

All Lives Matter

Posted on [January 25, 2015](#) by [Carol Hixson](#)

<https://poynterdean.wordpress.com/2015/01/25/all-lives-matter/>

Note from March 2021: in the intervening years, some web sites and other portals have changed. Some of the links in the posting below no longer function. Please search the [USFSP Library](#) and [USFSP](#) web sites for current links, as well other secondary sites, if you encounter a link that no longer works.

In a January 19 article on the [Young Adult Library Services Association \(YALSA\) blog, The Hub](#), Alegria Barclay wrote a piece entitled “[Black Lives Matter: Building Empathy Through Reading](#)” that outlined a role for librarians that challenges a more traditional view of librarianship and promotes a role of actively influencing our readers. She wrote:

“I feel strongly that it is an essential part of our calling to do more than simply recommend books to our teenage patrons; we must promote, persuade, and provoke our young readers to pick up those books that broaden and challenge our understanding of what it means to be another and to be ourselves. To echo the #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign, we need diverse books because reading can change the world one perspective at a time. And change must come. And it will come because reading is an act of communication that can and does open minds and hearts, transcending our often irrational and unfounded fears to create newfound empathy and compassion.”

While librarians, like journalists, are committed to providing access to a wide array of information and points of view, does that mean that we must remain impartial? Like Ms. Barclay, I have been concerned about the ignorance and complacency that I encounter all too often when it comes to understanding what people from non-majority backgrounds experience on a daily basis. And like her, I have felt the need to poke and prod and get people to think and question the world around them. I think helping to develop critical thinking skills is one of the main reasons that libraries exist, especially academic libraries. And learning to think critically about one’s own assumptions is surely the foundational critical thinking skill.

As a white woman who is now firmly entrenched in the more privileged end of the middle class, I seldom experience discomfort when I enter a room – unless I consciously seek out an experience that puts me in the minority. Although I came from a poor background and was the first person in my family to go to college, I am now able to “pass” in the world of privilege – at least, if I keep quiet. Yet, I continue to seek out those uncomfortable experiences where not everyone looks and sounds just like me because that is where I can still grow and change. That is what lies behind my love of travel, what lies behind my study of foreign languages, what lies behind the [diversity programming](#) that this library has offered and continues to develop.

After recently seeing the film [Selma](#) which chronicles a key part of the Civil Rights Movement under Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr’s leadership, I have challenged myself to read more, think more, and do more. And I pledge to share my reading and thinking with the students and faculty of USFSP and the broader community. I’m still thinking about how best to do that and welcome suggestions and feedback from everyone, either here on this blog or to my email at hixson at usfsp.edu (*Note from March 2021: this email is no longer active*).

To close this posting, I return to Ms. Alegria and the first paragraph of her article which so eloquently sums up the beauty of reading and the value in being a librarian:

“Librarians are peddlers of empathy. We understand that reading is a chemical reaction between reader and writer producing a visceral engagement with the characters that allows us to live the lives of others, if only for the space of a novel. We know that when we give a book to a patron, it can be at once an act of revolution, a

strike against ignorance, a catalyst for change, a necessary escape, a life-saving event, a clarion call, a moment of peace, or simply a riveting read. Whatever it turns out to be though, it is always founded in empathy. As readers, each book allows us to, at turns, discover, reaffirm or reimagine what it means to be human.”