

The Race to Stop the Apocalypse

An Analysis of the *Librarians for Nuclear Arms Control Almanac*, 1984-1990

Introduction

Radical librarian. Not a combination of words that you see put together very often. However, due to the political climate of the Cold War in the 1980s, a growing group of librarians became just that: radicalized. According to *Merriam-Webster*, radicalism is defined as “the opinions and behaviors of people who favor extreme change especially in government [with] radical political ideas and behaviors.”¹ Not exactly a term you would use when describing a librarian. The definition seems to run counter to librarianship, a profession that has traditionally sought to be neutral or pro-government on political matters. Further, librarians are often portrayed in the popular media as quiet, conservative book stewards sitting passively at reference desks, shushing people, and insisting on strict adherence to rules; they are not usually portrayed as outspoken protestors in picket lines railing at the powers that be and stirring up opposition to government policies.² Yet, a small but courageous group of librarians, the members of Librarians for Nuclear Arms Control (LNAC), adopted a radical mindset in the Eighties because they truly believed that they needed “literally to save the world, which daily inches closer to nuclear

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disaster.”³ The group’s newsletter, *The LNAC Almanac*, offers insight into the degree of radicalism and ideological justifications of these library activists. The *Almanac* reveals that LNAC members, driven by the threat of nuclear war, became radicals in the true sense of that word, demonstrating that librarians can move beyond their traditional neutrality and take up the mantle of social crusaders in order to protect the knowledge of civilization and its people.

The *LNAC Almanac*, which ran from 1984-1990, served as the main newsletter for the group. LNAC published opinion pieces and letters from its members, reports on protests and other peace activities by librarians, satires of government policies, reprints of articles by outside scholars, bibliographies on arms control, and witty anti-war cartoons penned by library staff. The *Almanac* provides richly-detailed content about the thinking of informational radicals, and this article offers an analysis of this content. In doing so, it finds that LNAC fit the definition of a radicalized group, and explores the ideology that the members used to step out of professional neutralism and into the political arena.

A Neutrality Mentality in Libraries

Breaking out of the traditional mold of political noninvolvement required a lot of courage for LNAC members because librarians of the early twentieth century had enshrined the ideal of neutrality. As library science departments took form at universities in the 1930s, many of their faculty preached that librarians should emulate the objectivity of the scientific professions. Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn, two philosophers who believed that the scientific approach could be applied to human society, heavily influenced librarians towards this line of thinking. Archie L. Dick, who traced the history of neutralism in library thinking, explains that “it becomes clear in an examination of the library profession’s search for its social scientific base, following the philosophy of science path, why objectivity and neutrality assumed such prominence as professional ideals.”⁴ Librarians believed that they, as social scientists, should strive for neutrality so they could be completely objective in their book selections, reference service, and other professional endeavors. The profession’s leaders believed that librarians should certainly not engage in public discussions over the morality of particular political policies, or bias their services in favor of a specific point of view.⁵

Several works on the ethos of librarianship in mid-century deepened the neutrality mentality. In one example work in 1962, Douglas Foskett summarized the creed of the librarian with the phrase “no politics, no religion, no morals,” an idea suggesting that the nation’s book stewards should focus on providing information services to their patrons without regards to their own personal beliefs.⁶ In 1972 David Berninghausen wrote “Social Responsibility

vs. the Library Bill of Rights”, an article that argued strongly for impartiality by librarians. He contended that ALA should not participate in radical campaigns to end racial prejudice or stop wars, believing that the association and its librarians would lose their credibility by endorsing specific causes. If libraries became tools for furthering social agendas, he warned, they would open the door for groups and governments to pressure librarians to censor materials that opposed their programs.⁷

However, around the time that Berninghausen was writing, some librarians, especially those in ALA’s emerging Social Responsibilities Round Table began to resist the neutrality tradition. They countered that since libraries must stay relevant to the interests of their patrons, they could take part in current debates. They also pointed out that in trying to maintain a neutral collection, librarians would have to recognize when a collection was biased and rebalance that collection by vigorously adding books from the opposing viewpoint.⁸ Perhaps even more significantly, Dorothy Broderick and other socially responsible librarians argued that certain books, such as racist works, promoted ideas that subverted other people’s rights. Librarians had a responsibility to weed out books from their collections that made the bigot’s point of view seem to be on an equal footing with ideas about human dignity.⁹ However, despite the development of the Social Responsibilities Round Table and an ideology that qualified the traditional view of intellectual freedom, the library profession as a whole would still follow a policy of impartiality at the end of the Sixties.¹⁰

Works on Radicalism in Librarianship

In taking a look at recent works on library radicals, none have focused on LNAC. However, library scholars have debated about the meaning of library neutrality in philosophical discourses and analyzed librarian activism in other chapters of America’s radical history, thus providing a background for LNAC’s story.

The Progressive Librarian has published a plethora of articles about the debate between neutralists and radicals in the library field. Many of the most provocative articles from the journal were compiled into a 2008 book, *Questioning Library Neutrality*. In the article “Activist Librarianship: Heritage or Heresy?” Ann Spananese explained the crux of the issue:

The struggle is over whether we as librarians should practice total neutrality in terms of library materials and service, or encompass advocacy in our work. Should librarianship become involved in the great issues of the day, or remain a profession aloof in the abstract world that thinks of intellectual freedom in the most idealized, purist fashion?¹¹

Steven Joyce answers that question in another essay from the same book, arguing that advocacy is indeed possible for a librarian and pointing out the shortcomings of traditional library neutrality:

Neutrality does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is immersed in a largely taken-for-granted and unquestioned status quo, and that status quo is certainly not neutral. If ‘neutral’ librarians are also immersed in that status quo (or dominant ideology or hegemony or discursive formation or whichever phrasing you wish to employ), can they really be neutral?¹²

Librarians who claim to be “neutral” thus give tacit endorsement to the prevailing ideology. In making room for social justice initiatives within an intellectual freedom framework, Joyce points out that speaking out in favor of a particular point of view does not mean that librarians are suppressing other points of view. In fact, intellectual freedom means that librarians can advocate in favor of a radical point of view as long as they allow for others to participate in the discussion as well.

Weighing into the debate with “The Myth of the Neutral Profession,” Robert Jensen argued that librarians simply cannot be neutral because they make acquisitions and programming decisions every day that take into account the needs of their communities. Librarians who think that radical ideas could help their communities could justifiably advocate those ideas. Jensen believed that the tradition of so-called neutrality has only served to neutralize librarians, tying their hands and quieting their voices in the political arena.¹³

In addition to these philosophical discussions, several scholars have focused on specific radical movements in the history of librarianship, such as in the essay collection *Activism in American Librarianship, 1962-1973* published in 1987. Many of the essays note that the Sixties witnessed the birth of real radicalism in librarianship, buoyed as it was by the waves of radicalism in American society as a whole. A number of library historians have covered the civil rights struggle and women’s liberation movement through the profession’s main historical journal, *Information & Culture*.¹⁴ These campaigns to ensure equal rights for all librarians and their patrons certainly helped to kindle the fires of radicalism in the hearts of many librarians.

However, in “The War and Librarianship” in *Activism in American Librarianship*, Frederick J. Stielow argues that the Vietnam War was the watershed for radicalism in the library field. Up to that point, librarians had approved of most of the federal government’s policies about wars. However, the carnage, long years without victory, and funneling of billions of dollars into bombs and bullets eroded librarian support for a U.S. presence in Vietnam. Some librarians took a clear anti-war stand and formed the Librarians for Peace group,

marking the first time that librarians would truly move “beyond the stultifying social inertia wrought by decades of overly narrow professionalization and bureaucratization” and directly challenge a government policy.¹⁵ This anti-war strand of radicalism would clear the path for the nuclear bomb opponents of the 1980s.

Jumping to the present day, a number of books have appeared that testify to a growing interest in activism among librarians. In the book *The Generation X Librarian*, the authors dedicate a chapter to highlighting socially responsible librarians in the present and encouraging new librarians to follow their lead.¹⁶ In the book *Informed Agitation*, a panel of authors shed light on radical twenty-first century library groups, such as Radical Reference.¹⁷

Thus, authors have discussed the radicalism vs. neutrality conflict in librarianship, and examined episodes in library activist history in the 1960s as well as in the present day. However, few have concentrated on LNAC’s radicalism, a 1980s ideology which helped provide a link between the Sixties radicalism and today’s activists. In the article “From Atomic Shelters to Arms Control”, one of the authors briefly touches on LNAC but offers no substantive analysis of the *Almanac*. This article seeks to fill this gap in the literature.

Before diving into the *Almanac*, some general works on radicalism and revolutions can help us clarify LNAC’s thinking. In *The Anatomy of Revolution*, a comparative study of several historical revolutions, Crane Briton explores the motivations behind revolutionary fervor. He finds that one of the key motivators for revolutionaries is *hope*. Revolutionaries have hope that they can make a difference, a kind of vibrant optimism that they can end an oppression, improve their societies, or change their government’s policies. Indeed, radicals are rarely pessimistic or fatalistic, as such beliefs would deflate their activist energy, leading them to accept the status quo. In another work focusing specifically on the American anti-nuclear movement, Paul Y. Watanabe and Michael A. Milburn consider psychological factors that produce activism. They find that “strong feelings of political efficacy” and the belief that activism could have a significant impact on decreasing the chances of war are two of the biggest predictors.¹⁸ As will be seen, LNAC librarians expressed the types of revolutionary ideas described by Briton, Watanabe, and Milburn: a hope that they could bring about real political change and a conviction that they, as America’s information professionals, had the power and the skills to help save the world.

Our article tells the story of *Almanac* in two parts. The first part shows that the *Almanac* portrays LNAC to be a league of librarians whose ideas and actions fit the definition for a truly radical group through the use of deliberate collection development, programming and exhibits. The second part breaks down the content of the *Almanac* into its elements, revealing the motivations and justifications that LNAC members had for radicalizing.

Part I: The Almanac as the Chronicles of a Radical Group

In order to understand the mind frame of the LNAC members, one must look to the political landscape of the day. The terrifying surge in the number of nuclear weapons and the increase in the potency of individual nuclear warheads compelled all Americans, including librarians, to take heed of the political debates surrounding war and peace issues during the Eighties. By 1980, the United States had stockpiled 23,764 nuclear warheads, and the Soviet Union had amassed 30,062. The total number of bombs would increase as the decade went on, topping off at an incredible 70,000 warheads by the mid-1980s. Yet, not only had nuclear bombs become alarmingly numerous by this decade, but their individual destructive power had also grown exponentially. In fact, a strategic nuclear bomb of the 1980s could explode with between *8-100 times* as much firepower as the A-bombs dropped on Japan.¹⁹

Indeed, the effects of a nuclear war in the 1980s, as forecast in several scholarly studies of the time, would have been truly Armageddon-like. Projections placed the number of immediate fatalities of a U.S.-Soviet war at 1.1 billion. Another 1.1 billion people would likely suffer severe wounds, and with many hospitals destroyed, the injured would have scant hope of receiving help. Altogether, a third to a half of the human race would perish in the first few days of the war, and the World Health Organization warned that the survivors would face starvation, epidemics, loss of utilities, and anarchy. Moreover, many scientists contended that the smoke and dust generated by nuclear explosions would rise up into the atmosphere and block out sunlight for years, a phenomenon they termed “nuclear winter.” The totality of all of a nuclear war’s effects, some scientists warned, might very well result in the extinction of humanity.²⁰

Newspapers carried these grim reports to the American people.²¹ Fictional movies, such as *The Day After* (1983), *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), and *By Dawn’s Early Light* (1990) brought home the effects of a nuclear exchange through graphic special effects and woeful tales of characters fighting to survive in a shattered world.²² Fictional and popular nonfiction books also compelled Americans to imagine the nightmares of a nuclear war.²³

The nuclear issue gained even more urgency by what some perceived to be a reckless militarism in Washington. In his first years in office, President Ronald Reagan articulated a passionate anti-Soviet agenda and proposed initiatives to bolster America’s nuclear prowess, bringing an end to the more relaxed relationship between Russia and America during the *détente* years of the late Seventies. He denounced the Soviet Union as an “evil empire.”²⁴ Reagan planned a massive military build-up that included programs for an MX missile, a weapon which would empower the United States to launch a first strike on the Soviet Union. Some Reagan administration officials also downplayed the

potential impact of a conflict, believing that Americans could easily survive a nuclear war with enough shovels (all they had to do was dig holes in their backyards, one official claimed, and throw doors over them to build fallout shelters).²⁵ Some Americans feared that the Reagan administration's hawkish rhetoric, provocative military measures, and naive thinking would drive the United States headlong off a nuclear precipice.

LNAC was just one group among many that formed during this time period in hopes of influencing the government to make a drastic change in policy. The main difference between LNAC and other groups, like Physicians for Social Responsibility or Lawyers Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control, was that while these groups could be extremely effective, they had limited constituencies. "Librarians, on the other hand, reached all the above groups as well as many others making up the diverse public of the nation's libraries."²⁶ For this reason, LNAC members, as professionals who specialized in the dissemination of information to all Americans, believed that they were best positioned among the anti-nuclear groups to stop the approaching storm of mushroom clouds.

The extraordinary threat to humanity's very survival would force the library profession—as no other issue before it had—to reconsider its traditional stance of neutrality. By forming the activist group, Librarians for Nuclear Arms Control (LNAC), many librarians courageously rose to the challenge of addressing the atomic issue.

Victoria Kline Musmann, director of the Santa Fe Springs City Library in California, founded LNAC in 1983. Musmann and her fellow librarians sought to ensure global salvation by pressuring the American government to reduce or eliminate its nuclear arsenal. There had already been some movement in ALA towards peace advocacy; the Social Responsibility Round Table had passed a resolution through ALA Council in 1980 calling for more efforts to find peaceful ways to resolve global conflicts.²⁷ However, LNAC members apparently felt the need to create a group specifically dedicated to nuclear issues, in imitation of other professions as noted in their first *Almanac* issue.²⁸ It is important to note that LNAC, rather than fight against the established professional associations, would advocate within the associations for greater librarian involvement in the anti-war movement.

Moving Their Profession Towards a Radical Stance

LNAC's statement of purpose, as printed in the *Almanac*, shows that the members believed that librarians had a crucial role to play in the solution to the nuclear crisis and that through their knowledge and shared information they could provide their patrons with eye-opening facts about the effects of nuclear weapons:

We realize that librarians are reluctant to impose their own political and moral convictions upon the community at large, but we believe that the gravity of the nuclear threat demands our involvement. As librarians we constitute a respected and influential segment of society. We are charged with the preservation of our shared culture and intellectual heritage and we are dedicated to education and the communication of information. It is urgent that we use our resources and professional skills to inform the public about the dangers of nuclear weapons.²⁹

Throughout the volumes of the *Almanac*, librarians relentlessly took a stand against the government's use of nuclear weapons in an attempt to educate their fellow professionals and constituencies. The *Almanac's* editors encouraged their readers to disseminate the *Almanac* and its anti-nuclear ideas among fellow librarians.³⁰ LNAC's leaders also reported on their formal dissemination activities within the library associations in the *Almanac*. In the Summer 1987 issue, LNAC's leaders highlighted an exhibit they created at the American Library Association conference. The display gave them a foothold for radicalism in the profession, allowing them to distribute anti-nuclear materials to thousands of librarians, including a Nuclear IQ Quiz, fliers for pro-peace movies, LNAC stickers, and provocative items designed to rally both librarians and their patrons to the peace banner.³¹

Most significantly in its associational activities, LNAC's members participated in bringing about a nuclear freeze resolution through the California Library Association (CLA). The nuclear freeze resolutions called for the US and USSR to stop making, testing, and developing nuclear weapons, and for the two countries to arrange a summit as soon as possible. Victoria Kline Musmann, LNAC President, proposed the freeze resolution at the CLA conference, and some of what she chose to say is radical indeed. She urged the members to vote in favor of the resolution because she believed that there was...

...a real possibility that our civilization, including all libraries everywhere, will be destroyed in a nuclear war...I know that some believe that it is unethical for librarians to endorse a nuclear freeze... that we must maintain our neutrality...One nuclear bomb dropped on either Los Angeles or San Francisco would be more destructive to the free flow of information than the most repressive censorship.³²

Strong words that reflected a belief that the world was on a precipice. The CLA and ALA passed nuclear freeze resolutions in 1984, heavily influenced by LNAC's advocacy.³³ LNAC won another important victory that same year, when LNAC member Vincent Jennings (working through the Social Responsibilities

Round Table) lead ALA to join the Citizens against Nuclear War coalition of organizations.³⁴

Publicizing the Propaganda of Peace

LNAC librarians sought to propagate their peace ideas among the American people at the grassroots level through public libraries. What made this group of librarians radical is that they made no attempts to stay neutral, no attempts to show the other side of the nuclear story. The *Almanac*'s authors only wanted to spread their own one-sided materials, a peace propaganda. Musmann and her daring band of librarians would take a "proactive instead of reactive" approach to the nuclear issue through deliberate dissemination efforts.³⁵

While its members produced some original materials for the American people, LNAC's peaceful information campaign derived its greatest strength from the capacity of libraries to distribute the materials produced by a variety of other anti-nuclear radical groups. These groups included:

- American Friends Service Committee
Supplying slide shows and facts sheets from the Quakers to support peace education campaigns
- Physicians for Social Responsibility
Offering books and videocassettes specializing in the medical impacts of nuclear bombs
- Center for Defense Information
Producing reports on military spending and policies
- Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Providing lesson plans for anti-bomb teachers along with visual aids³⁶

Libraries could provide Americans a peace propaganda that would encompass the publications of peace groups and the ideas of the greatest anti-nuclear writers, movie directors, and leaders of the day—because libraries could offer ready access to the peace books, films, and programs created by all other activists through library's collection funds, shelving capacity, display cases, circulation policies, meeting rooms, and networks of branches that spanned America.

Accordingly, the beginning volumes of the *Almanac* focused on the compiling of books, activities, and programs not only to educate the general public on the horrific effects of nuclear weapons but also to keep them up to date with the situation as a whole in a time when information was not as readily available. LNAC had to carry out its information dissemination mission in a time before the internet, before smartphones were in everyone's hands, without access to unlimited information 24 hours a day. The librarians of the Eighties

therefore needed to be the window into the world of information, especially unfiltered political materials. LNAC librarians did not join the organization just because they wanted the label of “radical”; they joined because as librarians they truly believed that they had a duty to use their informational powers to keep the issue of nuclear arms at the forefront of the public awareness and in turn became the activists that we are studying today.³⁷ These library crusaders sought to wield books, periodicals, posters, films, and programs as weapons in their fight against nuclear war, information formats which could circulate all the particulars about nuclear weapons and the effects of a war.³⁸

The real meat of LNAC’s stance against nuclear weapons can thus be found in the extensive bibliographies of suggested book purchases and provocative programming ideas listed throughout the newsletter. LNAC firmly believed that the sources found in the libraries needed to be strongly pro-peace since the government and the media had harangued the American people with so many pro-nuclear sentiments.

Amidst the pages of bibliographies, some book titles that stand out include: *Fatal Obsessions: Nuclear Weapons and Star Wars*,³⁹ *Does Your Child Fear Nuclear War?*,⁴⁰ *Nuclear Winter: the Human and Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War*,⁴¹ *Please Save My World: Children Speak Out Against Nuclear War*,⁴² *Overkill: Weapons of the Nuclear Age, Nuclear War*, and *Nuclear Winter, Growing Up Scared? The Psychological Effect of the Nuclear Threat on Children*.⁴³ This short selection of titles reflects how librarians of the Eighties made strategic decisions to stack their shelves with books that took an unabashedly anti-nuclear position. The *Almanac*’s columnists even suggested stocking libraries with alternative press publications by anti-nuclear groups such as Women Against Military Madness and Ground Zero.⁴⁴ Further, LNAC audaciously recommended manuals and workbooks for libraries that could go beyond the provision of nuclear facts and serve as tools for local activists. For example, the *Almanac*’s authors advertised *The Military in Your Backyard*, a book published by the radicalized Center for Economic Conversion that outlined specific steps that Americans could take to put arms control proposals on local ballots.⁴⁵

LNAC also supplied posters for libraries, funded anti-nuclear activists’ speeches in libraries, and offered high impact ideas for exhibits and programs, all in attempts to help sway the public to the realization that nuclear weapons were inherently evil and that if they did nothing, the world would end.⁴⁶ One example can be found in the Spring 1984 *Almanac*, which advertised the poster session “An Educational Exhibit About the Effects and Dangers of Nuclear War” that included 16 large posters (38 in X 25 in) with titles like “Hiroshima and Nagasaki Destroyed,” “Thermal Effects of Nuclear Explosions,” “The First 110 Seconds after a One-Megaton Air Burst” and “One-Megaton Air Burst Over New York.”⁴⁷ Materials like these offered very graphic, hard hitting

arguments against any use of nuclear weapons. The *Almanac* provided access to exhibits of many peace groups, supplying ordering information for displays like “Forbidden Faces” which featured photos taken by American visitors to the Soviet Union, images that helped to humanize the Russian people.⁴⁸ The *Almanac* also carried lists of films designed to “get you up off the edge of your seat” about the nuclear issue.⁴⁹ Shining with the passion that the anti-Bomb librarians had for their mission, the *Almanac* even alerted librarians to radical books for children’s story time programs.⁵⁰

LNAC called for librarians to use their training as information professionals for the common good--to take a stand against an issue that could spell the end of civilization. Many librarians agreed and even began to view it as unprofessional *not* to do so, as explained in the 1985 report “State Library Associations Warming Up To Freeze” which documented the success of anti-nuclear librarians in spreading their creed to dozens of state associations.⁵¹ LNAC members needed to spread their propaganda of peace as quickly as possible, to as many people as possible, because in our great country, there was only one way to implement change: and that was through the people.

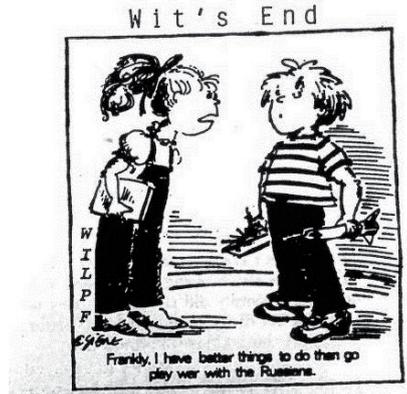
Pushing Peace in Pictures

On top of the programming ideas and bibliography lists, sandwiched between the anti-nuclear book lists and the voting records of Congressmen, small pieces of peaceful marketing appeared in the *Almanac*.

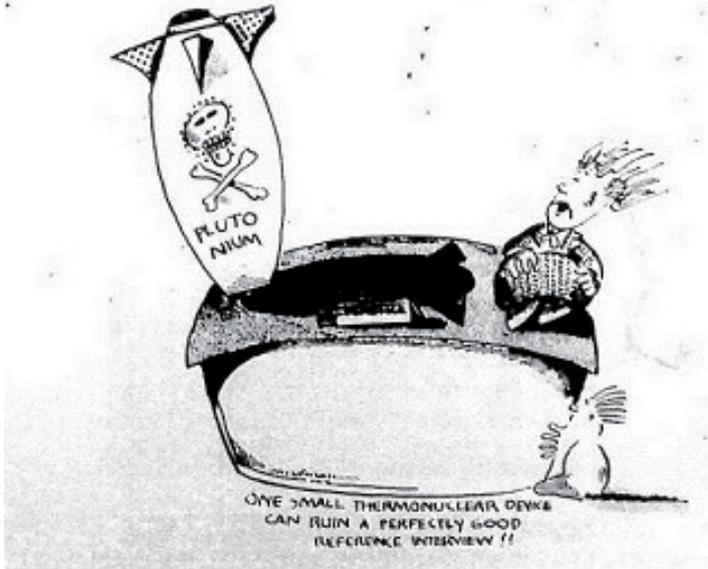
Littered throughout its many volumes were slogans, peace mottos, and political cartoons to help persuade the reader to rally to the side of peace. These small slivers of propaganda could be just as effective as the radicalized speeches printed in the column in rallying librarians to participate in the peace movement:

- Be all you can be. Work for Peace⁵²
- Stop the arms race not the human race⁵³
- Peace is our only security⁵⁴
- Give your country a birthday present: work for peace⁵⁵
- Books not bombs⁵⁶
- Question Authority⁵⁷
- War doesn’t decide who’s right-only who’s left⁵⁸

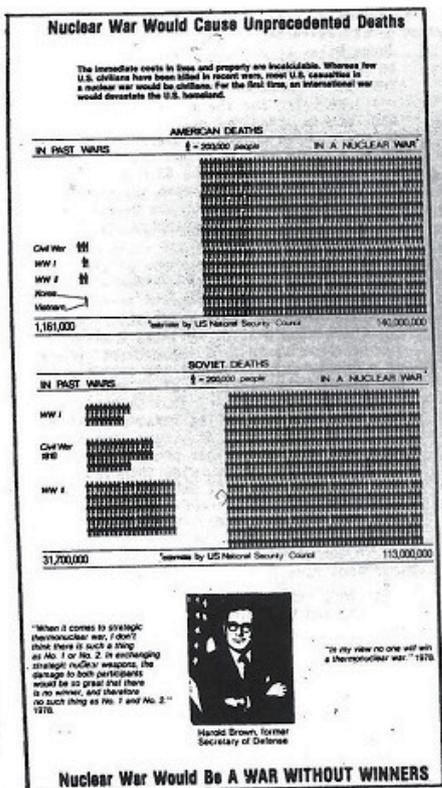
The political cartoons are an excellent view into the mind frame of the time period as well as that of the editors of the *Almanac*. Some of the cartoons are very broad in terms of nuclear weapons and the fear for the world, such as these images found in the Fall 1988 issue,⁵⁹ and the Winter 1984 issue,⁶⁰



Other images in the newsletter were more geared towards an audience of librarians, focusing on how a nuclear war would affect the profession in a satirical sort of way:⁶¹



But in true radical librarian style LNAC did not just stop at satirical drawings or small political cartoons to make a point. They portrayed the truth of what the world would look like if the apocalypse occurred. They saw the fear in the American public and they ran with it, as this image found in the Winter 1984 issue clearly shows:⁶²



The Front Lines of Radicalism

Some LNAC librarians took their radicalization to the next level, going beyond the provision of books and displays, or the penning of essays and cartoons about disarmament. In fact, several members of LNAC took matters into their own hands, speaking out in public venues and participating in protests with the audacity one normally associates with radicalism. Beth Sibley, a reference librarian from UC Berkeley, and a member of LNAC, lectured on librarians as activists at the 1986 National Women's Studies Association Conference. Her questions for the group probed whether it was a librarian's place to pursue and influence social responsibility, arguing that librarians have been doing so for many years. Tackling hot topics of the day relevant to libraries (such as illiteracy) was commonplace, so taking the step to stand against nuclear weapons was not a far cry for them.⁶³

Going further, a Los Angeles chapter member of LNAC, Maggie Murphy, recounted to her chapter how police had arrested Murphy and four others

for a peaceful protest when they courageously marched within four miles of the Nevada Nuclear Weapon Test Site on a day when the government was conducting dangerous nuclear testing!⁶⁴ Murphy was not alone. In 1987, LNAC president Victoria Kline Musmann was arrested with fifty other protesters when they sat down in the middle of a road that led to a testing site in Nevada. Musmann stated that: “For me it was time to say ‘No’ to nuclear weapons in a more radical way [--] in a way that might jeopardize the normalcy and safety of my daily life.”⁶⁵

But the radicalism of anti-nuclear librarians does not stop there. The *Almanac* celebrated the bravery of anti-nuclear librarians outside of LNAC who could model activism. Anne-Marie Hendrickson, a New York librarian flew to Moscow and faced detainment when she and a group of six peace activists (members of the Group for the Establishment of Trust Between the Soviet Union and the United States) stood outside the entrance to Gorkey Park with leaflets speaking out against nuclear weapons and alerting Russian citizens that they needed to protect themselves from the radiation released by the Chernobyl meltdown.⁶⁶

Part II: The Elements of LNAC Radicalism

We summarized the ideas and actions conveyed in the *Almanac* in Part I, demonstrating that the *Almanac*'s contents marked LNAC's members as peaceful advocates. In Part II, we analyze the apocalyptic-inspired radicalism expressed in the newsletter, highlighting the exact elements that provided the impetus and justifications for LNAC members to break away from the profession's traditional neutralism.

Element One: A Matter of Survival

The sense that the world was on the brink of a disaster that could annihilate librarians and everyone else forced librarians out of their neutrality shells like nothing before it ever had. In 1986 the LNAC National Board commented on a vigorous letter-writing battle taking place in *Reference Quarterly (RQ)*. In the Summer 1985 issue of *RQ*, three library science professors at the University of Maryland argued that libraries should create a “national peace information network” within the nation’s public library system.⁶⁷ In response, Connie Jo Ozinga of Seymour Public Library, Indiana, contended in a letter to *RQ* that “...I am convinced that the public library must remain neutral on social issues, no matter what the personal beliefs of the staff might be.”⁶⁸ Sanford Berman, a cataloger at Minnesota’s Hennepin Public Library and an LNAC member, fought back in another letter arguing that “simple self-interest dictates that we try to prevent” nuclear war, as it would bring about a cataclysm that would

wipe out librarians and their patrons. “To us, it’s a matter of ... survival” he explained.⁶⁹ To save themselves and the rest of the human race from war, librarians would simply have to become radical pro-peace soldiers. Concern for the survival of the human race eclipsed neutrality as a professional value in the *Almanac*.

Element Two: Guardians of Culture

In addition to protecting human lives, the hearts of LNAC librarians harbored a belief that they had a solemn responsibility to preserve America’s knowledge, an idea that gave rise to radical political action if interpreted to its fullest extent. Musmann and LNAC had a grander definition of librarians than did some of their other colleagues who saw librarians as only providers of facts. In the debut issue of the *Almanac*, Musmann explained:

The possibility of nuclear war has forced me to reexamine my own assumptions regarding the basic responsibilities of our profession. Although we call ourselves information specialists, our role is much more important. We are perceived as guardians of culture. We are the only profession dedicated to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of the collective wisdom of human civilization. We must protect our culture and intellectual heritage from nuclear destruction.⁷⁰

Librarian radicalism thus resulted from a need to *preempt* threats to the stored up ideas from past generations through political action, in addition to protecting the lives of the current generation.

Element Three: Providing Books of Real Relevance

The LNAC army also argued that providing information on serious issues like nuclear war would make libraries more relevant and meaningful to Americans, even if it meant having librarians step into the political arena. In a 1984 piece, Musmann criticized efforts that diverted “public attention away from important issues to trivia,”⁷¹ explaining that librarians should offer programs on nuclear winter rather than flower arranging, and supply books on missiles instead of diet fads. If librarians fulfilled their professional roles in a more substantive way, the public would give them more support. She pointed out that police and fire departments receive greater support from Americans because they deal with life-and-death concerns. Librarians should also focus on real issues, rather than just hobbies or product information.⁷² If society was hurtling towards an apocalypse, what was more real or relevant than that?

Musmann acknowledged that librarians had a duty to provide information on popular policy topics, but it was even more important that librarians bring up significant topics, like nuclear war, that did not receive enough public attention. She acknowledged that most reference librarians received few questions about nuclear war. The military-industrial complex had created “psychic numbing” in America, telling Americans that the arms race was too complicated for them and there was nothing they could do about it. Librarians could combat this mentality by building collections that made nuclear weaponry understandable to laypeople and outlined solutions to the arms race.⁷³ The drive to cultivate library collections that tackled issues of real significance in American society provided some of the justification for LNAC’s radicalism.

Element Four: Saving Youth from a Fear of Futurelessness

Librarians also served as sentinels of the nation’s children according to many of the *Almanac*’s authors, and libraries had a duty to help them cope with nuclear issues and reduce the threat of an apocalypse. The library profession’s growing concern about the war’s impact on young minds expressed itself in the creation of a new subject heading, “Children and Nuclear Warfare” in 1984. Children’s librarians made up a large block of LNAC and the library profession, and they tried to lead librarians to take a stance that would save their young patrons from the bomb itself as well as the psychological stress produced by worrying about the bomb.⁷⁴ One LNAC writer described the trauma inflicted by the threat of an apocalypse as a “fear of futurelessness” among youth.⁷⁵ Many children also lacked the resources to meet their physical and educational needs while the country spent billions on nuclear bombs.⁷⁶ The immediate, practical needs of their young patrons outshone the need for the profession to have lengthy, esoteric debates about whether or not librarians should remain purely neutral on the topic of nuclear war.

Children’s fears about nuclear war inspired many LNAC radicals to provide outlets for youth to express their concerns, and offer books with a message of hope for the new generation. Some librarians coordinated bibliotherapy programs to help children address their concerns about nuclear war, such as encouraging children to make posters about war based on books at their libraries, and displaying the posters for the public.⁷⁷ While some Americans felt that the arms race might be too controversial and scary for children and teenagers, LNAC members felt that the right selection of constructive dovish books, written by authors with a sensitivity and positive attitude, could help youth cope with life in the Atomic Age and find ways to stop the arms race.⁷⁸ LNAC members saw librarians as torchbearers of hope to the new generation, radicals who held up a flame of truthful, peace-based books about nuclear issues for the nation’s youth.

Element Five: Undermining Domestic Endeavors

The LNAC army also felt justified in breaking from the neutrality mentality because they thought that increasing the size of the nation's nuclear arsenal not only made an apocalypse more likely but it also undermined social services, including libraries. The *Almanac* featured research from "The Women's Budget" published by the Jane Addams Peace Association of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1985, which reported that governments worldwide were spending \$1.3 million every thirty seconds on war preparations. The "Budget" authors suggested an array of federal reallocations that would invest money in rape crisis centers, homeless shelters, and senior citizens. They held the conviction that the public funds spent on Stealth bombers represented lost opportunities to help society's neediest members.⁷⁹

Further, LNAC librarians believed that that a pro-nuclear budget posed a specific threat to American libraries by syphoning off potential book funds into the production of warheads. One member put it graphically, lamenting that an unbelievable fortune was being spent on war preparations, but "meanwhile, you can't ride an MX missile to work and you can't run a bookmobile out of a tank."⁸⁰ LNAC's sense that building more nukes and other weapons made an apocalypse more likely in the future, while also mispending funds that could go to libraries, spurred them beyond the boundaries of neutrality.

Element Six: War is the Real Enemy (not the Russians)

Another element of the radical philosophy in the *Almanac* was a belief that the most effective way of preventing Armageddon was by coming to an agreement with the Soviets for reducing the number of bombs, not increasing the number of bombs to deter a Soviet attack. They thought that armed conflict as a phenomenon, rather than a specific country, posed the biggest threat to the American people, rallying around the slogan that "war is the real enemy."⁸¹ They believed arms control could work if the U.S. government would be willing to negotiate with the Soviet Union. In a spring 1986 essay in the *Almanac*, the authors pointed out that the Soviet Union had ceased nuclear testing in August 1985, as part of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations, and encouraged the United States to do so well. The federal government had refused; and, in fact, escalated the arms race by engaging in Strategic Defense Initiative testing.⁸² Espousing a different view, LNAC's radical writers argued that the Soviets could be trusted, at least enough not to start a war if the United States shrank its nuclear arsenal. *Almanac* authors pointed to pro-peace statements from Russian leaders as evidence that there were doves in the Kremlin. For example, they cited a Russian defense leader's statement in 1988 that called for converting ballistic missiles into baby carriages.⁸³

In probing their thinking on this matter further, the *Almanac* revealed that many LNAC leaders believed that war resulted from distrust, and distrust resulted from lack of information or misinformation. Therefore, librarians should offer books that provided truthful information about the Soviets, portraying them as people with many of the same interests as Americans, and not as an “evil empire” as labeled by Reagan.⁸⁴ The belief in the essential humanity of the Soviets, blended with the librarian-styled idea that the enmity driving the arms race stemmed from faulty information dissemination, helped to energize LNAC’s radicalism.

Element Seven: Ideology Equalizers

As pointed out earlier, some LNAC authors made an effort to justify their radicalism with the concept of ideological equalization, claiming that pro-nuclear groups already had enough voices in library collections and that librarians should add more anti-nuclear voices in order to give equal opportunities for both sides to be heard. Thus, like their activist predecessors in the Sixties, some LNAC members found room in the framework of intellectual freedom for radical advocacy, and even argued paradoxically that ensuring intellectual freedom sometimes meant advocating a particular ideology. The Nuclear Arms Freeze Resolution passed by the California Library Association declared that librarians’ “responsibility for freedom of and access to information...does not relieve librarians or libraries from the obligation to provide information and arguments from all points of view.”⁸⁵ As a corollary, if librarians saw that a particular ideology was underrepresented in their collections or programming—or underrepresented in American society as a whole—they had the duty to advocate that ideology more vigorously than others to ensure that it had a fair chance on the stage of public opinion.

In a 1986 *Almanac* issue, the LNAC National Board noted that librarians, as stewards of books and other resources, had their fingers on the cultural pulse of America, and they could easily ascertain that the prevailing American ideology leaned towards war. LNAC pointed out that most card catalog drawers related to wars were quite full, while drawers indexing peace initiatives were sparse in comparison. LNAC noted “that the bulk of information in any society reflects the ideas of its dominant forces,” and librarians could clearly see that the bulk of information in America slanted towards militarism based on their collections.⁸⁶ It was thus their duty to restore balance to America’s information by advocating only for peace, much like the Jedi Knights of the *Star Wars* saga who sensed that the universe leaned too heavily to the dark side and saw it as their duty to go on crusades for the good side in order to restore a balance to the force. Accordingly, restoring balance meant buying books and sponsoring programs that would advocate anti-nuclear policies, not acquiring any more

pro-war materials. A radical, dove-biased library collection could be a counterweight to the heavy load of hawkish ideologies in the government and media.

Element Eight: Librarians as Stimulators and Moderators of Meaningful Political Discourse

Underlying all their beliefs about the need for a radical approach to nuclear issues, LNAC members had a conviction that librarians had the power to produce political change by sparking public debates. They could do so by presenting viewpoints that challenged mainstream thinking and furnishing truthful information about key issues so that Americans could form well-educated opinions about government policies. One *Almanac* writer proclaimed that “by providing information about the effects of nuclear weapons and the skewed priorities of the federal budget, we help to feed the fires of dissent that have always inspired and sustained our political system.”⁸⁷ Anti-nuclear library writers also suggested changing subject headings, such as replacing the outdated “atomic” to “nuclear” as well as creating headings for such topics as “nuclear winter,” to facilitate public access to arms race information.⁸⁸ Librarians could also stir debates by providing radical literature that directly opposed government policies and commonly-held beliefs. In rejecting the idea that librarians should be neutralists, the *Almanac*’s editors quoted Patricia Case, a curator at Temple University, who argued that libraries should strive to be controversy-generators in American society by deliberately seeking to include alternative press publications in their collections.⁸⁹

In LNAC’s thinking, librarians should not try to create an artificial calm regarding controversial issues; in fact, they should stir up political storms. LNAC members had hope that an ongoing, nationwide discussion—fueled by the compelling arguments of dove groups and informed by the facts about nuclear warfare in library collections--would lead Americans to steer their nation’s policies towards a peaceful course and avoid the nuclear precipice. The *Almanac*’s authors believed in the ability of Americans to see the truth about the bomb, if their libraries would help them. Confidence in the political efficacy of librarians thus provided the foundation for LNAC’s radical efforts to halt the countdown to the apocalypse.

Conclusion: Apocalypticism as the Catalyst for Library Radicalism

The *LNAC Almanac* reveals that librarians can become radicals despite the profession’s traditional neutrality mentality, with the *Almanac*’s authors proving that librarians have the right and duty to radicalize in order to protect their ideals, collections, and patrons from destruction. LNAC had demonstrated that librarians could find a way out of its morass of neutrality debates and mobilize

themselves for a just political cause along with other professions. They had even won national attention outside their field. Leading peace authors of the day, including Helen Caldicott and Carl Sagan, commended the *Almanac*.⁹⁰ *U.S. National Security Policy Groups: Institutional Profiles*, a directory published in 1990, listed LNAC alongside other American associations dedicated to defense issues.⁹¹

Indeed the *Almanac* documents the stories of librarians who engaged in protests and speech-making, risking their jobs and livelihoods for their cause, and displaying the “opinions and behaviors of people who favor extreme change” as noted in the definition of radicalism at the beginning of this paper. In addition to going to the front lines of the radical peace movement, LNAC nourished the other radical anti-nuclear forces in America by disseminating a propaganda of peace through books. Essentially, LNAC librarians functioned as radicals in two ways: they wanted extreme change in their profession’s ethos, and in their government’s policies. LNAC members’ bravery and zeal, which came out in their dual radicalism, should be remembered along with the courage of their radical predecessors of the Sixties.

The radicalism in the *Almanac* flowed from its writers’ apocalypticism. It is true that intellectual freedom-based beliefs about the need to equalize dovish ideologies with hawkish ideologies in libraries had helped open the door to radical activities for some LNAC members, and helped fend off attacks from the profession’s neutralist librarians about the ethics of LNAC’s activism. However, the driving force, the fiery energy, the main argument, the strongest impactor for the LNAC members was the realization that they were in a *race to stop the apocalypse* and that time was running out. The conviction that a continuation of the arms race would result in a nuclear war that would destroy libraries and the rest of the Earth provided the key motivation for abandoning the traditional neutrality mentality. This belief produced several corollaries. Among them were contentions that the constant fear of the impending apocalypse traumatized the nation’s youth, and that the government’s expenditures on building nuclear weapons wasted money by merely making the end of the world even more likely.

In addition to expressing a burning desire to stop Armageddon, the *Almanac* exuded a great deal of optimism and feelings of political efficacy that galvanized radical activism. LNAC members’ confidence in their abilities as information professionals to fuel political discourse about nuclear issues, and the hope they had that the American people would stop the arms race if presented with the facts, gave the LNAC librarians the endurance they needed to run the race against the militarists who had such a huge head start on them.

Traditionalist and Sixties librarians debated about the value and ethics of neutrality as a professional ideal, with the newer librarians making some qualifications to the doctrine of impartiality. As a professional ethos,

traditionalist librarians believed in protecting intellectual freedom by building balanced collections, encompassing all points of view in services, and espousing a neutral, passive professional agenda. Socially responsible librarians of the Sixties countered that librarians could not really stay neutral, because to do so was to vote for the prevailing ideology, and librarians made value-based decisions each day about what to add or discard from their collections. Accordingly, these reformers contended that librarians should express socially responsible viewpoints in their selection of books, films, and program ideas as well as by speaking out as librarians in political venues. Ensuring intellectual freedom for these new socially responsible librarians meant adding works to a collection to balance it out against mainstream ideology and give voices to the oppressed, as well as rejecting books that argued for bigotry, evil, and the denial of the freedom of other people's rights to express themselves. These points provided some stepping stones to radicalism.

While taking some steps towards radicalism on the points made by the Sixties librarians, LNAC librarians of the Eighties made their huge leap from neutralism to radicalism by pointing out that debates about intellectual freedom and neutrality had little meaning if libraries and their societies were destroyed. Their appeals mainly stemmed from their responsibility to take proactive political steps to prevent the destruction of library information, and more importantly, the people who used it.

The *Almanac's* creators thus believed that their drive to stop the apocalypse gave them a very strong justification for a one-sided presentation of their issue; toward anti-nuclear radicalism. In their defenses against neutralist critics, the writers of the *Almanac* sometimes resorted to some of the same intellectual freedom arguments for activism that Sixties librarians had used, which still hinged on attempts to ensure adequate representation of all valid points of view in a library. However, most LNAC members became even more extreme in their thinking, going further in taking a stand and choosing not to worry about representing both sides of the story. The *Almanac* shows that they consistently chose to only focus on one angle: that of peace. And peace to them meant disarmament.

The LNAC librarians had a trump card that in their mind shattered any counter-argument by neutralists and made debates about objectivity moot—the world would probably end if librarians did not convert to anti-nuclear ideologies. Apocalyptic prophecies gave activist librarians *an urgency and justification for radicalism* never before seen in the profession. While librarians through the ages had sought to ward off direct threats to their collections, few had faced the kind of global threat that librarians of the Eighties faced, and the extreme nature of this threat sparked LNAC's high degree of radicalism. The stakes had gotten higher for librarians and humanity as a whole in the Eighties than ever before. The *Almanac* conveys the frenzy and fervor LNAC members

felt about the nuclear issue, the explosive energies in their hearts that helped to break down the wall of neutrality. In ways never seen before in the library profession, LNAC launched a preemptive strike to change government policies, and advocated radical and detailed changes to everything from diplomacy to federal spending. Librarians of the past sometimes took political positions against the direct threats to collections posed by censorship, but this group of courageous men and women took it one step further and demanded that we the people needed to be protected from the ultimate censorship: the complete annihilation of all known information.

The argument that the *Almanac's* writers developed—that protection of books and people beats out neutrality as the main professional ideal for librarians—provided a clear justification for radicalism in what was one of America's most politically neutral professions. The *Almanac's* editors noted in 1985 that:

Society looks to librarians as specially trained professionals who provide information necessary for the common good. Our profession is beginning to realize the necessity of taking a stand on the issue which has the potential of destroying all civilization.⁹²

This statement encapsulates the reasoning behind LNAC's jump from neutrality to radicalism. Librarians had a higher duty than staying neutral; they had a responsibility to spread information for the common good and uphold civilization.

In placing the *Almanac* within the general history of American activism, LNAC had forged a fairly unique brand of radical activism. They were radicals in the classic sense who participated in protests and gave speeches, but they also functioned as *propaganda publicizers* who made the biggest impact for their cause by collecting and promoting books, periodicals, films, and other informational materials that the other anti-nuclear groups of the Eighties needed. LNAC's important, behind-the-scenes work in arming these groups for peace work is hard to measure, inestimable in its impact. Lawyers, physicians, teachers, professors, scientists, journalists, politicians, and others who fought for disarmament no doubt turned to libraries for information many times to help build their arguments, especially in the pre-internet age. Thanks to LNAC and its allies, libraries could do a more effective job of supplying materials relevant to these other groups' peace efforts.

LNAC's collecting crusades also helped generate general public awareness of the nuclear issue. Librarians were not experts on every political issue, nor did they have the perfect solutions to all social ills. However, as propaganda publicizers, LNAC librarians could catalyze constructive thinking about solutions by offering the public accurate reports about nuclear technologies and

budgets as well as alternative literature published by peace groups to the public. By the end of the 1980's, there were over half a billion library visits per year in the United States.⁹³ Thus, any library collections or peace exhibits could reach large percentages of the American population.

In their final letter in February 1990 to all members, LNAC's Board of Directors articulated that with the end of the Cold War and the de-escalation of the nuclear build-up on both sides, LNAC had completed its mission and the organization would be simplifying and would cease publication of the *Almanac*, vividly ending the letter with "we may all be happy about recent positive progress in arms control and proud of the small part that LNAC has played in these positive events."⁹⁴

LNAC should be commemorated for its own sake, and for establishing a precedent for activism among today's librarians. The *Almanac* reveals that LNAC's librarians took a true grassroots movement and turned it into an organization that was poised to make a difference; it had the ability and wherewithal to take a stand and make a change. LNAC's members conclusively demonstrated that librarians could take on the mantle of radical crusaders, engage in individual and collective activism, and overcome their neutrality mentality. In doing so, the members helped to refute the neutral notion of the librarian who remains behind stacks of books in a quiet library aloof from external political debates. It can easily be said that the Sixties librarians cleared the path for the profession's move away from neutrality and towards political participation but the LNAC librarians paved the way with their endurance and fierce commitment to their mission of stopping the apocalypse.

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