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EDITORIAL: CALAMITY AND RESILIENCY

Reflections on the Past Two Years and Library Responses

Martin Halbert

This second issue of *Library Diversity and Residency Studies (LDRS)* is being issued at the end of 2021 after a significant gap of almost two years since the first issue. It will perhaps not be surprising to hear that the intervening months were as disruptive for our editorial staff as virtually everyone else who lived through this difficult period. Much that happened during this challenging period bears reflecting on however, as it has had profound ramifications for our perceptions regarding diversity in the United States and both the role of libraries in supporting diversity in our society and threats to libraries in fulfilling that role. This brief editorial will make some observations on these points and introduce the renewed LDRS journal and our plans for it.

TWO YEARS OF CALAMITY

The entry for “calamity” in Merriam-Webster defines the word as “a disastrous event marked by great loss and lasting distress and suffering” or “a state of deep distress or misery caused by major misfortune or loss”. To describe the two years of 2020 and 2021 in terms of calamity is not an overstatement. While few of us need reminders of the grim events of the last two years, it is nevertheless worth acknowledging the hard facts of what we have lived through if we are to draw any useful observations about them.

We are steadily approaching the stark statistic of a million deaths in the United States in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this tragic backdrop of death, the national reckoning with racism has emerged in equally stark terms as never before. Climate change caused by human activities continues to be a

looming problem causing both short-term and long-term environmental disasters. Finally, the political divisions between the Left and the Right have become extreme, threatening our ability to respond to the other chronic problems we face as well as fundamental shared conceptions of what constitutes the United States.

There is no gloss that can mitigate the facts of these calamities, and they are not going to go away without collective action, and the longer we delay the worse these problems become. The task in front of us therefore is marshalling our society for collective action to address these issues. That may seem like a tall order these days, but there really is no other option and we need to do everything we can to start the process. It will require contributions from every part of society, including libraries. And diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are an extremely important aspect of what libraries are all about (more about this in a moment). But first, a basic point about calamities.

RESILIENCY ARISES FROM CALAMITY

Scholars ranging from philosophers to biologists believe that distress causes living things to both respond and improve their response in order to avoid distress. The old saying “that which does not kill me makes me stronger” is a hard lesson in life. Any child who ever learned to ride a bicycle started by falling down painfully. A lot. Pain and distress are not pleasant things to encounter, but they *are* fundamental motivators. If a child wants to learn to ride a bike properly, the pain of falling over is great motivation to learn how to balance. This is a trivial example in

comparison to the pain caused by mass death and injustice, but it is the same principle. Living things either overcome situations causing them severe distress or succumb. A successful response leads to adaption and long-term survival. Robust adaptation leads to resiliency.

As a society and culture, we must overcome the calamities that we are encountering and reach a state of greater resiliency. Accurate information is a very basic need in order to respond to distress. A child has to be able to discern when they are tipping over if they don't want to fall. Sure, the child could avoid the situation by giving up trying to learn how to ride a bike. But gaining mobility, the ability to travel in a new way, see new sights, and reach new places is worth the pain of learning to balance for any child that grits their teeth, gets back up and tries to balance again. And so, they pay closer attention to information their senses are telling them, and learn to balance more accurately.

That is where we are now. Among other things, we have to improve our collective ability to process information accurately. And access to accurate information is what libraries are all about. And such access must not be limited and constrained; the access to information that libraries provide must be to comprehensive and diverse sources of information, because we live in a comprehensive and diverse culture.

LIBRARY DIVERSITY AND RESIDENCY STUDIES

Our editorial board continues to feel that there are many critically important topics to treat with regarding diversity efforts in libraries, and a number of specific issues to engage with regarding the diversification of librarians specifically. This combination of topics has particular saliency for libraries which value transformational efforts to provide content that is representative of the full diversity of their clientele, by means of librarians that are likewise also representative of the full diversity of their clientele.

The LDRS journal plans to do this by continuing to solicit high quality scholarship on

the intersection of libraries and diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, human rights, combatting censorship, and the many potential programmatic strategies for libraries to pursue the above goals.

We also invite scholarship on the more focused topic of library diversity residencies because we feel that this strategy for increasing diversity among librarians has proven to be problematic to implement in libraries over the past two decades at least, and needs to either be overhauled or discarded in favor of other more effective approaches. We continue to believe that this combination of both broad and more focused topics is a synergistic and useful topical area for this journal, and that providing a forum for rigorous peer-reviewed scholarship in these areas is a valuable professional venue for librarians.

We also would very much like to invite your feedback regarding our approach. Please contact our editorial board with proposals for submissions of all kinds. Our thanks go out to all libraries working to promote these topics and we look forward to continuing our dialogue with you in coming months.