1. My name is Adrienne Harling. I am a library and archives consultant and work with the Karuk Tribe. I am also a settler living on stolen Karuk land. This presentation is geared towards those new to issues surrounding Tribal cultural information, and the images in my slides are focused on my home region, when applicable, to illustrate the concepts.

2. The premise of this panel is that resistance to documentation inhibits the diversity of the historic record, and that the archivist’s role is to find ways to overcome this hurdle. However, Indigenous communities are resisting misappropriation of their cultural knowledge, and in this case the archivist’s role is to support Indigenous-led resistance.

3. Indigenous communities share having traditional knowledge systems that are not based on written records. These systems are managed through oral traditions according to cultural protocols about access, and have succeeded for generations to preserve information about all aspects of life, history and culture.

4. The first written documentation of Indigenous communities in the US was created by settlers, through the lens of a social and governmental mission to destroy Indigenous culture and people. This documentation resulted in important records of American settler colonialism, but did not represent Tribal people, culture or perspectives.

5. This was followed by another wave of documentation stemming from a new narrative that Indigenous people were a “vanishing race”. Anthropologists and entrepreneurs collected massive quantities of cultural items and knowledge that were sold on the open market and deposited in museums and archives for settlers to access, own and use.
6. There was no way for the Indigenous people who shared their knowledge with anthropologists to understand that Copyright Law would privilege the researcher conducting interviews as the legal “Creator”, and that as a result they would no longer be able to control how their knowledge was accessed, used, or disseminated, or that their own tribal laws of property would not be applied.

7. In fact, ethnographer’s records are widely distributed in repositories throughout the US and are commonly perceived to be authoritative sources of information about Native cultures. However, anthropologists commonly misinterpreted Tribal cultures, so there is widespread and ongoing misinformation about Native people resulting from these materials.

8. Further, the information is managed according to Copyright Law and Western archival and library best practices, which violate Indigenous cultural protocols that restrict access to sacred and other kinds of special knowledge. In this case, Copyright Law is a tool of colonialism that makes traditionally restricted knowledge available to the public.

9. All of that being said, ethnographic records have content that is highly valued by their source Tribal communities, yet these communities do not have access or control over their own cultural information held in these records. Distant, non-Native repositories have control and primarily non-Native people have access.

10. Indigenous communities worldwide have accomplished a lot to address these issues through the development of Tribal libraries, archives and museums, improving access for Native people, restoring traditional knowledge practices, correcting misinformation, and through Native authorship providing documentation that is self-representative.
11. However, non-Native repositories and archivists have commonly resisted making changes to repair the injustices that we have inherited from this history and system of settler colonialism. Many are unwilling to transfer copyright and/or implement differential access to materials when requested by Tribes.

12. Non-Native repositories resist transfer of ownership, authority and power of the Tribal cultural materials they inherited through Colonialism, because it is perceived as loss of valuable holdings that only the Western institution can care for properly. They also fail to recognize that the initial transfer of information may not have been lawful under tribal law.

13. It is also commonly believed that “the train has already left the station” with regards to materials in non-Native institutions that Indigenous communities are concerned about. So much of this material is already in the public domain and is widely distributed and available online, that it is easy to feel that there is nothing that can be done to address Tribal concerns about it.

14. And certainly, traditional Indigenous knowledge systems that are based on differential access are challenging for archivists and librarians to support, when open access has been such a core principle of our professional education and values. To do so we must embrace more than one cultural framework within archival practice.

15. Underneath these rationales for resisting what Indigenous communities are asking of non-Native repositories and archivists, are the enduring systems of settler colonialism and white supremacism - where white and western are the default standards and where white western society feels entitled to keep Indigenous cultural heritage on its own terms.
16. The train has not left the station, but a truly diverse historic record can not be achieved without dismantling the systems that center whiteness and Western values in our profession. This is not only possible, but it is our responsibility to right the wrongs that our institutions have inherited.

17. How can we do this? For one, we can implement the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials. Drafted in 2007, the Protocols provide clear instructions for meaningful consultation with Tribes, implementing differential access, repatriating materials, reciprocal education, and much more.

18. We can move beyond fears about losing content from transferring copyright and repatriating materials back to Tribes, and focus on what can be gained: from building collections collaboratively with Tribes that are culturally sensitive and self-representative, and from providing access to Indigenous perspectives that Tribes would like to be more visible.

19. We can make resources available to Tribes who want and need them, such as use of digitization and preservation equipment, archival storage space, joint custodial care of collections, professional development training, or other forms of reciprocity. We can also support the work of and provide jobs for Indigenous archivists.

20. To do right by Indigenous Communities, non-Native archivists and institutions must learn new ideas and skills, challenge our own foundational understandings and identities, and proactively acknowledge Indigenous communities as the rightful authorities of their cultural information. Thank you.