

2018 MLK Sunrise Celebration

Call to Action

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Where Do We Go From Here?

I am honored to deliver today's Call to Action on the Theme: "Where Do We Go From Here" and am inspired by Mr. Graves' example of how he bravely survived so many injustices and responded by creating ways to ensure that others do not experience these same injustices. He chose to give hope instead of falling to despair. I take inspiration from this!

As I prepared these remarks I struggled with understanding how to define the here and now. It is a moving target, every day we seem to hear of yet another injustice to people of color, women, children, Dreamers, those who struggle socioeconomically, those deemed less than by the broader society. It was almost overwhelming. And then I delved into the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, recalled my history lessons and listened to stories of people who have faced these struggles and chose to meet these challenges and realized that while things may feel as though we have seen slow progress, we are seeing progress none the less, with the election of our first African American President, people galvanizing - uniting to form movements such as #Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, #TimesUp, and many other causes and initiatives.

One thing I know for sure is that "We Are Here" People!!! Estamos Aqui!! "We are Present!, "Presente! Despite the many efforts to erase us, silence and subjugate us, We Are Here!

So, where do we go from here? Well that depends on where you are, where you stand. It is contextual to each one of us. It is informed by our belief systems, our values, and our personal histories. I am grounded in my personal identity of being multiracial and a child of the 1960's when my existence was deemed to be illegal due anti-miscegenation laws. I am also informed by my spiritual home of the

Bahá'í Faith – whose core tenets include the equality of the races, genders, and religions and, one tenet that helped to shape my professional choice of librarianship, the individual investigation of truth. For, without truth there can be no justice, and, as Dr. King said, “...without justice there can be no peace.” We each entered or are involved in our beloved profession for different reasons but I bet they center on values such as our willingness to fight for intellectual freedom, equitable access to information and education, and the preservation of the world's knowledge. We often are the center of the communities we serve, we create community. We strive to foster the ability to seek, find, and interpret or think critically about the vast amounts of information that we are inundated with on a daily basis. We help folks create new knowledge. We fight against misinformation – fake news – and make the search for truth attainable. We assist people to interpret and present knowledge and create new ways of knowing. We make what seems like the impossible possible.

I believe that as we consider where to go from here in our fight for diversity, equity, and inclusion we consider what motivated our choice of this profession and what we had hoped to accomplish. We are all here in this room because we believe in Dr. King's vision for civil rights. We all are working to make this “dream” a reality within our organizations and communities. But, many of us are tired of having to lead the way, constantly educating those who we hoped by now would get it; feeling responsible for changing things that we did not have a part in making. Recently a dear friend lamented that she is frustrated with the social protest movements, fearing that these would fall away with no progress to show for the efforts. She pondered why we should have to shoulder the burden of educating the oppressors about why they should not oppress and wondered how long must we protest the treatment of our brothers and sisters before we see real change? She exclaimed that “she was done!” And yet, later that same day, she accepted an appointment to co-chair her institution's Diversity Council. We are tired and yet, we hold hope and seek to set an example of selfless perseverance in solidarity with Dr. King's Legacy. The inestimable Audre Lorde says, “Life is short and what we have to do must be done in the now”

So where do you take your stand and how do you overcome the inertia that sets in through this long hard struggle? Think of what you'd love to accomplish with your inherent gifts, developed skills, and passion. What is at your core foundation that gives you happiness? For me it is the impact that my work has on the students that I engage with at my institution and members from within the many communities I serve. I hold a vision of the future that I want for my nieces and nephews, and all the children of this world. And where do we find the strength to move forward? I find it in the examples set by such luminaries as Dr King, WEB DuBois, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Rosa Parks, Harvey Milk, Fred Korematsu, Grace Lee Boggs, Winona LaDuke, Vine Deloria, Jr., Ghandi, Mandela, and many more. I also find hope and fortitude in those lessons and stories of our ancestors, and in the work and wisdom of my mentors and friends – past, present, and future, so many of whom are right here in this room!

We chose the library profession in which we endeavor and I believe our profession makes dreams possible and makes the answers to mysteries attainable. We must utilize all of our resources to address the critical issues of our day, of which the most important is the attainment of Diversity, Equity, and inclusion across society and the whole world. Our most precious resources in this endeavor are the hearts and minds of those who hold these values dear – this is you, my friends! Your presence here this early morning indicates to me what you value! And you have a network of people who cannot be here today who also hold these values dearly and with whom you share a vision for something greater for our civilization. We can realize success in our shared dreams but only if we bring to bear all of our resources together! This means that we must seek solutions across our library organizations, across all job classifications, and, most importantly across our social identities. Look around you, we are each unique in these identities but we are united as allies for a shared cause. WEB DuBois, whose 150th anniversary of his birth is this month, said “In all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” W.E.B. Du Bois, [The Souls of Black Folk](#)

There are many opportunities to seek out and learn from one another. An excellent one is coming up at the end of September of this year – The 3rd National Joint Conference of Librarians of Color (JCLC) which is sponsored by ALA's five ethnic affiliates. This conference is open to all library staff, students, influencers, and decision makers who are interested in exploring inclusive policies and practices in libraries and how they affect the diverse communities who use our services.

All of us have knowledge, skills, and abilities that we must utilize to effect change. If you cannot travel to a conference, learn within your community, research, explore. Create opportunities for others to learn, if you cannot initiate this yourself, seek out your networks – Look around you, you have a readymade army prepared to assist you.

I'd like to end with one more quote from DuBois:

“Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year. It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow. Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest and the playtime.”

— W.E.B. Du Bois, Three African-American Classics: up from Slavery, the Souls of Black Folk and Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

I am ready to take a step forward right here, right now, together, with you.
Will you join me?!

Thank you!