

I live with privilege but I want justice
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Pride Inside & Out: Annapolis Pride 2020
Black Lives Matter
Black Trans Lives Matter

Hello Friends,

This time last year, I was marching along with numerous library staff in the inaugural Annapolis Pride Parade. What a day that was! What used to be called gay pride to me is joy, love, and exuberance. It's why I was dancing pretty much along the whole parade route last year.

I'd like to begin by applauding Annapolis Pride for the important work they continue to do for the LGBTQ+ community and for people of color. Their support of the Black Lives Matter movement serves an example to us all. I'm very happy to have Leslie Anderson as a member our Board of Trustees and Deirdre Hendrick as well.

I've lived a pretty long life and observed a number of milestones in the emergence of LGBTQ rights along the way. As a young reference librarian in Charlotte in 1978, one of my colleagues and good friends was a gay man who had worked there 5-10 years before I arrived. When the AIDS epidemic emerged not too long after, it was about a decade of disbelief, terror, and craziness. My wife's nephew who she used to babysit was one of the many victims. He died in his 20s. Two of my new colleagues when I became a branch library manager in Carroll County in 1990 lost siblings to AIDS.

Five years ago today, I was in San Francisco at the American Library Association conference. The day before, the Supreme Court had ruled same-sex marriage is guaranteed by the United States Constitution. As I walked to their wonderful main library and the convention center and that evening to the Opera House, it was once again happiness, love, joy, and exuberance. During intermission at the opera, many of us walked out to the terrace which looks across the plaza to City Hall. It was lit up in the rainbow, just as the White House was back here on the East Coast.

I'm telling you these things because I believe the centuries of oppression were created from ignorance, fear, misunderstanding, and lies. All of us in the LGBTQ-I-A community can and should celebrate but can never forget that ignorance, fear, lack of understanding, and darkness live on in America and throughout the world. Knowledge and understanding grow from experience and reading and from having an open mind and a caring heart.

Our libraries want to be light in the darkness. Governed by a Board of Trustees who in 2017 adopted a statement on race and social equity, our libraries do not simply store a collection of books, movies, and music for checkout. We also engage with partners throughout our county, and our Trustees and Staff are very proud to partner with Annapolis Pride!

Our Board and Staff are committed to “an intentional, systemic and transformative library-community partnership.” We have promised to “eliminate racial and social equity barriers in our programs, services, policies and practices.” We stand for “diversity, inclusion and respect.” We are devoted to “reaching and engaging disenfranchised people in our community and helping them express their voice.” We want to do everything we can “to address community challenges” and to confront “tough issues that are important in our community.” You can find this statement with the library policies on our website. I bring it to your attention because we are standing with you to say as loud and clear as we can that Black Lives Matter. Period. Transgender Lives Matter. Period. And Black Trans Lives Matter. Period.

As a white man who grew up mainly in North Carolina, I benefit enormously from the system established after slavery ended, a system built upon on the backs of Black people. It was a system that kept Black people from voting or holding elected office for a century. It was a system of subjugation at least as bad as apartheid in South Africa. It was a system that used Black people where necessary but eliminated opportunity wherever there might be competition with White people. It was a system put in place by the elite and enforced by the Ku Klux Klan and other militias like the Red Shirts in South Carolina.

I live with privilege but I want justice. We at the library are committed to rooting out racism and “advancing equity among all our county’s residents through the programs, resources and materials we provide to the community.” We are listening and, in the wake of an avalanche of murders of innocent Black women and men, we are speaking out to battle racism and injustice through “education for all. Our libraries serve as critical anchors in times of turmoil and tragedy,” and I’m speaking here not just about the highly publicized events of recent months but also as thousands, even millions, of individuals deal with personal trauma due to structural racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, sexism, and more.

For people of privilege who just don’t understand or really haven’t known people of color, who may live in fear and ignorance of what life is like for those whom they don’t think are like themselves, we created a list of books on our website for [Combating Racism](#). We also are creating programs like the one on Thursday on 300 years of LGBTQ+ people in the Chesapeake region. We look forward to hosting more programs like this one. We also look forward to offering training soon from the Racial Equity Institute on how to understand structural racism. Check our website at www.aacpl.net for details in the next few weeks.

Our library system is your library system. We stand with you. We **are** with you. If we don’t live up to your expectations, let us know. We are for justice and human dignity. Black Lives Matter. Black Trans Lives Matter. I look forward to the rest of today's discussion and continuing to support these important movements.

And next June, God willing, the pandemic will be over and we can all dance in the streets together in the Annapolis Pride Parade!