

# Speech and Silence: Race, Neoliberalism, and Intellectual Freedom

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**ABSTRACT:** In 1977, the American Library Association's (ALA) Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) produced a film entitled *The Speaker* which depicts a high school that invites a professor to speak on the inferiority of African Americans. A throughline connects *The Speaker* in its 1977 incarnation to OIF's 2018 actions and discourse around its 2018 revision of the "Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" to specifically include hate groups. It is not coincidental that the construction of the library as a marketplace of ideas takes place through debates around the fundamental humanity of Black people in the United States; this throughline is embedded in racial capitalism. In this essay, we argue that debates around intellectual freedom within librarianship, with their reliance on the metaphor of the library as a "marketplace of ideas," must be understood through the broad lens of racial capitalism. More specifically, we use Jodi Melamed's typology of liberal antiracisms in the twentieth and twenty-first century to analyze ALA and OIF documents, as well as *The Speaker*, and draw on Randolph Hohle and David Theo Goldberg's work to consider the relationships between public space, neoliberal policy, and race at play in the "Meeting Rooms" documents.

Keywords: race, neoliberalism, intellectual freedom, free speech, critical theory



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*If the majority in a community has the right to “protect” itself from minority opinions, would, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have been permitted to express views that were clearly unpopular in many communities?*

American Library Association, 1977

*Democracy does not require “tolerance of ideas we detest.” This nation was founded by people who would not tolerate “ideas they detested.” Slavery in this country would not have been ended if tolerance of the detested idea had prevailed, nor would Hitler have been stopped.*

Black Caucus of the American Library Association, 1978

In 1977, under the leadership of Judith Krug, the American Library Association’s (ALA) Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) produced a film intended to take on “one of the most sensitive—but doubtless one of the most important—aspects of freedom of expression: toleration of ideas we find offensive and repugnant” (ALA 1977, 6). Entitled *The Speaker*, the film depicts a high school that invites a professor to speak on the inferiority of African Americans, leading to backlash from the community. In a 2017 *American Libraries* article celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the OIF, Eleanor Diaz and James LaRue (director of the OIF at the time this essay was written) suggest that with the production of *The Speaker*, “Krug transformed the image of librarians from quiet, behind-the-desk researchers to fierce ‘gatekeepers of the marketplace of ideas’” (para. 26). A throughline connects *The Speaker* in its 1977 incarnation, to its rebirth in 2014 at the ALA Annual Conference, to OIF’s 2018 actions and discourse around its revision of the “Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” to specifically include hate groups and hate speech.

In this essay, we argue that each of these moments is embedded in liberal antiracist ideologies that have changed historically. We use Jodi Melamed’s typology of racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberal multiculturalism, Randolph Hohle’s work on race and neoliberalism, and David Theo Goldberg’s model of racial americanization to understand and unpack the workings of race in ALA and OIF documents, the 1977 film *The Speaker*, and the 1991 and 2018 versions of the “Meeting Rooms” policy document. Melamed’s framework provides an understanding of the specific shape of racial capitalisms in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Racial capitalism in this time period takes the form of three distinct, yet frequently overlapping, liberal antiracisms: racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberal multiculturalism. This framework is particularly useful in understanding ALA and OIF documents, many of which have undergone a series of revisions, and *The Speaker*, which is strongly connected to those documents. Hohle and Goldberg's work connects racial capitalism to the emergence of neoliberal ideology and policies, specifically regarding public space, and so serves to ground our discussion of the "Meeting Rooms" documents. We trace the metaphor of the library as the marketplace of ideas throughout these texts and uncover the ways in which this metaphor works in conjunction with racial ideologies while denying the existence of race, which is crucial to the functioning of these ideologies. The first section provides an overview of racial capitalism and liberal antiracism. The second section introduces the metaphor of the library as the marketplace of ideas through ALA and OIF texts; the third section analyzes *The Speaker*, and the fourth section looks at the "Meeting Rooms" documents. This essay seeks to understand the workings of racial and economic ideologies within librarianship, as exemplified in specific instances, rather than to provide answers to specific policy questions.

## Racial Capitalism and Postwar Antiracisms

While much work in library and information science (LIS) has considered capitalism and its most recent modality, neoliberalism,<sup>1</sup> in relation to libraries and librarianship<sup>2</sup> and other work has considered race and racism (as well as its intersections with other forms of identity and difference) in LIS,<sup>3</sup> the nexus of race and capitalism within LIS has received little attention, even as the ways in which racial and economic oppression and power are frequently inextricable have been analyzed in other disciplines (for example, C. Anderson 2017 and Rothstein 2017). In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, an early articulation of the relationship between race and capitalism, Cedric Robinson argues

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- 1 We follow both Wendy Brown and David Harvey's definitions of neoliberalism. To Brown, "Neoliberalism is a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a 'conduct of conduct,' and a scheme of valuation. It names an historically specific economic and political reaction against Keynesianism and democratic socialism, as well as a more generalized practice of 'economizing' spheres and activities heretofore governed by other tables of values" (2015, 21). Harvey's definition is much narrower: "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2005, 2). As Brown argues, neoliberalism is "disunified and nonidentical with itself in space and over time" (2015, 21)—Harvey's definition helpfully identifies frequently seen elements.
  - 2 See, for example, Beilin (2016), Buschman (2012), Nicholson (2015), and Seale (2013).
  - 3 See, for example, Hudson (2017), Schlesselman-Tarango (2017), and Chou and Pho (2018).

that as “the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term ‘racial capitalism’ to refer to this development and to the subsequent structure as a historical agency” (2000, 2). Building on Robinson’s work, Melamed argues “racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires” and that “procedures of racialization and capitalism are ultimately never separable from each other” (2015, 77). Similarly, Stuart Hall (1980) contends that capitalism works through race, but that neither is reducible to the other: “Race is thus, also the modality in which class is ‘lived,’ the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and fought through” (341). To these theorists, capitalism generally and neoliberalism as a recent mode of capitalism are always already racialized; that is, “capitalism *is* racial capitalism” (Melamed 2015, 77).

As Hall (1980) suggests, racial and economic formations are not eternal and unchanging, but historically specific and contingent. In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, Melamed describes the specific post-World War II “hegemonic complexes of official or state-recognized liberal antiracisms” (2011, xv). Racial liberalism characterized the United States from the 1940s to 1960s, after the “racial break” in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, decolonization, and the rise of anticolonial and Pan-African nationalisms.<sup>4</sup> Racial liberalism works to obscure understandings of global capitalism as a “racial-political matter” (Melamed 2011, 10). Within racial liberalism, racism is understood as individual prejudice, while equality results from releasing “liberal freedoms from racial restrictions by extending equal opportunity, possessive individualism, and cultural citizenship to African Americans” (Melamed 2011, 9–10). During this time, “the content of the American Creed—equal opportunity, abstract equality, possessive individualism, and market liberties—came to define the substantive meaning of antiracism” (Melamed 2011, 25). Antiracism became the limited and conditional inclusion allowed by liberalism and capitalism (Goldberg 2009, 10).<sup>5</sup> Liberal multiculturalism emerges in the 1980s and 1990s and retains racial liberalism’s emphasis on individualism and property while emphasizing

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4 Howard Winant, in contrast to Melamed, emphasizes the continuity of white supremacy and “racial dualism” rather than a radical break (2001, 6). In light of recent political events, we are perhaps inclined to agree with Winant.

5 Librarianship during this time participated in racial liberalism by emphasizing assimilation and formal desegregation. See Schlesselman-Tarango (2016), Battles (2009), Knott (2015), and Wiegand (2015). David James Hudson (2017) also notes how racial liberalism continues to undergird understandings of race within LIS.

pluralism, representation, recognition, and fairness. Antiracism is formulated primarily as a desire for diversity (Melamed 2011).<sup>6</sup> Neoliberal multiculturalism becomes the dominant, but not sole, racial formation beginning in the late 1990s. While neoliberal multiculturalism, like neoliberalism itself, draws on liberal notions of subjectivity, “in neoliberal multiculturalism a multicultural formalism has been abstracted from anything but an ideal relationship with concrete human groups and, instead, has directly coded an economic order of things. In short, neoliberal multiculturalism has portrayed an ethic of multiculturalism to be the spirit of neoliberalism” (Melamed 2011, 41–42). Neoliberalism simply *is* antiracism; neoliberal multiculturalism speaks of difference, not race, and is invested primarily in economic freedom and consumerist diversity (Melamed 2011, 39, 42–43).<sup>7</sup> Within neoliberal multiculturalism, “all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized” (Brown 2015, 10). While Melamed’s typology identifies specific racial formations with specific historical periods, earlier formations do not entirely cease to exist; ideas such as the American creed, equal opportunity, fairness, and pluralism continue to have resonance even as neoliberal multiculturalism emphasizes consumerist diversity.

Librarianship has participated in and reproduced these ideologies around race and capitalism since its emergence as a profession. The remainder of this essay will use the overarching framework of racial capitalism and these historically specific liberal antiracisms—racial liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and neoliberal multiculturalism—to think through librarianship’s conception of intellectual freedom as expressed through ALA and OIF documents and *The Speaker*. Within librarianship, definitions of intellectual freedom rely on the metaphor of free speech, free thought, and indeed, the library itself as a “marketplace of ideas.” The connection made by this metaphor between intellectual freedom and capitalism is apparent; what is less apparent is why debates and controversies around intellectual freedom within librarianship so often entail the denial of Black peoples’ humanity. We consider the documents that seek to define intellectual freedom within librarianship and for librarians, including the 1977 film *The Speaker* and the 2018 version of “Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights.” We also analyze reactions to *The Speaker* in

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6 Hudson (2017) describes how liberal multiculturalism and diversity remain the dominant frameworks for understanding and addressing race in LIS. Librarianship during this time becomes less interested in assimilation and more focused on control, specifically of information technology. For the racial and gendered implications of this shift, see Mirza and Seale (2011), Mirza and Seale (2017), and Harris (1992).

7 Librarianship during this time embraces technocratic solutionism and technological determinism and seeks to model itself on Silicon Valley’s information technology companies. For the racial and gendered implications of this shift, see Mirza and Seale (2017).

1977–1978 and in 2014, when it was shown at the ALA Annual Meeting, and to the revision of “Meeting Rooms” in the summer of 2018. The “Meeting Rooms” revision invites a consideration of public space and policy, which we analyze by drawing on Hohle and Goldberg, who theorize the connections between public space, policy, and race within neoliberalism.

## **Intellectual Freedom, Race, and Neoliberalism**

The American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom was founded in 1967 and is “charged with implementing ALA policies concerning the concept of intellectual freedom as embodied in the Library Bill of Rights” (ALA n.d.). The Library Bill of Rights (ALA 1996), written in 1939 and predating OIF by nearly thirty years, is described as ALA’s “basic policy” on “free access to libraries and library materials” (ALA n.d.). The Freedom to Read Statement (ALA 2004), created in 1953, is among several intellectual freedom resources offered by ALA and OIF. Perhaps unsurprisingly given when it was first drafted, the Library Bill of Rights is invested in racial liberalism. It is premised on notions of the abstract equality of library resources, which should represent “all points of view” (ALA 1996) and of library users. For example, “Materials should not be excluded” based on their qualities or because of “partisan or doctrinal disapproval” (ALA 1996). The Library Bill of Rights also draws on liberal multiculturalist notions of pluralism in its references to “all persons and groups,” individual rights, and the equitable availability of library spaces (ALA 1996). The Freedom to Read Statement similarly draws on racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism in its evocation of individual freedom (to read), Americanness, democracy, and the Constitution, and its focus on a “diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous” (ALA 2004). Sveta Stoytcheva (2016) has described how librarianship’s core values, including intellectual freedom, fail to acknowledge that those values are subject to the operation of power and are contested and negotiated. Similarly, Kyle Shockey has argued that the “paradigm of intellectual freedom within which American librarianship operates” entails a “commitment to professional neutrality” as opposed to advocacy and social justice (2016, 103). Both tendencies are apparent in these documents. Neither directly addresses race, instead relying on liberal ideas of individual rights and freedom to stand in for antiracism. They are unable to grapple with power and oppression beyond referring to “suppression” and “censorship.” These are treated as discrete incidents rather than understood as systemic or structural, which David James Hudson (2017) notes is characteristic of liberal antiracism in LIS.

The Freedom to Read Statement also draws on the metaphor of the “marketplace of ideas” in its understanding of intellectual freedom: “The ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation, and to make their own decisions about what they read and believe” (ALA 2004). This is undergirded by “free enterprise in ideas and expression” (ALA 2004). Within this marketplace of ideas, “the answer to a ‘bad’ book is a good one, the answer to a ‘bad’ idea is a good one” (ALA 2004), as books and ideas exist in abstract equality and are thus interchangeable. This, of course, requires “free enterprise in ideas and expression” (ALA 2004). The First Amendment and Censorship document (ALA 2017), which like the Freedom to Read Statement is also labeled as an intellectual freedom resource, specifically cites a Supreme Court opinion which uses the phrase “marketplace of ideas” and argues that people have “the right to hear all sides of every issue and to make their own judgments about those issues” (ALA 2017). The Library Bill of Rights (ALA 1996) similarly describes libraries as “forums for information and ideas.” The metaphor of the library as the marketplace of ideas is pervasive in ALA and OIF definitions of, and correspondingly, policies around, intellectual freedom.

Ronald J. Heckart traces the notion of the library as a marketplace of ideas to a concept borrowed from American constitutional law, specifically to a Supreme Court dissent that argues “the most satisfactory version of the truth emerges through free trade in the marketplace of ideas” (1991, 493). Heckart suggests the Library Bill of Rights and Freedom to Read Statement figure the library as the preeminent marketplace of ideas: “Rather than shut out seemingly dangerous ideas and unorthodox thinking that might lead to new solutions to social problems, the profession would endorse a free trade in ideas and trust that individuals, with the contending points of view before them, would make good decisions” (1991, 495). Librarians would then be “neutral facilitators in the marketplace of ideas” (Heckart 1991, 496; Shockey 2016). Like Shockey (2016), Heckart identifies tensions and contradictions in associating intellectual freedom with librarian neutrality; “a truly unfettered market would be dominated by the powerful and well-to-do,” (1991, 497) while untrue ideas often are popular, and moreover, “other competing values may outweigh the value of a free trade of ideas” (1991, 501).

Nailisa Tanner and Grant Andersen (2018) connect the library as the marketplace of ideas specifically to neoliberalism. Like Heckart, they trace the marketplace of ideas metaphor to American jurisprudence and suggest that it embodies “the tendency of legal reasoning to become generalized as a social norm” (2018, 62). The most recent instance of the metaphor

(as both “political marketplace” and “marketplace of ideas”) is in the Supreme Court decision *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. Drawing on law scholars and Wendy Brown (2015), Tanner and Andersen argue that this case is “neoliberal jurisprudence,” which “recasts speech as a form of capital, and recasts citizens as consumers of this speech/capital. Correspondingly, discussion is recast as an activity of productively managing the investment and circulation of speech/capital” (2018, 65–66). The marketplace of ideas metaphor is “not merely a metaphor, but rather a model: investment, competition, and consumption are not images employed to describe the public sphere, but rather are the forms of activity that it demands” (Tanner and Andersen 2018, 70). The use of the metaphor within librarianship furthers the economization of librarianship and reframes the political elements of librarianship as economic (Brown 2015, 17). In treating speech as “qualitatively undifferentiated” capital, the marketplace of ideas metaphor erases power relations between speakers and within the broader social world. In so doing, it validates and reproduces those power relations (Shockey 2016; Tanner and Andersen 2018). Those power relations are always already racialized within a neoliberal multiculturalism that figures a diversity of speech within a marketplace of ideas as antiracist.

## ***The Speaker in the Marketplace***

*The Speaker*, which was produced by OIF in 1977, exemplifies the racial ideologies underlying the metaphor of the library as the marketplace of ideas. Elaine Harger argues that because it is available online, it “now stands as an ongoing, permanent, easily accessed and publicly available representation of OIF’s and ALA’s, understanding of First Amendment rights” (2016, 16).<sup>8</sup> The film both begins and closes with references to the First Amendment, and presents free speech as an absolute individual right. High school history teacher Virginia Dunn leads her class in discussing the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and in the scene immediately following, guides the current events club in a debate about inviting James Boyd, a professor who believes in the genetic inferiority of African Americans, to speak. When a

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8 Harger’s chapter on *The Speaker* provides a useful history of the production and reception of the film in 1977–1978 as well as of its revival in 2014. The 2014 ALA website, “The Speaker. Tools, Publications & Resources” also provides helpful historical context (ALA 2014). Harger (2016) and the Black Caucus (1978) also take care to describe the historical and legal inaccuracies in the film; as the Black Caucus argues: “The interpretation set forth is a manipulation of the First Amendment to deftly force the ordinary program-planning function of choosing a speaker to conform to imaginary First Amendment strictures. This distortion completely discredits and invalidates ‘The Speaker.’ This fundamental error, established at the beginning of the film, is never corrected” (1978, 3). See also “Commentary on *The Speaker*” (2014) for commentary from librarians, many of whom were and are involved with the Social Responsibilities Roundtable, who offer insight on both the 1977 premier and the 2014 revival.



Black student objects, a white student responds by invoking the marketplace metaphor: “I think we all believe that it’s important to hear all points of view. It’s not a question of whether or not we agree with him, we’re supposed to try and get speakers who make us think, challenge us” (ALA OIF 2014).

Dunn exhorts fellow teachers to listen to opera while grading and has family members in the military; she is rational, civil, cultured, and patriotic, in contrast to characters of color opposed to inviting Boyd and who are presented as angry and “uncivil.” The film is careful to not depict Boyd supporters as entirely white. A Black student and Black teacher defend his right to free speech, while two white teachers oppose his visit (for reasons other than his racism). A white teacher who defends Boyd is depicted as taking a principled stand for free speech and Boyd’s rights as a “minority” and indeed, throughout the film, Boyd is consistently identified as a member of an oppressed minority. In their response to the film, the ALA Black Caucus pointed out that “the subject of the mental inferiority of black people—more commonly identified as ‘white supremacy’ or ‘racism’—has plagued this country for three centuries and now convulses the world. It is hollow mockery to present Boyd’s point of view as ‘unpopular’ or as ‘minority opinion’” (1978, 4–5) but the film expends a considerable amount of run time and narrative effort to advance this point of view. This emphasizes the protection of “minority” opinions afforded by the marketplace of ideas, and the need for “free enterprise in ideas and expression” promoted in ALA and OIF documents (ALA 2004). Dunn reiterates this: “Life consists of pleasant and unpleasant things. You can’t live and shut your ears to the unpleasant things. . . I’ve always taught my students . . . that the more ideas they’re exposed to the better and that includes painful ones” (ALA OIF 2014).

Dunn is asked to have her students reconsider the invitation, and she refuses, invoking censorship and book banning. As the student and local newspapers cover the controversy, community members threaten to withdraw ads from the local paper, while the student newspaper is told by a newly appointed advisor that they are now required to ask for permission to publish stories. Parents attempt to remove Boyd’s work from the school library and debate nuances of “selectivity” and “censorship” with the librarian. Public librarians are forced to deny meeting room requests due to funding threats. The film argues that freedom of speech and First Amendment rights are absolutely inviolable, employing slippery slope reasoning. As Sam Popowich (2019) points out, the use of slippery slope logic assumes that there exists “self-regulating unregulated (intellectual) freedom” which relies on a sense that “*Our* society—a society of freedom, individualism, and the social contract—is innocent,

unregulated, living off manna from heaven” (para. 5). That is, this reasoning assumes that intellectual freedom exists outside of the social, historical, and contextual. The film concludes with the school canceling Boyd’s talk and Dunn’s impassioned speech in response:

I personally feel that the cancellation of his speech was a great loss because I feel that the James Boyds of this world have a right to speak, as much right as the rest of us who don’t hold views unpleasant and unpopular. The majority has ruled and the majority in our country has the right to rule, but side by side with the concept of majority rule is the concept of protecting the minority from the passions of the majority. You see, if we could know for sure that what the majority decided was right and true there wouldn’t be any need to protect the minority—there wouldn’t even be a minority—but we cannot know permanently what is right and what is true and so we must never give in to the temptation to suppress what we don’t believe in or agree with or find painful to hear. That’s my view of our history and I’ve never thought that history was something just to be read and studied. We have to believe it and live by it. The fact that something has been lost this time, well, it needn’t be a permanent loss. No, I’ve told you what I believe. It’s up to you to decide what you believe. (ALA OIF 2014)

This speech contends that the true “minorities” in the United States are not those marginalized or oppressed due to their race, gender, sexual, class, ability, and other identities but rather those who do not hold “popular” opinions. In contrast to the Library Bill of Rights (ALA 1996) and the Freedom to Read Statement (ALA 2004), race is explicitly invoked in *The Speaker*; it is, indeed, what drives the main conflict within the film. Boyd’s ideas about the racial inferiority of African Americans are described as the minority viewpoint. But as the Black Caucus of the ALA pointed out, this is currently and historically a widely held, even hegemonic, position. It is also, as the Black Caucus noted, the only speech that matters: “Under [Dunn’s] guidance the Club members are fighting for Dr. Boyd’s right to be invited to lecture, instead of fighting to uphold their own right to invite the speaker of their choice” (1978, 2). This is neither accidental nor incidental. Structural and systemic forms of oppression are recast as suppression of speech, and all speech and speakers as fundamentally equal (Tanner and Andersen 2018). The film suggests that the marketplace of ideas can protect “minorities” in both senses of the word, even as it erases power, dominance, and oppression. The film argues that the marketplace of ideas is fundamentally fair and is what makes individual freedom possible.

This understanding of free speech and intellectual freedom proceeds as though neutrality is possible and as though power relations do not exist; it is entirely removed from history and context, despite the film's repeated and insistent emphasis on both (Shockey 2016; Serwer 2018). The film's simultaneous reification of abstract and ahistorical notions of freedom and history are made possible by commitment to abstract rights such as the freedom of speech. In this way, the diversity of speech in a marketplace of ideas based on formal equality becomes the goal, and the very definition of free speech and intellectual freedom. In this vision of free speech, when ideas are just ideas, endlessly exchangeable with each other, abstracted from their histories, there is no room to challenge ideas and speech that perform violence (Harger 2016). There is no room to grapple with the structural and systemic dominance and oppression that make violent ideas and speech both possible and powerful. Racism is individual and always about intent rather than outcome in *The Speaker*, as in LIS and liberal antiracisms more broadly (Melamed 2011; Hudson 2017).

*The Speaker* deploys both racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism in its emphasis on individual freedom and abstract equality as well as commitment to pluralism as obtained through individual rights and representation. To feel bad about racism and to desire diversity, as white characters in *The Speaker* do, is portrayed as antiracism. This emphasis on individualism renders redistribution and an acknowledgement of systemic power as unfair. Focusing on individual freedom transmutes the political question of inviting a speaker who believes some of the student body to be genetically inferior into an economic question of the individual right to freedom of speech within the marketplace of ideas. *The Speaker* insists that racism can be solved through the marketplace of ideas while denying that race exists or matters; it turns the political into the economic and neoliberalism becomes antiracism (Melamed 2011). Denying the operations of power ultimately works to reproduce the hegemonic social formations of white supremacy.

Neoliberal multiculturalism obfuscates race and politics to speak of difference that can and must be negotiated within the realm of the economic, even as neoliberalism depoliticizes the economic. The ALA and OIF documents, as well as *The Speaker*, are invested in racial liberalism and liberal multiculturalism, which are not incompatible with the neoliberal multiculturalism revealed in defining intellectual freedom and librarianship using the metaphor of the marketplace of ideas.

## Meeting Rooms in the Marketplace

In 2014, *The Speaker* was screened at the ALA Annual Conference, and a moderated panel discussion followed. Although there was some pushback (“Commentary on *The Speaker*” 2014), the Black Caucus co-sponsored the mostly uncontentious screening and panel (Morehart and Eberhart 2014). In its justification for co-sponsoring the events, the Library History Roundtable (LHRT) wrote, “*The Speaker* and the controversy it caused are nearly forty years old. Yet we face some of the same issues today. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are nearly one thousand hate groups operating in the United States. They request meeting rooms in libraries and other public spaces, including a Ku Klux Klan rally planned last year at Gettysburg National Military Park. The intended purpose of *The Speaker* was to invite librarians to examine the limits of their own commitment to intellectual freedom. Such an exercise remains worthwhile” (LHRT 2014). Harger (2016) notes that the discourse around the 2014 revival, including this LHRT statement, suggested that these sorts of conversations had never happened before and that the film therefore occupied some sort of “minority” or “unpopular” position that had to be allowed within the marketplace of ideas.

Four years later, in the summer of 2018, intellectual freedom, free speech, and race were again thrust into the spotlight for the ALA. In June 2018, at the ALA Annual Conference, the ALA Council approved changes to the language of the OIF policy document, “Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights” (ALA 2018). Specifically, the phrases “hate speech” and “hate groups” were added to and thereby specifically protected by the policy:

A publicly funded library is not obligated to provide meeting room space to the public, but if it chooses to do so, it cannot discriminate or deny access based upon the viewpoint of speakers or the content of their speech. This encompasses religious, political, and hate speech. If a library allows charities, non-profits, and sports organizations to discuss their activities in library meeting rooms, then the library cannot exclude religious, social, civic, partisan political, or hate groups from discussing their activities in the same facilities. (ALA 2018)

Following protests and pushback,<sup>9</sup> including the #NoHateALA Twitter campaign, the policy was again revised to remove the phrases “hate speech” and “hate groups” and approved by

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9 See, for example, Hathcock (2018) and K. Anderson (2018).

ALA Council.<sup>10</sup> We turn to this event and the discussions around it because the question of public space has particular resonance when considering racial capitalism, and more specifically Melamed's (2011) concept of neoliberal multiculturalism, within librarianship. Using the metaphor of the library as a marketplace of ideas displaces politics for economics and in so doing, works to uphold hegemonic social formations such as white supremacy. Concomitantly, the metaphor denies the existence of race and other forms of dominance and oppression. And yet race is central to the formation of neoliberal economic policies, particularly those around public space.

Hohle and Goldberg's work extends Melamed's formulation of neoliberal multiculturalism to the question of public space and race more specifically. In *Race and the Origins of American Neoliberalism*, Hohle argues that "race plays a causal role in the American political system by coding and recoding political and economic preferences into categories of black and white. The most significant recoding of state policy was embedding black into public" (2015, 4). Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, most whites supported the welfare state, but as African Americans gained political power and spaces became more integrated, whites stopped supporting policies that sustained the public good: "The language of neoliberalism is organized around the white-private/black-public binary. . . . The process of black civic inclusion changed the meaning of public as parts of public life became desegregated, thus, fusing the meaning of public with black. Black-public began a sequence where neoliberals could insert subsequent concrete policy proposals" (2015, 4). Whiteness became associated with "private" as private institutions, organizations, and spaces can regulate participation. Taxes became discursively associated with white-private, but government spending became black-public<sup>11</sup> (Hohle 2015, 14). Through these associations, neoliberal ideology vilifies the state and public sector through race but without directly invoking it. Neoliberalism works in concert with white supremacy in both discourse and policy around public spaces.

Goldberg's (2009) model of "racial americanization" points to the embeddedness of neoliberalism in racial formations. Racial americanization, he argues, "proceeds by *undoing* the laws, rules, and norms of expectation the Civil Rights Movement was able to effect, attacking them as unconstitutional, as the only sort of racial discrimination with which we should be concerned today" (2009, 78). These changes frequently involved public spaces. Following the Civil Rights Movement, whites came to "read the state as being in the service

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10 James LaRue's post on the OIF blog, entitled "Library Meeting Rooms for All" (2018), has a thorough overview of the events and timeline.

11 We have capitalized "Black" when referring to people, but do not capitalize in quotations and when referring to the ideas of other scholars, as in Hohle's formulation of "black-public" here.

of brown and especially black Americans” (2009, 91).<sup>12</sup> Within racial americanization, private (racial) preferences are subsidized in the private sphere by public funds, which Goldberg refers to as “racisms deregulated” (2009, 344). Melamed echoes this argument: “Since the 1960s, desegregation of public institutions has essentially been accompanied by publicly subsidized resegregation in the private sphere as whites have either claimed their own municipalities through suburbanization or turned to private providers for schools and other services. Neoliberalism and the growing power of wealth introduce even stronger privatized modalities of redlining” (Melamed 2011, 221–22). Racial americanization presents itself as race neutral and the natural result of human tendencies and as such benefits from the “antiracist formalism of neoliberal multiculturalism” (Melamed 2011, 222).

The “Meeting Rooms” documents invoke “the public” in varying ways, assuming the transparency of the term. Both documents refer to public funding: “libraries supported by public funds” in the 1991 version becomes “publicly funded libraries” in 2018. Given Hohle’s description of the ways in which taxes and spending are racially coded, this language could imply that white taxes are being spent on black services.<sup>13</sup> The 2018 revision also uses “discriminate” to describe denying access to meeting rooms to unspecified groups. As in *The Speaker*, discrimination is not systemic, structural, or racialized, but is performed and experienced individually. The 1991 version uses “exclude,” which is less specific in its subtext. The 2018 revision presumes that the absence of barriers to free speech and intellectual freedom, as in a marketplace of ideas, eliminates discrimination. This is neoliberalism as antiracism, economics as politics (Melamed 2011). The inclusion of “hate speech” and “hate groups” in the 2018 revision resolves the tension between competing racialized invocations of the public. By explicitly using both terms, the 2018 revision indicates that the public at large does not experience the violence of hate speech or hate groups. The public of the 2018 revision is implicitly coded as white. This is “racism without race, racism gone private, racism without the categories to name it as such” (Goldberg 2009, 23). The 2018 “Meeting Rooms” revision reproduces the neoliberal multiculturalist notion that “people should be free to express and exercise their preferences as they see fit” and a simultaneous denial of the centrality of race to those preferences (Goldberg 2009, 341). Meeting rooms must allow hate speech and hate groups because libraries should function as

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12 Goldberg (2009) further suggests that the association of the state with blackness allows funding to be shifted from public goods to institutions of security, compliance, and control that manage non-whites both within the United States and outside of it.

13 This is not merely language; library funding, like funding for most public services, correlates heavily with race (with increased funding associated with increased wealth and property values). See for example Garrow (2015).

the marketplace of ideas. The 2018 “Meeting Rooms” revision represents a formally apolitical and not-racialized policy that seeks to substitute the economic for the political. It embodies Hohle’s description of how neoliberal policies function: “The devout belief in markets became an end to itself, where all that is left are *market-based solutions to problems created by market-based solutions that mask racially segregated public life*” (2015, 6). The solution to the problem of hate speech is a market that denies the centrality of race to both the world more broadly and the problem more specifically.

As in *The Speaker*, the dissociation of speech from its context is at the center of the “Meeting Rooms” revision. In a post on the OIF blog, LaRue wrote: “ALA does not endorse hate groups, and does not seek to normalize hate speech. But it recognizes that ‘hate groups’ is a remarkably elastic term, prone to thrown about by both sides of a political spectrum. It has been attached to book discussion groups, Black Lives Matter, Muslim groups, and others” (LaRue 2018, para. 6). LaRue argues that all speech is equal, even when it is made in bad faith or performs violence, a move that is made possible by removing context. In the same post, LaRue (2018, para. 7) wrote: “It is the premise of intellectual freedom that providing broad access to public space *builds* communities, not only by providing common ground, but by facilitating the sometimes contentious discussion that lead to positive social change” (2018, para. 8). He continues with “**librarianship is not based on the suppression of speech.** It is based on the right to express it and access it” (2018, para.11). These statements directly invoke the library as the marketplace of ideas metaphor, which removes context, obscures racialized power and oppression, and turns antiracism into economization. In drawing on neoliberal notions of the self-regulating, limitless market, the marketplace of ideas conceals already-existing restrictions that allow markets to function at all (Polanyi 2001). Defining intellectual freedom and free speech in these terms similarly erases already-existing limits to speech and oversimplifies politics and ethics. Within the idealized marketplace of neoliberalism, there is no politics or power, only essentially equal consumers choosing amongst essentially equal options. But the “Meeting Rooms” policy is not an abstraction; it involves physical spaces and bodies and the complexity of the social world. Policies shape material reality (C. Anderson 2017). Unless librarianship expends effort in understanding racial capitalism as articulated in the frameworks developed by Melamed, Hohle, and Goldberg, they will reproduce the inequities inherent in these structures. Goldberg argues that “antiracism requires historical memory, recalling the conditions of racial degradation and relating contemporary to historical and local to global conditions” (2009, 21); this essay has been an effort in this direction.

## Race Radicalisms and Complex Unity

Melamed suggests that race radicalisms can contest liberal antiracisms such as neoliberal multiculturalism. Race radicalisms, she argues, are “materialist antiracisms that prioritize the unevennesses of global capitalism as primary race matters” (2011, 47); they attempt to think through “the complex unity and *differentiae specifica*e of social formations,” in Hall’s words (1980, 329). They return history, context, and complexity to liberal antiracisms that frequently function at the level of common sense. Hudson has called for library scholars to “treat the relations of racialized difference and power in LIS as extensions of, rather than separate from, the systems of racial domination that characterize society more broadly” (2017, 26–27). The documentation of professional organizations, a low-quality film made in the 1970s, and revisions to a policy on meeting rooms affect the shape of our profession and the work that we do and yet are also simultaneously embedded in the inequities and oppressions of the larger world. In this essay, we have argued that the framework of racial capitalism, which understands capitalism as racially overdetermined, is necessary for understanding librarianship and have used this framework to analyze controversies around intellectual freedom. Defining intellectual freedom through the metaphor of the marketplace of ideas works to replace politics with economics, thereby reproducing neoliberalism and white supremacy. Libraries need to move beyond thinking about libraries and intellectual freedom as marketplaces, and instead work to situate both within their historical contexts.

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