

FROM THE PRESIDENT

SHANE J. ROOPNARINE



Looking into the Future

In his speeches and sermons, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shared the belief that “the arc of the moral universe, although long, is bending toward justice,” an idea that was borrowed from Theodore Parker, an abolitionist preacher^[1].

President Barack Obama paraphrased this statement in his own speeches, and the idea persisted through his tenure and later into his post-presidential work. I often think about this quote, read different perspectives on its interpretations, and weigh it against my own values. I believe that if we are to achieve its promise, we must actively and energetically work toward this goal.

Phyllis Gorshe, our Immediate Past President, concluded the 2021-2022 year with an excellent theme: Reset and Reconnect. While libraries restarted and reengaged with their communities, library staff also sought to recover from the experiences of the pandemic. Self-care was never more important, and I am glad that this past year’s theme also reminded us to look after ourselves and each other. In the upcoming year, my theme will ask us to look to the future once again.

[1] <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/statement-ending-bus-boycott>

We have returned to something resembling normal, but I believe that it is instead a new normal. In my role as an academic librarian, we have seen fundamental shifts in the way we deliver library instruction. While we have returned to teaching face-to-face, more of us are also teaching online. We are trying new strategies and instructional methods in online classes. In terms of engagement with our students and faculty, we are now regularly meeting via Zoom and providing more fully online workshops. For public libraries, virtual programming is now a part of the new normal.

Common in all libraries, we are seeing new and emerging trends. The services that we offer, and how we deliver them, have changed. Remote work is a big part of this new normal. Our colleagues are more dispersed, but collaboration can happen instantly via Slack, Zoom, and other platforms. In the upcoming year, I ask you to share your new ways of working, the new products and services that you have created, and the innovative ways that you have adapted to our new reality.

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In the new normal, there are also new challenges. Across Florida, there is an unprecedented increase in material reconsideration requests at school libraries, opposition to inclusive and diverse book displays in public libraries, and new laws that conflict with the tenets of intellectual and academic freedom. Our profession, no matter the discipline, is founded on the rights established by the First Amendment. As a key part of our advocacy, the association will continue to work on these issues. I ask that all members join us in advocating for our professional values and the essential information needs of our communities.

My theme is also rooted in the perspective that we can achieve great things when we work together. For me, this is inspired by the utopian future of *Star Trek* in which we, the people of Earth, will go to the stars in search of new life, new cultures, and new knowledge. *Star Trek* has long included people of color and people with disabilities as the main characters. It reminds us that our diversity is a strength, and we should embrace who we are. At the heart of its philosophy is a future that is inclusive of all people.

[2] <https://www.startrek.com/news/nichelle-nichols-remembers-dr-king>

The late Nichelle Nichols played Lt. Nyota Uhura on the original *Star Trek* series in the 1960s. She considered quitting after the first season until she met an unexpected fan, Dr. King. He said that her role portrayed a future where they were seen with respect and dignity, and this convinced her to continue on the show[2]. Uhura was an officer on the bridge of a starship, traveling through the galaxy with a diverse crew in an imagined future, far from the calls for justice during the Civil Rights Movement.

Our association has made a commitment to supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and access for our communities and in our profession. We may not command starships, but we are collectively charting a course to new and undiscovered places. I ask that you join me in creating the future. I am excited to share this year's theme with you:

The Next Frontier: Creating Learning, Engagement, and Services in the New Normal.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shane J. Roopnarine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.