

# Not in My Library!

Sanford Berman

Foreword by Maurice J. Freedman



"Berman's Bag" Columns from  
*The Unabashed Librarian*, 2000–2013

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**ADDITIONAL WORKS BY SANFORD BERMAN AND FROM MCFARLAND**

*Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (1993)

*Worth Noting: Editorials, Letters, Essays, an Interview, and Bibliography* (1988)

**SANFORD BERMAN AND JAMES P. DANKY TOGETHER EDITED THE SERIES**

*Alternative Library Literature: A Biennial Anthology. THE VOLUMES COVERED 1984–1985* (Oryx, 1986)—**AND FROM MCFARLAND:** 1986–1987 (1988); 1988–1989; 1990–1991; 1992–1993; 1994–1995; 1996–1997; 1998–1999; and 2000–2001 (2002)

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SANFORD BERMAN

*Foreword by Maurice J. Freedman*



McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers  
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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGUING DATA ARE AVAILABLE

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING DATA ARE AVAILABLE

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On the cover: Sanford Berman in his home office, 1999 (photograph by Tony Nelson); quotations from Sandy; hand painted tempera background (iStockphoto/Thinkstock)

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To the memory of these inspiring  
and supportive friends and colleagues:

Fay Blake

Bill Katz

Noel Peattie

Marvin Scilken

Celeste West

Charles Willett

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## Foreword

*by Maurice J. Freedman*

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I first met Sanford Berman via his letters from Africa that were published in *Library Journal* in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They were strongly political—if memory serves me right—and most especially they were critical of Library of Congress cataloging practices.

I personally became involved with him later. In 1972, I was head of technical services at the Hennepin County (Minnesota) Library, which at the time had its headquarters in the third and fourth floors of the Minneapolis Public Library. The HCL head cataloger left for California and I needed to replace her. I called two close friends of mine for recommendations, Art Plotnik and Patricia Glass Schuman. At the time Art was editor of the *Wilson Library Bulletin* (now defunct) and subsequently editor of *American Libraries* prior to his retirement. Pat had an editorial position at R.R. Bowker (a vastly changed company now, which also dropped the R.R.); more recently Pat sold Neal-Schuman Publishers (of which she was president and co-founder) to the American Library Association (ALA).

I asked both of them if there was anyone they knew or could recommend to help me fill the vacancy. Surprisingly, they each, quite separately and without any mutual consultation, recommended Sandy. Art said that I knew his politics were good from the letters he sent to *LJ*, but I wondered if he knew anything about cataloging. I pretty clearly remember Pat saying that he was brilliant. I know both gave him a strong recommendation.

In January 1972, computing was mainframe-based and required people with strong systems and programming abilities to make them work. At Hennepin I was fortunate enough to have Jerry Pennington, formerly of the Library of Congress MARC Project, a great programmer as well as librarian, who was the HCL computer maven, and assistant head of technical services. Back then the big annual computer conference was the Joint Computer Conference, which was held in Anaheim, California, that year. I asked Jerry to meet with Sandy in Los Angeles while he was at the conference to see if Sandy was qualified for the cataloging position. When Jerry, a relatively taciturn guy, returned from the conference he told me that Sandy would be fine. I don't remember getting much more from Jerry, but knowing him very well, I knew that that was a strong recommendation.

I subsequently called Sandy to see if he'd be interested in the position. I was pretty sure he would be, having been told by Pat or Art that Sandy was unemployed, and that he and his wife, Lorraine, and their two children, Jill and Paul, were living in someone's basement in L.A. We chatted a while. He said that he was interested in the job. I told him I'd get back to him. I called him back and offered him the job. I asked him how much he wanted. He said \$10,000 or \$11,000, maybe. I told him that I would hire him but it had to be for \$12,000+ dollars. I made that decision because I didn't want him to be paid any less than someone in the public services department in a comparable position. His response was something to the effect of, "When do I start?"

Fast forward to my meeting him at the airport in the middle of winter on the Minnesota tundra. He and

his family were dressed in clothes that were L.A.'s best approximation of what winter apparel should be in Minnesota. They all moved into my house until they could find a place of their own. It worked out very well. My children, Jenna (now Director of Research & Instruction services and Zine Librarian, Barnard College Library) and Susan (a psychiatric social worker at Hunterdon [N.J.] Medical Center), were roughly the age of his children and our families became lifelong friends.

Getting back to library matters, I had sent Sandy the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, and Jean Weihs' book, *Non-Book Materials: The Organization of Integrated Collections*. I asked him if he could begin working on rules for cataloging non-book materials. The Hennepin County Library in the early 1970s was undergoing a revolution in library buildings, collections, and service, which included a major commitment to audiovisual materials. I was surprised when Sandy showed up with a completed set of rules specifically applicable to the cataloging and classification of non-book titles. These rules were instituted and applied virtually at once.

There was so much that was done at HCL during the early 1970s. (My tenure was 1969–1974; Sandy stayed on much longer.)

Robert H. Rohlf, a world-class library buildings consultant, was the director of HCL from 1969 through almost all of my tenure (I started a couple of months before Bob arrived, but he was there many years after I left for the New York Public Library), and a good chunk of Sandy's time. To Bob's credit, he encouraged the "hundred flowers to bloom." In technical services, I was the division manager; Jerry Pennington was the assistant division manager (and also immediately responsible for systems and programming); Sandy was the head cataloger; and, elsewhere, Don Roberts, the great librarian media advocate, innovator, and practitioner, was responsible for the introduction and use of a broad range of media equipment, collections, and services. (Don was the guy who coined the phrase regarding the worship of library buildings: the *edifice complex*.)

Bob Rohlf was supportive of what we did, much of which had never been done before and probably has never been done since. Of particular note, the automated book catalog we produced was a complete effort that was innovative in a variety of ways. Originally, HCL was going to use the series of programs that were being developed at the University of California's Institute of Library Research (ILR) for the purpose of converting all of the university's campuses' catalogs to the MARC format and then producing from that database a printed book catalog.

John Knapp, one of the three authors of the original MARC II Communications Format during his Library of Congress tenure, was head of systems at the University of California at Santa Cruz and affiliated with ILR; he recommended that the ILR conversion and maintenance programs would save HCL a tremendous amount of money and simplify data entry and record maintenance. The reason for the savings was that the few libraries actually creating MARC records and manipulating them had to fill out *on paper* the equivalent of an OCLC online cataloging template. Except for the college libraries of Ohio that were the only OCLC members at the time,<sup>1</sup> there was no online input to MARC available to HCL or any other U.S. library with the possible exception of Stanford University's BALLOTS system.

An ILR staffer with an MIT Ph.D. in linguistics, Don Sherman, noticed that random samples of the millions of catalog cards in the collective UC card catalogs shared similar formatting. Noticing that such elements as the main entry came first, the title paragraph followed after a carriage return and

indent, subject headings were preceded by Arabic numbers followed immediately by a period, added entries were introduced by Roman numerals, etc., he decided that rather than manually coding data on worksheets it would be so much faster and cheaper to write a program—Automatic Field Recognition (AFR)—so that the data entry person need only enter the bibliographic information in the sequence and with the spacing and punctuation found on the actual catalog card. In the beginning Sherman created a few simple codes (e.g., the “¢” sign) to separate some of the data elements. But the codes selected could readily be learned and inserted by the keyboarder as part of the data entry process. This eliminated the tedious process of handwriting (or typing) code sheets for subsequent input by the typist.<sup>2</sup>

We also made the decision to hire University of Minnesota library school (now defunct) students to proofread the MARC records created with the ILR programs.

Seemingly a major digression from Sandy’s work at HCL and our relationship, this automation background is relevant to what ultimately became Sandy’s great achievements while at HCL.

Automation projects then, and today IT projects, virtually always missed multiple deadlines. One systems designer would estimate how long it would take to get a piece of software written, double the estimated time, and still found that the predicted deadline was missed.<sup>3</sup> Of consequence here was that HCL had an enormous building program underway. The point of the book catalog was to eliminate the need for card catalogs in the newly constructed branches. The problem was that ILR was massively behind in the development of its predicted completion of the two major programs needed to create the formatted data as it was to appear on the pages of the book catalog. Consequently, we had created a MARC database but it could not be used for the creation of a book catalog. Sort of “all dressed up and no place to go.”

In January 1972, Jerry and I attended the MARC Users’ Group meeting at ALA Midwinter. Making a presentation were the head and assistant head of the New York Public Library Systems Analysis and Data Processing Office (SADPO), James A. Rizzolo and S. Michael Malinconico. They distributed sample pages from the automated system that NYPL would soon be using to produce book catalogs for NYPL’s Research Libraries and Branch Libraries, respectively. Aside from state-of-the-art photocomposition that effectively displayed catalog entries with letterpress quality, it introduced automated authority control to the machine-based cataloging process. This was revolutionary, and had especially important implications for HCL.

What made it unique and of such importance was that its goal was to automate the cataloging process whereas the increasingly successful OCLC (then spreading to networks beyond Ohio, slowly but surely) was designed to facilitate data entry or transcription of cataloging information and the subsequent production of catalog cards.<sup>4</sup>

Together, Jerry and I decided that we should approach NYPL to see if we could use their system to create a book catalog for HCL from the MARC database HCL created using the ILR programs. Without going into the gory details, a deal was struck. HCL contracted with NYPL to have its MARC records processed through the NYPL system. As part of the process, HCL received a printout of all of the authorities (authors, subjects, uniform titles, and series titles) in its database. NYPL used the authority system to ensure that its catalog records were rigorously consistent with the Library of Congress names, subjects, etc. The system displayed erroneous terms and permitted simple (and not

so simple) corrections. It also automatically flipped names or subjects that were cross-references to the established forms. The system permitted global changes to terms when LC updated some of its many outmoded headings—if LC changed “automatic calculating machines” to “computers,” all of the records with the former heading could be converted to the latter by simply changing the authority record. Of course, for LC to change a heading, it had to reprint and then file every catalog card in three separate catalogs in which the outmoded term appeared.<sup>5</sup> NYPL also provided with the system for the embedding of public notes and cataloger notes in the authority records. The cataloger notes only were displayed for the cataloger.

As stated, NYPL did not want to change LC cataloging to meet some other standard; it used the system to be consistent with the LC name and subject authorities.

Hiring Sandy combined his brilliance, his seemingly Renaissance knowledge, and his strong political and social views with the capabilities of the NYPL authority control program. It was a collaborative effort. We suggested that Sandy could take advantage of the system to “correct” all objectionable or outmoded LC terms and to add appropriate terms where none heretofore existed—as Sandy saw fit. Prior to implementing this change in cataloging, i.e., moving beyond the slavish adherence to LC cataloging followed by virtually all libraries to this day, I recommended this policy to Bob Rohlf, who gave us the go-ahead. Bob was more conservative than we were, but his principled stance as a librarian made it possible for so many wonderful flowers to bloom at Hennepin—not just the cataloging and automation innovations.

With the policy now adopted and in place, Sandy led the cataloging staff in implementing the kinds of changes he had recommended in *Prejudices and Antipathies* (Scarecrow, 1971; revised and updated, McFarland, 1993) and whatever else made sense—because automated authority control made it possible!

Two major achievements took place:

1. The (probably) only time that a mainframe-based library catalog system was transferred and implemented at another location, and it was done twice by HCL: first with the University of California Institute of Library Research’s book catalog system and second with the New York Public Library automated book catalog system.
2. The adoption of a cataloging policy and its implementation that broke with the automatic adherence to LC terminology and practice. When LC’s terms didn’t make sense, were wrong, outdated or nonexistent, Sandy and his staff could correct or innovate them because the NYPL system gave them the facility to readily do so.

The second would not have been possible without the first.

I can’t proceed further without recognizing the enormous contributions of Jerry Pennington and Michael Malinconico. Jerry did the incredible work required to make that mainframe software transfer happen on the Hennepin end. From a systems standpoint it was an enormous achievement. Without Michael’s help on the NYPL end the first HCL book catalog could not have been produced. He and his staff did all of the work necessary to process the HCL database, get it run through the NYPL system, and then produce the first HCL book catalog. (The actual transfer of the system from NYPL to Hennepin occurred later.) The HCL MARC database could not have been successfully created without

the contribution of Stephen Silberstein (of ILR at the time and future and past co-owner of Innovative Interfaces, Inc.) who came to Minneapolis and installed FIX, the complex program he wrote that provided the means to edit the converted MARC records.

One interesting story—of so very many—will be mentioned. It was an enormous job getting the master catalog card file converted to machine-readable form. We chose to use the IBM Magnetic Tape Selectric Typewriter (MTST) for the conversion. These devices were leased and very expensive. We started with two or three and added another one. We wanted to increase production so that a book catalog could be produced in the not too distant future. It occurred to me, why not put on a second shift. That would mean that we could increase productivity without adding more machines.

Two keyboarders were hired, one of whom was Myrna Harper, who had been taking one or more extension courses at the University of Minnesota that focused on Native American history. Myrna also read the information on the catalog cards as she was typing it onto tape. She came to me and said, “I see that you’re changing the names of all of these African peoples to the way they want to be identified, why aren’t you doing the same for the Native American tribes?” My response was simple. “You help us, and we’ll do it.” Myrna worked with Sandy—while still doing her keyboarding—and Sandy systematically changed the LC Westernized version of the tribal names to the names by which they preferred to be called. And that is how “Nimipu” became the name for the people that French settlers called “Nez Percé.”

The last major innovation was the creation of the *Hennepin County Library Cataloging Bulletin*. I had suggested to Sandy that he create a newsletter for the public service staff that would inform them of the changes being made to the catalog. The idea was to help them better serve the patrons and guide their own research. It became a wonderful publication. Sandy listed the changes but also wrote explanations and mini-essays concerning cataloging policy and practice. *HCL Cataloging Bulletin* had an international circulation and was widely read and discussed in cataloging circles. In 1976, it won the H.W. Wilson Library Periodical Award.

I will move forward with a discussion of this collection of Sandy’s columns in *The U\*N\*A\*B\*A\*S\*H\*E\*D<sup>TM</sup> Librarian, the “how I run my library good”<sup>SM</sup> letter (U\*L)*, but first a not-so-happy coda must be added to the Hennepin story. Once I left, many of the 100 flowers wilted.

As Sandy related, “Rohlf ... was so uncomfortable with our cataloging operation that I tried to get out.... [Rohlf] and [Lora Landers, a Hennepin division manager] censored the *Cataloging Bulletin*, banning all illustrations<sup>6</sup> and insisting that all copy be approved by them in advance. That’s what reduced the mag to simply a bare bones report on new and changed headings.” Don Roberts fell out of favor and, according to Sandy, “was ridiculed and humiliated in front of library staff by Landers.”<sup>7</sup>

The retirement of Bob Rohlf led to his replacement by someone who had *no* respect for the work done by Sandy and his staff, nor for that matter did he see any value in the innovative audiovisual services introduced by Don Roberts. In a Stalinesque erasure of history, the HCL cataloging database was overlaid by OCLC’s LC (or other) catalog records and all of the innovative work was destroyed. The director reassigned Sandy to a research position, thus relieving him of all catalog management responsibility. And that was the end of a creative era at the Hennepin County Library that had begun in 1969. With a prescience that I hadn’t foreseen, Sandy, at a goodbye party for me, said about my leaving HCL, “That’s the end of Camelot.”

As Vonnegut would say, “and so it goes.”<sup>8</sup>

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Now let’s pick up the U\*L story. U\*L began in 1973. It was the creation of Marvin H. Scilken, its *Founder* (Marvin’s self-appellation) and one of the great and most underappreciated librarians of the 20th century. Marvin was an iconoclast, a public librarian who believed that public libraries existed to provide the best possible service to their patrons. His criticism and anger were directed at libraries and library practitioners who established practices and procedures that made things easier for the staff but frequently usually made things harder for the patrons. In the days before integrated library systems, Marvin had his circulation staff make a crayon hash mark in the back of the a book every time it circulated, changing the crayon color each year. In this way, by simply opening the back of the book he could tell how many times an item circulated each year with a simple glance, as well as the first and last time it was borrowed.

He had a seemingly infinite number of ideas to improve service to the public. He also had numerous criticisms of library practices, but always suggested user-friendly alternatives. U\*L was the place to go for ideas, suggestions, procedures, and forms that would improve service to the public library user—and sometimes for a good laugh. Marvin also included in U\*L similar material from libraries around the country that he characterized as *nifty*. Along with his wife Polly (now deceased), he produced four issues per year up until 2000, when he died suddenly of a heart attack while attending the ALA Midwinter meeting in January.<sup>9</sup>

My wife, Paula, and I came into the U\*L picture when we purchased U\*L from Polly in early 2000. The first 113 issues were edited and published by the Scilkens. Beginning with issue number 114, the first issue of 2000, Paula and I have published all subsequent issues of U\*L.

Not being Marvin or having the veritable fountain of nifty ideas that flowed from him, we decided that having some regular contributing editors would be a positive addition to the kinds of material that characterized U\*L from the outset. We asked Sandy to be a columnist for a couple of reasons. We knew that Sandy had an enormous following and would offer columns that always would be challenging and sometimes even controversial.

In addition we added Mark Hasskarl, a long-time public library director and also a published movie critic in Connecticut papers, and Bernadine E. Abbott Hoduski, probably the single most important advocate for government publications in the last several decades. Jenna Freedman at Barnard College Library has contributed articles on an occasional basis. Ben Ostrowsky contributed crossword puzzle for numerous issues; and Dan Stanton, government information librarian at Arizona State University contributed a number of interesting articles.

At present, along with Sandy, Mark, and Bernadine, Adrienne L. Strock, a YA librarian recently appointed Manager of YOUmedia Chicago, Youth-Powered 21st Century Learning, at the Chicago Public Library; and Susan L. Polos, Library Media Specialist, Mount Kisco Elementary School, Mount Kisco, New York, have been regular contributors.

There are numerous articles of varying size and topics that are drawn from library newsletters, nonprofit journals, and miscellaneous sources including all that speak to best practices for public, academic, school, and other types of libraries, or as Marvin put it, articles about “how I run my library good.”<sup>SM</sup> Occasionally some of them are in a more academic voice, but overall U\*L has been practic

and practice-oriented. Because of my extensive travels, there are at least a couple of photos each issue to do with libraries in a multitude of venues, foreign and domestic.

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As a contributing editor, Sandy has had virtually complete license about what he chooses to write and its length. You'll see from the range of his contributions that there are a variety of topics, but his focus on the terminology of LC—going back to the 1960s—the de facto national library, has never flagged.

He also has been a pain in the ass.

All of Sandy's contributions are typewritten on a manual typewriter. When we worked together at Hennepin, I offered to get him an electric typewriter, but he declined the offer. An extraordinary typist—80 to 90 words per minute—he said he likes to think with his fingers on the typewriter keys. Unfortunately his resting fingers are not always idle. Unintentionally a resting finger may trigger a keystroke. Which is why Sandy will only use his manual typewriter. I tried to buy him a PC for his columns. For the same keyboard-related issue, he rejected the offer.

Sandy sends me manual typewriter-produced copy. This means that there are shadowed letters, insertions of printed text of various physical size and type font, redactions, and a multitude of ink spots, all of which confuse the sophisticated—but not sophisticated enough—scanning/Optical Character Recognition (OCR) program, ABBYY® Fine Reader® 11. Photocopied information and cataloging information with all of its esoteric single and multiple indents, capitalizations, etc. all bedevil [not so] Fine Reader. If Sandy had sent me a word-processed document of his article, I'd have little to do other than ensuring that it would be accurately placed into the desktop typeset publication.

The initially scanned output from his manuscript can look like a train wreck. The OCR program converts every shadow, redaction, smudge, etc. into something that makes no sense, a seemingly random series of characters, that otherwise bears little relation to what Sandy intended. It then is incumbent on me to use his manuscript as a reference in order to make the additions, deletions, and changes to the OCR output that will result in the U\*L published article that Sandy intended it to be. Depending on the condition of Sandy's manuscript, the conversion process runs the gamut from extraordinarily tedious and painstaking to a little less tedious and painstaking. The beauty of it is that at the end of the process, the successfully converted column is yet another nugget of Berman gold.

It's a labor of love. I love Sandy, and I'm happy and proud to publish his columns—all of which have enriched U\*L and its readers. (It should be noted that Sandy had occasionally submitted pieces to Marvin Scilken during the first 27 years of U\*L's history.)

I'm also thrilled that having Sandy as a contributing editor of U\*L has provided yet another reason for maintaining a friendship and a professional relationship that began 40+ years ago in Minneapolis, Minnesota, one I cherish to this day.

Maurice J. Freedman, MLS, Ph.D.

Publisher, *The U\*N\*A\*B\*A\*S\*H\*E\*D™ Librarian*

## **Notes**

- [1.](#) Hence OCLC’s original name, Ohio College Library Center.
  - [2.](#) Incidentally the ILR staff member primarily responsible for creating the MARC record maintenance program was Stephen Silberstein, co-founder and co-owner of Innovative Interfaces, Inc. He stayed at my house in 1973 when he came to Minneapolis to install the FIX program, i.e., the ILR program for correcting errors in MARC formatted records.
  - [3.](#) Based on my experience of having worked on such projects beginning in 1968, I came up with the adage, “We always meet our last deadline.”
  - [4.](#) The catalog card production process developed by OCLC left the Library of Congress catalog card service in the dust. While OCLC used a degraded type font—degraded only by letterpress standards—it produced catalog cards from OCLC line printers alphabetized in filing-ready order with tracings and call numbers in place exactly to the specifications of the individual library—virtually overnight. This was effectively the end of the LC card service although it didn’t shut down till much later. It must be added that OCLC, despite its poor quality control, created the most extraordinary interlibrary loan to date in history.
  - [5.](#) This was the harsh economic reason why LC wanted to avoid changing its terms. The cost of reprinting the catalog cards and filing them, and of removing the outdated cards, was the primary reason LC was so reluctant to make changes. We also know that LC avoided changes that (cont.) had political implications inimical to government policy (e.g., Vietnam Conflict rather than Vietnam War) or represented cultural shifts which essentially made a stodgy LC uncomfortable. Sandy has written extensively about LC’s intransigence when it comes to popular culture terminology replacing LC’s outmoded terms or innovating new terms reflecting contemporary usage.
- Henriette Avram, the “godmother” of MARC, put all of her effort into the development, maintenance and adoption of MARC internationally; this is why LC was quite late coming to the development and implementation of a cataloging and authority control system—hence LC’s resistance to changes in headings, not just because they didn’t like them politically speaking but also because of the enormity of the cost of implementing changes in withdrawing, printing, arranging, and filing cards from card catalogs.
- [6.](#) The illustrations were created initially by the late Inese Jansons, the HCL staff artist, a warm, extraordinarily talented and joyous person filled with love for the people she liked, which fortunately included Sandy and me. The offending cartoons were drawn by Inese’s successor, Jackie Urbanovic.
  - [7.](#) Quotations are from a letter sent to me by Sandy, dated May 17, 2013.
  - [8.](#) A favorite expression of Kurt Vonnegut that appeared countless in his writings.



[9.](#) It was the third consecutive Midwinter Meeting in Philadelphia at which librarians died. Harold Roth was the first, followed by Elizabeth Futas, and then Marvin. I was nervous about attending the next Midwinter scheduled for Philadelphia—fortunately, there were no mishaps.

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*A Note from the McFarland Editors: The Unabashed Librarian has been going since 1973. It's a terrific periodical, unique in coverage and wide-ranging in subject. Mitch Freedman is the publisher and may be contacted at [editor@unabashedlibrarian.com](mailto:editor@unabashedlibrarian.com) or at PO Box 287, Mount Kisco NY 10549, for subscription information or editorial correspondence. Highly recommended!*

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## Introduction

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I first wanted to call this collection *Making a Stink* or *Raising Hell*. Why such inelegant titles? This interview, conducted by Kristin Hoyer in March 2005 and originally published in the fall 2004 *Counterpoise*, may help explain.

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**Counterpoise (CP):** Were you surprised when the American Library Association awarded you honorary membership, its highest award? Do you feel ALA has supported you in the work you have done?

**Sandy Berman (SB):** Not entirely, since I'd been forewarned about the nomination. I confess, though, that nearly every time I get an ALA envelope in the mail, I wonder if it's going to be an oops!-sorry-for-the-mistake-but-please-send-back-the-award message. While there was no chance at the award ceremony to make an acceptance speech, I wanted to say something like this:

You do me a great honor today. Yet an even greater honor, both for me and all of you—the whole association—would be to energetically promote and implement ALA's Poor People's Policy, which has essentially remained dormant since 1990, and to add to the "Personnel Practices" policy a clause affirming free speech for library workers.

Although happy for the recognition (especially when still fit enough to enjoy it)—and truly overwhelmed by the loud and loving ovation at the Orlando presentation—the truth is that a number of other people also deserve such affirmation and applause. Thus, without doing a humility trip, I want to now share the award with:

- The late Noel Peattie, *Sipapu* editor, UC–Davis librarian, poet, raconteur, reporter, printer, aesthete, social activist, philosopher, critic, publisher, sailor, cat-lover, and eccentric.
- Fay Blake, library educator, access-advocate, and unstoppable hell-raiser.
- Zoia Horn, the very embodiment of intellectual freedom and personal courage.
- Celeste West, *Synergy* and *Booklegger Magazine* editor, the most awesome, electric, and incisive voice ever in library literature.
- Five selfless citizen-activists who love books and libraries so much that they're willing to fight for them: Peter Warfield and James Chaffee (San Francisco), Fred Whitehead (Kansas City, KS), Fred Woodworth (Tucson), and Nicholson Baker (Maine).

Has ALA supported my work? Well, some of ALA has. Sometimes. SRRT colleagues have surely been supportive. So have people in EMIERT and GLBTRT. Once, for a brief, glorious period, the Subject

Analysis Committee—under the leadership of an unusually responsive person—actually took important action on previously-ignored proposals to expand subject and genre access to fiction and other literary works, to expedite the creation and use of topical descriptors, and to eliminate remaining bias from Library of Congress Subject Headings. On the other hand, myriad letters to ALA executive directors and presidents, for instance concerning resuscitation of the Poor People’s Policy, advocacy for workplace speech rights, and—most recently—support for the National Coalition for the Homeless-crafted Bringing Home America Act have gone either unanswered or without follow-up action. And my personal ALA history, of course, began with a disaster: the refusal of the Association’s Publishing Services to print my *Prejudices and Antipathies*, a tract on the LC subject headings concerning people, without serious revisions in content and tone—even though ALA itself had commissioned the book!

**CP: After your forced retirement from the HCL in 1999, you must have been angry. How do you feel about the Hennepin County Library now that the dust has settled? Do you feel they have disrespected your life’s work?**

**SB:** Angry? Yes (when I allow myself to think about it, which isn’t that often). All I wanted subsequent to that forced retirement was two things:

- Rescinding the unjust reprimand that disciplined me for expressing my professional views on AACR2 and allegedly opposing Hennepin County Library’s membership in OCLC (I didn’t oppose it)
- An apology for the humiliation and punishment inflicted on me. I never demanded reinstatement or monetary damages. Just a clean record plus a “We’re sorry.” But they simply couldn’t manage it, despite several requests. In fact, most later correspondence to HCL, typically dealing with cataloging service, and collection issues (e.g., recommending local alternative press and ethnic, particularly Latino, publications for the magazine collection), were never answered. And three successive letters a community newspaper simply asking about HCL’s activities regarding the USA PATRIOT Act elicited no reply whatever.

Did they “disrespect” my life’s work? Much worse than that: they literally demolished it. Perhaps two or so years ago, the authority file and bibliographic database carefully, innovatively, and lovingly built over 2.5 decades, were totally destroyed, being replaced by strictly “standard” OCLC records and LC terms. (A “snapshot” of our earlier labor was captured on a disc only after a public outcry and clamor. It has yet to be made available, perhaps through the University of Illinois Archives, in an easily searchable, interactive mode.) In the meantime, the director who presided over my expulsion and the later data-demolition left—voluntarily—for a warmer clime. And the cabal of upper-level managers who inspired and engineered the catalog destruction as well as my exile remain, to this day secure in their positions. None of the three principals have ever, even privately, expressed any remorse or regret over what happened. On a less somber note, many frontline HCL staff, especially those who in the late ’90s formed the first-ever librarians union at Hennepin, were and continue to be, firm friends and colleagues. Hell, I lunch with 3 or 4 of them every week! And their AFSCME local succeeded in getting a “free speech” clause added to their contract. That’s gratifying.

Bottom line: I’m profoundly disgusted by HCL’s administration (which, incidentally, I believe was complicit in the wholesale removal of some 6 books by and about me, plus their online catalog records, a few years ago), but I highly respect the dedicated and imaginative HCL workforce.

**CP: You have long been associated with the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association. How has it changed? How do you feel about having future involvement in SRRT?**

**SB:** I've been a SRRTer, with only a few interruptions, since 1973. It's the only place to be inside ALA for those who oppose "business model" librarianship, replete with branding, naming rights, blockbuster-hyping, outsourcing, mindless weeding, endless management fads, and top-down governance, and who are actively concerned about the connection between libraries and democracy, social justice, and the environment. SRRT has historically functioned as ALA's, if not the profession's, conscience. Its *Newsletter* today, ably edited by Sally Driscoll, is better than it's ever been (including my own 2-year stint in the '70s). Some of its task forces have become so large and strong that they morphed into round tables themselves. That's the genesis of GODORT, EMIERT, GLBTRT, and, I think, IFRT. So SRRT has definitely been a prod, a beacon, an incubator. The one task force I founded, dealing with what I have increasingly felt is the paramount issue facing society and libraries, poverty, has seemed relatively inactive in the past several years (apart from a fine program in Toronto). It needs to spark interest in the long-aborning Poor People's Policy and provide desperately-needed counsel and information (e.g., on how people experiencing homelessness can get library cards and what libraries can do to better sensitize their staffs to poor people's rights and needs). With the recent advent of a new coordinator—John Gehner, a soon-to-graduate library student who has actually worked at a homeless shelter and is extremely principled, skilled, and creative, the Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty Task Force is certain to fully revive and make a real impact on library practice.

There has always been some contention and even heated debate within SRRT. In the past few years, however, there appears to have developed an almost measurable rise in incivility, vituperation, and often vindictive, lacerating, ad hominem attacks. This trend contributes nothing to improving librarianship (or the world). It only wastes time and energy, embittering and alienating many erstwhile allies and comrades in the process. Someone last year described the AC Coordinator as a kind of "excrement." I've been savagely accused of doing things I never did (like deliberately excluding *Progressive Librarian* selections from *Alternative Library Literature* anthologies and somehow "giving up the fight"). I've been characterized as throwing a "hissy fit" over the editorial mutilation of an article I submitted to *PL*. ("Righteous outrage" would've been more accurate.) I've been excoriated for labeling people "Stalinists," although I never did so. During an unsolicited phone call after I'd announced support for a draft ALA resolution praising the Cuban Revolution's health and literacy progress, but calling for the release of some 75 jailed dissidents, I was derided for not being a "deep thinker." Later I was termed "a foot soldier for Bush" (and worse)! (All because I took the very same position on the dissident-crackdown as Naomi Klein, Barbara Ehrenreich, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Cornel West, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.)

Which brings me to two deeply troubling recent events concerning SRRT. The second I already alluded to. When ALA convened in San Francisco in 2001, the Hotel Workers' union declared a boycott against the Marriott Hotel, designated as ALA Conference Headquarters. Many ALA units accordingly arranged to switch their event-venues from the Marriott to other locations. SRRT's Coretta Scott King Task Force did not arrange to move its scheduled Tuesday morning award breakfast out of the Marriott. H.E.R.E. Local 2 planned to picket the Marriott that Tuesday morning. SRRT leaders vigorously tried to get the union to forego that demonstration, inasmuch as it would embarrass the CSK Breakfast attendees. Persons who resisted this pressure were dismissed as "racist

(Never mind that Local 2 is hugely multiracial.) The SRRT leaders may have sincerely wished not to discomfit the largely Black CSK Task Force. They may also have sincerely wished not to lose the considerable revenue that the breakfast ordinarily produces. Although alternative sites were proposed (probably involving the sacrifice of the \$40-per-plate breakfast), none were accepted. Then the inevitable happened. Having been told of the CSK TF intention to meet in a boycotted hotel, Coretta Scott King herself issued a letter stating the obvious: that such an act would not harmonize with Martin Luther King's legacy and spirit. Once published, CSKers and SRRT cancelled the whole program. No alternative venue. No possibly donating the uneaten breakfast food to hotel workers or soup kitchens. Nothing. At the very least, the Marriott fiasco represented a case of paralytic inflexibility. At the worst, it was a betrayal of principle.

The second instance: Cuba. Frankly, it has shaken me to the very core that nearly everyone in SRRT, however intensely committed to Cuban sovereignty and pleased with its literacy and medical successes, could fail to understand that the 75 dissident journalists, teachers, and librarians were the victims of totalitarian repression. They were tried suddenly in remote locations. They were charged with such heinous crimes as mounting human rights posters and holding or disseminating "subversive" and "counterrevolutionary" materials. Yes, they may have received money and literature and communications equipment from the United States. (Sweden and Spain, too.) But dealing with books, posters, and faxes—not guns and grenades—hardly makes these people dangerous spies, saboteurs, or agents of American imperialism. Simply to invoke terms like "subversive" and "counterrevolutionary" is to give away the game: that the regime wants to suppress ideas, to restrict speech, to limit intellectual freedom. Of all people, librarians should instantly recognize that kangaroo courts and the confiscation, even destruction, of reading matter signifies thought control, censorship, and repression. Yet not many have recognized that, leaving me, at any rate, with a sickening feeling in my gut that our professional commitment to free speech is not universal and unequivocal, but rather circumscribed by politically convenient double standards.

**CP: How would you update your comments in "Jackdaws Strut in Peacock's Feathers," which appeared in *Librarians at Liberty*, six years later?**

**SB:** Of course, some specific examples might be dropped or revised, but I'd retain the overall complaint and indictment. Let me stipulate the continuing problem in a few pithy observations:

- Cataloging should unmistakably identify a given work, convey its nature, content, and thrust, and specify how it can be accessed: e.g., by subject headings and various added entries for title variations, editors, illustrators, notable contributors, translators, associated groups or agencies, and local, specialty, and alternative presses.
- Electronic tinkering and keyword searching do not compensate for rigorous, accurate, fulsome, and fair cataloging at the start: that is, the crafting of a functional bibliographic record.
- Most U.S. libraries rely on Library of Congress cataloging for the bib-records that will appear in their local OPACs. This is especially so for U.S. trade publications, which constitute the bulk of new acquisitions by public, school, and some college libraries.
- Increasingly, most libraries do not review "outside copy" (i.e., the LC or network-supplied data) in a constructively critical fashion. Too often, paraprofessionals or clerks may be assigned merely to check on call number suitability and verify such basic elements as main entry and title, nothing more.

- As demonstrated in “Jackdaws” and numerous other sources, LC-originated copy is often deficient in notes, subject tracings, and other access points. Further, despite some fairly recent improvement in the liberality of heading assignment and the topical and genre treatment of literary works, such assignments remain inconsistent and spotty. Moreover, much subject heading vocabulary is still biased, awkward, or absent.

The dilemma persists: libraries accept LC-like products and tools with an almost infantile faith that they’re really useful. In fact, they are frequently imperfect and dysfunctional. What to do? Undertake more local enhancement and revision, realizing that poor cataloging may undo the considerable effort and expense of selecting and processing material. If the items can’t be found, what’s the point? Also, support LC’s future requests for greater funding and staffing, providing they acknowledge what particularly needs repair, like the more timely establishment of topical headings and the accelerated inclusion of content-clarifying and keyword-searchable notes.

For recent examples of LC cataloging infelicities, see my column, “Berman’s Bag,” in UNABASHED LIBRARIAN, no. 132. Last week, I received a gift from students at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul: *Shut Up Shut Down: Poems* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2004). It’s by Mark Nowak, with an Afterword by Amiri Baraka. It consists largely of poems about work, workers, and the labor movement, punctuated by black-and-white photos, quotations, and reading lists. Coincidentally, it is a case study in what’s wrong with standard cataloging. LC assigned a generous four headings: Corpora culture, Corporations—Corrupt practices, Business ethics, and Greed, all subdivided by—Literary collections. The sole added entry: I. Title. So what’s amiss? No added entry (access point) for notable contributor Amiri Baraka. No turnaround title added entry for “Shut down shut up.” No tracing for the alternative publisher: Coffee House Press. No note indicating the graphic dimension, the photo-documentary aspect. No genre heading for “Working class poetry.” No topical headings for plant closings, downsizing, and labor movement. Nor for, say, “Employee resistance and revolts.” And “Greed” is way too broad. This is emphatically about corporate greed, which demands an appropriate new heading. Also needed: “American poetry—21st century.” Finally, Dewey classifiers placed this essentially verse collection in “American fiction.” Not quite bibliocide-by-cataloging, but close.

For the record, over two years or longer I submitted suggestions and documentation regarding cataloging improvements and possible new or substitute headings to LC’s Cataloging Policy & Support Office. No replies. Then, finally, after some 40 or 50 submissions, came a response, which I believe materialized only because the CPSO Chief was ordered to do so by her superior. Since that December 16, 2004 letter, more have arrived. I would dearly like to report that the “thaw” betokens a genuine responsiveness, manifest in concrete reforms or new-heading creation. Alas, that hasn’t quite happened. Mostly, it’s been perfunctory acknowledgments or tortured explanations about why they won’t do what they should do.

Among other things, I’ve been trying to get them to introduce subject headings for CULTURE WAR, INFOSHOPS, STUDENT ANTI-SWEATSHOP MOVEMENT, PLUTOCRACY, and NATIVE AMERICAN HOLOCAUST, as well as either replacing FANZINES with ZINES or creating ZINES as a complementary descriptor. The latest LC communication was a full-page rebuke, dated 2-10-05, for daring to mention the inadequate Cataloging-in-Publication entry for Nan Levinson’s *Outspoken: Free Speech Stories* in my upcoming *College & Research Libraries* review.

**CP: You encouraged Charles Willett to start *Counterpoise*, and have been associated with it since**

## **the first issue. How has it changed or improved? How could the magazine improve?**

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**SB:** Rescuing *Counterpoise* from the clutches of a few SRRT Action Council members who sought to emasculate it was an accomplishment I'm genuinely proud of. I believe that the review-and-essay journal devoted to alternative media and socially responsible librarianship that Charles Willett had the vision to create and the expertise to produce qualifies as the most lasting, tangible, and useful product ever to emerge from the Alternatives In Publication Task Force—and SRRT itself. Indeed, the only other comparable achievement in recent AIP and SRRT history also owes much to Charles Willett's inspiration and guidance: the absolutely critical support provided to our island companions during the Hawaii Outsourcing Scandal. The advice, encouragement, and communication resources supplied by AIP's Hawaii Working Group to those beleaguered offshore colleagues absolutely enabled them to successfully resist the privatizing machinations of Bart Kane and Baker & Taylor. No other ALA unit came so quickly and committedly to their aid. For those two triumphs alone, Charles Willett should long ago have won the Jackie Eubanks Memorial Award. I nominated him more than once.

*Counterpoise* could improve in two basic ways: First, it needs to appear more regularly. And second, it should contain more reviews. Otherwise, it's terrific!

## **CP: What can and should librarians do outside of libraries and in their communities?**

**SB:** Within the very real limits of available time and energy, tell community groups, publications, and activists about new (and even old) library resources likely to interest them and perhaps help in their work: from books, CDs, and videos to journals, databases, and web sites. Government documents, too. Do it by mail, phone, or computer. And don't wait to be asked. If you're comfortable writing, contribute letters, columns, and op-eds to the local press on library and information-access issues (e.g., "dumbed down" collections); Internet filtering; media bias and concentration; regional and out-of-the-mainstream news and opinion sources; the USA PATRIOT Act; censorship-by-copyright; inadequate and stable library funding, perhaps through special tax districts, to prevent closings and cutbacks in hours; materials on urgent topics like peace, war, poverty, corporate greed and power, citizen action, GLBT rights, genocide, election reform, and environmental threats that can be reached online or found at libraries. If you'd rather speak, do the same on public access cable and community radio shows. Or arrange to talk or conduct panel discussions at meetings of civic, religious, labor, business, and political organizations.

## **CP: How long have you been sending out informative mailings? Where do you get the material, and to how many people do you send it?**

**SB:** Forever. Well, almost. I did it while working. And I do it in "retirement." Admittedly, it's kind of a compulsion. An obsession. But my hope is that recipients find at least some of the material useful, perhaps even amusing or inspiring. What I typically send are newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, clippings, flyers, and—uh huh—web printouts. My object is to target the items to particular individuals and groups. Not everyone gets the identical mailing.

How do I assemble this treasury of stuff? Many things I pick up as freebies at shops or events. Some material comes through memberships and subscriptions. And a small but diligent network of penpals supplies the rest, most notably Steve Fesenmaier (West Virginia Library Commission), Jim Danky (Wisconsin Historical Society), Donny Smith (*Dwan/American Libraries/Library Journal*), Chris Dodge (*Utne*), Fred Whitehead, (*People's Culture/Freethought History*), Earl Lee (Pittsburg State

University), and John Gehner (ALA/SRRT Poverty Task Force). While there's no formal "mailing list," I currently have about 81 active address cards. If I don't mail out SOMETHING every week, I'm likely to sink into serious depression and self-rebuke.

**CP: What print and Internet resources can you recommend for people who will be the Sanford Bermans of the next generation?**

**SB:** Hey, the next generation of "revolting librarians" doesn't need ME to recommend Internet resources. They're all amazingly adept and knowledgeable concerning online communication. Some, in fact, maintain their own web sites and blogs. Others produce their own zines. Since there's occasionally a temptation among, ahem, senior members of our congregation to bewail how few younger colleagues seem to be carrying on the (let's call it) radical or progressive or ass-kicking tradition in librarianship, let me puncture that somewhat condescending contention by naming several committed, energetic, and independent colleagues I happen to know—all my juniors by about 30 years or more—who make me confident that the future's in very good hands: Jenna Freedman, Sean Stewart, Bruce Jensen, John Gehner, Jessamyn West, Katia Roberto, Donny Smith, Alycia Sellie, and Tatiana de la Tierra.

**CP: What words of wisdom can you give to budding librarians and activists?**

**SB:** At the great risk of being at once trite and obvious:

- As much as possible, try to harmonize your values and your behavior. (Your mental health may depend on it!)
- In the process of saving the world, don't stint on family and friends. (Indeed, they should come first.)
- Read *The Onion*. Laugh a lot. Sometimes do silly things. (If possible, hang out with toddlers and kids up to 7 or 8 years old.)
- No matter how dismal or hopeless things seem, don't give up. Said Gandhi: "Even a single lamp dispels the deepest darkness." And Adam Hochschild has demonstrated in his *Bury the Chains* that even so clearly compelling a matter as ending the British slave trade took at least 50 years of effort.

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Okay. End of interview. The fact is that "making a stink" or "raising hell" is sometimes the best—and perhaps only—way to raise otherwise overlooked issues (like self-censorship and such wanton government repression as the treason charges leveled against whistle-blower Bradley Manning and Mayor Bloomberg's destruction of the Occupy Wall Street library), change attitudes (for instance about treating poor people with respect instead of disdain), and actually get something done, whether cajoling the cataloging gods (at the

Library of Congress and elsewhere) to variously reform antiquated and bigoted terminology (e.g.,



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