

LIBRARIES WITHOUT BORDERS

NEW DIRECTIONS *in* LIBRARY HISTORY

edited by

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“THE HILL WE CLIMB”

Towards Equity and Inclusion in Library and Information Science

The Keynote Address from the Library History Seminar XIV

RENATE L. CHANCELLOR

When Amanda Gorman recited her Inauguration Day poem *The Hill We Climb* on January 20, 2021, the world witnessed what many have characterized as an eloquent and brilliant encapsulation of the urgent need for unification throughout America.¹ Gorman’s words resonated deeply with viewers around the world not only because of her compelling diction and cadence, but also because of the events that had occurred exactly two weeks earlier—when thousands of white supremacists and supporters of the immediate past president stormed the steps of the United States Capitol in Washington, DC, to protest the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. The insurrectionists flooded the ground with debris and erected a noose on the lawn outside the Capitol building. Inside, the Confederate flag was brandished. Violent attacks on federal and local police officers resulted in the deaths of four individuals. While Gorman’s poem offers hope for America’s founding principles, it also reminds us of America’s struggle and unwillingness to end racism.

Much like U.S. history, the library and information science (LIS) profession has grappled with racism. Figures 0.1 to 0.3 are timelines of U.S. history along with some of the pivotal moments in the history of the profession. Despite being founded on the cornerstone principles of democracy, the library profession has never lived up to those ideals. Critics have argued that leaders in the profession conveniently rely on the neutrality stance when asked to tackle difficult issues of race.² In 2022, LIS scholars Nicole Cooke, Renate L. Chancellor,

Sarah Park Dahlen, Amelia Gibson, and Yasmeen Shorish defended the profession’s commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) by rebutting a *New York Times* opinion piece that claimed that libraries should remain neutral and not promote progressive views on race policing, sexuality, and other issues.³ Others contend that the profession has a deep history of entrenched elitism and therefore will continue to struggle until there is a reckoning with racism. April Hathcock reminds us that “public libraries in the U.S. developed initially as sites of cultural assimilation and ‘Americanization’ of immigrants needing to learn the mores of white society. Given the historical context, white normativity continues to be a hallmark of modern librarianship.”⁴ She further asserts, “A major contributor to the invisible normativity of whiteness in librarianship has been the fact that whiteness has played such a fundamental role in the profession from the start.”⁵

In the post-Civil Rights Era, there have been many efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity in LIS. Despite numerous initiatives on this front, the equity and inclusion of librarians and information professionals from under-represented groups have remained relatively stagnant. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 85.3 percent of librarians were white in 2015, 84 percent of them were white in 2010, and 88.3 percent were white in 2005.⁶ In 2020, just 9.5 percent of librarians identified as Black or African American, 9.9 percent as Hispanic or Latino (of any race), and 3.5 percent as Asian American or Pacific Islander.⁷ This data indicates that despite the efforts the profession has made to recruit and retain librarians of color, it has not been successful in increasing equity and inclusion. Much of the discussion on diversity in LIS revolves



FIGURE 0.1

Timeline of ALA and American historical events, 1854–1964

around the notion of increasing diversity or inclusion (e.g., Paul Jaeger and Renee Franklin, Kyung-Sun Kim and Joanna S. Sei-Ching, and Samantha Hastings).⁸ While this is a desirable and valuable goal for our discipline and for society in general, very little scholarship has examined EDI from a social justice perspective, from the standpoint of the other—and taking into consideration the innate dignity and worth of each human being. In other words, is it enough to simply aim for diversity? Or should we be thinking beyond diversity towards equity and inclusion? Towards social justice? What happens to those recruited to achieve the diversity sought? Do their failures and successes have an impact on the diversity agenda? Are their needs supported? What does that diversity feel like for them? This book strives to address these questions by arguing that total equity and inclusion can occur through the lens of social justice. To fully understand the challenges of inequity and exclusion of librarians of color, it is important to contextualize the history of struggles in the profession. While there are many instances that can be discussed, one of the earliest examples occurred when the American Library Association (ALA) decided to draft a resolution stating that it would not hold meetings in cities where all members were not welcomed during the height of Jim Crowism.

Segregation and the issue of race did not become a *real* concern for ALA until 1936, when its annual conference was held for the first time in the South.⁹ The first published account of discrimination in ALA occurred at its annual meeting in Richmond, Virginia, that year. To obtain a large turnout, Black librarians from other cities had received invitations from the Richmond Local Arrangements Committee to attend the conference. It was not conveyed to them, however, that the participants would endure the segregated conditions of Richmond. Although African Americans were permitted to use the same hotel entrances as white conferees, they were not allowed access to conference halls or meetings that were held in dining areas in conjunction with meals. Additionally, Black members of ALA were given reserved seating in a designated area of the meeting hall, thereby diminishing their ability to fully take part in the conference. Due to many protests by delegates and state associations, ALA's Executive Board subsequently appointed a committee to formulate policy to ensure that this form of discrimination would never occur again. As a result, signs were posted at future meetings which stated, "all rooms and halls for conference use would be inclusive to all members."¹⁰

The library profession did not begin to address the issue of racism until 1964. African American librarians were confronted with discrimination when the

Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi library associations would not allow Black librarians to become members. It took the efforts of the outspoken librarian E. J. Josey, who drafted a resolution that prevented any ALA affiliate from discriminating against its members, to force ALA to take a stand against excluding Black librarians in the deep southern states.¹¹

Although Josey’s resolution is credited with integrating the American Library Association, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) librarians felt that they were not considered for leadership positions in the organization. Many also felt discrimination in their workplaces. The Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) was founded in 1970 to prepare individuals to take on leadership roles on ALA Council. As a result, Clara Stanton Jones became the first African American to become the president of ALA, in 1976.¹² Soon thereafter other ethnic caucuses were formed within ALA.

Inspired by leading figures such as Martin Luther King, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Malcolm X, critical race theory (CRT) was first introduced during the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s, but was developed by legal scholars, such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, in the 1980s. CRT draws from academic and legal scholarship that has studied the historical and contemporary relationships between race, racism, and power.¹³ CRT explores the ways institutional and legal structures have perpetuated oppression and exploitation. Moreover, it can be extended to shed light on the unfair treatment of BIPOC faculty by providing a foundation for understanding the historical racialized experiences of Blacks in the United States.¹⁴ CRT advances theoretical understandings of the law, politics, and other disciplines that focus on the efforts of white people to maintain



FIGURE 0.2
Timeline of historical events, 1965–1999

their historical advantages over people of color. Furthermore, CRT considers the influence that white supremacy has had on the American mindset.¹⁵

Critical race theory offers a theoretical lens to examine and understand the persistent racism underlying the social inequities that have been thrust upon Black people in the United States. It is a critical perspective to use as it highlights the role of race and racism in contexts where pervasive and overt forms of structural and interpersonal racism are not sanctioned by society. Since 2020, CRT has been the object of extreme and often misguided national debate. Criticism of the theory was led by then President Donald Trump, who issued an executive order on September 22, 2020, just a few months before losing reelection, which did not name CRT but attempted to challenge its underpinnings and fabricate alarm about its impact. The order purported to “combat offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating.”¹⁶ It warned that some beliefs about racial and sexual identity were a “malign ideology . . . now migrating from the fringes of American society and [threatening] to infect core institutions of our country.”¹⁷ This incited officials in conservative states to ban textbooks and curricula that involve race or racism, thereby presenting tremendous challenges for BIPOC educators.

Due to the rhetoric around CRT, conservative state governors have called for prohibiting the teaching of CRT in the classroom. This has also led to a renewed and strong push for book banning. ALA has noted that many, if not most, of the recent book challenges focus on “LGBTQIA+ issues and books by Black authors or that document the Black experience or the experiences of other BIPOC individuals,” thus showing that censorship has a disproportionate impact on

THE WEAPONIZATION OF INFORMATION

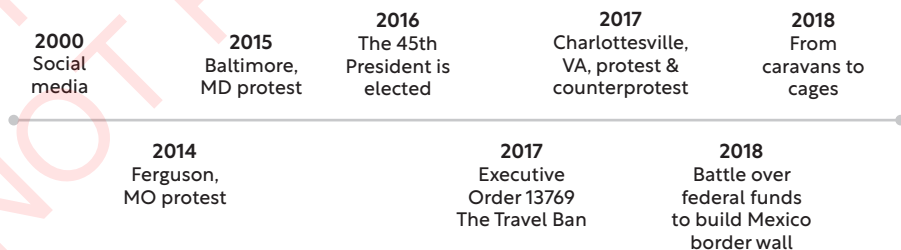


FIGURE 0.3

Timeline of historical events, 2000–2021

minority communities.¹⁸ The past few years have demonstrated a significant increase in challenges and censorship attempts of books in America, and the rapidly polarizing political climate suggests that this issue will not disappear in the near future.

ALA reported 1,269 known book challenges in the United States in 2022 and reported that 2,571 unique titles were targeted for censorship that same year; these numbers are the highest annual number of challenges and annual number of unique titles targeted since ALA began recording this data more than twenty years ago.¹⁹ Censorship attempts have increased not only in number but in scale as well, becoming national issues, political campaign tools, and social media trends rather than issues considered by individual libraries. The increasingly politicized and publicized efforts to censor materials over the past few years, and the increasingly personal attacks launched against librarians, have led to many librarians quitting or losing their jobs over the debate to keep certain books on the shelves.

The many hills that professional librarians have had to climb due to racism have resulted in social justice efforts. Many librarians have participated in the Black Lives Matter marches, the Women's March, and protests against Asian American hate, to name a few. The concept of social justice has religious roots originating in the nineteenth century during the Industrial Revolution, when attempts were made to promote more egalitarian societies and reduce the exploitation of certain marginalized groups due to the vast disparity between rich and poor at the time.²⁰ Initially, social justice focused on issues such as the distribution of capital, property, and wealth due to the extreme levels of inequality and economic distress prevalent at the time, resulting from the European social class structure.

Today, social justice has shifted toward a stronger emphasis on human rights and improving the lives of disadvantaged and marginalized groups that have historically faced discrimination in society. These groups have been discriminated against on the basis of their race, sex, age, wealth, ethnicity, heritage, social status, or religion. Social justice often leads to efforts to redistribute wealth to some underprivileged groups by providing income, jobs, and educational support and opportunities. It follows the principle that all individuals and groups are entitled to fair and impartial treatment, and attempts to prevent human rights abuses and is based on notions of equality and equal opportunity in society. Social justice has only come to the fore in the LIS profession over the last twenty years. According to Joseph Winberry and

Bradley Wade Bishop, research on social justice was first introduced to LIS in 1978.²¹ However, it wasn't until the 2000s that social justice issues began appearing regularly in the scholarly literature. Applying a social justice framework will only help to reinforce the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the library profession. It allows us to see each other as humans and presents an opportunity to break down structural barriers. EDI is driven by social imperatives that have challenged LIS educators and professionals to prioritize internal work, examine our own implicit biases, and actively educate ourselves on what antiracism requires from us as individuals and as a profession. After the death of George Floyd in May 2020, social justice has been pushed to the forefront of society's consciousness and has compelled professionals and scholars to consider how they can advocate for justice. With the rising surge of hate, racism, intolerance, and the attacks on critical race theory, it is imperative that LIS professionals keep climbing the hill. Just as Amanda Gorman provided us with words so that we can envision a way to heal and come together amid the tragedy we experienced on January 6, we as a profession can also find a way forward despite the challenges in our profession.

*When day comes, we step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid,
The new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it,
If only we are brave enough to be it.*²²

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INTRODUCTION

This volume contains papers presented at the fourteenth Library History Seminar (LHS), which had the theme “Libraries Without Borders.” It is not, strictly speaking, the proceedings of LHS XIV, but rather is a collection of papers presented at the seminar or tied to its theme.

The Library History Seminar is a quinquennial gathering of scholars of library history, sponsored by ALA’s Library History Round Table (LHRT). Since 1961, these seminars have served as one of the preeminent outlets for research in our field. Frequently, the proceedings or collections of papers have been published and serve as a core component of library historiography.¹

Although the seminar celebrated sixty years of showcasing excellence in library history, LHS XIV was a first in several ways. For reasons that will be detailed in the afterword by Bernadette A. Lear (who served as conference organizer and chair of LHRT during the seminar), it was the first to be held online, which allowed for record-setting numbers of participants and attendees. More significantly in terms of scholarship, it was the first seminar held since LHRT began publishing its journal, *Libraries: Culture, History, and Society* (*LCHS*), in 2017.

The appearance of *LCHS* (with which several of us editors have professional links) helped to open new vistas in library history. Although it was launched in response to the fact that some journals which had previously published library history had changed their emphasis and thereby deprived scholars of important outlets, the ethos of the journal “strives to situate libraries as part of a larger whole, while attending to something different than ‘information’ . . . expect[ing] authors to extend their analysis beyond institutional and professional perspectives.”² By no means is *LCHS* the first vehicle to encourage library historians to examine libraries in the contexts of their communities; but its wide reach (more than 500 subscribers, including quite a number of libraries) and robust publishing schedule have popularized that approach among our scholarly community.

It should be no surprise, then, that when LHRT issued successive calls for papers in 2020 and 2021 with the theme of “Libraries Without Borders,” which echoes the approach of *LCHS*, the conference organizers received enough quality submissions that they could accept nearly three dozen of them—enough to fill three days of the seminar with fascinating and informative research into the roles that libraries have played in the communities they serve, well beyond the stacks and circulation desk. Some of those outstanding papers are included as chapters in this volume. Each chapter was subject to revision by its authors and to peer review by the scholars listed in our acknowledgments. In compiling this volume, we have used “signed peer review,” in which the reviewers’ identities are made known to the authors. We believe that this approach encouraged a collegial atmosphere in which the “borders” separating author from reviewer were made porous so that authors could be encouraged in their scholarship rather than merely criticized and could work with an understanding of the “cloud” of library history scholars who are helping make their work as good as possible.

What does it mean for a library to be without borders? This volume could have been called, alternatively, *Libraries That Defy Definition*; the libraries and library workers throughout these chapters share some common elements, but do not always fit solidly within conventional understandings of what a library is or should look like. Nor are all the people discussed strictly librarians as we would categorize them today. Instead, we see a variety of practices, places, and goals, all with the intention of fostering community and providing information. The nature of this information, too, varies among these chapters. Our aim throughout has been to challenge the notions of definitions and to demonstrate how library practice has been and continues to be a practice of pushing beyond borders.

In the spirit of post-*LCHS* library history, we have encouraged authors to think about the history of libraries not merely as institutions, but as collectivities of librarians, patrons, and other stakeholders who share interests related to information-seeking, community formation, and empowerment. The research contained in these pages shows how librarians and users reached not only beyond the border separating professionals from patrons, but also across institutional boundaries separating different specializations within the profession, and outside traditional channels of knowledge acquisition and organization.

Renate L. Chancellor provided the keynote address for the conference, in which she contemplated the links between the history of whiteness in librarianship and current efforts to make the library profession more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Her remarks are captured in her foreword to this volume.

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The demand for access to libraries was a recurrent theme of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, but one that is often studied by focusing on the institutional responses to activism. In the book's first chapter, LaVerne Gray, Beth Patin, Tyler Youngman, and Rachael Nutt share their research into parallel stories of activists in both the North and South, and demonstrate that community-based activism has been key to battling the "epistemicide" that threatens to undermine collective understandings about the world and the interests of African American library users.

While there are few institutions more hierarchical than the Roman Catholic Church, we have in Henry Handley's research a fascinating story of a grassroots movement among devotees of the Virgin Mary to create a comprehensive collection related to the theology and practice of the Society of Mary at a time of great ecclesiastical and liturgical changes in and around the Second Vatican Council. He demonstrates that a determined community with a clearly articulated information need can utilize traditional library acquisition and organizational practices to create unique collections that serve pressing needs.

Within the profession, librarians have often needed to think beyond traditional occupational categories when new ways of serving patrons become apparent. The early years of American librarianship found librarians working in technical services, reference, or circulation. In Kelly Hangauer's research, we find historians exploring the ways in which professionals innovated to create new areas of librarianship: specifically, bibliographic instruction. This field is now an established specialty with its own professional organizations, conferences, and publications; the Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries serves to connect librarians in this specialty.

As the famous example of Chesterton's fence illustrates, borders do not develop without reason (whether good or bad)—and conflict often arises when a boundary is crossed. We feature two case studies involving this principle. John DeLooper examines the fascinating aftermath of that petty limitation, the due date; by examining popular news items about long-overdue books being returned, he seeks to understand how library patrons and the general public feel about the role of libraries and their rules in the lives of average Americans. Emily D. Spunaugle explores rules of much greater consequence as she writes about the federal Foreign Agents Registration Act and its influence on the work of research libraries that collected materials from the Communist bloc.

Our book concludes with encouragement for you, the reader, to reach beyond your own boundaries. Tom Glynn provides a primer on conducting research in library history that will allow you to explore how libraries in your community

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have affected the lives of their users. And Loriene Roy and Rea N. Simons offer a critique of library history as it is currently conducted, pointing out the borders of habit, familiarity, and bias that thwart diversity within library and information studies. As a corrective, Roy and Simons biographize current Indigenous library practitioners in an effort to document and *create* library history.

While we are pleased that this volume presents so many new approaches to library history, it is not the volume it could have been. While many positive developments came from the need to move our conference online—including a larger audience, lower barriers to attendance, and an emboldened commitment to inclusivity—the facts of life in 2021 imposed themselves negatively as well. In particular, many of the papers presented at LHS XIV were works in progress, which were complete enough to present at our conference because of work that had been done before the lockdowns began in March 2020. However, many authors found themselves unable to bring their papers to a publication-ready state. Some cited the inaccessibility of research materials in archives during 2020 and 2021. Others became ill themselves, or had to tend to ill family members, or suffered bereavement. We sincerely regret the omission of many excellent papers that were given at the conference, and we encourage their authors to seek other outlets for their research.

We are grateful to the contributors who have done so much to demonstrate the power of libraries to shape communities and vice versa. This collection serves as a reminder that library history is more than the history of libraries; it is the history of readers and information-seekers whose needs determine the shape of the institutions that serve them. If, as Ranganathan noted, the library is a growing organism, it will naturally outgrow any borders placed around it, and library history is witness to the ever-changing shape of libraries within their communities.

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February 27, 2023

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