

# OCCUPY WALL STREET LIBRARIANS SPEAK OUT

by Daniel Norton, Mandy Henk,  
Betsy Fagin, Jaime Taylor  
and Zachary Loeb

*Following is the text presented at the American Library Association's Midwinter Conference Saturday January 21, 8:30 am at the Dallas Convention Center Theater.*

**G**ood Morning ALA Midwinter 2012 Dallas! My name is Daniel Norton, I am a student of Library Science, and I am both proud and honored to introduce to you a group of professionals who have not only impacted me in very meaningful ways as a future professional, but who have an inspiring and interesting story to share with you today...

*Mandy:* On Sept. 17th of last year [2011] a group of committed activists, activists diverse in age, race, and social class, taking their inspiration from the Arab Spring, "occupied" a public space in New York City's financial district. They rejected the legitimacy of the existing authorities and engaged in direct action to build a new and better world. A world based on old principles. Principles embedded deep in the American psyche, but lately forgotten. Solidarity. Mutual aid. Equality. Autonomy. Democracy – real democracy based on consensual, non-hierarchical self-governance. The activists of Occupy Wall Street built a People's Kitchen so that no one need know hunger. They built a Comfort station so that no one need suffer the cold. Medical care, Arts and Culture, a Spirituality Space, even a phone charging station . . . all of the necessities of life—including a library. Occupy Wall Street is about creating a new and better world ourselves. As a free people united for justice.

Occupiers have faced repeated police brutality – peaceful Occupiers have been arrested, maced, gassed, attacked with police scooters and sound canons. On November 15th, our occupation and our library were destroyed in a brutal, early morning raid. Our colleagues and comrades were arrested, our collection tossed into a dumpster, our tent cut apart with a chainsaw. But we are here, we are strong, and we are committed to the fight for justice. We are the Librarians of Occupy Wall Street and we are committed to using the tools of our profession – books, literacy, bibliographic control, reference, and readers advisory in that fight. As librarians we understand the vital role libraries play in society and in a healthy democracy and our library stands as our living commitment to fulfilling that role. We're each

going to give a brief reflection and then we'll have a presentation on our library and time for questions.

Betsy: One of the unique characteristics of Occupy is how it is a very local expression of a group of people in any particular place, but the impulse to build a library, to share knowledge and resources is universal.

In November there was a brief article in the *Guardian* with a slide show of other Occupy Libraries in Washington DC, Vancouver, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Toronto, and London that gave us one of our first glimpses of how Occupy libraries were multiplying.

The Biblioteca Acampada Sol in Madrid that grew out of the M15 movement has been a particular inspiration to us and I want to read some of a letter they sent to us in early October as it mirrors our own experience at Occupy Wall Street and expresses some of how we are bound together whether we know it or not:

Hi Peoples Library! Cheers from the public library of the Spanish revolution occupation at Madrid!

We are the Acampada Sol Library, the library that was formed during the occupation of the Puerta del Sol Square here in Madrid, Spain, last May. We have been following OWS from the very first day and let's say we are glad to see that you found the way out to organise you up almost in the same way we did while we were camping at the city hall square in Madrid at Puerta del Sol.

What we saw [in] the pics of OWS was quite impressive, but you couldn't imagine how surprised we were when we realized that OWS has also a library. It may sound stupid but when we knew that, we celebrated it as the birth of a new one in the family.

Why? Well, it's difficult to explain, but during the nearly seven weeks we lived there hearing the rain fall over the piece of plastic that barely covered our books (not us) we had a lot of time to think about what we were going through. The media described us as bums, the government as the most dangerous kind of terrorists (the pacifist's kind) and we slept always waiting for the final police riot that would throw everything down. We had time for joy and also for despair. We never knew what we were doing, we only knew that it was right. People said it was useless to demand a U-turn in local politics in a country with a globalized economy. We replied if so, that we expected to make our demands go global then, they said it was a childish dream and they laughed...

We only want to thank all of you to be there, because maybe you don't realize it, but you're making our dream come true... Obviously to do the right thing, far from being a utopia or related to culture is a matter of common sense.

We should say that none of us decided to open up a library during our occupation, it appeared by itself. People who came to support us wanted us to have some of their books, they wanted

us to read and to take care of them. We started out only with forty titles. People came up to rest from the everyday routines, trying to find a shelter in the written words under our blue tent, poets showed up to read them their works and free thinkers their essays...The manager of one major corporate library in town gave us book-carts and everything we needed. "Just don't tell anyone" he asked. One donation come after another and in a few weeks we reached nearly four thousands titles at our outdoor library. A funny heritage to save considering that we were waiting to be bludgeoned and evicted from one minute to other...

We love to hear from you to know how all of you guys are going and we hope you'll find inspiration in our little story to realise that you are not alone in this.

Thank You!

P.S. Sorry for our lousy English.

Bibliosol – Biblioteca de Acampada Sol

During the time we held the park, we were so busy organizing and running the library, arranging events, talking to people and trying to evade arrest that we didn't have much opportunity to reach out beyond Zuccotti Park. Since the raid, connecting Occupy libraries together has become one of our primary aims.

We are still in the early stages of forming a consortium of Occupy libraries (and if anyone would like to get involved, please get in touch with me), but have already been in touch with libraries that are still active despite many of the camps being shut down. As of today, we've had enthusiastic response from about a dozen libraries and we are beginning to share our experiences and resources to strategize future steps and clarify the roles of libraries within the Occupy Movement. One particularly exciting development has been the role our library can play assisting educators. Many college professors have begun teaching courses on Occupy and who better to help them find accurate, timely information than the libraries and librarians who have been there.

*Jaime:* I want to make it very clear that the People's Library is not like most other libraries. Most libraries, at least those in places like the United States, have walls and roofs and doors and shelves. They have regular electricity, bathrooms, call numbers, hours of operation. They don't have, for the most part, rain and snow inside them, or giant papier mâché bulls on Sunday afternoons, or constant police presence and the threat of arrest or violence that comes with it. Your library has probably never had anything to do with a tent, nor is anyone living in it, and while some of you have had the occasional visit from the authorities, your disaster plans don't stipulate what to do when hundreds of cops come calling, tear down the whole thing, and arrest anyone inside. Let me also be clear that none of this is hyperbole.

One aspect I particularly want to touch on is the decision-making process we use. The Library Working Group works on consensus. When I was in library school, we talked about horizontal structures and consensus as a cutting edge way of organizing library work and staff. Please throw that all out the window. Please. The meaning of “consensus” used in my library school classroom and the meaning of it at the Occupation and in radical politics generally are not the same. For us, consensus requires that nearly everyone support a decision. If there are people with serious concerns about a proposal, what we call a “block,” we need at least 90% those present to be in support of it. Degreed librarians have no more weight in making decisions than an 18-year-old college student, an underemployed actress, or a crusty traveling kid. At the same time, individual librarians are empowered to act autonomously to a large extent; if a librarian had a good idea, and an action wouldn’t greatly affect the library as a whole, that person was welcome to make it happen, barring serious concerns from others, without seeking permission as such. The flip side of that autonomy is that an individual librarian need not involve themselves with a library project they don’t like or agree with, that in Occupation terms they “stand aside” from. This is in severe contrast to even the flatter organizational structures in normal libraries, which remain hierarchies and for which we might say about consensus, “you keep using that word; I do not think it means what you think it means.”

When formulating policies and procedures for the Library, we considered not only library best practices, but also the ideological nature of our existence, and the unique practical realities of our operations.

There are some aspects of the Occupy Wall Street Library that are easily recognizable: we have an OPAC of sorts on LibraryThing; we have master’s degree holding librarians doing library work, as well as what could be termed paraprofessionals, techies, and friends of the library; we have books and – had – computers.

Our OPAC, as I’ve said, is on LibraryThing. We already had several hundred books when the catalog began, and so we retroactively cataloged everything in the collection at that point, and then cataloged new arrivals as they came in. Some books were added through barcode scanning, but most were done by searching the ISBN. Chapbooks, older books, and other items without ISBNs were cataloged by hand. We’d then mark the books as having been received and cataloged. At times when we didn’t have available internet – which is often – we’d write down ISBNs and enter them into LibraryThing when internet was again available.

For most of the library’s existence, we didn’t have actual shelves. The first volumes were placed on a stone bench at the northeast corner of the park. Then they were put in cardboard boxes. Which melted in the rain. Then they were covered by tarps and put in plastic bins. Sometimes the bins could be on the bench and the ledge above it, sometimes the cops told us they couldn’t be. Very often – especially when it was raining – we were

told we couldn't cover them with tarps. You know, because we might be hiding bombs under there. Or something. So we got clear plastic sheeting instead. Which was acceptable slightly more often than the opaque tarps. But, back to shelving.

Our books don't have call numbers, and therefore don't have exact locations. They were broadly sorted in to categories and topics – fiction and non-fiction, non-print, history, economics, poetry, education, women, queer, people of color, non-English, etc. We performed what I liked to call “directly democratic shelving.” That is, whoever was sorting books was empowered to put items where they thought they best belonged. And then if someone found a book in a certain place, but they thought it might be better elsewhere, they were welcome to move it. Personally, and as I would suggest to anyone who asked for advice on shelving, I tried to keep the principle of use in mind. If I was of more than one mind about where a book might belong, I'd consider where our readers might think to look for it, if they wanted that particular book. Or, I'd think about what section they'd be delighted to find it under. Use says that it goes where it will be most and most happily read.

The LibraryThing catalog is a record of the books that have ever been a part of the collection. It does not reflect what might be actually available in the library at any given moment. Circulation is one of the places where ideology and practically met harmoniously. Given that our library in Zuccotti Park had no building, no call numbers, and no library cards, we did not track circulation. Like maintaining a strict shelving order, it would have been nearly impossible to do, and certainly beyond the person-power at our disposal. There was never a formal method of borrowing and returning books. The only method was to find a book you wanted to read, pick it up, and walk off with it. We asked only that the reference collection, which included traditional reference materials such as dictionaries as well as copies of our most popular books – Howard Zinn's *People's History*, for example, not leave the library. Returns are most welcome, but not required. Readers are welcome to pass books along to friends, take them to other Occupations, or hold on to them. We suggest that somehow, though, the book continue to be used.

This method, aside from being practical, given our resources, was ideologically sound. First in mind is that we are the People's Library. The librarians are caretakers and facilitators. Also, the library was created in a climate of surveillance and a growing police state. Many libraries are very careful about how they keep records and who has access to those records; we circumvented the point by never keeping any. The only way anyone might ever know who read what book would be to see them doing it.

Lastly, there is no collecting policy. Or, rather, there is, and it only has two points: everything we have was donated to us, and we accept everything. We buy supplies, but we never buy books. Every single volume is in the library because some person thought it should be. And although many of

us have disdain for some authors or viewpoints, or the quality of some literature – and being readers as well as librarians, it's our movement, too, after all, are welcome to say so – we never recycled a book on account of its content. This means that not only was the Library for the people, but, as they are responsible for its creation, that it is of the people.

*Zachary:* The People's Library represents a collection of thousands upon thousands of books, it ranges across all genres, publication dates, and target audiences. To date over 9,000 books have been cataloged in our group's LibraryThing – and this is a number which is probably several thousand books lower than the true number of books that have come through the library. While the number of books is impressive in terms of quantity and variety, what makes it truly remarkable is that it is a collection built almost entirely by the library's patrons (we received some generous donations from publishers).

Books would get placed in the donation box and we would process them: mark them OWSL (or stamp them, back when we had the stamp), write down the ISBN number, sticker them so we knew the volume was "processed," and shelve them. When we were asked "How does this work?" (which we were asked constantly), we replied: "It's a library. Take a book, read it, bring it back, or lend it to a friend, so that the library keeps spreading."

In the library we were commonly asked "What books do you need?" To which we typically responded: "What do you think we need?" or "What book changed your life?" or "Whatever you want to give." Although, at a certain point we added to the third response, "but we don't really need more fiction." True, the library was built by a steady flow of fiction (popular and classics), but the library sections most heavily perused and borrowed from were: politics, history, biographies, philosophy, ecology, and spirituality. It is a, shall we say, diverse collection. Our collection was as varied as the library's patrons, who – after all – built the collection. We have Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes. We have Ayn Rand and George Orwell. We have Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Michael Savage, and Ann Coulter. We have Howard Zinn, Frances Fox Piven, Naomi Klein, and Noam Chomsky. We also have Stephen King, William Shakespeare, Dr. Seuss, and a book by the library's star patron Michael Bloomberg. We built a reference collection of books that were highly demanded (based largely on request) and F.A. Hayek was in there right next to Karl Marx...though we probably should have known better than to ask people not to remove the reference copy of "*Steal this book.*"

Due to the ever changing nature of the collection, it could be quite the challenge to help patrons find books, but in the process it provided a real look into what brought people to the occupation. Working in the library involved: searching for books to fit a lot of bizarre requests, listening to a lot of life stories, getting to know the regulars and their book tastes, being yelled at for random things, tidying, processing a ton of books, doing data entry, it was a lot like...working in a library.

*Danny:* Disregarding personal opinion on the matter, Occupy Wall Street, as well as other occupations worldwide, are happening, and they're inspiring discourse, debate, interest in political spheres and a renewed sense of the power that knowledge holds. The unifying theme of the occupy movement is dissatisfaction, and the result of people gathering to take part in the democratic process of their nation is a rekindling of interest in the early ideas and protections afforded us by our forefathers. This is America, and we The People are our own government. With the ubiquity of information access via the Internet, and the perception that people have the power to access knowledge that suits their needs, what is it that a library affords a populace? A place of community, sharing, conversation and insight. Libraries unite through educational outreach and conservation of those aspects of ourselves and society that represent our culture. What the People's Library has afforded her patrons is a place to engage with what's happening in our country, a means to contribute their own sentiments through the donation of materials, and the literacy to see other view points, perhaps form one of their own, and to express criticisms in an effective way. I've heard vicious and unapologetically ignorant statements made about the work being done here, even from members of this professional community, and it needs to be recognized that not everyone has the luxury of camping out in Liberty Plaza in order to take a stand, not everyone agrees with the tactics of the Occupy movement, but far more people than is represented are dissatisfied, feeling victimized or are otherwise feeling unfulfilled by the present state of our world, and they've chosen the library as a place of solace, and as a means of joining the conversation. The People moved to create a central place of collaboration and equal representation, and (of all things) they built a library as a symbol of such legitimacy.

What does this mean for librarianship? I believe that there is much to be learned from an organizational structure that eschews traditional approaches to educating and informing. I believe that there is insight to partnership in information-seeking in a scenario where there is no circulation desk creating a physical barrier between "librarians" and information seekers. There is an obvious wisdom to be gleaned from the concept of bringing the information to the field as opposed to idly standing by and waiting for the opportunity to field queries from a position far removed from the place in which information is most needed. Our archival team is archiving history in real-time, instead of trying to piece it back together in preservation of retrospect. The precedence here is that librarianship is now this dynamic and engaging vocation that is changing even faster than current professionals believe. The people we serve are redefining us and demanding that we assume our roles as beacons of intellectual freedom and the physical embodiment of American democracy that our education tells us we are. Pertinent to the people in this room, something proven to be most confronting, and a prime example of the ways in which The People's Library is challenging present structures, is that their resident pre-professional, who is the designated student outreach appointee speaking as a guest at library schools nationwide, is not enrolled in a Master's program at all, he's an undergraduate obtaining his bachelor of science in information

and library services through a degree offering at the university of Maine at Augusta; a statement whose reception I've had run the gamut from an unanticipated hug, to even further unanticipated outright hostility.

What I'm trying to say is that this is such an exciting time to be involved in librarianship. We are existing in a generational instance laden with economic turmoil, burdened with recession and depression, yet people have risen to say that they love their books, they love their right to know, they love their librarians and (most importantly), they love their libraries and that it's on us. The moral of the story is that we shouldn't – we can't – let them down.

*Mandy:* It was Jesse Shera, one of the foremost American library theoreticians of his or any generation, writing almost 50 years ago, who said, "The aim of librarianship, at whatever intellectual level it may operate, is to maximize the social utility of the graphic records, whether the patron served is an unlettered child absorbed in his first picture book or the most advanced scholar engaged in some esoteric inquiry." He goes on to say, "The storage and retrieval of information, of facts, however expertly done, are valueless if those facts are not used for the betterment of mankind."

At Occupy Wall Street, the People's Library evolved, as did the Biblioteca Acampada Sol in Madrid and the other Occupy libraries, because libraries are necessary to the betterment of humankind.

As a profession, librarianship has had a long history as a liberating force in society. Going at least as far back as the working class Chartist movement in England, people seeking their own freedom have built libraries. Libraries offer universal access to recorded knowledge, they offer access to truth, they offer the intellectual means to liberation. That a library should sit at the center of a movement for American liberation, for a revolution in American politics and values is perfectly natural. Libraries, after all, are one of the few sites in American society where that uneasy, yet revolutionary, alliance between working class and intellectual class finds common ground.

Still though, why today, why now? Why has a collection of some 7,000 books managed to create such a stir. How have we come to a place where the sharing of books, the gathering and disseminating of knowledge, has come to be such a revolutionary act? One that brought the full force of the militarized New York police department down upon it. I think the reason is that today we see an all out assault on exactly what libraries stand for and what they do. Libraries are struggling today, not because our services and collections are no longer relevant, are no longer needed, (there is more than ample evidence proving the opposite) but because the very thing we stand for, the very thing we represent, is itself under assault. The idea of a common, of shared resources, of equal access--access not mediated by a market, but granted as a fundamental right, one all human beings share by the virtue of being a member of the human family – is under assault. Libraries are valuable to society and promote the betterment of humankind

because they serve as an intellectual and physical common, a shared collection and shared space that allows people to gather and educate themselves – to debate, discuss, and through the joint exercises of reading and conversation devise for themselves the kind of world they want to build and the way they want to build it.

In times like these, times when economics has been converted to a religion and leaders promote the doctrine of the free market as a panacea, librarianship is a radical profession. Unavoidably, our profession is political, is radical. It's political because we stand at the juncture of people and knowledge, and knowledge is power. It is radical because people with access to knowledge and the means to understand it are a powerful people, they are a people who have the means to liberate themselves and to fight for their own freedom.

I see librarianship at a crossroads, we face a choice: do we continue down the road of unfettered markets constructing our relationships and communities or do we step back from that false vision and its unfulfilled promises of a golden future and fight for a different future, one based on our fundamental principles, on the idea that all people have value—that all people have inherent worth and dignity? Our country is facing multiple existential challenges—income inequality, climate change, economic catastrophe. We are living in a time when the future looks bleaker everyday.

But we have a choice. We can decide to shun cynicism and hopelessness. We can choose instead to look to our roots, to our radical role as supporters of equality and democracy, and work together within our institutions and cities and profession to carry our libraries into the future, not the technoutopia often held out as the future, but a real future where we tackle our social problems through the provision of knowledge to all and by fiercely defending the common that we and those who came before us have worked so hard to build.

I joined the People's Library, I slept out at Zuccotti, in a fort built of boxes of books – of ideas, of stories, of hope, watched over by police wielding clubs and guns, to defend that common, and for the opportunity to build a collection and a library based on the principles that I hold dear. I joined because building a library in times like these is an act of resistance and protest and hope and love.

*Jaime:* On Monday, November 14, I went to Zuccotti after work to spend a few hours in the library, as I'd been doing almost every day since October 2<sup>nd</sup> – it was, basically, a second full-time job. That day I was there until 9 or 10 at night, and then went home to Brooklyn. At 11:30 I went to bed, looking forward to be getting almost enough sleep that night. Sleep is in chronic short supply at the Occupation.

At 12:53 am on the 15th, an hour and a half later, I got a text message from one of the half dozen live-in librarians, just saying, "Police are here."

Unable to get back in touch with him or any other librarians on site, I called a friend from the jail support team who works overnights and I therefore knew would be awake. By ten after 1 he'd confirmed that it was for real this time. I rolled out of bed, put on my boots, and started calling and texting the other librarians while grabbing the day's necessities. I got on a train, and got to the financial district at 2 am.

Even making it in that quickly, I couldn't get within two or three blocks of the park. There were barricades and cops – whom Mayor Bloomberg has since called his “own army” – on every street. As we quickly learned, there was a general media blackout. Reporters were not allowed within sight or hearing of the park, supposedly for their “safety,” which is belied by the fact that news helicopters were also grounded.

It hardly mattered what our emergency plan had been. Of the five librarians who were inside the park that night, two elected to stay, and the three others were only able to remove what they could carry in one trip; once they left the park they could not return to retrieve either personal possessions or library materials. Given that restriction, they carried out our emergency plan, devised after the city's previous attempt to remove us, admirably.

The two librarians who stayed ended up being beaten, pepper sprayed, and arrested with more than 150 other Occupiers. Those who were by computers at the time could see them retreat to the Kitchen, which was at the center of the park, as the livestreams and other social media stayed up as long as they could. Within a couple hours, the library, along with the rest of the camp, and been torn down, loaded into city sanitation dump trucks, and carted away. In video from that night you can see tents being taken down with chainsaws.

As the sun came up, those of us still free gathered in Foley Square. Breakfast appeared from somewhere, the medics continued to clean people up, and working groups and friends tried to figure out who was missing. Around 8 am we heard that the park was cleared and we could go in. A couple of us walked back down, where we met up with a handful of other librarians. We put the books we had on our person back on the bench where the library had been just a few hours earlier and declared the People's Library open once again. We were there only a half hour or so before the cops completely barricaded the place off and kicked us all out. For the rest of the day, the park was closed off like that, the mayor and the police department directly ignoring a court order to allow the people access to the park.

When we finally were allowed back, under heavy security, we set up the library over and over. Those actions have resulted in additional confiscation of books and threats of further arrests. The rules under which police and security have allowed us to operate shift constantly. Aside from the library as place, we've taken it mobile, for our own actions as well as in support of other groups' actions.

During the days after the Occupation's eviction, Library recovered what we could from the city. That amounted to very little, as Zachary will tell you. We demanded restitution and apologies from the city, which were not forthcoming. We are now pursuing legal action, which will take time, and we will certainly keep the library community up to date as things happen. Our librarians who were arrested that night have just had their first court appearances, but this, too, will take time. In the meantime, we are doing our best to continue providing library services in support of the movement.

*Zachary:* Shortly after the raid the Mayor's office sent out a picture via twitter of some books on a table, saying that the People's library was safe, and that we would be able to go recover it. It was a small picture, hardly panoramic, but it was obvious that the books in the picture were far less than what was taken. Still, we were hopeful that there were just more books off camera. When they finally let out information about recovering materials, members of the work group rushed to get back the books. Librarians went to the specified sanitation garage with a print out of the catalog, ready to recover everything that was lost. What was lost? Our tent, our shelves, tables, chairs, bins, archival materials, laptops, miscellaneous office supplies, oh, and around 4,000 books. What was waiting at sanitation was... a few broken bins filled with books, a severely broken chair, and a folding table. The materials were taken back to a safe storage location, and then I began to sort them. I'm a librarian, but my focus in library school was actually archiving. I've done preservation assessments before, and before I went to storage I looked over my notes on conducting such assessments. I went in ready to triage 4,000 books. There weren't 4,000 books.

There were 1,275 books. I divided these into three categories. Fine, the books that were not damaged, or just lightly so – these were books that could easily be circulated. Damaged but reusable, for books that had taken a beating but which could still be re-read, this was the qualifier for books that had ripped covers, heavy spine damage, light water damage, or some other malady that nevertheless did not keep them from being readable. And then there were the destroyed, books ripped in half, books that had been warped beyond readability, and books that were more mud than book. The break down of this was 579 were fine, 389 were damaged but reusable, and 308 were destroyed. But that's not where this story ends. Earlier, when I discussed the collection I mentioned that we would mark all of the books so that we knew they were ours...and I was coming across a lot of books that weren't marked. I also found a lot of journals...and a broken kindle. Sanitation, it seems, didn't just give us the library books. They gave us every book they found. And thus I re-sorted and re-ran the numbers. It turned out that 272 of the books we got back were not actually library books. Meaning we got back 1,003 library books – about a fourth of what was taken. The break down of those books was that 504 were fine, 298 were damaged but reusable, and 201 are destroyed.

Personally, I hope that Mayor Bloomberg just wanted to do a lot of reading – as all but two books from the reference collection vanished – he certainly got an interesting selection. But, I kind of doubt that's the case.

*Betsy*: One of the primary characteristics of our library is its fluidity. Every day we re-invent ourselves. What we're doing right now at the People's Library is streamlining our mobile library project and finding interim physical space for the collection. We are building alliances across the Occupy movement, with educational institutions, and strengthening our ties with allies in public and academic libraries. Books are being published about the Occupy movement, professors are teaching courses on it, and students are studying what we have already done. We mean to be an integral part of these conversations.

What I see in the future is another physical occupation, re-establishing the common. Over the winter we're strengthening our roots. We are empowering the decentralized network of people and institutions who are committed to realizing social and economic justice, addressing climate reality and confronting the host of other issues we've gathered to address. Together we are willing and able to take our power and insist on necessary, revolutionary change. Join us!

*Zachary*: Despite "the protester" being named the person of the year by *Time Magazine* (and the article containing a reference to the people's library), the People's Library found itself ranked quite differently by another publication. The *Village Voice* put together a list of the 100 most powerless New Yorkers – yes, powerless. "The Librarians of the Occupy Wall Street 'People's Library'" came in 34th. Here's what the *Voice* had to say about us,

One of the most fun aspects of Zuccotti Park this fall was the "People's Library" a wide selection of books that sparked free-wheeling discussions. Volunteer librarians (like Bill Scott [who was on the cover]) guarded it with professional care. Although they protected it from Mayor Bloomberg's first threatened raid on the park (by taking the books away via Zipcar to an "undisclosed location"), the librarians were rendered utterly powerless after the city launched its surprise raid and returned the collection looking like shit.

It's an odd feeling to see yourself called one of the 100 most powerless people, just as it's odd to see a magazine like *Time* declare the protestor to be the person of the year. But what's really odd, isn't that the People's Library came in 34th (though it's worth noting that "The Occupy Wall Street Crust Punks" came in 40th [and if you've ever listened to crust punk music you know that calling a crust punk powerless is like calling a chainsaw a feather duster, but I digress]), it's who came in 13th. Any guesses? The 13th most powerless person/institution in NYC: "The NYPL's Librarians," of whom the *Voice* said:

Perhaps the only people less powerful in the library system than the homeless patrons are the librarians themselves. Gone are the days when a master's degree in library science and a job in

the nation's largest public-library system meant that you would spend your days helping writers to research and mesmerizing people with your encyclopedic knowledge of the Dewey decimal system.

Today's NYPL librarian needs to be a social worker, a specialist at dealing with the homeless and the severely mentally ill, a computer tech wiz at solving people's Wi-Fi problems and a job (and suicide-prevention) counselor helping people look for jobs that simply don't exist.

Even those librarians at the flagship Fifth Avenue main branch (who have been inoculated to some degree from the shit storm of the branch libraries) are preparing for it. As a recent article in the *Nation* reported, the 3 millions books beneath the Rose Reading Room will soon be shipped off to a storage facility in New Jersey and replaced by seven floors of computer terminals. As a former NYPL librarian said of the branch across the street and the main branch's future: "That place is utter chaos. And it will all come here – the noise, the teenage problems, the circulating DVDS."

Zounds. It seems like the *Village Voice* wants to give the impression that being a librarian in NYC is to consign yourself to being powerless.

Luckily, this is only relevant to NYC. Right? Surely, nobody could say this of librarians in Chicago? Or, California? What about in Michigan? How about Missouri? It's getting tough out there for librarians. Powerless? It certainly seems that way. But even as librarians have fought, and rallied, they have still seen library hours reduced, budgets cut, and so forth. And it doesn't look like those attacks are stopping, no matter how many hours our read-ins last, or no matter how many people we get to hug the library. Heck, the "library" section on *The Huffington Post* is actually called "Libraries in Crisis."

After the raid on the park, we heard from many people who were horrified by what had happened. And, honestly, it was pretty horrifying. But let's be honest, libraries were under attack by mayors before the People's Library, and they will be after. Bloomberg was cutting the New York library budget's before, and he'll probably do it again in his coming budget. Rahm Emanuel in Chicago...the same. The discussion around libraries these days seems to be about cuts, and about whether or not libraries are relevant in today's world. Librarians – who frequently find themselves in the ranks of those evil "public service workers" – are regularly under assault, and thus it is understandable if a feeling of powerlessness can begin to sink in.

I don't agree with the *Village Voice's* placement of the people's library at 34. Were we technically powerless to stop Bloomberg's "private army" from tossing the books in the dumpster? Yes. But the library is much more than that, the movement is much more than that, and in the end they're the ones powerless to stop it.

Powerlessness is what happens when you sit behind your desk and do nothing. Powerlessness is signing an online petition, or commenting on an article, or forwarding an e-mail. Powerlessness is doing nothing. And I can honestly say that the moments in my professional life when I feel the least powerless, occur when I'm doing OWS library work.