HOPEFUL VISIONS, PRACTICAL ACTIONS

CULTURAL HUMILITY IN LIBRARY WORK

Edited by **SARAH R. KOSTELECKY, LORI TOWNSEND,** and **DAVID A. HURLEY**

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CONTENTS

Foreword by Mark A. Puente ix

Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction xv

PART I: ORIGINS

1 "Time Is a Ship That Never Casts Anchor" 3

Indigenous Adages in Promoting Cultural Humility

LORIENE ROY AND LEISA MOORHOUSE

2 Redressing Power Imbalances in Librarianship Using Cultural Humility 17

A Perspective from Two Black Librarians

XAN GOODMAN AND TWANNA HODGE

3 Getting Past "Approachability" 35

What Cultural Humility Brings to Library and Information Education

LILIANA MONTOYA AND SARAH POLKINGHORNE

PART II: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

4 Reflections on Culturally Humble Practice in Bibliography, Scholarship, and Readers' Advisory 49

A Case Study

MICHAEL MUNGIN

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available at alastore.ala.org

5 Cultural Humility and Evaluating Books for Young Readers 63
SILVIA LIN HANICK AND KELSEY KEYES

6 Learn, Act, Connect 81
Thriving as an International Librarian and Global Citizen
MEGGAN HOULIHAN, DINA MEKY, AND AMANDA CLICK

7 Cultural Humility in Instruction on Health Outreach Projects 95
Revising a Course on the Grant-Writing Process
JARROD IRWIN

PART III: COMMUNITY

8 Embedding Diné Culture in Individual and Institutional Cultural Humility Practices 109
A View from the Tribal College Library
RHIANNON SORRELL

9 Beyond Late Fees 125
Eliminating Access Barriers for Everyone
CARRIE VALDES

10 Small Changes Make an Impact 137
How Access and Metadata Services Teams Address Cultural Humility
MELANIE BOPP, TRICIA MACKENZIE, AND KIMBERLEY A. EDWARDS

11 Cultural Humility and Servant Leadership 153
MARK EMMONS

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PART IV: HOPEFUL VISIONS

12 Knowing (un)Knowings 175

Cultural Humility, the Other(s), and Theories of Change

NICHOLAE CLINE AND JORGE R. LÓPEZ-MCKNIGHT

13 Cultural Humility 189

A Journey to Radical Self-Love

NAGHEM SWADE AND DANIYOM "DANI" BEKELE

About the Editors 205

About the Contributors 207

Index 213

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FOREWORD

IN THE LAST NINETEEN MONTHS, WE HAVE SEEN A PROLIFERATION OF articles, op-eds, special editions of journals, podcasts, webinars, and numerous other types of publications and programs on the topics of racism, systemic racism, and antiracism. To *some* communities (emphasis intentional), the discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has never been so visible or so poignant, especially after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. To many communities—especially communities of color, and in particular those who identify as Black—the inequities that became more visible from that tragic event are simply a reality of everyday existence. The worldwide racial awakening that followed, perhaps compounded by the global pandemic, launched statements in support of Black lives (and others) from corporations, higher education, not-for-profits, and many other sectors. In the library and archives profession, reading lists on the topic were developed and disseminated at perhaps record pace. Discussion groups were formed. DEI and antiracist trainers and facilitators have been unable to keep up with demand. Philanthropic organizations with immense resources, such as the Ford, MacArthur, Kellogg, and Andrew Mellon foundations, have committed unprecedented amounts of money to racial equity efforts. And a highly contentious presidential election brought the concepts of systemic racism and critical race theory into the living rooms and vocabulary of most US citizens even though there were and there remain, in the opinion of this author, broad misconceptions about what either of those terms mean.

Nevertheless, the quest for understanding and "answers" seems to be the focus of much activity. Individuals and organizations appear to be committed to uncovering the solutions for this seemingly intractable problem that, according to many social scientists, historians, and thought leaders, has

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existed for centuries. What training can one attend that will provide a convincing argument of the severity of the problem? In what institute can one enroll that will provide the tools for action that might lead to systemic change? What assessment methodologies can be deployed that will provide us with the data we need to advance equity in organizations and in society? Society needs answers and solutions. And these need to be accessible, expedient, tenable, and sustainable.

But is that realistic? Is it just that the magic formula or the most convincing analysis has eluded us to date? To those paying attention, even prior to 2020, the tenor of conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion were changing dramatically. To that litany of terms, organizations and institutions added *belonging* and *engagement* in addition to *antiracism*. The framing of "multiculturalism" seemed, to many, out of fashion and insufficient at addressing the root causes of inequities based on racial/ethnic identity or other marginalized identities. Did this trajectory, prior to 2020, hold any promise? Or was the tendency to provide framing of our common humanity and the universalism of the human experience too safe an approach? To what extent do we derail efforts by introducing the most challenging of phrases such as *white privilege* or *white supremacy*? What exactly is the approach, what are the exact terms, and which is the exact methodology that will lead to enduring change?

I posit that it is the quest for perfection—for quick and easy solutions—that stalls us in our efforts. Perhaps there is room, if not necessity, for every approach, depending on context and urgency. It is clear that decades of efforts have fallen short. It is evident from data about differential outcomes for communities of color when they (we) engage with any social system that the US is not in a postracial reality. It is equally clear that socioeconomic status alone does not account for those differential outcomes in healthcare, education, access to housing, the accumulation of generational wealth, the criminal justice system, or demographic representation in the library profession, among other measures. It is also clear that no single approach to these issues will resonate with—much less convert—those who doubt if not outright deny the realities of systemic inequities and injustice.

The concept of cultural humility is not new to libraries and information science. Many attribute the development of the framing to the medical profession and concerns about the shortcomings of "multiculturalism" as it relates to patient/healthcare providers and physicians (Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). The concept has been adapted by many other professional sectors,

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including librarianship, which has seen numerous presentations and articles surface in the literature within the last five years. Among those, perhaps the most impactful has been the *Reference Services Review* article by the editors of this compilation, "Cultural Humility in Libraries" (Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend 2019). In their review of the literature and of the concept, they emphasize several key dimensions or hallmarks of cultural humility that are especially cogent in contemporary times. The first is that cultural humility is an ongoing process that involves self-reflection, not a finite set of skills that can be mastered by any individual (Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend 2019, 13). The second is that cultural humility, in any interaction, demands deference to the characteristics that are most salient to the object (person) of the transaction—that is, the person who embodies the difference and whose experience and life we are trying to improve (Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend 2019). In this way, there are no assumptions that even people from similar cultural backgrounds hold the same values and prefer to be treated or represented in a similar way. Moreover, there are no presumptions that the values and behavioral characteristics (or preferences) of people from majority cultures and identities (e.g., white, straight, cisgender, able-bodied) align with those from different cultural identities or expressions. Finally, and most important, the concept of cultural humility demands that we address the power differentials, either real or perceived, that exist between the parties involved in any transaction. In this way, whether at micro-, macro-, or mezzo-levels, we can begin to redress the long trajectory of disadvantage experienced by communities of color and people from other marginalized and underrepresented identities. Perhaps this framing can lead to systemic change in our profession.

The chapters within this collection are diverse, representing authors from varied personal backgrounds as well as professional contexts—from library administrators in higher-education environments, to library and information science educators, to public and community college librarians. Readers will no doubt be challenged to think about the implications of cultural humility on our professional practice, certainly, but also on the way we live our lives, day to day. We are challenged, through the lens of cultural humility, to embrace paradox—that is, to embrace "both/and" thinking, rejecting the traditional, Western either/or approaches (Gulati-Partee and Potapchuk 2014). In addition, we are encouraged to become comfortable with nonclosure, which is a "direct challenge to the cultural norm of perfectionism that dominates" the work of libraries, archives, and other cultural-heritage and -memory

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institutions (Gulati-Partee and Potapchuk 2014, 33). Engaging these counter-cultural norms will allow us to reify the core principles of cultural humility, which, in turn, may lead to more meaningful experiences and more equitable outcomes for all those for whom access has been denied for generations.

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INTRODUCTION

AS WE ARE WRITING THIS INTRODUCTION, IT HAS BEEN ALMOST EXACTLY A year since we put out a call for the chapters in this volume. We are also two years into a pandemic that has changed every facet of our lives. The year in which these chapters were written was a year filled with despair, hope, despair again, and then a more cautious hope intertwined with frustration, anxiety, and, yes, bouts of despair even still. Perhaps this is an apt metaphor for what we hoped to achieve in bringing together these authors in a book on cultural humility: a cautious hope in the face of so much trouble, but one too grounded in experience to be a naive hope.

You may already be aware of the concept of cultural humility emerging as another approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts within librarianship. Though there are a number of definitions of *cultural humility*, we have defined it for library contexts as "the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other oriented in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the other person, the ability to recognize the context in which interactions occur, and a commitment to redress power imbalances and other structural issues to benefit all parties" (Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend 2019).

Cultural humility's core tenets include an awareness of and commitment to challenging inequitable structures of power. A culturally humble approach to work recognizes the need for partnership and gives individuals concrete tools for undertaking and continuing such work with patience and hope. In this way, cultural humility offers an approach for navigating our work, whether the interpersonal interactions with patrons and/or between staff members, or the behind-the-scenes work of collection development, cataloging, or administration.

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Much of practicing cultural humility involves self-reflection and so happens within the mind. This can make it difficult to recognize specific actions as resulting from cultural humility. Instead, we (Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend 2022) have identified some key mental practices of cultural humility, including:

- Don't be defensive.
- Recognize other perspectives.
- Practice critical self-reflection.

The contributions in this volume tell stories that illustrate these elements. Our hope is to share the many ways people engage with this approach in libraries with colleagues and patrons, leading to meaningful change and growth—making things a little bit (or a lot) better.

Within the following chapters are visions of cultural humility and the changes, big and small, that it facilitates. The authors represent a diverse set of life, work, and library experiences, which reinforces the relevance and applicability of a cultural humility practice across individuals and environments. Though we have grouped the contributions into distinct sections, they do not exactly fit their labels—a statement that applies to many of the authors as well. Many of the stories shared here start from a place of not fitting in. This is enough of a theme that we think this experience may be an asset in practicing cultural humility. We think it is a strength of this volume too, that the chapters bring different approaches, styles, and purposes, creating a whole that is richer than it is tidy.

Many of the authors in this volume have bravely and generously shared their personal stories and experiences, illustrating the many ways people practice cultural humility. Writing in such an open and honest way can be difficult, and we are grateful for the trust they have placed in us, as editors, and you, as readers, to share and receive their stories.

Origins

The first section of this book focuses on origins, roots, and beginnings. We don't mean the origin of cultural humility itself—that is documented elsewhere (e.g., Foronda et al. 2016; Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend 2019; Tangney 2000; Tervalon and Murray-García 1998). Rather, in this section, we hear from authors about *their* origins with cultural humility, starting with its deep

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roots in Indigenous cultures, then exploring individual journeys to understand and implement the concept, and finally, considering cultural humility at the beginning of a journey into librarianship.

In some ways, this is also the origin of this book project itself. Like many of our colleagues, we were introduced to cultural humility from outside the field of librarianship. Seeing its potential, we immediately looked for examples of cultural humility being used in libraries. While we were sure they existed, we couldn't find any back in 2014. And so we began work on our vision of what we thought cultural humility practice might look like for libraries.

Over the next several years, as we began to write about and present on cultural humility, we started hearing it mentioned in other presentations, saw it referenced on our social media timelines and in books, and, eventually, encountered other visions of cultural humility in webinars, presentations, and writings from people like Twanna Hodge, Xan Goodman, Nicola Andrews, Sunny Kim, and Josie Watanabe. We learned later that Omar Poler had been discussing it in courses in the Tribal Libraries, Archives, and Museums Project at the iSchool at University of Wisconsin–Madison. Clearly, many people in many libraries were thinking about, engaging with, and doing cultural humility in a variety of ways. This book stems from a desire to discover and learn from those colleagues throughout the library world.

As we started looking for and talking about cultural humility, we noticed two things. First, many people who were engaged with the concept had very personal stories of how they relate to or value cultural humility. Second, many of the people we talked to who hadn't heard the term *cultural humility* had a response along the lines of "Oh, there's a name for that?" For us, this second group often (though certainly not exclusively) consisted of Indigenous people. Though this is certainly partly explained by our social networks—two of us are Native, and all of us have worked in libraries in Native institutions—we repeatedly noted the interesting work on cultural humility being done in Native communities, such as by the First Nations Health Authority in Canada.

We are therefore delighted to have Loriene Roy and Leisa Moorhouse's chapter, "'Time Is a Ship That Never Casts Anchor': Indigenous Adages in Promoting Cultural Humility," to open the collection. Loriene and Leisa share a variety of Indigenous adages that can help individuals in their own cultural humility practice. They highlight the importance of adages and how these can give an individual a tool for reflection and guidance to go forward in the world. The lessons imparted in Indigenous adages reflect the tenets of cultural

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humility and can be useful reminders for engaging with others using the approach. Adages can be referred to when needed in difficult times throughout life, supporting the lifelong learning that is part of a cultural humility practice. This chapter will help readers think about cultural humility in new ways and open a space to think about the values conveyed in familiar adages from their own cultures.

We are equally delighted that Xan Goodman and Twanna Hodge, two pioneers of cultural humility in libraries, collaborated on "Redressing Power Imbalances in Librarianship Using Cultural Humility: A Perspective from Two Black Librarians." Using critical race theory and autoethnography, they share their own counterstories of their individual experiences as Black women working in libraries. Their stories illustrate how race, ethnicity, culture, positionality, kinship ties, and socioeconomic aspects can create and reinforce power imbalances, anti-Blackness, and oppression within the profession. Cultural humility, they argue, can change personal, organizational, and systemic practices that create and perpetuate these problems. They also share practical ways to engage in self-reflection and strategies for addressing power imbalances. This chapter can help readers recognize, articulate, and reflect on the many subtle and unsubtle assumptions, norms, and values that contribute to the problems in the profession.

Liliana Montoya and Sarah Polkinghorne, together as student and instructor, reflect on the benefits of introducing cultural humility to library school students. In "Getting Past 'Approachability': What Cultural Humility Brings to Library and Information Education," they explore the concept of service as taught in library and information science classrooms, typically through the lens of "approachability." They problematize and deconstruct approachability, highlighting that power dynamics are always at play when a person assesses whether or not a librarian seems approachable. Cultural humility, which they point out is "user-centeredness in action," makes these issues salient to students who are considering how to be information providers. This chapter will be useful to both new and experienced librarians who want to incorporate cultural humility into their ethos of librarianship.

Reflective Practice

As we grow from our origins, we seek diverse examples of cultural humility in practice. In the following chapters, individual librarians make change—in

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their own practice and in the world—through both transformative shifts and bold remakings, as well as smaller but still meaningful remodelings. As we hear their stories, we see how their practice moves all of us toward positive change. Their generous sharing of both professional and personal growth, beginning with self-awareness and continuing with reflective practice, clarifies how we realize cultural humility in everyday library work.

In "Reflections on Culturally Humble Practice in Bibliography, Scholarship, and Readers' Advisory: A Case Study," Michael Mungin contributes a warm and engaging reflection on cultural humility in his work, from teaching information literacy at the University of Washington to creating a queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) film bibliography. He shares his background and his experiences with libraries growing up, and how these have informed his current positionality. Michael discusses the QTPOC Film Canon resource using a cultural humility lens, and the story of its development serves as a reminder of the potential positive impact we as individuals can have through our work in libraries. This chapter will appeal to anyone interested in the practice of cultural humility in public services, and it's a great place to start thinking about what a culturally humble practice looks like and how to think about cultural humility as an individual library worker.

Silvia Lin Hanick and Kelsey Keyes, both academic librarians who were members of the American Library Association's committee Rise: A Feminist Book Project for Ages 0–18, provide practical guidance on incorporating cultural humility into the practice of selecting children's literature in their chapter "Cultural Humility and Evaluating Books for Young Readers." They use vivid examples and relatable personal narratives to reflect on the emotions they experience as professionals, mothers, and readers when selecting children's literature. They show us how cultural humility can be applied not only to our interpersonal interactions but also in the relationships we form with books. In so doing, they expand the boundaries of our (the editors') understanding of cultural humility and have developed an insightful set of principles for applying cultural humility to an important part of librarianship. This chapter provides an example of cultural humility in practice and will be particularly valuable for librarians interested in children's literature.

Meggan Houlihan, Amanda Click, and Dina Meky explore cultural humility in the context of international librarianship in "Learn, Act, Connect: Thriving as an International Librarian and Global Citizen," as American academic librarians who have lived and worked outside the United States. They frame

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these experiences through the lens of Tangney's dimensions of humility and Goodman's pillars of cultural humility. Using lively and pertinent examples from their own and other international librarians' experiences, they express the appreciative joy of cultural humility as they discuss exploring, learning, making mistakes, and experiencing wonder in new and unfamiliar environments. This chapter will be helpful to anyone thinking of working abroad, but also in reflecting on how we approach the world as "outsiders" and how we might use those approaches in thinking of how we work with our patrons and colleagues.

In "Cultural Humility in Instruction on Health Outreach Projects: Revising a Course on the Grant-Writing Process," Jarrod Irwin describes how he incorporated principles of cultural humility into an online course about grant writing for health outreach and education projects. He highlights the importance of libraries working in partnership with local community members and organizations and how a culturally humble approach must be taken with these partners. He details the changes made to the course in adding cultural humility elements and explains the reasoning for each change. This chapter offers guidance for those readers looking for concrete ways to use cultural humility in their own contexts, even if those contexts don't initially appear directly related to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Community

The contributions in this section illustrate the impact of community in shaping one's practice of cultural humility, within the library and more broadly. Libraries can cultivate an environment that helps individuals in their cultural humility practice. As we engage with the individuals from the communities around us, we can listen to their needs and experiences to advocate for changes to power structures within libraries. The authors in this section describe the process of examining embedded library practices and policies through the lens of cultural humility and, as a result, implementing changes that center the other person and their needs. They help remind us to reflect on seemingly small aspects of an interaction with someone (saying "have a good day" to a patron) to the larger ones (taking patrons to court for lost books) and how those reflections may help us in our interactions going forward.

In "Embedding Diné Culture in Individual and Institutional Cultural Humility Practices: A View from the Tribal College Library," Rhiannon Sorrell

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shares her reflections about cultural humility practice as a librarian at Diné College, where she engages with members of her own tribal community. She discusses how humility is embedded within Diné cultural teachings, although there is no specific word for the concept in the Diné language. Rhiannon thoughtfully shares how she realized she had to "unlearn" norms from Western education to help library users at Diné College. Writing about her experience of self-reflection makes the process visible, which can help others in this effort. This chapter provides an example of the value of cultural humility practice in an Indigenous context (where the librarian and patrons are of the same cultural background), and how it can be practiced by and for Indigenous people and communities.

The next two chapters present case studies of making changes in libraries. In "Beyond Late Fees: Eliminating Access Barriers for Everyone," Carrie Valdes, director of the public library in Moab, Utah, shares how a light-bulb moment several years into her tenure as director led her to begin a complete reevaluation of her library's policies, procedures, and services, engaging her staff, the library board, and the local government along the way. Realizing that library policies were creating barriers for the people who most needed its services, she changed how cards are issued, how lost books are handled, even the forms needed to check out equipment, with more changes planned. But beyond the specific changes, Valdes presents a model for how to think about library services and the policies that support, or prevent, the community from using them. Anyone who has ever felt that some things just can't be changed will find inspiration in this chapter.

From the public library in a town of 5,300, we move to a university library serving a population of 38,000. In "Small Changes Make an Impact: How Access and Metadata Services Teams Address Cultural Humility," Melanie Bopp, Tricia Mackenzie, and Kimberley A. Edwards share their experiences working to embody cultural humility as a core value of their departments in the library at George Mason University and the additional challenges that come from operating within a consortium. In Access Services, they were able to be flexible with policies and rethink interactions with patrons as a way to mitigate the hierarchical nature of patron/employee relationships. In Metadata Services, they not only changed the labels for metadata, such as replacing .N for "Negroes" with .B for "Black people" in their Cutter numbers, but also rethought what metadata should be recorded at all for nontraditional collections. The care for both the patrons they directly serve and the creators whose

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works appear in their collections stand out. This chapter will be especially useful to people working in big systems, where even small changes matter.

In his chapter "Cultural Humility and Servant Leadership," Mark Emmons, associate dean at the University of New Mexico University Libraries, considers the connections between the theory of servant leadership and that of cultural humility through an analysis of the scholarly literature. He also reflects on his own experience growing up as a "third culture kid" and how that has impacted his views on leadership and service. Mark provides a starting place for conversations about cultural humility in leadership, suggesting leaders can benefit their organizations by employing a servant leadership and cultural humility approach to their work, and that these approaches are complementary.

Hopeful Visions

The closing section is formed by contributions that express a vision for cultural humility, whether engaging critically with it and future imaginings of it, or embracing it and making it manifest in the world through generous practice.

In their thoughtful piece "Knowing (un)Knowings: Cultural Humility, the Other(s), and Theories of Change," nicholae cline and Jorge R. López-McKnight share reflections about the potential of humility broadly and engage in critique of the cultural humility concept as an act of love. The promise of humility as a core value is explored, with the authors considering the potential impact if we truly engage in a humble way. Critique is raised through questioning: Can cultural humility truly be a way to make change while it is "haunted" by cultural competence, the model from which it came? Will cultural humility become institutionalized as a concept but do little to change the composition of the library and information science field or its structures? They also share their cautiously hopeful perspective on the use of cultural humility while recognizing the concept may be misappropriated. The vision for a future of cultural humility centers practice, reflection, and engagement with others in order to strengthen the approach while gathering stories and experiences highlighting its usefulness.

We close the book with "Cultural Humility: A Journey to Radical Self-Love" by Naghem Swade and Daniyom "Dani" Bekele. Part of a team tasked with creating a cultural humility workshop at the Denver Public Library, the two authors share a journey of discovery through critical self-reflection—honestly and insightfully exploring how they have unconsciously replicated

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their own experiences in their interactions with others, and occasionally adopted assumptions about people even though those assumptions would have been incorrectly applied to themselves. Naghem and Dani present their work as a way to help others in their own understanding of cultural humility through sharing their respective paths to engage in the practice themselves.

As we edited this volume, we found the collection as a whole inspired us with the many ways that cultural humility practice manifests across libraries and librarianship, by people bringing a range of experiences and backgrounds. The diversity of this collection reinforces for us the belief in the benefits of a cultural humility approach within the diversity of our libraries, our patrons, and our staff. The contributions in this volume also give hope that each of us may find ways to change and improve our libraries, our services, and our profession through the practice of cultural humility.

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INDEX

A

AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community, 69, 162–163
access barriers
  See library access barriers
Access Services and Metadata Services, GMU
  background of, 137–138
  conclusion about, 148
  further cultural humility work, 146–148
  library staff, cultural humility changes, 144–146
  library users, cultural humility changes, 138–143
  questions for reflection/discussion, 149–150
  resources for, 150
  summary of, 148
accountability, 30, 57–58
accuracy
  of children's literature, 63–65, 77
  guiding questions for, 65
ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries), 150, 181
"ACRL Access Services Interest Group: Dude, Where's My Yes?" (ACRL), 150
adages, Indigenous
  across time, 5–6
  description of, 4–5
  function of, 3–4
  for guidance on humility, 9–13
  as instruments of instruction, 6–8
  introduction to, xvii–xviii
  for learning about cultural humility, 8–9
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 191–192
Addis Ababa University, 192
Adler, M., 150
agile project management, 100
Ahił na'anish value, 117, 120
ALA
  See American Library Association
Alderson, B., 76
All About Clive series (Spanyol), 67
All About Rosa series (Spanyol), 67
Alsop, P., 7
American Library Association (ALA)
  book awards for children's literature, 70–73
  on fines, 146
  Kimberley Bugg's project at Annual Conference, 54
  Spectrum Scholars, theory of change, 181
American Panda (Chao), 69
American University in Cairo (AUC)
  librarians working at, 81
  list of contacts for newcomers, 83
  power imbalances, removal of, 87–88
Anderson, V., 159
Andrews, Nicola, xvii
Annamma, Subini, 180
Ansari, A., 203
antiracism
  American universities and, 137
  in conversation about DEI, x

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antiracism *(cont'd)*
cultural competency and, 178
cultural humility and, 183
approachability
consideration about, 36–38
cultural humility and, xviii, 35
definition of, 36
Apt, N. A., 4
Argandona, A., 158–159, 161
arrogance, 10
Arrow to the Sun (McDermott), 72
Asbill, L., 8
Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, 69, 162–163
assimilation, 199–201
Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), 150, 181
Association of Research Libraries, 181
assumptions, 42–43
AUC
See American University in Cairo
authenticity, 156
authority, 159–160
autoethnography, 17–18
Avoseh, M. B. M.
on adages, weight of, 9
on adages for cultural humility, 8
on Māori adages, 5

B

The Banjo Lesson (Tanner), 64
Bannister, Edward Mitchell, 64
Bauer-Wu, S., 203
Beautiful Shades of Brown: The Art of Laura Wheeler Waring (Churnin), 64
Bekele, Daniyom "Dani"
on cultural humility, 189–203
experience of US cultural norms, 197–198
information about, 207
overview of chapter by, xxii–xxiii
personal culture story of, 191–193
on shedding status quo, 199–201
Bell, A., 65
belonging
children's books and, 69
in conversation about DEI, x
proving, 198
"Beyond Late Fees: Eliminating Access Barriers for Everyone" (Valdes), xxi, 125–136
biases
checking, 138
cultural humility and, 40
decentering yourself as reader, 68
implicit bias, 203
Naghem Swade's experience of, 201
bibliography/scholarship/RA, culturally humble practice in
background/self-reflection on cultural humility, 49–54
conclusion about, 58–59
questions for reflection/discussion, 59–60
resources for, 60
summary of, 59
Towards a QTPOC Film Canon, 54–58
BIPOC community
children's literature awards and, 71–73
power imbalances in libraries, 26–30
racial/social injustices facing, 189–190
servant leadership of, 162–163
in workplace, 24
Black people
Black women working in libraries, 22–26
cultural humility and, xviii, 18
LCC Cutter change, 141
power imbalances in libraries, 26–30
social determinants of health, 97
whiteness/fitting in, 25
Blessingway Teachings, 115–116, 117
Bocarnea, M., 157
Bonheur, Rosa, 64–65
book awards
ALA book awards for children's literature, 70–73
cultural humility approach for selection of children's books, 75–76
Bopp, Melanie
cultural humility/DEI work of, 138
on GMU's Access Services and Metadata Services, 137–150
information about, 207

FOR PREVIEW ONLY
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
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overview of chapter by, xxi–xxii
Bopp, R. E., 37
Brewer, C., 158
Bronson, Angela
"Mirrors and Windows: Diversity in Children's Picture Books," 79
on representation, 70–71
on *The Snowy Day* (Keats), 76
Bugg, Kimberley, 54
Bureau of Indian Affairs, 112

C
Caldecott, Randolph, 71–72
Caldwell, C., 159
Carlos, Wendy, 65
Carnegie-Whitney Grant
for Fade 2 Black Popular Culture Index, 54
for QTPOC Film Canon, 55, 57
cataloging
alternative controlled vocabularies, 147–148
by GMU's Metadata Services, 143
privacy of creators, 140–142
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 66
challenges
of GMU Libraries' changes for staff, 145–146
of GMU Libraries' changes for users, 142–143
A Chance in the World: An Orphan Boy, A Mysterious Past, and How He Found a Place Called Home (Pemberton), 128
Chanel, Coco, 65
change, theory of, 181–184
Chao, Gloria, 69
Chávez, Vivian, 55, 60
Chen, X., 158
children
access barriers to library, 129
library late fees and, 126, 128
student card for library, 130–131
children's literature, cultural humility approach to evaluating
accuracy/completeness, 63–65
conclusion about, 77
decentering yourself as reader, 66–70
introduction to, xix
power imbalances, recognizing/mitigating, 70–77
questions for reflection/discussion, 78–79
resources for, 79
summary of, 78
Churnin, N., 64
Civitello, A., 23
class, 162–163
classic books
inertia and, 74–75
power imbalances and, 70
questioning, 76
classification system, 133
Click, Amanda
commitment to learning, 84–85
information about, 207–208
on international librarianship, 81–94
overview of chapter by, xix–xx
work after return to US, 92
work history of, 81–82
Cline, Nicholae
information about, 208
"Knowing (un)Knowings: Cultural Humility, the Other(s), and Theories of Change," 175–187
overview of chapter by, xxii
"Clinical Conversations Training Program" (NNLM), 105
collaboration
cultural humility in grant-writing process course, 97–98
cultural humility instruction for, 103–104
grant-writing and, 99
collaborators
cultural humility with servant leadership, 163–165
humility/performance, 158–159
power/authority of servant leadership, 159–160
questions for reflection/discussion, 167–168
relationship with leader, 166
servant leadership done well, 158

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

collaborators *(cont'd)*
use of term, 155
See also partners
Collins, J., 158, 159
Collins, P. H., 23
coloniality, 183
communities of color
cultural humility and, x–xii
DEI, discourse on, ix–x
See also BIPOC community
community
Diné culture in individual/institutional cultural humility practices, 109–122
GMU's Access Services and Metadata Services, cultural humility lens, 137–150
in host country, finding, 91
impact on cultural humility, xx–xxii
library access barriers, eliminating, 125–136
newcomer to tribal community, 110–111
Community Policing Defined (US Department of Justice), 150
completeness, 63, 64–65
connect, commitment to
by international librarian, 91
international librarianship, respect for, 88
new/unfamiliar, appreciating, 85–86
as pillar of cultural humility, 82
preparing to live in unfamiliar culture, 83
context
of interactions, recognition of, 159
positionality statement for, 57
Cooke, N. A., 94
Cottrell, A. B., 154
COVID-19 pandemic
Grand County Public Library and, 131, 132
virtual coffee meetings during, 145
Crenshaw, K. W., 17
Cristodero, D., 137
critical cultural humility, 24
critical race theory (CRT)
for autoethnography, 17–18
Xan Goodman/Twanna Hodge on, xviii
critique, 176–177
Cullinan, C. C., 24
cultural competence
cultural humility and, 41, 110, 177–178
haunting of cultural humility, 185
Mark Emmons on, 154–155
reliance on, 179–180
cultural humility
adages for learning about, 8–9
approachability and, 36–38
autoethnography as tool for self-reflection, 17
benefits of, 35, 42–44
change, theory of, 181–182
community, xx–xxii
concept of, x–xi
core tenets of, xv–xvi
countercultural norms, engaging, xi–xii
critique, process of, 176–177
critique of, 178–181
cultural competency haunting, 177–178
definition of, xv
at Denver Public Library, 189–203
dialectics of humility, 184–185
Diné culture, embedding in, 109–122
engaging in, 19–20
GMU's Access Services and Metadata Services, 137–150
in grant-writing process course, 95–106
hopeful visions, xxii–xxiii
humility in Diné interpersonal values, 115–116
Indigenous adages, guidance on humility from, 9–13
in Information Resource Discovery course, 38–42
key dimensions of, xi
love as necessary for, 177
meaning to librarianship practice, 18–19
nurturing, 161–165
origins, xvi–xviii
personal culture, questions about, 195–196
points/questions to aid you, 202–203
power imbalances in libraries and, 26–31

FOR REVIEW ONLY
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
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QTPOC Film Canon's connections to, 55–58
reflective practice, xviii–xx
relevance to grant-writing course, 96–98
roots in Diné culture/teachings, 114–115
servant leadership and, 155–161, 165–166
as shared dream, 175
as theory of change, 181–182
three pillars of cultural humility, 82
what must be done, 182–184
"Cultural Humility: A Journey to Radical Self-Love" (Swade & Bekele), xxii–xxiii, 189–203
"Cultural Humility and Evaluating Books for Young Readers" (Hanick & Keyes), xix, 63–79
"Cultural Humility and Servant Leadership" (Emmons), xxii, 153–168
cultural humility approach to evaluating children's literature
accuracy/completeness, 63–65
conclusion about, 77
decentering yourself as reader, 66–70
power imbalances, recognizing/mitigating, 70–77
questions for reflection/discussion, 78–79
resources for, 79
summary of, 78
"Cultural Humility: Essential Foundation for Clinical Researchers" (Yeager & Beauer-Wu), 203
"Cultural Humility in Instruction on Health Outreach Projects: Revising a Course on the Grant-Writing Process" (Irwin), xx, 95–106
"Cultural Humility in Libraries" (Hurley, Kostelecky, and Townsend), xi
Cultural Humility: People, Principles and Practices (documentary film), 60
cultural humility/servant leadership
conclusion about, 165–166
Mark Emmons on being a TCK, 153–155
nurturing cultural humility, 161–165
questions for reflection/discussion, 167–168
resources for, 168
servant leadership, 155–161
summary of, 166
cultural identity
Daniyom "Dani" Bekele's experience of cultural norms, 197–198
Naghem Swade's experience of cultural norms, 198–199
servant leadership and, 160–161
Cultural Inclusivity Services Department, Denver Public Library
cultural humility training, 190, 202–203
cultural norms in US, 196–199
moving from self-competency to self-humility, 191–195
status quo, shedding, 199–202
cultural norms
personal culture and, 196–199
status quo, shedding, 199–202
culturally humble practice in bibliography/scholarship/RA
background/self-reflection on cultural humility, 49–54
conclusion about, 58–59
questions for reflection/discussion, 59–60
resources for, 60
summary of, 59
Towards a QTPOC Film Canon, 54–58
culture
adages that communicate values, 4
challenges of GMU Libraries' changes for users, 142–143
cultural humility and, xi
Diné culture, embedding in cultural humility practices, 109–122
library cultures, geography's impact on, 21–22
Navajo cultural protocols, 113
personal culture, 191–195
status quo, shedding, 199–202
of students, lack of, 18
third-culture kid and, 153–155
unfamiliar culture, preparing to live in, 83

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D
Damasco, I. T.
on critical cultural humility, 18
on employment of Black women, 23
on workplace/cultural humility, 24
Daniel, J., 54
Database Integrity and Analysis department, GMU, 138
deadnaming
GMU Libraries policy on, 141
treatment of trans identities, 65
decentering yourself as reader, 66–70, 77
defensiveness, xvi
degrees, 27–28
DEI
See diversity, equity, and inclusion
Dennis, R. S., 157
Denver Public Library (DPL)
cultural humility training at, xxii–xxiii, 190, 202–203
cultural norms in US, 196–199
moving from self-competency to self-humility, 191–195
status quo, shedding, 199–202
Department of Māori Affairs, 7
description, 140
Detroit, Michigan, 21–22
Devine, P. G., 52
Dewes, T. K., 11
Dewey, Melvil, 133
Dewey Decimal System, 133
DiAngelo, R., 23, 27
Diné College
becoming unselved, 110–111
college values/policies, 116–118
Diné patrons at Diné College Libraries, 112–114
Diné values for cultural humility practices in library, 118–120
diversity at, 109–110
final thoughts about, 121
humility in Diné interpersonal values, 115–116
humility's roots in Diné culture/teachings, 114–115
questions for reflection/discussion, 122
summary of, 121–122
values/policies of, 116–118
Diné College Libraries
Diné values, applying for cultural humility practices, 118–120
diversity/experience at, 109–110
patrons at, 112–114
Diné culture
becoming unselved, 110–111
college values/policies, 116–118
Diné patrons at Diné College Libraries, 112–114
Diné values for cultural humility practices in library, 118–120
final thoughts about, 121
humility in Diné interpersonal values, 115–116
humility's roots in Diné culture/teachings, 114–115
introduction to, xx–xxi
questions for reflection/discussion, 122
summary of, 121–122
direction, 156
DisCrit (disability critical race theory), 180
diversity
in children's literature, evaluation of, 66–67
in Diné culture, 109–110, 120
of GMU Libraries' library staff, 147
TCKs embrace, 153–154
diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)
cultural humility and, xv, 183, 185
for racial change, 182
for redressing power imbalances, 30
training for systemic change, ix–x
worldwide racial awakening and, ix
Diversity Alliance, ACRL, 181
"Diversity Standards on Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries" (ACRL), 181
Diyin Dine'é (the Holy People), 114
dominant culture, 17–18
Dorfman, P. W., 160
Dowd, Ryan, 136
Downie, R. D., 153
Dunbar, A. W., 17–18, 23
Duncanson, Robert S., 64
Dyment, J. E., 20

available at alastore.ala.org

E
Ebert, Roger, 52
education
See library and information education
Edwards, Kimberley A.
on GMU's Access Services and Metadata Services, cultural humility lens, 137–150
information about, 208
overview of chapter by, xxi–xxii
egotism, 10–11
Egypt
bawaabs in, 91
international librarians in, 81
language for connecting with community, 85–86
new/unfamiliar, appreciating, 84–85
power imbalances, removal of, 87–88
preparing to live in unfamiliar culture, 83
shopping in, 84
"Eliminating Library Fines: Improving Community Access, Equity and Usage" (WebJunction), 150
embedded library practices, xx–xxii
"Embedding Diné Culture in Individual and Institutional Cultural Humility Practices: A View from the Tribal College Library" (Sorrell), xx–xxi, 109–122
Emmons, Mark
"Cultural Humility and Servant Leadership," 153–168
information about, 208
overview of chapter by, xxii
empathy
films as empathy machines, 52
humility's close connection to, 56
employees, 156–157
See also library staff
"Empowering Values of the Diné Individual" (Office of Diné Culture), 115–116
empowerment
cultural humility with servant leadership, 163–165
Diné interpersonal values for, 115
empowering/developing people, 156
of library staff, 144, 147
engagement, x
Eni, R. A., 4, 9
Espinal, I., 26
Ethical Questions in Name Authority Control (Sandberg), 141, 150
Ethiopia, 191–192
Eva, N.
on learning to be humble leaders, 161
on servant leadership, 158
servant leadership definitions of humility, 157
evaluation
of children's literature, cultural humility approach to, 63–79
grant-writing course content on project evaluation, 100–101
of partnerships, 104
expertise, 43–44
experts, 99
expressed humility, 158
Eyes That Kiss in the Corners (Ho), 70

F
fact-checking, 65, 78
factual accuracy, 63–65
factual inaccuracies, 64
Fade 2 Black Popular Culture Index, 54
false narratives, 51
fee schedule, 132
feedback, 101
fees, 146–147
See also late fees
feminists, 64–65
Fenwick Library, GMU, 138
Ferreira da Silva, Denise, 177
Fields, D. L., 160
Fienup-Riordan, A.
adages for guidance on humility, 9, 10
on Indigenous adages, 3
on tradition of storing words, 13
on Yup'ik view of instructions, 7
filmography, 54–58
films
Michael Mungin's librarian origin story, 52–54

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films *(cont'd)*
QTPOC Film Canon, 54–58
fines, 146–147
first impressions, 37
First Nations Health Authority, Canada, xvii
Fitzgerald, J., 68
"The 5 Rs of Cultural Humility: A Conceptual Model for Health Care Leaders" (Robinson, Masters, & Ansari), 203
Floyd, George, ix
Focht, A., 157
"Folk Wisdom and Orally Transmitted Knowledge—Everyday Poetry in Adages, Rhyme, and Riddles" (Gaski), 14
followers
as collaborators, 166
importance of, 159
rejection of notion of, 163
use of term, 155
Foronda, C., 8, 13
Fox, Mem, 66–67
France, 85, 86
"Free Is Key: Library Fines and Access" (Wacek), 136
The Funny Little Women (Lent), 72–73

G

Gaski, H.
adage on humility, 9, 10
on Indigenous adages, 3–4
"Folk Wisdom and Orally Transmitted Knowledge—Everyday Poetry in Adages, Rhyme, and Riddles," 14
on Sámi proverbs, 8, 13
gender
children's literature and, 64, 65, 67, 75
Diné values, 118
host country connections and, 91
in metadata descriptions, 140
servant leadership and, 162–163
generosity, 10
geography, 21–22
George Mason University (GMU)
background of, 137–138
cultural humility at, xxi–xxii
cultural humility changes for library users, 138–143
cultural humility changes, library staff, 144–146
further cultural humility work, 146–148
LC/NACO Name Authority Record Policy for Personal Names, 141
"Getting Past 'Approachability': What Cultural Humility Brings to Library and Information Education" (Montoya & Polkinghorne), xviii, 35–46
Gilbert, Elizabeth, 128–129
Global Baby Boys (Global Fund for Children), 67
GLOBE (global leadership and organizational behavior effectiveness) cultural attributes, 160
goals, 100
Gonzalez-Smith, I., 58
"good vs. bad" mentality, 194
Goodman, Xan
autoethnography of, 17
cultural humility writings, xvii
earning tenure, 28
engaging in cultural humility, 19
on geography's impact on library cultures, 21–22
information about, 208
overview of chapter by, xviii
pillars of cultural humility, xx
on power imbalances in libraries, 26–27
"Redressing Power Imbalances in Librarianship Using Cultural Humility: A Perspective from Two Black Librarians," 17–32
three pillars of cultural humility, 82
work history of, 22–24
graduate information services course, 38–42, 44
Grand County Public Library
changes made at library, 129–130, 132–133
Dewey Decimal System, challenging, 133
filing charges against patrons with overdue items, 126–127

FOR REVIEW ONLY
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

identifying, 133–134
inspiration for change, 128–129
overdue library materials, stories about, 125–126
proof of residency for adults, 131
questions for reflection/discussion, 135–136
replacement costs, elimination of, 131–132
resources for, 136
summary about, 134
unattended-children policy, 130–131
Grants and Proposal Writing On Demand course
changes to course material, 98–103
conclusion about, 103–104
cultural humility in, 95–96
introduction to, xx
questions for reflection/discussion, 105
relevance of cultural humility to, 96–98
resources for, 106
summary of, 104–105
greed, 10
Greenleaf, Robert
on effect of servant leadership, 161
goal of, 164
on power/authority, 160
on servant leadership, 155
group actions, 30
Grove, N., 6, 7
Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers (RUSA), 36–37, 41
guiding questions
for accuracy, 65
for decentering yourself as reader, 70
for power imbalances, 77
Gulati-Partee, G., xi–xii

H

Hale, J. R., 160
Hampton University Museum, 64
handshake, 113
Hanick, Silvia Lin
on cultural humility when evaluating books for young readers, 63–79
on decentering herself as reader, 68–69
information about, 209
on nostalgia, 73–74
overview of chapter by, xix
Harney, Stefano, 175, 186
Harper, D., 183
Harper, L. M., 150
Harris, A., 54–55
Harry Potter series (Rowling), 73–74
Hathcock, A. M., 26
haunting, 177–178
"He kete whakataukī: Using Narratives and Values in Māori Proverbs" (Moorhouse), 15
health disparities, 96–97, 104
health outreach projects, 95–106
Healthy People 2030, 97
help desk, 112–114
help of others, 10
Hemara, W., 6
hijab, 193, 194
Ho, Joanna, 70
Hodge, Twanna
autoethnography of, 17
cultural humility writings, xvii
engaging in cultural humility, 19–20
on geography's impact on library cultures, 22
information about, 208
"Integrating Cultural Humility into Librarianship" YouTube video, 60
"Integrating Cultural Humility into Public Services Librarianship," 46
overview of chapter by, xviii
on power imbalances in libraries, 27–28
"Redressing Power Imbalances in Librarianship Using Cultural Humility: A Perspective from Two Black Librarians," 17–32
reflective practices of, 20–21
workplace history/experiences of, 24–26
Holvoet, K. G., 94
Homeless Training (homelesslibrary.com), 136
homophobia
films and, 52
Michael Mungin's experience of, 50–51

FOR REVIEW ONLY NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

homophobia *(cont'd)*
representation and, 52
Hook, J. N., 43
hopeful visions
cultural humility as journey to self-love, 189–202
cultural humility/theories of change, 175–187
overview of, xxii–xxiii
host country
finding community in, 91
learning about, 86–87, 93
Houlihan, Meggan
commitment to learning, 84
information about, 209
on international librarianship, 81–94
language barrier experience, 90
overview of chapter by, xix–xx
pecha kucha talk, 89–90
trust with students, 87
understanding of historical events, 86–87
work after return to US, 91–92
work history of, 81
How Mamas Love Their Babies (Fitzgerald), 68
Hózhǫ́ǫ́jík'ehgo (Blessingway Teachings), 115–116, 117
Hudson, D. J.
on cultural competence, 179–180
on power imbalances in libraries, 26
humility
as attribute/practice, 182–183
connection to institutions, 179
dialectics of, 184–185
in Diné interpersonal values, 115–116
for DisCrit Resistance, 180
humble practices, 19
Indigenous adages for guidance on, 9–13
mistakes, acknowledging, 88–90
performance and, 158–159
roots in Diné culture/teachings, 114–115
as servant leadership characteristic, 156, 157–158, 165–166
Tangney's dimensions of, 82
See also cultural humility
Hurley, D. A.
concerns about cultural humility, 117, 177
on context, 54
on cultural humility, xi, 41
cultural humility approach of, 165–166
cultural humility definition, xv, 155
on cultural humility practices, xvi
on false narratives, 51
information about, 206
on leaders, 164–165
on positionality, 49, 50
on power imbalances, 112, 160–161, 179
on power/authority, 159

I
Ichiho, R., 159
ideas, 86–88, 93
identity
decentering yourself as reader, 66–70
personal culture, 191–195
of third-culture kid, 153–154
See also cultural identity; personal culture
IILF (International Indigenous Librarians' Forum), 12–13
Iłʼ ééhózin value, 117, 120
Iłʼ ídlį́ value, 117, 119
"Illegal Aliens" term, 142, 143
illustrations
children's literature awards, 72
representation in children's books, 70–71
immigrants
assimilation into US society, 196
experience of US cultural norms, 197–198
library services for, 199–201
implementation
grant-writing course content on, 99–100
of servant leadership, 156–157
implicit association tests, 30
implicit bias, 203
"In Praise of Followers" (Kelley), 159
"in-between space," 180
inclusion, 101–103

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
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Indigenous adages
across time, 5–6
description of, 4–5
guidance on humility from, 9–13
as instruments of instruction, 6–8
for learning about cultural humility, 8–9
questions for reflection/discussion, 14
resources on, 14–15
summary of, 13
teaching/advice from, 3–4
Indigenous people
acknowledgement of, 189
adages of, xvii–xviii
alternative subject headings for, 141–142
cultural humility work by, xvii
Diné culture, embedding in cultural humility practices, xx–xxi, 109–122
Indigenous adages in promoting cultural humility, 3–15
working with, 120
individual, 166
individual actions, 30
individuation, 52
inertia
evaluation of children's books and, 74–75
power imbalances and, 71
reliance on, 70, 76–77
information desk, 144
Information Resource Discovery course (University of Ottawa's School of Information Studies)
conclusion about, 44
cultural humility in, 38–39
Liliana's student experience, 39–40
Sarah's instructor experience, 40–42
information services
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility in Information Resource Discovery course, 38–42
cultural humility, learning about, 35
Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals (Cooke), 94
institutional accountability, 57–58
institutional actions, 30
institutional support, 59
instruction, adages for, 6–8
instructors
approachability, cultural humility and, 36–38
cultural humility in library education and, 35
experience of teaching cultural humility course, 40–42
Naghem Swade's experience of, 194
power imbalances, removal of, 87–88, 90
"Integrating Cultural Humility into Librarianship" YouTube video, 60
"Integrating Cultural Humility into Practice" YouTube video (NNLM), 32
"Integrating Cultural Humility into Public Services Librarianship" (Hodge), 46
International Indigenous Librarians' Forum (IILF), 12–13
international librarianship
background of librarians, 81–82
conclusion about, 92
cultural humility in context of, xix–xx
mistakes, acknowledging, 88–91
new ideas, being open to, 86–88
new/unfamiliar, appreciating, 84–86
preparing to live in unfamiliar culture, 83
questions for reflection/discussion, 93–94
resources for, 94
returning to US, 91–92
summary of, 93
three pillars of cultural humility, 82
internet, 132–133
interpersonal acceptance, 156
interpersonal actions, 30
interpersonal interactions
approachability, 36–38
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility in Information Resource Discovery course, 38–42
cultural humility, learning about, 35
with patrons at Diné College Libraries, 112–114

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interpersonal stance, 165
interpersonal values, 115–116
Irwin, Jarrod
  information about, 209
  overview of chapter by, xx
  on revising course on grant-writing process, 95–106

J
Jackson, L. M., 51
Jeff (servant leader), 162–163
Johnson, M. D., 157–158, 159
Just for You (Mayer), 74–75
justice
  cultural humility and, 180
  humility as dream of, 184, 185
  racial justice, 26

K
Kaleidoscope Program, 181
Kāretu, S.
  on adages as instruments of instruction, 6
  on self-praise, 10
  on shared understanding of proverbs, 9
Kāretu, T., 11
Katz, A. S., 103
kawau (cormorant), 11
Kawharu, M., 5
K'é system, 114–115, 120
Keats, Ezra Jack, 76
Kelley, R. E., 159
Kendrick, K. D.
  on critical cultural humility, 18
  on employment of Black women, 23
  on workplace/cultural humility, 24
Kern, Kathleen, 37
Keyes, Kelsey
  on decentering herself as reader, 68
  on evaluating books for young readers, 63–79
  on inertia, 74–75
  information about, 209
  overview of chapter by, xix
Kids Café, 132
Kim, Sunny, xvii
Kinaaldá ceremony, 119
King, Billie Jean, 65
King, M., 5
kinship ties, 29
Kishi, Claudia, 69
Klumpke, Anna Elizabeth, 64–65
"Knowing (un)Knowings: Cultural Humility, the Other(s), and Theories of Change" (Cline & López-McKnight), xxii, 175–187
knowledge transmission, 7
Kohere, R.
  on construction of proverbs, 9
  on Māori adages, 5
  on whakataukī, 7
Kois, D., 54–55
Kostelecky, S. R.
  concerns about cultural humility, 117, 177
  on context, 54
  on cultural humility, xi, xvi, 41
  cultural humility approach of, 165–166
  cultural humility definition, xv, 155
  on false narratives, 51
  information about, 205
  on leaders, 164–165
  on positionality, 49, 50
  on power imbalances, 112, 160–161, 179
  on power/authority, 159
kūmara (sweet potato), 10
Kupenga, T. R., 7

L
language
  changes to language in grant-writing course, 101–103
  for connecting with community, 85–86
  power imbalances, removal of, 90
late fees
  elimination of, 129–130
  filing charges against patrons with overdue items, 126–127
  inspiration for eliminating, 128–129
  stories about, 125–126
LCC (Library of Congress Classification), 141–142
LC/NACO Name Authority Record Policy for Personal Names, 141, 145

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings), 141–142
leadership
development of cultural humility in, 155
servant leadership, 155–161
"Learn, Act, Connect: Thriving as an International Librarian and Global Citizen" (Houlihan, Meky, & Click), xix–xx, 81–94
learning
cultural humility, 13
Indigenous adages for, 6–9
ongoing, emphasis on, 100
See also library and information education
learning, commitment to
mistakes, acknowledging, 88–90
new/unfamiliar, appreciating, 84–85
openness to new ideas, 86–87
as pillar of cultural humility, 82
preparing to live in unfamiliar culture, 83
Leftwich, A. M., 20
legal action
filing charges against patrons with overdue items, 126–127
for overdue library materials, elimination of, 129–130
Lent, Blair, 72–73
Leung, S. Y.
on context, 21
on experiences of BIPOC, 25–26
on racism in American society, 24–25
on reflective practices, 21
LGBTQ+ community
Dewey Decimal System's classification of, 133
Michael Mungin's librarian origin story, 50–54
librarians
approachability, cultural humility and, 36–38
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility, meaning for librarianship, 18–19
decentering yourself as reader, 66–70
patrons at Diné College Libraries and, 112–114
power imbalances in libraries, 26–30
reflective practice of cultural humility, xviii–xx
of Seattle Public Library, 53–54
Twanna Hodge, work history of, 24–26
Xan Goodman, work history of, 22–24
See also library staff
The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness: An Empathy-Driven Approach to Solving Problems, Preventing Conflict, and Serving Everyone (Dowd), 136
librarianship
cultural humility concept in, xi
cultural humility definition, xv
cultural humility, meaning for practice, 18–19
power imbalances in libraries, 28–29
See also international librarianship; power imbalances in librarianship
libraries
DEI activities of, ix
impact of community on cultural humility, xx–xxii
mission statements of, 134
origins of cultural humility in, xvii–xviii
power imbalances in, 26–30
redlining, impact on, 21
library access barriers
changes made at library, 129–130, 132–133
Dewey Decimal System, challenging, 133
filing charges against patrons with overdue items, 126–127
identifying, 133–134
inspiration for change, 128–129
introduction to, xxi
overdue library materials, stories about, 125–126
proof of residency for adults, 131
questions for reflection/discussion, 135–136
replacement costs, elimination of, 131–132

FOR REVIEW ONLY NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

library access barriers *(cont'd)*
resources for, 136
summary about, 134
unattended-children policy, 130–131
library and information education
approachability, 36–38
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility, learning about, 35
graduate course during COVID-19 pandemic, 38–39
Liliana's student experience, 39–40
questions for reflection/discussion, 45
resources for, 46
Sarah's instructor experience, 40–42
summary of, 45
library and information science (LIS), 182
library anxiety, 112
library culture, 21–22
Library of Congress Classification (LCC), 141–142
Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), 141–142
library policies
barriers, elimination of, xxi
communication about, 143
as guidelines, 138–139
LC/NACO Name Authority Record Policy for Personal Names, 141
review of by GMU's Access Services, 146
library services
approachability, 36–38
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility in Information Resource Discovery course, 38–42
cultural humility, learning about, 35
for immigrants/refugees, 199–201
library staff
access barriers to library and, 133–134
Access Services and Metadata Services' cultural humility changes, 144–146
approachability, 36–38
changes to language in Grants and Proposal Writing on Demand course, 102
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility implementation by, 148
cultural humility, learning about, 35
microaggressions by, 24
project plan, implementation of, 99–100
See also librarians
library users
See patrons
lifelong learning, 56
limitations
adages about awareness of, 10–13
of international librarian, 89–90
LIS (library and information science), 182
listening
cultural humility for sensitivity to, 43
by humble leaders, 158
to Indigenous adages, 7
by international librarians, 83
to patron, 40, 42
Liu, Helena, 162–163
López-McKnight, Jorge R.
on context, 21
on experiences of BIPOC, 25–26
information about, 208
"Knowing (un)Knowings: Cultural Humility, the Other(s), and Theories of Change," 175–187
overview of chapter by, xxii
on racism in American society, 24–25
on reflective practices, 21
love
cultural humility as act of, xxii
demands critique, 177

M

Macdonald, Maryann, 64–65
Macharia, Keguro, 177
Mackenzie, Tricia
cultural humility/DEI work of, 138
on GMU's Access Services and Metadata Services, 137–150
information about, 209
overview of chapter by, xxi–xxii
MacLeod, Kirk, 41

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

Māori
adages about humility, 10–12
adages exist across time, 5–6
adages used by, 4–5
meaning in whakataukī, 7
shared understanding of whakataukī, 9
MāoriLanguage.net, 14
Marsden, M., 5
Mason Zines, 140
Massey University, 14
Masters, C., 203
Matsuda, Mari J., 25–26
Mayer, Mercer, 74–75
McDermott, Gerald, 72
McGhee, H., 21
McLain, K., 23
McRae, J.
on construction of proverbs, 9
Fade 2 Black Popular Culture Index, 54
on knowledge transmission, 7
on Māori adages, 5, 6, 9
Mead, H., 6, 7
Meky, Dina
commitment to learning, 84
information about, 210
on international librarianship, 81–94
overview of chapter by, xix–xx
work after return to US, 92
work history of, 81
Mensah, E. O.
on adages for learning about cultural humility, 9
on adages/proverbs, 4, 13
on repeating instructions, 7
mental practices, xvi
Metadata Services
See Access Services and Metadata Services, GMU
Metge, J., 5, 7
Metres, P., 186
Micas, Nathalie, 64–65
microaggressions, 201, 202–203
Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 81–82, 88
Milroy, James Te Wharehuia, 11
Minicomics Collection, 140
"Mirrors and Windows: Diversity in Children's Picture Books" (Bronson), 70–71, 79
mistakes, 88–91, 93
Mitchell, T. R.
on humble leaders, 159
servant leadership definitions of humility, 157–158
Mittal, R., 160
mobile devices, 132–133
money
cost of librarianship, 28
socioeconomic factors of power imbalances in libraries, 28–29
Montoya, Liliana
experience of Information Resource Discovery course, 39–40
"Getting Past 'Approachability': What Cultural Humility Brings to Library and Information Education," 35–46
information about, 210
overview of chapter by, xviii
Moorfield, J. C., 14
Moorhouse, Leisa
"He kete whakataukī: Using Narratives and Values in Māori Proverbs," 15
on Indigenous adages in promoting cultural humility, 3–15
information about, 210
overview of chapter by, xvii–xviii
Morrison, Deb, 180
Moten, Fred, 175, 186
motivation
servant leadership and, 156–157
understanding of, 162
multiculturalism, x–xi
Mungin, Michael
information about, 210
librarian origin story of, 50–54
overview of chapter by, xix
"Reflections on Culturally Humble Practice in Bibliography, Scholarship, and Readers' Advisory," 49–60
Murray-García, J.
on cultural humility, 40, 53

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Murray-García, J. *(cont'd)*
Cultural Humility: People, Principles and Practices (documentary film), 60
on cultural humility tenets, 55
on multiculturalism, x
Muslims
Naghem Swade, personal culture of, 193–194
Naghem Swade's experience of cultural norms, 198–199
status quo, shedding, 201–202
Mutonyi, H., 4

N

Naayée'eek'ehgo (Protectionway) Teachings, 115–116, 117
Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO), 140–141
Napson-Williams, T., 23
narratives
false narratives, 51
of LGBTQ+/QTPOC people, 52
self-reflection on, 202
toxic, exposure to, 195
toxic, perpetuation of, 198
National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NNLM), 95–106
Native people
See Indigenous people
Navajo culture
See Diné culture
"Navajo Educational Goals," 109
Navajo Nation
Diné College of, 109–110
Rhiannon Sorrell's return to, 110–111
Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM), 32, 105
New York University (NYU) Abu Dhabi, 81
Newbery, John, 71
Newbery Medal, 71
newness
appreciation of, 84–86
new ideas, openness to, 86–88, 93
Ngata, Apirana, 12
Nihokáá' Dine'é (surface people), 114
Njwe, Eyovi, 4, 6
NNLM (National Network of Libraries of Medicine), 95–106
NNLM (Network of the National Library of Medicine), 32, 105
noblesse oblige, 160, 164
nonclosure, xi–xii
norms
personal culture and, 196–199
status quo, shedding, 199–202
Northeastern University, 81
nostalgia
evaluation of children's books and, 73–74, 76
falling back on, 70
inertia and, 74, 75
reliance on, 76–77

O

O'Connell, T. S., 20
Office of Diné Culture, Language, & Community Service, 115–116
Okun, T., 21, 27
Oliphant, T., 44
openness
cultural humility requires, 39–40
Diné culture on, 115, 119
to learning, 103
to new ideas, 86–88, 96
to patrons, 42, 43
servant leadership and, 165
origins
cultural humility in library/information education, 35–46
Indigenous adages in promoting cultural humility, 3–15
overview of section on, xvi–xviii
power imbalances in librarianship, 17–32
Ossom-Williamson, P., 28
other
otherness, cultural humility and, 183
perspectives, recognition of, xvi
practicing cultural humility, 179
third-culture kids as, 153, 154
overdue library materials
elimination of late fees, 129–130

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

filing charges against patrons with overdue items, 126–127
replacement costs, elimination of, 131–132
stories about, 125–126
Owens, B. P., 157–158, 159
Oxenbury, Helen, 66–67

P
paradox, xi
Parris, D. L., 158
partial expertise, 43–44
partners
changes to language in Grants and Proposal Writing on Demand course, 102
cultural humility and, xv, 105
fostering positive relationships, 103–104
project-planning by, 98–99
See also collaborators
patrons
approachability of library staff and, 36–38
cultural humility approach, benefits of, 42–44
cultural humility changes for, 138–143
cultural humility in information services course, 44
culturally humble approach to, 39–40
at Diné College Libraries, 112–114
Diné values for cultural humility practices, 118–120
late fees and, 125–130
Patterson, J., 5, 7
Patterson, K. A., 157
Peachey, J. W., 158
pecha kucha talk, 89–90
Pekerti, A. A., 160
Pemberton, Steve, 128
performance, 158–159
personal culture
Daniyom "Dani" Bekele's experience of cultural norms, 197–198
Naghem Swade's experience of cultural norms, 198–199
questions about, 195–196
self-reflection on, 202
status quo, shedding, 199–202
stories for identification of, 191–195
personal responsibility, 162
perspective-taking, 52
Philip, John, 7
Phillips, L. S., 94
planning
project plan, implementation of, 99–100
project planning, grant-writing course on, 98–99
"Poetry as Untelling: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip" (Metres), 186
Poler, Omar, xvii
police, 139–140
policies, 116–118
See also library policies
Polkinghorne, Sarah
"Getting Past 'Approachability': What Cultural Humility Brings to Library and Information Education," 35–46
information about, 210–211
as instructor for Information Resource Discovery course, 40–42
overview of chapter by, xviii
Pollock, D. C., 153
Ponton, M., 157
positional power, 159, 160
positionality
acknowledgement of/reflection on, 59
discussion of, 49–50
of Michael Mungin, 50–54
"positionality statement" in QTPOC Film Canon, 57
Potapchuk, M., xi–xii
power
cultural humility and, xv
dynamics, cultural humility and, 38, 42
Indigenous adages about, 12
servant leadership and, 159–160
power imbalances
Access Services, cultural humility changes, 139–140
adages for fixing, 8–9
addressing in cultural humility, xi
in children's literature, disrupting, 78
in children's literature, recognizing/mitigating, 70–77

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
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power imbalances *(cont'd)*
countering, 29
cultural humility approach and, 179
cultural humility approach to evaluating books, 77
cultural identity and, 160–161
engaging in cultural humility and, 19
international librarians and, 90
in librarianship, redressing, xviii
manifestation of in library services, 59
new ideas, openness to, 87–88
new/unfamiliar, appreciating, 85
patrons at Diné College Libraries and, 112
QTPOC Film Canon's redress of, 56–57
removal of, 82
servant leadership and, 159–160, 162–163, 164
power imbalances in librarianship
actions for redressing, 30
autoethnography, 17–18
cultural humility, meaning for librarianship practice, 18–19
engaging in cultural humility, 19–20
factors of, 28–29
kinship ties factors, 29
library culture's, impact of geography on, 21–22
questions for reflection/discussion, 31–32
rank/status factors, 29
reflective practices, 20–21
resources for, 32
socioeconomic factors, 28–29
summary of, 30–31
Twanna's work history, 24–26
Xan's work history, 22–24
privacy, 140–141
privilege
of international librarian, 89–90
library access barriers and, 129, 134
noblesse oblige, 160
project evaluation, 100–101
Project Implicit, 32
project plan
changing, 101
Grants and Proposal Writing On Demand course, changes to, 98–99
proof of residency, 129, 131
proofreading, 102
Protectionway Teachings, 115–116, 117
proverbs, 4
See also adages, Indigenous
Public Library Association Conference, 2018, 128–129
publishers
power imbalances in children's literature, 71, 73
zines and, 140
Puente, Mark A., ix–xii

Q

QTPOC (queer and trans people of color)
Michael Mungin's librarian origin story, 50–54
QTPOC Film Canon and, 54–55, 56, 58
QTPOC Film Canon
background of, 54–55
connections to cultural humility, 55–58
Michael Mungin on, xix
queer people
homophobia, confrontation with, 50–51
queer erasure in children's books, 64–65
questions, about culture, 195–196
questions for reflection/discussion
for children's literature, evaluation of, 78–79
for cultural humility in library departments, 149–150
cultural humility in library/information education, 45
for cultural humility reflective practice, 59–60
for cultural humility, visions of, 186
for cultural humility/servant leadership, 167–168
for grant-writing process course, 105
for Indigenous adages, 14
for international librarianship, 93–94
for library access barriers, 135–136
power imbalances in librarianship, 31–32

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

R
race
in children's literature, 66–67
servant leadership and, 162–163
"Race and Ethnicity in Classification Systems: Teaching Knowledge Organization from a Social Justice Perspective" (Adler & Harper), 150
racism
Dewey Decimal System and, 133
racial change, theories of, 181–182
racial/social injustices facing BIPOC communities, 189–190
servant leadership and, 164
third-culture kid and, 153
training for systemic change, ix–x
Twanna Hodge's experience of, 24–25
worldwide racial awakening, ix
Randolph Caldecott Medal, 71–72
Ranganathan, S. R., 66
rank, 29
reader, 66–70
Reading Rockets, 66
Reale, M., 20
recognition, 56–57
redlining policies, 21
"Redressing Power Imbalances in Librarianship Using Cultural Humility: A Perspective from Two Black Librarians" (Goodman & Hodge), xviii, 17–32
Reeves, Roger, 177
Reference and Information Services: An Introduction (Bopp & Smith 2011; Wong & Saunders 2020), 37
Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) Guidelines
on approachability, 36–38
in Information Resource Discovery course, 41
reference services, 36–38
Reference Services Review, xi
reflection
See questions for reflection/discussion; self-reflection
"Reflections on Culturally Humble Practice in Bibliography, Scholarship, and Readers' Advisory" (Mungin), xix, 49–60
reflective practice
children's literature, cultural humility for evaluating, 63–79
for cultural humility, xviii–xx, 50
culturally humble practice in bibliography, scholarship, RA, 49–60
for engaging in cultural humility, 19–21
grant-writing process course, cultural humility in, 95–106
international librarianship, 81–94
of Twanna Hodge, 20–21
refugees
assimilation into US society, 196
library services for, 199–201
relationships
authentic/long-lasting, 190
cultural humility recognizes complexity of, 185
humility as theory of change, 184
power/authority of servant leadership, 159–160
of servant leadership, 156
replacement costs
elimination of, 131–132
filing charges against patrons with overdue items, 126–127
for overdue library materials, 125
representation
in children's books, importance of, 70–73
cultural humility and, 51
opportunities with, 52
reputation, 9
residency, proof of, 129, 131
"Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity" (ALA), 146
"Resonances: A Conversation on Formless Formation" (Harney, Stefano, Ruiz, & Vourloumis), 186
resource description, 140, 147
resources
for children's literature evaluation, 79
for cultural humility in library services, 150

FOR REVIEW ONLY
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

resources *(cont'd)*
for cultural humility library/ information education, 46
for cultural humility reflective practice, 59–60
for cultural humility, visions of, 186–187
for grant-writing process course, 106
for Indigenous adages, 14–15
for international librarianship, 94
for library access barriers, 136
for power imbalances in librarianship, 32
for servant leadership, 168
responsibility, personal, 162
Ride, Sally, 65
Riggs, Marlon, 52
Riley-Reid, Trevar, 58
Rios, M., 26
riots, 22
Rise: A Feminist Book Project for Ages 0–18, 63, 79
Robinson, D., 203
Roessel, Ruth, 120
Rogers, A., 50
Rosa's Animals: The Story of Rosa Bonheur and Her Painting Menagerie (Macdonald), 64–65
Rost, Joseph, 155, 159
Rowling, J. K., 73–74
Roy, Loriene
on Indigenous adages, 3–15
information about, 211
International Indigenous Librarians' Forum, 12–13
overview of chapter by, xvii–xviii
Royal, T. A., 5
Ruiz, Sandra, 186
RUSA Guidelines
See Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) Guidelines
Ryan, B., 160

S

Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón philosophy, 116–117
Sametinget, Samediggi, 13
Sámi
adage on humility, 9
The One Who art piece, 13
proverbs of, 8
Sandage, S. J., 157
Sandberg, Jane, 141, 150
Saunders, L., 37
sayings
See adages, Indigenous
Scholarly Kitchen, 22
Schon, D. A., 19, 20
school
Daniyom "Dani" Bekele's experience of, 192–193
Michael Mungin's experience of, 50
Naghem Swade's experience of, 194
student library card, 131
Schwarz, M. T., 114
Sealey-Ruiz, Y., 18
Seattle Public Library (SPL), 52, 53
self-awareness, 39–40
self-competency, 191–195
self-focused responses, 63
self-humility, 191–195
self-identity, 110–111
self-initiative, 118, 119
self-knowledge, 162
self-praise, 12
self-promotion, 157
self-reflection
about assumptions, xxii–xxiii
autoethnography as tool for, 17
as continuous process, 194–195
for cultural humility, xi, xvi
cultural humility promotes, 42–43
importance of, 191
for openness to new ideas, 86
on personal culture, 202
QTPOC Film Canon's connections to cultural humility, 56
Sendjaya, S., 160
servant leadership
characteristics of, 156
concept of, 155
connection with cultural humility, xxii
cultural identity, 160–161

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

humility, 157–158
humility/performance, 158–159
implementation difficulty, 156–157
power/authority, 159–160
role of, 156
service
cultural humility and, 43
TCKs desire to help others, 154
See also library services
servitude, 162, 163
sex work, 68
sexual orientation, 50–51
Sharkie, R., 158
Shepard, Matthew, 51
"show, don't tell" guidelines, 140
Siegert, R. J., 100
SJSU School of Information, 60
Slate's Black Film Canon, 54–55
"Small Changes Make an Impact: How Access and Metadata Services Teams Address Cultural Humility" (Bopp, Mackenzie, & Edwards), xxi–xxii, 137–150
smiling, 37
Smith, D., 177
Smith, L. C., 37
Smith-Cruz, S., 180, 187
The Snowy Day (Keats), 76
social cues, 86
social determinants of health, 97, 105
"Social Determinants of Health" (US Department of Health and Human Services), 105
social hierarchies, 91
societal norms, 196–199
socioeconomic status, x, 28–29
Sorrell, Rhiannon
on Diné culture in cultural humility practices, 109–122
information about, 211
overview of chapter by, xx–xxi
return to Navajo Nation, 110–111
Spanyol, Jessica, 67
Spears, Larry, 155–156, 160
SPL (Seattle Public Library), 52, 53
Spotify playlist, 187
St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands, 25
staff
See library staff
standards-based approach to teaching, 111
status, 29
status quo, 196, 199–202
stereotypes
about patrons, 42–43
cultural humility and, 40
false narratives, 51
stewardship, 156
stories
about cultural humility, xvii
Daniyom "Dani" Bekele's experience of cultural norms, 197–198
Daniyom "Dani" Bekele's personal culture, 191–193
Michael Mungin's librarian origin story, 50–54
Naghem Swade's experience of cultural norms, 198–199
Naghem Swade's personal culture, 193–194
for personal culture identification, 191
of shedding status quo, 199–202
Stories of Traditional Navajo Life and Culture (Roessel), 109
student library card, 130–131
students
access services for users at GMU, 138–140
approachability/cultural humility, xviii, 36–38
cultural humility course, experience of, 39–40
cultural humility in course, response to, 41–42, 44
cultural humility, learning about, 35
at Diné College Libraries, 112–114
of George Mason University, 137–138
library late fees and, 125–126
positionality discussion with, 49–50
power imbalances, removal of, 87–88, 90
staff training in cultural humility, 144
Sue, D. W., 27
supervisors
kinship ties factors and, 29

FOR REVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION
available at alastore.ala.org

supervisors *(cont'd)*
power imbalances in libraries and, 26–27
Swade, Naghem
on cultural humility, 189–203
information about, 211–212
overview of chapter by, xxii–xxiii
on personal culture, 193–194
on shedding status quo, 201–202
Swanson, J., 58
system actions, 30

T

T'áá hó ájít'éego value, 117, 118
Taking Your MLIS Abroad: Getting and Succeeding in an International Library Job (Phillips & Holvoet), 94
Tan, E. C., 154
Tanaka, A., 58
Tangney, J. P.
dimensions of humility, 82
on humility, 57
on positionality, 49
on working with patrons, 119
Tanner, Henry Ossawa, 64
Task Force for Ethical and Anti-oppressive Metadata (TEAM), 147
Taylor, R. J., 29
Taylor, W. J., 100
TCK
See third-culture kid
Te aka Māori–English, English–Māori Dictionary and Index, 14
"Te Ao Hurihuri" adage, 5–6
Te Ao–Māori News, 11
teachability, 162
teachers
See instructors
TEAM (Task Force for Ethical and Anti-oppressive Metadata), 147
team actions, 30
Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes (Fox & Oxenbury), 66–67
terrorist, 198
Tervalon, M.
on cultural humility, 40, 53, 55
Cultural Humility: People, Principles and Practices (documentary film), 60
on multiculturalism, x
theory of change, 181–184
third-culture kid (TCK)
ideas about leadership, 164
Mark Emmons on being, xxii, 153–155
unfamiliar culture, openness to, 166
Thompson, A. D., 157
Tikki Tikki Tembo (Lent), 72
time, 5–6, 13
"'Time Is a Ship That Never Casts Anchor': Indigenous Adages in Promoting Cultural Humility" (Roy & Moorhouse), xvii–xviii, 3–15
Towards a QTPOC Film Canon, 54–58
Townsend, L.
concerns about cultural humility, 117, 177
on context, 54
on cultural humility, xi, 41
cultural humility approach of, 165–166
cultural humility definition, xv, 155
on cultural humility practices, xvi
on false narratives, 51
information about, 205–206
on leaders, 164–165
on positionality, 49, 50
on power imbalances, 112, 160–161, 179
on power/authority, 159
tradition
reliance on, 70, 76–77
selection of children's books and, 75–76
training
by Cultural Inclusivity Services, 190, 202
staff training in cultural humility, 144
transgender people, 65
See also QTPOC (queer and trans people of color)
transphobia, 73, 74
travel, 28–29
tribal college
See Diné College
Tribal College Library
See Diné College Libraries
trust
in employees, 156

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humility engenders, 158–159
in librarian, 49
for removal of power imbalances, 87
Tuck, Eve, 177, 181

U
unattended-children policy, 130–131
unfamiliar, appreciation of, 84–85, 93
unfamiliar culture, 82, 83
unfamiliar norms, 165
United States
cultural norms in, 196–199
Daniyom "Dani" Bekele on move back to, 191–193
international librarian's return to, 91–92
third-culture kid's experience of, 153–154
University of Ottawa's School of Information Studies, 38–42
University of Utah, 18–19, 24
University of Washington library system, 58
unknowing, 183
unlearning
cultural humility as, 202
intentional, 199
question about, 121
Unlearning & Divesting from the White Colonial Mind (website), 32
unselving
challenge of, 121
question about, 121
of Rhiannon Sorrell, 110–111
US Department of Agriculture, 97
US Department of Health and Human Services, 97, 105
US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 150
U.S. News & World Report, 137
US Virgin Islands, 25
Useem, R. H., 153, 154
users
See patrons
Utah Food Bank, 132

V
Valdes, Carrie
information about, 212
on library access barriers, elimination of, 125–136
overview of chapter by, xxi
values
cultural humility and, 183
of Diné College, 116–118
Diné values for cultural humility practices, 118–120
humility in Diné interpersonal values, 115–116
servant leadership, alignment with, 156
of TCKs, assumptions about, 153–154
van Dierendonck, Dirk
characteristics of servant leadership, 167
humility in servant leadership, 157
model of servant leadership, 156
outcomes of servant leadership, 158
visibility, 37–38
"Visibility/Approachability" guideline, 36
Vourloumis, Hypatia, 186
vulnerable communities, 103

W
Wacek, Dawn, 136
Wang, K. T., 154
Washington Research Librarian Consortium (WRLC), 142, 147–148
Watanabe, Josie, xvii
Waters, A. J., 8
Wayne State University, 18
We Are Water Protectors (Lindstrom & Goade), 75–76
WebJunction, 150
whakapapa (genealogical line), 6
whakataukī (proverbs)
about humility, 10–12
of Māori world, 5
meaning in, 7
shared understanding of, 9
time and, 6
as tools of education, 6
"Whakataukī: Māori Proverbs" (Massey University), 14

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Wheeler, Laura, 64
White, K. R. J., 100
white people
  children's literature awards and, 71–73
  power imbalances in libraries, 26
  workplace, cultural humility and, 24
white privilege, x
white supremacy
  in conversation about DEI, x
  impact in publishing, 76
  impact of geography on Xan Goodman, 21
  power imbalances in libraries, 26
  representation in children's books, 71
"White Supremacy Culture Characteristics" (White Supremacy Culture), 32
whiteness
  in critical race theory, 17–18
  power imbalances in libraries, 27–28
  Twanna Hodge's experience of, 25
Wiens, T. W., 157
Wiley, C. W., 92
Willocks, H. W., 25
Winston, B. E., 160
women
  accuracy/completeness of children's books, 65
  book awards for, 71
  experience of Black women working in libraries, xviii, 23
  ideas about Muslim women, 198, 201
  in Middle East, 91
Women in Art: 50 Fearless Creatives Who Inspired the World (Ignotofsky), 65
Wong, M. A., 37
Wong, Shirley Temple, 69
Woodard, Beth, 37
workers
  See library staff
workplace
  safety, 44
  in Xan Goodman's work history, 22–24
WorldCat, 55
WRLC (Washington Research Librarian Consortium), 142, 147–148

X

Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia, 142

Y

Yang, J., 158
Yang, K. Wayne, 177, 181
Yeager, K. A., 203
young readers
  See children's literature, cultural humility approach to evaluating
Yup'ik people
  adage about generosity, 10
  adage about reputation, 9
  adages of, 3
  on repeating instructions, 7
  tradition of storing words, 13
yuuluaqautekat, 3

Z

Zhang, W., 158
zines, 140

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