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Preface

We started this book project in early 2019, which seems about a century ago. We recruited coeditors, sent out a call for proposals, evaluated and selected proposals, and started receiving drafts of chapters.

And then the world fell apart. A global pandemic with a stunning death toll, the police killings of George Floyd and other unarmed Black Americans, and a bitterly contested election with our very system of democracy hanging in the balance were only some of the horrors we faced in 2020. Everything changed—but in fact the pandemic showed us that nothing had changed at all—systemic inequities in income, health care, worker security, housing, food, education, and indeed all aspects of life were only worsened by the pandemic, but they had been there all along.

Most colleges and universities and their libraries were shut down, doing their best to educate and support students remotely, though it required redesigning a lot of what we do on the fly. Higher education was in crisis. Carving out the time to work on the book was more difficult than ever. Among our coeditors and contributing authors, there were changes to job descriptions, new jobs, illnesses, sick relatives, and, tragically, one death.

Our desire to contribute to real change regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the world of academic libraries—the purpose of the book—was stronger than ever. We had set out to gather practical examples of projects that academic librarians could undertake now. Our conviction that our original framework would be useful was shaken at times—in the face of everything going on, would anything we could do really make a difference?

As we read and reread contributed chapters, we were deeply moved by the determination, creativity, and commitment to social justice demonstrated by the authors. Some were able to harness the energy from a campus crisis or a national reckoning to start the process of change in their libraries. Others took advantage of collegial networks or created new networks. Many sought to reeducate

themselves and their colleagues. And some took hold of everyday library activities and tried to change them in the service of equity for library workers and users.

It was not until we heard Tressie McMillan Cottom deliver the ACRL 2021 opening keynote address that we realized there was a name for what we were doing: “pragmatic hope—‘having a set of beliefs and ideas and knowing from the outset that you are going to fall short of them,’ but figuring out how to try anyway.... ‘Pragmatic hope is about translating those big ideas—human-centered, ethical, fair, just—what does that look like on Tuesday at 5?’”¹

Many library workers are committed to transforming libraries into change agents for social justice. Every library is in a different place when it comes to equity, some further along than others, which means that each library and library worker has a different set of tools available to them. Some of us are dreaming of wide-scale change, and some of us are hoping for small wins. We hope this book offers ideas for both.

Note

1. Tressie McMillan Cottom, quoted in Lisa Peet, “Keynote Tressie McMillan Cottom Talks Human-Centered Data Rights and Pragmatic Hope | ACRL 2021,” *Library Journal*, April 14, 2021, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=Keynote-Tressie-McMillan-Cottom-Talks-Human-Centered-Data-Rights-and-Pragmatic-Hope-ACRL-2021>

Bibliography

- Peet, Lisa. “Keynote Tressie McMillan Cottom Talks Human-Centered Data Rights and Pragmatic Hope | ACRL 2021.” *Library Journal*, April 14, 2021. <https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=Keynote-Tressie-McMillan-Cottom-Talks-Human-Centered-Data-Rights-and-Pragmatic-Hope-ACRL-2021>.