

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's book. I said I didn't know what the news was and she told me that the book was being released and it was because of librarians and my e-mail to them. I was shocked. It wasn't on my mind. But sure I was pleased, and there (or maybe it was on Holt uncensored) began the urban legend of the "lone librarian" who saved Michael Moore's book from the recycling machine.

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.

Why was the attempted self-censorship by HarperCollins so significant, as I saw it that morning in New Brunswick? To tell you the truth I was quite stunned by what 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 (truly *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.

That, indeed, was truly stunning. I remember thinking – hey this is Michael Moore! Not some unknown first time-author. This post-9/11 world is more scary that I thought because there are books that *never* will see the light of day by new, less powerful, less revenue generating authors. This was *serious*. Which is why, when Moore advised the audience to "do nothing"

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 librarianship, 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 iconoclas-

tic 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?

Sooner 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY – or one librarian’s two-part list of relevant and thoughtful reading for the engaged librarian and the involved citizen

Part I — Especially for the Librarians Among Us:
Librarians and Social Responsibilities

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.
- Bundy, Mary Lee and Frederick J. Stielow. *Activism in American Librarianship, 1962-1973*. New York, Greenwood Press, 1987. A collection of articles by librarians, who, with the exception of one, were all deeply involved in the movements of the “sixties.”
- Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sandy Berman But Were Afraid to Ask*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995. Minnesota’s own pioneer in cataloging for the people is celebrated with a series of essays.
- Horn, Zoia. *Zoia! Memoirs of Zoia Horn, Battler for Freedom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1995. Perhaps Zoia is best known for going to jail for her refusal to testify in the Harrisburg 7 conspiracy case in 1972. But her experiences as chair of ALA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee in 1976-1977 also make illuminating historical reading.
- Josey, E.J. ed. *The Black Librarian in America*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1970. The thoughts, experiences and perspectives of African Ameri-

cans in librarianship are brought together here by one of their exemplary practitioners.

- Kister, Kenneth F. *Eric Moon: The Life and Library Times*. With a Forward by John N. Berry III. 2002: Jefferson, 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 this principle 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.
- Samek, Toni. *Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility on American Librarianship, 1967-1974*. With a Forward by Sanford Berman. 2001: Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland. An examination of some crucial years in which librarians engaged on the purism of intellectual freedom versus libraries as agents of social change.
- Schuman, Patricia Glass, ed. *Social Responsibilities and Libraries: A Library Journal/School Library Journal Selection*. Schuman. New York: R.R. BowkerCo., 1976. These articles originally appeared in the pages of *Library Journal*.
- Swan, John and Noel Peattie. *The Freedom to Lie: a debate about democracy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. Print version of the great debate of '88 between intellectual freedom “purist” Swan and social responsibilities advocate Peattie.
- 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

- Ansary, Tamim. *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2002. After September 11, Ansary wrote a moving email that went around the world, and then he wrote this exquisite little book about his bicultural American life.
- Boyer, Richard Owen and Herbert Morais. *Labor's Untold Story*. Third edition, New York: United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers, 1975. Opinionated for sure, but never a dull moment in this history of unions distributed by one of the most activist unions of them all.
- 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.
- Brown, Dee. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. New York: Holt, Reinhart Winston, 1970. Gut-wrenching history of the making of America.
- Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2003. The author, a clinical psychologist who was a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, had a series of encounters with Eugene de Kock, the commanding officer of the apartheid state's death squads, which caused her to write this extraordinary examination of guilt, self-examination, good, evil and human transformation.
- 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.
- Hertsgaard, Mark. *The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2002. Full of information that you won't get on the nightly news, but goes a long way in explaining the nightly news.
- 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.

- Levitas, Daniel. *The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right*. Not all fundamentalist enemies of American-style democracy hail from the Middle East. Levitas traces and documents the origins of the Posse Comitatus, its deep roots in the racial history of the U.S., and the places they lead.
- 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.
- Moore, Michael. *Stupid White Men and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation*. New York: Regan, 2001. You'll laugh 'til you cry.
- Robinson, Randall. *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*. New York: Dutton, 2000. This is basic reading to begin to understand the call for reparations for the effects, still present, of African-American enslavement and Jim Crow.
- Roy, Arundhati. *Power Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2001. The author of the prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*, is a peace and justice activist in her native India. In this book she writes about the destruction of the life of millions of Indians by a gigantic system of dams, government duplicity, and her strong anti-war convictions.
- Schiffin, Andre. *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read*. New York: Verso, 2000. Schiffin, the former head of Pantheon, writes about the concentration of book publishing into a few hands and the price the reading public pays for the new "bottom line" values exist.
- Walker, Alice. *Living by the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988. This activist writer's essays beautifully communicate her personal and political sensibilities.
- 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