

J. Paul Leonard Library Workers Statement on Anti-Racism

This statement from the Library Faculty Chair and faculty members of the J. Paul Leonard Library (JPLL) at San Francisco State University, with contributions from library workers across a wide spectrum of the JPLL, affirms our belief that Black lives matter. We condemn the brutal deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless Black people at the hands of police. We condemn, as well, the painful 400-year history in the United States of injustice and dehumanization that is the legacy of enslavement and colonization. This has led to deeply entrenched and widespread structural racism in every American institution, including higher education and libraries. We stand with those protesting, and with those speaking up, including the [Black Caucus American Library Association \(BACALA\)](#), [SF State's Associated Students Board of Directors](#), [SF State's California Faculty Association \(CFA\) chapter](#), the [California State University Employees Union \(CSUEU\)](#), and [SF State President Lynn Mahoney](#).

As part of the broader SF State community, we proudly count as part of our history the student strike of 1968-1969, the longest student-led academic strike in American history. The Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front, a diverse coalition of SF students, fought for increased enrollment of students of color and greater racial inclusivity among faculty and in the university curriculum, which directly led to the establishment of the Department of Black Studies and the country's first and only College of Ethnic Studies. At the same time, we acknowledge the many ways we have failed to live up to the 1968 strike's call for racial justice and equity, allowing ourselves to instead remain complicit in the perpetuation of systemic racism and structures of white supremacy. We recognize that now is the time for us to enact major and meaningful changes to the JPLL.

With the murder of George Floyd, we see, hear and feel this moment of crisis and uprising. We stand in solidarity with SF State's Black community and all those who have been harmed by racism, racial inequality, and police terror and violence. We share your rage and your sorrow and we grieve with you. Yet, Black students, staff and faculty have been living with this pain for much longer. With humility, we acknowledge the role of white power structures, including the academy and academic libraries, in replicating and perpetuating white supremacy, racism and racist violence. We affirm our belief that libraries are not neutral and acknowledge the deeply racist histories of libraries. Libraries have long claimed openness and support for all in the communities they serve, but this is a falsehood that attempts to erase the exclusion and harm inflicted upon Black folx by libraries. To this day, [the library profession is 88% white](#), and approximately 82% of our own Library faculty is white.

Libraries have long held a position as gatekeepers of knowledge in Western society, and like all social, political, and economic systems, they wield power and influence over the production of, access to and uses of information. This has manifested in libraries and librarianship in ways that specifically harm Black folx through:

- Racist and economic barriers to entry into the profession that reinforce the whiteness of libraries
- Racist work environments that expose Black library workers to discrimination, microaggressions, implicit bias, low wages and employment precarity, a lack of mentorship, and oppressive power dynamics that negatively affect their retention and success
- Creating collections that exclude Black voices, perspectives, and experiences, and codify and perpetuate white supremacy
- Racist cataloging practices that erase the lived experiences of Black folx and replicate and perpetuate whiteness (e.g., by placing Black authors in categories such as “Special” or “Other”, and describing enslaved people as property: “Slaves”)
- Investing substantial funds in subscription fees to for-profit publishers that create and perpetuate information privilege, racist knowledge production practices, and other barriers
- Teaching and learning activities that privilege a dominant narrative and exclude diverse ways of knowing

We must do better as institutions and as a profession. Library workers must rise to meet this moment by actively working to disrupt and dismantle the machinery of racism while also committing to action toward an anti-racist society, campus and library, where systemic change is possible, replicable and sustainable. We, a large number of the J. Paul Leonard Library workers, will advocate for and commit to the following initiatives in our continuing efforts to improve the J. Paul Leonard Library by taking actions that matter:

- Listen.
- Hire, mentor, retain and promote Black and NBPOC library workers, recognizing that many experience multiple forms of oppression due to their intersectional identities.
- Develop outreach programs and pipelines to ensure diverse, equitable hiring practices.
- Hire, mentor, retain and promote Black and NBPOC workers, including those with intersectional identities, to better reflect the racial diversity of the SF State student body. Maintain awareness of the white supremacy and racist structure that exists while evaluating candidates and eventual hires throughout the hiring process.
- Implement an anti-racism training program for library workers that includes learning about critical race theory, critical pedagogy and critical librarianship.

- Listen.
- Design programming at JPLL using a racial equity framework that educates and offers a forum for our campus community about systemic racism in our community, such as offering a student research award focused on anti-racism.
- Convene working groups to reexamine, challenge and interrogate our institutional policies, services, resources, collections, and priorities to ensure they are anti-racist.
- Initiate a dialogue to reconsider JPLL's relationship with campus police and other police forces in the area.
- Hold our professional organizations to the highest standards of anti-racist teaching, learning, actions, policies and practices.
- Listen.
- Develop a strategic plan that will acknowledge, challenge and address longstanding structural racism in libraries and in our own library.
- As we continue to review and revise the JPLL's policies regarding late fines and replacement fees, commit to identifying specific ways to lessen the financial burden that these costs often place disproportionately on disadvantaged and specifically BIPOC students.
- Invite SF State Black student groups, the College of Ethnic Studies and other campus groups to create partnerships with the JPLL and to open dialogue about the Black, NBPOC and intersectional experience on campus and in the Library. Foster a sense that "this is your library".
- Collaborate with partners to identify the academic and technology needs of Black and NBPOC students, including those with intersectional identities.
- Devote a greater proportion of collection funds to publishing initiatives and [publishers](#) that are committed to amplifying the voices and stories of Black and NBPOC folx, including those with intersectional identities and experiences.
- Listen.

We recognize the need for transformational change and commit to doing better. We welcome further suggestions (via this anonymous [feedback form](#)) from students, staff, faculty and other SF State community members.