

# Backstories: Reflections of the Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecture

2000-2019

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In the spirit of Sandra Rios Balderrama, whom I remember always opens with dedications, I dedicate this presentation to Jean Coleman herself, of course, to my parents, both librarians, Ruthe and AP Marshall, ALA executive directors from Elizabeth Martinez to Mary Ghikas, and to my ALA colleagues, staff and members, all who cleared the way for this Lecture series to continue annually!

Today we're going to To



opportunity for the office's growing constituency to come together and be more visible to each other and ALA membership, and their resources acknowledged and accessible.

Her words, "The librarian in the United States has long held a strong sense of the mission to serve the underserved: witness the work of The Office for Literacy and Outreach Services and Jean Coleman, whom we remember today," was the perfect launch for the Lectures for the coming years. She went on to articulate the mission of the office:

Serves the Association by supporting and promoting literacy and equity of information access initiatives for traditionally underserved populations, including:

- New and non-readers
- People geographically isolated
- People with disabilities
- Rural and urban poor people
- And people generally discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, language and social class

She detailed the office's history:

As the Coordinating Committee on Library Service to the Disadvantaged – 1968

Its establishment as the Office for Services to the Disadvantaged – 1970

Jean Coleman's appointment as its staff liaison – 1973

The Literacy Training Project, one of its first major initiatives – 1979

Its name changed to the Office for Library Outreach Services – 1980

Another name changed



The OLOS Advisory Committee selected Lotsee as the 2002 Jean Coleman Lecturer as the Council Committee on Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds was strengthening its direction for the Association. Lotsee educated us more on the discrimination of indigenous populations globally, then numbered by the World Bank at 400 million, and facing discrimination in terms of their basic rights to property, language, culture and citizenship..and access to basic services. She highlighted

realities. She walks that walk today, as should we. I hope visiting here in her 'new digs' is on your scheduler this week.

The 2007 Jean Coleman Lecturer was Anne E. Moore, who introduced "Lies in the Libraries: Changing the Image of Gay and Lesbian from Abnormal to Acceptance," as her theme. She recognized Barbara Giddings, the founder of ALA's Gay Rights Task Force, now the ALA Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Round Table. Did you know that that initial gay member group has the distinction of being the first gay-affiliated unit in a professional organization in the nation? Anne celebrated "GLBT library professionals as activists on the front lines for social justice,"



and access to information resources for all. As a respected library leader and academician, his expertise is still sought in strategies for delivering library services to marginalized communities.

Janice Rice, the 2017 Jean E. Coleman Lecturer, was the last Coleman Lecturer before today. Janice greeted her audience from her Ho-Chunk ancestry, acknowledging the names of pioneering American Indian library pioneers, Jean Coleman, Lotsee Paterson, Virginia Mathews and others. Janice called for mutual respect for the ideas, voices, the languages and values of all cultures that make our libraries and communities so rich." In her lecture, "Visions of the Web: Indigenous Values, Voices and Literacy," Janice made a direct challenge to the Association to "create an overarching web of communication that keeps libraries relevant for our respective communities." She continued, "We cannot afford to have only one unit of ALA devoted to a more meaningful inclusion of American Indian voices."

So you see, the uniqueness of this annual conference program, the Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecture, highlights folks with their own backstories in the delivery of services. Again, they've been representatives of the marginalized populations they choose to support and be advocates, and their lectures have reflected their personal and career advocacy for so many others in similar circumstances. And each year their challenges to the American Library Association have been similar – taking major steps toward expanding outreach in the quest for what is now popularized as EDI, equity, diversity and inclusion.

As an elder in life and in this profession, I am blessed with lots of time on my hands, and on my smartphone. And therefore, as probably some of you know, I spend entirely too much time on Facebook, the only social media platform I choose to support. I seldom accept new friends anymore, but I'm blessed that my FB community ranges from family, childhood, college, library colleagues spanning from a multiple years and locations, church, and folks who've picked me up along the way, including some friends I share with my children.

One group that I treasure these days is 'we here,' a closed Facebook group of librarians of color, by us, for us, who crave the communal connections, the opportunities to vent, while offering possibilities and reminding us of our worth. ALA has multiple opportunities for that kind of kinship.

To them, and to you I say, heed the focuses of these lectures, the challenges to our Association, our profession. Accept the charge for resolution as your own, our own. Your voices, our voices, are welcomed and must be heeded, if nowhere else but in this Lecture series, in this room, in this convention center, at this annual conference, in this Association, and in your libraries, now.



