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MAIN STAGE: LIBRARY WORKERS: ORGANIZE AND ACTIVATE

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>> ANNOUNCER: Please welcome your moderators for today's session, ALA President Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada and ALA President-Elect Emily Drabinski.  
(Cheers and applause)

>> LESSA PELAYO-LOZADA: It's weird seeing our faces up there like that.

Good morning, everyone. And welcome to Library Workers: Organize and Activate. I am Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada, ALA President and co-moderator of this morning's panel, where we explore how organizing shows up in libraries, our work, and our drive towards justice, equity, and inclusion for our communities. This year, my presidency has been focused on our brave communities. We have been brave over the last few years through COVID, economic changes, global changes, and more. And we have been brave to work towards sustainability in our libraries and the world. And we have had to be especially brave over the last few years in the face of book censorship and challenges in a way that is unprecedented in the 20 years that ALA has tracked challenges.

We have been brave, but how do we keep being brave? We cannot do any of this alone, and we know this as ALA members and being a

part of this community. We are members because we see the value in community around common core values and because we know there is strength in numbers and a unified voice.

We are members because we are there for our communities and we are parts of our communities. And at the foundation of libraries and being able to do our job as librarian workers is organizing and is activating.

I never saw myself as an organizer or an activist, but once I sat down and I really thought about libraries, I realized that we are all organizers, and many of us take it to that next step to activist. We organize materials of all types for collections and archives. We organize people for programs and classes. And we also organize ourselves for advocacy, fair wages, fair treatment, and more. At our best, we are front-line activists defending intellectual freedom, the right to read, and equal access to information for everyone in our communities.

Today we will hear from those who have made big change by working together to make a better world and are familiar with library workers organizing and advocating for themselves and their communities. Those who have been brave and set the example and the path for many of us to follow. So I will stop there because I want to hear from them, and I am going to welcome them this morning. I am pleased to welcome K.C. Boyd, who is currently a school librarian with the District of Columbia Public Schools System and is the National 2020 School Library Journal librarian of the year.

(Cheers and applause)

She has served on the Executive Boards for the District of Columbia Library Association and Washington Teachers Union and is an active committee member for the American Library Association Chapter Council representing Washington, DC, and every library institute advisory board. She is also a member of the District of Columbia public Schools Library Core and serves on the AASL school library event promotion committee. She is also a national ambassador representing the Washington, DC, area for technology, virtual classroom, and the news literacy project. A staunch advocate for school libraries, she is widely known and respected for her work with educating parents, teachers, and district officials on promoting leisure reading for children and teens. And she is a sought-after and popular keynote speaker and conference presenter at the local, state, and national levels. It is her belief that all children, despite economic circumstances, have the right to read and should have access to books that reflect themselves and encourage inquiry.

Welcome, K.C.

(Applause)

Next up is Lesley Garrett, who has been a public library worker since 2014 and is currently a Library Associate II at Seattle Public Library as well as a Reference Assistant at Seattle Central College. Prior to moving to Seattle to work on their MLIS at the University of Washington, Lesley was the bookmobile and outreach coordinator

at McCracken County public library in Paducah Kentucky. In this role, they focused on projects such as digital toolkits, design for people who have recently experienced incarceration. Lesley has also been a community organizer since 2017 and published with American Libraries and presented for the Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services about the overlap those experiences have with library services, and particularly how disability justice principles can shape programming design. In their academic work, Lesley is researching de-escalation practices and front-line staff well-being in public libraries, anti-racist safety technology UX, and the role of public libraries in climate crisis response.

And next up we have Candice Wing-yee Mack, who manages system-wide young adult Services at the Los Angeles public library.

(Cheers and applause)

She is humbled and thrilled to be a member-at-large on the public Library Association's Board of Directors, the current Chair of YALSA's Morris Debut Award Committee and a Past President of the Asian Pacific American Librarians Association and the Young Adult Library Services Association. Candice co-authored the civics and society chapter in Media Literacy for Justice, lessons for changing the world 2022, based on the initiative she created at her library. Candice has taught at UCL a A's Graduate School of Information studies, was an emerging leader and a 2016 ALA Spectrum Scholar. She was also an inaugural member of the ALA Library advocacy and policy Core, a member of the 2018 we need diverse books Walter D. Meyers Awards jury. Her commitment to community, diversity, connected learning, social justice, youth development, and an unusual coincidence led her to pursue public librarianship.

Last but not least, we have the indomitable Elizabeth Martinez.

(Cheers and applause)

Her memoir A Jaguar in the Library, tells a story of extraordinary experiences as the first Chicana librarian to become Executive Director of the American Library Association, representing America's libraries. Elizabeth has left her footprints and spirit in every position held, establishing four ethnic resource centers in Los Angeles County public library that thrive today, American Indian; Asian Pacific Islander; Black, and Chicano. Opening the new 500,000-square-foot central library in Los Angeles, just to name a few.

(Applause)

At ALA, we are not done. At ALA, she established the Spectrum Scholarship.

(Cheers and applause)

Secured \$200 million from Bill Gates for computers and technology training for 4,000 library systems throughout the nation in poor areas. And secured funding for a new Cesar Chavez Library in the farmworker community in Northern California in 2012. She has been a lecturer at UCLA, San Jose State, and the University of Arizona. In 2015 in New Mexico, she was appointed to the State Library Commission and was the first President of the Mexico Public

Library Foundation. She has advocated for everything and everyone and has also been instrumental in the development of REFORMA, the National Association for public library services to Latinos and the Spanish speaking and honored her with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

So, everyone, we have some very wonderful people here. You have heard a lot from me talking about them, but now I want to hear from them. And I felt it important to read out their numerous accomplishments to really set the stage for what this work looks like and what it leads to as well. Because as we are going to talk about when we are in it, it doesn't always feel like people see you or hear you, but in the end, we do see and hear you.

And so let's get to know each other a little bit, everybody. Tell me, how did you come to this work, what is the first campaign you worked on, and what's your biggest one? We are starting off big, everybody. K.C., we'll start with you.

>> K.C. BOYD: Good morning, everyone. My parents are originally from Louisiana. Mother is from Shreveport, father is from New Orleans, and they experienced, of course, Jim Crow South, so they participated in a lot of protests when they were in college, Southern University A&M College -- woo-woo, I am a second-generation graduate of the University too.

So I was raised in a household with parents that taught my siblings and I the importance of speaking up, amplifying your voice. Now, my first venture into experiencing advocacy was dealing with the Chicago Public Schools' problem with closure of libraries. There were 50 schools that were closed as a result of Renaissance 2020, I believe it was, and as a result of that, there were so many school libraries that were closed.

A group of us, we named ourselves Shy School Librarians. We got together and we began to advocate and to try and just change the trajectory and turn it around. We were not successful. It was heartbreaking. But I will say this. I learned a lot from that loss. And so sometimes when you lose, you actually win on many levels. And so when I moved to the District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington, DC, two years into that position learned that they were trying to close library programs, particularly in Black and brown neighborhoods across the river in Wards 7 and 8. And I felt that this was an inequity of service to those children. We began to work together. The librarians and I. We mobilized. We organized. And we got the parents, the community, and eventually the DC Council behind us.

Long story short, we were able to secure \$3.2 million two years ago to ensure that every child in Wards 7 and 8 would have a certified, full-time librarian.

(Applause)

Now, no, don't clap because now, this is two years in. The problem that we are experiencing now is that librarians should not be budgeted year to year. You don't do that with math and English and science teachers. This needs to be a permanent position. So what this calls for is education reform. The language has got to

change. And that's what we are fighting for right now.

(Applause)

>> LESLEY GARRETT: All right. It's my turn. Hello, everyone. I am Lesley, from western Kentucky. I started working in libraries in 2014 as a part-time summer job and fell in love with it. So I have been in libraries, except for some breaks to do community organizing. My first, like, real campaign/win was in 2017. I was working with Kentuckians for the Commonwealth staffed for the Western Kentucky Chapter, and we were organizing to pass a fairness ordinance, which is just legal protections for LGBTQ people. And so that -- it was in my hometown, Paducah, and it was a very personal campaign in the sense of we were just trying to get basic protections so people couldn't get fired or lose their house for being queer. And I grew up in Center Baptist Church, I was very steeped in this culture, and it was a very personally transformative experience. We did end up passing it. It was a very intense fight. And it really involved a lot of coalition building between -- because we had a lot of opposition that was from the faith-based community, but we also did recruit some folks in the faith-based communities to come out in support of it. So we were able to bring in, like, folks from the economic development communities and just general support for that. So I'll talk about coalition building later, but that was a really intense win, and I cried so much after it.

(Laughter)

But so that was in my hometown. It might seem small on the grand scale, but those, like, really personal wins are what can push you into this work and sustain you. And especially seeing, like, people you have grown up with come up and be like, hey, like this actually matters to me and have no idea. So you never know who you are supporting. And yeah, that was my first big win. And actually, one of my colleagues who was at that Council meeting is here. Leah, if you are out there, hey. Shout out to my McCracken County Public Library folks who were at that City Council meeting and saw that win and watched me grow up. Hey. Yeah.

>> CANDICE MACK: Good morning, everyone. I guess pretty significant part of my journey actually started in this city. I was really fortunate to be a Spectrum Scholar, so I keep looking at K.C. and Elizabeth because I started at a student worker. At UC, my undergrad college, I needed a job. I was in libraries as support staff for quite a while, almost a decade, before I went to library school. And the unusual coincidence, actually, that was mentioned in my bio is that I actually ran into on a bus going to work Spectrum Scholar Todd Honma, and he was the one that was like come to this UCLA information session about the school and find out more because we need more library staff of color to get into the profession. So, right, like it was another example of, I think, just, you know, bringing somebody along. You know? And doing that work.

But my first -- so I couldn't go -- I couldn't afford to go to library school without the Spectrum Scholarship. So as part of the Spectrum Scholarship, there's a Leadership Institute, and you get

to go to Conference. So my very first ALA Conference ever was in this city in 2006, after Hurricane Katrina. And one of the things that we did is -- because there happened to be seven of us from UCLA that year. And I just said hey -- it was Tracie who organized the volunteer opportunity I believe the Friday before Annual really got started for us to help the New Orleans Public Libraries clean out their libraries because they had been locked up since Hurricane Katrina. And so I just put an email out there on the UCLA listserv, hey, anyone going to Annual, do you want to come and just join this volunteer opportunity? And so a bunch of us did, and it was really transformative. It was before it was called Libraries Transforming Communities, but it did. We got suited up in our Tyvek outfits looking like spacemen. You know? Like the folks at the parade last night, goggles, you know, and gloves. And it was so striking to -- it was heartbreaking to have to -- but also beautiful in its way to see how much I -- we worked at the Nora Navra branch to clear that out to see how much it meant to the community, you know, just these remnants of artwork that the children had done and the books and the desk furniture. You know, because it needed to be cleared out in order to be rebuilt. You know, pulling up the carpet, and it was a big mess, but it really, I feel like, framed my journey into librarianship, into the work. And it really turned something, you know, that was a job that I liked, you know, into like a professional career. And tying how much of library work is community work.

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: First, thank you for inviting me to be part of this panel. I feel like we are better librarians now than we were in my time. You are a powerful force. We may be only 10% of the population of the profession, 10% librarians of color, but look at the positions you are in. Look at the influence that you have. And look at the fact that you are now players at the table, whether you brought the table or the chair yourself, but you are there, and that's very different from where I come from.

So today, libraries are for everybody. Today we have collections and services and staff and such that are representative of communities. That was not the case when I started. So the progress that we have made in that is notable, it's important.

I had the extraordinary opportunity to, my first, very first, to work with a group of women who represented the community. Ann Rosen, who was an elder and who taught us all that if you take one spoonful from everybody's bowl of soup, you can feed another person. And she wasn't talking about soup. She was talking about helping others. And Joyce Sunby, a Black children's librarian, who taught me about choosing my battles. You know, Elizabeth, there's four walls around us. Pick the one with the crack because that will be easier for you. I didn't learn that for a long time. But I remember it to this day because it was -- she was right.

And Harriet Covey, who kind of afraid of, this white lesbian librarian, because she was tough and she was loud, and she was teaching the youth to read Malcolm X and Saul Alinsky and authors that they probably would not have come across. Bennie Wilkin, still

a friend, the only one of that original group who is still alive, and she is still teaching because she says that when I heard her speak at California Library Association Conference, I went up to her and I said I want to be like you. I want to be like you when I grow up. Because I was first job, first librarian. She was loud, she was formidable, and she made people laugh. I could be loud too, and I could say the same things, but I couldn't make them laugh like she did. So it was important lessons for me to learn.

And Margot Wong, the other librarian, who taught us the value of money. Very wealthy librarian who would come to us and say "What do you need?" And write a check. Checks in those days. What do you need? And always, no matter if it was helping somebody in the community, you know, find a home or shelter or somebody that needed help with their tuition or somebody that needed a meal, she was right there with us, handing out her checks.

So this group of women taught me how to survive in this profession when, you know, we weren't welcome for some of the things we were doing. I was working in East Los Angeles, you know, Joyce and others were working in South Central Los Angeles with the Black community, and it was a time to introduce them to libraries because libraries did not have what you have today. They didn't have collections that represented everybody. You couldn't speak Spanish in a library. You couldn't hire staff that spoke Spanish. It was such a closed -- in a progressive, you know, California, it was so, so different.

So I am so pleased today -- I never would have seen a panel that's representative of everybody in this profession. Here we are. It wouldn't have happened when I was starting out as a librarian, certainly when I tried at ALA. One of us -- one, one, one, only one, never two, only one. Maybe one brown, maybe one Black. That's all. But here, look at this. I applaud you all. Thank you. Thank you for making this possible.

(Applause)

So I feel that I am witness to what the progress that's happened, and I am very grateful for all the work that all of you do, and I feel so proud of all of you. So thank you. Thank you.

(Applause)

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: It is so wonderful to hear your stories and hear the important role that taking part in activist activities has had in your careers. I know that for me, work that I have done with others on behalf of a good beyond me is what sustains me and gets me up in the morning.

That said, I don't like a rally. It's too hot. There are too many people. Like my feet hurt. When people say we need more activists in libraries -- and I think we do; right? We are at an existential moment for the field -- I don't want to have to, like, get on the bullhorn. Has anybody here been on a bullhorn before? It's like -- there is a technique; right? You've got to really yell into it. So there are lots of reasons to not want to do that.

So I think if we are going to get everybody onboard, we need

to think about all the different work that's necessary that goes into making political change possible.

So I wonder if we can talk a little bit about the different ways people can participate in organizing. And I'd love for you all to be as concrete as possible. What are some examples of jobs that you have done as you have worked towards political change, and what other kinds of jobs are there for people who maybe don't feel comfortable on the mic, who feel like their feet hurt. We'll start with you, Elizabeth.

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: My feet hurt.

(Laughter)

I speak from a different -- actually, a different era here because I was alone. I didn't have a cadre like you, all of you folks. There were a few people around there that, you know, protected, sheltered and such. But it wasn't easy. You know?

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: It's still not easy.

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: But there are more -- you know, you are together. That's one of the things that have changed, I think, is that while we are all trying to do things in our -- now you can do it together, and that's a powerful force. So I am very grateful to watch that. I think that's why I am glad to be here. You give me faith in the profession again. You know, a profession that wasn't quite --

>> You can say it

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: Welcoming.

>> CANDICE MACK: Well, I just want to say thank you, Elizabeth, because you made it possible for us to not be alone in this. Because of the Spectrum Scholarship and the cohorts every year. You know? So that's what you did. Not on a bullhorn, and not walking a rally, but with everything that you did and everything that you struggled through. You know, there are so many -- I am ashamed I can't remember what year we are on now, but I know we celebrated our 25th anniversary of Spectrum not too long ago. That's 25 years of cohorts. You know? So I want to make sure to give you your flowers for that and so much more because I know that I wouldn't be able to be in this profession without, you know, standing on the shoulders of so many others, including you. So thank you, Elizabeth.

(Applause)

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: If I could clarify one thing about Spectrum, it was a group of librarians of color -- Cherokee, lesbian -- color, too -- but Black, Chicano, Japanese -- that came together to plan this program. And it happened because for 20 years, we had heard how profession needed to diversify. We need more people. You know? And so it was a group of librarians of color who put that plan together. I was the instrument to make it happen, but they came up with the ideas, the program, the amount of money, everything. And it was, I think, the best thing most of us have ever done was that particular program. Some of us paid the price, and others, the profession came through, though, and that was the best.

>> CANDICE MACK: Well, thank you again, Elizabeth.



In terms of other things that folks can do, so in Los Angeles, during the 2008 recession, 2009, there was a lot of budget cuts that the city was going through. And so along with our -- so the Librarians' Guild is the union at Los Angeles Public Library, and they started a "Save the Library" campaign in order to try and reduce the cuts in hours and layoffs and whatnot. And so one of the things that I started doing -- so this is back in 2009-2010 -- was exploring this newfangled thing called "social media," so I want -- I did participate in protests, but it is also sort of, I guess, similar to sending out that email asking for help. It was that, but amplified through Twitter, through Facebook, just asking people: Do you care about whether or not this city has a fully functioning library with staffing and with full hours? Right? And if you do, just getting the word out about what folks could do, whether it was showing up at city hall, whether it was signing a petition, whether it was making demo -- posters for the demonstrations, whether it was doing story time on the mayor's lawn, you know, and bringing your families to listen to that story time. You know, those kinds of things. So yeah, not the bullhorn, not the -- you know, but just doing things like that to just get people going. Bringing the snacks.

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: And having an ask; right? I need you to show up here on this date.

>> LESLEY GARRETT: I also absolutely hate the bullhorn, it's not my lane, but kind of similar to social media, and sending that email, during the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprising, my lane was more of a care role in, like, after the protest, whenever, like, your adrenaline drops and you are exhausted and emotional, like I am carrying the tissue box. Always carrying the tissue box, like waiting for that support afterward. And so my roles were, one, doing, like, check-ins with folks, making sure that they were okay afterward and really making sure we were taking care of ourselves emotionally for the long run. Very background. And also moving resources. Doing mutual aid fundraisers because bills still need to be paid whenever we are on the front lines. And that really comes up in union organizing as well. But yeah, moving money to buy water, snacks, all the things we need on the front lines of demonstrations, as well as just on the daily. So that's a big need as well, like, as librarians who know information resources, we know how to find where the resources are, and the organizing side is how do we send those where they are most efficient. So finding that role is one of my favorites.

And then yeah, taking care of ourselves and taking care of each other is a big part of it. And so, like, if you, like, are a care worker, like really, like I find -- I love that role because it's so human and so -- it's what makes it worth it, really. And so yeah. Also, I brought tissues on stage. Always have tissues. So yeah. Like that's the big one.

And then as far as, like, from the disability justice angle, not everyone can show up on the front lines and walk around. And during the pandemic, especially during the 2020 demonstrations, like

people who were immunocompromised couldn't show up to those in-person events. It was too risky. And like finding ways to have virtual ways to tune in, actions that are accessible, especially during a pandemic, when the risk of catching COVID is not possible and that still remains today because we are still in it. And I think a big challenge for us now is to maintain that energy. Because there is a lot of energy, like putting everything on line at the beginning of the pandemic. And now we are a couple years in, and those options are starting to trickle away. I think it's really important we maintain that energy of keeping those multiple entry points virtually. And yeah. So that's a big part of my answer.

>> K.C. BOYD: Well, I was exposed to bullhorns very early in life. Both of my parents were avid members of the Chicago Teachers Union. And during the '70s and '80s, there were a ton of strikes. So I was out there on the picket lines with my parents, my siblings, and I during that time.

So I had that experience, and I saw how important it was to have a role and to, of course, participate. And moving that thought process to DC public school librarians, a lot of my colleagues were afraid. They didn't want to speak up. They were afraid of retaliation. And I was like girl, you better stop because if you keep this up, we're not going to have a job, so you are going to have to do something. You know, that was my attitude with them. I've seen this happen in Chicago. This can happen here. So we are going to have to get past this fear. But there was still a percentage of librarians that felt that fear. And I had to -- that's the most important thing is that you have to respect it in terms of how far a person -- you can push a person. So where I am really good with social media, I am a big loud mouth there. I don't have a problem with saying a lot of things online. You know, I just say it. But I am respectful. And I always encourage, like, my new librarians that just joined the district, listen. You are kind of on probation. You don't need to get too deep into this. So what you can do is you can post online the beauty of your library program on a regular basis to show people what you are actually doing. Librarians like myself that have over 20 years of experience and, you know, not afraid, you know, you can go to the board meetings, and you can speak up.

And I want to clarify something. We don't have a school board. We have to deal with politicians because our politicians are really our governing body for the district in DC. So now we get into our librarians that are about to retire. They could give a crap, really, because their thing is I am retiring soon. What can you do to me? So they have an attitude, and they can -- they really can amplify their voice and speak up for those who really don't want to speak up. And they are afraid.

And then, of course, you have the retirees. The retirees know where the bones are buried in the district and also the foolery that takes place. And they have no problem with going to a council meeting, whether it's during the day or at night, and testifying and pretty much telling people off, which is really fun to see.

(Laughter)

So yeah, it's that -- it's with this, you have to be respectful of everyone's limitations. Everyone can participate, whereas I am not really good at writing a testimony on the drop of a hat. But we have people that have that talent. I am not really good with rallying people in the community because I have only been in DC now six years. But then there's those that are amongst me that know people in the community, that have introduced them to me, and they are helping in this fight. So everyone can contribute and everyone has a role.

(Applause)

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: And it's going to take everybody; right? What I am hearing from all of these stories is that none of us act alone, and the more we pull people in, the bigger our power is going to be; right? That every time I ask you can you order a set of whistles for this rally; right? Somebody's got to order the whistles; right? And that person, you know, I think what's great about organizing and activating is it gives you a sense that the world you are in could be different. And you can make it so.

>> K.C. BOYD: Can I also add? We are getting ready to gear up for School Library Month. Because all during the pandemic, we still had people that were plotting against getting rid of the librarians. You know? In the district.

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: They are sure organized; right?

>> K.C. BOYD: I am not good at making T-shirts, but someone else is, let them handle that. If that's your contribution, that's your contribution. That's where we are right now, getting ready for School Librarian Month. It's going to be dynamite.

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: You tell us what we need to do.

For the panelists, and we will start with you, Candice, the sustaining and caring for ourselves in the work, I think, can be quite challenging because when we fight, we win. But also, when we fight, we get tired. And I know that for myself and my own activist work, there are times when I am on the phone -- I am planning my next tattoo, I think it's going to be a switchboard operator because you are just plugging everything in; right? That can be really exhausting. And I have learned a lot from many of the women up here about how to take care of myself in the work. So I would love to hear about your strategies for caring for yourself and sustaining yourself in the work and how you balance the personal and professional. Right? Because power is definitely always at play here. What I am able to do I am able to do because of my positionality and my position, and I haven't always, you know, I think what you were talking about, KC, really resonated with me. Maybe you can kick us off talking about how you take care of you.

>> CANDICE MACK: I think sort of hearkening back to what everybody is saying, there is that saying that if you go alone, you can go faster, but if you go together, you go farther. So that goes back to that idea of allowing folks or encouraging folks to do what they can from where they are. Right? Or where they are able to or

what their capacity is. So also that idea of stepping up and then stepping back; right? So that you have that time to care for yourself and reenergize. You know, no matter what it is that you've been helping with. And bringing other folks in to also step up and step back so that no one is getting burnt out. You know? Because I think that's really easy -- it's really easy for that to happen.

I don't know that -- I mean, I try to, you know, give myself grace in that break time too, but it's challenging. So definitely having colleagues to vent with I think is really, really helpful and really sustaining. So it's really appreciated. And some of them are out here right now.

Thanks.

>> LESLEY GARRETT: Yeah, the anger and knowing how to work with it is pretty key. Anger is an appropriate reaction to a lot of the problems. And I think it's really valuable to embrace it and learn how to sit with it. There is a really great book called Love and Rage. It has some reflective activities in that that I have used. And I think one of the greatest areas of personal growth has been to accept my anger and, like, realize it's okay. Like, we can work with that. And the thing about anger is that it's a very, very powerful organizing tool. But like fire, it will consume everything, so you have to be able to channel it and work with it in a constructive way. Kind of like how they use fire to, like, maintain forest growth. Like you've got the wildfires, but on the other hand, it's maintenance. So it's just about how you work with it.

And also for me, like kind of hand in hand with the anger part of it is knowing what's individual, knowing what's structural. This is going to get really heavy for a second, so hang with me. At my library recently we lost a patient to homelessness. And I was sitting in the counseling session that we had for staff to cope with it, and my grief was anger because this was not a death that should have happened. And we were going through the regular self-care strategies, and I was looking at the list of PTSD symptoms and checking off everything because that's public library work at times. We are collectively very traumatized. But yeah, I was sitting in this session, and I was just like feeling all of the anger take over. And toward the end of the session, I just, like, choked out. We can't self-care our way out of massive structural problems that are quite literally killing people.

(Applause)

Yeah. Know it's bigger than us individually. And that's why we organize is because these are massive issues. They are not going to be fixed with one program. They are not even going to be fixed with one team-up with the food bank to get people food. Like, it's going to be -- we need massive change, and to make massive change, we need each other.

>> Uh-huh, that's right.

>> K.C. BOYD: Anger is something I have a problem with managing. I am a fire sign, Aries, so yeah, I can get really upset, so things

don't go well, I can come home and start throwing stuff, cursing like a sailor, and carrying on. But it's important to have friends and family that understand is what you are experiencing. And I am not talking about the friends that are just in town. I have friends around the country that will call and check and say "are you okay?" And that means the world to me because I am dealing with a chancellor that his mother is a school librarian, and this is happening, and it makes you so angry, you know, that there's a lack of respect for school librarians in the district.

So I really, really lean on friends and family to help me remain calm. And in addition to that, I also lean on quotes. And you know me well, I love John Lewis, the late John Lewis, and what he stood for. And John Lewis talked about hope and optimism. Because that's the only way you can do this work. If you have hope and optimism. Because you've got to put the anger behind you. You've got to find a way to keep it -- you've got to let it out, and then you've got to put it back in its box and put the padlock back on it until the next episode.

(Laughter)

And you have to have hope and optimism. And then the next thing is you've got to play it clean. And I will say that again. You have to play it clean. And Ida B. Wells talks about the importance of shedding light and truth on issues because, you know, as John Lewis said, you know, you have a moral obligation to speak up when you see something that's not just or right. And that's what we are doing in DC. And sometimes there is retaliation. You know, I haven't been paid twice. You know? And at first when it happened, I was like, nah, they wouldn't do this. And then when it happened again, I was like uh-huh, it is. You know, I didn't receive payment for a program. And it took almost six months to get, you know, paid for it. And I am like no, this is deliberate because it went through the chancellor. And again, you know -- what we do is we are forcing the hand of the district by telling the truth, and the media asks the questions why. And they don't have a substantial answer for why. So we've kind of put the onus back on them and the embarrassment on them.

So I will conclude by saying this. Marc Morial, who is the former mayor of New Orleans, and he is also the President of the Urban League, wrote a book several years ago called The Gumbo Coalition. Get it? It's ten steps for leaders. And I have dog-eared that book so much because there are so many good tips in there to help me remain sane and just to keep moving forward. So I am really -- that has really been a helpful tool for me over the last couple of years.

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: So I call on my ancestors. I talk to them. Should I do this? Should I do that? And it's -- I can't imagine going through life without having that history, that family, that -- living this way. Because I have found, certainly in my career, that it's very hard to separate professional from personal. And that many times the professional is personal. And so I developed a strategy that I'll share with -- maybe I'll share two strategies

with you. I'll share one about go to meetings. Only one. Go to meetings. And my grandmother had told me to draw a table, place the people there. What animal do they remind you of? So I -- do you know there's a lot of rats in the library profession?

(Laughter)

Seriously. I think about rats. They are busy. You know, think about the characteristics of rats. They are busy. They get things done. They go, they are always moving. You know? But once in a while you'd find a duck or a bear. You know? Shark, mm, I don't know. So I'd label them. And every single meeting I ever went to in my profession, I had a drawing of a table with all these little characters. And so it was like my people are helping me understand where I am at. Where I am at. If that didn't work -- it usually did, but sometimes I would also prepare myself for some meeting, and I would -- you know how you get dressed and ready, you know, power colors and all this stuff. And armor. I put my armor on. And I remember going at a council meeting once, where it was after the 2009-10, the recession was going, and I was proposing I am going to build this library, the Cesar Chavez Library, and I am going to build it for the farmworkers and for the people who call themselves the dust bowl people, it was a community and a city. How can you do that? It's a recession. There is no money. Never believe people when they say there's no money. There's always something, and it's never in the operating budget. It's somewhere else in some escrow, somewhere else there's always money. And so I said I'll find it. I'll raise it. I'll do it.

And it was walking out of this council meeting, I was approached by a deputy police officer, chief -- the deputy, not the chief. And she said: Elizabeth, you better watch your back.

And immediately, you know -- why? I am from LA. I came with armor. That was how I survived. I came with armor. I am from LA. You know? And I've got people behind me.

So however we each find a way to do that, and I think we all do, we find our own way, that's what sustains us, I think. And sometimes it's very personal.

>> LESSA PELAYO-LOZADA: I think the armor is a very good point. I feel like sometimes I have to go into a different persona, almost, to accomplish some of these tasks. I almost like black out. I don't know what I am saying. I don't know who I am. But when I come out on the other side, I have gotten a lot done.

(Laughter)

So one of the things that also, you know, K.C., you were saying, you know, quotes sustain you sometimes; right? For me one of those quotes is "Resistance is the reward," so that's a quote by a Native Hawaiian scholar who was really big into the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. So Hawaiian sovereignty is likely not something that we will ever see in our lifetime, but working towards it and working towards understanding, right, where we came from and how we became colonized and are able to move on, and how that is reflected also in the work that's done in the community libraries in Hawaii and how

that organizing has come up has been very interesting to see. By having bilingual signage because Hawaii is also the only state that has two official languages, English and Hawaiian, making sure that our native practices are inculturated into programming on a regular basis, renting out the community space for baby showers and for luau and things like that, and making sure that we are doing everything appropriately. Organizing comes into all of these different spaces, and there are so many lessons that we learn as we go through it. And I think that we grow and change based on the different experiences that we have so that some day we can all grow up to be an Elizabeth Martinez and have that large impact; right? I think that's what the ultimate goal is for us to make a very strong impact on the communities that we work and live in.

So we have heard a lot of wisdom here today, and as we are kind of barreling towards the end, I wonder if you folks could share with all of us what is the most important lesson that you've learned, or what piece of advice -- and/or what piece of advice do you have for us all as we sustain ourselves, as we leave this space today and go out to do that work? So we will start with Lesley.

>> LESLEY GARRETT: Oh, wow, so much that I have learned. Probably what I lead with in both my library work and my community organizing and where those overlap was something I learned from Miriam Kaba, who is an abolitionist organizer and now librarian, I think she graduated with her MLIS, so very incredible person that I look up to as an organizer and a library worker, but yeah, her advice is to fall in behind good work that's already happening. So like look for what's already happening, fall in behind and support it. And then if you look around and the work that you want to do is not happening yet, then you come in and build out. And I think that is especially important to me, as a young person in the field, still like getting my bearings and getting my degree and building up. A lot of awesome work already exists. And even like being on this panel, I feel like an absolute baby. And like I am baby, I am here, I am contributing, but like it's so cool to be on stage with everyone here and, like, learn from you all. So I think, yeah, like look at the work that's already been done, but also don't be afraid to ask questions. And also, what I always try to do in my work is center the most directly impacted. Whenever I put together those reentry toolkits, trying to get feedback from folks who have experienced incarceration and actually ask directly "what do you need?" And that toolkit, phones came up. Like phone access was one of our biggest asks from our patrons who are just gotten out of the jail right across from the library. So we added onto our existing digital toolkits. We had the computers for checkout and the Wi-Fi hotspots for checkout, and we grew from that program to then add the cell phones. So it was combining that existing great work with asks of the directly impacted people.

And while we are on that, just a quick note. So we've talked a lot about book bans. Don't forget about book bans in prisons. The U.S. has one of the largest rates of incarceration in the world, and

book bans are really intense in prisons. So I just wanted to throw that out there. When we are talking about book bans, some of the people most directly impacted are people who are incarcerated currently. So yeah, those are my main takeaways. And also get organized into unions because union protection is really important, especially when things get heated and you are trying to push back against people in power, because that's how you make change. If you are, especially like rank and file, like I am, you don't have much power to throw with. And that puts livelihoods at risk. Oftentimes it's worth taking that risk, but having a union and having that legal backing and knowing that you've got someone who can come to the table and negotiate with you is really, really critical.

So I have worked in non-unionized workplaces, and I now work in a unionized workplace, and it does make a difference. I feel even more confident, even as a Library II associate at this stage, knowing that there's that structural support. So yeah, we are stronger together, especially as workers.

(Applause)

>> K.C. BOYD: I couldn't wear red today because of the red background, but I wear red for ed, and that's the thing that the Washington Teachers Union will do every Friday, we wear red for ed, and I have learned how important it is to be an active member of the union, especially if you work in a school district. I took it to the next level. I just pushed myself, and I said okay, I am going to run for a seat on the Executive Board. I got it. So now I can really amplify the voice of the school librarian and the support that's needed through the Washington Teachers Union to fight this fight.

I have also learned how important it is for us, as librarians, to reeducate the educated. Everyone thinks they know everything about school libraries, and they don't get it. And I find educators are the toughest group to, you know, really explain that school libraries have changed over a matter of 30 years. And there's 30 years of research that's tied in to the impact that a full-time certified librarian has on a child's education. And just repeating that and getting these university professors that are contracted with the school district or schools to understand that. It's tough. It's not easy. But I just say this in closing. I love my quotes, so I have one from Cardi B. That is "You may knock me down nine times, but I get up ten." That's important when you do this work.

(Applause)

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: So there's so many ways that others can help us, but I have learned that everybody can contribute something. You are not -- I was told after the Rodney King civil disobedience in Los Angeles, by Debbie Allen, the actress who came and said I am going to raise a million dollars, I am going to restore the two libraries that burnt, and Elizabeth, you need to speak with a loud voice. And I don't always do that. I have a soft voice. You know? And she said no, you need to speak with a loud voice. And I have learned that, but I have learned that other people don't have a loud



voice, but they can order the t-shirts. You know?

>> You've got to get everybody's t-shirt size.

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: So there's something everybody can contribute to the cause. In my day, it was always something that we had to achieve. But the lesson was we have to do it together. That was my lesson. I had to find people so that we could do it together. Because we are not alone. And look at the people here, and look at everyone that has found their way and is accomplishing to make it a better library community and, therefore, a better community itself. Together. And that's, you know, (Speaking Spanish). That's how we get there.

(Applause)

>> CANDICE MACK: For me, I think about progress, not perfection. Right? So any movement forward, however that looks like, helps. And also, I think about, you know, as someone who loves to read, stereotypically, especially fiction because I am a youth librarian, youth fiction, you know, I just would -- or try to think about, like, when I read those stories as a kid, you know, who did -- you know, I feel like no matter how bad things got in those books -- and it sort of speaks to, right, the book banning and how harmful it is -- that, sure, horrible things happened in those books, whether they are fiction or nonfiction, to people, and we know that they happen in real life to folks unfortunately too. But the light at the end of the tunnel, right, and the value of fairy tales and whatnot, is that there was success at the end. People survived. They made it through. And so I try to think about when things get really bad, like I feel like when things get really bad, this is our opportunity to be that hero. You know? Not savior in any way, shape, or form. Or be that person that, as kids, we wanted to be. You know? Whoever that was and whoever we admired when we read those stories. Like even if it's scary, and even if it's in this tiny way; right? That this, every day we have that chance. You know? And no matter if it's just an email or a tweet or whatever, ordering the whistles, making the t-shirts, there is an opportunity there. You know? And even if you can't come up with it yourself, you know, you can just ask: How can I help? Do you want me to get the bananas for snacks? Like whatever. Right? And that's what I try to think about and do and encourage others to do as well.

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: Can I take a co-moderator point of privilege and ask you, Lessa, as an organizer, what's your take-home. Sorry to spring it.

>> LESSA PELAYO-LOZADA: No, she did spring this on me, and I have nothing prepared. Everybody knows I love to be scripted, just to be clear. I think that my biggest takeaway is to have people that you trust and to have people that you can talk to, whether they are your ancestors, whether they are living, whether they are folks that you are bringing up, to be able to be real with so that you can get those lessons out, but to also be able to check you. Because, as much as I love to think I am right all the time, sometimes you can be wrong. Or sometimes you need a little bit of added perspective.

And so just really to be able to identify who those people are I think is something that helps to sustain me and a valuable lesson that I have to remind myself over and over again because it's really easy to try to do it alone.

There you go. Was that okay?

(Applause)

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: I did not know when I was elected to this position that meeting and learning from lessons in her capacities would be one of the best parts of the job. So thank you, Lessa.

>> LESSA PELAYO-LOZADA: And I will just add good boundaries is another lesson too.

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: She has given me some good instruction on those boundaries. I will add my two cents too. One of the things, especially in this moment in libraries, when we are feeling under attack in ways that I think many of us could have ever imagined, that putting a book in the hands of a child could become politicized to such an extent that we have places in this country that are threatening to put library workers in jail for, you know, like just reading. You know? And you think about a library, and who could be against it? Like you can only be for it; right? And I think for me, getting sort of weighed down by those stories can be really -- you can feel -- you can begin to feel that it is hopeless. And so for me, the most important thing that I bring to my own work is the sense of hope every morning. A belief that the world could be otherwise, and taking that as an essential way of thinking about the world. And we learn -- and why it's, I think, even more important to hear the stories of the people who have come before because it must seem to you, Elizabeth, that things that you did not think were possible, such as a panel like this, would be possible in the field. Right?

>> ELIZABETH MARTINEZ: Yes, that's true. But that's what we were aiming for.

>> EMILY DRABINSKI: Yeah, but you must have believed every morning when you got up that it was possible. That kind of radical hope is something I think is really important, to develop and be around people who believe that also.

To that end, I am going to make a pitch for my own LibLearnX session, which is happening right after this. Just as Dr. Kendi said yesterday, that there is something to know about racial justice work, that it isn't something that people are born with, that there is an expertise -- and not that I am an expert in it, but I do believe that there are techniques and strategies for organizing and building the collective power necessary to build the world that we want. And those are little things, like everybody's got to be in the same t-shirt; am I right? You've got to show up to the meeting in the same t-shirt. And you've got to have a list of everybody in the unit; right? And you have to understand how to take your complaint. Why isn't there a library here? Why don't we have enough staff to be open? Why, why, why? And these sorts of complaints. How to take that complaint and turn it into a demand that we make to the people in power who need to move if we are going to have the world that we

deserve.

And so that session is going to be happening right after this at 10:00 in Room 298-299. I invite those of you in the room to join me in that. And I want to express my extraordinary thanks to being on the stage with these folks as the highlight of my year, frankly. So just thank you so much, and to Lessa for pulling this together.

>> LESSA PELAYO-LOZADA: Thank you so much. Thank you so much, everyone. We look forward to seeing you all at future sessions.

(Applause)

(End of session, 9:41 a.m. CT)

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