

# **Progressive Librarians Guild Statement on Racist Incident at ALA Midwinter and Call for Critical Inquiry into Institutional Practices that Reproduce Forms of Oppression**

February 15, 2019

In the aftermath of an incident of unprovoked racial abuse, and reports of harassment of non-cisgender individuals during the midwinter meetings of the American Library Association, ALA's Governing Council members and other units of the ALA have been compelled to address how to support those adversely affected by such abuse. This has meant providing resources to contextualize the implicit bias underlying these incidents, attempting to hold individuals and structures accountable for their actions, as well as writing an open letter and numerous statements such as:

- The ALA Executive Board statement, available at <http://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2019/01/ala-executive-board-releases-statement-regarding-incident-council-forum>
- Statements from various ALA units as gathered by Diedre Conkling, available at <https://bit.ly/2HU9FaF>

Taking strong action to name the problem and to support individuals in doing the requisite personal work to address their biases is essential. The PLG echoes the recommendations ALA Councilor April Hathcock has made for next steps within the ALA, including:

- Convening a working group of the Executive Board to examine the Council Forum and find ways to make it a safer space;
- Reviewing and strengthening the current Conference Code of Conduct reporting process to make it more effective;
- Arranging for facilitated racial equity training for the Annual Conference Council Session I, building that training and the Code of Conduct into future Council Orientation sessions; and
- Coordinating with the Office for Diversity, Literacy, and

Outreach Services to provide online and in-person resources on equity, diversity, and inclusion

- (SEE <https://aprilhathcock.wordpress.com/2019/01/30/alamw-what-happened-and-what-should-happen-next/>)

Alongside these recommendations, it is equally important that work be done to identify and change the institutional practices that sustain the environment for such hateful incidents. This dynamic, for example, was at play when ALA lawyer, Paula Goedert, acted in a way that caused April Hathcock to feel silenced by the ALA's prioritizing legal defense over her dignity and emotional well-being. Such action stands in great contrast to the long overdue message of empathy the ALA sent in issuing an official apology last year for its history of involvement in Jim Crow segregation.

The PLG believes that its members and others can contribute to this work by taking a critical look at the manner in which institutional practices reproduce oppression. To help move the profession forward in regards to racism and other "isms" at both the individual and institutional levels within ALA and beyond, the PLG would like to offer the following questions that — when honestly, meaningfully engaged with — we believe can help spur the dialogue necessary for such forward motion:

- How might using a racial, social, and/or restorative justice lens inform instructions given to lawyers by librarians, library directors and board members in such moments?
- How should the ALA address other aspects of the legacy of racism in librarianship? For example, should the ALA apologize for the racist incidents surrounding the creation and 1978 release of the film *The Speaker*?
- How can we hold the ALA and other professional spaces accountable when micro-aggressions and verbal abuse happen to members and other attendees?
- How can resources and trainings that assist librarians in engaging with their own biases be made accessible and better utilized?

The PLG encourages our members, as well as other librarians and information professionals, to assist in these endeavors. We hope the work done on these issues will one day lead to the ALA, and librarianship at large, having "an environment of welcome, inclusion, and participation of all ages, genders, races, languages, socio-economic and educational backgrounds in the development and provision of library services and resources," in keeping with the PLG's own commitments (available at <http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/content/commitments.shtml>).