

MAY 2021



DEI NEWSLETTER

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INTERNATIONAL TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY


LESA PETRUCCI

International Transgender Day of Visibility is an annual event occurring on March 31. The day is dedicated to celebrating transgender people and raising awareness of discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide, as well as a celebration of their contributions to society.

The day was founded in 2009 by Rachel Crandall-Crocker, a transgender activist from Michigan. At the time, the only well-known transgender-centered day was the Transgender Day of Remembrance, celebrated annually on November 20th, which mourned the murders of transgender persons. Ms Crandall-Crocker wanted a day set aside not to mourn lives lost but to acknowledge and celebrate living members of the transgender community.

On March 24, 2021, by a 52-48 vote, the US Senate voted to confirm Dr. Rachel Levine as the new assistant secretary of health at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). For the last three years, she has been the secretary of health for Pennsylvania and prior to that she was the state's physician general. With the nomination by President Biden and the subsequent confirmation she is now the highest-ranking openly transgender government official in US history.

Despite the confirmation of Dr. Levine, as of March 31, 2021 there were more than 80 anti-trans bills pending in state legislatures across the US. Most of the bills would limit trans youth from playing sports that do not correspond to the gender they were assigned at birth and from accessing affirming medical care.



For additional resources, the following links may help provide an understanding of what it means to be transgender and ways to move toward becoming an ally.

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-and-non-binary-faq>

<https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies>

DEI BOOK CLUB



Sarah Edwards

The DEI Team is excited to start the second book in our book club. The book of choice, by popular demand, is Ruth Bader-Ginsburg, *My Own Words*. This is a collection of writings and speeches from Ruth Bader Ginsburg since becoming a Supreme Court Justice in 1993. Ruth held a powerful and enduring influence on law, women's rights, and popular culture over the decades. The book offers a glimpse into her fascinating life, and covers topics such as gender equality, the workways of the Supreme Court, and the value of looking beyond US shores when interpreting the US Constitution. We are looking forward to the discussions this book will create.

Please keep in mind you can join in any time, even if you have not read the book, or are running a little behind in your reading. The conversation starts with the book material; however, the discussion draws from everyone's life experiences as well. Your input is greatly appreciated regardless of where you are at with the reading.

The Aging Workforce

Terra McMillan

Did you know there are people considered “too old” to be employable? We’re not talking 80 and 90-year-olds. Some believe that even 40 is too old depending on the industry. To those that are still clinging to youth, this may not be a blip on the radar, but it is a real thing.

With succession planning in mind, companies often lean towards hiring younger employees. However, they also need to embrace aging employees and what they bring to the table. People who have been a part of the work force since the 60s through the early 2000s have endured some of the most challenging changes in the labor force. A big transition was from manual labor to the start of technology taking over in the late 70s, early 80s. Employees had to learn new ways of doing things, some with tools or machines that never existed before. Companies will often overlook a prospective applicant, or pass over someone for promotion, based solely on age, not taking into consideration experience or qualifications. Industry is always looking for fresh eyes, new ideas, and that often translates to youth, but life and work experience can be just as crucial.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and remarked, “This act does not compel employers and labor unions and employment agencies to choose a person aged 40-65 over another person.

It does require that one simple question be answered fairly: Who has the best qualifications for the job?” The ideology behind this was to promote employment of older persons based on their ability rather than their age. As people live longer, healthier lives, and end up working longer, this type of continued discrimination will likely not go away any time soon.

To pull a bit from personal experience, I reference factory life. Oftentimes, employees working in factories are considered “lifers.” Many get hired in their late teens or early 20s, and 15, 20, 30, even 40+ years later, are still there. Take Electrolux and Tower Automotive, for example. Both were factories based in Greenville, and both closed their doors in the mid-2000s. Many people were left without jobs, old and young alike. A good chunk of that population was in their late 40s, 50s and even 60s, not prepared to retire, who had to figure out what to do and where to go. There was fear that they would not find employment that fit their skillset, and they often found nobody wanted to hire them for the short-term before retirement. Schooling was an option after the closures, but can you imagine trying to go back to school in your 40s or 50s? A young person had the stress of having to find another job, but not the added stress of being considered “too old” to work. The same thing has happened in different places, different scenarios, but it is always the older employees who struggle the most in trying to figure out what the next step is.



MONTH LONG OBSERVANCES

May

Mental Health Awareness
Older American
Jewish American
Asian American & Pacific Islander

5/13 End of Ramadan
5/21 World day for Cultural Diversity for
Dialogue and Development
5/23 Pentecost
5/31 Memorial Day

June

LGBTQ Pride Month
Immigrant Heritage Month

6/15 Native American Citizenship Day
6/19 Juneteenth (Emancipation Day)
6/21 National Indigenous Peoples Day

July

7/18 Nelson Mandela International Day
7/26 Disability Independence Day



The Growing Problem of Racism Against Asian Americans

by Libby Shaw, former HF employee

The past year has seen an alarming spike of crimes against Asian Americans. While many people are quick to say that these are stories circulated by the media, or that these are happening mainly in bigger coastal cities, these are unfortunately on the rise across the world. From the Atlanta shooting that left six Asians dead in March, to an Asian student getting lynched in Australia, to an elderly couple beaten in Oakland, reports are increasing rapidly since coronavirus hit the world radar early last year. Since then, many Asians have been scapegoats for the virus, even if they aren't Chinese, or if they have lived in other countries for years.

Here in West Michigan, Asian Americans are more concerned about going out to regular stores or restaurants for fear of harassment. Families are being made uncomfortable in restaurants and told that it's their fault Covid-19 is here, to the point that they move tables to get away. Children in our community are being taunted in school, being told they are a virus and being called "Wuhan" during class without teachers stepping in. Pregnant women are told to go back to China at the grocery store, even if they aren't from there, and have lived in this country for over 30 years.

I wish these examples were farfetched or made up stories, but these are accounts that have all happened to my friends here in the Grand Rapids area in the last year and have been recounted to me personally. These happened in Grandville, Rockford, and Standale. These happened in "nice communities" where "stuff like that doesn't happen," as I've been told by disbelieving people.



We would like to think that things are progressing and that we are moving past the racial injustices that have plagued our history books, but racism is still simmering under the surface even in beautiful cities like ours. Now we have cell phones with us to record when this happens. We have social media to help spread the news and out the people who treat minority groups like lesser people. But the work isn't over. We need family, friends, coworkers, and the general public to help stand up against racism in all its forms when it happens. So if you are out in public and you see someone being treated unfairly based on their ethnicity, whether they are Asian, Black, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, or any other minority group, a huge step to preventing it from going further is to step in and say something. If you have a voice, use it to help someone else. Speak out against racism, and help be the change that this world, and this community, needs.

KID'S CORNER

Provided by: Shirley Freeman

(bookseller with 'This is a Bookstore and Bookbug' in Kalamazoo, MI)

<https://www.bookbugkalamazoo.com/>

WHEN YOU TRAP A TIGER BY TAE KELLER

Middle Readers (ages 8-13)

Kids who appreciate a little magical realism will like this 2021 Newbery winner. The story is told by a reserved, 6th grade girl experiencing several changes at once: moving to a new state to care for her sick grandmother, a teenage sister changing from a warm fuzzy to a cold prickly and several Tiger sightings that feel very real. I liked the exposure to Korean culture, the way the grandmother approached death and the eventual resolution of the sibling and family relationships. This would be a good read-aloud perhaps – topics such as a younger sibling's dawning understanding of her older sibling's sexuality, a child's dawning understanding of her grandmother's illness and consequent periods of confusion and instability and pieces of Korean culture all beg to be discussed.

Young Adult (ages 14-above)

THIS IS MY AMERICA BY KIM JOHNSON

This YA novel about racial injustice is hard to put down! High school junior Tracy Beaumont has been writing weekly letters to Innocence X (a fictional version of the Equal Justice Initiative made famous by Just Mercy) to ask them to take on her father's case. Her dad has been serving 7 years on death row for a crime Tracy is sure he did not commit. At the same time, a fellow journalism classmate is found dead and Tracy's high-achieving brother is on the run. How was her brother involved with this girl? What story was she investigating for the high school paper? How can Tracy get help for her dad before his time runs out in a few months? As Tracy searches for answers to help her family and get to the truth, she discovers some horrific history in their small town. This is both a fun detective story and a sobering account of how low some people will go to preserve the (white) status quo.

LAILAH'S LUNCHBOX: A RAMADAN STORY BY REEM FARUQI & LEA LYON (ILLUSTRATOR)

Picture Book

Ten-year-old Lailah is excited that she is finally able to fast for the month of Ramadan but she has moved from Abu Dhabi (where all her friends will also be fasting) to Atlanta where none of her classmates will understand. Lailah feels shy about giving her teacher the note from her mother explaining why she's not eating lunch. Lailah leaves the cafeteria to spend time in the school library where a kind librarian helps Lailah feel comfortable teaching her new classmates about Ramadan.