

PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN

A Journal for Critical Studies & Progressive Politics in Librarianship

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HAPPENINGS AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
NEUTRALITY IN LIBRARIANSHIP
MI MANO, TU MANO, SU MANO...¿NUESTRAS MANOS?
21ST CENTURY PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANSHIP
POLITICS & PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTIONS
PHILANTHROPY
DOCUMENTS, REVIEWS & MORE

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COVER IMAGE: The artwork for this issue is a selection of literacy graphics created by Rini Templeton (1935-1986). Rini was perhaps the most prolific movement graphic artist of the late 20th century, illustrating the struggles of the people in the United States, Mexico, Central America and Cuba. Rini made thousands of drawings that were freely reproduced in countless newspapers and flyers for popular movements. She did not sign her work, and thus remains largely unknown. She was not only a keen observer of social movement struggles, she was an engaged participant all over the hemisphere – helping with the literacy campaign in Cuba after the revolution, working on a Chicano newspaper in the U.S. southwest, or as a propagandist for Mexican peasant rights movements. *Rini Templeton, Presente!* <http://www.riniart.org/>

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WHAT IS GOING ON AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS?

The judgements made in this paper do not represent official views of the Library of Congress. TM

by Thomas Mann

Several recent decisions by the current Library of Congress (LC) administration have produced firestorms of protest, both inside and outside the Library, that LC is abdicating its professional responsibilities to the national system of shared cataloging, as well as undermining its core mission to acquire, catalog, make accessible, and preserve its own unparalleled holdings – especially its book collections. Among these recent decisions are:

1. The commissioning of “The Calhoun Report” to provide an ostensibly objective cover to justify abandoning the system of Library of Congress Subject Headings (among other recommendations to downgrade LC’s cataloging and classification operations; See <www.guild2910.org/AFSCMECalhounReview.pdf>.)
2. The unilateral decision to stop creating Series Authority Records, in violation of the standards the Library previously agreed to in the national Program for Cooperative Cataloging. (For an overview of the damage this will do to researchers, see the national petition, with 3,495 signatures, to protest this move at <http://www.petitiononline.com/MARC830/petition.html>.)
3. The decision to accept digital formats for preservation purposes in place of paper copies or microfiche for traditional materials that are not “born digital.” In May of 2006 Beacher Wiggins, the Director for Acquisitions & Bibliographic Access, and Deanna Marcum, Associate Librarian for Library Services, agreed to cancel print titles from the Emerald group of publications in exchange for access to digital versions; in the previous month they agreed to stop collecting American doctoral dissertations on microfiche from University Microfilms in exchange for electronic access to digital versions. (LC, according to its national library responsibilities, had up to then maintained the only full set of dissertations in preservable form in any American library.) It was decided that “access” to electronic copies was less expensive. Recent papers on the astronomical economic costs of maintaining digital formats, as contrasted to microfilm – even apart from the still unsolved technical problems of emulation and migration –

were simply disregarded. They can be found at <<http://jodi.tamu.edu/Articles/v04/i02/Chapman/>> and <<http://hurstassociates.blogspot.com/2006/04/article-digital-black-hole.html>>.)

4. The decision by the Library's Copyright Office to dumb down the cataloging of copyright receipts by recording only the information on the registrant's application form, without any inspection of the actual deposited items. (An essay on the problems this will create for future researchers is at <www.guild2910.org/CopyrightCatalog.pdf>.)
5. Perhaps most disturbing of all, the continual starvation and dilution of the Library's book-cataloging operations over a period of several years, with the claim that "inelastic funds" necessitate a massive retrenchment in this area, when in fact it is the administration's change in "vision" that now ranks the digitization of copyright-free special collections as a higher priority for the Library's funding than maintenance of traditional book cataloging operations. The accumulation of these decisions marks a tipping point in imposing an agenda that has long been the goal of the current administration – a goal that will have profound negative implications for research libraries, as well as for individual scholars, throughout the nation. This goal can be characterized as "moving the Library into the digital age" – the "digital age," however, as it is envisioned from a decidedly blinkered perspective.

Characteristics of the Blinkered "Vision"

Several characteristics of LC management's vision for the future of LC, and of research libraries dependent on LC systems, are matters of great concern:

- It puts much greater emphasis on digitizing LC's "special collections" (manuscripts, maps, photos, etc. – in general, our non-book formats) at the expense of cataloging and classifying our "general collections" (i.e., the books).
- It effectively subordinates LC's book collections as being less important to scholarship than its non-book formats.
- Its new concentration on special formats entails a de-valuing of cataloging and classification operations for book formats – effectively a turning away from maintenance of the cataloging systems that research libraries everywhere depend on.
- It puts inordinate faith in Internet search mechanisms (Google-type relevance ranked keyword searching, Amazon-type user preference ["folksonomy"] tracking) for providing access to books, at the expense of entry through vocabulary-controlled headings and authority-controlled names, titles, and series,

the loss of which will be profound for systematic (rather than haphazard) searches.

- Its advocates' confidence in the adequate operation of Internet-type search mechanisms that "relevance rank" keywords from digitized full texts is itself predicated on the wishful-thinking assumption that copyright restrictions on book digitization will be greatly relaxed in Google's favor.
- Its proponents are acting as though those copyright restrictions are *already* legally relaxed, by attempting to dismantle the access systems (cataloging and classification) that remain necessary for efficient access to printed and non-digitized books – as well as any digital counterparts they may have.
- It asserts that substantial onsite collections of printed books are themselves no longer necessary in research libraries, and that books ought to be housed in remote storage warehouses to avoid "costly duplication" among research library collections; consequently neither LC nor any library following our lead needs to concern itself any more with the shelving of large collections of physical books in subject-categorized groupings for onsite subject browsing.
- Its belief that merging book records (either catalog records or digitized full texts) into a single huge database of "everything" searchable simultaneously ("seamlessly") through a single Google-type search box would effectively bury books amid mountains of irrelevancies that would make substantive scholarship much more difficult to accomplish.
- Its understanding of what "the user" wants is severely skewed by misrepresentations of what user studies actually report.
- Its proponents are relying on "feedback" from only a small coterie of like-minded "digital library" advocates, to the neglect of most users of LC cataloging and classification systems.
- It is essentially writing off efficient access to all books that are not in the English language – sources that would be systematically retrieved in the conceptual categories created by cataloging and classification but which will not be retrieved by Google-type keyword searches or Amazon-type reader referrals.
- It is effectively changing the very mission not only of LC itself, but of all research libraries, from that of promoting systematic scholarship, especially (though not exclusively) within book literature, to that of simply providing "something" (usually not books) delivered quickly and remotely, and discoverable only through haphazard and non-systematic keyword or user-referral mechanisms.

It is perhaps hard for the outside world to believe that such massive changes in the national library system – and such prospective losses of access to *books* – have already progressed as far as they have. Any further

debate on these issues, by either AFSCME 2910 members or the outside scholarly community, needs to be informed by a look at the pattern of LC management's own statements and actions.

In LC Management's Own Words

In a May 5th, 2006 letter to the directors of the Association of Research Libraries, Deanna Marcum, the Associate Librarian for Library Services, says the following:

When I spoke to the Association of Research Libraries shortly after I was appointed Associate Librarian for Library Services, I spoke of the necessity of rethinking our bibliographic infrastructure. I charged all of the directors with redesigning our services and products *with the needs of the end-user – the individual researcher – in mind*. I also charged the Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate...with streamlining their processes *to make information held by the Library of Congress more conveniently and more quickly accessible to our users...*

Despite the call from petitioners for restoration of funds to replace retiring staff, our decision to stop creating series authority records was not a cost consideration. We, like all of you, are looking for ways to invest more of our inelastic funds *in services that add value for researchers, students and the general public*. We are using the opportunity that comes with retirements to *reconsider areas in which to invest our staff resources*. We have millions of items in our *special collections* that are not available to the public because they do not have even cursory bibliographic description. *We know that increasingly our users go first to Google and other Internet search engines to find information they are seeking*. We have made it a priority to **increase access to content rather than to continue bibliographic practices that, though helpful to other librarians, do not add immediate value for the user.**"...

Big changes are on the way. The series authority records are but the first step in refocusing the Library of Congress to take advantage of the promises of technology, to focus on the actual needs of information seekers, and to build a 21st century library that is as effective in the digital age as the traditional library has been in the world of print. [Emphasis added here as below]

Dr. Marcum's vision for the "digital age," as expressed here, consistently reiterates her comments elsewhere, as reported (for one example) in the distributed minutes of LC's March 24, 2004, Cataloging Management Team (CMT) Meeting:

Deanna reminded the CMT of the "Out-Sell study" commissioned by the Council on Library and Information Resources and issued in October 2002, *Dimensions and Use of the Scholarly Information Environment: Introduction to a Data Set Assembled*

by the Digital Library Federation and Outsell, Inc., (available at <http://www.clir.org/pubs/abstract/pub110abst.html>). This study asked more than 3,000 faculty and students at nearly 400 academic institutions, ranging from community colleges to the Ivy League, where they went to fill their information needs. ***Deanna said the study showed that faculty and students have enormous respect and trust for libraries, but they don't use them. Instead, they turn first to Google.*** Most members of the CMT nodded in agreement. Deanna said this finding raised the question of how much to invest in the ways libraries have been providing information....She asked the CMT to think about cataloging ***from the perspective of users, not necessarily of other libraries.*** She also predicted that the future of libraries would be closely tied to relationships with Google and other similar organizations.

[Arts and Sciences Division Cataloging Chief] Judy [Mansfield] mentioned research by Prof. Karen Markey Drabenstott (University of Michigan School of Information) showing that ***end users "always" construct keyword searches as one or two words....***

Deanna said that the Library of Congress needed to undertake a massive effort to digitize its collections, notwithstanding obstacles posed by copyright law. The Library would need to negotiate settlements with intellectual property-rightsholders...

Dennis [McGovern, of the Social Sciences Cataloging Division] pointed out that *Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)* inform the *Dewey Decimal Classification* and the Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (FAST), and therefore have a life of their own even if students don't search directly using LCSH. LCSH is also important to researchers outside their own fields since the headings and reference structure present a view of the organization of knowledge in all fields. Numerous other databases use LCSH. In reply to a question from Dennis, *Deanna said that there is a good deal of research showing that subject analysis is less important now than in the past. She repeated that helping people get to information is the work we have to do....*

Deanna said that Google was seeking agreements with libraries to digitize the content they owned. If Google succeeds in digitizing a library of eight to ten million volumes and making the content available on the Web, what happens to every other library? *She said Library of Congress cataloging would not be needed in these circumstances. The LC role might be to augment the digital core with its special collections....*

Jeff [Heynen, Chief of the History and Literature Cataloging Division] said that "our biggest problem" was that the Library of Congress is committed to applying consensual standards which take years to establish and change.

Deanna closed her remarks by saying she was thrilled that CMT members were thinking as broadly and creatively as they could. [Emphasis added]

Of the many points touched on here, let us concern ourselves first with Dr. Marcum's expressed concern for "the user."

A Skewed Vision of the Library's Users

The passages just quoted place emphasis, commendably, on serving "the needs of the end user." What is problematic is Dr. Marcum's vision of who that end user is. In the letter to ARL directors she says "We know that increasingly our users go first to Google and other Internet search engines to find information they are seeking." And in the CMT minutes she claims that the *Dimensions* study "showed that faculty and students have enormous respect and trust for libraries, but they don't use them." This assertion, however, is directly contradicted by the study itself, which found, from over 3,200 interviews, that 55.4% of all respondents (and 59.7% of undergraduates) still regard browsing as "an important way" to get information. Two thirds of faculty and grad students use print resources for research all or most of the time; 52% of undergrads use print for coursework all or most of the time. (For additional evidence of students' continued library use, from multiple other surveys, see "Survey of User Studies" at <<http://www.guild2910.org/google.htm> >.)

Second, she says – accurately – that students do turn "first" to Google. But her implication is that the typical student today uses *only* Google – i.e., the user does *not* use the library *in addition to* Google. This is clear from the way she has repeatedly represented that user in several of her speeches. Indeed, AFSCME 2910 members need to be clearly aware that Dr. Marcum has portrayed "the user" that research libraries need to be concerned with not as a serious scholar but rather as undergraduate with a certain mind set:

And let's suppose that I am one of your students with a term paper coming due. And let's suppose further that I've been assigned to write about the foreign policy of President Fillmore.

Now, in the old days, I might have walked to the library.... But today, let's say it's cold outside on campus, and I don't want to go to the library. *I want to stay in my cozy dorm room*, where I have a computer....

I...have the option, *sitting there in my cozy computer-equipped dorm room*, of *ignoring the library*, and going online to, say, the Google commercial search service. *With Google, all I have to do is type my subject* – "President Fillmore Foreign Policy" – into a search box and click on "Go." If I have used "Advanced Search" to get only references containing all four words, up will come what Google calls the first ten references out of "about 14,200." I don't have to go through multiple organizational layers, guessing and clicking, to get *something* on my subject.

(From speech on "The Challenges of Managing Information" to the 2005 Presidents Institute of the

Council of Independent Colleges, 6 January 2005
[emphasis added]; same example used in “The Future
of Cataloging” January 16, 2004 <http://www.guild2910.org/marcum.htm> .)

In another speech, to the Great Lakes Colleges Association, 13 April 2006, Dr. Marcum uses the example of a now college-aged “Calvin” from the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, who also wishes to avoid the burden of “making the physical trek from his dorm all the way to the campus library.” In past times he “still had to go to the library building to get [information]. *He didn't like that,*” she says. She continues:

Eventually, you [college administrators and head librarians] *made it easier* for him by setting up an e-mail address, through which he could consult with a reference librarian *without going to the library*. And you installed a computer program that enabled him to do key-word searching of the online catalog. But before long, Calvin looked at Hobbes, and Hobbes looked at Calvin, and they both nodded – yes, *there's an easier way. Go to the Web, get the Google search box, type in a keyword, and get back **not catalog information, and not advice, but information itself*** – the stuff you really need to write a term paper. On the Web he could do that *without having to go to the library or anywhere else outside his dorm room, except that candy-bar machine*. Calvin really liked that. [Emphasis added]

The “user” who is portrayed repeatedly in Dr. Marcum’s speeches as someone who avoids the library entirely is not the user who is described in a wide variety of user studies (*supra*). Nevertheless, it is *just* this dorm-bound undergraduate whom Marcum consistently portrays as “the user” that research libraries should be striving to accommodate.

It is noteworthy that there are a variety of ways, not one, to deal with the student who does not “like” to have to go “all the way” from a “cozy dorm” room into a physical library. One is to educate that person to an awareness of the range of resources and search techniques that he or she is missing by avoiding the library and confining search inquiries to the Google alone – as opposed to endorsing the rank superficiality of scholarship on “Millard Fillmore Foreign Policy” that Google, at its best, enables. (See “Research at Risk,” *Library Journal*, July 2005, regarding the results that Google actually turns up on Fillmore.) This is not Marcum’s recommendation, however; she sees the Google Book Search project as essentially *eliminating the need for education*. In the same Great Lakes speech she says:

The project, Google said, would greatly advance its stated mission, which is nothing less than, quote, “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.” Additionally, Google is working toward providing, quote, “*the perfect search engine,*” which, quote, “*would understand exactly*

what you mean” (in your requests as a searcher) and “give back exactly what you want.”

That set of intentions is breathtaking.

Google, it would appear, will greatly *accelerate* digitization of huge libraries.... Also, Google keeps working on ways to enable users of masses of digitized material to find what they want ***with ease and precision***. Hearing this, Calvin suddenly ***lost interest in literacy training***. A new time-machine-like technology was in sight to simplify his homework again. [Emphasis added]

Marcum’s solution to the problem of how to serve “the user,” then, essentially recommends that libraries (a) put more digitized full-text content into Google, to increase the quality of what is available, and (b) to rely entirely on Google’s search software to provide efficient access to it because (c) Google makes educational “advice” from librarians and “literacy training” on how to do research unnecessary.

*Digitizing Special Collections as a Higher Priority than
Cataloging and Classifying Books*

Further, Marcum recommends specifically that the Library of Congress concentrate on digitizing its special collections (mostly copyright-free non-book material) rather than expend labor on its general collections—its books. Note, again, the consistency of her 2004 and 2006 views:

[2004] – If Google succeeds in digitizing a library of eight to ten million volumes and making the content available on the Web, what happens to every other library? ***She said Library of Congress cataloging would not be needed in these circumstances. The LC role might be to augment the digital core with its special collections.*** [Emphasis added]

[2006] – We have millions of items in our ***special collections*** that are not available to the public.... *We know that increasingly our users go first to Google and other Internet search engines to find information they are seeking. We have made it a priority to increase access to content rather than to continue bibliographic practices that, though helpful to other libraries, do not add immediate value for the user.* [Emphasis added]

Service to “the user” in this world does not value libraries’ creation of mere catalog records (“bibliographic practices”) for *books*. Nor does it value the intellectual labor of creating *authority controlled* names or titles, or *standardized* subject headings – why should it when Google’s keyword search software is envisioned as providing access “with ease and precision”? Apparently “the perfect search engine” would “understand exactly what you mean” and “give back exactly what you want” simply on the basis of relevance-ranked keywords and user referral folksonomies

(“people who ordered this also ordered these”). Is it any wonder, then, that LC is already moving to curtail authority work, or that it has commissioned an “outside” study – the Calhoun Report – to recommend that LC Subject Headings be entirely abandoned?

Endorsing Ignorance

Further, “the user” in this vision does not just use Google *first* – he or she does not use the “content” of any physical library *at all*. “The user” wants only “something” that can be found online, and won’t bother to trudge “all the way” to the library to get any other “content.” The highest levels of LC administration now believe that such behavior is to be simply accepted and endorsed as inevitable. In the digital-library mind set, it is an unshakeable article of dogma that “advice” from librarians and “literacy training” will always be ignored by the Calvins of the world, so why even bother to provide such education? This is tantamount to an abandonment of the ideal of education for an endorsement of ignorance – we shouldn’t even bother to provide instruction or advice on information literacy, because “Calvin” wouldn’t *like* that. The willfully ignorant undergraduate *is* “the user” whose immediate wants we need to dumb down our operations to serve.

In Marcum’s vision, providing whatever “content” we can digitize, as long as it is *immediately* and *remotely* available *through Google’s search software*, trumps all other considerations of what LC in particular, and research libraries in general, ought to be doing.

Shared Remote Warehouses in Place of Substantive Onsite Book Collections

In the new vision being promoted by LC’s administration, it is not even necessary for research libraries to maintain substantial onsite book collections! Such collections, of course, can be browsed for subject access because they are shelved according to the subject classification system created by the Library of Congress; and browsing enables researchers to recognize relevant books whose keywords, in a variety of languages, cannot be specified in advance. LC tried a decade ago to abandon the practice of shelving books in subject categorizations; the idea then was to shelve them by height, and within height groupings by acquisition order. Of course, abandoning the shelving of books by subject would also entail saving a lot of money in classifying them to begin with—the goal then (as now) was to abandon the maintenance of as much of the LC Classification system as possible (particularly Cuttering).

That attempt, however, was stymied by a strong report from the Task Group on Shelving Arrangement that rejected the idea:

Based on surveys, comments, and discussion with Library of Congress reference librarians and subject specialists, both in

CRS and public reading rooms, learned opinion favors retaining a classified collection on Capitol Hill not only to enhance in-depth research for the most complex questions, but to enable continuous and efficient evaluation of collections for collections development and management purposes, and also to facilitate risk management assessment....

The consensus of all survey participants, as expressed in their written comments, is that the use of the stacks in browsable classified arrangement, allowing additional subject access to information in related books, is essential to meeting the mission of the Library of Congress, "...to make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people..."

(from the *Working Group on Reference and Research Report to the Task Group on Shelving Arrangement*. October 30, 1997).

Even the Congressional Research Service weighed in with its own report, pointing out the adverse affects that height shelving would have on its ability to serve Congress:

According to a recent CRS survey, 52% of CRS staff responding to the questionnaire indicated they regularly go to the stacks to browse or select appropriate books for 5% or more of requests. A majority favors continuing to shelve books needed for congressional research in classified order in the stacks. The survey identified several reasons for this opinion. In particular, the current system allows additional subject access that browsing like works in a single location provides, to meet the needs of Congress, and especially to meet RUSH deadlines. Short deadline requests handled by CRS comprised 79.8% of FY96 requests (388,500 requests out of 487,000).

Of particularly serious concern to the Congressional Research Service is that under the proposed fixed-location shelving scheme, materials most immediately affected would be current incoming books, those most frequently used for congressional research.

Despite the gain of perhaps 33% shelf space for books that are arranged by size and fixed location (reportedly the experience of the New York Public Library), 87% of CRS staff who responded to the survey still preferred retaining subject arrangement of books on the Hill, even though this might mean more library materials stored off-site to continue classified arrangement of books needed for congressional research in the stacks.

(from *CRS Response to Shelving Alternatives in Library of Congress Stacks*. June 4, 1997).

Scholars throughout the country continue to regard browsing library book collections arranged in subject-classified order as essential to their research; this fact is confirmed repeatedly in a variety of user studies (see, again, the Survey of User studies appended to the Calhoun Report review

at < <http://www.guild2910.org/> >). One survey elicited the finding that “The importance of serendipitous browsing in library collections *cannot be overemphasized* by the majority of faculty space holders.”

That LC is once again primed to stop shelving books by subject was hinted at in a memo circulated to staff by Dr. Marcum on 11/7/03, in which she recommends the reading of an article by Richard Atkinson, “A New World of Scholarly Communication,” that appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 7, 2003). Atkinson regards the duplication of printed books in multiple research libraries – the maintenance, in his words, of “many parallel, redundant research collections” – as a practice that is “outmoded and no longer affordable.” He specifically labels as “self defeating” the maintenance of “the Association of Research Libraries’ membership index – which ranks the association’s more than 120 member libraries largely according to the number of volumes they hold on their shelves”; in his view, this traditional measure of library quality “provides no incentive for consortium members to forgo acquiring holdings that are otherwise available to the system as a whole. Even though the membership index rewards inefficiency and waste, we continue to treat it as a meaningful measure...in a networked digital age, *excessive attention to the local management and ownership of physical materials impedes the responsible stewardship of the scholarly and cultural record*” (emphasis added). His recommendation is that research libraries rely on shared remote warehouses for the storage of their book collections.

Remote storage warehouses, of course, do not shelve books in classified subject groupings; they are housed randomly in tubs (but retrievable through bar code correlations). Advocacy of such a scheme effectively eliminates the very possibility of browsing books on the same subject shelved contiguously – the books would neither be onsite to begin with, nor arranged by subject in the remote warehouses.

The Calhoun Report, commissioned by LC, strongly endorses Atkinson’s proposal. Both Calhoun and Atkinson take Association of Research Libraries (ARL) libraries to task for maintaining onsite collections whose books duplicate each other (and which could be locally browsed).

That is cause enough for concern, but other statements made by Dr. Marcum point in the same direction. In her “Challenges of Managing Information” speech” (*ibid.*, 2005), she says:

How libraries did it last night – indeed, in the last few decades – just isn’t going to work anymore. It isn’t going to work because what we were doing was loading physical libraries with such an increasing quantity of books and journals that we were pushing out the students and learning activities that libraries should serve. My guess is that the need for more shelves is what your campus librarians have complained about most.

What you should do depends on your situation, but here’s

what some others are doing about this nearly universal problem. Some are freeing library space by acquiring or building relatively inexpensive repositories off-campus for print resources that are the least used.

No one has any problem with a recommendation to send the “least used” material to offsite storage. But Marcum continues:

Some are containing costs further by collaborating with nearby colleges to build such off-campus repositories for their combined usage. Some colleges are collaborating further by making their collections accessible to students at all schools in a consortium, whose librarians then work together on *non-duplicative book and journal purchasing*. [Emphasis added]

Warehouses, here, are to be used not merely for the “least used” books, but also to house copies of *current* books to avoid duplication among many local libraries. The concealed proposition, again, is that scholars no longer have any need to browse in substantial onsite book collections.

In a more recent speech, “The Future of Libraries in a Digital Age” (an “Address to Faculty and Librarians of Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, 17-18 April 2006”), Dr. Marcum cites with approval a number of ideas advanced by a colleague from California:

I hold in high esteem a friend of mine in the library community named Jerry D. Campbell, who is chief information officer and dean of University Libraries at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles. In a recent issue of *EDUCAUSE Review*, a journal that deals with information technology in higher education, he has published an article entitled, “Changing a Cultural Icon: the Academic Library as a Virtual Destination.” There he argues that, quote, “the library is relinquishing its place as the top source of inquiry.” [< <http://www.educause.edu/apps/er/erm06/erm0610asp> >] Let’s think about what he has to say.

The Web, he says, has become the world’s largest, easiest-to-use store of information. Libraries might once have argued for their survival on grounds that much Web-accessible information is unreliable, and many publishers have resisted digitizing monographs. However, we’re discovering that works not digitally available are getting ignored. And so libraries, themselves, are digitizing books. In addition, major efforts to digitize more books – millions, in fact – have recently been announced by search-engine companies such as Google, which plans to digitize large parts if not all of five major research libraries. *Now, almost everybody believes that eventually the Web “will have it all,” says Campbell, who adds: “For most people, including academicians, the library – in its most basic function as a source of information – has become overwhelmingly a virtual destination.”*

Dr. Campbell does not believe that the Library of Congress, his libraries at USC, or your own Kenyon should immediately close their doors. Academic libraries must continue current operations through a *transition period until everything is on the Web*....what I take Campbell to mean is that *eventually all of us will go to the open Web for scholarly material, not to the campus library or even to its particular Web site. We will go "Googling" or "Yahooing" via the Internet to find what we need from wherever.*

Do libraries then disappear? Not exactly, Campbell says. Instead, some services, though "derivative" and not collectively "a fundamental purpose for the library," in his view, may "hold the key to its future." What are these services?

[Emphasis added]

The "services" in question are, according to Campbell and Marcum, providing "quality learning spaces," "creating metadata," offering "virtual reference services" (although "Campbell thinks the future of library reference service is uncertain"), "teaching information literacy" (although, in line with her comments above, Marcum adds, "Will making everything Web-accessible reduce the need for literacy training...? Perhaps...") It is noteworthy that no reason occurs to Dr. Marcum to justify the continuance of instruction). The other "services" are choosing digital resources and "maintaining resource licenses," "collecting and digitizing archival materials," and "maintaining digital repositories."

It is noteworthy that the maintenance of substantial onsite book collections, arranged in subject-classified arrangements to facilitate browsing and direct access, does not even appear on the radar screen. It isn't even mentioned as *one* of the multiple "services" that future research libraries need to provide. It is simply not a concern of the digital age vision shared by Marcum, Campbell, Calhoun, and Atkinson. As Marcum mentions at the end of this speech, "Perhaps Campbell is right that the book-based library may eventually disappear and the Web may become the library of the future." That, in any event, is the clear goal: to get research libraries out of the business of having to deal with onsite printed book collections.

What then happens to libraries as places if they don't have substantial book collections on the premises? Dr. Marcum sees future library buildings as "providing spaces in which learners can use...resources, individually and collaboratively, in multiple ways, including ways of their own invention. Computer banks, electronic classrooms, distance learning labs, special program facilities, collaborative study lounges, copy centers, even cafes and canteens and corners for contemplation – these are increasingly valued features of libraries. *Physical libraries.*" (This is from her speech "Libraries: Physical Places or Virtual Spaces in the Digital World?" at the National Library of Medicine, November 5-6, 2003). As she said to the college presidents audience of her "Challenges of Managing Information" talk (*supra*), "If you aren't figuring out how to get a little café in your

library like the big book stores have, well, just keep right on using it as a place that supports books, not students.” Libraries, of course, should not be devoting their resources to maintaining onsite book collections; Marcum, Campbell, and Calhoun believe that, instead – not *in addition to*, but *instead* – they should be digitizing “everything” to provide “direct access,” which is envisioned *only* as *remote* access to *digitized* texts, not as onsite-browsing access to printed books shelved in subject categories. The printed books, again, should be shelved in remote warehouses, to prevent “costly duplication.”

Recapitulation

In sum, because the Google Book Search project is envisioned as providing access “with ease and precision” to “the digital core” of millions of *books*, it is no longer necessary for the Library of Congress to expend its efforts and resources in this area – LC should, *instead*, concentrate on digitizing its special collections. This radical change in priorities (“Big changes are on the way”) has been a consistent feature of Marcum’s vision for years. The reason is obvious: since “the user” can rely on Google digitizing and keyword searching to provide adequate access (“with ease and precision”) to *books*, what’s left for LC to do, then, is simply to digitize the unique, *non-book* collections in its custody that Google will not find at Michigan, Stanford, Harvard, Oxford, and NYPL.

Providing leadership in the cataloging and classification of book collections is no longer regarded as necessary at the top levels of LC administration. Cataloging and classification are themselves regarded as replaceable by keyword searching, relevance ranking, and user-referral mechanisms.

Objections

Are objections to this “vision” merely instances of “resistance to change”? Are they really just attempts to preserve “the status quo” when a wholesale “transition” to digital libraries is offered as the sole alternative to the maintenance of traditional libraries? Do objections from professional librarians reflect only short-sighted and selfish concerns to maintain the “comfort” of old-fashioned but outdated practices? Are so many professionals’ objections, both from AFSCME 2910 and the larger research library community, simply crass attempts to keep unnecessary library jobs from being eliminated?

Or is it possible that the digital age proponents and consultants have only a very partial grasp of the truth, and that their attempt to force the whole of our responsibilities onto the Procrustean bed of a Google search box may actually be counter-productive, indeed *destructive*, to scholarship?

Is it possible that they in fact have no actual contacts with “the user” whose needs they profess to understand and represent?

Is it possible that their high administrative positions have isolated and insulated them from the needs of real researchers (not made-up cartoon characters), and from feedback on how badly Google actually works when the goal is scholarship rather than mere quick information seeking?

Is it possible that they do not grasp the importance of maintaining traditional book resources and access mechanisms within real libraries as *alternatives* to Google, when users' first-choice Google searches do not provide what they ultimately need?

Is it possible that they also lack feedback from any substantive first-hand experience in using their own libraries' book collections—the ones they are in charge of—for scholarly research?

Is it possible that they are misrepresenting the user studies to which they appeal as the ground for their beliefs?

Is it possible that they lack first-hand experience in struggling to read the e-book formats they would impose on everyone else?

Is it possible, when they confidently assert that *almost everybody* believes that eventually the “Web will have it all,” that their circle of acquaintances is much too limited to be representative of either the library profession or the much larger scholarly world it must serve?

Is it possible that they do not perceive any real differences between quick information seeking, on the one hand, and substantive scholarship, on the other?

Is it possible that they do not understand that “hit and miss” retrieval mechanisms which provide “something” quickly, while appropriate (and necessary) in some situations, are no substitute for alternative mechanisms that provide systematic and comprehensive retrieval when much more than “something” is required?

Is it possible that, on the basis of misread statistics, highly selective feedback from a too-limited “choir,” and lack of personal experience in using cataloging and classification systems, that they cannot discern if a real baby is being thrown out with the bath water?

One would hope that none of these possibilities is in fact a reality. If even a few of them were, then ALA President Michael Gorman's call for renewed emphasis on library education would be fully justified.

*The Continuing Need for Library of Congress Subject Headings
in Online Catalogs*

Since I have quoted so extensively from opposing viewpoints, I will give my own critics the opportunity to challenge some passages from my

own book *The Oxford Guide to Library Research* (3rd edition; Oxford University Press, 2005). It is a text that I wrote in the hope that it might play an important part in just the kind of educational effort Gorman has called for. In the current debates within the library profession, I hope the book as a whole will demonstrate that there is much more substantive value to traditional library practices than has been recognized by many proponents of the digital “vision.” The first passage, from Chapter 2, provides an example of the continuing need for Library of Congress Subject Headings, and for online catalogs with mechanisms (unlike Google’s) that can *display* such headings.

One researcher interested in the history of Yugoslavia asked for help at the reference desk because, on his own, he’d simply done a Boolean combination of the keywords “Yugoslavia” and “history,” and had been overwhelmed with too many irrelevant records. The solution to this problem was the use of the online catalog’s *browse* displays. When doing a subject (not keyword) search under Yugoslavia, a browse display of many screens’

Yugoslavia–Antiquities
Yugoslavia–Antiquities–Bibliography
Yugoslavia–Antiquities–Maps
Yugoslavia–Armed Forces–History
Yugoslavia–Bibliography
Yugoslavia–Biography
Yugoslavia–Biography–Dictionaries
Yugoslavia–Boundaries
Yugoslavia–Civilization
Yugoslavia–Civilization–Bibliography
Yugoslavia–Commerce–History
Yugoslavia–Commerce–Pakistan
Yugoslavia–Commercial treaties
Yugoslavia–Constitutional history
Yugoslavia–Description and travel
Yugoslavia–Economic conditions
Yugoslavia–Encyclopedias
Yugoslavia–Ethnic relations
Yugoslavia–Foreign economic relations
Yugoslavia–Foreign relations–Great Britain
Yugoslavia–Foreign relations–Soviet Union
Yugoslavia–Foreign relations–United States
Yugoslavia–Geography–Bibliography
Yugoslavia–History–1992-2003
[NT cross-reference to **Yugoslav War, 1991-1995**]
Yugoslavia–History–Bibliography
Yugoslavia–History–Chronology
Yugoslavia–History–Dictionaries
Yugoslavia–History, Military
Yugoslavia–History–Soviet occupation, 1979-1989

Yugoslavia–Kings and rulers–Biography
Yugoslavia–Maps
Yugoslavia–Pictorial works
Yugoslavia–Politic and government
 [with period subdivisions]
Yugoslavia–Relations–India–Bibliography
Yugoslavia–Relations–Pakistan–Chronology
Yugoslavia–Road maps
Yugoslavia–Social conditions
Yugoslavia–Social life and customs
Yugoslavia–Statistics
Yugoslavia–Strategic aspects
Yugoslavia–Yearbooks

These are only a sample of the full list. The researcher, in this case, was delighted: he could immediately see that he had many more options for his topic than he had realized. He was particularly excited by the **–Antiquities** subdivisions, which his keyword search under “history” had missed entirely.

Note also that all of this material would have been missed if the searcher had simply typed “Yugoslavia” and “history” into a blank search box in a massive full text database such as the newly-proposed Google Print project [now Google Book Search], which plans to digitize millions of books. The Google software cannot display browse menus of subjects-with-subdivisions and cross-references, allowing researchers to simply recognize options that they cannot specify in advance. Library catalogs provide much more efficient and systematic overviews of the *range* of books relevant to any topic. Searching for all relevant book texts via a simple Internet-type search box would be like trying to get an overview of a whole country while looking at it only through a bombsight. While the Google project may enhance *information seeking*, it will greatly curtail scholarship – which requires connections, linkages, and overviews – if it is regarded as a replacement for real libraries and traditional cataloging. (See Chapter 3 for more on Google Print [Book Search].)

I cannot recommend this too strongly: use your library catalog’s browse displays. When there are multiple screens of subdivisions, *take the time to look through all of them*. You will *usually* be able to spot important aspects of your topic that you would never have otherwise noticed. This technique is almost tailor-made to solve the frequent problem of getting too much junk via keyword searches.

The larger a library’s catalog, the more researchers must rely on *menu listings* that enable them to simply *recognize* relevant options that they could not specify in advance.

There are three such menus you need to look for: the cross-reference lists of NT and RT terms, the alphabetically adjacent narrower terms in the red books, and – especially – the rosters of

subdivisions that automatically appear in online-catalog subject searches. A great deal of intellectual time and effort by catalogers goes into the creation of these menus; without them, you simply have to guess which terms to use; and, as in this **Yugoslavia** example, no one will be able to think up beforehand all of the relevant topics that could readily be of use in researching the country's history. Online browse displays of subject subdivisions are the kinds of things real users would kill to have in Internet searches – but Net search engines simply cannot produce them. This radical advantage is available to researchers only in library catalogs.

*The Continuing Need for Substantial Onsite Book Collections
Shelved in Subject Classified Order*

The second passage from *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*, from Chapter 3, is an example the continuing need for onsite book collections arranged in subject-classified arrangements for in-depth browsing:

Let me offer one more example of the need for focused browsing of contiguous full-texts. A scholar from France, working on a study of the writer Paul Valery and his times, needed to pin down an important bit of information regarding Valery's connection to the famous Dreyfus case, in which a French military officer of Jewish descent was convicted of treason, and, only years later, acquitted. The woman had hearsay information from Valery's children and daughter-in-law that he had signed his name to a "petition" or "liste" on the issue at the time, but had no specifics of place or date. The large online *Tresor de la langue française* database of full text sources did not solve the problem, nor did biographies of Valery, nor did the *Historical Abstracts* or *Francis* databases (the latter having an emphasis on French studies), nor did two massive published bibliographies on Valery (each over 600 pages). I finally had to go back into the bookstacks, where, at the Library of Congress, we have 186 volumes on 6 shelves in the classes DC354-354.9 ("Dreyfus case"). As a shortcut, I was particularly looking for a volume that a browse display in the computer catalog had alerted me to, with the subject heading **Dreyfus, Alfred, 1859-1935–Trials, litigation, etc.–Sources**. (The **–Sources** subdivision indicates a published compilation of primary sources concerning the actual event.) This volume, shelved at DC354.8.Z65 1994, however, did not reprint or identify the particular newspaper petition with Valery's signature. On the shelf above it, however, I noticed another book, which, it turned out, did indeed have the necessary information. As an extra serendipitous bonus, the same volume turned out to contain additional information about one of Valery's close friends – information that solved another problem for the researcher, about whom she hadn't specifically asked.

Once again, a search of the computer catalog – even by call number – could not identify *which one* of the 186 volumes had the exact information that was needed. If all of these volumes had been scattered by acquisition number, or shelved according to their many different heights, it would not have been possible to find the right book without making separate requests and waiting for 186 individual deliveries. (The volumes could not even be delivered *en masse* if they were not shelved next to each other in the first place.) In the real world, the prospect of that degree of “hassle” effectively precludes the necessary scholarship from being accomplished. Libraries that do not take into account the Principle of Least Effort in information-seeking behavior are simply not functional, no matter how much money they may save; the purpose of a research library is to facilitate scholarship, not to save funds.

I emphasize the point because many library administrators these days do indeed think that “remote storage” techniques can be used within central library buildings themselves. This is something academics need to watch out for: if your library committees do not take active steps to prevent this erosion of shelving by subject, you will wind up with book collections that cannot be browsed *or* focus-examined down to the level of individual pages or paragraphs. In that case, you will no longer have systematic access to the “depth” parts of the books not contained on their catalog records: not just tables of contents and indexes, but maps, charts, tables, illustrations, diagrams, running heads, highlighted sidebars, binding information, typographical variations for emphasis, bulleted or numbered lists, footnotes, and bibliographies. All such material is readily searchable by focused browsing of subject-classified book collections. Further, the browsing search mechanism that presently allows you to recognize relevant books, or individual pages and paragraphs within them, will be replaced by blank search boxes on computer screens that require you to specify in advance, in detail, every word or phrase that may possibly be related to your topic.

The recently announced Google Print [Book Search] project, aims to digitize the full-texts of fifteen million books, from a variety of research libraries, and make them freely available for keyword searching on the Internet. It is not yet clear exactly how the project will segregate works still under copyright protection (life of author plus 70 years) from those in the public domain; but in any event the announcement of the operation has caused some observers to assert that local, onsite book collections will no longer be necessary if every text is keyword searchable on the Internet.

There are, however, real problems with such a naive assumption. Those who hold it are apparently innocent of experience in the ways real scholars must actually work. Let me return to the above examples....

Similarly, with the Paul Valery example, the researcher told me it is highly unlikely that she could have found the necessary information even in a huge full-text database like Google Print [Book Search]. One problem is that Google may not be able to mount copyrighted texts, which would include the French book that provided the information in this case. The other, more serious problem is that the researcher did not know in advance the right keywords to type in. Again, the Valery family members simply said the writer had, at some point, signed a “petition” or a “liste.” It turns out that it was actually a subscription fund to provide money for the widow of one of the individuals involved in the scandal; and the text in question, *L’Affaire Dreyfus et la Presse* (Armond Colin, 1960), reports that the names were published in the journal *La Libre Parole* in 1898. The researcher, however, did not know the name of this journal in advance; nor does the French text use the words “petition” or “liste” to describe the roster – it uses the words “souscription” and “souscripteurs” instead. In other words, the scholar would not have been able to type in the right keywords to find the information even if the copyrighted text were fully searchable online.

It is noteworthy that a search in the Google Web engine on “Valery” and “Dreyfus” already produces over 3,500 hits, and one on “Paul Valery” and “Dreyfus” produces 344. Keyword searching in a Google Print [Book Search] file is likely to produce similar mounds of chaff—especially since the single instance of Valery’s name in the entirety of the *L’Affaire Dreyfus et la presse* (272 pages) would not have ranked this text at the top of any retrieval set derived from all of the words on 4.5 billion pages, or from the frequency of “hits” on this one very obscure book. Focused browsing in classified bookstacks, enabling scholars to simply recognize what they cannot specify in advance, remains crucial to advanced scholarship.

It is especially noteworthy that any proposed use of Google Print to replace classified bookstacks would entirely segregate foreign language materials into multiple electronic “zones” that could not be searched simultaneously by the specification of English keywords. With classified bookstacks, on the other hand, books in all languages are grouped together by subject in the same locales; and oftentimes researchers can simply notice relevant foreign books on a topic simply by their illustrations or other visual cues. Google Print enthusiasts would unwittingly re-create in reality the disastrous consequences mythologized in the Tower of Babel story.

Google Print [Book Search] will be a wonderful supplement to classified bookstacks in real research libraries, but a terrible substitute. The overriding reason is that mere relevance-ranking algorithms cannot solve the massive problem of out-of-context keyword retrievals in full-text databases. Any large digitization project without the filtering, structuring, segregating, and channeling elements provided by traditional library categorizations would do much more actual harm than good – assuming, as the digital paradigm does, that digitized book collections would replace rather than supplement

onsite print collections – because the efficient *categorizing of books by subject* is not a problem that technology can solve through any ranking algorithms of keywords. *Information seeking* at the level of finding discrete data would improve, but *scholarship* (being dependent on contexts, connections, and webs of relationships) would be made much more difficult under the “replacement” scenario. Any attempt at a structured overview of resources would be precluded right from the start by inadequate filtering, segregating, linking, and display mechanisms.

Faculty library committees need to be aware that most library administrators fail to note the distinction between (a) general browsing to see what’s available, versus (b) focused searching for definite, and very specific, information likely to be found within a limited range of fulltexts, *recognizable* within that range even when its keywords cannot be specified in advance. If this difference is blurred, then all of the (valid) objections against general browsing as the primary way to do systematic research come into play, and none of the arguments for recognition-access to the depth contents of contiguous full texts are noticed. Although all historians, anthropologists, linguists, and others have experienced the advantages of direct access to classified bookshelves, almost no one bothers to write down the numbers of contiguous volumes examined, as in the above examples. It just takes too much time, and most academics have never perceived a need to do so. Nor do they articulate clearly the crucial need, in many research situations, for recognition access rather than prior-specification search techniques. (It is the dismissal by library administrators of any concern for recognition mechanisms that is especially galling to working academics, as it is usually done with the patronizing air that advocacy of anything other than computerized keyword retrieval is merely “sentimental” rather than rational.) Until recently, scholars could simply assume that no research library administrator would even think of undermining the practice of shelving books by subject. Unfortunately, that assumption is no longer a safe one – the abandonment is being actively promoted by bean counters who overlook the operation of the overall system in which the beans are situated.

The book provides numerous other concrete examples of the practical utility of LC cataloging and classification in solving the growing problem of too much junk being retrieved through Internet search mechanisms. The point is that Internet search mechanisms do not eliminate all difficulties – they in fact create as many problems as they solve. And those problems require *other* mechanisms for their solutions than Google and Amazon type access.

What is Going on at the Library of Congress?

So what is the bottom line here? The question with which this paper began is: What is going on at the Library of Congress?

There is substantive evidence, provided by *patterns* of statements both from LC management and from the sources it relies on, that the Library of Congress is striving mightily to get out of the business of providing systematic access to a large collections of printed books through the provision of LC Subject Headings (in an online catalog that is not merged with Google) and through the provision of subject-categorized shelving of actual volumes arranged according to the LC Classification system. It sees the digitization of book collections being essentially accomplished completely by Google's Book Search project (and some others), in spite of copyright restrictions. It also envisions keyword searching of these digitized book texts, with computer-algorithm "relevance ranking" of the results (and Amazon-type reader-preference tracking) as being adequate to meet the new goal of research libraries, which is simply to provide *something* delivered *quickly* and *remotely* to "the user." Questions regarding the *quality* of resources made available on the Internet are all to be answered simply by digitizing *everything* – in spite of copyright restrictions and in spite of the fact that Internet search mechanisms cannot *find* the quality material, or adequately segregate it from the mountains of chaff, through keyword and user-tracking softwares.

As with research libraries in general, the goal to which LC in particular should now devote itself no longer includes the component of providing complete and systematic subject access to printed books (i.e., to show "what the library has" in its book collections); rather, in furtherance of the goal to provide merely "something" remotely, the new emphasis is on revealing the content of non-book special collections over the contents of books. (Google will be trusted to provide the latter.) "The user" whom the Library is striving to satisfy is not the scholar who requires complete and systematic access to relevant books, nor does that user any longer require mechanisms enabling him or her to recognize important works (in a wide variety of languages) whose keywords cannot be specified in advance in a blank Google search box. Rather, "the user" whose satisfaction is paramount is the uninstructed undergraduate who has a term paper due quickly, who does not want to leave her cozy dorm room and trudge all the way to the library, who does not have time to read entire books in any event, who wants only English language material, and who cannot be bothered with anything that does not come up immediately in a Google search. Moreover, LC management's goal of focusing on the wants of this user includes the assumption that such students will not simply use Google *first*, and then go to the library, but that they will avoid going inside any library *at all*; this "user" wants *only* fulltexts that can be tapped into remotely. Digitizing those texts for remote access is now seen as *constituting* all that is needed to provide adequate "access" to them; no matter how bad, or how overwhelming, keyword retrievals may be, the proven alternative filtering mechanisms of conceptual cataloging and classification are now regarded as outmoded. And professional librarians who raise objections to the abandonment of cataloging and classification be dismissed as dinosaurs whose "resistance to change" springs not from their concern for

the maintenance of high professional standards, but from a selfish fear of losing job security.

And so the Library's management in recent years has consistently disparaged the work of its own professional catalogers, has invited a string of outside speakers to tell them how irrelevant and outmoded their work is "in a digital age," has changed Library priorities to avoid hiring new professional catalogers as old ones retire, has restricted catalogers' ability to extend the subject headings system, and has generally sought to promote the belief that authority control, standardization of headings, and the shelving of actual books in subject categories – that all such practices are now no longer necessary because keyword searching in Google Book Search is, or soon will be, an adequate substitute. For some time now, LC management has been looking for every excuse it can find to dismantle as much as it can of its own cataloging and classification operations.

The imminent loss of the LC systems will have profound implications for research libraries throughout the world, and for all of the scholars in all academic disciplines who depend on them. The dismantling of these access systems, already taking place, will make scholarly research in large *book* collections much more difficult to do at all, and impossible to do in any systematic manner. Retrieval of books through Google and Amazon type search mechanisms, in place of systematic cataloging and classification, will produce results that are superficial, incomplete, haphazard, indiscriminate, biased toward recent works, and largely confined to English language sources. LC's abdication of leadership in cataloging and classification is on the brink of dragging down the capacities of research libraries all over the nation to promote substantive scholarship over "quick information seeking." In the new "vision," the Internet, and not large, onsite book collections, is now regarded as central to substantive research; and research libraries themselves are viewed mainly as feeder-streams to provide "content" to Google, rather than as providing *alternatives* to Google in both content and search method capabilities. This re-centering of focus constitutes an abandonment of the mechanisms that provide systematic subject access to printed books. The national library of the United States is giving away the birthright of American scholars in exchange for a mess of Internet pottage.

That is what is going on at the Library of Congress. If scholars in this country, in all subject areas, want to maintain efficient, deep, extensive, and systematic access to book collections in research libraries, they had better speak up now.

Editor's Note: This paper was prepared for AFSCME 2910 the Library of Congress Professional Guild representing over 1,500 professional employees www.guild2910.org June 19, 2006. No copyright is claimed for this paper. It may be freely reproduced, reprinted, and republished.

THE HOTTEST PLACE IN HELL: The Crisis of Neutrality in Contemporary Librarianship

by Joseph Good

*“Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro
de li angeli che non furon ribelli
nè fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sè fuoro.”*

(They intermingle with that wicked band
of angels, not rebellious and not faithful
to God, who held themselves apart.)

Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy, Inferno,*
Canto III, lines 37-39

Contrary to common belief, the hottest places in hell, at least according to Dante Alighieri, are not, strictly speaking, reserved for those who remain neutral during times of crisis. That’s not to say that the neutrally inclined get off easily in Dante’s celestial paradigm, though. Dante places those who were neither for nor against God – “*non furon ribelli nè fur fedeli*” – in a region all their own at the very mouth of hell. Their lot is particularly unenviable, as Dante’s guide, Virgil, relates:

*Questi non hanno speranza di morte,
e la lor cieca vita è tanto bassa,
che ‘nvidiosi son d’ogne altra sorte.
Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa;
misericordia e giustizia li sdegna:
non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa.*

(They have no hope of death,
and their blind life is so abject
that they are envious of every other lot.
‘The world does not permit report of them.
Mercy and justice hold them in contempt.
Let us not speak of them – look and pass by.)¹

This sounds bad enough. It is therefore curious that history incorrectly attributes Dante as having consigned those guilty of neutrality to the hottest places in hell. Isn’t “blind life,” abjectness, and the envy of “every other

lot” rather enough, considering what else lies writhing in Hell (according to Dante’s witness)?

The fact is, the first connection between Dante and the “ultimate sin” of neutrality was made by President John F. Kennedy, Jr. Kennedy gave a speech on June 24, 1963, in Bonn, Germany, at the signing of the charter of the German Peace Corps. During that event, Kennedy made the following remark: “Dante once said that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality.”² Perhaps he was mistakenly thinking of the aforementioned lines 37-65 of Canto III in Dante’s *Inferno*; or, perhaps Kennedy was confident that Dante, in his expansive view of human morality, had equated neutrality and the lack of moral initiative with the greatest sin a human being was capable of. After all, we should consider the times Kennedy was emerging from; Europe had been torn to shreds by two world wars in the past fifty years, the later of which had very nearly annihilated an entire people by the most horrific kind of genocide. Indeed, the Holocaust itself would never have been as efficient as it was without the willing, in fact the eager, participation of the police departments and para-militaries of the nations that became subordinate to the Third Reich, such as France.³ The “neutrality” of the Frenchmen and Germans who stood by while their friends and neighbors were shipped off to Buchenwald and Natzweiler-Struthof may well have been on Kennedy’s mind as he stood on German soil and spoke that day in 1963.

So what precisely is meant by “neutral,” anyway? Switzerland seems emblematic of “neutrality.” Yet the Swiss government, in tandem with the Swiss banking system, conspired to smuggle millions of Deutschmarks of stolen Jewish money, in the form of gold bouillon, out of Nazi Germany during the height of the Holocaust.⁴ All the while, Switzerland maintained an official political neutrality that enabled it to preserve the integrity of its borders throughout and escape war crimes prosecution later on. One might question how “neutral” this “neutrality” was if Switzerland was acting as a covert banking agent for the Nazi regime while remaining politically uncommitted on the international front. This begs the further question: is this the true face of neutrality? Did Switzerland’s ostensive neutrality enable it to justify, on a moral level, financial dealings with the Nazi regime which ultimately contributed to the Holocaust? There is no escaping the definitiveness of Switzerland’s neutrality, since it was their statement *to the world*; in the end, Switzerland may have been more “neutral” than anyone suspected.

For it truly seems that somewhere in neutrality lays the negation of moral responsibility. President Kennedy and Dante Alighieri both understood that there is an inherent moral duty in the virtuous citizen to take hold of everyday events, to shape and define them. In Dante’s case, virtue was directly correlative with religious piety; in Kennedy’s case, with participation in electoral democracy. In both cases, however, these men understood the dangers of allowing people to become neutral observers

of history as it passed by. Kennedy perceived that such passivity led to uncontrollable downward spirals of political and social turmoil; Dante felt that moral indifference put a person's very soul at risk.

What are the social responsibilities of a librarian, vis-à-vis neutrality? The proposition that a librarian is responsible for neutrally communicating both sides of an issue, merely for the sake of ensuring that both sides are heard, seems fallacious, at best. Indeed, the very notion that both sides of an issue are inherently equal, and therefore entitled to an equal share of the public's attention, smacks of moral relativism. There's something more insidious, however, at work in such a practice. It is the perception that an idea must be given public hearing at all costs, regardless of its intrinsic worth. In such a case, the idea becomes secondary to the imperative to communicate the idea. The idea thereby loses any relevance in cultural or intellectual discourse.

Take, for instance, the argument presently raging over teaching intelligent design in America's classrooms. Gerald Graff, a professor of English at the University of Illinois, wrote a book in which he advised that instructors should "teach the conflict" surrounding an academic issue so students could understand its context. The deeper, tacit notion here is that knowledge is neither inertly given nor merely a matter of personal opinion, but rather, established in the furnace of controversy. The book is entitled *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflict can Revitalize American Education*.

The religious right took hold of Graff's idea and, in his own words, "hijacked it." The culture war that Graff sought to ameliorate has now, perversely, incorporated Graff's own idea as a weapon to be unleashed on the disciples of rational humanism.⁵

Graff's idea allows the religious right to divert attention from the relative merit of the idea they are advocating – in this case, intelligent design – and focus instead on theoretical notions of freedom and investigation. Truth and reality diverge; the idea itself is no longer the focus of interest. Rather, the notion that an issue (regardless of its individual merits) should be entitled to at least as much academic exposure as its contrary, takes center stage in lieu of real intellectual labor devoted to the idea itself.

What are the consequences of this practice? Simply, that any idea can be validated once attention is deflected from its claims and attached instead to some general truth or value that can be sanctimoniously affirmed. One is left not with an argument for an idea, but merely the quasi-religious certainty that the idea must be advocated for the public good. If this is what a librarian is reduced to – airing arguments merely because they exist in opposition to popular, moral, or ethical ideas – then the librarian is indeed peddling a set of hollow wares: ideas denuded of any moral or intellectual consequence.

The librarian's very space in the fabric of social and political discourse is threatened by the practice of neutrality. By offering neutral responses in the increasingly partisan cultural atmosphere, the librarian denies him or herself the opportunity to definitively reverse the tide of negative educational trends which have seen the diminishment of the influence of the library in American society. Neutral responses to the vital issues of gay marriage, African-American reparations, and affirmative action, continually jeopardize the library's relevance in contemporary society. If the librarian cannot be motivated to take a stand on pressing social issues out of a sense of moral duty, certainly the librarian should break his or her neutrality in the name of self-interest.

Charles Knowles Bolton stated that "Ethics...have been inherent in his profession even when not expressed in a code."⁶ This moral/ethical focus of librarianship seems curiously gone astray these days. There is abundant discussion of professional standards and competencies, but little mention of an ethical basis for these standards. Without an ethical basis, these standards are fundamentally two-dimensional. It takes moral conviction to make a professional standard work; the habit of lackadaisically permitting any idea, no matter what its relative moral merit, to filter through the library to the patron, is an affront to the professional standards of the modern librarian.

Neutrality is the logical conclusion of moral relativism; it is the pose most naturally assumed as a result of an ethical regime whose standards are defined by transient events rather than by consistent and unswerving convictions. Moral relativism disavows any universally solid principles; it is a road to the hottest part of Hell with a stop in Auschwitz along the way. Mussolini's own words on the topic of moral relativism should serve as a clarion call to every librarian who presumes to sit on the fence and await the outcome of the socio-political conflict our public libraries now face:

Everything I have said and done in these last years is relativism by intuition...If relativism signifies contempt for fixed categories and men who claim to be the bearers of an objective, immortal truth...then there is nothing more relativistic than fascistic attitudes and activity.⁷

ENDNOTES

- 1 Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto III, lines 46-65, Princeton Dante Project <www.princeton.edu/dante>
- 2 Quote # 1211, Bartleby's Quotations. <<http://www.bartleby.com/73/1211.html>>
- 3 For a thorough discussion of this phenomenon, see Susan Zuccotti's *The Holocaust, the French and the Jews*. NY: Basic Books, 1993. Susan Zuccotti is noted Holocaust expert and has authored, amongst authored works, *Under His Very Window: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (Yale University Press: 2000)
- 4 See Address to the United Jewish Appeal National Young Leadership Conference, Washington, DC, March 23, 1998 by Stuart Eizenstat, Under Secretary of State for

Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1998/980323_eizenstat_ngold.html

- 5 For a further discussion, see Stanley Fish's recent article, "Academic Cross-Dressing: How Intelligent Design Gets its Arguments From the Left" in *Harpers* 311 (1867), December 2005
- 6 Bolton, Charles Knowles. "The Ethics of Librarianship: A Proposal for a Revised Code." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 101, The Ethics of the Professions and of Business (May, 1922) 138-146.
- 7 Benito Mussolini, *Diuturna*. Milan: Imperia, 1924, pgs. 374-377



MI MANO, TU MANO, SU MANO... ¿NUESTRAS MANOS?¹

Reflections for socially responsible librarians

by Edgardo Civalero²

To Tupaq Amaru³
Not even four horses silenced your voice

*If we want
we can write a new history.
We can invent the daylight.
We can make the sky to move.
We can build new things with poetry.
If we want, we can chat with our past.
If we want, we can transform this present.
If we want, we can shape our future.
If we want...*

“Si queremos” – Illapu (Chilean group)

Alexander the Great had a very peculiar habit. When he received someone who complained about another's actions and asked for punishment, he covered one of his ears with a hand and listened. He explained this practice by saying that the covered ear was the one which had to listen the other person's version of facts. If the socially responsible librarian takes Alexander's role, one ear hears his or her own story, the experience of one's own life, work and visions. In seeking to work in solidarity with others whose life experience and cultural history are different... how should the other ear be opened? How could others' needs and desires be understood if our own are all we hear, keeping us from making a real connection with those with whom we would make common cause? Closing one's own ear in order to fully hear another's is not, after all, an easy task. This text is offered as a guide for self-identified socially responsible librarians wishing to work in solidarity with colleagues and peoples in countries outside their own – in this specific instance, in Latin America.

The signs telling all the stories, discoveries, successes and failures of humankind have been kept in the shelves of libraries from the dawn of

historic ages. The written memories of men and women, all their most valuable information, have always been managed by the hands of librarians. All this knowledge is an immense power: the power for understanding the past, solving present problems and developing strategies for the future. Librarians' responsibility is as huge as the power they manage and preserve, as their actions and policies can provide whole societies with chances for empowerment and progress.

However, many librarians seem to sleep a sweet dream inside a safe, quiet, passive bubble, without noticing the dramatic reality surrounding them and the urgency of the necessary and strategic service they should provide. There is a whole world outside the walls of libraries in need of help, education, opportunity, information – a world full of critical situations – every day. But even the librarians who are aware of this reality seem to prefer to remain isolated from this harsh universe, safe behind protective institutional walls.

Latin America is a conflictive land, a continent full of beauties as well as serious deficiencies. Most of its large population need high-quality education and updated information resources in order to overcome the challenges they face. Latin American librarians cannot ignore this fact anymore: they must become involved in their society's struggles and efforts, supporting their users' search for information and knowledge. Foreign librarians who want to help Latin American colleagues must learn how to collaborate in a supportive way, creating bridges with their work, and avoiding deeply engrained "First World" attitudes and colonizing mentalities that for centuries have built divides between north and south, developed and developing countries, informed and ill-informed peoples.

To understand Latin American reality – and, therefore, to understand the role of librarians within it – it is necessary to understand the historical process that led this continent to its current situation... and what exactly is this situation. This essay is a little, completely personal and subjective view, written from a Latin American perspective. It will not deal with usual LIS issues, as far as they are sufficiently presented and widely discussed in specialized journals and papers everywhere. Instead of this, this essay gives a social approach to Latin American users' reality and needs. Such understanding is essential, because if this social and cultural context is not known and understood in the first place, librarians cannot expect to design useful services, collections, programs and activities. Without this context all the academic LIS literature and aid programs become completely useless.

People used to reading conventional Euro-North American points-of-view might find the contents of this text radical or unflattering. But sometimes it is wise to listen others' opinion before building one's own. This essay is aimed at providing thought for reflection, and to help uncover "the other ear."

Part 1. A foggy history

*My feathered brothers saw them arriving from the sea.
They were the bearded Gods announced by prophecies (...).
But Gods don't eat, and they don't enjoy stolen goods,
and when we realized this, everything was already finished.
We kept the curse of giving to foreigners
our faith, our culture, our bread and our money.*

“Maldición de Malinche.” Mexican song.⁴

Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano entitled one of his more famous books “The Open Veins of Latin America.” Only those who have seen Latin American social reality up close are able to understand that Galeano did not use a metaphor. The peoples of this huge continent hide, behind their natural happiness, passion and enthusiasm, hundreds of open wounds that never heal.

Before the arrival of Europeans to the western hemisphere, aboriginal societies – some of which were developing rich and highly sophisticated cultures – did not precisely live in peace and harmony. “Pink legends” spread by Latin American writers, historians and some social movements depict a romanticized life for indigenous peoples which is far from the hard, complex reality lived by those societies, a reality shared at various points in time by every human group in every corner of the planet. They killed and were killed for power, they conquered and were dominated, they invaded and were exploited. An opposing school of thought circulates the “black legends” which place responsibility for all suffering in Latin America on the Spanish conquest.

European invasion did, indeed, bring to what became the Americas a social, economic and political scheme that lasted through centuries and that immersed the whole continent in shadows: colonialism.

Rooted in military coercion, in cultural denial, in the violent elimination of whole populations, in the systematic destruction of pre-existent socio-environmental, economic, productive and political structures, the conquest and colonization of America subjected millions of people to an almost slavist regime, creating, at the same time, a powerful elite which controlled the destinies of peoples and territories according to the colonizers own material interests.

To generalize is a mistake, of course, and to believe either the “pink” or the “black legends” as an absolute reality is erroneous. Hundreds of autochthonous cultures survive into present times, and, in several aspects, local and foreign systems blended in an amazing way, originating new regional identities, which expressed the best – as well as the worst – features of their predecessors.⁵ Over time, tens-of-thousands of people struggled for justice and for the welfare of their societies, and a lot of them sacrificed

their lives in honor of their ideals of freedom, equality and political and cultural autonomy.⁶

Setting aside myth and legend, the basis of what became a characteristic social structure in Latin America was established: European (or europeized) elites of educated and conservative landowners, traders, bureaucrats and politicians loomed over this immense continent of indigenous, black, mulatto and mestizo peasantry who worked the lands that, in old times, belonged to some of their ancestors.

Part 2. Independence?

*Listen, mortals, the sacred cry:
Freedom, freedom, freedom...*

Argentinean national anthem

The Andean miners, the Central American peasants, the gauchos in Argentinean pampas and the slaves in the plantations shared a common past and a common destiny: to extract benefits from land and industries, benefits that went directly to fill the chests of the upper classes. The absence of education, organization and basic instruction among the lower classes was remarkable, and thwarted their attempts to create a better future, and seek alternative paths, but they never stopped trying. In fact, during the first three centuries of Hispanic occupation, popular rebellions were extremely violent, and their results were sadly dramatic.

The first books printed in America were catechisms, published in the languages of indigenous groups, used in the evangelization of local peoples, as well as grammars and dictionaries of indigenous languages, mainly used for translating those catechisms. The sword dominated, the cross tamed, and “the Book” taught how to put other checks on peoples who were not considered human beings by Spanish laws until the middle of the sixteenth century.⁷ Several decades vanished before Latin American publishers produced a non-religious book.⁸ At the same time, texts arrived from Europe started spreading ideas in vogue on “the continent.” Scarce and precious goods, they were the tools that began the diffusion – during late eighteenth century – of revolutionary ideas among the educated layers of Latin American societies, eventually igniting a political fire that swept the whole continent during the first half of the nineteenth century and which ended in the birth of the current “independent” nations.⁹

Even though education, printing, and books spread, and with them were disseminated literacy, culture, development and recovery of regional traditions, the ever-oppressed masses of people remained in their place. After national independences,¹⁰ they might have been liberated from a number of yokes, for sure, but the newly formed societies – quickly forgetting their egalitarian and libertarian ideals and creating new foreign-like elites of power – kept them bound to the same basic situation of oppression.

Peasants and workers were scorned when compared with the refined European culture: traditional and popular traits became mere curiosities; peasant realities were rough and inferior; labor demands became rebellions of wretched poor people; and the lower classes' demands were treated as simple banditry hardly deserving notice.

Dozens of popular movements have arisen in Latin America since the late-nineteenth century and continue today, especially when political power – always faithful to European and North American interests – is taken into military hands. Peasants, have-nots, intellectuals, artists, idealists and priests, all have joined around great personalities many of whom became famous leaders, who slowly implemented changes. Great popular heroes arose: Zapata, Sandino, Torres, Preste, Guevara, Castro... and thousands of anonymous fighters who fell in combat or disappeared in the turbulent periods of dictatorship and dirty war.¹¹ There also arose those who fought with songs, words and ideas: writers, musicians, poets, artists – all reflecting the soul of the people, of a wounded people who never learnt to surrender. Throughout all this upheaval, education spread via books, schools and libraries, and they did not just spread culture, but again new ideas, cutting chains and handcuffs, uncovering eyes and ears, eliminating gags and liberating minds from their most recent bonds.

Today, new winds blow in Latin America, and even if foreign imperialistic powers still step with their boots on the continent's neck, and dominant classes try to keep alive their traditional forms of power, domination and oppression, popular and progressive movements – of an obvious left-wing tendency – are taking the reins of national destinies and slowly changing the social panorama and the course of events. Latin American social trends, their progressive political turn in socialist directions, the payment of external debts and the creation of regional alliances demonstrate a clear will to create strong, really independent political and social identities, based on the popular reality of the continent.

Part 3. About problems and solutions

*The [Spanish] dreams of swindle and sackery,
their love of gold, their desire of power
are the cancer who made their heirs ill,
are the history of a land condemned to suffer.*

“Carabelas.” Ricardo Arjona

Latin America – the protagonist of this history – is a vigorous land with important creative and intellectual capacity, industries and immense human and natural resources. But, socially speaking, it remains a strongly rural and peasant continent, even if most of its population is stacked around huge urban settlements, many living under precarious conditions, experiencing the same poverty and marginality they tried to escape when

they left their rural homelands. Latin American social reality is too complex to be described in a few lines, but, basically, cities teem with marginal populations barely surviving at alarming levels of poverty, and rural spaces are territories sparsely populated.

The problems of city and countryside are similar: cities are places of job shortages, social exclusion, lack of education and family planning, delinquency, addiction, identity loss and violence; rural areas suffer from sanitary problems, illiteracy, loss of local culture, poverty and malnutrition, labor exploitation, violation of rights and discrimination of minorities. The absence of literacy, education, labor formation, and legal and sanitary information programs are problems in both city and country, and are perhaps one of the main challenges for national governments. A new source of inequity in the form of information and communication technologies (ICT) is now widely spreading. In cities the digital divide is strongly felt in the face of a “knowledge and information society” that never stops its frantic race and that never waits for those left behind.

Can the book and the library contribute to solving problems arising from the timeless struggle for basic human needs and equally timeless yearning to fulfill human creative potential? But, of course! The question is – how?

Obviously, books and education alone cannot solve present hunger, but they are indispensable instruments if a nation expects to solve the future hunger of its people. In principle, they can also recover local identities that are vanishing, they can preserve the memory of destroyed minority cultures, and can record oral traditions that are being lost daily. They can provide two basic instruments for every community or people that wishes to thrive: reading and writing. They can inform about how to solve basic problems concerning health, nutrition and environment, or how to defend rights and assume responsibilities. They can support basic and higher education, and provide instruments for the creation of small industries and work skills. They can offer opportunities for development that most people have not experienced in five centuries of history. They can especially continue cutting chains and liberating minds. They are not a miraculous cure for all human problems, but they are an essential element in the cure – if they are correctly used, if their use is guided by the spirit of social responsibility.¹²

The social responsibilities of librarians are precisely based on this “correct use”. The explosive development of library and information sciences, of books and of ICTs on an international level has demonstrated that human beings can manage their knowledge in a tremendously efficient way, obtaining great benefits. But, for several reasons, many of these benefits have not been reaped in the “developing” countries.

Why? Probably, because of the absence of “correct use.”

First, the distribution of resources and goods in Latin America is terribly unequal. Second, it is common to import, from “advanced” or “developed”

countries, tools and work models that never fit the needs and features of the final users. And it is, of course, just as common that these strange imports are refused by the recipients. And third, the very idea of social responsibility within librarianship is not fully developed yet, even if there are, everywhere, examples of social responsibility that are almost heroic.

As evidence of the underdeveloped state of social responsibility as a central component of librarianship, LIS education – with rare exceptions – deals very poorly with popular and social aspects of libraries within society. This is not only a shortcoming just in Latin America, but here there is some urgency for every region to address social needs and, therefore, its absence within librarianship is more striking. LIS education does not even show an awareness of what we in Latin America call “trench” libraries – rural, popular, community libraries that are cared for by professionals who feel (and sometimes actually are) isolated, and who bravely struggle to complete or continue their education, and to provide, with almost nonexistent resources, services that address the imperative needs of their communities.

Part 4. Where brilliance is brightest, the shadows are deepest

*In my country, yearly, 5000 children take flight
like little angels, with their wings over the good airs...
They have the good luck and the quietness of ignoring everything..
Maybe God stole these souls for keeping them as good beings.*

“Mensajes del alma” León Gieco

Latin America is a world full of light and brilliance. But, in keeping with a very simple physical law, everything in this world having a bright side also has a shadow. And shadows, in this continent, can be terrible, and make up the daily world of librarians “in the trenches.” Babies and children die in the cold of Susques (Jujuy, in northwest Argentina), a little village where 35% of children die before reaching 5 years of life. This is not an isolated problem happening just in this little Andean village. It also happens in other spots in Latin America. It happens in the whole continent.

Susques is one of the thousand places in Latin America where children have to travel from six to eight hours, riding a mule or walking, to reach the nearest school and attend classes. In order to provide an effective and realistic educational service in areas such as this, schools usually become places where children live, sleep and eat a great part of the year. But, due to the lack of resources, most of schools are forced to close their doors during the hard winters. Some of them cannot afford the gas, oil or firewood for their stoves. The luckiest ones can take care of all the children almost the entire year. But they are a minority. Even when such hardships are overcome, a high number of children from 8 to 12 years old have to forget classes and start working to help their families survive. Children gather

crops in the fields or take care of flocks when – in other parts of the world – others of their same age are studying.

In Misiones, in Tucuman, children still die of starvation, as well as in a good number of other important Argentinean provinces, and in places, large and small, all throughout the continent. Here and there, newspapers reflect this reality, but sensationalistic waves in print are easily forgotten or avoided, as people prefer not to know (or to forget) this unpleasant news. Children suffer hunger as well as old people. An old Qom woman from Chaco (in northeast Argentina) declared during an interview several years ago, when asked what she ate: “I can’t eat”. And, showing her mouth, empty of teeth, she ended her sentence. “Even if I had teeth, I wouldn’t be able to eat anything. National government stole our lands, so I can’t grow and harvest my food.”

Children also die because of diseases like dengue fever or cholera. In 2002, Analía, a three-year-old Qom girl, with lovely dark eyes and long black hair – a pretty, really pretty little girl – died in this author’s arms, from simple diarrhea. Can it be imagined? She slowly lost all the water in her small body, and she died, literally dehydrated. Can this picture be imagined? The little child’s life just vanishing between my hands, and I could not stop the process, a process which started when the parents didn’t get the necessary information about what diarrhea is. Can it be just imagined? The little, beautiful girl closing her eyes forever, and one standing there, totally useless, just caressing her face and wondering what was happening there, thinking that it was a bloody nightmare and not a part of reality. Can it be imagined, a life going away between one’s own arms? No, it’s difficult, perhaps impossible, to imagine. People who speak of poverty and disease in Latin America (or wherever) should have this kind of experience. They would surely stop speaking and they would start acting.

After watching little Analía die in one’s arms, the only thing a person can feel is hatred, rage and an infinite anger against this world... a world that didn’t stop to tell Analía’s parents that dehydration can be treated with water, salt and sugar, things that the family had in their kitchen. The author arrived too late, and Analía went away in his arms, smiling softly before flying to a sky where the star-women of her people’s tales look down every night, crying in front of these terrible facts.

“Campesinos” are killed in Latin America, here and there, and their lands are stolen by rich people, and nobody says a word, because those who speak might finish their days with a bullet in the head, sleeping somewhere under two feet of Latin American soil. The author of this essay has been openly menaced by political activists for teaching “indians” to read (so they can read their rights, the unfair contracts, the newspapers, etc.). His life (is this clearly understood? life, my life!) has been openly menaced with a gun, just for providing information and basic education. In Latin America (and in a lot of spots all around this world) people die for land, for money, for politics, for power. And nobody stops it. Nobody. Sometimes, things

are changed. But the reforms last just a couple of months, and then the whole thing is forgotten, newspapers and journalists stop speaking about it (excepting independent websites like Indymedia), and again and again things start going wrong... “Campesinos” go on dying, and landowners go on getting richer and richer... In my province of Argentina, in northern Cordoba, which is one of the biggest and most developed of the country, this problem of theft and death is terribly common, and a good number of people are struggling to avoid both. But people live constantly under menace. Some of them just vanish from this world, and nobody knows what happened to them.

In Patagonia, in southern Argentina, rich foreigners – like Mr. Bennetton – possess thousands of square miles of aboriginal lands. They extract oil from the sacred lands of Mapuche and Tewelche peoples, poisoning their waters, burning their air and their sky, killing their animals and plants. Indigenous activists who bravely fight against these violations – in totally democratic and legal ways – are jailed or silently murdered and forgotten. In Formosa province (in northeast Argentina), a wide area of rainforest belonging to native communities (Wichí, Nivaklé and Yofwaja) has been bought by an Australian company (for \$3.50 per square mile) to cut precious trees and sell the wood to rich Asians. In Chile, North American companies are extracting water from the mountains and drying up native communities. In Colombia, in Peru, in Ecuador, in Guatemala, in Mexico, in Panama, in Brazil, foreign companies are devastating local environments and economies, “campesinos” are still massacred, indigenous populations are persecuted... Perhaps everybody knows all these facts. They should. However, it seems that nobody moves a single finger to stop these abuses against basic human rights.

Children are used almost as slaves, even in Argentina. Women are used as sexual slaves, men are used as work slaves. The hands of a man, a woman or a child after gathering the cotton used for our T-shirts is an image that cannot be described or forgotten. I worked with the pickers of cotton for a year, in Chaco, in northeast Argentina. Cotton has thorns, and these thorns cut the hands if the white fibers are not taken very carefully. But when the boss pays 0.80 Argentinean pesos (around \$0.30) for every kilo of cotton (and a real mountain of cotton is needed to make a kilo), people don't mind about being careful: they need to hurry if they want to pick enough kilos, to make enough money to pay for food to eat that night. Young boys and women are preferred as workers in cotton fields, because their hands are little and they can take the cotton easily, without cutting their hands so badly. I have seen their hands covered by new and old scars, and my own have been cut by the cotton thorns as well. The pain felt, and the humiliation of being paid with such a little wage for such strenuous work, is nearly indescribable. It feels like slavery. There's not another word for it. But workers know that they cannot do anything else, at least if they want their families and themselves to have some dinner.

This humiliation and exploitation is experienced by people harvesting cotton, but workers cutting sugar cane, harvesting yerba mate, collecting

apples and grapes, all experience it, as do people sewing cheap clothes in illegal factories, women selling their bodies in illegal bars... This happens everywhere.

All I describe is a part of the reality of this great continent, a part lived and witnessed by many, if not most, Latin Americans, myself included. This is our reality, a reality that is seen by foreigners in the safety of movie theaters, on living room televisions, or if experienced directly is known to be only temporary. A foreigner, after all, can get on an airplane and return to the safety and comfort of home if the realities of Latin America become too difficult.

Maybe things cannot be fully understood if they are not lived or experienced in a direct, personal way. It's very difficult to understand a point-of-view or a problem if it's not felt inside one's bones, if the pain, the rage, the shame and the humiliation are not lived, if they seem to be so far, far away. As an Argentinean song says, "ningún dolor se siente mientras le toque al vecino" ("pain is not felt if it hits our neighbor").

Maybe these words seem like a cruel form of presenting problems and reality. But if human beings continue using euphemisms, metaphors and indirect ways of speaking about urgent and painful problems, we will never realize that they are actually urgent, that there are people suffering, that a solution is needed. The first step in knowing about a problem is identifying it, knowing it, facing it in a direct way, naming it with all the letters of the word: murder, slavery, misery, poverty, starvation, hunger... These images of pain must work as an alarm clock inside the mind of the sleeping ones. These images must help the sleeping to awake, to notice the situation, to realize that a great deal of help is needed, that positions must be taken in a proper – but fast – manner. If human beings go on looking in the opposite direction when they see bad things instead of facing them, they will never exorcize their ghosts, they will never fight against their fears, they will never be able to overcome challenges. And they'll never be able to help.

Social responsibility needs to be based on realistic information, because realistic solutions must be provided, realistic policies must be designed and implemented. There's no other useful way. Tears will be cried and rage will be howled. But, from these broken mirrors of an artificial reality, from these labyrinths of information and words, a useful, practical work can be organized. Not words. Just action.

Part 5. Enter the foreigner – Welcome comrade, or arrogant do-gooder?

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara

A large number of foreign organizations and individuals develop professional activities in Latin America. Generally speaking, the presence of these groups in the countries of the continent can be considered as a useful benefit for both sides, considering the magnitude of the tasks developed, the importance of the skills taught, the valuable information transmitted, the know-how implemented in practical actions, and the excellent outcomes obtained in a daily basis, at a regional level.

The international presence in Latin America includes Spanish governmental organizations collaborating in the recovery of material cultural heritage, French and Canadian professors providing educational instruments, USA and German engineers facilitating information literacy and tools for telecommunications, Australian and Asian technicians implementing plans for sustainable management of natural resources, and a long list of individuals and institutions investigating ways to apply their knowledge in the improvement of life conditions for the huge Latin American human mosaic.¹⁴

The “dark side” of the foreign presence is represented by the actions of multinational companies and others, which exploit (or even loot) the natural and human resources of the region in a totally irresponsible way – usually protected by national governments, which don’t care very much about environmental and social impacts as long as they get a share of the profits.

A special situation – more linked to the human arena than to the economic one – are the religious missions arriving from Europe and North America, a phenomenon which has greatly increased in recent decades. Even if their work cannot always be criticized (Franciscan and Anabaptist missions in northern Argentina are doing a very good work in indigenous communities), some of these religious volunteers have become instruments of blind cultural change and massive conversion, collecting lambs for increasing their flocks.

Between the two ends of this range – the excellent works and the deplorable actions – are foreign professionals, students and workers who visit Latin America to have contact with a different reality: to have an “experience” in a “developing” country. They are usually motivated by a sincere wish to help and collaborate. As individuals, or organized in groups or NGOs, these professionals (among them, a good number of librarians) try to link themselves to the host societies, to become a part of regional structures, to recognize problems and to use their knowledge and resources to pursue, at least, partial solutions. Sometimes the results of such activities are positive and useful, and even successful, but in a high number of cases, their interventions are self-defeating: the expected or desired outcomes are not obtained, and the actions produce discomfort – and even rage – among the final recipients of their aid. Discomfort and rage arising from foreigners’ unexamined, sometimes unconscious, sense of superiority, from their mindlessness of the need to close one ear in order to listen.

What follows is a short ensemble of general suggestions provided to orient professionals who hope to work in Latin American societies, in a manner respectful of the cultures within which the foreigner is a guest. These suggestions are based on observations within large organizations, as well as in the experiences and opinions of local people who have witnessed the negative behavior of many foreign visitors. These suggestions are intended to facilitate the contact with societies in the continent, in order to improve relationships and to help in the implementation of programs rooted in a true spirit of solidarity, social responsibility, and an open-minded framework.

1. *Avoid comparisons.* Social, economic and political differences between Latin America and other regions of the world are evident, and might be extreme in several aspects. It is highly recommended that the foreign visitor accept, from the very beginning, that the continent is a new world, with new rules and customs with which to become familiar, and features that should be known, accepted and respected. Many visitors think nothing of making and openly expressing comparisons between their own countries and the place they are visiting: “In my country we don’t have this poverty...” “The city where I live is cleaner and more modern than yours.” “In my library we have high-speed Internet connection... How can you live without it?” Such comparisons usually put the local population in a negative light, and are not only unhelpful, meaningless actually – even if they are true – but they generate distances, divides and walls that undermine building the solidarity necessary for cooperative projects. Such comparisons do not bring about substantial change or advancement.

As comparative information of this sort is completely useless, its expression should be avoided. Comparisons can be made and expressed in other, respectful ways: “How do you develop this service in the library, working with low-speed Internet? In my country we work with X and Y... Maybe with some of these tools and techniques used in my country we could improve your work, if you consider it possible...” This is a good example of positive comparisons, where help is offered and valuable information is provided, and a respectful non-condescending relationship between professional colleagues is developed.

2. *Accept the local culture.* Latin American customs and regional cultural traits are the fruit of centuries of evolution, adaptation, development and community life. It’s necessary to recognize and to know this culture, to adapt and become a part of it, to explore it and to enjoy it. Even if a lot of features look funny or ridiculous to visitors, they should be respected like natural and proper facts. By understanding culture, problems can be understood as well, from a broad and open-minded perspective. And, if people visiting Latin America want to help they must make efforts to become deeply familiar with the culture. Questions like “Why do you eat this?” “Why do you do that?” “You call this noise ‘music’?” “Why do people have 5 children when they are 23?” “Don’t you think that your behavior is silly?” are completely useless: they show a close-minded person asking for answers that cannot be provided, because it’s very difficult to

explain every aspect of one's own culture (and the visitor will not accept the answer anyway). Facts that seem incredible or curious can be remarked upon in a friendly manner, and they'll surely be explained and shared.

An important point is the knowledge of the local language (Spanish or Portuguese, and even Guarani, Quechua, Aymara and other regional – and widely extended – idioms). Maybe English or French (or even German) seem “international” languages to their speakers. But this is an arrogant point-of-view: after a couple of days walking the streets of the biggest cities of Latin America, a visitor will understand that this “rule” doesn't work in the continent. In difficult or isolated areas, just local dialects of Spanish are spoken, or native languages. So, a good advice is to have a good command on these idioms. Don't expect to have translators: visitors' daily life cannot depend on the help of a translating person. This can be of help in working areas, but not in normal, common activities. Knowledge of the language is indispensable in establishing relationships with people, and in understanding the local culture, as such knowledge demonstrates clearly the extent to which the intentions of visitors are to truly help.

A knowledge of and participation in the hosts' culture allows a visitor to create and reinforce links with the local population, enriching one's perspectives, broadening and deepening one's life-style, and providing valuable information about regional conditions, points-of-view, needs and beliefs. Qualitative research techniques like “participant observation,” “life stories” or “action-research” strongly encourage researchers to become deeply linked with communities and people.

3. *Visitors are not saviors.* Even if some professionals working in Latin America are providing essential education and information, useful for the solution of urgent problems, they shouldn't act like “saviors” or “heroes.” This, unfortunately, is a very common attitude in some foreigner visitors. Often a person who, in their own community in their own country, couldn't make any changes believes, merely because they are a “developed” person in an “undeveloped” country, that they have greater influence and more important ideas than they actually do. Even if sometimes they might think the contrary (either consciously or subconsciously), Latin American is not a continent of savage, underdeveloped people: it's just a land that lacks widespread access to many technological and infrastructural advances or has been neglected because of historic processes, corrupt governments, mismanagement, or social problems. The old image of “third world” countries should be erased from visitors' minds, at least if they expect to work in true solidarity and friendship with local collaborators.

4. *Avoid hypocrisy.* The same people who condemn Latin American sexual behaviors as “disordered habits” are the ones who enjoy orgies with local wo/men (Cuban, Brazilian, Colombian or Argentinean examples are well-known). The same people who condemn drugs are the first looking for spirits and exotic herbs. The same people who speak against racism and discrimination are the ones who don't want to travel in cheap buses

because of “the smell of the people.” The same people who speak about the value of culture are the same who leave a country without knowing the name of its best writer, singer or artist. The same visitor who speak about their perfect societies – high wages, ordered structures, perfect lives, technology, resources, high education, high-quality and high-level things in a highly-developed country – are the same who confess that they would love to stay forever in Latin America (and sometimes do it). It’s better to keep an intelligent silence in order to avoid disgusting situations.

Most visitors who travel to Latin America hoping to engage in projects that become expressions of their social responsibility find thousands of opportunities for working and helping. They learn to give the best of their knowledge in a manner of human solidarity and respect, obtaining, in return, a huge amount of information and experience from local professionals, collaborators and the general population. As a result of this process, both sides win. But a good number of foreign travelers seem to believe that, because they come from wealthy and powerful nations, they are ‘superiors.’ This arrogant attitude is openly rejected by Latin Americans, and creates a sad stereotype of the “new conqueror.”

Latin Americans are a friendly, warm, passionate people, who always open the doors of their homes to strangers with a smile. Those who have understood this fact have fallen in love with this marvelous land (as a matter of fact, a lot of them remain in Latin American countries, getting married and creating families there). Maybe the best way of understanding a people is to fall in love with them. Even if it sounds funny, utopian or romantic, from a love-perspective, a deeper understanding of persons and situations can be gained, and a greater, more sincere, willingly helpful and collaborative relationship can sometimes grow from love.

And, anyway...what’s solidarity, but love?

Part 6. Social responsibility

*One percent [of the country] want to change all this,
nine percent have the power.
Of the rest, the fifty percent just eat,
and the rest just die without even knowing why.*

“Los Salieris de Charly” León Gioco

The actualization of social responsibility by librarians (in Latin America as well as in the rest of the world) neither starts nor finishes with the expression of magnificent opinions, in writing long papers (like this one), or in attending international meetings and conferences on rights and duties in the “Knowledge Society.” These activities are a good start and might help, in the long run, to clarify ideas or arouse desires, but they are really not more than an infinite collection of words, sounding and sounding, while across the planet, pain goes on.

Social responsibility does not mean the investment of great amounts of money and technology in countries that do not have much of either. This sort of “goodwill” normally serves to clean the conscience (and the closets) of the powerful, a convenient dispensation for feelings of guilt. Goodwill and charity, in reality, often change the situations of recipients only slightly, or not at all, or even negatively. It is like building a luxury skyscraper for homeless people... on a swamp. The building is beautiful and expensive, indeed, and the ones who funded it want to be photographed stretching their hands in front of it, but... everybody knows the structure’s fate when the pompous speeches, applauses, toasts and welcomes of inauguration are finished.

From the point of view of any country – but especially of Latin American nations – the assumption of social responsibilities implies self-determination, the taking of decisions into a nation’s own hands, without waiting for foreign “gurus” who tell us what to do and how to act. For, usually, these brilliant minds – in spite of their good intentions – know only their own ideas of our reality, and base their plans and projects in some theoretical knowledge learned in comfortable classrooms in comfortable universities, far, far away from problems. And such theoretical knowledge does not get along very well with reality.

Social responsibility starts by recognizing that our work starts at home. Each professional has an ethical duty within society, wherever he or she works, wherever they want to help. Foreign help, theories, long articles and good ideas are useful for collaboration, but the real point of departure must be the acknowledgement of one fundamental obligation of every professional: namely to recognize and feel that each one of us must work in our own community, our own region, country, and culture and with our own people. And we must feel that change – each little, tiny change – is possible, and that this possibility is in our hands.

From this point of departure, it is necessary to get immersed in the problems of the people with whom and for whom we work, to know these people, their needs, and their expectations and desires for the future. What are their reasons and their possibilities, and which is the best way for them... according to their own understanding? This work is not about becoming heroes with great answers and salvations – the missionary approach will be refused or will fail. This is about forgetting catechisms and statistics, it is about learning the human side of the story. This is about using methods like participant observation, action-research, thick description and life stories, and forgetting the number-crunching. This is about blending oneself with the problem, feeling it on one’s own skin, inside one’s own bones. And then, it is about giving solutions from a grassroots development perspective: what do these people need? what do they want to do? what future do they want to build? how can I help them to achieve it? What expertise do I have that they can use in whatever fashion they think best?

And the solutions? They will never change the entire reality. They will change little parts, pieces, fragments... And that will already be a miracle.

It is useful to accept this idea from the beginning: great solutions do not exist, they do not work... A historic reality cannot be modified in a few months. Maybe not even in years. The problem is placed in the very origin of the history of these peoples, in their foundations. And, unfortunately, it is impossible to change foundations quickly without destroying the entire building.

Solutions must be patient and constructive. The task of the professional is to provide the community with the tools they need; it is about teaching them how to use these tools (and here is the "correct use") according to their values, necessities, background and ideas; and it is about accompanying the users of the tools provided on their path toward development, so the given instruments will be able to work properly and reap benefits. Then, it is just about helping in a soft, friendly way. It can be a work of years, but this is the only way of making it work, of changing something, of making the real difference. Thousands of little experiences all over Latin America confirm this idea.

And foreign help should also assume other forms: to support specific projects, especially those of grassroots development; to send work groups interested in getting involved – in a personal way, in the field – with real proposals; or to provide academic, technological or ideological solidarity to help with popular initiatives. Funding is not always useful: money imitates happiness very well... but it does not make it. In the long run, funds vanish and the problem survives. Money is not a satisfactory solution. Donations either: they look like charity (sometimes that's what they are) when they are not realized in a definite way, to an specific situation. Even if sometimes funding can work, external help must be respectful, realistic and a sign of solidarity... or not exist.

Part 7. A kind of conclusion

*Do not stay motionless in the border of the road.
Do not freeze gladness, do not love without passion.
Do not save yourself now; never save yourself.
Do not fill yourself with quietness.
Do not reserve a quiet corner of the world for you.
Do not close your eyes, heavy as judgments.*

“Entre estatuas” Mario Benedetti

Every word said about the social responsibility of librarians (or any other professional) are beautiful, but if they are not based in a sound knowledge on situation at hand, and linked with practice, they are totally meaningless and, therefore, useless beyond their emotive or spiritual intention. Progressive and leftwing ideas have good objectives, but they are better fulfilled with facts instead of words, and especially, with a true open mind, which can go further than simple talk, and get involved in the real action.

There is a lot to do, and it is not so difficult. Just let's do it. The proposal is hard and complicated: we'll probably be involved in painful and unpleasant social situations; we'll witness sadness and problems; maybe we'll travel miles and miles with no other help but our own free will; we will have to change our beliefs, ideas and mental, ethical and social structures; and we'll have to learn again, completely, our profession, all the theories, methods and tools learnt in classes.

All this, for a change that perhaps will never arrive, for a result that maybe we'll never live to see. But we'll be improving our lives, our knowledge... We'll be growing as professionals and human beings... We'll be learning new things all the time... We'll be becoming new persons, good teachers, wise researchers... We'll witness how our hands become really useful.

We'll discover that our words can become hammers for smashing walls and for filling divides... We'll discover that our acts can clean waters dirtied by history... We'll understand that the real "weapons" in this "battle" are ideas and knowledge, and that they can shake our reality harder than bombs... And we'll learn that the intelligent people are not those who keep a lot of information in their brain, but those who use this information in order to achieve the welfare of their society.

And, at least, we'll be supporting a people who has been struggling for a long time, who never forgets, who needs hands for raising again and for recognizing itself free and independent – for once in its history – of all the hands that have oppressed it for centuries. A people who dreamt and spilled its blood for this ever-delayed freedom. A people that still remembers these heroes who moved it with their ideals and their acts. A hectic and passionate people, who desires progress but who seldom finds the way or the doors opened. A people with projects that, like every human group, also fails and falls... A people who is a prisoner of its own history and its own reality, owner of a rich culture, of an ancestral heritage and of a lot of resources, those resources which have fed and are feeding the development of other countries.

It is worth the pain to try it. It is just necessary to give the first step and to stretch out the hand: a whole, huge continent needs it and waits for it.

ENDNOTES

1. My hand, your hand, his / her hand... our hands?
2. A CV of Edgardo Civalero can be found in www.thelogofalibrarian.blogspot.com.
3. Tupaq Amaru. Born José Gabriel Condorcanqui in 1740. He led one of the strongest and most famous insurrections of Andean indigenous peoples (1780-1) against the Spanish colonial power settled in the city of Cuzco (current Peru). He used the name of the last Inca emperor (Tupaq Amaru, meaning "royal serpent"). He was finally captured by Spaniards in 1783, and, after witnessing the torture and execution of his whole family in the "Plaza de Armas" (Central Square) of Cuzco, he was tortured himself by the traditional Spanish way

of tying the arms and legs to four horses to be torn apart. He resisted it, and was decapitated, and his head and limbs were sent to the four corners of the old Inca Empire, as a warning for future rebels. His name was used in the 70's by the famous Uruguayan rebel movement "Tupamaros."

4. The complete translated text of the song is the following:

My feathered brothers saw them arriving from the sea.
They were the bearded Gods announced by prophecies.
The voice of the monarch was heard, saying that Gods had arrived,
and we opened all our doors, with fear to ignored things.
They came riding beasts, like demons of the Evil.
They came with fire in their hands, and covered by shields of metal.
Just the courage of a few ones opposed resistance,
And we, we saw the blood being spilled, we felt shame [of our Gods].
But Gods don't eat, and they don't enjoy stolen goods,
and when we realized this [that they weren't Gods], everything was already finished.
And, with this mistake, we gave the greatness of our past.
And, with this mistake, we were kept as slaves for 300 years.
We kept the curse of giving to foreigners
our faith, our culture, our bread and our money.
And we still go on, changing our gold for their glass beads
and all our treasures for their mirrors with bright.
Today, in XXth century, we go on receiving blonde people,
opening our doors and calling them "friends."
But when an indian arrives, tired of walking the mountains,
we humiliate him, and we treat him like a stranger in his own homeland.
You hypocrite, showing your humble face to the foreigner...
Why do you become arrogant with your own brothers?
Malinche's curse, disease of the present times...
When you will leave my land? When you will free my people?

5. This is recognized in the Peruvian notion of *compenetrado*, the "mutual penetration" of indigenous Andean religious ritual and belief with those of Catholicism.

6. Good examples are the Quechua rebellion of Tupaq Amaru, quoted before; the Aymara rebellion of Tomás Apasa (called Tupaq Khatari, "the royal rebel," in Quechua), in 1780, who almost seized the old city of La Paz, in Bolivia, and followed the same destiny of Tupaq Amaru; the rebellion of Guarani peoples in Paraguay, against the slavist Portuguese and Spanish forces, after 1787 (when Jesuits were expelled from America); the great Calchaquí rebellion, which harassed for years (1561-3, 1630-1637, 1655-1667) the Spanish cities of northwestern Argentina and had a terrible bloody end; or the long rebellion of the Araucanians in Chile, who were never totally defeated.

7. The "Disputa de Valladolid" (Valladolid Debate, 1450-1) was a famous public discussion between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (and their followers). Las Casas, a famous defender of American native peoples, claimed that indigenous inhabitants were human beings with human souls and human rights; Sepúlveda -following a religious belief based in Aristotle's ideas - claimed that they were savages without soul that could be used as animals and made slaves, and that war (and slavery) against them was fair. Nobody "won" the discussion, but the outcome of this interesting Debate were the "Leyes Nuevas" ("New Laws"), Spanish laws which gave the American aboriginal nations the same rights of Spanish citizens, avoiding, by this way, suffering and excesses from conquerors and colonists. Even if they weren't respected (colonists felt them unfair), the Debate gave birth to the analysis and creation of the "Derecho de Gentes" ("People's Rights," an old term for "Human Rights") and was the basis of later struggles for human rights.

8. The first American press started working in Mexico, probably in 1532; the oldest book conserved from this print is a catechism in Nahuatl language (1539) as well as grammars of several Mexican languages. In 1541 it printed the first "non-religious" pamphlet, a description of the earthquake of Guatemala, which happened the same year. In South America, the press

started working in Lima (Perú) in 1584, with a catechism in Quechua and Aymara languages, as well as dictionaries and vocabularies (“Artes”) of these Andean idioms. In 1705 started working the first Jesuit press, in the middle of the rain forests, in Paraguay, printing catechisms in Guaraní, as well as grammars of all the local languages. Even if some works were produced about “non-religious” subjects, the presses were controlled by religious authorities. The first “religiously-independent” books started appearing after the independence of the colonial territories, in 1810-1820.

9. The books written by French and English philosophers and thinkers, after the French Revolution, with their ideas about freedom and liberalism, were the basis for revolutionary independence movements in Latin America. In some Spanish territories, these books were forbidden, and, anyway, obtaining them was a very difficult process.

10. Argentina was independent in 1810; Paraguay, in 1811; Perú and Mexico, in 1821; Bolivia, in 1825; Uruguay, in 1828; Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela in 1830. Haití was the first independent nation in the region (1804), and Cuba, the last one (1898).

11. Mexican revolution in 1910 (Zapata, Morelos, Carranza); Pancho Villa’s movement in Mexico in 1914; Guatemalan revolution in 1944-54; Nicaraguan problems during 1981-87; Cuba revolution, 1959-60; Problems in El Salvador, Panamá and Venezuela; Guerrilla in Colombia; Peruvian guerrillas in 1980 (“Sendero Luminoso”); Dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile, 1973-88; Argentinean dictatorship, 1976-83; Uruguayan dictatorship, 1973-1985; Dictatorship of Stroessner in Paraguay, 1954-89.

12. Some great examples are the Colombian (<http://www.senderos.gov.co/>) and Mexican systems of Public Libraries, the Chilean DIBAM (<http://www.dibam.cl/>) (whose program of mobile libraries is one of the best in the whole continent), the rural libraries in Perú and Bolivia, and the indigenous libraries in Brazil... as well as all the university libraries and the highly-specialized research-centers.

13. <http://argentina.indymedia.org/features/pueblos/>

14. For example, the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation (<http://www.aeci.es/02exterior/americaS.asp>).

15. The end of Benedetti’s poem says:

“But if you can avoid it, and you do it...
Then, don’t stay by my side.”

Author’s Note: Written with thanks to my editor and friend, Elaine Harger.



A PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIANSHIP FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by William F. Birdsall

The philosophical foundation of twentieth century librarianship derives from the American concept of informed citizens having universal access to information. I believe the concept of the informed citizen can no longer sustain a relevant librarianship in the twenty-first century. As an alternative, I propose a human rights conceptual framework for a progressive librarianship in a world of inter-personal, global electronic communication and of the growing achievement of individual and collective human rights. I argue that we need to shift from the concept of the informed citizen in a mass media culture to that of the *communicative* citizen in a global communicative culture exercising her or his human right to communicate.

Progressive Librarianship

Progressive librarians are in the forefront in linking librarianship with human rights (Samek 2004a; Samek, 2006; Phenix and McCook 2005, Maret 2006). However, I believe progressive librarianship can make an even greater contribution to mainstream librarianship, but to do so it must overcome at least two obstacles.

One obstacle is that there is considerable ambiguity about just what constitutes progressive librarianship. According to Toni Samek, it is known in North America as socially responsible librarianship, activist librarianship, or radical librarianship (Samek 2004a, 2). As a consequence, "... progressive library discourse reflects the divergent voices on the margins of librarianship..." that includes, according to Samek, "... a range of viewpoints on a continuum that spans from an anarchist stance to varying degrees of a social responsibility perspective" (5).

Samek raises the legitimate question: "Will progressive librarianship be mainstreamed?" (Samek 2004a, 15) In my view, there is little possibility of progressive librarianship becoming mainstream while its nature remains so amorphous. Although Samek usefully delineates twenty-three defining characteristics and intentions of progressive librarianship, it strikes me that such an extensive list only confirms the lack of a central core of defining components (see also Rosenzweig, 2000).

With regard to human rights, it is noteworthy that a commitment to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and related UN covenants and IFLA statements, tops Samek's list of progressive librarianship's characteristics (Samek 2004a, 11). Samek asserts that progressive librarianship "is inextricably linked to the concept of intellectual freedom and the more 'universal' concept of human rights" (Samek 2004a, 4). She points out there are several UDHR articles relevant to librarianship (such as privacy, participation in the cultural life of the community, intellectual property), but does give particular emphasis to intellectual freedom as represented in Article 19 (Samek 2004b; Samek 2006). As well, Katharine J. Phenix and Kathleen de la Peña McCook claim librarians recognize that human rights and library values intersect, a position they support through an analysis of the values espoused by ALA that are compatible with those of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in particular Article 19 relating to the intellectual freedom (24-25).

The commitment to human rights is highly commendable but I believe it is too narrowly focused on traditional human rights statements, in particular as regards intellectual freedom. I will attempt to show below that, in contrast, a basic universal human right to communicate, while rooted in Article 19 of the UDHR, is far more comprehensive, encompassing not only intellectual freedom but also intellectual property, privacy, access to information and modes of communication, and so forth. As well, I will contend that the relationship between the values of librarianship and human rights must be more than just a case of compatibility or intersecting of values; librarianship must be founded on a human right to communicate.

My assessment, then, of the current status of progressive librarianship is that its vitality is offset by a lack of clear definition as a movement and the resulting marginality to mainstream librarianship, and by a commitment to human rights that remains within the traditional articulations of the free flow of information. I believe a human rights framework residing in the basic right to communicate can provide a comprehensive foundation for a progressive librarianship that moves it to mainstream librarianship. Towards this end, progressive twenty-first century librarianship should incorporate within such a human rights framework at least six components. This paper briefly examines these six components whose foundation is a human right to communicate.

Components of a Progressive Librarianship

Component 1: A progressive librarianship responds to the emerging context of the expansion of global inter-personal electronic communication and of the increasing global achievement of individual and collective rights.

There emerged in the last half of the twentieth century two major, inter-related developments having profound implications for librarianship: (1)

the global expansion of inter-personal electronic communication and (2) the global expansion of individual and collective human rights.

The communications revolution of the closing decades of the last century was due to the convergence of satellite communication, the Internet, the World Wide Web, and the personal computer. According to Internet World Stats, as of June 30, 2006, world Internet usage totaled 1,043,104,886, a growth rate of 189% since 2000 (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>). The availability of personal, interactive global electronic communication is increasingly enhanced with the development of various modes of communicating, obvious examples being email, listservs, blogs, podcasts, and such websites as YouTube.com and Myspace.com. The important factor in these developments is that they make it possible for millions of people personally to communicate directly electronically and globally with other individuals and groups.

This ability is, of course, by no means universal as the extensive research on the phenomenon typically described as the “digital divide” demonstrates. While Internet usage may exceed one billion, it only represents, according to Internet World Stats, about 16% of the world population. Limited digital access among countries is clearly evident (Birdsall and Birdsall 2005). Nonetheless, the number gaining access steadily increases and promoting greater access is an ongoing national and international public policy objective as demonstrated by the recent United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Coinciding with the expansion of global personal instantaneous communication there is a growing achievement in attaining individual and collective human rights. Since World War II and the resulting adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, there has been a revolution in the expansion of human rights throughout the world. In 1993, 171 countries affirmed their commitment to the UDHR at a World Conference on Human Rights. The concept of universal human rights, unknown before World War II, is now central to human “rights talk” at the national and international level (Glendon 199, Lauren 1998).

Of course, the identification of legitimate human rights and the struggle to achieve them continues in all countries. However, there is measurable evidence that more people enjoy a greater range of human rights than they did at the beginning of the previous century. As the United Nations 2000 *Human Development Report* states:

One of the 20th century’s hallmark achievements was its progress in human rights. In 1900 more than half the world’s people lived under colonial rule, and no country gave all its citizens the right to vote. Today some three-quarters of the world lives under democratic regimes. There has also been great progress in eliminating discrimination by race, religion and gender—and in advancing the right to schooling and basic health care (United Nations 2000, 1).

Despite setbacks the momentum favors continued progress in the implementation of human rights in the twenty-first century.

While there has been a continual interaction between the development of communication freedoms and technology, it was not until the late 1960s that universal human rights and communication were linked in a specific right (McIver and Birdsall 2004). With the development in the late 1950s and 1960s of communication satellites Jean d’Arcy, French television pioneer, Eurovision founder, and United Nations public servant, recognized that the convergence of direct satellite broadcasting and computing was going to open up multiple channels of communication to individuals and groups.

In contrast to the traditional modes of corporate mass media communication, global two-way or interactive communication could be available to everyone. As a result, the traditional statements of freedom of expression and information arising out of earlier mass media print and electronic communication technologies and environments, as exemplified by Article 19 of the UDHR, were no longer adequate. For d’Arcy the time had arrived to move beyond Article 19; he enunciated in 1969 the need for a new human right, a right to communicate (d’Arcy 1969).

D’Arcy never articulated a precise definition of a right to communicate but since 1969 there has been much discussion and research exploring the meaning and implications of such a right. Desmond Fisher, an early participant in efforts to promote a right to communicate, concisely delineates how this right differs from traditional communication freedoms and entitlements, such as those stipulated in library statements and policies. He observes jurists make a distinction between two types of individual liberties. Among the first are such fundamental rights as freedom of religious belief and the right of citizen to choose their own government. However, they do not recognize freedom of speech, of assembly, and association as belonging to the category of fundamental rights “because they are not absolute and may be limited” Fisher 1977, 95-96).

It was d’Arcy, according to Fisher, who recognized these second category freedoms were no longer adequate to meet the needs of citizens in the emerging global communicative culture; thus, the need for a fundamental right to communicate. Fisher explains the character of such a basic right:

It [a right to communicate] springs from the very nature of the human person as a communicating being and from the human need for communication, at the level of the individual and of society. It is universal. It emphasizes the process of communicating rather than the content of the message. It implies participation. It suggests an interactive transfer of information. And underlying the concept is an ethical or humanitarian suggestion of a responsibility to ensure a fairer global distribution of the resources necessary to make communication possible (Fisher 1982, 8).

Essentially a right to communicate includes “the right to inform and be informed, the right to active participation in the communication process, the right of equitable access to information resources and information, and the right of cultural and individual privacy from communication” (Richstad and Anderson 1981, 26-27). It is interactive in that applies to two-way horizontal communication between groups and individuals in contrast to the traditional mass-media one way, top-down modes of communication. A right to communicate is participatory in that everyone should have access to the resources necessary to exercise the right as well as the right to participate in the development and use of global communication processes.

A right to communicate shares with traditional freedoms and liberties a concern about the free flow of content but it gives primacy to the *process* of communication and the right of the individual to participate in the process. It provides a comprehensive conceptual framework within which to address policy issues of access, intellectual freedom, property rights, cultural and linguistic rights, and privacy for individuals and communities in a world of global communication. It provides a human rights basis upon which to attack such immediate challenges as the digital divide and the cross-currents of globalization (Cunningham 2005; Dakroury 2004). In short, it moves beyond the traditional articles of the UDHR and other rights statements in recognition of the realities of global interactive communication in the twenty-first century.

Globalization raises technological, political, and cultural challenges to all human rights. Regarding a right to communicate specifically, Aliaa Dakroury raises the question whether globalization will lead to Utopia or prison (Dakroury 2004). Indeed, the threats and opportunities of globalization continues to be an issue of intense debate within the human rights community (Ishay 2004, 246-311). What is without question is that human rights in the context of global communication will be a paramount issue during the twenty-first century, therefore, in my view, it must be as well the central context of formulating a twenty-first century librarianship.

Component 2: A progressive librarianship shifts the focus from the concept of the informed citizen to that of the communicative citizen.

The concept of the informed citizen gained broad political support in eighteenth-century America when revolutionary leaders realized expanding voting rights to select segments of the common people (excluding, for example, women and slaves) was a means of attracting supporters to their revolutionary political objectives. This new perspective began a shift from the idea of the gentleman citizen to the informed citizen. After the American Revolution political leaders saw a continuing need for developing an informed citizenry to insure the preservation of liberty from irresponsible demagogues and for the preservation of social order (Brown 1996).

The concern over maintaining both a stable society and democracy led to the creation in the nineteenth century of tax supported public schools and libraries whose objective was the development of informed citizens. The concept of the informed citizen was sufficiently malleable to allow libraries to respond over time to social, economic and political changes. The result was such library initiatives as the Americanization of immigrants, promoting vocational self-education, advancing individual cultural development, and serving as the gateway to the information highway (Molz and Dain 1999, 11-44). Regardless of the specific objective or program, the image of the informed citizen is the foundation for all of them.

So from the earliest days of the modern library movement to the present, librarians affirm that universal access to information through libraries is critical to having informed citizens in a democratic society; indeed, libraries are promoted as “the cornerstones of liberty” (Kranich 2001). When this goal is challenged library activists rise to its defense. For example, in response to the shift to a neo-conservative public policy environment in the 1970s and 80s, the Progressive Librarian Guild (PLG) was created in 1990 by “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.” In response, the PLG affirms:

...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 (<http://libr.org/plg/statement.html>, my emphasis).

However, as voting rights became incrementally more inclusive during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, defining just what it meant to be an informed citizen became more difficult. Society may continue to give a rhetorical commitment to the idea of the informed citizen but in reality there is little evidence that such a vision is the basis of substantive public policy. The print and electronic mass media, a major source of information for most citizens, are increasingly dominated by a few national and global corporations. Governments at all levels limit access to government information. The United States government increasingly encroaches on the privacy of citizens while striving to control the international governance of the Internet (Cukier 2005).

More to the point, librarians have little hard evidence demonstrating to what extent, if any, libraries directly contribute to the development of informed citizens. The lack of such evidence makes the concept of the informed citizen a shaky foundation for a twenty-first century librarianship. In contrast, the Pew Internet and American Life Project continues to document the increasing use by Americans of the Internet as a means of keeping informed. People who used the Internet, listened to National Public Radio,

and were readers of news magazines were most informed about the 2004 presidential election (Pew Research Center 2003, 6).

The number of people turning to the Internet for information relating to their civic life, health, work, hobbies, interests, and decision making continues to increase (Lake Snell Perry & Associates 2004, Madden 2006; Horrigan and Rainie 2006). By early 2006 about 50 million Americans use the Internet on a typical day for news (Horrigan 2006).

Meanwhile, blogs, a prime example of global individual, interactive communication, are emerging as major sources of information and dialogue on civic affairs with politics and government being, after “my life experiences,” the second major topic of blogs (Lenhart and Fox 2006). It is evident the informed citizen looks to the mass media and, increasingly, the Internet, to stay informed. It is within this emerging communicative culture that a conceptual framework based on the idea of the twenty-first century communicative citizen possessing a right to communicate provides a foundation more aligned with global developments and democratic communication than that of the eighteenth-century concept of the informed citizen.

Component 3: A progressive librarianship responds to the political economy of librarianship by advocating a shift from a mass-media mentality favoring top-down, one way vertical communication to that of a communication environment favoring global, personal, two-way, horizontal communication between individuals and groups.

Libraries operate in a political economy. As public institutions they are an instrument of public policy which arises out of political processes. Therefore, it is crucial for librarians to understand the link between power, politics, and economy in the sphere of public policy (Birdsall 2000).

The traditional one way flow of information through the mass media, and the statements of freedom of information that flow from it, represents a political economy subject to domination by political, economic, and cultural elites. Indeed, the traditional emphasis on the free flow of information gave rise to what Jean d’Arcy described as the “mass media mentality.” According to d’Arcy, in the mass society of the twentieth century people became conditioned to accept as normal the unilateral, vertical, top-down flow of information characteristic of the mass media that evolved out of the print and broadcasting technological and power structures. For d’Arcy this type of communication is inadequate in an era of global communications where the individual can directly participate in horizontal, interactive communication with other individuals or groups. He stressed the traditional one-way transmission of information is not communication; communication is about the *interactive* exchange of information (d’Arcy 1983).

Since d'Arcy's analysis the concentration of the corporate mass media and modes of global communication has increased even more so while governments and the private sector accelerate their efforts to control and monitor access and use of the Internet for their own political and economic ends. These challenges arise out of a public policy environment dominated by a neo-conservative ideology of information technology that conceives the idea of universal access not as a necessary condition for the cultural, social, and educational benefits of all citizens but as a means of creating a critical mass of potential consumers in the ecommerce marketplace (Birdsall 1996). The "war on terror" reinforces these tendencies.

This is a political economy that has corrupted the concept of universal access developed in an earlier era of mass media communication public interest regulation. While communication rights related to access to information, government information access policy, intellectual property, intellectual freedom, and so on are central to the core of librarianship's professional values, the revolution in global communication combined with a political economy driven by a mass media mentality of information technology is generating intense challenges to all of these traditional values.

Librarians are, of course, concerned with information freedoms and liberties as reflected in the many policy statements of their professional associations. However, such statements were conceived in the context of a political economy dominated by a mass-media mentality and one-way flow of information rather than within a context of participatory, horizontal interactive communication. As a result, these statements reflect mass-media mentality values concerned about the flow of and access to information, not about two-way, interactive communication. This orientation is seen in the emphasis librarians — including progressive librarians — give to access to information and to serving, as do mass media outlets, as gateways to the one way flow of information (Rosenzweig 2000).

This emphasis on information flow, intellectual freedom, access, free flow of information and the gateway role is explicit in the American Library Association Code of Ethics which states:

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 (ALA, 1995).

Likewise, IFLA's Glasgow Declaration on Libraries, Information Services and Intellectual Freedom which states: "IFLA proclaims the fundamental right of human beings both to access and to express information without restriction." Furthermore, it affirms libraries "...serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture, offering essential support for independent decision-making, cultural development, research and lifelong learning by both individuals and groups" (International Federation of Library

Associations and Institutions 2004). The conceptualization of libraries must shift from a focus on the one-way flow of information to that of horizontal interactive communication from a mass media communicative culture to a personal or individual, global communicative culture.

This shift does not necessitate abandoning a concern about content; recall that a right to communicate encompasses both a right to inform and to be *informed*. Rather, it means adopting a conceptual framework embracing all elements of the generation, transmission, and use of information and knowledge. Consequently, it is necessary to develop a new concept of the library and librarianship in a human rights context that contributes to the transformation of a political economy currently dominated by a mass media mentality. Alternatively, librarians must work to establish the principle that it is the responsibility of the state to insure resources are available to allow citizens to exercise their right to communicate. Thus, a right to communicate must be embodied in legal, political, and institutions structures. The most central of those institutions must be the tax-supported library.

Within such a human rights framework the library becomes the institutional embodiment of a right to communicate. The library, whose legal foundation is a right to communicate, becomes the preeminent social institution whose social role is to insure the communicative citizen can exercise a right to communicate.

Component 4: A progressive librarianship favors a new balance between the needs of the individual and of the community through a combination of individual and collective rights.

The meaning of community has always been problematic in America (Fowler 1991; Shain 1994). As political scientist Derek L. Phillips observes: "We are always dreaming, it seems, of community" (Phillips 1993, 3). The library's real contribution to community, framed in a nostalgic picture of the small town public library, is increasingly difficult to assess in an era of the rapidly expanding urbanization. Indeed, the modern American library movement has always been an urban phenomenon while successfully incorporating into its ideology American dreams of the rural, small town community. What is required is a more explicit link between community and human rights. As Gregory J. Walters observes:

Human rights require community for their implementation, while community requires human rights as the basis of its morally justified economic, political, and social operations and enactments; hence the need for a community of rights in the information (Walters 2002, 239).

The library has always been cast as one of those public institutions constituting a community. Librarians stress in their professional ideology their service to both the individual and the community (Birdsall 1985).

For progressive librarians the library is a “community building institution” (Rosenzweig 2000). However, in the end the primary focus of library services is service to the individual toward the goal of insuring she or he is an informed citizen. Indeed, the development of the rational, informed individual is seen the library’s primary contribution to the community. This objective is in accord with the American allegiance to first generation civil and political rights.

First generation civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, are typically orientated to the rights of individuals in opposition to real or potential restraints imposed by the state or other collectives such as the church. Belief in these rights is especially strongly held among those countries whose human rights history arises out of the Anglo-American human rights tradition (the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia) and they are endorsed by these nations in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Second generation economic, social, and cultural rights (such as education, health, social security) recognize the rights of individuals with a social or collective context. These rights are more firmly entrenched in those countries whose rights tradition derives from the Continental or French human rights tradition which places individual rights within a social context. While first generation rights are to protect the individual from the state, second rights place an obligation upon the state to provide the means allowing citizens to exercise such rights. The United States has not formally endorsed these rights as express in the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Emerging third generation rights relate to global issues including the environment; economic, social and cultural development; peace; common heritage; humanitarian assistance; a right to communicate. Debate continues on the precise definition and implementation of these third generation rights but because of their global implications there is general agreement they are not only the rights of individuals but also of communities. Collective or community rights are relevant to a right to communicate in regard to such issues as intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples, the protection of cultural identities, or the preservation of minority languages.

A third generation right to communicate provides a new conceptual framework for defining the relationship of the library to the individual and community. As lawyer and library trustee Merrilee Rasmussen asserts: “The right to communicate embodies the individual’s right to belong to a community in an era when the nature of community is changing.” Global electronic communication opens the possibility to form new modes of community, indeed, according to Rasmussen: “The right to communicate grounds the very idea of community” (Rasmussen 2002, 142). Based on a right to community held by both individuals and communities, a progressive librarianship can continue to serve the needs of the both by providing communicative opportunities for all citizens in a global context.

Component 5: A progressive librarianship encompasses any particular form the library may take and works for its continual transformation.

Beginning in the 1970s, librarians entered a period of intense angst over their professional future and that of the library. Challenged by the prognostications of Frederick W. Lancaster librarians have ever since dwelt upon the question of what form the library will take in the electronic era (Lancaster 1978; Harris, Hannah, and Harris 1998, 30-38). Would it be a electronic, virtual, digital, or hybrid library—or even not exist at all? However, it matters not whether the issue of the form of the library remains unresolved as it should not be determining factor in the role the library plays in meeting society's needs. In this respect, borrowing from Umberto Eco, the library is conceived as an open work, a concept endowed with sufficient generality and universality to be interpreted appropriate to its context and the communicative needs at any particular time and place (Eco 1989; Birdsall 2006).

Librarians' strict adherence to universally applying accepted professional techniques and standards has marginalized different ways of knowing certain types and formats of information. These dominant professional methodologies, constructed in a print environment, are increasingly irrelevant in the digital environment. Likewise, the traditional top-down professional/client relationship in an era of growing citizen empowerment is no longer viable. The centralized, hierarchical construction of programs, standards, and techniques typical of the traditional professional model must give way to participative collaboration between professional and client in constructing the open library at the community level.

Indeed, there will be the recognition of many communities and of many ways of knowing that require the development of unique approaches to reflect multiple knowledge systems. The focus should be on creating through professional/client collaboration an open library embodying a wide range of communicative opportunities. New developments, such as Web 2.0, embody values of client participation that enhance the possibilities of such collaborations for developing multiple strategies to meet individual and community communicative needs (Miller 2005). One can envision libraries serving particular communities being in a "perpetual beta" state of evolution (on perpetual beta see O'Reilly 2005).

Whether the library as place or the digital library, a right to communicate provides a framework within which to develop progressive library organizations and operations centered on dynamic communication processes and services rather than solely on the traditional passive focus on content and collections. As well, libraries would be evaluated on the range and quality of services they provide rather than the increasingly irrelevant counts of their collection size or circulation of items. The primary resource of the library becomes the staff working in collaboration with users rather than passive services orbiting around the library's collections. This transformation of the library creates the possibility of attracting a more

inclusive clientele for the library as well as creating political alliances with other activists and others promoting communication rights including academics, computing professionals, women's groups, the disabled, journalists, and ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Component 6: A progressive librarianship embraces the development of a genuinely international librarianship that yet remains responsive to local needs.

The values of twentieth century librarianship based on the concept of the informed citizen were formulated in the United States. This commitment to an informed citizenry has been adopted by librarians around the world. For example, the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, adopted in 1994, states:

Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions/ UNESCO 1994)

But as the concept of the informed citizen is no longer sufficient to sustain a vital librarianship in an merging global communicative culture we can expect the development of a twenty-first century progressive librarianship will be an international and multi-national project.

A progressive librarianship will be international to the extent it is grounded in a *universal* human right to communicate. Yet, if librarianship is to develop within the universalization of global communication and of human rights, the development of which are at various stages among nations, we can also anticipate a progressive librarianship that will take various forms among nations of various cultures. Indeed, librarians, in their efforts to construct a librarianship sensitive to both the local and international context, will need to be especially attuned to cultural differences. As Randy Kluver observes: "In a globalized world, the political abstractions known as nations are becoming increasingly irrelevant, while the symbolic systems known as cultures are continually in flux" (Kluver 2000).

This sensitivity to cultural differences will require librarians to devote more attention to understanding cross- or intercultural communication. This must involve an understanding of intercultural communication in itself and as a field of research examining how people communicate among different cultures and their unique knowledge systems.

Conclusion

I have delineated a set of six components of a progressive librarianship for a twenty-first century communicative culture. The basis of that

librarianship is a basic human right to communicate possessed by the communicative citizen. A right to communicate establishes a fundamental legal foundation for the library as the institutional embodiment of a right to communicate in an era of global electronic communication and expanding human rights. It transforms traditional library values in accord with the emerging global communication and human rights environment. It envisions the library as being an important component of global electronic communication networks while offering an alternative political economy encompassing an active role for the communicative citizen. It shifts the focus of the library from information to communication, from content to process, from the informed citizen to the communicative citizen. It allows for a participatory process based on a close collaboration of professional and client. It provides a conceptual framework for the library regardless of its form. Finally, it opens up the possibility of a genuinely international librarianship that is also responsive to diverse cultural needs.

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PHILANTHROPY'S UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: public libraries and the struggle over free versus proprietary software

by Siobhan Stevenson

In 2003, Phase 1 of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Library Program was completed. Over a period of 5 years, the Foundation reported funding approximately 40,000 public access computers in more than 10,000 libraries across all fifty states (Gordon, Andrew, et al., 2003, 44). At its completion, "...more than 95 percent of public libraries offer[ed] Internet access to their patrons, with an average of 7.5 workstations per location (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2004, 15). Phase 2 of the program, designed to help libraries stay connected, is well under way. For participants and philanthropoids alike, the Gates Library Initiative Phase 1 achieved its original purpose to bridge the digital divide. Indeed, according to Alabama's State librarian, Rebecca Mitchell, "the digital divide has been seriously bridged" (Kniffle, 2003, 54). In more measured tones, a recent Foundation sponsored report stated, "by reaching nearly all communities, library computers have been an effective way to reach the 'digitally divided.'" (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2004, 6)

But the policy problem captured in the catchphrase "to bridge the digital divide" is not as transparent as it might first appear. For Bill Gates, the problem was one of access: access to the technology and training, hence his philanthropic program consisted of the distribution of hardware and full suites of Microsoft software including the Internet browser, Internet Explorer. In addition to the hardware and software, a comprehensive training component was included to support software training for both library staff and, through train-the-trainer programs, their publics. Conversely, for Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Foundation (FSF), the digital divide is the symptom of a much larger and more complex social problem: proprietary software. According to Stallman, "Computer users should be free to modify programs to fit their needs, and free to share software, because helping other people is the basis of society" (Stallman, 2002, 16). In a critique of the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Stallman described the problem this way, "Part of the digital divide comes from artificial obstacles to the sharing of information. This includes the licenses of non-free software, and harmfully restrictive

copyright laws” (Stallman, 2003, ¶4). Stallman also emphasized the educational value of free software over proprietary:

But free software offers a deeper benefit for education: the knowledge in free software is public knowledge, not secret. The sealed black box of a proprietary software system is designed to keep people in the dark. With free software students can study the software they use, to learn how it works. They can write improvements to the software, and thus learn the craft of software development (Kuhn 2, 2001, ¶4).

From this perspective, the problem of the digital divide cannot be separated from the culture surrounding proprietary software and within which Bill Gates has amassed his fortune. Not surprisingly then, the ideological divide between Bill Gates and Richard Stallman runs deep and wide. To be fair however, while Stallman targets Gates with most of his criticism of the proprietary software movement, he does concede that “Microsoft is just one of many proprietary software companies all more or less disrespecting the freedom of their own users. Microsoft is not really worse than a lot of others. They’re all bad” (Bowman, 2002, ¶2). That being said, in response to a statement attributed to Gates that “anyone who won’t give blanket support to all these [intellectual property] laws is a communist,” Stallman cautioned “When someone uses the term ‘intellectual property,’ typically he’s either confused himself, or trying to confuse you. The term is used to lump together copyright law, patent law and various other laws, whose requirements and effects are entirely different” (Stallman, 2005, ¶2).

Public libraries may seem far removed from the conflict between Bill Gates and the Microsoft Corporation and the dissident hackers at the center of the Free Software Movement. There is however no more relevant arena for this conflict than the public library, not the least because Gates chose libraries as the object of his philanthropy which came bundled with a free suite of Microsoft software. The influence of Gates’s philanthropy is evident. Equally evident is the apparent consonance of the ideals of the Free Software Movement with the traditional mandate of the public library. Indeed on the face of it there would seem to be a greater affinity between the public library profession and free software hackers than public libraries and the corporate mission and goals of Microsoft.

The premise underlying the following discussion is that as a result of Bill Gates’s library philanthropy, public librarians have been provided with an important window of opportunity with respect to defining and establishing a new and indispensable place for themselves within a yet to be stabilized global information society. And while technology will be at the root of this change, it will at the same time bear the unmistakable imprint of the public library’s traditional values and philosophy of service. This window of opportunity exists at the intersection of the completed Phase I of Gates Library Program, and the resulting public access computing (PAC) services and programs now established in over 95% of America’s public libraries.

Libraries and philanthropies

Before considering the meaning of this intersection, we need to step back for a moment and think about public libraries and private philanthropy. Gates's library philanthropy was well covered in the popular and professional presses not only at the time of its inauguration in 1996 but up to and including its completion in 2003. One common feature of this coverage was the inevitable comparison with Andrew Carnegie and his library-building program at the turn of the last century. Such comparisons are not without merit; indeed the similarities between both men as captains of industry during periods of profound social change are quite stunning, if not historically significant. For our purposes here, it is the role of Gates's and Carnegie's programs as public policies that is relevant.

First, together both Carnegie's library-building program and Gates's automation program represent the most significant philanthropic programs to affect American public libraries during their history. Further, these types of philanthropic enterprises are a uniquely American phenomenon and play a profound but often unacknowledged role in the establishment of public policy agendas and programs. According to the radical philanthropy scholar, Robert Arnove, large scale private philanthropies such as Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller, and here we could include Gates,

...represent relatively unregulated and unaccountable concentrations of power and wealth which buy talent, promote causes, and, in effect, establish the agenda of what merits society's attention. They serve as cooling out agencies, delaying and preventing more radical structural change. They help maintain an economic and political order, international in scope, which benefits ruling class interests of philanthropists and philanthropoids – a system which has worked against minorities, the working class and Third World Peoples . (Arnove, 1980, 2. Emphasis mine.)

This is important because by virtue of their private status they are able to operate outside of the regular public policy process. And yet, given their resources (wealth, expertise, and the status and connections of their founders), they play a powerful role in shaping policy directions and decisions.

One of the key ways in which they achieve this is through the provision of seed monies and other forms of support to get specific projects and initiatives up and running. Once the programs become relatively stabilized, they withdraw their presence and the responsibility most often falls to a public body to maintain the operating costs of the program.

Gates's Library Philanthropy

Like Carnegie before him, Gates's largesse received mixed reviews among the library community. On the one hand, the donation of computers,

software, Internet access and training for the purpose of bridging the digital divide speaks directly to the democratic concerns of public librarians. For the executive director of the American Library Association, the Gates Foundation represented “the culmination of a dream” and “is an enormous gift to our nation’s libraries. It means potentially every child and adult will have access to global information online...” (Kniffel, 1997, 14). On the other hand, Gates’s gesture was viewed as self-serving. In 1997, an editorial in *Library Journal* stated “some observers in the library community have said they feel that Gates may be pulling off a marketing power play to try and bring Microsoft software to hundreds, if not thousands of communities, through the public’s frontlines, their local libraries” (Anonymous, December, 1997, 71). In a similar vein, others accused him of trying to whitewash his reputation and that of his corporation in light of the U.S. government’s allegations of anticompetitive and predatory behavior within the Internet browser market. This interpretation is not without merit given the timing between the program and the Department of Justice’s antitrust lawsuit.

Regardless of where people stand on these questions, an analysis of the program as a public policy illuminates some of its more troubling aspects and, in so doing, provides recipients with the ability to make different decisions with respect to the program’s future directions.

*Setting the Library Agenda: constituting a role for the public library
in an information society*

Essentially what Gates has done with his program is set the public library policy agenda for at least the foreseeable future. There are a number of ways in which he has achieved this through his philanthropy program.

First, the one-time nation-wide infusion of cash, computers, software and training combined with the design of the program itself has solidified Gates’s positive relationship with the public library community. As described by researchers at the University of Washington in their report, “Legacy of Gates Foundation’s U.S. library program: impacts of public access computing positive, widespread” (2003), “The Gates Library Program has been unprecedented in its size and comprehensiveness, in the speed with which it has been implemented, and in the rich array of resources it has provided [e.g. installation, training, on-going technical support, etc.]” (Gordon, Andrew, et al. 2003, 48). The specific features of the program that facilitated library buy-in and local compliance included: the creation and repetition of a set of clear and consistent messages regarding the purpose of the program and its social value; the provision of significant training opportunities (on-site, online, and in Seattle) to support library workers in setting up and managing a public access computing centre including working with individual pieces of Microsoft software, and providing software support and training to library users; the creation of a technical help desk to support troubleshooting; the dissemination of

abundant program documentation and support materials for both library staff and the public; and, the establishment of a vehicle for professional communication in the form of the newsletter Connections which dealt with a broad range of issues associated with implementation, program maintenance and sustainability. Perhaps one of the most significant strategies undertaken to ensure the program's ongoing success was in the area of program monitoring, evaluation and feedback. In 1998, the Foundation approached researchers at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Affairs, Public Access Computing Project (PACP) and asked them to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the library program in bridging the digital divide. PACP developed a multi-year, multi-method, and independent research project and by 2003 it had released more than 23 evaluation reports. Most recently it published its "Legacy of Gates Foundation: Impact of Public Access Computing Positive, Widespread" (Gordon, Andrew; et al., 2003). The scope of the research project coupled with the regular communication of its findings in professional venues such as *Library Journal* (Gordon, Margaret; et al., February 15, 2001; Gordon, Andrew; et al., 2003), and at professional conferences (i.e. the Public Library Association's conference in 2002) further legitimated the program's goals as well as ensuring widespread community support.

A second aspect of the program which went a long way toward ensuring its success, particularly when combined with the design elements mentioned above, was that it represented a one-time only infusion of technology, support and cash. As a seed program many library recipients expressed grave concerns regarding the program's long-term sustainability. (Gordon, Margaret; et al., October, 2002). In a time of government retrenchment and fiscal austerity, maintaining a public access computing center is no small feat. However, the decision about whether to continue or not was, for all intents and purposes, taken out of the public librarian's hands given the tremendous reception that public access computing received in their communities and as repeatedly reported in numerous PACP reports (Gordon, Margaret; et al., February 15, 2001; Gordon, Margaret, et. al., October 2002; Gordon, Andrew; et al., May 2001). Published research demonstrated that indeed the program did what it had set out to do, that is, connect society's most vulnerable with the technology and public access to the Internet (Gordon, Andrew; et al., 2003). The research also emphasized some of the positive spin-off affects of the program including attracting new users and increasing circulation (Gordon, Margaret; et al., February 15, 2001). However, it is early days yet, and as technology and connectivity costs drop, the value of public access computing for attracting new users and increasing circulation will need to be revisited.

It is clear that any program as significant as the introduction of public access computing into libraries has serious implications for all aspects of that organization's functioning including personnel, facilities, administration (finance and organizational planning), and services. Yet despite reported concerns with the program itself and/or sustaining the initiative in the long term (Gordon, Margaret, et. al., October 2002) the overarching message

contained within the collective PACP reports is that the program had been good for America's libraries and "librarians [were] proud of the changes that have accompanied public access computing and the enhanced reputations and importance of their libraries" (ibid., 22). To recap then, some of the main pressures to continue with public access computing at the time of the program's completion in 2003 were:

- (1) User expectations had been established with respect to technology in libraries which libraries would have been hard pressed to unplug.
- (2) Government support via the provision of the e-rate served to further legitimate the Foundation's program.
- (3) Pressure from within the public library community itself. Again, research out of the University of Washington clearly demonstrates that among librarians there is agreement that this is the way to go. Further, library users, as well as librarians and administrators were reported to feel that PAC services should become a budgetary and service priority after traditional collections (Gordon, Margaret; et. al. May 2001, 16; Gordon, Andrew; et. al. May 2001).

But there is a caveat. Concomitant with constitutions of the positive impact of the program on libraries are repeated reminders of the symbiotic relationship that now exists between the Gates Foundation and America's libraries.

All in all, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Library Program's efforts to assist America's public libraries in making public access computing available to everyone has proven to be very successful. Access to a wide variety of useful computer programs, and up to date information on the Internet, have become key features in libraries throughout the United States. Further, about three-quarters of libraries in the first 10 states appear to be able to sustain their programs. The remaining fourth seem to need additional support before they can sustain their programs alone. PACP assumes the foundation will want to make the additional effort in order to protect their investments, but especially to ensure that access to computers and information continues to bring the advantages of technology to all citizens (Gordon, Margaret, et al., February, 2004, 29. Emphasis mine.).

Gates's seed program worked because it managed to transfer a sense of ownership and responsibility for its reproduction to the local library community. This is particularly noteworthy in light of the near hegemonic status of Microsoft software products for public access computing and related programs.

So what's this window of opportunity & how does it represent a site of struggle?

It is not about whether or not to continue offering public access computing but it is about rethinking what it is all about and what public librarians and their communities want to achieve with it. Certainly the goal of the original program was laudable (ensuring that every one has access to the Internet) and not out of step with what public libraries traditionally provide.

Indeed, libraries were heading in this direction before Bill Gates arrived on the scene. The A.L.A.'s *Goal 2000: Planning for the millennium* (1996) targeted connecting America's public libraries to the information highway as one of its key initiatives. In fact, it was the A.L.A.'s Executive Director, Elizabeth Martinez, who initially approached Bill Gates and Microsoft in 1995 with "'The Big Idea' — a plan to fulfill A.L.A.'s Goal 2000 through connecting every library in the nation, especially in poor communities, and training libraries to use electronic resources" (Kniffle, 1997, 14). So no, the service of continuing to provide the community with public access to computing information resources and the Internet is not the issue. The issue is perhaps far more historically significant and offers one possible window of opportunity for public libraries to carve out a unique and relevant role for the library in an information society. The issue is about maintaining the integrity of the public library as an information commons in an increasingly technologically mediated world. Maintaining the public library as an information commons demands both a philosophical response and a pragmatic response.

Let's consider the philosophical aspects of this issue first.

The concept of a "commons" comes from the English tradition in which lands were held in commonality and everyone in the community was given free access to use these lands for a wide variety of purposes. Commons benefited the individual and the community. From this perspective, the library as place has long represented a community information commons. In an article entitled "Reclaiming the Commons," David Bollier provides an excellent summary of what constitutes the commons today.

The American commons comprises a wide range of shared assets and forms of community governance. Some are tangible, while others are more abstract, political, and cultural. The tangible assets of the commons include the vast quantities of oil, minerals, timber, grasslands, and other natural resources on public lands, as well as the broadcast airwaves and such public facilities as parks, stadiums, and civic institutions. The government is the trustee and steward of such resources, but "the people" are the real owners.

The commons also consists of intangible assets that are not as readily identified as belonging to the public. Such commons include the creative works and public knowledge not privatized under copyright law. This large expanse of cultural resources is sometimes known as the public domain or—as electronic

networking increases its scope and intensity —”the information commons” (2002, ¶4,5).

The issue here is the need to articulate an underlying philosophy towards the public library’s future role in public access computing within an information society and one which resonates with the public library’s long-standing traditional values. These include the public library as a place which allows and encourages the free exchange of ideas, a place which promotes free access to a diversity of opinions and world views, and a place which celebrates individual freedoms with respect to the right to access information without barriers or constraints, the freedom to create and the freedom to innovate.

The challenge for libraries now is to find a way of translating these values and practices beyond their physical walls and out into cyberspace. The following, or some variant of it, might capture the spirit of the library as an information commons in a digital context: A digital gateway and a space (physical and virtual) within which citizens actively and freely participate in the new information society, celebrate the emancipatory and democratizing potential of the new information and communications technologies, and basically reap the benefits of what Gates has described as the “web lifestyle” (Gates, 1997). But a way of life defined by the community and not by Bill Gates.

It is important to step back for a minute and consider Gates’s discourse. Despite Gates’s high praise for libraries (St. Lifer, 1996; St. Lifer & Rogers, 1996), librarians (Kniffle, 1998) and the continuing value of the book (ibid, 1998), many of his essays constitute a world in which libraries and librarians are rendered essentially redundant, or at least, no longer necessary in the ways in which they have been in the past (Gates 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2005). The following is representative of that vision as expressed around the time of Gates’s entry into the philanthropy business.

Living a web lifestyle will mean that you rely heavily on the interactive network to gather and use information. You’ll take the network for granted, turning to it instinctively and without a second thought. You’ll check it to see what’s cool, what people are talking about and what they’re thinking. You’ll check it before making any major purchases and minor one’s too. (Gates, 1996, ¶7)

For Gates, a distinguishing feature of a web lifestyle is that digital devices and digital connections are based on immediate and customized access to the web. The emphasis on the “personal” as in “personal computer” and “personal digital companion” assumes private ownership of the device. Public access computing as exists in libraries, while currently providing the have-nots with an alternative means of access, cannot, by Gates’s definition, allow these citizens to take advantage of the powerful new services available over the Web and as required for a web lifestyle.

In order for “turning to the Web” to become a reflex, access must be immediate and continuous. This is not the case in a public access computing context. It is not a reflex if you have to drive or walk or take a bus to the library in order to take advantage of your scheduled half-hour of computer time.

The information commons

Lawrence Lessig in *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (2002) persuasively argues that the origins of the Internet were that of an information commons. Early software development was premised on the notion of freedom, as in the code (API) that runs the program was made freely available to all. If you wrote a program for something, you placed your program on the net with your source code and anyone else was free to pick it up and to improve it or create something new as long as they in turn made their code free. It was the Internet as an information commons that generated TCP/IP protocols, Unix, gopher space, WWW, Mosaic, all of which represent important building blocks of the Net (19-25).

Lessig (1999, 2002, 2004) argues that this commons is in the process of being enclosed by powerful social forces on both a legal and architectural front. Legally through the extension to the duration of U.S. copyrights by 20 years (Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, 1998) and the establishment of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the same year. Architecturally, this is occurring vis-à-vis the increasing commercialization of the web. If any one doubts the latter, consider Nick Dyer-Witthford's findings:

In 1991 there were only some 181,361 “.com” hosts, 12 percent of the total, lagging just behind the 13 percent of “.edu” sites associated with universities, research institutes, and schools. In 1995 “.dot.coms” were not only some ten times as numerous—1,829,119—but also accounted for 31% of all hosts. In 2000 there were a staggering 32,696,253 commercial sites—35 percent of all hosts. In 1993, 1.5 percent of the World Wide Web had the “.com” suffix, by 1995, 31.3 percent, and by 1997, 62.6 percent. According to the OED two-thirds of Internet traffic consists of internal data transfers within corporations (Dyer-Witthford, 2002, 135).

Dyer-Witthford goes on to say that “even these figures may underestimate the actual commercial presence. A 1999 study of Web server content in the journal *Nature* [Lawrence & Giles, 1999] reported 1.5 percent of its sampled pages as ‘pornographic,’ 2 percent as ‘personal,’ 3 percent as ‘health information,’ 6 percent involving ‘scientific and educational’ material, and 83 percent as ‘commercial’” (Ibid).

With respect to the extension of copyright to software: there can be no clearer example of the threats this poses to intellectual freedom than the findings of the US government's antitrust suit against Microsoft.

Not surprisingly then, for Lessig “code” is the law of cyberspace and the extension of copyright to software and digital materials completely undermines the original values of the Net and ones commensurate with public library philosophy.

*On a practical level, the choice is between
proprietary versus freelopen system architecture*

Let’s step back in time and envisage a completely imaginary world in which public libraries are being asked to adapt themselves to computers and the Internet. They are given two choices:

(1) Sponsorship from a philanthropic foundation whose founder’s corporation has actually been convicted in a US court of law for abusing its monopoly position by engaging in anti-competitive behavior and among other things, stalling innovation (see U.S. District Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson’s Court’s Finding of Fact, November 5, 1999, S. VII). As industry leader, the software (operating and productivity) has become the *de facto* industry standard and once libraries sign on a perpetual schedule of expensive upgrades based on the corporation’s own research and production agenda ensues. Finally, the software code itself is copyrighted (the code does not travel with the software) so libraries and their users are restricted from making any modifications, customizations and fixes that would enhance the software’s value for the institution and its users, not the least of which would be the value of free and open software as an important educational tool for those looking to enter the IT industry as independents. Programming knowledge is power today. Programming knowledge and free access to a world of code is emancipatory. Or,

(2) Choosing free software in which the source code is open, and adapting it to the library and community’s needs. By making this choice, the public library finds itself aligned with a social movement, the Free Software Foundation (FSF), which is committed to the principle of free software as a matter of liberty not price, or as the founder of the FSF Richard Stallman likes to say, “remember to think of ‘free’ as in ‘free speech’ not as in ‘free beer’” (Stallman, 2002, 63). This principle is embedded in the concept of “copyleft” and the General Public License or GPL, both of which are very important to the anti-enclosure movement. From a practical perspective, free and open software it has been shown actually results in a better quality product sooner and certainly cheaper (Raymond, 2001). While there may be an initially steep learning curve, the longterm payoffs are substantial, not the least of which is arming public librarians with a powerful new tool and literacy with which to develop customized library applications, and, if the public library community as a whole adopts the software and the underlying philosophy, some very exciting things can begin to happen. Not only will librarians have the language and skills necessary to establish a strong public presence on the Web, but they will also be able to empower their users as both citizens and workers. Rather than offering “Word Wednesdays” and other Windows and Microsoft training programs (for

example the Flint Public Library, Newark Public Library, and Arlington Public Library, among many others advertise MS Office training), libraries will be able to provide learning opportunities that promote the emancipatory potential of the new ICTs, while at the same time providing their users with some of the skills necessary for good independent work in the new information economy. In a free and open source world, there are few barriers to market entry.

Free/Open Software and the Struggle to Create an Information Commons

Lawrence Lessig and Richard Stallman among others create a very interesting and alternative agenda for public libraries and one which is far more in keeping with the institution's traditions, values and social purpose. Public libraries are by definition committed to the principles of free access (both "free" as in free speech and "free" as in free beer) to information and knowledge without barriers or restrictions on use (except those constraints currently imposed by fair use legislation). Given the increasing reliance of these institutions on information and communications technologies for the purpose of information access and service provision to their citizens, attending to the warnings and challenges posed by individuals such as Stallman, Lessig and others is essential, if not fundamental to their social mandate.

Buildings and Codes: Architectures for Compliance

Ursula Franklin in *The Real World of Technology* (1999) described our current world like this,

As I see it, technology has built a house in which we all live. The house is continually being extended and remodeled. More and more human life takes place within its walls, so that today there is hardly any human activity that does not occur within this house. All are affected by the design of the house, by the division of its space, by the location of its doors and walls. Compared to people in earlier times, we rarely have a chance to live outside this house. And the house is still changing; it is still being built as well as being demolished (1).

In *Code and other laws of cyberspace* (1999), Lessig captures the essence of the challenge:

This code presents the greatest threat to liberal and libertarian ideals, as well as their greatest promise. We can build, or architect, or code cyberspace to protect values that we believe are fundamental, or we can build, or architect, or code cyberspace to allow those values to disappear. There is no middle ground. There is no choice that does not include some kind of building. Code is never found: it is only ever made, and only ever made by us (Lessig, 1999, 6).

He finishes with a quote by Mark Stefik, author of *Internet dreams: archetypes, myths, and metaphors* (1996): “Different versions of [cyberspace] support different kinds of dreams. We choose wisely, or not” (Lessig, 1999, 6). It is this battle in which the FSF finds itself positioned on one side and Microsoft on the other.

In an increasingly networked world in which more and more services and products are migrating to the web (e-government, e-commerce, e-education, e-health, etc.), the kinds of communication pathways, computing conventions, and practices coded into enabling software (communications, operating systems and productivity) play a significant role in mediating the life experiences of users just as the organization of physical space directs the flow of movement. For individuals such as Richard Stallman and Lawrence Lessig, the code that makes up software, while enabling some activities must, by definition, constrain others. If, as Richard Stallman (2002) argues, software were to be “free” and individuals were “free” to modify/ restructure and otherwise adjust the program to suit their needs, they would no longer be economically and socially constrained by what experimental physicist and social activist Ursula Franklin has referred to as “control-related technologies” (1999, 9). This, of course, presupposes access to the software’s source code. Without this access however, users are denied the option of working with the software and hence must learn to live within its constraints and restrictions and essentially incorporate these into their practices. In essence, they must comply with the software’s requirements. It is this concept of constraint, artificial barriers to access, and forced compliance (as entrenched in current copyright and intellectual property law) and its implications for civil liberties and freedoms which concern, albeit for different reasons, people like Lawrence Lessig and Richard Stallman and should be of great concern to librarians.

Conclusion

At no other time in our history, except perhaps in the early days of the public library movement have we had the opportunity to reassess and reshape our services and our approach to their delivery. The underlying democratic principles remain the same and continue to hold the same value but the kinds of battles and the ways in which we chose to practice them have changed. As a profession, public librarians have a responsibility to themselves and their communities to aggressively embrace the new information and communications technologies, to uncover their emancipatory and democratic potential, and to translate these into their services, practices, and research. This is a time for critical reflection, political action, and community building.

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POLITICS & PUBLIC LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

by John M. Budd

The collections of public libraries are sometimes used as evidence for the political stances of the librarians who select materials for the collections. Nicholas Jackson, in an online magazine, *The Conservative Voice*, took aim at public libraries that are, according to him, corrupting children. The corruption comes in the forms of: gay-oriented magazines, such as *The Advocate*; gay-themed books, such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*; and unfiltered Internet access. These features of Jackson's hometown public library prompt him to accuse libraries, as liberal institutions, of indoctrinating children. Academic and school libraries are also criticized, primarily in Web-based sources. An article at WorldNetDaily (2006) takes academic librarians to task for perceived anti-conservatism because they have tended not to select *The Marketing of Evil*, by David Kupelian for their collections. Kupelian (who is a managing editor of WorldNetDaily) condemns homosexuality in his book and the article chastises libraries for not owning the book. As *Columbus Dispatch* columnist Joe Blundo points out, the book contains numerous factual and logical errors. Its notoriety stems from a controversy at Ohio State University-Mansfield, where librarian Scott Savage recommended it as required reading for incoming freshmen. The PABBIS (Parents Against Bad Books in Schools) website (n.d.) lists a number of book titles that they claim some may find objectionable. A statement at the site reads, "Bad is not for us to determine. Bad is what you determine is bad. Bad is what you think is bad for your child. What each parent considers bad varies and depends on their unique situation, family and values. The main purpose of this webpage is to identify some books that might be considered bad and why someone might consider them bad. Another purpose of this webpage is to provide information related to bad books in schools." Some of the titles listed are: Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams*, Richard Peck's *Are You Home Alone*, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Librarians sometimes address the criticism of collections. For example, Edwin S. Clay III (2001) mentions a newspaper report that libraries are left-leaning. He writes, "Watchdog groups (and in this case, media) who attempt to criticize library collection policies by pointing out what is not on the shelves are, indeed, missing the point" (265). His observation has considerable merit; exclusion cannot be assessed unless accompanied by

inclusion. In our own professional discourse, however, there are some seeming contradictions. The official rhetoric of openness, as exemplified in documents such as the Library Bill of Rights, is sometimes offset by actual speech acts. For example, Whitney Davison-Turley (2004) reports on her experience at a membership meeting during an American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference. She spoke against ALA adopting resolutions opposing torture and the U.S. presence in Iraq. She says, "I was not opposing the resolution, but only pointing out that a large number of our membership probably would do so if given the chance" (33). According to her, a respondent said that if she questioned the resolutions then she must be in favor of torture. Davison-Turley does not claim to be politically conservative, but she expresses concern over what freedom of expression is. The political tension that is present in public library collections is evident in a piece by Susan Hill (2005). Without irony she states within her brief article that rural communities tend to be conservative, but her library is passionate about offering a balanced collection, and then concludes by saying that majority rules (46). Tocqueville's warning of the potential tyranny of the majority is nowhere to be found. A more strident internal criticism is offered by David Durant. He states that ALA is supposed to be nonpolitical (although he presents no rationale for that claim). He follows that with other dicta, making statements bereft of evidence or logical examination. His complaint about the profession centers on perceived partisan political bias that permeates the entirety of librarianship and that left-wing politics is pervasive in all aspects of the profession.

The state of public library collections cries for some empirical analysis. Juris Dilevko and Lisa Gottlieb (2003) focus on the Public Library Catalog and conclude that the tool, if overused, can lead to homogenized collections. The recommended works in the Public Library Catalog may be inadequate in their theoretical and epistemological balance. Kirsti Nelson and Lynne (E. F.) McKechnie (2002) examine library users' awareness of how items are selected for public library collections and find that 60% do not know about librarians' responsibilities. They state that, "we have identified collection development, acquisitions, and cataloging as the 'hidden intellectual work' of librarianship. This work is intellectually interesting and challenging, but because it is conducted behind closed doors the public is unaware that it goes on" (296). Other work addresses the management of the physical space of the library. Tony Greiner (2005) advocates using circulation data to reallocate shelf space as a means of meeting patron needs.

Some of the background literature points to some stark challenges inherent in our professional discourse on public library collections. Clay (2001), for example, says, "While representing multiple viewpoints is key to collection development policy in most public library systems in the United States, libraries are also in the business of responding to demand and making tough decisions on what to buy and what not to buy, often based on the question of use" (265). He equates the wise expenditure of funds with circulation. Greiner (2005), in a similar vein, observes, "Libraries with this user-centered philosophy (best summarized as "Give 'em what they

want”) recognize that library acquisitions need to change to reflect changes in patron demand” (347). He adds, “Concerns might be raised that using shelf allocation as a tool will lead to an imbalanced collection. Actually, it is such collections as the one in our example that are out of balance” (349). Circulation, then, may be reified, in the sense Georg Lukacs (1971) means in his critique of capitalism. What is missing from the opinions of Clay and Greiner is an understanding of the complex human dynamic of selection and acquisition on the one hand, reading and circulation on the other, and the relationship between the two.

Some Numbers

All of the foregoing raises questions about the manifestation of political balance/bias in public library collections. For example, if Davison-Turley’s experience were to be translated into selection, one might expect to see a particular tendency among libraries to own some titles, and not others. Further, if Durant is correct, then the political leanings of librarians might result in a one-sided collection. These kinds of extensions of criticisms form the basis of the present examination. The question of the political state of public library collections certainly can’t be answered definitively with numbers alone. On the other hand, examination of some empirical data can undoubtedly enhance critical evaluation. Fortunately, a quite large data set is available and can be employed as part of the evaluation. Users of the SirsiDynix system collect holdings and circulation data, and the data are cumulated in aggregate form by SirsiDynix. The aggregate information is accessible by ALA-accredited library and information science programs. The data include the years 2003 through 2005. The data of a total of 416 libraries are represented in the accessible database. Given the statements made about left-leaning collections in public libraries, the area of political science is the focus of examination here. The SirsiDynix database can generate reports on the titles with the highest circulation; this list can be compared with the titles in a report on those that are led by the most libraries. Table 1 presents the top titles by circulation (the titles included circulated at least 900 times during the time period).

Table 1
Works with the Highest Circulation

| | Title | Author | Circulation |
|---|---|------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Slander: Liberal Lies about the American Right | Coulter, Ann H. | 7,132 |
| 2 | Martin Luther King, Jr. | Fairclough, Adam | 5,350 |
| 3 | Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terror | Coulter, Ann H. | 4,491 |

| | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------|-------|
| 4 | How to Talk to a Liberal if You Must | Coulter, Ann H. | 4,260 |
| 5 | Rosa Parks | Brinkley, Douglas | 3,467 |
| 6 | America, the Book | Stewart, John | 3,301 |
| 7 | Deliver Us from Evil | Hannity, Sean | 3,089 |
| 8 | Dude, Where's My Country | Moore, Michael | 2,918 |
| 9 | The Enemy Within | Savage, Michael | 2,607 |
| 10 | Spy | Platt, Richard | 2,285 |
| 11 | Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them | Franken, Al | 2,082 |
| 12 | The Future of Freedom | Zakaria, Fareed | 2,066 |
| 13 | Homegrown Democrat | Keillor, Garrison | 1,793 |
| 14 | House of Bush, House of Saud | Unger, Craig | 1,761 |
| 15 | National Party No More | Miller, Zell | 1,743 |
| 16 | Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr. | Adler, David A. | 1,512 |
| 17 | The Truth about Hillary | Klein, Edward | 1,510 |
| 18 | Ellis Island | Perec, Georges | 1,472 |
| 19T | Had Enough | Carville, James | 1,472 |
| 19T | The Civil Rights Movement | Winters, Paul A. | 1,420 |
| 20 | Sleeping with the Devil | Baer, Paul | 1,346 |
| 21 | Rewriting History | Morris, Dick | 1,234 |
| 22 | Vote | Christelow, Eileen | 1,137 |
| 23 | See No Evil | Baer, Robert | 1,136 |
| 24 | How to Prepare for the US Citizenship Test | Alesi, Gladys E. | 1,120 |
| 25 | Martin Luther King, Jr. Day | Foran, Jill | 1,092 |
| 26 | Winning the Future | Gingrich, Newt | 1,090 |
| 27 | Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity | Limbaugh, David | 1,062 |

| | | | |
|----|-------------------------|------------------|-----|
| 28 | Citizenship | Schleifer, Jay | 987 |
| 29 | The Rise of the Vulcans | Mann, Jim | 917 |
| 30 | Ultimate Spy | Melton, H. Keith | 902 |

As is apparent, the titles represent a number of points on the political spectrum — from Michael Savage and Ann Coulter on the right to Al Franken and Michael Moore on the left. Some of the works represented are less polemical than the aforementioned. For example, James Mann’s *The Rise of the Vulcans* and Craig Unger’s *House of Bush, House of Saud* appear on the list. The latter work has drawn praise from a variety of commentators, including both Maureen Dowd and George Will. A closer examination of the titles will follow, but first a listing of titles by numbers of holding libraries is also instructive. Table 2 presents this list.

Table 2
Works Ranked by Number of Holding Libraries

| Rank | Title | Author | Holding Libraries |
|------|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Martin Luther King, Jr. | Fairclough, Adam | 293 |
| 2 | Rosa Parks | Brinkley, Douglas | 248 |
| 3 | Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terror | Coulter, Ann H. | 236 |
| 4 | The Civil Rights Movement | Winters, Paul A. | 235 |
| 5 | Slander: Liberal Lies about the American Right | Coulter, Ann H. | 215 |
| 6 | Deliver Us from Evil | Hannity, Sean | 213 |
| 7 | How to Talk to a Liberal if You Must | Coulter, Ann H. | 185 |
| 8 | Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr. | Adler, David A. | 177 |
| 9 | How to Prepare for the U.S. Citizenship Test | Alesi, Gladys E. | 173 |
| 10 | See No Evil | Baer, Robert | 171 |
| 11 | National Party No More | Miller, Zell | 170 |

| | | | |
|----|--|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 12 | Martin Luther King, Jr. Day | Foran, Jill | 169 |
| 13 | Homegrown Democrat | Keillor, Garrison | 151 |
| 14 | Spy | Platt, Richard | 149 |
| 15 | Ellis Island | Perec, Georges | 141 |
| 16 | Vote | Christelow, Eileen | 138 |
| 17 | Had Enough | Carville, James | 135 |
| 18 | Winning the Future | Gingrich, Newt | 131 |
| 19 | America, the Book | Stewart, John | 130 |
| 20 | The Enemy Within | Savage, Michael | 128 |
| 21 | House of Bush, House of Saud | Unger, Craig | 126 |
| 22 | The Truth about Hillary | Klein, Edward | 125 |
| 23 | Persecution: How Liberals Are Waging War Against Christianity | Limbaugh, David | 124 |
| 24 | The Rise of the Vulcans | Mann, Jim | 122 |
| 25 | Rewriting History | Morris, Dick | 117 |
| 26 | The Future of Freedom How to Prepare for the US Citizenship Test | Zakaria, Fareed Alesi, Gladys E. | 116 |
| 27 | Ultimate Spy | Melton, H. Keith | 103 |
| 28 | Sleeping with the Devil | Baer, Robert | 88 |
| 29 | Dude, Where's My Country | Moore, Michael | 75 |
| 30 | Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them | Franken, Al | 69 |
| 31 | Citizenship | Schleifer, Jay | 63 |

A striking element of a comparison of the two tables is the disparity between rankings. We should not overstate the fine points of the rankings; the examination should be taken as little more than indications of the political state of public library collections. Five titles that are clearly right-leaning are among the top half in holdings. Only two left-leaning works are in the top half. We can ask whether this disparity is meaningful beyond an initial perception, and rank-order correlation provides one mechanism to suggest meaningfulness. Applying Spearman's rank-order correlation can offer a description of the differences. When the ranked lists are compared the

correlation coefficient (rs) is .44. This is not a strong correlation; in fact, it is possible to translate the rs score into an approximation of Student's t. The resulting t score is 2.63, indicating that there is a significant difference between the two ranked lists ($p \leq 0.01$). In other words, the disparity between the two lists is not merely perceptual; there is a real difference between the rankings. Given that the right-leaning titles tend to be more widely held, one possible conclusion is that public libraries are actually more likely to tend towards the conservative side, at least in their holdings on politics.

The dynamics of holdings and circulation (and we must acknowledge that the relationship is dynamic) can be illuminated by some additional numerical analyses. The top ranked title in circulation is Ann Coulter's *Slander*. A total of 215 libraries own the title, so the ratio of holding libraries to circulation is 33.17. To extend this examination a bit, we can see that the 215 libraries own 426 copies of the book, resulting in a ratio between copies and circulation of 16.74. By comparison, a left-leaning polemical work—Michael Moore's *Dude, Where's My Country*—is owned by only 75 libraries. The holdings-circulation ratio is 39.91. The 75 libraries own 175 copies, so the resulting ratio is 16.67. The similarity of the ratios for the two titles is open to interpretation, but the data strongly suggest that demand for both right-leaning and left-leaning titles is high. The dynamic of (somewhat) less polemical works mirrors the foregoing similarities. Zell Miller's *National Party No More* is owned by 170 libraries; the holdings-circulation ratio is 10.25. The libraries own 249 copies; that ratio is 7.00. Unger's *House of Bush, House of Saud* is held by 126 libraries, resulting in a ratio of 13.98. The libraries own 208 copies, so that ratio is 8.47. Again, public demand does not appear to be dominated by the political right, even though public library holdings tend to represent right-leaning titles more heavily.

Where Do We Stand

In trying to locate meaning in the phenomena of holdings and circulation in public libraries we can return to some of the remarks that introduced this examination. The holdings of public libraries are products of intentional actions by people. It is the intentionality, though, that may be most elusive. However, the statements of some librarians provide clues as to intentionality. For example, Greiner says, "Use statistics (circulation, in-house use, and interlibrary loan) are an essential tool in determining how well a library is meeting patron demand" (p. 350). The statement can be critiqued two ways: (1) use data indicate which items that a library owns are meeting the demands of some users, and (2) there are, as is evident from the numerical data presented here, items that are being demanded but that are underrepresented in public library collections. The two critiques, taken together, point to problems with libraries' holdings. The first is a systemic misunderstanding of the meaning of circulation data. The data cannot be interpreted in isolation; what is held is a determinant

of what circulates. It may also be the case that the complete character of the collection influences circulation. That is, if the collection has been developed according to what has been in some demand in the past, those patterns of both demand and circulation are likely to be perpetuated into the future. If a library were to find that military history and biography circulated heavily and so that library adjusts its selection and acquisition to weight the collection more heavily in that direction, circulation in those subject areas may increase. Also, circulation in other subjects areas may decrease because of the adjustment. This critique reveals that circulation is not a “natural” event; it is a complex human action that is influenced by the prior actions of other humans. The simplistic analysis of circulation data is itself an intentionality that may or may not be political.

Further, what is not owned cannot be checked out. The holdings and circulations of *Slander* and *Dude, Where's My Country* are indicative of this problem. While it is impossible to say that, were Moore's book to be owned by as many libraries as Coulter's, it would rank higher in total circulations, it is safe to say that its total number of circulations would be considerably higher. The libraries that do not own Moore's book can, of course, point to an absence of circulation data, but that absence is not meaningful. The intentionality of this action is open to speculation; if, however, selection is based on “majority rule,” a minority (which may constitute just under half of a community's population) is disadvantaged. This intentionality begs the question what is public about public libraries. There are both negative and favorable reviews of the controversial titles considered here. The existence of favorable reviews does not indicate ownership by a large number of libraries. Likewise, the existence of negative reviews does not necessarily indicate that libraries are averse to owning some titles. To turn Greiner's assertion on its head, use data are potentially misleading tools in determining community demands that are not being met.

The titles included in the present study represent a somewhat skewed political perspective. Ten of the titles are right-leaning; only seven are left-leaning. Three might be considered right of center (based on content and reviews). The remaining titles have less partisan political points of view. The combination of the skewed perspective and the difference between the two ranked lists suggest some potentially troubling conclusions about public libraries. Complaints about “liberal” bias, if we limit our examination to the data available, are misplaced. In order to take the investigation further into the matter of bias and balance, a more complete analysis of intentionality is needed. Statistical analysis alone cannot provide clear understanding of intentionality. Politics, perhaps especially democracy, is maintained by continuous intentional acts. Public libraries can only accomplish their missions by conscious, deliberate, and intentional acts. An examination of those acts can point out how Durant's plaintive cry rings hollow. The library is inevitably an undeniably political institution. The politics in which libraries operate does not mean that the correct response is mindless pandering to what might be seen as demand. Durant, Hill, and others may take respite in the state of public library collections, but that state may be

representative of a non-reflective and narrowly technical practice. A full understanding of conscious, deliberate, and intentional acts will require the kind of praxis that John Doherty (2005/2006) calls for: "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" (16).

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THE WRONG PATH & THE RIGHT PATH: the role of libraries in access to, and preservation of, cultural heritage

by Michael Gorman

What is happening to the human record in this “age of information?”

Writing was invented at least eight millennia ago. We have, in that period, amassed an almost uncountable store of texts (often accompanied by images) that constitutes the largest and most important part of the human record—a storehouse of the thoughts of the dead and living that transcends space and time. That store of texts has increased exponentially since the introduction of printing to the Western world five centuries ago. The Western printed codex (“the book”) is important not primarily because of its intrinsic value but because it has proven to be the most effective means of both disseminating *and* preserving the textual content of the human record. Texts have always been contained in other formats (hand-written on paper, vellum, or scrolls, scratched on papyrus and palm leaves, incised in stone or on clay, stamped on metal, as microform images, created digitally, etc.) but none of these methods can compare to the book in both dissemination and preservation—particularly when we are thinking about long complex texts. However, it must be emphasized that it is texts that are important not the carrier in which they are contained. We call believers in the great monotheistic religions “People of the Book,” but they would be more accurately called “People of the Text.”

The existence of these texts and, increasingly, other manifestations of the human record, led to a community of learning that transcended national boundaries centuries before the much-vaunted commercial globalization of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Long before we lived under the shadow of post-moral, transnational companies and people all over the world felt the effects of modern globalization, there was a global community of scholars and learners united in their search for truth and wisdom in the human record to which the great libraries of the world gave access. The chief allegiance of that community was to learning and the search for truth, not the narrowness of feudal or national entities. In many ways, that community of learning and research is still with us—aided, in many cases,

by modern technological innovations that, paradoxically, are seen by some as threatening the culture of learning in which that community is rooted.

The backdrop to this paper is the intellectual struggle that is going on as computers dominate many aspects of our lives and, in the opinion of many, are transforming not only our physical lives for good or ill, but our mental lives as well. The most extreme version of this opinion can be found in the writings of those who theorize intense interactions between humans and machines to the point at which they fuse and become a single entity. The founder of “cybernetics,” Norbert Wiener warned about this line of thought as long ago as 1950.¹ He wrote

They [communication machines] have even shown the existence of a tremendous possibility of replacing human behavior, in many cases in which the human being is slow and ineffective... To those of us who are engaged in constructive research and in invention, there is a serious moral risk of aggrandizing what we have accomplished. To the public, there is an equally serious moral risk of supposing that, in stating new potentials of fact, we scientists and engineers are thereby justifying and even urging their exploitation at any costs.

Wiener goes on to protest against all inhuman uses of human beings, all systems in which humans are subjugated and reduced to the status of an automaton—“...effectors for a supposedly higher nervous system.”² Though Wiener was concerned with communication theory and human-machine interaction, these comments and others in his book are an indictment of the anti-humanistic aspects of scientific management (of which more later).

In all the current chatter and unthinking acceptance of statements about “ages of information,” “post-modern societies,” etc. we can see the fissures in modern thought that have commoditized information on one side and recorded knowledge on the other; the consumer and infotainment culture on one side and the culture of learning and reflection on the other; mind control, censorship, and conformity on the one hand and freedom of thought and enquiry on the other; profit-driven information technology and scientific management on the one side and humanism, unfettered creativity, and spirituality on the other. In many ways, one side of the debate is dominated by individualistic materialism, in which the driving forces are possessions, access to “information” and entertainment to make the individual physically comfortable in a society that, paradoxically, exacts the price of conformity for these desired things. The other side is dominated by self-realization through learning—a true individualism that, again paradoxically, is often expressed in service to society and a belief in the greater good.

One important feature of this contest of values is the devaluation of reading and of the print culture of which it is a part on the part of those

who espouse the side of materialism. Though almost everyone agrees that literacy is important to children, the sub-text of discussions about the digitization of books, the “inevitable dominance” of e-books, etc., is that sustained reading of complex texts is not a necessary part of mature life in an “information age.” As I have said before, I am wedded to “the book” only because it is demonstrably the best format for both sustained reading and for the preservation of the textual part of the scholarly human record. If another format were to be shown to be superior on both counts, I would embrace it. After all, it is the fixed, authentic text as created by its author that is of central importance, not the carrier of that text. My devotion to the text is transcendent, my devotion to the book utilitarian.

Lest you might think that literacy is simply a tool of learning and not at the heart of a civilization and way of life, just consider these casually come-upon words from a review of a book about the career of former Italian prime minister Berlusconi:

The narrative traces the descent from the idealism and intelligence of a print-based culture into a world in which personality, celebrity, money, and media control are the driving forces.³

This quotation is a graphic illustration of the extent and results of the slide (in this case in Italy, but in all Western countries) away from a culture rooted in reading and learning—a development that has affected us all and situated us in a post-modern world of a-literacy and illiteracy, the exaltation of faith over reason and the visual over the textual, and belief that transient “information” is more important than enduring knowledge. It is comparatively easy to list the numerous developments in the last 30 years or so that have brought us to this point—the ubiquity of television and personal computers; the rise of an “infotainment” culture fuelled by technology; the abandoning of the teaching of reading, writing, grammar in favor of self-expression and *faux* literacies; the egalitarian impulse in revolt against canons; the anomie and alienation of lonely crowds; sound-bite political culture, etc. It is much harder to see whether these are passing phenomena or the entwined causes and symptoms of a massive change in our societies, priorities, ways of living, educational systems, public discourse, and values comparable to such watersheds as the spread of printed texts in Europe in the 15th century or the industrial revolutions of the 19th century.

I think that none of this need be the case. I believe that there is a wide range of cultural and educational institutions (including libraries) that can unite to promote learning and literacy in the face of the slide into infotainment and vacuity. I propose here to describe the present state of, and challenges to, libraries; urge a turning away from two alien systems that dominate much contemporary library discourse and practice; to talk about the nature of cultural heritage and the role of digital documents in that heritage; and to propose a coming together of cultural institutions to take the right path to the future.

What is Happening to Libraries in this “Information Age”?

The following words were written in the late 1940s:

Out of this past has come what we may call the library faith. It is a fundamental belief, so generally accepted as to be often left unsaid, in the virtue of the printed word, the reading of which is good in itself, and upon the preservation of which so many basic values in our civilization rest.⁴

If one were to base one’s understanding of the role of libraries on articles appearing in contemporary professional journals, one would have to conclude that the library faith in reading and preoccupation with reading is a thing of the past in a library environment dominated by innovative uses of technology and the application of business management theories.

The eminent library historian and educator Wayne Weigand has pointed out that the common misconception that libraries are part of the world of information is upside down. In particular, Professor Weigand argues the importance of the library as an institution and physical place central to the promotion of culture (in particular, through reading), social interaction, and for the building and exchange of social capital.⁵ The truth is that information is part of the world of libraries, not *vice versa*. Further, libraries have concerns that are more complex and important than the storing and imparting of information. Once one embraces this idea of the library and its role, one can see that library work and services go beyond any particular communication technology, though technology is clearly a central tool in achieving some of the library’s objectives. To put it simply, libraries are concerned primarily with the messages that constitute the human record and only secondarily with the medium by means of which messages are transmitted. Once this concept is accepted, the library is clearly seen to be a part of the general context of the history of human cultural evolution and learning and in the context of the societal institutions that promote education, learning, social cohesion, and the higher aspirations of humankind.

The Wrong Path

The following is recent news about a library in San Francisco, California:

The San Francisco Maritime Museum’s library, which has the largest and best collection of materials on ships and the sea on the Pacific Coast, will be closed to the public, except by appointment only, effective Oct. 1. That means people will have to make an appointment to look through the library’s huge collection of maritime lore — including 32,000 books, a collection on whaling, volumes of sea shanties and more than 900 oral history interviews. Now the library, which has been open five days a week since it was founded 47 years ago, will rely less on face-to-face contact

with library users and researchers and more on the Internet. The decision was made by Kate Richardson, superintendent of the maritime park, who said the changes were necessary for financial reasons and because of changing times. “Every library in the world is facing moving the library to the 21st century,” she said. Using the Internet, she said, ‘is how people do research today.’”⁶

Could there be a more concise expression of the cosmic misunderstanding of the role of libraries than this last statement? Let us leave aside the fact that closing a library and restricting its services is hardly “moving the library to the 21st century” and concentrate on the statement “using the internet is how people do research today.” There was a time when the word “research” meant “critical and exhaustive research or experimentation having as its aim the discovery of new facts” or interpretations. “Research” today often means little more than locating random snippets using a search engine. This mass delusion—that one can do serious research using the internet by way of search engines—adversely affects public policy and attitudes toward libraries and other cultural institutions.

Libraries and librarians took a wrong path in the period between the late 1960s and the late 1980s. The consequences for libraries, library education, and the future of librarianship have been both profound and malign. That wrong path taken was the embrace of, and domination by, two systems—scientific management and computer based information technology—that are, ultimately, antithetical to the enduring values and mission of libraries. I say they are antithetical because the things their proponents and adherents value — speed, efficiency, the bottom line, information rather than knowledge — are not the primary aims of libraries and libraries, any more than they are the primary aims of a vast range of cultural institutions with which libraries should be aligned and whose values we share. There is an alternative to the wrong path — it lies with those cultural institutions and in seeing computerization and management as what they are — tools that can, if they are put in their place, be useful in furthering the aims of libraries but should never be allowed to be the main drivers of librarianship.

I have proposed a definition of librarianship that is centered on the human record — that vast assemblage of messages and documents (textual, visual, sound, and symbolic) in all formats created by humans since the invention of written and visual communication millennia ago. Given that focus, librarianship is seen as the field of those professionals:

- who assemble and give access to selected sub-sets of the human record (library collections — tangible and intangible);
- who organize and list those sub-sets so that they can be retrieved;
- who give help and instruction in the use of the human record;
- who work to ensure that the records of the sub-sets of the human record for which they are responsible are integrated in order to allow universal access to the whole human record; and

- who are dedicated to the preservation and onward transmission of the human record.

This wide definition stands in stark contrast to the narrow attitudes of those in this field whose thinking is dominated by materialism, management theory, and information technology — all attitudes and cultures that are inimical to the mission and goals of libraries.

The era of scientific management and the rise of information technology had their origins in the immediate post-World War II period (1945 onward), but both came into their own in the U.S. in the late 1960s. An examination of the 1967-69 and 1970-71 volumes of *Library Literature*⁸ reveals the first glimmerings of both in the world of libraries. Neither *scientific management* nor *information technology* were index terms in those volumes, but articles on each are to be found under related topics. For example, a book and a conference paper on systems analysis in university libraries⁹ appeared under *College and university libraries — administration*, but were surrounded by many other papers, etc., on pre-scientific management topics and genres such as organization structures, personnel, and case studies. The same goes for a provocatively titled article on management theory and the public library that appeared in London in 1971.¹⁰ Similarly, Henriette Avram's seminal report on the MARC pilot project¹¹ — a milestone in library automation — can be found in the same volume as a host of other contributions indexed under such headings as *Computers; Information services, scientific and technical; Automation of library processes; and Information retrieval — technology*. The vast majority of these papers, etc., was concerned with pre-information technology topics such as scientific and technical data; automated language processing; automated cataloguing, acquisitions, and circulation systems; and the use of computers in national bibliographies. The first glimmerings of scientific management and information technology can be seen in a few entries in the library literature of more than 35 years ago. However, the overwhelming impression is of both management ideas and computers and other technologies (the 1967-69 volume contains an entry under *Electric erasers*) being perceived as tools that would make the libraries of the period more effective in delivering service rather than either being perceived as revolutionary, as changing the nature of libraries and librarianship or, indeed, being the primary driving forces of libraries and librarianship.

The scientific management or business approach to libraries is largely based on unexamined assumptions. Just as the unexamined life is not worth living,¹² so a major movement in librarianship that is driven by unexamined assumptions results in a hollowness and dissatisfaction all the more acute for being undefined. Here is a statement from a recent book giving the entire justification for the book based on layers of such unexamined assumptions:

... libraries are not exactly in competition with each other for survival in a global marketplace. So what is driving this

pervasive, if not perverse focus on the customer? The answer may be that libraries, too, are beginning to recognize that customers have choices for their information needs and that some of these choices are drawing customers away from the library in increasing numbers, and perhaps for good. The Internet and its almost unlimited potential, mindless convenience, and ultra-cheap (if not free) access, looms large as a competitive information resource.¹³

I give this one example as a surrogate for countless texts on management of libraries in an “information age,” and as a useful illustration of an entire, increasingly dominant, and seldom challenged way of thinking. It starts with the assumption that there is a parallel between libraries (and other non-profit enterprises) and commercial entities in a global marketplace, when the values and mission of the first could not be more different from those of the second. It goes on to characterize library users as “customers” (because of that false parallel) bent on satisfying their “information needs.” Libraries are not and have never been primarily about “information” and to characterize them as such has two negative consequences. The first and the more obvious is that the concentration on information ignores the role of the library as place at the heart of communities; as custodian of and gateway to the human record; as essential parts of the literacy movement; and as teaching institutions. The second is that the concentration on “information,” “customers” and the like makes the application of scientific management plausible. Thus, reductionism is allied with business jargon to shrink the historic roles of libraries to the status of a shop. This library “shop” is moreover one with a single commodity—information—and in competition with other shops offering the same commodity who may lure its “customers” away forever. Here we can see clearly that the twin concentrations on “information” and digitized records to the exclusion of wider realities such as learning, knowledge, and the vast amount of the human record that is not in digital form, and is unlikely to be so in any useful way, is a narrow exercise resulting in an abdication of the many other functions of the library.

Cultural Heritage & the Human Record

“Cultural heritage” is a widely used term that refers to all testaments to cultures past and present. It embraces all the works and thoughts made manifest by humans and human societies and groups. The following statements issued by the Cultural Section of UNESCO delineate the expansive and expanding definition of cultural heritage.

Having at one time referred exclusively to the monumental remains of cultures, heritage as a concept has gradually come to include new categories such as the intangible, ethnographic, or industrial heritage. ...This is due to the fact that closer attention is now being paid to humankind, the dramatic arts, languages

and traditional music, as well as to the informational, spiritual and philosophical systems upon which creations are based. The concept of heritage in our time accordingly is an open one, reflecting living culture every bit as much as that of the past.¹⁴

All the human creations and ideas referred to in this paragraph are the fit subjects of the work of librarians in connection with professionals from other cultural institutions (see below). UNESCO's Cultural Section goes on to discuss the role of libraries in cultural heritage and the perils that menace that role.

The documentary heritage deposited in libraries and archives constitutes a major part of the collective memory and reflects the diversity of languages, peoples and cultures. Yet that memory is fragile. A considerable proportion of the world's documentary heritage is disappearing due to "natural" causes: paper affected by acid and crumbling to dust, and leather, parchment, film and magnetic tape being attacked by light, heat, damp or dust. The first and most urgent need is to ensure the preservation, using the most appropriate means, of documentary heritage of world significance and to promote that of the documentary heritage of national and regional importance. It is just as important to make this heritage accessible to as many people as possible, using the most appropriate technology, whether inside or outside the countries of its location.¹⁵

This general statement about the fragility of the documentary human record is then particularized to cover digital documents.

More and more of the entire world's cultural and educational resources are being produced, distributed and accessed in digital form rather than on paper. Born-digital heritage available on-line, including electronic journals, World Wide Web pages or on-line databases, is now an integral part of the world's cultural heritage. However, digital information is subject to rapid technical obsolescence or decay. ... The need to safeguard this new form of indexed heritage calls for international consensus on its storage, preservation and dissemination. Such principles should seek to adapt and extend present measures, procedures, legal instruments and archival techniques.¹⁶

We face many issues and problems in thinking about the preservation of digital documents and resources — especially those that were created and only exist in digital form. The problems are immense and growing — they include

- rapid changes in technology resulting in obsolescence
- our inability to differentiate easily between the substantial minority of digital resources that are of enduring value and the majority of

- digital documents that are of local, transient, or no value at all
- the fact that the millions of digital documents and resources are uncatalogued and even unmapped and difficult to retrieve and identify in any satisfactory manner
 - the vast sums that would be needed to create and maintain digital archives
 - the inherent mutability and fragility of the digital documents themselves.

No one agency and class of institution can possibly resolve these issues—it will take coherent and cooperative action by all cultural institutions of the kind that I outline below.

Preservation and Onward Transmission

The term “cultural heritage” contains within it a clear implication — that of onward transmission. The word “heritage” means something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor. In order for that generational transfer to take place, the item of cultural heritage must be recorded and preserved. Something that has only transient existence — a dance, the singing of a bard, a religious ritual — cannot be transmitted (i.e., cannot form part of a heritage) if it is not described or recorded in some manner that ensures the accurate transmission of the event. Take the case of the, unfortunately, large number of languages that are in danger of extinction. After the last speaker of such a language is dead, we can only depend on texts, transcriptions, or recordings of speech in that language for it to remain part of the cultural patrimony of the world.

For these reasons, I am concerned, for the purposes of this paper and the thesis that I wish to propound, only with those aspects of the cultural heritage that are tangible or have been recorded. This definition embraces all kinds of text (printed, digital, and otherwise), sound-recordings, film and video recordings, still images (art works, photographs, prints, etc.), created three-dimensional objects (sculptures, etc.), multi-media works, and all other “documents” created, recorded, or treated as such by humans.¹⁷ This definition purposely does not comprehend those aspects of cultural heritage that are not recorded or otherwise made tangible. In particular, an oral culture (its traditions, rituals, and a host of other intangible events) can only be studied, organized, preserved and made accessible if the parts of it are recorded in some form or another (tape-recordings, transcriptions, choreographies, film, etc.).

The Right Path

I have mentioned the wrong path that I believe libraries have taken in the past decades and now would like to offer a right path that is available to us and will provide us with allies within a shared culture that will enable libraries to flourish and prosper. Our destiny does not lie with the culture

of materialism, of information and the technology associated with the cult of information, or of the doctrines of cost-efficiency espoused by theorists of scientific management. It lies in working with the great range of cultural institutions that are concerned with the organization, preservation, onward transmission of the human record—that vast manifestation of cultural heritage in all its many recorded forms. The policies and procedures of all these bodies and institutions are similar to the policies and procedures of libraries in that they play a part in:

- working with elements of the human record and of our common cultural heritage
- furthering the use of the human record by fostering culture and learning and the creation of new contributions to the human record, and
- are dedicated to the preservation of all aspects of cultural heritage and the onward transmission of the human record.

The institutions, bodies, and groups with which libraries should ally themselves and form structures based on communities of interest include the following (examples are taken from the *Europa World of Learning*).¹⁸

- Archives: These important institutions contain manuscript and printed texts, sound recordings, films & videorecordings, still images, artefacts, and realia. They can relate to events, persons, institutions, places, and any other subject and can consist of one form of communication (for example, the National Photographic Archive in Dublin, Ireland) or of many forms of material (for example the City of Westminster Archives and Local History Centre in London). In either event, many archival procedures and policies, though they may differ in detail from those of libraries, are based on the same general approach to such matters as selection, cataloguing, access, and preservation. Therefore, archives are a fruitful area, already characterized by cooperation with libraries, for the new orientation I propose.
- Museums: Museums are institutions “devoted to the procurement, care, and display of objects of lasting interest or value.”¹⁹ Those “objects” can be man made (artefacts of all kinds), documents, or found objects such as stones, gems, and fossils. Museums can be general (testifying to the history of entire civilizations); national; regional, and local or they can be devoted to a particular topic or person. Examples of the vast range of museums include the Troubridge Gorge Museum in Shropshire, England, which documents the early history of the Industrial Revolution; the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia, Bulgaria; and, the Museo della civiltà romana, in Rome, which documents the history of that city. The chief overlap, in a practical sense, between museums and libraries are the collections each have of textual material. More broadly, each is concerned with selection, cataloguing, access, and preservation of the documents and objects with which they are concerned and with the interaction of

their collections in presenting and preserving the cultural heritage of humankind.

- Art galleries and institutes: These institutions are, in a sense, specialized museums that concentrate on works of art (products of the fine arts—paintings, prints, sculptures, ceramics, etc.—in which the primary meaning is aesthetic rather than the conveying of knowledge) from all ages and all cultures. Examples include the Wallace Collection in London, which contains many *objet's d'art* as well as paintings from Western Europe; the National Art Gallery in Sofia, Bulgaria, which contains both modern Bulgarian art and icons and other ecclesiastical art; and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark, which contains modern Danish and international art. The overlap with museums and libraries/archives in the broad context of cultural heritage is obvious. Again, we can see the common activities of selection, cataloguing, access, and preservation, this time applied to art works, but existing on the same moral plane as other cultural institutions and with the same impulses and mission.

The core of any grand plan for alliances devoted to the preservation of the human record and advancing cultural heritage issues around the central tasks of selection, cataloguing, access, and preservation consists of libraries, archives, museums and art galleries. However, other institutions, though less directly concerned, may have a role to play.

- Learned societies and research institutes: Though these associations and institutions are not primarily concerned with collecting documents and objects that contain or convey knowledge or aesthetic pleasure, they are concerned with studying aspects of the arts and sciences and, in many cases, with creating new knowledge that, when documented becomes part of the human record and our common cultural heritage. To take but a handful of the tens of thousands of learned societies, Britain's Ancient Monuments Society; the Bulgarian Philologist's Society in Sofia, Bulgaria; the Japanese Institute of Landscape Architecture in Tokyo; and the Italian Institute of Human Palaeontology in Rome all publish learned journals, maintain libraries, and facilitate the study of the particular branch of learning with which they are concerned. Because of these activities and preoccupations, they are natural allies in seeking a unified approach to cultural heritage, as are the many research institutes such as the British Textile Technology Group; the Institute for Thracian Studies in Sofia, Bulgaria; and the Danish National Institute of Social Research in Copenhagen.
- Performing groups: Some aspects of cultural heritage are only fully realized through performance—dance, music, drama, etc. In order to be added to the human record, such performances must be recorded in some way, but performance is a necessary pre-condition of such recording. For that reason, performing groups and the institutions that make their work possible are important factors in the advancement

of cultural heritage. These groups and bodies include opera houses, dance companies, orchestras, bands, performing arts centers, and their allied associations.

I repeat that, in rejecting the dominance of information technology and scientific management, I am not saying that libraries and the networks of cultural institutions of which I wish them to be a part should eschew taking advantage of computers as tools and digitization as a strategy, nor am I saying that good management practices should be rejected, as long as all are seen and employed in a humanistic context and a culture of learning. What I am saying is that the complex of cultural institutions should embrace a mission of ensuring the survival of the human record and of the testaments to the past that make up our common cultural heritage.

What I call for are cooperative bi-lateral and multi-lateral structures and agreements (including the framing and adoption of shared standards, policies, and procedures) between libraries and the cultural institutions listed above. These structures and agreements would be aimed at pooling resources and harnessing energy and expertise to achieve common goals, especially the overarching goal of the organization, preservation, and onward transmission of the human record and the cultural heritage that it embodies. They would exist at all levels—international, regional (geographic and linguistic), national, province/state, and local.

No less than the future of a civilization based on learning is at stake. Libraries have a choice. We can continue to be inward-looking and decline into insignificance by following the materialistic, mechanistic path of “information” and management, or we can work with the cultural institutions that are our natural allies to create expansive structures in which knowledge and learning can flourish and the preservation and onward transmission of cultural heritage is assured.

Thank you.

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(Editor's note: the preceding was delivered as a keynote speech at the Sofia 2006 conference "Globalization, Digitization, Access, and Preservation of Cultural Heritage" in Sofia, Bulgaria on November 8th, 2006)



DOCUMENTS

PLG Statement on UCLA Incident

The Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) condemns the violent treatment of Iranian-American student Mostafa Tabatabaiejad at the Powell Library of the University of California (UCLA) on November 14, 2006.

Caught on video, and viewed by witnesses, the police assault on Mr. Tabatabaiejad is a violation of Mr. Tabatabaiejad's constitutional rights under U.S. law, and the U.N. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

PLG believes there are no circumstances under which such police behavior can be sanctioned or rationalized given eyewitness accounts, video documentation, and the statements of parties to the event. No university security policy can legitimately sanction or condone this type of police assault with a potentially deadly weapon.

PLG, a group of librarians and library workers, is particularly appalled that this incident occurred during a random security check of ID cards at the Powell Library. The abusive and violent intimidation that occurred against Mr. Tabatabaiejad compromises the security that libraries traditionally have offered their users.

We condemn the violent actions against Mr. Tabatabaiejad. We call for the UCLA and Powell Library administration to immediately convene a nonpartisan, public investigation into campus security policies.

Approved by the PLG Coordinating Committee
November 27, 2006

THERE IS POWER IN A UNION: Union Activism 2006 Timeline

compiled by Kathleen de la Peña McCook

Unionism is the action for workers that dare not speak its name in much of the literature of librarianship. The library press does not cover union activity on a regular basis. In the early 1990s Elaine Harger and Mark Rosenzweig did a column for *Library Journal* called “Talking Union,” but since that column ended there has not been ongoing reporting.

The ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA/APA) was established by the American Library Association in 2001 for two purposes:

- Certification of individuals in specializations beyond the initial professional degree (see www.ala-apa.org/certification/certification.html).
- Direct support of comparable worth and pay equity initiatives, and other activities designed to improve the salaries and status of librarians and other library workers (see www.ala-apa.org/salaries/salaries.html).

Union activity falls under the catchall phrase “other activities” but is not highlighted or supported as such by the ALA-APA. The organizational home of unionism in the ALA-APA is under a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on the Salaries and Status of Library Workers. This is very low visibility and organizational commitment for a profession in which approximately 30% of all workers are unionized.

Union activities of library workers are highlighted in this timeline to provide a record of the Progressive Librarians Guild and our solidarity with unions.

February 2006

☞Cheshire (CT) public library staff form a union under AFSCME.

☞AFSCME Local 1526 of the Boston Public Library won the second annual SirsiDynix-ALA-APA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Promoting Salaries and Status for Library Workers.

By selecting Boston Public Library’s AFSCME Local 1526, nominated by Diane Fay, we honor a segment of our profession without a big voice, “ said jury chair Peter McDonald. “The union did an outstanding job in their last contract negotiations to win upgrades for all 76 library support staff in the 26 of the 27 branches of the city public

library system. With support of administration, and in good faith negotiations with the city, Local 1526 was able to win a 10% salary increase over the next four years through exemplary effort, dogged perseverance, and impeccable arguments of how important library support staff are to the libraries they serve.

March 2006

☞ John N. Berry III, Editor-in-Chief, *Library Journal*, and a lifelong advocate of libraries and the people who staff them spoke to the Interest Group for Libraries and Unions (IGLU) of the Washington Library Association. He addressed ways for making library workplaces worthy of the professional values they represent. He discussed examples of workplace rights violations and the negative impact these violations can have on staff at all levels of the library.

☞ Joan Cassidy, librarian, New York State United Teachers, Latham (NY), is the 2006 recipient of the John Sessions Memorial Award presented by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA).

Joan Cassidy has done a fabulous job of librarianship in creating the Albert Shanker 'Where We Stand' database," said Dan Golodner, award committee chair. "She did the research, legwork, training, and was the liaison between Cornell University (Ithaca) and the New York State United Teachers in which one of the most outstanding research tools for labor and education historians was created.

April 2006

☞ With libraries facing daunting budgetary challenges, President Gerald W. McEntee of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) commemorated National Library Workers Day by thanking the librarians, library workers, technicians and support staff who have dedicated their lives to the goal of keeping America reading.

June 2006

☞ Seattle Public Library employees of AFSCME Local 2083 pass resolution calling for President Bush's immediate removal or resignation from office.

☞ "Ignored Too Long: the Benefits of Managing a Library with a Union" John Buschman, Steve LaBash, Dorothy Warner. Panel at the American Library Association Conference, New Orleans. The panel examined library management fundamentals that union

environments encourage or require to counter a longstanding undertone of avoidance and resentment concerning the subject. This panel – eagerly embraced by APA - was one step toward changing thinking on a topic discussed behind closed doors to strip away myths and misconceptions of managing in a unionized environment.

☞ American Library Association endorses Employee Free Choice Act.

☞ **38.5%!!** That is the result of the 2005 Survey of Librarian Salaries question about library employees covered by collective bargaining reported in the ALA-APA Newsletter, *Library Worklife*.

July 2006

☞ Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library employees pushing for a union suggested their own cuts of about \$1.2 million by trimming the costs of hiring temporary workers and consulting and legal services.

“Library employees want a voice in their future,” said David Warrick, executive director of the local chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union.

“Their efforts have been disrespected by this board. Now we are at the point where we don’t ask, we demand notice and recognition.” Michael Torres, a library employee organizer, said confrontation was the next step because the board has not recognized a request to meet for several months.

☞ The Progressive Librarians Guild passed a resolution in support of the Indianapolis-Marion County Librarians as published in the summer 2006 issue of *Progressive Librarian*.

August 2006

☞ Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Board OKs Union Vote the *Indianapolis Star* reports: The Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Board agreed to recognize an employee union if enough eligible workers vote for it.

☞ National Education Association’s Library, Information Literacy, and Technology (LIT) caucus promotes Information Literacy through the use of both books and technology. Many are school library media teachers. The caucus meets each summer during the NEA Annual Meeting and Representative Assembly (RA).

September 2006

- ☞ More than 100 Illinois State University union employees marched by the campus administration building - contesting continued salary negotiations, and decrying ISU's proposed raise schedule... "We've been working without a contract since June 30, and we're working on last year's wages," said Karen Dunton, president of Local 3236 American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.
- ☞ American Federation of Government Employees National Council of EPA Locals #238's (AFGE Council 238 or the Union) Demand to Bargain over the closing and major reorganization of the EPA Headquarters and Regional libraries. We demand this right pursuant to Article 45, Supplemental Agreements and Other Negotiations During the Life and Term of this Agreement and Designated Representatives of the Parties of the Master Collective Bargaining Agreement between the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the AFGE.

October 2006

- ☞ Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild-CWA members planned a second rally Wednesday, October 25 to continue pressing for a contract with Catholic News Service. The employer's demand that it be able to unilaterally terminate the pension is the key sticking issue. WBNG represents more than 3,000 workers in the metropolitan area and is a local of the Communications Workers of America. The Guild represents 20 employees at Catholic News Service, including reporters, editors, photographers, librarians and clerical workers.
- ☞ A state arbitrator has imposed a three-year wage settlement that will give 79 Monroe County [NY] court workers raises through 2008, totaling 11 percent. The Monroe County commissioners formally ratified the settlement Wednesday with Teamsters Local 229. The bargaining unit includes law librarians.

Report from Union Librarian, edited by Kathleen de la Peña McCook, AFT Local 7463 <http://unionlibrarian.blogspot.com/>

BOOK REVIEW

People's Movements, People's Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements by Bob Ostertag (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

Reviewed by Chuck D'Adamo

Bob Ostertag has written a brief history of the relationship between the independent press and five social or political movements in the United States. The movements concerned the abolition of the slavery of people of African descent, women's suffrage, gay and lesbian liberation, the GI movement within the broader anti-Vietnam War movement, and the environmental movement. Throughout Ostertag skillfully interweaves the use of primary documents and secondary sources.

Ostertag's guiding premise in his survey of the periodicals is that "words matter, but only when something is done with them." Thus, he reviews the work of publishers and editors at the origins of these movements: David Walker's *Walker's Appeal* (founded in 1829), William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* (1830), Frederick Douglass's *The North Star* (1847), Paulina Wright Davis's *Una* (1853), Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's *Revolution* (1869), Henry Gerber's *Friendship and Freedom* (1924), Edythe Eyde's *Vice Versa* (1947), Robert Mitch's *The Advocate* (1967).

These founders and their periodicals helped expand within the U.S. liberal oligarchy (what mainstream political scientists call "liberal democracy") the individual rights of blacks, women, gay men, and lesbians. The stories are often exciting with moments of danger, and in the case of the abolition of slavery not completed until the end of Civil War.

David Walker, a free black publishing from Boston, advocated that blacks north and south act for their rights, including the "right of slaves to rebel," though his priority seemed to be education. Distributors of *Walker's Appeal*, black and white, often sailors, were arrested in Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans. Shortly after distribution of the pamphlet began, the state of Louisiana enacted law that threatened life imprisonment or the death penalty on anyone who might "write, print, publish, or distribute any thing having a tendency to create discontent among the free coloured population of this state, or insubordination among the slaves."

The work of Walker and other movement publishers expanded civil and political rights in the 19th and 20th centuries, though many of these struggles continue today, witness the conflicts over same-sex marriage. While Garrison, who was also involved in the American Anti-Slavery Society and once escaped lynching, stopped publishing *The Liberator* with the end of slavery, gay and feminist periodicals like *The Advocate* and *Off Our Backs* continue in their 40th and 37th years, respectively. And 142 years after emancipation, blacks still experience oppressive inequality even though the Civil War left more than 620,000 dead.

1970 was an important year in US history, one of many reasons being the enactment of the Environmental Protection Act, signed into law by Republican President Richard Nixon. Ostertag surveys the press of the environmental movement.

David Brower “re-founded” the *Sierra Club Bulletin* in the 1950s. Originally founded in 1893, the *Bulletin* was for decades an outdoors report and lobby media for wilderness conservation. Under Brower, the *Bulletin* emphasized popular mobilization as well as lobbying for legislation. Yet, the Sierra Club did not oppose nuclear power until 1974. Eventually, Brower left Sierra to found the Friends of the Earth and its periodical *Not Man Apart*, a more radical project.

Even more radical tactically was Earth First! and its tabloid of the same name. Founded in 1980, Earth First! advocated direct action, such as tree-spiking, rather than lobbying, to stop the logging industry’s deforestation. But, on the whole, the environmental press like its movement focuses on reforms doable within the U.S. liberal oligarchic regime even as environmental catastrophe looms. Ostertag is critical of this press, writing: “while researching this chapter, I was actually put to sleep reading through them.” The articles bored him even as they gave him nightmares about future devastation.

The year 1970, in May, was also the year of the general strike of more than four million students in protest of the Vietnam War. Related to the anti-war movement was the development of the “underground press.” roughly 1967-1973, which Ostertag briefly reviews. May 1970 was the year of the highest level of participation of GIs in the anti-war movement. Ostertag’s survey of the development of the GI “underground press” is the most exciting part of his book.

In 1967, Andy Stapp began publishing *The Bond* with the mission to help organize GIs into a union – the American Servicemen’s Union. Stapp was found with anti-war literature while stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He fought a court-martial to publicize his position on the war.

Jeff Sharlet, a veteran, used a Woodrow Wilson scholarship to found *Vietnam GI* in 1968. This paper’s audience was GIs in Vietnam; its writers active soldiers and veterans. Careful distribution networks were developed to get the tabloid to Vietnam. In its pages, a retired brigadier-general even advocated mutiny. By 1972, 245 GI anti-war periodicals were publishing according to the U.S. Department of Defense.

The distribution of these publications, like that of *Walker’s Appeal*, entailed risk. Andy Stapp served 45 days hard labor in 1967. Wade Carson was sentenced six months for “intention” to distribute. Bruce Petersen got eight years hard labor at Leavenworth. More dangerous was Vietnam. And the GI movement made it dangerous for U.S. officers in the field. From 1969 to 1972 between 550 and 1,000 fraggings occurred, mostly by grenades. These were radical times and Ostertag brings to life the seriousness of the GI movement’s “underground press.”

The excitement of much of the book’s narrative dies down, and not because of the bedtime reading of the environmental press. There is no conclusion. Instead, there is “A Note from the Independent Press Association” written by its executive director. This indicates the major

weakness of Ostertag's book: it was an expansion of a report commissioned by the IPA, a nonprofit organization. (Note: the reviewer served on IPA's board 1999-2001).

Ostertag writes that he did not seek to be comprehensive. Still, a chapter on the origins of the labor movement press would have enhanced the work, especially with coverage of its related socialist press, including anarchist and communist. James Weinstein's research found 323 socialist newspapers and magazines published in 1912.

Nowhere does Ostertag define what is a social movement. And is there a difference between a "people's movement" (in the book's title) and a "social movement?"

Sociologists have developed two general orientations to analyzing social movements: resource-mobilization paradigms (for example, Charles Tilly) and identity-oriented paradigms (for example, Alain Touraine). True, Ostertag is writing as a historian; however, some definition would have helped. Without it, it remains unclear why these particular movements.

Ostertag argues that he choose the abolitionist, suffrage, gay/lesbian, environmental, and GI movements because they allow of a "broad mix of issues of class, race, gender, and age" with specific goals. And he writes that "the book will end with the emergence of the Internet, which in some ways signals the end of the era of the social movement [press]." Yet, to not survey the labor movement press means Ostertag is weak on class, and he never does discuss the emergence of the Internet.

With the Internet, Ostertag could have reviewed the development of the Independent Media Center movement in Seattle in 1999. What has developed is a global network of volunteer journalists –150 centers and counting. While sometimes uneven in content, Indymedia is connected to the movement against global capital and has given birth to a number of print newspapers, including the excellent *Indypendent* in New York City.

In his introduction, Ostertag mentions the "conventional left" newspaper *In These Times*. But this "conventional" paper had unconventional origins. Its 1976 founder, James Weinstein, was a founder of the New Left journal *Socialist Revolution* in 1970 and its predecessor *Studies on the Left* in 1959, and in the early 1950s was trailed by FBI agents. There's an interesting thread of history with these periodicals, and others with origins in the New Left, such as *The Black Scholar* and *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. The editors and writers for these publications were intellectuals with activist orientations who sought to develop broader structural analysis of the political-economic and socio-cultural conditions in which movement activists worked for social change – radical change, not only the expansion of liberal rights and the passing of reform laws.

Ostertag's book, while often engaging and informative, falls short. It lacks comprehensiveness; it lacks clear definition. A chapter on the labor and socialist press was needed – a conclusion acknowledged by the author when suggesting ideas for further research. Nonetheless, *People's Movements, People's Press* is recommended for public, college, and university libraries.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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