The SRRT Newsletter

Libraries, COVID-19, and Advocating for BIPOC Lives

Dear The SRRT Newsletter Readers,

In March we decided we would dedicate the June issue to the challenges we’ve all been experiencing related to COVID-19, by both library users and library staff. I didn’t imagine then that this would still be impacting all of us so severely – libraries closed but trying to figure out how to slowly reopen, library workers furloughed, businesses closing, communities losing members. And then George Floyd was murdered by a police officer and we are seeing what looks like – and I hope continues to be – a revolution that is sorely needed. What part libraries can play in addressing the systemic racism that has been the underlying and consistent story for more than 400 years in this country is playing out across the United States. There is so much we can do and I look forward to seeing how each library, each community, moves us forward.

It is times like these when I am so glad to be a part of the SRRT community. The commitment on the part of SRRT to speak out about inequities – consistently, persistently – is why I belong to this round table. And possibly why I continue to be a member of ALA. The wheels of bureaucracy move as slowly as the wheels of justice and I was disappointed this year that ALA didn’t take quick advantage of the upcoming Virtual Conference to ensure that those who have never been able to attend ALA, for physical or financial reasons, were included in this year’s conference. It was an EDI moment that was passed over and I was sorry to see this happen. To their credit, they did create a form to encourage ALA members to pay for others to join ALA and be able to attend the conference at the free rate. Unfortunately, the form came less than one week before the registration deadline. Since it wasn’t publicized by ALA, it came too late to have a meaningful effect. However, if the ALA Midwinter Meeting in 2021 also turns out to be a virtual event, we now have the form ready to go.

I hope you come away from this newsletter with information you didn’t already have and thoughts you’d like to share. We’d love to hear from you.

Julie Winkelstein
The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editor

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Special points of interest

- Details of SRRT Afternoon of Social Justice programs
- SRRT’s Commitment to the Struggle Against Racism
**From the SRRT Coordinator-Elect**

I joined the Social Responsibilities Round Table after years of being angry at the social injustices around the world and just as many years feeling powerless to change them. Since joining, I’ve done my best to be an active member and to contribute positively. I am proud of the work I’ve done so far and I look forward to doing more in the years to come. In addition, my involvement with SRRT has given me the motivation to be an activist wherever I go. For years, I worried about the repercussions of outwardly caring, whether that be penalties in my job or alienation from friends and family. SRRT gave me a safe place to “dip my toe” into activism which helped me learn that many of my worries were exaggerated in my own head. However --

When I was first asked if I wanted to write something for *The SRRT Newsletter*, my gut reaction was “no.” There is so much wrong in the world right now - so much that I sometimes don’t know where to look or what action to take. I am still so angry, heartbroken, and lost. I want to hold the names of all those who have died unnecessarily, have been prosecuted or detained, or who have been silenced - but the names overflow from my hands and slip through my fingers. It is as if I’m drowning in the names of those who need me to speak. But how can I deny the call of those who have been silenced? And this is why I’m writing.

When we find ourselves overwhelmed, we have two directions we can take: forward or nowhere. First, I want to tell you that whatever feelings you’re having—anger, hurt, confusion, fear—are valid.

“SRRT gave me a safe place to “dip my toe” into activism which helped me learn that many of my worries were exaggerated in my own head.”

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**ALA Virtual 2020**

Please see the [ALA Virtual Scheduler](#) for details of the programs offered.

- SRRT Chair’s Program: [Herstory through Activism: Women, Libraries, and Activism](#)
- Co-sponsored Program: [Behind the Wires: American Concentration Camps Then and Now](#)

**SRRT Afternoon of Social Justice 2020**

SRRT will be hosting a slate of programs on Monday, June 29. More details in this issue.

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To the ones whose names we know and to the ones we don’t. To those fighting oppression in the U.S. and abroad. To those who face prosecution for their race, gender, orientation, or religion. I see you.

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April Sheppard, SRRT Action Council Coordinator-Elect
SRRT Afternoon of Social Justice

Registration is free and you do not need to be an ALA member. Each session must be individually registered for and a link to recorded sessions will be emailed afterwards for those who can’t attend live.

June 29th, 12:00pm – 4:30pm Eastern Time

Speaker Bios

Join the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table for an Afternoon of Social Justice. This free virtual event features librarians and scholars as they present on a variety of topics including Native American treaty rights, democracy in the time of COVID, and women activism and libraries. Plenty of time will be allowed for questions and discussions after each presentation.

Schedule (Eastern Time):
- 12:00pm – 1:30pm Native American Treaty Rights in the Time of Covid-19
- 1:45pm – 3:15pm Democracy in the Time of COVID
- 3:30pm – 4:30pm Herstory through Activism: Women, Libraries, and Activism

This program is sponsored by the American Indian Library Association and the International Responsibilities Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table.

The struggle to defend the treaty rights of Native Americans has been long and difficult. But the Covid-19 pandemic has presented new challenges to the protection of the voting rights, the environment, and the health and safety of Native American communities. Our panel will address these issues, and what you can do to help.

Register: https://ala-events.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_W8-fkwOeRXCe2HeNSrZjQ

Panelists:
- Tadd Johnson, Senior Director of American Indian Tribal Nations Relations, University of Minnesota
- Winona LaDuke, activist and Executive Director of Honor the Earth
- Dallin Maybee, Assistant Director of Development, Native American Rights Fund

Moderators:
- Cindy Hohl, President-Elect of the American Indian Library Association
- Tom Twiss, Co-Chair, SRRT’s International Responsibilities Task Force

Democracy in the Time of COVID
The focus of this panel discussion will be how COVID19 may impact November’s election and how the ongoing attacks on “vote by mail” could result in massive voter suppression. Panelists will also consider the chimera of voter fraud and how it is being used as a subversive tool to undercut our democracy. The session will begin with a short documentary that goes behind the scenes of the so-called “voter integrity” movement, “Voter Fraudbusters,” from the producers of “Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook.”

Register: https://ala-events.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZsJ09YtzR-eNFvshp218Q
SRRT Afternoon of Social Justice

Panelists:
Carol Anderson, Chair, African American Studies, Emory University and author of “One Person, No Vote”
Mac Heller, Executive Producer, “Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook”
Tomas Lopez, Executive Director, Democracy NC

Moderator:
Melanye Price, Endowed Professor of Political Science, Prairie View A&M and author, “The Race Whisperer: Barack Obama & The Political Uses of Race”

Herstory through Activism: Women, Libraries, and Activism

In honor of the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage and the 50th anniversary of ALA’s Feminist Task Force, this panel presentation will look at the intersections and relationships between women, libraries, and activism. From early literary clubs to today’s radical feminists, libraries have always been a haven for both women and activists. Hear “herstory” from a diverse group of librarians and learn more about how this relationship developed and grew into today’s current activism. See how far we’ve come and what else is left to do.

Note: this is a recording of our ALA Annual presentation. Panelists will be available afterwards for live discussions and questions.

Register: https://ala-events.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_j5Ww9M-HRS2OlK2K0mBwFw

Panelists:
Emily Drabinski, Interim Chief Librarian, Mina Rees Library, CUNY Graduate Center
Dalena Hunter, Librarian/ Archivist for Los Angeles Communities and Cultures, UCLA
Teresa Neely, Professor of Librarianship and Assessment Librarian, University of New Mexico and author of “In our Own Voices, Redux: The Faces of Librarianship Today”

Moderator:
Sherre Harrington, Feminist Task Force Chair

Ethnic & Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) News

EMIERT would like to share their virtual chair’s program, which focuses on providing multicultural spaces in virtual spaces due to the COVID-19 library closures. The program will be held on Friday, June 26, 2020, from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m. Central.

News Around Libraryland
Feminist Task Force (FTF) News

Program at ALA Virtual
Feminist Task Force’s program Herstory through Activism: Women, Libraries and Activism, was selected for ALA Virtual. The program, including a live Q&A with the panelists, will be presented on Thursday, June 25, 10-10:45am CT and repeated at SRRT’s virtual event on June 29.

In honor of the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage and the 50th anniversary of the Social Responsibilities Round Table’s Feminist Task Force, our three panelists will discuss the intersections and relationships between women, libraries, and activism. The panelists are:

- Emily Drabinski, interim chief librarian at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. She edits Gender and Sexuality in Information Studies, a book series from Library Juice Press/Litwin Books.
- Dalena Hunter, Librarian/Archivist for Los Angeles Communities and Cultures in UCLA Library Special Collections. Her work includes improving representations of marginalized communities in special collections and working and supporting community archiving projects. This is her first ALA panel presentation.
- Teresa Y. Neely, Ph.D., professor of librarianship and assessment librarian at UNM in Albuquerque. Dr. Neely has worked in academic research libraries for nearly 30 years, and her most recent publication was In our Own Voices, Redux: The Faces of Librarianship Today, co-edited with Jorge R. López-McKnight. Her current research project, Dismantling Constructs of Whiteness in Higher Education: Narratives of Resistance from the Academy, co-edited with Dr. Margie Montañez, is under contract with Routledge and expected in late 2021.

History of the Task Force
If you’ve been watching the TV drama about the Equal Rights Amendment, Mrs. America, you’ll be prepared to follow along with the librarians who were working on many of the same issues (although apparently without a charismatic nemesis a la Phyllis Schlafly).

The first ALA group to focus on women’s issues, the Feminist Task Force was founded in 1970 as the Task Force on the Status of Women in Librarianship. Its stated focus was the collection and dissemination of information relating to equal opportunity and responsibility for women in the profession. (SRRT Task Force on the Status of Women in Librarianship, no. 1, August 1970)

One of the first actions was a resolution on Equal Opportunity for Women in Librarianship, adopted by ALA Council at midwinter 1971. The resolution committed the organization to taking steps to equalize salaries and opportunities for employment and promotion. The task force polled council candidates, reporting by name whether each councilor endorsed or opposed implementation of the measure. While several councilors did not respond, only Thomas L. Hart said he would actually oppose measures to implement the policy.

Throughout the 70s the task force pushed relentlessly for ALA to adopt policies and practices that are now fundamental – support for pay equity and affirmative action, free childcare at conferences, inclusion of salary ranges in ALA-published job ads, protection from retribution for reporting sexual harassment, the inclusion of sex as a protected category in the Library Bill of Rights, and the elimination of sexist language and content in ALA publications.

The activist women who led the task force also used it as a training ground to go on to fill influential roles within the organization, including ALA President. Reading through archived issues of the task force newsletter, you’ll see Kay Cassell, Jackie Eubanks, Michelle Rudy, Ellen Gay Detlefsen, Patricia Glass Shuman, Elizabeth Futas, Betty Turock, Kathleen Weibel, Anita Schiller and Margaret Myers, just in the first few years.

The task force fostered other ALA women’s groups, including, in 1976, proposing the creation of COSWL, the ALA Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship. Women Library Workers, the ALA Committee on Pay Equity, LLAMA Women Administrators Discussion Group, and the ACRL Women’s and Gender Studies Section are among the groups that have roots in the task force.
Feminist Task Force (FTF) News

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force. At annual 1977, COSWL's resolution committing ALA to holding conferences only in states that had passed the ERA was adopted by Council. In 1978, after ratification failed in Illinois, Council voted to move the 1979 midwinter meeting.

Like other second wave feminist organizations, the task force was predominantly white and slow to recognize the importance of incorporating an examination of racism into its activism. This was even as the ALA Black Caucus, which also celebrates a 50th anniversary this year, was working simultaneously to address racism in the profession and the organization. The first sustained focus on racism did not begin until the mid-1980s, culminating in a June 1987 preconference at UC Berkeley, *Librarians as Colleagues: Working Together Across Racial Lines*. Conceived as a “conference for white people to help other white people to improve each other’s understanding,” the three-day workshop featured activist/organizational consultant Reneta Martin and Frances E. Kendall (author of the 2002 book Understanding White Privilege). The outcome was a list of over 30 strategies for institutional changes, including creation of an ALA division committed to eliminating racism, recruitment of minority students and staff to library schools, and a variety of reform measures targeted at ALA publications. ([Women in Libraries, September 1987, p.2](#))

The task force formed alliances with women’s and other small presses to get their books into libraries. From the beginning, children’s books were a particular focus, with task force members deployed to the conference exhibits to judge whether publishers “provide us with the materials we need and want.” A popular alternative to the Newbery-Caldecott awards, begun in 1970, became known as the Newcott-Caldeberry luncheon. In 2002, the task force initiated *Rise: A Feminist Book Project*, to

Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF) News

In reaction to the closure of libraries across the country because of COVID-19, the Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF) of SRRT created an online Qualtrics survey of libraries, asking about how they were or were not able to serve their unhoused community members during this time. There were more than 400 responses to the survey and HHPTF will be analyzing and reporting the results as soon as possible.

The questions started by asking about the area served: rural, suburban, urban or other, the type of library (public, academic, etc.) and the status of the library: closed, closed but offering some services and so on. Then specific questions about their services included:

- During the pandemic, which services are you able to provide to your unhoused community members?
- During the pandemic, how are you collecting information about the needs of your unhoused community members?
- Describe the biggest barrier your library faces in providing services and resources to your community members who are experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.
- Before the pandemic, what services/resources did you wish you could provide for unhoused community members? What were the barriers to providing those services?
- Are there any previously existing needs of unhoused community members that have become more obvious since the pandemic? If so, what are they? What would need to change about your library in order to serve those needs in the future?

There were a range of answers to these questions, from “Our library is not meant to serve those in need. Our library is meant to be a place for academic study. It’s not a homeless shelter, halfway house, or place to get out of the weather. It’s a library for students. It’s not meant to serve the homeless” to “I wish that public libraries were better funded and recognized for the social work that they do for their communities. Perhaps this pandemic will open the eyes of so many who didn’t value our existence until now, when they don’t have certain services. Our library was
Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF) News

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the community center for the town - there is no other organization filling that void” to “Inequities are becoming apparent during this pandemic to library staff in a way they weren’t before” to “It would be great to get some guidance from ALA, state associations” and many answers in between.

We saw excellent examples of creative programs that libraries are taking to address homelessness in a situation that highlights the need for a consistent, supported, funded, thoughtful approach to addressing homelessness among community members. For example, rural bookmobiles being used as mobile hotspots; most libraries leaving their internet connection online password-free for 24 hours a day and extending the reach of that connection; providing computers to shelters in the area; lending mobile wi-fi hotspots; providing portable toilets and handwashing stations in their parking lots; and, allowing people who are living in cars and vans to park on the library premises while the library closed.

Overall, it was heartening to see the concerns expressed by library staff regarding unhoused community members and the role of libraries in their lives. We look forward to sharing the full results with you in the future.

As usual, please reach out to us with questions or comments or simply to connect. We’d love to hear from you. Julie Winkelstein (jwinkels@utk.edu) and Lisa Gieskes (lgieskes@richlandlibrary.com), HHPTF co-coordinators

"Inequities are becoming apparent during this pandemic to library staff in a way they weren’t before...”

Feminist Task Force (FTF) News

Continued from p. 6

A recent goal has been for ALA to acknowledge the racist, sexist and anti-Semitic beliefs and statements of ALA founder Melvil Dewey. In 2019 the task force introduced the resolution that resulted in the removal of Dewey’s name from ALA’s prestigious leadership award.

FTF is now at a critical moment – where next? We hope you’ll be engaged by the program and join us later for a follow-up planning session.

Submitted by Sherre Harrington, FTF Coordinator

As usual, please reach out to us with questions or comments or simply to connect. We’d love to hear from you. Julie Winkelstein (jwinkels@utk.edu) and Lisa Gieskes (lgieskes@richlandlibrary.com), HHPTF co-coordinators

"Inequities are becoming apparent during this pandemic to library staff in a way they weren’t before...”

Submitted by Julie Winkelstein, HHPTF Co-Coordinator
International Responsibilities Task Force (IRTF) News

SRRT’s Commitment to the Struggle Against Racism

June 9, 2020

The last few weeks have been stressful and upsetting, but also exhilarating. With the rest of the world, members of the Social Responsibilities Round Table again have been shocked, saddened, and outraged by the recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis, and George Floyd. We have been angered by images of police repressing demonstrations against those murders and reporters covering those demonstrations. And we have been disgusted by a president who has denounced peaceful demonstrators as terrorists and who has prepared to employ military forces against them. But we have also been inspired by the explosive reinvigoration of a powerful movement against racism, led by a new generation of Black activists.

For all these reasons, SRRT Action Council has wholeheartedly endorsed the statement condemning racism and violence issued by the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA). We have also provided significant input and endorsed the statement drafted by ALA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee and approved by the ALA Executive Board calling upon ALA “members to support initiatives to end police violence against Black people, to combat the systemic racism that infects our society, and to speak out against all attempts to restrict First Amendment rights.”

Please visit the SRRT website to read more.

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Submitted by Tom Twiss, IRTF Co-Coordinator

Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Task Force (MLKTF) News

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Task Force Statement on Police Brutality and People of Color

“We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.” Martin Luther King Jr., I Have a Dream speech (1963).

When Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his iconic speech during the 1963 March on Washington, police brutality had long plagued black communities. Police brutality was a staple of the civil rights movement in the 60s and has always been a key tenet of modern era policing. During the 60s, images of peaceful protesters were often juxtaposed with scowling police, as they deployed dogs, fire hoses, and other weaponry to discourage African Americans from peacefully assembling. When the images were recorded and broadcast to the world, they were met with shock and outrage as white Americans, especially, grappled with their own attitudes towards civil and human rights for American blacks. As time marched on, cameras became the most reliable source for documenting police brutality. This was especially true in 1991 when a video, detailing the beating of Rodney King at the hands of the LAPD, was released. Since then, cell phones with cameras, and social media have become a reluctant tool in documenting the police’s war on citizens of color. This was particularly evident as the murder of George Floyd, by Minneapolis police, played out on social media and news posts all over the world. And in response, the world lit up with outrage. We can only hope that George Floyd’s death will not be in vain, and ultimately, American citizens will demand that police are held to account for their brutality towards people of color.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Task Force is in solidarity with our BCALA colleagues, who roundly condemned the death of George Floyd at the hands of the police. Also, the Task Force passionately supports Black Lives Matter’s #whatmatters2020 goals and focus. We especially support their demands to: defund/divest funds from the police, ban stop-and-frisk, de-militarize the police, terminate the presence of police at schools, decriminalize sex work, and dissolve police unions.

While the aforementioned campaign particularly focuses on the DC area, the demands listed should be implemented nationwide. It’s important to note that this chapter regarding police reform in the U.S. is long and still incomplete. It’s an exhausting one, but not yet closed. As we are learning more about the death surrounding Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Rayshard Brooks, who all died at the hands of police in 2020 alone, please recognize that none of us should ever be satisfied as long as people of color continue to be the victims of police brutality.

Martin Luther King Jr. Sunrise Celebration

Planning for the Martin Luther King Jr. Sunrise Celebration has begun. We are prepared to go virtual if necessary. More details will be coming soon regarding the January event.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Task Force Statement on Police Brutality and People of Color

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Task Force Archives Project

Virginia B. Moore, Past Chairperson

Our illustrious past Chair, Ginny Moore, gives us an overview of the Dr. King Holiday Task Force archive project below:

FORMATION/ MISSION/ HISTORY

As best remembered, this undertaking began with my holding materials of the National Library Involvement Committee of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission. The documents included activities such as Commission meetings at congressional offices as well as our Committee meetings in Washington, DC and at ALA Annual and Midwinter while devising a way for official ALA affiliation. During that time, Lucille Thomas, (Co-Chair, 1993-1995), introduced me to Charles Harmon because he was with “ALA archives at the University of Illinois Library” and he could help us preserve documents about our work. We talked briefly with his mention of the need to work with the University Library guidelines and the ALA Office of Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS). Later, in meeting Sybil Moses, OLOS Director, guidelines and assistance were offered. However, no consideration could be possible until 1999 when we became the SRRT Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Task Force. Then, Satia Orange, in addition to her work to establish the Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Sunrise Celebration, offered encouragement along with plans to provide the guidelines, and assistance for an OLOS record of the activities and materials donated to the University of Illinois Library. However, with more pressing activities and distractions, the archives were not relevant for many years.

TASK FORCE, OLOS, INPUT AND OTHER INVOLVEMENT

The most recent interest in the project was generated when I used the materials to present the Jean E. Coleman Lecture with the help of Michele Washington, OLOS Director. Most significantly, eminent historian and prominent Task Force advocate, Al Kagan, (Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois), made the generous offer to work on materials sent to him at the University of Illinois. Moreover, his motion provided a $ 500.00 budget for transferring the materials. Also, loyal Task Force booster, Gerardo “Gary” Colmenar, Exec. Director (2006-2012), Asian-Pacific American Library Association, was in contact with an interested faculty member at University of Maryland LIS that changed locations. And ardent Task Force promoter, Julie Winkelstein offered help during a family visit in the Washington, DC area. In addition, I met a private high school librarian at the close of the 2019 ALA Annual who wanted the organizing project for his library club. The school was in my county and within easy access but his effort to arrange space, security, and scheduling was unsuccessful. Accordingly, our staunch and invaluable Task Force Chairperson drafted an appeal for assistance in the SRRT Newsletter that could bring positive response to help us move forward.

OTHER INFORMATION AND ISSUES

• Since 1990, I have been keeping materials (documents) about the activities of the Task Force.

• The documents were randomly placed in folders, notebooks, boxes, etc. (not archival) with labels MLK, SRRT, or ALA. The contents include correspondence, fliers, meeting agendas/minutes, memoranda, news reports, photographs, programs, publications, reports, speeches, and email.

• Special assistance will be needed in Washington, DC Metro to organize, record, and ship the archives.

CONCLUSION

Wholehearted appreciation to everyone that contributed to achievement in this endeavor. Let us continue to work with OLOS (now ODLOS). and ensure that our Task Force archives will provide meaningful information and research to promote Dr. King’s philosophy and legacy for future generations.

Virginia B. Moore, Past Chairperson
Call for Submissions

The SRRT Newsletter is always looking for good articles, essays, and letters to the editor. The next submission deadline is August 31, 2020.

The SRRT Newsletter invites submissions from library and information workers, students, educators, and all others who recognize the critical importance of libraries in addressing community and social issues. Submission content should align with the goals of SRRT: matters of social responsibility and values, current social needs, and opportunities and problems as they relate to libraries, library workers, or the communities they serve.

Please send your submissions electronically in one of the following formats: MS Word, RTF, PDF, or plain text pasted into the body of an email. Submissions should be 500 to 1,000 words. Graphics are encouraged and should be sent separately. If using images that are already on the Internet, the URL of the image and a caption or description may be added to the text of the submission.

Please email original submissions and inquiries to The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editors Melissa I. Cardenas-Dow and Julie Winkelstein, indicating “SRRT Newsletter” in the subject line of your email. A confirmation of receipt will be sent in a timely manner.

Submissions for book or media reviews should be sent to Madeline Veitch, The SRRT Newsletter Reviews Editor, indicating “SRRT Newsletter Review” in the subject line of your email.

Submissions to The SRRT Newsletter Letters to the Editors

The SRRT Newsletter invites readers to submit letters to the editors relating to social responsibilities and libraries. The letters should be respectful and thoughtful, either respond to specific content in the newsletter or include suggestions for topics of interest to SRRT members to be addressed in future issues. We will only publish letters of more than 200 words in exceptional circumstances.

Submit your letters to Laura Koltutsky, member of The SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board. You may submit your letter as an attachment in one of these formats: .doc, .docx; or in the body of your email message.

Letters must include your full name, address, a telephone number and email address if you have one. This is for us only — we don’t share this information.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Task Force (MLKTF) News

If you are interested in helping us with this, please contact me. We are looking specifically for folks who live in the D.C. area and could work directly with Ginny. Thank you for your support.

Laluan S. Pringle, MLKHTF Coordinator

“We can only hope that George Floyd’s death will not be in vain, and ultimately, American citizens will demand that police are held to account for their brutality towards people of color.”

Essay: The Impact of COVID—My Personal Story

How has COVID impacted me? The onset of this virus has been one of both negative and positive outcomes that will lead to a new normalcy both in our profession and in the homes of families. Professionally, I had to adjust to a new work space at home, I have to think of new ways to conduct professional development, and to adjust to work and care for my family. At the end of this pandemic, we as a country will have shared stories and journeys that will change how we envision our lives.

Aunt’s Funeral and COVID - April 4 - 11, 2020

On April 4, 2020, I received a phone call from my mom that my Aunt Lynn had a stroke and was at the hospital. My first thought was to drive to the hospital to see how she was doing, but due to the pandemic, there were hospital restrictions on visitations, so I was unable to see her. My mom had to argue with the hospital staff to allow my uncle, my aunt’s spouse, to be at her bedside. He was the only one that had knowledge of her health condition. Unfortunately, due to the complications with my aunt’s leukemia, there was nothing the hospital could do for her and she ended up in hospice and succumbed to her illness.

Though my aunt did not have COVID, her death was affected by it. Her funeral was held via Zoom, so we as a family could not physically gather and console each other. No hugging each other or being able to tell each other how much we loved her and other members of our family. It was very emotionally draining for all of us to not be able to have that proper goodbye.

Continues on p. 11
**Essay: The Impact of COVID—My Personal Story**

Continued from p. 10

**Mental Health and COVID - March 21 - April 20**

The next major impact of COVID was on my older son and his mental illness. He struggles from anxiety and depression. Him being sheltered in as well as other struggles in his life made his thinking very unstable. He feared for his and his family’s well-being, that we would catch the virus. He missed out on activities that would have brought him great enjoyment like traveling to Atlanta for his birthday. I stepped in right away, checked on him daily to ensure he didn’t feel isolated and alone. Out of this formed a Zoom family movie night every Saturday. Family members would pick any movie and we would watch, in addition to a 30-minute check in session at the beginning.

**COVID Survivors - April 17 - Now**

My husband, younger son, and I are all COVID survivors. My husband is an essential healthcare worker with underlying health conditions and he had brought the virus home.

We quarantined him as soon as he started experiencing symptoms and I cared for him. I wore a mask and gloves as well as made sure the house was sanitized.

The virus ended up dividing our home and took a tremendous toll on our family. My husband’s health declined with his struggling to breathe. I did my best to care for him while trying to be strong for the family at the same time. Watching him like this was emotionally draining. I ended up calling emergency medical services. They came in the nick of time. My husband’s oxygen level had dropped to 50%. He was rushed to the hospital where he is still.

His strength has been amazing. He wanted to make sure everyone was aware he was okay because we were not able to be by his bedside. He took selfies and texted us until he was finally placed on a ventilator. He didn’t want to be placed on it, but it was necessary for his survival.

For me, my husband’s hospitalization has been a rollercoaster of emotions. I had to make major life decisions for placing him on dialysis, placing him on an extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) ventilator, and adding a trach tube. Not being able to physically visit him, I still had to be the primary communicator of his condition to our family on a daily basis. I receive calls everyday from his medical team. We do FaceTime and Zoom to keep my husband from feeling lonely. He flatlined three times and survived. My husband now is breathing on his own, standing up using a walker, and will be doing his rehabilitation at home in about three weeks. All this is thanks to a great medical team of doctors, nurses, residents, respiratory therapists, and countless health care staff.

While I cared for my husband, I also had to take care of my younger son and myself. Our symptoms quickly went from mild to moderate. I had experienced all of the symptoms made publicly known, except for the shortness of breath and cough. I diligently ate healthily every day, took my vitamins, and drank plenty of water. I was afraid that this virus would take me away from my husband, my sons, and my grandkids. All the while, I worked with the medical team from the hospital and managed care for my husband. I was very fearful that I would be hospitalized too, which would have taken me from caring for my younger son.

My younger son had all of the symptoms except shortness of breath. He was worried about me and was trying to be there for me. It was amazing and touching all at the same time. He developed chest pains which took me totally off guard. He is 25 and in great health. We both pulled through and are truly survivors.

**COVID Takes My Father -in-Law - April 27 - May 12**

In top of everything we had already endured, my father-in-law tested positive for the virus. He ended up in the hospital a week after my husband. He started out on the oxygen mask for two days and then ended up on the ventilator. He was stable but was touch and go for a few days. But then, all of a sudden, he took a turn for the worst. There was no way to control his oxygen level and blood pressure. He had an intestinal infection.

We all had to say our goodbyes to him via FaceTime and he ended up succumbing to the virus on May 12th, a week after his birthday.

I know this is a lot to take in but the positives of this virus is that it brought our family closer together. It built strength in me and I used it on behalf of my husband. I was calm and strong when I spoke with the medical team. I asked plenty of questions. Still, behind closed doors, I had my moments. I had to make decisions to save my husband’s life. To see the positive results of those decisions is amazing to behold. This experience has reintroduced me to my faith in God and I realized the great support system I have in my family, my coworkers and managers, and my friends.

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Submitted by Monica Porter
Public Services Librarian, University of Michigan, University Library

“At the end of this pandemic, we as a country will have shared stories and journeys that will change how we envision our lives.”
increased from 30 in 1979 to more than 1,000.

In New York City, for example, the number of EFPs increased dramatically since the 1980s. In New York (CUNY) professor Maggie Dickinson examines factors around food insecurity in the United States and how shifts in policy since the 1980s have resulted in a food safety net that is centered in charity and has supplants wage growth and other income-based supports. Situated in her ethnographic field research as a food pantry volunteer and benefits advocate in Brooklyn, NY, Dickinson’s research uses the real-world, lived examples of other volunteers and food pantry users to unravel the ways policy and politics have led to an over-reliance on emergency food providers as a response to stagnant wages and job insecurity. Dickinson argues that the food safety net in America has actually expanded since the 1980s, tied to three major issues: changes to the delivery of benefits in the modern U.S. welfare state; the reliance on charity and public-private partnerships to manage (not end) poverty; and increased attention to the rise in obesity and related health concerns.

Increasingly, government benefits to low-income people have become tied to work. Thus, low wage, on-the-books workers are able to access food benefits like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) that those who are not working—or who cannot prove they are working—are denied. In addition to playing into existing ideas around the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, this policy move also means that “these benefits have become a key incentive and a key punishment, encouraging working people to accept the increasingly poor terms employers are offering them” (p. 10). Thus, individuals are often forced to take a job for poor wages that does not work with their family responsibilities or that is difficult to get to in order to document they are working and therefore deserving of food benefits. Those who cannot accept those conditions, cannot work, or are working under the table, are locked out of government benefits and must turn to the vast network of emergency food providers (EFPs) that currently number in the thousands.

Dickinson points out that the number of soup kitchens and food pantries in the U.S. has increased dramatically since the 1980s. In New York City, for example, the number of EFPs increased from 30 in 1979 to more than 1,000 today. EFPs are almost exclusively staffed by volunteers, most often community members who use the food service themselves. While conventional wisdom holds that the shelves are stocked by food drives and private donations, the bulk of the food EFPs make available comes through the USDA, which purchases surplus commodities that are distributed to food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens. Budget cuts or low levels of surplus mean fewer items on the shelves at EFPs around the country. According to Dickinson, “Emergency Food Providers, structured by state funding, but not identifiable as state institutions, are inextricably linked to both the market and the state” (p. 115). Disguised by the masks of charity and volunteerism, the benefits received by individuals via EFPs become impervious to the kinds of collective action that could be leveled at direct government aid. Even when pickings are slim in EFPs, the narrative is that at least it’s better than nothing, and that the volunteers don’t have to do what they are doing.

Concerns about obesity and food-related illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease are framed as public (or personal) health issues, but as Dickinson argues, are inextricably linked to work, the market, and the state. Thus, it is not individuals’ health and quality of life that are at the root of the concern, but the potential loss of the individual as a healthy, productive worker, and the subsequent costs to government in benefits and health care. Dickinson explains, “Not tending to your body is a sign of neglect, not just at the personal level, but a neglect of your duty to be productive for the greater good—for the market. It is each individual’s duty to invest in their own human capital. Obesity, then, is seen as a failure to consider one’s own long-term economic viability” (p. 139). Thus, food benefits are linked to ideas of healthy eating in order to produce and sustain work-ready bodies, while ignoring the reality that even with benefits, many low income people can only afford food that is unhealthy and nutritionally poor, since these are the cheapest and most available foods.

Dickinson has created a work that is both highly readable and deeply troubling. Her book challenges many of the assumptions around poverty, benefits, and food in this country, and is increasingly relevant as the COVID-19 pandemic shines a devastating light on the prevalence of food insecurity and hunger. In an April 2020 opinion piece in the journal Agriculture and Human Values, Dickinson argues that food workers

were viewed as cheap and disposable before the crisis, are now deemed essential. And yet, they have not been provided with the protections and pay commensurate with their status. They are being asked to risk their lives for paltry wages and with no protections so that the rest of us can eat...Food workers are the canaries in the coal mine of a labor market and a safety net that keeps people mired in poverty and on the edge of hunger. But they are also leading the way—disrupting business as usual with walk outs and strikes at companies like Whole Foods and Instacart to demand higher pay and control over their work environments.

As in her book, she advocates for systemic changes to wages and work, a wholesale restructuring of how we view poverty and benefits, so that those who can and want to work can do so for fair wages and with adequate rights and protections.

I strongly recommend Feeding the Crisis: Care and Abandonment in America’s Food Safety Net for everyone interested in food justice issues, anti-poverty work, and labor issues.

Reviewed by Vikki Terrile, The SRRT Newsletter