

# Liberatory Librarianship

Stories of Community,  
Connection, and Justice

**Edited by Brian W. Keith, Laurie Taylor, and Shamin Renwick**

IN COLLABORATION WITH CORE

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FOR REVIEW ONLY

# Introduction to Liberatory Librarianship

Brian W. Keith, Laurie Taylor, and Shamin Renwick

## TERMS OF UPLIFT

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What is *liberatory librarianship*? We use the term *librarianship* capaciously, to include all information professionals, including archivists, museum professionals, and others who may or may not identify as librarians. *Liberatory* means serving to liberate or set free.

*Liberatory librarianship* involves applying the skills, knowledge, abilities, professional ethics, and personal commitment—along with leveraging the systems and resources of libraries—to support the work of underrepresented, minoritized, or marginalized people to increase freedom, justice, community, and broader awareness.

How can librarianship be liberatory? How does librarianship help people to be free? How are library capacity and expertise used to increase freedom, justice, and community?

For liberatory librarianship, we can reference advances in the roles of archives. Writing in 2016, Jarret Drake defines “liberatory archives—which are a type of community archive—by focusing on two actions that these spaces have the potential to engineer: the action of belonging and the action of believing.” Similarly, Michelle Caswell explains that liberatory memory work requires recognition (representation and enabling people to see themselves in the archives, and the joy that comes from this) and a redistribution

of resources “toward community-based archives representing and serving minoritized communities” (Caswell 2021, 145–54). These authors have joined their voices with others in calling for decolonizing work, slow archives, emancipatory libraries, and more. These conversations respond to the fact that libraries have been instruments of the political and legal dominance of one culture over others. We follow Rapheal Randall’s (2018) description of “liberatory education” as “rooted in self-determination, derived from an understanding that all human beings have the right to participate in shaping a world that is constantly shaping them. Collective participation in governance amongst a community or people with shared interests is a mainstay of this concept.” This builds upon the work of Merlo-Vega and Chu, and Gomberg around the concept of contributive justice: achievement is what we give to others, and there is both a duty and an opportunity to contribute.

We came to questions of liberatory librarianship by working with the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC), with a generous community who showed us a different model, which we have called a “liberatory digital library” (Keith and Taylor 2021).

Liberatory librarianship goes beyond decolonizing, which has been the dominant diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) model for librarianship. We define liberatory librarianship as work that uses library capacity and expertise to uplift the spirit of freedom, justice, and community through shared contributions and collective benefits, and as work that supports the ability for minoritized and oppressed people to—with the collective support of the community—be better positioned.

## **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

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We became very interested in editing a book focused on liberatory librarianship, to bring together stories of liberatory librarianship from and about those working in libraries including archivists, curators, and technical experts, and that would cover all types of libraries and other information systems. This work parallels recent scholarship on liberatory archives and libraries, known by those and other terms. In this edited volume, we seek to define, recognize, and foster liberatory librarianship by bringing together many voices who share their stories about this work. We feel this is particularly timely, as many

librarians are seeking to translate their DEIJ passion and awareness into their professional contributions.

These are practical stories that can inspire us to think about our work. They are not opinion pieces, and this collection is not a sounding board. It is based on information professionals doing something tangible. Some of the authors contribute their own stories, and some share the stories of others. While the entries in this work are almost entirely in English, the stories depict work undertaken in other languages as well. This book is meaning-making for the term *liberatory librarianship* and provides a platform for stories of this work and the workers involved in it.

In compiling this book, we have been inspired by Toni Morrison's Nobel Prize acceptance lecture. In that address, she talks to us about language: "Sexist language, racist language, theistic language—all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas." As an alternative, Morrison puts forward, "Word-work is sublime . . . because it is generative; it makes meaning." We seek to generate and make meaning in defining library practices using the term liberatory librarianship. We share this book filled with the joy that comes from knowing the many successes and failures in collaborative efforts in which we were involved to further librarianship in service to justice. We hope that these stories inform and inspire, and that there will be more volumes to come.

## OUR STORIES

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We came together for this edited volume based on our connections with the Digital Library of the Caribbean, or dLOC. This is an open-access digital library of Caribbean and circum-Caribbean resources. dLOC was born out of ACURIL, the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries. ACURIL was founded in 1969, amidst fights and wins for independence by Caribbean peoples. A group of libraries created ACURIL, recognizing that people need access to their shared experiences and pasts through media, and that creating, disseminating, and preserving culture and information should be done by the people—not the former colonizers.

ACURIL is important because experts in the Caribbean created that association for their needs. ACURIL identifies the Caribbean as any area washed by



the Caribbean Sea and includes the Caribbean diaspora. One example of the latter is Jamaica, which has an estimated population of nearly 3 million people. Jamaica's diaspora includes an estimate of more than 2 million additional people. Similarly, Puerto Rico's population on the island itself is estimated to be over 3 million people, with nearly 6 million more in the diaspora.

In the 2000s, Judith Rogers led ACURIL's Information Technology Special Interest Group. Rogers, who was then the director of the University of the Virgin Islands Libraries, led the drive to create dLOC. As the libraries' director, she was responsible for supporting her students, with campus locations on three islands (St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John) where transport is either by commuting or seaplane or by ferry for St. Thomas and St. John.

Rogers and the team at ACURIL recognized that many of our core communities span vast geographic areas and that the internet, if wielded by community stakeholders for our needs with a platform designed by us, had the potential to better support both immediate local needs and the important needs of broader communities. At the same time, partners throughout the region recognized that accessing each other's collections was and would continue to be difficult. We all faced problems with preserving our materials because of our region's tropical climate. We also recognized that we all needed to work together to identify, share, and preserve materials. Judith Rogers and the other founding partner representatives recognized that a technological system using the internet had to have and be part of a community, and that we had to develop this so that we could all support each other and grow together.

In 2004, several ACURIL members founded dLOC. Early partners included the Archives Nationale d'Haïti; the Caribbean Community Secretariat; the National Library of Jamaica; La Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo; the Universidad de Oriente, Venezuela; the University of Puerto Rico; the University of the Virgin Islands; Florida International University; the University of Central Florida; and the University of Florida. Leaders from these different institutions were drawn together for a collective purpose.

Over time, we have told versions of dLOC's story by focusing on different theoretical and practical aspects including appropriate technology, innovation, community of practice, the impact of open access, and more. We have talked less frequently about Rogers's role in weaving together rich

understandings of technology and community to create dLOC. In this work, among the stories we share about liberatory librarians is a short chapter on Judith Rogers.

It is important to tell stories of liberatory librarianship's work and impact on the world because these are the stories that feed dreams, inspire hope, and change reality. These stories describe librarians' experiences in addressing challenges, inequities, and injustices. These stories illuminate the past, present, and possible future, informing trajectories for new work by liberatory librarians with us now and those to come.

## REVIEW OF CONTENTS

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In light of events in 2020 in the United States, the chapters in this volume address the imperative need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), reflecting a greater openness to and awareness of the need to share stories about work for social justice in the United States, both recent and for the longer history of libraries as part of justice struggles. The experiences recounted in these chapters are generally more recent, with important initiatives and programs, and they are also deeply rooted in institutional and community histories.

After this introduction, *Liberatory Librarianship* opens with several short chapters, the first four of which are focused on specific liberatory librarians: Dr. Alma Jordan, Lillian Marrero, Rosa Quintero Mesa, and Judith Rogers. In sharing stories about these librarians, the chapter authors contribute new entries to extant lists of exemplary library leaders, adding these important figures who have worked toward liberation through their work in libraries.

Following this first part are two chapters on programs that support liberation, undertaken by libraries and archives in the United States. Brian Boies looks at programs in the Oakland Public Library, while Felicia A. Smith explores Stanford University's KNOW Systemic Racism project.

In the book's next part, collaborators Tiffany Grant, LaWanda Singleton, and Clementine Adeyemi share the personal and professional nature of DEI work. Similarly, JJ Pionke explains using the personal as professional in his chapter, "Disabled in the Library."

In the next part, three collaboratively authored chapters address long histories and changes for liberation. Willa Liburd Tavernier, Ursula Romero, and

Christina Jones's chapter shares a case study of the Land, Wealth, and Liberation critical digital collection that provides research and primary sources as a counter to forces suppressing stories of Black communities. In "Unsiloes, Cross-Jurisdictional DEI," Tiffany J. Grant, Mikaila Corday, Michelle McKinney, Margaux Patel, Eira Tansey, and June Taylor-Slaughter provide another study, where they explain the importance of cross-cutting efforts across traditional silos in order to advance DEI across large, distributed organizations. Closing this section, Farzana Qureshi and Ludi Price share the story of decolonization initiatives within their library.

After these chapters, Bernadette A. Lear provides a case study of a liberatory library instruction program for users, which is followed by Sarah Dorpinghaus and Ruth E. Bryan's case study of a liberatory archival training program. The volume concludes with Sabine Jean Dantus's chapter, which explores the radical and liberatory power of empathy in librarianship, for both our patrons and our world. In this final chapter, we hear the call and the opportunity to imagine and enact liberation together through empathy.

Through these chapters, the authors explore positive and productive ways to build power as part of the struggle for liberation and justice. Because the personal is also political and communal, these stories are rooted in institutions, places, and lived experiences as these intertwine in the work for liberation.

## NOTE ON STYLE

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Please note that the style used in this volume is in flux. As we write this, ALA Editions recommends capitalizing Black but not white, which is the style we have followed. This has changed rapidly in recent years, with the *Chicago Manual of Style* recommending capitalization of both. In addition to normalizing for style, the editors took a light approach to editing to allow the diversity of voices and perspectives to speak clearly and strongly, as each author tells their story of liberatory librarianship.

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# Appendix

## Acronyms

ACURIL	Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ALA	American Library Association
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and people of color
CoP	Community of practice
CV	Curriculum vitae
DEI	Diversity, equity, and inclusion
DEIAJ	Diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice
DEIJ	Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
dLOC	Digital Library of the Caribbean
DLS	Doctorate of library science
ERGs	Employee resource groups
HBCUs	Historically Black colleges and universities
ICTA	Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture
JEDI	Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion
KSR	KNOW Systemic Racism
LATT	Library Association of Trinidad and Tobago
LDC	Library Director's Council
LEI CoP	Library Equity and Inclusion Community of Practice

LIS	Library and information science
LoC	Library of Congress
LWL	Land, Wealth, Liberation
MHI	Master of health informatics
PoS	Port of Spain
RESPECT	Racial Equity Support & Programming to Educate the Community Team
SAHM	South Asian Heritage Month
SALALM	Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials
SCANAS	Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
UCL	University of Cincinnati Libraries
UCWI	University College of the West Indies
UF	University of Florida
UK	United Kingdom
UKL	University of Kentucky Libraries
UL	University librarian
UNICA	Association of Caribbean Universities
UPRISE	Undergraduates Pursuing Research in Science & Engineering
U.S.	United States
UVI	University of the Virgin Islands
UWI	University of the West Indies
VR	Virtual reality

# About the Editors and Contributors

## EDITORS

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**Brian W. Keith**, MLIS and MBA, is a professor and the dean of library services at Eastern Illinois University. Previously, he was associate dean and the university librarian at the University of Florida. Brian has envisioned and shaped libraries in terms of spaces, services, collections, and partnerships. He has an extensive record of professional accomplishment and national and international scholarship and service focusing on DEAIJ. He is a past recipient of the SirsiDynix—American Library Association & Allied Professional Association’s Award for Outstanding Achievement in Promoting Salaries and Status for Library Workers, and he was an Association of Research Libraries Leadership Fellow.

**Shamin Renwick**, PhD, is a senior librarian II at the School of Education Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, and has served as director of library services at St. George’s University, Grenada. She has been a librarian for more than 36 years, 24 of them as an academic librarian. Renwick was awarded the ACURILEANA Star 2007 for research and publication and the ACURILEAN Medal for significant contributions to ACURIL (the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries). In 2012, she was named an Outstanding Graduate of the 1980s of the Department of Library and Information Science, UWI Mona Campus.

**Laurie Taylor**, PhD, is the associate university librarian for collections and discovery at the University of Connecticut Library. She was previously the senior director for library technology and digital strategies at the University of Florida and the operational lead and digital scholarship director of the Digital Library of the Caribbean. In 2018, Laurie was named Caribbean Information Professional of the Year by the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Clementine Adeyemi** is a student at the University of Cincinnati's Department of Pathobiology and Molecular Medicine. Besides conducting research, she is passionate about equity and inclusion in STEM. To this end, she serves organizations such as Empowering Female Minds in STEM as its current director of communications and outreach and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science as the vice-president of its Cincinnati chapter. As a first-generation doctoral student, she believes that having mentors, allies, and sponsors is critical to retain students like herself.

**Brian Boies** has been a public librarian for over twenty years in New York and California. He developed the Oakland Public Library's Instagram account (@oaklandhasjobs) to post at least six local, entry-level job openings and training resources six days a week to more than 8,100 followers. This was a helpful way to inform patrons of the changing employment and social services landscape as COVID-19 developed. Brian is also a father, husband, and writer living with his family in Sacramento, California. He is looking to continue to utilize his passion and experience to best serve his new home as a librarian at the Sacramento Public Library.

**Ruth E. Bryan**, a certified archivist, serves as university archivist at the University of Kentucky Libraries' Special Collections Research Center in Lexington, Kentucky, where she leads donor relations, archival appraisal, collection management, and public services and outreach for University of Kentucky records and related collections. Ruth is a co-creator and co-organizer of the "History Allies: Helping Protect Your Past" workshops, a basic archives workshop for nonprofit, religious, civic, genealogical, and other community-based organizations.

**Mikaila Corday** is a serials cataloger in the Electronic Resources Department at the University of Cincinnati (UC) Libraries, where she is devoted to creating seam-



less access for library users in order to discover a wealth of online resources. Inspired by UC President Neville Pinto's words that we must use our "own campus experts to eliminate structural racism throughout the educational life cycle," Mikaila is passionate about leading antiracism awareness efforts by participating in campus and library groups. She was the 2022 staff recipient of the Marian Spencer Equity Ambassador Award.

**Sabine Jean Dantus** is an outreach and reference librarian for Florida International University Libraries and a writer specializing in empathy-based library marketing and communications. She believes that by understanding and utilizing empathy, library staff can create more welcoming and inclusive environments for everyone. Sabine has been an active member in the Association of College and Research Libraries since 2014. She is writing her first book, on empathy-based library marketing and communications and how to be equitable and inclusive in libraries.

**Sarah Dorpinghaus** is the director for digital strategies and technology at the University of Kentucky Libraries, where she provides leadership for application and website development, library service platforms, computing infrastructure and systems, and digital scholarship and data. She also develops and oversees long-term strategies for digital preservation. Sarah is a co-creator and co-organizer of the "History Allies: Helping Protect Your Past" workshops, a basic archives workshop for nonprofit, religious, civic, genealogical, and other community-based organizations.

**Tiffany J. Grant**, PhD, is the assistant director for research and informatics and a co-leader of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Libraries' Research and Data Services Unit. She also serves as the director of the UC Undergraduates Pursuing Research in Science and Engineering (UPRISE) program. Grant was the 2017 recipient of the UC Libraries Award for Faculty Excellence and the recipient of the 2023 Faculty Marian Spencer Equity Ambassador Award. She earned a certificate in diversity and inclusion from Cornell University and is a certified diversity executive. Her research interests include infectious diseases, microbiology, and the intersection of health disparities and health/racial equity.

**Christina Jones** received her MS in library and information science from Indiana University (IU) Bloomington in 2003, after receiving an MS in secondary education from the same institution. From 2005 on, Christina has taught courses in youth services and collection management at IU Bloomington's School of Informatics and Computing Department of Information and Library Science. She was a children's services librarian at the Monroe County Public Library for eighteen years before

joining IU Libraries, where she serves as head of the Education Library. Christina presents and writes on topics related to instruction, digital tools, children's literature, and storytelling.

**Bernadette A. Lear** is an education, behavioral sciences, and social sciences librarian at Penn State University Libraries, serving the University Park and Harrisburg campuses. Her publications focus on the history of libraries and librarianship, collection development, and children's literature. With Eric C. Novotny, she is the founding coeditor of *Libraries: Culture, History, and Society*, the peer-reviewed journal of ALA's Library History Round Table. Bernadette is passionate about encouraging all people to use libraries. She cites library interactions with children, formerly incarcerated persons, international students, LGBTQ+ students, military veterans, students with disabilities, and other diverse clientele as enriching her understanding of what college librarianship can be (and should be).

**Michelle McKinney** is the reference and web services librarian at the University of Cincinnati's Blue Ash College Library. Her current responsibilities include research services, website management, web marketing, and collection management for the Biology, Chemistry, Math-Physics-Computer Science, and Veterinary Technology departments. Michelle earned a BS in communications from Ohio University and an MA in library and information science from the University of South Florida. She is passionate about DEI issues in librarianship and works on several library-related diversity initiatives at the local, regional, and national levels.

**Margaux Patel** is the business and data analytics librarian at the University of Cincinnati Libraries. For the past five years, she has worked to elevate library resources and services at the Lindner College of Business. Prior to joining the university, Maggie was a competitive market researcher in the financial and legal industries for more than ten years. She has a BA in international studies from American University and an MLS from the University of Maryland, College Park. She works on several library-related diversity initiatives at the local, regional, and national levels.

**Richard Phillips** worked for thirty years at the University of Florida (UF) Libraries with Latin American and Caribbean studies programming. He served in Peace Corps Brazil in 1971-72 and with Catholic Relief Services Guatemala in 1973-74. He holds an MLS degree from Florida State University and an MA in Latin American studies from the University of Florida. Richard was awarded an honorary membership in SALALM (Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials) upon his retirement from the UF Libraries in 2014. He continues to live in Gainesville, Florida, and remains active in campus and local community matters.

**JJ Pionke** is an adjunct at Syracuse University. He received his MS degree in information from the University of Michigan and joined the University of Illinois in late 2014. His research is focused on disability and accessibility in libraries for both patrons and employees. He has explored such topics as website accessibility, the differences between compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accessibility, and the educational needs and comfort levels of library graduate students and current library employees with assistive technologies.

**Ludi Price** is the librarian for China and Inner Asia at SOAS Library and was previously Far Eastern cataloguer there for six years. She is also a visiting lecturer at City, University of London's library school (CityLIS). She earned her PhD in information science at CityLIS, specializing in the information behavior of media fan communities on the internet. She has published in the *Journal of Documentation* and *Journal of Information Science*, and she recently published a chapter about the journey to decolonize SOAS Library in *Narrative Expansions: Interpreting Decolonisation in Academic Libraries*. She is also a cochair of SOAS Library's Decolonisation Operational Working Group.

**Farzana Qureshi** is an arts and humanities librarian at SOAS Library and was previously librarian for South Asia there. She has a BA in English literature with modern history and an MSc in library and information studies. She was a co-investigator for "Two Centuries of Indian Print," a digital collaboration with the British Library, and was an international courier for an exhibition held at the National Museum, New Delhi. Farzana has served as Project Dastaan's outreach coordinator, a peace-building Partition initiative. She co-chairs SOAS Library's Decolonisation Operational Working Group and retains a passionate interest in Partition and migration studies, including Asian and African/Caribbean diasporic storytelling.

**Tania María Ríos Marrero** is the project coordinator of the Digital Library of the Caribbean at the University of Florida, where she manages a program to develop and promote open educational resources in Caribbean studies. She previously worked as a community organizer at the Free Library of Philadelphia, where she developed and facilitated community engagement and participatory design projects as part of the 21st Century Libraries Initiative. She holds a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Washington and a BA in writing, literature, and publishing from Emerson College. She lives in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

**Ursula Romero** is the outreach librarian at the Lilly Library, Indiana University's rare books and manuscripts library, where she has worked since 2019. In this role, she teaches classes on a wide variety of subjects, plans events, manages the library's

social media accounts, and provides reference services. Ursula is also a Rare Book School–Mellon Cultural Heritage Fellow and is dedicated to highlighting the lives and stories of historically excluded groups and making these stories accessible to students, researchers, and the public. Her interests include Black history, labor history, and historic fashion.

**LaWanda Singleton** has worked in the health information management field for more than twelve years. She is currently a director of health information management and an HIPAA/corporate compliance officer working with mental health and substance abuse records. LaWanda develops policies and procedures for the preparation, maintenance, completion, privacy, regulatory compliance, and retention of medical records. Ensuring the privacy and security of patient information is essential for health care providers and other HIPAA-covered entities. Knowing that patient information is secure is at the forefront of what LaWanda believes in. While being a mother of five, she has earned four degrees pertaining to health information, including her master's in informatics obtained from the University of Cincinnati.

**Felicia A. Smith** is the inaugural racial justice and social equity librarian at Stanford University. Felicia has worked as a criminal defense private investigator in Chicago, specializing in homicide and narcotics. Felicia is working on Stanford Libraries' KNOW Systemic Racism project, which documents and visualizes data about interconnected systems that pose threats to Black people in America—systems that have been shaped by racist policies and practices for centuries. The project's pilot phase focuses on the systems of policing and housing in the Bay Area of California. This is a partnership with research centers, community activists, investigative journalists, and nonprofit organizations.

**Eira Tansey** is the digital archivist/records manager for the University of Cincinnati. She is responsible for the university's records management program and for the planning and development of workflows related to born-digital archives and the digital preservation of electronic records. She received her BA in geography from the University of Cincinnati (UC) and her MLIS from San Jose State University. Eira served as chair of the UC Libraries' Faculty Executive Committee and was on the Executive Council of the American Association of University Professors–UC Chapter.

**Willa Liburd Tavernier** is the research impact and open scholarship librarian at Indiana University (IU), Bloomington. She manages open scholarship resources at IU Bloomington Libraries and provides publication data analysis for institutional decision-making and individual faculty needs. Willa is committed to advancing

inclusion and belonging in her work and research. Her research agenda focuses on centering community in scholarly communication. Willa's recent work includes "Land, Wealth, Liberation: The Making and Unmaking of Black Wealth in America," a public-access open scholarship digital resource; the Copyright Clearance Center's town hall "What's Ahead for Libraries and Researchers?"; and the RIG Diversity Resident Toolkit.

**June Taylor-Slaughter** has dedicated thirty-six years to working at the University of Cincinnati (UC) Libraries. She earned a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) certificate from Cornell University and serves as DEI trainer for student assistants employed at ten UC libraries. She works to train student assistants on being aware, mindful, empathetic, and ethical when making decisions. In 2020, June was co-chair of RESPECT (Racial Equity Support & Programming to Educate the Community Team) in its first year and worked hard to ensure its success. For her efforts to promote DEI, the University of Cincinnati named June Taylor-Slaughter as the 2021 recipient of the Marian Spencer Equity Ambassador Award.

FOR REVIEW ONLY

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