# **Progressive Librarianship in “Red” America**

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses a number of library and information-related illusions remaining after Joe Biden’s defeat of Donald Trump in the 2020 American presidential election. Such issues may mirror conditions in other nations where racial, religious, and/or economic rights are asserted and challenged. In the United States of America (U. S,) the conservative Republican base, largely white, extends beyond the “Red” (Republican) states won by the former President Donald Trump in 2020. The majority of votes cast for Trump were actually in “Blue” (Democratic) states won by President Joe Biden (Bump 2020). Similarly, Biden won a majority of votes in certain progressive municipalities and counties in states carried by Trump (Brilliant Maps, 2020). A review of the electoral system which actually selects the American president is provided for those unfamiliar with an 18th century system designed to constrain voter choice. Cherished beliefs of many politically liberal librarians such as (1) documented facts are able to change the minds of opponents, and (2) critical race theory will be widely believed are considered. Such mental constructs are deemed to be unworkable for guiding library service in communities dominated by conservative white Republicans. Equally problematic, arguing a philosophy that undermines the ideal of library neutrality is seen as counterproductive in Republican-dominated states and communities. Such arguments may provide a justification for conservative seizure of control over public libraries and their programs. This article offers ways to develop interlanguages, utilize use pragmatic theories, and embrace political realism. These approaches are seen as essential to expanding support for public library services to underserved populations in states, counties, and municipalities in Red America.

## **A Nation Divided**

In 2021 the contemporary state of the United States of America (U. S.) is far from united. As reported in the November 16, 2020, issue of *Time,* the actions and rhetoric of President Trump, “engineered a lasting tectonic shift in the American political landscape, fomenting a level of anger, resentment, and suspicion that will not be easy for his successor to surmount” (Ball 2020). A November 13, 2020, posting by the Pew Research Center entitled “America Is Exceptional in the Nature of Its Political Divide” outlines the challenges being faced. According to Pew, “the studies we’ve conducted at Pew Research Center over the past few years illustrate the increasingly stark disagreement between Democrats and Republicans on the economy, racial justice, climate change, law enforcement, international engagement and a long list of other issues” (Dimock and Wike, 2020).

Furthermore,

The differences between them [Democrats and Republicans] are about more than just politics and policies. A month before the election, roughly eight-in-ten registered voters in both camps said their differences with the other side were about core American values, and roughly nine-in-ten – again in both camps – worried that a victory by the other would lead to “lasting harm” to the United States. (Dimock and Wike, 2020)

For international audiences familiar with deep discords in other nations, this Conservative Republican-Progressive Democrat division in the U.S. may be seen as reaching the point where it could mirror the Buddhist-Christian-Hindu-Muslim divisions in Sri Lanka (U. S. Department of State, 2019) or the Hindu-Muslim-Sikhs rift in India. This Indian comparison was made by former Indian Congress Party President and MP Rahul Gandhi in a 2020 interview, "when you divide African Americans, Mexicans [Latinx Americans] and other people in the US, so you divide Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs in India, you're weakening the structure of the country… but then the same people who weakened the structure of the country say they are the nationalists" (Gandhi 2020)

Religious differences affecting political viewpoints also exist in the American context. Members of conservative faiths may be equally fundamentalist in their politics. Ryan Burge (2020) is a researcher at Eastern Illinois University and an American Baptist pastor who studies the intersection of religion and politics. According to Burge, the data demonstrate that white evangelical voters are “Republicans first, white people second, and evangelicals third.” As a whole, Republican Party members, regardless of religious affiliation, self-identify as conservative, “75% of whom now consider themselves conservative, up slightly from 73% in 2019 and the highest proportion yet in Gallup's trend since 1994” (Saad 2021).

Much of this national division is also geographic in nature. While Biden won more votes than any other presidential candidate, he won the fewest number of the nation’s counties, the chief geographical subunits of America’s states (Brilliant Maps, 2020). His electoral success was made possible by the fact the counties he did win were among the most heavily populated (Caldera 2020).

## **Establishing Credentials**

Prior to earning a PHD and becoming a library and information educator the author worked in libraries in progressive New York, and states that voted conservative in the 2020 election –Alabama, Indiana and Ohio. It was a practitioner career with positions rising from clerk and reference librarian to multitupe cooperative administrator and deputy state librarian. It also was concurrent with stints of volunteer political work as a state legislative committee member and chair, as well as Federal Relations Coordinator. In the process the author spent years helping to develop coalitions of those with differing political views yet possessing a shared commitment to excellent library service. This extensive professional experience led the author to research and write from the theoretical percpective of pragmatism. One of the shorter definitions of pragmatism is provided in the *Oxord Dictionary of Critical Theory,* ***“***pragmatism is distinguished by its interest in how things work and its foregrounding of belief as an effective mode of thought—we act on beliefs even when we have no way of verifying them” (Buchman 2018).

## **A Note on U.S. Presidential Elections**

Readers unfamiliar with the non-democratic process through which the United States of America actually selects its president every four years may find the following explanation to be of assistance. It reflects the reality that the 18th century “Founders” of the United States of America simply did not trust the average voter.

We use the so-called “Electoral College” system to choose our president, which today means that 538 Electors drawn from the states and the District of Columbia speak for the rest of us. ….Electors do possess the legal prerogative to vote as they wish, and under extraordinary circumstances they might exercise that prerogative to change the expected outcome dictated by popular election returns. (Ceaser and Raskin 2021)

The full description of the workings of the fully constitutional “Electoral College,” an entity that has been used at times to thwart the popular will of voters, should be of interest to readers. The link can be found in the “References” section of this paper.

## **Information and Facts Versus How People Really Think and Act**

Library and information professionals who assert that validated information can and does change minds may well have overlooked a strong history of U. S. and European research that proves otherwise. As the author concluded in 2019 after a review of the relevant English language literature, ”it simply remains the case that too many otherwise commendable people (1) are most receptive to information that supports what they already believe and (2) prefer guidance from heuristics [mental models] reflecting their own seat-of-the-pants experience rather than documented, if time-consuming, methods of securing reliable information. (Crowley, 2019, 219-20)

Writing in *Governing*, a magazine targeted to America’s local and state government officials, Alan Greenblatt (2020) offered an observation by Henry Adams which captures the reality of contemporary American political life. Over a century ago that historian identified politics as "’the systematic organization of hatreds.’”

Such animosity is a critical part of the current Republican-Democratic divide where politics is both polarized and toxic. As stressed by Greenblatt, “the two parties at this point represent people of separate and distinct ideologies, economic and educational backgrounds, cultural and religious values, attitudes toward science and higher education, and ideas about gender, race and identity” (Greenblatt 2020).

The unwillingness of voters and policymakers to act on what librarians and other information providers perceive to be the validated facts of a given matter is a truism complicated by a number of actualities. One such is that only facts supporting existing perceptions and values are likely to be accepted by people, particularly by those with power or aspiring to power. It is a situation that is often overlooked by change-minded political idealists but known and processed by political pragmatists. Understanding influential subjectivities such as the paramount role of perceptions and often dominating role of party loyalty is essential in achieving necessary and long overdue change (Crowley 2019).

## **Political Animosity and Really Difficult Conversations**

Peter T. Coleman, author of *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization* and head of Columbia University’s *Difficult Conversations Lab*, reports that the current polarization of American culture is actually a development dating back to the 1970s period (Coleman 2021, 22). More recently, Trump “shattered the barriers between the Republican Party and far-right extremists but also enormously intensified a trend that predated him: a growing willingness inside the GOP's mainstream to employ anti-small-d-democratic means to maintain power in a country demographically evolving away from the party” (Brownstein, 2021).

In his detailed analysis of American divisions, Coleman noted that the Congress, the national legislature of the U. S., is nearly as divided as it was after the U. S. Civil War of 1861-1865 (2020, 22).

## **Critical Race Theory (CRT) and** **White Identity Politics**

**Critical Race Theory**

For analytical purposes both Critical Race Theory and White Identity Politics will be considered as ideologies associated with the contemporary developments of America’s two major political parties. In their textbook *Understanding Political Ideas and Movements,* British researchers Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd have explored the role of ideologies in human life.

Even at a simple, unsophisticated level we have views on the ‘correct’ form of

government, freedom, equality and equal rights, the ‘proper’ role of government

in society, how ‘democratic’ one’s own political system is, the right levels of

public spending, and so on*. How we think about these and many other subjects*

*will be influenced by the kinds of ideological beliefs we carry around in our*

*heads, the product of our social conditioning, our life experiences and our reflections on them, the nation we live in, our educational level and our social class* [emphasis added]. (Harrison and Boyd 2018, 136)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) began in the field of law and has now been adopted as an analytical tool in a number of fields and disciplines. As might be expected, this has resulted in a variety of CRT definitions. This was addressed by the “Explainer” with Columbia University’s *Columbia News* in a July 1, 2021, posting of the results of interviews with Columbia Law School professors active in its development and use of CRT:

Although the [CRT] scholarship differs in emphasis and discipline, it is united by an interest in understanding and rectifying the ways in which a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color in America has had an impact on the relationship between social structure and professed ideals such as “the rule of law” and “equal protection.” (Explainer 2021)

**A Presidential Executive Order**

A fundamentally influential assault on CRT was delivered by then President Donald Trump on September 22, 2020, when he issued his infamous “Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping” (E. O. 13950) attacking critical race theory. The executive order stressed,

Many people are pushing a …. vision of America that is grounded in hierarchies based on collective social and political identities rather than in the inherent and equal dignity of every person as an individual. This ideology is rooted in the pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country; that some people, simply on account of their race or sex, are oppressors; and that racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as human beings and Americans. ” (E. O. 13950)

In a June 18, 2021, *New Yorker* article entitled “How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict Over Critical Race Theory” Benjamin Wallace-Wells reported that this anti CRT Executive Order was produced after then President Trump watched a Fox TV eposode of *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. It was an installment where Christopher Rufo described how CRT training was found throughout the federal government. Carlson was so outraged that he demanded Trump issue an Executive Order against it (Wallace-Wells 2021).

Although CRT has been strongly defended by both AAUP, the American Association of University Professors (Mulvey 2020), and ALA, the American Library Association (ALA Statement 2020), its condemnation of the CRT by conservative Republican was rapid and yet continues.

As reported in the July 1, 2021, *Columbia News*

Speaking at a conference held by the Faith and Freedom Coalition on June 18, former Vice President Mike Pence said that “critical race theory is racism.” Senator Ted Cruz, at the same gathering, compared the theory to the Ku Klux Klan saying the curriculum is “every bit as racist” as the white supremacist hate group. “Critical race theory,” the senator said, “says every white person is a racist” (Explainer 2021).

A number of states have even outlawed the teaching of CRT (Adams, Smith and Tambe (2020). It is an action to be increaingly expected now that dispute over a wrongly interpreted critical race theory (CRT) has contributed to an intensfying ideological war.

In responding to efforts to demonize CRT Columbia Law Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, a longtime CRT advocate, asserted, “’the idea that anti-racism is racism against white people has got to be the oldest talking point in their playbook. There is not a thing happening today that we have not seen before, including the ascendance of racial demagoguery on the anti-democratic, authoritarian, and nationalist impulses of a population mobilized through the discourse of aggrievement’” (Explainer 2021).

Inasmuch as critical race theory lacks a standardized definition of the term, progressive supporters of the concept inevitably fell into the classic political trap of having themselves and CRT negatively defined by their political opponents.. This adverse definition has been advanced, “often, though not exclusively, [by] conservative Republicans. Critics charge that the theory leads to negative dynamics, such as a focus on group identity over universal, shared traits; divides people into ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’ groups; and urges intolerance” (Sawchuk, 2021).

In analyzing the interaction of CRT and white identidy politics, Michael Tesler, a professor of political science at University of California, Irvine, concluded, “the war on critical race theory suggests that the white grievance politics Trump helped activate isn’t going anywhere; rather, it’s a key part of the GOP strategy moving forward” (Tesler, 2021).

The calculated misinterpretation of CRT by its opponents has the potential to affect people of all races, classes, sexualities, and ideologies, particularlly in Red America. For libraries and information centers supportive of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) this reality largely represents an external threat to the library and information effort to pursue social justice.

**The Neutrality Problem**

Over the last several decades there has been a movement within the American library community, reflective of a national suspicion of institutions, asserting that libraries are not neutral and their services reflect only the interests of a community’s white residents. In a time of white identity politics this strongly negative characterization of the library and its services, accurate in many contexts, could nevertheless be used as a possible barrier to social justice efforts in Red America. In 2017, conservative intellectual Clay Waters laid the groundwork for such a reaction when he analyzed the American Library Association’s commitment to progressive agendas and observed, “librarians today are doing less shushing and more shouting, as the academic social justice movement has penetrated the library stacks….The profession has always had a tilt” (Waters 2017).

As of yet, this is an avoidable problem. Any practitioner who has passed a library referendum, or faculty member who has taught marketing or advocacy knows, or ought to know, that it is fundamentally important to use the language and consider the priorities of those one is trying to influence. Pragmatically, if significant players in the Red Aemrica’s political and governmental sectors hold a more positive valuation of the term “neutral,” it is important to use the term in a affirmative way. To do otherwise might hinder future progress in library efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

## **Stop Giving Away the Perception of “Neutrality”**

The first thing to note about arguments asserting that the library is not a neutral entity is that they are part of a society-wide movement where institutions and their leaders are seen as untrustworthy. David Greenberg a Rutgers University professor of history and media studies has observed, “it’s hard to say when the rejection of neutrality went from being a persistent intellectual critique to a dominant belief—or even whether it’s reached that point yet.” (2018)

Additionally, Greenberg stresses.

The collapse of neutral institutions also feeds a vicious cycle of polarization and extremism. When institutions no longer enjoy credibility across the political spectrum, people look to more ideological sources for confirmation of what they want to believe. Conservatives drift toward the Tea Party and Trump, and progressives toward left-wing radicalism. Some long-standing neutral institutions, particularly in journalism, seem to be feeling pressure to abandon their historic role in order to please their audiences. (Greenberg 2018)

In the contexts described by Greenberg, library progressives in Blue America may challenge the concept of neutral libraries with a fair degree of confidence that long-overdue strides towards DEI may not be hindered. On the other hand, if librarians tear the layer of neutrality from libraries in Red America, the consequences might be quite negative. This results from the fact that activist groups increasingly enforce a sort of party discipline over their members (Crowley, 2019).

If libraries are erroneously labeled as being “antiwhite” in Red America, they may join colleges and universities in being seen as having “a negative effect on the way things are going in the country” (Busteed, 2017). Given the provisions of state constitutions and laws, it is usually the case that conservative Republicans can control colleges and universities only at the state level when prescribing anti-social justice changes. However, local paths for negative library transformations are considerably easier. In a state’s cities, towns, and counties, conservatives may need only arrange for supporters of white identity politics to secure positions on local governing boards in order to make sweeping changes in library policies and personnel (Bader 2021).

For most of the author’s career a primary interest has involved efforts to span the divide that separates professional practice from the theory, often the linqua franca in higher education. Of late, a number of students in the author’s Dominican University School of Information Studies courses have been using critical theory in class assignments to justifiably critique an American culture where citizens of color so often receive lesser levels service and face greater roadblocks to achievement. They will also point out, and rightly so, that the percentages of African-American and Latinx library and information professionals employed in libraries, information centers, and knowledge positions are far less than their percentages of the general population.

After making such points in their midterm or final papers, a number of students will argue in a critical theory vein that libraries and librarians should abandon “neutrality.” In doing so they tend to adhere to the arguments of Stacie Williams who asserted “neutrality doesn’t encourage our critical thinking; it doesn’t ask us to question facts that are wrong, or behaviors that are prejudiced. By this measure, neutrality doesn’t necessarily reveal injustice but further entrenches it, which is ironic” (Williams 2017).

While listening to such arguments the author sees a positive pathway for their use in progressive America. However, the outcome may be different in conservative contexts. Students turned graduates attempting to conduct a conversation stressing a lack of library neutrality with library board members and local funding authorities in municipalities and counties influenced by white grievance politics may encounter quite different responses.

Library board members, politicians, and government administrators may have become comfortable with past library rhetoric emphasizing the library’s neutrality. They may not see calls to abandon neutrality as an academically acceptable shorthand for taking the steps deemed necessary for equalized library services. Instead, in the case of the public and school libraries, funders in Red America may see calls to abandon library neutrality as a pernicious attempt to use a publicly supported service to achieve partisan progressive ends. In worst case scenarios such perceptions, particularly where the librarians lack tenure protections, can lead to suggestions that resignations are in order in lieu of firings.

It is an unfortunate reality that individuals with first-rate intellects who lack an extended political background may not understand how the system actually works. The result can be disastrous for progressive ends. Although not directly related to library service but involving major issues of war and peace, the author strongly recommends the following cautionary tale for those who believe that intellect alone can substitute for practical political experience.

In his 1972 epic on the origins of the U.S. war in Vietnam, the great journalist David Halberstam told of then-new Vice President Lyndon Johnson's coming back from his first meeting with the top people President John F. Kennedy had picked to serve in his administration. Johnson was dazzled by how brilliant they all were and told his mentor Sam Rayburn [Speaker of the American Congress’s House of Representatives] how smart each Kennedy appointee was. After listening to his fellow Texan, Rayburn said: "Well, Lyndon, everything you say may be true, but I'd feel a whole lot better if one of them had ever run for sheriff [an elected American office]." (Shields, 2014)

In Red America efforts by librarians to better serve the spectrum of their communities may be more successful if they publicly adhere to the “neutral” goal that all taxpayers, by right, ought to receive deserved services through inclusive personnel policies and responsive educational, informational, and recreational programs. If presented in a politically acceptable manner, planners and decision makers over much of the political spectrum may accept the reality that achieving the neutral goal of service excellence can and does require using different approaches reflecting the varying life circumstances of actual and potential library users.

In recent years examples of different approaches to equalized service include libraries hiring social workers to meet the needs of the homeless or those facing other life challenges (Schofield, 2021). Youth and adults do not learn very well when hungry. In recognition, public libraries now offer meals and snacks to the underprivileged participants in their summer reading/learning programs through the US Department of Agriculture’s Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) (Collaborative 2021). Hiring teachers to provide homework help when schools are closed for the day is now commonplace (Chicago Public Library 2021). Have such changes fully met the “neutral” goal of excellent service for all community members? Obviously not. But they are becoming significant in that effort.

What factors have limited full library success in inclusively serving their communities and institutions in contemporary America? Discrimination is obviously in play. Nevertheless, it is possible to see additional reasons for present day failures of libraries and librarians to fully remedy past service failings. Significantly, there might be a lack of sufficient funding. Libraries received less than one percent of the budgets of state and local governments in fiscal year 2018 (Urban Institute n.d.). Additionally, a combination of other human and societal factors could be a significant factor. These might include ineffective professional education and mentoring, a lack of marketing approaches to identifying and addressing the needs of various population segments, the traditional reality of libraries as employers of the reclusive, a bureaucratic lag in updating services, and an unwillingness to do the extra work necessary to achieve an effective connection between public needs and library priorities.

**Something Has to Be Done**

## **Barriers to Change**

A number of macro barriers to changing library programs in a socially just direction in Red America can be identified. In some cases these obstructions are longstanding.

First **o**n the macro level, the perceptive analysis of Dimock and Wike’s, using Pew Research Center data, discerns “what’s unique about this moment – and particularly acute in America – is that…divisions have collapsed onto a singular axis where we find no toehold for common cause or collective national identity” (2020). In short, the visons of America and its problems held by conservative Republicans and progressive Democrats are so different that the gap appears to be unbridgeable. As a result, one continuing challenge will be for progressive Democratic librarians to convince conservative Republican communities of the fundamental necessity of effective library service for all segments of the local population.

Second, historically the American library community has lacked publicly identifiable internal “translators” who can advocate in Red America for equalized library services and representative personnel from a conservative perspective. Traditionally, the number of publications on a topic, and more recently its range of web postings, have indicated the value of a given concern to the library community. Bluntly stated, only a few reports about the problematic professional existence often suffered by conservative librarians working in America’s libraries have appeared in print and on the web. These suggest, at national and local levels, that American librarianship has been intolerant of conservatives within its ranks (Durant 2005; Manley 2010; Kendrick and Damasco 2015). In retrospect, this may be seen as the waste of a valuable human resource for promoting social justice in library services in the present extraordinarily troubled time.

As educated and often experienced professionals, often with a commitment to inclusive library service, it can be expected that conservative librarians will be less susceptible to the contemporary mislabeling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.) efforts by politically influential conservatives. Ideally, such librarians are strong adherents to the “Library Bill of Rights” (American Library Association 2019). As such, they may be able to provide conservatively acceptable reasons to decisionmakers for equalizing the effectiveness of library services for the full spectrum of a community. Variations of “all taxpayers deserve to receive the library service they are paying for” is such a traditional conservative rationale. It still might be acceptable in communities that have not totally organized themselves as bastions of the conservative counter-revolution.

Third, positive change in the public sector populated by many libraries is often more difficult to achieve than progress in corporate arenas. Decades ago, the philosophically pragmatic researcher Patricia M. Shields addressed public sector program limitations that apply to many library administrators in both progressive and conservative contexts.

Public administrators are faced with more constraints than private administrators. Any change can upset powerful interest groups, employees, clients, politicians etc. As a result, administrators in American bureaucracy are more likely to get in trouble, if they instigate change, than to be rewarded, Instead of learning to act, experience and consequences may teach administrators to duck. (Shields 1993, 34)

Despite the observation offered by Shields, politically astute members of the U, S. library community might well be able to advance social justice in the design of programs and the delivery of services, Nevertheless, undertaking the necessary effort requires a thorough understanding of the nature of the geographical or institutional communities to be served. One theoretical “size” does not fit all in the effort to advance DEI. What works in progressive Democratic communities is unlikely to be successful in their conservative Republican equivalents. Educators who ignore this reality in teaching aspiring librarians and information specialists, who also devalue the on the ground knowledge learned through practice, may be influenced by an academic ideology prizing theory over reality.

## **Library Service in Progressive Municipalities and Counties**

It can reasonably be expected that library and information programs in progressive contexts may be using CRT as a metric for planning, hiring staff, and delivering services guided by a commitment to social justice. In such circumstances, with word changes for different library and information contexts, professional leaders may find the following guidance provided by the Urban Libraries Council in *Leadership Brief: Anti-Racist Executive Leadership for Public Libraries* (n.d.) to be of considerable use.

* Start by focusing inward.
* Do the personal work required to lead with intention, persistence and honesty.
* Call it what it is — race and racism.
* Prioritize becoming an anti-racist library.
* Invest in diversifying the library profession.
* Stay the course. (Urban Libraries Council, n. d.)

## **When CRT Can Be Counterproductive**

In Michael Tesler’s “How The Rise of White Identity Politics Explains The Fight Over Critical Race Theory” the point was stressed that “Republican politics have become so animated by white victimhood in the Trump era that any honest accounting of racial injustice in U.S. history is almost certain to draw conservative ire” (Tesler, 2021). Given this reality, those seeking to utilize CRT in setting the agenda for library social justice in deeply Red American contexts may be doomed to failture. As already stressed (above) basic understanding of the priorities of the leading groups of their service area, including perceptions of CRT, would be essntial for any success in planning,

One such reality must be central to success in incusive service delivery. According to a *Yahoo News* survey taken from June 22 to June 26, 2021, “just 27 percent of Reublicans say there’s a problem with systemic racism in the United States, while a full 57 percent say there isn’t” (Romano 2021). When srong resistance to CRT is locally detected, one’s planning for DEI would best be undertaken with another theory that has been used to advance equality.

## **Why Pragmatism?**

CRT has been subjected to numerous illusionary claims. With white identity politics seeing application of CRT as an attack, it has doubtless lost much of its ability to guide change in Red America. On the other hand, in its more than a century of philosophical pragmatism’s existence, it has achieved an accepted place in day-to-day public life.

Much of the currently perceived value of philosophical pragmatism, one of the major contributions of the U. S. to the intellectual world, has been identified by European theorists. As pointed out by Roberto Frega “pragmatism shares the main features that have made Critical Theory the most promising tool for sustaining processes, of emancipation, while avoiding some of its controversial theoretical assumptions” (Frega, 2013, 76). In this context Frega, a faculty member with the French National Center for Scientific Research, captured the essential value of the work of pragmatist giant John Dewey in solving disputes with a short summary--“*don’t ask for the causes, ask for the consequences* (italics in original)” (Frega, 2013, 68).

Why is an emphasis on the consequences of value? To an extent, it is a result of an unwillingness of adherents to deviate from conservative or progressive accepted definitions of causes. People are increasingly defaulting to ideological beliefs over facts. Coleman stresses that people are “putting much less time and energy into seeking accurate information about the people on the other side of the divide” (Coleman 2021, 24). This is another example of the pragmatic unserstanding that people act “on beliefs even when we have no way of verifying them” (Buchman 2018). Despite such seemingly unavoidable circumstances, librarians in Red communities might yet achieve some degree of success in advancing DEI through a mutually acceptable and very pragmatic development of a specific interlanguage for discussion of how to achieve positive chanage in library service to communities and institutions.

## **Interlanguages**

The author’s *Spanning the Theory-Practice Divide in Library and Information Science*, contains a useful definition of interlanguage developed for the information and library professions, “a negotiated, evolving, mutually acceptable repertoire of common understandings about the world or aspects of the world viewed as important by humans seeking to communicate in a given context” (Crowley 2005, 204). Such local language development must be founded on the condition of mutual respect. In the event that either conservatives or progressives demand the other side use their terminology for identifying and addressing library problems, effective discussion will be impossible. It will simply result in arguments over causes. Such disputes result in little, if any, action on any negative library consequences needing to be remedied. When people are forced to defend their beliefs or the language in which those beliefs are expressed, such beliefs will be intensified (Coleman, 2021).

Instead of disputes over causes and languages it is best for planners to agree to identify the actual problems in library service needing to be solved for the benefit of all a community’s taxpayers. Does the composition of the library staff reflect the demographics of the taxpayer community? Do the library system’s oldest branches need to be replaced? How can the library better provide after school homework help, particularly in areas with poorly-performing schools? What efforts of other libraries with a similar population base and library wants heve proven successful? In short, which community or institutional needs for library service are not beng met?

Obviously consequences or service plusses or minuses are likely to vary by Red communities. One proven approach to identifying local service consequences and any necessary changes would be for community planners to develop a listing of which programs the planners believe local taxpayers can reasonably expect their library to provide. The listing should allow for the use of different delivery systems in providing such services. This approach, which is designed to minimize finger-pointing and a subsequent planning b/reakdown, can be effetive in determing if certain community segments, specificalaly including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), are being adquately served.

## **A Case in Point**

Here it should be stressed that this approach is not new. Years ago the author used a variant of it while facilitating the work of an Alabama committee composed of public library heads. These library leaders were charged with developing recommendations for the Alabama Public Library Service to administer the state financial aid provided to public libraries. Specifically, the leaders needed to resolve a long simmering dispute over the allocation of funds based on square mileage versus population of the service areas. It was a disagreement over costs where failture to concur would have brought the matter to the attention of state legislators. Escalating the division to the political level would have been easy, albeit most probelmatic. At the time, Alabama’s Speaker of the House lived in an area served by the library of one of the planners. Had this failure in library self-interest occurred, state regulations on aid to public libraries would have been based, not on needs, but on which side had the most votes at the state capitol. This reliance on political strength instead of professional expertise in determining library service priorities would have set a dangerous precendent. Fortunately, the library heads were able to agree among themselves and avoid this unwanted intanglement.

In any planning effort to advance DEI in Red communities, the author recommends Peter T. Coleman’s *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization*. (2021). Relying an extensive research, Coleman addresses such factors as the most effective outside assistance for facilitating community discussions, how the complexity of major community problems requires time to successfully address, and the worth to a community of smaller groups addressing identifiable problems as a spur to effective problem solving.

One important finding of conflict minimization is the fact that the traditional debate format where sides sequentially presenting their views do not solve probems. Instead, they only reinforce the existing views of participants and audiences. To avoid this negative at the planning level, the approach of using a round table or a square of traditional tables is recommended. It might help in the necessary effort to identify present realities needing change. Avoiding arguments over disputed causes for such negative realities is helplful in maintaining momentum towards progress.

## **An Extended Effort**

It is becoming more the case that U. S. libraries are now functioning in localities dominated either by the progressive CRT-enhanced revolutuion (Blue America) or facing the conservative counter-revolution (Red America). In such circumstances, only change that is effectively managed can be successful adopted and maintained.

In summarizing the research on change, Coleman observed

Genuine, sustained change usually reuires a concerted effort by leaders and citizens at various levels (particularly local, grassroots leaders) both to reduce the likelihood of additioal violent, polarizing, or otherwise destructive incidents and to increase the chances of more positive, prosocial types of language, encounters, and activities between members of the previously waring groups. (2021, 14)

The challenges facing libraries with Red American efforts to equalize service will not be easily solved. Their very nature works against it. Regardless of their physical form, libraries are social constructs, representing a number of prior decisions. They have existing commitments and program clienteles with an interest in maintaining the current state of affairs. These present realities can work to prevent necessary transformation. Additionally, as stressed by Tetlock and Gardner, “organizations consist of people who have interests of their own, most notably preserving and enhancing a comfortable status quo” (Tetlock and Gardner 2015, 95).

One reality cannot be overstated. In Red American contexts avoiding necessary and overdue library reform is unprofessional and self-defeating. Where CRT is seen as too controversial to be an effective engine of change, another approach must be adopted by the local library community. To succeed it will require an understanding of library ideologies and the ideologies of those who control the resources necessary for addressing identified needs.

Above all, there will be times when overdue library change will necessitate a pragmatic emphasis on reforming inequitable consequences while avoiding unyielding disputes over causes. It is a doable undertaking that must not be ignored.

**An Additional Resource**

For a further consideration of America’s troubled racial history, as well as strategies offered to libraries of all types for addressing the Red-Blue divide while pursuing social justice, the reader is directed to the author’s “Facts (Almost) Never Change Minds: Libraries and the Management of Democracy‐Supportive Public Perceptions.” This a chapter in the soon-to-be published *Libraries and the Global Retreat of Democracy:* *Confronting Polarization, Misinformation, and Suppression.*

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