of friendliness. On the surface, these terms sound like Midwest nice and are quite similar in many ways. However, a couple of articles have characterized the nuanced expressions of racism in the Western United States using phrases such as *ambient racism, hostile shores,* and *bastions of white supremacist visions*. As Camhi (2020) explains, Oregon was founded to center whiteness, and racist language from its constitution was not removed until 2002, although 30 percent of voters voted to keep that language. From its original Black exclusion laws of 1844, as described by Taylor (1982), to Crawford's (1994) book describing the Northwest Imperative, a separatist movement for white supremacists, it is clear that the West, and particularly the Northwest, have a long history of racism. Both the physical and sociopolitical infrastructure of the West (from the railroad to the government) were built, in addition to Irish immigrants, largely by people of color, including Indigenous people, Chinese immigrants, and slaves, but not *for* them (Brice 2023). Almost a century later, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II exemplifies how pro-American racist discourse and physical structures of racism were enforced, paralleling social and institutional systems that marginalized these communities then and perpetuates anti-Asian sentiment in this region now (Nagata, Kim, and Wu 2019). The West is characterized by the intersection of economic, physical, and social infrastructures in perpetuating racism. Today, people of color in the West experience "benevolent racism" and often feel "regarded as abstractions in the racial justice discourse" (Murphy and Jones 2024).

Woody (2023) underscores the idea that regional racial dynamics intersect with individual experiences, explaining that the racialized production of space creates meaning. The author also introduces the concept of *ambient racism,* a concept that links structural racism and the emotional dimensions of racism by "illustrating how racial structures are felt by racially subordinated groups" (981). Woody interviewed forty Portlanders of color to gain a deeper understanding of what it feels like to work and live in the whitest city in the United States with a population of over 500,000 people and to explore what it means for a place to *feel* racist. The author argues that "subtly isolating and exclusionary characteristics are 'baked into' the culture, built environment, and daily interactions in (seemingly progressive) majority white contexts" (982). Jen, a Korean American woman, compared her experiences with ambient racism in Portland to that feeling "when you're in a bar or in a building and you're like, this place is not earthquake proof" in the sense that "this place is full of white people and if anything happened to me, like harassment, discrimination," no one will help (Woody 2023, 987). That inability to count on anyone to help results in a feeling of being trapped, and "there is just no getting out of the situation" (ibid). The West Coast chill is chilling, indeed: People of color must strategically move through public spaces, pass when possible to come off as less of a threat in predominantly white spaces, and perform "likeability" for white people by catering to white norms (Woody 2023).

From Models to Mazes: Navigating Tactics and Crafting Counterstories to Strive Toward Anti-Racism in LIS

After first outlining the STAR model and then examining how racism manifests across various geographical regions in the United States, we will now explore the connections between these concepts and discuss potential strategies we can implement within LIS to strive toward anti-racism. The STAR model was designed with the individual in mind but also links more broadly to manifestations of racism across geographies.

The STAR model, while widely applicable across the four geographic regions we have described here in this essay, does provide some insight into some of the patterns of racism we see within them. For example, the Southern hostility of the South region maps well onto the strategic harm category of the STAR model. One instance of this can be seen in Texas, which recently banned *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* by Linda Coombs while determining whether to categorize the book as fiction or nonfiction, ultimately deciding it was fiction (Grunau 2024). Advocates of intellectual freedom and the author spoke out against the decision, arguing that it was an accurate, fact-checked, historical account written by a historian and author from the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah. The decision here to ban the book first, then later erase this history of colonization by labeling it as fiction, is strategically harmful and aligns well with the category of the STAR model. On a more acute level, racism actively impacts employment and people's ability to live and thrive. In Brannon (2025), Aliyah Jones (a Black woman) describes her experience trying to find a job on the LinkedIn website. She was told that she didn't fit the corporate image. As an experiment, she changed the *demographics* of her profile, not the content—she became a blonde, blue-eyed white woman named Emily—and suddenly, she was inundated with messages and job leads. Aliyah's experience coincides with previous studies about employment inequality (Gerdeman 2017; Stockstill & Carson 2022). In the next sections, we discuss ways to challenge racism, both individually and within our communities, and then discuss how the STAR model can help guide us in these efforts.

Mazeways: Navigating Our Assumptions to Chart a New Path

Wallace (1961) posits that mazeways are to the individual what culture is to the group; they are the personal schemas or "mental maps" people use to navigate through the world (750). Mazeways are conditioned by a person's environment and take on the characteristics of the larger culture(s) around them—there is a certain level of groupthink involved in mazeway development. Mazeways are also influenced by place and/or regional characteristics and beliefs about privilege and racism that can manifest in how people regard those who are different from them. Hence, racism and discrimination look different in the Northeastern United States than they do in the Southwest because the mazeways of the individuals in those places reflect the subcultures in which they exist.

The challenging part of a person's mazeway is that it is implicit and entrenched because it is a personal mechanism of control and coping:

> Character structure, or the totality of traits which determine the broad, consistent patterns of man's behavior from one situation to the next. It is according to these outlooks, many of which he does not perceive as being his, that he interprets his daily experience with himself and with others; it is in terms of these attitudes that he evaluates his ability to cope with such experiences. These character traits

> not only determine how he sees the world but also how he responds to it. (750)

Mazeways are not permanently immovable. As people travel and move around geographically, mazeways are subject to change, and new cultures and norms are experienced. Education can also reshape and expand mazeways by providing new information and dispelling disinformation and stereotypes; this is one of the goals of the STAR model.

Crafting Counternarratives to Regional Racist Contexts and Structures

As Neill (2023) argues, "White Americans have fostered techniques, such as false narratives that coerce others and themselves to remember the façade of manipulated historical events, all the while slowly forgetting or refusing to acknowledge the truth of the past. This is how the American collective memory functions, ebbing and flowing with events that have their meaning either altered or forgotten altogether" (7). We have a choice to *reject* false narratives. We also have a choice to *create* counternarratives that allow us to shape the American collective memory and future, particularly in relation to libraries and librarianship.

The STAR Model as a Tool for Confronting Racism and Strategizing for a Battle Against Fascism

The STAR model is a useful tool for considering how racism appears in geographic regions throughout the United States. The model helps us understand old and new behaviors and trends in racism that are now intensified as a result of the election. The model explains how we got to this point and that we can learn from some of these broader patterns. We are unable to stand up against racism if we can't name it. This essay calls attention to and specifically names racism, and the model provides context, nuance, and language to use moving forward. It also provides us with coping mechanisms, with the possibility that we can incite change within our institutions, profession, and communities.

Using the STAR model as a framework provides valuable insight into the social psychology and information behavior displayed by people with privilege. It also helps validate the lived experiences of racialized people and sees how we are all impacted by racism. The model gives us a tool by which to ask questions of ourselves, our profession, and scholarship to help address racism. Although we may not yet be able to anticipate what this new fascist regime will bring to the United States, we at least have the tools necessary to cultivate resilience, strategically prepare for the challenges that lie ahead, and build our capacity for advocacy and resistance.

Conclusion

This article introduced us to ways in which racism manifests regionally throughout the United States, including examples of emboldened racist acts as a result of the election. From this analysis, we can see that libraries are microcosms: They reflect their communities, are influenced regionally, and suffer under this new administration. Libraries are embedded within communities, and they are also embedded within white supremacy. They are at the heart of racism in many ways. It is, therefore, our responsibility to go beyond saying we think our community should challenge this new regime. The STAR model gives us a lens to exam-

ine ourselves, our institutions, and our profession more closely and consider the nuanced ways in which racism manifests and undergirds the United States.

While the recent election has cast that long and troubling shadow over the field of librarianship, we are not powerless. When it comes to community engagement, we recognize the power of storytelling as a tool for resistance and community building. As professionals, we must work to intentionally create spaces for crafting and sharing stories that reflect the reality we live in now and the hope we have for a more just and anti-racist future. Additionally, within the profession, we must challenge the use of vocational awe as a mask that conceals the "profession's very real flaws of institutional oppression and exploitation" (Vander Kooy et al. 2022). We have an opportunity to create stories that center truth, confront racism head-on within our institutions and our communities, and work together to dismantle white supremacy. We reject neutrality as complicity and recognize that a future rooted in social justice depends on our courage to create it.

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