CHAPTER 3.

KEEPING BAD COMPANY: "LISTENING" TO ARYAN NATIONS IN THE ARCHIVES

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This chapter describes a collaborative archival research endeavor involving Aryan Nations propaganda, including newsletters and prison recruitment materials. Undertaken by two graduate students and their professor in Fall 2020, this project began when they learned that these documents were housed in the archives at their large, public university located in the Pacific Northwest. "[T]he most powerful organizing force for white supremacists in the United States" in the 1980s-90s (Balleck 40), the Aryan Nations established their headquarters in the "backyard" of their university, making these materials of "regional interest" to now-retired acquisitions librarians. While this propaganda targeted specific populations, its presence in the archive understandably alienates others, resulting in a tendency to ignore white power propagation. Using community listening as a non-neutral, embodied methodology to conduct their research and engage with community stakeholders, including the archivists at their institution, this chapter describes how they attempted to "take responsibility" for these materials.

Content Warning: This chapter contains extreme words of racism and anti-Semitism drawn directly from Aryan Nations newsletters. Please read with care.

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"Community," writes Raymond Williams, "can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably. . . ." (40, emphasis in original). In this articulation, Williams alludes to a key tension of this "feel good" word: while there is considerable promise in community, however it might be defined or imagined, it is inevitably subject to the challenges and complications associated with conglomerations of people who have different views, values, and varying degrees of power. The promise and predicament of "community" was a point of conversation that repeatedly emerged as we, Patty, Mitzi, and Wyn, embarked upon a collaborative archival project on the Aryan Nations. Propaganda for this group of Christian Identity Theology believers is housed in the library of our large, public institution, Washington State University (WSU)—our most immediate academic community. As potential sites for community listening, what Jenn Fishman, Romeo García, and Lauren Rosenberg describe as the process of "emerging in and through the stories that acculturate us, including stories that transform, oppress, and liberate," archives give rise to narratives about our past that inform our present, shaping our environs and the structures of power that configure these places. While we did not want to claim the Aryan Nations as members of our community, their legacy reverberates throughout the region, which is reified for us most immediately by their presence in the archives and library at our university.

Our work with the Aryan Nations materials began in the context of ENGL 597: Rhetorics of the Archive, the graduate-level course that Patty, then assistant professor of English, taught in the fall of 2020, at a time in which institutions were beginning to reckon with their implicit and explicit connections to white supremacy. Mitzi and Wyn, both English graduate students, enrolled in the small course.[1] As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we faced significant constraints. Our class took place via Zoom, and because the Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) was closed to the public, we were not able to examine physical artifacts in person. We leaned heavily on two very accommodating archivists to help us overcome these hurdles. After consulting the archive's finding aid, we requested that the archivists provide copies of sample materials from three different collections that potentially aligned with our commitments to doing antiracist work in the archive. These included the "Washington State Office of Commissioner of Public Lands Land Grant Ledgers" from 1901-1912,

1 In addition to Mitzi and Wyn, there was one other student enrolled in English 597: Rhetorics of the Archive, but they opted out of composing the chapter.

the "WSU Police Officer Papers" from 1967-1972, and the "Racism Workshop Papers" from 1970-1971. The archivists generously provided scanned copies of these materials, but it was during one of the class consultations that they mentioned that MASC also counted among its collections Aryan Nations propaganda, specifically newsletters that spanned from the 1970s to the early aughts. Because these materials are cataloged both as rare books and periodicals at our institution, they did not appear in our review of the finding aids for MASC. In this way, these documents constitute an archive more in the "vernacular" meaning of the word, what Peter B. Hirtle explains is "anything that is old or established, be it collections of old movies . . ., a journal that publishes what the editors hope will be papers of enduring value . . . or even rock-and-roll oldies on cable television" (10). But as critical archive scholars Jeanette A. Bastian and Ben Alexander remind us, "records in all their manifestations are pivotal to constructing a community, consolidating its identity and shaping its memories" (xxi). Though classified as lower-case "a" archives, the Aryan Nations propaganda is illustrative of the commemorative power of the material, functioning as the basic matter that begets the narratives that help define our community.

After much deliberation, we, as a class, decided to pursue an archival project involving the Aryan Nations newsletters. Driven by a similar impulse that spurred Kenneth Burke to examine Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, we wanted to get a better sense of the "snakeoil" (165) that these texts offered readers. As we grappled with the damaging rhetoric of this white supremacist propaganda, we thought deeply about how archives can function as places for community listening that "re-situat[e] the individual within constellations of stories, genealogies, ghosts, and hauntings," as García explains ("Creating Presence from Absence and Sound from Silence" 7). A wellspring of remembrance, archives are, in the words of Charles Morris, "rhetorical sites and resources, part of a diverse domain of the usable past that, despite the sincere if not conceited espousals of disinterested custodianship by its representatives, nevertheless functions ideologically and politically, and often insidiously" (146). The power associated with such sites, as Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook maintain, informs "the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies" (2). A product of Euro-American epistemologies that privilege material and discursive records, archives are highly curated collections that (often white) archivists[2] deem worthy of preservation. The Aryan Nations collection held in our university's library is a manifestation of that power, "necessarily mean[ing] that other records will

2 According to a 2012 survey conducted by the Society of American Archivists, the archival profession overwhelmingly trends white, representing 89% of those who participated in the study ("Member Needs and Satisfaction Survey, 2012" 14).

not be preserved" (Jimerson 11). And while that gives us pause, especially in the fraught context of higher education where students of color have not always been welcomed or well-received, we also see the collection's presence as problematically necessary, as it documents the region's white supremacist history that might otherwise be subsumed by the more ubiquitous contemporary narratives that paint this corner of country as "liberal."

Because community listening calls us to examine "the privileges we inherit and enact and the privileges we want—and need—to reckon with" (Fishman, García, and Rosenberg), we felt compelled to listen to this archive, however contemptible it may be, and tell its story, which is our story, too. But the rhetorical power of the archive is located not only in what is preserved, but in how those materials are organized, described, and dispersed, as KJ Rawson elucidates. As we learned more about the accession of Aryan Nations materials and how they are managed in our library, we grew increasingly concerned with their exhibition: these documents circulate with surprisingly little intervention at our university's library. The story that we tell, then, is also about our attempt to use community listening to encourage the archivists to further contextualize this collection and, more broadly, adopt antiracist archival practices. Making such requests raises important questions about disciplinary boundaries and reminds us, as Michelle Caswell has rightly observed, that there is a general propensity to overlook the expertise of archival scholars properly. Though we kept these critical concerns in the forefront of our minds, we were nevertheless moved to intervene to take responsibility, however imperfectly executed, for the varying acts of latent and overt white supremacy embedded in our community.

While archives are inevitably shaped by those who create them, they are what Barbara Biesecker calls "scene[s] of a doubled invention" ("Historicity" 124, emphasis ours), where researchers' embodied experiences are also brought to bear on the collections they study and the narratives they craft. As we collaboratively tell the story of the Aryan Nations archive and our experiences with it, we recognize that this account is inescapably slant, informed by the intersections of our own individual identities. A white, cisgender woman of relative means and privilege with Catholic and working-class roots, Patty came to this research as a pre-tenured professor, challenging her work with this project, as she tried to balance her commitments to social justice and intersectional feminism with the demands of being both a teacher and colleague. But born and raised in Portland, Oregon, Patty keenly recognized the discrepancy between the progressive perceptions of the Pacific Northwest and its racist past. These formative experiences contributed to her understanding of the project. As both a practicing Catholic and an Idahoan, Mitzi felt a sense of urgency in taking up these materials, though her ability to do this was complicated by being the only person of color

working on this project. She felt that her racial identity and status as a then-master's student impacted the power dynamics, and she held back during the writing of this chapter. Her hope is that her silence will also create a sound that other communities can hear, one that reverberates past the writing. From her position as a highly privileged white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, cisgendered woman, Ph.D. student, Wyn, felt a deep responsibility to work on this project due to her driving ideology of radical racial justice. Because Wyn is not directly targeted by the bigoted hate of Aryan Nations, she recognized her important role of reader of these archival items. Though she was dispirited to consider these people part of her community, they are. She must listen to current white supremacists with the hope of disrupting the ruinous consequences of racialized hate.

Though we occupy different "politics of location," to borrow the phrasing of Adrienne Rich, we all agreed to undertake the work of analyzing and collaboratively writing about these deeply racist texts that have propagated hate and helped inspire tangible acts of violence. Such an endeavor, we believed, would render legible the rhetorical strategies employed by white supremacist groups and, more broadly, call attention to the role that archives play in buttressing past, present, and future mechanisms of power. But engaging with these vile documents also necessitated that we intently listen to each other as poured over these trauma-inducing texts. Though we did not always agree and there were layers of power to navigate, an "ethics of hope and care" informed our collaborative research and composing practices, as we sought to "listen and speak, not just with our heads by with our hearts, backbones, and stomachs" (Royster and Kirsch 146).

ARCHIVES AS SITES FOR COMMUNITY LISTENING

Attending to the ways that physical place and space define community and inform community listening practices, we began our research on the Aryan Nations propaganda by first asking, "Why are these materials *here*?" The location of archives function as what Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki call "experiential landscapes" where "the larger landscape (and of attendant sites) spill over into specific sites" (29). Shaping hermeneutical approaches, archival scenes influence cognitive and affective interactions with materials, as scholars such as Malea Powell, Gesa E. Kirsch, and Liz Rohan, among others, have observed. But relatedly, place also can determine the records that archivists seek to collect, illustrative of a desire to connect local communities with views of regional pasts. As such, these repositories function as potential sites for community listening where particular narratives of the past co-constitutively shape and are shaped by the places in which they emerge and reside.

WSU is located in Pullman, Washington, on the eastern, more agrarian, side of the state. A land grant institution, it was founded in 1890 and built upon the ancestral lands of the Niimíipuu and the traditional homeland of the Pelúuc Band of Indigenous People. Although it is a predominantly white institution, as Victor Villanueva observes, "WSU's history has always included, from its inception, American Indians, African Americans, Chicanos, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, no less than the many hard-working White Americans of the state" (N.P.). For some, the university's location in the Pacific Northwest may conjure notions of "blue state" politics, but the region is very much shaped by both implicit and overt white supremacy, which continues to haunt Washington, Idaho, and Oregon in a variety of ways. Most pertinent to our discussion of archival places, however, is the university's proximity to Aryan Nations headquarters which, until 2001, was located in Hayden Lake, Idaho, approximately 100 miles away. This area was specifically chosen by the founder of Aryan Nations, Richard Butler, because of its distance from "the mongrel masses" (Day).

Today, the population of Idaho consists of approximately 93% people who identify as "white," according to the US Census Bureau data from 2019. This racial makeup is a direct result of intentional efforts to create a white stronghold, which largely began with the "white flight" that took place after the American Civil War. As historian Jill Gill explains, after the war, Southerners who sought to preserve their way of life moved to the Pacific Northwest; legislation was introduced to help promote this brand of white supremacy ("Why Idaho's Racist History Matters"). Oregon, for example, passed Lash Laws that called for non-enslaved Black people in the state to be whipped for merely existing within its borders (Nokes). In Idaho, Jim Crow-type laws were established to help control Black populations, but additional exclusion laws were enforced to deter other people of color from settling there ("Why Idaho's Racist History Matters"). It was this homogeneity of whiteness that drew Butler to Hayden Lake where he later established Aryan Nations headquarters in the late 1970s.

The geographical proximity of Hayden Lake to WSU contributed to a long-retired librarian's decision to acquire Aryan Nations propaganda, reminding us that "all archival programs and institutions are the contingent products of their time and place," as Adrian Cunningham explains (55). While some finding aids are more transparent about the "archivists' invisible hands" (Morris and Rose 52), including statements of accession and provenance, because of how the Aryan Nations materials are classified at WSU, no such details about the collection are available. This omission called us to employ community listening principles and dig more deeply into the origins of this archive so that we might better understand the construction of this archive. When we asked the current archivists about the acquisition of these materials, they contacted several

now-retired employees to help us find answers to our questions. According to the archivists' contacts, the materials were of interest to the now-deceased acquisitions librarian who wanted to preserve a range of voices that characterized the region. While some might debate the value of housing such racist materials, we agree with the assessment articulated by archivist Richard J. Cox:

> if we are doing our job well, we often will hold archival materials challenging the identity or role or even value of other groups. We want the records of both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Ku Klux Klan . . . . They are all bellwether issues for our society, and if our objective is to leave for future generations a reasonable documentation of what our society represents, we need to be deliberate and public about efforts to encompass a wide range of perspectives, activities, organizations and institutions. (257)

Of import, artifacts such as the Aryan Nations materials enable researchers to track unambiguously oppressive organizations, a necessary step to reckoning with past and present wrongs. Without records of the Aryan Nations' propaganda, this unfortunate legacy that haunts the Pacific Northwest would be less conspicuous. But while these documents preserve the region's troubling past, in listening for the ways in which power informs the logic of this acquisition makes perceptible a common, though increasingly disputed, ideological commitment to fair and balanced treatment of all sources regardless of the message espoused. In characterizing these materials as just a local perspective without addressing their explicit racist messaging neither accounts for the sway these documents continue to hold nor takes responsibility for the place they now occupy in a research university's library. So while we deem such collections necessary, how these materials are organized, described, and displayed should appropriately respond to the white supremacist content in accordance with reparative archival practices that "reckon with the past by repairing the harm that was done," as critical archive scholar Lae'l Hughes-Watkins maintains (4).

In applying community listening practices to the archive to learn more about the story behind the story, we uncovered more about the problematic acquisition of the Aryan Nations propaganda. When we started this project, we assumed that the Aryan Nations sent their literature unsolicited, but as we sought to better understand the collection's relationship to the university, we learned that the library paid for the materials. This was confirmed when one of the former librarians recalled that when the Aryan Nations newsletters ceased before the subscription was complete, the organization wrote to the library, asking if they would donate the remainder of subscription fee to their cause in lieu of

a refund. The librarian found it satisfying to decline this request, noting that it was a matter of principle, not money. Though only a nominal amount, the funds used to purchase the subscription inescapably supported the Aryan Nations publication. And while troubling, without this material record, our ability to document the evolution of this white supremacist group, its violent rhetoric, and its lingering presence in the region would be impeded. To be sure, there is a long legacy of institutions that have acquired materials in ethically dubious ways, but community listening, and its attention to the gaps and silences in the stories we tell, calls us to consider such dimensions of the archive but also bring them to light. Here, we are again reminded of how reparative archival practices "acknowledge[e] these failures and engag[e] in conscious actions toward a wholeness that may seem to be an exercise in futility but in actuality is an ethical imperative for all within traditional archival spaces" (Hughes-Watkins 4).

For this archival project, community listening also called us to consider the ways in which artifacts are housed within a particular institution or organization and the implications of that positioning, as display and arrangement, too, are rhetorical and imbued with meaning. In the libraries at WSU, the Aryan Nations materials are kept in two places: in special collections, which means that some copies are kept in storage and require potential users to view them in person within MASC's reading room. But at our institution, these documents are also available in the public stacks. Located among books that discuss hate groups, *Calling Our Nation* circulates publicly in a series of nondescript mauve or brown hardcovers. Patrons can pull these collections off the shelf and leaf through them, whether intentionally or by chance; they are also available for checkout. Their placement in these public stacks, with no label, explanation or contextualization, is predicated on a supposed spatial objectivity, but as the explicitly racist contents of these materials make clear, how they are displayed in the library and what that signifies merits greater consideration.

While we find the easy accessibility of this propaganda troubling, as it ostensibly neutralizes the content contained therein, such positioning has afforded patrons the opportunity to "talk back" to these documents. Listening, as García encourages, "for humanity in stories and memories in between cultures, times, and spaces" ("Creating Presence from Absence" 7), we noticed in our study of these materials how some patrons reinscribed meaning of these texts. Someone, for example, penned "Fuck You Whitey" on a page, while another wrote "Assholes" next to the word "Aryan." Though the institution approaches these texts from a seemingly impartial perspective, these individuals subverted authority and voiced their own disapproval of these materials. Through such acts of disruption, they make visible the different cultures of the university but also the nonlinear and participatory nature of community listening as employed within this archival collection.

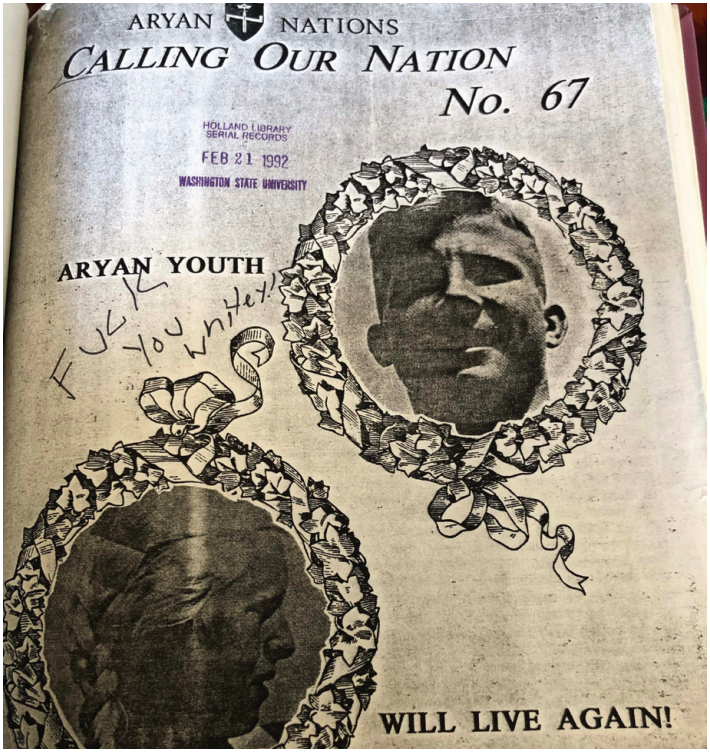

Figure 3.1. Cover Page of WSU-Bound Edition Calling Our Nation*, No. 67.*

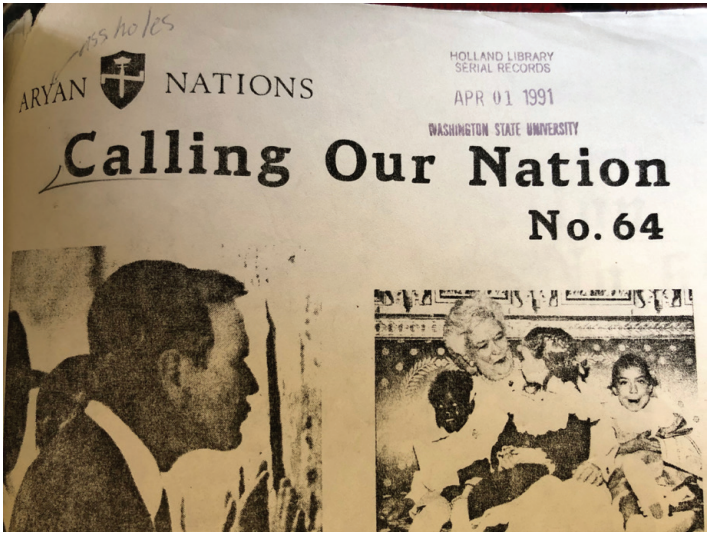

Figure 3.2. Cover Page of WSU-Bound Edition of Calling Our Nation*, No. 64.*

The photographs in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 capture the "disruption" found within the bound copies of *Calling Our Nation*.

COMMUNITY LISTENING AS ARCHIVAL METHODOLOGY

As we began examining the Aryan Nations' general newsletter *Calling Our Nation*, it became clear that *how* we listen is very much by context. In addition to living through the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed local and nationwide demonstrations that called for police accountability and the need for police reform; unprecedented wildfires burned around us so closely and intensely that the sky was dark and smoke crept in through our doors and windows, and a contentious presidential election was underway. These experiences greatly impeded our ability and desire to listen to the Aryan Nations propaganda: we struggled to "stan[d] under" these discourses (Ratcliffe 28), to "suspen[d] judgment" (Fishman and Rosenberg 2), and to engage in "empathetic listening" (Lohr and Lindenman), prompting us to recalibrate our approach. Inspired by García's use of community listening in the settler archives, we aimed "to create presence from absence and sound from silence in the name of justice" ("A Settler Archive" 7). For us, this meant reading the Aryan Nations documents against the context of the given moment, seeking explicitly to put these artifacts into conversation with the events that were unfolding around us. A publication "of, by and for the White 'Aryan Nations' kinfolk of people on this earth," as stated on the title page, *Calling Our Nation* is clearly only concerned with the voices of Christian Identity Theology and white supremacy. "No pretense is or will be made as to any so-called 'objectivity' concerning any other peoples, their beliefs, doctrines, customs or so-called gods," the publication continues to explain. The clear intent of the Aryan Nations newsletter is historically dishonest and realistically warped propaganda. These were challenges we faced as we wrestled with our responsibilities to practice community listening in the context of an overtly racist archival collection. Though the Aryan Nations documents are abhorrent and detestable, we must listen to these sources to confront the racist legacy that continues to haunt the Pacific Northwest and avoid the kind of white supremacy propagation that occurs when such ugly voices are routinely ignored. For this reason, we made the difficult decision to include excerpts from these materials in the section herein. While we struggled with the politics of such citations, we ultimately concluded that it was important to unequivocally demonstrate why these texts are so violent.

Commencing our work with this project, we first read issue #28 of *Calling Our Nation*. One of the earliest editions available in our library, it was published in 1979. From the first issue our class reviewed until the last, a common

theme found within these newsletters was the supposed false narratives conveyed by the media. To illustrate, Colin Jordan writes in a reprint of "Great Lie of the 6,000,000," "From the moment the National Socialists came to power in Germany in 1933, Jewry—through its colossal power over the press, radio and cinema of the remainder of the globe—began the greatest campaign of distortion and fabrication which the world has ever seen" (19). Given our time of reading within the final year of the Trump presidency, we could not help but see similarities between the views championed by both Aryan Nations and the Trump presidency concerning the media. While *Calling Our Nation* doesn't have a quick catchphrase, like "Fake News" or "Alternative Facts," as we witnessed from the Trump administration, the skewing of history and historical quotations alongside dishonest claims of the persecution of the white man, racialized scapegoating, and Jewish media domination, the same tactics have been utilized in many corrupt and fascist governments.

Though some governments' uses of these tactics are more subtle than others, through the publication of *Calling Our Nation*, Aryan Nations makes its worship of Hitler and the Third Reich very well known. Hitler's government scapegoated Jews, Romani people, and other "racial inferiors," the Trump administration scapegoated Mexicans, Central Americans, and Muslims. The Third Reich, Aryan Nations, and the Trump administration all worked to discredit intellectuals, communists, and those with left-leaning politics. While the Third Reich and Aryan Nations exclusively employed rhetorics of fear concerning communists, the Third Reich deployed a fraudulent appropriation of the word "socialist." Trump's GOP and its supporters called everyone with humanist opinions "communist and/or socialist," almost exclusively in error. Aryan Nations clearly adopted the Third Reich's rhetorical maneuvers of misleading political and historical context. Each of us in class found it easy to connect these dots.

Relatedly, we noticed the many ways in which history was appropriated, distorted, and otherwise falsified in the effort to generate support for the Aryan Nations. In an article from *Calling Our Nation* #89, "Caucasian Genocide: What will it take to save the White race from Extinction," author Gerhart Hauptmann (most likely a pseudonym stolen from a Nobel prize-winning German naturalist dramatist and novelist) writes, "All of this is neither theory nor opinion, but rather, documented fact supported by an abundance of documentation for anyone willing to investigate the evidence." However, the only evidence provided in this article is opinion and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. When we were reading this issue, the similar tone peddled by coronavirus deniers and popular QAnon conspiracy theories, such as Pizzagate and the false narrative of US Democratic party members as pedophiles and baby eaters, the similarities could be laughable were it not for the violence and death these conspiracy theories spawn.

As we studied this propaganda, the human casualties were never far from our hearts and minds. In an effort to listen to the voices most affected by the hate speech contained within those documents, we reflected on the rise in harassment and violence that people of color and Jews endured. As Wyn observed, the Aryan Nations are "equal opportunity racists; they hate anyone who isn't white, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, and male." As we read through the hate-filled pages of *Calling Our Nation* that rhetorically "othered" and subjugated non-white, non-Christian people, we collectively turned to the many examples of hate crimes and violence that we had recently witnessed, connecting violent rhetoric with physical acts of violence, for as Fishman and Rosenberg remind us, "Community listening arises from the recognition that none of us is ever outside of our communities. We are never teaching or researching or organizing or writing unmoored from the communities to which we belong, from what surrounds us, or from the people with whom we engage" (3). Hate crimes have been on the rise since 2014, according to the FBI statistics, which can be directly correlated with an increase in dehumanizing rhetoric. The acts of violence that we witnessed the summer prior to our class, particularly the murder of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, are forever burned into our brains, but we know, too, that so many instances, macro and micro, were not recorded or given the platform warranted. As we reflected on these matters, we thought, too, about the systemic flaws that enabled COVID-19 to disproportionately ravage Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic and Latinx populations, all while Donald Trump and other political leaders added insult to injury with their racist characterizations of the virus that contributed to a notable increase of anti-Asian sentiment.

While no racial, ethnic, or religious group was left untouched, Jews were particularly targeted in the issues that we reviewed. In issue 73, for example, the re-print from *Gothic Ripple* in *Calling Our Nation,* "The Enemy Within," notes that the "InterNational Jewry, a Corrupt & Malignant Tree Bearing No Godly Fruit. It Blots out THE LIGHT and strangles God's Living" (6). We grappled with this kind of ubiquitous dehumanization as we acknowledged the considerable uptick in anti-Semitic harassment and hate crimes that have occurred since 2019. This matter was brought to a head for us when, in Dec. 2020, the Idaho Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial, located in Boise, was vandalized with stickers displaying swastikas and the phrase, "we are everywhere" ("Idaho Anne Frank Memorial"). This upset all of us, but Mitzi was particularly affected. Born and raised in Boise, she used to walk past the memorial every day. She had proudly told the class that it's the only place in the U.S. where you can see the entirety of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on display, and it's one of only 11 sites in the U.S. to have received a sapling from the Anne Frank chestnut tree in Amsterdam. To Mitzi, the monument was a reminder that even

though she was dealing with racism every day, there was hope for intersectional parity. In response to this hate-filled vandalism, Mayor of Boise, Lauren McLean said acts of hatred are not the Boise way. "Bad actors who use racist and violent rhetoric are not welcome in this community" ("Idaho Anne Frank Memorial"). While many of us wish to deny that these "bad actors" are part of the community, as their stickers indicated, they are everywhere. For us, community listening is "a way to *be-with* others," (García, "Presence from Absence" 7), a sharing of responsibility that requires us to accept the "bad actors."

This reality was, unfortunately, reaffirmed a few months later when, in February 2021, in Spokane, Washington, fewer than one hundred miles from WSU, Temple Beth Shalom was vandalized with painted swastikas. However, this most recent incident in the Spokane synagogue was not the first. In 2014, "a swastika was painted on a concrete wall during a service on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for the Jewish community" (Riordan). Rabbi Tamar Malino said, "Our community is in shock and in grief, and trying to be strong. It's very difficult to know that there are people that hate you that much for being Jewish and have intention of expressing that. It's very important for our community to continue living meaningful, strong, and Jewish lives and not be afraid to continue being who we are" (qtd. in Riordan). Christian allies from Spokane decried this vandalism. The dean of St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, Heather VanDeventer, stated, "We pray for our neighbors at Temple Beth Shalom. We pray for an end to anti-Semitism and other expressions of hate which hurt and demean our siblings. We pray for continued strength, focus, and determination as we seek to walk in the Way of Love and to build the Beloved Community" (qtd. in Riordan). This statement of support is a far cry from Aryan Nations' Christian Identity Theology. Perhaps because of our reading of Aryan Nations messages of hate combined with the persistence of anti-Semitism found in current regional white supremacist groups, such as the One Percenters, Oathkeepers, and the Proud Boys—many of whom participated in the attempted insurrection at the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021—we were deeply saddened and sickened, but we were not surprised.

In the case of Aryan Nations' legacy, the greatest failure in community listening is the inclination for the broader members of the community to ignore white supremacist groups. It is the act of ignoring these communities that perpetuates the cycle of hatred and violence, as is evidenced by their continued existence. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are 22 hate groups, primarily white supremacist, in Washington alone; 838 in the United States ("Hate Map"). James Baldwin famously said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." To disrupt this fatal cycle, community members must contribute to the ongoing work of listening,

learning, and resisting; they must not ignore this harmful offshoot of the community. As many well-intentioned white non-racists are wont to say, hate isn't born, it is taught. But to be truly antiracist, we must address this teaching of hate, and learn how to decompose these organizations and their actions of hate.

COMMUNITY LISTENING AS INTERVENTION

As we grew more acquainted with the Aryan Nations propaganda, we became increasingly concerned with the lack of context that accompanied these inflammatory materials. Residing both in MASC and in general circulation stacks, these documents are cataloged under *Calling Our Nation*. The entry for this periodical is rather sparse: there is no summary, no additional notes, no discussion of acquisition; it contains only basic information, including the author's name, date of publication, and subject headings, neutralizing the gravity of these documents and the serious harm for which they blatantly advocate.

Further, because of their classification as both rare books and general periodicals, facsimile copies of these documents circulate in the general stacks, a practice that deviated from other institutions that managed these same materials much more carefully. In our library, though, issues of *Calling Our Nation* are bound together into a series of hardcover books that are readily available to the public; there is no explanation of these sources, no acknowledgment of their misleading and violent statements, and no content warning. These consequential omissions, born out of status quo archival practices, prompted us to bring our concerns to the archivists who introduced us to these artifacts. In this way, we sought to share the responsibility that the archivists inherited with the *Calling Our Nation* newsletters as an act of community listening.

In many ways, this chapter would not have been possible without the archivists. They found the materials for us, and they did additional, extraordinary work, such as emailing former archivists and librarians to help us learn more about the acquisition of the documents. Our archivist colleagues met with Patty several times in preparation for the visits with the full class and exchanged emails with her throughout the semester and beyond; they even agreed to read this essay, offering valuable feedback. Importantly, we recognize, as Magia G. Krause observes, "only people who work in the archives really know the collections" (404). Although we appreciate their generosity of time and energy, we also had some challenging questions, which the archivists graciously answered during two separate class meetings; both conversations became strained. While this tension was palpable for all parties, we follow Fishman and Rosenberg's idea that the purpose of community listening "is to find ways to make relationships more productive and substantial with the goal of meaningful change" (5).

In our first conversation, we learned that a former librarian had paid a subscription fee for the newsletters. The conversation turned tense when we asked the archivists if this contribution could be taken as supporting a then-prominent white supremacist group, but pointing to their email correspondence with former librarians, they saw this more as an attempt to preserve a wide range of viewpoints, even those deemed unpalatable. Though library sciences have long encouraged professionals to remain objective, such decisions illustrate how, in the unequivocal words of historian Howard Zinn, this "supposed neutrality…is a fake" (21). To be clear, the archivists with whom we worked were not part of this decision-making process; they had inherited the problem that we were bringing to them. But while we agreed that the area's history of white supremacy shouldn't be denied, we wondered how these sources were interpreted by patrons.

The next step was to ask if the materials had an introduction or content warning. They answered no, explaining that if teachers assigning Aryan Nations propaganda wanted a trigger warning, it was up to their own discretion to provide one. The archivists abided by a similar practice in MASC, giving student workers the option of not scanning the materials if they felt uncomfortable, so while there was recognition that these materials warranted greater care in some contexts, there was no move to attend to these concerns in broader, public application. We invited the archivists to return to our class because we had additional questions for them, and despite the discomfort we all felt during our first conversation, they agreed to another meeting. At this point, our understanding of community listening was informed by Karen Rowan and Alexandra J. Cavallaro's idea of listening being the "work before the work" (27). Drawing from Krista Ratcliffe's scholarship on rhetorical listening, they explain that there is a "need to listen beyond individual intentions to 'historically situated discourses . . .'" (Rowan and Cavallaro 26). Prompted by this insight, we reflected on why our previous conversation with the archivists had felt tense and what this tension meant for us and the broader WSU community. Why, for example, were we upset that this propaganda sits unattended on the self? Why were we bothered about the lack of a content warning in the newsletters? And why did we feel angry that there was no transparency regarding the accession of these documents? Such questions and the emotions that haunted them informed our next steps.

As the instructor of the course, but also as a colleague who hoped to build a relationship with the archivists, Patty wanted to ensure that they did not feel ambushed when they spoke with the class during the second visit, so she emailed them in advance with some of the questions that had come up in class. In asking them to discuss MASC protocols for sensitive materials, she acknowledged that the class had "do[ne] a little research [and] noticed that other libraries limit access to [*Calling Our Nation*]—that is, [these documents] are for "library-use" only. Are

there policies that inform why [the library] allows them to circulate more freely? Are there any documents in the archive that are more difficult to access because of their sensitive nature?" As Patty further explained, "We are interested in learning more about how [MASC] and archives more broadly handle these kinds of materials." In response to these questions, the archivists reminded us that the Aryan Nation materials are in two places at WSU: the original publications are housed in MASC, overseen by the archivists, but the bound facsimile copies are shelved in the library, falling under the purview of university librarians. As noted by the American Library Association, even "hate speech is protected by the First Amendment." We tried to clarify that we weren't asking for the materials to be removed, but rather, we strongly believed that these physical documents warranted greater contextualization. But we also asked why there weren't more institutional controls in place for accessing these materials, again pointing to the precedent established by other universities holding Aryan Nations periodicals. Patrons wanting to view these documents either needed to request access to them because of their archival status or check them out in two-hour increments. The archivists reiterated that their mandate was to preserve history and serve the community, though our lessons in community listening had us asking ourselves what members of the community are prioritized with such directives. We went around in circles like this, failing to find a way forward that satisfied us all.

But discussing the availability of these documents wasn't the only uncomfortable moment in our conversations. The tension deepened again when we asked if there was talk about implementing any library protocols on how to address racist materials, similar to the plans of action put forth by the National Archives[4] and the University of California Los Angeles (Smith), among others. Though, as Elizabeth Yale maintains, "No archive is innocent" (332), antiracist archival practices specifically call institutions to acknowledge their role in acquiring and disseminating materials that contribute to systemic oppression; develop finding aid descriptions sensitive to the implicit and overt racism that lives in the archives, including transparent context statements about accession and provenance; appropriately manage known white supremacist materials with content warnings and reasonable control of access; and create a concrete plan of action for when oppressive materials inevitably emerge (National Archives). We continue to recognize the web of complications associated with such a request, especially when budgets and personnel are scarce. The conversation remained locked until one archivist nodded to the "white fragility" of the matter: "we could start working on this stuff and get feedback."[3] Finally, the

3 According to Robin DiAngelo, white fragility is "[a] state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (57).

tension snapped like a rubber band as the archivists laughed and admitted to feeling uncomfortable.

We'd like to retrospectively unravel this moment in the conversation because the archivists effectively opened portals into community listening, though we failed at the moment to recognize them. Justin Lohr and Heather Lindenman contend that self-disclosure can invite empathetic listening, to "hear the collective refrains and struggles that often present themselves in individual voices" (72). Confessing to something as vulnerable as white fragility and discomfort invited our two mini-communities to "be with" each other to understand our different positions. Lohr and Lindenman propose empathy as a steppingstone to community listening. It was easier to withhold judgment and have an openness to understand the archivists' perspective because they were willing to be open with us. As García writes, "Responsibility, then and now, meant listening to know and to learn" ("Creating Presence from Absence" 10). Part of our responsibility was listening with that openness, and that also gave us hope that our working relationship could be meaningful and productive—that together, we could "know and learn" to better serve our shared communities.

Mitzi would like to draw attention to the close of what was, at the time of writing, the last conversation with the archivists. They responded to a question about accessibility of the materials. "Do we want to interrogate people every time they want access to any material, though?" they asked. The response, Mitzi thinks, might be, "Who will be responsible for the hurt that comes when somebody accesses material containing hate speech, material that is presented as neutral?" The library shelf in a university has an undeniable ethos. This matters to Mitzi because, on the shelves of her undergraduate institution, she once found a doctoral thesis arguing that students of Mexican descent are underachieving because they are lazy. The unspoken authority in the thesis' placement communicated that the university supports or at least tolerates racism. What is the inadvertent message sent in a bound volume of Aryan Nations propaganda sitting unsupervised on the shelf with no statement of context?

These struggles taught Mitzi, Patty, and Wyn their first lesson in the limits of community listening. They were uncomfortable and dissatisfied with how the conversation flowed, particularly with what they interpreted as a reluctance on the archivists' behalf to move toward changes in contextualizing, handling, and housing of the material. Rowan and Cavallaro contend that community listening work "entails more than envisioning a better world, but rather, using that vision as 'an ethical guide for the practical work that must be done in the here and now' [in the words of Paul Feigenbaum]" (27). Wyn had entered the conversation believing that the archivists were going to readily see our perspective, and she found the pushback galling. Patty tried to listen to the archivists

but was hoping for more immediate results; worthy of note, she felt conflicting obligations, as she tried to be a good teacher and colleague, while also following her conscience. As the only person of color involved with this project, Mitzi had her walls up. Erica Stone posits that we all bring different identities and roles to community listening—the self brings history to community that we are attempting to listen to (20). Our idea of being open was challenged as we thought about how we had closed off—were we truly open to listen if we shut down when the archivists weren't on the same page?

Months after our second conversation, we continued to engage in community listening when the archivists sent us an invitation to a webinar they thought would interest us. We attended a panel titled, "When Collections are Considered Controversial," where we were introduced to the article "A Reconsideration of Library Treatment of Ethically Questionable Medical Texts: The Case of The Pernkopf Atlas of Anatomy." Scheinfeld et al. investigate the handling of the *Pernkopf Atlas*, a medical atlas created with "a disregard for human life and informed medical consent" by an active member of the Nazi party (165). The *Atlas* has Nazi symbols on many pages of illustrations, the authors write, "Though these facts are extremely distasteful, censorship of distasteful material is not part of the mission of libraries. What makes the *Atlas* a work of which libraries should be aware is that individuals depicted in the anatomical drawings were likely victims of the Nazi regime" (Scheinfeld et al. 165). The text also echoed many concerns we heard from the WSU archivists, such as the avoidance of censorship and the risk of vandalism "or mutilation [of controversial texts]" (166). However, the article concludes that "Situational meaning created by location is balanced by curatorial and cataloging decisions that provide additional context to the work" (170). We understand community listening to be a non-linear, recursive process that involves both past and present selves. Part of the discomfort in our conversations with the archivists was caused by knowing that other libraries have more control over controversial materials, and this discomfort resurfaced again as we read the article on the *Atlas*. Wendy Hinshaw points out that "Community listening also means recognizing our limitations, the barriers of listening created by our subject positions" (67). We recognize that the listening we invited and engaged in with the archivists is complicated by the fact that our community is impacted by white supremacy. In tangling with our shared responsibility and discomfort, we hope to better understand ourselves as community members. How do we bring our individual positionalities into the listening in a way that respects all?

We honor our relationship with our archivists and echo the participants from the Krause survey, who note that archivists are "probably the best suited people to highlight what [primary sources] mean to our cultural heritage to enhance

people's appreciation for that cultural resource" (404). In our case, providing context and transparency about the acquisition of Aryan Nations materials is a matter of acknowledging WSU's entanglement with the white supremacists in our backyard, a way of providing information student researchers should consider in their work. Finally, as Rowan and Cavallaro suggest, "Our approach to community listening must be ongoing, reflective, and subject to revision" (34). We understand that community listening is not over once this chapter is finished. We hope to continue the dialogue with the archivists and with each other to work collaboratively toward meaningful change in our community.

REFLECTIONS ON KEEPING BAD COMPANY

As Fishman and Rosenberg explain it, community listening is a process "that involves deep, direct, engagement with individuals and groups working to address urgent issues in everyday life, issues anchored by long histories and complicated by competing interpretations as well as clashing modes of expression" (1). In positioning archives as sites of community listening, we were committed to attending to the unfortunate but very real legacy of white supremacy in our local and regional communities. While the explicit racism that the Aryan Nations propaganda espouses is understandably alienating, the ensuing sense of disidentification that subsequently emerges tends to ignore white power propagation.

Listening to these collections, for us, also further exposed the socially negotiated nature of such collections and the narratives that emerge from these places of memory and history—including the story that we've offered here, which is informed by our own collective and individual values and embodied experiences. Originating in the archive, our account is illustrative of what Rodney Carter calls "[a]chival power," which, "is, in part, the power to allow voices to be heard. It consists of highlighting certain narratives and of including certain types of records created by certain groups" (216). While Carter's observation largely rings true in theory, it is not always executed in meaningful ways in practice, as our experience with the Aryan Nations collection suggests. Moved by a sense of responsibility to our community, a defining tenet of community listening, we attempted to enact change through our requests to contextualize these explicit racist documents and develop protocols for addressing future similar occurrences. While we were largely unsuccessful in these endeavors, we are reminded of bell hooks' observation: "To build community," she writes, "requires vigilant awareness of the work we must *continually* do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination" (36, emphasis ours). In this spirit, we are hopeful that the conversations have only just begun.

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