

Librarians as Professionals

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UP THROUGH THE 1950s, and even into the early 1960s, a student of the professions could say: "Everywhere in American life, the professions are triumphant. . . . The college graduates of today are . . . convinced that the future belongs to the professions . . ."1 without danger of dissent from listeners or readers. By the early 1970s, a similar audience concurrence would greet a statement like this: "Everyone is down on the old-style concept of professionalism today: those who are served by professionals . . . the students . . . the paraprofessionals . . . and finally, many practicing professionals themselves."²

While neither of these statements was meant to refer to librarianship as such (indeed, their authors would probably not have admitted librarians to the august company of professionals at all), the shift in attitude they reflect is a pretty accurate description of the change among librarians in their outlook toward professional status. What happened to cause such a reversal?

Well, what happened between the 1950s and the 1970s was: the 1960s. This term, "the 1960s," will be used throughout this paper as a generalized designator for that period, and more loosely for the viewpoint that characterized it: a posture of dissidence, questioning and revolt against the Establishment that for librarians sprang already full-grown into the 1969 conference of the American Library Association (ALA) in Atlantic City. This viewpoint had its roots in the 1950s and still has its adherents in the 1970s; as the reader will discover, many of the more cogent statements of this "1960s viewpoint" will be from publications

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issued in the 1970s. The term is used not as a strict chronological concept, but as a kind of shorthand for a revolution in attitude. It is an important factor in any discussion of the topic of this paper, for "professionalism" is an almost perfect symbol for that which the traditionalists revered as an enviable ideal, and what the dissidents saw as the very essence of all that they detested about the Establishment. The 1960s marked the turning point.

The earlier view seldom criticized professionalism as an ideal toward which librarians should strive. In this, librarians were no different from most other occupations. As L. Carroll DeWeese points out:

Occupation has gradually replaced traditionally accepted status-gaining attributes such as ancestry, ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation. . . . Occupation reveals more about a person's social standing than any other single attribute, with the possible exception of race. . . . If a practitioner wishes to improve his occupational status, he must adopt one of three strategies: (1) leave his occupation for one of higher status; (2) increase his status within his occupation; or (3) improve the status of his occupation.³

The first two strategies are, of course, personal solutions for individual situations, but the third is more generalized and appears frequently in the library literature. The basic assumption is that improvement of the status of librarianship would be most readily accomplished if librarians could win acceptance of it as a profession, and the attempts to gain that acceptance take certain familiar forms: (1) the outright claim that it is a profession, in the hope that someone will believe it; (2) attempts to draw parallels between librarianship and already accepted professions to substantiate the claim to the recognition; or (3) proposals that librarians assume more of the familiar characteristics of the acknowledged professions to press their claim more convincingly.

It is interesting, in the light of the continuing struggle to gain professional recognition a century later, that Melvil Dewey in the first issue of *American Library Journal* made bold to claim it as already accomplished. "The time has at last come," said he, "when a librarian may, without assumption, speak of his occupation as a profession."⁴ "At last," indeed! The struggle had hardly begun.

Dewey's overconfidence reflects not only his familiar, personal self-assurance, but the spirit of the time. Librarians began to be conscious of their status and their identity as a definable calling at the same time that

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practitioners in many other fields were doing so. Professional associations began to appear in the latter half of the nineteenth century — the first national law association was founded in 1878; social work in 1874; and between 1864 and 1888, nine separate specialties within medicine all established associations. Even sports began to professionalize; 1876 marks the establishment not only of the ALA, but of the National League as well.⁵

Until the turn of the century, these strivings for professional status were generalized and uncritical. The traditional professions had associations, so other occupations formed associations. The traditional professions put their training programs into universities, so other occupations developed university training programs. The traditional professions had codes of ethics, so other occupations wrote codes of ethics. The “inevitable” result, that was sure to come if one did the right thing, was sufficient justification.

The first really critical look at what “professional” means, and whether these indicators of professionalism were really sufficient, came from Abraham Flexner. In 1910 he published his *Medical Education in the United States and Canada*,⁶ and in 1915 gave his influential address, “Is Social Work a Profession?”⁷ All current discussions in any professional or would-be professional field about its professional status and its prognosis for successful acceptance as a profession derive from these two sources. In librarianship the parallel landmark title is, of course, Williamson’s *Training for Library Service*,⁸ which raised the same kinds of questions about library education that Flexner had raised about medical education, and introduced the same kind of drive within the field toward critical analysis and tangible improvements.

It was also in the second decade of this century that Louis D. Brandeis formulated a definition of a profession that served as a core for almost all definitions thereafter until the dissidence of the 1960s. It is useful to repeat that definition, because its elements recur throughout the subsequent discussions of professions up to the present time: “First, a profession is an occupation for which the necessary preliminary training is intellectual in character, involving knowledge and to some extent learning, as distinguished from mere skill. Second, it is an occupation which is pursued largely for others and not merely for one’s self. Third, it is an occupation in which the amount of financial return is not the accepted measure of success.”⁹

In his 1915 address, Flexner added to Brandeis’s insistence on an intellectual component and an altruistic motivation the ideas that professional practice puts knowledge to use, and that this craftsmanship is

teachable, learnable and socially useful; that society turns over control of the profession to the profession itself for self-policing, accepting the premise that the quality of professional performance is capable of judgment only by its own practitioners; and that a profession transcends rigid and mechanical application of rules: "what matters most is professional spirit."¹⁰

From that time forward, explorations by different occupations of their own qualifications for professional standing looked to existing definitions, and then added elements of their own. It is a standard format for articles and books about an occupation's professional status, not only in librarianship but in all fields, to begin with definitions already formulated by others and to examine the occupation for evidence that these requirements are being met.¹¹ But as the 1960s approached, the social scientists increasingly placed their emphasis on intangible indicators and not just on such easily identifiable attributes as whether the field has a lengthy training program, has an organization, and provides a full-time occupation for its practitioners. An interesting variation was introduced by Nathan Glazer, who examined the characteristics of those occupations which have not yet qualified for professional recognition rather than those which have.¹² As shall be seen, the parallels between librarianship and the not-yet-professions are as great as those which librarians had so assiduously been trying to draw between librarianship and that "in" group.

But while librarians tried to come to terms with the discrepancies between the accepted definitions of what constitutes a profession, and what they found in their own occupation's theory and practice, there was never a doubt that professional status is what they wanted and that if there were areas in which they did not yet measure up, the logical course of action was to work to remedy these inadequacies. The tangible ones were comparatively easy; they could simply go out and get one of each thing they now lacked. Shaffer's study is typical in its treatment of the characteristics of librarianship as unfavorably compared with those of the accepted professions:

No form of internship or student librarianship is required. . . . Medicine, law, and theology all require supervised training experience. . . . Not every library school is accredited by the American Library Association. In contrast, every medical school is accredited by the American Medical Association. . . . Only one third of the eligible librarians throughout the country are members of the American Library Association. . . . Of the 228,926

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physicians in the United States, approximately 69 percent are members of the American Medical Association.¹³

Barber derides the marginal or emerging professions for this kind of surface approach to the establishment of professional qualifications;¹⁴ Pierce Butler identified this tendency much earlier, and put it in its place: “[The librarian] has always been inclined to imitate the outward forms of the other professions before attaining the corresponding internal development.”¹⁵

This does not mean that librarianship exhibits none of the essential characteristics of the established professions. A key indicator — one that turns up in virtually every set of criteria in the literature of professionalism — is altruism. It appears in a variety of formulations: “an orientation toward service,”¹⁶ a “primary orientation to the community interest rather than to individual self-interest,”¹⁷ “a *service orientation*, which means that he [the professional person] uses his expertise on behalf of the particular needs of his client,”¹⁸ “commitment to the social welfare . . . altruistic, public service-oriented,”¹⁹ “the ideal of service,”²⁰ and from the very beginning, in Brandeis, “an occupation which is pursued largely for others and not merely for one’s self.”²¹ Until the 1960s, this was seen as a *sine qua non* of professionalism. Certainly the distinction between the professional and the businessman has rested almost solely on the professional’s more direct concern with community interest and the welfare of society rather than profit and self-interest. Shera and McFarland suggest that one of the reasons that information scientists seem less concerned than librarians about establishing their credentials as professionals may be in part because “information science is only incidentally service-directed.”²²

This devotion to the client’s interests rather than to one’s own, this “dedication to a 24-hour day,”²³ came to be questioned in recent years; it was no longer seen as particularly admirable that the one thing that really gave librarianship its claim to professional status was its adherence to Brandeis’s criterion: “an occupation in which the amount of financial return is not the accepted measure of success.” But the question is raised about the validity of the criterion itself, not about the librarians’ failure to meet it. So long as this selfless commitment to service was considered a professional value as such, library service received very high marks.

This is not so in all areas, however. Most of the definitions stress a body of information and theory that is more than simply empirical. Flexner stated that the members of a profession must “constantly resort to the laboratory and seminar for a fresh supply of facts”;²⁴ Maureen Harris

specifies that professional knowledge is "a body of information and theory which has been analysed and tested, and which is capable of extension through research";²⁵ Greenwood stresses that the special knowledge of the professional cannot just be skills per se, but skills that "flow from and are supported by a fund of knowledge that has been organized into an internally consistent system, called a *body of theory*." Preparation for a profession, says Greenwood, "must be an intellectual as well as a practical experience."²⁶

Librarians themselves have recognized their weakness in scholarly research and publication, and the social scientists have not been diffident about reminding them of it, lest they forget:

The essential missing ingredient [in librarianship] that keeps it from attaining professional status is some important creative content to the profession itself. . . . the characteristic of the intellectual occupations is that they add to the core of our culture rather than serve the fringes. Certainly librarians are the keepers of our culture and without them much that is central to our intellectual heritage would disappear in a welter of confusion. But it is the scientists, humanists, writers, philosophers who add significant increments to our cultural heritage. Librarians share with teachers and advertising personnel the characteristic of being close to the intellectual life, but not in it to the same degree that are the creative professions.²⁷

More than fifteen years have passed since Rossi's indictment, and there have been some creative contributions to the literature since then that he could not have considered, but the progress is slow. There had also been an 11-year lapse between Rossi's statement and the cold comfort of Butler's observation that "many considerations suggest that among librarians the development of a complete professional scholarship is retarded rather than unnecessary."²⁸ The necessity meanwhile has become more urgent, but the retardation seems not to have been notably reversed.

It is at least conceivable that the library field's inadequate creation of an intellectually respectable body of knowledge and theory has affected its success in achieving two other important hallmarks of professionalism: autonomy and authority. Autonomy is related to the client's confidence in the professional as one who, because of extended technical education or training, knows better than anyone else what is good for the client. For that reason, the professional subjects his decisions only to the review of colleagues, and demands autonomy of judgment of his own performance.

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This is seen as "the ultimate criterion of professionalization according to most sociologists."²⁹ Such confidence is based upon the body of knowledge which is exclusively that of the professional group. "The fully fledged profession can claim the right to be final arbiter in problems under its jurisdiction by referring to its codified knowledge, over which its mastery is greater than that of any other group."³⁰ Jencks and Riesman go even further:

We do not regard an occupation as a profession simply because it requires advanced training or expert knowledge. We use the term only to describe an occupation that is relatively colleague-oriented rather than client-oriented . . . professionalization means that the practitioners seek the exclusive right to name and judge one another's mistakes.³¹

Librarianship has achieved this status to a certain extent: its programs of preparation for library work are accredited by its own organization, and the standards were set by librarians. But appointment to "professional" positions in libraries is not limited just to those who have the accredited degree; neither the public nor the field itself is convinced that successful achievement in librarianship must be based on the systematic knowledge or doctrine that can only be acquired through the long period of prescribed training. By and large, the degree stands primarily for some training in skills, and many librarians themselves seem to want it that way. Under the circumstances, and in view of the librarians' frequent public insistence that they are not prepared to tell people what to read, it is not surprising that the general public is not completely convinced that the librarian knows better than anyone else what is good for the user of libraries.

The relationship of autonomy to authority is clear. In the field of technical competence, the professional has a monopoly of judgment. Thus, the professional serves clients, not customers (the customer is always right). Ideally, the client derives a sense of security from the professional's assumption of authority, and concurs in surrendering to the professional the judgment and prescription.³² But this is precisely what the librarian almost never does: he does not prescribe. And for that reason, Goode feels that librarianship may never attain true professional status.

At present, the librarian has little power over his clients. They do not pay individually for his services. . . . The client has the right to check out and use the materials of the library even if the

librarian believes he cannot use them to advantage. The librarian is a gatekeeper who can exclude almost no one . . . a stockroom custodian who must hand over any of his stock even if he is sure the person really wants or needs something else. . . .

This comes dangerously close to the position taken by a minority of librarians, that their duty is to give the people what they want. In such a conception . . . he yields a central meaning of service, the commitment to run personal risks in order to fulfill a high obligation to the society, to *educate* the reader and the public. This strain between the wishes and the real needs of a clientele is perhaps to be found in all professions, but in established professions more often it is resolved by the professional's decision.³³

The failure — or the reasoned refusal — of the librarian to prescribe and to dictate goes back in part to the absence of a body of knowledge unique to the librarian on which he or she can base the judgment of what is best for the client. It is not simply that the client — the library user — initiates the relationship; that is true of the medical doctor and the patient also, but the difference is crucial: the doctor determines the solution to the client's problem, not the client, and may withhold professional service unless the client agrees to follow the advice given. "Professionals *profess*. They profess to know better than others the nature of certain matters and to know better than their clients what ails them or their affairs. This is the essence of the professional idea and the professional claim."³⁴

While librarians have tended, since about the end of World War I, to back away from this authoritarian mandate, it was not unknown in the history of American librarianship. In the past librarians saw selection of materials as one of their most important professional responsibilities, and they carefully put into their libraries only those things that they thought the library's users should know. They exercised considerable control over what the public could have access to, and if there were materials that were — in the judgment of the librarian — suitable for some but not for others, they had no qualms about closed shelves, guided reading and even the elimination of information from the public catalog that might lead the "wrong" people to the potentially dangerous works. Since the early 1920s, however, the conviction has been growing among librarians that the free public library should be both free and public, and they have moved increasingly in the direction of absolute freedom of access. In its

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statement of policy, which takes on the character of an official statement from the profession as a whole, the Office for Intellectual Freedom of the ALA has presented the extreme absolutist view:

In basic terms, intellectual freedom means the right of any person to believe whatever he wants on any subject, and to express his beliefs or ideas in whatever way he thinks appropriate. . . . The definition of intellectual freedom has a second, integral part: namely, the right of unrestricted access to all information and ideas regardless of the medium of communication used.³⁵

It is the second part of that statement that has been taken as the description of the librarian's role — to facilitate unrestricted access for all persons to all information and ideas, subject to no judgment as to the value, appropriateness, or even potential harm to the patron.

Not all members of ALA, to say nothing of the entire membership of the library occupation, are willing to go this far. There are many different reasons why librarians back away from so absolute a position, but in the context of this paper, the key concern would be the professional person's obligation to exercise some kind of expert control over the materials disseminated by the library for which he or she is responsible. Even in the militant 1960s, an echo of this view of the librarian's responsibility, as the holder of special knowledge, to use that knowledge to prescribe, continues to find support.

The professional, by virtue of his training, experience, and specialized knowledge, offers the client the counsel, service, or prescription which he views to be appropriate *whether or not* this is precisely what the client wants or thinks he wants. The professional's guidance may not always be followed, but the judgment and recommendation of the professional are not open to question or debate by the layman. The professional *knows*.³⁶

Thus, even at the height of the antiprofessional movement there was recognition that: A "qualified professional is supposed to be an *authority* on his subject and an *expert* on its application to the solution of particular problems presented by clients. . . . Professional authority in its pure form is in the nature of *advice*."³⁷

But here one encounters an interesting reservation that has traditionally been placed upon the professional person's authority. The traditional premise is that the professional's knowledge is assumed to be specific; that is, "a professional does not have the license to be a 'wise man'

outside the area defined by his training."³⁸ Professional persons are expected to limit their services to their own area of competence, not use their cloak of authority to cover other areas in which they have a personal or private interest but no technical expertise. This "functional specificity," as Talcott Parsons calls it,³⁹ would seem to limit librarians to bibliothecal matters, but rule out their giving advice or taking positions on matters of subject content. This has always been a sticky point in librarianship which, as shall be seen, caused a great deal of trouble in a variety of interesting and contradictory ways in the social responsibility debates of the 1960s.

After the 1920s, the library could begin to claim to be meeting the professional standard of functional specificity in a sense. The objectivity and neutrality embedded in most professions' codes of ethics had become a guiding principle of library service. Provision of materials on all sides of an issue was seen as an essential of the library's role in the society. Librarians might exercise judgment about the quality of a book, but not about the ideas in it; in that sense, librarians believed that their role paralleled that of the doctors who could not refuse service because of political or moral views held by the patient with which they disagreed. As a private person, a librarian could believe in and work for any cause that he or she chose, but in one's professional capacity one was to remain objective and uninvolved. The analogy is not quite exact; it is true that the physician does not withhold service on the basis of the patient's political or moral views, but he or she may refuse a service which in his or her judgment would be detrimental to the patient. The librarians' expertise in the realm of books and reading inevitably touches upon subject matter in a way that health care does not, and the client of the library assumes that it is on subject matter as well as format that the librarian possesses special knowledge. The librarians' absolutist view of free access to all ideas was meant to meet the professional criterion of neutrality, but the concept may not be transferable without considerable distortion.

This leads to another characteristic of the established professions: a code of ethics. The code of ethics is a recognition by an occupational group of the responsibility that goes with its privileges. Because a great measure of control is handed over by the society to the profession itself, it becomes necessary that a profession be governed by a code of ethical conduct, not only to protect the interests of the clients, but to protect the profession as well against charlatans and improper practitioners. "The general performance norms [regulated by ethical codes] refer primarily to peers, since incompetent or slovenly performance, or failure to protect a client's interest, necessarily reflects discredit on the professional collec-

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tivity."⁴⁰ Thus, codes of ethics are a means for controlling possible abuses that could arise from the monopoly granted by community sanction. These abuses would affect the public adversely, but if they were to become conspicuous they would also lead to revocation of the profession's monopoly.⁴¹ Both altruism and self-interest dictate the formulation of a code.

The library occupation has several documents in which some aspect of professional conduct is regulated. Policy statements — such as the Library Bill of Rights⁴² — are related to ethical professional conduct, and several sets of standards for different types of libraries contain elements of an ethical code. This formal code of ethics has never met with much approval, however, either among librarians or among nonlibrarian students of librarianship as a profession. Boissannas says of the 1938 Code of Ethics of the ALA that: it does not set forth "the laws and rules which members of the profession must abide by in their relationship with their clients and among themselves. . . . It tells the librarian to obey his employer and to live for the library and its users."⁴³ Goode is even more outspoken: "How lacking in this code is any sense of drama, of moral urgency! How absent is a sturdy awareness that the profession has a task, a destiny, a set of issues about which it is concerned."⁴⁴ Others had taken an equally dim view; as a result an ALA Council Committee on Professional Ethics worked for four years on a new "Statement on Professional Ethics" (note that it is called a statement, not a code) and asked for reactions from the membership.⁴⁵ There was little response, and a second call for reaction was solicited in late 1977.⁴⁶ As of this writing, no formal report has been made by the committee, but Shirley Fitzgibbons, writing in the *ALA Yearbook 1977* says that Goode's criticism of 1962 "is applicable again in reaction to the 1975 statement."⁴⁷

Librarianship is not, it seems, absolutely alone in this failure. Bledstein accuses the professions in general of "regularly mistitling practical codes of etiquette by referring to them in the lofty name of 'codes of ethics.'"⁴⁸ A code of etiquette merely describes the conventional forms of intercourse by which practitioners relate to each other; a code of ethics should prescribe the moral responsibility of the professional to the public. It remains to be seen whether the librarians will write such a document — and live up to it.

Of all the characteristics identified with professionalism which librarianship has been striving to attain, the one in which they have been least successful may be that of "sanction of the community."⁴⁹ Community sanction, of course, grows out of the community's acceptance of a profession's ability to demonstrate the other characteristics: its altruism, its

possession of expertise in a special field of knowledge important to the community, its authority. Convinced that a particular occupational group does exhibit these qualities, the community acknowledges its sanction by according it the right to accredit, control admissions to the field, preserve the confidentiality of its relationship with its clients, and regulate and police itself. It is thus a demonstration of community trust, confidence and even awe in the face of the social value that the occupation preserves and delivers.

Librarianship has not yet convinced the community at large that its services are necessary in the same way that law and medicine have been able to do. In this connection, it is useful to note a distinction which Wilbert E. Moore draws between *prestige* (the recognition and awards that accrue to a position in a fairly organized social system), and *esteem* (the deference accorded superior role performance in a position).⁵⁰ In librarianship there are likely to be more instances of esteem earned by individual performance than of recognition and awards accruing to the title "librarian" as such. One does not get the preferred treatment from a headwaiter by announcing that one is a librarian that he or she might well receive by announcing the title "doctor"; "the public considers hospitals indispensable and also nurses; considers schools indispensable and also teachers; considers libraries indispensable but not librarians."⁵¹ The reason for this, Gwinup believes, is that librarians have not distinguished between what is professional work in their occupation and what is not, and as a consequence have failed to create the favorable public image that calls forth community sanction.

An important aspect of this failure is the public's perception of the comparative importance of the librarians' decisions. As Goode suggests, "the claim to autonomy or trust loses its point unless the client or society can *in fact* be *harmed* because of unethical or incomplete work by the practitioner."⁵² This represents, of course, an element of risk that is part of the responsibility of the professional person, who must make decisions and act on them, recognizing that the consequences of that action can be vital in both its strict and in its extended sense. "The image of the librarian is primarily deprecatory, not threatening: he is thought to be able to help, but not to harm."⁵³

Librarians have corroborated this image by their refusal to prescribe, their self-effacing evasion of decision-making responsibility ("Who am I to say what a person ought to read; I'm only the librarian"), and their unwillingness to face the consequences if their professed ideals were carried out in practice.⁵⁴ Within their own ranks, they are not agreed that

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theirs is a body of knowledge that must be mastered to assure professional performance; that those without the qualification perform less well than those with it; that a degree in some other field isn't equally useful in preparing for acceptable performance; that librarians do bring to bear a certain knowledge, skill and aptitude that is not matched, let alone surpassed, by the common sense and goodwill of the interested volunteer and amateur. The image is inoffensive, nonassertive, compliant; it does not command the deference and the respect that leads to the community sanction accorded the well-established professions.

There is a social factor involved here which Peter Rossi thinks may well be the major reason that librarians find it difficult to achieve a true professional status: "Any occupation in which there is a high proportion of women suffers a special disability. . . . Women depress the status of an occupation because theirs is a depressed status in the society as a whole."⁵⁵ Note that this is not an attack on the abilities of women, but rather on the society which jumps to a foregone conclusion about women's role. The feminist writers have noted the same phenomenon, citing it to show that the depressed status of a predominantly feminine occupation occurs not because women are incapable of performing at a professional level, but because the society has been — and continues to be — so stereotyped in its view of "feminine" characteristics that the criteria for professional status would seem not to be fulfilled in an occupation which women predominate.⁵⁶

As a result of this stereotypic approach to libraries and librarianship, the dominance of women in the field has held down salaries and social status and thus has limited the field's appeal to men — and to many women — who sought a more challenging and satisfying prospective career. Moreover, where women do accept the role that society has defined for them, they do not consider it appropriate to exhibit the sense of commitment, the drive to lead rather than to follow, the necessary assertiveness required to prescribe, or to demand professional rights and responsibilities. The accusation thus becomes self-fulfilling. Several psychological profiles of librarians, constructed in the days when the masculinity-femininity measure was widely used in personality testing, found the so-called "feminine" characteristics to be typical of librarians, whether male or female.⁵⁷ It could hardly have been otherwise, when love of books or a preference for reading were considered to be "feminine" traits. It is difficult to break out of a vicious circle.

This, then, was the state of librarianship on the threshold of the "1960s." Social scientists and librarians alike were agreed that librarian-

ship did not yet come up to very many of the professional standards. The pessimists among them concluded that it never would: "Many aspiring occupations and semi-professions [of which librarianship is one] will never become professions in the usual sense: they will never reach the levels of knowledge and dedication to service the society considers necessary for a profession."⁵⁸ Depending on how near or how remote the chances appeared to be for breaking into the charmed circle, they listed librarianship with other "aspiring professions" like pharmacy and nursing — or with plumbing, janitorial work and tree surgery. The optimists, on the other hand, were convinced that the areas of weakness could be identified and repaired; they saw professionalism as a continuum, with librarianship "on its way to becoming an organized profession."⁵⁹ A full decade after being characterized thus by Leigh, Goode saw librarianship as being still on its way.⁶⁰

As consolation, librarians preferred to think of "professionalism" as a kind of abstract ideal rather than a description of actual practice in any occupation. They decided it would be more accurate not to use the term *professional* to describe a field, but rather to raise the question of "how professionalized" it is,⁶¹ and to seek constantly to move toward the "high" end of the scale. What no one questioned, however, was that the ideal of professionalism as such was one toward which librarianship *should* aspire.

The 1960s changed all that. The major planks in the platform of the 1960s' dissidents were an opposition to structure, to the status quo, and to the Establishment. Social change was the watchword, and change, not as a means but as an end in and of itself, was seen as a value. As Paul Goodman put it at the time: "Along with science, the young discredit the professions in general, and the whole notion of 'disciplines' and academic learning. . . . Rationality itself is discredited."⁶² Abstraction, exploitation, domination were the enemy — and all of these were characteristics of professionalism as they saw it. Typical of the attitude were such statements as these:

I no longer believe that professionalization is the solution. On the contrary it is the problem.⁶³

My aim is . . . to alert middle-class librarians to their unconscious class prejudice, embodied specifically in elitist ideas like "Professionalism."⁶⁴

No one who has accepted the title of professional, or who aspires to it, can be anything but quiet, careful and conservative, because his entire status rests on these qualities.⁶⁵

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Given the drive toward change, almost every characteristic traditionally assigned to professionalism began to be seen as a fault rather than a virtue: formalization of qualifications, testing and screening for credentials, institutionalization of procedures, recognition of certified authority, professional rather than community control of standards and ethics, emphasis on formal education, esoteric knowledge, system, respectability, meritocracy, ambition, prescription.⁶⁶

As to the professionals' claim that their focus was on service to others rather than on self-advancement and advantage, the dissidents simply didn't believe it. Dissidents saw themselves as "primarily concerned with the well-being of people, and with the social change necessary to achieve it,"⁶⁷ but when a professional practitioner claimed to believe also in the goal of the well-being of people, when the accomplishments in the social realm were cited along with an acknowledgment of abuses, they were called liars, finks, mystifiers, or deluded. What the dissidents wanted was simply to heal, teach, serve justice, or communicate information — and they saw *instead* that one had to become a doctor, teacher, lawyer or librarian — a member of an established, institutionalized and rigid profession with its complex system of training schools, licensing procedures, professional associations and regulations. When asked whether, in any social order they could envisage, it would not be necessary for engineers to know about stresses and strains, and healers of the sick to have special knowledge, they replied, no, "it was important only to be human, and all else would follow."⁶⁸

This is, of course, a description of an extreme among the 1960s positions, but it touches on a basic concern of the time, i.e., that "the traditional paradigm of professionalism encourages a static condition which is incompatible with the dynamism inherent in a truly client-centered (including non-user clients) professional orientation," and that therefore the forces of change become the antitheses of the basic characteristics of professionalism.⁶⁹ The questions were being raised about all professions, whether firmly entrenched or only aspiring, and librarianship was subjected to the same scrutiny about its practice and its goals. What was being urged upon librarians, unheard-of in their previous developmental history, was a new idea of professionalism that questioned the traditional one, a professionalism that would exhibit an indifference to credentials, display an attitude of criticism, be impatient with the present rate of change, accept consumer control, and be animated by compassion and concerned with the well-being of people.⁷⁰ Not all of these requirements would necessarily have entailed equally radical changes in the goals of

traditional professionalism, but their proponents saw all of them as threatening to the status quo, and their opponents tended to be intimidated into accepting that evaluation.

Certainly one of the areas in which the threat was real was in the attack on the concept of the professional's special knowledge. The traditional librarian has always seen this special knowledge as the key to library service; it was a skill which made possible their particular contribution to the well-being of others, and would earn them the social recognition of their contribution.

The income of professionals averages higher than that of other occupations because their services are needed (they have the knowledge to solve a problem) and there are no alternatives. In single supply-demand terms, they have a monopoly over a valuable product. On the prestige market, too, their product is valuable because of their dedication to the service ideal, because their education is high, and because their performances are above those of average people.⁷¹

Until the 1960s, such a statement would have seemed to be in praise of professionalism, with its stress on special knowledge put to use to discharge the service function and to foster excellent performance. In the 1960s, the other elements took precedence: "no alternatives" suggested that recruitment and preparation of people have been manipulated to keep the knowledge arcane; "monopoly" carried bad connotations of cynical control to serve self-interest; the high level of education became an unnecessary requirement unrelated to any real social need ("education has little necessary relevance to occupation"⁷²); and the idea that the professionals' performance is above that of average people was, of course, elitist and meritocratic.

One might consider this quotation from Wilbert Moore, which is deliberately left unfinished here: "Some people know things and how to do things that others do not. If the knowledge that is not universally shared is at all useful or important for those who do not have it, then those who do possess it..." The traditionalist would complete such a sentence with something like this: "...are in a position to perform a useful and needed service which benefits society." But Moore's quotation continues: "...have a relative advantage. These simple truisms provide one basis for social inequality."⁷³

It was social inequality that became the focus in the 1960s. The emphasis on skills and knowledge came to be seen as merely a self-serving

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ploy of those who wanted the elitist advantage of professional status; professions were seen as deliberately and artificially keeping their knowledge esoteric by a variety of devices designed to hold down the number and character of those initiated into its mysteries, in order to keep themselves on top and the uninitiated at their mercy. "Professionalism, supposedly service-oriented, still provides the means to control others and maintain privilege over them. . . . The mystification centers around what professionals do and who can be part of the group: knowledge and skills are closely guarded and credentials jealously meted out."⁷⁴

The threat to tradition lay in the ideas that special skills and knowledge aren't all that special; that the kind of education considered essential may not be necessary after all; that the quality of service may even be reduced rather than enhanced by the emphasis upon professional education. One of the strongest expressions of this mistrust was to come not from wild-eyed radicals but from the government itself:

When the reliance on education credentials compels individuals to spend tedious hours and years in school against their interest, perpetuates social inequality, gives one group in society unique and arbitrary power over the lives of many, establishes conditions in which people will be dissatisfied and unhappy with their jobs, undermines the educational process, and *all this unnecessarily* — then the time has come to change these practices. (italics added)⁷⁵

"All this unnecessarily" is the phrase that introduces the 1960s approach to professional education. Traditionally, as Mayhew points out: "One of the basic assumptions on which the whole edifice of formal professional education is based is that the individuals with potential for professional work can be identified, and that the work offered in the professional school assures successful professional performance."⁷⁶ Now this assumption was being called into question. A key word was "relevance," a term that had many aspects. Given the new demand for librarians who would serve audiences hitherto ignored or unreachd, who would act as advocates for all who were being denied rights to which they were entitled, who would become more directly involved in social services than in narrowly bibliothecal problems, the content of traditional library school curricula was seen as sadly wanting. "Whether consciously or unconsciously, the 'better' schools of librarianship tend to place their emphasis on that content which prepares higher administrators, research workers and potential teachers in library school to the alleged neglect of training for the

central role of the practitioner."⁷⁷ In other words, the "central role of the practitioner" was being redefined, and with it the appropriate content of preparation for that role.

Another question of relevance was raised about the schools' monopoly over screening and granting credentials, and particularly over the criteria in carrying out the screening function. The attack was aimed at the use of educational requirements and standardized tests which introduce cultural elements that discriminate against certain groups in the society, and at certain traditional academic screens that seemed to bear no relation to the demands of the job. Among these was the possession of a college degree before admission to library school. Mayhew cites a number of studies which seem to show that there is a minimal positive or even slightly negative relationship between job performance and length and level of education: "If such studies are further validated, professional schools, if they are to continue to warrant the support and regard they have achieved in the past, will be forced into radical revision of the entire process of education, beginning with techniques of admission and extending to organization of courses and requirements for graduation."⁷⁸

An underlying assumption in many of the attacks on the schools is that educators are politically and socially conservative — if not reactionary — and that the whole process of schooling is dedicated to preservation of the status quo. It is a familiar stereotype, but one might ask whether, by and large, it is not likely that the instructors in any professional field are more concerned about social amelioration than are the majority of its practitioners:

The reformers in any given profession are disproportionately concentrated in its training institutions . . . at any given moment the quality of practice taught at a professional school is likely to be higher than that actually carried on by the alumni of that school. Indeed the exalted image of a profession provided by its better schools may first help it attract better recruits than it deserves and then help sustain these men in the face of its often sordid and tedious reality.⁷⁹

Paul Wasserman also acknowledges the leadership role that professional schools have taken: "A most hopeful and striking phenomenon is the way in which the opinions, the concepts, and the advanced practice which are born in the professional schools ultimately are seen to have foreshadowed those of the professions which they serve, and in some instances, by as much as a generation in advance of their acceptance."⁸⁰

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It should be noted that Wasserman is speaking not of library schools as they now exist, but of truly professional schools, and that he sees a distinction between the two. The point of his comment is that the library schools could play such a role if they would. That some of them already do to some extent is attested to by the criticism so frequently heard from new graduates that the schools have led them to expect much more opportunity to play a role in social change than the jobs permit, and by the complaints from the field that the schools pay far too much attention to principles, ideals and abstractions and not enough to down-to-earth knowledge of how to operate today's library services in today's libraries. But in the 1960s it was not considered enough for the schools to be nothing more than not quite as bad as the field.

Another attack on the schools was that they were a training ground for professionalism and inculcated its ideals. Before the 1960s, this would not have seemed a criticism. The very fact that a period of special training precedes practice had been taken to be a major justification for claiming professional status for an occupation. The "community," the "culture" which characterizes a professional group (i.e., its shared values, norms and symbols), and its ways of operating and its rules, form the basis of a professional curriculum. To become a professional, one must become acculturated, and it is to the schools that one turns to receive that acculturation.⁸¹ That this process can be abused is certainly possible, particularly if the process of screening for admission seeks to identify those who will "fit in" to some narrowly defined class of "superior beings." But a professional school is by definition a school that prepares for a profession. It is not as illogical as it may seem that the critics of the 1960s sought to reform the schools as a means of reforming or even doing away with professionalism: "the strategic locus for effecting change is the professional education process."⁸²

The belief that the professional's special education and esoteric knowledge is a manufactured mystique to keep the patient/client/patron at the mercy of the professional seemed to the critics of professionalism to be corroborated by the professions' insistence on the right of self-policing. As has been noted, Jencks and Riesman had made the exclusive right to name and judge one another's mistakes the sine qua non of professionalism.

Professionalization in our lexicon . . . implies a shift in values, in which the practitioner becomes less concerned with the opinion of laymen . . . and becomes more concerned with the opinion of his fellow practitioners. . . . As Everett Hughes noted, the very

concept of quackery boils down to the charge that a man is doing better at pleasing his patients than at pleasing his colleagues.⁸³

This "alienation" of the professional from the client was one of the major evidences in support of the charge of elitism. Since the autonomy of the professional cannot be questioned by the layperson, the client is made dependent upon the professional rather than acting as an equal partner. The profession begins to see itself as a separate and higher part of society, subject only to the moral and ethical considerations determined by the professional group itself, and answerable to no outside authority. Even their codes of ethics, presumably designed to protect the rights of the public against the possible abuses that arise from the monopoly granted by community sanction, were seen instead as yet another means for keeping the public at a safe distance from the decision-making process that affects them. Where the professional group extolled objectivity, detachment, freedom from value judgments, and the unimpeded search for truth as essential to the integrity of professional performance, the critics saw them as coverup words to disguise special privilege and indifference to the human beings who seek the professional's services.⁸⁴ It is easy to see how, in this context, the professional ideals taught in the library schools became a target for attack.

From this premise, it is a simple step to the demand that the profession should abandon its traditional stance of objectivity and neutrality, and move to become "an instrument of positive social change."⁸⁵ The virtue of detachment, which allows the practitioner to remain objective and not too personally involved in the individual case, became a vice in this context. What was called for was more involvement, not less; more personal interaction, not less; more promotion of what is right and suppression of what is wrong. The 1960s would not condone the separation of the librarian as an individual from the librarian in his or her professional capacity.

Here, of course, these new attitudes came into direct conflict with the professional limitation of "functional specificity": one is not an authority outside the field of professional expertise. The areas in which the socially conscious librarians wanted to take positions were precisely those outside their specialty: legal reform, ecology, overhaul of the educational system, social equality, right to abortion, and the military/industrial complex, among others. When Paul Wasserman calls for a new professional commitment which will no longer simply match users and the information sought, but will enlist "its expertise in the cause of advancing the

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needs of the client group first by pragmatically resolving their information problems and then extending beyond into other spheres which relate to a range of other requirements of the constituency,"⁸⁶ he is asking for an emotional and personal involvement in aspects of the clients' needs that fall outside librarians' traditional professional competence. Wasserman is well aware of this; he is urging that the new breed of librarians should become competent in a wide range of skills and insights which do not normally fall into today's definition of librarianship.

The traditional basis of professional neutrality had been to assure the provision of service to all who request it, irrespective of the client's age, income, kinship, politics, race, religion, sex, or social status; the rendering of service "upon request, even at the sacrifice of personal convenience."⁸⁷ The new librarian would keep as much of that as possible, but saw it better served through personal involvement than through neutrality.

Bureaucracy was identified as one of the barriers to the kind of personal involvement that the 1960s were striving to promote. A "change institute," held in 1969, placed its major emphasis on the need to break out of the bureaucratic structure. Typical was Eldred Smith's forthright statement of his position:

I'm going to assume at the beginning that we recognize a need for change in library practice and that we also recognize the shortcomings of the library bureaucracies in achieving change. . . . I think that it's becoming very clear that there is a basic conflict between the bureaucratic organization of libraries and the abilities of the individual librarian within his organization to function as a creative professional.⁸⁸

As so frequently occurs in the attacks on professionalism, a dichotomy was identified here between the needs of people and the needs of the Establishment. Against the loyalty to the societal responsibility of his or her calling that the new librarian saw as a commitment was pitted the institution's demand for organizational loyalty: "The professional who retains a fundamental identification with clientele commitment is inevitably forced into a position of conflict with organizational requirements."⁸⁹ This conflict is seen as running through the whole library occupation, including the ALA: "By giving its primary rewards to those who achieve administratively, the association and the profession may greatly undervalue professional contributions. In seeking to achieve its institutional ob-

jectives, the American Library Association may fail to stress professional objectives and developments."⁹⁰ Clearly, institutional objectives are seen here as inevitably incompatible with professional objectives:

The bureaucratic sickness of the education profession is only an extreme instance of a more general disease afflicting other professions as well. . . . The cure is the same for all: to replace the unresponsive hierarchies that now exist to serve entrenched interests with new, humane professionals that really serve their clients, particularly poor clients.⁹¹

The bureaucratic hierarchy began to be seen, not only as detrimental to a service responsive to the client, but also as inimical to the full professional development of the individual staff member: "Professional autonomy and bureaucratic lines of authority are incompatible. . . . The librarian cannot exercise independent professional authority if he holds an essentially managerial position within the bureaucratic hierarchy."⁹² The drive to break down the hierarchical structure reflected this new consideration of individual satisfaction and career development. In the beginning of the movement, the anti-Establishment posture concentrated on the "people" in terms of broad issues, such as poverty, slums, racism, and social services; now it was becoming a management/worker confrontation within the library itself as well. Library staff members were becoming interested in matters beyond the content of the job functions performed, and began looking to their own needs and work environment issues.⁹³ When the term "the people" was invoked in the rhetoric, it might well apply to the nonadministrative staff of the library, rather than the more familiar disadvantaged and oppressed minorities.

Thus, the advancement of the profession, once seen solely in terms of an improved public service that would automatically result in improved prestige and status, now began to entail also the promotion of the economic well-being of its members. Librarians no longer believed that if they "focus all attention on providing an outstanding service . . . adequate payment in various forms will automatically follow."⁹⁴ Adequate payment and individual self-fulfillment had not notably followed from quiet, unobtrusive public service, but from demands, unionization, and a bit of hell-raising. As Blake put it: "Instead of issuing a superficial call for dedication beyond the demands of duty, speakers at library conferences ought to consider practical techniques for attracting and keeping first-class persons."⁹⁵

The new assumption was that better services come from staff mem-

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bers who are well treated, happy in their work, and free from institutional constraints that hamper their own development and satisfaction.

To call for dedicated service out of sheer love for the profession alienates the really first-class librarian. . . . If we really want to attract top-notch persons to the library profession . . . we must recognize publicly that adequate pay and personal advancement will do a great deal to attract the kind of people we want.⁹⁶

One way to pursue such benefits as more adequate pay and personal advancement is through union activity, and the drive to introduce unions into libraries became more pronounced in this period. There were those who opposed unionization on the ground that it was unprofessional to participate in "demands" for pay increase ("We prefer to earn our salaries, not demand them," as one letter on the union question put it⁹⁷); on the other hand, there were those who began to call for a change in the nature of ALA, away from its position as an educational organization to a more frankly protective agency. And there were those who quite openly opted to drop membership in the too-slow-moving ALA in favor of some existing union which, however remotely related to librarianship as such, seemed more likely through past experience and militant tactics to achieve the desired results. Proponents and opponents of unionization in librarianship expressed themselves with equal fervor and conviction in print and at ALA conferences, and special attention to the question of unionization began to be given in the library press in the form of special issues and symposia, or regular feature sections on the topic.

As a result, the tradition of undeviating devotion to the ideal of altruism began to be somewhat tempered by more realistic considerations. To those who still held to the idea of selfless dedication, the new emphasis on self-satisfaction, shorter hours and more pay seemed to be a repudiation of the very social responsibility it professed to promote. But the two goals were not seen as mutually exclusive by those who sought staff benefits; what they were seeking was equal attention to staff needs and those of patrons, with a firm conviction that satisfied staff might well be a better guarantor of good public service. The "handmaiden" image had become outmoded, and a term like *service* began to take on connotations of self-abasement and subservience that the new, self-aware librarian was unwilling to accept. In 1971 an institute sponsored by the Library Association of the City University of New York chose the title, "The Academic Librarian: Educating, Yes; Serving, No." "Serving, No" would have been an unthinkable slogan for librarians before the 1960s' upheaval.

Tied to this changing self-image in a predominantly feminine profession was the increasing conviction that sexism and racism riddled not only society at large, but also — some would say especially — the established professions. Once again, self-policing, freedom from outside judgment, and autonomy of the professions were perceived as devices for maintaining the status quo against the rising expectations of minorities and deprived groups.

The revolt against established authority, against what is increasingly recognized as the hypocrisy (or more objectively, the obsolescence) of the conventional wisdom, is inevitably a war against the sexism which supports it in exactly the same way that racism supported the plantation agricultural system of the nineteenth-century South.⁹⁸

As can be seen, there are at least four sides to the antiprofessionalism position. On one hand, there is the view that professionalism is in itself bad and that the only way to reach socially responsible goals is to reject it and start anew outside its stultifying structure and requirements. On the other hand, there is the view that the traditional goals of professionalism are good, but that some professions or professionals may have lost sight of them; what is needed is a return to true professionalism. There is a kind of midway position, which suggests that some of the original ideals of professionalism are basically good, but that some of the developments in the professional structure are not, and that a reexamination of both the ideals and the structure is in order so that what is good can be preserved and what is bad can be changed. Finally, there is the fourth position, which urged a "new professionalism" that would alter both goals and structure to create a different definition of what it means to be professional.⁹⁹

In all these positions there is a recognition that changing conditions may require changing institutions, processes and mechanisms; the conflict is over whether these changes can come from within or only from outside; whether they can come through evolution or only through revolution; whether there must be changes in the ideals themselves, in the means for reaching the ideals, or both.

Of course, there was also a pro-professionalism view that continued throughout the period. The preceding discussion may have created the impression that antiprofessionalism was a universal or at least an overwhelmingly majority view, but this was not so. There were a large number of librarians who believed in the original goals, who saw professional

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structure as the best way to serve them, and who felt that the occasional abuses that occur in any human institution were the exception and not the rule, and could best be dealt with through a self-policing machinery. There were many who believed that librarianship does have a special knowledge which can best be mastered through a formal program of professional education; that this body of knowledge is an essential tool for meeting the information needs of all the people, and not a contrived mystique to keep the laity uninformed and powerless; that standards and accreditation are essential to preserve the quality of performance, not just to protect special privilege but to assure superior public service; that those who know what librarianship is are the appropriate ones to set its standards and judge its performance; that there is a distinction between the quality of service provided by those professionally qualified and by those who are not; that libraries as institutions are not barriers against the ideals of a public service but rather the best means through which to achieve them; that recognition, prestige and status do — and should — follow upon superior performance; that administrators are motivated by the same ideals of library service as the nonadministrative staff and work with them rather than against them; that librarians at all levels are sincerely dedicated to serve the needs of users before their own self-interest; and that their overall performance is testimony to this commitment.

At the very time that some librarians were condemning the elitism of the ALA and seeking to make it even more democratic and open, others were moving to establish organizations which would be comparatively even more exclusively “professional” in nature.¹⁰⁰ Membership in ALA is, after all, open to anyone interested in libraries; it is not, and has never claimed to be, a professional organization in the sense that it excludes all but those officially qualified to perform as librarians at a professional level. In reaction to the dissident drive to blur or abandon the distinction between librarians and others who work in libraries, these organizations would make the distinction clear and unabashed.

This traditional position was not held only by the older librarians. In an article entitled “Is Librarianship a Profession?”¹⁰¹ published in 1964, Henry Madden took a dim view and denied to librarianship any real sense of a calling. There was a swift student response to the article, most of it defending the striving for professionalism. Typical is this comment from one student: “Many older people in librarianship have never considered it a profession, but younger people now coming in are motivated by the ideals and philosophy behind librarianship — they have the calling and

will carry on the fight for professional maturity."¹⁰² An interesting aspect of this statement, in view of the popular belief that the 1960s revolt was a youth movement, is its perception of antiprofessionalism as a stance of the "older people in librarianship."

It is highly likely that for every critic who saw an ulterior, self-serving motive behind the professed goals of public service and equality, there was at least one defender who would sincerely deny the accusation, and both could point to an instance in practice to support his or her side of the argument. Thus, in the midst of all the questioning of professionalism and its symbols, the ALA brought before its membership a policy statement on the education and function of library personnel¹⁰³ which attempted to define the professional person and make distinctions between professional and nonprofessional tasks, responsibilities and training. It was overwhelmingly, if not unanimously, approved. (The major opposition to the policy came not from the dissidents protesting this commitment to professionalism, but from a group of school librarians who feared that their professional status would be jeopardized by the educational standards suggested.) A new set of *Standards for Accreditation*,¹⁰⁴ which reaffirmed the concept of self-regulation, was also approved after considerable debate — not over the concept of accreditation as such, but over the extent to which the standards should be quantitative, and their implementation made more rigorous. The drive for academic status for librarians in institutions of higher learning received official approval,¹⁰⁵ testimony to the desire of librarians to be counted among the elite within the community they serve. In all of these documents there is some reflection of the themes that the 1960s had stressed: equal opportunity, equal access to services and nondiscrimination in human relations both within the occupation and in its relations to users. However, these were not seen here to be incompatible with the premises of professionalism, i.e., that standards of education and experience should be applied in the identification of superior qualifications, and that superior performance should be recognized with titles and positions of status.

It is not surprising that the thesis/antithesis confrontations of the 1960s should ultimately move toward synthesis as they seem now, in the latter half of the 1970s, to be doing. Many forces contributed to the change from the flamboyant revolt of the previous decade. For one, those who were in their twenties when the "don't trust anyone over thirty" slogan was coined, while they have not necessarily abandoned the ideals they fought for, have passed the deadline birthday. Many of them are now in positions of authority and leadership ("coopted by the system" they

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would once have said) and are able to introduce some of their desired changes through regular channels rather than through anti-Establishment confrontations. A changing job market has altered the freedom with which students or new graduates can be indifferent to prospective employment; subtler tactics are imposed by economic circumstances. In some cases, the desired goals are no longer seen as radical but have become part of accepted thinking. And in other cases, the demands have been or are being met.

The present mood, then, is not so much one of rejecting the goals of the dissident revolt but rather of examining means for implementing them and following through on their implications. Where once the assumption was that any advance inquiry into a proposed change was simply a destructive delaying action, the present tendency is to accept the possibility that unexamined change can introduce more problems than it solves, or lose forever something that is worth keeping.

One such area of present concern has to do with the criteria on which qualification for professional appointment is based. In response to the pressures of the 1960s, such concepts as affirmative action and equal opportunity have become basic commitments of both federal and state governments, resulting in the issuance of guidelines and requirements that could have an important impact on many occupations and professions. For librarians this has come most dramatically to the fore in the actions taken in California to open professional appointments to examination regardless of previous traditional library education.¹⁰⁶ Following the formal acceptance of this procedure in Sacramento, a group of county librarians endorsed the idea of cooperative research on problems of librarian selection, looking to the development of a selection system that would identify the knowledge, skills, aptitudes, abilities, and other personal characteristics absolutely necessary to perform as librarians, and that would comply with federal and state laws, regulations and guidelines on non-discrimination and affirmative action in employment. To carry out this recommendation, a consortium of thirteen city and county libraries and the California State Library contracted with an independent research agency, the Selection Consulting Center, to carry out a Library Selection Project, the first phase of which would (1) define "entry-level skills" that can justifiably be required of any beginning librarian, and (2) examine the extent to which existing library school courses and curricula provide these skills.¹⁰⁷ Although the results of such a study could provide solid support for library education as it now exists, and for the criteria for admission and for appointment that now prevail, there is every possibility

that the data could raise serious questions about the validity of the present MLS degree, and the procedures by which admission to the schools, and appointments or promotions in the field, are determined.

A reflection of this concern in the profession in California was the establishment of an organization of "Concerned Librarians Opposing Un-professional Trends (CLOUT)" to work against what it sees as "the downgrading of the professional librarian."¹⁰⁸ On the national scene, ALA's Library Education Division sponsored a discussion meeting on the topic "Testing or Training?"¹⁰⁹ at the 1977 ALA annual conference, and *Library Journal* gave major space to a special minisymposium on "professionalism."¹¹⁰ Meanwhile other states are being pushed to alter their present requirements for professional appointment. For example, the state civil service requirements of Ohio, seeking to restrict the use of educational criteria in favor of performance-related requirements, have set a seventh-grade education as the maximum educational level that may be specified for appointment in its library series even at the professional level, although additional courses may be named as directly relevant to the duties enumerated in the job description.¹¹¹

The entry-level tasks defined by the California study have been published,¹¹² and the interpretation of their implications is now being assayed. In 1977 the Advisory Committee of the ALA Office for Library Personnel Resources established a task force on the Validation of the MLS and Equivalencies (now called the Task Force on Minimum Qualifications for Librarians) to study the purport of these developments in their legal, educational and professional aspects. A program meeting was developed for the annual ALA conference in 1978 to bring to the general membership current information on this question of minimum qualifications as reflected in federal regulations, research and new developments in library practice. Pressure from outside may bring librarians together once more in defense of professional standards for librarianship.

The sharp questions raised during the 1960s about the traditional indicators of professional status revealed a positive as well as negative aspect of antiprofessionalism. In the past, if there were any characteristic of professionalism to which librarianship did not conform, the immediate assumption was that librarianship, not the criterion, must be at fault. The 1960s movement, by demonstrating that it is possible to examine the professional criteria and to reject them if they are found wanting, introduced a new approach to the status of librarianship. It became possible to eval-

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uate the practices of librarians on their own terms, and to decide whether criteria borrowed from other occupations are really applicable. By accident, foresight or default, librarianship has not yet fully adopted some of the characteristics of the traditional professions which are now most vulnerable. We are thus free to decide which standards will best serve the needs of librarianship and will preserve those aspects of its service which are unique.

The role of the library in giving access to information *without prescription*, for example, may be a value worth preserving. The tendency to instruct patrons in the skills with which they can help themselves instead of turning always to us, may be a desirable aspect of our social contribution that we do not wish to change. The long-held devotion to client—rather than colleague-oriented goals, while not always successfully attained, has been an important orientation in librarianship to which some of the other occupations are only now beginning to give serious attention. Where the 1960s would have rejected the sincerity of ideals which were not fully implemented in practice, the 1970s are beginning to agree with Moore that “ideal values and norms are not made irrelevant by failure to achieve them,”¹¹³ and with Andrews that “we should be careful not to let too literal a definition distract us from the spirit of professionalism.”¹¹⁴

In other words, we may wish to concentrate on those professional goals that have withstood the critical scrutiny of the 1960s — client-orientation, special knowledge enlisted in the service of people, public benefit before private gain, for example — rather than on the symbols of particular occupational prestige. This may keep us forever out of the traditional professional pantheon. On the other hand, it could lead to the discovery of a different and better star to be the hitching post: a new, more flexible set of professional standards which would focus, not on the symbol, but on the thing itself.

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