Resolution to Honor African Americans Who Fought Library Segregation

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Whereas the system of “Jim Crow” laws and customs officially existed into the 1960s—a century after the official end of slavery in the United States;¹ ²

Whereas virulent racism, disenfranchisement, Black Codes, and racial segregation laws imposed a rigid system of officially sanctioned racial segregation in virtually all areas of life, including access to public libraries;¹ ²

Whereas, despite the work of African American librarians, including but not limited to Clara Stanton Jones, E.J. Josey, Albert P. Marshall and Virginia Lacy Jones, and the allies who stood with them to fight segregation, a large majority of the nation’s library community failed to address the injustices of segregated library services until the 1960s;³ ⁴ ⁵

Whereas, in many cases the American Library Association participated, both passively and actively, in the disenfranchisement

⁴ John Mark Tucker, Untold Stories: Civil Liberties, Libraries, and Black Librarianship, (Champaign, IL,1998), Publications Office, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.
⁵ Cheryl Knott, Not Free, Not for All, (Amherst, 2015), University of Massachusetts Press.
of African American librarians, depriving them of the resources of professional association;

Whereas the American Library Association continued to accept segregated public libraries as members into the 1960s; 3 4 5

Whereas the American Library Association filed no amicus curiae briefs in any of the local, state, and national lawsuits filed in the 1950s and 1960s to desegregate public libraries; 3

Whereas the nation’s library press reported nothing about the 1939 Alexandria (VA) Library sit-in by five young African Americans that took place two months after the American Library Association passed a Library Bill of Rights; 3

Whereas a sincere and heartfelt apology is an important and necessary first step in the process of reconciliation;

Whereas an apology for decades of injustices cannot erase the past, but a recognition of the wrongs committed and injustices ignored can help the nation’s library community confront the ghosts of its past: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the American Library Association

1. Acknowledges the fundamental injustice, cruelty, and inhumanity of racially segregated libraries;

2. Apologizes to African Americans for wrongs committed against them in segregated public libraries;

3. Commends African Americans who risked their lives to integrate public libraries for their bravery and courage in challenging segregation in public libraries and in forcing public libraries to live up to the rhetoric of their ideals;

4. Welcomes all African Americans to libraries, recognizing in particular those who were forced to use segregated libraries;

5. Encourages libraries to defend, in their policies and in their actions, the ALA Code of Ethics principle 1 – “We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests;” 6

6. Will review policy documents and internal procedures to ensure Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles are reflected throughout, and;

7. And be it further resolved that this resolution be printed in full in American Libraries and publicized widely via all media channels.

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New Jersey Library Association
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North Carolina Library Association
Ohio Library Council
Pennsylvania Library Association
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Federal and Armed Forces Libraries (FAFLRT)
Intellectual Freedom Roundtable (IFRT)
International Relations Round Table (IRRT)
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Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT)
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