

## Discussion Post Draft for Week 14 of 5023

As I read through Bell (1917), I thought about how proud this author and this library system is of their library system within a system especially for “colored people.” I look at their supposedly separate but “equal” library system with horror here in 2017. But truly, they are proud of what they have accomplished, that they have brought library access to “colored people.” (I refuse to use that phrase without quotes.)

Some gems of “pride” in the project from the article:

“Special entertainments, story hours, and clubs mean far more in the life of the colored child than in the life of the average white child. He owns few toys or books; in fact recreation in any form is almost unknown to the large majority” (171).

“Kentucky has one of the best child labor laws in the United States. Our children, white and colored, must attend school until they are fourteen” (172).

They collected data on which kinds of books the children are checking out based on whether children are white or colored, which was easy to do when there are separate libraries (173).

Certainly, we no longer have separate library systems for “colored people.” That, thankfully has changed. Bell and her cohort in Louisville truly believed they were doing a good thing. With the lens of 100 years, we are rightly appalled by the idea of a separate library system for a different race along with other upsetting views of the time about differences in people based solely on race.

What’s sobering to me, though, is that this article doesn’t sound that different than any glowing article I’ve read in *Library Journal* or *School Library Journal* about special library collections or projects for underserved or marginalized populations. In fact, it feels very similar in tone and language to an article I read recently about library projects serving people in prison and their families. I don’t mean to say that these kinds of projects are the same as having a separate library for “colored people,” but rather to take a step back and think about those stories. Who is being centered in the project? How are we talking about the project? Are we using demeaning language for people who are different than we are? What systemic issues are we ignoring?

In the spirit of thinking about “what hasn’t changed,” I would say that librarians still have a way of patting themselves on the back over helping people who are different than we are. I remain appalled at the segregated library systems depicted in Louisville in 1917. Yet it has prompted me to examine ways in which I may be like those who created a segregated system. How do I perpetuate narratives that are unhealthy? Am I centering my experience when I talk about helping others?

I will leave you with the last sentence of the article, which helped to prompt this introspection.

“In closing, let me say that we feel very much encouraged by the progress of our work with the colored readers” (173).