
Intellectual Freedom, Racial Subjugation, and Class Suppression

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIBRARY NEUTRALITY

A TALE OF TWO HISTORIES

“LIBRARIES ARE
innately subversive institutions,
born of the **RADICAL NOTION** that
EVERY SINGLE MEMBER
of society deserves
FREE, HIGH QUALITY ACCESS
to knowledge and culture.”

-Dr. Matt Finch

- The Radical Activist, Fighting for the People’s Right to Information
- The Rich White Supremacist, Controlling the Unruly Poor with ~~Propaganda~~ Proper Values

THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN LIBRARIAN

- “Library” AKA book club for propertied white men who shared texts with only each other
 - “Collection” AKA professional and religious texts
 - “Librarian” AKA the men guarding this property and enforcing strict borrowing policies
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THE ORIGINAL PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- Industrialization, Urbanization, Immigration
 - Xenophobia and Classism
 - ~~Indoctrination~~ Education viewed as solution to “idleness” of working class and threat of subversive behavior and organizing
 - Attempt to assimilate immigrants and poor people to white, upper class, Anglo-Saxton Protestant values
 - Public Literacy, Education, and Libraries
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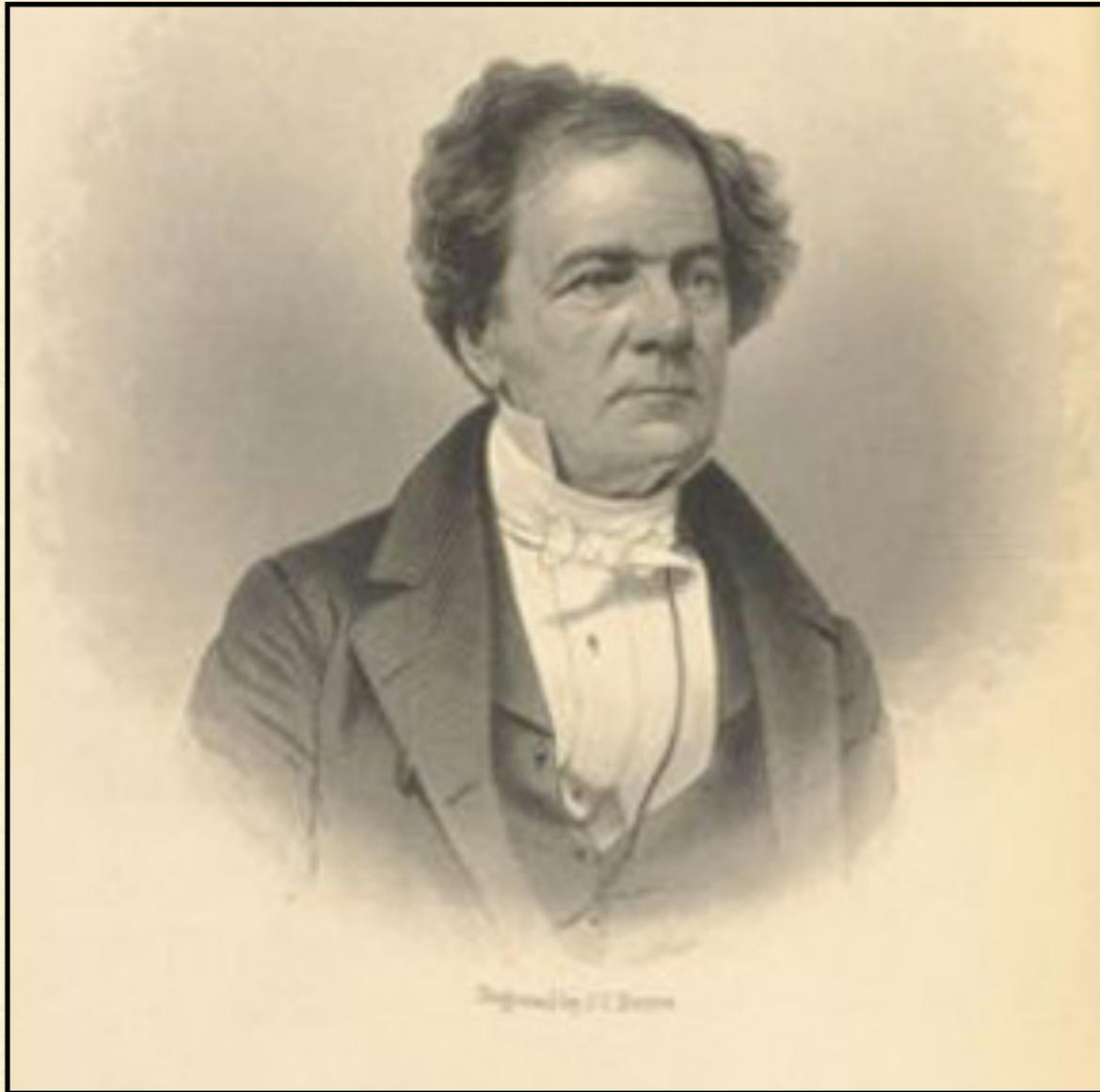
SEGREGATION & WHITE SUPREMACY

- Collection development structured around white supremacist ideology.
 - African Americans were not legally allowed in libraries until the African School Society created a school and library in Delaware in 1816
 - Libraries were strictly segregated
 - Libraries across the country accepted donations of pro-slavery propaganda for children from the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a white supremacist women's group.
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PHILADELPHIA LIBRARY COMPANY OF COLORED PERSONS

- Established in 1833 by and for Philadelphia's black community (as the Library Company of Philadelphia only served whites).
 - Promoted literature, science, readings, debates, lectures, and public speakers
 - Mentioned in *The Liberator*, a Boston-based Abolitionist newspaper, published by William Lloyd Garrison, 1831-1865
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ARTHUR AND LEWIS TAPPAN



- 1872
 - Two wealthy abolitionists donate 2,000+ anti-slavery writings to Howard University in Washington D.C.
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NATIONALISM & CENSORSHIP

- Early 1900s, WWI
 - Strategic ideological alliance with government and business
 - Weeding and censoring materials deemed “unpatriotic” and promoting “pro-war” views
 - Persecuting anti-war librarians
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UNITED STATES IDEOLOGY

- White Supremacy and Black Inferiority
 - Xenophobia and Nationalism
 - Capitalism as Natural and Necessary
 - Universally Just Foreign Policy of United States
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“Librarianship must stand firmly against social and political and economic censorship of book collections; it must be so organized that it can present effective opposition to this censorship and it must protect librarians who are threatened by it”

—Bernard Berelson, social scientist, 1938

COLD WAR CONTROVERSY

- Library's role in patriotic propaganda
 - Commitments against censorship vs Fear of communism
 - ALA protests loyalty investigations into US libraries
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“We don’t want any
Communists or cocksuckers
in this library”

–*Luther Evans, Librarian of Congress, 1947*

THE ORIGINAL NEUTRALITY

- “Objectivity” = “Please don’t accuse me of being a communist”
 - By providing “all” points of view, there was no concrete evidence of librarians’ opinions.
 - Neutrality inherently represents a pretense of allowing “all” perspectives while simultaneously ensuring a context of support for capitalism.
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PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANS' COUNCIL

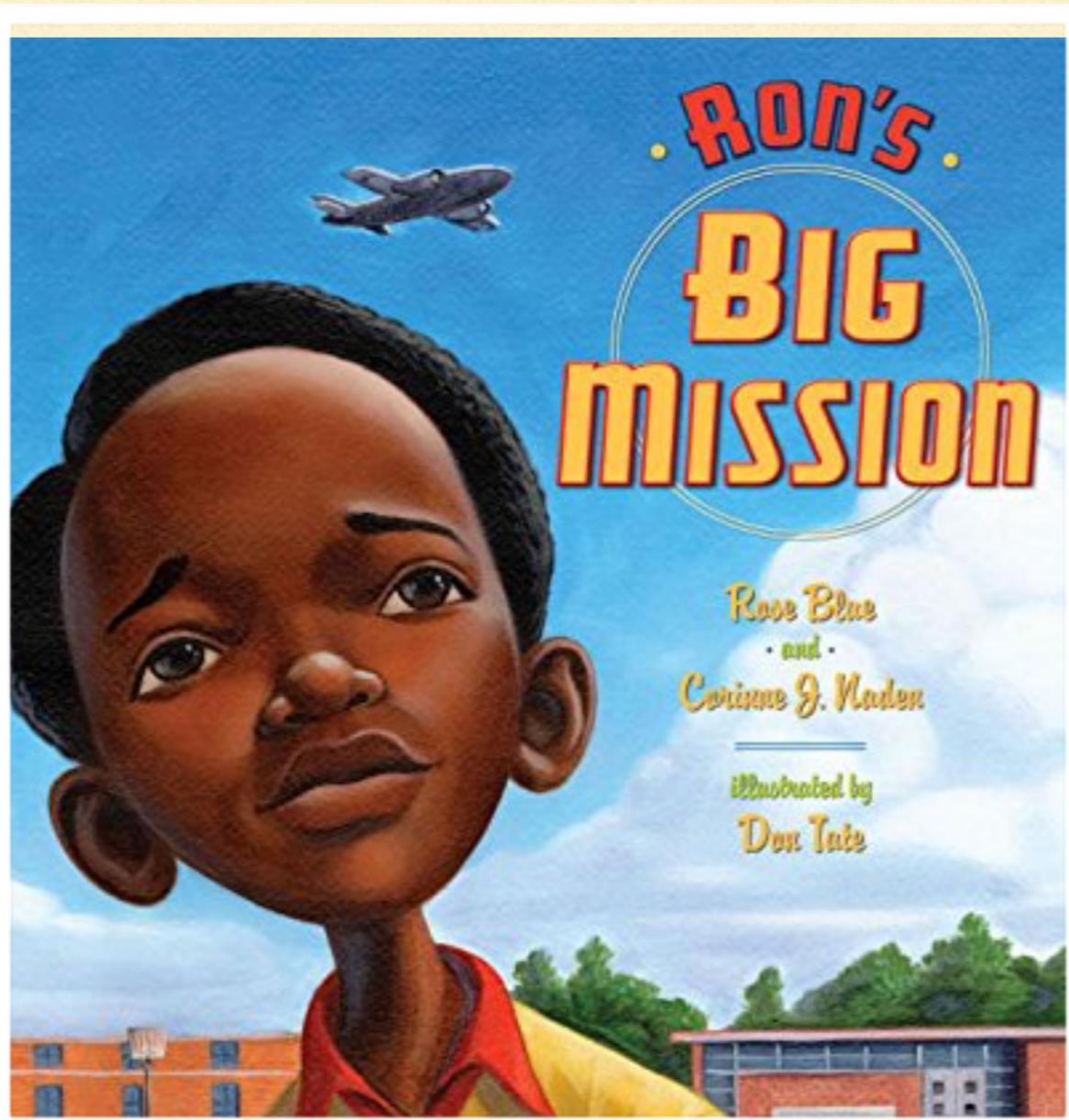
- Established in 1939 by Philip and Mary Jane Keeney
 - Fought for more democratic organization and power within ALA
 - Anti-censorship, job security for librarians
 - Wanted better library services for remote communities
 - During Spanish Civil War, smuggled money to librarian leftist resistance members exiled in France
 - When both were fired from their positions for leftist views, they attempted to start library services for socialist nations, but were denied access to passports by the State Department
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RUTH BROWN - 1951



- White librarian, fired for supporting civil rights movements and desegregation of libraries
 - IFC and ALA condemned her firing because of their anti-censorship policy (not in support of her anti-racist politics)
 - Dissonance between supposed defense of intellectual freedom while deliberately denying access to information to African Americans
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RONALD MCNAIR



- Born in 1950, engaged in direct action against a segregated library at 9 years old
 - Refused to leave Lake City Public Library without being able to check out his books
 - Police & his mom were called, and he ended up with the ability to check out books, and eventually the library was named after him
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INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

- 1953, President Eisenhower came out in support of the anti-censorship values of libraries
 - Public begins to associate libraries with defense of intellectual freedom and anti-censorship views
 - Throughout 1950s, most librarians quietly removed books by blacklisted authors
 - IFC training sessions from 1952-1955 on how to implement the Library Bill of Rights without becoming susceptible to communist ideology
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ACTIVISTS VS LIBRARIANS

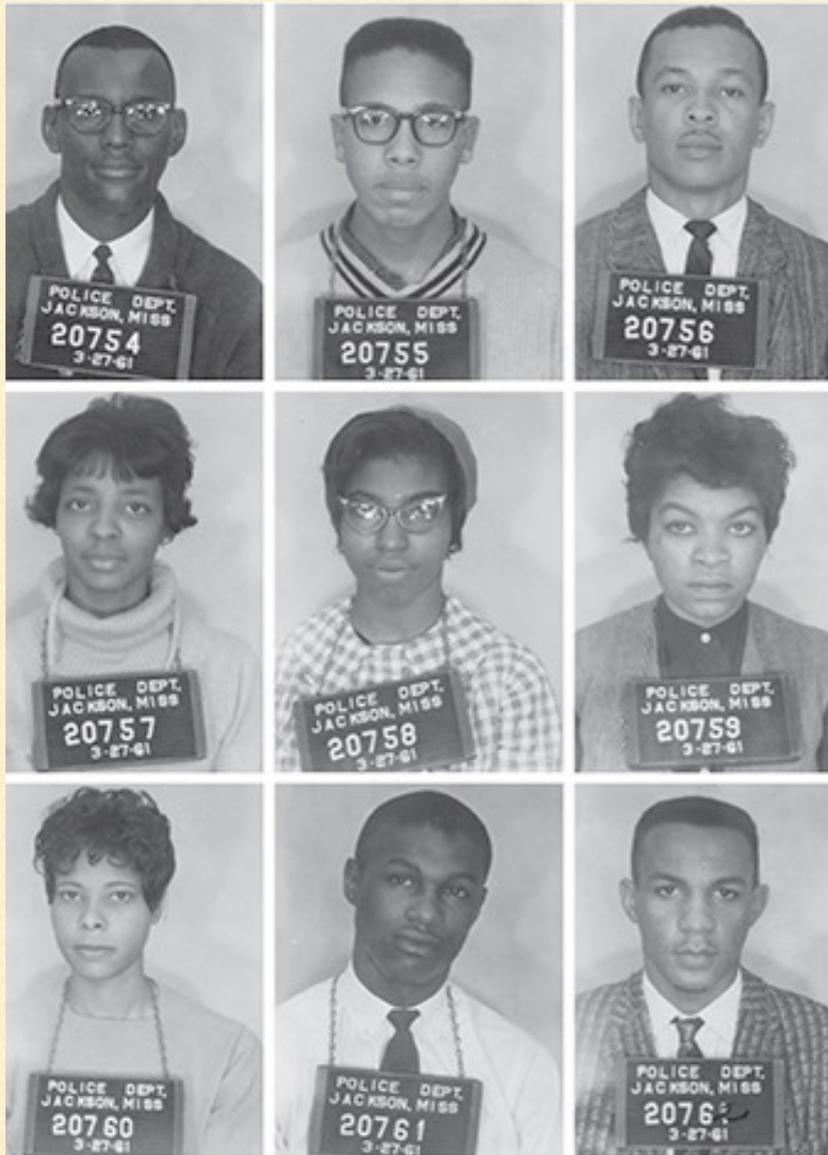


Photo of a black woman being arrested for trying to read a book in a segregated library.

Albany, GA. 1962.

- Librarians did not desegregate library spaces or their profession willingly.
 - Desegregation came from coordinated direct action on the part of black activists
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TOUGALOO- 1961



- Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission photographs of following arrests for participation in a sit-in at a library in Jackson, Mississippi, 1961 March 27.
- A group of black students at Tougaloo College who staged sit-ins at segregated public institutions in Mississippi.
- Fined \$100 each and given a thirty-day suspended sentence and year's probation

“If they are not fulfilled by intelligent, compassionate,
and cooperative social action involving all of society...
they will be achieved by force and violence”

–Harold Taylor, 1967,

Middle Atlantic Regional Library Conference

TRANSFORMING LIBRARIANSHIP

- 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, which encouraged desegregation of libraries and ALA chapters
 - The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited racial segregation in schools, workplace, and in public accommodations, and remaining segregated libraries were dragged into acceptance of basic steps towards information access equity.
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E. J. JOSEY

- Civil Rights activist, NAACP Board member, and librarian
 - Worked to desegregate libraries through proposing a resolution to ALA in 1964 to prevent ALA officers and staff from attending segregated state chapter meetings
 - Continued to oppose discrimination based in race, gender, and orientation throughout his life
 - Passed away 9 years ago at age 85
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BLACK CAUCUS



- Created in 1969 by black librarians and information professionals to address unmet needs by the ALA
 - Led by E.J. Josey
 - Not officially affiliated with ALA until 1992.
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SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES ROUND TABLE



- 1968 ALA conference
- “On behalf of black militants, political radicals, members of women’s liberation groups, and individuals interested in library unions”
- Established in 1969

CONGRESS FOR CHANGE

- In spring of 1969, a group of Library students from the University of Maryland gathered for a two-day session to discuss needed reform in ALA
 - Teamed up with the SRRT to pressure ALA to consider establishing professional values and outlining social responsibilities in librarianship
 - Threatened to launch a campaign to discourage membership if ALA refused to make changes
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ANACONDA

- ALA responds by establishing Activities Committee on New Directions for ALA (ACONDA)
 - In 1970, ACONDA proposed responsibilities of ALA, explicitly including social responsibilities
 - The Ad Hoc Committee on ACONDA (ANACONDA) was formed to make recommendations on the proposal, and the mention of social responsibilities disappeared.
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ACTIVISM INSIDE LIBRARIANSHIP

- SRRT and individual progressive librarians continued their work to change the profession from within
 - IRS began to complain about the activities of the SRRT and the subversive element within librarianship in the 1970s
 - ALA members were petrified by the threat of losing their tax exempt status, or facing other financial, legal, or social consequences, so largely avoided consideration of adopting the recommendations of the SRRT
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DAVID K. BERNINGHAUSEN

- Published *The Flight from Reason* in 1975
 - Established a perceived link between social responsibility and “extremism”
 - Believed social responsibility and intellectual freedom were mutually exclusive
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(Wedgeworth et al., 1979, p. 47).

Berninghausen went on to point out that it was not the purpose of ALA "to promote homosexuality as a life-style" (1972, p. 3675). Such



I say, "Up yours. It's gay."

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANS GUILD

- A far left of SRRT created in 1990 to revitalize library radicalism “which had begun, even in SRRT, to lose its impetus”
 - Global vision of socially responsible librarianship
 - Does not accept “neutrality” and are explicitly political
 - “Exists to expose and call out librarianship's active and passive complicity and acceptance of those systems, to offer and practice alternatives to those systems, to empower the voices of those excluded from positions of power and/or the historical record and to develop a praxis that contributes to on-going pursuits of human rights and dignity.”
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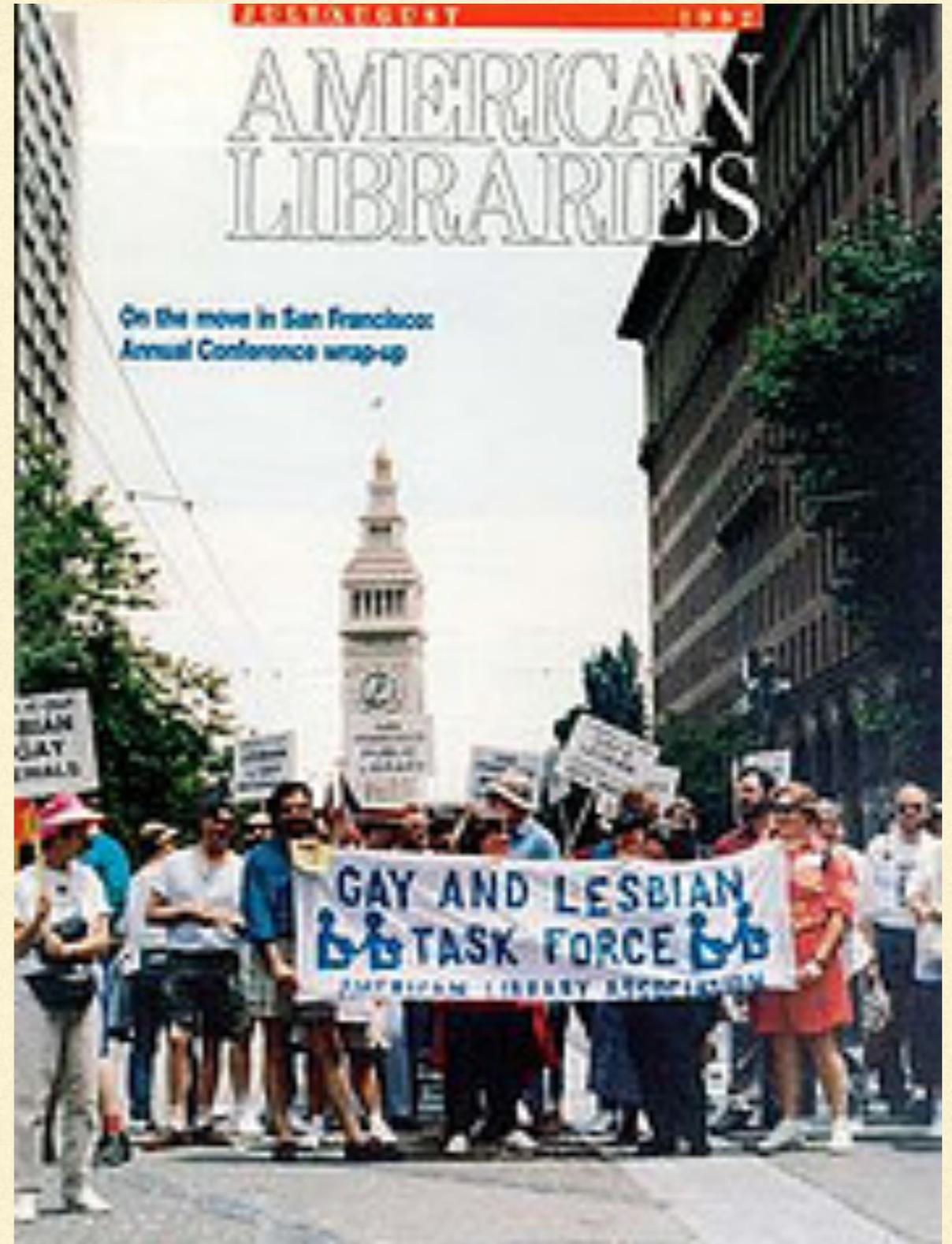
ALA's Task Force on Gay Liberation

1970

- FIRST GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION IN US

GLTF - 1992

GLBTRT - 1999



ALA OPPOSES PATRIOT ACT

**The FBI
has not
been here**

[watch very closely for the removal of this sign]

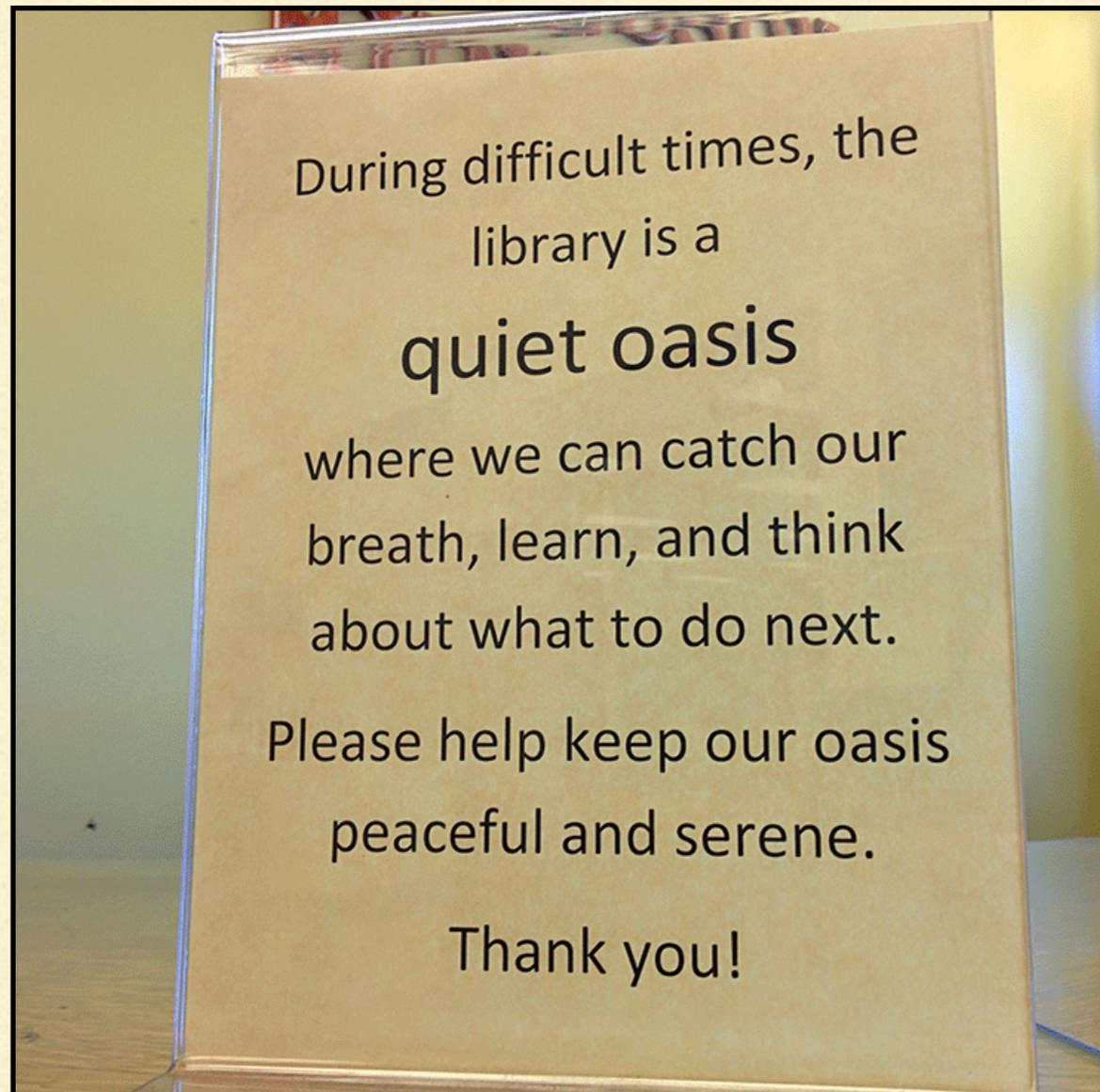
- Due to internal pressure from activist librarians
- Representing interests of people over loyalty to government

CARLA HAYDEN



- 2016, became first woman, first African American, and first African American woman to be Library of Congress
 - Was president of the ALA from 2003 to 2004
 - During her ALA presidency, she was a leading voice against PATRIOT Act
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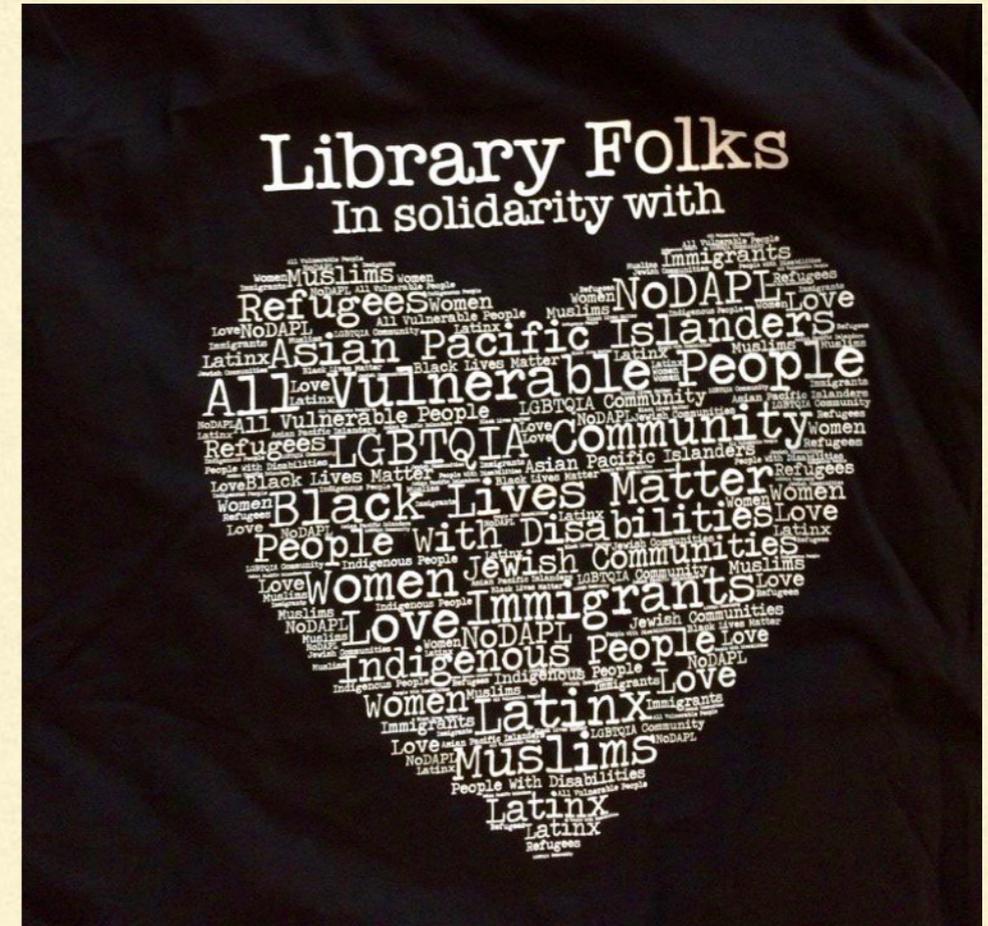
FERGUSON



- August 9, 2014 - Murder of Michael Brown
 - November 2014 - Jury decides not to charge officer who killed him
 - Library stayed open even when schools wouldn't amidst grief and protests. Organized 100+ volunteers to help take care of children.
 - "Healing Kits" for kids,
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Boston March for Science



Shirt design created by a Librarian named Alanna Aiko Moore.



StorytimeUnderground

@StorytimeU



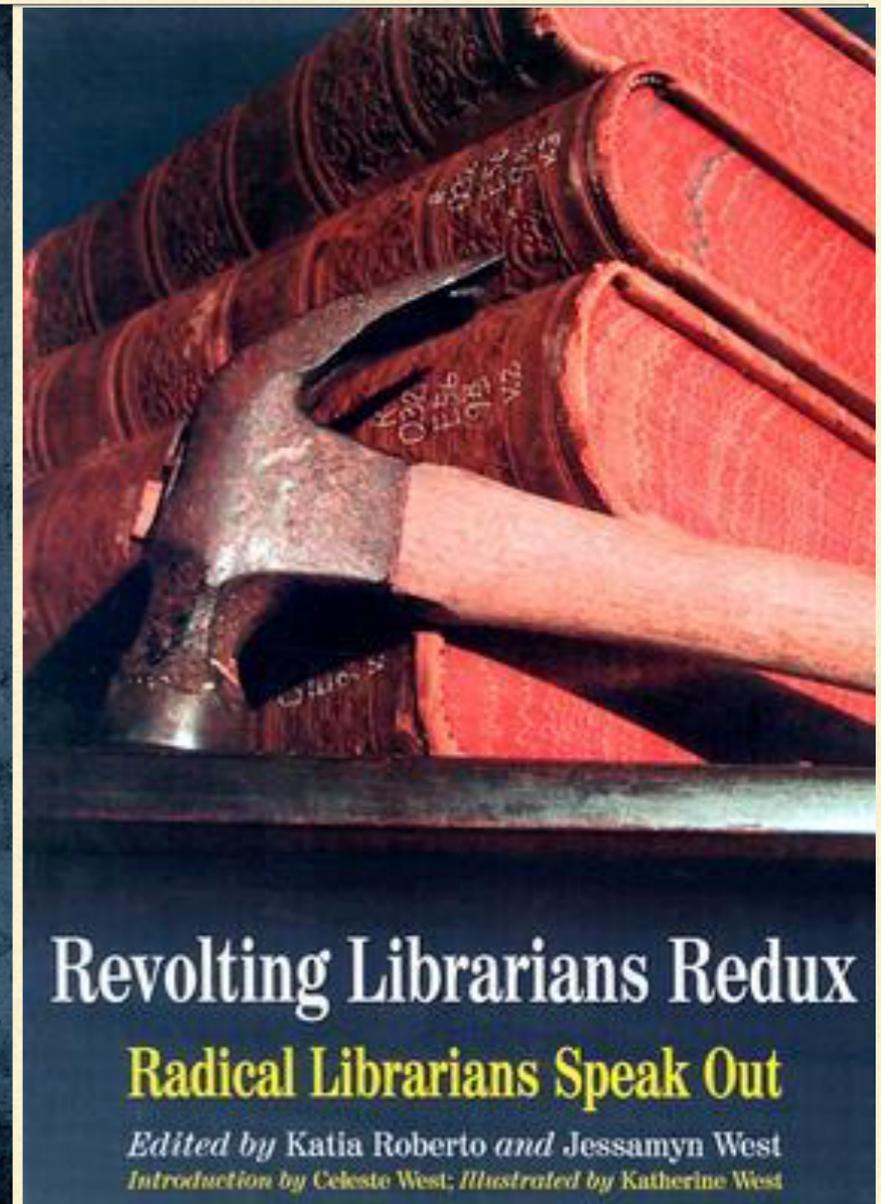
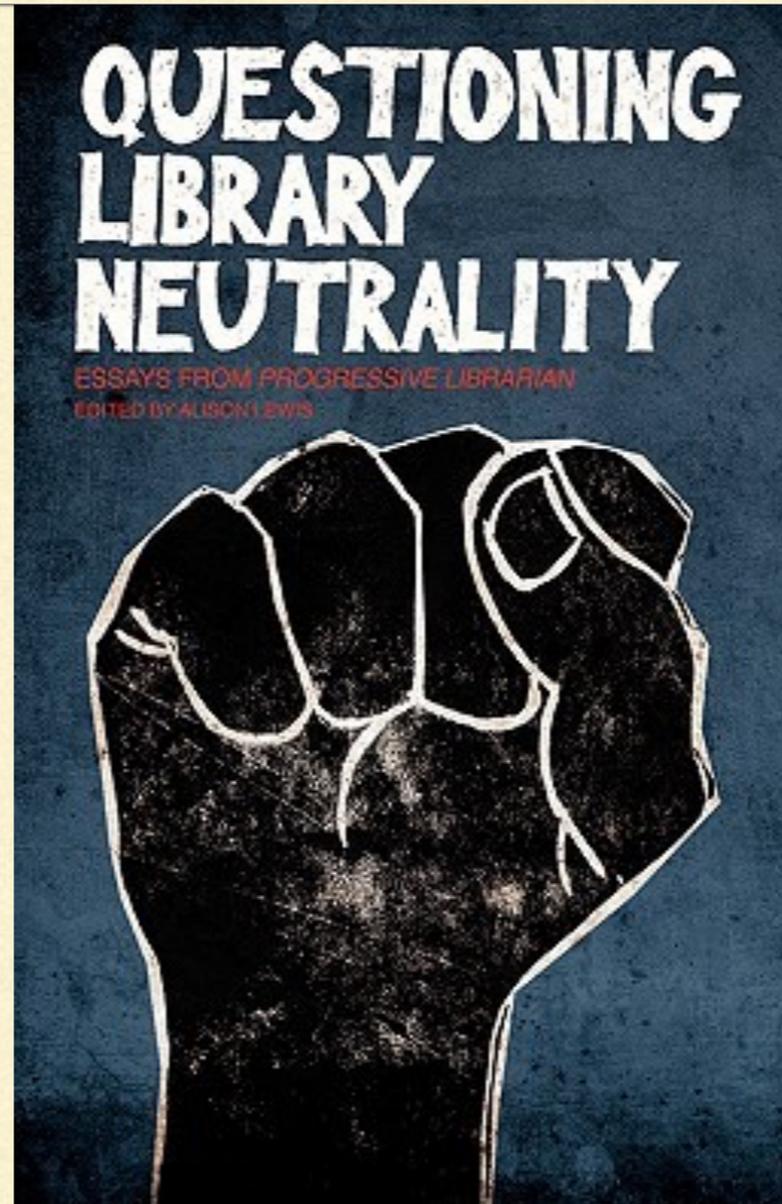
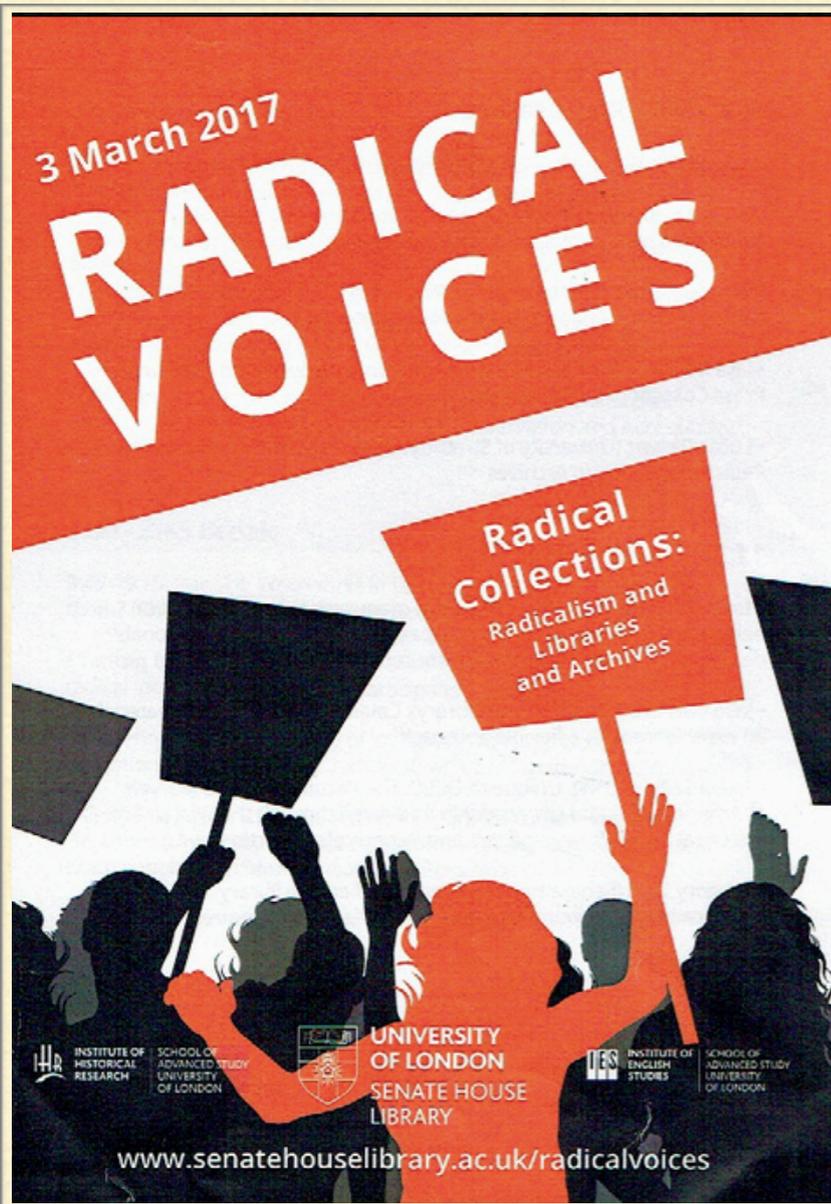
Libraries aren't neutral spaces, librarianship isn't a neutral profession, and black lives fucking matter. [#noneutrallibraries](#)

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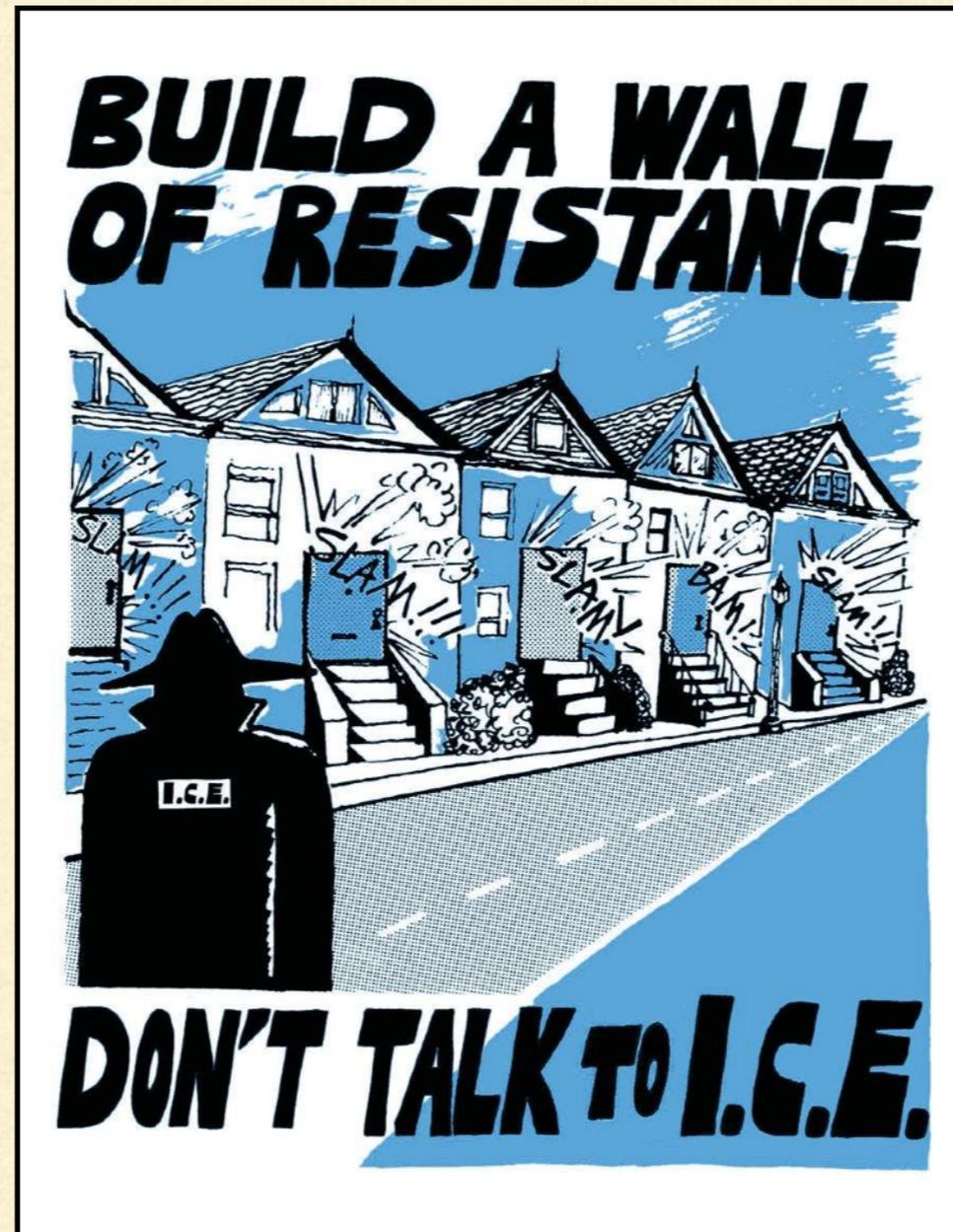


LESSONS FROM OUR HISTORY



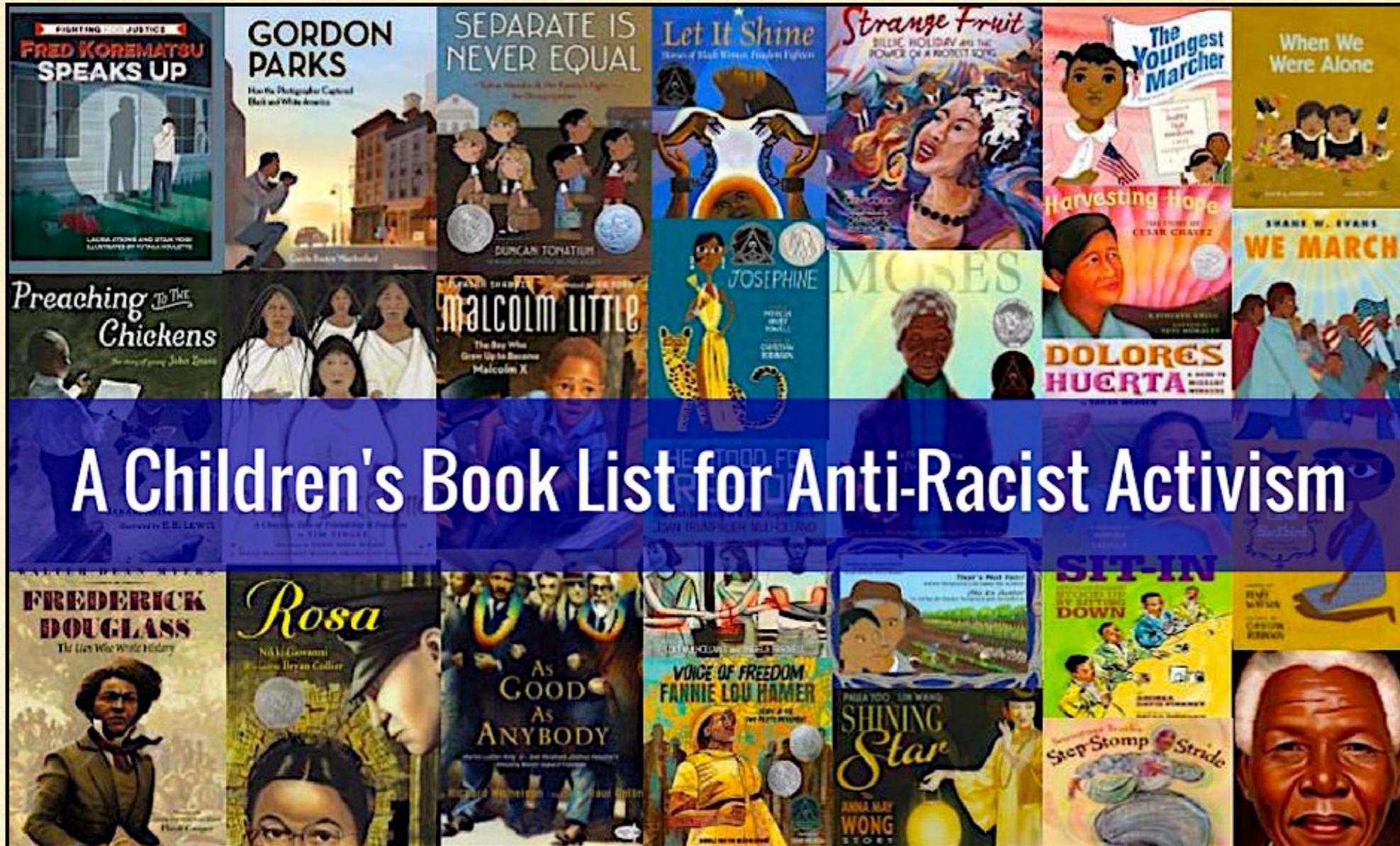
ORGANIZE

Strategy #1



BE UNCOOPERATIVE

Strategy #2



A Children's Book List for Anti-Racist Activism

DONATE MATERIALS

Strategy #3



DIRECT ACTION

Strategy #4



MAKE YOUR OWN

Strategy #5

MAKE A RUCKUS
