I hope the best for your health and your work as we continue with the challenge of COVID-19. In this issue, we have taken a closer look at what libraries are doing to support voting in their communities. The role of libraries in helping people register and vote can be a critical one, especially in states that have so many barriers to voting, such as requiring a witness to sign a mail-in ballot (e.g., Wisconsin), requiring a copy of an acceptable ID to be included with a mail-in ballot (e.g., Alabama) or not allowing ballot drop boxes (e.g., Tennessee). We encourage libraries to provide as much information as possible for local voters, so they know where and how to register and vote and what they need to do that. There are some excellent websites that provide specific information about local voting and registrations, such as Vote.org and VoterRiders helps people actually obtain the ID they need. GODORT has put together a Voting and Election toolkit. HHPTF has also put together a template that can be used to guide libraries in providing relevant and timely accurate voting and registration information for each community. The document also provides a short annotated list of recommended websites.

I also want to mention the SRRT newsletter archives. These archives offer an opportunity to look at the history of SRRT through the newsletters and I highly encourage browsing them.

If you have comments, suggestions, ideas about the SRRT newsletter, we’d love to hear from you!

Julie Winkelstein
The SRRT Newsletter Co-Editor
From the SRRT Coordinator-Elect

SRRT in the Age of COVID-19

Even before the pandemic, 2020 was shaping up to be an important, nerve-wracking year for the Social Responsibilities Round Table. The year started with discussions of Forward Together, its potential impact on round table representation, and the effect it may have on round tables themselves. In every conversation I had, the toll of the uncertainty was apparent.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic happened. In many ways, the impact of COVID on SRRT and ALA is not surprising. All of our questions and concerns about Forward Together became amplified. Many library personnel and ALA staff struggled to balance our sense of duty and service with our need for self-preservation. And as our libraries closed and our work went virtual, many of us struggled with feelings of being disconnected from our peers and with questions about the role libraries should play in their communities. Should we be open? Should we not? It did not help that every other email we received made sure to remind us that we were “in unprecedented times.”

As the pandemic continues, we began to see the impact on ALA. I should state here, that I do not blame ALA for being affected by a global pandemic — I think for years to come, most of us will be able to draw a line between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic times. But the impact on ALA did trickle down and affected SRRT too. First, there was the adjustment to working virtually in a changing world. Information became bogged down and we began having problems receiving the information we need to run effectively, such as financial and membership reports.

Second, ALA Annual went virtual for the first time ever. For many, conferences are important tools for developing connections with their peers. Finally, ALA began furloughing staff in August, which in turn, changed how we communicate with our designated staff and how we plan for meetings and events. We’re still adjusting.

Despite these challenges, 2020 has not been hopeless. ALA Virtual opened up the conference to those who normally would not be able to physically travel. It created a new way for library personnel to make connections. It also provided SRRT with the opportunity to have our first virtual program and virtual meeting. We also learned of the possibility for sponsoring ALA memberships so that members could attend Annual. After ALA Virtual, we hosted a free, online event, SRRT Afternoon of Social Justice, which featured three programs that were recorded and placed on our YouTube playlist for future viewing. We have also begun having monthly virtual meetings.

I am very impressed with how SRRT members, Action Council, and our designated ALA staff have looked for opportunities instead of falling into a pit of despair and what-ifs. We have grown so much in these last few months and I look forward to continuing to grow together. Discussions have already begun about possibilities for our next Afternoon of Social Justice virtual event, but if you have additional ideas for events or for how SRRT can be successful in a virtual environment, please do not hesitate to contact me.

“Despite these challenges, 2020 has not been hopeless.”

April Sheppard, SRRT Action Council Coordinator-Elect
Run for SRRT Action Council & SRRT Councilor for ALA Council

Please consider running for SRRT Action Council. Action Council, the coordinating body of the Social Responsibilities Round Table, is 10 SRRT members (elected by the SRRT membership) and one ALA Councilor (also elected by the SRRT membership).

SRRT has 3 Action Council terms and one ALA Councilor expiring in 2021. The terms are 3-year terms. Action Council meets during the ALA Midwinter and Annual conferences. Those elected this spring will have terms starting at the end of the 2021 Annual Conference and running through the end of the 2024 Annual Conference. Current Action Council members whose terms are up are eligible to run again.

To run for a position, you will need to fill out the form for ALA Division/Section and Round Tables in order to have your name placed on the ballot. You do need an account or sign in before filling out the form. Go to the Divisions/Roundtables ballots for SRRT Action Council ballot. The more complete the information you provide the better it is for all of us when we are voting. Deadline for completing the ballot form is December 3, 2020. Please contact Charles Kratz, SRRT Action Council Past Coordinator for more information or any questions.

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Submitted by Charles Kratz, SRRT Action Council Past Coordinator

June 29, 2-4 p.m. The meeting began with a discussion culminating in an unanimous condemnation of the “Survey of the Priorities of Members of ALA.” Betty Turock said she had been hearing a lot of talk about ALA being better off if there were less diversity of opinion within the membership. Herb Biblo felt the survey findings had been tilted so it would appear that ALA members were growing less concerned with the issues of social responsibility. Jackie Eubanks observed that this was an insult to the ALA membership who had created SRRT in the first place. Jim Dwyer suggested that the seemingly low priority assigned by members responding to issues of social responsibility in the survey resulted from an erroneous classification of what does and does not constitute social responsibility. Herb asked, “Who determined what social responsibility is?” Jackie further commented that the result of the survey findings, if accepted as valid, would subvert democratic processes within ALA. Michael Diodati suggested that an ALA resolution be drawn up criticizing...
Six days before the deadline for the virtual ALA Annual conference 2020, ALA created a gift membership form. Although it was too late for Annual, the dates on the form have been updated and this form can be used for the upcoming Virtual Midwinter conference 2021. As with Annual 2020, ALA is offering free attendance at the conference to ALA members who have been furloughed, who are unemployed or low-income. As they say on the ALA website:

> If you’ve recently been furloughed, laid off, or are experiencing a reduction of paid work hours, we invite you to join us for no cost at all. During the registration process, you can indicate your circumstance to receive your complimentary registration. ([https://2021.alamidwinter.org/faqs](https://2021.alamidwinter.org/faqs))

I appreciate that ALA is offering free attendance for members and so the only barrier to attendance becomes membership itself. SRRT is committed to providing funds to help pay for the basic $53 membership, so people who can’t afford the membership and who would like to attend the conference are able to do so. This virtual conference offers an excellent opportunity for ALA to be more all-inclusive. This hasn’t been true for in-person conferences – there are many who can’t afford the airfare, hotels, and time off to be able to attend. We see this as an excellent chance to bring in more voices and life experiences, as well as providing access to the same programs and information as those who have the means and time to attend. If you’re interested and able to pay for a membership for another person, the form is available online and this issue of The SRRT Newsletter. We encourage round tables and affiliates to commit their own funds to this cause. In this challenging time, we can find community in myriad ways and working together so all can attend is one of those ways.

Submitted by Julie Ann Winkelstein, The SRRT Newsletter co-editor
Volunteer for FTF

Feminist Task Force is looking for volunteers! Have ideas? This is your chance to put them into action. Feminist Task Force has always been a place where anyone can get involved and where ideas can take off quickly. That’s true now more than ever with virtual options at our disposal. And the success of our ALA Virtual 2020 program (reprised at SRRT’s Afternoon of Social Justice) demonstrates that there’s abundant interest in continuing conversation and activism.

But we need for you to get involved! Please consider volunteering in one of these ways:

• **Coordinator** (or perhaps Coordinator-Elect, if you’re not ready to commit to Coordinator right away). Taking on responsibility as FTF Coordinator is an opportunity for real leadership within ALA and the broader library community. The Coordinator facilitates all activities of the Task Force, including planning activities and meetings, initiating new programs and projects, and collaborating with and supporting project coordinators such as the Rise co-chairs.

• **Representative to the SRRT Action Council.** Sometimes the Coordinator, sometimes a delegate, the FTF representative to SRRT Action Council reports on FTF activities and is a voting member of Action Council on non-financial matters. Action Council is currently meeting virtually the last Thursday of the month, 12-2pm Central. A new Coordinator could take on this responsibility, but the current Coordinator needs to delegate this responsibility because of election as Action Council chair-elect.

• **Program coordinators & project facilitators.** Got an idea related to feminism & libraries? FTF can support you! Programs and projects can range from facilitating a virtual discussion group on a topic of interest to developing formal proposals for programs at ALA conferences to bringing to reality an idea that meshes with FTF’s mission.

• **Women of Library History.** We also have a long-standing project that needs new coordinators. Women of Library History took a break in 2020, but no decisions about its future have been made. At minimum, the existing content needs a new home, but this is also an opportunity to take this project in new directions!

We’re planning a virtual FTF meeting – it would be great to hear from you soon so we can make sure you’ll be able to participate! **Volunteer!**

Submitted by Sherre Harrington, Feminist Task Force Coordinator
Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force (HHPTF) News

From April to June, the SRRT Hunger, Homelessness & Poverty Task Force sent out a survey asking libraries how, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they are meeting the needs of community members who are experiencing homelessness. As a new member of the task force, I was eager to see the results.

Of the more than 400 responses we received, I was surprised at how some libraries appeared resistant to the idea of providing equitable service to unhoused patrons. One response in particular stood out to me:

“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.”

While many responses in the survey outlined services and resources that libraries provided for their community members experiencing homelessness, some saw the act of doing this as “mission creep” or, as we see in the above response, tried to dismiss the need to consider unhoused community members in their library operations.

As academic librarians and library staff members, we need to understand that those students we serve and who may use the library as “a place of academic study” could very well be experiencing homelessness.

As an academic library staff member myself, I am particularly invested in ways academic libraries can support students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice’s April 2019 publication, “College and University Basic Needs Insecurity: A National #RealCollege Survey Report,” surveyed nearly 86,000 students across the country and found that 60% percent of students at “two-year institutions and 48% at four-year institutions [experienced] housing insecurity” and that 18% of students were affected by homelessness at “two-year institutions and 14% at four-year institutions.”

Just last year, when I was still in college, I knew multiple fellow undergraduate students who didn’t have stable housing and/or experienced periods of homelessness. This was before the pandemic hit the U.S., and I know that those students relied on the library for a place to study and for stable internet access, and likely in other ways they didn’t share with me. Clearly, homelessness and housing insecurity impacts college students, and with the pandemic causing financial strain for millions of people, we must unfortunately assume that these numbers will increase.

We know that academic libraries are important resources for students, so academic librarians and staff need to be cognizant of these students and their needs, or they’re going to fall between the cracks. Academic libraries’ workers already have the tools necessary to support these students: we must continue to consider the needs of our communities, listen to students, and be in touch with campus life. Additionally, let’s remember to think beyond the needs of a “traditional” student, who is often an upper-middle class, housed, able-bodied, white, non-transfer, non-first generation twenty-something that has a positive relationship with their family.

Some academic libraries have created Lib-Guides to help point students in the direction of resources if they experience housing insecurity or homelessness. Some great examples...
of such guides include the University of Pittsburgh “Pitt and Community Assistance Resources” guide, Palm Beach State College’s “Community Resources: Housing Insecurity/Homelessness & More” guide, and the Queensborough Community College’s “Student Basic Needs Supports” guide. I also recommend the presentation “Beyond Books: How College Libraries Can Support Students’ Basic Needs” from the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth’s 2019 conference.

With many librarians and library staff members working from home, we must challenge ourselves even more to consider these students’ needs and perspectives as we begin the fall semester.

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Submitted by Meghan Brody, guest contributor and Hunger, Homelessness, & Poverty Task Force member.

Meghan Brody is a Discovery Services Professional Aide at Michigan State University Libraries in East Lansing, Michigan. She has been a member of the ALA SRRT’s Hunger, Homelessness, & Poverty Task Force since April 2020. Questions and comments can be directed to Meghan via email.

“\textit{The Other America seems just as relevant today as when Dr. King Jr. first spoke of it.}”

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

In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a speech entitled “The Other America” to Stanford University. This speech cites two stark realities for American citizens. Dr. King Jr. speaks of one America as “overflowing with the milk of prosperity and the honey of opportunity. This America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies; and culture and education for their minds; and freedom and human dignity for their spirits.” According to Dr. King Jr, this America allows young people to “grow up in the sunlight of opportunity.” But there is the Other America. Dr. King Jr. says the Other America “has a daily ugliness about it that constantly transforms the ebulliency of hope into the fatigue of despair.” This America is besieged by unemployment, poverty, and despair. As we fast forward to today, one asks if The Other America is still relevant today? I believe it is. In 2011, Michael Moore revealed that the Forbes 400 boasted more wealth than the bottom 50% of U.S. households combined. With an even timelier topic, we also know that the African American and Latinx communities are disproportionately affected by police violence. The Other America seems just as relevant today as when Dr. King Jr. first spoke of it.

We are currently planning the next Martin Luther King Jr. Sunrise Celebration. This will be a virtual celebration. It has been tentatively scheduled for \textit{Monday, January 25, 2021} with a start time yet to be determined. The theme is The Other America. More details will be coming with regards to keynote and call to action speakers. This program is being planned in conjunction with the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), Beacon Press, and OCLC. We’re looking forward to an exciting and reflective celebration.

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Submitted by LaJuan Pringle, MLK Jr Holiday Task Force Coordinator.
What Libraries are Doing to Support Voting and Voting Rights:
Two Voices

I am a librarian at one of the largest community colleges in the nation within the City University of New York (CUNY). The Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) typically has 23,000-27,000 students (head count) each semester. Our college is as diverse as our city is. Like most large city community colleges, our students usually fall into three broad categories: straight out of high school, immigrant/foreign students learning the American higher education system, and (my beloved) non-traditional age students who are returning to higher education at a more mature age.

Since we shuttered for COVID back in early March of 2020, my department quickly set up an effective chat reference platform thanks to SpringShare/LibGuides/LibAnswers where students and faculty alike are met with the invitation to “chat” with a reference librarian remotely. As shelter-in-place/quarantine/lockdown progressed with all its stringent stipulations for venturing outside, especially in New York City, we learned of the horrible attacks on Asians and BIPOC which led to civil unrest resulting in peaceful demonstrations declaring ‘enough is enough.’ These were not always met peacefully by those sworn to protect all residents and citizens living within the United States. In the background of all of this, the 2020 presidential election season went into high gear as well.

I wanted to reach out to our students to somehow take peaceful strong action. I started with those who came to us remotely for help, which was not always library related, as many academic librarians know. Given the tumultuous year that 2020 is, I felt led to have as many of our students know that someone cares about their constitutional right to vote if they are a naturalized or native citizen of the United States and are above the age of 18. So, at the end of most of my chats after they received my help, I add this simple plea:

Please please register to VOTE: https://vote.gov/Register & then actually vote. Please.

In this small way, I hope I am reaching enough people to make a difference.

~ Dorothea J. Coiffe-Chin, Associate Professor, Reference Librarian, Borough of Manhattan Community College/CUNY

When the SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board started talking about this fall issue and getting information to and from libraries and library works about supporting voting and voter rights, I didn’t think I would have much to share. New York had offered absentee ballots for anyone for the June primary election, and despite significant problems with that election, the Governor recently signed an executive order allowing absentee ballots again for the November elections. At the same time, with my campus and library physically closed for the fall semester, supporting voting didn’t seem like something we could do. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized these were excuses and that especially in this context, I needed to act and do what I could to support students’ and their right to vote.

Our campus has a Campus Voter Registration Coordinator who is also our Director of Student Leadership and Development, so my first step was to reach out to her and see how she thought the library could help. They already have a presence on the college website connecting students to voter registration forms and other resources. In my initial email, I had two suggestions for what I thought the library could do: create a virtual display around voting and voting rights on the library’s homepage, as I had done in June with a Black Lives Matter display; encourage librarians to plug QCC’s voting resources and voting in general during our push-in information literacy (IL) sessions with students. I was pleased that I got a quick response to my email and was able to meet online with the Coordinator and the Student Life Specialist within just a couple of days after reaching out.

Based on their enthusiasm and support, I went ahead with a virtual display and a LibGuide that highlights voter registration information in New York City and New York State, as well as information on voter suppression and organizations fighting to combat it. The LibGuide is also linked on the campus voting page, so there is good circular promotion happening there. I shared the LibGuide with my library peers and explained the importance of highlighting the LibGuide as a resource and/or mentioning voting as part of our information literacy. While no one objected, no one was particularly enthusiastic about talking about voting during IL instruction, either, so this will be an ongoing effort on my part. It’s hard to tell how any students will see the LibGuide or display unless we direct them there; these pages are somewhat hidden on the library’s homepage even if the students manage to get themselves to our site in the first place. Thus, I make sure to show and talk about the LibGuide during every synchronous IL session I am teaching and to include it as a resource in my asynchronous IL materials as well.

~Vikki Terrile, Assistant Professor, Public Services and Assessment Librarian/Co-Coordinator of Instruction, Queensborough Community College/CUNY, SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board

Submitted by Vikki Terrile, SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board
News Around Libraryland

Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) Resources and Tools Supporting Social Justice Work

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL), an ALA affiliate, is an international organization of librarians, archivists, researchers, writers, and teachers. The ideas of Social Justice infuse everything AJL does. Our association strives to create strong Jewish libraries, because they educate Jews to engage pride in their religious and cultural traditions and educate others to help them understand the Jewish people. Some of the many of the AJL activities that promote social justice are:

- **Developing a series of book lists for young readers**, titled Love Your Neighbor. Initiated in response to the horrific act of domestic terrorism at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA in October 2018, and in continuing response to rising antisemitism in the United States, the Association of Jewish Libraries began a series of book lists for young readers. The Jewish books recommended on these lists are meant to be shared with all readers, including non-Jewish children and teens. Books read in youth impact future outlooks, and meeting Jews on the page will inspire friendship when readers meet Jews in real life. The entire Love Your Neighbor series of book lists can be found at the webpage Love Your Neighbor. Book List #1: Standing Up For Each Other, features stories of Jews and non-Jews standing up for each other, working out differences, and confronting prejudice. Book List #4: Let’s Be Friends features stories of Jews and non-Jews enjoying each other’s company, sharing food, skills, support, and friendship. List #7: The Black Jewish Experience highlights the experiences of Black Jews.

- **Working with others in the area of information for and about religious minorities.** AJL member, Heidi Rabinowitz, an AJL officer, and Kitaab World founder, Sadaf Saddique, wrote We Need Diverse Jewish and Muslim Books: A Conversation in the March 27, 2020 issue of the Horn Book. Additionally, they were scheduled as a panel for the 2020 ALA Annual Conference, “Combating Antisemitism and Islamophobia with Multicultural Children’s Literature.” When the conference went virtual, the panel was cut; however, the Ethnic Materials Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) is preparing the presentation as an EMIERT webinar.

- **Diversity bloggers working together.** The Association of Jewish Libraries invites diversity book bloggers, websites, and podcasts to participate in Through the Window: A Diversity Exchange. This initiative is designed to fight antisemitism and other forms of bias through education and allyship. Participating Jewish and non-Jewish websites are paired to swap guest posts.

- **The AJL website has two important knowledgebases.**
  - The Jewish Values Finder helps users identify books for children and teens by the values and ethical behavior they depict. Here are just a few of the values included that relate to social justice: social activism/tikun olam (healing the world), bringing peace between people/ha va’at shalom bein adam lahavero, loving one’s neighbor/v’ahavta l’reyacha, respecting and appreciating differences, and tolerance/sovilut.
  - The Bibliography Bank lists bibliographies for both adults and children; however, most of the bibliographies are children’s books. Although none of the lists are specifically about social justice, many relate to the Holocaust, and there are lists on gratitude, immigration, ecology, and visiting the sick.

- **Recent AJL statements.**
  - In response to the spate of antisemitic attacks, especially those that took place during the Hanukkah holiday in December 2019, AJL posted a Statement from the Association of Jewish Libraries Regarding Recent Antisemetic Acts.
  - Then, six months later, in response to the murder of George Floyd, AJL posted an All Statement on Violence.

These are just a few of the social action activities of AJL. Because social action is a touchstone of Jewish life, AJL will continue to respond in whatever way necessary to support everyone in the communities we serve, whether Jewish or not.

Submitted by Emily Bergman, AJL Liaison to ALA and Chair of the Jewish Information Committee of EMIERT
**Essay: What We’re Doing at Springfield-Greene County Library**

As America’s most trusted institutions, libraries have a responsibility to be on the right side of history if and when the heat on this embroiled year finally dissipates.

Here at the Springfield-Greene County Library in Missouri, our pandemic response has been to follow the advice and guidelines of local government officials. After a local lockdown that lasted around six weeks, our library offered drive-through services while safety and social-distancing measures were put into place to open our doors. With new plexiglass barriers at public desks, and repurposing meeting rooms as quarantine areas for materials, our branches opened with limited hours to the public in early June. In August, city officials passed a mask mandate that effectively required masks be worn by all patrons and employees at our branches. In our region we are lucky to live in a city that has taken action on mandatory mask wearing.

Prior to the lockdown, our library was working closely with the 2020 Census providing meeting rooms for recruitment, allowing access to public spaces for Census, and designating specific computer terminals at each branch for patrons to complete their census survey online. While the pandemic derailed most of the federal infrastructure aimed at facilitating an accurate and comprehensive census, our library has recognized the potential issues of conducting a fair presidential election this November. To that end, our district facilitated notary training for one staff member at each of our two largest branches to provide free notary service to aid our patrons with mail-in ballots.

“As America’s most trusted institutions, libraries have a responsibility to be on the right side of history if and when the heat on this embroiled year finally dissipates.”

In response to racism and the resulting social unrest, Springfield-Greene County Library is taking steps to reinforce our position that anyone and everyone is welcome in our facilities through signage and dedicate a page on our website featuring Black Voices, Black Lives. Our administration has also provided training and is conducting listening sessions with staff to better understand our expectations and solicit input on ways to improve diversity and inclusion within our institution.

On balance, I believe our library is working hard to ensure that our resources support and promote a healthy democracy, social equality, and an end to racism.

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Submitted by Kyle Evans, SRRT Newsletter Editorial Board
Pennsylvania is a battleground state.

As a public library director, who happens to be in Pennsylvania, I prioritize the development and provision of programming and services that help individuals to be full participants in society. That focus includes programming that provides information on the issues about which individuals are asked to make decisions and which can enhance the quality of their lives. Simultaneously, it is critical that libraries are neutral, provide access to quality information reflecting a wide range of perspectives, and provide a safe space.

Obviously, the pandemic has raised concerns about in-person voting. The J. Lewis Crozer Library serves community members, who face a range of economic and other challenges throughout the year, such that registering to vote and voting may not seem to be high priorities for some. As a city of approximately 34,000, Chester is one of the most diverse locations in the state, with a population that is approximately 75% African American, 17.2% White, and 9-11% Hispanic. The poverty rate is approximately 33%, with nearly 50% of children and teens living in poverty.

In the state, voting by mail is being supported by the expansion of the number of ballot drop boxes that will be located throughout the state. When staff of the Delaware County Bureau of Elections contacted the mayor of Chester and a member of the city council regarding "the preferred location for the installation of the Ballot Drop Box" in the city, they recommended the public library.

It is gratifying for the library to be identified, we hope, because of its importance as an anchor institution in the community, as a location that is known and familiar to residents, and as a space that is seen as neutral and nonpartisan. As of now, at least four of the fifty ballot drop boxes in the county will be located at public libraries.

As residents (both of Chester and other parts of the state) visit the library, library staff can encourage them to drop off their completed ballots safely, in the secure drop boxes, themselves surveilled by the separate, mounted security cameras, with a solar feed to the county monitors, and safely, with complete social distancing. The library’s marketing of its current contactless pickup and return of library materials, virtual library programming, and slowly resuming access to the high-demand library services, such as photocopying, faxing, and use of public computers and internet access, can now include marketing of the library as a conveniently-located ballot drop-off option, including for those who question the effectiveness of mail delivery at this time or for whom travel to an election bureau location is inconvenient or, for some, impossible.

As the drop box and the security camera are installed, each in a concrete base, the role of the library in supporting the engagement of residents in this key aspect of the political process is made permanent and ‘set in stone.’ And, the images of the ballot drop box at the library will now be a part of photos that represent the library for a wide range of audiences, helping to illustrate the centrality of encouraging individuals’ full participation in the political process in the library’s mission.

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Submitted by Mark Winston, Executive Director of J. Lewis Crozer Library, Chester, PA

"As of now, at least four of the fifty ballot drop boxes in the county will be located at public libraries."
Imagine a library devoted to social justice in all its interlocking and evolving forms. Imagine that library loaded with books and periodicals, brimming with programs and resplendent with posters, murals, photographs and crafts. Add to it a collection that integrates immigration and the local community—perhaps the largest Hmong archive in the world.

Welcome to the East Side Freedom Library (ESFL) in St. Paul, Minnesota. Not all librarians would feel at home at the ESFL (even aside from the politics). Public, academic, and school librarians might cringe at the blatant and blasphemous violation of library norms. Books are unlabeled, shelved and located by a mere slip of paper with the LC call number. The primary classification is by the book’s donor (there are 19 of them), and then arranged by LC within each collection. Books are shelved at vertigo-inducing heights with the upper reaches available only with rolling freestanding library ladders. Weeding has recently become necessary because ceilings are, after all, ceilings. Only duplicates are weeded and books with notes and underlining are given preference in the process. Writing in the books by donor is viewed as a plus, giving readers possible insight into the donor’s thoughts, and context for the collection understood as an idiosyncratic whole. There are no public computers, printers or copiers; nor reference librarians, security systems, bar codes, carrels or orderly arrays of tables and chairs. Library consortium or ILL? No. And there is no book budget or collection development policy (or dutiful perusal of Library Journal, Choice or Baker & Taylor catalogs); Peter buys a few hundred books each year with his own money to keep the collection current. This is not your typical library.

In addition to Peter Rachleff’s extensive collection, almost twenty other scholars have donated their own personal libraries. Contributions from teachers of history, music, women’s studies and the arts have established the following subject strengths: labor and radical history, immigration, African American history, Asian American history, political philosophy, jazz and radical music history and women’s history/feminism. Bruce Willms, the head cataloger, has decades of cataloging experience, and has trained over sixty volunteers over the years, to help catalog the Library’s 20,000+ collection. The materials are cataloged in the web-based Koha system and the catalog is accessible on the ESFL website, along with biographical sketches of the book donors. (Special note to catalogers: Bruce could use some assistance in processing some materials in Southeast Asian languages: Hmong, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese.)

The idea for the East Side Freedom Library came from a visit to New York City in 1998. Peter-Rachleff and Beth Cleary, the founders of the Library, were inspired by a loft space devoted to combined arts archive and artist meeting space, created and maintained by Camille Billops and Jim Hatch. Rachleff and Cleary, both professors at Macalester College, returned to St. Paul with an idea and a mission. As recounted in Reinventing the People’s Library, by Greg Gaut, they spent the next fifteen years building a library: recruiting fellow conspirators, collecting materials, networking with community organizations, engaging an architect, raising money and finding a building. A stroke of luck in the form of a newly decommissioned St. Paul branch library, made a beautiful old Carnegie building available in 2013. Reinventing the People’s Library examines the building’s history and the changing immigrant communities which have made it their own.

Art is everywhere at the ESFL. Posters find their way to the spaces between bookshelves (and some hang from the ceiling). Murals capture our attention on the stairwells and in the basement. Hmong arts and crafts and musical instruments grace surfaces both vertical and horizontal. A labor-themed quilt covers a bench sitting space. Objects with stories (e.g. a brick from the Italian Hall massacre of 1913, and a medicine wheel belonging to Meridel Le Sueur), contribute to a museum quality. Prints and adorn the kitchen and rest rooms and, who knows, maybe closets as well.

The beating heart of the East Side Freedom Library is its connections to its constituencies. The Library is a frequent sponsor of meetings, conferences, exhibits and a variety of other events involving the labor, Hmong and activist communities. In 2019, there were over 300 events held in the building.

The ESFL has close ties to the local labor community. The Library sponsors a monthly labor history reading group, and has hosted a labor open house; a discussion series focused on union activism in Black Lives Matter, housing, immigration and healthcare issues; films, plays, book talks, an annual union job fair and more. Several unions are financial backers of the Library.

The Hmong Archives contains thousands of periodicals, print files, photographs, posters, videos, books, art works, and 3d objects. As of February 2019, the collection totaled over 200,000 items. The Archives has its own Board of Directors, programming and acquisitions strategies. Much of the collection is donated from the local Hmong community. Some, like the paj ntaub story-telling weaves, come from communal workshops in the Library basement. The collection’s archivist, Marlin Heise, also collects objects on periodic trips to Southeast Asia. On one such expedition, Heise asked a 12-year-old Hmong lad to “create an air force” to defend the Archives. And sure enough, a wooden model jet now—successfully—protects the materials against all enemies from atop its file cabinet perch. Events by and for the Hmong community have included: an art exhibit, a discussion on “Being Hmong, a meet and greet for Hmong legislators, a womxn’s book club and a youth poetry reading.
But that’s not all. Other programming has included such varied topics as meditation, African American theater and dance, local climate action, local history, African drumming, children’s theater and a women writers’ retreat.

Sizable libraries dedicated to social change materials and programming are, let’s say, pretty rare. There’s the independent South Central Library in Los Angeles, the Interference Archive in Brooklyn, the university-connected Tamiment Library (NYU), Dur-land Alternatives Library (Cornell), and Walter Reuther Library (Wayne State University). Smaller libraries connected to organizations are more abundant. These include libraries at the People’s Forum (NY), Civic Media Center (FL), Niebyl-Proctor Marxist Library (CA), and The Long haul (CA). African-American, labor, women’s and LGBT libraries include the Schlesinger (Harvard), Schomburg (NYPL), Out Alliance (Rochester NY), Lavender Library (Sacramento), and American Labor Museum (Haledon NJ). Each has its own specialty and strength and character. As Gaut concludes in *Reinventing the People’s Library*, “…the ESFL has developed into a thriving “free space,” the kind of place where the public good is discussed and nurtured.” All a direct result of the rich collection, energetic programming, ties to the community, warm inviting atmosphere, friendly staff and volunteers, lovely art, and social justice mission of the East Side Freedom Library.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, events have been virtual and visits are by appointment.

For some online resources of the ESFL:
- a [video introduction](#) to the ESFL
- the [ESFL catalog](#)

Please contact ESFL about helping to [catalog foreign language materials](#).


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Reviewed by Rob Lerman. He is a mostly-retired reference librarian (Wellesley Free Library), slowly completing his Almanac of the American Left.
Essay: Voter Registration in Libraries

The Jenna Welch and Laura Bush Community Library, a unique community college / public library partnership on the El Paso Community College Northwest Campus has been active in voter registration activities since 2018. We have three deputy voter registrar librarians and the support of our head librarian and campus administration. We regularly contact our teaching faculty to help promote our voter registration drives and that has continued during this time where we’re all largely working and studying from home.

In conjunction with district wide efforts, we went to students’ homes to register them in their driveways. We also participated in two drive-thru Census registration events at the Northwest Campus in conjunction with local census organizations. Head Librarian Lorely Ambriz received a grant from the American Libraries Association to purchase tablets for this effort which enabled residents to fill out their census forms from the safety and convenience of their vehicles. We used this activity to register voters and educate people on the election process.

Submitted by Rachel Murphree, Librarian and Deputy Voter Registrar, EPCC NW Campus Library

The COVID-19 Pandemic is hurting libraries and library workers. Cities are responding by furloughing workers which will have long-lasting effects on our communities. Friends groups in El Paso have joined together to show solidarity in support of libraries and library workers. Following is an Opinion Editorial article written by Gretchen Trominski, Vice President on the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Westside Branch Libraries in El Paso, Texas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially hard on El Paso’s libraries and its employees. Our librarians and paraprofessionals were furloughed on May 5th during the complete lockdown in El Paso. Contract employees and those on probation were terminated at that time. Out of 156 employees, 137 were furloughed. Since then 7 paraprofessionals have retired. When the city finally agreed to allow the libraries to start curbside service in mid-August, only 6 library assistants were reinstated to help. This October our furloughed librarians will reach their 6th month of unemployment. Those benefits expire after 6 months. While the city continually demands the loyalty of its employees, where is the return loyalty and respect? The staff is demoralized by the long furlough and lack of any information about a plan for it to end. Our librarians need to resume their jobs.

As the numbers of COVID-19 cases in El Paso continue to decline more and more, activities are beginning to be allowed with various restrictions for safety. Our churches have resumed services, some schools are having in person classes, football games are being played, the El Paso Zoo is reopening and restaurants have certainly started to see more customers. Libraries across Texas and the rest of the country are finding innovative ways of safely opening and serving the public again.

We do not believe the city has any excuse for not proceeding to some sort of limited opening of our libraries. As a city with a high rate of illiteracy, our citizens need the access to the computers and printers as well as the books. It is our most vulnerable citizens that are being affected by shuttered libraries, the elderly, the financially at risk, and our students.

It comes down to finances. The city has apparently decided that financially they cannot afford to reopen our libraries. Yet, raises have been reinstated, merit bonuses have been accepted by some of the highest paid individuals, and stimulus checks have been given to city employees. Not the furloughed employees, though. This seems morally corrupt. That our librarians and the library system are being damaged in this way is heartbreaking. Our libraries are the first line of defense against illiteracy in any society. It is incredible that the literacy of our city is seen as unimportant by city leaders or at the very least something to be deferred.

The current status of El Paso’s public libraries being closed for the rest of the year is outrageous. The City of El Paso can find the funds to restore city employees to their positions just as other cities have. Libraries should be a priority.

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Submitted by Gretchen Trominski, Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Westside Libraries

Friends of the Library, citywide, held a Car Rally on October 24th to bring attention to their libraries and, most importantly, to show support for their librarians and staff. In order to do so safely, participants stayed in their cars and travelled from Memorial Park Branch Library to the Main Library in downtown El Paso.
Statement in Defense of Democracy  
by the Action Council of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT)  
October 29, 2020

[SRRT is a body within the American Library Association but does not and should not be taken to speak for the Association as a whole. In this statement SRRT Action Council speaks only on its own behalf.]

During the current presidential campaign, repeated statements have been made indicating an unwillingness to abide by the outcome of the upcoming election. Statements such as these represent a direct challenge to democracy, the Constitution, and the political traditions of the United States—and to the core values of the American Library Association (ALA). The Action Council of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of ALA is issuing this statement to express our support for democracy and a free and fair election.

In response to candidate statements this year challenging democracy, one progressive group, Choose Democracy, has appealed for nonviolent street demonstrations if a coup is attempted. Other progressive organizations, including the Moratorium Now Coalition in Detroit, the Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement, and the People’s Alliance—Bay Area have issued a call for a general strike if there is an attempt to overturn the results of the election or refusal to accept the will of the electorate. Similarly, in separate statements various labor organizations, including the 100,000 member MLK Labor Council in Seattle, the 70,000 member Rochester (NY) AFL-CIO Labor Council, union activists with the American Postal Workers Union in Detroit, and the Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation have pledged to meet any attempt to obstruct, overturn, or reject a fair and complete count of presidential ballots with nonviolent protests and labor actions.

The Action Council of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of ALA supports such initiatives in defense of democracy. Following the lead of the MLK Labor Council we encourage information workers to sign the Coup Preparation pledge issued by Choose Democracy. We also urge information workers to participate actively in peaceful demonstrations and/or strike actions to oppose any coup attempt associated with this election.
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