

Message of Solidarity to Research Community Members

Alexander J. Carroll, MSLS, AHIP
Librarian for Stem Research
Jean and Alexander Heard Libraries
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee

Dear Research Caucus Community Members,

As the Chair of the Research Caucus, I want to express my solidarity and love for our black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) library community members. I can only imagine the pain, trauma, and exhaustion that you have been experiencing as you have seen the images of anti-black violence perpetrated across the United States over the last week.

The horrifying and heartbreaking images that we have seen across the country reflect the systemic racial inequalities that have been a pervasive and persistent aspect of the United States since its founding, and indeed preceding even that. As medical librarians, it's critical that we recognize that libraries are not immune from the systemic inequities that permeate our society; rather, libraries often reflect and reinforce those inequitable values through our systems, spaces, collections, budgets, and through the makeup of our staff.

For white members of our Research Caucus community who have found the images of police brutality shocking, I would urge you to spend some time listening to our BIPOC colleagues. While seeing this violence up close may be news to many of us, it is not news to our BIPOC colleagues. For members of our community who seek to criticize the ongoing protests against police violence rather than criticizing the over-aggressive policing that has led to protests, I would encourage you to read [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."](#) Written just over 57 years ago, Dr. King's words remain as convicting as ever:

"First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can

set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured."

For those of us seeking to learn more about how we can get involved in anti-racism work, I would encourage you to explore some of the resources highlighted in the following lists:

- "Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List," a curated list of LIS scholarship via the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries: <https://www.library.wisc.edu/gwslibrarian/bibliographies/disrupting-whiteness-in-libraries/>
- "Anti-Racism Resources for all ages," a curated reading list developed by Nicole Cooke, the Augusta Baker Chair in Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina School of Library and Information Science: <https://padlet.com/nicolethelibrarian/nbasekqoazt336co>
- "Anti-Racist Reading List from Ibram X. Kendi" (via the Chicago Public Library): <https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/list/share/204842963/1357692923>
- we here's "Anti-racism resources for white people": https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BRIF2_zhNe86SGgHa6-VIBO-QqiriTwCTugSfKie5Fs/preview?pru=AAABcoT0otc*qOQtmQ_BIbDNBDzloyfD-g

However, listening and educating ourselves is not enough. Speaking out about systemic racism only during widespread anti-black violence like we've seen over the last week is not enough, either.

The Research Caucus' role is to encourage MLA members to use research to answer the questions that matter. As members of the Research Caucus, I encourage each of you to consider asking questions about systemic inequities within medical libraries. How do our systems and services reflect and reinforce systemic inequality, and what can we do to reform those systems to create more equitable libraries, institutions, and communities? These questions are challenging; asking them will require courage and will lead to discomfort. But if we want to live up to the spirit of "I Am MLA," which MLA Past President Beverly Murphy describes as "the collective understanding...that it is up to us, as members and as volunteers, to do what needs to be done for our association," we must rise to meet that challenge.

Sincerely,
Alexander J. Carroll, MSLS, AHIP
MLA Research Caucus Chair 2020-2021