

**CALL TO ACTION!**  
**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunrise Commemoration 2015**  
Satia Marshall Orange, February 2, 2015

Shhhhhh!  
Can you feel it? Can you hear it?  
The rumble of thought.  
The shudder of challenge.  
The anticipation of possibility.  
And yet still, the swell of discomfort.

And what we feel may be the obvious recognition that there is too little done about the discontent in today's world.

Somewhere, in the lineage of all of us, are those who sought to make a difference THEN, so that we could make a difference NOW. And although we stand on proud shoulders, there are those behind us, around us, and coming soon, needing strong shoulders TODAY on which to stand.

When I first met many of you as the new OLOS director at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in Washington, DC in 1997, we sought a significant direction for the traditionally underserved in library communities from which we traveled, and a stronger, significant direction within ALA, and our profession.

We gathered at conferences, in meeting rooms, in cafe booths and at restaurant tables, and in lobbies and hotel rooms considering strategies, even creating enterprising initiatives that could more equitably deliver library services. We felt the urgency of creating opportunities for access, direction, and support for those who sorely needed it at home.

Some of you in the caucuses, the associations of libraries of color, may remember we convened one Thursday afternoon, soon after I started. We pronounced each others' names, shook hands, and a few hugged, some touching different folks of color for the first time in our lives. We were determined to leave with a strong collective commitment towards serving populations that we knew had too-little heard voices about their current and future circumstances. And we quickly learned that the founding missions of our five separate organizations had many common concerns.

Those thirty-five who attended may remember too that, after a long afternoon of work, we moved into a smaller area, initially sitting in groups defined by our own ethnic affiliations.

But on that day something changed. We purposefully changed our seating to sit next to others whom we knew not, so that the collaborative spirit from the afternoon could continue.

That spirit of respectful recognition, consideration, and compromise continued soon after with other ALA units serving OLOS constituents, addressing the needs of GLBTQ communities, people who were poor and homeless, people with differing abilities, people living in rural communities, new and non-readers, those served by bookmobiles, and so many others. It soothes my soul to see those groups still functioning effectively and resourcefully, working together in the Association today.

I believe that an important responsibility for an ALA conference attendee is to focus less on maintaining our institutional positions and the trajectory of our own careers, and more on reinforcing resources for deliveries of services to those who are suffering from exclusion and omission, with little hope or opportunity.

Let's encourage our colleagues attending the conference in San Francisco, and every ALA annual conference henceforth, to attend sessions that address the needs of others in our library communities, in addition to those with whom we are directly affiliated.

Let's learn how to serve more than just those whose skin color is like our own, or who speak similar languages and dialects, or who live in similar urban, rural or suburban communities, or whose academic and income levels are similar to those we serve.

Let's purposefully focus on the creation, support, distribution, and availability to more visible and initiatives for the library staff who cannot attend conferences, but who work in the communities we should be serving. They can join us in broadening professional expertise to serve all of the above, so everyone can be welcomed in library communities.

Let's continue that spirit of connection, of purpose, of service, as mentioned in the mission statements of our libraries, our companies, our organizations, and our lives, to make libraries even more relevant to more people.

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to whom we have paid this ALA Midwinter Meeting tribute for fifteen years, was an individual like you and me, with a strong concern and commitment for and to his people. He heeded a call for leadership that continues to make a difference in national and world communities, but mostly the difference can be seen and felt on streets and communities, and in the hearts and homes of everyday people.

My call to action to you, to all of us, is to heed that same call for leadership. More than ever, the people back home need us.

Thank you.