SOUTH AFRICAN LIBRARIANSHIP
ACTIVISM & LIBRARIANS
PLG STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST WINNER
FROM THE ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
DOCUMENTS
BOOK REVIEWS
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Progressive Librarian #22, Summer 2003**

## ARTICLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Transformation of South African Librarianship: Survey Results and Analysis of Current Opinions</td>
<td>Al Kagan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist Librarianship: Heritage or Heresy?</td>
<td>Ann Sparanese</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation — Patriots Act: The Role of School Libraries in Promoting a Free and Informed Society</td>
<td>Michele Sipley</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## FROM THE ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

Expanding Our Work with Prisoners | Lynn Andersen | 62

## DOCUMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Accuracy and the Web: A PLG-net Exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POETRY MATTERS! On the Media Persecution of Amiri Baraka</td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## BOOK REVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vandals in the Stacks? A Response to Nicholson Baker’s Assault on Libraries</td>
<td>Richard J. Cox reviewed by Lincoln Cushing</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censorship, Inc.</td>
<td>Lawrence Soley reviewed by Chris G. Hudson</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CALL FOR PAPERS

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

Typewritten manuscripts are welcome, or submit an IBM compatible, high-density disk in ASCII/text-only file. Use current *MLA Handbook* for in-text citation style for references.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

Submit manuscripts to:
Progressive Librarians Guild, *PL* Editors
P.O. Box 2203, Times Square Station, New York NY 10108

---

**PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN** Issue #22 Summer 2003

Published, produced and distributed by Progressive Librarians Guild
2 issues per year; ISSN 1052-5726
Indexed in *Alternative Press Index* and *Library Literature*
Printed by Durland Alternatives Library, Cornell University, Ithaca NY.
Cover photos by Elaine Harger, February & March 2003 NYC anti-war rallies

Editors:
Henry T. Blanke, John Buschman and Mark Rosenzweig
Managing Editor: Elaine Harger; Book Review Editor: Rory Litwin

Subscription/membership rates
$20 individuals; $35 institutions; $40 overseas firstclass
Checks and money orders in US$ to Progressive Librarians Guild

All correspondence, manuscripts, subscription requests to:
Progressive Librarians Guild
P.O. Box 2203, Times Square Station, New York NY 10108
Tel: 212/865-6925 or 212/942-6718; www.libr.org/PLG
THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN LIBRARIANSHIP: SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF CURRENT OPINIONS

by Al Kagan

Prologue

This article is being published simultaneously in the Progressive Librarian and in issue #25 of the most important South African library and information science journal, Innovation: Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa (http://www.library.unp.ac.za/innovation/id1.htm). It is the lead article in an issue devoted to the issues examined here. In the interests of full disclosure, note that this author is on Innovation’s Editorial Committee.

Although most readers of the Progressive Librarian will probably be generally familiar with South Africa’s apartheid history, some further context of the current situation will probably be of help to those who have not followed library developments. Under apartheid, the white society had a highly developed library infrastructure, similar to the environment enjoyed by affluent North Americans. But the parallel with North America did not extend down the racial hierarchy. Poor and minority communities in the United States usually have some type of library access even if relatively or severely underfunded compared to nearby richer and whiter communities. There is a parallel here with middle class so-called coloured or Indian South African communities, but not with those who lived in townships or in poor rural areas. And of course the great majority of African South Africans still live in townships or rural areas.

There was an attempt to develop community resource centers in the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s by NGOs and community organizations, but government supported library development for poor communities only started after majority rule in the mid-1990s. Most township and rural dwellers simply never saw a library during the apartheid era. This
situation has changed dramatically, but there is still a long way to go to provide anything near sufficient library resources for the majority of the population. Public libraries are a provincial function under the South African constitution, but large cities have also taken their own initiatives. The degree of library development varies by the relative richness of the various provinces and cities and the degree of commitment to serious transformation. The way public libraries are run also varies according to the relative strength of the political forces in each area. For example, centralized collection development provides inappropriate collections in terms of content and language in many public libraries.

Apartheid's legacy is also evident in South Africa's higher education libraries. There were separate technical colleges (technikons) and universities for whites, coloureds, Indians, and Africans. Their library resources were directly tied to the racial hierarchy. Today, the historically disadvantaged higher education libraries are suffering and the historically white libraries continue to be well funded (although the fall of the Rand against the dollar has seriously impacted these historically advantaged libraries). For example, the University of Transkei Library has not been able to buy any new books and serials since 1998 while the University of Cape Town Library is able to mostly keep up with collecting at an international level.

Regarding library education, there is a distinct difference between the US and South Africa. There is no recognized baseline professional degree such as our MLS. Instead there are numerous undergraduate and graduate programs offering various degrees. This is explained more fully in the article. Suffice it to say that most librarians are educated at the undergraduate level, which takes three years, with an optional honors year. A small percentage go on for graduate education. This lack of a broad liberal arts background coupled with a lack of graduate education makes it difficult for librarians to claim truly professional status. Librarians are therefore not yet able to exert their fair share of influence within society.

Most librarians and library educators in positions of power are still white, although many young black librarians are now beginning their careers. Of course, there are many dedicated white librarians who worked against apartheid, but the survey results undoubtedly reflect the opinions of a mostly white survey group. Much has changed in South Africa, but much has also remained the same. This article describes the context of what has been accomplished but also the crying need for more rapid transformation.

Background

It has now been eight years since the first majority-rule election in 1994 and the chance to transform and democratize South African library practice. But the victory of majority rule coincided with the intensification of globalization regimes dominated by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and later the World Trade Organization. South Africa's ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) aimed at fostering equality and development for the disadvantaged majority was short-lived and soon displaced by the same kind of neo-liberal policies seen elsewhere in Africa and poor countries around the world. South Africa's neo-liberal plan to integrate itself in the world economy is called the Growth, Employment And Redistribution policy (GEAR). As a result, the ANC with its alliance partners, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), have redefined and diminished many economic and social commitments first proclaimed in the Freedom Charter of 1956.

This research project investigates the status and role of the South African library profession within the current neo-liberal context, and explores attitudes towards and initiatives towards socially responsible practices that could promote a more democratic and equitable South African future. The following assumptions and hypotheses regarding African studies librarianship, education, status, and professional development inform the project.

South Africa is an African country, however the apartheid legacy continues to mystify perceptions of many South Africans, including librarians. The white-minority government looked to Europe for its cultural focus and tried to create a pseudo-European outpost for the privileged minority. This strategy was so successful that many White, Coloured, or Indian South Africans still claim to be going to "Africa" when they cross one of the borders with a neighboring country. But in order to foster a better quality of life for all its people, the country must prosper within its region and the continent as a whole. A continental orientation can be strengthened through formal and informal educational systems, and libraries can play a key role in such empowerment. Libraries can foster a vibrant understanding of African realities and the information and knowledge necessary to help overcome apartheid myths of European superiority. Continental solidarity might also be a force to oppose neo-liberal policies at home, throughout the continent, in the African diaspora, and throughout the world.
In order for libraries to fulfill this role, librarians will need an appropriate educational background and access to relevant collections. But the bibliography of the African continent is not taught as a discrete course at any library school in the country. This lack must affect many librarians' unexamined assumptions regarding the availability and quality of African studies materials. On a deeper level, this lack of knowledge may feed into continuing apartheid myths, perpetuating racist misunderstandings, and discriminatory interactions with library users. In the academic world, graduate students who fail to get an introduction to the interdisciplinary literature of African studies and appropriate research methodologies must be at a disadvantage with their peers elsewhere. This lack of grounding is likely to affect their future careers, including scholarly production in subtle ways. They will find it harder and more time-consuming to locate needed materials, and they will be more dependent on the expertise and good will of their local librarians.

Librarians' status around the world varies, but in general it is quite obviously too low in most countries to maximize potential societal benefits. Academic librarians will be most effective when they have sufficient status to comfortably interact with other faculty as peers. This implies appropriate graduate education and advanced subject knowledge in addition to library and information science education and expertise. Public librarians can also gain increased status from advanced degrees. Furthermore, such status provides librarians a legitimate voice and the possibility to act forthrightly to advance socially responsible policies for a more just society. But South African library education programs foster a very hierarchical system and include numerous undergraduate and post-graduate degrees and permutations. Rationalization was considered but not implemented in the late 1980s. Under apartheid, most librarians (as other professionals) knew their place and did not challenge the status quo. It is difficult to overcome such a legacy. It appears that only a select few have managed to acquire appropriate status under the current configuration.

Historically, it appears that only the elite South African librarians had access to sufficient and appropriate professional development opportunities. Conferences and symposiums, professional visits, sabbaticals, and formal courses are the stimuli that invigorate individuals and the profession and advance the field. Now that South Africa has reentered the international arena, librarians must have full access to the world of African and international librarianship as well as the chance to create a vibrant profession at home through the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) and other organizations. Knowledgeable and confident professionals can work together with their colleagues to develop socially responsible policies and oppose the worldwide trends to privatize and commercialize library functions and services. It seems that the profession's inward looking tendency is probably another heritage of apartheid. The counter-tendency to overvalue European and North American practice seems alive and well, and can easily prevent learning from other appropriate African and Third World experiences.

**Methodology**

Two survey instruments were developed and first sent out by printed copy and e-mail (where known) on July 1, 2001. A follow-up e-mail message was sent on July 21 to those who had not yet replied. The first survey was sent to the directors and other faculty members of the thirteen known university schools of library and/or information science in South Africa. For consistency, the second questionnaire was sent to practicing senior academic librarians at these thirteen universities, as well as the senior public librarians in places where these universities are located (and in neighboring towns if large public libraries were lacking). It was also sent to the directors of the Provincial Library Services of the nine provinces. Each survey was accompanied by a list of key social responsibility concerns derived from analyzing the concerns of four progressive library organizations in three countries. The cover letter stated that confidentiality would be assured, and that anonymous responses were welcome. It turned out that three of the library and information science schools had recently dropped their LIS programs, making a total of ten programs left in the country. However, one respondent from one of these schools did reply on the basis of recent experience and that survey was added to the database. Responses from university and public librarians in these places were also retained. Some responses were initiated or supplemented through personal interviews on 7-10 August 2001 in Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Dlangezwa, Empangeni, and Richard's Bay.

A total of 143 surveys were mailed and 51 useable responses (36%) were received. Respondents in 31 of the 45 geographical places (69%) responded. See the Table on the following page for a detailed explanation of the responses.

In order to further ground the findings, the author arranged eleven personal follow-up interviews with a select group of respondents and three others...
almost all of the people in this group had a chance to read a draft of this article beforehand. Most of these follow-up interviews were conducted with people who had given especially thoughtful survey responses. They took place in Cape Town (4 interviews), Pretoria (5 interviews), and Umtata (2 interviews). Most of the interviews were conducted one-to-one, but there were also two group interviews (one with four educators at the University of Cape Town and one with one provincial and one public librarian in Pretoria). These follow-up interviews included five LIS educators, four academic librarians, three public librarians, one provincial librarian, the executive at LIASA, and the National Librarian. Almost all of these interviews lasted two hours. Nearly all of the respondents were eager to talk and quite engaged in the issues. As a group they were extremely supportive of this research project.

Summary Results

Since most of the questions in the survey involved yes or no answers with a chance to explain, it is easy to compile some major trends and to find points of agreement or divergence across the four survey groups: university, public, and provincial librarians and LIS educators. However, note that only five of the questions on the LIS educators survey overlapped with the survey for librarians actually working in libraries. These five questions can be included and analyzed here. Both surveys include four types of questions: on African studies, LIS education, the profession, and socially responsible practices.

African Studies

Slightly more than half of responding working librarians think that library and information science programs should teach an in-depth course on the bibliography of the African continent, yet such a course is not available in South Africa. Public and provincial librarians are more in favor than their university colleagues are (about two-thirds vs. half). Two counter themes stand out. Those who affirm the need for such a course refer to the promotion of the ANC’s “African Renaissance” initiative and the need to know one’s heritage. On the other hand, those who do not see the need for such a course state that it is important to teach the bibliographic skills rather than the content. The important outcome is that students will know how to find any kind of materials.

Only one-third of working librarians have access to extensive African studies collections. Many libraries have extensive local, provincial, or national collections, and some libraries have extensive collections on the Southern African region. Of course, this varied with size of library or library system collections. Larger collections were more apt to have a broader scope. A majority of university librarians answered in the affirmative, but only a small number of public and one-third of provincial librarians stated that they had extensive African studies collections. But as in other African countries, emphasis is national. In fact, these inward looking tendencies are evident from responses that seemed to equate African studies materials with explicitly South African materials even though the question clearly asked about the African continent.

Education

Only one-quarter of respondents from all four groups are satisfied with the current levels and kinds of LIS degrees offered throughout the country. Nearly half of those surveyed support the retention of undergraduate LIS degrees. Taking these two questions together, the largest group is unsatisfied with the current situation but wants to retain undergraduate LIS degree. However the second largest group is satisfied with the current situation including retaining undergraduate degrees. And the third largest group is unhappy with both the current situation and retaining undergraduate degrees. Here we find a wide difference of opinion. University and provincial
librarians are almost evenly split. More than two-thirds of public librarians are mainly unsatisfied, but want to retain the undergraduate degree. This shows a serious lack of consensus within the profession.

There are a surprising number of respondents who address questions on “education” by discussing “training.” In the United States, we often talk about the phrase “education and training” as if it was one concept but we are clearly referring to theory as well as practice. One gets the sense that many South African librarians really are addressing practical skills rather than theoretical grounding when discussing “education.” It is likely that this derives from the emphasis on undergraduate LIS education, and the generally low status of the profession, especially for public librarians. This is further discussed in the following sections. Other themes are the problem of differences and perception of university vs. technikon degrees and the need for better basic skills and more practical knowledge or experience, especially with information technology. Some value technikon degrees probably precisely because they provide more “training” than university programs.

The eleven universities award at least 29 different LIS degrees, and five technikons award at least six other LIS degrees. See Appendix 1 for an incomplete list. These 35 degrees are awarded at six or seven levels. This confusing diversity of degrees makes it hard to compare LIS programs across the country. But when asked if LIS programs and degrees (not necessarily courses) should be regularized, only slightly more than half responded in the affirmative. Only the university librarians showed a clear preference for regularization (76%), while not surprisingly two-thirds of the LIS educators showed a clear preference for the status quo. One possible caveat should be noted. Although the question clearly stated that regularization did not necessarily mean standardization of courses within programs, some respondents’ answers implied that they might have missed this distinction. For those in favor of rationalization, common responses were the need for standards, and that it would make hiring easier for employers. A number of respondents also advocated not only rationalizing but also reducing the number of LIS programs. In considering hiring decisions, several people asserted that it is not the degree that matters but the reputation of the program.

The Profession

Although there is disagreement on LIS education, nearly all respondents believe that the profession needs to be upgraded. One respondent disagreed with the terminology, saying that the profession needed to be “transformed,” implying an even more fundamental shift. Respondents noted the need for more continuing education, and more information technology expertise. On the other hand, one of the follow-up interviewees noted that most library staff have no idea that librarianship is a profession!

As with all other aspects of librarianship, South Africa’s LIS professional organizations have been deeply affected by the apartheid legacy. The previous mainstream organization, the South African Institute of Library and Information Science (SAILIS) was seen as deeply compromised by many black librarians who by apartheid necessity had set up their own organization, the African Library Association of South African (ALASA). Furthermore, a new nonracial progressive organization arose during the dying days of apartheid, the Library and Information Workers Organization (LIWO). While SAILIS and ALASA recently disbanded in order to form the new Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), LIWO which took a critical stance towards unification, has now disappeared. SAILIS contributed ten percent of its resources to LIASA while ALASA contributed all of its very small treasury. Considering the history, it is not surprising that LIASA still has a relatively small membership compared to the universe of possible members, and that there are widely divergent views of its current worth and potential for the future.

Two-thirds of respondents are either members or participate in LIASA. As opposed to the former SAILIS, it is interesting that LIS educators show the smallest membership percentage, only half of the respondents. This is counter-intuitive since one would expect that the intellectual framers of the profession would be the most active group in the national association. However, these LIS educators participate in a wide range of other professional associations, (including IFLA and in organizations in other countries) so these results are probably representative. Eleven other organizations were noted. Organizations with two or more participants are: IFLA, LIWO, Association of Southern African Indexers and Bibliographers (ASAIB), and the Library Association (UK). Excluding the LIS educators, only IFLA and LIWO were represented.

Representatives from LIASA confirm these perceptions. The largest membership group is public librarians. In follow-up interviews, the following reasons were given for the lack of LIS educator membership. SAILIS was dominated by LIS educators and academic librarians. Many of these people
do not see LIASA as a sufficiently professional organization because it is open to all. Some of this group may stay out because of their continuing racism. On the other hand, one white respondent noted that whites may feel unwanted in the new organization. On a more mundane, level, it may be a question of the lack of services previously provided by SAlLIS, including lack of a professional journal, lack of accreditation mechanism, and the lack of a need to join for career advancement. Other important reasons are that most librarians cannot attend meetings due to lack of financial resources, lack of administrative support, and lack of sufficient staffing.

A slight majority of respondents think that it is too early to evaluate the work of LIASA. The remaining group is decisively split between positive and negative impressions. LIS educators have fewer strong opinions that the other groups; three-quarters of them think it is still too early to evaluate the Association. About one-third of both public and provincial librarians are negative, which is more than the average. Those who have a positive view or think it is too soon to judge would like to see LIASA get more involved in continuing education, leadership training, lobbying for resources, and collective bargaining. Those voicing negative comments think of LIASA as the old SAlLIS in a new form, and voice very strong opinions such as: “There is no attempt at transformation,” “I refuse to get involved,” “LIASA is silent on major issues,” and “LIASA is useless.” Finally, one of the follow-up respondents noted that the responses might be quite different from junior colleagues.

Socially Responsible Practices

In order to better define the term “social responsibilities” for the purpose of this survey, a list of key topics was appended to the questionnaire (see Appendix 2). The list of thirteen topics was developed by comparing the concerns of four specifically alternative library organizations in the US, UK, and Sweden. The dangers with this approach are that some particularly African concerns might be missed and that the concerns come from rich countries as opposed to the relative poverty of South Africa. However, these organizations have explicitly concerned themselves with Third World solidarity, and these concerns should therefore be mitigated. It is perhaps harder to evaluate responses in this section than in the other sections. It is likely that nearly all respondents would like to claim that they are socially responsible and that they carry out such policies in their work. The importance of the attached list therefore becomes more evident.

Less than half of the respondents think that the profession is meeting its social responsibilities. LIS educators and public librarians are the least satisfied with these efforts. Provincial libraries rate the profession's efforts slightly higher, while university librarians rate these efforts at the highest rate of the 4 groups). Perhaps they are extrapolating from their own sectors of the field, and perhaps with some justification. Several public and provincial librarians noted the many new libraries in townships and rural areas. Several respondents noted that they needed more funding to be more socially effective, and two people noted that current Government policies are making matters worse rather than better.

Respondents noted the following themes in their socially responsible practice: building of new libraries, provision of community services and library programs, free and open access to collections, and providing access to the alternative press. But several public and provincial librarians again noted decreasing resources. They are personally proud of their own efforts in providing youth services and service equality to all.

Results by Respondent Group

This section addresses each of the four groups of respondents, providing more detail, salient comments, explanations and conjectures.

African studies bibliography courses

University librarians were almost evenly split on the need to teach an in-depth course on African studies bibliography. However, as explained above, more individuals might have agreed if the question was broken down by level of education, undergraduate vs. post-graduate. One respondent felt it was a big problem that students were not learning their heritage, and one referred back to the African Renaissance initiative. One respondent said that it was a normal practice in any country to learn the resources of that place. Of course, the nebulous concept of African Renaissance may not directly refer back to students learning their own particular cultural heritages, except through focused assignments. The hope is that students would be able to better situate themselves more generally within the African context.

On the other hand, two respondents noted the need to be able to find materials rather than studying the sources for the African continent. As a long-time teacher of such a course in the United States and after recently...
teaching several African studies bibliography classes at the University of Cape Town, the importance of such a course is clear to this author. Librarians who have not been exposed to the rich variety of African studies sources often have no idea of what is available and how to find it. My UCT students were particularly interested in learning about these materials, and one professor remarked that there might now be a new demand for such instruction.

As opposed to the university librarians, a majority of public librarians are in favor of teaching African studies bibliography courses. Perhaps this relates to being closer to what one respondent called “vital importance for community needs.” Or to put it more bluntly, perhaps this reflects a more European and elitist orientation in the universities. Other reasons given in favor of teaching it were the need for transformation of society in light of the “African Renaissance,” a general lack of knowledge of Africa and the world, and as a way to encourage the community to write. The one reason against was again the need to teach bibliographic skills rather than content.

Of the three groups of librarians surveyed, provincial librarians are most enthusiastic on teaching the bibliography of Africa. Two-thirds think this is a good idea. Besides citing the “African Renaissance,” other reasons given include the need to address development problems and the ability for graduates to seek employment outside of the country. One respondent noted that South Africa is not a province of America or Europe! The standard counter argument was also put forward, the need to teach bibliographic skills, not content. Of course, one wonders why both goals could not be accomplished at the same time. After all, it is impossible to teach bibliographic skills without using some representative literature.

Instead of asking about the need to teach the bibliography of Africa, the LIS educator questionnaire began with a question on whether or not the respondent’s program actually did teach such a course. All answers were negative. One educator responded that although they did not teach such a course, their entire program was quite Africa-centered. On the negative side, an anonymous angry response asserted that there was no such thing as “African librarianship,” only librarianship. Of course, this response completely missed the content of the question.

African studies collections
A majority of university librarians claimed access to an extensive African studies collection, and three-fifths noted the existence of strong regional collections on Southern Africa. One made the comment that the library was “buying the wrong materials from North America and Europe” instead of buying more materials from Africa. One librarian noted the critical need for indigenous knowledge.

Only two public librarians said that their libraries had extensive African studies collections. This may be slightly misleading in the case of big cities with long established African studies collections such as Johannesburg or Cape Town. Presumably at least some library users in those places could get to these large central collections if they were aware of their existence, and if they made the effort. Two respondents noted that they did not have to collect African studies because these major collections were nearby. Only three out of ten of these respondents noted their extensive national, provincial or local collections (rather than continental collections), and they seemed to think these were appropriate collections for their users needs. However two librarians complained about the lack of appropriate African studies collections, including the lack of needed adult books in the Zulu language.

Two-thirds of the provincial librarians stated that their library systems did not extensively collect African studies materials, and half of them said that they did collect extensively for the country and/or their provinces.

Education
Satisfaction with LIS degrees
Slightly more than half of university librarians are unsatisfied with the current levels and kinds of LIS degrees and almost half are unhappy about retaining the undergraduate degrees. The split indicates profound disagreements among colleagues. The problem of differences and perceptions of university vs. technikon degrees was noted. Several respondents think that the degrees need to be more practically oriented (as at the technikons) while one respondent noted that the degrees are much too practical and ignore important theory and issues of social responsibility. Two individuals note the need for more information technology instruction. Other issues mentioned include: the need for bridging courses for basic communications and language skills, and the need to produce subject specialists with honors degrees. One person made the comment that recent graduates are becoming increasingly less employable.

Although public and university librarians have similar dissatisfaction with
the current level and kinds of LIS degrees offered, public librarians had an opposite response from university librarians in supporting the retention of undergraduate LIS degrees (88% as opposed to 47%). Perhaps this relates to the need to hire low-level positions due to traditionally poor budget allocations. It may also relate to the perception of library education as “training” rather than truly professional education and the inadequate self-image of South African public librarians. About one-third noted that librarians have poor general knowledge, and one-fifth stated that there are too many graduates for the number of jobs available. One-fifth volunteered that technikons provide better LIS education than universities. Again, this may reflect an emphasis on practice rather than theory, and an entirely different instrumentalist view of these positions. A few actually state that small libraries cannot even afford to hire LIS graduates. One respondent even went as far as to say that some of the poorer provinces actually hire cleaners as librarians!

Only two of the six provincial librarians answered in the same way, that they are unsatisfied with the current situation, and that they do not support the retention of undergraduate degrees. Again, there is an almost complete lack of agreed upon standards. Comments included: it is the relevancy of the degree that matters not the level, there is a need for more practical experience especially exposure to the Internet and online databases, and there is a need for more specialization by library type and kind of work. One person stressed the need for more “disciplinary skills.” On the other hand, one respondent stated that LIS education is too technologically focused, and provides little knowledge mastery and consideration of social responsibilities.

LIS educators are equally split on their satisfaction concerning the current levels and kinds of LIS degrees, and three-fourths of them want to retain the undergraduate degree. Two respondents noted that they are only temporarily satisfied with the LIS programs, and that too many programs lead to mediocrity. They advocate a future amalgamation of programs. On the other hand, two respondents argue that specialization at various institutions develops excellence. One commented that undergraduate degrees should be retained for information studies, but that library studies should only be pursued at the post-graduate level. Another noted the need for basic skills, critical thinking and writing, and computer literacy. A related comment argued that the lack of basic skills came from an inadequate high school experience, and thus the need to upgrade the entire educational system. Two educators commented on LIS technikon degrees. One noted that BTech people often expect better positions than they are able to get. The other noted that technikons should limit themselves to teaching paraprofessionals. Finally, the angry anonymous reply stated that the US model is “worthless,” and that the South African model is much superior. Although the LIS educators may be more thoughtful in their replies, they are just as split in their conceptions of the way forward. However, they do agree with the public librarians on the necessity to retain the undergraduate LIS degrees, although perhaps not at the technikons.

**Regularization of degrees**

A majority of university librarians think that LIS programs should be regularized. Reasons include the need for comparability and quality control, as well as that this would be good for employers. On the other hand, one respondent noted the need for flexibility to meet community needs. For hiring purposes, one respondent noted that the degree itself is not important, but rather the quality of the person. Another responded that the degree is not important, but rather the reputation of the program. These last two responses downplay the value of a well-conceived program that can attract quality students. They miss the point that the degree should at least theoretically certify a level of basic knowledge and the promise of competence. Perhaps people have just gotten used to the chaotic nature of the situation.

Public library respondents are evenly divided on the question of regularization of degrees. One stated that rationalization is needed as well as reduction in the number of library programs. Another stated the need for standards. One respondent surprisingly said that rationalization would be useful but it is not now affordable. Regarding hiring, a few said they relied on the reputation of the school rather than the degree awarded. Lack of funding and the contraction of the job market may be partial reasons for the negativity of some of these responses.

As the public librarians, the provincial librarians are split on regularization of programs, half in favor, one-third opposed, and the rest undecided.

Two-thirds of the LIS educators disagree on the need to regularize degrees, however as noted above two respondents advocate the amalgamation of LIS programs. Two also noted that employers would welcome regularization. One respondent advocated closing the technikon programs.
Almost all of university librarians think that the profession needs upgrading. Several people noted the need for more short courses, including electronic courses and the need for more information and communications technology education. One person asserted the need for faculty status, including the need for research and publication. Another individual mentions the importance of closing the information gap between communities. One interesting comment notes that the profession is sinking lower, and that librarians need to earn higher status by upgrading themselves, not through some sort of artificial designation.

Similarly, almost all public librarians think that the profession must be upgraded. Two advocated the need for an entrance examination with attention to general knowledge and communications skills. Other comments include the need for basic standards, more specialization and management skills, and community involvement. Other upgrade avenues advocated were raising awareness to gain public support, raising status through state acknowledgement, and redressing past injustices through empowerment. Problems mentioned included poor self-image, inward focus, lack of career paths, and down-top bureaucracy (“the minority prescribing for the majority”).

Under the authority of the South African Constitution, public libraries are a provincial responsibility. Two of the follow-up interviewees noted the forthcoming legislation to change responsibility to the local level. One strongly advocated autonomy under the metropolitan structure in order to empower local community libraries. One case in point is the very recent centralization of collection development for the Cape Town city libraries under the aegis of the Western Cape Province. It seems clear that the local librarians would have a much better sense of local needs than administrators physically removed from the local environments. This practice is taken for granted throughout almost all of the United States. But the one notable exception on the state level is illustrative. Only Hawaii has a unified public library system with centralized collection development. A scandal ensured some years ago when the state outsourced collection development to a commercial vendor in order to save money. In a state with a tropical climate, local public librarians were incensed when they started to receive books on snow skiing and ice-skating. They also complained that more expensive titles were excluded because the contract only designated number of titles, not value of book purchases. The state librarian was eventually fired and the contract was litigated in court.

All provincial librarian respondents agree that the profession needs to be upgraded, although one person noted the need to “transform,” not just upgrade. One person commented on the need for more African content and services for illiterate people. Another noted the need for continuing education. One individual claimed that the profession had been downgraded by allowing anyone to be a LIASA member, and noted the lack of renaissance. The most devastating comment came from one of the poorer provinces where “70% of public libraries are staffed by paraprofessionals or non-professionals” due to lack of resources.

All but one LIS educator thought that the library profession needs to be upgraded. Two advocated much more attention to theoretical and social issues, and an additional two noted the need for a research journal. Other comments included: the need for accreditation, more continuing education, more information technology expertise, the promotion of a service ethic, the need for a national commission, the need for information literacy outreach to the community, and the need to “weed” unqualified staff. On the other hand, one educator argued that too much reliance on information technology is leading to a somewhat uncritical approach. Another commented that the profession must see itself as a significant player in society in order to have the desired effect. Finally, the most thoughtful response discussed the lack of agreement on articulation of LIS programs, and noted that he is currently writing a paper on this subject.

Only half of the LIS educators stated that their institutions have taken steps to upgrade the profession. This seems a bit odd since there is almost complete agreement on the need to do so. Two noted their upgrade of courses, and two more noted their winter schools. Other upgrade efforts include an information literacy program and the awarding of high status to campus librarians.

There is also a need to uplift library assistants and other staff through continuing education, salary raises, and better benefits including child care. Para-professionals should be rewarded for their community involvement and language abilities. It is important that upgrading professionals not create a wider gap between them and their support staff, a recipe for demoralization. Finally, libraries can encourage motivated and capable para-professionals to become professionals by providing time off, flexible work schedules, and full or partial tuition to attend LIS programs.
LIASA and other professional organizations
As with the other groups of working librarians, nearly three-fourths of university librarians are members of LIASA. University librarians also work in IFLA and the American Library Association. One mentioned former participation in LIWO. About half of this group thinks it is still too early to evaluate LIASA, nearly one-third have a positive view and nearly one-fifth have a negative view. One respondent noted the importance of LIASA’s advocacy training, grantwriting workshops, leadership training, lobbying, and the promotion of a South African National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS). One person noted the value of LIASA’s learning experiences, networking, and bringing together vendors at its conferences. Others noted the need for more academic content, clear objectives, and training opportunities, as well as collective bargaining status. One respondent asserted that LIASA must be “professional, not political,” but another noted that it represents the establishment, and small grassroots groups could be much more effective. Finally, one person called LIASA a “social club.”

When asked about membership or participation in LIASA or other library organizations, more than two-thirds of public librarians noted that they belong or participate in LIASA, but one specifically noted the need to revive LIWO. The public librarians feel much the same as the university librarians regarding the value of LIASA. Almost half say it is too early to tell, one-quarter have positive responses and almost one-third have negative responses. The one positive comment praised good practical work sessions. One interesting undecided comment was that librarians need to have a “mindshift” from what can LIASA do for me to what can I contribute. Another commented that LIASA needs to take on the Government and act as a union. One-fifth said that either the LIASA provincial branch committees acted as the old SAILIS or that it was an extension of the old SAILIS. The numerous negative comments included that LIASA has no intellectual rigor, is silent on major issues, evidences no obvious outcomes, and has not attempted transformation. Finally, one person stated the need for a Black Caucus.

All but one of the provincial librarian group are LIASA participants or members. One respondent each also participates in IFLA, LIWO, and the Occupational Committee for Library and Information Workers of the Public Service Association (PSA). As the public librarians, this group is more negative than positive regarding LIASA (one-sixth positive, half too early to say, and one-third negative). Comments from those who said it was too early to say advised that LIASA needs to provide more practical opportunities for networking and empowerment, and that LIASA needs to provide more continuing education, fight for salaries and provide leadership. As with the other groups, there were serious negative comments including: LIASA is “useless” and still run by the old SAILIS people, the profession only pays lip-service to transformation, and that LIASA is silent on municipal fees.

Only half of the LIS educators participate or are members of LIASA. This is the lowest percentage of the four groups. However, the educators also participate in ten other organizations. One-quarter noted their work in IFLA, and another quarter noted their previous commitment to LIWO. Two are members of the Library Association in the UK and two are members of the Association of Southern African Indexes and Bibliographers. The other organizations are the Institute of Information Scientists, IATUL, FID (now disbanded), Progressive Librarians Guild, and the International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Information Specialists.

Fully three-fourths of the LIS educators group are still waiting to evaluate LIASA. Two have a positive opinion and one has a negative opinion. Those who said it was too early to evaluate want LIASA to lobby, encourage creativity, provide leadership, sponsor a professional journal, and create professional solidarity. Two people praised its management structure and constitution, but another two said that opening up the membership has lowered standards. One person commented that it is a very bland organization and that it is not doing much. Another called it a “disaster.” Given that three-quarters of this group have not yet formed an opinion, it seems strange that only half are participating. One would think that much of the intellectual direction of a national professional organization would likely come from its educators. Perhaps the distasteful apartheid history of the South African library profession encourages those who can to participate in other organizations, even in the national organizations of other countries.

Socially Responsible Practices
Less than half of the university librarians think the profession is meeting its social responsibilities; equal numbers are unsure and negative. Positive comments included that it was doing good work on freedom of expression, and that it was trying under difficult circumstances. Undecided comments included the need for more funds, need for a clear voice and standing in
society, and the need for skills development mechanisms. Those with a negative view commented that things were worse than before in one of the provinces, that the profession is too divided and out of touch with society’s needs, and that varied interests will prevent socially responsible actions. One respondent claimed that social responsibility was not important enough to merit consideration, and that the profession could not be a political or welfare organization.

Half of the responding public librarians were unsure if the profession was meeting its social responsibilities. The remaining group was evenly split between positive and negative answers. The one positive comment noted that new township libraries are bridging the information gap. Negative comments included lack of funding to provide public Internet access, and that the Government is not meeting its social responsibilities so the library is not able to meet its responsibilities. One thoughtful answer explained that the profession does not see libraries as change agents, and that there is a need for a social responsibility campaign.

Half of the provincial librarians group does not think the profession is meeting its social responsibilities, one-third think it is, and the rest are unsure. Provincial library systems fulfill their social responsibilities in the following ways. One person noted that libraries are now being built in rural and disadvantaged areas. Another respondent noted that her office had built 70 libraries in the past three years! One-third noted that they provide relevant collections and special programs. Other comments included service to the poor, materials on cultural heritage, reading programs, mobile bookbox wagons, promoting of oral history and indigenous languages, free access to materials, and discouragement of privatization and commercialization of information. But one respondent noted declining funding.

Two-thirds of the educators think that the profession is not fulfilling its social responsibilities. Comments included the need for more funding, more attention to rural areas and townships, provision of information literacy for the community, and realignment of resources. One person noted the fragmentation of the profession with its accompanying competing interests. Another respondent advocated the puzzling formulation of the need to balance our efforts between social responsibility and quality of service. Finally, probably the most thoughtful respondent noted the fragmentation of the profession with its accompanying competing interests. He postulated that these continuing conflicts preclude the overall development of a socially responsible profession.

Two-thirds of the LIS educators said that they are teaching courses specifically concerned with the social responsibilities of the library profession. The topics include information literacy, legal aspects of information, children’s literature, repackaging information, libraries and society, users groups and information use, information delivery systems, LIS issues, records and archival management, and users studies. Some of these topics seem quite traditional, so we may or may not assume that the content fits the definitions supplied. The angry anonymous respondent gave his opinion that this kind of teaching is unnecessary, and that the list supplied for definitional guidance is “ideological and a waste of time.”

Library Initiatives
Community services are provided by four-tenths of the university respondents’ libraries. Several are in consortiums that include sharing services with local NGOs. Other comments included: the library creates space and opportunities, provides mentorship programs and donates books and equipment, provides staff development and employment equity, promotes local and regional self-help projects, acquires alternative press and speaks against censorship. On the negative side, one person bemoaned poverty that necessitated ignoring alternative press materials, and another expressed the lack of a service culture.

In addressing social responsibility needs, four-tenths of the public library respondents said that their libraries were providing empowerment to the community through various activities including literacy training. An equal number mentioned policies providing information to all. One quarter noted regular exhibits. Other answers included access for people without addresses, fostering gender equity and skills development, community development by providing a reading culture, serving the previously unserved (especially women and children), supporting unions, opposing racism, providing a meeting place, and buying alternative press materials. Problems preventing socially responsible practices included decreasing resources, membership fees, and a moratorium on filling vacancies for 20 months!

Individual Initiatives
Individual university librarians promote social responsibilities in their own work by promoting democracy and freedom of expression, book and equipment donations, free access for the community, buying alternative press materials, bringing school groups to liberation movement archives, promoting quality service, reducing gaps between blacks and whites, discussing major issues at regular staffing meetings, and recruiting promising
African librarians. One person was sorry that his socially responsible research must be done on his own personal time.

Four-tenths of public librarians note personal community outreach activities (including to NGOs, businesses, and government). One quarter of the individuals provide literacy classes, one-fifth promote equity, one-fifth provide aftercare centers, and a small number noted their holiday programs for children. Other activities mentioned included giving talks in schools, strong opposition to membership fees, participation in national and world campaigns on social issues, services to seniors and the young, previous work on transformation committees, and establishing a debating society or a book club. One noted that empowerment is undermined by local officials.

One of the follow-up interviewees noted rising xenophobia, and the lack of services for African refugees especially from Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the lack of services for the homeless.

The following responses were given for the question on how provincial librarians integrate social responsibilities into their own work: hosting conferences, promoting the value of information, advocating against privatization and commercialization of information, providing equitable services for all, building libraries in disadvantaged areas, hosting exhibits, providing a venue for community activities, producing materials on social issues, providing training, organizing projects on social topics, and providing service to the poor, children, and illiterates.

Two-thirds of the LIS educators stated that they had undertaken research related to social responsibilities. Topics included information literacy, community libraries and resource centres, women and information gaps, the digital divide, information for development, information and the legal needs of sex workers, the role of one of the LIS departments, and the role of information in rural contexts. The anonymous respondent said this was a "waste of time."

Discussion

Given the ANC's controlling role in the current Government, it is useful to look back at the Freedom Charter to see how current policies and practices reflect or not the ANC's historical roots. One of the follow-up respondents noted the ANC's obligation to promote libraries by citing the words of the Freedom Charter. However, most of the follow-up respondents thought that the Freedom Charter was now ancient history, and that the African Renaissance concept was a much more powerful tool to promote their concerns within the current context. In opposition to these ideas, another follow-up respondent advocated the need to refer back to the principles in the Freedom Charter now more than ever since the ANC has seemed to abandon them. Furthermore, another follow-up respondent emphasized his frustration with people who get to the top and are then content to revel in their personal glory while forgetting about the disadvantaged people who remain behind.

The Freedom Charter states that:

"The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life;

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace;

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit;

Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan;

Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens;

The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished."

As opposed to some of the more explicitly socialist provisions of the Freedom Charter, its education and culture sections could be embraced by governments of various ideological persuasions. Mainstream liberal demo-
ocratic practice contains most if not all of these provisions, with the possible exception of a mass state education plan to eradicate illiteracy. However, current neo-liberal economic policies, even in the so-called “advanced democracies,” are eroding basic education and cultural institutions. Budget cutbacks and the privatization of education make these goals much harder to actualize. The free exchange of books is threatened by lack of funds to build and adequately maintain new libraries in townships and rural areas. The commodification of culture and knowledge such as copy-protected CDs or library charges for Internet access challenge the public good concept in the Freedom Charter.

Of course, adequately funded libraries with free and equal access policies can obviously play an important role in fulfilling these provisions of the Freedom Charter: in the enhancement of cultural life, the promotion of brotherhood, peace and liberty, the eradication of illiteracy, and the promotion of equality and human rights. Libraries can promote the free exchange of ideas and provide access to the world’s cultural treasures.

The Freedom Charter advises that the goal of education shall be “to teach the youth to love their people and their culture…” as well as to learn about other lands. The ANC’s and the ANC-led Government’s current promotion of an “African Renaissance” is foreshadowed here. The survey questions on African studies courses and collections relate to this emphasis. The results show a majority of respondents are in favor of teaching an in-depth course on African studies bibliography. It is not clear if the glass is half full or half empty. Perhaps these results show a lot a progress over past practice, at least on a theoretical level. But only one-third of respondents have access to extensive African studies collections. One might speculate that a more thorough transformation of the profession would result in higher percentage rates affirming the need for an emphasis on Africa.

The Charter emphasizes the need for access to higher education and technical training. Here we need to sort out the seeming confusion between “education” and “training” in the LIS world. In theoretical terms, most librarians would probably be in favor of “educating” rather than only “training,” but the surveys and literature show a confused picture. In searching for these two terms in the survey responses, the term “training” appears more frequently than the term “education.” It is interesting that LIS educators used the term “education” more than “training” (15 vs. 10 times), but that the working librarians used the term “training” almost twice as much as “education” (14 vs. 26 times). Koekie Meyer’s recent survey is

To be a member of a profession implies not only advanced skills, but also an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of a body of knowledge and allegiance to ethical principles. “Training” can provide skills, but not the rest. On the other hand, “education” provides the theory as well as an exploration of ethical questions. Training equips one to do a job, while education better equips one to participate in shaping the profession and civil society.

This question was thoroughly explored in the follow-up interviews. As in the English language spoken in South Africa and the United States, Afrikaans-speakers do not use these terms to reflect their true meanings. In fact, people tend to use these terms interchangeably. In the U.S., they are often used together as a phrase encompassing both concepts. Perhaps it is best to think of these two concepts as end points on a continuum.

Never-the-less, it is clear that this distinction is important. The follow-up interviews appear to have uncovered the problem. As taught at the universities, LIS schools concentrate on theory but provide very little possibility for practice. As opposed to the U.S. where almost all LIS students work in libraries during the time of their studies, South African LIS students do not have these opportunities. Most U.S. library school students need to work to maintain themselves, and most U.S. university libraries use library school students as highly motivated and cheap labor. As opposed to LIS schools in universities, South African technikons do provide work experiences. It is therefore no wonder that several people have praised the technikon courses as better than the university programs. This accounts for the comments stating that new LIS graduates often know little of what they are really expected to do when starting their first library jobs. It seems that university programs do educate, but do not usually train their students. This is why Koekie Meyer’s publication is indeed focused on training of librarians and information workers.

Furthermore, in contrast to the US where all professional librarians are expected to have a master’s degree, Christine Stilwell found in a recent survey that only 5% of her respondents at provincial library services had master’s degrees. Cathy-Mae Karelse goes a step further in advocating that academic librarians need advanced subject degrees in addition to LIS.
degrees (as in the US or Germany). It is worth noting that no respondents addressed this point! Having a narrow self-conception may be an important factor leading to librarians' low status and often passive orientation towards their communities. Of course, the extreme hierarchical nature of society coupled with repressive structures under apartheid is a hard legacy to overcome.

The question of undergraduate verses graduate degrees also comes into play here. About half the respondents support the retention of the undergraduate LIS degree. Even though it seems that undergraduate students are indeed “educated” rather than “trained,” one can still question whether or not such education is sufficient, especially when compared with those who get a broad-based liberal arts education and then do an LIS master's degree. Even if half of the LIS undergraduate curriculum is in liberal arts, these students will still miss out on a significant number of courses that would give them a wider perspective on the world. This wider perspective is a prerequisite for enhanced professional status.

Meyer's report also notes the lack of consistency in tertiary LIS education courses, and advocates that LIASA or other professional bodies identify a core curriculum. She determined that only one LIS program is teaching rural librarianship. It is likely that a more diverse profession would find it more compelling to address the needs of the millions who live in rural areas.

The overwhelming majority of respondents from all groups realized the need to upgrade the profession. Unfortunately, responses on how to upgrade generally focused more on technical expertise than on societal transformation. It was only a few public librarians and one provincial librarian who focused on redressing past injustices, combating a problematical bureaucracy (“the minority prescribing for the majority”), and the need to “transform” the profession. It is precisely this question of transformation, of creating a more just society that can provide a lever to enhance the status of librarians, provide them a better standard of living, and empower them to gain more satisfaction in their careers. This author previously reported the lack of professional development opportunities for academic librarians at six South African universities. Academic librarians are often seen as managers rather than intellectuals, and often do not even have final responsibility for collection development. Indeed, libraries do not generally reward research and service accomplishments. Library administrators should remember the Freedom Charter's exhortation to open the doors of learning for their own staff members by providing scholarships for graduate degrees along with flexible work schedules and childcare.

South Africa has appropriated terminology directly from the United States regarding redressing the apartheid structure of society. One should indeed question the validity of these terms taken from a majority white society as applied to a majority African society. In the United States, diversity and affirmative action refer to bringing minority groups into the mainstream. In South Africa, the terms apply to the empowerment of the majority of the population. Never-the-less, these terms are used.

It is profoundly disturbing to read Dennis Ocholla's conclusion that “diversity is not a focus issue” in the South African LIS workplace. Similarly, Ocholla found that “diversity issues never featured” in LIASA's agenda. In the South African context, diversity should mean not only color and gender, but also ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. The promotion of diversity is not only the law, but also the vision of a more just society. Professor Ocholla notes that library workplaces remain essentially the same. For example, previously majority Zulu or majority Afrikaner libraries remain so in terms of staffing. However, several respondents have noted that there are exceptions. The follow-up respondents noted excellent progress at UNISA, the Gauteng public libraries, and the senior management at the National Library. For Gauteng, this means that all new appointments must be made in line with the 80-20 plan until the targets are reached (80% includes all previously disadvantaged groups). The National Library has a14-person senior management team which is 50% black. However some respondents also note that recruiting can be difficult because black library school graduates can often make two to three times more salary in the private sector.

The African Renaissance concept is ambiguously defined and contested. One of the follow-up white interviewees said that it should mean a renaissance for all people in South Africa including whites (who are also Africans). Another follow-up interviewee dismissed the concept as a frivolous public relations campaign oriented to foreign policy and festivals. Another stated that nothing in this regard had been done in the public libraries in his region. He asked the question, Where is Africa in the Library?” Another follow-up participant noted Gauteng Province's “African Renaissance through Libraries” campaign. The Province has created an expanding “Transformation Collection” made up of a Political Heritage Collection of more than 400 titles, publications in African languages, and publications written by African authors. She referred to library...
services such as telling stories in old age homes, collecting local histories, creating library murals, and sponsoring dramas and dancing. Finally, one follow-up respondent noted that there could be no renaissance without literacy, oral and written literature, and performance art. He went on to cite priorities for indigenous knowledge, repatriating materials, and the promotion of writing and publishing in Africa.

Coming back to LIASA, we must acknowledge that it is as yet a new organization. Unfortunately, it seems that the drive to unify under one professional body was seen by some as transformative in itself. The LIS establishment, most clearly represented by SAILIS, certainly had a hand in shifting this debate. Whether consciously engineered or not, the establishment of LIASA seems to have sidetracked the strong emphasis on equity issues. One follow-up interviewee again noted the need for more than one library organization citing the Constitution’s freedom of association clause. Another follow-up respondent compared South African librarianship to that in his home country of Nigeria, and noted the rigidity of LIASA and its penchant for sticking to the status quo.

Although this survey paid no initial attention to South Africa’s apartheid racial classifications, it was possible to pull out respondents with African names to investigate Ocholla’s conclusions. One person was excluded because it is a name taken by marriage. It is quite significant that there are only six “African” librarians in the pool (two university, one public, one provincial, and two LIS educators).28

Going further, it is interesting to analyze the responses of the six librarians with African family names. Regarding working librarians, the responses are remarkably congruent with the majority. There is no disagreement for university or provincial librarians on the seven relevant questions. The one public librarian differed with her colleagues on the value of LIASA (positive vs. only one-sixth positive for the group), and on whether the profession was meeting its social responsibilities (a very positive response compared to only one-third of her colleagues). Perhaps a study of young librarians that would include a more diverse sample would yield more interesting results.29

On the other hand, the two African named LIS educators disagreed with their colleagues on three of seven relevant questions. They think LIS degrees should be regularized as opposed to two-thirds of their group who disagree. They both participate in LIASA as opposed to only half of their colleagues. And they have a positive impression of LIASA as opposed to three-quarters of their colleagues who think it is too early to say and a small number who have a negative opinion.

It is likely that a more diverse professoriate would strongly influence the profession both at their own institutions and through LIASA in ways different from current practice. They would have the potential to invigorate LIASA and make it much more appealing to black librarians and former members of LIWO. This could lead to a much more effective and relevant organization. They would also obviously influence their students who might graduate with a more activist orientation, which could continually prod the transformation of the profession. Of course, this assumes that these new faculty would take leadership roles and continue to be more engaged with social issues.

Women make up the majority of respondents in all three of the working librarian groups, however only five of twelve LIS educator respondents were women. A quick check of the LIS women educator responses showed no significant differences from their male colleagues.

**Conclusion**

P. C. Coetzee has been called the South African “father of readership.” Archie Dick describes him as a serious scholar, who in 1962 as editor of the South African Library Association’s journal, defended the establishment of racially segregated library associations. Coetzee thought of the library as a cultural instrument to advance Afrikaner racist ideology. This kind of leadership made the profession and its organizations complicit with apartheid, or as Dick called it, “a morally-warped profession.” In another article, Dick explains how market ideology (“the language of neo-liberalism and GEAR”) has diluted any progressive ideas that might have flourished in the profession. And he goes on to note that librarians have completely missed that point because they are technicians rather than educators. They have concentrated on technical skills, and they have lacked political insight and sympathy for change. One of the follow-up respondents said that technocism is a retreat from social involvement. Similarly in discussing LIS policy-making, Mary Nassimbeni notes the contested power relations, and that only certain voices have been heard. In other words, there has been no radical LIS departure in the “New South Africa.” Amongst other recommendations, Dick concludes with the need for a South African social responsibilities round table, and the development of more black and female
researchers who will be able to frame problems within wider socio-economic contexts.35

These survey findings are consistent with Dick’s analysis. The South African LIS profession is split in many ways. Regarding LIS education, just over half of working librarians surveyed support teaching African studies librarianship, but no programs actually do this. There is a wide divergence on the kinds of degrees that should be offered and the necessity of teaching LIS at the undergraduate level. Almost all think that the profession needs to be upgraded, but only a very few refer to diversity issues in stating how to do it. Two-thirds of the respondents participate in LIASA but only slightly less than half have reached an opinion on its value. Nevertheless, the group that has an opinion is split almost evenly between positive and negative attitudes. The majority of respondents think that the profession is either not fulfilling its social responsibilities or are unsure about this.

As the South African liberation struggle so clearly demonstrated, transformation does not happen by itself. The South African library profession is no exception. Despite much good will, old structures and attitudes die hard. The most reactionary elements of the former SAILIS have not all disappeared or retired. LIASA has an excellent constitution, but it is the responsibility of the democratic forces to actualize these goals. More librarians will need to rise to the challenge to transform the profession, through LIS programs, local work, and vibrant regional and national professional organizations.

A transformed profession would work to decrease the information gaps between the rich and poor, and promote the democratization of society and human rights. A vibrant library profession would actively oppose racism and promote gender equity and gay rights. It would support unions and workers rights as well as environmental justice, oppose censorship and promote freedom of information and expression. A transformed profession would oppose neo-liberal policies, especially the privatization, outsourcing and commercialization of library services and the commodification of information. It would promote access to a wide range of sources, including non-mainstream viewpoints in the alternative press. The Africanization of the profession would certainly promote solidarity and cooperation with Third World librarians and create linkages across the African continent. These results show that new socially responsible organizational structures within or in addition to LIASA are needed.

Footnotes

1 This project was sponsored by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (USA) through sabbatical leave from January through August 2001, and a grant from its Library’s Research and Publication Committee. Mailing and some other expenses were generously provided by the University of Cape Town Department of Information and Library Studies.
2 See Appendix 1 for a list of current degrees.
3 Surveys were sent to the following universities and public libraries in these university cities and towns: Potchefstroom University (Noordbrug, North-West Province), Rand Afrikaans University (Johannesburg, Gauteng Province), University of Cape Town (Cape Town, Western Cape Province), University of Fort Hare (Alice, Eastern Cape Province), University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu/Natal Province), University of Pretoria (Pretoria, Gauteng Province), University of South Africa (Pretoria, Gauteng Province), University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch, Western Cape Province), University of the Free State (Bloemfontein, Free State Province), University of the North (Sovenga, Northern Province), University of the Western Cape (Cape Town, Western Cape Province), University of Transkei (Umtata, Eastern Cape Province), and University of Zululand (Kwa-Dlangezwa, KwaZulu/Natal Province). These universities are located in 7 of the 9 provinces. The provinces excluded were Mpumalanga and Northern Cape.
4 Note that the technikons were not surveyed.
5 It is also quite possible that librarians working in places that have library science schools will be more knowledgeable and informed of current developments and trends in the field.
6 Of course, under the Constitution, public libraries are a provincial function. The conception of the role and function of Provincial Library Services varies by province, especially in relation to the centralization or not of collection development and their relationships with city libraries. ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table, Progressive Librarians Guild (US), Bibliotek 1 Samhälle (Sweden) and Information for Social Change (UK). See Appendix 2 for the list.
7 Only one anonymous response was received.
8 Rand Afrikaans University (Johannesburg, Gauteng), University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch, Western Cape), and University of the Free State (Bloemfontein, Free State).
9 Others sat in at the interview with the National Librarian, but said very little.
10 Note that the technikons were not surveyed.
11 Note the small size of the sample in the previous table, especially for university and public librarians vis a vis the totals for these categories in the country. The size of the sample for Provincial Library Service librarians and LIS educators although small represents a large portion of the universe in these categories for the country as a whole.
12 However, it may be that there is a problem with the way the question was phrased. If post-graduate versus undergraduate education was differentiated, it is possible that the affirmative percentage might have been higher. It is clearly appropriate to include more specialized education at the graduate level. This dichotomy of students from this researcher’s unconscious American assumption that LIS education is normally on the graduate level.
13 However, note that technikon LIS educators were not surveyed.
14 SAILIS was itself formed to replace the exclusively white previous organization, the South African Library Association (SALA) which had been a target of an Inesesco boycott.
15 A new LIASA journal is forthcoming at the time of writing.
16 Or gave unclear answers.
17 See Appendixes 3 and 4 for the survey forms with Yes/No responses.
18 Although there were only six respondents in the provincial librarians group, they represent a two-thirds return rate.
19 The LIS Educators survey was similar but not the same as the working librarians’ survey. Five of the ten questions were either exactly the same or similar. The unique questions investigate specific teaching and research concerns. Note that although only 12 of 41 people
responded to the questionnaire, this represents approximately 27% of all the LIS educators in the country. The group includes respondents from a majority of the library schools in the country.

26 Of course, this author did a bit of teaching African studies bibliography at the University of Cape Town in 2001, but this was a one-time special effort.

27 This author is grateful to one of the prepublication readers of this article for insisting on these points.

28 See Appendix 5 for course titles.

29 See the previously discussed list, in Appendix 2.

30 Adopted by Congress of the People, Kliptown, 26 June 1955. See http://www.anc.org.za/ ancdocs/history/ charter.html

31 Although as others have pointed out, this phrase is a contradiction in terms and has no fixed meaning. Why use a European concept for an African revitalization? This author criticized the first LIASA conference brochure for having a beautiful photo of what looked like an Italian library building.


36 However, this argument does not negate the value of teaching information literacy courses to all undergraduate students to enhance their ability to succeed academically and for life-long learning.

37 Meyer, “Results,” point 8.

38 Meyer, “Results,” point 15.


41 Ibid., p. 65.

42 Personal correspondence from Colin Darch.

43 Although some typically Coloured names might be fairly obvious to identify, it was not possible to differentiate all the coloured respondents. There are only two Indian names.

44 LIASA is compiling a directory that should eventually make sure a study possible.


47 More ominously, one follow-up respondent reacted to this by saying that it was not a lack of political insight, but that the white power structure intentionally wanted to maintain the status quo.


49 Archie L. Dick, Reading and Outcomes-Based Education: Should Income be the Key Outcome?,” Perspectives in Education (Pretoria) 19, 2 (July 2001): 46.

References

Dick, Archie L. “Reading and Outcomes-Based Education: Should Income be the Key Outcome?” Perspectives in Education (Pretoria) 19, 2 (July 2001): 37-48.


APPENDIX 1:

An incomplete list of degrees currently available at 11 universities and 5 technikons

University Degrees - 29
Certificate in Children’s and Youth Services in Libraries
Lower Diploma LIS; Higher Diploma LIS; Higher Diploma IS
Diploma in School Library Science; Diploma in School Library Studies; Diploma in School Librarianship; Diploma in Specialized Education
Post-grad Diploma IS; Post-grad Diploma LIS BAIS; BBibl; BBibl(H); BIS; BIS(H); BIS(H); BLIS; BLIS Ed; BLIS(H); BLS; BLS(H)
Mbibl; MIS; MLIS; MPhil
DLit of Phil.; Dphil; PhD

Page 32

Page 33
Does your library/library system extensively collect materials from and about the African continent? If yes, is there a regional, subject and/or language focus?

Are you satisfied with the current levels and kinds of LIS degrees offered throughout the country? Do you support the retention of undergraduate LIS degrees? Which degrees do you support for the indefinite future? How do candidates' degrees affect your hiring decisions?

Technikon Degrees - 6
- National Certificate; National Higher Certificate; National Diploma
- BTech
- M Tech
- D Tech

APPENDIX 2
Social Responsibility Concerns of Progressive Library Organizations

Statements and programs of the following four progressive library organizations were analyzed to distill their common core societal concerns:

- ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (U.S.), http://libr.org/SRRT/
- Bibliotek I Samhalle [Libraries in Society] (Sweden), http://www.bok-form.se/bis/eng_1.htm
- Information for Social Change (U.K.), http://libr.org/ISC

For more information and organizations, see the Progressive Librarians Around the World website, http://home.germany.net/100-115158/adresse.htm.

Key Social Responsibility Concerns
- Working against information gaps between the rich and poor
- Promotion of democracy, and opposition to repressive regimes
- Promotion of human rights
- Opposition to racism, and support for multiculturalism
- Promotion of gender equity and gay rights
- Support for unions and workers rights
- Opposition to censorship, and promotion of freedom of information and expression
- Access to non-mainstream viewpoints in the alternative press
- Opposition to the commodification of information
- Opposition to the privatization and outsourcing of library services
- Opposition to the commercialization of library services
- Solidarity with third world librarians, and opposition to repressive foreign policies
- Advocacy for environmental concerns

APPENDIX 3
Research Survey for South African Librarians

Universe of University Librarians = 17
Universe of Public Librarians = 16
Universe of Provincial Librarians = 6

1. Do you think all South African library and information science programs should teach an in-depth course on the bibliography of the African continent? Please comment.

   University: YES = 8 responses (47%)  NO = 9 responses (53%)
   Public: YES = 10 responses (63%)  NO = 6 responses (37%)
   Provincial: YES = 4 responses (67%)  NO = 2 responses (33%)

   University: YES = 9 (53%)  NO = 8 (47%)
   Public: YES = 2 (14%)  NO = 14 (86%)
   Provincial: YES = 2 (33%)  NO = 4 (67%)

3. Are you satisfied with the current levels and kinds of LIS degrees offered throughout the country? Do you support the retention of undergraduate LIS degrees? Which degrees do you support for the indefinite future? How do candidates' degrees affect your hiring decisions?

   University: Y & Y = 5 Y & N = 2 N & Y = 3  N & N = 6 Y & ? = 1
   Public: Y & Y = 4 Y & N = 0 N & Y = 10  N & N = 1 N & ? = 1
   Provincial: Y & Y = 1 Y & N = 0 N & Y = 1  N & N = 2 N & ? = 1

4. Do you think that all South African LIS programs in universities should be regularized, defined as offering the same degrees (not necessarily courses) at various levels? Please explain.

   University: YES = 13 (76%)  NO = 3 (17%)  ? = 1 (7%)
   Public: YES = 8 (50%)  NO = 8 (50%)
   Provincial: YES = 3 (50%)  NO = 2 (33%)  ? = 1 (17%)

5. Do you think that the South African library profession needs to be upgraded? If so, how?

   University: YES = 15 (88%)  NO = 2 (12%)
   Public: YES = 14 (88%)  NO = 2 (12%)
   Provincial: YES = 6 (100%)  NO = 0 (0%)

6. Are you a member and/or do you participate in LIASA or any other library professional organization? If so which ones?

   The following responses relate only to LIASA:

   University: YES = 12 (71%)  NO = 5 (29%)
   Public: YES = 11 (69%)  NO = 5 (31%)
   Provincial: YES = 5 (83%)  NO = 1 (17%)

6. What is your opinion of the value and effectiveness of LIASA or other library professional organizations? How could the organizations be improved?

   University: POSITIVE = 5 (29%)  TOO EARLY = 9 (53%)  NEGATIVE = 3 (18%)
   Public: POSITIVE = 4 (25%)  TOO EARLY = 7 (44%)  NEGATIVE = 5 (29%)
   Provincial: POSITIVE = 1 (17%)  TOO EARLY = 3 (50%)  NEGATIVE = 2 (33%)

8. Do you think the South African library profession is meeting its social responsibilities? See the list appended for definitional guidance. Please explain.

   University: YES = 7 (41%)  NO = 5 (29%)  ? = 5 (29%)
9. How does your library/library system fulfill its social responsibilities?

10. How do you personally integrate social responsibilities into your work?

APPENDIX 4
Research Survey for South African University LIS Educators
Universe of 12 responses

1. Does your program teach an in-depth course on the bibliography of the African continent? If no, is this covered in depth as part of another course? Please provide course titles.
   YES = 2 responses (17%) NO = 10 responses (83%)

2. Are you satisfied with the current levels and kinds of LIS degrees offered throughout the country? Do you support the retention of undergraduate LIS degrees? Which degrees do you support for the indefinite future? Please explain.
   SAME AS Q3 ON LIBRARIANS SURVEY
   YES and YES = 5 responses NO and YES = 4 responses
   YES and NO = 0 responses NO and NO = 3 responses

3. Do you think that all South African LIS programs in universities should be regularized, defined as offering the same degrees (not necessarily courses) at various levels? Please explain.
   SAME AS Q4 ON LIBRARIANS SURVEY
   YES = 3 responses (25%) NO = 8 responses (67%) ? = 1 response (8%)

4. Do you think that the South African library profession needs to be upgraded? If so, how?
   SAME AS Q5 ON LIBRARIANS SURVEY
   YES = 11 (92%) NO = 1 (8%)

5. Has your institution taken any initiatives to upgrade the profession? If so, please explain.
   YES = 6 (50%) NO = 5 (42%) ? = 1 (8%)

6. Are you a member and/or do you participate in LIASA or any other library professional organization? If so which ones?
   SAME AS Q6 ON LIBRARIANS SURVEY
   The following responses relate only to LIASA:
   YES = 6 (50%) NO = 6 (50%)

7. What is your opinion of the value and effectiveness of LIASA or other library professional organizations? How could the organizations be improved?
   SAME AS Q7 ON LIBRARIANS SURVEY
   POSITIVE = 2 (17%) NEGATIVE = 1 (8%)

TOO EARLY TO EVALUATE OR UNCLEAR ANSWER = 9 (75%)

8. Do you offer any courses specifically concerned with the social responsibilities of the library profession? See the list appended for definitional guidance. If yes, is this a separate course, or is it part of other courses? Please provide course titles.
   YES = 8 (67%) NO = 4 (33%)

9. Do you think the South African library profession is meeting its social responsibilities?
   SIMILAR TO Q9 ON LIBRARIANS SURVEY
   YES = 3 (25%) NO = 8 (67%) ? = 1 (8%)

10. Have you undertaken any research related to LIS social responsibilities? If so, please explain.
    YES = 8 (67%) NO = 4 (33%)

APPENDIX 5
LIS Courses Including Social Responsibility Issues

Current Issues in Information and Library Studies; Development Librarianship; Information delivery systems; Information Literacy; Information Society; Information users and use; Issues in Library and Information Science; Legal Aspects of Information; Libraries, Information and society; Philosophy of Information; Political Economy of Information; Professional Ethics; Readership and Children’s Literature; Records and Archival Management; Repackaging Information; Research Methods/Research Report; User Groups and Information Use; User studies
ACTIVIST LIBRARIANSHIP: HERITAGE OR HERESY?

by Ann Sparanese

When Bill Kenz first wrote me last fall about possible doing a talk at Minnesota State University here in Moorhead, I was pretty surprised. I told him, “I’m not on the speakers’ circuit.” He said that was what you wanted. So I’ve been mulling over this talk, as you can imagine, for a good long while, imagining what it is that you would want to hear from me, a good year and half after I wrote that little email to librarians that is credited with “saving” what would become a bestseller: Michael Moore’s book, Stupid White Men.

People tell me, and the books say, that you should start out a talk with something funny, something that makes people laugh and makes you, the speaker, feel comfortable and accepted by the audience. I mulled over this advice too. I thought of saying, “we all know that you have invited me here today” or “for a year and a half I have been trying to play down the role that little e-mail played in the story that has fascinated reporters and, to a lesser degree, the professionals who have now been catapulted into the spotlight as heroes and, as Michael now is fond of calling us, “revolutionaries.” I was mulling all this stuff in bed a week ago and one of my four, relatively pacifist cats was sitting near my head as I was just waking up. I was pondering the “how to start” “how to be funny” questions when an ear-piercing yowl went up, and my most timid cat raced across the bed, and in her path was my face, and my first thought was, as the blood ran down my cheek, now I not only have to be funny, but I will have to do it with a huge cat scratch across my face, giving a whole new meaning to the label “scrappy” librarian.

My fights, as an activist librarian, I assure you, have mostly been non-physical, and verbal or written in nature! I did once have a long drawn out union battle against our former library director – because I am a union shop steward in our library – in which I was known to have said that, when it was over, only one of us would still be standing. But that was merely figurative, at no time did a cat-fight ensue (although a court fight did).

The irony for me in all this business surrounding the release of Michael Moore’s book is that, although I have been an activist woman for most of my adult life and an activist librarian for more than fifteen years, the stuff I have worked on, and consider to be important, worthwhile and genuine contributions have garnered very little recognition. This is normal. Considering that I am the adversarial union shop steward at the Englewood Public Library, you can imagine that as far as my library’s board is concerned (with a couple of exceptions), they are not anxious to sing my praises. That might be a bad precedent come contract time! What happened with the Michael Moore book was a fluke – one of those little seeds that a person plants at the right moment, which actually bears abundant fruit. If you are a gardener, you know what I mean. Every garden has its surprises, and it is often those little seeds you disregarded as soon as you threw them into the ground.

When I wrote the now-acclaimed, but seldom seen, e-mail to two library listservs, I had NO idea that it would have any effect at all. In fact, it is a testimony to how little interest I thought other librarians would have in this that I did not even send this email to the listservs read daily by American Library Association Council members or to Member-Forum (another ALA listserv) or even to PUBLIB, a vast list read by public librarians. I sent it to two lists “populated” by librarians and library workers “left of center,” those considered “activist librarians.” Those would be the listservs of the ALA’s Social Responsibilities Round Table, and the Progressive Librarians Guild, an independent group of which I am a dues-paying member.

Now here would be some folks who are interested in this, I thought, and anyway I am just doing my duty to report what Michael Moore had reported a day or two before at a meeting of the New Jersey Citizen Action organization, where he was the keynote speaker.

I didn’t actually know that Michael Moore was scheduled to speak there. I vaguely knew that he had a new book coming out, because we had placed it on pre-pub order at our library. I was at the meeting in the first place because of another aspect of my life in which I consider myself to be an activist, as I have already mentioned – that of the trade union movement. I am a trustee of New Jersey Citizen Action, appointed to that position by the Bergen County Central Trades and Labor Council. The central labor councils, in case folk do not know, are the local groups which bring together all the unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO in a given geographical area. So that is why I was there in the first place and why I heard Michael Moore
despondently tell the group of about 100 assembled that his new book Stupid White Men was definitely not going to be released by his publisher HarperCollins – ever – and that we at that gathering would probably be the only people to see or hear any parts of this book. So he read us some of the juicier parts, including his open letter to the president. He also told the audience there assembled that he didn’t want them to “do” anything about this situation. That there were more pressing problems to attend to. But I am a librarian, this was a large public gathering, and I knew what I had to do, small as it seemed.

That was Saturday, Dec. 1, 2001. On Monday I sent the e-mail. It was a pretty much verbatim report of what went on at the meeting that Saturday. I wrote, proofed and pressed “send.” And then, quite honestly I must tell you, I forgot about it. Although it must have gotten picked up by others who sent it around, and it definitely was picked up by a little ‘zine on the web called “Library Juice” edited by a young librarian named Rory Litwin.

I know your publicity for tonight’s presentation says that I organized a “letter-writing” campaign. It really didn’t happen that way – and I’ve corrected Michael Moore when he says I went into librarian “chatrooms” as well – what librarian chat rooms? I wasn’t even thinking of organizing an e-mail campaign to HarperCollins – although looking back on it now, someone should have done that! I guess, if I was thinking of any kind of action at all, I was focused on the fact that in a month or so, the American Library Association would be having its midwinter conference in New Orleans and HarperCollins would undoubtedly have a large presence there in the exhibits area. If I was thinking of anything, it was that we would get a group together and go to visit HarperCollins and say “What gives? Why did you censor Michael Moore’s new book?” But we never got to do that, because in January before the conference, I got a call from a reporter from Salon.com asking me if I was happy about the news about Moore was saying. Being from the New York City area I knew the effects of Sept. 11 on the psyche of the city and the country (a pall hung over our area of the country for a good two months after the attack and it took that long for people to have smiles again). Also, the country was at war in Afghanistan and the PATRIOT I had been passed. But that was government stuff. The government always censors and represses in time of war. But the government had not taken any particular interest in Moore’s book. This was the publisher itself who decided to “pulp” the book and its already-made investment in it! This was an action – as Moore himself pointed out – against its own bottom line: profit. Now profit, not patriotism, is the bottom line of the new global economy. So this was truly stunning. Of course they hoped to recoup some of those losses by asking Moore to rewrite the offensive passages (true most of the book!) and then pay for it, but by December they must have figured out that that was not going to happen. So – they were willing to just eat the investment.

But of course it was nothing of the kind. Rather it was a rare, lovely, delicious and relatively easy, victory gained through the collective action of librarians in defense of one of our core values, opposition to censorship. Librarians, as a integral part of their professional commitment, take censor-ship seriously and fight it where they find it. In this case, it was directly at the publisher’s door.

As you probably know by now, HarperCollins wanted Moore to rewrite objectionable parts of the book and pay for the reprinting.

Think about it – what would make a publisher take money already invested in printing and sales (through pre-publication orders) and toss it into a paper shredder, short of a government order? Since there apparently was no “government order,” this form of censorship that went against the company’s bottom line profits could only be motivated by the fear of seeming unpatriotic. I suppose the publisher honestly believed that public opinion would not only guarantee failure of this book, but that they might have been haunted by the specter of public disapproval tainting future releases of other books. I think it must have been “fear” pure and simple and wanting desperately to remain in the mainstream of what they calculated to be pro-government public opinion after the terrorist attacks of September 11.
about his book, I didn’t pay him any mind at all. Well maybe a little mind, in that I briefly thought about the fact that he knew there were no press at the meeting and had no reason to believe there was a librarian there – but that’s life. This was bigger than Michael Moore and more important than him alone. Which is why I wrote the e-mail.

Whatever prompted HarperCollins to commit the profoundly disturbing act of pulling the book after actually printing it, the publisher surely miscalculated – grossly miscalculated – what the public reaction to this book would be. A couple of weeks after it was released in mid-February 2002, it made it’s first appearance on the *New York Times* bestseller list. And it’s still there today. Given everything that has happened and is happening in the country, the book has struck a deep reservoir of mistrust and truth-seeking of the American people. While probably not the best book written on contemporary politics and, some would say, full of hyperbole and maybe even some bad stats, the book has tapped into the desires of the people to hear it told another way than in the daily press. Despite everything, people in the U.S. still do connect to politics and treasure the role of dissent even in the most difficult times. At least this is what Moore’s commercial success with this book means to me.

Somewhere in the course of last year, some colleagues started suggesting nominating me for intellectual freedom awards and stuff like that – that I absolutely had to nip in the bud. It was totally inappropriate. In librarian-ship, unbeknownst to most of the public and almost equally unbeknownst to most librarians, there is a long and hallowed history of activism in the interest of intellectual freedom and the social responsibilities of our profession. Librarians have lost jobs that they loved, their reputations besmirched and lost their incomes in defense of the principles embodied in the right to read, and the Library Bill of Rights. I was none of these, and take no credit as a champion of intellectual freedom, at least not in this case. I wrote an e-mail. It does not rise to the level of heroism, though it did provide us with one small sweet victory and reflects well on the role of librarians in our society.

But what it signifies and what it really speaks to is the power of collective action by librarians in anything they might set their minds to. It does testify to the fact that we are important to publishers and when we take the time we can help them to do the right thing. And by doing so we enrich our society, live our professional values, and help our nation to live its true values.

All this attention, as well as your kind invitation to speak to you today, has caused me to think more deeply about our profession, and its history of involvement with the important issues of the day, and not only censorship as it most grossly presents itself. It has made me interested in studying the policy manual of the American Library Association and the history of my colleagues in the defense of democratic values, including civil liberties and diversity. The willingness of some – apparently enough – librarians to engage in activism surrounding our values has made me very interested in the history of activism in our profession—where when and how it has been present and where and how it has been fought.

I didn’t become a librarian to do this activist stuff. I didn’t become a librarian in order to find a venue for my commitment to social change (though I had that and had acted upon it for many years) I became a librarian because I thought it was a salutary profession, good for the society we live in (in some vague way) and mostly because I was tired of waiting tables with a BA degree and it was time to get off the Mommy-track. I had no grand notions of doing much more than serving my own diverse community in some positive way. I didn’t even take an intellectual freedom class in library school – it wasn’t required. I had no idea that my previous life of activism and engagement (being child of the 60’s, the anti-war movement, a Cuba traveler, etc.) could somehow ever spill over into my life as a librarian and, to tell you the truth, it didn’t for many years.

I think I started to make the activism-librarianship connection when I realized that my library – in which I was simply a rank-and-file librarian (which I still am today though I manage a six-person reference staff) – was not really serving our community. Despite the fact that the official census in 1990 reported that our town was 40% African American, our library’s collection of materials about contemporary Black life, Black writers, and Black history and issues was severely lacking. It didn’t take me too long to figure out that this needed to change. I didn’t see anyone else around who saw the need to change it, though we were a building full of good, solid librarians and nice people. I realized that I could write a grant for enough money to change the situation. This was in the days when the New Jersey State Library had grant money to give away – not like today when state libraries and state budgets are under siege. Grant writing was not in my job description, but I won the grant and bought lots of books, even the most controversial ones. I convened, through advertisements and news stories, a Community Advisory Committee to help build the collection by asking community members what they wanted for the collection. This was so
successful that I repeated the process with Hispanic collections and outreach services; with a collection and outreach campaign built around labor studies – an esoteric subject even in the union-dense state within which I live. With each new project, the idea of library activism – in this form of community outreach and service – informed my work. I think, as a whole, one rule of activism is – do it where you are. And I was a librarian.

Going to ALA conferences and learning what other librarians were doing whetted my appetite for more engaged librarianship.

Library activism for me, has to do with the social responsibilities of libraries. Not all librarians agree with this concept although it is enshrined, to some degree, in the mission and policy statements of the American Library Association. The struggle is over whether we as librarians should practice total neutrality in terms of library materials and service, or encompass advocacy in our work. Should librarianship become involved in the great issues of the day, or remain a profession aloof in the abstract world that thinks of intellectual freedom in the most idealized, purist fashion?

It would take a much longer paper for a much more involved presentation to plumb the depths of this debate over the years in librarianship – and perhaps in other professions as well, such as journalism. But the librarian’s devotion to democracy and democratic values often requires an activism that goes beyond lip service to abstract principles, to the nitty-gritty of how such principles play out in the society. This dialectic – has encompassed many years and many individual battles, perhaps the greatest of these occurred during the 1960’s and 70’s when, like in every other arena in U.S. society, values were being questioned, and the great battles around civil rights and the Vietnam War were being fought. Activist librarians were in there from the get-go. It wasn’t until I began to do the research for this talk here today that I realized the deep roots that activism in librarianship has, and that it parallels activism in American life in general.

For the librarians in this audience especially, I have prepared a bibliography of the books I have found that illustrate and describe great activist moments in library history. There is E.J. Josey, an African-American librarian from Savannah State College in Georgia who, because of his race, was denied membership in his state librarian association. Despite the fact that segregation existed in Southern libraries, and substandard service for Blacks in libraries of the north, not one word was written about it in the library press since an article by Stanley Kunitz in 1936. At least, not until the iconoclastic and activist editor of Library Journal, Eric Moon, took up the mantle in 1959. Eric Moon said “I believe that libraries are involved in society per se and that actions such as Vietnam involve libraries. I believe that war affects libraries. I believe that racism affects libraries.” Beginning with a stand against racial segregation, the organization representing American libraries would eventually take “the unprecedented action of denouncing a war.” The legacy of that period is still seen in the policy manual of the American Library Association, in the resolutions that come forth at every Council session. The struggle between concern for strictly “traditional” library issues and a broad view of the role of the library and librarians in society seems to be played out continuously – at least as long as I have been in the profession. But for me, the social responsibilities argument has potency.

Not everyone believed that social responsibilities are central to librarianship and many still don’t. Those who say that librarians, as librarians, should only be involved in the most narrow of library-related issues are still most influential in the American Library Association. I consider myself in the Moon school of library activism. He said, “Libraries had a simple choice: to be a significant thread in the social fabric, an active participant in social change, or to face an inevitable passage toward irrelevance, possible extinction or an existence as some kind of historical relic.” Socially responsible librarianship is librarianship that is part of – not dissociated from – society and its needs, problems and concerns.

There is also Zoia Horn, a reference librarian at Bucknell University who was jailed for her principled refusal to testify at the conspiracy trial of the Harrisburg 7 in 1972. There was an informer who worked in Zoia’s library at Bucknell, and ex-convict sent there by the FBI. This informer implicated other library personnel in the fabricated “conspiracy” and later, though given immunity from self-incrimination, Zoia refused to testify because she objected to the idea that libraries could become places of infiltration and spying. She went to jail for 20 days for contempt of court, although it could have been three months if the trial had not been cut short. The American Library Association did not come to her support, because there was conflict within ALA over whether she was doing these things “as a librarian” and whether she was correct in doing so. Zoia’s story is well-told – as are other historic moments in library history – in her memoir listed on the bibliography I have given you.

Zoia’s run-in with a planted spy has a particular resonance for the spot that librarians are finding themselves placed in with the passage of the USA
PATRIOT Act. As many of you probably know, this huge legislation was passed by Congress with almost no discussion in October 2001. Some of the elements of this law include the cancellation of habeas corpus for non-citizens; expanded government wiretap ability; the authorization of secret searches; new rules for seizure of library and bookstore records; the monitoring of conversations between lawyers and clients; CIA spying on American citizens; the possible designation of domestic groups as terrorists; lowering the threshold for obtaining a search warrant from probable cause to “ongoing criminal investigation”; and the institution of military tribunals for anyone called a “suspected terrorist” by the president. The ACLU maintains that sections of this law are blatantly unconstitutional. Despite this, only one senator voted against this bill (Feingold) and in the House of Representatives, only 66 of 435 voted against.

Section 215 of this law specifically grants the government the right to obtain library and bookstore records in secret without proving that a crime has been committed. Librarians presented with such a warrant under PATRIOT are forbidden to discuss it anyone except a lawyer. The librarian is forbidden to discuss it with the patron whose records may be sought despite the fact that the patron may have committed no crime, or even be suspected of committing a crime. I suspect that most library users have no idea that their records -- for instance Internet use or books checked out -- may be obtained in such a manner and with such secrecy. After much debate, the American Library Association passed a resolution opposing this section of the law at its meeting in January 2003, followed by several state associations. But it was activist librarians who led the way in this work, librarians who feel compelled to defend the Bill of Rights and to advocate against the passage of legislation that erodes our freedoms in the name of protecting them from terrorists.

There is a new law coming down the pike: PATRIOT II. An article about this legislation says that the administration is holding back proposing it until Congress is in a vulnerable state of fear -- for instance if and when we are in a war against Iraq and the risk of terrorist reprisals is high. It’s called the Domestic Terrorist Act of 2003 (DSEA), and grants the Attorney General almost unbridled powers in a wide arena of law enforcement. It authorizes secret arrests. It allows local police to spy on citizens. It even puts citizenship itself in jeopardy -- and I am not talking about the citizenship of the naturalized -- I’m talking about the citizenship of the native-born American. Section 501 would allow the federal government to strip the citizen of an American citizen if the person provided “material support” to a group that the United States has designated as a terrorist organization. I don’t know if this particular legislation mentions libraries as specifically as PATRIOT I did, but I would hope -- and I’ll be in there fighting -- for our professional association to take as strong a stand as it possibly can against it. Libraries might be a cornerstone of democracy, but without all of the other cornerstones, guarantees, rights, and liberties that make up a democracy, how powerful a force can libraries ever be?

Soon or later, I suspect there will be a librarian who will refuse to provide information or who will reveal the requests of the FBI to the press. Hopefully, the ALA will come to her or his defense. But it is clear that the activist librarians will be right there, I can assure you.

Many of the rights and liberties we Americans have taken for granted with regard to information seeking -- at a university library like this or the public library -- are up for grabs in the new political climate. The impending war against Iraq -- although everybody with any common sense can see that when money is spent for bombs and war, it cannot be used for institutions such as libraries. Just the other day, Jeb Bush, in justifying his gutting of the Florida State Library, said that money cannot be found for everything, war takes money away from other priorities. Although war is not good for libraries, librarians at the ALA refused to take a stand urging the president to continue with the inspection process rather than launch a unilateral war. I put forth the resolution and I regret the outcome. I don’t see how the democracy that librarians believe in cannot be compromised by the events that accompany a war. Not that I don’t believe that there can be a just war that might justify libraries taking a back seat, but I’m convinced that this is not one of them.
Neutral institutions perpetrate such social ills as racism and sexism. They don’t go around advocating that blacks and women be denied equal rights and libraries don’t brag that their collections contain nothing but the story of John Q. Wasp... but burying one’s prejudices in a bureaucracy does not qualify one as neutral. Mary McKenney, 1971.

The broad social responsibilities of the American Library Association are defined in terms of the contributions that librarianship can make in ameliorating or solving the critical problems of society; support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on these problems and to encourage them to examine the many views on and the facts regarding each problem; and the willingness of ALA to take a position on current critical issues with the relationship to libraries and library service set forth in the position statement. ALA Policy Manual, 1.1, from the ALA Handbook of Organization, 2002-2003.

Abdullahi, Ismail. E.J. Josey: An Activist Librarian. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992. E.J. Josey believed in the connection between libraries and human rights. This series of essays by librarians who were influenced by him reveals the vast contributions that he made to librarianship.


Kister, Kenneth F. Eric Moon: The Life and Library Times. With a Forward by John N. Berry III. 2002: Jeffferson, NC, Mcfarland. Moon was ALA president in 1976-77, but what led to that was Moon’s struggle inside the ALA for social responsibility. This biography conveys the spirit of the times, the tumult inside the association over such touchstone American issues as racial segregation, and the Vietnam war.

Robbins, Louise. Censorship and the American Library: the American Library Association’s Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press., 1996. The freedom to read became a guiding principal of American librarianship during this period. Yet the ALA also frequently failed in its defense of these principles during this same period. (???)

Robbins, Louise. The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown: civil rights, Censorship and the American Library. 2000: Norman, OK, University of Oklahoma Press. Brown was the town librarian at Bartlesville (OK) Public Library for thirty years when she was fired in 1950 ostensibly for refusing to remove books and periodicals from her library’s collection. But Miss Brown’s case was far more complex than a “simple” censorship issue.


Venturella, Karen. Ed. Poor People and Library Services. with a forward by Sanford Berman. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998. The ALA has a “Policy on Library Services to Poor People” which recognizes the barriers that poverty presents to information access. This collection of essays describes the barriers and what can be done to eliminate them.
History does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. James Baldwin

Part II — Eclectic Reading for Informed Citizens: A Personal List

It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have. James Baldwin


Bradsher, Keith. *High and Mighty: SUVs: the World's Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Got That Way.* Dangerous, gas-guzzling, polluting, egoistic vehicles—so why are they so popular and so destructive? Bradsher tells all and automakers apparently can't stand it.


Hedges, Christopher. *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning.* New York: Public Affairs, 2002. The NY Times war correspondent has seen it firsthand and explodes the “myth of war” in our times.


Korten, David C. *When Corporations Rule the World.* West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1995. A primer on why all those young people are out in force against the World Bank, the IMF and international corporate globalization.


McChesney, Robert W. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communications Policy in Dubious Times.* The subject is the takeover by corporations of the media of the US and the resulting loss of a diverse press. The FCC, under Michael Powell, is poised to make media even more concentrated, which is an urgent concern for librarians and the public, but currently off the radar screen.


Zinn, Howard. *A People’s History of the United States.* Its latest edition marks the sale of 1,000,000 copies. It’s U.S. history from the point of view of the “losers.”

If you don’t know history, it’s as if you were born yesterday. Howard Zinn
OPERATION – PATRIOTS ACT:
THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES
IN PROMOTING A FREE AND
INFORMED SOCIETY

by Michele Sipley

Why do we need to know all this stuff? My dad knows all this stuff, and he’s mad all the time. I’d rather be happy and ignorant,” a 9th grader stated during an English class in which the teacher was trying to initiate a discussion about the recent elections. As my husband (the English teacher) relayed the story to me later, he was dismayed to hear this girl’s reasoning for apathy yet comforted in a small way to hear that at least her father held some passion for current events.

Many of us take our democratic rights for granted, growing fat and lazy on our foreparents’ efforts. Some of us have been oppressed and disenfranchised for enough generations that democracy seems like a farce. A school of thought that has recently gained popularity is that, to be a patriot, we as citizens must accept our government representatives’ decisions without question, as all decisions are made for our own good. Based upon this country’s founding ideas, however, the most basic right and duty of a true patriot is to question each and every decision that our government makes. We must ensure that our representatives are upholding our rights and those of our counterparts. We must make sure that those we elect are sufficiently pursuing and protecting our interests. As citizens and patriots, we have a duty to remain informed on issues that affect us and our neighbors.

As librarians, we all have a mission to not only maintain, but promote a free and informed citizenry. While all libraries play a role in slowing the trend of ignorant bliss (and possibly reversing it), a large percentage of the U.S. adult population has already surrendered to a life of aggressive apathy. The most effective place for libraries to play this essential democratic role is in the schools. School libraries have been doing so for years, however, recent developments in technology and federal policy have created barriers to the process. School libraries must continue to work at this role, sometimes subversively. This type of “infiltration” into our youth takes an organized plan. Some call it curriculum – I call it Operation: Patriots Act.

Like tobacco companies, elementary school libraries can use the curiosity and naiveté of children to promote the agenda of a free and informed citizenry. Libraries nurture children’s curiosity and use it to instill a sense of “information entitlement.” Teen angst and anger against society and “the man” can be channeled into productive action in the high school library. Rather than continuing to be frustrated, students learn how information can empower them and how to use that power to protest government actions that they disagree with and to support political candidates who promote their agenda.

The School Library’s Role as Promoter of Information Literacy

The most basic, fundamental step in this mission is to imbue information literacy tools into these young people at an early age and then develop this literacy as they grow. Students who cannot think independently as children have much less chance of thinking independently as adults. Information literate students are able to recognize the need for information, identify and locate it, gain access to it, and evaluate the quality of the information. Students who can do this “feel good about themselves as learners, and they leave school feeling passionate about some content.” (Hancock, 1993).

In many schools, students are guided to think in pre-formed molds that the school system prepares (take standardized tests, for example). Teaching students to take control of their own learning counteracts the information dependency created by traditional schooling (Hancock, 1993).

Covert Technique 1: Luring By Personal Interests

Students are constantly bombarded with information and may be resistant to the concept of self-initiated research. Carol Gordon (2002) performed a study of 9th graders to determine research perceptions. These students viewed research as “one of the trials and tribulations of going to school” and as a waste of time that could be spent learning other things. Librarians are more productive in these attempts when they lure young people into information seeking activities by linking the activities with the students’ personal interests. As Gordon (2002) states:

Research is not collecting information and rearranging facts. It is not a
linear process of steps or a recipe that dictates what happens next. It is not a neat, grammatically correct paper. It is not an experiment or survey. Research is methodical inquiry driven by curiosity. It is a question, problem, or hypothesis. The child who asks why the sky is blue may be closer to the essence of research than the high school student who looks up gun control and writes a paper that summarizes various points of view about the topic.

Example: Q&A Time for Children.

Small children often have endless questions, for which parents and teachers may not have readily-available answers. “How do zebras get their stripes?” “Where do bugs go in the winter?” This myriad of questions shows a curiosity in children that should not be smothered. School and public librarians might consider providing “Question Night” or “Question Hour” to help parents and children learn together where to look for such information. Instead of simply having children come in and explore in a general manner, “Question Nights” encourage children to come in who have specific questions they’d like answered. Both parents and students learn to search for the information either in library databases, online, or on specially prepared “question websites” containing information on the most frequently asked questions developed by the library. For children too young to read, picture-based websites could be helpful.

Example: Controversial Debates

“The essence of a healthy democracy is open dialogue about issues of public concern. An integral part of the training of young citizens, therefore, includes the discussion of controversial social, political, and economic policies.” (Harwood & Hahn). As children become older, cliques and stereotypes begin to develop along with a student’s sense of self. As students become more interested in social issues, school libraries can use the opportunity to teach students how to grapple with these issues and to “deliberate with other citizens about the nature of public good and how to achieve it.” (Harwood and Hahn, 1990).

Some school libraries have created an effective teaching tool by working with social studies classes to hold controversial debates, which allow students to compare views on controversial issues. Students research their points of view and cite references during their debate. The environment must be one of intellectual safety – free from retribution for unpopular ideas. Issues may be as varied as “Eminem is anti-female and should be banned” to “Immigration laws in California should be changed so my family can stay here.” Even if the debate topics chosen by students seem trivial, their debate preparation involves material relevant to the student and helps a student learn the research and information interpretation process. It basically takes “Question Night” to a new level, having the student interpret the information that she/he retrieves and use it for the benefit of winning an argument. In addition, the debate itself opens the student to opposing points of view and help a student develop listening skills. The student must listen to the opposing student’s point and think quickly to counter the point. (Harwood & Hahn, 1990).

Covert Technique #2 – Empowerment Through Information Retrieval Tools and Evaluation

One definition of “frustration” is having an information need and not being able to fill it. The first step in promoting an informed citizenry in the school is peaking interest in government and current events. If people have no tools to retrieve information on these topics, either the frustration pushes them right back into apathy, or they accept the easiest-retrieved information, which is usually not the most accurate. Many students assume that slogging through research is much like chopping down a forest with a dull axe. School media specialists have the opportunity to teach these students that their information literacy skills will be their “power tools” to help them in their research. Our youth have a reputation of being raised sucking on the teat of the internet, and 64 percent of graduate students surveyed felt prepared to perform independent research, yet fewer than 1 percent of the same students could correctly name a meta-search engine, and only 29 percent could list two criteria for evaluating a website. (Gordon, 2002). These are graduate students – imagine the knowledge level of those with less education. This is obviously an area where school libraries need to push harder to reach more students more effectively.

Example: Bridging the Information Gap

Although school libraries and computer labs are a great place to level the playing field for information “haves” and “have-nots,” an inequality of access to school technology still exists, and we must be cognizant of that as librarians. Insufficient numbers of computers, a common problem for both primary and secondary school media centers, can lead to scheduling that limits the availability to certain types of students. “…at all school levels, the most exciting computer opportunities are disproportionately available to
students with the highest abilities; low achieving, high risk students, particularly in high school, are less likely to be in classes in which these opportunities occur.” (Neuman, 1991). These high-risk students are the most likely to become disenfranchised adults and the least likely to receive the computer-related information literacy skills to combat the trend. Knowing this helps the school media specialist create schedules that embrace these students and that leads to their “positive attitudes towards technology in the library so that under-served students can understand its relevance to them” (Neuman, 1991).

Example: Teaching Information Evaluation and Critical Thinking

Gordon’s (2002) study of 9th graders revealed that a number of them assumed that research would lead directly to an answer on a bookshelf rather than the material needed for them to create their own answer. School libraries teach students how to fish, yet they must also teach them the importance of comparing the quality of the fish caught with a pole to the ones skinned off the top with a net.

Ernest Boyer, former U.S. Education Commissioner, points out that “Our children must learn how to …distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage. The sheer mass of information and variety of media formats challenges every learner to filter, interpret, accept and/or discard media messages” (Considine, 1994). Learning analytic skills skill early establishes a strong foundation for adulthood, where critical analysis is imperative to navigate through the “spin” of most news stories in our current political environment. As Considine (1994) also states,

If schools truly wish to foster responsible citizenship, curricula must address more than...who won an election. We must also direct children’s attention to how elections are won. To study the political process without also studying the role of advertising and the news is to ignore the context in which electronic information both covers and creates candidates and public policy.

School librarians must foster a sense of healthy skepticism within our students regarding the sources of their material and provide learning opportunities to reinforce the knowledge that not everything that they read/see/listen to is true.

Example: Collection, Censorship, and Curriculum

School libraries must sometimes be more restrictive in their selection process than their public library counterparts, however, “any lesser goal than assisting in the development of the critical faculties of students puts the school library at risk of becoming marginal, irrelevant, ignored, and devalued.” (Schrader, 1996). To avoid defending controversial books to parents or school boards, many frightened school media specialists have begun self-censoring. Some have begun limiting young students to read only from the “easy” section and requiring written parental permission before any aged child may read books such as Judy Blume’s Forever, or Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. While selecting new books for the school collection, they attempt to “choose safe books. These practices, however, aren’t eliminating the problem; they are amplifying the issue.” (Scales, 2000).

Library’s Role as Protector of Students’ Intellectual Freedom and Privacy

Promoting an informed citizenry also means protecting the citizen’s intellectual freedom and privacy. Maintaining intellectual freedom for students is a difficult task for school media specialists. They act in loco parentis and therefore must keep parents’ wishes in mind, mainly involving the protection of our students from information seen as inappropriate for them. Also, because our schools receive support from our parents as taxpayers and in many other ways, schools certainly want to maintain a positive relationship with them. However, these children are students, first-and-foremost, and “Our primary community – youth – has no voice. These children are non-voting, and they do not have a voice unless we as their advocates allow them one.” (Sutton, 1994). Keeping that in mind, it is difficult, but imperative, to promote the concept of intellectual freedom and First Amendment rights to our students, rather than limit their access to certain books and online materials (Scales, 2000) even though in many ways these students are not yet allowed to exercise these rights themselves.

The development of critical viewing, thinking, and listening skills offers children greater protection and independence than do well-meaning attempts to control the content of music, movies, or television, which inevitably clash with First Amendment rights. When young people can recognize a stereotype, detect bias in news reporting, and understand how images can be offensive and demeaning to minorities, they are less likely to accept the value systems portrayed in media representations. (Considine, 1994).

Page 56 Progressive Librarian #22

Page 57
In many cases, simply having a school board-approved collection policy in place may help prevent such a desperate need for self-censorship. Such policies may not prevent material from being challenged; however, a national questionnaire sent to school librarians shows that a policy that is effective in dealing with complaints and that is followed leads to challenged material being retained. (Hopkins, 1996).

Scales also mentions that the school media specialist should not only avoid self-censorship whenever possible but “must realize that our task is much broader than raising public consciousness for First Amendment rights through Banned Book Week exhibits.” Working alongside social studies teachers, the school media specialist incorporates Intellectual Freedom lessons into the curriculum to reinforce that First Amendment rights extend to many areas of a student’s life.

To combat stereotypes and encourage independent thinking, the school librarian should ensure that the school materials collection be broad enough to reflect perspectives other than just the mainstream. “One would prefer to have citizenry, whether in the voting booth, in the jury box, on the school board, or next door, whose ideas about Native Americans had not been exclusively formed through coloring cut-outs of Pilgrims and Indians or producing ice cream container Kachinas and brown paper bag headdresses.” (Taylor and Patterson, 2000). Therefore, rather than worry about too much information being available to our students, we should instead concern ourselves with the lack of such information and with the students “who have access to only one view of the world...with no knowledge of choice (or)...awareness of diversity.” (Schrader, 1999).

**Example: Filtering Software versus Critical Searching**

Assuming that the Supreme Court maintains that CIPA is unconstitutional, school media specialists may be faced with the difficult decision of keeping filtering software versus asking school librarians to monitor internet usage. Parents’ wishes will be a major influence in such a decision, but schools would be doing students a disservice by not informing all those interested in the pros and cons of using filtering software.

The most obvious problem with filtering software is its inaccuracy. “Internet blocking software is like performing brain surgery with a chainsaw...Society is intrinsically complex, and complex concepts do not fit into simple compartments. The word, phrase, and site identification strategies of the blocking products pigeonhole ideas and impose ideological agendas” (Schrader, 1999). Recent studies found that widely used filtering software blocked sites such as the Richard “Dick” Armey official site. (“Internet Filtering,” 2002). In addition, Schrader (1999) also points out that many students who are avid readers usually read above their publisher-assigned reading level, yet rating software uses these levels as law for all children, regardless of maturity level.

More importantly, filtering software removes vital decision-making opportunities from students. By making the decisions for them, filtering software prohibits students from learning to make judgments and decisions using their own moral criteria. Teachers of information literacy therefore miss a real and necessary opportunity to “facilitate and promote critical thinking in action. They (filtering software) disempower everyone.” (Schrader, 1999). Librarians may need additional resources to pursue this avenue if they remove filters, but they would certainly be able to explore internet usage issues with students this way. Using questions such as “What do you do when coming across a website that makes you feel uncomfortable or mad?” can help students navigate through non-censored materials themselves. These people will be dealing with the same issues later – why not arm them with the necessary tools now, with supervision?

**Library’s Role as a Bridge Between School and “Real Life”**

Many students have a “school life” and a “life,” and they keep the two worlds separate. In order for students to become truly informed, they must learn to bring their social and political interests into the library, and to use their information literacy skills to critically analyze information bombarded at them in everyday situations.

**Example: Transitioning Techniques**

Much of what students are taught in school may never make the transition into their adult lives. If students, especially disenfranchised ones, do not see the information that they learn as useful in daily life, then they simply will not retain it. Fortunately, “The library serves the whole child, not just in his school capacity.” They can “be recognized for all of their interests and all of their pleasures – everything they want to know about...” (Sutton, 1994). One of the most effective tools school librarians can use is to determine how these children fit into their schools and their community. Keeping track of each child may not be within reach, but a school librarian...
who knows her school community and culture has a stronger background to help determine how to work with students. In addition, many schools librarians are able to connect the students' interests with outside organizations or museums that help strengthen that in-school/out-of-school tie.

Example: Channeling Frustration & Anger into Action

A free and informed citizenry should also feel capable of expressing their points of view and acting to affect their government. School librarians, in combination with social studies teachers, are in a position to teach students how to channel their frustration with their parents, their peers, society, or their government into action — most importantly, POSITIVE action. There are many questions that can be posed to students: Slaves were forbidden from learning to read for a reason...what would that be? Why would being able to read make such a difference in the attitude of those disenfranchised? How do adults go about making changes in their country? How can voting, petitions, letters to the editor help? Think about your neighborhood — if you all agreed on an issue or political candidate, and you all voted on this issue or for this candidate in an election, wouldn’t your hundreds of votes make a difference? How could you get the word out to others who may not be familiar with this particular issue or candidate?

Conclusion

School media specialists have the opportunity to teach our youth not only that they are entitled to information but what to do with the information once they retrieve it. Teaching how information can be interpreted and analyzed, how to explore different points of view to see the "whole picture," and how to use this information to benefit ourselves and our country is essential to developing a free and informed society of patriots. Not until our students feel a sense of entitlement to this information will they begin to recognize when these entitled freedoms are being taken away.

Works Cited


FROM THE ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

EXPANDING OUR WORK WITH PRISONERS

by Lynn Andersen

Over the last three years, the Alternatives Library Books in Prison project has focused on residents at one of the juvenile correction facilities in the Ithaca area. In fact, the cover of the last issue of the Progressive Librarian was done by Marc Anthony S., one of the young men who contributed to our first poetry book, Inside Coming Out.

As I write this article, we are finishing a second book of poetry written during weekly sessions with the residents of MacCormick Secure Center. This latest edition has created a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm because of our inclusion of a CD of original music, written and performed by some of the residents. The music was recorded on computer by Shaun Fyffe, one of our student staff. Being a rapper himself, Shaun was able to connect via the internet with his musician friends who kindly donated samples—the music background for rap—to our project. Once we do the final layout for the book and design the packaging, we’ll be ready for the press. The working title of the new book is Another Sad Inning: Incarcerated Youth Reveal their Trials, Tribulations and Loves. I have been working with many of the same young men for the last two years and am happy to say that, as of this week, all but two have been released and are either home or in school.

A little over a year ago, we began working with the local Books Thru Bars group, volunteers who send books to prisoners in New York State. The group facilitator, Jurden Alexander, mentioned that he continually receives a number of letters from prisoners out-of-state and wondered if we would be interested in receiving and responding to them. Of course, we said yes.

The letters started coming in. At first we received just a few each week. Gary Fine, Assistant Director of the Alternatives Library, began answering the letters and sending out boxes of books. By the end of 6 months, we were getting a dozen letters a week, and now the number has almost doubled. Many of the prisoners write to the library on a regular basis and share their stories and thoughts regarding their lives and many other issues. The letters are very moving and have inspired us to do something that would enable these prisoners to be heard. We decided to send a form to all the regular writers seeking permission for the library to publish their letters, and we have gotten the go-ahead from most of the prisoners who write to us. Over the next few months we will be organizing the letters and starting the preparation for our first prison letters publication. The following two pieces are excerpted from two letters:

You asked me what my plans were if I get out . . . I’m never getting out. I’m on death row. I will most likely be executed next year . . .

I’m on death row for killing a kid because he stole some drugs that didn’t belong to me but that I was responsible for. That’s why I am not putting up a defense. What for? What possible excuse could there be that would condone what I did? That I was high on drugs? That I was scared? Nobody forced me to get high or do drugs. Nobody forced me to be a drug courier. I made the choice, even knowing how violent I become on drugs. Anyway, I don’t mean to sound angry or come on too strong. Everyone here keeps telling me I should fight it.

What is my life like in here? Very, very, boring and monotonous. My cell is big by normal prison standards I guess. Just picture a bathroom with a bathtub, toilet, sink. I’m not a good drawer but I think you can see what I mean. It’s all metal and concrete. The door is solid still [steel] with two small slots for windows with reinforced steel mesh. I’m allowed out of my cell for one hour of recreation per day but I don’t usually go. There’s nothing to do in the day room except walk around in circles. There’s no television. They let us buy radios. Small AM/FM clock radios. There is a unit library here but it stays closed most of the time (for us anyway), and now they’re only letting us check out one book per week. Unless a person has a lot of money or people out in the world to help out, a lot of guys rely on organizations like yours for their reading materials.

from P. A. Austin, Polunsky Prison, Livingston, TX

You would think, it being the 21st century, we would be beyond race. Since we are all part of the same human race, this should be where we find our pride. Admittedly there is often little to be proud of in our common race. We must all admit to some small part in the failure to produce a generation capable of transcending skin color.

from an article by D. H. Harris, Huntsville, TX
The letters have inspired Gary and me to expand the library’s Books in Prison program to include inmates like the two above who are doing life sentences or are on death row. We are also trying to identify groups who want to correspond with prisoners. At the beginning of the new project, Gary was writing personal letters to the prisoners, but we are now overwhelmed and can barely keep up with reading all the correspondence.

We are excited about the new book possibility. Every day is a delicate balance between keeping the library vital and active in providing an alternative to corporate news and keeping the prison projects going. But every jam-packed minute is more than worth the effort when we read and hear from patrons and prisoners who appreciate what we are trying to do.

DOCUMENTS

HISTORICAL ACCURACY AND THE WEB: A PLG-NET EXCHANGE

The following documents are the primary texts of an exchange on the PLG-net list concerning a perhaps-too-timely quote from Herman Goering on the nature of public/political persuasion and war—a topic with which many of us are engaged at present. It took place primarily between April 7th and April 9th, 2003. In all, there are nine parts to this “conversation”—which has been only lightly edited for flow, misspelling, taking out the notations peculiar to e-mails (like the address string, an occasional representation of a frowning face, etc.), and the lengthy repeating of attached messages when an item is being replied to. Thanks must go to Kathleen de la Peña McCook who wrote urging us to publish the exchange on the quote and Snopes, etc. in Progressive Librarian because she thought “it captures with clarity a critical point” for her M.L.S. students.

Introduction and editing by John Buschman

I. From: Bill Shakalis
   Subject: Quote sent around the High School List

Here’s a great quote sent to a Boston area h.s. peace list. Anyone got a Ready Reference file on Herman Goering? Really: it would be best to have this quote authenticated.

Attached message:

I found a great quote and I made it into a flyer and am putting it in my school. I thought others might want to do the same:

“Of course the people don’t want war. But after all, it’s the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it’s always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it’s a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack
of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger." – Hermann Goering, Nazi Minister of Propaganda

II. From: Debbie Richards  
Subject: Re: Quote sent around the High School List

This quote/image (the text on the jpg I just sent) is making the rounds in Boston today (I'm in Cambridge). If anyone can find the citation please do post it. Thanks.

III. From: Frederick W. Stoss  
Subject: Re: Quote sent around the High School List

The Urban Legends site, Snopes, provides the following explanation of this True quote, with its attribution to the Post-WW II War Crime Trials at Nuremburg:

http://www.snopes.com/quotes/goering.htm

There is a VERY interesting history of this that it was updated last October (2002) with an original 1947 source of the text.

IV. Related posting to Intellectual Freedom Action News, forwarded to PLG-net:  
From: Program Officer/Communications  
American Library Association, Office for Intellectual Freedom


Status: True

[Editor's note: At this point, a portion of the exchange focused on the Snopes.com website, reiterating that the Goering quote was not an urban legend, and defending the site as an authority on urban legends: "there may be problems with the [Goering] article, [but] it clearly says that this is a case of a genuine quote, and explains the context in which it was made."]

V. From: Mark Rosenzweig  
Subject: Re: Quote sent around the High School List

Thanks to Debbie for finding the quote with the jpg. There is a major difference between this version and the one we received as making the rounds of school lists and flyers. First of all, the quote that was sent to us is incorrect in its attribution to Goering as "Minister of Propaganda." That was not one of his many portfolios. That notable role was held by Josef Goebbels, a very different, sinister and powerful figure in his own right in the leadership of the Nazi Party. Perhaps this has already been pointed out, but I haven't seen it.

So the present quote carries new fundamental misinformation in its very description of the alleged source, a basic element of the attribution in this case and of its assumed significance. Instantly that calls into question the accuracy of the quote that I believe would have been apparent to most people who had read any book about the Third Reich, the Nazis, the Second World War in Europe, or, for that matter, 20th century European history, not so long ago.

As Fred Stoss correctly points out, the quote has only indirectly been attributed to Goering, in the first place, based on a private conversation (eventually written up) by an individual, sympathetic interlocutor, not while Goering was in power, but while Goering was on trial for war crimes in Nuremberg and in prison there after the war, said, in context, supposedly by way of a rationalization of his alleged lack of direct responsibility for the crimes of which he and the rest were accused. It was not said in his strutting role as second in command to Hitler, as Minister of anything, but as a war crimes prisoner. In the original form dug up by Debbie (as opposed to the original item sent), at least the quote's attribution has Goering correctly identified and not called the "Minister of Propaganda," simply. Perhaps, because that seems to "make sense" and, strengthens the irony a bit. And besides...what's the difference?

Since we have the link to the story of the quote's origin, my only other concern here is that it is somehow trivializing to allow to go unchallenged, as well, naming something like this an "urban legend" — as does the Snopes.com web page. That term has been distorted far beyond its reasonable use, over and over. The popular widespread misuse of the term by reference librarians in the US (urban and otherwise) is highly dubious. It is not a "legend," it is not "urban." In the form we received it on the librarian
lists, is an error (and not a trivial one), and passing it on contributes to ignorance, confusion, the acceptance of collective mental lassitude and the erosion of historical memory. Darkly, I consider it a manifestation of the American “Whatever!” syndrome, where if it is “in the ballpark” it is good enough, even if the ballpark is in the wrong city, at the wrong time, with different teams playing.

What's the big deal? How can we be trusted to authoritatively expose the lies of the US government about what's going on, say, in Iraq, when, in the course of our own enthusiasm for signs of opposition, we are not concerned with an obvious historical error in a supposedly clever historical analogy. To my mind, even among librarians, intellectual vigilance and scrupulousness is an important element of developing popular confidence in the anti-war position as something other than soft-headed and deluded, as it is painted often by its opponents. I would be glad to think that I wasn't the first or only one to express concern over this matter.

VI. From: Frederick W Stoss

Mark (and others),

You make a very good observation about the context of this as an Urban Legend. When I first saw the “hit” on the Snopes.com page, I almost immediately assumed the quote was false, as I have seen extremely few “True” stories on this or other similar attempters-at-dispelling-the-big-lies-we're-led-to-believe-are-true. I would therefore assume some larger volumes to eventually appear in the future as the lies of the administrations of recent decades will (eventually) be laid bare for all to see and analyze (e.g., the Viet Cong sunk our boats, guns-for-oil was fun, I did not have sex with that woman). It is another quirk of the times that there are those in Europe making the analogy between the current Iraq-thing with events in Europe prior to the start of WW II, except Bush is the analog to Hitler.

VII. From: Mark Rosenzweig
Subject: Re: Quote sent around the High School List

No blame is intended. Here are my three points, the last re: “urban legends” is the only one, which, I would think, is controversial and possibly more broadly interesting.

1. The statement, if indeed it was made by Goering in those words, or made at all, is only known to us by its appearing as a reconstruction by a single witness speaking with H.G. in unusual circumstances (a prison cell conversation) and written down as a “quote” much later.

1.1 It is, therefore, unsubstantiated, and, while it has, with interpretation, the earmarks of a rationalization of Goering’s in prison, it can hardly be used with authority to represent a direct statement of the views of Goering in his own words as might a letter, a public statement, or a stenographic record, or a private diary, or a public speech, or a press interview, or a wire recording or a sound film.

1.2 Putting it back in this context is not merely a pedantic nicety, but reveals that if such a statement were made directly by Goering in these or other words, it would have most likely been to try to show how his view was very much consonant with a commonplace view of high military officers and theorists of his time (and, we might add, thereafter as well). The statement is remarkably un-Goering-esque.

1.3 The original quote, therefore, should be considered “anecdotal,” attributed to its actual source, the fellow who actually wrote these words and claimed they were Goering’s, and furthermore they should be cited as “attributed to Goering” (i.e. as remarks in conversation with an official observer while in prison) or cited as coming from the book which was published much later in which these remarks are noted.

2. The problem is compounded. Goering did not say these words, if he said them at all, as “Minister of Propaganda”, as is asserted in one of the Items being circulated and, in fact, his position in the Nazi regime is being confused consequentially with Goebbels, himself a major figure in the Nazi leadership, who was, in fact always its, Minister of Propaganda.

3. What actually puzzles me most is this. How did this quote come to be adjudicated in terms of “urban folklore”? That is not the usual bar before which such a matter is validated. Who claimed it was so-called “urban folklore” in the first place?

3.1 Isn't it implicitly an odd question “Is this true or is it ‘urban folklore’?” as if that is an exhaustive distinction? If it is not refuted as urban folklore by Snopes.com would it likely be true? The truth of a proposition “This is a quote of Herman Goering” ought not be decisively determined in
a framework of “urban folklore, true” versus “urban folklore, false.”

3.2 I know that it is a widely held view among US reference librarians that any story which is spread about which is not true, whether it is about a computer virus or a concentration camp, can be called “urban folklore.” I think that is a complete distortion of the original meaning of the term, which, if it had any distinct usefulness and clear meaning, is now transmuting through its misuse into something entirely different.

3.3 “Check Snopes.” The usefulness of Snopes.com on the web may in fact itself be the ultimate “urban legend” and it is unfortunate from a social science point of view that the character of legends is being confused with lies and errors and misconceptions and misquotations. This is not only not useful, it is intellectually and culturally destructive.

VIII. From: John Buschman
Subject: Quote and getting Goeringed

I think Mark’s points are well taken, and I would like to supplement them with two things. First, Neil Postman has long argued that television (and by extension, I would argue that this applies almost equally to the web) is most dangerous not when it entertains, but when it pretends to educate. The Snopes.com site was most useful in ferreting out my mistake on the National Public Radio hoax (“On NPR’s Morning Edition last week, Nina Totenberg said that if the Supreme Court supports Congress, it is in effect the end of the National Public Radio {NPR}, NEA & the Public Broadcasting System {PBS}. PBS, NPR and the arts are facing major cutbacks in funding...”) — and my willingness to believe the story. (Debbie Richards wrote that “This is a very old urban legend from 1998. You can read about it at http://www.snopes.com Urban Legends Reference Pages.”) Amusing? Yes. Was my being corrected by Snopes.com mildly informative and useful? Sort of. Mark’s points about the real nature of the Goering “quote,” its dubious non-debunking on the web, its mistaken attribution of the title of Goering (if indeed it is a quote), and its context as a “real” fact within the genre of urban legends are all correct, and make Postman thesis very clearly and point by point. Librarianship did not become debased by radio, television, or film — and we should not allow the web to do so either (and yes, those media are the correct grouping in which to lump the web). I’ve long argued that, as a profession, we are mysteriously naive and willing to put an incredible amount of faith in what is actually a rather fragile and evolving and expensive technical system. I’ve long argued that, if we really want to make that technology useful, we should evaluate it as critically as we have expensive print resources and the balance of collections. On the whole, across the profession, we don’t.

Second, I hear from reference librarians every day (and I experience it myself): library users and students simply turn away from any question that requires a bit of thought, effort, research, and thinking. Literally, if they can’t find it on the web, then it is a question not worth investigating. Our little Goering foray and the real situation and history behind it are highly instructive. Without real library values, our Goering quoted would have been “verified” as “fact” by Snopes.com. And that would have been that. Standing on form and defending the web in the face of what Mark laid out is, I hate to say it, anti-intellectual. If we are to have any real role that is worth the while (and yes, actually progressive), we may have to go back to something like the old scolding role we’ve run away from. Yes, we just might not be able to be so hip and cool and be progressive: knowing real things takes a bit more work and thought than surfing the web, and if we don’t actually say that and reinforce it in our libraries, we aid and abet shallow postmodern media/advertising culture — and cut more away from what is left of democracy. Thanks to Mark for pointing out that the actual circumstances of the Goering quote — however inconvenient — are still important.

IX. From: Fiona Bradley
Subject: Re: Quote and getting Goeringed

John (and others),

One of the problems with the net is the lack of tools to evaluate what is found there. There’s only a very small body of literature devoted to evaluation based on author, date, etc., etc. While I love the Internet because anyone can be on it, if only there was some way of making everyone put in the date when they write a page at the very least. But there’s no stopping a bull that has escaped the gates, and after-the-fact measures like XML are not going to change the way people do their websites.

Some writers have studied the way people use the Internet and found that people use a completely different information seeking behaviour than they would use if they were looking up a book. The question is of course, why this is so. I wonder if there was a similar change in searching strategy between when people used card catalogues and OPACs. You know what I
think one of the problems is? When using a card catalogue you really had
to think about what terms you were going to use. Now with OPACs and
search engines, you’re bound to turn up something on a search no matter
what word you use. And once again we march into the land of controlled
indexing and the debate over whether terms should be derived from set lists
(like LCSH) or from the item itself. So maybe someone should devise a
search engine that takes the keywords on webpages and categorises them
according to standard subjects (with greater flexibility than the current
subject headings allow of course) to force a more structured searching
approach?

"Of course the people don’t want war... That is understood... Voice or no voice, the
people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to
do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism
and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country."

Hermann Goering
Adolf Hitler’s Deputy Chief and Luftwaffe
Commander, at the Nuremberg trials, 1946

The silent agitator-like sticker reproduced above was found on a lamppost on
Broadway and 114th Street in New York City on October 18 or 19, 2002. The
quote attributed to Hermann Goering is actually from Gustave Gilbert, a psychol­
ogist who visited Goering in his prison cell during the Nurenberg Trials. After
his visits, Gilbert would record these conversations, which he eventually pub­
Rosenzweig provides the following as a correct citation for the quote:


POETRY MATTERS!
On the Media Persecution of Amiri Baraka

Poetry is dangerous. What makes Amiri Baraka’s “Somebody Blew
Up America” so provocative is that the poem traces a trajectory of
human atrocity and culpability without accepting the premise (so widely
held in the U.S. after September 11, 2001) that the lives of certain sets
of victims are intrinsically more valuable than others. In doing so,
Baraka interrogates the arrogant, naive, and dangerously reductive
rationales frequently used to explain and promote the perpetual U.S.
War Against Terrorism.

Little wonder, then, that Baraka was singled out for hysterical
censure last fall by the corporate news media’s in-house bullies and
ideological pitbulls, the vast majority of whom rarely discuss poetry on
their evening cable television news programs.

Particularly disturbing about the Baraka affair was the conspicuous silence of those who are normally quick to defend poetry and
intellectual freedom. The cancellation of the White House’s Poetry and
the American Voice symposium in February – First Lady Laura Bush’s
pre-emptive attack on dissent – triggered far-flung antiwar poetry
actions that attracted some news coverage. Why, then, was there almost
never a mention of those who defended Baraka for the same reasons of
civil liberty that they backed poets writing and reading against the
invasion of Iraq? Neither the Pen Club nor the National Writers’ Union,
for example, uttered a word in Baraka’s support.

The “Poetry Matters!” declaration (reprinted here) originally ap­
peared on the Surrealist Movement’s website (and was posted on such
websites as the Library Juice free speech forum, the Black World and
Autonomedia websites, and the anti-racist/anti-fascist One People’s
Project. Alas, internet searches show that bigoted, reactionary screds
charging Baraka with “hate
speech II are far more numerous.

In the new millennium, free speech for poets is more precarious
than ever.

introduction for PL by Don LaCoss

POETRY MATTERS!

Poetry Festivals don’t usually trigger hate campaigns or Red Scares, but this
year’s Geraldine Dodge Poetry Festival at Waterloo Village in Stanhope,
New Jersey, proved to be different. There, on September 19th, Amiri Baraka
read his poem “Somebody Blew Up America.” The applause was thunder-
ous, but some people apparently didn’t like it, for almost immediately the poet was singled out for an incredible barrage of vilification by Murdoch’s Fox News, the New York Times, the National Review, and scores—by now probably many hundreds—of bigoted, neoconservative, white-supremacist talk-shows and periodicals. Leading the assault on the poet is the so-called Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a powerful right-wing political organization notorious for its virulent opposition to Affirmative Action and for its routine use of character assassination against its critics.

It so happens that Baraka wrote “Somebody Blew Up America” in September/October 2001, in the weeks following the tragedy known to all as “9-11.” The 226-line poem was promptly posted on the Internet, copied onto many websites, and further publicized by the poet at numerous well-attended readings all over the U.S. and in many other countries. It quickly became one of the most widely circulated of his works. No attempt was made to conceal the fact that the poem was, in Baraka’s own words, “an attack on Imperialism, National Oppression, Monopoly Capitalism, Racism, Anti-Semitism,” and that it was meant to “probe and disturb.” Not until the Dodge Poetry Festival, however, did anyone object to it.

What provoked the sudden media war on Amiri Baraka in September 2002? Assuredly it was not merely a difference of opinion regarding the art of poetry. In truth, despite the hue and cry, the poem itself is not the central issue here. In any event, the principal charge alleged against the poem (that it is “anti-Semitic”) cannot withstand a moment’s critical examination. Indeed, with its salute to the memory of such revered Jewish revolutionists as Rosa Luxemburg, and the questions it raises about U.S. capitalism’s little-known complicity in the Holocaust, Baraka’s poem is explicitly against anti-Semitism and all racism. If the ADL’s hollow charge, repeated ad nauseam by the media, had even the slightest substance, how are we to account for the fact that it was completely unnoticed by the hundreds of thousands who had read or heard the poem during the preceding year? (The ADL, of course, construes any and all criticism of the Israeli government—even the merest mention of its long support of South African Apartheid, for example—as “anti-Semitic.”)

No less spurious is the ADL’s puerile argument that Baraka’s poem is helping to foment “anti-American xenophobia,” but this charge—bristling with sinister insinuations—does bring us closer to the real issues at stake in the media “police action” against the poet. For what the ADL, neoconservatives and repentant ex-New-Leftists really hate about Baraka is that he is a sharp critic of this country’s anti-democratic institutions, and an activist who has time and again protested the U.S. government’s repressive role in foreign and domestic affairs. Worse yet, from the point of view of the white ruling class and the politicians who do its bidding, Baraka is also an outspoken revolutionary.

Clearly, then, the real target of the ADL’s ongoing defamation of the author of “Somebody Blew Up America” is not that particular poem, or any other poem, but the poet himself, his revolutionary courage and audacity, and above all his ability to articulate the anxieties and yearnings of those “furthest down” in humankind’s long hard struggle against inequality and tyranny.

The question, “Why did the assault on the poet start as late as September 2002?” is easily answered: Because in August, a few weeks before the Dodge Poetry Festival, Amiri Baraka became the poet laureate of the State of New Jersey. An honorary title with a small stipend, this was far from a position of power, but for the state’s corrupt “business-as-usual” Establishment, it was evidently way too much.

And so Baraka’s poem—or rather, the distorted, out-of-context fragments quoted by his critics in the press and on TV—was made a pretext for racial and political persecution by that arch-enemy of all poetry, solidarity, and freedom: the white power structure.

The ADL and other bigots are demanding that Baraka be removed as poet laureate. Cravenly submitting to white-supremacist pressure-groups, New Jersey Governor James E. McGreevey has formally asked the poet not only to resign as laureate, but also to apologize for his poem! Baraka has refused.

In the current U.S. political climate: a climate of domination, fear, and insipid conformism; increasing government surveillance and curtailing of civil rights and liberties; persecution of immigrants, radicals, and organized labor; massive militarization and flag-waving war hysteria, all promoted by an unelected President and a billionaire-owned media—the assault on Amiri Baraka is a matter of the greatest concern to all who care about human freedom, the right to dream, and the right to speak out.

This attack on a poet is an attack on all poets, all poetry, and all free speech. The persecution of Baraka is about stifling poetry, suppressing criticism,
silencing voices of dissent. It is about censorship and coercion; the imposition of conformity and misery; the denial of freedom.

Unalterably opposed to all forms of bigotry, we say:
Hand off Amiri Baraka!
Long live the unfettered imagination!
An injury to one is an injury to all!

For the Surrealist Movement in the United States:

The following individuals — poets, writers, artists, musicians, teachers, editors, and activists — have expressed their solidarity with the foregoing statement, and asked to have their signatures added to it: Ernest Allen, Ron Allen, Miekal And, Derek Bell, Max blechman, Stephanie Book, Doreen C. Bowens, Dana Boyer, John Bracey, Lisa Brock (School of the Art Institute, Chicago), Dennis Brutus, Paul Buhle, Ed Bullins, Vinie Burrows (Permanent UN rep for Women's Int'l Democratic Federation), Carolyn A. Butts (African Voices Magazine), Alexander Cockburn, Carlos Cortez Koyukukatli, Polly A. Connelly (organizer, United Auto Workers, ret.), Maria Damon (University of Minnesota), Susan G. Davis, Dave Dellinger, Diane di Prima, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Howard Dyckoff, Patricia Eakins (ed., Frigate: The Transverse Review of Books), Katie Eppich, Martin Espada, Torvald Faegre, DuEwa M. Frazier (CEO, Lit Noire Publishing), Chris Funkhouser, Nicole Henares Garland, John Higginson, Steve Garabedian, Regie Gibson, Stephanie Gilman, Maurice Greenia, Jr., Michael Gregory, Tyree Guyton, Mary Ann Hansen, Elaine Harger (Progressive Librarian), James V. Hatch, Patrick Herron, Herbert Hill, Amy Huftnagle, Noel Ignatiev, Michael James (Heartland Journal), Joseph Jarman, Carolyn Karcher, Marie Kazalia, Joel Kovel, Kari Lydersen, Harry Magdoff (co-editor, Monthly Review), Clive Matson, Deborah Meadows (Calif. Polytechnic State U., Pomona), David Meltzer, Naeema Muhammad (Black Workers for Justice, NC), Saladin Muhammad (Black Workers for Justice, NC), Sheila Nopper, Mark Nowak (ed., XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics), Rob O'Brien (ed., ache magazine), Alix Olson, Jim O'Neal (founder ed., Living Blues), Simon J. Ortiz, Martin Paddio, Robert Penny (founder, Kuntu Writers' Workshop, Pittsburgh), Eric Perkins, Elizabeth Petersen, Utah Phillips, Peter Rachleff, Margaret Randall, Adrienne Rich, Henry Rosemont, Jr., JoAnn Rosemont, Mark Rosenweig (Councilor at Large, American Library Association), John Ross, Ron Sakolsky, Sonia Sanchez, David Sands, Archie Shepp, John J. Simon, John Sinclair, James Smethurst, Gary Snyder, John Starrs, Dan Stern, Nelson Stevens, John Stevenson, William Strickland, Rodrigo Toscano, Askia Touré, Tony Menelik Van Der Meer, Joseph Verilli, Lise Vogel (Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ), Darryl Lorenzo Wellington, Christopher Winks.

BOOK REVIEWS


Review & commentary by Lincoln Cushing

Poking a Hornet's Nest

Nicholson Baker's Double Fold, published in 2001, was a provocative analysis of how certain library policies and practices had profoundly negative consequences on public access to the content of historical documents in print. The book unleashed a firestorm within the library and archive community. Although a few librarians defended Baker's premises and criticisms, the majority were angry at what was perceived as an unwarranted and ill-informed attack on the profession. Numerous articles, letters, and book reviews were devoted to critiquing the book and denouncing the author. Vandals is the first book devoted entirely to extending this defense of librarianship.

The nature of the library community's response to Double Fold has been remarkable, and I would suggest that much could be learned about the profession by analyzing these reviews. Before Richard Cox's book came along, I noticed that virtually all other articles and reviews boiled down to the following commonalities:

- Hostility towards anyone making criticisms of the profession.
- Hostility towards Mr. Baker as an outsider.
- A begrudging acknowledgement that many of the points Mr. Baker makes are true, or at least worth consideration.
- The viewpoint that Mr. Baker's suggestions, though well-intentioned, are simply impractical.

Unfortunately, despite its length, Vandals proves to be no different. Like other critics within the profession, the argumentative escalation begins with the title. Barbara Quint's scathing review in June 2001 Searcher was "Don't Burn Books! Burn Librarians!" and Cox's provocative title comes from a review of Double Fold, not from anything actually written or said by Baker.
Cox’s Main Criticisms

A professional archivist, Mr. Cox first goes to certain lengths to explain how *Double Fold* impacts his particular profession. Although he correctly castigates Baker for sloppiness in conflating the two fields in *Double Fold* (p. 21), the unfortunate awkward stylistic consequence in *Vandals* is that throughout the book almost every instance of title or institution is described as “librarians and archivists” and “libraries and archives.”

Mr. Cox’s main thesis is that Nicholson Baker is an arrogant, ill-informed high-profile outsider who got enormous public attention by taking cheap shots at the library profession for self-serving reasons. Time after time he challenges Baker’s motives and integrity. “That Baker, a non-librarian and non-archivist displaying a remarkable lack of understanding about what these institutions and their professionals do, should get so much credibility...” (p. 6); “Nicholson Baker might think of himself as a Greek hero, calling others to join him in his epic quest to save America’s past.” (p. 103). “This chapter considers how Baker considers the misguided intentions of libraries and archives, perhaps because he is worried about the future of his own publications.” (p. 7)

Consistent with previous defenses from the profession, Mr. Cox resorts to hyperbole, unsubstantiated charges, and putting words in Baker’s mouth. Two of the most persistent criticisms have to do with the definition of what to save and the description of whom to blame. The first characterizes Baker’s position as being “all originals ought...to be saved.” (p. 16, italics mine); this is stated over and over again in various ways: “Third, a major theme of *Double Fold* is that everything should be saved...” (p. 2); “...his arguments suggest that all newspapers have to be kept in original format and that libraries and archives are really little more than warehousing operations.” (p. 7); “Baker believes that all original must be saved...” (p. 104); “Baker wants every book to continue to exist somewhere...” (p. 149). The fact is, Baker consistently denies taking this extreme position.

The second point, that Baker’s targets are “librarians and archivists” (pp. 2, 18). At every opportunity, Cox makes it clear that *Double Fold* disparages librarians at all levels. “Librarians and archivists are being attacked in the very area they thought they had gained substantial public support, the preservation of our documentary heritage.” (p. 15). “...Baker believes that librarians and archivists were involved in a great effort to deceive the American public.” (p. 104). “...Baker does not present a true vision or try to engage anyone in debate; instead, he simply indicts librarians and archivists in a manner that does not elevate discussion...” (p. 123). “...America’s librarians (and archivists) need to realize that they are under siege from many quarters because the public does not understand what they or their institutions really do. It is an attack started by Baker in the early 1990’s when he noticed the destruction of the old library card catalogs.” (p. 125). Oddly enough, this characterization is inconsistent with the facts as well as some of Cox’s own observations. As anyone can tell from a careful reading of *Double Fold*, this is not what Baker really says. *Double Fold* is not an attack on the entire profession, or even of line-staff librarians. It is a serious, impassioned, and yes, occasionally overstated critique of high-level institutional policies and policy makers. It is only when quoting *Double Fold* that Cox finds himself forced to use Baker’s true phrasing – “Here we see, of course, the same formula that he uses in *Double Fold*, the misguided work of library administrators against the common sense of maintaining what anybody can see is valuable.” (p. 130); again in quoting *Double Fold* “...the removal of the concrete word ‘books’ from the library’s statement of purpose is exactly the act that allows misguided administrators to work out their hostility toward printed history...” (p. 133) – this, just after a line that states that “Baker also depicted librarians as deceitful.” Again, “...but he places far more emphasis on misguided decisions by library administrators...” (p. 144).

Finally, there are several issues raised in *Double Fold* that one expects to see soundly rebutted, and are not. These include the main premise of the book (brittle books and the weak science behind their definition), the undue penetration of commercial interests in library policies, and the case for improper “conspiracy” between the Library of Congress and post-Cold War defense research agencies. The first Cox dismisses with the statement that “In asserting that newsprint will last indefinitely, Mr. Baker is overlooking several decades of scientific research that contradicts the linchpin of his argument.” (p. 67), yet he does not provide any reference to documentation that supports this. The second issue is ignored entirely, and the notion that Library of Congress policies might have been driven by anti-communism and CIA-bred secrecy is tossed away with the statement that “(even if he does not use the [conspiracy] word)” (p. 150) “*Double Fold* is not a mere critique of the preservation methods of librarians; instead, it looks for a conspiracy (and looks and looks) including “...constant references to the CIA, federal funding, and other like features of the preservation movement...” (p. 40).
Once one reads beyond the knee-jerk defensiveness, however, Cox does offer some observations that should be valuable to the archival and library professions.

- He faults the profession for not doing a better job at educating the public, and suggests that lack of public relations about our challenges and limitations restricts our effect on public opinion. This may not be an easy task, since "...they lack the profile and literary agents if not the time and the motivation." (p. 13).

- He notes that more technical research and policy should be devoted to substantive issues. "...What is the evidence to suggest that microfilming complete runs of newspapers did in fact enhance scholarship and research more broadly defined? ...In responding to Baker, archivists and librarians have to be more serious about studying what they do and communicating the nature of their work to researchers, funders, and policymakers." (p. 63).

- New technical solutions may have negative consequences. Baker's criticisms were not that microfilming was "bad", but that: 1) it was based on poor science, 2) commercial interests played too strong a role, and 3) policymakers were not accountable. Cox quotes Baker, "'There is nothing intrinsically wrong with microfilming...'" (p. 74), then goes on to say "One point on which I agree with Nicholson Baker regards his criticism of the zeal by which librarians and archivists may have embraced microfilming as the solution to the problem that they face with printed sources." (p. 102). "Noting that digitally reproducing newspapers would be very expensive today, Baker also adds that when the technology improves and costs go down that the major problem may be the lack of originals to digitize. It is a compelling point..." (p. 182).

- There are unresolved or partially-resolved public policy issues within the profession that must be addressed. One major one is the balance of how to select, and by whom? "The problem with the question of newspaper microfilming is that neither the library nor preservation communities have been as open about developing criteria for selection, until very recently." (p. 96).

Cox even acknowledges the potentially positive value that Double Fold debate can have on the profession. "Despite whatever one's personal reactions may be to the book, archivists and librarians need to take it very seriously." (p. 105). Cox continues, "We should be thankful, however, for such writings that jolt the library profession out of its complacency about its own past and its own records and artifacts." (p. 144); "But for this book to serve such a purpose [breathe some new life into tired old debates] it requires that librarians and archivists to speak up and round out the debate. Librarians and archivists need to admit their mistakes, while trying to make the public and policymakers understand why these mistakes may have been made as well as their overall mission regarding the documentary heritage." (p. 174). Cox's conclusion is perhaps the most backhandedly gracious point made in the whole book -- "Perhaps it will take such a rant from outside of our community to wake us up about what and how we need to communicate." (p. 194).

The Task Ahead

Cox is refreshingly self-deprecating when he states at the outset "I expect my critics will come from within the library and archives community since I have little name recognition outside of it." (p. 6). The issue of librarian culture, and our own sense of fit to the broader world, is one of the issues raised by both Double Fold and Vandals. I would suggest that the deep responses evoked by Double Fold reflect a character feature of the profession -- that we, as a group, are not used to criticism, and don't handle it very well. I think that is a fair characterization that most librarians have a self-perception as helpful public servants, much like firefighters, park rangers, or nurses. Nobody goes into this profession to make money or become famous. So when anyone, especially and outsider, raises criticisms of the work we do our response is to circle the wagons. Cox, despite his intentions of taking the moral high ground, unfortunately fails by resorting to character assassination and reflexive defensiveness.

I find this response to be troubling and ultimately counterproductive. Baker raised many substantive issues, from public accountability to sloppy science. It is our task to rise to the challenge of continuing the debate -- not by trivializing it or dismissing it, but by carefully analyzing the issues and asking for better answers. Our profession would be all the more vital if we did a little more listening and a lot less complaining.

reviewed by Chris G. Hudson

Which is the greater Constitutional threat? Does it lie within the statutory power and officialdom wielded by the state? Or is it embedded in the tremendous wealth and control of the modern multinational corporation? Such is the dichotomy reinforced by Lawrence Soley in Censorship, Inc. and it is the perceived underrepresentation of the latter in legal histories of the First Amendment which he seeks to redress.

Soley promptly takes the liberal bait and characterizes creeping concern over state power as the province of “Waco wackos, paranoid militiamen,” and the “hard-right Republicans.” He makes the generalization that federal courts have become more protective of speech while the consolidation of corporate power has continued apace. He has arranged and cataloged within the book the means by which corporations have asserted their increasing power into four broad categories: control of the labor process, civil litigation, acceleration of privatization of property, and control of the media. Critical to all of these categories was the 1886 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that equated the legal status of corporations with persons and all of the attendant “rights” inherent to individuals. Thus the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, originally drafted with the intent of redressing past inequalities has since been consistently turned on its head to challenge legislation designed to protect workers.

Censorship, Inc.’s greatest strength resides in its recitation of historical examples of the way corporations limit debate. In the company towns of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, workers were encouraged to embrace the “freedom” to consume life’s necessities as provided by the company store(s) while the security of employment was leveraged against their complicity in their own exploitation alternately by the velvet glove of paternalism and the iron fist of the Pinkertons. Under modern capitalism, many of the relations have become rationalized and mediated by the state but the result of tying one’s economic security to one’s livelihood remains the same. Those individuals who dare to speak out against their oppression largely face financial, psychological and quite possibly physical ruin.

Other detailed examples provided by Soley run the gamut from occupational blacklisting and its coordination by relevant industrial associations to the Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP suits) often filed by corporations as much for their power to intimidate as for their stated intent, to the proliferation of private shopping mall property in the last half of the twentieth century and the concomitant decrease in Supreme Court rulings in favor of free speech and distribution of political literature on such property.

And so upon identification of the problem, any purported leftist worth their salt must eventually address the eternal question of “what is to be done?” Even allowing for the collective stuttering that tends to accompany the left’s response to such inquiry, Soley is less than conclusive. He acknowledges the weight of over 100 years of case law recognizing corporations as individuals and consequently recommends the relatively small steps of campaign finance reform and anti-SLAPP legislation as pioneered by the State of California. A fundamental question which he skirts throughout the bulk of his material, whether intentionally or not, is the question of the role of the state under capitalism which took up so much radical debate in the 1970s. Privileging the role of private enterprise in censorship over that of government tends to preclude a view of the state as an instrument used by the ruling class against the ruled. As Michael Tigar identified in Law & the Rise of Capitalism, individuals eventually recognize via the class struggle that any given legal ideology contains both rules that seek to maintain the established system of social relations and rules that seek to embody at least neutrality if not outright progressive principles. This was the case during the overthrow of feudalism by capitalism and it is currently the crisis faced by bourgeois ideology as the contradictions of capitalism continue to sharpen and the system of social relations outgrows its utility for the greater part of humanity. In this light, the threats to freedom of speech from private enterprise so aptly codified by Soley represent the struggle by the ruling class to maintain its control over the sick body of capitalism. The state does its best balancing act by affirming this control through its favorable rulings towards private property and accommodating challenges to its legitimacy through its favorable First Amendment rulings. The legal victories obtained in these interstices are only part of the large challenge of replacing capitalism with something more humane. While far from inevitable in the face of state and corporate control, it’s absolutely necessary.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Lynn Andersen is director of the Durland Alternatives Library housed at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Lincoln Cushing is the Electronic Outreach Librarian at University of California’s Institute of Industrial Relations. He is one of the few graduates of UC Berkeley’s School of Information Management program to enter the library profession. He is currently on the American Federation of Teachers bargaining team for the statewide UC librarian union contract and his book *Revolucion! Cuban Poster Art* was recently published by Chronicle Books.

Chris G. Hudson can be found — more often than not — behind the reference desk of the Business & Technology Division of the Columbus Metropolitan Library. He and his wife are expecting their first child in the fall and he greatly anticipates the prospect of adding a badly needed reinforcement to the forces of revolution.

Al Kagan is the African Studies Bibliographer and Professor of Library Administration at the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign. He was on sabbatical at the University of Cape Town in 2001.

Don LaCoss teaches history at the University of Wisconsin/Lacrosse. Active in the Surrealist Movement, he has co-edited a book on surrealism and politics scheduled for publication this year.

Michele Sipley, winner of PLG’s first student essay contest and the Miriam Braverman Prize, is originally from Knox City, Texas. Shelley received her BBA in accounting from Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas. She is currently the Associate Director of Financial Aid at Syracuse University and is pursuing a Masters of Science degree in Library and Information Science, specializing in the school media program. She lives in Syracuse, New York, with her husband Dave.

Ann Sparanese is head of adult & young adult services at the Englewood Public Library in New Jersey. A member of PLG, SRRT and ALA Council, she has been active in movements for progressive social change and international solidarity all her adult life. She is her library’s shop steward and a vice president in the Bergen County Central Trades & Labor Council. Ann was the guest speaker at the Livingston Lord Library’s annual lecture series at Minnesota State University at Moorhead on March 10, 2003.