POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LIBRARIANSHIP
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
READING IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL MEDIA
WTO & THE THREAT TO LIBRARIES
POTENTIAL UNEXPLOITED: LIBRARIES & ADULT LITERACY
"INSIDE" CENSORSHIP
FROM THE ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
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### CALL FOR PAPERS

Articles, book reviews, bibliographies, reports, documents, and poetry that explore progressive perspectives on librarianship and information issues are wanted for future issues of *Progressive Librarian*.

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Librarians are striving to ensure that libraries are part of emerging national and global information infrastructures. The creation of these infrastructures is typically presented as being the result of developments in information technology, in particular, the convergence of computing and telecommunications. Such a view encourages librarians to be lulled into thinking the challenge facing them is solely technical. This is not the case. The potential transformation of libraries due to developments in information technology cannot be divorced from political and economic forces driving technological change. Consequently, this paper argues that there is a need for a political economy of librarianship.

The phrase "political economy" conjures up for many images of quaint looking eighteenth and nineteenth century economists. And rightly so. All the great eighteenth and nineteenth century founders of modern economics -- Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx -- were political economists because they recognized the intimate connection between economics and politics, between economy and state. The focus of the classical economics of the eighteenth century was on the nature and generation of the wealth of nations, as exemplified by its most famous exponent, Adam Smith. As the economic historian Robert Heilbroner observes, "the attribute of early capitalism most attractive to [Adam] Smith was political, not economic." (Heilbroner 1996, 56) Early political economists were attempting to explain not only the new phenomenon of the capital market but also its relationship to the state and the welfare of its citizens.

There have been various schools of political economy including the classical or liberal, the Marxist and, more recently, the institutional (Babe 1995, 72-75). In the latter case, political economists are attempting to move away from the ideological connotations surrounding the liberal and Marxist traditions. Instead, they focus more on the concrete world of politicians and political processes, policy players, and how they relate to economic forces. Whatever the focus or method, "the immediate central political issue in
capitalism, the issue that takes on an often obsessive prominence in every capitalist nation is the relationship between business and government, or from a somewhat more distant perspective, between the economy and the state.” (Heibroner 1992, 50)

Early political economy was the foundation of the modern social sciences; indeed, by the twentieth century economics and political science became professional disciplines that staked out separate spheres of social life for investigation. However, more recently there is the recognition that the separation of economics and politics as distinct disciplines is an artificial one. As Todd Buchholz, student of economic theory and former member of the White House Economic Policy Council, observes: “The strongest link between economics and the real world has always been politics.” (Buchholz 1989, 2). Political economy is a thriving field of scholarly pursuit as perusal of the titles on the in-print lists of respectable university presses attest. Indeed, regarding the name “political economy,” the Oxford Dictionary of Economics asserts: “It can be argued that it [political economy] is actually a better name for the subject [economics], as it draws attention to the political motivation of economic policies: policy makers and lobbyists are often more concerned with the income distribution than with the efficiency effects of policies.” (Black 1997, 357)

How does a political economist differ from the more widely recognized commonplace economist? University of Ottawa professor in communications studies Robert Babe asserts that political economists “place the question of power front and center.” (1995, 63) They recognize that the economic system does not derive from some divine or natural law, but IS a human creation that cannot be divorced from considerations of power relations in society. Indeed, according to Babe, political economy “seeks to reintegrate, for purposes of comprehension and analysis, the polity and economy.” Thus, political economists “address the impact of laws, regulation, political influence, and governmental processes on economic activity, and conversely the manner and degree whereby economic activity and financial matters impinge upon legislation and legislative processes.” Political economy is, then, “the study of the economy as a system of power.” (1995, 71) Business leaders and policy pundits advocate the differentiation of the economy and the state, but political economy reveals that economics and politics are entwined by power relationships. As the earlier quote from Oxford Dictionary of Economics noted, the primary concern of policy makers and those who attempt to influence them is most often their own interests, not the public good, a particularly noteworthy point when we look shortly at the current political realm of the library.

No profession concerned with the administration of a public institution, such as the library, can ignore the need to pursue serious research into the politico-economic sphere of public policy. Understanding the enduring link between economics and politics is crucial to understanding the current political realm of librarianship. Achieving this understanding is the reason for the need to develop a political economy of librarianship. Currently, the primary attention librarians give to politics and economics is political advocacy for the purpose of generating enhanced funding of libraries. Such advocacy is admittedly very important and librarians have become increasingly sophisticated at doing it. However, I assert that librarians need to devote more effort researching the political and economic dynamics that define the past and current environment of libraries. Libraries are the creation and instrument of public policy derived from political processes. Understanding these processes includes appreciating the connection between the polity and the economy. This connection between the polity and economy defines the political realm of the library and the basis for this paper’s claim that there is a need to develop a political economy of librarianship.

It is especially important at this time that librarians concern themselves with the power relationships embodied in the economy and polity because so much government information public policy is currently under the spell of an ideology of information technology. (Birdsall 1996) This is an ideology that promotes economic ends by diminishing the political will and power of the general citizen. It promotes consumer sovereignty over citizen sovereignty. Accordingly, it denigrates the value of public institutions such as the library and advocates the moving of the services they provide out of the category of public goods and into that of commodities to be traded in the marketplace.

The ideology of information technology consists of the following chain of premises:

- Information technology is the sole cause of the inevitable economic, social, and cultural change from an industrial society to an information society.
- In the knowledge-based economy only the marketplace should determine how information, its primary raw material, is generated, priced, and distributed.
The market is at its most efficient when government does not intervene, especially in the global economy. Government’s primary role is to promote a competitive market through deregulation, privatization and the development of e-commerce.

The knowledge-based economy requires a new kind of worker, a knowledge worker who is prepared to go anywhere in the world to sell her or his skills.

The knowledge worker is expected to have no loyalties to the local community and its public institutions.

The knowledge-based economy also requires a new kind of citizen, the citizen as consumer. The primary responsibility of a good citizen is to be a good consumer at the information highway mall.

The ideology of information technology promotes a fatalism that encourages political passivity by claiming that our fates are determined by the uncontrollable gale forces of global creative destruction.

Heilbroner observes that “ideologies are systems of thought and belief by which dominant classes explain to themselves [his emphasis] how their social system operates and what principles it exemplifies.” (1985, 107) The ideology of information technology is consistently expounded in the business media and by industry-funded think tanks, government departments, politicians, popular futuroists, and corporate leaders. Business and political elites constantly promulgate this ideology to justify and explain to themselves—and to convince others—that this is the way the world is, the way it has to be. It is, in short, a rhetorical device used for persuasive, ideological reasons. As Simon Fraser University Professor of Communications, William Leiss, points out, this persuasive intent leads to a self-fulfilling circularity. If we can be persuaded that the information society, for example, is inevitable and alter our behavior and policy accordingly, we will find the “inevitability” of the initial prediction achieved. He describes this process as follows:

1. Analysis develops a conceptual model, namely, the concept of the “information society” whose objective is to influence
2. policy initiatives that will create favorable conditions for shaping a
3. social response that over time results in changed social behavior and new
4. behavior patterns that resemble those originally predicted as desirable in the
5. analysis itself, thus confirming the model’s predictions about
6. what was “inevitable.” (Liess 1989, 284)

This is the political realm that threatens the library. Libraries are marginalized as institutions serving the public. Instead, the ideology postulates that the private sector can most efficiently meet consumer needs by delivering information directly to consumers through an electronic market on the privately constructed and operated information highway. Industry Canada is given the mandate by government to promote the private sector construction of the information highway while it focuses on a “Connecting Canadians” access policy aimed at delivering Canadians to the Internet mall. As for information generated by the government itself, adherents of the ideology believe it should be sold directly to the consumer rather than distributed free through the library. The commodification of information should be facilitated by government copyright policies that favor creators over users and privacy legislation aimed at promoting e-commerce rather than wider social needs. Furthermore, the distribution of information in the market should be promoted by privatizing and deregulating public services, such as libraries, broadcasting, and telecommunications that were formerly required to meet universal access public policy requirements.

Government’s reliance on the private sector to build the information highway has had a direct and logical consequence for the funding of public institutions. The building of the infrastructure and the development of services do require a massive infusion of capital. Hence, the almost obsessive attention given in the popular media about the mergers and acquisitions of information technology companies, the issuing of IPOs, the rise and fall of the Nasdaq Stock Market, the emergence of e-commerce, and the phenomenon of the over-night creation of twenty-something millionaires. Of more direct consequence to libraries is the logical result that corporations in the information and telecommunications sector, eager to absorb all available capital, strive to diminish funds flowing to government by urging that debt reduction be given the highest government priority, that telecommunications firms and their employees be given tax breaks, and that public funding give highest priority to technical and scientific training.

Scholars in other disciplines outside of librarianship have challenged the validity of the premises of the ideology of information technology. Of particular relevance to librarianship is the rich body of Canadian research in the political economy of communications. Inspired by the work of Dallas Smythe, if not actually trained by him at the University of Regina and Simon Fraser University, a distinguished line of scholars in Canada have

Activists in librarianship, working through such bodies as the Canadian Library Association Committee on Information Policy, have also challenged the premises of the ideology of information technology (Campbell 1998). Nonetheless, practicing librarians, struggling to formulate effective political strategies to insure citizens’ access to knowledge through libraries lack a body of research that could provide them with a conceptual framework within which to develop effective advocacy strategies. There has been little sustained critical inquiry within librarianship of the premises upon which much government economic policy is founded. What would be the characteristics of a political economy of librarianship?

In his The Political Economy of Communication (1996) Vincent Mosco discusses four characteristics of political economy that provide a framework for how a political economy of librarianship could be formulated. (Mosco, 27-38) For Mosco, the first characteristic of political economy is a focus on social change and historical transformation. Librarians are not, of course, unaware that these are times of social change. However, they avoid critical analysis of this change: rather, they have uncritically adopted the popular simplification of a shift to an information society. The study of library history has become an arcane specialization within librarianship. Its place within the curriculum of schools of library and information studies has been greatly diminished with the result that new practitioners have little understanding of the political and economic environment confronting libraries. (This lack is perhaps being offset to some extent by the greater attention some schools are now giving to information public policy.)

Following on the focus on social change, political economy as a discipline is concerned with the social totality. While it is primarily concerned with the economic and political aspects of life, it encompasses the full range of social and cultural life. Again, librarians have increasingly narrowed their perspective, concentrating on how librarians as “information managers” can contribute to the electronic transmission of information to the customer rather than on the role of librarianship in promoting access to knowledge in all its forms in the educational, cultural, social, political, and economic life of the citizen.

A third characteristic of political economy is its grounding in moral philosophy, that is, a concern for social values and practices. Librarianship, with its commitment to universal access to knowledge is certainly not devoid of moral values. Librarians have tended to want to project librarianship as an objective profession transcending any particular political or moral imperatives. Their ideal is to retreat to a value free information science. Such a stance is untenable at a time when the existence of libraries is threatened by a pervasive ideology that maintains that the generation, distribution and provision of access to knowledge should be provided through an economic market sustained on an information highway built and controlled by the private sector.

The fourth characteristic of political economy identified by Mosco is praxis, the real world of human activity. Political economy strives to relate theory and practice and in that respect it is closely related to such disciplines as communication, policy and cultural studies. The focus on praxis leads to the question: who will create a political economy of librarianship? There has always been a gap between the practitioner in the field and the academic in the professional school. Developing a political economy of librarianship can provide a common ground bringing practitioner and researcher together. Communication scholar Herbert Schiller’s delineation of the characteristics of a political economy of culture identifies lines of inquiry that can be jointly pursued by the practitioner and academic in librarianship: “It requires, among other qualities, the scrutiny of decision-making processes, the identification of the participants as far as it is possible to do so, the weighting of their relative influences, and the factoring of fiscal, administrative, and technical acts of commission and omission.” (Schiller, 83)

Following along Schiller’s suggestive points, a political economy of librarianship could examine, for example, the validity of the premises of the ideology of information technology, how they have become incorporated into public policy, and whose ends are being met.

Telecommunications public policy issues are increasingly among those issues daily confronting librarians. All the issues that have been central concerns of modern librarianship are challenged by those advancing the development of a global, information technology-based economy. Concepts about which there was once general agreement, such as intellectual property rights, intellectual freedom, and universal access are open to
debate and redefinition in the world of the Internet. (Adams and Birdsall 1999) The relevance of public institutions such as the library is challenged by those advocating the allocation of services in accordance with demand generated by those who can pay. The confluence of research and practice in a political economy of librarianship can strengthen the library profession for the critical advocacy and political role it must play in creating a new telecommunications environment that insures citizen access to knowledge.

This paper argues that a political economy of librarianship is required, especially at this time when a pervasive ideology of information technology seeks to replace the role of libraries with market mechanisms in the provision of information and knowledge. Furthermore, it is my position that practitioners in the field should combine their frontline experience with the theoretical perspectives of academics to formulate jointly a political economy of librarianship. Finally, I encourage librarians to draw on the political economy tradition of the cognate discipline of communications studies, which can provide conceptual frameworks and specific lines of inquiry.

WORKS CITED


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The concept of intellectual property informs many aspects of the way we interact with information. We believe in the existence of the "original author," and we legislate to that author the right to own and profit from his or her ideas. We also agree that the disseminators of these ideas publishers, distributors, and online service providers can “buy up” information and benefit financially from allowing the public to access it. As our economy becomes more and more information based, possession and control of this type of intangible “property” becomes increasingly imperative to economic survival.

Implicit in this scenario is a process wherein information becomes commodified. Bringing information into the forefront of a market system changes it from a shared resource to a purchased good, and transforms its access from a right into a privilege. Recent advances in technology bring their own complications into the picture, as in the modern context what the information consumer is purchasing is often not the information itself, but the right to view it, temporarily, on the seller’s terms.

Critic s of the present situation offer state that technology has spurred the commoditizing process, and that the principles of information ownership are created and perpetuated by those who create technological trends. But is the commodification of information really a new process? Is technology really its source? Or does the current situation have deeper social and political roots? This paper will examine the idea of information as a commodity from a historical perspective. It will propose that the role of technological innovations in supporting commodification is reflective of underlying cultural values that enshrine market processes, profit orientation, and disposability, rather than an outside force that the culture reacts against. The role of libraries as a counteracting force, democratizing information access, will also be discussed.
History

Although we often think of information commodification as a new process, the history of intellectual property goes back into some of the farthest reaches of our recorded history. In fact, according to Mulgan, “the book was one of the very first commodities.” (119) Both he and Kleinbart look to Greece in the 5th century B.C.E., and its active book trade, for the first examples of buying and selling information. The rise of this intellectual market coincided with a renewed acknowledgement within the culture of the existence of the individual creative self, as well as with the development of urban societies and commerce (Bettig 134). Previously, it had been not originality, but craftsmanship within established forms, that had been valued. Oral cultures like that of the earlier Greek societies had viewed creative works as collectively produced, and as entities to be imitated and built upon by others (Bettig 134, Kamber 428-29).

In Europe, the scribal culture of copying and the oral nature of much of Medieval communications worked against the concept of intellectual property rights (Bettig 136), but this situation changed with the invention of the printing press and the increasing literacy rates among the general populace. Mulgan discusses the control of early printing monopolies by royal “privileges” and dates the first example of copyright to historian Antonio Sabellico in 1486. Both he (121) and Bettig (138) note that established authorities understood the threat that mass printing and distribution posed to their control of information dissemination, and asserted their control over the presses to reestablish and reinforce their control over their subjects. Authors themselves were arguing for their own rights of intellectual control as early as Milton, who wrote in his *Aeropagitica* that “every author should have the property of his work.” (Mulgan 121)

Kleinbart devotes the first section of his paper, “The intersection of information, economics and universality in the 1990s” (7-13), to tracing how the economic structures of Western history became a basis for our overall culture; the initial local, decentralized Greek structures, he says, lasted through to the Medieval period, when the Crusades expanded the reach of economic activity across national borders. Economic theories and values slowly started to become universal, part of the “natural world order,” underpinning the eighteenth-century intellectual property/copyright debates and the later rise of the Industrial Revolution. The literature on the Enlightenment period (Kamber, Swartz, Woodmansee) discusses how copyright and intellectual property legislation arose in conjunction with the shift towards a recognition of individual authorial genius, and an acknowledge-

ment of writing as a professional, rather than a purely artistic, occupation. Wordsworth figures prominently in these sources, as he was highly active in the campaign to extend copyright and give authors the right of ownership and control over their works — these rights including the right to profit. In an interesting parallel to modern concerns, Swartz states that the people of that time were worried about what they saw as a “simultaneous [process] of commercialization and commodification of culture” (501), which may explain the ambivalence, demonstrated in even its staunchest supporters, towards the mercantilization of original authorship. There was a sharp line drawn between the original genius or true artisan, disinterested in material fortune, and the crass commercialist looking to make a quick dollar (Swartz 486). Even as they fought for the economic control of their work, authors in the Enlightenment period still wanted to distance themselves from the image of the tradesperson or the mercantile. They wanted to be seen as artists, or cultural treasures, and above worldly concerns. Paradoxically, however, they still wanted to gain monetarily from their art. Justification for the “disinterested genius” still expecting to profit from his or her writings was provided by shifting the focus to the author’s need to provide for their families, whose estates should not be allowed to suffer (Swartz 507).

It is interesting to see similar concerns color the debate on modern library services. Some feel these services are basic and necessary, and should be above concerns of cost, profit, and the “market.” According to others, however, libraries should be financially self-sustaining, and prove their worth to their users. Libraries adopt private sector ideas of customer orientation and fee-for-service, but still think of themselves as a public good that should be supported appropriately. Whether library services are sacrosanct or expendable, a necessary public good or an unnecessary service, seems undecided, even among professionals.

Perhaps it is worth noting here, too, that even though some writers believe that libraries have always been “genuinely idealistic institutions” (Roszac 172), during the Enlightenment library users were deliberately restricted by social class and ability to pay. Part of the motive was profit-oriented, as seen in the example of Xavier Mayer von Schauensee and other eighteenth century Lucerne librarians “intrigued by the commercial possibilities of renting out books” (Kamber 209). These men charged high subscription fees, which would necessarily restrict their audience to those who could afford the charge (207-8). But another aspect of the pricing scheme shows concern with maintenance and control of social conditions; as Kamber states: “[o]n the one hand, the philosophes proclaimed the elimination of
ignorance and superstition among the people; but, on the other hand, they feared that educated commoners would become dissatisfied with their social and economic status" (209), a situation which could be a first step toward revolt or revolution. A convenient side effect of pricing information out of the lower classes' reach generally, then, is that of social control – another theme that could be conceivably carried over into the present day (although, the current protected interests would likely be that of government and industry).

Schiller discusses the eighteenth century events from a Marxist socialist perspective, linking them to the broader history of capitalism. He notes that Karl Marx and the agents of the Russian Revolution stated outright that economic concerns structure the way a culture operates, and posited them as a "universal, unifying force in the world" (138). The post-War period has only continued this trend, as we see in events like the Gulf War, which could be said to have been motivated solely by global economic concerns. Schiller argues that changes in the nature of information and information access play a significant role in enabling the economic viewpoint (138).

Technology, Culture and Shifts in Concept

Berrid Frohmman and Dan Schiller are among the most political critics of the contemporary arena, connecting the transformation of information into a commodity with overarching social and economic structures; rather than taking the consumer model for granted, they examine and critique it from a socialist perspective. Schiller, especially, comments on how the commodification of information adds to the larger commodification processes at work in our society, with an interesting examination of the movement in biology and biotechnology towards information communication models (101-103). Working from a Marxist viewpoint, he shows how capitalism and the capitalist process are connected with, and reinforced by, an acceptance of information as a commodity. Frohmman frames his discussion in the context of Library and Information Studies, as he writes of the implications of both the focus on the cognitive viewpoint and the information commodification process for the field. Both consumerism and the shift in LIS to a discourse of images and subjectivity, he says, are disempowering to information users, as advertisers and the market exploit and manipulate images to create identity and manufacture information need (382-384). Further commentary in a Marxist vein is provided by Davis and Stack, who foresee access to information by the public decreasing as information and database access is quantified, privatized, and sold (10-11). Theodore Roszak looks at twentieth century events in detail, from the negative views of information workers that were prevalent mid-century to our current glorification of information and information access. His discussions raise issues around power and control over the dissemination of information and the industrial creation of an information market (172-5; 3-14). Other writers approach the topic from different perspectives. Allen writes from the economist's viewpoint, introducing complex mathematical formulae in an attempt to calculate the value of information. She also discusses several of the problems involved in quantifying information, and introduces the idea that commoditized information can "decay rapidly" (271) and be considered disposable. Looking at the writings of Adam Smith, whose ideas influenced United States policies in the 1980s, Braverman makes a case for libraries falling under Smith's category of "public goods," i.e., institutions which are worthy of state support because they are beneficial to society as a whole (398); she warns that business models of efficiency and cost-effectiveness segment the library "market" and, like the Enlightenment librarians described earlier, deny information to those who cannot pay (401).

Asheim, Kleinbart and Mulgan all comment on the commodification of information in the context of recent technological developments. Issues around the difficulty of exclusive ownership and control due to advances in automation and its reliance on copying are discussed, and they speak of commodification as a reactive process to technology and telecommunications (Asheim 191; Mulgan 123; Kleinart 139). Finally, as an interesting change from the rest of the literature, Martell describes his personal thoughts on the subject over the past two decades. While he originally felt that the commodification of information would lead to society placing a higher value on information services ("Finance, business, transportation and government dwell on what is happening with commodities. As part of this world, librarians will be better off."), he has since been disillusioned with the process, finding it focuses more on economic interests and machines than on human beings (85). All these sources discuss the fact that the movement away from pricing the containers of information to pricing the information itself – a process which began in the Enlightenment – has been reinforced by today's technology.

As noted previously, many writers – Asheim, Kleinbart, Mulgan, even, to an extent, Schiller – see the present trend toward commodification as a reaction to the capabilities inherent in computerized information processing and transfer. This raises the question: if historical shifts to commodification...
of information were influenced by societal forces, could not the present situation also be culturally based? Did this technology really create commoditized information out of a vacuum, or is it instead a product of human invention, and therefore an outgrowth of the cultural context in which it was created? It is indisputable that we are living in a world where the market is king, and that information is being redefined and sold within that market discourse. My inclination, then, is to see the commodification of information as a reflection of what some of the more socialist writers examined here might call the advanced capitalist underpinnings of our culture—a symptom of our overall condition, rather than a separate condition itself.

All this being said, what are the problems with treating information as a commodity in a technological context? One of the most obvious has been touched on earlier: the fact that allowing the marketplace to determine the price of information and its access will ultimately mean that those without material resources—the marginalized, the uneducated, and those who are simply uncomfortable with electronic mediums—will find it difficult or impossible to acquire it. Lack of ready access will become even more of a problem in the event that the much-trumpeted “Information Age” actually arrives. Markets are built around pricing, and as Mulgan points out, “[u]nless information can be kept scarce it cannot command a price. Without a price, private capital has no incentive to provide it. If production industries are unable to control the commodity form of what they produce the end result will be massive underproduction” (135). If our economy, our society, and our daily lives are to be built around interactions with information, then access to information becomes crucial. The possibility of profit motives alone determining the level of our access to information services is truly disturbing, especially if one considers the impact it could have on the ability of already cash-strapped libraries to maintain and develop their collections and services.

Another factor is consumerism and its reliance on obsolescence, or disposability. Along with creating artificial scarcity, one method of creating product demand is to convince potential buyers that what they already own is not good enough, and should be supplanted or replaced. As Frohmann says: “[t]he ideal consumer good has least endurance, because it permits the translation of sustained desire into repeated consumption” (383). Further imposing this quality on a product that is already described as being one that “decays rapidly” (Allen 271), and has “something less than the shelf life of a styrofoam cup” (Lazer 54) may be counterproductive. If knowledge and wisdom (both personal and collective) are built upon information that has not only been accumulated over time but also digested, lived with, and worked upon, what does our obsession with acquiring the new at the expense of devaluing the old mean for our potential for learning and experience? And if information is parceled out in expensive fragments, rather than being freely available as an holistic corpus, what will be the impact of the potential knowledge gaps on our ability to create wisdom within an historical context?

The Role of Libraries

If the process of information commodification is indeed as problematic as it seems to be, what role can libraries play in insuring that the process is counteracted, or at least slowed? Although we have seen that libraries have not always historically been free from concerns of profit and social control, it is possible that in some respects modern libraries, by their very existence, are agents of protest against the capital interests of the “information marketplace.” If profit depends on scarcity, then the open nature of the library works to devalue sold information; even if a library charges subscription fees, as many currently do, that fee is substantially lower than the price of obtaining information through the private sector. The public offering of database searches and other online services undercuts attempts by the market to create scarcity and concentrate ownership, as well as countering efforts by technological industries to commodify information access and restrict its flow to those who can afford to pay for the latest connectivity, CD-ROMs and software. At its most extreme, one can imagine a scenario of libraries as radical socialist forces facing off against capitalist information monopolies. The image is not entirely realistic, but one cannot deny that libraries can take a stand against informational and cultural commodification merely by strengthening their commitment to holistic, free or low-cost service.

In the context of information obsolescence and disposability, libraries can also function to preserve our cultural heritage by collecting and maintaining historical materials. I use the word “historical” here in its broadest sense, as advances in technology have made accessing records stored in obsolete formats next to impossible. Industry profit motives mean that older equipment is not maintained or supported; it is also expensive (in equipment and in labour) to convert old records to new formats. While libraries already function as our cultural memories to a certain degree, in the future this “memory” may be even more important, as older information is discarded by a market fascinated by the new and contemptuous of the “outdated.”
Conclusion

The concept of intellectual property is not new. In truth, the commodification of information began as far back as the 5th century B.C.E.; it continued with the invention of the printing press, the decline of feudalism and the move towards capitalist social structures; and it was codified with copyright legislation in the Enlightenment and beyond. Neither is the commodification of information a process discrete from broader political contexts. Instead, we have transferred cultural values of free-market processes and disposability onto the ways we deal with information. Technology has hastened the process, but technology is in itself only a reflection of our broader social mores.

Libraries in general, and public libraries in particular, have not been immune to these trends. Debates about what constitutes "core services" rage on in many institutions, as libraries expand their reach into the corporate marketplace and begin to offer fee-based information services. At the same time, public demand and changing information platforms mean that Internet access and the provision of online databases occupy larger percentages of total library resources. Libraries, too, are increasingly in danger of becoming leasors of information access, relinquishing control and ownership to secondary vendors who may not reliably preserve — or even provide — historical data.

Yet it is generally accepted that intellectual freedom, which asserts rights of access to all regardless of ability to pay, is the modern library's mandate. In this regard, libraries play an almost subversive role in the information "marketplace," giving away for free what others would prefer to have the exclusive privilege to sell. If they so choose, libraries can act against the forces that would work to further commoditize information and to bestow upon it the characteristics of any market good. In accepting and fulfilling this role, libraries can become agents of true democracy, empowering citizens with the knowledge they need to avoid being manipulated for the interests of others more powerful than themselves.

WORKS CITED


Reading in the Age of Global Media

by Mark Crispin Miller

Since I’m among friends I will speak more candidly than I’m ordinarily inclined. On the subject of media ownership and libraries, I wanted to come up with a succinct but deeply moving epigraph for my remarks, and I wanted something from Benjamin Franklin. I couldn’t remember him saying anything about creating the first library in the United States, as I’m sure you know he did in 1731. Eleven years later that library was chartered as the Free Library of Philadelphia. Not knowing where to turn, I turned to the Internet. I could have used a librarian to help me out, but instead I put in “Benjamin” and “library” as keywords. I discovered a lot of things about the Free Library of Philadelphia, but I couldn’t find anything on its history. Now I’m sure there’s a site with the Library’s history on it, but the fact is, the screen was covered with advertisements. I never found anything about Benjamin Franklin or the history of the Free Library. So, let this story stand as an epigraph to what I’m going to say. I’m here to talk about reading in the age of global media.

We live at a moment of unprecedented economic concentration in all sectors of the economy, but most dramatically and most influentially in the media industries. Book publishing is now in exactly the same position as all the other culture industries, even though it has historically been very different in its structure, its reach, and its economics from TV or radio. Book publishing has historically been more like newspaper publishing – conglomerates of family owned newspapers in different cities (which itself has only recently become a matter for huge chains like the New York Times Co., Knight-Ridder, etc.). The fact is that publishing at its best in this country and Europe was always a cottage industry. I’ve been accused of romanticizing this past, and I’m unapologetic for that. Publishing was a different business when it was run by people who loved books. Quaint, I know, but books were the point. Book publishing was never a good business for those who wanted to get rich, and it still isn’t. Newhouse is happy to sell out to Bertelsmann, and RupertMurdoch is eager to find a buyer for HarperCollins. Viacom would like to sell Simon & Schuster. Publishing is not a moneymaking business. (I say this as the son of publishers: my parents owned Academy Publishers.) All that has changed now. Most of American publishing has been absorbed by a nexus of 7 (formerly 8) global media corporations: among them Bertelsmann, Time-Warner, Murdoch’s news corporation, and Hearst. That’s it. There are two major independents left in this country: Houghton Mifflin in Boston, and W.W. Norton in New York. Meanwhile we have 2 book marketing superchains going head to head compounding the problem. The output of small and alternative publishing houses will inevitably fall out of these book superchains because they’re driven by bestsellers, to which I will return in a moment. So we’ve got the houses owned/absorbed into nexus of few, very huge corporations and we’ve got the book retail industry succumbing to conglomeration, and distribution by two big firms.

Meanwhile there is less money for public libraries, and there is less and less money for academic libraries.

The direct consequences of conglomerization are worth noting. I learned from Nancy Kranich at NYU about the tremendous profiteering that goes on now. Certain publishers own so many journals and charge for highly specialized subscriptions up to $15,000 per year. This is a disaster. This is an example of the classic consequences of economic over-concentration. Anyone in the Department of Justice would understand that too much concentration of economic power equals profiteering, not competition. Bear in mind that we’re seeing the same thing over all media. As soon as the Telecom Bill was passed in 1996, radio came to an end as a competitive business. There are no minority station owners to speak of, and you have huge concerns like Westinghouse and Infinity, the largest radio company in the world now. If you drive around the country and listen to the radio in Omaha for example, you’ll probably hear the same thing as in San Francisco because it’s centrally programmed. I’m not an expert in economics or in the library field, so what I want to do, having introduced this talk, is offer observations on the subtler problems of libraries in the United States today. The library is fundamentally at odds with the culture of the TV and fundamentally at odds with TV’s message. I want to talk about that and I want to talk about how the library, by its very nature, is a repudiation of the media culture. I will end on more positive note, because the library needn’t be only a repudiation.

What it is about a library that makes it definitive? Well, many people will tell you that it is, first of all, a quiet place. Not always, but it is certainly renowned for its silence and indeed the figure of the librarian is routinely
They’re gone! They don’t exist! For instance, Lou Cannon’s magisterial biography of Ronald Reagan was published seven years ago and is titled *The Role of a Lifetime*. It got great reviews and it is a great book. Try to find it now. It is not in paperback – it’s gone. The library in this sense, is the antithesis of a book superchain where you’re bedazzled by all these attractive, but perishable items.

Most crucially (and here I may sound sentimental), the library is public – books are free, and they’re available to everybody. I’ll read the mission statement of the Free Library of Philadelphia:

The mission of the Free Library of Philadelphia is to provide to all segments of the population of Philadelphia, a comprehensive collection of recorded knowledge, data, artistic expression and information to assure ease of access to these materials, and to provide programs to stimulate the awareness and use of those programs.

I’m not fond of the last part (it’s kind of PR speak), but it’s an unexceptionable statement nonetheless. Franklin had in mind yet another great democratic innovation – a free library. Think about it. Books are not like boxes of Kleenex, or paper hats, or slurpees. They’re not meant to be consumed and tossed. They’re there. You read it, you put it back, and somebody else reads it. That’s amazing. I would say that the public library may be the last great public institution in the United States, or the last great public institution of the United States that has a civilizing aim. Now of course libraries got a huge boost in the 19th century from Andrew Carnegie who endowed many of them with $40,000,000, and that was not hay back in those days. (Today it’s like lunch money.) We thank him and bless his gift of private money, but the thesis here is that books should be in the library and free to everybody as a democratic, public good, funded by the public sphere.

At this moment, we live in a world of increasingly privatized space; the public sphere is under siege for a number of reasons – economic and ideological, and so on. The notion of public services, of government participation in the economy, has been completely discredited and the library suffers greatly because of this. I don’t have to tell the people in this room what I’m talking about here. Whether it’s university cutbacks in library budgets, or whether it’s a matter of cutbacks in civic funding, municipal funds, state funds, the problem is exactly the same. The library

ridiculed on this account. The figure of the librarian, like the figure of the teacher, like the figure of a nun, is always a repressive presence, prune-faced, nasty, asking people to be silent, hushing people, pointing to the “silence is golden” sign. First, it’s a female figure, which is one strike against her. Second, she’s asking for people to control themselves, which is another strike against her. And third, there’s something vaguely 19th century about her – school marm, scolding – these are all words used to put people down routinely. However, silence is a precious thing in a world of advertising, ceaseless solicitation, in a world of very noisy, very expert propaganda. A quiet place to think is a near-miracle today and inasmuch as the library is such a place, it doesn’t go along with much else in the current media culture, MTV, walkmans, surround sound, or anything else. Just by its contemplative quiet, it recalls the monastic origins of the postclassical library, the library is an anomaly.

In a second, very fundamental sense the books are all there at the library. If they’re not there, they’re in storage, they don’t get pulped. I’m sure they do sometimes, but basically it is contrary to nature for the library to throw books away. The library is an archive we can have faith in, whose persistence we can trust. We know the record of the culture is there somewhere. The bigger the library the more volumes. Compare this to Borders or Barnes & Noble. The many developments I’ve talked about at the outset have tended to encourage a book culture in which books do not last. This is memorialized in a 1979 Supreme Court decision which upheld an IRS ruling that books are like machine parts – they cannot be taken as a tax write-off when they are warehoused. As a result, publishers can no longer afford to keep books in inventory, and that means publishers cannot keep books available in print. I hear horror stories from my friends who say that a publishing executive ordered that three tons of books be pulped – literally bulldozed – because it was not cost effective to keep them. Further, because there’s so much competition for the shelf space in those superchains I noted, the shelf life of your average book is comparable to the shelf life of yogurt or houseflies, as I have said in my writing. (Fierce competition to sell books shouldn’t be confused with a diversity of viewpoints, by the way.) The fact of the matter is that, if you read about a book in the *New York Times*, Borders will probably have it. *Barnes & Noble* and Borders order allot, and I have found many things in their stores I might not have otherwise known about. But if you go back in 10 days it might well be gone from the shelves, never to return. Interestingly enough, since it no longer pays to warehouse books, there is a whole generation of titles that sold well, got great reviews, are important books, and they’re all out-of-print!
has a crucial function that is now actually being threatened. With all due respect to the people who think that the Internet will save us, the Internet cannot replace the library because not everyone can afford to go online, whereas the library is a place where anyone can go. All they need is a proof of residence, and one can be further helped by professionals who know how to instruct in the indispensable art of finding out what’s out there to read and to learn. Another difference between the library and the Internet is that the Internet is a kind of jungle, a kind of bizarre universe, in which you can be forever stuck in mazes — lost. You can click on whatever obsesses you and read nothing but prejudices, preconceptions, and obsessions. You can inhabit a world of Nazi conspiracy theories, if you like. There’s no one there to suggest to you that there’s another point of view. On the Internet, Microsoft, Disney, and other providers of the search engines help you find what you want so you don’t encounter smut, so you do not encounter anything that might presumably discomfort you, Microsoft or Disney. Librarians are skilled at telling people how to find out things that they need to know. It is not just a matter of saying go down to level three and look on these shelves, but telling people how to use the catalog, the Internet, how to use databases.

In sum, we live in a time of unprecedented privatization, unprecedented media concentration, when it is difficult to find a quiet place to think, when all information tends to come at us in predigested bites without any ambiguity or nuance. We live in a time (now I’m going to sound archaic but I think it is the most appropriate word) of propaganda. It is a time of unprecedented mass saturation of various propaganda, be they political or commercial. Advertising is a form of propaganda. In contrast, the function of the library, like the function of the school, is to help us to become better citizens by introducing us to other points of view. It’s certainly the function of the teacher to instruct the young on how to think, not the function of a librarian to do that. But librarians can take that newly thoughtful person and lead them to what they can to look into and where to find it. Go to Borders and you won’t find that, or perhaps if you did you couldn’t afford it. In the library it’s free. Inasmuch as we are in need of a quiet space where various points of view pervade and are made available, the library is not just a repudiation of the media culture, but it is in fact, ultimately the salvation of civilized life and of democracy. This sounds over the top, rhetorically. It also sounds like I’m trying to flatter, but as one whose happiest hours were spent in libraries, I say this from the heart: the library is an indispensable resource for democracy just as Benjamin Franklin understood. It is important to do something more than simply fight back against those various parochial forces that are always trying to get you to take books off the shelves. This is a problem all over the country: keeping Judy Bloom on the shelves or Heather has Two Mommies or Huckleberry Finn. I would suggest, however, that it is not the overwhelming problem. The problem is, paradoxically, the technological and economic mechanisms that seem to be giving us so much that we can’t even begin to comprehend all the choices. That mechanism in various indirect ways is impoverishing libraries and cultural life in general. So you are to be saluted, and you are to be encouraged because without libraries and without the services that libraries provide, Benjamin Franklin and his compatriots may have failed.

Further comments from Miller in response to the audience:

There’s a basic rhetorical device that I encounter when I talk and write: it is to caricature what I’ve said as the apocalyptic ravings of a grinch who thinks that there is nothing good out there and that we should all go home and kill ourselves. The point here is not whether we think things are great, or whether we think things are lousy. The point here is that we’re trying to talk about power as Franklin did, and as Tom Paine did. We are living in a moment of extreme concentrations of power, a moment at which, not only many members of the general public, but many of the media workers in these different culture industries agree that something’s wrong. There are the beginnings now of an understanding that there’s a direct connection between the deplorable phenomena of the Lewinsky-type of coverage on the one hand, and the kind of concentration we’ve been talking about on the other. It is an economic situation deeply affecting our culture. To throw up our hands and say “oh well, things aren’t so bad” is to leave out of account the democratic alternative or, dare I say, the democratic obligation. I don’t think we are fulfilling our obligations as citizens in a democracy if we let the economy take care of everything. Over and over again I hear the comment that “oh well, that’s the economy.” You would think that we were living in the Soviet Union, because the economy made all the decisions there too. We live in a world where there has to be a state of politics, as well as an economy, or else we’re going to be back to the days of Carnegie.

By way of some perspective, every time there’s been a major, technological innovation in communications over the last 100 years, there’s been an upsurge in millennial optimism, starting with the film industry, and going on to radio, and going on to TV. However, technology itself won’t deliver us from evil. We have to make sure that technology’s democratic potential is preserved. In the 1996 Telecom Bill, which I don’t expect that anyone in
here has read because its 40,000 pages long and deliberately impenetrable, one of the subtexts in the legislation was to make sure that cyberspace is a corporate property. I think the Internet is a fabulous thing, e-mail is a terrific aid, but that bill tells us that the Internet is not something that’s going to maintain its integrity all by itself. (Robert McChesney of the University of Wisconsin is someone important to read on this point.) It’s very important, it seems to me, that the citizens of this country know who owns the media, and know the consequences of the concentration of ownership, and not get lost in the latest hype over technological utopia. The only way to do that is going to happen is through the schools, libraries, religious arenas, through the labor unions...it ain’t gonna happen through the media!

Response to Mark Crispin Miller
by John Buschman

I tend, in the main, to agree with Dr. Miller, and I would like to bring some of his issues closer yet to librarianship. I think there has been a culture change, both generally and specifically, within our profession. For instance, ALA’s policy manual lists all kinds of policies which drive us into action and drive us into at least studying and publicizing what we’ve been talking about. For instance, the “Library Bill of Rights” (Policy 53.1) states that: “Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.” That idea is repeated about three or four more times in the text of other access and in preservation policies. That position alone should drive librarians into some form of activism. However, it is not a secret that ALA is trying to finesse the role of social activism, developed in the sixties and seventies based on these policies, in light of a new economic “realism” and the dominant sponsoring culture of our field which has just been thoroughly presented.

Dr. Miller has picked up and carried forward the work of a wonderful scholar, Ben Bagdikian who wrote in the 1970s and throughout the 1980s in the same vein. I’d like to read a quote from something he wrote almost ten years ago:

The global media oligopoly is not visible to the eye of the consumer. Newsstands still display rows of newspapers

This trend has been known in our profession for a long time. For instance, John Haar has been writing for over a decade about how electronic resources tend to sway our collecting patterns. Let’s face it, what the kids use, what the students use, what is popular is what we tend to select for our collections. Haar has noted that the popularity of these new electronic resources drives our patterns of collecting. Our institutions do have a curriculum, be they a public library or academic, and we try to respond to what is our curriculum. Too often, popularity has become our curriculum. Charles Willett published a study in 1992 that talked about libraries’ over-reliance on review mechanisms, which focus almost exclusively on mainstream publishers and mainstream book distributors. He noted that there is an institutionalized hesitation to purchase alternative materials for libraries. We tend to want the Choice review or the stamp of approval of appearing in New York Times Book Review or Booklist or Publishers Weekly. Those are very narrow mechanisms. Further, book distribution is essentially dominated by two or three large firms in our field. What they choose to provide quick access to is probably the key. How many of us have hesitated okaying an order because we know it’s going to give our order department and business office, and clerical staff fits because it’s not put out by Yale University Press or HarperCollins? It happens every day. The library systems that we purchase, our bread-and-butter online catalogs, are increasingly owned by corporate giants or those fake nonprofits like OCLC or CARL or RLIN. There is virtually no distinction that I can tell between the large library nonprofit cooperatives and a for-profit institution anymore. They all aggressively market their services, they all aggressively develop products, absorb new ones from other companies, sell spin-offs. Their behavior is basically identical. Roughly 30 percent of our library systems are now owned by some sort of corporate, or quasi-corporate vendor like Ameritech and whoever owns CARL and UNCover now. A

and magazines in a dazzling variety of colors and subjects. Bookstores and libraries still offer miles of shelves stocked with individual volumes. Throughout the world, broadcasting cable channels continue to multiply, as do videocassettes and music recordings in dozens of languages. But if this bright kaleidoscope suddenly disappeared and was replaced by the corporate colophons of those who own this output the collage would go gray with the names of the few media multi-nationals that now command that field.
good example is the British on-line company who purchased Knight-Ridder (a major database vendor), who also was the parent company of CARL (a former non-profit) and its UNCover company, who now owns Dialog and DataStar. Even within our own little world, we’re facing exactly the same kind of media concentration that Dr. Miller has noted in a broader context. I hope that everyone realizes by now that consolidation of ownership and the selling off by associations of their in-house journal publishing activities is what led to the journal inflation that libraries have been facing for the past 15 years.

Electronic information products in libraries are becoming ever more like broadcast media in ways other than ownership. We all know that our CD-ROM indexes, the Internet, our video collections, have gotten more and more visually appealing to catch the eye. Was there anything really wrong with the old versions? No, but now we now have a Windows version that gets us into more complicated, sexy forms of searching via some sort of flashy graphic designed to pull you into a zone of advertising. As near as I can tell, multimedia encyclopedias basically try to combine nature and science TV programs and lots of sound and color pictures with the old Encyclopedia Britannica. They’re designed to catch the eye. In fact, there’s an old article in American Libraries called “Electronic Products Designed to Capture the MTV Generation.” I think that pretty much says it all, and it’s our fault if we don’t take professional responsibility and let media flash influence our collecting and service decisions too much. It is worth noting that we don’t own electronic output, we don’t control its archival quality or integrity, and we pay for access to the same information repeatedly—furthering our already considerable budget problems.

Libraries as institutions are pushed more and more to become like Barnes and Noble, and Walden Books, and Borders. We’re being pushed to install coffee bars, to get the really snazzy covered magazines, and have comfortable chairs. We have to think about what we’re facing. In order to stay relevant, we must market a nonprofit institution that was originally founded in the public good. That’s a horrific thing to say and it’s a horrific thing for us to have to justify ourselves that way. A little bit might be good for us, but we’re responding to the economic culture by me-too-ing. There’s a tremendous amount of hype in support of that culture out there. I’ll quote one of the best examples of that hype from John Perry Barlow, one of the Electronic Frontier Foundation guys. A couple of years ago he said, “we’re in the middle of the most transforming, technological event since the capture of fire. I used to think it was just the biggest thing since Gutenberg, but now I think you have to go back farther.” I don’t know that we have always responded well to the tremendous amount of social hype and social pressure on our institutions. We have tried to position ourselves as info-navigators and the really best and smartest surfers on the web.

I agree with Dr. Miller: libraries have an innate connection to books and print literacy. I don’t think what many of us are contemplating will really be a library in the future. To reprise an oft-cited historical analogy, all the blackssmiths didn’t go work at Akron Tire and Rubber, they went away. Maybe that will be our fate if the economy and culture is going to digitize, and sell, and market all information individually. We’re struggling with fair use and privacy issues in an environment not of our making, and we’re responding in ways that really disturb me. It was proposed about a year and a half ago in a Library Journal article that we maybe stop thinking about the privacy of circulation records, and instead use and work that data to market and target our services to our local communities or campuses more specifically. In other words, libraries would be the nonprofit add-on to Wilson, Psych-lit, MLA, Alta Vista, etc. I have serious trouble with that, and I have serious trouble with us not being an oppositional professional voice to what’s going on. We need to retain some fundamental character of the 19th century institution that finally embraced intellectual freedom.

Last, but not least, there’s Microsoft. Read The Road Ahead. Bill Gates didn’t make any bones about what he wants. He’s said it over and over again: he wants his software running a computer to be the toaster, the VCR, the internal combustion engine all rolled together for the twenty-first century. Microsoft is aggressively putting its products into our institutions. I’m not ideologically pure, if he came along and gave us a couple of NT servers I’d take them. We’ve actually spent money on them, and they’re not terrible products. What I worry about is his voracious appetite for content. He already has a teacher education pre-packaged program and he affects the fair use doctrine by his financial ability to enforce his version of copyright through the courts. That may be what is going to be the determining factor in fair use rules for images, which he digitally distributes. I see our field as very conflicted because we love the software giveaways, we love the fact that Gates called that splashy news conference and appeared next to ALA leaders, and told us all that we were going to update our libraries and become the bridge to the twenty-first century. But there’s a tremendous monopolizing and homogenizing force behind that kind of power, and I worry about our relationship to that. I especially worry
that we're repositioning the profession to such a degree that we're going to lose our basis of opposition. For us to be info-entrepreneurs, there's no room for intellectual freedom, there's no room for archival integrity, there's no room for democratic information provision. We've never accomplished that job perfectly, nor will we ever do it completely, but libraries are one of the few places left where that is happening at all. I got a little angry when I re-read Dr. Miller's articles. I don't know that ALA is always serving us well in how it responds to the issues we've discussed today, and ALA's corporate culture is increasing. I think we should step back from the hype and quit worrying about some 15 or 16 year old kid with a network connection taking our jobs away from us. We should just do our jobs, and I suspect that librarianship will be around for a good long time to fulfill the role Dr. Miller sees for us.

Editor's note: This is an edited transcript of a panel presentation and follow-up discussion at the 1998 American Library Association Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. The panel was organized by Steven Harris. Robert J. Lackie prepared the transcription.

The WTO and the Threat to Libraries

by Fiona Hunt

How many of you here today would prefer not to buy products made with child labor? How many would prefer not to eat food treated with hormones? Even if you don't care about these things yourself, do you think that people should have the right to make these choices?

The WTO would like to take away that right, and has done so already in a number of cases.

According to the WTO, countries cannot discriminate against a product based on its method of production, even if the same standards are applied to domestic as well as foreign products. Such discrimination constitutes a "non-tariff trade barrier."

For instance, in 1988, the US passed a law banning the sale of tuna caught using "purse seine" nets, nets which injure and kill dolphins as they catch the tuna. This law is applied to domestic tuna as well as imported. Even so it has been ruled WTO-illegal as a barrier to trade. Similarly, a ban against shrimp caught in nets that injure sea turtles was overturned by the WTO. The US ban fell under the US Endangered Species Act as well as satisfying US obligations under the global environmental treaty CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). Despite these facts, it was deemed a non-tariff barrier to trade.

Where food safety is concerned, the WTO contends that unless a product is scientifically proven to be unsafe, it should not be discriminated against in trade. Countries should assess what they consider a "tolerable" risk. Many countries prefer to adopt a "zero tolerance" attitude and wait until the product has been proven safe to ensure ultimate safety for their citizens. Such a stance constitutes a WTO non-tariff barrier to trade. For instance: Since 1988, the European Union has had a ban on the sale of domestic and imported beef treated with bovine growth hormone. Bovine growth hormone is suspected as a possible cause of cancer as well as premature pubescence in girls. It has not been absolutely proven, but the EU has
decided to apply the “Precautionary Principle” and wait until it is conclusively pronounced safe before allowing it into its food supply. The US challenged this ban in 1996, and in 1998, the WTO ruled that the EU must begin importing hormone-treated beef by May of 1999. When the EU refused to comply with the ruling, the US requested that sanctions be applied. The EU currently pays over $100 million in trade sanctions ($116.8 million to be exact) because of its refusal to import beef felt to be unsafe for its population.

In each of the above scenarios, the right to choose has been taken away in favor of the “right” to trade.

It might also interest you to know that every environmental law challenged in the WTO’s dispute resolution court to date has been overturned. Numerous other laws aimed at protecting the world’s environment have been stopped in their tracks by the threat of a WTO challenge. All have been deemed WTO-illegal barriers to trade.

The governments bringing these challenges to the WTO did so on behalf of corporations in their countries. It is the corporate interest that is being upheld.

What does this have to do with libraries? Under WTO laws, public libraries could disappear.

What is the WTO?

The World Trade Organization was established in 1995 to regulate global trade coming out of the 1994 Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations. At the moment, there are 137 WTO member countries from the developed and developing world and that number is growing. Member states vote on agreements and bind themselves to implement all or part of these agreements within a certain time frame, failure to meet a deadline results in pressure from the WTO. It also acts as a settlement “court,” settling disputes that arise in the arena of global trade; a place where corporations (through their national governments) can complain of and be compensated for other members’ “unfair trade” practices. The WTO is backed heavily by transnational corporations (TNCs).

In the words of Ralph Nader’s Public Citizen, the WTO’s goal is “to provide transnational corporations (TNCs) with a cheap supply of labour and natural resources. The WTO also guarantees corporate access to foreign markets without requiring that TNCs respect countries’ domestic priorities” (Working Group 1999); in other words, it awards TNCs all of the rights and none of the responsibilities of unfettered access to global markets.

WTO decisions are heavily influenced by the so-called “Quad” nations (US, Canada, Japan, European Union), who often meet behind closed doors to make key decisions, excluding the other, primarily developing, member states. It strives to abolish the public sector and encourage privatization and deregulation.

How Could the WTO Affect Libraries?

The WTO encompasses many different agreements dealing with different aspects of trade. One such agreement is the GATS, or General Agreement on Trade in Services. Libraries could face the threat of extinction under the GATS. Before we look at the GATS, however, we need to talk about National Treatment.

What is National Treatment?

Put simply, national treatment is the right of foreign companies to be treated the same as or better than domestic companies. For instance, if a foreign company enters the US market, selling the same or similar products as US companies, it has the right to apply for any benefits or special treatment afforded the US companies. The concept of national treatment is built into all WTO agreements and is meant to create a “level playing field” for all companies doing business in the same market so that there is no discrimination against foreign companies. WTO-style national treatment goes one step further, however. Not only must foreign corporations be treated the same as domestic corporations, there is no way for governments to place performance requirements on them. A foreign company would not be required to hire locally, bring technology into the country, etc.; it could simply use the population as consumers, adding nothing to the economic development of the region. And government’s hands would be tied.

What is the GATS?

The GATS introduces a whole new field to international trade, namely, services. Born in 1994, out of the Uruguay Round of the GATT proceedings, the GATS has remained relatively unknown amongst the public. With the 1999 Seattle WTO Ministerial, however, the GATS has come to the forefront and the WTO now recognizes services as the next big area for the
expansion of international trade. It is an area hitherto undeveloped with tremendous potential for profit-making.

The GATS strives to deregulate all services across all borders world-wide with the goal to commit each country to deregulate every service sector and provide national treatment for foreign service-based companies. Services include almost everything that is not a “good” or commodity: education, health care, broadcasting, child care, social services, water treatment, energy distribution, and a multitude of other things including libraries, museums and archives.

National Treatment and the Threat to Libraries

Take the following scenario - it could easily come about under the GATS national treatment guidelines:

Public libraries are in the public domain, supported by public taxes. Imagine an “information services” company entering a market and demanding the same subsidies and tax support that public libraries get. It would be entitled to do so under national treatment rules, providing it can prove itself to be the same kind of operation. The government’s most likely response would be to cut back on or eliminate public funding to libraries so as to avoid similar claims in the future. Libraries could find themselves forced to generate income to survive. The worst case scenario is that, without public funding, libraries could disappear altogether. The public would then be required to buy their information from “information companies” or from libraries, if libraries could stay afloat by charging for their services. Either way, the public would find itself paying for information that was once in the public domain.

Think this sounds far-fetched? According to an article in the Vancouver Sun dated August 1999, there are companies launching what they call “information markets” on the Internet. Information markets are essentially Internet-based “reference desks,” providing reference service to paying customers (Ott 1999). The Information Market pairs up experts in various fields with people seeking answers to e-mailed questions; once an answer has been received, the seeker pays a fee, from which both the expert and the Information Market take a cut. Should companies offering this type of service enter the US market, they could, under national treatment guidelines, try to claim government funding, describing themselves as library-like companies offering library-like services. In addition, many libraries are experimenting with fee for service arrangements to deal with already inadequate funding levels; these schemes could open the door to competition with companies offering the same kinds of services.

One issue that could affect the magnitude of the threat to libraries is how they are classified according to the GATS. As it happens, libraries fall under the broad classification of Division 96 “Recreational, Cultural, and Sporting Services” under the UN classification of services. The UN classification is the one generally used by countries when they make their commitments under the GATS. You can go to: http://gats-info.eu.int/gats-info/swtosvc.pl?&SECCODE=10.C to find the countries that have made commitments under library services. You’ll see that the US and Japan have made almost total commitments, meaning that any country’s private library services could bid on contracts for local libraries once the sector has been opened up to competition.

An example of this kind of scenario taken from real life, involving the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): United Parcel Service (UPS) courier service in the US is challenging Canada Post’s practice of funding the Canada Post courier service, under NAFTA’s chapter 11 guidelines, which pertain to expropriation of profits. They hold that Canada Post’s courier service is being given an unfair advantage and that UPS should receive the same kind of funding. Sound familiar?

Last year in Canada, the government sent out a questionnaire to public libraries asking them to identify areas where they might have “export” interests. This is how the GATS is being sold. Rather than protecting public services within Canadian borders, the focus is on getting foreign market access for Canadian services exports. Support for the GATS is being solicited using exports as the carrot, completely ignoring the other side of the coin – namely, probable privatization of all services currently in the public sector.

Another way in which libraries could be affected by the GATS is the current move towards including professional licensing standards in the agreement. Extending the concept of the “level playing field,” the GATS would like to see standards for licensing professionals brought down to the lowest common denominator. “Pro-competitive” is the preferred terminology. Such a provision in the GATS might mean that professions could no longer demand a certain standard of education or licensing amongst their members. Demanding that your employees and colleagues hold an ALA-accredited masters degree could constitute a non-tariff barrier to trade.
The GATS is explicit in its goal of privatizing the last remaining vestiges of the public sector. Public libraries would face the same threat of extinction under the GATS that was predicted with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), a draft treaty that was abandoned in December 1998 after France’s withdrawal from the proceedings. The difference is that the GATS already exists and is relatively unknown to the public, making it an easier target for WTO negotiators.

Some quotes from WTO officials:

Pierre Sauve, an OECD official and advisor to Industry Canada, told a services lobby conference sponsored by the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC, June 1, 1999 that the advantage of pursuing an investment agreement through existing WTO rules is that it “is more difficult to oppose than a full blown negotiation in a ‘new’ policy area. [ie. Investment] This is particularly true of investment discussions centered on the GATS...”

David Hartridge, director of the WTO services division, wrote in a memo to WTO services negotiators in November 1999: “Services is the major part of the built-in agenda; less difficult and less visible politically than agriculture but very much larger in economic importance and potential. It is also the least controversial element of the Seattle agenda.”

Seattle

So what happened in Seattle? How did libraries fare?

As you are no doubt aware, thousands of people marched through the streets of Seattle on November 30, 1999 to express their concern over WTO rules and their potential to affect the safety and well being of the public. Despite careful planning on the part of demonstration organizers, with a route clearly planned to create as little havoc as possible by skirting the area around the conference center, demonstrators managed to take their message to the doors of the center and delay the official opening of the meetings.

Despite this rocky start and the general disagreement on other key issues amongst WTO members, the GATS talks went well and a draft services document emerged. The goal was to begin talks early in the year 2000. This goal was achieved and as we speak, GATS negotiations are taking place, with several meetings scheduled for this month. The GATS is going ahead. All negotiations are secret and carried out behind closed doors, with little or no information about the substance of the talks feeding out to the public.

The following document [see Appendix A “Services Document”] is the blueprint for the current negotiations. Looking at it, you can see that it is dangerously ambiguous, leaving the door open for negotiators to take whatever direction they like.

The main issue is that of protecting or excluding those sectors that members do not want to be open to liberalization. This is the only way to avoid the concerns we’ve looked at today, short of scrapping the GATS entirely. If an exemption can be obtained for libraries, then they would probably not be in danger from foreign library-like companies claiming national treatment rights. While obtaining exemptions for specific sectors is not necessarily a guarantee for the future, it is better than nothing. However:

i) Paragraph (c) of the document says “the negotiations, from which no service sector or mode of supply shall be excluded a priori...” This means that right off the bat, all sectors are on the table, open to liberalization. No sector gets special treatment; nothing is considered so sacred that it wouldn’t be included. Potentially any sector could be offered up.

ii) Secondly, and related to the above point, is the issue of “negotiating modalities.” Looking at paragraph (b), we can see that the wording is so contradictory and ambiguous as to mean almost nothing. “Based on the request-offer approach” implies a bottom-up approach, which is promising. A bottom-up approach means that the participants introduce to the negotiations only those sectors that they wish to be liberalized. But “and supplemented as necessary by other appropriate negotiating modalities, applied on a horizontal or sectoral basis” seems contradictory. A “horizontal modality” means that whatever is decided in one sector will be applied across the board to all other sectors, while “on a sectoral basis” means that decisions will be applied individually, sector by sector. In this case, members would decide that a particular sector should be liberalized the same way for all members.

This paragraph probably means the following: WTO members must offer up sectors to be committed. This constitutes the “request-offer” approach mentioned. Members will commit sectors they are willing to open up to liberalization. Decisions made during the negotiations will be applied to
these committed sectors only. However, some GATS clauses will be applied horizontally to all sectors, even those sectors not committed in the “request-offer” process. So, even though a WTO member may not commit its education sector, or health services, or libraries, these sectors will still be subject to probably some of the worst GATS clauses.

As we speak, negotiators are meeting to decide where to use this horizontal application of rules. So far, they have isolated domestic regulation. In response to a WTO challenge, a country would need to prove that the regulation under challenge was serving a “legitimate” objective. Incidentally, in putting together a WTO-approved list of “legitimate” objectives, “safeguarding the public interest” has already been rejected. So have “cultural diversity” and “environmental protection.” Instead, a May 9, 2000 confidential paper suggested that legitimate objectives could include “economic efficiency,” “competition” and “economic development.”

Supposing a country were successful in proving that its regulation was serving a legitimate purpose, it would then have to prove that its regulating action was the least trade restrictive action it could have taken, which is nearly impossible. Once a WTO ruling was reached in such a case, the ruling would apply horizontally, across all sectors, whether the sectors were committed by WTO members or not. For example, a ruling by the WTO on domestic regulations concerning hiring practices in the health sector would automatically apply to libraries, museums, education, social services, etc. It is breath-taking in scope.

Finally, some sectors, like telecommunications and finance will be negotiated on a sector by sector basis, applying the same rules to these sectors across all the WTO member states. Tourism is next on the chopping block and if negotiated on a sector by sector basis, would prove disastrous for developing countries, which would not be able to regulate to protect delicate and already damaged eco-systems.

Returning to our services document, when you take the two paragraphs, B and C, together, the implications are disturbing. One high-ranking EU official stated in a press conference that “all the boxes will be opened, but not all of them will be filled.” It occurs to one to ask why boxes that will remain empty should be opened at all. Regardless of the rhetoric being used, the agenda is to liberalize all sectors, if not immediately, then gradually over time. Article 19 of the GATS talks about “progressive liberalization” and indeed, this document (see the introductory paragraph) states that the aim is “to achieve progressively higher levels of liberalization of trade in services…”

When asked in a press conference about protections for the Canadian health care and education systems against privatization, Pierre Pettigrew, Canada’s Trade Minister and chair of one of the WTO working groups, brushed-off the question as irrelevant due to the built-in protections for those sectors in the GATS. There is a clause in the GATS that exempts “services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority.” However, public services operating in competition with other service suppliers (like private schools) would not qualify for this exemption. A library could be considered to be operating in competition with other service suppliers by engaging in fee for service arrangements.

Should the GATS proceed smoothly in this current round of negotiations, we could soon see a world in which only the richest can afford information – and a host of other things.

What Can You Do?

- get informed on the issues
- spread the word to your friends and colleagues
- write your congressperson and the president
- put up displays in your libraries to inform the public
- invite speakers to your library to inform the public
- join a listserv devoted to these issues
- make some noise! Demonstrate publicly...
- volunteer with any one of the public interest groups fighting against these proceedings

Do one or more of these things and you’ve taken your first step towards helping to fight this agenda. Globalization itself is not necessarily a bad thing; it could be a good thing. And it is perhaps inevitable. The WTO’s globalization agenda, however, is corporate-driven and the rules are being written with the good of corporations, not the well-being of the public, in mind.

If even one of the things you’ve heard today has made you angry, I will consider this presentation a success. Thank you very much.
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Editor's note: This article was presented at the Chicago 2000 annual conference of the American Library Association at a program organized by Al Kagan and the International Responsibilities Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table.

APPENDIX A: Services Document drafted at the Seattle WTO Ministerial Conference, November 30 - December 4, 1999

28. Pursuant to the objectives of the GATS; as stipulated in the Preamble and Article IV, and as required by Article XIX, negotiations based on these guidelines shall aim to achieve progressively higher levels of liberalisation of trade in services through the reduction or elimination of the adverse effect on trade of measures as a means of providing effective market access. The negotiations shall take place with due respect for national policy objectives and the level of development of individual Members. In this process, the existing structure and principles of the GATS shall be preserved. To this end:

(a) The negotiations shall be conducted in full accordance with Article IV (Increasing Participation of Developing Countries) and Article XIX (Negotiation of Specific Commitments) and the Annex on Article II (MFN) Exemptions.

(b) Liberalisation may be achieved through bilateral, plurilateral or multilateral approaches, based on the request-offer approach and supplemented as necessary by other appropriate negotiating modalities, applied on a horizontal or sectoral basis. Participants shall submit initial requests or proposals on specific commitments by 1 November 2000 and initial offers by 1 November 2001.

(c) The negotiations, from which no service sector or mode of supply shall be excluded a priori, shall aim to promote the interests of all participants and to secure an overall balance of rights and obligations through the liberalisation of services across a broad range of sectors. Special attention shall be given to sectors and modes of supply of interest to developing countries.

(d) In order to improve market access and make the operation of the Agreement more effective, work currently in progress under the GATS shall be expedited, alongside negotiations on specific commitments. The Working Party on Domestic Regulation shall aim to conclude its work on the development of new disciplines no later than the fourth Ministerial Conference. The Working Party on GATS Rules shall aim to conclude its work by the same date. However, negotiations under Article X (Emergency Safeguard Measures) shall be concluded by 15 December 2000, as agreed by the Services Council on 24 June 1999. Participants shall aim to conclude the work undertaken by the Committee on Specific Commitments on the nomenclature of services and the scheduling of commitments no later than the date of the fourth Ministerial Conference.

(e) Existing provisions of the GATS may be subject to technical review, as agreed by Members, in order to improve the clarity and legal consistency of the text.

(f) In the conduct of negotiations, account shall be taken of any autonomous liberalization undertaken by other Members since the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and credit shall be given for it according to modalities to be developed during the negotiations.

(g) Negotiations shall take account of the results of the reviews to be conducted by the Council for Trade in Services of Article II Exemptions and the Annex on Air Transport Services.
Potential Unexploited: Public Libraries and Adult Literacy
by Jennifer Cram

There is a Yiddish proverb that goes "The one who can't dance says the band can't play." In public libraries, in the area of literacy, many of us are guilty of taking it one step further. Our mindsets tell us that there is no band. The following is theoretical and, I hope, challenging.

I want you to come with me on a journey, a journey through the mindsets that hinder the full exploitation of resources that we already have in our libraries. You will notice that I use the word mindset rather than attitude, which was the word I used in the abstract of this paper. The change is deliberate. I used attitude in the abstract because it is a more familiar and perhaps less threatening word. An attitude is something of which most of us are aware, and most people's attitudes are, to a greater or lesser degree, fluid. If we cannot completely change an attitude, at least we find the boundaries of that attitude changing on a day to day basis.

A mindset, on the other hand, is something of which we are generally not aware, simply because it is an ingrained way of looking at things. It is habitual and we may never become aware that we even have a particular mindset until it is pointed out to us that there may be a different way of looking at a particular subject.

Lawrie Ryan, recently retired State Librarian of Queensland, is wont to say that libraries support the act of reading. I cannot fault him on that one. But if we leave it at that we severely limit what libraries can do.

Homo Typographia

We limit what libraries can do because we become guilty of a mindset that we are dealing only with Homo Typographia, Typographic Man, a kind of sophisticated subspecies of Homo Sapiens. The mark of Homo Sapiens is the word. The word is the main means of communication for our species.

As Laurens van der Post says:

The word is not just a rational thing...it is a very complex, seed thing. With every good word some of it is rational, some of it is non-rational, full of its own, independent association, feelings, meanings and very complex context like a seed that grows when the rain falls on it: it is received and the reception is its rain. Part of it is obvious: you can see it logically and recognize its use at once. But there is a strong non-logical content in it, so great that the word is more than it expresses. One can listen to words, poetry above all, and one is aware of this immense, almost magical evocation of meaning, of ancient meaning that just comes along with the words as part of the package...Altogether words form a system of communication which is as profound, subtle, proven and experienced as life itself. And in a sense it is life and gives life. Without it, life as we have know it is inconceivable. (Van der Post 1986)

The Word in Society

We tend to think that those who come from cultures that did not develop writing are somehow the product of more primitive societies. They may be more primitive in terms of our technology, though one often finds that the technology they developed was entirely appropriate for their society. However if one looks at the development of the word in that society, a somewhat different pictures emerges.

When everything depends on the word, the living word, the spoken word, that word is meant to be forever. The sign of a well-brought up person in such cultures is the person who speaks well. A well-spoken person in that context is not a person with the gift of rhetoric, nor a person with a highborn accent – our definitions of a well-spoken person – but the person who can use the word in a way that moves people, that changes people.

That is what our libraries are really for. They are very dangerous places, as has been acknowledged in those political coups and revolutions that require people to be passive and accepting, and which therefore burn books and restrict access to libraries.

So, are we sure that we are not operating with a mindset that urges us to restrict the dangerous ideas we house by making them available in a form which is accessible only to Homo Typographia? I would ask you to hang on
to this thought about the importance of the word and to measure the ideas posit in this paper against it.

The human spirit owes a tremendous debt to the word, and it is therefore terribly one-eyed to assume that only in its written form, and only to those who can decipher this written form, is it of any importance. Such claims are the product of a particular mindset that looks at society on a macrolevel.

**The Macrolevel View**

On a macrolevel our society is a literate one. Without being able to read and write English at a reasonably sophisticated level it becomes difficult not only to adequately fulfill one’s legal obligations but to operate on a day to day basis. To decipher the directions on a packet of aspirin or read the instructions on a frozen TV dinner one needs to read at the level of those who complete eight years of formal schooling. To read a lease document one needs a post-secondary reading level.

**The Microlevel View**

On a microlevel things are very different. And, if public librarians are giving more than lip service to the professional pledge to match the user with material at this own level, then we have to consider the microculture which formed each individual. We are seeing many people in the their 60s and 70s now, who, because of the Depression, had such interrupted schooling that they never learned to read or write. Depending on their reaction to this their children and grandchildren have grown up in one of two possible microcultures.

Those who missed out on learning to read would have felt the lack keenly and while possibly covering up their own inability would have encouraged reading in a way that conveyed quite forcefully within the home that these were to be valued. Or in discovering that they could function quite reasonably adequately without reading the microculture of the home could have become one in which reading was either ignored or denigrated.

In dealing with migrants we tend to classify cultures as literate or non-literate. Ross Gibbs from Carringbush Library told me of a story about that library’s attempts to provide services to a reasonably large Turkish population in the area. They bought books and magazines, advertised the services and waited for business. It was not forthcoming. Eventually someone thought to ask a few questions. The answer was simple, and unexpected.

While Turkey, on the macrolevel is and has been a literate society for a very long time, the particular area from which the groups of migrants had come was not a literate one. Carringbush changed the books for videos, usage took off and everyone was happy.

Public libraries do serve those who cannot read, but that service tends to be conditional. It is conditional on being intellectually able to decode words on paper, but because of physical infirmity or age, being no longer able to hold a book and turn the pages, or because of visual impairment, being unable to see the words on the page. Or it is conditional on having a genuine desire to learn to read and an innate ability to do so.

**Conditional Services**

Are we serving those who cannot read as exceptions rather than as customers who deserve service at a level appropriate to their needs and abilities? I believe that our mindset says “we deal with Typographic Man, he is our prime customer, the stereotype for whom our services and stocks are designed. We make exceptions for those who can no longer read the printed word because of physical infirmity or visual impairment, and we make exceptions for the migrant and the illiterate and for the native peoples of our countries, but only if they are trying to fit into our norm.”

It seems to me that while we do tend to make exceptions for the aged and infirm we tend not, as our mindsets allow us to believe, to serve them out of pure philanthropy, but rather out of sneaking self interest. In addition we feel that these people are all right, they are our type of people, they really can read. We feel comfortable with them.

Many librarians joined with Hear-a-Book and the Australian Listening Library in the fight to have the copyright waiver extended to those who are physically impaired. The fight to have such a waiver extended to the illiterate is by no means as intense. We happily provide children’s picture books for children who have not yet learned to read, because we are preparing them for reading, for entering into the typographical culture. And we try to ensure that what we buy for them is enjoyable. But when we are looking to buy material to support English as a Second Language students and Adult Literacy students do we look at the material for its enjoyment factor? Probably not. Enjoyment is what you get from being one of us. When buying to support adult students just how guilty are we of regarding reading as exercise?
Library Users and Nonusers

Librarians tend to divide people into users and nonusers, rather than users and potential users. Into the group of nonusers we put those who are never going to learn to read, and as a result that group tends to be very poorly served, even though we may well have a lot of material suitable to their needs already in our collections.

The Newly Illiterate

There is another group, almost universally ignored by public libraries, and that is the newly illiterate. We tend to think of the illiteracy-literacy continuum as a one-way street. Unfortunately it is possible for those who are literate to become illiterate, and that change is almost inevitably accompanied by tremendous emotional difficulties.

Brain damage can cause people to lose the ability to decode the printed word, or it can so impede sequential concentration that it becomes impossible to read a sustained narrative. I must stress that just as the congenitally intellectually handicapped person is often aware of his own intellectual limitations and acutely embarrassed by them, so is the person who can no longer perform to the level which he recalls was normal for him. And then there is the migrant who is newly illiterate because while he may speak and understand English, he is used to a different sort of writing. For him the Roman alphabet is just marks on paper. Alan Barclay, in a paper given earlier in 1988 at the conference “Opening doors for closed ears” makes this comment when comparing services for deaf people with the adult literacy experience in libraries:

Librarians gradually became aware of the literacy problem, so widespread but hidden, in the community some years ago. They had to examine their library materials and determine how people with literacy problems could best use them. Music and spoken word cassettes were often in the stock and so too were “teach yourself English language” tapes. Librarians found something to offer these people immediately. Further research identified books in the children’s library with large printing, and a simple range of vocabulary accompanied by illustrations. Suitable texts – often photographic, in the adult section were also identified. Lists were prepared of these books for people who wished to develop reading skills. Librarians promoted literacy in their community, and as specially designed materials became available for people with literacy problems, many librarians included them in their stock. They were not restricted to that group and many other people in the community, such as parents or teachers, use the literacy section today as freely as the tutors and literacy students.

Barclay’s summary is a neat one. It demonstrates, however, not only how one can find material to support new usage, but also how by one’s attitude once can limit that usage. “Librarians,” he said, “promoted literacy in their community.” Until it becomes clear to all that libraries do not only support literacy, that it is acceptable to appreciate the word and the idea and thirst after both in other than the written form, and that there will be no stigma attached thereto, libraries will not reach their full potential.

Resources

Let us take a brief look at the resources in our libraries that we may not be exploiting to the full in the interest of the literacy student. First, there is the building itself. We do not have to run classes ourselves though many libraries do that successfully. We can provided access to the building as a classroom or meeting place for tutors and students, and we can provide access at a time when the library is closed to other users to enable new readers to become familiar with the idea of using a library in a nonthreatening situation.

But this still limits us to usage by people who have admitted they have problems with literacy and want to do something about it. What about those who have not yet taken that step? If we provide an environment that communicates clearly this is a place in which it is accepted positively that not everyone wants to read, we broaden the potential for the illiterate citizen to feel that it is all right to “come out of the closet” if he feels that learning to read is something he wants to do.

This means simple things like looking at our advertising, looking at the form of our application card, in short taking an illiterate look at our own services and deciding whether they are appropriate and accepting. When we look at our book collection have we ensured that we have enjoyable material at all levels? Are we providing adult material for whose who have problems with sequential concentration – picture books with short, snappy, directly connected captions? We often find those are scattered through the collection; we just never thought to group them in that way.

It is not much use making lists of those things which are scattered through
the collection which may be appropriate. It is easier for a hale and hearty, fully literate user to find material which has been taken out of the main collection into a special collection, than it is for those who have difficulties to find material which is appropriate to their needs but which is scattered through general collections. It is also an easy matter to find non-perjorative terminology for those collections. The term “Adult picture book collection” is, for example, pleasantly neutral.

And what about material that is not in print format? Are we still limiting our purchase of recorded readings of books to those restricted to the physically impaired? A few years ago manufacturers of recorded books in the United States realized that there was a whole reading public out there in the marketplace that was too busy to read except when they had time on their hands – on the freeway.

The result was a huge increase in the availability of recorded books. Manufacturers moved away from the abridged recorded book and started to produce full length recordings of popular material. This has been the publishing success of this decade. Many publishers release the recorded book almost simultaneously with the printed one, and a whole generation of executives is now keeping up with cocktail party discussions of mainstream, high hype novels before they are turned into mini-series.

How many of our staff have to wait for the end of the request list to get hold of those books which our public have expected them to know about and discuss across the counter? How many librarians actually buy commercial recorded books? In not providing recordings which may be borrowed by the healthy, able person we deprive our staff of reading experiences (a recorded book can make shelf checking and shelving a more pleasant experience). We also lose the custom of those people who can really influence those who fund libraries. But worse still we deny the pleasure of the story to those whose taxes may have contributed to its purchase, simply because they do not fit into our norm. If we accept the notion that libraries, particularly public libraries, exist primarily to communicate ideas, and we also accept that the word is the vehicle by which Homo Sapiens communicates these ideas, then it becomes perfectly logical to accept that as communication by the written word is only one means of disseminating ideas, public libraries are morally obliged to support the illiterate. It is only by actively supporting the illiterate population that we can support literacy, and the developing literacy of the user populations we are funded to serve.

If we wish to support literacy through public libraries we must make sure that the message those libraries delivers to the community is not “Come join us in literacy” but rather the more neutral and accepting “Come join us in the library.”

The problem really is not as I suggested at the beginning that in libraries we say there is no band. That is, and was meant to be, a provocative absurdity to catch your attention. The problem may be more invidious than that. Are we saying, “If you want to dance, you do not need a band, the musical score is enough?”

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"Inside" Censorship

by Sanford Berman

If anyone is expecting a rant on "challenges" to library materials like the Harry Potter series and R. L. Stine Goosebumps books, on attempts to remove Huckleberry Finn or Catcher in the Rye, or on Dr. Laura’s crusade for Internet filtering, you’re going to be disappointed. Challenges happen frequently. Often, but not always, the motive is censorious. And in such cases, the effort should be resisted, invoking the First Amendment and Library Bill of Rights.

But two things need to be observed about “challenges” or “requests for reconsideration.” First, it should be the staff and public’s right to question materials selection – unless you believe that selectors are always infallible, that they just can’t make mistakes. A library user some years ago at Hennepin County (HCL) complained about a kid’s book dealing with Down Syndrome that consistently employed the obsolete and demeaning terms, “Mongoloid” and “Mongolism.” Obviously, this was something that staff had overlooked in weeding. So it was rightly, if belatedly, withdrawn. About a year and a half ago, I asked – at HCL – for reconsideration of a French picture book, accurately titled *Ugh!,* that had been secured through a jobber without any reviews or other evaluation. The selection was outsourced, done sight unseen. In fact, on examination, the book peddled every imaginable stereotype concerning Native Americans, clearly violating most guidelines for bias-free writing and illustrating. They retained the title, but I think it was proper to question the choice.

Second, while individual “challenges” usually garner headlines (and ACLU or American Library Association attention), they don’t represent the true extent or depth of library censorship. This “outside” censorship is almost certainly less pervasive and less damaging to intellectual freedom than what I call “inside” censorship. To put things into rational perspective: when, for instance, Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* is dropped from a school reading list in Peru, Illinois, that’s not good, but neither is it a national calamity or a meaningful case of book-banning – because the chance is that the novel is still available in the school library, in the public library, and in the local or electronic bookstore.

To allude once more to Dr. Laura and filtering: the ostensible object is to “protect” minors from violence and especially sex on the Web. The filters, of course, are notoriously unable to differentiate between “legitimate” and “obscene” sexual matter, and if universally applied within a library would limit access by adults to Constitutionally protected speech. The American Library Association (ALA) has adopted guidelines opposing filtering as an abridgment of the First Amendment. Librarians have also developed online kid-guides that promote “safe” sites. The lovely irony here is that the profession seems to be suddenly defending the presence in libraries of often graphic, explicit sexual images and texts in electronic form that it just as diligently excludes from libraries in print or video formats. There are real, on-the-floor problems in many libraries involving patrons who not only access visual erotica on the Internet, but then deliberately attempt to impose those images upon other library users, for instance by printing copies and laying them out publicly, or leaving a terminal with possibly offensive graphics still appearing on the screen. However, these are behavioral issues that can be best addressed by rules and protocols and particularly by remote printers, automatic turnoffs, and privacy screens, not by filtering or pulling the plug.

I believe the following are the far more widespread and serious kinds of censorship – i.e., limiting access to ideas and opinions and cultural expression, as well as limiting speech itself – that are practiced within and by libraries:

- failure to select whole categories or genres of material, despite public interest and demand on the one hand or the need to reflect a broad spectrum of human belief and activity on the other,
- irresponsible, often circulation-driven weeding, consigning sometimes valuable, classic, and unique works to the dumpster,
- economic censorship in the form of fines collected solely for revenue and the imposition of fees for services that make them unavailable to poor or fixed-income people,
- inadequate, if not outright erroneous cataloging, as well as restrictive shelving practices, rendering much material inaccessible even though it is in the collection,
- repression in the workplace, denying staff the opportunity to express themselves without fear on professional and policy issues,
and – especially by means of electronic monitoring – creating an atmosphere of intimidation and submissiveness.

Selection

Self-censorship is librarianship’s “dirty little secret.” Put another way, it’s the fact of seldom-acknowledged and hard-to-justify boundaries or exclusions. As examples, most libraries don’t collect comics or many graphic novels. Few get any ‘zines whatever, even though that’s arguably the hottest contemporary publishing scene. Recent surveys show that small press fiction and poetry, together with many other well-reviewed free thought, labor, and alternative press titles, are woefully underrepresented in both public and academic libraries. Then there’s sex, particularly if it’s in the form or photos or film or deals with beyond-the-pale topics like anal intercourse or S&M. Ordinarily, libraries would have bought multiple copies of anything by Madonna. But her graphic Sex book, which featured a number of S&M pics, was barely bought at all – or treated like a communicable disease. One copy is often sequestered (as at Minneapolis Public Library) behind the reference desk, only to be glimpsed in-house after giving up your driver’s license as collateral. As an ironic contrast, libraries like Hennepin County – serving suburban Minneapolis – that didn’t get Madonna’s tome at all, did buy Madonnarama (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1993), a collection of essays and criticism about her book. So there’s abundant commentary available regarding a work that deliberately isn’t available!

In “Really Banned Books” (April 1998 Counterpoise), librarian/author Earl Lee focuses on the two largest supporters and holders of books: libraries and bookstores. He writes, “Few, if any books are banned outright in this country. But many books are overlooked, ignored, sidelined and squeezed out of the market place. Many small press books are unable to find a place in bookstores or libraries.” Of the numerous books that aren’t “popular” or that are overlooked, especially by libraries, those with sexual content topped his survey-based list. Concluded Lee: “The books found in the fewest number of libraries tended to be those that dealt with sex in a graphic ‘how to’ manner…Evidently masturbation is not a popular topic in libraries.”

These are a few examples of works that libraries true to the Library Bill of Rights should buy, but don’t:

Erotic by Nature: A Celebration of Life, of Love, and of Our Wonderful Bodies

Progressive Librarian #18
**Naked Libido** (Chicago, IL: LIBIDO, Inc., 1999). Consists chiefly of photographs, some in color, representing the unique sexual perspectives of Eugene Zakusilo, Trevor Watson, and Ralph Steinmeier. Including a preface by editor Marianna Beck and introduction by Larry Tritten, this is the first book-venture by the quarterly LIBIDO: The Journal of Sex and Sensibility (P.O. Box 146721, Chicago, IL 60614; 30/year), described by an EIDOS reviewer as “informative, intelligent, engaging, and beautiful...eroticism at its best.”

Having referred to the underrepresentation of free thought – that is, atheist, humanist, and agnostic – materials in libraries, these are three outstanding “ungodly” magazines, at least one of which ought to be in every library system (about 11% of Americans, some 24 million adults, profess no belief in religion or the supernatural):

**Humanist** (American Humanist Association, 7 Hardwood Drive, P.O. Box 1188, Amherst, NY 14226-7188; bimonthly; $24.95/year). The oldest and most attractive of the three, this features essays, editorials, letters, and news on a host of social, economic, philosophical, and political issues. Because of its age, breadth, and being covered by online indexes, The Humanist has surely been the one freethought periodical most favored by libraries.

**Freethought Today** (Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701; bimonthly; $20/year). A 20-page tabloid, consisting of reports, correspondence, and articles, that accents church-state separation, religious bigotry, and clerical misdeeds. Although not as broad in scope as The Humanist, Freethought Today and Secular Nation are unquestionably feistier and more robust.

**Secular Nation** (Atheist Alliance, 5146 Newton Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN 55430; quarterly, $20/year). Letters, book reviews, analyses, essays, and news – punctuated with cartoons and poems – passionately and often wittily express the atheist worldview and lifestyle.

A related journal that belongs in all libraries:

**Skeptical Inquirer** (Committee For The Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, 3965 Rensch Road, Amherst, NY 14228-2743; bimonthly; $32.50/year). CSICOP’s “magazine for science and reason” examines occultism, parapsychology, and pseudoscience from a critical perspective. Highly readable, it is a painless, frequently exhilarating primer on gullibility and scientific method.

Libraries deficient in freethought books can remedy that lack by checking the reviews and ads in relevant periodicals, as well as scanning the nearly 100 page-long trade catalog from Prometheus Books (59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, NY 14228-2197; 716-691-0133; orders: 1-800-421-0351; Fax: 716-691-0137; PBooks6205@aol.com; www.prometheusbooks.com whose secular-oriented wares cover such categories as “Alternative Medicine,” “atheism,” “Biblical Criticism,” “Christian Science,” “Church & State,” “Creation vs. Evolution,” “Critical Thinking,” “Gay and Lesbian,” “Human Sexuality,” “Humanism,” “Mormonism,” “Popular Science,” “Self-help,” “Sexual Autobiography,” and “Women’s Issues,” plus a whole section devoted to literature for young readers. Says an EIDOS reviewer: “This beautiful catalog has it all!”

Finally, and perhaps somewhat quirkily, I confess to conducting a personal crusade to lighten up both our libraries and our lives by encouraging subscriptions to:

**The Onion** (33 University Square, Suite 270, Madison, WI 53715; weekly; $50/year). By turns irreverent, scathingly satirical, and undeniably sophomoric, The Onion is also unfailingly funny. Indeed, it’s easily the most humorous publication in the cosmos. I’m so confident of that claim, that I readily make a second challenge to doubters: I will remit $5 cash to anyone who can honestly state that they read through the first four pages of any Onion without once grinning, smirking, chuckling, or chortling. No need to notarize. (Incidentally, what the 44 page tabloid looks like is a newspaper, visually resembling USA Today. What it really does is parody the familiar, usually chain-controlled daily rag, whether local or national.) [Editor’s note: in May 2001 the offices of The Onion burned down and as of the time we went to press there was no new address.]

Increasingly dominant within librarianship is what might be termed the Techno-Blockbuster Philosophy, which views digital technology as the overriding fact of the future, rendering traditional formats like books, magazines, CDs and videos ultimately superfluous. There is a corollary emphasis, for the time being, on conglomerate-published, Madison-Avenue-hyped “bestsellers,” which may be bought in massive quantities to satisfy artificially-created demand. These aren’t just acquired. They’re prominently displayed and promoted by libraries as though there were some special, intrinsic, compelling worth to them. They are deliberately “pushed” in ways that most mid-list or small and alternative press materials are not, reflecting a distinct bias in favor of bigness and big money. Just two years ago in a talk at the University of Illinois library school I said:

The shibboleth is that libraries are supposed to oppose censorship and provide the widest possible spectrum of perspectives and information – cultural, social, economic, political, religious, sexual. At the national and state policy levels, something curious has
The antidote to this bleakness is for librarians to consciously and energetically identify, secure, and publicize much more non-conglomerate, diverse, and lively material, and for library users themselves to demand this: by letter, email, or in person. Among several helpful guides and resources, here are two essential tools:

**Counterpoise: For Social Responsibilities, Liberty and Dissent**

1716 SW Williston Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; quarterly; $35/year institutions, $25 individuals. Commented *Library Journal*: “It packs 65 pages with bibliographic essays and nearly 120 reviews of books, reference sources, pamphlets, magazines, videos, and CD-ROMs, primarily drawing from the output of independent U.S. publishers and occasionally works from overseas.” And *College & Research Libraries News* declared: “The books, pamphlets, zines and non-print materials included... are often overlooked by schools, universities, and libraries. *Counterpoise* attempts to correct this imbalance by provoking essays and original reviews of small and alternative press publications, as well as reviews reprinted from out-of-mainstream newsletters.”

**MultiCultural Review** (Greenwood Publishing Group, 88 Post Road W., P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881-5007; quarterly; $65/year institutions.) Easily the premier review-source for both adult and children's books, AV materials, periodicals, and electronic media concerning ethnic groups, women, and lesbigays. Although not limited to small and alternative press output, they are well represented, as are academic publishers, activist organizations, and research institutes. Most issues also contain four or five major, resource-laden features, several columns, and a publishers directory.

Not likely (because of its “hot” graphics) to be received by libraries, but still a valuable guide for individual librarians and lay people interested in new sexuality publications is:

**EIDOS: Sexual Freedom & Erotic Entertainment for Consenting Adults**

(P.O. Box 96, Boston, MA 02137-0096; quarterly; $25/year). An acronym for “Everyone is doing outrageous sex,” and published by Golden Phallus winner Brenda Loew, *EIDOS* mixes articles, letters, and editorials with erotic poetry, art, photos, and ads. But the core content is reviews, mostly of magazines, books, and catalogs, sometimes of music and videos.

**Weeding**

Discarding damaged or truly obsolete library materials is a practical necessity. But lately, in part flowing from that Techno-Blockbuster approach that de-emphasizes print and AV in favor of purely digital resources, there’s been an epidemic of trashing, hiding, or selling arguably historic and valuable items without proper review or consultation. At San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), for example, an expensive new downtown building was constructed with ample accommodation for computer terminals but hugely insufficient shelf space for books, resulting in thousands of volumes – some estimates suggest half-a-million – being unceremoniously and often secretly pulped or remotely stored. Variations of this are now so common that Clark Dissmeyer – a Midwest library user – was prompted to write this poem for the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*:
Public Library, R.I.P.

Thieves are in the treasure house
Ravaging, plundering, laying waste
To everything beyond their taste
And in the throes of mad carouse

This ugly new breed of alleged librarians
Stupid, incompetent, computer-obsessed
Techno-yuppies, by ignorance possessed,
Prove themselves the new barbarians.

Where's "The Fox Woman" by Merritt and Bok?
Discarded and dumped and sold
For a pittance, because, they told
Us, why should we stock

A book not lately checked out?
And so among the shelves they blunder,
"Weeding," they call it, "discarding." No wonder
the Battle for Culture ends in a rout.

When boors like these are in power!
By the time they are done
No books will be left. Not one.
Above the ruins, computers will tower,

Buzzing in triumph, until they too,
Perhaps in 2 years, themselves are outdated.
To be replaced by others, created
To offer still less, nothing old, nothing new.

What does all this have to do with censorship? Simply this: Fines demonstrably keep some low- and fixed-income people from using the library. When it's a question of putting milk on the table or paying an overdue fine (or paying for transportation to return the material on time), milk wins as it should. The result is often that folks then stay away from the library or keep their kids out. In short, fines are discriminatory. So are fees for core services—like Internet use or video borrowing. Three or more ALA policy statements unequivocally proscribe fees, yet libraries continue to assess them, in effect censoring certain resources and services for people without the ability to pay. (Bestseller rental programs are another example of a service denied to persons strictly on an economic or classist basis.)

Bibliocide by Cataloging and Shelving

Libraries tend to trumpet how easily and helpfully their wares can be accessed. Some really seem to think that just because they have online catalogs with keyword searching, everything is findable. As I've argued in a number of writings (see for instance "Jackdaws strut in peacock's feathers: the sham of 'standard' cataloging," in June 1998 *Librarians at Liberty*), basic, national cataloging records—whether created at the Library of Congress (LC) or in the LC manner—provide too few subject and other access points, seldom include searchable and clarifying notes. They continue to employ abbreviations and other bibliographic conventions—e.g., slashes, dashes, brackets, and equal signs—that most people don’t understand. What's more, many topics are still not recognized by LC. Try searching for CORPORATE WELFARE, WORKING POOR PEOPLE, PSEUDOSCIENCE, SECULAR HUMANISM, CYBERCULTURE, MANAGEMENT FADS, CONSPIRACY THEORIES, CULTURE WARS, ANTIRACISM, CLASSISM, NATIVE AMERICAN HOLOCAUST (1492-1900), MIDDLE PASSAGE (AT-LANTIC SLAVE TRADE), BUTCH AND FEMME (LESBIANISM), or MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT ON INVESTMENT! Some subjects are rendered in such an arcane, unfamiliar form that almost no one would search for them that way (and many libraries don’t make necessary cross-references): ABNORMALITIES, HUMAN instead of BIRTH DEFECTS; CESTODA rather than TAPEWORMS; INTERVERTEBRAL DISK DISPLACEMENT for SLIPPED DISC; and—no kidding!—CANADA. TREATIES, ETC. 1992 OCT. 7 instead of NAFTA or NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT.
Other topics are constructed in an indisputably biased or inaccurate fashion that may misinform or prejudice catalog-searchers against either the materials or the subjects: e.g., MANPOWER, CRO-MAGNON MAN, and SWORDSMEN instead of the more inclusive HUMAN RESOURCES, CROMAGNONS, and SWORDFIGHTERS; GYPSIES rather than the self-preferred ROMA; UNTOUCHABLES rather than DALITS; the misleading and degrading SIAMESE TWINS for the now common, medically-employed CONJOINED TWINS; the stigmatizing LEPERS and LEPROSY instead of the U.S. Public Health Service-approved and patient-desired HANSEN'S DISEASE PATIENTS and HANSEN'S DISEASE; and a distinct preference for Christianity in scores of religion-related forms.

LC could mandate much more helpful cross-references (like “Columbia. See Colombia” and “Prostrate. See Prostate”), but the sorry truth, already intimated, is that even when such cross-references are sanctioned, many local librarians don't put them in their catalogs. I’ve tried to find LATINOS in catalogs at UCLA, Albuquerque Public, and Los Angeles Public, coming up empty each time. Because LATINOS did not appear as a “see” reference pointing to where the considerable material was actually listed – under HISPANIC AMERICANS – it mistakenly seems that the material isn't there, that the library has no such holdings.

There are frequent errors, which, if undetected and uncorrected locally, can effectively murder a work. For instance, Life lessons from Xena, warrior princess: a guide to happiness, success, and body armor (Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel, 1998), clearly labeled a “a parody” on the cover, was soberly classed by LC in “Self-help psychology” and harmoniously subject cataloged under SUCCESS – PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS! A tome entitled El Dorado, dealing with South American gold mining and working, got classified in the number for “El Dorado County, California.” A juvenile novel was assigned the subject heading, ESKIMOS – FICTION, although no “Eskimos” (i.e., Inuit) appeared in it.

Right now, as still another manifestation of that Techno-Blockbuster mentality, the Librarian of Congress, James Billington, hopes to one day save space by shelving books in LC's Capitol Hill collections by height – effectively eliminating useful browsing by reference librarians and scholars. He apparently believes that everything will ultimately be digitized and available on the tube, so why bother about shelving the physical volumes in any classified order? He also seems to suffer from the delusion that standard, LC-type cataloging is so adequate, so functional, that relevant, wanted materials can be easily and confidently identified through the catalog. Every LC professional organization has openly opposed this potentially precedent-setting, wrong-headed idea, but Billington still seems wedded to it.

There is another shelving problem or obstacle that may be even more widespread, exemplified by the situation at Minneapolis Public Library (MPL), which has long needed a new central building and now seems likely to get it. This is what I recently wrote to a community newspaper about their shelving plans:

Dear Neighbors,

Your editorial exults about the possibility of “a new Central Library that could actually put most of its books out on the shelves.” An accompanying news report indicates that “more than half the collection could go on open shelves, compared to 15 percent currently.” Again, the tone is celebratory.

One glory of American librarianship – and a revolutionary model for much of the world – is the idea of “open stacks”; making books and other materials easily accessible to public and staff by arranging them in a sensible, consistent way on open shelves. No cages. No barriers. No asking permission to browse. That’s the self-reliant, free-spirited American Way. Apparently, however, it’s not the Minneapolis Public Library Way.

For decades, only a fraction of MPL’s downtown circulating collection has been “open.” Building a new facility presumably would have been an ideal opportunity for truly and finally liberating that sequestered and no doubt greatly-underused bulk of the library’s resources. The Library Board’s plans to more than triple the percentage of the circulating collection on public shelves would still leave 50% of that collection in closed stacks. What possible excuse is there for continuing to hide so much of the library’s riches? Do the Board and administrators genuinely believe that users can readily and confidently identify the out-of-sight 50% through the online catalog and then simply request that desired materials be paged?

If so, they are seriously mistaken since “standard” cataloging practice is woefully deficient in search-points and clarifying notes, and also burdens patrons with frequently incomprehensible and alienating abbreviations and punctuation. In short, it’s essential to be able to shelf-browse for yourself, and to do so effectively, all the library’s
wares – with the exception of rare and fragile works – must be arranged on open, unrestricted shelves in a manner that collocates similar and related items. Fifty percent is not good enough. Eighty percent would also be too little.

Were Walt Whitman, the bard of American democracy, aware of this restrictive MPL plan, he’d probably roar:

CUT THE WIRES! TEAR DOWN THE WALLS!
LET NOTHING KEEP WE, THE PEOPLE, FROM
THE BOOKS WE SEEK! NO NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY
WITHOUT FULLY OPEN STACKS!

Workplace Repression

In this last area of “inside” censorship, my tentative conclusion is that workplace speech in libraries is generally not free or legally protected, and that the only staff who may enjoy some measure of personal liberty are those either covered by academic freedom guarantees in university settings or represented by a union. Like it or not, my recent employment case makes clear the issues over library free speech. While it would be wrong to generalize from my own experience, it is worth reviewing the relevant facts, which illustrate the point.

First, a bimonthly HCL Cataloging Bulletin began publication in 1973, and some time before 1979, under my editorship, the Bulletin won a national award as the best library periodical of the year. It typically contained essays, letters, reviews, and reports of HCL innovations. Early on, it was illustrated with drawings and cartoons by two successive and enormously gifted HCL staff artists. In 1979, I was summoned before the Library Director and Deputy Director and informed that they didn’t like the cartoons, that the illustrations would have to stop, and that all future copy could have to be approved by higher-ups before publication. This was not discussible, I learned, so—regarding the edicts as unacceptable interference, as censorship— I resigned as editor. The May/June issue contained no pictures, but did conclude with a “Publisher’s Note: S. Berman’s editorship ceases with this issue. The contents of succeeding issues...will be new or altered cross-references, DDC-numbers, and subject descriptors...” Anyone curious about what censorship actually looks like can compare the March/April 1979 issue (No. 39) with the July/August product (No. 41). The contrast is stark.

Second, much later on in the summer of 1996, I was accused in the Director’s office, with only my immediate boss present, of being disruptive and undermining. What terrible act had I committed? I publicly opposed the first proposal to emerge from a Revenue Generation Team assembled by the director: a plan to raise $100,000 a year by doubling the juvenile fine rate. The purpose was not to get books back on time or to instill greater responsibility in youthful borrowers. It was single-mindedly to impress the Board of Commissioners downtown with how tough and effective the Library could be in reducing reliance on property taxes, on public money. It happens that neither the Board nor County Administrator had ever made a formal, written request or demand to raise non-tax funds. It was just something that our administration thought they should do. Realizing that much of the staff, not to mention public, might question such a kid – and also poor – bashing policy, the Team deliberately did not consult with the system’s two dozen children’s librarians or anyone else who might have objected. Instead, the plan was railroaded through the Management Team and Library Board with great haste and minimum opportunity to criticize or debate.

I and the Children’s Services Coordinator testified at a board meeting where we were rudely received. The day before, there had been a brief discussion among the Management Team, concluding with a 10-10 split vote on the proposal—a vote that was never even intended (I had to ask for it). Half the senior managers opposed it, but the Administrative Committee that afternoon approved it anyway and the appointed Library Board did likewise the next day, with only one member dissenting. Given the appalling lack of staff and public input, I talked to someone at an alternative news weekly who ran a short story on the issue, captioned “Library Pinches Nickels, Kids” and I initiated a simple petition, finally signed by nearly 140 staff, which asked that the fine policy be withdrawn. As it happens, the policy did get revoked, but probably because of a call from one county commissioner, who had been alerted to the library’s plan and surely recognized it to be both unfair and a probable PR disaster. I wasn’t the person who contacted the commissioner, but I know who was: someone I had merely spoken to, a citizen and library activist who realized that this was bad news for kids and poor people. As a result of testifying publicly, talking to the press, and starting a petition, I was to be reprimanded and I would have been—except that I could afford $500 to hire labor lawyers who phoned, faxed, and mailed the administration, advising that free speech rights might be involved and that they intended to represent me at any hearing or trial. That did it. They backed off. But how many librarians can afford the $500 to buy their First Amendment rights? How many have their mortgages paid...
off already? I did, but I was lucky.

Third, only a few years ago, a cataloging staff member jokingly posted a New Yorker cartoon related to the Bobbitt case on his cube wall. It showed two fully clothed men at a bar or diner. The caption included the word “penis.” Someone filed an anonymous complaint. Instead of realizing the inoffensiveness of the cartoon and the inherent contradiction of a free speech library banning or removing a New Yorker cartoon, a cartoon incidentally available upstairs on the periodical shelves of the same building, the Administration ordered it taken down. The staffer and I sought aid and solace from the state and national library intellectual freedom offices and also the ACLU, but got none. In fact, we also asked for support from the New Yorker, but the magazine itself was supremely uninterested in its own content being banned.

Fourth, many people have seen the online or hardcopy City Pages article early last summer on my forced retirement (“Sandy Berman’s last stand,” volume 20, no. 971, July 14, 1999), or the special double issue of Librarians at Liberty (“Sandy Berman’s forced retirement from the Hennepin County Library: a series of documents, followed by letters of support and a petition on the Internet,” volume 7, nos. 1/2, December 1999). I won’t rehash those details, but it is worth emphasizing that my initial reprimand and later mandatory reassignment stemmed originally from simply having expressed my opinion on certain cataloging rules and practices to two colleagues at the University of Minnesota in a short letter. This had been done in the context of a team-based decision-making process having been summarily scuttled by management. Not mentioned in City Pages or the mainstream library press was this: on a spring Wednesday (last year) I received a fax from the OCLC Newsletter in Ohio, asking me to correct and emend the text of an article announcing Hennepin's new membership in that bibliographic network. I had been told nothing earlier of such an article. As it happens, at least two paragraphs dealt directly with me and HCL cataloging policy. Of two photos in the article, one was of me as Head Cataloger. I faxed several corrections and revisions to Ohio the next day. On Friday, following a hunch, I phoned OCLC, asking if my fax arrived safely, only to be told that it had, but that my immediate boss had in the meantime instructed them to ignore all my suggested changes. Needless to say, I was never told that. I accordingly requested that if my input were not accepted – after being invited – they should drop my name and photo. I made the same request of my boss, also asking why she had unilaterally and secretly censored my words. Despite follow-up requests, I’ve yet to receive a reply or apology.

The most recent event in this sorry saga erupted in late January. In sum, six titles either by or about me had disappeared from the HCL catalog, and perhaps also from the collection and after I blew the whistle, some copies of one work were somehow found and a catalog-record recreated for that title. All the wayward books were reordered, although not all would likely be replaced since a few are out-of-print. The official management line is that anyone, anywhere in the system, could have deleted the catalog records and that there was no formal recall of these books. I deeply suspect that this was a conscious, deliberate act of bibliocide, of censorship directed at me, my words, and my ideas. I think it probable and logical that the very persons who last year expelled me from the library would later expel my name and influence from the catalog and the shelves.

Lastly on the issue of library workplace free speech, it seems that some libraries are considering installation of “Little Brother” software to monitor staff Internet use. During one initial experiment, an employee was rebuked by his supervisor for having spent 29 seconds at a Web site deemed not job-related. Of course, staff shouldn't be wasting time and money on purely personal or recreational net-surfing, but this sort of covert surveillance – wherever practiced – is almost sure to create an atmosphere of intimidation and repression. At the very least, it hardly conduces to loyalty, trust, and openness. (Another such software package is called “Message Inspector.” Both apparently monitor internet use and email.)
Taking it to the Streets

by Lynn Andersen

At the end of November of this year, Mark Rosenzweig sent out a list of ten points for consideration by librarians and information workers [see p. 71]. He called upon progressive librarians worldwide to share thoughts on the points. In the following article, I would like to reflect on some of the issues raised in these points, as well as offer some program ideas that are meant to address them. It is my hope that this will initiate a sharing of our work and ideas in a way that will inspire and invigorate our library programming.

The 6th point caught my attention because it is very close in text to our mission statement: The Durland Alternatives Library (DAL) is dedicated to providing free and open access to materials expressing viewpoints and information not readily available through mainstream publications and mass-media sources. Our collection development policy goes further in directing staff to build a collection that reflects progressive viewpoints. Most libraries have a broader collection scope, but it’s necessary to include some direction for the collection of alternative materials in the overall policy. Otherwise it’s too easy for those areas to be ignored or discounted.

Once we can affect change in the stated policies of our organizations, we’ll have a mandate to invigorate library collections with materials that reflect the areas covered in Mark’s ten points. As librarians who have given much attention to a progressive agenda, we are well positioned to assist in the expansion of library collections to include alternative, independent, and progressive viewpoints. We can also strengthen our ties to other information workers and develop our solidarity as librarians committed to the broader issues of justice and social change.

One organization that works globally to encourage the exchange of ideas between libraries is UNESCO-UNAL, United Nations Network of Associated Libraries. For information see their website is http://www.unesco.org/webworld/unal/unal_introduction.htm. One of the areas to note is the twinning program that has been instituted by UNAL. It is an opportunity for libraries to design partnerships that will be of mutual support in their work. There are member libraries all over the world. Unfortunately, only two libraries in the U. S. have joined the program.

The rest of this article describes another community outreach program of the Alternatives Library. In the best of all worlds, libraries attempt to serve everyone equally. But in fact, there are many people who are not served at all, either because they can’t get to the library, or because the information that speaks to their particular needs is not there.

One group that we are focusing on through DAL programming is that of incarcerated people. The library advisory board has committed time, energy and resources to a number of programs that are aimed at serving imprisoned populations. Beyond basic high school equivalency instruction, the government of New York State has stopped funding education opportunities in prisons and detention centers. This is a phenomenon that is familiar to many of you throughout the United States. Right now, the DAL is working with the staff and an incarcerated group of young men at a maximum security juvenile detention center in our area. The “residents” (the term used by the center) are between the ages of 14 – 21. The facility director welcomes our efforts and has been open to a number of activities that have been created by library staff and board members. In order to better understand the needs and workings of the facility, two of us (one board member and myself) are part of its Citizens’ Advisory Board.

We began our programming by helping to increase the facility library collection. The library staff person – unfortunately, there is not a full-time librarian on site – has selected books from those donated to us for our annual book sale. In addition, she has chosen 50 books from our stacks, the first batch in a series of rotating collections we are offering. Each group of books will stay in the facility for 3 months. As we track what gets used the most, we can use that information to identify the areas of interest to the prisoners and expand our collection accordingly.

Another focus of our work at the detention facility is in the area of literacy. I’m working one-on-one with a facility resident as is another library board member. After 3 months, I find the work stimulating and rewarding, more so than I ever expected. I am working with a 16-year-old young man and have yet to figure out which one of us is the teacher and which the student.
Cultural programs have been a component of our work with the detention center. I have done a map and slide-show presentation on Senegal and have another one on Kenya scheduled as I write this. Bringing other parts of the world to these young men has reverberated in their lives beyond the program. So much of our value system is formed by interaction with a diverse cross-section of world cultures. Without that exposure, we are left in a rather pasteurized, homogenized state of being that is of no help in dealing with the complexities and demands of our work and social activities. We can’t live fully if we fail to spend time with diverse communities and establish connections with other cultures and ways of thinking. Yet the young men and women who could benefit so much from outside contact, have few options at gaining access to the outside world. In whatever small way we have addressed this lack at the local facility, we have impacted the lives of the people locked-up there. The interest and gratitude expressed by both prisoners and staff has been heart-warming and inspiring.

An important thing to remember when planning programs with prisons and other detention centers is that consistency and ongoing activities are the most beneficial. Many of these facilities get one-time offers from individuals and community groups, but developing long-term relationships with the prisoners and staff, wherever we can, really helps guide activities in ways that are more in tune with prisoners needs. Book donations or other singular offers are important, but personal contact with a prisoner or prisoners over the long-haul, carries the message that their lives are of value, their rights are respected, their ideas and struggles are heard, and, most of all, that there is someone who wants to spend time with them as an equal partner in an ongoing exchange.

As progressive librarians, we can support and share the work we do; help each other to have a voice in what goes on in this world; give voice to underrepresented peoples, at home and throughout the world; and expose the destructive forces that would deny human rights and social justice through print, electronic media and any other means necessary. The points Mark has offered are meaningful to me, not as form, but as catalyst for action. We’re not talking about words on paper here, we’re talking about getting out there and doing something to move the world in a better direction for the greatest number of people. It doesn’t matter if it’s in the office or in the street—we’ve got to keep doing the work and doing it together. I look forward to hearing about the work of other people in who read this and keeping the ideas flowing freely.
point-of-view to the attendees. A small international group met with Feisal Husseini, the informal mayor of East Jerusalem and the member of the PLO Executive Committee who is in charge of Jerusalem affairs. The group was presented with a statement from the National Conference of Palestinian Librarians which reaffirmed the boycott, noted that the Israeli Government had prevented a workshop for Palestinian librarians, and called for Unesco intervention to maintain the cultural identity of the city. This statement was finally published in the conference newsletter, the *IFLA Express*, on the last day of the meeting. IFLA President, Christine Deschamps, stated at the closing session that the IFLA Executive Board dissociated itself from political incidents during the conference, but claimed that these were beyond the control of the local organizing committee. This was the weakest response possible.

Several other statements were made during the conference in at least two other meetings. I took the opportunity to address the question at both the panel and the business meeting of FAIFE, the Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression. I asked the following rhetorical questions concerning the Opening Session: Why were we welcomed to the “unified capital of the State of Israel?” Why was it focused on the peace process with only the Israeli point-of-view and no chance for discussion? Why were there Israeli peace songs but no Palestinian peace songs? And in a city with a large Palestinian population, why was there not one word of Arabic? At the FAIFE business meeting, I said that the situation was entirely predictable five years ago, and I asked that FAIFE have some input into future venue decisions.

Although the Israeli Organizing Committee had to promise that all would be welcome in its bid to win the venue, it turns out that visas were denied to many third world librarians. It is notable that the Regional Section on Africa’s funded speaker was denied a visa as were a number of other African librarians. Many also suffered long and difficult immigration and customs interrogations, both on arrival in Israel and before takeoff at El Al Airlines facilities at other airports. I observed what appeared to be a typical case of profiling on my arrival, the same kind of treatment that blacks often suffer here in the US.

On the positive side, I am pleased to report a successful meeting of the IFLA Social Responsibilities Discussion Group. There were about 80 people who engaged in a lively discussion around recommendations to IFLA on addressing the growing gap between the information rich and the information poor, both between countries and within countries. About 30 people have volunteered to work on implementing the recommendations assuming endorsement by the IFLA Professional Board. The recommendations were forwarded to the Professional Board for action at their fall meeting in The Hague.

It was also heartening to find a panel on “Libraries and the WTO.” The speakers were Frode Bakken, the current President of the Norwegian Library Association, and Paul Whitney from the Burnaby Public Library in Canada. They explained the excellent IFLA policy on the WTO (which has been endorsed by ALA) and talked about what happened in Seattle. Unfortunately, as opposed to our SRRT panel in Chicago, the spirit of Seattle was not evident in the room. There was also a Guest Lecture on the WTO by Steven Shrybman, also from Canada. He characterized the WTO as the “most powerful organization that has ever existed.” For example, he noted that the US has won a case against Canada treating periodicals as commodities, exactly the same way as beer. Local content in Canadian periodicals has no relevance under WTO rules.

There were three notable agenda items at the FAIFE meeting, the recently issued report on the state of libraries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the draft World Report on the state of libraries in various countries and the controversy around the FAIFE report on Cuba. The Bosnia report has been issued as a monograph. It describes the war devastation and offers recommendations for revitalization. The first World Report will be issued next year and will be something like an Amnesty report on the state of libraries. Marta Terry, the President of the Cuban library association, ASCUBI, made an impassioned rebuttal to the FAIFE report condemning Cuban Government repression against the so-called “Independent Librarians.” Her remarks will be available in English shortly. I was able to back-up her remarks by referring to the recent trip by US librarians who visited two of these “independent libraries.” I noted that they were neither independent nor librarians, and that their small living room collections of books distributed by the US Interest Section in Havana did not function as libraries.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Margo Brault who told me about the wonderful Jerusalem Hotel and their Alternative Tours. This small, decorative and warm Palestinian Hotel served as my home away from home in East Jerusalem, provided me with wonderful food in their garden restaurant, helped me attend the exquisite Jerusalem Festival for Arabic Music and Jazz, and provided me with political tours to Gaza and The West.
Bank. A tour of a refugee camp in Gaza was an experience I will not easily forget. I did learn more about the Medical Library in Gaza, and I hope we can follow-up on our proposed aid project. It was quite a trip.

Al Kagan
August 27, 2000

**Circle of Studies about Political Librarianship**

**MEXICO**

**Founders:** Filipe Meneses Tello, Julia González Valencia, Celso Martínez Muciño; Martin Vera Cabañas (mvera69@yahoo.com)

**Mission:** In Mexico, libraries and information centers are generally institutions which have been created and developed without a national tradition and they primarily imitate library practices from First World countries. Regrettably libraries have been used only for political purposes or to promote political campaigns. Because of this Mexican libraries don’t have an appropriate plan of development.

We are conscious that libraries and information centers are often created without a clear commitment to the social classes they must serve. We also think that libraries have become one of the principle sources that globalization has used to reinforce its power.

Since library education in Mexico is based on a technical and managerial model, Mexican librarians don’t realize the importance of linking librarianship with major fields like politics and sociology among others. Their participation and resistance against unilateral decisions is scarcely visible.

Recognizing that democratic libraries and information centers contribute to the change of social structures, our group is founded to promote a real participation of the Mexican library community in political and social scenes of librarianship as well as to support social movements and non-governmental groups that fight for a Mexico with justice and social equality.

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Program for International Progressive Librarianship

by Mark Rosenzweig

1. We shall work towards an international agenda as the basis of common action of librarians everywhere actively committed, as librarians, to social justice, equality, human welfare, and the development of cultural democracy.

2. We will unite librarians and information workers in opposition to the marketization of public goods, to privatization of social resources and to outsourcing of services and will oppose international treaties and institutions which advance destructive neo-liberal policies.

3. We insist on the equality of access to and inclusiveness of information services, especially extending such services to the poor, marginalized and discriminated against, including the active solidarity-based provision of information assistance to these groups and their advocates in their struggles.

4. We shall encourage the exploration of alternative models of human services; promote and disseminate critical analysis of information technology’s impact on libraries and societies; and support the democratization of existing institutions of education, culture, communications.

5. We shall undertake joint, interdisciplinary research into fundamental library issues (e.g. into the political economy of information in the age of neo-liberalism and corporate globalization) in order to lay the basis for effective action in our spheres of work.

6. We will support cooperative collection, organization and preservation of the documents of people’s struggles and the making available of alternative materials representing a wide range of progressive viewpoints often excluded as resources from the debates of our times.

7. We will investigate and organize efforts to make the library-as-workplace more democratic and encourage resistance to the managerialism of the present library culture.

8. We will lead in promoting international solidarity among librarians and cooperation between libraries across borders on the basis of our joint commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants which create a democratic framework for constructive cooperative endeavors.

9. We will organize in common with other cultural and educational progressives, to help put issues of social responsibility on the agendas of international bodies such as IFLA and UNESCO.

10. We shall oppose corporate globalization which, despite its claims, reinforces existing social, economic, cultural inequalities, and insist on a democratic globalism and internationalism which respects and cultivates cultural plurality, which recognizes the sovereignty of peoples, which acknowledges the obligations of society to the individual and communities, prioritizing human values and needs over profits.
LINK: A Network for North-South Library Development

Librarians and information workers all over the world share many common problems and experiences. Many workers, especially in the “South” have developed library techniques to suit local conditions. Their solutions, however, may be applicable elsewhere. To facilitate the sharing of these ideas, some interested librarians in the United Kingdom got together in 1988 to form LINK.

LINK is a network that intends to be an informed, experienced and realistic forum that will raise awareness of “Third World” library issues within the information-related professions of the “North.” It aims to link librarians and libraries in the “South” with colleagues worldwide, for their mutual benefit, and to provide support, briefing and continuing information to individuals who intend to do information work in developing countries.

Specific objectives and activities of the group include:

- Raising awareness among professional bodies and related organizations in the information world.
- Raising awareness among individual librarians through personal contact, and other activities, such as talks, articles and meetings.
- Raising awareness among staff and students of UK library schools.
- Providing information and support to individuals before, during and after their work overseas.
- Supporting students, librarians and information workers from developing countries who are in the UK and librarians and information workers in developing countries.
- Producing a newsletter to inform, connect and support participants' activities and provide a forum for discussion of professional issues.
- Producing a directory of network participants and other resources that can facilitate the main aims of the network.

Who are we?

Most of us are librarians who have worked alongside local colleagues in libraries and information centers in developing countries, trying to provide basic services and solve problems on a day-to-day basis. Much of this experience, though not all, has come from “volunteer” projects associated with organizations like VSO, UNAIS, APSO, and CUSO. Returning home is not the end of our interest and involvement in Third World library development. We want to keep these issues visible, and also contribute in various ways to further development and improvement of libraries and information centers worldwide.

LINK also seeks to raise the political awareness of library and information workers around the world and provide the opportunity to discuss professional and political issues that arise from our work.

If you are interested in these issues, or have useful experience or ideas to share, we would like you to participate with us in some or all of the network’s activities. Contact us at: LINK, c/o Gillian Harris, 64 Ennersdale Road, London SE13 ENGLAND, e-mail: 101450.2167@compuserve.com.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Lynn Andersen is the director of the Durland Alternatives Library on the Cornell University campus, Ithaca, NY. Her work with the library focuses on building coalitions with community social activists and making library resources available for their work on issues of justice, human rights, peace, diversity, and the environment. At present, the library staff and advisory board are working to bring literacy training, books, poetry and cultural programs and continuing education funding to a juvenile detention center in the Ithaca area.

Sanford Berman, PLG member and former Head Cataloger at Hennepin County Library, co-edits Alternative Library Literature: A Biennial Anthology (McFarland).


John Buschman is Acting Chair of Talbott Library at Rider University and Collection Development Librarian. He is co-editor of Progressive Librarian and the editor of Critical Approaches to Information Technology in Librarianship (McFarland, 1993).

Jennifer Cram, former President of the Australian Library and Information Association and Associate Editor for Australasia for Counterpoise (1996-2000), has wide experience of managing public, academic and corporate libraries. Jennifer is a frequent invited speaker at conferences in Australia and abroad, and is widely published on a range of topics including library service design and delivery, performance measurement, social justice implications of library structures and services, and libraries and the Internet. Her current position is Manager, Library Services for Education Queensland.

Michael Donovan, librarian and artist, is a union organizer for UNITE.

Zoia Horn has worked on public, high school, university and special libraries – most recently the DataCenter and the Center for Investigative Journalism. Jailed during the Vietnam War in conjunction with the Harrisburg 7 trials she became an
Recommendations for Action in Implementing
ALA’S “Library Services for the Poor” Resolution
(aka ALA’s “POOR PEOPLE’S POLICY”)

The American Library Association promotes equal access to information for all persons, and recognizes the urgent need to respond to the increasing number of poor children, adults, and families in America. (from the Poor People’s Policy)

Actions for Citizens

1. Challenge public policy that adversely affects low-income people, such as, punitive welfare reform, cutting tax credits, reducing food stamps, eliminating benefits to immigrants, limiting health care access, and criminalizing homeless persons (e.g. through laws against loitering, panhandling, and camping).
2. Join local advocacy groups that work to promote resources and services for poor people.
3. Promote full, stable, and ongoing funding for existing legislative programs in support of low income services, and for pro-active library programs that reach beyond traditional service sites to poor children, adults, and families.
4. Promote an expanded federal low-income housing program, national health insurance, full employment policy; living minimum wage and welfare payments, affordable day care, and other programs likely to reduce, if not eliminate, poverty itself.

Actions for Library Professionals

Related to library services and policies:
1. Examine your library’s mission statement. Who is supposed to be served? Are all people welcome? Are all people being served? What are the barriers to people using the library? What steps could be taken to eliminate these barriers?
2. Insure that people know how library policies are determined and are able to voice their concerns.
3. Evaluate library policies to ensure that they do not discriminate based on the ability to pay for access and/or service (e.g. video rental fees and bestseller rental programs).
4. Promote the removal of all barriers to library and information services, particularly fees and overdue charges, as well as homeless-excluding residence requirements.
5. Ensure the future success of all children by contributing to efforts that insure children know how to read and are encouraged to read.
6. Work with local literacy providers to publicize availability of Adult Basic Education classes, GED and ESL to help adults improve their literacy skills.

Related to Outreach Services:
1. Ask local welfare consumer and antipoverty organizations what issues they’re working on and how the library can contribute to their work.
2. Promote the determination of output measures through the encouragement of community needs assessments, giving special emphasis to assessing the needs of low-income people and involving both anti-poverty advocates and poor people themselves in such assessments.
3. Have a special area of reports, brochures, and newsletters of local organizations and agencies with addresses, contact names, and purpose of groups so that interested people can get involved.
4. Fund and support outreach services that address community needs such as literacy and read-aloud programs.
5. Promote networking and cooperation between libraries and other agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups in order to develop programs and services that effectively reach poor people.
6. Build partnerships with organizations in your community that serve low-income families. Tell those organizations what you have, how the library works, and update them on new materials and services.
7. Promote among library staff the collection of food and clothing donations, volunteering personal time to anti-poverty activities and contributing money to direct-aid organizations. Also, promote related efforts concerning minorities and women, since these groups are disproportionately represented among poor people.
8. Compile a database of local community organizations and make it part of your library’s web pages and/or online catalog, readily available to patrons who may need it.
9. Sponsor public events (such as forums, speakers, community discussions, presentations by local organizations) so people can understand issues affecting them, like taxes, child care options, corporate welfare, crime, school services, growing wealth disparities, housing and health policies, and fair trade.
Related to Public Awareness:

1. Promote increased public awareness – through programs, displays, bibliographies, and publicity – of the importance of poverty-related library resources and services in all segments of society.

2. Promote direct representation of poor people and anti-poverty advocates through appointment to local boards and creation of local advisory committees on service to low-income people, such appointments to include library-paid transportation and stipends.

3. Collect, display, and make readily accessible current and up-to-date information on issues such as wealth distribution, child-care, welfare reform, living wage laws, single-payer health insurance, and affordable housing.

4. Promote the publication, production, purchase, and ready accessibility of print and non-print materials that honestly address the issues of domestic and global poverty, hunger, and homelessness, that deal with poor people in a respectful way, and that are of practical use to low-income patrons.

Related to Professional Association activities:

1. Read ALA’s “Poor People’s Policy” and think about how its recommendations may be implemented in the libraries where you work.

2. Distribute copies of ALA’s “Poor People’s Policy” to colleagues. Initiate a discussion of the “Poor People’s Policy” at the libraries where you work, and get your colleagues thinking about and discussing ways it can be implemented.

3. Ask ALA’s Washington Office to actively support legislative initiatives that would contribute to reducing, if not eliminating, poverty (e.g. living wage, more low-income housing, and universal health care).

4. Get involved in the ALA units working on the issues of library services to poor people, such as the Social Responsibilities Round Table Task Force on Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty or the OLOS subcommittee on the “Poor People’s Policy.”

5. Document effective library services aimed at serving poor people and share information about these programs through ALA publications, conference sessions and electronic discussion lists, as well as with groups outside ALA.

6. Encourage library science programs to offer courses on services to both urban and rural poor people.

7. Volunteer to develop and lead creative strategies within ALA and other professional associations that can bring visibility to the issue of libraries’ services for poor people.

8. Ask all ALA units to report on past, present, and future activities undertaken to implement the “Poor People’s Policy.”

Compiled by the ALA/SRRT Task Force on Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty
April 2000

BOOK REVIEW


Reviewed by Zoia Horn

There is nothing like a story about a real person battling for a principle against great odds to bring a surge of faith, optimism and even action in support of the good cause. The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown is such an account

The bare bones of the story are simple. Ruth Brown, a long-time librarian at the public library in Bartlesville, a small city in Oklahoma, was dismissed by its City Commission. She was highly regarded in the community. There was no question of her competency. But, early in 1950, forty Bartlesville citizens accused her of “supplying ‘subversive’ materials at the library” (p. 55). When asked for particulars, they identified subscriptions to the Nation, the New Republic and Soviet Russia Today. The Bartlesville Library Board supported her. A “Friends of Miss Brown” Committee was quickly formed to publicize what had happened and to raise funds for her.

The pressures against Miss Brown escalated. The City Commission crafted a new ordinance that permitted a summary dismissal of the Library Board and the replacement of the board members with anti-Brown people who could then “control” and oversee “material selection” (p. 69). Such were the times after World War II when the cold war was revving up, and anti-communism was unleashed by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy with its flagrant witch hunts and loyalty oaths. As Louise Robbins graphically describes, on the surface, this was a censorship issue. But, the urge to censor had an underlying fear driving it. Ruth Brown had shown a “commitment to racial equality” both within and outside the library. She had informally opened the library to African-Americans; she had friends among them, and she had, most shockingly to the community, come with two African-American teachers from the local segregated school into “the largest drugstore that served food” (p.54) and asked to be served. (This was five years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man and before the sit-ins of the Civil Rights Movement.) It was February 1950, which was Brotherhood Month, and it seemed an appropriate step to take. She had come to her anti-racist views through voracious reading over
the years, but particularly from reading Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*.

It was Ruth Brown’s anti-racism, anti-discrimination and support of interracial programs that were perceived as the threat to the comfortable life of many in the community where an adequate supply of “Negro” manual labor was always available to do the daily chores. This fear of a challenge to their way of life was the driving force behind the attack on Ruth Brown.

The remarkable quality of this book is the interweaving of the social, political and economic pressures on people in this period of United States history exemplified by this incident in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Using quotes from interviews, letters, and books mentioned in her extensive notes and bibliography, she provides a sense of immediacy to the events and to the analysis of them. The many uses of anti-communism, for example, have an economic as well as a political function. “Conservative businessmen…used the cold war anti-communist crusade to diminish the strength of labor unions and to combat liberalism generally.” (p. 6) There was a fear of losing cheap black labor by business, or fear of job competition. The Roosevelt New Deal reforms “which emphasized social and economic welfare of all people” (p. 4) were called communistic, and people advocating racial justice and equality were accused of being communists (p. 159).

It then became easy to label books and other publications that were liberal or just critical of the status quo. Librarians became even more vulnerable to pressures to remove books. Ruth Brown was one of those who battled censorship, but no one knows how many chose to avoid any problems by not purchasing potentially controversial publications. Ruth Brown had called for help from the American Library Association, which responded by publishing her case, and even “mandated the first on-site investigation of a censorship episode.” But, as Brown put it, “I could not...understand why the ALA carefully seemed to avoid the racial aspects of the case.” As a matter of fact ALA may have unwittingly “helped to obscure the issues of race [and] to nullify the attention Brown was trying to focus on segregation.” (p.163)

Robbins points out “the importance of gender in this skirmish (in Bartlesville) and in the nationwide battles” (p.154). Women’s cultural boundaries were understood. They were to be “submissive, nurturant, moral, and domestic.” This community had a patriarchal atmosphere “cultivated and exploited” by the major employer, Phillips Petroleum Company. Librarians being, at that time, 88.8 percent women, they were expected to provide a “homelike space,” well-organized materials and services, and to be “submissive to the prevailing ideology.” Brown stepped over these cultural strictures when she acted upon interracial commitments. She found strong allies among other women who had turned their energies beyond home-making alone, to social reforms that would improve the general welfare: peace, consumer protection, and advancement of women and minorities. The YWCA was central among local institutions to work for these causes. But the power was elsewhere. She makes an interesting point that the “containment of communism” was mirrored in other containments domestically: the containment of women at home or in low paying jobs; of African Americans and other minorities in segregated ghettos, with limited educational and economic opportunities; and also, the containment of ideas that might transgress the prescribed beliefs.

Ruth Brown’s story became the basis of the film *Storm Center*, starring Bette Davis, when a screenwriter read an eloquent letter to the editor in the *Saturday Review* written by a friend of Brown’s, describing “the events surrounding Brown’s firing” (p.128). Here too the example of the film’s making and the reactions to it is revelatory. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) had as early as 1947 held hearings to “uncover communist influence in the film industry” with devastating results. Suspicion and fear permeated the atmosphere within the film industry (p. 130). Blacklisting destroyed jobs for many talented people. (Some were imprisoned for refusing to “name names” of friends and colleagues whose freedom to speak, write and associate with others was being endangered, despite the First Amendment.) The intimidation by HUAC’s activities resulted in the film industry’s choice of safe, non-controversial scripts.

The film *Storm Center* (originally named *The Library*) was going to “Fight...McCarthyism through film” (p. 128). The core of the film was the librarian’s battle against pressure to remove books that were called “subversive” and “communist” in a “red scare” atmosphere. The racial equality issue is totally missing from the film.

Support for the film came from outstanding people like Drew Pearson and Eleanor Roosevelt. ALA’s Library Bill of Rights was used in a brochure put out by the Motion Picture Association of America with Eisenhower’s “Don’t Join the Book Burners” speech (p.143). ALA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee chairman was used as a technical consultant on the script. A pre-release screening of the film was held at the ALA Conference for
2000 librarians. They were less than enthusiastic about it, for varied reasons. *Storm Center* received more praise and acceptance abroad. As Robbins sums up, the film “was both the Ruth Brown story and the Hollywood story” for it “captured...the reality of the red scare.”

Louise Robbins’ first book, *Censorship and the American Library: The American Library Association’s Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969*, promised much with its careful scholarship, its historical viewpoint and the enthusiasm she brought to her writing. In *The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown*, Robbins has hit her long stride. She has brought to the surface how anti-intellectualism, the cold war with its anti-communism and its flagrant manifestations of loyalty oaths, witch-hunts, censorship, and guilt by association, have divided communities, undermined democratic principles, and victimized many people. She also shares with the reader her experience and involvement in writing about Ruth Brown. It is good history, a good story, and an inspiration. It is to be hoped that Robbins will take on the challenge of another book, covering another challenging period for librarians, from 1969 to 1999, with the same verve and enthusiasm.

ardent advocate for intellectual freedom. She served as chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee of ALA and is the author of the memoir Zoia (McFarland, 1995). **Fiona Hunt** is currently Information Literacy Librarian at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates. After receiving her MLIS at the University of British Columbia Fiona become interested in international trade agreements such as the MAI and GATS and their potential impact on libraries. Since then, she has been working to raise awareness on these issues and currently moderates a WTO-related listserv.

**Al Kagan**, currently on sabbatical as a Visiting Professor at the University of Cape Town, is African Studies Bibliographer and Professor of Library Administration at the University of Illinois Library. He is a Councilor of the American Library Association, representing the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table, the Convenor of the Social Responsibilities Discussion Group of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, is active in the Africana Librarians Council of the [U.S.] African Studies Association, and is on the Executive Board of the [U.S.] Association of Concerned Africa Scholars. He is co-author of *Reference Guide to Africa: A Bibliography of Sources* (Scarecrow Press, 1999).

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*Progressive Librarian #18*