

# Medical Archives and Their Complicated Pasts:

## An Exploratory Study on the Historical Connections of Medical Archives, Libraries and Racial Science

By Raymond Pun (he/him) (rpun101@Stanford.edu)

### Problem Statement

**Introduction/Problem Statement:** The poster presentation (a work in progress) examines the complex roles of archives in shaping and contributing to colonial studies in medical and health science fields and applies critical discourse theory to explore the power structures of medical libraries and their collections including archives in placing and reinforcing imperial values and priorities over human dignity.

Through colonial practices and experiences, scientists created biological classifications based on race and fostered a racial hierarchy scheme. *Transylvania Medical Journal* (1818–1862), *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* (1848–1877), and *The New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* (1844–1973) are examples of journals that were collected, disseminated and studied, particularly by white southerners prior to the American Civil War. Along with medical archives, these journals contained reflections and assumptions by physicians for historical research.

### Further Research

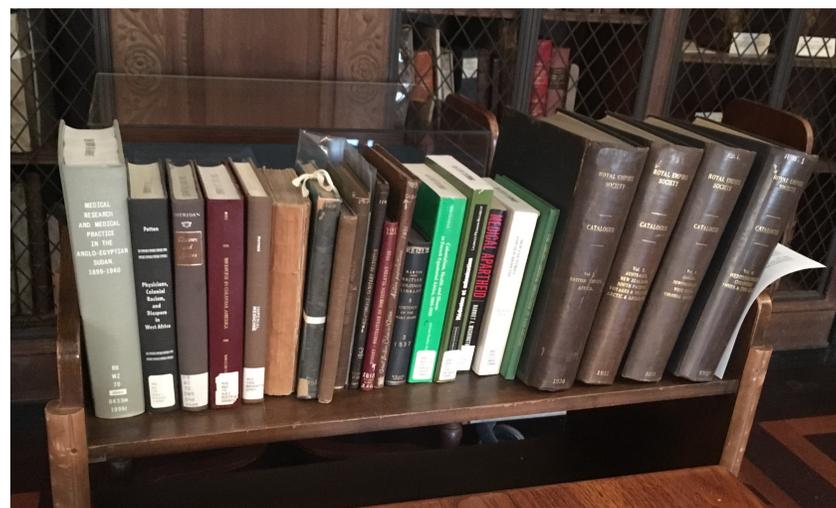
- Visuals and texts reflecting racial science are problematic. Using such historical content for research and teaching has sparked ongoing debates regarding medical ethics and humanities in the medical library community.
- How to best engage in teaching ethics in the fields of archival science and medical librarianship to infuse critical pedagogy?

### Research Method

**Content analysis and historical research** were applied to examine primary sources and scholarly works on medical archives.

**Critical Discourse Theory (CDT):** Using CDA as a method to critique relationships and structures of language and power and access in medicine through racial divisions. In response to eugenics and “racial science” as “expert knowledge” and “medical authorities.” The archives reveal the process of gathering, describing and classifying medical texts to be consumed. Critical discourse analysis: texts are collected, described, disseminated, transferred and preserved as foundational knowledge in medical libraries.

When thinking of archival sciences, particularly in medical field, we need to think more about power and attribution in the process.



*Figure 1.* A collection of primary documents, catalogs and secondary sources on the history of medicine and empire building at the New York Academy of Medicine

### Results & Findings

- Acts of collecting, researching, classifying, comparing, and preserving data while colonizing.
- “Colonialism is literally a health hazard” from *Public Health in Papua New Guinea: Medical Possibility and Social Constraints* (1984).
- “Transformation in the [medical] field is dependent on colonialism, creating new social status and hierarchy in society” (Headrick, D. & Headrick R., 1994),
- As a result, colonial health data fortified medical texts and archives that are studied, classified, produced, authoritative, and disseminated.
- Advancing knowledge in medicine were made at the expense of vulnerable populations and colonized bodies.

### Select References

Fisher, Walter. "Physicians and Slavery in the Antebellum Southern Medical Journal." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* (1968): 36-49.

Headrick Daniel and Headrick, Rita. *Colonialism, Health and Illness in French Equatorial Africa, 1885–1935*. United States: African Studies Association Press, 1994.

Hogarth, Rana A. *Medicalizing Blackness: making racial difference in the Atlantic world, 1780-1840*. United States: UNC Press Books, 2017.

Savitt, Todd L. "The Use of Blacks for Medical Experimentation and Demonstration in the Old South." *The Journal of Southern History* 48, no. 3 (1982): 331-348.

Washington, H. A. (2006). *Medical apartheid: The dark history of medical experimentation on Black Americans from colonial times to the present*. Doubleday Books.