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The Impact of Utopian Thoughts and Social Protests on Library Education in the 60s and 70s - The recollection of a former utopist and protester, with "a little help from his friends"

(Work in progress)

Abstract

The role of a school of library and information science in utopian and social protest movements of the late 1960s and 1970s is investigated through the use of archives and personal recollections of the author who was involved at the time. The University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science is used as the case study in this work. The author's experiences as a graduate student and a member of the library school faculty during the 1960s and 1970s in the context of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war protests, teach-ins, and social action events are detailed. Factors relating to the role of the school as a research and educational institution and its commitment to social progress and the freedom of information are chronicled in the context of the events of the time, such as attempts to destroy library catalog records. Special programs, such as student projects directed toward reaching the underserved and directed toward serving underrepresented populations, are described. The paper assesses the short term and long term impact of social change and utopian thought on librarianship and on library education, examining possible connections between the current move toward delivering library education through internet distance education programs and the social and reform efforts of the 1960s and 1970s.

For context, the following chronology of the period 1968-73 is presented.

1968 CE - TET Offensive in Vietnam
Student protest movement in many countries
Walter Cronkite states on TV that it does not look like U.S. is winning in Vietnam (February)
Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr - April 4
First manned lunar orbit (Apollo 8)
Discovery of pulsars
President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibiting
discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.
Assassination of Robert Kennedy - June 5
Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia
Democratic National Convention – Chicago Police riot against Anti-
War protesters
Nixon elected US president 1968

1969 CE -
First man on the Moon (Neil Armstrong)
Outbreak of troubles in Northern Ireland
Woodstock Music Festival in Upstate New York
Vietnam Moratorium Day (October 15th)

1970 CE -
Kent State Killings (May 4th)
Vietnam Moratorium Day (May 8th)
Boeing 747 "Jumbo" jets introduced

1971 CE -
500,000 people protest in Washington, DC (April)
NY Times begins publishing the Pentagon Papers
East Pakistan becomes Bangladesh
Policy of détente introduced by USA with USSR and China
Decimal currency introduced into UK
Pentagon Papers Published
Attica Prison Rebellion

1972 CE -
Pocket calculators introduced
Break-in at Democratic National Headquarters - Watergate Hotel

1973 CE -
Britain joins European Economic Community
US forces withdraw from South Vietnam
Death of Picasso

Being a doctoral student, a research assistant, and an instructor in a graduate library
school in the latter part of the 1960s and the early 1970s brought an opportunity to
see challenges to many long accepted traditions of life in America, including
challenges to debilitating racial discrimination sanctioned by some state and local
laws and the decades long tradition of patriotism based on the foundation of the
commitment developed in World War II that extended through the Korean Conflict
and was then being challenged in the divisive Vietnam war. Ironically, the popular
display of the American Flag in a variety of contexts at the time serves as a metaphor
for the relationship between the two major utopian social concepts of the time: 1) the
utopian conviction that people of all races and ethnic backgrounds should and can
live, work, and play together in harmony with equal opportunity and love; and 2)
that wars are not inevitable and that people can put a stop to wars that are judged to
be unjust by exercising their democratic rights to petition the government through
demonstrations and protests in opposition to war and in support of peace.

For many years, the southern states in the United States had proudly kept the
memory of their effort to exercise their perception of the ultimate choice of democracy,
namely to secede from the union of states to preserve the institution of slavery. After
the Civil War and the following reconstruction period had passed and “Jim Crow”
laws led to the legalization of segregation of the races in many of the former
confederate states, many of these former states incorporated aspects of the former
confederate flag into their state flags (a fact that led to some conflict in the late 1990s
with a number of the states finally abandoning the remnants of that flag in 2000 and
2001). It was very common for individuals in the former confederate states to fly
the confederate flag or post large decals of the flag on their jackets or in the rear
windows of their pickup trucks. When the civil rights movement began in the early
1960s, the Confederate Flag became a symbol of the defiance of the states rights
supporters who opposed racial integration and supported the continuance of racial
segregation begun after the civil war reconstruction period. The symbol of this flag
as a protest against reforms advocated by civil rights activists was not found just in
the southern United States. At the University of Illinois in the early 1960s the
Confederate Flag was displayed in some windows of student rooms and displayed
on automobiles and trucks by those who never had lived in the former Confederate
States, but who opposed the civil rights movement and its goals.

Ironically, as the Vietnam War protests escalated, many of those who formerly
displayed the Confederate Flag as a method of protest against federal government
civil rights policies, began substituting the American Flag to show support for the
Vietnam War effort and to demonstrate their dislaste for the “flag burning” of the
“liberal, anti-war” protestors who seemed to share many physical and intellectual
characteristics with the civil rights protesters of a few years back. The American
Flag, which had been used by Civil Rights marchers as a symbol of social change in
America, became all over the United States a symbol of pro-administration and pro-
government support for the execution of the Vietnam War.

Thus the American Flag began to be posted on the back windows of pick-up
trucks in Alabama and Mississippi where just a few years earlier the Stars and Bars
of the Confederacy had been defiantly placed. The flag that had been a symbol of
states rights and resistance to the civil rights movement a few years before was
replaced in many instances by the national flag that was being burned along with
draft cards by anti-war protestors because it represented a symbol of support for the
national government and the Vietnam war effort for many people. It was this social
and political context that existed during my residency as a doctoral student and
beginning instructor at the University of Illinois during the 1968-1973 period.

Having begun the doctoral program at the Graduate School of Library Science
(now the Graduate School of Library and Information Science) at the University of
Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1968, and elected as the doctoral student
representative to faculty meetings during this period, I had an opportunity to observe
and take part in numerous discussions of issues relating to the social and political, as
well as intellectual, concerns that swirled in academe during this period. I had
received my Master’s Degree in library science three years earlier and therefore was
familiar with the faculty and the context of the school from an earlier time. The
faculty and student body in the school represented a range of attitudes and
involvement in issues that mirrored the nation. Under the leadership of Robert B.
Downs, Dean of the Library School and Director of the University Library, Herbert
Goldhor, Director of the Library School, and Terry Crowley, Assistant Professor in
the Library School, as well as other faculty and students, there were a number of
activities that would qualify as consistent with utopian concepts, and perceived as
part of the protest movements of the time.
Projects Related to Civil Rights and the Disadvantaged

The Library School had tackled the issues relating to civil rights and services to the economically and socially disadvantaged with what might be called an activist and utopian strategy of establishing locally a special project as part of a class taught by Herbert Goldhor. This special project involved planning and assistance in establishing a demonstration library for the residents of the section of Champaign that had traditionally been the African American neighborhood. There had been a division in the community for many years between black and white citizens. In fact the community was divided physically by the main line of the Illinois Central Railway, with White business and residential areas to the west of the railway tracks and the Black business and residential area to the east of the tracks. While much has changed today, in the 1960s the change had not taken place and the city could be considered to be de-facto, although not legally, segregated by race. It was evident from interviews with African American residents that they were not comfortable going to the “West Side” for library service. Thus the Library School, as a class project, devised a plan to establish a branch east of the railway tracks and developed a proposal, with the involvement of the Champaign Public Library, which led to funding from the Illinois State Library for establishing such a branch as a demonstration project in 1970. The Champaign Public Library funded the branch after the demonstration project funds ended and today this neighborhood branch continues to serve the community. Although there is open housing in Champaign in 2001 and the city is no longer as racially divided as it once was, the Douglass branch of the Champaign Public Library system (named for Frederick Douglass, the 19th century African American leader in the abolitionist movement) recently moved into new quarters and continues to meet the needs of the lower income residents that live nearby.

The second project related to minorities was more nationally based and began in 1968 when the University of Illinois Library School developed a proposal to establish a program to recruit and mentor minority students. In 1970, the School received a grant of $65,000 from the Carnegie Corporation to establish a two-year program for disadvantaged students (mostly black and Hispanic) to become librarians. Eleven “Carnegie Scholars” were admitted in the summer of 1970. A second group of 19 students were admitted to the special program the following year when additional government funding was obtained. While there were many challenges in this program, overall the program can be considered a success in that all those who entered the program graduated and many of the graduates went on to contribute significantly to the profession in major positions in public, special and academic libraries in the nation. In many ways it was a high point of minority recruitment and enrollment at Illinois in the library school. The proportion of minority students admitted peaked at 16% at the time, a figure not exceeded even today at Illinois despite continuing efforts to increase minority enrollments in the library school. Once the special funds were no longer available, the number of minority students decreased. However, the commitment to recruit minorities was established as a result of this program and the former admission requirements of two years of a foreign language and less than flexible minimum grade point averages were re-evaluated as a result of the success of this program and modified to be more flexible. In that sense, the legacy of the program continues to this day in the continued revision of admission requirements, most recently eliminating the requirement of the Graduate Record Exam for admission to the Master’s degree program in part because of
concerns that minority applicants may be placed at a disadvantage in such standardized testing. In 2001, the enrollment of minority (non-white) students in the Master's degree program remains about 16% at Illinois. This is one area where not much progress has been made in the past thirty years. In all ALA accredited library schools, non-white enrollment is closer to 21%.

The Vietnam War

The second social and political issue during this period was the Vietnam War. There was much discussion in the literature and at regional and national conferences over the appropriate role of libraries in informing the public about issues related to the ever escalating Vietnam conflict. As early as 1967, students in the library school were being advised by faculty not to participate in anti-war demonstrations. As the December 11, 1967 faculty meeting minutes indicate, students should "be warned about participating in demonstrations. If a demonstration is a legal one, there is no possibility of losing a fellowship; but if it is illegal, it may very well be lost, according to the University Legal Counsel's office."

As the Democratic Convention convened in Chicago in 1968, the country had become polarized over the Vietnam War and libraries were central in many communities in providing information on both sides of the issue. Faculty and students in library schools were also polarized. At Illinois, the faculty were divided on the appropriateness of academe, and specifically library educators, to respond to the issues related to the Vietnam War. Most faculty held to the rule that library educators should not let their personal political and social opinions enter into the classroom or in the content of the instruction just as library collection policies and information provision policies should be politically neutral. A few students and faculty, however, felt strongly in the spirit of one of the chants of the time: "If You Are Not Part Of The Solution You Are Part Of The Problem." As the war continued to escalate and the first national Vietnam War Moratorium was called, the issue of appropriate response came up at faculty meetings for discussion. Some academic departments on the Illinois campus had voted to cancel classes on moratorium day. Others held teach-ins instead of classes. Many continued to hold classes scheduled for that day based on the need to maintain the university apart from the hotly debated political issues that were at issue in the nation. When it came down to a vote at the Library School faculty meeting in May, 1970 as to whether the School should hold classes as scheduled or should honor the national strike and teach alternative classes or dismiss classes, there was only one negative vote against holding classes as usual, although students who wished to participate in the strike were to be given an opportunity to make up work without penalty.

At the same time the University was under siege. The card catalog (yes, we still had a card catalog in the late 60s and early 70s) had been raided, and an unknown number, but estimated to be several hundred, catalog cards in the U.S. Government corporate entries had been torn out of the catalog drawers and taken to a nearby restroom where an attempt was made to flush the cards down the toilet. Some had also been torn up and discarded in trash while others had been burned and only charred fragments left for recovery. (Some cynics suggested that since no one could find anything in the corporate entry drawers anyway because of the complicated filing rules, the loss was not significant to access to information.) The issue of what
response should be taken became central to the discussion on campus. All factions on campus (pro-Vietnam War protesters and those who were opposed to university students and faculty involvement in protests) were outraged by the vandalism of the University Library catalog. Administration and some faculty called for security steps to be taken, ranging from armed guards in the library to closed circuit television or parabolic mirrors to enable staff to observe users in the library. Dean Robert B. Downs, who had been both Director of the library and Dean of the library school for many years, and nationally recognized for his commitment to intellectual freedom, refused to take any of the steps suggested, feeling that guards, television or mirror surveillance would not be in the best interest of open and free access to the information in the library. It was not a popular stance to make at the time, but it was an important one in the tradition of the library profession.

A similar position against the overwhelming advice being given at the time by politicians and others as to how to handle student demonstrations was taken by the University of Illinois President, David Henry. Costa-Gravis’ film “Z,” which chronicles the overthrow of the democratic government in Greece, was showing on the Illinois campus in 1970. It was shortly after the Kent State killings. The Illinois National Guard had been called to campus because of the student demonstrations and threats to university and commercial property in the campus area. Having attended the film on campus one evening and exiting the University building where the film was being shown to meet Illinois National Guard troops with fixed bayonets marching through the campus, it seemed to many of us that Kent State had come to Illinois. But to his credit, the President of the University ordered the National Guard off the campus and also insisted that the troops not carry loaded weapons. So for several days, under the orders of the Governor of the State of Illinois, the Illinois National Guard ringed the campus much like a military siege of an enemy compound. Eventually the troops were recalled and all present escaped any serious physical injury.

Perhaps ironically, given the importance of the Internet to education and to libraries, one of the targets at this time on the Illinois campus was the Advanced Computation Building. It was a windowless building looking much like a bunker. It was rumored to have been funded by the Defense Department and the computer equipment it contained were suspected of being involved with targeting ICBMs and controlling the Defense Department’s world wide communications. In fact, it probably housed the early developments of the Internet. ARPANET, The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, which was the precursor to the Internet, was created by the United States Department of Defense. Protests, some of which resulted in numerous broken windows on the University campus and nearby businesses, were undoubtedly one of the contributing factors bringing the National Guard to campus.

My connection with this period of activity ended in 1972-1973 when I successfully defended my dissertation and received my doctorate and then received a visiting appointment as an instructor in the library school for the 1972-73 academic year prior to the start of my employment at Mississippi University for Women as head of the library science department. In a sense the culmination of the experience of these troubled times peaked for me when I learned that my dissertation advisor and chair of my doctoral committee had been arrested a few days before a demonstration against the Vietnam War at a nearby Air Force base. Fortunately for both of us, he was released from custody in time to arrive at my defense, although I was a bit
concerned that his incarceration may have affected his memory of my scheduled dissertation defense, and even of me as his advisee. As we rode up together in the elevator to the examination room where the rest of the committee waited for us, he seemed not to recognize me. It was only later that he remarked that in fact he did not recognize me, since a few days earlier I had shaved off the beard I had grown for most the period I had worked on my dissertation.

So what impact had the utopian and activist activities from this period had on library education? Nationally, we have seen an increased effort to recruit ethnic minorities to the profession. Shortly after the establishment of the Carnegie Scholars program at Illinois, the University of Toledo, in Toledo, Ohio, established a "Community Information Specialist" program to recruit and train people to work in libraries and other institutions to meet community social and information needs. This program seems to have disappeared around 1976, but some might argue that the development of community based "freenets" in the 1990s is an alternate form of providing such services. In 1993, Ann Bishop and Gregory Newby, two faculty from the Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, started Prairinet, a community based "freenet" to offer access to the Internet to members of the community who might not have other options for access. Prairinet also provided training in internet and computer use and space for establishing information databases of special interest to racial and ethnic minorities in the community. This effort might be seen as a natural extension of the Douglass Branch library effort of the 1960s and 70s.

LEEP (Library Education Experimental Program), a web-based delivery of the Master's degree in library and information science online, was begun in 1996. LEEP was initially established after efforts to take the Urbana-Champaign campus program to Chicago to attract a more ethnically diverse student body failed to win approval from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE). The proposed off-campus program was blocked by the Illinois Board of Higher Education twice. The first time it was blocked, the library school responded by establishing a "Fridays Only" enrollment option for providing students from the Chicago area as well as other areas of the state, with an option to come to campus once a week over a three year period to obtain the necessary courses to earn the Master's degree. This program has been very successful with thirty or more students a year entering the Fridays Only program. Students usually share vehicle commuting with others in their area for the drive to Urbana for classes on Friday. The second time a Chicago based program was rejected by the IBHE in 1995, the faculty suggested a web-based delivery of the program as an alternative. Since it was delivered by the Internet, at the time it was not subject to the approval of the IBHE. Like the Chicago-based proposal and the Fridays Only program, the web-based LEEP program was intended to extend enrollment to a more diverse group of students who were likely to be geographically tied to a specific area and could not move to Urbana-Champaign to enroll in on-campus classes. This effort to obtain a more diverse student body, I would argue, is consistent with the efforts in the 1960-70s that led to the Carnegie Scholars proposal.

It is a bit more challenging to try to assess the impact and legacy of the activist movements represented in the Vietnam anti-war protests of the 60s and 70s. The Robert B. Downs Intellectual Freedom Award, which was established by the Faculty in 1969 to recognize Dean Downs' contributions to intellectual freedom in the profession of librarianship, was one of the first of the professional awards for intellectual freedom and continues to this day to recognize the efforts of those who
defend intellectual freedom. The continuation of this award is certainly one of the legacies of the commitment of the school and the faculty to the concepts of intellectual freedom.

In 2000, the faculty of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science added a new student award, the “Social Justice Award,” sponsored by alumnus Lionel Elsesser. This is presented to the student who has shown a special interest in providing or enhancing library and information services to groups whose needs fall outside the parameters of traditional services. Again, the development and approval of this award seems consistent with the utopian and activist traditions developed in the 1960s and 70s as evidenced by the prior examples.

This paper has been characterized as a "work in progress." I have focused on the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science as a case study of events that took place in the 1960s and early 1970s. As time and opportunity permit, I hope to look at events at other library schools during the same time period to determine the involvement of the faculty and students in such events. Given the traditional commitment of library education to equity in access to information and library resources and on instilling the principles of intellectual freedom to future professionals, one would expect graduate schools of library science to be in the forefront of the efforts to provide access to information to the disadvantaged and others who had not had the same opportunities to have library service or to partake of graduate library education. A commitment to supporting and facilitating citizens in the exercise of their rights of freedom of expression in petitioning the government through demonstrations has also been part of the creed of librarianship and library education. In addition, protecting the privacy of users of library resources has been and remains an important part of the utopian goals of librarianship. I believe both the University of Illinois Library School and Library demonstrated a commitment to these principles in the 1960s and early 70s. I will look forward to exploring the record of other schools of library and information science during this same period.

The following sources were used in addition to the recollection of the author:


Interviews with librarians at Champaign and Urbana public libraries, March and April, 2001.

Faculty Minutes, Graduate School of Library Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. 1967-1973.