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# Libraries in Times of War, Revolution, and Social Change

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The pillage and burning of Iraq's National Library and its National Museum in the spring of 2003 sent cultural shock waves around the world. "Stuff happens," Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. Secretary for Defense, declared offhandedly, dismissing these events.<sup>1</sup> But such events, and the variety of responses that they evoke, raise a number of urgent historical questions to which the articles in this volume represent tentative answers.

The collections and services of libraries and related agencies, such as museums and archives, are important components of social and institutional memory. They are both physical places of intellectual work and highly symbolic places. They represent national and cultural identity and aspirations. They are venues for individualized access to educational and cultural resources. They are also part of an infrastructural continuum for disseminating information, forming opinion, and providing literate recreation. At one end of the infrastructural continuum lie telecommunications, mass media, and more recently the Internet and the World Wide Web. Libraries have traditionally been situated at the other end of this continuum as places of access to the historical diversity of opinion represented in cumulating collections of printed materials, though in the digital era they are clearly moving to a more central position on this continuum.

## LIBRARIES, INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE, AND REVOLUTION

Those who write (and those who read) the history of wars and revolutions have tended to focus their attention on creating (or consuming) inevitably dramatic narratives. An important aspect of these narratives is the causal framework of antecedent, contemporary, and subsequent political, economic, and social developments by means of which the narratives are given coherence and explanatory power. Each of the large categories that

may be used for historical analysis—the social welfare of a people, the structure and interaction of social classes, the nature and conditions of the economy and trade, territorial changes, the interrelationships of the institutions of church and state, the mechanisms of government and the national and international dimensions of political relationships, and ideas of patrimony and cultural heritage, for example—involves at some level an encounter with aspects of the production, communication, and use of information and the mechanisms and practices by means of which such encounters become possible.

It can be argued that information infrastructure—the organizational arrangements, technologies, and practices by means of which information is routinely generated, disseminated, and used within a society—is a basic and all pervasive social “glue.” Both social continuity and social change are dependent on and are supported by this infrastructure. The great libraries of the past, as part of this infrastructure and in so far as they—or records of them—continue to exist, present themselves to us as monuments to the past with all the inertia of warehouses or museums. This is no less true of the great national and research libraries of the present except that they integrate records from the past with those of the present in a distinctive and vital process of historical continuity. Within all of these libraries the recorded heritage of the societies of which they are part gradually accumulates and is preserved and organized for present and future use. Social, cultural, political, religious, and economic practices of every conceivable kind may be reflected in these records. Libraries tie the present—and what is authorized in the present by being incorporated into the collections of libraries—to the past. One might say that their function is to appropriate the past for present purposes. Such libraries often represent the intellectual and cultural authority that an individual or an institution has attained. This authority exacts a special kind of social deference both in the historical period in which it is first recognized and subsequently, especially as the library moves from the private to the public sphere.

Our great national and research libraries are subject themselves to what is usually a slow process of change over time in terms of what they do, how they do it, and for whom. Nevertheless, the substantial buildings in which their physical bulk is manifested are designed to suggest weight, solidity, permanence, and continuity. Libraries so housed are designed to evoke awe, even reverence, toward that which underpins, anchors, and outlasts the evanescent events of daily life. These libraries are often incorporated into the apparatus of government and higher education, where they reflect the power and prestige of the state.

Other libraries are created for special purposes by individuals, local communities, the professions, and commerce and industry, but they have similar functions. They are designed to support the activities of individuals in a local community or the personnel of various organizations and enterprises. Whatever their intellectual scope and physical dimensions, these

libraries also create both a physical and symbolical presence and a sense of organizational identity, permanence, and stability.

During the last several centuries, the history of most nations has been marked by war and revolutions. Some of these wars and revolutions from a Western vantage point are considered to be epoch marking: the English Civil War, the American Revolution and the American Civil War, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the two world wars. That same perspective has yet to be attained for more recent struggles that lie outside a Eurocentric frame of reference, even though the West has often been involved in these struggles militarily and continues to find their outcomes politically and economically troubling. Here one might instance the anti-colonial struggles in Latin America, Africa, and India, and more recently the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the advent of the revolutionary regime of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the theocratic ascendancy in Iran, the internecine struggles in the Balkans, and, of course, the ongoing warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. Equally important have been the political and social transformations associated in South Africa with the imposition and then destruction of apartheid and in Germany and Eastern Europe with the onset and cessation of the Cold War.

As a cultural icon the library's role has been in part to act as a special kind of permanent repository of written heritage. As such, pairing "the library" with revolution and transformation, with turbulence and conflict, seems an odd juxtaposition of antithetical ideas. However, the library and librarians have always consistently played a role—though perhaps rarely a central one—as either victim or agent in the events that characterize periods of social upheaval. Here one might instance the public library acting as a key agency for the Americanization of immigrant populations during the U.S. Progressive Era and libraries as sanctuaries of subversive thought that were subjected to the massive book-burning spectacles orchestrated by the Nazi Party in Germany in 1933. At that time there were pressures to have popular libraries assimilated into the institutional arrangements of the State as instruments of National Socialist ideology. In Russia, popular libraries and special recommendatory reading programs operating through them were viewed by Lenin and his wife Krupskaja as powerful instruments in achieving the ideological transformations they desired in the post-1918 revolutionary communist state. The deliberate, targeted destruction of the National and University Library in Sarajevo in 1992 in the course of the Balkan Wars was as much an attempt to erase the cultural memory of an ethnic or national group as it was to demoralize a city's population. By contrast, the destruction of the Cambodian national library collections in Phnom Peng by Khmer Rouge pig keepers and others in the mid-1970s occurred casually and carelessly through indifference, ignorance, and ideological blindness.

The destruction or loss of libraries can act as a formidable symbol around which to mobilize opinion and support not merely for the reconstitution

of the libraries but also in affirming the value of the cultural heritage and national identity that these depredations had seemed to threaten. One thinks of the international response to the Germans shelling the library of the University of Louvain in both world wars and the response to the destruction of the library in Sarajevo to take just two examples spanning three quarters of a century.

And so we come to the historical questions that are evoked by an off-handed phrase: “stuff happens.” In times of war, revolution, and violent social change, how have libraries as congeries of collections and services but also as physical and symbolical places appeared to the various protagonists—to the revolutionaries in their efforts to overthrow, reform, or replace the existing social and political order and to their opponents who wish to preserve the status quo? How have ordinary people—children, professors and students, civil servants, the man and woman in the street, those involved in the trades and professions, for example—fared in their access to and use of libraries and the literature and other resources libraries contain as they have tried to carry on their daily lives and fulfill the responsibilities of their various occupations? How have libraries and related agencies for the transmission of ideas and cultural and social values and for the shaping of opinion been used and with what effect as great social and political movements—revolutionary movements—begin to take shape and get underway? When, why, and how have libraries variously been pillaged and destroyed or appropriated and reorganized to serve a conqueror or a successful revolution’s purposes?

#### LIBRARY HISTORY SEMINAR XI, OCTOBER 27–30, 2005

These questions lay behind the proposal of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois to the American Library Association’s Library History Round Table to hold the eleventh five-yearly Library History Seminar sponsored by the Round Table at Illinois. The subject proposed for the seminar was “Libraries in Times of War, Revolution, and Social Change.” The seminar took place October 27–30, 2005, at the university’s conference center at Allerton Park and was dedicated to Professor Don Davis, longtime editor of *Libraries and Culture*, on the occasion of his retirement from the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin’s Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

Papers were invited on themes such as the following:

- Books and libraries as agents of cultural memory to be protected, appropriated, or obliterated
- Library collections and services as instruments of political power in providing or withholding access to information
- Libraries as places of refuge, solace, and practical help in times of war, revolution, and social change

- Libraries and their contents as cultural patrimony and as booty
- The nature of the revolutionary cultural and political regimes in which libraries are situated and the attitudes of the regimes to literacy and learning
- And the responsibilities of the international community in creating and enforcing policies and procedures for the protection, reconstitution, and restitution of cultural artifacts, including books and libraries

The twenty-seven articles that follow are drawn from the papers read at the seminar. They have gone through a rigorous process of review. They are not a systematic account across all nations and periods but a reflection of a varied body of scholarship relevant to the general questions with which we began this introduction and to the themes listed in the paragraph above. The articles range in time and place from ancient China, through the Paris Commune of 1871, the First and Second World Wars and the immediate aftermath of these wars, especially in Europe, and to modern Iraq.

There is a special cluster of articles about aspects of the Second World War. These are in a sense led off by Kathy Peiss's masterly account of the development and implementation of the U.S. policy of protecting books and other cultural resources during the course of the war and of the role of librarians, scholars, and ordinary soldiers in carrying out this policy. All of this was pointedly at variance, as Peiss points out, with the lack of such policies in Rumsfeld's Iraq. Nabil Al-Tikriti's paper documents some of the immediate consequences for libraries of the destabilization of Iraq. But the problems he discusses continue and are given vivid and unsettling life by the diary that Saad Eskander, director of the Iraq National Library and Archive is maintaining on the British Library's website.<sup>2</sup> An article in the *New York Times* reports on the diary and offers excerpts from its latest entries for January 2007, such as:

... , he was having trouble repairing the Internet system; the Restoration Laboratory "was hit by 5 bullets"; and "another librarian, who works at the Periodical Department, received a death threat. He has to leave his house and look for another one, as soon as he can; otherwise, he will be murdered."... In mid-January, he published a chart on the impact of sectarian violence on his staff for just the month of December. It included 4 assassinations of employees and 2 kidnappings, 66 murders of staff members' relatives, 58 death threats and 51 displacements.<sup>3</sup>

But in addition to an account of a major library currently in the midst of a war, we have intriguing, perhaps unexpected, and sometimes moving analyses of libraries during the Second World War, in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, for example, in Finnish hospitals, in the American Library in Paris with its formidable protector, the Countess de Chambrun, and of the discussions that took place in Japan about the role of libraries in that wartime society.

Another group of articles is devoted to aspects of Chinese history. Hilde De Weerdts studies the dynastic struggles that led to the dispersal and then attempts to reconstitute the imperial library during the Sung dynasty in the twelfth century. The complexity of what this meant in terms of collecting practices and attitudes to the material collected is extraordinary. The articles of Ping Situ and Chengzhi Wang study the long, eventful history of two ancient libraries that have survived into the present. The unresolved and continuing struggle over ownership within the country of one of these collections is captured in the title of Chengzhi Wang's article, "Badly Wanted, but Not for Reading: The Unending Odyssey of *The Complete Library of Four Treasures* of the Wensu Library"—now wanted in different localities in China for economic and cultural reasons. This kind of contemporary struggle is also the theme of Marek Sroka's account of a similar struggle half a world away from China, a tug-of-war that has gone on over the ownership and location of the music collection of the Prussian State Library. After World War II the collection ended up almost by chance in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, Poland, where it remains, in a sense as the spoils of war, despite numerous attempts to have it repatriated to what is now a unified Germany.

Another group of articles is concerned with children and their reading in wartime. These articles are international in scope. They range from Melanie Kimball's portrait of children's services at the St. Louis Public Library during the First World War, to Debra Mitts-Smith's account of the beautifully named "Le Heure Joyeuse" in Belgium after the First World War, to Chris Lyons's account of the founding and development of the Notre Dame Grace Library in Montreal, Canada, during the Second World War.

Yet another group of articles is concerned with libraries not so much in times of war or revolution but in times of radical social upheaval. Here are accounts of the desegregation of the Houston Public Library during the 1950s and, a generation later, of the attempts of the American Library Association to determine what its role should be in shaping library responses in a period marked by widespread and rapid social change. But in this group too is to be found an account of the complex role of libraries as places of refuge as well as places of information and education during the apartheid era in South Africa and an account of a provincial Russian library system struggling to respond effectively both to the opportunities and the problems created by the fall of communism.

It is not our aim to give an account here of every article in the collection, though each paper has what we believe will be an interesting story to tell. We hope, however, that this volume of *Library Trends* will be full of surprises for both the systematic and casual reader. In this brief introduction, our aim is only to give the reader a sense of the intellectual background for collecting

the papers together in this volume, as well as the variety of the papers and the range of perspectives, localities, periods, personalities, institutions, and analytical frames that they represent. We wish also to offer our thanks to the contributors for their patience and responsiveness to what was sometimes an intense and for some disquieting editorial process. They have allowed us to provide something extraordinary to our readers who, we hope, will enjoy and be informed by the papers as much as we have enjoyed and been informed by them in preparing this volume for publication.

#### APPENDIX: LIBRARY HISTORY SEMINAR XI, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, OCTOBER 27–30, 2005

This issue of *Library Trends* could not have happened without what was a very successful seminar on Libraries in Times of War, Revolution, and Social Change. The following organizational details about the seminar are provided for the historical record.

##### *Organizing Committee*

The University of Illinois organizing committee members were indispensable and active players in organizing the seminar, seeking funds, and reviewing abstracts for papers to be presented at the seminar. They are listed here with heartfelt thanks:

Don Krummel, Professor Emeritus, Graduate School of Library and Information Science

Nelly González, Professor of Library Administration, Head of Latin American Library

Al Kagan, Professor of Library Administration, African Studies Bibliographer

Karen Wei, Professor of Library Administration, Head of Asian Library

Jo Kibbee, Associate Professor of Library Administration, Head of Reference

Miranda Remnek, Professor of Library Administration, Head of Slavic Library

Barbara Ford, Mortenson Distinguished Professor and Director of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs

Susan Schnuer, Assistant Director of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs

Steve Witt, Associate Director of the Center for Global Studies

Lynne Rudasill, Assistant Professor of Library Administration, Global Studies Librarian

##### *Honorary Committee Members*

Alistair Black, Professor of Library History, School of Information Management, Leeds Metropolitan University

John Y. Cole, Director of the Center for the Book, Library of Congress  
Donald G. Davis Jr., Professor of Library History, School of Information,  
University of Texas at Austin

Christine Jenkins and W. Boyd Rayward were co-chairs of the organizing committee and of the seminar.

We wish to place on record our appreciation of the invaluable help of a number of students and above all of Kathy Painter of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science who managed all of the logistical detail of the seminar with consummate skill, good humor, and patience.

#### *Administrative and Financial Support*

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- The George A. Miller Programs Committee for support of Professor Kathy Peiss as Miller Committee Visiting Professor
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- The Graduate School of Library and Information Science
- The University Library
- The Center for Global Studies
- The European Union Center
- The Center for African Studies
- The Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center

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#### NOTES

1. See <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/04/11/sptj.irq.pentagon/>. See the articles by Kathy Peiss and Nabil Al-Tikriti in this issue.
2. <http://www.bl.uk/iraqdiary01.html>
3. Patricia Cohen, "Baghdad Day to Day: Librarian's Journal," *New York Times*, February 7, 2007 [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/07/books/07libe.html?\\_r=2&th&emc=th&oref=slogin&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/07/books/07libe.html?_r=2&th&emc=th&oref=slogin&oref=slogin)

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W. Boyd Rayward was educated in Australia and the United States where he received an M.S. degree from the University of Illinois and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago. He is currently professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois. He has held professorial and deanship positions in the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago and in the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. He was editor of the *Library Quarterly* from 1975 to 1980. He is currently North American editor of *Library History* and has recently become co-editor with John Unsworth of *Library Trends*. His research examines the history of the international organization of knowledge. Recent studies have been on Paul Otlet's ideas in relation to hypertext and the beginnings of modern information science, a number of utopian schemes of knowledge organization including H. G. Wells's idea of a world brain, and, from a historical point of view, the implications of digitization and networking for libraries and museums. He

is currently preparing for press a volume of contributed papers entitled *European Modernism and the Information Society*.

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Christine Jenkins is associate professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she teaches courses in youth services, young adult literature, and literacy. Her research explores various aspects of historical and contemporary connections between texts and young readers. A former school librarian with an M.S. in library and information science and an M.A. in English/children's literature, she received her Ph.D. in library and information science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1995; her dissertation is a historical study of the role of U.S. youth services librarians in defending young people's right to read during the early Cold War era. Her work has appeared in *Library Quarterly*, *Library Trends*, *Libraries and Culture*, *Horn Book Magazine*, *VOYA*, *School Library Journal*, and *Book List*. She recently co-authored (with Michael Cart) *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969–2004* (Scarecrow Press, 2006). Chapters by Jenkins are included in *Learning, Culture, and Community in Online Education: Research and Practice* (Peter Lang, 2004); *Books, Libraries, Reading, and Publishing in the Cold War* (Library of Congress, 2002); and *Reclaiming the American Library Past: Writing the Women In* (Ablex, 1996).