
Introduction

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SOMETIMES I WORRY ABOUT THE PROFESSION. From my perspective, there seems to be a tendency to insulate ourselves from new ideas that are driving the intellectual world to which we are connected. Perhaps worse, within the profession we have evolved a unique discourse with a logic of its own that outsiders often find unpersuasive. For example, the December issue of *American Libraries* contains a feature article entitled "12 Ways Libraries are Good for the Country" (1995, pp. 1113-19). To illustrate the point about our insulated professional world, let me sample a few of these "ways."

The first is labeled "Libraries Inform Citizens," and states that "democracy and libraries have a symbiotic relationship. It would be impossible to have one without the other" (p. 1114). The third argues that "by making all its resources equally available to all members of its community, regardless of income, class, or other factors, the library levels the playing field" (p. 1115). The ninth asserts that at a time when drugs, teenage promiscuity, violence, and divorce tear at the fabric of family values, "the American family's best friend, the library, has stepped into the breach with services guaranteed to hone coping skills" (p. 1118). The tenth is titled "Libraries Offend Everyone." A "willingness" a "duty" to "offend connotes a tolerance and a willingness to look at all sides of an issue that would be good for the nation in any context. It is particularly valuable when combined with the egalitarianism and openness that characterize libraries" (p. 1118).

All of these statements are offered as if they were absolute truths, yet all of the statements are unsupported by any proof, do not appear to have

been subject to any scholarly scrutiny, and, as far as I can tell, are not based on any research. These days I spend much of my time reading scholarship grounded in race, class, gender, Third World, and sexual orientation perspectives that argue terms like “democracy,” “family values,” and “tolerance” are highly contested and radically contingent. Whether subjected to Michel Foucault’s (1972) archaeology of knowledge, Barbara Hernstein Smith’s (1988) idea that all values are radically contingent, Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, Sandra Harding’s (1991) argument for feminist standpoint theory, or Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) definition of specific taste cultures, the absolutes built into statements like those quoted above will not stand up. It seems that rather than harnessing such powerful ideas to identify an ever-elusive “essence” of librarianship (Budd, 1995), the library profession has, for several generations now, been content not to engage in debate with outside experts, not to leave its insulated world.

In my own research and teaching, I attempt to bring these perspectives to bear on the history of this profession. I tell students that solid research exists to demonstrate that libraries have not only survived in totalitarian countries in this century, often they prospered (Stieg, 1992). I tell them about Annie McPheeters (1988), whose life as a black professional librarian bears witness to the fact that the African-Americans she struggled so hard to serve never enjoyed a level playing field. I also cite research that proves lesbigay families are much less likely than conventional heterosexual couples to find materials in the library to help them cope (Bryant, 1995). And from my own research I have discovered that American libraries have historically not been characterized by egalitarianism and openness (Wiegand, 1993).

But nowhere are the unquestioned absolutes more evident than in the discourse surrounding the Library Bill of Rights. For much of my adult life I have listened to the profession preach—largely to itself, I think—the benefits of the Library Bill of Rights. Do not misunderstand; history shows (and several of the historical pieces in this issue of *Library Trends* validate) that the Library Bill of Rights has done much good. But, by the last decade of the twentieth century, this discourse seems to have evolved a reality of its own that declines to engage the powerful ideas being debated in a broader intellectual world. And within a cocoon-like self-constructed reality, librarians unknowingly (sometimes knowingly, unfortunately) hide from themselves their personal hierarchy of values that frames their materials acquisition, programming, and outreach decisions.

Seldom has the profession actively sought out scholars representing alternative perspectives to debate the validity of principles enunciated in the Library Bill of Rights. Several years ago I witnessed the effect of this insulated discourse at an ALA meeting. In a well-delivered speech, one of the profession’s high profile advocates of intellectual freedom waxed

eloquent about the Library Bill of Rights. After he finished, someone from the audience asked what a local suburban public library—which had the Library Bill of Rights written into its collection development policy—should do about a challenge it was experiencing at the time against the controversial rap group 2 Live Crew. Without hesitation, he argued that because 2 Live Crew’s music was not covered in conventional library reviewing sources, the library had no obligation to stock “that crap” (his words, not mine).

This intellectual freedom advocate seemed oblivious to a behind-the-scenes world of privilege in the American publishing industry—be it print, recording, or video—that greatly advantages certain materials and greatly disadvantages others (and especially those representing voices outside the dominant culture). Who decides what gets reviewed? Whose criteria are applied to these decisions? Are the criteria biased against race, class, or gender? Does the history of the American publishing industry, which counts libraries as a substantial fraction of its market, reflect any of these biases? Is the library—as a market—influenced by these biases? The speaker seemed oblivious to these kinds of questions. And, looking over the crowd, most people (200 strong) appeared to agree with his response.

None of them, I would guess, had ever read Joanna Russ’s (1983) *How To Suppress Women’s Writing*, which demonstrates how a culture has exercised its quiet, but powerful, influence to exclude on the basis of gender at multiple sites in the life cycle. None of them, I would guess, had ever read Edward Said’s (1979) *Orientalism*, which demonstrates how a culture had exercised its quiet but powerful influence to exclude on the basis of race in some of the world’s premier institutions of higher education. None of them, I would guess, had ever read Michel de Certeau’s (1983) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which shows that people appropriate texts differently, and that most of those differences can be traced to race, class, and gender perspectives. I wondered whose culture had evolved the “standards” this white, male, middle-class professional was applying to pronounce 2 Live Crew’s music “crap.”

It was with the intention of bringing different perspectives to bear on the Library Bill of Rights that a decision was made to put together a symposium at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s School of Library and Information Studies for September 29, 1995. As chair of the school’s colloquium committee, I was given carte blanche to organize and invite—as long as it didn’t cost the department any money, of course. But that posed no problem. There is a wealth of talent on the Madison campus, and things came together quickly. My first responsibility was to get a First Amendment scholar from the legal community to tell our audience whether current law supported the principles built into the Library Bill of Rights. Fortunately, Gordon B. Baldwin, Mortimer M. Jackson Professor

of Law at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Law School, quickly and graciously accepted responsibility to deliver the keynote address. "Sounds like fun!" he said to my invitation. Then I gave him his assignment—analyze and critique the Library Bill of Rights based on his perspective as a First Amendment scholar.

To respond to Baldwin, a panel of five was sought, two of whom would take a historical perspective on the Library Bill of Rights, two of whom would represent library constituencies that used the Library Bill of Rights most often to fight challenges, and one of whom could bridge the library and legal communities. All accepted quickly.

For the historical perspective I tapped a colleague and doctoral student. I asked Louise Robbins, who at this writing is fast developing a national reputation as an authority on intellectual freedom in librarianship during the McCarthy era, to take a historically focused look at how the library profession and the American Library Association adhered to Library Bill of Rights principles in the 1950s. I also asked Toni Samek, one of Wisconsin's doctoral students doing a dissertation under my direction on the alternative press and libraries during the Vietnam Era, to take the same approach for the late 1960s and early 1970s.

For contemporary perspectives based on library practice, I asked Dianne McAfee Hopkins, another colleague who has developed a national reputation for research on censorship in school libraries, to analyze how the Library Bill of Rights has functioned in school libraries, where materials were frequently being challenged. Fortunately for our symposium, Dianne was also at the time serving as consultant for the plaintiff in a lawsuit brought against the Olathe, Kansas, school board involving the removal of a book from a high school library. I also asked Ginny Moore Kruse to comment on Baldwin's remarks based on her experiences as director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Cooperative Children's Book Center, which has been on the firing line of challenges to children's books for most of its quarter-century existence. To complete the panel, I asked my wife, Shirley Wiegand, a professor in the University of Oklahoma's Law School, to bridge the worlds of law and librarianship, and to capitalize on her own research concerning state laws governing the disposition of library records.

After putting the program together, the editors of *Library Trends* were contacted to see if they would be interested in publishing the proceedings. They responded quickly and affirmatively. By August 1, Baldwin had finished a first draft of his keynote that was then forwarded to all panel members. I also sent a copy to the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom and invited a member of the office to attend the symposium and write an epilogue to the proceedings.

The symposium went very well; about 150 people attended. Students generated many questions, and my colleagues indicated that they over-

heard several members of the audience say things like “This was fun”; “I never thought of the Library Bill of Rights in that way before”; “Is that really the law?” If these comments are indicative of audience reception, the symposium accomplished its purpose—to bring different perspectives (especially legal and historical perspectives) to the Library Bill of Rights.

I had hoped to present *Library Trends* readers with the polished remarks of all symposium participants, but unfortunately Ginny Moore Kruse became ill at the last moment and was unable to submit a paper in time to meet the deadline. As a substitute, Kathy Wolkoff offered to revise a paper she did for an intellectual freedom class which fit our symposium theme. The original paper had won the library school’s 1995 Valmai Kirkham Fenster Award and came highly recommended by several of my colleagues. After reading it, it was decided to include it with others in this volume because the paper demonstrates that librarians have approached certain false literatures from three different philosophical positions. Taken collectively, these articles expand the debate on the Library Bill of Rights and open new opportunities to more realistically define its limits for the profession.

It is regrettable, however, that this issue of *Library Trends* will not include Ginny Moore Kruse’s remarks on the Library Bill of Rights and children’s libraries; I also regret that the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom failed to answer my invitation to contribute an epilogue to this volume. Having these voices represented would have added significantly to the issue.

Readers should not look for a single theoretical foundation or philosophical perspective here; instead they should expect essays to reflect the richly diverse opinions of contributors. Panelists did not all agree and that is good. It is my hope that readers (and especially students and teachers of intellectual freedom courses in library schools across the country) will engage the thoughts of each of these scholars, debate the merits and demerits of their arguments, and carefully evaluate their research. Only then should they make up their minds. At the very least they should not walk away from this volume without questioning the validity and utility of the Library Bill of Rights, nor should they take solace in unsubstantiated absolutes that will not weather critical analysis outside our professional discourse.

I want to thank all the panel members for participating in the symposium and for tolerating their unforgiving editor. I also want to thank my library school faculty colleagues—especially Interim Director Jim Krikelas—for promoting the symposium on and off campus, and the library school students who came, listened, and had the intellectual courage to question long-held beliefs. I want to thank the University of Wisconsin-Madison for providing the kind of environment where open, free, multidisciplinary inquiry is not only encouraged, but is also expected. Finally, I want to express my thanks to Chris Schladweiler, who carefully

put together the bibliography at the end of this issue, and the *Library Trends* editors, who showed patience and understanding above and beyond the call of duty.

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