

12. Celeste West and Elizabeth Katz, introduction to "The Officious Orthodoxy," 22.
13. Melinda Schroeder, "I Never Wanted to Be a Librarian," 115.
14. Tod Hawks, "A Dewey Decimal Mind," 71.
15. Plotnik, 7.
16. Harleigh Kyson, "Library School Lunacy," 29, 31.
17. Judy Hadley, "Trials of a Paraprofessional," 79.
18. Berman, 57.



SILENCING SANDY: THE CENSORING OF LIBRARIES' FOREMOST ACTIVIST^{1,2}

Naomi Eichenlaub

Sanford Berman is perhaps the most legendary library persona of the second half of the 20th century. He is also, perhaps, the most highly praised and highly esteemed librarian of our time. In parallel, some also regard him as the noisiest and most irritating of librarians. Just who is this guy? The question, sadly, must be rephrased as who was this guy, for he was somewhat recently (June 1999) forced to take early retirement from a job he held for over a quarter of a century as the radical, renegade head cataloger of Hennepin County Library (HCL) in Minnetonka, Minnesota. In his work at HCL, Sandy was first and foremost a cataloger. But he was a cataloger with a conscience, an activist working to ensure that cataloging fulfilled its primary goal, that of access. Berman can be attributed with creating awareness for the need for socially responsible librarians. Furthermore, he is responsible for demonstrating that for a librarian to truly fulfill their professional duties, they must be socially responsible. Sandy worked zealously in an effort to preserve free speech, to ensure access to information, and to promote an uncensored press (Gilyard 1999). It is indeed ironic, therefore, that it was in exercising his own right to free speech, in a profession which bases its mandate on the premise of the promotion of free speech, that he was censored, reprimanded, and forced to retire.

Sandy's ranting is his greatest contribution to librarianship. It is this ranting that has landed him the position of the library world's leading activist for social responsibility. He is credited with having influenced "an entire generation of librarians" by setting an example that "activism and librarianship can co-exist" (Roberto 1999). With a festschrift in his honour, and more recently, an e-zine entitled *Kiss My Fil-ling Indicators: the Sandy Berman Rocks My Socks Issue*, the praise offered up in his name

by his supporters knows no bounds. Debra Stevens, in an article on social responsibility and librarianship, quotes Patricia Schuman's 1976 assertion that "silence has been recorded throughout history as affirmation" (Stevens 1989). With a publishing record that is beyond impressive, as his 1988 select bibliography in *Worth Noting: Editorials, Letters, Essays, an Interview, and Bibliography* illustrates (and that was fifteen years ago!), Sandy has done his best to ensure that silence is not mistaken as affirmation.

Always at the core of Sanford Berman's writings has been social responsibility in librarianship. In his contribution to a 1972 collection of essays entitled *Revolting Librarians*, Berman wrote a lament entitled "Libraries to the People" in which he described the collections of most public libraries in the U.S. at that time as "stodgy preserves of the elite" (Gilyard 1999). Berman reminds readers that the Bill of Rights, long ago adopted by the library profession, explicitly states that libraries should carry materials that cover all possible political viewpoints (West and Katz 1972). Berman points out the complete absence of radical, underground publications in the collections of public libraries. He warns that this "denies [the] very vitality, conflict, and color that help to make this country unique" (Berman 1981). He laments this oversight in "Libraries to the People":

How in hell can the pothead groove on *Business Week* and Norman Vincent Peale? A feminist get excited over *Cosmopolitan* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*? Or an acid-rock fancier find any goodies in the *Reader's Digest*? It ain't easy. Still, longhaired freaks and madassed revolutionaries are as much members of the community as Big Money Makers and hard-hat "straights" [West and Katz 1972].

Other works to Sandy's credit include the 1971 *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*, in which he exposed the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as being Eurocentric and androcentric, among other biases. Sandy is perhaps best known for his criticisms of, and work to improve, the user-friendliness of LCSH. In 1993, Sandy gave a speech at the Library of Congress where he condemned what he called "bibliocide by cataloguing," the process whereby works are made inaccessible "through LC's misleading and biased subject headings" (Dodge and DeSirey 1995). The catalogers in his cataloging department have come to be known as *Sandynistas*, after the Nicaraguan *Sandinistas*, (leftist revolutionaries headed by Augusto Sandino during the Nicaraguan Sandinista Revolution of 1979), as they worked with Sandy to establish HCL's own subject headings and other pioneering work such as assigning subject headings to works of fiction. In fact, Sandy is so well known for his hounding of the LC to change and expand their subject headings that a librarian at the Library of Congress, known only as Fred,³ is quoted as saying:

Sandy Berman is a major pain in the ass. He runs a horse-and-buggy cataloging operation in Minnesota and he thinks he can tell us how to do our jobs. He's an insufferable, self-righteous, unrealistic, naive, head-in-the-clouds idealist who knows nothing about the real world of grind-it-out bibliographic data [Dodge and DeSirey 1995].

Sandy also wrote the 1981 *Joy of Cataloging: Essays, Letters, Reviews, and Other Explosions* which features in one of its sections a sample sex index, entitled "If There Were A Sex Index...." According to Berman, "libraries' skittishness around sexual topics is a disservice to patrons" (Gilyard 1999). Patrons need to be able to find what they are looking for, and if they are too shy to ask a reference librarian, Berman argues the library catalog should accurately represent the materials that a library has in its collection (Gilyard 1999). In fact, Berman has even received an award for his work toward promoting access to sexual information. In 1997 he was recognized by Factor Press in Alabama with the Golden Phallus Award for "body- and sex-positive contributions to society" (Gilyard 1999). The award honours Sandy's "lifetime commitment to promoting the availability of unpopular, ignored, and even condemned literature ... on all aspects of sexuality" (Dodge 1998).

Sandy's other contributions to socially responsible librarianship include founding the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table on Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty, being a charter member of the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) and co-editing the biennial anthology *Alternative Library Literature (ALL)*. *ALL* collocates critical and alternative perspectives on all facets of the library world. With articles on cataloguing, collection development and social responsibility, Elaine Harger, a PLG cofounder, urges that the latest edition of *ALL* should be a required text at library schools (Dodge and DeSirey 1995).

Sanford Berman has a history of voicing his opinion about issues that he deems socially irresponsible. A self-professed purveyor of information, it was also (and still is) his habit of circulating information to all those he feels would benefit from it. He is quoted in numerous places (Dodge and DeSirey 1995; Gilyard 1999) as saying "I can't have information I know would be of interest to someone and not share it." Unfortunately, his policy usually clashed with that of the HCL administrators. Chris Dodge, friend, former co-worker of Berman, and co-editor with Jan DeSirey of the 1995 festschrift *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sandy Berman But Were Afraid to Ask*, points out in his contribution entitled "Troubled Waters," that Sandy's work at HCL "has been perhaps more tumultuous than idyllic" (Dodge and DeSirey 1995). The following paragraphs detail examples of occasions where Berman, in his work to provide socially responsible librarianship, has been censored from and reprimanded for expressing concerns that relate directly to his profession and area of expertise.

An incident occurred in 1990 whereby Berman came across a book published by Life Tapestry Press which contained statements such as "'AIDS is a form of self-punishment' and 'maybe a cry of the belief system of many that homosexuality is unnatural or wrong'" (Dodge and DeSirey 1995). Sandy responded by sending a letter to the publisher on HCL stationery in which he urged the publisher, who was also the author, to recall all copies of the book, make appropriate deletions and corrections, and "issue an apology to the gay community and all persons with AIDS" (Dodge and DeSirey 1995). Berman sent copies of this letter to a number of gay, lesbian and AIDS-related bookstores, organizations and periodicals. The publisher, angry,

threatened legal action against HCL. In response, Sandy suggested that the publisher send a written response to his letter, which he would then forward to everyone who received his letter. HCL directors, however, did not approve of Berman's idea and instead Sandy received a formal reprimand.

A second example dates to 1996, when HCL administration announced a plan to raise \$100,000 a year of revenue by doubling late fines on children's materials. Berman points out that "the purpose, let me assure you, was not to get books back on the shelf quicker, or to instill greater responsibility in youthful borrowers" (Berman 1998). Instead, the sole purpose was to increase the library's financial self-sufficiency by raising non-tax, that is, non-publicly funded money in order to impress the County Board of Commissioners (Berman 1998, 2002). Sandy, aware that none of HCL's two dozen children's librarians had been consulted on this proposal, circulated a petition, "asking simply that the fine policy be withdrawn" (Berman 1998). In addition, he, by his own admission, spoke with someone in the media at an alternative news weekly in Minnesota, which in turn ran an article entitled "Library Pinches Nickels, Kids" (Berman 1998).

Not surprisingly, HCL administrators were about to take action against Berman again, this time for "testifying publicly and starting a petition" (Berman 1998). Sandy, about to be reprimanded, decided to hire labour lawyers who advised HCL that free speech issues might be involved. Administration backed off and did not file the formal reprimand. However, in a very poignantly worded question, Berman asks, "How many librarians can afford the 500 bucks to buy their first-amendment rights?" (Berman 1998).

A further incident occurred in 1998, when HCL decided to implement the "Best-seller Express," a program that would allow patrons, for a three dollar fee, to rent new-release, high demand titles. "Bestseller Express" was proposed as a means of reducing long waiting lists, but Berman was quick to bill it as an "elite, discriminatory service based entirely on a person's ability to pay" (Gilyard 1999). Despite Berman and others' opposition, the program was implemented. When Berman restated his concerns in a short email memo sent to all HCL staff, Director Charles Brown branded Berman's email as "unnecessary and inappropriate," further requesting that Berman "please refrain from utilizing this important library communications tool to broadcast [his] personal perceptions and views" (Gilyard 1999).

On January 18th, 1999, in an act that Berman saw merely as contributing his professional opinion, he responded to a memo from Bill DeJohn and Carla Dewey of MINITEX, the Minnesota library network that was overseeing a new move at HCL to join OCLC. Berman was responding to a statement in the memo that extolled strict adherence to AACR2 standards (Berman 2002), a practice that, under Berman, had not been in strict adherence by HCL catalogers.⁴ Furthermore, HCL was in the process of re-examining their AACR2 modifications and the continued modification of them in the future. What was supposed to be a participative process was not, and the decision was made arbitrarily and in secret, with no discussion permitted (Berman 2002).

Berman began his response by affirming that "he was convinced that the Hennepin County Library and AACR2 could collaborate on the transition to an expanded cataloging system" (Gilyard 1999). Berman did, however, express his concern that "School, public, and community library users, in particular, were not well served by the AACR2 drafters" (Litwin 2: 17). He closed the memo by inviting DeJohn, Dewey, and MINITEX "to join me in a nearly 3-decade-long campaign to genuinely make library catalogs more user-friendly & much less elitist and mystifying" (Litwin 2: 17). Signing off "with warmest regards," Berman copied the email to HCL administration (including Director Brown and Elizabeth Feinberg, his immediate boss) and HCL cataloging staff.

The recipients at MINITEX did not find the memo contentious. According to DeJohn, he saw the memo as "a friendly response to my note" (Gilyard 1999). Dewey added that "I received it as just a statement of [Berman's] position, some of his concerns about the widely accepted standards" (Gilyard 1999). HCL administration, however, reacted much differently. Berman was censored from expressing his concerns regarding cataloging matters, something that as head cataloger, he should have been encouraged to do. Instead, Brown and Feinberg charged that

Your active support of these changes is required. At this time, your "three-decade-long campaign" is extremely counterproductive to the cataloging reengineering process, causes divisiveness throughout the organization and presents an extremely poor image to colleagues who are working with HCL [Gilyard 1999].

Berman sought to have the formal reprimand "rescinded and removed from his file" (Litwin 2: 17), emphasizing that he supported the decision to join OCLC. When Brown refused to withdraw the reprimand, Berman went public about the reprimand he received, publicizing the issue in an attempt to raise support from colleagues and friends in the library world (Litwin 2: 17). As a result, Brown's office was flooded with angry letters and petitions in support of Sandy and his right to voice his professional opinion without fear of being reprimanded. In an email dated February 27, 1999 and sent to both the ALA Council List and the SRRT Action Council, Sandy highlighted the irony of the situation by creating a mock-tabloid headline to describe his own situation: "Much-Honored Minnesota Cataloger Disciplined For Talking About Cataloging! Free Speech a "NO GO" Inside Nation's 5th-Ranked Public Library" (Litwin 2: 9). In his appeal, Sandy demanded that his reprimand be withdrawn and that "an apology for false accusation and wrongful discipline — plus firm guarantees that staff can freely address professional and policy issues without fear of reprisal" (Litwin 2: 9) be issued. Director Brown and Elizabeth Feinberg were later awarded "The Staff Morale & Unity Award" in the April Fool's edition of *Library Journal*, for their written reprimand to Sandy (LJ 1999).

Further censorship was at issue when OCLC was preparing to announce HCL's OCLC membership in its newsletter. A copy of the article was sent to Sandy for his approval and in order that he make any corrections he deemed necessary (Litwin 2: 17). Sandy submitted "a number of corrections & additions, solely to the passages dealing

with [him] and cataloging, in order to make the report fuller and more accurate" (Litwin 2: 9). In what Berman calls a case of "rank & arrogant censorship" (Litwin 2: 9), the recommended changes were, by order of his immediate supervisor, ignored (Litwin 2: 9).

On April 19, 1999, three months after Berman had sent his memo to MINITEX, he arrived at work to discover that he would no longer be serving as head cataloger. With absolutely no prior consultation or notification, Berman was notified in a meeting that very morning that he was to "immediately occupy a remote office ... no longer supervise Hennepin catalogers or perform cataloging" and was informed "that his new project was to create a cataloging manual" (Dodge 1999). Berman viewed the reassignment as retaliation for going public about the reprimand he received for writing the MINITEX memo and, commenting on the lack of respect it showed for him as a colleague and a person, is quoted as saying that the project was a "reassignment to full-time toilet cleaning" (Gilyard 1999).

This was clearly a violation of Berman's right to free speech. Sandy maintains that when he wrote the MINITEX memo regarding the HCL OCLC partnership, he was only attempting to encourage professional discourse on certain aspects that he felt still needed addressing before the merger was completed (Gilyard 1999). Instead of accepting his new job assignment, Berman surrendered and submitted his resignation from HCL for June 10, 1999, going on sick leave effective April 23, 1999 (Gilyard 1999). HCL administration had finally succeeded in permanently censoring Sanford Berman — at least as one of their employees. His words in a final email message to HCL staff echo this surrender: "I refuse to submit to any further muzzling, punishment, and humiliation" (Gilyard 1999).

Berman may no longer be at work at HCL, but he has far from abandoned his attention to the incident. Since he received the reprimand for writing the MINITEX memo, he has been photocopying and mailing documentation of the events to colleagues and library presses around the world, in an attempt to seek support for his right "to freely address professional and policy issues without fear of reprisal" (Litwin 2: 17). In addition, ALA Councillors and supporters of Berman including Mark Rosenzweig and Maurice Freedman asked the ALA Council to consider a resolution which called for the censure of HCL administration for what they describe as "its infringements of Berman's free-speech rights, for its retribution against him, and its overall violations of his professional rights" (AL August 1999).

Berman, in his last post as ALA Councillor at the Annual Conference in New Orleans in June of 1999, presented a resolution that called for an amendment to the Library Bill of Rights. It would include the addition of the following sentence: "Libraries should permit and encourage a full and free expression of views by staff on professional and policy matters" (AL August 1999). Unfortunately, the motion was defeated and it was suggested that it would perhaps be more appropriate to include the proposed amendment in the ALA Code of Ethics, since the Bill of Rights "addresses the relationship between libraries and their users, not the rights of employees" (AL August 1999). In an attempt to rescue his proposed amendment, Berman put forth

the argument that "a muzzled or chilled staff is frankly unlikely to render the most effective service to library users" (AL August 1999). There was lengthy debate on the issue and the motion was referred to the Ethics Committee of ALA (AL August 1999). In a similar situation in Minnesota, the Minnesota Library Association rejected the following resolution in support of employee free speech:

Whereas: Libraries value the free expression of ideas; Whereas: Library professionals have a wide range of professional expertise; Whereas: A fair and rigorous debate of ideas will result in the best decision for any organization; Therefore be it resolved: That the Minnesota Library Association encourages the freedom of librarians and other library professionals to freely express their professional opinions as it is related to the responsibility of their job. That the Minnesota Library Association discourages the use of disciplinary action against library employees for expressing their opinion about matters related to their professional responsibilities [Dodge 1999].

Berman's attempt to lobby for the right to free speech for library employees was rejected both by his state library association as well as the ALA. However, as the evidence suggests, Berman is not one to give up without a fight, even if he has been forced to resign from working directly within HCL and the ALA. There are still plenty of other venues, especially within the radical librarian community, which holds Sandy Berman as nothing short of a guru. The Progressive Librarians Guild website has an online petition in support of Sanford Berman in which they demand that HCL management request Sandy's "return to his position in the cataloging department at HCL" <<http://libr.org/PLG>>. Finally, on the afternoon of Saturday, June 12, 1999, at a celebration being held in honour of the now-retired Berman, his former colleagues awarded him the first annual Sanford Berman Award for Social Responsibility in Library Services (Gilyard 1999). The award was created and presented by HCL's Librarian and Support staff unions (AFSCME locals 2822 and 2864). Since the award's inception, it has been awarded twice to HCL staff who work with immigrant families and at-risk children (Berman 2002).

It may appear, in retrospect, that this story tells a sad tale, but that is only half of the truth. It is indeed a sad tale. Sad for HCL administration and the loss to their library system that they are directly responsible for, sad for Sandy who is now retired and no longer cataloging and hounding LC, sad for the Sandynistas, and sad for the library profession. There is, however and more significantly, a happy tale here as well. If Sandy were not the earth-shaking, trouble-stirring soul that he is there would not even be a story here. And so we must thank Sandy for that. Thank-you Sandy, for your work, impact, inspiration for change, and most of all, your ranting.

"All I did', [Berman] offers with a sigh, 'was write a letter'" (Gilyard 1999).

When Sandy left HCL, he left behind a legacy of cataloging and authority work unique to our profession. Unfortunately, recent events threaten to destroy both the continued application of, and the existence of this list of user-centered, original subject headings. This list, created by him and his staff over two and a half decades at

Hennepin County Library, will now be replaced in the catalog by straight LC subject headings (Litwin 5: 9 2002). Hennepin was not the only library using this subject authority file. Other libraries, including the database Novelist, have also been benefiting from subject authority work done by Berman and HCL cataloging staff.

As it stands, it is unknown what steps, if any, will be taken to preserve the HCL authority file from the Berman era.

The HCL press release can be read at

<<http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/ead/ala/9701040a/berman/biblinks/hclpr.pdf>>.

Sandy's response can be read at

<<http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/ead/ala/9701040a/berman/biblinks/sresp.pdf>>.

For an authoritative source for documentation concerning Sandy's "last stand," including all relevant correspondence, plus petition and various support letters, please see the double issue of *Librarians at Liberty*, December 2001.

See also *The Sanford Berman Website*, created by Madeline Douglas at

<<http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/ead/ala/9701040a/berman/sanford.htm>>.

Notes

1. The title comes from a letter dated February 26, 1999 and reprinted in *Library Juice* 2: 16, April 21 1999, written by Robert Hauptman, Professor of Learning Resources and Technology Services at St. Cloud State University, Minnesota and Editor of the *Journal of Information Ethics*; in which he calls Sandy Berman "one of librarianship's foremost activists" in response to the HCL press release and staff memo of April 19, 1999, announcing the development of a Cataloguing Practices Manual. <http://www.libr.org/Juice/issues/vol2/LJ_2.16.html>

2. This paper was originally written as a requirement for LIBR 560, Organization of Information, School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, December 1999. Some revisions and updating have been done to the original paper.

3. "Fred" is rumoured to be a fictitious character (Berman 2002).

4. According to Berman, he only expressed his sentiments regarding AACR2 to DeJohn and Dewey "because they, by invitation, had contributed a statement extolling strict adherence to standards that was attached — as justification — to an email proclamation to the entire staff that HCL would completely embrace AACR2, abandoning its several departures or deviations from those rules developed over many years" (Berman 2002).

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LIBRARIES TO THE PEOPLE, REDUX

Chris Dodge

The word "DISCARDED" is stamped on the title page of my copy of *Revolting Librarians*. It stands for something larger than the edition's removal from the Lincoln Public Library in Lincoln, Illinois. All across North America other libraries seem to have done away with the very principles on which the book is based and abandoned practices for which it passionately advocates (if in fact they adopted them in the first place).

Take Sandy Berman's contribution, "Libraries to the People," which describes a lack of diversity in the Los Angeles Public Library collection circa 1972. Great for bankers and investors, crappy for workers. Full of orthodox literature, but almost devoid of local and ethnic publications, radical papers, gay and lesbian literature, and anti-war titles. "The closest it comes to any rag dealing with Third World revolutionary struggles is the *African Violet Review*," Berman quipped.

Public libraries belong to everyone — or do they? Alison Parker's book *Purifying America* (University of Illinois Press, 1997) contains an interesting chapter on the American Library Association's historical role as "guardians of public morals." Fiction itself used to be considered of dubious propriety in public libraries. When I