Resolution to Resolution to Honor African Americans Who Fought Library Segregation

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

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

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

Whereas, in many cases the American Library Association participated, both passively and actively, in the disenfranchisement of African American librarians, depriving them of the resources of professional association;

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

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

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

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

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

Resolved, That the American Library Association

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

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

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

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

(5) Encourages libraries to defend, in their policies and in their actions, the *ALA Code of Ethics* principle 1 – “We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests;”[[4]](#footnote-4)

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

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

1. United States. Cong. House. Apologizing for the Enslavement and Racial Segregation of African-Americans. 110th Cong. 2nd sess. H. Res. 194. (2007-2008). 154 Cong. Rec. H7224. Washington: GPO, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. United States. Cong. Senate. Apologizing for the Enslavement and Racial Segregation of African-Americans. 111th Cong. 1st sess. S. Res. 26. (2009-2010). 155 Cong. Rec. S6761. Washington: GPO, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shirley A. Wiegand and Wayne A. Wiegand, The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South: Civil Rights and Local Activism, (Baton Rouge, 2018), LSU Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Code of Ethics of the American Library Association. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)