The Library Bill of Rights in the 1960s: One Profession, One Ethic

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION OF AMERICAN LIBRARIANSHIP'S treatment of the Library Bill of Rights in the 1960s. The author introduces two vying interpretations of the utility of the Library Bill of Rights, then examines the conflict surrounding these interpretations in order to probe their impact on the viability of the profession. Findings are based on both primary and secondary sources, including ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table Papers located at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University Library Archives.

When Wayne Wiegand asked this author to participate in the symposium on the utility of the Library Bill of Rights, at first there was some hesitation to accept. While my research on librarianship and the alternative press movement from 1967 to 1973 is closely connected to the subject of the utility of the Library Bill of Rights in the 1960s, there had been no thought of framing this work in Wayne's terms. The more the idea was thought about, however, the more intriguing the idea became of examining the Library Bill of Rights from its inception to the present. This author saw that the full historical context of the Library Bill of Rights gave the subject more power. As a result, the research findings were more provocative in light of other findings, and so the offer was accepted.

This article explores American librarianship's treatment of the Library Bill of Rights between approximately 1967 and 1973. The topic comprises a piece of librarianship's intellectual and cultural history that continues to prompt basic philosophical questions concerning

librarianship's professional jurisdiction and intellectual freedom. In addition, the essay supplements Baldwin's lead article, "The Library Bill of Rights: A Critique"(in this issue of *Library Trends*), which takes a legal perspective on the contemporary Library Bill of Rights. His three introductory points serve to contextualize his approach to the Library Bill of Rights.

First, Baldwin states that there are "tensions" and "contradictions" that reduce the "persuasive force" of the Library Bill of Rights. His article in this issue of *Library Trends* addresses this macro issue by treating three micro themes: (1) "deeply felt notions about intellectual freedom"; (2) "the more parochial interests of librarians"; and (3) "legal protection against government." This article primarily treats the first theme—i.e., deeply felt notions about intellectual freedom.

Second, Baldwin notes in his article that "libraries are forums for information and ideas," then asks "for whom, and for what?" This author's own research was prompted by the same basic question, but framed in slightly different terms—i.e., can a case be made for viewing the library as a forum for the production and reproduction of culture? Can a case be made for viewing the library as an institution in and through which ideology flows, is produced, and is perpetuated?

Third, Baldwin states that the Library Bill of Rights offers "multiple interpretations" and suggests that this is a flaw. While this is a critical issue, there is more concern with exploring how these interpretations affect librarians' behavior. This article introduces two vying interpretations of the utility of the Library Bill of Rights, then examines the conflict surrounding these interpretations in order to probe their impact on the profession's viability.

Having thus established three basic ways in which this author's own effort differs from Baldwin's perspective on the Library Bill of Rights, there is an additional point not covered by Baldwin. Although he says he offers the reader a "dispassionate attempt to point out the weaknesses of the Library Bill of Rights" how dispassionate is he? Clearly he has notions of intellectual freedom. For instance, when he states that he fails to understand why a library faced with "scarce or inadequate resources" must accommodate "mushroom hunters or Holocaust deniers," he appears to have views on the subject. But has he really understood the library profession's public notion and professional conception of intellectual freedom and its connection to the Library Bill of Rights?

In the early 1970s, David K. Berninghausen, director of the Minnesota library school and a former chairman of the American Library Association's (ALA) Intellectual Freedom Committee, had a comfortable position in the ALA establishment. Soon thereafter, however, he became a central figure in one of the most memorable conflicts in ALA history. Berninghausen did not burn a book, denounce the time-honored Melvil Dewey, or sully the name of the venerable Library of Congress. But what

he did caused a stir nonetheless. In an article published in a 1972 issue of
Library Journal entitled "Antithesis in Librarianship: Social Responsibility
vs. the Library Bill of Rights," he took on librarianship's most sensitive
subject—intellectual freedom and the Library Bill of Rights.

In Berninghausen's view, the Library Bill of Rights served to both
codify and standardize a purist moral stance on intellectual freedom by
which impartiality and neutrality on nonlibrary issues served as the cen-
tral principle of the profession. Berninghausen's portrayal of the role of
a neutral stance on intellectual freedom as the ethic of the profession
reinforces Louise Robbins's proposition that "pluralist democracy" played
a large role in shaping the profession's notion of intellectual freedom in
the 1950s. During the McCarthy period, Berninghausen felt that aca-
demic freedom and the freedom to read were threatened from the right.
But in the 1960s and 1970s, he felt the threat to intellectual freedom also
came from the new left. The concept of "social responsibility" that
emerged in the context of librarianship in the late 1960s, for example,
was in Berninghausen's opinion, a new left tactic that threatened ALA's
traditional neutrality and purpose.

Not surprisingly, Berninghausen's article did not go unnoticed by
the profession. For example, Patricia Schuman, a librarian at Brooklyn
College, New York, and associate editor of *School Library Journal*, responded
to Berninghausen's argument with the following remark: "You frighten
me, David Berninghausen ... you promulgate your thesis by setting up a
dangerous and insidious syllogism that says: intellectual freedom is the
guiding ethic of our profession: therefore, all other ethics are incompat-
ible with it" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 28). Detroit Public Library
Director Clara S. Jones accused Berninghausen of turning "back the clock"
(Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 33). And following his own perusal of the
article, E.J. Josey, chief of the Bureau of Academic & Research Libraries
at New York State Library, stated: "If Berninghausen's proposals are what
intellectual freedom is like, I for one want no part of it. As a black man
who was born and grew up in the South, I have experienced this kind of
intellectual freedom and I reject it as inimical to my freedom as a human
being" (in Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 33).

At the time that Berninghausen's article was published, Schuman, Jones,
and Josey were each a part of an activist movement within the library profes-
sion opposed to ALA's purist moral stance on intellectual freedom and its
accompanying neutral account of the Library Bill of Rights. They were ex-
perimenting with "social responsibility"—an alternative conception of intel-
lectual freedom and the Library Bill of Rights. The social responsibility per-
spective ideologically opposed Berninghausen's proposition of intellectual
freedom because it called upon ALA to move away from a neutral stance and
toward a viewpoint on social issues. At the very heart of the social responsi-
bility movement in librarianship lay a key question: Was intellectual free-
dom the profession's only ethic?

Jones held that the Library Bill of Rights "evolved from the profession's developing commitment to the concept of social responsibility." She viewed it as "the civil rights document of the profession...a rallying point for social action" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 33).

Jones's interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights illustrates how the social responsibility movement within librarianship was symptomatic of the democratic and participatory campaigns being launched across the nation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many citizens were tired of the social and political indifference of the Eisenhower years, involved in the Southern civil rights movement, morally resentful of the war in Vietnam, and bitter about a government "incapable of solving racial and poverty problems in the world's wealthiest nation" (Glessing, 1970, p. 11). A number of these citizens participated in the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the counter culture, and the new left, and sought left-of-center change by using tactics such as boycotts, counter cultural education, and nonviolent demonstration.

In librarianship, one of the first indicators of political unrest surfaced at the 1968 annual ALA conference in Kansas City. There, many library school students and young practicing librarians uncomfortable with ALA's neutral position on social concerns lobbied the association "to demonstrate a sense of responsibility" (Alfred et al., n.d.) on nonlibrary issues. Primarily they wanted a round table on the social responsibilities of libraries which eventually became known as the Social Responsibilities Round Table of Libraries (SRRT) within the formal ALA structure. Very quickly, SRRT became the site in ALA that drew other groups who "had not had effective power within the organization over the years...black militants, political radicals, members of women's liberation groups, and individuals interested in library unions" (Raymond, 1979, p. 354).

Within a year, members of disparate radical library groups had formed a united front to discuss ALA's future. On June 19, 1969, 180 people met in Washington, DC, for a one-day meeting called the "Congress for Change" (CFC). While the different groups attending CFC had diverse political agendas, they all shared a common dissatisfaction with the way ALA was run. They used CFC to pull together and plan a program for the upcoming 1969 annual ALA convention in Atlantic City.

At Atlantic City, CFC representatives made it clear that their members were unwilling to separate politics from work, and that they wanted the library profession to take a stand on issues such as "race, violence, war and peace, inequality of justice and opportunity" (Duhac, 1968, p. 2799). They also claimed that they based their proactive stance on the Library Bill of Rights.

As Louise Robbins points out in the preceding essay in this *Library Trends* issue, ALA adopted its first policy statement on intellectual freedom in 1939 and titled it "The Library's Bill of Rights." A year later, ALA established the Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the

Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry, which eventually was re-named the Intellectual Freedom Committee.

While the Library Bill of Rights has always represented "the profession's policy statement on intellectual freedom involving library material," it has, nonetheless, evolved on this ground (ALA, Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992, p. xiv). Until 1967, the Library Bill of Rights stated categorically that "books or other reading material of sound, fac-tual authority should not be proscribed or removed from library shelves because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval" (ALA, Office for Intellec-tual Freedom, 1992, p. 7). Theoretically, then, librarians could use the earlier version of the Library Bill of Rights as a justification for the exclu-sion of library materials or, as Director of the Minneapolis Public Library Ervin J. Gaines put it in an article published in a 1973 issue of *Library Journal*, as a "shield for their prejudices" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 36). Criticism of the earlier version, for example, was prompted by an inci-dent in which a Catholic librarian in Belleville, Illinois, excluded a Prot-estant document because it lacked "sound factual authority" (ALA, Office for Intellectual Freedom, 1992, p. 9). The incident illustrates how the problematic phrasing of the previous version of the Library Bill of Rights led to its misuse.

ALA revised the Library Bill of Rights in 1967. The new directive in-structed that "no library materials should be proscribed or removed from libraries because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval" (ALA, Office for Intel-lectual Freedom, 1992, p. 11). Returning to Baldwin's article, he notes the deletion of the factual correctness standard but wonders if the deletion was useful. "Doesn't this standard have some value?" he asks. Baldwin also notes that the more recent ALA directive to reflect "all points of view" creates draft-ing problems that arise from "framing a policy in neutral terms" (p. 8). He argues that "the breadth of the LBR invites making decisions...that a book selector can justify why an item does not match community needs, that it isn't hard to dress decisions in nonpolitical terms which may mask politics and moral sensibilities."

Baldwin's article offers a good illustration of how both the pre- and post- factual correctness versions of the Library Bill of Rights are open to censorship effort. Baldwin draws a distinction between exclusion based on factual incorrectness and exclusion based on political bias and ap-pears to favor the former. But are factual correctness and political bias always easily discernible as mutually exclusive categories? Are some kinds of censorship more justifiable than others? Are there degrees of censor-ship? Is it better or worse to censor adults than children? Videos than books? High-brow literature than middle-brow or "trash" fiction? Main-stream publishers than alternative presses? Right than left?

Baldwin's preference for censorship based on factual incorrectness versus political bias suggests consideration of the censor's motives. Per-

haps it is natural for legal professionals to take this perspective. But is it natural for so-called "neutral" librarians? For example, if a person challenges a book, is that person's motive part of the librarian's professional jurisdiction? When librarians look to the Library Bill of Rights for guidance, what exactly is the directive they are given?

In order to hook these broad-reaching questions more directly to the Library Bill of Rights in the 1960s, it is useful to examine two sets of specific questions: (1) What was Berninghausen's interpretation of the 1967 revision of the Library Bill of Rights? Did the new Library Bill of Rights help or harm his case for a neutral stance for ALA? (2) What was SRRT's interpretation of the 1967 revision of the Library Bill of Rights? Did the new Library Bill of Rights help or harm SRRT's case for taking a stand on social issues?

Berninghausen interpreted the 1967 instruction to represent all points of view. For him this meant intellectual freedom would be upheld by libraries, that neutrality would rule. Both Berninghausen and SRRT favored the new ALA directive for all points of view over the old factual correctness clause but for different reasons. While Berninghausen wanted to preserve the status quo, SRRT wanted to transform the character of ALA. On the one hand, Berninghausen championed the 1967 Library Bill of Rights revision as the new neutral stance vision for libraries.

SRRT, on the other hand, countered that, in at least two respects, the new Library Bill of Rights text could be seen as amenable to the social responsibility conception of intellectual freedom. First, the Library Bill of Rights acknowledged a library's responsibility to inform on the issues of the day and furthermore implied that libraries had a role to play in them. Second, in its indication that the balanced collection was the ideal, the Library Bill of Rights implied that imbalance in library collections should be redressed.

First and foremost, SRRT pressed ALA, which had been institution-oriented, to be responsive to its membership's needs. Up to this time, ALA's administration focused on "the badly needed task of promoting libraries in America" (Raymond, 1979, p. 353). But after 1969, SRRT (and CFC) began to press ALA leadership to address issues like library unions, working conditions, wages, recruitment, the place of minorities and women in the profession, and the concept of intellectual freedom. To maintain pressure, SRRT created task forces to advocate for minorities, women, gays and lesbians, the American Indian, migrant workers, political prisoners, and the peace movement. Perhaps most importantly, in 1969 SRRT created a task force on intellectual freedom. It was established in conjunction with ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Intellectual Freedom Committee for the purpose of creating a support fund for librarians whose intellectual freedom efforts were being challenged.

For a brief time it looked as if SRRT's vision of a more democratic and proactive ALA would succeed. The situation appeared particularly

hopeful when ALA President William S. Dix informed the membership in 1969 that an Activities Committee on New Directions for the ALA (ACONDA) would be set up to evaluate the association's structure and goals (ACONDA was also known as Dix Mix). As it became apparent that the idea of reforming ALA was no longer just a murmur, Berninghausen and others became uneasy about where ACONDA would lead. They were particularly concerned that specific items on the ACONDA agenda— social responsibilities; manpower; intellectual freedom; legislation; plan- ning, research and development; democratization and reorganization— were nonlibrary issues. Berninghausen later called ACONDA the "first official attempt to discard the principle [of intellectual freedom]" (Ac- tion Council Business, 1972-1973).

In June 1970, at the Detroit ALA conference, ACONDA's Subcom- mittee on Social Responsibility set to work reformulating ALA's concep- tion of intellectual freedom. To this end, three approaches were dis- cussed: (1) direct and immediate library programs for the underprivi- leged and the semi-literate; (2) acquisition and provision of the full range of material on societal problems; and (3) support of ALA membership in becoming instrumental in social change. The original subcommittee rec- ommendation stated that, "the social responsibility of ALA must be de- fined in terms of the contribution that librarianship as a profession can make in the effort to ameliorate or even solve the many critical problems of society" ("ACONDA Summary," 1970, p. 685). The greater ACONDA body, however, modified the subcommittee's statement to read: "[E]stablish an ALA Office for Library Service to the Disadvantaged and the Unserved" ("New Directions," 1970, p. 938).

ACONDA's newly couched terms were designed to dilute the social responsibility message and heated discussions ensued the revision. These discussions revolved around two issues in particular: (1) whether ALA's tax-exempt status was threatened by the association's involvement in nonlibrary issues, and (2) whether the public would lose faith in the pro- fession if it deviated from the traditional neutral stance. Debate surround- ing these issues persisted for the next several years.

Many of the ACONDA recommendations were passed on to the fol- low-up body, the ALA Ad Hoc Council Committee on ACONDA (ANA- CONDA), for further consideration. In the summary of ANACONDA's major recommendations, five of the six original ACONDA issues were mentioned: manpower; intellectual freedom; legislation; planning, re- search and development; and democratization and reorganization. The sixth recommendation, social responsibility, was not mentioned.

ACONDA/ANACONDA took action on many of the issues brought forth by SRRT (and CFC) including, as Raymond (1979) notes, reorganization into a new and more directly elected body; going on record against discrimination toward homosexuals within libraries; setting up a

manpower office concerned with the welfare of librarians; and setting up a committee on mediation, arbitration, and inquiry (p. 358). Despite several years of concerted activity, however, SRRT's essential issue of social responsibility had been carefully side-stepped.

In an attempt to reclaim lost ground in the ALA power structure, library activists determined to reveal what they perceived to be Berninghausen's motives for writing the 1972 *Library Journal* article on the Library Bill of Rights and social responsibility. SRRT believed that Berninghausen wrote the controversial article for two reasons. First, Berninghausen viewed the social responsibility movement as a direct threat to the viability of ALA. In this view, the social responsibility concept encouraged ALA to take "partisan positions on substantive issues unrelated to librarianship," thereby politicizing a so-called neutral profession ("Action Council Business," 1972-1973). Here, this author would suggest, are grounds for interpreting what Baldwin calls decisions that "may rest on very subjective factors" (see Baldwin's article in this issue of *Library Trends*). Second, Berninghausen believed SRRT had misappropriated the Library Bill of Rights in such a way as to lead ALA "to decide which books would be included in library collections and which would be banned" thereby putting an end to freedom of access to all points of view ("Action Council Business," 1972-1973). It is suggested here that Baldwin's comment that "no bright line between censorship and legitimate selectivity exists" rings true. SRRT's approach was to show how the premise of Berninghausen's two arguments was the same—that the concepts of social responsibility and intellectual freedom were antithetical.

In 1973, the debate escalated to new heights when *Library Journal* sponsored a rebuttal piece to Berninghausen's original article in the form of a collection of responses by people like Schuman, Jones, and Josey (Wedgeworth et al., 1973).

In the article, the authors accused Berninghausen of engaging in "smear tactics" and pitting librarians against one another (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 28). They collectively railed Berninghausen for proposing that social responsibility was an anti-intellectual freedom rationale, for misinterpreting the social responsibility movement, for assuming that social responsibility led to censorship, and for insinuating that intellectual freedom was the only ethic of the profession.

Apart from providing a forum for venting anger and frustration, the rebuttal article also gave SRRT a golden opportunity to outline its critique of Berninghausen's proposition that intellectual freedom and social responsibility were antithetical. SRRT based its critique on Berninghausen's idealization of balance in library collections. SRRT argued that the profession was "guilty of partisanship toward those social groups which have the largest and most conservatively respectable power base" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 27).

SRRT claimed that the prevalence of an imbalanced library service in the nation served as an impetus for movement toward social responsibility. When Berninghausen claimed that the social responsibility of librarians was "to select library materials from all producers, from the whole world of publishing media (not from an approved list)," he set himself up for criticism ("Action Council Business," 1972-1973). Schuman posed the question: "Where were you David Berninghausen, when movement groups publications were not being purchased by libraries? (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 28).

Furthermore, while Berninghausen's discussion of balance was replete with abstract examples and hypothetical scenarios, SRRT's counter argument was based on lived experience. Starting in the late 1960s, SRRT had expended much energy attempting to inform librarianship on the alternative press movement. In 1970, SRRT had created the Task Force on Alternative Books in Print, and its fledgling publication *Alternatives In Print* (AIP), precisely to address the issue of balance in library collections.

By focusing on the treatment given to alternative press materials by the library establishment, SRRT had a ready response to Berninghausen's rhetorical statement that materials should be chosen from the whole world of publishing. SRRT made the case that collection building based on social responsibility was more, rather than less, inclusive. "Those who believe in the concept of social responsibility want to add the underground press to their collections, not toss out the traditional press....They have created access where it did not exist" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 28). Furthermore, SRRT argued, collection building based on social responsibility did not lead to censorship. "AIP, for instance, was created by SRRT to meet the need for information that the traditional libraries ignored. They did not then advocate the burning of BIP [*Books in Print*]" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 28).

Despite the strength of the activists' rebuttal, personal research on American librarianship's treatment of the Library Bill of Rights in the 1960s indicates that the professional community of librarians was unwilling to explore the debate between Berninghausen and SRRT further. This author would argue that Berninghausen successfully scared librarians away from the topic of social responsibility by playing to ALA's deep concern for legality and what Sellen called "action-crippling fear"(Sellen, 1987, Box 11, p. 1) about its "extremely favorable tax-status" (*Transcripts and Minutes,* 1968, Box 6).

Berninghausen argued vociferously and gave much emphasis in publications and speeches to one conclusion—i.e., ALA, as an educational association, was tax-exempt and "thus not permitted by law to actively support work for or against positions on issues that do not involve professional interests" (*Should ALA Take a Stand?* 1969-1970, Box 8). At the same time, he barely mentioned in passing, and gave very little atten-

tion in publications and speeches to, another conclusion: "Admittedly it is sometimes difficult to draw the line sharply" (*Should ALA Take a Stand?* 1969-1970). In others words, Berninghausen warned librarians that it was not advisable to take a position on issues, but he did not illustrate a clear way to avoid them. In light of this, it is ironic that Berninghausen accused SRRT of having a "weaselly type of argument" (*Should ALA Take a Stand?* 1969-1970, Box 8).

SRRT considered the tax-exempt status issue its worst enemy. The issue was first raised during the 1968 discussions about whether or not SRRT should be accepted into ALA as a Round Table. It continued as a major point of discussion in 1970 at the ACONDA meetings and ultimately peaked in 1974 when the ALA attorney reported at the first council meeting of the annual conference that "the IRS was concerned about 'certain activities' undertaken by 'certain units' " ("The SRRT and the SRRT Concept, 1968 through 1975," 1975, p. 6).

In the hopes of allaying membership fears, Robert Wedgeworth, SRRT supporter (and ALA Executive Director) pointed out that "viewing librarians and libraries in the political process, it seems somewhat more difficult to separate the nonlibrary issues from the library issues than the author [Berninghausen] implies" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, p. 25). In a last ditch effort, SRRT posited that ALA was an association and not a library and therefore not even subject to the Library Bill of Rights. But it was too late. Berninghausen had played his hand well. Whether the profession agreed with SRRT's points or not, fear of social, financial, and legal repercussions had already paralyzed the library community from further movement toward nonlibrary issues. By this time, ALA membership was arguably less interested in the utility of the Library Bill of Rights than in its own professional viability. Once again, the status quo—hardly a "neutral" site in 1974—had secured the profession's ethical jurisdiction.

Despite Berninghausen's apparent victory in the debate over librarianship's professional jurisdiction and intellectual freedom in the 1960s, SRRT played a key role in exposing the flimsiness of ALA's universal claim of neutrality. Baldwin notes that "libraries are forums for information and ideas" and asks "for whom and for what?" During the 1960's debate, Schuman posed this question to Berninghausen, only in more rhetorical terms. She asked: "Do you really believe that our society is controlled by individuals acting as individuals? That there are not 'special interest' groups like General Motors? The National Rifle Association? The American Library Association? which attempt—and often do—influence the progress (and regression) of society?" (Wedgeworth et al., 1973, pp. 28-29). SRRT's many efforts during the 1960s not only exposed the danger in assuming that ALA functioned as a neutral institution but also provided a viable answer to Schuman's query. By pointing out ALA's neglect of the alternative press, SRRT made a case for finding the

association guilty of promoting the production and reproduction of main-stream culture and dominant ideology.

Based on research of American librarianship's treatment of the Library Bill of Rights in the 1960s, there is agreement with Baldwin that the existence of multiple interpretations creates "tensions and contradictions" that reduce its "persuasive force." It should be added that ALA practice plays an equally important role in defining both the utility and the validity of the Library Bill of Rights. In light of Baldwin's observation that the Library Bill of Rights "does not guide the practices of many (if not most) book selectors" (from Baldwin's article in this issue of *Library Trends*), one is left wondering just how far deeply felt notions of intellectual freedom will push both the rhetoric and the practice of the profession in the future.

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