

[\[Review\] *Libraries in Times of Utopian Thoughts and Social Protests—the Libraries of the Late 1960s and early 1970s,*](#)

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Libraries in Times of Utopian Thoughts and Social Protests-The Libraries of the Late 1960s and Early 1970s. Proceedings of the Conference, University College of Borås, 27-29 May 2002. *Journal of Swedish Library Research* 14, no. 3 (2002). Edited by Joacim Hansson. Borås, Sweden: Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University College of Borås, 2002. 175 pp. ISSN 0284-4354.

Young twenty-and thirty-somethings now wear garb from the sixties and seventies to costumed events, little aware that to persons of a certain age (including their own parents) these clothes were a political statement as well as fashion. Similarly, among that aging cohort of baby boomers, the "student revolution" of the 1960s and 1970s encompasses a national as well as a personal level of experience. Unfortunately, as a nation, Americans are provincial when they are not xenophobic-long may we lament the demise of foreign-language requirements in academe and the inadequate attention to the proprieties of English in the anti-elite era of inclusiveness.

Portions of the present-day library establishment have regressed to blind nativism in the past forty years, for all the rhetoric expended on that shibboleth "global information" and even though that lapse may be subconscious. Comparative librarianship is all but absent from U.S. library and information science curricula, for example, since it has been crowded out by technological subjects of the moment. This collation of international conference papers demonstrates, among other things, the profundity of that loss. Even among those active in the front lines of political protest in the 1960s or in the American Library Association in the early 1970s, many are probably unaware of the more profound political implications that the student rebellion had in Europe or in other parts of the world. Not by accident did Chairman Mao destroy the libraries and the American library school founded by Mary Ellen Wood during China's cultural revolution. How central libraries are to social and political stakes, however, remains a matter of indifference and contention to the present day.

The conference whose proceedings these papers represent was made possible by the University College of Borås, the International Federation of Librarians (IFLA), and Nordbok (the Nordic Literature and Library Committee). The countries (and speakers) included cover a wider range of cultures than might be expected: Kenya, Africa (Shiraz Durrani), Australia (Judy Claydon), Mexico (Valentino Morales-Lopez), and Romania (Hermina G. B. Anghelescu) are the most exotic. Among western and northern European nations, France, Italy, and Spain are not represented, and the paper by Alistair Black (United Kingdom) has been published elsewhere. The presence of The Netherlands (Marian Koren), Germany (Peter Vodosek), Finland (Ilkka Makinen), Greenland (Elisa Jerimiassen), Denmark (Ole Harbo on Danish librarianship, Pierre Evald on *Biblioteksdebat*, the "activist" Danish library journal of the era), and Sweden (Lennart Wettmark) would seem to indicate that the conference was dominated by a Germanic/Nordic nexus, except that seven papers representing various aspects of American library history were presented at the conference, four of which (Fred Stielow on Sydney Ditzion's *The Arsenal of a Democratic Culture*, Lorie Roy on the development of tribal libraries since the late 1960s, Donald G. Davis on the Mississippi Freedom Libraries, and a delightful personal memoir from Terry Weech) appear here. Bill Lukenbill and Irene Owens published their papers in another journal, while Toni Samek's

paper on the American library alternative press experiment was published in fuller form as part of her book on intellectual freedom during the 1969-74 period. Happily, all of the U.S. papers are well written and researched.

Magnus Tortensson, senior lecturer at the host institution, the Department of Library and Information Science at the University College of Borås (Sweden), explains well why the balance of papers seems to favor Western "developed" countries. Some of these countries were still recovering from World War II in 1960. I visited London in 1956, when many landmarks since restored were propped up and shells of buildings, not to mention ominous empty lots, seemed to dot every block. In other parts of Europe, Holland was still largely agricultural; Danish libraries were controlled by a hidebound authoritarian committee with collection-building powers; Romania suffered from the Ceaucescu "neo-Stalinist" dictatorship, although the dictator himself was surprisingly supportive of a wide variety of materials in libraries. In other countries, library "revolution" encompassed structural reorganization and growth of the public library system (Denmark, Sweden, and Holland); avoiding takeover by neo-Stalinists or Marxists (Finland); or unionization (Australia). In Greenland (population 40,000) such concerns must have seemed very effete indeed, for the national library was nearly entirely destroyed by a 1968 fire, and most of the next two decades were spent in reconstructing or locating and soliciting donations of materials and manuscripts relating to Greenland's history.

In at least two cases, library conditions were such that niceties like "democratization" were not a principal motive. In Mexico, for example, the violence of government repression of the student movement and the conservative nature of the library establishment itself meant that library workplace concerns were not associated with the popular liberation movement. In Kenya democratization of libraries meant getting rid of incumbents, and not necessarily by the vote. Some readers, in fact, especially those who remember reading Robert Ruark's *Something of Value* (1955), may feel odd about hearing the Mau Mau conceptualized as a liberation party, although that it certainly was.

The entire collection is put in the context of Ditzion's classic *The Arsenals of a Democratic Culture* (ALA, 1947), summarized in a very fine articulation by Fred Stielow. This seems an appropriate reminder that meanings of the word "democratic" may range from political to cultural and social ones from nation to nation and from individual to individual. Ditzion's interpretation, of course, was taken from the experience of struggle against totalitarian regimes during the Second World War and colors the American viewpoint even to the present day—a fact not lost on these writers in the wake of the terrorist attacks on Americans and the incursions made by the U.S. government on citizen rights in recent legislation.

In short, this collection deserves republication as a monograph. The success of *Revolting Librarians Redux* (2003), an updated reprise of the classic *Revolting Librarians* (1970), indicates that interest in this period will only become more pronounced whenever individual freedoms are threatened. Before that happens, however, one would humbly implore Swedish Library Research to engage a native English speaker for the job of editing. In the case of most non-English-authored papers herein, errors are extremely minor. In the case of Mexico and Denmark, however, the solecisms impede understanding. It would be helpful if all academics rushed less into print so that the standard of editing could be raised. The same could be said, incidentally, of many American publications. But, then, I graduated with the college class of 1969.