"While radical, militant librarians kick us around..."
- F.B.I.
October 16, 2003

LOCATION TRACKING, RFID & LIBRARIES
TOWARDS SELF-REFLECTION
INFORMATION BEHAVIOR OF PRISONERS
HURIDOCs — HUMAN RIGHTS MATERIALS
LIBRARIES BURNING & BLOOD RITUALS
DOCUMENTS & ADDED ENTRIES
PLG's Purpose & Commitment

Progressive Librarians Guild was formed in New York City on January 1990 by a group of librarians concerned with our profession's rapid drift into dubious alliances with business and the information industry, and into complacent acceptance of service to an unquestioned political, economic and cultural status quo.

We reaffirmed, significantly, that the development of public libraries was initially spurred by popular sentiment which for one reason or another held that real democracy requires an enlightened citizenry, and that society should provide all people with the means for free intellectual development. Current trends in librarianship, however, assert that the library is merely a neutral institutional mediator in the information marketplace and a facilitator of a value-neutral information society of atomized information consumers.

A progressive librarianship demands the recognition of the idea that libraries for the people has been one of the principal anchors of an extended free public sphere which makes an independent democratic civil society possible, something which must be defended and extended. This is partisanship, not neutrality.

Members of PLG do not accept the sterile notion of the neutrality of librarianship, and we strongly oppose the commodification of information which turns the 'information commons' into privatized, commercialized zones. We will help to dissect the implications of these powerful trends, and fight their anti-democratic tendencies.

PLG recognizes that librarians are situated as information workers, communications workers, and education workers, as well as technical workers. Like workers in every sector, our work brings us up against both economic and political issues. Cataloging, indexing, acquisitions policy and collection development, the character of reference services, library automation, library management, and virtually every other library issue embody political value choices. PLG members aim to make these choices explicit, and to draw their political conclusions.

Progressive Librarians Guild is committed to the following:

* to providing a forum for the open exchange of radical views on library issues.
* to conducting campaigns to support progressive and democratic library activities locally, nationally and internationally.
* to supporting activist librarians as they work to effect changes in their own libraries and communities.
* to bridging the artificial and destructive gaps between school, public, academic and special libraries, and between public and technical services.
* to encouraging debate about prevailing management strategies adopted directly from the business world, to propose democratic forms of library administration, and to foster unity between librarians and other library workers.
* to critically considering the impact of technological change in the library workplace, on the provision of library services, and on the character of public discourse.
* to monitoring the professional ethics of librarianship from a perspective of social responsibility.
* to facilitating contacts between progressive librarians and other professional and scholarly groups dealing with communications and all the political, social, economic and cultural trends which impact upon it worldwide, in a global context.

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page 80

Progressive Librarian #26
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Progressive Librarian #26        Winter 2005/06**

## ARTICLES

- **Location Tracking, RFID & Libraries, by Lee Tien**  
  [3]
- **Towards Self-reflection in Librarianship: What is Praxis? by John J. Doherty**  
  [11]
- **The Context of the Information Behavior of Prison Inmates, by Diane K. Campbell**  
  [18]
- **“Formats are a Tool for the Quest for Truth”: HURIDOCS Human Rights Materials for Library and Human Rights Workers, by Susan L. Maret**  
  [33]
- **Libraries Burning: A Discussion to be Shared by Sarah Prescott**  
  [40]
- **Blood Ritual in the Library: reflection into praxis, or, how I learned to worry and stopped loving the flag, by Elaine Harger**  
  [46]

## DOCUMENTS

- **Resolution on the Connection Between the Iraq War and Libraries**  
  [66]
- **Resolution on Disinformation, Media Manipulation and the Destruction of Public Information**  
  [68]
- **Progressive Librarians Guild Opposes Roberts’ Confirmation**  
  [70]

## ADDED ENTRIES

- **REPORT: The USAPATRIOT Act, Dr. Sami Al Arian & the United Faculty of Florida, by Kathleen de la Peña McCook**  
  [72]

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*Progressive Librarian #26        page 1*
I. The Setting

Imagine a world where you or your every possession—clothes, books, cash—could be precisely and invisibly tracked. In this world, your purchases, movements, and activities could be monitored in real time or recorded for posterity by marketers or the government, all without your knowledge or consent.

Now imagine a different world, a world where you control whether your movements and belongings are tracked, and can even “turn off” this silent surveillance permanently. Which would you choose?

This is the choice that location-tracking technology poses. But if industry and government get their way, you won’t have much of a say in the matter.

II. The Concern

The Electronic Frontier Foundation’s (EFF) concern about tracking and privacy spans several different technologies. For example, we recently learned that the U.S. Justice Department—the same folks who brought us the USAPATRIOT Act—has for years been tracking cell-phones without a warrant based on probable cause. A brave magistrate judge in the Eastern District of New York recognized that this practice was unlawful, and since then two other federal magistrates have agreed.

Law enforcement likes to use GPS “beepers” to track suspects’ cars as well. Federal law isn’t very helpful here, but a recent court decision in Washington state recognized that tracking can reveal much about who we are, what we believe, and what we do: our “travel to doctors’ offices, banks, gambling casinos, tanning salons, places of worship, political party meetings, bars, grocery stores, exercise gyms, places where children are dropped off for school, play, or day care, the upper scale restaurant and the fast food restaurant, the strip club, the opera, the baseball game, the ‘wrong’ side of town, the family planning clinic, the labor rally.” Because
such tracking “can provide a detailed picture of one’s life,” the Washington court said that the government needs a warrant based on probable cause.

And, of course, the spread of video-surveillance cameras in public will make it easier to “map” your movements as well; in Manhattan in 1998, volunteers counted 2,400 electronic eyes in public places, and that number has undoubtedly grown.

But of all these tracking technologies, RFID (radio-frequency identification) technology may be the most dangerous. Touted as the new barcode, RFID technology uses tiny computer chips and antennas integrated into “tags” that hold data – at the very least, a unique ID number, and in some cases much more – and broadcast that data when triggered by an electronic scanner (RFID reader), thus enabling the automatic identification and tracking of tagged goods. RFID readers can be placed on or built into walls, shelves and doorways. RFID tags the size of a grain of rice can be near-invisibly embedded in the sweater you’re wearing, the disposable razor you’ve bought, or the book you’ve just checked out of the library.

EFF believes that people have the right to move about in everyday life without being secretly tracked – and without fearing that they’re being secretly tracked. These technologies threaten that right by making secret tracking easier. Equally problematic, these technologies are now being deployed in society with little public attention and with considerable government support, raising serious questions of legality and accountability.

III. The Threat

The fundamental problem with RFID technology is simple: RFID tags and RFID readers communicate using radio waves, and their signals are harder to secure than wires or cables.

Several additional factors make RFID tags especially threatening to privacy:

• they’re promiscuous: generally designed to be activated, and their transmissions receivable, by any compatible reader/sensor device;
• they’re stealthy: you don’t know that the tags are being read, or by whom;
• they’re remotely readable, and can be read through many common substances (cloth, leather, paper).
Moreover, RFID reading devices aren’t hard for engineers and hobbyists to build, and will be easier to build as RFID technology spreads. Nokia has a cell-phone that can read RFID tags. There are SD (secure digital) cards for Palm-compatible handhelds that can convert popular PDAs (personal/portable digital assistants) like the Treo into RFID readers. A German hacker used a PDA equipped with an RFID reader to read and write to RFID tags in a German grocery store. That’s why U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy called RFID tags “barcodes on steroids,” and warned that they herald an age of “micro-monitoring.” (Leahy)

In short, RFID tags are designed for convenience, but that convenience comes with a high cost to privacy.

So, what are the threats? My very boiled-down summary:

- knowing who and where you are
- knowing what you have and do
- knowing what you think or believe

RFID tags pose several generic privacy threats: the ID linkage or association threat; the inventory threat; and the tracking threat. The ID linkage threat is pretty self-explanatory: because RFID tags have a unique ID number, and are promiscuous, stealthy, and remotely readable, your personal identity can be linked to any RFID tag you’re carrying. It could happen when you use a credit card or otherwise identify yourself while carrying an RFID tag.

Or it might happen because you’re carrying an RFID tag that contains personal information. The U.S. State Department will be embedding RFID tags into all U.S. passports, and these RFID tags would store and broadcast the same information that a person could read from the passport – your name, birthdate, photograph, and country of citizenship.

Under the REAL ID Act, your driver’s license might be equipped the same way: all of the information available from looking at it would also be available by reading the RFID chip, including one’s name, address, birthdate and photo. Fortunately, the Department of Homeland Security isn’t requiring RFID technology in driver’s licenses – yet.

An obvious subcategory of the ID linkage threat is inventorying: what do you have? Many RFID vendors and retailers want to use unique ID numbers to identify individual goods, like a particular pair of jeans or the international standard book number (ISBN) of a book.
You might not care that someone can use an RFID reader to discover that you wear size 8 Levi’s jeans. But you might think differently if he could discover that you’re carrying contraceptives, a pregnancy test kit, or various medications.

Some people also wouldn’t want the government to know what books they read. Books or other “information goods” are considered especially sensitive in our culture, for free speech as well as privacy concerns. Imagine if during the McCarthy era, anyone could know that you were carrying a copy of the *Communist Manifesto*.

The RFID industry is well aware of this issue. Indeed, one RFID industry paper noted:

> It is conceivable that there is information that one would not want to disclose, such as the type of medication, clothes and under garments, expensive items, bills, and books which reflect the preference and thought of their owners. (Ishikawa et al.)

The problem here isn’t merely that someone knows what you have – it’s that knowing what you have can be the basis for inferences about who you are and what you believe, whether it’s your medical status, lifestyle choices, politics, or religion, and these inferences can cause others to treat you differently. Note here that it’s unnecessary for anyone to actually know who you are. The mere fact that you are carrying a book about Osama Bin Laden might make you a “person of interest.”

I think librarians are very aware that RFID tags should not blab the book’s title. This will be an issue, though. Will the book industry add ISBNs to RFID tags in the future? Will there be consortium barcoding with standardized IDs? One publisher in the Netherlands, NBD/Biblion, is already tagging its books.

Moreover, even without an ISBN, tags used by libraries with the Innovative bibliographic database have well-known, geographically unique prefixes that reveal something about the library of origin, and some vendors might place library IDs into tags to prevent tags from one library from triggering detection sensors at another. In general it’s dangerous to assume that each library is an island.

Even if RFID tags contain nothing more than a unique ID number, they pose a tracking threat – the threat that others can pinpoint where you are at a particular time or track your movements by reading your unique RFID numbers.
Finally, a special problem for libraries is what library RFID expert David Molnar calls the “hotlist” threat, where some library material is deemed “of interest” and the authorities try to find out who was reading that material. We’ve been assuming that the tag ID is secret, or at least obscure. But is it? Remember the FBI’s Library Awareness Project? The FBI was interested in who was reading particular books. Today we’re concerned about USAPATRIOT Act Section 215 as well as National Security Letters and their use in libraries. It would be a trivial task for an adversary to compile a “hotlist” in advance of “suspicious” books – anarchist literature, the Koran, etc. – visit the library to read the tag ID of those books, and make a database. Once they see the tag ID, they would know the book and the library it came from. Obviously, this takes manpower, but if the IDs aren’t changed after each circulation the information will be useful — and the FBI is well known for mobilizing whatever manpower and money it takes for surveillance.

Both hotlisting and tracking can be defeated if you write a random ID on every checkout. Your database can remember the mapping of the true barcode to the random ID. Unfortunately, we at EFF don’t know anyone who does this. Worse yet, this only works if the library controls all of the tag data and ID numbers. Molnar showed that some RFID tags have a static ID burned into it by the manufacturer. There is nothing that you can do about it. Molnar has also talked about how tags at a low level might use static collision avoidance IDs. Here again, this is something the library can’t change.

RFID proponents usually try to minimize these threats with three arguments. First, they argue that the read-range of RFIDs is too short to be useful. The simple response is that we pass through doorways all the time, and RFID sensors can be built into them. If RFID reader gates work at libraries, they’ll work elsewhere. A read-range of one or two feet is enough. For instance, Molnar and Wagner note that library RFID vendors “claim that their readers can interact with tags from a distance of 2 feet (for large sensors at library exits), and hand-held readers might work for up to 8 inches away from the tag.” (Boss; see also data sheets from vendor Checkpoint Systems)

Second, proponents argue that no one is interested in who you are, what you have, or where you go, but marketers and insurance companies and employers are acutely interested in the details of our lives. That’s why companies like Choicepoint have enormous databases on 95 percent or more of American households, and why data-mining was a prime focus of Admiral John Poindexter’s “Terrorism Awareness Program.”
Third, they argue that the data on a library RFID tag is meaningless without access to the library’s internal databases, but databases are often insecure. Countless news stories report that insiders with authorized access misused information. Moreover, threats like hotlisting don’t require access to internal databases. The problem will only get worse if book publishers embed RFID tags into books before they ever get to the library.

IV. Pervasiveness

The degree to which RFID tags threaten privacy depends to some extent on how pervasive or ubiquitous RFID technology becomes. Because RFID technology is only now taking off, it’s arguable that there is a very small risk that a network of RFID readers could track any given person. Thus, RFID proponents often complain that privacy advocates are using scare tactics and making up a threat that doesn’t really exist. Libraries that use RFID seem to take comfort in this.

The problem is that RFID is proliferating today, from the ground up as well as from the top down. I’ve already mentioned federal government plans to embed RFID tags into passports and other ID documents. A growing number of mass-transit agencies are using RFID tags at toll bridges and roads and in bus and subway cards. In January 2005, parents in a small school district in California complained loudly about their children’s being forced to wear RFID tags – what *Scientific American* editors later called “human inventory control.”

EFF believes that the proliferation of RFID technology will lead to more RFID readers in the social environment. Big money wants to sell RFID chips and the computers and databases to manage information about us, what we do, what we buy. Governments want that data too. The lesson here is that the threat is not from government or business – it’s from government and business working together.

EFF sees insecure RFID tags as privacy pollution. We’re familiar in the environmental context with the “tragedy of the commons.” It might make financial sense for a company to pollute rather than scrub its emissions or stop dumping toxic waste into rivers, but that choice pollutes everyone’s air and water, and results in unacceptable costs to society and the environment. What’s profitable for one company isn’t necessarily good for society.

The same is true for RFID tags in our social environment. It might benefit the companies that use RFID for inventory control or other purposes, but it is highly likely to create privacy problems for everyone else. Libraries might believe that RFID technology will create cost savings for them (a
choice which might stem from budget and staffing cuts), but what about the privacy risks then imposed on library patrons? Do we really want to live in a society where both private businesses and public entities are embedding RFIDs and building RFID readers wherever they can because tracking things and people is efficient? I don’t think so. Why wait until it’s too late, when RFIDs and RFID sensors are everywhere?

V. Accountability

The last issue I want to describe concerns public process. What kind of public process should be required before the government implants RFIDs in the things that we must use?

The Government Accounting Office (GAO) recently noted a lack of privacy discussion in federal RFID decision-making. I’ve seen this in many settings, from little school districts to city libraries to the State Department. There’s an amazing lack of public deliberation about whether RFID should be used, and how it should be designed if it is to be used. There is relatively little advance public input into these decisions, and when complaints are later aired, government entities are reluctant to provide reasoned justifications or even basic facts about their decisions. They act offended that anyone would question them. It’s as if deciding to use RFID were no more significant than deciding to buy new chairs. Given the privacy issues, that’s irresponsible. From a lawyer’s perspective, this is an issue of the burden of proof. We think the burden should be on the government. Senator Simitian, the author of the California RFID bill, frames the issue as “whether California should force its residents to carry tracking devices at all times.”

Agency accountability to the public is especially important given that RFID technology is relatively new in the public sector and is sufficiently “high-tech” that many people don’t really understand its details. I’m afraid that the RFID industry has strong ex parte channels into government decisions, with no privacy advocates or even neutral security researchers involved. I’m also concerned that it’s very hard to get access to government testing of RFID implementations or proposed implementations.

VI. Librarianship’s Responsibility

Since September 11, librarians have been strong and influential advocates of civil liberties in opposing many provisions of the USAPATRIOT Act and in fighting national security letters. But libraries have been less vocal in addressing the civil liberties issues surrounding RFID technology, partly
because they believe that it serves their interests. Unfortunately, library use of insecure RFID tags will likely legitimize RFID use in society; how bad can they be if your friendly neighborhood library is using them?

Today’s RFID tags don’t do a good job of protecting privacy. EFF believes that libraries will promote socially responsible use of technology by refusing to use RFID tags unless they are made secure against unauthorized access.

Works Cited


TOWARDS SELF-REFLECTION IN LIBRARIANSHIP:
WHAT IS PRAXIS?

by John J. Doherty

Praxis, in Marxist terms, refers to the process of applying theory through practice to develop more informed theory and practice, specifically as it relates to social change. The progressive ideal implied in this is obvious, and is of particular relevance to librarianship. Also, in responding to a challenge for the need of a more theoretical framework to inform library theory and practice, John M. Budd defines praxis for librarianship in progressive terms as “action that carries social and ethical implications and is not reduced to technical performance of tasks” (20). In saying this, however, Budd further agrees with Richard Bernstein’s critique that the meaning of praxis has been watered down, in part, due to “an overenthusiastic affinity for technical matters and deference to technical expertise” (Budd 20).

That there is a need for a clear idea of praxis in relation to librarianship is obvious when the profession’s progressive roots are so clearly articulated in the Code of Ethics of the American Library Association:

In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations. (American Library Association Council)

The goal of social transformation inherent to this statement should define much of library theory and practice. In some instances it does, in progressive terms that are reminiscent of educational philosopher Paulo Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed.” For example, information literacy instruction comes with the working assumption that information is a tool that “enables people to overcome their false perceptions of reality” (Freire 86). Freire believes that “the transformation of thought to text requires the conscious consideration of one’s social context” (Fiore and Elsasser 89). In other words, the statement implies a theoretical framework to
librarianship, namely that to librarians knowledge is a social construction and that there is no privileged constructor.

Yet, the technical rationalist tone of library literature has resulted in a technical rationalist outlook in the profession. Such an outlook is not only symptomatic of the profession’s inferiority complex, but an example of transference. The true discussion in library literature ought to be on the praxis of librarianship, particularly within the “trademark pedagogy” (Kapitzke 37) of librarianship, information literacy instruction. This requires attention to both reflection and direct action, and their relationship to each other. This paper, therefore, suggests that a model to follow can be found in educational literature, where there has been a similar tension between its progressive roots and a technical rationalist tone. By looking at how educators have developed the notion of praxis through critical self-reflection, in order to inform theory and practice, it is possible to come to terms with contrarian views in order to develop the critical theoretical framework essential to inform the changing practices of these difficult times in librarianship.

A Need for Critical Reflection

Librarians, however, are not very reflective practitioners. For example, Cushla Kapitzke indicts librarians for hiding behind their presumed impartiality. She criticizes this role as exempting school librarians specifically (and, I would argue, all librarians in general) from critical inquiry. I would further add that it also allows librarians to exempt themselves from the self-reflection necessary to praxis.

Freire’s seminal 1970 work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, argues for a transformative praxis, wherein education can be used to foster critical reflection and action in order to transform: the pedagogy of the oppressed, he states, is “an instrument for [the oppressed’s] critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization” (Freire 48). He goes on to say that the oppressed must see their reality as not closed, without an exit, but as something that can be transformed:

Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (51)

Henry Giroux speaks of a “notion of self-criticism [that] is essential to critical theory” (35). He calls into question the objectivity that positivism encourages: “critical theory contains a transcendent element in which
critical thought becomes the precondition for human freedom. Rather than proclaiming a positivist notion of neutrality, critical theory openly takes sides in the interest of struggling for a better world" (37). Freire goes further, equating praxis with self-criticism: people will be truly critical only when “action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organizes their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naïve knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the causes of reality” (Freire 131).

Intrinsic to praxis, therefore, is reflection-in-action. Myles Horton intriguingly challenges people to act on their experiences (Horton and Freire 146). If one examines the self-imposed objectivity of librarians in this light it is easy to lean towards Kapitzke’s argument. For example, if one were to reflect on the “reference interview” (considered by many — myself included — to be a form of information literacy instruction) and the referrals made from it, one might begin to see the inherent privileging of information. The reference interview occurs usually when the librarian needs to learn more from her patron on his information need. The interaction is framed in a form of open-ended questions designed to clarify and draw out the needs of the patron and usually concludes with the librarian assisting the patron in meeting that need. Implicit in much of the description of the interview is that the librarian maintains her impartiality in the light of the request, using her skills to elicit enough data to make reasonable referrals.

In recent conversations I tried a little informal “self-reflection” with my colleagues; I was curious to discover the privilege inherent in these and other library transactions. What I discovered, mostly from digging, is that we tend to refer patrons to a core of information based on the Western cultural paradigm. This reminded me of what I previously wrote: that the resource selection process in libraries is hegemonic, depending as it does on privileged source lists and methods of collecting titles. On re-reading this piece, I was especially drawn to my argument that: “a recent survey of scientists and journal editors in developing countries discusses ‘structural obstacles and subtle prejudices’ that prevent them from sharing their research with the world.” (Doherty 404)

Dialogue, or Reflection-in-Action

Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that educational practitioners have to be committed to self-critical reflection on their educational aims and values (31). They go on to say that teachers should become more self-enlightened regarding their own world views and how these can distort
and limit their professional roles in society. They suggest that praxis is just this—doing-action, or remaking the conditions of informed action by constantly reviewing such actions and the knowledge that so informs these actions (33). If we replace teachers with librarians here, we could have a recommended course of action for our profession.

Freire speaks of the importance of a dialogic form of education in which pedagogy is developed and acted upon. He indicts the “banking” concept of education as one that seeks to maintain the status quo—the oppressors seeking to maintain their position. Through a form of “problem-posing” education, the oppressed are encouraged to communicate, to become conscious of their own consciousness: “People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher” (Freire 80). He goes on:

Dialogue is a human phenomenon, of which the word is at the core. And in dialogue, there is no room for banking. The “dialogical man” is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power. (91)

This dialectical notion argues that “observation cannot take the place of critical reflection and understanding” (Giroux 38). Lather (1986), in calling for a praxis-oriented form of research, defines praxis as a “dialectical tension, the interactive, reciprocal shaping of theory and practice” (258). As one reviews library literature and theory, one finds little in the way of critical reflection and understanding. In part, this is due to time constraints—the old argument of “I’m too busy to reflect.” However, I would argue that it is also due to the fact that most librarians involved in the “trademark pedagogy” of information literacy instruction are not trained as either instructors or critical reflectors. Indeed, information literacy librarians would echo Myles Horton: “the way to learn is to start something and learn as you go along” (Horton and Freire 40).

However, adopting a form of library praxis would encourage reflection-in-action, informed by the theories and practices of the profession. One informs the other, and, therefore, one is equitable to the other. For example, it is safe to say that librarians have issues with scavenger or treasure hunts. Yet if one acknowledges this as a form of uncritical bias, it becomes increasingly obvious that there is a demand, for in-house orientations, unmet by librarians and thus filled by instructors through such hunts, which usually prove unsatisfactory to both students and library staff.

Recently I had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with myself, my
colleagues, and some campus peers on this very issue. A research article challenged me to critically rethink my attitude and bias against treasure hunts. It ultimately led me to try to find ways to engage students in learning about the library through a case-based, problem-based learning approach (Carder, Willingham and Bibb). This method would allow for students to come to own their learning by giving them more control and ownership of that learning. We tried this with a class in which they were given one of four problems to resolve: researching occupations/careers, researching colleges, how-to-get financial aid, and scholarships. In groups, these students brainstormed their problem-solving process, and then utilized resources (some of which are already pre-identified by the librarian) to resolve the issue at hand. We facilitated direction when called on, but this was meant to be a student-centered process. After 30 minutes, we reconvened, reported out, and wrapped up. Importantly, the librarian is not in control of the learning—the students were.

Peterson (2003) speaks of the progressive teacher as one who builds on her students’ interests. To him however, the Freirian teacher does more: “She asks questions.... [e]ngaging children in reflective dialogue on topics of their interest” (365). In the previous library example, we did much of the same, challenging the concept of a library tour as an example of the Freirian concept of “banking” education. Just as Peterson notes in his examples, we preferred to look at the dialogic “problem posing” method—where “teachers and students both become actors in figuring out the world through a process of mutual communication” (366). Indeed, it was interesting that Peterson states that teachers themselves must undergo a transformative process; this is the challenge of a library form of praxis: “breaking the ideological chains of...formal education, of past training, and the inertia of habit of past teaching” (367).

_Transforming the Profession: Action Research_

It is telling, when one examines the literature of information literacy instruction, that most of what is published could be categorized as action research. Beile (2003) takes library literature to task for a lack of disciplined inquiry. Most of it comprises program descriptions, bibliographies and literature. In a generous moment, one could describe some of these program descriptions as a form of action research, wherein the practitioners (in this case, the librarians) are producing their own knowledge, sometimes in a dialectic of practice and theory.

In education, action research has been defined as “inquiry teachers undertake to understand and improve their own practice” (McCUTCHEON and Jung 144). Action research, in other words, is focused on the practitioner,
with the intent of self-reflection allowing for growth and change. The reason I am hesitant to completely ascribe action research as a category of library literature is the usual lack of self-reflection necessary to good action research.

A case in point would be my own co-authored paper on the development of a 3-credit information literacy class at Montana State University (Doherty, Hansen and Kaya). This work was informed by the theories of Daniel Bell and the recommendations of the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University. It is clear on re-reading this work that the authors were, at first, learning as we went. Then, with the introduction of someone to the team with an interest in undergraduate education and the social forecasting of Bell, some theory began to inform the practice. We began to do what Gitlin (1990) refers to as identifying and examining normative truths (448).

However, while we describe the development of our information literacy program in the light of such information, and imply some critical re-examination of our situation before fully completing the development, we are not very critical of the outcomes. While we do leave open many questions, especially those that arose from our review of our practices, it was unfortunate that most did not lead to a re-examination of those practices for continued improvement.

**Conclusion: What is Praxis?**

Recently some major voices in the library profession have argued that “[w]ithin library and information work there is a fairly long-standing antipathy toward ‘theory’” (Budd 20). I would concur with this statement: too much weight is given to the practical aspects of library practice at the cost of the theoretical. Yet, as Budd and others (Wiegand; Crowley) argue, it is only in a self-reflective praxis that librarians could critically engage with current theory. I would further add that practitioners could also actively begin to develop or transform that theory through critical reflection of their practice.

Praxis, therefore, in librarianship, is Freirian in outlook: “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire 79). It is very easy to assume that librarianship is a stable profession, wherein practice is stable, “less and less subject to surprise” (Schon 60). Indeed, many of the textbooks of the profession encourage such thoughts. In practice, however, the average librarian is likely to speak of the ever-changing world of information, access to information, and ways of facilitating such access (Doherty, Hansen and Kaya). Minus a grounded
theory of librarianship or ways of developing a grounded theory, or even more specifically of information literacy instruction, librarians tend to fall back on technical, rationalist based methods even when ineffective.

Beile notes, for example, that much of the information literacy literature of the 80’s and 90’s focused on the “variety of strategies for orienting the students to the library and teaching them to use its resources and services more effectively” (Beile 272). Few of these studies actually investigate the effects of information literacy (or, as she terms it, library instruction) on student learning. The academic library of the 21st century is a much different information environment than the majority of the academy has been used to. Librarians are bringing the library, and information literacy, into the academic curriculum — where the 21st century library is an integral part of the academic experience, and where students are asked to use it at the most appropriate moments to their research process, not just during the third week library tour.

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THE CONTEXT OF THE INFORMATION BEHAVIOR OF PRISON INMATES

by Diane K. Campbell

When we look at prison inmates we see people in a situation that is environmentally unusual and, simultaneously, very common in its occurrence, particularly in the United States. It is an enclosed world, high in stress, low in opportunities for decision-making, and socially isolating. We think of prisoners as different from ourselves. In reality, the chances continue to increase that we or one of our family might become prisoners at one time or another. In 2001, the rate of incarceration in the United States was 686 to 100,000 of population (Pastore and Maguire, 2003). We lead the world in incarceration of our citizens, the next closest is Russia with 635 per 100,000 (Motherjones.com, 2001). Whereas our national population has grown 20% in the last 20 years, the number of prisoners has doubled, and then doubled again (Beiser, 2001). The total number is 1,962,220 persons in state and federal prisons and local jails. These numbers do not include those on probation or parole, but do include those in prisons owned by private contractors. If we include probation or parole, the number jumps to approximately 6,594,000 (Pastore and Maguire). The population of this “small world” (Pendleton and Chatman, 1998) is staggering. What is the typical prisoner like? In 1997 92.8% of federal prisoners were male; 29.9% were white, non-Hispanic; 37.8% black; 27.3% Hispanic. In state prisons it was 93.7% male; 33.3% white, non-Hispanic; 46.5% black; 17% Hispanic. The discrepancy from 100% represents other groups, each less than 0.5%. The median age in federal prisons was 36, and 32 in state prisons (Pastore and Maguire). This diverse prison population has unique informational needs, and study of their information behavior will yield insight that can be broadly applied.

Information Behavior

In 1996, T. D. Wilson published “Information Behaviour: An Interdisciplinary Perspective.” In it he argued that information science is in reality only one of several disciplines that examine the information behavior of various groups. He surveyed a large quantity of psychological, sociological and communication studies and found many theories that illuminated his understanding of context, barriers and behaviors involved in information seeking. The outcome was a modified version of his original
model of information-seeking behavior incorporating much of what he found in the research of other disciplines. The general motivation for this survey arose from the fact that funding for empirical studies is never lavish (particularly when regarding marginal groups as in this case) and, by sharing data across disciplines, we can all increase our knowledge base. While uncommon, this should become the norm.

“Information behavior” as a term will be used here as well as “information seeking behavior” and the discussion will include motives for seeking information and motives for avoiding it among prisoners. The information studies field has not ignored the prison population, but very few articles found were user-focused and strictly observational. It was only by applying Wilson’s model of information behavior to the data from other disciplines that a clearer and deeper understanding of inmate information behavior became possible. I have organized this paper under the most relevant headings that correspond to Wilson’s model and I hope to begin to demonstrate how much we already know about inmates’ information behavior and what still needs to be studied.

![Diagram of Wilson's model of information behavior]

Context of Information Need

What are the information needs of prisoners? Bluntly, they need to know how to survive and how they might get out. To survive they need to know who is trustworthy, what will make the prison society accept them and what rights to humane treatment they have. To get out they need to know the law and what they can do with their lives when free. There is a body of work that concerns itself with the legal rights of prisoners, and most articles that deal with prison libraries focus on access to information about the law and its application to individual inmates. This will be discussed in the section devoted to environmental intervening variables.

An excellent example of an information need was the focus of one of the few observational studies done of prisoners in the process of information seeking, “The Social Construction of Snitches” written by Malin Kerström in 1988. Kerström studied the efforts that inmates in a Swedish prison expend in trying to identify and punish informants. This is a concern not only because knowing will make their surroundings safer from betrayal but also the labeling serves a purpose of underlining the group dynamic. This particular study will be reviewed in several contexts because it shows various channels of information, the values of inside and outside sources and the construction of a group norm with this information.

Activating Mechanism and Stress/Coping Theory

The “activating mechanism” of information behavior can be understood as a consideration of motivation. Chatman discusses this in terms of situations that would cause an inmate to cross information boundaries, in other words, to be motivated to get information from outside the inner circle. She names three conditions that need to be met: 1) the information is critical; 2) it is relevant; and 3) the current situation in no longer functional (1999). Wilson illuminates this concept with a discussion of stress and coping theories. He uses Folkman’s theory of psychology that defines stress as being a situation that exceeds a person’s resources and endangers his wellbeing. Coping is defined as “cognitive and behavioural effects to master, reduce or tolerate the demands of stressful situations.” (1996, Chapter 2). He goes on to make a point of explaining that “endangering” could relate to something so minimal as to not even be related as stressful by the information seeker. Here, in a discussion of inmates, we see many instances where “endangering” is literally true. Two common coping mechanisms are: information seeking to reduce the uncertainty that is causing the stress, and information avoidance to try to escape the situation by denial. This corresponds to Chatman’s observations of women inmates.
who refuse to listen to information about life outside. They have learned that this information does not lead to decreased stress because knowing something does not mean that they can effect any changes outside the prison. Therefore a number of women inmates avoid knowledge of the outside entirely (1999).

In other situations, information can be used as a buffer to the stress of life inside. Mark Knudsen (2000), an inmate, describes how books and the worlds they represent have been a lifeline in his prison existence. “I do not think I would have been able to handle stressful situations if the library was not readily accessible to me,” reports Knudsen. “It allows me to escape the on-going stress and monotony of being unable to see the outside world firsthand.” Another kind of information, that detailing an aspect of the “inside” world, is the topic of informants or “snitches.” That this type of information is very important to inmates is detailed by Kerström’s review of the pertinent literature:

That the subject of informing is an important topic among criminals is evidenced in McCleery’s (1960) claim that uncovering snitches is an obsession for the majority of inmates. Furthermore, Maguire (1982:76) writes in a study of burglars, “We were surprised at the prominence the subject [informing] seemed to take in discussion among thieves…” (p.165)

Finding out who is and who isn’t a snitch would certainly be characterized as an “activating mechanism” by Wilson, and one more such mechanism is touched on briefly by Rebecca Dixen when she remarks that, “Another impact of the newer technologies is higher expectations among prison patrons. They know more information is available and they want more” (2001). We can see that a simple awareness of possibilities inherent in something like the internet can be enough to trigger information seeking.

Wilson extends his discussion of the seeking/avoidance continuum with an examination of some of the work done by researchers in the health disciplines. Health issues are areas where ordinary citizens confront information that holds the same relationship to life and death that prisoners feel with many of their information needs. A cancer patient and an inmate both need information to survive and yet both can experience information as increasing their distress rather than decreasing it. Wilson reviews several studies in health sciences to explore the question of why people in critical situations are as apt to avoid as to seek information. One of the clearest descriptions is from Miller and Mangan (1983) and their terms “monitoring” and “blunting.” Monitors are people who need a great deal of information to be comfortable with a stressful situation and blusters are
people who are made more and more fearful by increases in information. This continuum is certainly apparent in prison life. We have seen it already in Chatman’s 1999 study, “A Theory of Life in the Round,” when she details when the inmates stay within and when they cross the barriers to outside information. Where an individual falls on the continuum might be influenced more by the social roles of prison society than the individual’s original psychological preferences. We will explore this as we review some of the intervening variables that can create barriers in the information process.

Intervening Variables

Before beginning the discussion of intervening variables we should make clear that information behavior, like all human behavior, can frequently be understood using a model with seemingly linear steps. Life is rarely linear, however, and as Wilson points out, barriers can appear to prevent an individual from considering information seeking as a coping strategy; they can appear to prevent the success of information seeking; and they can appear to prevent the successful incorporation of that information into behavioral change (1996). Rather than reiterate these barriers at each step, we will use Wilson’s model to discuss some of them.

Psychological

Some psychological barriers related to information behavior have been reviewed in terms of the question of monitoring and blunting. Lesta Burt reports several psychological studies of inmates that create a common profile of a prisoner as someone who is impulsive, over-reactive, fearful, manipulative, and unable to plan properly for the future. (Burt, 1977). Whatever the common psychology of a “criminal” (making the leap that most people sent to prison are guilty of a crime), certain behaviors are associated with incarceration itself. Lee Bowker explores this in his book *Prison Subcultures* (1977). He calls the famous experiment done at Stanford University with a pseudo-prison “one of the most significant prison studies of the last decade” (p. 64). This experiment involved students who were randomly assigned roles as guards and prisoners. They were extensively screened before-hand, and the setting was completely artificial. Nonetheless, the experiment originally scheduled for fourteen days was called off after only six because the students were exhibiting irrational behaviors. “Prisoners became passive and troubled; guards became authoritarian and sometimes even sadistic” (p. 64). If after only six days, a normal student consciously participating in an experiment becomes passive and troubled, we can safely infer that most prisoners would be
detrimentally affected by their incarceration. Luis Medina, an inmate in Wisconsin, reports “Inmates often lack interest, motivation, intellectual hunger, drives and desires to learn” (2000).

Demographic

What demographic variables apply to prisoners’ information seeking? One of the most predictive is educational level. Obviously, someone who is illiterate relies more on gathering information from personal contacts and television. These are not normally ways in which useful legal information is found. In 1989, the United States Supreme Court decided that these prisoners have the right to receive legal assistance from others, specifically self-taught fellow inmates. These paralegals can assist them in preparing legal documents. This has been resisted by most correctional facilities because they wished to be able to deny inmates’ access to other inmates, and because these self-taught legal assistants sometimes abused their power by charging for the help, thus creating discipline problems. The Court held in Johnson v. Avery that illiterate inmates could not be prevented from having access to legal help.

Another demographic issue is language. Spanish is the primary language of more and more inmates in the United States, yet most of the information available is in English. This is even true when the population is overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking. David Wilhemus has detailed some of the effects of various court rulings on legal information available to prisoners (1999a). He reports that the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico responded to a lawsuit about access to legal information by placing law libraries in the federal prisons. There was

a problem with the development of legal collections in that 90 percent of Puerto Rico’s prison population spoke only Spanish and that none of the federal reporters were printed in the offenders’ native language. This problem was not dealt with by either the correctional facilities or by the courts. (p. 15)

If an inmate has the psychological motivation to seek information, can read the language it’s in and can understand legal writing, what other barriers might he find? Before we discuss the very large category of environmental barriers, we will look at inter-personal and role-related variables.

Role-related or inter-personal

Relationships with others can skew information seeking behavior toward either sharing or isolation. Status within the group can play a part in access
and in credibility. Kerström recorded some interesting findings regarding
the interaction of the guards and the inmates. Surprisingly, guards were
considered reliable, trustworthy sources and Kerström posits that this was
because communication between the two groups was restricted and that
hints from the guards as to the informant status of another inmate were
given reluctantly and very rarely. This makes all their information seem
extracted rather than volunteered, and therefore more reliable. Chatman
and Pendleton describe the withholding of information as a major reason
that some guards are called “bitch guards” by women inmates.

For example, prisoners perceive these guards as showing
extreme unwillingness to share information that could help them
understand various rules. This information is important because
understanding the rules can mean avoiding punishment, earning
earlier release time, getting desirable work assignments and even
wearing a certain color of uniform. (p.738)

The guards were believed to be using withholding of information to set up
prisoners to fail and get punishment.

Where does the librarian’s role fall in this divide between the guards and the
inmates? Lesta Burt reports “inmates usually think that the staff members
are withholding information which they actually do not possess” (1977)
and this corresponds with Chatman’s report that a prisoner thought that law
books were removed because inmates were finding out that their sentences
were unnecessarily harsh. When Chatman said they were removed because
legal services were now provided, her explanation was discounted because
the inmates felt she didn’t understand the way this access was restricted by
the administration. Thus we see active malice being ascribed to various
situations when it did not necessarily apply.

Wilhemus (1999b) describes the point of view of a prison administrator
when he hires a librarian. “The loyalty factor is a critical area of concern.
The administrator attempts to hire a qualified professional librarian who
will without question follow the policies of the institution…” When prison
library studies were conducted as part of a federal grant program, they
revealed “the librarian in the institution was the most important element
in determining the use that was made of the library” (Burt, 1977). This
need for loyalty to the institution, the suspicion of the inmates, and the
professional ethics as stated by the American Library Association in its
Library Bill of Rights, all pose difficult choices for the prison librarian and
illustrate the challenges inherent in their inter-personal relationship with
the inmates.
Finally, the roles and status of individual inmates can restrict their information. In the example of conversation with guards, low-ranking inmates were considered more suspicious if they talked to guards than high-ranking inmates (Kerström, p.160). Chatman and Pendleton also report that low-ranking inmates, in this case “brides” (p. 740), can have their access to information from other inmates restricted. A “bride” is a young, vulnerable inmate that has been co-opted by a high-ranking inmate upon entry into the general prison population. Chatman and Pendleton observe,

The effect of assuming the role of bride on an inmate’s behavior is obvious. Useful information enters her world at the discretion of her “husband.” Other prisoners approach her and share tidbits with her because she is the bride of so-and-so. If she becomes the bride of a prisoner with some status, her information becomes that much richer. (p. 741)

Environmental

It would seem obvious that their environment is a primary concern of inmates since they are behind bars and the environment is extremely restricted, a condition detrimental to the success of information seeking behavior in every sense. The effects of environmental constraints have been studied widely in psychology and sociology, but for purposes here, we will consider how prison environments differ from each other, and change over time, rather than how they differ from the world outside. Prison environments are more or less harsh according to what the general society supposedly wants. The increase in “get tough” policies over the last decades has caused a corresponding drop in services for inmates — including library services. Vince Beiser of MotherJones.com says this is caused, not by crime, but by the “perception of crime and how that perception has been manipulated for political gain and financial profit” (2001).

This interest in punishment rather than rehabilitation has changed the focus on legal information for prisoners from ensuring access to making them prove that they have been materially harmed by inadequate access. Bounds v. Smith in 1977 mandated that prisons have law libraries and inmates have access to legal help. But, in 1996, the United States Supreme Court decided in Lewis v. Casey to make an attempt to restrict the number of “frivolous” lawsuits by demanding that inmates demonstrate that lack of access to legal information had made them suffer actual injuries. How they are to prove this without adequate access to legal information is not
a question that currently troubles the Supreme Court. This change in philosophy has far-reaching effects, and the economic ones are simple to state. More and more incarcerated people mean more and more prisons need to be built. With a reluctance to raise taxes and to seem weak on crime, politicians allocate fewer dollars per inmate. The majority of these dollars are spent on supervision, and the little left over for inmate services must include health care and educational programs.

An overriding concern with costs can affect information flows: a 2000 budget proposal for the State of Washington eliminated all of that state’s prison law libraries stating that it would result in a $596,000 a year savings by eliminating 8.8 full-time staff positions. The replacement would be the provision of court forms. Since Lewis v. Casey, no class action suit challenging systemic court access issues have been won (Prison Legal News, 2001), so relief from the situation will not be simple or quick: Arizona shut down 34 libraries; Idaho and Georgia gutted prison libraries of law books; and Florida proposed cutting 30 prison librarian positions (Sullivan, 2000). Even before Lewis v. Casey, South Carolina’s governor changed its program in less than three weeks. “When American Libraries can laud an outstanding prison library program like South Carolina’s (February/1995) and report on its demise just four months later (June, 1995), one might wonder whether the punitive sense among those in power has not supplanted their common sense” (Schneider, 1996). The governor wanted to “get tough with criminals” and as a consequence, the director of the prison library system was dismissed, seventeen inmates who worked as library trustees were sent back to their cells, and every book to be purchased now has to be reviewed by the state superintendent of education, the DOE’s budget director, and the library system’s advisory council which rejects books without divulging its reasoning (Chepesiuk, 1995). This cumbersome process restricts access to new books simply by existing.

Time is a limiting factor in information access. In prisons, this can mean time available for the inmate to pursue his own interests or the time a librarian has to spend with him. Inmates have varied amounts of free time depending on whether or not they have required jobs within the facility. Even more limiting is the amount of time the librarian has to spend with each inmate. “Face-to-face reference interviews tend to average only 5 or 10 minutes per inmate…” (Dixen, 2001) Some statistics from the Minnesota Law Library Service’s 2001 annual report are of interest: requests processed increased by 26% between 1999 and 2001; on-site meetings with inmates increased 25%; and individuals assisted increased 17%. This was without an increase in paid staff, but with the addition of one part-time intern. The effect of this increase on quality of response is
not known. One other interesting fact from this report is that service to 20 Minnesota prisoners was provided despite their being housed out of state. Prisoners are frequently moved out of their original jurisdiction for economic reasons, depriving them of ready access to the appropriate and pertinent legal information. *(Law Library Services to Prisoners, 2002)*

Further evidence of the importance of time comes from the proposal placed before the Department of Corrections for the County of Santa Clara, California in January, 2003. In his recommendation to replace the jail law libraries with privately contracted legal research assistance, Jim Babcock, Chief of Correction, filed a report containing the following information:

Each pro per inmate [those who are indigent and qualify for public defense and whose access to the courts is in question] currently receives 2 hours, five days a week in the law library. Because there are more pro per inmates than there are hours in five days, inmates are scheduled in the library around the clock, seven days a week. (p. 4)

One of the most powerful environmental barriers to any independent behavior, whether information related or not is prison culture. A succinct description is in Lee Bowker’s *Prison Subcultures* (1977).

This subculture is a pressure cooker from which there is little chance of escape except through psychological withdrawal. Its rigid system of social stratification permits little vertical mobility. Nearly all social relationships have an authoritarian quality. Equality between peers is threatening to prisoners, so peer situations are usually resolved into relationships in which one man is subordinate to the other. The possession and use of coercive power is the central value of the prisoner social system. (p. 35)

No one in this situation is free to make his or her own choices regarding information seeking, much less acting on information received. We will discuss further the aspect of group norms and information in further sections.

*Source Characteristics*

Wilson discusses access, channel, and credibility as source characteristics and illustrates his main points with an examination of consumer information (1996). As much of the consumer work is not strictly applicable, and we have already discussed access, we will use Kerström’s study to look
at credibility in the prison world. Kerström describes four sources of information used in making the decision to label someone a snitch. First and foremost is personal communication. When inmates gather, they discuss who is and who isn’t a snitch. Sometimes this general discussion is sufficient evidence to label someone a snitch. It is especially accepted when the person speaking is considered generally reliable, regardless of whether or not it is judged that person would have access to more proof in this case than anyone else. Kerström says that these inmates have “a greater definitional power” (p. 159) because they have proven themselves to be extraordinarily trustworthy. The example given is an inmate who in the past testified falsely to save other inmates from punishment, even though they had not sought his help, but just because he was loyal to the group (p. 159).

If the inmate has enough definitional power, this may be sufficient to label the person in question a snitch. If not, more information is sought. Previously we discussed the quality of guards’ information for inmates, but just to reiterate briefly, guards are considered more reliable by Kerström’s inmates because of their aloofness and unwillingness to talk with inmates generally. A third source of information is observation of privileges of the suspect inmate. If enough privileges are accrued without a reason that is clear to everyone, the explanation is that the suspect is a snitch. The final source is “the papers” (p. 162). Each Swedish inmate at the time of Kerström’s study had a paper copy of his court documents with him in his cell. A suspect could be required to “show his papers” (p. 163) and they would reveal if he got a change in sentence due to informing, or if police testified to his help in the case. This was considered the most reliable source, but the very act of asking to see someone’s papers had an offensive implication. Most inmates would have to be fairly sure that they would find proof before they would ask to see the papers.

**Risk/Reward Theory**

Wilson uses consumer research to find a workable definition of risk in terms of information. He quotes Settle and Alreck (1996, Chapter 5) and their five components of risk: performance risk, financial risk, physical risk, social risk and ego risk. In their framework, performance refers to the product being researched by the consumer and the other risks are self-explanatory. In most consumer research, physical risk would not be a paramount concern. It would have a role in choosing something like an infant car seat, but that would be an exception. The other categories are the most often studied. However, in the case of prisoners, we see a group where physical danger is ever present, and the social risk of information seeking is also a physical risk. In the discussion of “brides” in Chatman...
and Pendleton’s research, low-ranking individuals like “brides” are not to attempt to get information on their own. What they need to know will be told to them by their “husbands,” and if the “husband” is high-ranking enough, and has given her permission, information can flow back to the husband through the “bride” from other inmates (1998). Violations of any social code in prison results in violence, and as Kerström found with the investigation of snitches, merely talking too much to guards is considered a violation and suspicious behavior. If the inmate talks enough to the guards to be labeled a snitch, it goes without saying that the “snitch” is then in physical danger from the others.

This threat of violence leaves an inmate with the task of judging whether gaining information will be worth whatever risk would be attached to the attempt. Another threat makes the role of the librarian very difficult. The librarian functions best when there is trust with the user, but if a librarian is perceived to be part of the administration, then that trust cannot exist. “Many are afraid of repercussions if they request information on their rights or on some subject that might seem to be related to illegal activities” (Dixen, 2001). Personal financial risk would not seem to factor into the inmate’s decisions, but in fact, those inmates that help others with legal information have been (against regulations) charging their fellow inmates for help. The currency was cigarettes and coffee, but it was “financial risk” nonetheless (Wilhemus, 1999a).

Social Learning Theory: Self-efficacy

Wilson discusses another social theory that is involved with activating mechanisms — self-efficacy. The definition he uses describes self-efficacy as a subset of predicting outcomes. Self-efficacy is the estimation a person has that a given behavior performed by himself will result in a given outcome. This can be in contrast to the general outcome he assigns to the behavior. To restate, an inmate could believe that higher education will lead to a good job while simultaneously believing that any education he could obtain himself would not result in employment. Much of the literature discussed mentions the passivity and powerlessness of many prisoners. Darrin Lawson did a study in 1996 measuring powerlessness, among other factors, and prisonization (defined as assimilation into prison culture). He found that the more powerless an inmate felt, the more he fit into the prison society. This was their cultural norm and has a profound effect on information seeking. Ironically, information seeking itself can result in a diminution of the feeling of powerlessness. Bowker found that exposure to the legal service project has a positive effect on attitudes.... and participation in the legal aid program was associated with decreased
prisonization” (1977). Jean Clancy Botta, a law library coordinator in the State of New York, said, “people in institutions need the hope of freedom and justice that is promised by access to the courts in order to survive behind bars” (1990). Mere access to information can be enough to make a difference.

Information Processing and Use

Any legal information that an inmate can apply to his or her situation can mean relief from poor conditions if not from incarceration itself. Educational information could be used for job seeking upon release. The possibility of barriers arises again, this time preventing assimilation of information rather than gathering. We will not reiterate these, but will instead use (again) Kerström’s study as an example of the successful utilization of information gathered.

The snitch has to be identified through a search. The reason for doing this is a belief in upholding norms as ends in themselves (p.158). It is a common belief that a snitch will always be discovered and will get “what he deserves.”...The identity of “the informer” is thus both something obvious – everybody knows who he is – and at the same time a social construction (since almost everybody had snitched at some time). (p.157). Overt acceptance of a rumor may become a symbol of loyalty to the group...when a group finally has drawn a conclusion, there is a demand on everybody to agree to this interpretation. If someone still disagrees, group sanctions will be applied. (p. 164)

The information is useful — not simply to discover the snitch’s identity, but also to reinforce group norms. Establishing and defining these group norms is a major task of prison culture, so this information seeking behavior is valuable to the group in and of itself.

Conclusion

T.D. Wilson’s 1996 model of information behavior has some demonstrated utility in examining the information behavior of prisoners. By searching across disciplines, most of the nodes can be addressed with current and established information, thus illustrating that the information behavior of prison inmates can be determined while not necessarily using information studies per se (except in the case of Chatman and Pendleton). Kerström’s work, while concerning itself almost exclusively with information gathering, was found in sociological literature. The worth of these studies
will not be in understanding prisoners alone — though using Wilson’s interdisciplinary model reveals much about the equity of the terms and conditions of being a prisoner in 21st century America in more arenas than availability of information. Prisoners are perfect examples of people under extreme stress — another group aside from cancer patients illuminating what happens under such conditions. They are tracked after leaving prison, so any changes in behavior can be studied longterm. And, as long as America leads the world in incarceration rates, we will need to understand what incarceration does to humans, and the implications to society of these changed individuals. We need confirmation that access to information and making choices regarding it are transforming experiences unrelated to the successful integration of the information. Information professionals understand this, but policy makers generally do not. Analysis of coping strategies such as monitoring and blunting before and after incarceration could lead to better methods of communicating to those under extreme stress. Studies should be empirical rather than based on opinion as so much of the literature regarding prisons has been. Policy makers will no doubt continue to make decisions motivated primarily by political concerns, but empirical knowledge of the population and the consequences of changes would be harder to ignore.

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“FORMATS ARE A TOOL FOR THE QUEST FOR TRUTH”: HURIDOCS Human Rights Materials for Library and Human Rights Workers
by Susan L. Maret

Sergio Vieira De Mello’s (2003) idea that “the culture of human rights derives its greatest strength from the informed expectations of each individual,” underscores the relationship between information and human rights. Further, international human rights instruments such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), and the Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (1996), serve as benchmarks of what constitute a set of information rights, which includes the implied role of information in self-determination. It is in this context that Martin Ennals (74) writes,

Without the knowledge that human rights exist, people cannot seek their own protection. Without the knowledge that human rights are violated, no individuals or organization can seek to provide protection. Both the promotion and protection of human rights therefore require that information be available for all.

Enter Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International

In 1981, Martin Ennals (74) former Secretary-General of Amnesty International, and founding president of Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International (HURIDOCS), observed that despite a “standardized, universal and statutory concern for human rights, there is yet no universal and homogenous system of handling information about human rights.” This dearth of information standards, techniques and appropriate technology for human rights violations information classification, documentation, reporting and storage led Ennals and others in the global human rights community to propose a “Human Rights International Documentation System,” which led to the formal establishment of HURIDOCS in 1982. HURIDOCS offices are located in Geneva, Switzerland.
Acting on Ennals’ idea, over the last several decades HURIDOCS has evolved into a global network of human rights advocates concerned with various educational and technological aspects of human rights information. Fundamental to its mission, HURIDOCS activities include “access to human rights information by developing and promoting monitoring, information handling and communication tools for use by the human rights community.” HURIDOCS also works closely with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in networking, information exchange, and adapting its publications for specific cases of human rights infringements. For example, the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) and the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) modified HURIDOCS materials for their work.

HURIDOCS offers training to representative human rights groups and advocates in the practical use of human rights violations classification, documentation and monitoring tools. Specifically, HURIDOCS concentrates on methods and techniques for human rights information handling, rather than on human rights in general. HURIDOCS has identified twenty-six training modules that focus on the relationship of human rights and information, information and communications technology, documentation, and HURIDOCS tools and monitoring and reporting techniques. Training on these educational tools, is, in a real sense, community capacity building.

**Documentation for Action: Various HURIDOCS Materials**

As former HURIDOCS chairperson Kumar Rupesinghe (vi) writes, information can be one of the most potent weapons in the battle against abuses of human rights. Furthermore, Rupesinghe believes, the documentation of human rights abuse

...begins with a word, then a phrase, the accumulation of facts and ideas, the creation of a history, and then an enduring memory, which all serve in resisting and turning back humanity.

Materials produced by HURIDOCS are a distinct set of materials geared towards library practitioners and those human rights workers who require classification, documentation and monitoring tools to manage aspects of human rights-related information collection, organization and manipulation. To this end, HURIDOCS goal is to “ensure that human rights organisations have the tools, knowledge, skills and supporting services to effectively utilise their information resources.”
Many of HURIDOCS library-related tools are MARC and AACR2 compatible, available in multiple languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic), and free through http://huridocs.org/tools.htm. HURIDOCS, in fact, encourages the use and distribution of its suite of human rights publications. Plug-ins such as Adobe Acrobat and (un)zip software are required to open and save some HURIDOCS materials. If ordering hardcopies of HURIDOCS publications, an easily accessible order form is available through the HURIDOCS website. Hardcopies of materials are sold at a modest price, and may be ordered by credit card through Paypal, bank transfer or money order.

For the purposes of this article, HURIDOCS materials are sorted into the following categories: library-type documentation tools, investigation (event)-related and monitoring tools, and web-based tools.

**Library-type Documentation Tools**

HURIDOCS library documentation tools such as the Bibliographic Standard Formats (http://www.huridocs.org/bbsf) the INDEP/SERIAL databases (http://www.huridocs.org/indepser), and “how to” guides such as “How to Index” (http://www.huridocs.org/popindex.htm), are noteworthy in that they not only assist those library workers with no formal library training, but aid experienced library workers in managing information in specialized human rights collections.

Specific HURIDOCS efforts are as follows:

“How to Index” (Vol. 4, HURIDOCS Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Series) This manual describes the different phases involved in the process of creating an index and thesauri, and using these tools to systematically index documents.

“HURIDOCS Standard Formats for the Recording and Exchange of Bibliographic Information Concerning Human Rights” by Aida Maria Noval, and a HURIDOCS Task Force, available in English, French and Arabic. This publication contains forms and guidelines for recording information regarding documents on human rights.

INDEP/SERIAL databases are for handling human rights bibliographic information. PC only.

“Standards for Electronic Publications: XML and Dublin Core” and the draft “Proposal for HURIDOCS to recommend use of metadata for electronic publications on the web” recommend that human
rights organizations which produce electronic publications adopt the Dublin Core metadata standard.

**Investigation and Monitoring Tools**

Investigation (event)-related tools are defined by HURIDOCS as those materials used “in conjunction with fact-finding, including gathering and recording information [of] events that actually or possibly contain human rights violations.” Events Standard Formats are produced by HURIDOCS for recording cases, documenting human rights-related (violation) events, and designing human rights-related databases. Reflecting Martin Ennals’ thought that “Without the knowledge that human rights are violated, no individuals or organization can seek to provide protection,” HURIDOCS notes that

…formats are a tool for the quest of truth. With them, it is possible to compile comprehensive data that tell in the minutest detail what became of a single victim. It is equally possible to compile comprehensive data that tell what happened to a whole country.

There are two main methodologies that can be employed in monitoring human rights violations: the “events” methodology, and the “indicators-based” methodology (Guzman 249: 2001).

The events methodology is used intensively in monitoring violations of civil and political rights, and involves the identification of the various acts that have a beginning and an end, or in more technical terms, acts of “commission” and “omission” that constitute, or lead to human rights violations. The events methodology has been effective in monitoring acts such as killings, arrests, torture and the like. Specifically, an event is

…something that happens, with a beginning and an end, and which progresses until its logical conclusion. It can be a single act, a series of related acts, or a combination of related acts happening together. For an event to be included in human rights monitoring, at least one act that it contains should be qualified as a human rights violation (e.g. arbitrary arrest, which is a violation of the right to liberty), or similar to such an act (e.g. legal arrest).

To further delineate the events methodology, HURIDOCS provides definitions for various elements of the methodology. For example, definitions include:

act — a single piece of movement or action, usually involving force. Usually, an act is committed by a person (an individual
or a group) against another, in which case it is referred to as an act of commission. Act can also mean the non-performance of an expected or required movement or action, in which case it is referred to as an act of omission.

victim — the person (individual or group) who is the object of an act

perpetrator — the person (individual or group) who commits an act that constitutes a violation. Perpetrators can be a state or non-state entities

means — the means used could be concrete arms such as guns or more abstract processes such as lawmaking.

Such definitions serve to frame a violation(s) in precise terms in order to establish involvement, relationships, roles and responsibility.

The indicators-based methodology is related to human rights norms and standards, and is especially suited for monitoring violations of specific economic, social and cultural rights such as the enjoyment of the right to education by a given population (Guzman 249).

HURIDOCS also produces materials which assist in the ongoing monitoring of human rights violations. The elements of monitoring are:

• collecting or receiving data or information over an extended period of time
• application of norms and standards which that act as a benchmark of what constitutes a human rights infringement
• results in a formal report that is used to take further action and make recommendations

HURIDOCS investigation and monitoring tools include:

“HURIDOCS Events Standard Formats”
“What is Monitoring?” (vol. 1) an overview of the subject of human rights monitoring; the work also discusses the various types of monitoring carried out by inter-governmental agencies, governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations; available in English, Spanish and Russian.
“What is Documentation?” (vol. 2) is intended for documentalists and
information workers of human rights organizations. It deals with
the following issues: what is documentation, what is a document,
why document, seeking information, producing documents,
acquiring documents, organizing documents and providing user
services. This volume can be printed in HTML and PDF formats;
available in English, French, Spanish and Russian.

“How to Index” (vol. 4) describes the different phases involved in the
process of creating an index and thesauri, and using these tools to
systematically index documents.

“How to Record Names of Persons” (vol. 5) provides instructions in
recording names based on international standards developed in
the field of librarianship.

“HURIDOCS Events Standard Formats: A Tool for Documenting
Human Rights Violations” by Judith Dueck, Manuel Guzman and
Bert Verstappen.

“Microthesauri: A Tool for Documenting Human Rights Violations,”
AACR2 compatible.

The WINEVSYS database is a Microsoft Access version of the
HURIDOCS Events Standard Formats which assists in organizing and
maintaining historical data concerning victim(s), perpetrator(s), and
event(s); WINEVSYS functions as an official historical record of acts
and events, which can be later used as evidence by civil society tribunals
or human rights commissions. WINEVSYS may be downloaded from
the HURIDOCS website, and does not require an internet connection to
maintain. There is no ability to encrypt data within WINEVSYS.

Web-based Tools

Specialized human rights “discovery tools” are not a recent development.
In 1996, the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program launched the
Directory of Human Rights Resources on the Internet. However, with
the discontinuation of the AAAS Directory, HURISEARCH (http://www.
hurisearch.org/), a pilot project developed by HURIDOCS in 2003 in
collaboration with Human Rights Education Associates (HREA; http://
www.hrea.org/), with funding from Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
“provides one point access to all human rights information published by
human rights organizations worldwide, and particularly human rights
NGOs.”

To better serve the human rights community, HURIDOCS partnered with
Fast Search & Transfer (FAST), a Norwegian based company, to develop
HURISEARCH. HURISEARCH is considered a vertical search engine,
which retrieves human rights based information published on the world-
wide-web by human rights NGO organizations.
HURISEARCH is geared to locate a broad platform of human right related-information, including: peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, preprints, abstracts and technical reports from the Web and in print format. HURIDOCS is currently developing additional criteria for site inclusion.

**HURIDOCS Mailing Lists**

Currently, HURIDOCS is involved with two e-mail lists of importance to library and human rights workers:

huridocs-gen-l.

News and developments in the field of human rights information and documentation handling, including announcements of upcoming events, vacancies, new tools and techniques relevant for human rights documentation workers. To subscribe, send the message “subscribe huridocs-gen-l <your address>” to majordomo@mail.comlink.apc.org

huridocs-tech.

Covers technology aspects of human rights and how they may affect human rights information workers. To subscribe, send the message “subscribe huridocs-tech <your address>” to majordomo@hrea.org

In closing, it is through the sincere efforts of HURIDOCS that Martin Ennals’ idea of a “universal and homogenous system of handling information about human rights” is made real. In an increasingly tense and technological world, where information and human rights often collide, various HURIDOCS efforts link libraries and human rights organizations in their common goal of education and empowerment.

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DEDICATION: This piece is dedicated to the memory of the late Sergio Vieira De Mello, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and U.N. Special Envoy, killed in Baghdad, August 19, 2003.

Progressive Librarian #26
LIBRARIES BURNING: A DISCUSSION TO BE SHARED
by Sarah Prescott

I was working in a library in Muscat, Oman, when the National and Koranic Libraries of Iraq were looted and burned. “Why?” asked one of my students in a rather plaintive way, like Cindy-Lou Who in The Grinch by Dr. Seuss, “Why did they burn it? Why?” And, you know, I could have thought up a lie and I could have thought it up quick – as to why some Iraqis burned their own library and as to why the Americans did nothing to stop it. Instead, I paused for a moment or two and thought of something I hadn’t before. Maybe, just perhaps, I should focus a bit more on the purpose of libraries rather than just talking about how to find the information in them.

So I tossed out the day’s lesson and read instead to my startled class:

The 100 foot flames were bursting out of the windows. Papers, files and handwritten letters flew all around him like wild birds. He reached out, caught one in his hand, and read about a request for protection of a camel convoy. Just a fragment of a 1,000 year history going up in smoke and scattering away on the wind.

from a description of the burning of the Koranic Library in Bagdad on April 14, 2003

The reading of this passage evoked a animated response from my normally lethargic group. This led to some research and discussion and a rather alarming discovery: that libraries are burning, and at a far greater rate than ever before in history.

The burning question is why? Libraries have a long and impressive lineage of being the torch-bearers of culture. They also carry with this heritage an equally long and complicated history of that torch being turned on themselves. While this notion is disturbing, to say the least, it is far more unsettling to learn that this practice is increasing. More books have been destroyed in the past century than in all the previous ones combined. It could be pointed out that this is because more books are being printed than ever before but there is more to it than that mere fact.

The grains of an answer lie in the very mission of a library. If the goal is to collect, organize, preserve, and provide access to knowledge and...
information, then it would appear that libraries are targeted for destruction for two reasons:

1. To prevent access to information. Those regimes who want to re-invent society by their definition certainly do not wish for other ideas to be available to the populace they are trying to convert.

2. To erase a peoples’ culture. Cultural genocide is practiced when the avenging power wants to erase a group they consider to be beneath them and/or a threat to their supremacy.

Unfortunately, burning libraries has proven to be a crude but effective, as well as highly visible, method for achieving these goals. It began with Ptolemy, who was the first to realize that knowledge is a form of power to be contained and hoarded like treasure. For that reason he created the first great library in Alexandria, Egypt (300 BC) and thus established the precedent that libraries, by their very creation and mission of collecting and centralizing information, serve the needs of rulers as much as scholars.

Gathering all knowledge into one place, however, has proven to be a dangerous practice because, during periods of turmoil, libraries rise from relative obscurity, like ghosts from the graveyard, to haunt the power-seekers and often to become locked in the cross-hairs of their weapons. Thus, almost all of the world’s greatest libraries have, at one time or another, faced a sentence of destruction, and most often it is death by fire. The interesting truth here is that because of this historical pattern, most of the material that has managed to be passed down to us through history has actually happened because it was tucked away in small, private libraries and escaped the fiery eye of the would-be conquerors.

Given this grim history, one wonders whether we should give up promoting libraries before they become targets? Well, frankly, this is not likely to happen because many libraries are powerful and entrenched institutions, but also, to do so would be to give up the hope that civilization will advance to a point where knowledge is no longer feared to the point of destruction. And it lies to libraries and the librarians who run them, to continue to believe. As Franklin Roosevelt said, “…when the clock of civilization can be turned back by burning libraries…an added burden is placed on those countries where the courts of free thought and free learning still burn bright.”

What follows is presented as a sort of “Combustable Library History 101,” a few examples from a long and scorching record.
Pre-19th Century Destruction

The Library of Alexandria was our world’s first “great” library. Founded by Ptolemy around 300 BC, it housed over 500,000 scrolls in its glory days and attracted scholars from all over the ancient world. Four stories, all hotly debated for their veracity, circulate regarding this library’s ultimate demise. The first to receive the blame is Caesar. In 48 BC, when visiting Alexandria as a guest of Cleopatra, he was attacked by an angry mob. To save himself, he set a fire which is reported to have spread to the library. Another suspected culprit is the Emperor Aurelian. In 270 AD he chose Alexandria as his battleground for supremacy over the Kingdom of Palmyra and destroyed the library in the process. Yet another theory blames the library’s destruction on a mob of angry Christians. Whipped up into a zealous frenzy by the Patriarch Theophilus, they stormed the library, carried out the scrolls into the streets where they built them into enormous pyres and burned them. And a final story comes from the Muslim invasion of Egypt in 691 AD. A Caliph Omar is said to have ordered that all the books be destroyed and thus the scrolls became the fuel for the bathhouses of the city. Whatever the real truth, the moral of this tale is that the library certainly did not meet a peaceful end and set the precedent for the burning of libraries during times of upheaval and shifts of power.

The Imperial Library of China began around the same time as the Library of Alexandria, (in the latter half of the Chou Dynasty), mainly to house the collections of the emperors. It did not have a chance to become a rival to Alexandria because, in the very next dynasty (Ch’in, 221-207 BC), the Emperor Shi Huangdi, in an effort to solidify his power, began by ordering the burning of any books that he disagreed with. And thus a pattern was established in China that would last for over 1,000 years, where each invasion and rebellion would be marked by the burning of books painstakingly recreated during times of peace. This practice was so common that the Chinese actually invented a phrase for it: “fengshu kengru” which is interpreted as the “burning of books and burial of scholars.”

The House of Wisdom was founded in Baghdad in 1004. Its creator, Caliph Al-Mamun, modeled it after the library in Alexandria and strove to gather together the most renowned books on every subject, and scholars traveled great distances to study there. This enlightened center of learning was wiped out when the Mongols swept down from Central Asia. Within one week they completely destroyed the House of Wisdom (and thirty-six public libraries as well). Rare illuminated manuscripts burned, finely tooled leather bindings became shoes, and knowledge the property of the conqueror.
Glastonbury Abbey was the most ancient of medieval Britain’s monasteries and contained many priceless religious treasures as well as a magnificent library that contained some of the earliest examples of Anglo-Saxon literature. Due to its prominence, Henry VIII, in his famous dissolution of the monasteries made a special example of Glastonbury. In 1539, the Abbot was tortured and executed, the treasures seized, and the building so thoroughly demolished that no evidence remains of the foundation. As for the library, the contents were looted and burned. A few books were saved and have turned up in other libraries, but with one deed England lost one the most important of its early libraries – all due to the greed of a king.

The Library of Congress was set on fire in 1814 and, although it was British troops who destroyed the 3,000 books and maps, U.S. aggression was in part responsible. The British conflagration was in retaliation for an American raid in 1813 in which we burned a British library and archives in York (now Toronto). After reading about the conflagration in the newspaper, Thomas Jefferson declared the loss a “triumph of vandalism over knowledge itself” and sold his private library to Congress to help them begin anew.

Post-19th Century Destruction

The Catholic University of Louvain Library fell victim to the World Wars. Yes both. It was first destroyed by the Germans when they invaded Belgium in 1914 as revenge for the shooting of some German soldiers. According to an eyewitness, the fire burned for days, consuming over 230,000 books, among them priceless editions of some of the west’s earliest books and manuscripts. The world was outraged and, after the end of the war, the Germans were compelled to give 10 million francs as well as 1,750 rare books and manuscripts from their libraries in compensation. The library was rebuilt and opened again in 1928. But a mere twelve years later, when the Germans once more marched into Belgium, they immediately burned the library again. This time they claimed the fire had been set by fleeing Belgians but eyewitnesses had clearly seen a German artillery unit lob shells at the library until it went up in flames.

The Angevin Archives in Naples contained priceless manuscripts and documents from the Middle Ages. During World War II, the documents that were deemed most valuable were removed to a villa outside of Naples. When the documents were discovered, the Germans decided to destroy them. In vain, the director pleaded with them to check with their superior officer, but the German in charge of the destruction squad merely shouted, “Commander know everything, order burn!” A three-man crew then set

Progressive Librarian #26 page 43
the fire with gunpowder and left. Courageous peasants managed to drag away eleven cases and 97 cartons but the rest was reduced to ashes and thus southern Italy lost priceless records of their heritage one morning in September 1943.

Jaffna Library served as the center for Tamil culture for centuries. It contained ancient books, manuscripts and ola (dried palm leaf documents). The library was popular not only with scholars, but with students and the public as well, and was celebrated as containing one of the finest collections of literature in South Asia. All this ended one night in 1981 when the library was set on fire by a group of thugs brought in from the south of the Island. The pretext for the destruction of the library was the killing of two policemen, but in truth it was an attempt to intimidate and crush the Tamil minority. The destruction of the library, however, marked a turning point in the broiling fight between the Sinhalese and the Tamils and resulted in the eruption of civil war two years later.

The Bosnian National and University Library in Sarajevo was also the victim of an attempt of cultural genocide. The library contained over 1.5 million volumes, a collection which represented generations of the area’s culture and literature. As the library’s director pointed out, “if they wanted to destroy this multiethnic society, they would have to destroy the library.” By they, he meant the Bosnian Serbs, and that is just what they did. On the night of August 25, 1992, they opened fire on the library from across a river bank. Sarajevan citizens desperately fought to rescue the books, but were shot down by machine-gun fire. The Bosnian poet, Goran Simic, solemnly gathered the flying bits of burned paper and later wrote, “characters wandered the streets / mingling with passers-by and the souls of dead soldiers.”

Hakim Nasser Khosrow Balkhi Cultural Center in Afghanistan contained 55,000 books representing Afghan culture. Afghanistan has been the victim of several burnings – first by the famed Genghis Kahn, who burned chests and chests of sacred manuscripts, then by the Communists who eliminated all ‘non-conformist’ literature, and finally by the Taliban who, after their rise to power, decided to eliminate all cultural items not in alignment with their idea of Islam. On August 18, 1998, Taliban soldiers arrived and dragged the books out into the main square, and set them alight. The director, Latif Pedram, saw the scene from a little window in his hideout and watched in disbelief as history repeated itself. “It was as if Genghis Khan, disguised as Mollah Omar [the Taliban leader] had entered the city with his army,” he sadly stated and then added, “Through this repetition of a tragedy…Afghanistan shamefully entered the twenty-first century.”
The National Library and Archives of Iraq & Library of Korans are the latest cultural war victims. In this case, however, it is not entirely clear who the culprit was. Though the Iraqis have branded the Americans as the “modern Mongols,” sweeping in and wreaking destruction, there is clear evidence that the looting and burning was done by Iraqis. Whoever is to be held responsible, the results are still the same: on April 14, 2003 over one million books and documents went up in flames.

Conclusion

And now a final word of hope amid this tale of wanton destruction. Somehow, many libraries do manage to survive cycles of social violence. Six of the libraries whose destruction is described above are in the process of being re-built and their shelves re-stocked with materials shared from other libraries. Librarians are doing a stupendous job sharing resources. Let’s make it worth the effort and, in the hope of lessening the risk, also begin sharing our long, hot history with our patrons.

At the end of our round of research on the destruction of libraries, one of my students concluded, “I did not realize that libraries were important. I only thought about me and the fact that I don’t like to read. Now when I enter a library I think about others.” Perhaps there is a future ruler who might, in some far off conflict, protect rather than destroy libraries.

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BLOOD RITUAL IN THE LIBRARY:
reflection into praxis, or, how I started
to worry and stopped loving the flag

by Elaine Harger

But your flag decal won’t get you into heaven anymore,
They’re already overcrowded from your dirty little war.
Now Jesus don’t like killing, no matter what the reason for,
And your flag decal won’t get you into heaven anymore.

John Prine, singer & songwriter

Early in the morning on September 11, 2001, I sat alone in the library at PS/IS 176, the W. Haywood Burns School, in upper Manhattan, thumbing through a picture book edition of the story of Noah’s ark – a tale of an angry god feeling justified in killing all but a few members of the human race, many perfectly innocent of any sin or crime worthy (if any ever is) of capital punishment. An old story of mass murder committed by a god, condoned by his chosen human intermediaries – sacrifice and slaughter of innocents made acceptable when done in the name of God.

The previous spring, middle school teachers and I had collaborated on an interdisciplinary proposal for a collection development grant. Our proposal had as its focusing theme the notion of catastrophes – natural and social. The earth science and social studies classes would explore a variety of phenomena – earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, wars, genocide, torture – which humans experience as low scale, local disruptions, or as national or global catastrophes to daily routine, individual life and limb, social relations and infrastructures. Units of study would explore mythology, literature, history, current events, and the earth and applied sciences.

The teachers and I arrived at catastrophe as a unifying curricular theme for several reasons. First, because middle school life is filled with the sturm und drang of adolescent catastrophe. Life abounds with disruption. Middle school students, by and large, have a natural affinity to catastrophe – physiologically, their voices break, blood descends, hormones explode; psychologically, the young adult rebels against the elder with a fury; socially, relations are established and severed with an abandon the equal of which can only be found in plate tectonics and volcanic eruptions.
Secondly, natural and social disasters are often in the news, students find the reports fascinating, and they can tie in conveniently to school curriculum. Lastly, our library was home to a mural, painted by New York City artist Ora Lerman, which depicted the aftermath of the great mythic flood and Noah’s ark. Vibrantly colored toy animals recreate the world with brushes and paints, scissors and pens after the divine destruction. A statement carved into a clay tablet by the artist draws parallels between the library and the ark – the former a repository of culture, designed to weather social and natural stress for the benefit of present and future generations.1

Many of our students had, literally, grown up beneath the mural, to which we occasionally made reference when students studied the mythologies of different cultures. Our art teachers also used the mural with their classes. It was familiar, and so the idea of exploring catastrophe and the human work of recovery would not be alien to our middle schoolers. We won the grant and purchased with half of the funds books on mythology, history, earth science, social studies, and novels, the later depicting the “social catastrophes” of slavery, genocide, apartheid, holocaust. For example, many of the new books, including the Noah story I was reading, would help students delve into the connections between ancient creation myths and geological and astronomical phenomena.

Over the summer, however, most of the teachers I’d worked with on the curriculum found other jobs (turnover was high at our young, struggling middle school). Now, here I was with lots of new books to support lessons designed by teachers who’d moved on to greener pastures. So, during 1st period on the second morning of the first full week of the new school year, I sat alone in the library, looking for angles to entice a veteran language arts teacher into using our new collection of “catastrophe literature.”

In the days and weeks following that fateful morning, we did make some use of the books and the mural with a few classes to discuss the work of rebuilding in the aftermath of the great human tragedy that was September 11, 2001. Unfortunately, for us at PS/IS 176, as for people throughout the country, the human solidarity sought by many in the days after Sept. 11, rapidly became overshadowed by divisions created by leaders who cast the traumatic events of that day in simplistic frameworks – “the terrorists hate our American way of life,” “you’re either with us or you’re with them” – and appealed to all to prove solidarity with the victims of the attacks by engaging in public acts of patriotism. On September 13th, Congress passed a resolution encouraging every U.S. citizen to fly the flag in a show of solidarity with the victims of the attacks.2 School districts required the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools.
Flag rituals, encouraged by Congress, required by school districts, and demanded by administrators, became the litmus test of each individual’s patriotism and a symbolic wedge, separating those who supported “us” from those who, supposedly, supported “them.”

These symbols, the flag and pledge, and their presence in the library form the subject of this essay, in which I argue that the presence of either violates a fundamental philosophical tenet of librarianship, namely that the library embodies the ideal of free and open exchange of ideas in a democratic society. I will also argue that there can be no progressive, peaceful cooptation of the U.S. flag. I take these positions because my experience has shown me that symbols and rituals are used in schools, and within society in general, for patriotic indoctrination. Such indoctrination creates powerful emotional bonds that render individuals susceptible to manipulation, and also accustom the individual to prioritizing obedience to authority before all other considerations.

Flags at School

New York City blossomed with American flags after the destruction of the World Trade Center. Large and small, the stars-and-stripes adorned jacket lapels and skyscrapers. It became difficult to locate a post office. Every street looked dressed for a Fourth of July parade. Baseball stadiums brought in eagles to soar aloft to the strains of the national anthem. Every bus and subway car was adorned with a backward (i.e. flying) flag decal.

Such was happening across the country. Expressions of patriotism were expected in every venue – from the hotdog vendor on the street corner to the halls of Congress to the airwaves – and those who questioned, or refused to engage in displays of patriotism were branded as uncaring, at best, but more often as unpatriotic or even in league with terrorists. The NYC Board of Education resolution requiring the pledge ritual was passed at its meeting on October 17, 2001. It read:

Whereas, the Board of Education stands united with the City of New York and the United States of America following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; and
Whereas, the Board of Education recognizes that patriotism, liberty, and justice are important values that should be imparted to students; and
Whereas, the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America and its flag embody those values; and
Whereas, many schools do not now fly United States flags outside their buildings, in student assembly rooms, and in classrooms; and
Whereas, Section 802 of the Education Law mandates that the Commissioner
of Education issue regulations concerning a daily pledge of allegiance to
the flag and other patriotic exercises in our schools, and pursuant thereto the
Commissioner has issued Part 108 of the Regulations of the Commissioner,
which provides Flag Regulations for all public schools; therefore be it
Resolved, That the Board of Education requires all schools to lead students in the
Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of every school day, and at all school-
wide assemblies and school events; and be it further
Resolved, That the schools are encouraged to form color guards to present the
flags of our City, State, and Nation at assemblies; and be it further
Resolved, that the Board of Education shall make every reasonable effort to
provide flags to schools that do not have them, with the goal of placing flags
outside every school building and in as many classrooms as is practicable;
and be it further
Resolved, That no student or staff member may be compelled to recite the Pledge
of…[Author’s note: Ironically, the document on the NYC BoE website was
cut off at this point]

In early November, the staff of PS/IS 176 met and discussed the Board’s
mandate concerning the pledge. The spectrum of thought and feelings
expressed was very broad. Some thought the pledge was an appropriate
show of respect and unity. Some thought each class should hold a discussion
and decide as a group whether or not, or to what extent, it would participate
in the ritual. Others thought the mandate should be ignored, while others
thought it should be actively protested. Whichever stand was taken,
each teacher spoke from the heart, and at one point the exchange became
so heated, with one teacher shouting “If you don’t love it [the U.S.A.],
then leave!” that the principal moved to end the discussion. Fortunately,
calm was restored, we continued to talk, and ended by requesting that
the principal find out from other schools how they were dealing with the
mandate. Later that week the principal sent out a memo to the staff:

Dear Staff – On Tuesday we had a difficult but a most necessary
discussion about the pledge of allegiance. This open discussion was only
possible because you were willing to share your thoughts, feelings and
suggestions. I thank you for that…. Reflecting on all this, I decided not
to go outside our community with regards to alternatives to the pledge.
Instead, I have opted to move forward with faith, trusting that each
individual in our community can each hold onto their stands without
compromising the quality of our coexistence…. So I ask that you discuss
with your students the intent of the pledge, teach them the words and
review the symbol of the flag. In preparation for this exercise, which
will begin on Tuesday morning, please review with your students how
the pledge will be done every morning at 8:45 and Board of Education
American flags will be placed in every room by Tuesday morning, these
must remain on display.

Miriam Pedraja, memo November 7, 2001
The principal declined to inquire from other schools what they were doing in response to the Board’s mandate, which troubled many of our teachers, and we all knew that, in spite of the seeming openness of the memo, the last paragraph contained our “marching orders.” The flag had not been a fixture on our building or in our classrooms. Our school was founded by politically progressive educators and parents, and served a large immigrant community. Many parents were citizens of countries other than the U.S., and all parents had their own, and widely differing, views on expressions of patriotism. Teachers were concerned with how students and parents would respond to the mandated recitation, and it seemed certain that the order to engage in the pledge would sow as much division as unity within our school community.

Flags in Libraries

While teachers at one small school in New York City discussed the flag ritual, libraries across the country were raising flags by the score. Central libraries hung enormous flags over entranceways, tiny flags popped up on reference desks, and in the weeks to come several members of the library community began to notice, and hear stories, of how these silent symbols were creating a climate of discomfort and intimidation within libraries.

The question which arose in the minds of many in the U.S. in the wake of the September attacks was, “Why?” Some traveled to libraries for answers to that simple, and yet so complex question.

Tragically, our leaders were not seeking to help answer that most important of questions. In their view, there was no time to waste in trying to understand, the important thing was to act, to retaliate. Any questioning was treasonous – “You’re either with us, or you’re with the terrorists.” – and a politically volatile atmosphere hovered about the newly erected flags, uplifting or comforting to some, stifling or ominous to others. The volatility, of course, arose from the fact that the flag, as the primary symbol of the United States, represented the invasion of Afghanistan, the new Bush administration’s policies of “preemptive” war, “homeland security,” the USAPATRIOT Act, and the detention of “terrorist suspects” without charge or access to legal counsel. And, in some cases it was used to express racist, xenophobic sentiments.

The flag discussion amongst librarians began on the internet with Library Juice and the listservs of the Progressive Librarians Guild and the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association, then moved into more mainstream forums like American Libraries and the ALA Council listserv. The following excerpt from a posting to PLGnet
is representative of the core concern raised by the sudden and widespread display of flags in the library.

The administration of the library where I work (Multnomah County Public Library, in Portland, Oregon) has just announced to the branch supervisors that there will soon be American flags displayed in each neighborhood library. The flags will be inside the branches, in a spot designated by the branch supervisor…

In addition, in the last month or so I have been dismayed to see a few of my colleagues wearing American flag pins or “patriotic” t-shirts while in public areas of the library…

Oregon law requires that public employees refrain from supporting or opposing political candidates, initiative petitions, or voter referendums. Multnomah County Library encourages staff to interpret this rather broadly, and we are asked to refrain from saying or wearing pretty much anything, while at work, that might make a patron think we’ve got a particular view on an issue that is sort of vaguely politically related. The example used in the required intellectual freedom training I attended was that a t-shirt with the slogan “Free Tibet” could well make folks using the library less comfortable asking certain kinds of reference questions, or checking out certain materials.

To my mind, staff wearing patriotic gear, or flags suddenly appearing in the branches is far worse than a staff member wearing a “Free Tibet” t-shirt – flags are being used as symbols of absolute and blind support of the United States’ war in Afghanistan, and by some, as a display of racism and hate against people of Middle-Eastern descent and Muslims. In this context, I worry about the comfort level and safety of our patrons – patrons who don’t support the war, but especially patrons who are or might appear to be Muslim or of Middle Eastern descent…

Are any of your libraries or library administrators suddenly getting patriotic? If you have ideas about how to fight this, please let me know. I am really going to hate coming to work if there is suddenly a big American flag behind the circulation desk.?

Another librarian on the same listserv took offense that anyone would feel negatively toward the sight of the flag:

I love what my country symbolizes, and that it’s embodied in the flag. I think that the Bush administration is doing us all a disfavor and the U.S. foreign policy has not lived up to the symbol of the flag, but to be distraught at the sight of such a beautiful symbol to me is a sign that some folks have forgotten just what it means…I have a flag on my desk [from long before Sept. 11]…INSIDE my car…I cry during fireworks at the 4th of July, but my patriotism does not mean I blindly support what
our government is doing. I support and believe in the ideals upon which
our country was founded, and I would like to see them upheld.\(^6\)

Encapsulated in these two postings are sentiments, which to this very
day echo throughout the U.S. It seems there are three basic categories
of emotion people feel for the flag: those who love it and support the
government with little or no question; those who love it in spite of serious
questions they have toward government; and those who have no love for
the flag, who see it simply as the symbolic expression of nationalistic
chauvinism.

Teardrops, goosebumps and the flag

Where do our strong emotions toward the flag come from? On July 4, 1989,
the \textit{Washington Post} reported on some recently published psychological
studies on patriotism.

Patriots are made, not born. The process begins in childhood, when the
seeds of national devotion are sown with simple acts such as pledging
allegiance to the flag and singing “God Bless America” long before they
ever understand the words… In children as young as 7 or 8, patriotism
can first be detected. Preliminary studies of patriotism in schoolchildren
conducted by UCLA’s Feshback found that “kids experience a great deal
of patriotic feeling.” For children, patriotism is pure devotion. There is
no hint of nationalism until adolescence, when teen-agers suddenly begin
to be drawn to feelings of national supremacy.\(^7\)

The article goes on to say “Why patriotism may be linked to early [parent-
child] relationships is not completely understood.”

My own experience, however, shows that this matter is actually quite
\textit{easily} understood.

My father was in the military until near the end of my 7\textsuperscript{th} grade in school.
I grew up reciting the Pledge of Allegiance daily with my classmates, from
kindergarten on – eight years of this ritual, on the majority of days in any
given year. Additionally, in movie theaters on military bases, the very first
film shown would be of the flag, billowing in the wind, blue sky in the
background, accompanied by a stirring rendition of the national anthem.
All movie goers would stand at attention for the duration, then settle down
with popcorn and soda for Armed Forces newsreels, previews and – finally
– the featured film (often, for us kids, a Saturday matinee double feature).

Dad left the service in the spring of 1969 while I was attending junior high
school in Wiesbaden, Germany. I finished the 7\textsuperscript{th} grade in Mountain Home,
Arkansas, where the family stayed with New Grandpa while Dad, who’d resigned his commission in protest of the Vietnam War, went in search of a job. At my new school in Mountain Home, I was scandalized that the Pledge of Allegiance was preceded by a prayer. My concern, at that time, had nothing to do with the appropriateness of a prayer being said in school, but at what to me was the audaciousness of giving pride of place to anything before the pledge. My youthful sense of protocol was greatly offended.

Later in college, I found it necessary to do some soul searching, some serious reflection on my experience of patriotic rituals. By that time in life, I’d learned enough about U.S. history to have long abandoned participating in patriotic rituals, and yet I was disturbed and confused by the powerful emotions that would sometimes course through my veins upon hearing the national anthem, or seeing a symbol of U.S. patriotism – the flag, the Statue of Liberty, a soaring eagle, and, yes, 4th of July fireworks. I could sit through “God Bless America” at rodeos and commencements without feeling a thing, ignoring raised eyebrows and hisses and accidentally spilled beers, but sometimes tears would well-up in my eyes, or I’d get that goosebump thrill or a palpitating heart when suddenly faced with some national symbol. Why? Why were my emotions at odds with what my mind knew? What was going on in my body that defied my brain? Where in my subconscious were those hair-triggered emotions? How did they get there? And, what allowed them to stay there with such strength?

I eventually arrived at the only explanation that makes any sense to me. As children, saluting the flag and singing the anthems are one of the only activities shared consistently with whole groups of other children and adults. Furthermore, we are told by teachers and parents to feel proud, to stand up straight, to recite or sing with feeling – and so we do. We feel proud together – together – a group, a community of Americans proud of our country. As children we might not know what the words we recite actually mean, we might not know what exactly we are to be proud of (or even if we should be proud), but the words spoken together, in unison, and the images seen establish powerful, emotional bonds to words, to musical notes, to other human bodies and voices, and to those stars-and-stripes. As children, we in the United States are indoctrinated to feel powerful emotions when patriotic cues are present. We are trained to thrill at the sight of the flag, in the same fashion as Pavlov trained his dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell.

For myself, the only similar emotional ties I have are to a few songs that became important to me at different times in my life. From my pre-school childhood, the songs “Jesus Loves the Little Children” and “This Little
“Light of Mine” can still generate emotions as strong as those roused by “Solidarity Forever” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and “We Shall Overcome” – the songs I later learned as an adult in settings with groups of people with whom I identified, people I admired and sought to emulate, join, to be a proud, loyal member of the group.

The emotional bonds of patriotic fervor are rooted either in the natural, trusting, unquestioning ignorance of children, or develop at moments of personal crisis or openness in the life of an adult who desires to establish psychological, spiritual or political ties with a group – whether it be a baseball team, religious cult, congregation, or political party.

The same *Washington Post* article reports on some opinion polls inquiring about feelings of patriotism in several countries. One set of findings in particular strikes me as revealing:

81% of respondents in the United States – the highest percentage of any nation – said that they were “very proud” to be Americans. Next came Ireland, where 66 percent of respondents said that they were “very proud” to be Irish. Third ranked was England, where 55 percent polled reported feeling “very proud” to be British. At the bottom of the list were Japan and West Germany. Just 30 percent of Japanese reported being very proud of their nationality, and only 21 percent of West Germans said they were very proud to be Germans.

Although the article attempts no analysis of this survey, the low number of “very proud” Japanese (and probably the Germans as well) could have much to do with the fact that, after World War II, the Japanese were forbidden by the U.S. occupying forces from indoctrinating their school children with nationalistic symbols, songs, and images. The U.S. military command knew very well that the fervid patriotism instilled in young children establishes an emotional foundation for the training of soldiers willing to die for country. World War II certainly provided a display of the strength of the patriotism of Japanese soldiers.

When the war ended, it was the common intent of all the Allied Powers to render Japan incapable of ever returning to the field of battle. “Demilitarization” was thus the first policy of the Occupation authorities and was accompanied by abolishing Japan’s armed forces, dismantling its military industry, and eliminating the expression of patriotism from its schools and public life.

To this day I struggle, although with less frequency, with emotions triggered by patriotic cues, and in discussions with school and library colleagues in
late 2001 I argued strongly against flags in the library and pledges in the school. As it turned out, no flag was ever mounted in the library at PS/IS 176. I don’t know why, perhaps the custodians weren’t given enough for all classrooms. I was relieved, of course, whatever the reason, and happy that the library was, as I phrased it, a “flag free zone.” The pledge ritual at 176 didn’t last long either. Not only was there some resistance, but it was an inconvenient routine. During the period in which we did the pledge, however, on one occasion a class was in the library when the recitation came over the intercom. I was struck by the fact that the student who stood tallest, recited most clearly, precisely, and enthusiastically – even without a flag on which to focus – was the sole Middle Eastern student in the class. A few of his classmates half-heartedly engaged in the recitation, while the rest stayed seated on the floor in preparation for our story. Both the teacher and I remained seated. Freedom of expression at work? Would the Middle Eastern student have recited with equal fervor under different political circumstances?

The discussion on the internet between librarians resulted in the passage of the following statement by the Social Responsibilities Round Table at its Action Council’s midwinter meeting in January 2002:

**Statement of Concern on the Use of Flags in Libraries’ Public Areas**

SRRT recognizes that the US flag ordinarily is appropriately, proudly and respectfully displayed according to custom and law in libraries and public institutions. The display of the colors is a formal matter which is meant to represent the sovereignty and unity of the nation.

However the aggressive display of flags in unusual places, in unusual numbers, and in an unusual manner might be taken to imply, among other things, institutional endorsement of current US governmental policies.

Privileging symbolic speech in possible support of current US governmental policies tends to undermine the library as a place of free thought and compromises the neutrality of the library space. Such unusual displays may create an intimidating atmosphere for some library users who may be deterred in their requests for materials and assistance.

SRRT urges libraries to be sensitive to these concerns.

**Flags in the school library**

Three years after September 11, 2001, I found myself on the other side of the country, the new librarian at a high school, when all of a sudden (to me), at the beginning of 2nd period on the first day of school, the cheerful voice of a female student came over the public address system – “Good morning, Mount Si. Please stand for the pledge of allegiance.”
I can’t recall if there were students in the library at that moment, but the two other adults promptly stood, faced the flag, hands over hearts and began the recitation. I, meanwhile, filled with a surprised shock, which almost immediately turned to silent, internal rage – knowing full well what was expected of me, and resenting it powerfully – slowly rose from my chair, but refused to turn my body to face the flag. Instead I bowed my head slightly, subjecting my body and spirit to this authority. I did not remain seated, as I normally would, out of fear – fear of offending my new colleagues, fear of giving anyone cause to question my moral capacity, my worthiness as a new, untenured employee of the school, as an educator of young people, fear of jeopardizing my job. I felt shame and fury.

In the following weeks, I responded to the 2nd period instruction in the same fashion, minus the charged emotions of the first day, but with an ever-growing sense of resentment and an equally blossoming knowledge that this couldn’t continue. Something had to give – and it wasn’t going to be me.

What came to my rescue, in a moment of reflection while writing in my new work journal, was action research, a method used in the education community to structure reflective practice and which I’d experienced as a truly empowering form of professional development. [See Doherty, p.15] I would explore this problem systematically, smartly, trying to set emotions aside, I would collect data, analyze it and try to arrive at some meaningful way to deal with the situation. Central to action research is the development and fine-tuning of the research question, and by early January I had finally articulated the question behind my quandary:

How can I address positively the “imbalance of respect” inherent in my school’s daily flag ritual?

I was able to arrive at this question because:

(1) I’d gotten to the root of why I found the ritual offensive;
(2) I’d arrived at what I thought was a satisfactory solution to the problem; and
(3) I’d finally worked up the courage to share my concerns with a couple of my new colleagues and the principal.

Robert Jensen, in a speech on November 10, 2001, which was posted the next day on the internet by CommonDreams, calls patriotism “perhaps the single most morally and intellectually bankrupt concept in human history.” He goes on to express best why I have come to find patriotic rituals offensive when he quotes Emma Goldman:
Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who had the fortune of being born on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all others. If patriotic rituals are exclusive, they especially do not belong in a library, which strives to be inclusive. However, as I learned, Washington state law mandates the pledge in public schools, and I was in no position (at the time) to take on the state legislature. I could, however, “temper” the ritual symbolically, and decided that hanging an Earth flag, preferably above, but eventually (in a compromise) at a height even with the U.S. flag, would let all who came into the library know that this was a space which acknowledges the views and beliefs of everyone.

With my Earth flag “solution” finally arrived at, I decided to broach the issue with someone else. Until then, I’d been silent, not knowing how to approach this volatile subject with people I didn’t know. Fortunately, just about the time I was feeling very much in need of someone to talk to, one of my new colleagues offered that if there was anything I ever wanted to know about the “politics” of the school, I should just ask – and I did.

I learned that, as regards the pledge, every classroom teacher deals with it in his or her own fashion. Some require their 2nd period students to participate or quietly stand, others allow students to follow their conscience, meaning they can sit it out, stand quietly or fully participate.

Later, my conversation with the school principal led me to the realization that central to the problem is what I call the “imbalance of respect.” The principal told me that those who did not wish to participate in the pledge, must stand quietly during it to show their respect to those who did participate. The notion of this show of “respect” grated on my mind, until I finally realized why – the respect is always one-sided. Those who don’t want to pledge must show their respect for those who do, but never does the reverse happen. There is never an occasion when the people who choose to engage in the pledge of allegiance stand up to show their respect for those of us who don’t. Not on a daily basis, not on a weekly or monthly basis, but never. And, more importantly, the suggestion that standing is simply a way of showing respect is a falsehood. It is a falsehood, a euphemism, a facade for what in truth is a demand that one subject oneself to the authority of the flag, and of the person requiring that one stand, whether it be a teacher, principal, or president. In a democratic, secular nation, this is the
equivalent of requiring an atheist to bow before god, for a rebel to bow before the king, for an early Christian to bow before the graven image of a Roman deity. The realization of this brute, albeit symbolic, subjugation was confirmed when I discovered the book *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*, by Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle (Cambridge University Press, 1999). In the introduction to their book, they write:

> How does the flag operate in American life? Religiously, in a word... In American civil religion, the flag is the ritual instrument of group cohesion. It transforms the bodies of insiders and outsiders who meet at a border of violence. This is the kernel of the totem myth, endlessly re-enacted in patriotic life and ritual, and always most powerfully in the presence of the flag. Though the structure of totem myth is as familiar to Americans as anything can be, it remains largely unacknowledged. Though it governs our political culture, we do not recognize it. When it threatens to surface, it is vigorously denied. What it conceals is that blood sacrifice preserves the nation. Nor is the sacrifice that counts that of our enemy. The totem secret, the collective group taboo, is the knowledge that society depends on the death of its own members at the hands of the group. [emphasis in the original]

> …The claim that Americans are devotees of a powerful civil religion is deeply suspect. Americans generally see their nation as a secular culture possessed of few myths, or with weak myths everywhere, but none central and organizing. We [Marvin and Ingle] see American nationalism as a ritual system organized around a core myth of violently sacrificed divinity manifest in the highest patriotic ceremony and the most accessible popular culture. Though it uses a Christian vocabulary, its themes are common to many belief systems. Our failure to acknowledge the religiosity of this system obeys the ancient command never to speak the true name of God. It is said that so-called primitive societies fail to recognize distinctions between their religion and their culture. This is the first of many resemblances between ourselves and cultures we consider to be different from us by virtue of a special condition of savagery or villainy or both. A feature of our modernity is projecting on other cultures impulses we believe we do not possess and deeds for which we claim no capacity. By remaining displaced observers of our most important acts, we define ourselves as a nation.15

*Totem in the Gym*

Imagine a school gymnasium, shining basketball court, bleachers out and filled with 1,300 high school students and another 100+ staff members. On the best of occasions, assembly emcees call for quiet, scold the chatterers, denounce disrespectful behaviors, and frequently give vent to exasperation.
at the assembled crowd’s inattentiveness. On this occasion, however, a dropped pin would have shattered the silence after the Veteran’s Day color guard marched, shoe taps clicking, across the gleaming wood floor up to the podium. Absolute silence reigned, not a cough, certainly not a giggle.

Leading the guard, the stars-and-stripes, next came the flags of the State of Washington and the United States Army, one guard shouldering a rifle and, bringing up the rear, another guard bearing a staff from which hung long, heavy ribbons, a colorful array, each embossed or embroidered with the name of a battle in which the guard’s regiment had participated. The ribbons hung thick, and had the staff been ornamented, not with pretty ribbons, but with the skulls of lives lost in all those battles, the gymnasium would have looked like the French World War I memorial at Verdun, the walls of its cellar rooms lined with the bones of the unknown dead. Death and fear were in the gym; one could feel it in the utter silence of all assembled.

A speech was made by one of the guards, a flag was ceremoniously folded, and a recitation made of a text which, we were told, described the “meaning” of each fold:

The first fold of our flag is the symbol of life.
The second fold is a symbol of our belief in the eternal life.
The third fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks who gave a portion of life for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.
The fourth fold represents our weaker nature, for peace as American citizens trusting in god, it is to him we turn in times of peace as well as in times of war for his divine guidance.
The fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Steven Decatur… “Our country, in dealing with the other countries, may she always be right, but it is still our country right or wrong.”
The sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our hearts that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under god, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
The seventh fold is a tribute to our armed forces, for it is through the armed forces that we protect our country and our flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.
The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day.
The ninth fold is a tribute to womanhood, for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great has been molded.
The tenth fold is a tribute to the father, for he too, has given of his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since she was first born.
The eleventh fold, in the eyes of the Hebrew citizen, represents the lower
portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies, in
their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
The twelfth fold, in the eyes of the Christian citizen represents an emblem
of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, god the father, the son, and the
holy spirit.
The thirteenth and final fold signifies the original 13 colonies upon which
this great nation was founded.13

We were led to believe by the presenter that this text was a traditional part
of the flag folding ceremony. As one who has been present at many such
events, I was surprised that I was hearing this “traditional” reading for the
very first time. I even became suspicious as to its authenticity.

I searched the internet for a few hours seeking information regarding the
origin of the text. I spent a full day at the University of Washington library
pouring through histories of the U.S. flag. Nothing, nada. In desperation,
I sought the assistance of fellow librarians, first from Radical Reference,
then from the reference librarian at the U.S. Air Force Academy. The later
confirmed what I suspected – this text had simply appeared on the internet
(the Air Force placed it on its website at the request of veterans) with
no attribution, no history, but wide distribution – an instant “historical”
text. A new “tradition” of indeterminate age, certainly less than ten years,
probably less than five.

I present the full text here, along with the description of the Veteran’s Day
assembly, as anecdotal evidence of the insights of Marvin and Ingle into
the religious role of the flag in U.S. life.

Old Glory – aglow with goodness?

Debates continue over whether or not the flag, as a symbol of love for
country, can or should be claimed to represent what is good, truly good,
about the United States of America. And, there is much that is good about
this country.

I have come to the conclusion, however, that there can be no positive or
progressive use of the flag that can make it mean anything other than the
blood sacrifice it actually and historically permits, commits, and justifies.
Were you to hand a flag to a pacifist and another to a warmonger, there is
nothing, absolutely nothing, laying deep in the hearts and minds of either
individual that can endow that inanimate, red-white-and-blue object with
any meaning other than the actual, complex, neither all-good nor all-bad
history embodied in those stars and stripes.

…the flag does NOT mean “whatever you want it to mean,”…
unavoidably DOES express support for our present government policies, and DOES express a membership in that famous 90% of Americans who are happy with president Bush, support the war, and implicitly support John Ashcroft and the administration’s stated position that to express dissent is to side with the enemy. In other words, on the inside of a library, a flag is a political statement, and a very strong one at that.

While the thirteen stripes, themselves, do represent a historic moment of rebellion against a colonial power, and the lofty ideals articulated in the Declaration of Independence, they also represent the dispossession of native peoples of their lands, lives and cultures, and of the kidnapping and enslavement of countless Africans by many of those same rebellious colonists and their allies. Like the notches on the butt of a rifle, or the scalps in the belt of a bounty hunter, each of the fifty white stars on field of blue represents the violent seizure of land from people who made that land their home long before the arrival of Europeans.

In response to one librarian’s listserv comment describing his love of flag in spite of his knowledge of America’s bloody past and his present opposition to U.S. foreign policy in the fall of 2001, Mark Rosenzweig wrote,

...Fred’s attitude towards the flag is a matter of conscience: he didn’t suddenly bedeck himself in red-white-and-blue in this outbreak of flag mania 2 months ago. I would assume that for him the flag represents the nation as it is, for better and worse, and is a sign of his appreciation of the luck of the draw that he was born here, of his realization that the bounty he enjoys is also the systematic material product of the want, need, disease, death squads, elsewhere (and of poverty, discrimination, social injustice within) and his commitment to doing whatever he can to getting rid of the flip side of American “prosperity” and the freedom it affords, which is the beggaring of other peoples, the use of disproportionate mass violence to solve conflicts, the degradation of a large part of the planet and the despoliation of the natural environment of the biosphere, to all of which we as a nation make more than our share of a contribution.

Some people “parse” the flag in ways that try to make it mean something more than what it means in its official form.

I don’t fly a flag or wear the flag because to the person on the street it appears to mean I support Bush and his cronies. But I do wear a peace sign over the flag button on my backpack instead (I also have a “peace is patriotic” button...)

Coupling the U.S. flag with other symbols does, in my view, alter it in ways that visually and symbolically acknowledge that the wearer or bearer wants to communicate some modification to the usual meaning of the flag.
I believe such images are a worthy transition, a “weaning” if you will, away from our emotional attachments to the official flag.

Without such parsing, however, the only complete, historically faithful understanding of the meaning of the U.S. flag can be found through the eyes of those who suffered and died beneath its folds. We can be guided in this quest for understanding by considering the general attitude held in the U.S. today toward the flag of the Civil War-era Confederacy to understand this. While the stars-and-bars elicits nostalgic feelings among some people for the grandeur of the Old South, and to others has been “appropriated” as a symbol of rebellion against any number of entities, for most people in the U.S. today the Confederate flag is the symbol of a society rooted in slavery, a society not to be held in memory with any fondness or longing or pride. The presence in recent years of this symbol of the slave states over statehouses and public spaces has been powerfully challenged on the grounds that, as a vestige of social structures which no longer have approval in the civilized world, it should not be given place of pride in any public sphere.

One day, the same could be true of the stars-and-stripes. As a society, we might one day come to see this flag as it has been seen for centuries through the eyes of those forcefully removed from their homes, family members slain, women raped, children burned by forces bearing, or trained or paid by that flag and the nation it represents. We might some day see the flag through the eyes of young American men and women who have been lured into the war machine, by dreams of glory or need of a paycheck, only to have their souls brutalized, their bodies maimed, their young, promising lives snuffed out – all for what? For another white star on a field of blue? For access to oil fields, rubber plantations, copper mines? Will we ever see in the flag the selfish sacrifice of our own children to the maws of wars of greed and power? Remember Abraham ready to slit the throat of his son to prove his own allegiance. Remember Noah’s god drowning innocents. Remembrance. We in the U.S. are in grave need of remembering our past.

In a recent Nation article, Naomi Klein writes about the “amnesia” suffered in the U.S. when it comes to responding to recent revelations of U.S. use of torture. In “Never Before! Our Amnesiac Torture Debate,” Klein points out that President Bush’s press announcement from Panama City that “we do not torture” was made at a location an hour and a half drive from where “the US military ran the notorious School of the Americas from 1946 to 1984, a sinister educational institution that, if it had a motto, might have been ‘We do torture.’” She asks why so few people are willing in the context of the current use of torture by U.S. forces to remember the actual and known history of our country’s use of torture.17

Page 62

Progressive Librarian #26
The same sort of “amnesia” seems to veil our sentiments in regard to the flag. We remember “what it stands for” selectively, we suffer “amnesia” at will, when it serves our most tender of feelings.

Could the U.S. flag ever embody any level of goodness, could it ever be washed clean of all the blood in which it is so thoroughly drenched?

It depends.

It depends on whether or not the people and leaders of the United States are willing, first, to ask forgiveness from all those whom we have wronged. Some “truth and reconciliation” is in order in the U.S. Secondly, we must be willing to begin the task of acting in accordance with the ideals we claim to hold dear. Ideals, such as democracy, justice, equality – which are not exclusively “American” ideals, but human ideals, shared by peoples of many lands, throughout human history. Plato, after all, wasn’t a U.S. citizen. Neither was Jesus, or Spartacus, or Robin Hood, or any other people who have struggled against oppression.

We in the United States of America would also have to admit in our hearts and minds that our comforts are largely rooted in the misery of others. The bright yellow, delicious bananas we feed our babies, for instance, are picked by mothers and fathers who have no choice but to raise their children in poverty, because of unjust economic relations between producing and consuming nations. The pretty, shiny patent leather shoes worn by our toddlers are made by women whose own children have no shoes.

We would have to learn enough about of our own country’s history in order to know from whom we must ask forgiveness.

We would have to humble ourselves – we big, arrogant Americans – before the hungry of the world’s population and actually have the courage to ask “Can you forgive me for contributing to your suffering? What can I do to atone for my country’s crimes against humanity?”

We would have to listen to their answers. And then we would have to act, to transform words into deeds. We would have to harness our wonderful, American – no, human – creativity, technology, knowledge and “can do” spirit to meet the task of proving ourselves worthy of forgiveness. Only then might the broad stripes and bright stars be filled with the broad spirit that is a real characteristic of Americans, with the bright promise of the ideals we claim to hold dear. By then, of course, we’d probably want a flag that represented all humanity, not just one nation. At that point, the stars-and-stripes might be placed in a museum, alongside the stars-and-bars and
countless other banners of cultures no longer considered civilized, societies in which people clobbered each other over the heads, disemboweled their heretics, dropped napalm on the brows of children, and poisoned their own soldiers and scientists with Agent Orange, dirty bombs and minds filled with the horrors of war.

What are the chances of such a transformation? Well, today we are led by the son of a man who “In 1988, after the U.S. Navy warship Vincennes shot down an Iranian commercial airliner in a commercial corridor, killing 290 civilians…said, ‘I will never apologize for the United States of America. I don’t care what the facts are.’”

We in the United States must begin to care what the facts are, and we librarians are in a position to help that happen. After all, we are the keepers of the facts and so it is our responsibility to actively nurture communities as places where the facts are desired and sought out and acted on. When we see that our communities are being lied to, we need to promote the facts, the truth.

My first years in college were spent at Jackson State University, a historically black college in Mississippi. JSU’s motto was from the Bible, a quote attributed to a peacemaker – “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Perhaps we could start with the truth of the American flag.

Conclusion

In my library an Earth flag hangs level to the U.S. flag, and there will soon be a poster placed nearby with a photo of the planet captioned with the words of Pablo Casals: “Love for one’s country is a splendid thing. Why stop at the border?”

I no longer stand when the pledge is recited, but go about whatever work is at hand. The fulltime library tech with whom I work pledges with ardor. One of our student aides ignores the pledge, another sometimes responds, sometimes doesn’t. Our attitudes and behavior toward the ritual co-exist. Am I satisfied with this arrangement? No. My hope is that one day our daily blood ritual at Mount Si High School will be replaced with a bloodless moment of silent contemplation on the state of the world and on one’s place in it. Until then, however, a little progress has been made and will be continued.
Notes
1. See website with Ora Lerman’s work at http://www.lermantrust.org/tour.html
2. See House resolution at http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?r107:/temp/-r107KGFHTw
edge%20of%20allegiance
5. Emily-Jane Dawson, PLGnet-L, 28 October 2001
7. Sally Squires. “Old Glory, New Passion; the psychology of America’s devotion to itself”
8. ditto
10. SRRT flag statement http://www.pitt.edu/~ttwiss/irrf/resolutions.flags.html
RESOLUTION ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE IRAQ WAR AND LIBRARIES

WHEREAS, the justifications for the invasion of Iraq have proven to be completely unfounded; and

WHEREAS, the war already has taken the lives of more than 100,000 Iraqis and more than 1700 U.S. soldiers; and

WHEREAS, these numbers will continue to mount as long as the U.S. remains in Iraq; and

WHEREAS, during the current occupation, many of Iraq’s cultural treasures, including libraries, archives, manuscripts, and artifacts, have been destroyed, lost, or stolen; and

WHEREAS, as long as U.S. forces remain in Iraq, the inevitable escalation of fighting threatens further destruction of Iraq’s cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. is spending billions of dollars every month for the occupation; and

WHEREAS, even a small fraction of these resources would be more than sufficient for rebuilding and greatly enhancing the libraries and educational institutions of both Iraq and the U.S.; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association calls for the withdrawal from Iraq of all U.S. military forces, and the return of full sovereignty to the people of Iraq; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association urges the United States government to subsequently shift its budgetary priorities from the occupation of Iraq to improved support for vital domestic programs, including United States libraries; and, be it further
RESOLVED, that the American Library Association calls upon the United States government to provide material assistance through the United Nations for the reconstruction of Iraq, including its museums, libraries, schools, and other cultural resources; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that this resolution be sent to all members of Congress, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the President of the United States, and the press.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This resolution originated in the International Responsibilities Task Force of SRRT, was approved by SRRT Action Council, then revised and adopted by the Council of the American Library Association on Wednesday, June 29, 2005 in Chicago, Illinois. The text here is the official ALA version.
RESOLUTION ON DISINFORMATION, MEDIA MANIPULATION & THE DESTRUCTION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

WHEREAS, American Library Association recognizes the contribution librarianship can make in giving support for efforts to help inform and educate the people of the United States on critical problems facing society (Policy 1.1); and

WHEREAS, the mission of ALA is to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all (Policy 1.2); and

WHEREAS, ALA has as one of its officially stated goals that government information be widely and easily available (Policy 1.3); and

WHEREAS, ALA opposes any use of governmental power to suppress the free and open exchange of knowledge and information (Policy 52.4.1); and

WHEREAS, inaccurate information, distortions of truth, excessive limitations on access to information and the removal or destruction of information in the public domain are anathema to the ethos of librarianship and to the functioning of a healthy democracy; and

WHEREAS, evidence exists revealing that some U.S. government officials and agencies use disinformation in pursuit of political and economic power, as well as war, thwarting the development of an informed citizenry and constituting a “critical problem facing society”; and

WHEREAS, the list of documented instances of government use of disinformation continues to grow, and includes:

• the distribution to media outlets of government produced “video news releases” under the guise of independent journalism;
• the use of commentators paid by government agencies to express views favorable to government policies in clear violation of Federal Communications Commission regulations;
the censorship of scientific studies warning of the true threat of
global warming;
the fabrication and deliberate distortion of information used to
justify the U.S. invasion of Iraq;
the removal of public information from U.S. depository libraries;
and
heightened assaults on constitutional rights under the guise of
“national security”;

now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the American Library Association goes on record as being
opposed to the use by government of disinformation, media manipulation,
the destruction and excision of public information, and other such tactics;
and, be it further

RESOLVED, that ALA encourages its members to help raise public
consciousness regarding the many ways in which disinformation and
media manipulation are being used to mislead public opinion in all spheres
of life, and further encourages librarians to facilitate this awareness with
collection development, library programming and public outreach that
draws the public’s attention to those alternative sources of information
dedicated to countering and revealing the disinformation often purveyed
by the mainstream media; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that this resolution be shared broadly with members of ALA,
the press, the public and government officials.

Adopted by the Council of the American Library Association
Wednesday, June 29, 2005
In Chicago, Illinois

EDITOR’S NOTE: This resolution originated in PLG, was approved by SRRT
Action Council, then revised and adopted by the Council of the American Library
Association on Wednesday, June 29, 2005 in Chicago, Illinois. The text reproduced
here is the final, official ALA version.
PLG ALERT 9/21/2005

The Progressive Librarians Guild Opposes Roberts’ Confirmation

After listening to several days of testimony from Judge John Roberts, we must oppose his confirmation as Chief Justice to the Supreme Court. His testimony has been inadequate and his record disturbing. Additionally, as librarians who believe that democracy is best served with full and open access to government information, we are deeply disturbed that Judge Roberts and the White House have refused to provide the Senate Judiciary Committee with key documents that would have provided a deeper understanding of the judge’s worthiness to become a member of the Supreme Court.

Judge Roberts has been evasive on the issues of equality, the right to privacy and women’s reproductive rights. His published writings on enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 demonstrate an unwillingness to work for protections for all people who live in the United States. He has argued that the Constitution permits religious ceremonies in public schools, and that environmentalists cannot sue for enforcement of the Endangered Species Act. In 1991, writing on behalf of the government in a case on federal funding of health programs, Roberts stated, “We continue to believe that Roe v. Wade was wrongly decided and should be overruled.”

Additionally, Judge Roberts’ refusal to recuse himself this past summer from the hearing of Hamdan v. Rumsfeld – at the very time he was being interviewed by the Bush administration for Supreme Court nomination – speaks volumes of his judicial integrity.

Appointment as a Supreme Court justice is a lifelong position and deserves not only intense examination by members of the Judiciary Committee and outside witnesses, but also a willingness on the part of the nominee to be open and forthcoming when questioned. Judge Roberts’ guarded responses, coupled with White House refusal to release key documents from Roberts’ tenure as principal deputy solicitor general under President George H. W. Bush makes this examination difficult.

The Progressive Librarians Guild has little confidence that Judge John Roberts will protect the United States Constitution or the rights of women,
minorities and citizens generally. We urge members of the Senate who support Voting Rights Act of 1965, women’s equality, the preservation of women’s reproductive rights and democracy itself to vote no on Judge Roberts’ confirmation.

Approved by the Coordinating Committee of the Progressive Librarians Guild, September 21, 2005
ADDED ENTRIES

REPORT: The USAPATRIOT Act, Dr. Sami Al–Arian & the United Faculty of Florida

Tampa, Florida is home to CENTCOM, one of nine Unified Combatant Commands assigned operational control of U.S. combat forces. The CENTCOM area of responsibility stretches from the Horn of Africa to Central Asia. Tampa is also home to the University of South Florida, a comprehensive research university of over 42,000 students. The Tampa community has long been an odd mixture of military supporters and First Amendment advocates.

After the bombing of the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, Dr. Sami Al-Arian, computer science professor at the University of South Florida, went on the Fox television O’Reilly program to discuss the role of Muslims in the U.S. post 9-11. Instead of allowing him to speak, “O’Reilly accused Dr. Al-Arian of being a terrorist and the University subsequently was besieged by phone calls and e-mails calling for his dismissal. This was because on his own time Dr. Al-Arian had long been very active in, and very outspoken on, a number of pro-Palestinian and Islamic issues.” (McColm and Dorn). The university administration suspended Dr. Al-Arian on September 27, 2001.

The days following September 11 were difficult for the academy. Vice-President Cheney’s wife was a leader in the group, American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) which issued a list of disloyal academics titled “Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America, and What Can Be Done About It” (Blumenstyk). The University of South Florida had recently been reorganized and placed under a Board, wholly appointed by Jeb Bush, which had been trained by ACTA. The Board did not like public criticism of the university for continuing to employ Dr. Al-Arian (UFF). However, the faculty union, United Faculty of Florida (UFF), led by president Roy Weatherford, led a delegation to consult with the president about Dr. Al-Arian’s rights, and also took out an ad in the university newspaper, “Statement on Academic Freedom,” signed by members of the union. On December 19, 2001, the Board of Trustees
voted to recommend dismissal, and before sunset, the letter of dismissal was in the mail (McColm). Union activity on Al-Arian’s behalf, however, postponed the actual implementation of the dismissal.

The university had completed fall classes by this time and many faculty were no longer in residence for the holidays. The United Faculty of Florida immediately began action in collaboration with the Faculty Senate. Sherman Dorn, historian of education and UFF officer wrote a 16 page “Memorandum on Historical Perspectives on Academic Freedom and Faculty Dismissals” in response to a query from the Faculty Senate. Although it was the holiday break, the union organized and mailed information to the entire campus community that an emergency meeting of the Faculty Senate would be held January 9. At that meeting a majority voted against the administration’s firing of Dr. Al-Arian. The university hedged and continued the suspension.

The UFF, which includes members of the library faculty, acted during 2002 to expand public discourse on the topic of academic freedom to educate the academic community what it meant to fire Dr. al-Arian without due process. Programs held by UFF in 2002 included: Ellen Schrecker, a historian of McCarthy-era repression; Robert O’Neil, of the Thomas Jefferson Center; Philo Hutcheson, discussing the history of faculty unionism; Sheldon Grebstein, president of SUNY Purchase who had been a victim of academic freedom attacks in the 1960s while on the USF faculty; and a panel led by President Weatherford on the Johns Committee of the 1960s.

On February 20, 2003, Dr. Sami Al-Arian was arrested on a 50-count indictment for violations of the racketeering and other federal laws. On February 26, 2003 the university again fired him. The case was broadly viewed as a crucial test of government power under the USAPATRIOT Act. The Act lowered barriers that had prevented intelligence agencies from sharing secretly monitored communications with prosecutors. The Al-Arian case was the first criminal terrorism prosecution to rely mainly on materials gathered (beginning the mid-1990s)under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), whose standards for searches and surveillance are less restrictive than those set by criminal courts (Hsu and Eggen).

On December 6, 2005, after over 1000 days in prison and a five-month trial costing U.S. tax-payers millions of dollars, Dr. Al-Arian and three co-defendants accused of operating a North American front for Palestinian terrorists were acquitted of a number of the 51 charges against them, and jurors said they were deadlocked on the rest. The great majority of jurors
wanted to acquit Al-Arian and the three co-defendants on all charges. John Sugg, who has long followed the Al-Arian case has noted,

This case was entirely an attack on Constitutional rights, especially the First Amendment. The government of Israel wanted Al-Arian silenced, and our government obliged. Meanwhile, while the FBI and federal prosecutors were spending tens of millions of dollars and thousands of people-hours pursuing Al-Arian – a man who never was a threat in any way to America – the same federal agents failed to notice that also living in Florida was Mohammed Atta, busily plotting his attack on the World Trade Center. Had the government spent more time looking for real terrorists in Florida, 9/11 might not have happened. (Institute for Public Accuracy)

The decade long struggle of Dr. Al-Arian, the university and others is complex but well documented at the website of the United Faculty of Florida (McColm, “Before September 11).

Although the U.S. Justice Department may yet request a retrial and Dr. Al-Arian may still be deported (Lichtblau) the case has demonstrated that the USAPATRIOT Act is not all-powerful and that voices raised as advocates for academic and intellectual freedom can still be heard over jingoistic din. The important role of the United Faculty of Florida was direct support of Dr. Al-Arian’s rights as well as expansion of the public sphere through public lectures, forums, and careful documentation of the events.

Faculty including librarians used the power of the union to defend Dr. Al-Arian’s right to a fair trial and his right to First Amendment freedoms. By holding unfair labor practices up to the light, by rallying to call an emergency meeting that prevented the administration from firing him without a hearing, and by using the public sphere to defend the ideals of academic freedom, the United Faculty of Florida demonstrated that transparency helps light the way to justice.

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*Note: Because of the reorganization of higher education by Governor Jeb Bush, the administration withdrew recognition of the United Faculty of Florida union. The union filed an unfair labor practice, held a reauthorization campaign, and was restored. The First District Court of Appeals ruled on February 14, 2005 that the efforts of politicians to deny collective bargaining rights were not acceptable under the state constitution.

report by Kathleen de la Peña McCook
REVIEW ESSAY

Adult Literacy Practitioner and Theorist: the writings of George Demetrion

The national funding agency for libraries in the United States, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), thrived under the leadership of Robert S. Martin (Berry). Martin spoke often at professional conferences during the period 2001-2005 on the centrality of education to the library mission. Martin stated:

Never forget that the primary mission of the library is supporting and facilitating the transfer of knowledge: libraries are fundamentally about knowledge and education. Let us return to the center of our professional existence, revitalize the discourse of librarianship, and bring a sharper focus to our educational enterprise. (Martin, 2001).

Why is there such little general understanding among librarians of the educational role of the public library when it has long been a basis of the library’s rationale and, as shown by recent IMLS budgets and mission statements, has provided the impetus for additional funding ?

The long history of public librarians providing adult education and literacy support has been outlined by Peggy Barber and myself. In our essay, we note with concern the lack of connection between library practice and adult educators. Since the advent of the internet, citations in the library literature that address the provision of adult education have nearly disappeared. Very few faculty teaching librarians develop courses using the literature of adult education.

The growing strength of the capitalist class has had a negative effect on adult education. The distribution of life chances decreases as the power of the organized working class decreases (Rubenson, 2005). Literacy has been appropriated by politician’s wives as a lady bountiful sort of activity with small grants going to feel-good projects through programs such as the Barbara Bush Foundation. There is simply no literature in librarianship to address the theory and the context of adult education, and we have been bought off by literacy programs funded by corporations. Librarians have become part of the “learn to earn” movement rather than holding a richer “learn to live” motivation.

page 76

Progressive Librarian #26
To understand the intellectual and philosophical basis of adult education, librarians would benefit by turning to the writing of George Demetrion, director of adult literacy programming in Hartford, Connecticut. In Demetrion’s 2005 paper, Between the Life of the Mind and the World of Action: Explorations into Consciousness, Pedagogy, Politics, and Scientific Philosophy in Adult Education, he observes:

While I remain perplexed in many ways, the effort to more clearly understand the dynamic of the field through a simultaneous embrace of the logic of my field-based practice and theory construction, and to make concrete improvements wherever possible in either realm, continues. (Demetrion, 2005)

Demetrion has written many articles and essays that examine the role of adult literacy in the life of the United States. Some of his topics are the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire; the question of how adult literacy can affect a person’s sense of inclusion, well-being, and growth; Henry Giroux on the relationship of schooling to society; and the difference between the perspectives of adult learners and policy makers.

George Demetrion has addressed these issues in full in his monograph, Conflicting Paradigms in Adult Literacy Education: In Quest of a U.S. Democratic Politics of Literacy (2005b). Demetrion’s historical review of adult education over the last 20 years provides a convincing argument for a stronger commitment to democracy in society-at-large. His audience is adult educators, educational policy makers, legislators, college students, and librarians.

Adult literacy has become hostage to a workforce model. Librarians who work with literacy providers may wonder why literacy is not a central policy focus. In George Demetrion’s clear and insightful book the workforce readiness model prevalent in the U.S. is explained. I have found this approach inimical, for the most part, to librarians’ commitment to human capabilities. Demetrion helps us all to learn that there are alternative models that motivate and give meaning to adult literacy, and he gives us the intellectual tools to implement them— if we have the will.

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review essay by Kathleen de la Peña McCork
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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John J. Doherty is a Librarian, Arts and Letters Team Leader, at Northern Arizona University Cline Library. An expatriate of Northern Ireland, Mr. Doherty is also a recent co-recipient of the Arizona Library Association’s SIRLS/Proquest Intellectual Freedom Award for his educative work on the USAPATRIOT Act. He is currently working on his doctorate in curriculum and instruction, using critical theory to deconstruct the role of the academic librarian in online education.

Elaine Harger is librarian at Mount Si High School in Snoqualmie, Washington, and is managing editor of Progressive Librarian. An earlier version of her article appeared in the online journal School Libraries in Canada at http://www.schoollibraries.ca/articles/155.aspx.

Susan Maret is adjunct professor in the Dept. of Library and Information Science at University of Denver, and the author of “On Their Own Terms: A Lexicon with an Emphasis on Information-Related Terms Produced by the U.S. Federal Government” (located at the Federation of American Scientists website: http://www.fas.org/sgp/library/maret.pdf). During the fall of 2004, Dr. Maret conducted postdoctoral research in the relationship of human rights and environmental information at the HURIDOCS office in Geneva.

Kathleen de la Peña McCook is Distinguished University Professor of library and information science at the University of South Florida in Tampa. She is a senator and bargaining team member for her union, The United Faculty of Florida. Kathleen’s most recent book is Introduction to Public Librarianship (Neal-Schuman, 2004) and she produces the blog, “Librarian at Every Table.” http://librarianoutreach.blogspot.com/

Sarah Prescott has been an international librarian for ten years, employed in educational institutions from the Marshall Islands to Brazil. She is currently developing the CERT Library for the Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates.

Lee Tien is a senior staff attorney with the Electronic Frontier Foundation in San Francisco.
PLG’s Purpose & Commitment

Progressive Librarians Guild was formed in New York City on January 1990 by a group of librarians concerned with our profession’s rapid drift into dubious alliances with business and the information industry, and into complacent acceptance of service to an unquestioned political, economic and cultural status quo.

We reaffirmed, significantly, that the development of public libraries was initially spurred by popular sentiment which for one reason or another held that real democracy requires an enlightened citizenry, and that society should provide all people with the means for free intellectual development. Current trends in librarianship, however, assert that the library is merely a neutral institutional mediator in the information marketplace and a facilitator of a value-neutral information society of atomized information consumers.

A progressive librarianship demands the recognition of the idea that libraries for the people has been one of the principal anchors of an extended free public sphere which makes an independent democratic civil society possible, something which must be defended and extended. This is partisanship, not neutrality.

Members of PLG do not accept the sterile notion of the neutrality of librarianship, and we strongly oppose the commodification of information which turns the ‘information commons’ into privatized, commercialized zones. We will help to dissect the implications of these powerful trends, and fight their anti-democratic tendencies.

PLG recognizes that librarians are situated as information workers, communications workers, and education workers, as well as technical workers. Like workers in every sector, our work brings us up against both economic and political issues. Cataloging, indexing, acquisitions policy and collection development, the character of reference services, library automation, library management, and virtually every other library issue embody political value choices. PLG members aim to make these choices explicit, and to draw their political conclusions.

Progressive Librarians Guild is committed to the following:

* to providing a forum for the open exchange of radical views on library issues.
* to conducting campaigns to support progressive and democratic library activities locally, nationally and internationally.
* to supporting activist librarians as they work to effect changes in their own libraries and communities.
* to bridging the artificial and destructive gaps between school, public, academic and special libraries, and between public and technical services.
* to encouraging debate about prevailing management strategies adopted directly from the business world, to propose democratic forms of library administration, and to foster unity between librarians and other library workers.
* to critically considering the impact of technological change in the library workplace, on the provision of library services, and on the character of public discourse.
* to monitoring the professional ethics of librarianship from a perspective of social responsibility.
* to facilitating contacts between progressive librarians and other professional and scholarly groups dealing with communications and all the political, social, economic and cultural trends which impact upon it worldwide, in a global context.