Cross, providing supplementary books to those libraries. Raber’s book also contains a number of typographical errors.

*Librarianship and Legitimacy* provides engaging reading, with highly germane applications to contemporary discussions of politics, mass media, the meaning of democracy, and the role of public libraries in American society. But it is hampered by the weakness of its subject, the Public Library Inquiry, while attempting to provide a realistic, empirically based model of library service instead offered a wishful vision that, although claiming to serve democracy, was in some ways undemocratic. The Inquiry ignored the reality of who actually used the public library and the spectrum of legitimate reasons why.

### WORKS CITED


Wayne A. Wiegand (1997) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Why Don’t We Have Any Schools of Library and Reading Studies?* *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (Fall, 314-326)


Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. Published by H-Lis@h-net.msu.edu (August, 1998) and reprinted with permission.

Becker <p2becker@uwsp.edu>, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

---


Reviewed by Martyn Lowe

“*The biggest corporate p.r. disaster in history*”
— UK television news report.

In order to review anything that covers the Anti-McDonalds campaign and McLibel lawsuit requires one important notation: the date. I’m writing this review during August and September of 1998. The McLibel trial has (so far) resulted in many acres of newspaper print, a book, computer website1, CBS “60 Minutes” slot, and a couple of movies.2 Yet the most remarkable aspect of McLibel is that it ever happened at all.

Towards the end of 1984, some activists within Greenpeace (London)3 were drinking after their weekly meeting at the Rising Sun, a pub on the Euston Road. In passing it was remarked that no one had ever campaigned about McDonald’s, or any other fast food outlet. The following week a leaflet “McDonald’s – The Sawdust People” was produced. On a Sunday evening during January of 1985, the group held its first demonstration outside of a McDonald’s outlet on the Stand.

Following the first Anti-McDonald’s demonstration a campaign came into being, which involved the distribution of the “what’s wrong with McDonald’s” factsheet. This McDonald’s took exception to (some years later), and claimed it was “libellous.” Thus – McLibel!

On the surface the McLibel trial was about proving whether the information in the factsheet was true (or not). It covered human and animal rights, diet and disease, cardboard packaging, trade union rights, damage to the rainforests, & the effects of advertising upon children. There are other are issues around the McLibel trial too. Issues concerning free speech and freedom of expression.

Before McLibel, McDonald’s had always managed to silence criticism with the threat of a libel case. Within Britain there is no legal aid in libel cases. Libel is a “rich man’s sport.” McDonald’s was always able to silence any individual, organization, newspaper, or broadcaster that made any criticism.
about how they operate. Libel settlements can and do run into many thousands of pounds in “damages.” McDonald’s has always been a litigious corporation. Thus they silenced criticism by threatening to drive critics into bankruptcy – a more effective method than any censorship law might be.

The biggest mistake the company ever made, however, was in taking on the McLibel Two.

McLibel became the longest trial within English legal history. Vidal’s book, McLibel, describes how two penniless Anarchists (Dave Morris and Helen Steel) took on a multinational company, while denied both legal aid and jury, in a case that started in 1990 and continued in the High Court for some 2 1/2 years. Vidal shows how the company employed spies, and infiltrated Greenpeace (London). McLibel is also about “how two worlds collide.”

Almost inevitably the McLibel Two lost the case on points, although it was shown that McDonald’s: exploits both children and its workforce; deceives their customers by promoting their food as “nutritious”; and is cruel to animals.

The book covers the various issues raised both within the factsheet and how the trial was conducted. McDonald’s had some 25 lawyers working on the case, and top executives were flown to London to give evidence against the defendants. Dave Morris is a single parent and former postman, while Helen Steel is a gardener. Neither Dave or Helen has ever received any formal legal training, so you will understand just why McDonald’s (with an annual turnover of $30 billion a year) needed so many lawyers. Maybe there is something to the old saying: “If you want to know the law – ask an anarchist!” The McLibel Two conducted their own defense throughout the case, with the help of a small support group.

The book also contains a “Diary of the Trial” and an “Afterword from the McLibel Two.”

Although there is no mention of this within the book, the author (Guardian environmental editor, John Vidal) wrote the work with the help of both defendants.

McLibel is a book for both the general reader and concerned individual. My only criticism being that there are some minor factual inaccuracies, mainly to do with the history of London Greenpeace. As Vidal points out: “London Greenpeace was the first Greenpeace in Europe and one of the first anywhere to campaign against nuclear power.” However, he does not set out to write a history of the group, but only to give some background information so that the case might be better understood. None of these inaccuracies relate to the trial itself however.

So to return to my point about when this review was penned. The case is not over yet, for it goes to the Court of Appeal on January 12, 1999. I should imagine that there will be another revised edition of the book. And it’s interesting to see that McJob and McLibel are now in the dictionaries & the library catalogue. The struggle against one firm’s attempt to suppress criticism continues.

---

1 www.McSpotlight.org
2 Even these documentary movies have become controversial in themselves, with accusations of television self censorship being made about them.
3 Greenpeace (London) is an autonomous group which was founded in 1971 and has no connection with the more authoritarian Greenpeace International.
4 This is something of a long list which includes the Sunday Times, Channel 4 (television), Veggies (a group based in Nottingham), and the London listings magazine Time Out.
5 There are some major differences between English and US laws which might be noted here, but it would require a separate essay to elaborate upon them. For example, Plaintiffs have to at one point in the early stages of the case hand over documents tied up in green tape. Many other aspects of the proceedings are just as antiquated too.
6 Not to be confused with the former US periodical of the same name.