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June 2022

The Past, Present, and Future of Information

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The Past, Present, and Future of Information

About Author

Tierra Holmes is a recent graduate of San José State University's MLIS program. She served as the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of *SRJ* during her final year at the iSchool and is excited about publishing her last issue with the journal. Holmes also graduated from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte with a B.A. in History and a B.A. in Art History.

The ways in which we share and interact with information is in a constant state of fluctuation, spurred on by major societal developments. We have in recent memory experienced the globalization of information with the rise of the internet and the virtualization of many information behaviors and services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is exceedingly clear that current events exert influence on the nature of information, one must not discount the significance of how the past may also help shape the future. In this issue of the *School of Information Student Research Journal (SRJ)*, our authors and faculty contributor explore the intersection between past, present, and future in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) and what it means for underrepresented groups.

Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran, assistant professor at San José State University (SJSU) and CEO of the CulturalCo, LLC consultancy, contributes an exceptionally pertinent piece on cultural competency in research. Her essay discusses how current trends of researching historically underrepresented groups and addressing inequities have made cultural competence a critical skill. She offers tips on how to understand and develop cultural competence based on a webinar given in conjunction with the American Library Association (ALA) Library Research Round Table (LRRT).

Lena Hernandez, a graduating student of SJSU's Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) program, offers an illuminating review of *Information: A Historical Companion* in which she explores the idea that the modern "Information Age" has evolved from centuries of history. She offers studies into non-Western information traditions as an area of future research that would address a current gap in the field.

Claire Kelley, a current MLIS student at SJSU, provides a thought-provoking review of Selby's *Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South*, that explores the largely overlooked history of Freedom Libraries and their relevance to LIS. She posits that the legacy of Freedom Libraries is important for contemporary research to meet the needs of underserved communities.

I am thankful for the opportunity to explore topics related to underrepresented groups in my final issue as the Editor-in-Chief of *SRJ*, as it is an area of research that sorely needs attention. I hope that the essays presented in this issue will facilitate discourse on how to fill such a critical gap in the LIS field and that you, our readers and contributors, will continue to support the journal as we endeavor to push LIS and related research forward by considering how the past, present, and future are intertwined.

Acknowledgements

As my last publication with *SRJ* comes to a close, I cannot help but reflect on the contributions of everyone who made this issue possible. Our Managing Editor, Meghan Duffey, was an invaluable partner and sounding board throughout the planning process; we dedicated many late nights to the journal this semester. The other members of our Editorial Team also played an integral role in the development of this issue; their passion for peer review enabled us to provide a

valuable experience to our authors through detailed and thoughtful commentary on submitted manuscripts.

Our Faculty Advisor, Dr. Anthony Bernier, has been an attentive mentor to our Editorial Team in the year I have served as the Editor-in-Chief of *SRJ*. I will miss his guidance as I begin the next chapter of my career, but I am confident that the skills we cultivated as part of the Editorial Team will help me fulfill my professional goals.

We would also like to offer our sincere gratitude to the Faculty Advisory Board, led by iSchool Director Dr. Anthony Chow and Associate Director Dr. Linda Main, for their continued support. *SRJ* has been downloaded over 160,000 times in 205 countries as of May 2022. Moving forward, we hope to expand the journal's reach even further as we endeavor to uphold our institution's values through establishing our journal as a premiere source for graduate research in LIS and related fields.

June 2022

Cultural Competence in Research

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Cultural Competence in Research

Keywords

cultural competency, intercultural communication, research methods

On November 17, 2021, Dr. Michele A. L. Villagran was invited by Dr. Africa Hands of the American Library Association (ALA) Library Research Round Table (LRRT) to present a webinar on *Cultural Competence in Research: From Models to Practice*. The LRRT, at its core, was created to

contribute toward the extension and improvement of library research; to provide public program opportunities for describing and evaluating library research projects and for disseminating their findings; to inform and educate ALA members concerning research techniques and their usefulness in obtaining information with which to reach administrative decisions and solve problems; and expand the theoretical base of the field. (ALA LRRT, 2022, para. 2)

This article focuses on the following key areas related to this session: 1) defining cultural competence, 2) examining the importance of including cultural concern in the research process, 3) offering examples of recommended criteria for culturally competent research, and 4) including models utilized in research.

Defining Cultural Competence

In considering what cultural competence is, Cross et al. (1989) have one of the most accepted definitions of cultural competence (specific to clinical practice): “A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable the system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (p. iv). Since then, others have interpreted this definition in a particular field or attempted to refine, expand, or elaborate on earlier conceptions of cultural competence. In addition, there have been many evolving definitions of cultural competence since then, focusing on complex and multidimensional views related to how race, ethnicity, and culture shape our beliefs, values, and norms. At the core, though, is the idea that cultural competence is demonstrated through practical means.

Cultural groups are diverse and continuously evolving, defying precise definitions. Cultural competence is not acquired merely by learning a given set of facts about specific populations, changing an organization's mission statement, or attending training on cultural competence. Becoming culturally competent is a developmental process – a journey – that begins with awareness and commitment to evolve into skill-building and culturally responsive behavior. This can be applied directly to the research process. Cultural competence literature highlights how difficult it is to appreciate and address cultural differences effectively because many individuals tend to see things solely from their culture-bound perspectives. Becoming culturally competent is complex (Flynn, et al., 2020) with movement back and forth along a continuum as identified in Cross et al. work. The stages within the continuum include cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, and cultural proficiency. As individuals, we move along this continuum.

The National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University further adapts Cross' definition for organizations to include the “capacity to (1)

value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve” (National Center for Cultural Competence, n.d, Cultural Competence: Definition and Conceptual Framework, para. 2). The National Association of Social Workers gives an even broader definition which is appreciated as it emphasizes not only *individuals* but *systems*, citing Fong (2004), Fong and Furuto (2001), and Lum (2011):

Cultural competence refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, spiritual traditions, immigration status, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. (National Association of Social Workers, 2015, p. 11)

The majority of definitions you will find from various disciplines focus on the cultural competence of the individual, such as in healthcare (Agner, 2020), education (Haupt & Connolly Knox, 2018), psychology (Chiu & Shi, 2019), social work and even library science (Overall, 2009).

In the session in November 2021, participants were asked how they define “cultural competence.” Figure 1 represents the aggregate of responses received in this initial exercise. You will see that many of the terms researchers thought of are described in the definitions above.

Figure 1. What is cultural competence?

What is cultural competence?



Within library and information science, it was not until the early 1990s that the term cultural competence became more recognized in the literature. Kikanza Nuri Robins (1994) wrote about culturally competent librarians' requirements, citing valuing diversity, respecting diverse populations, and learning about others aligned with social work literature. Ghada Elturk (2003) wrote a piece in *Colorado Libraries* that specifically focused on applying cultural competence to everyday library practice. In 2009, Overall took a more scholarly approach and defined it as the following for professionals in libraries, museums, and archives:

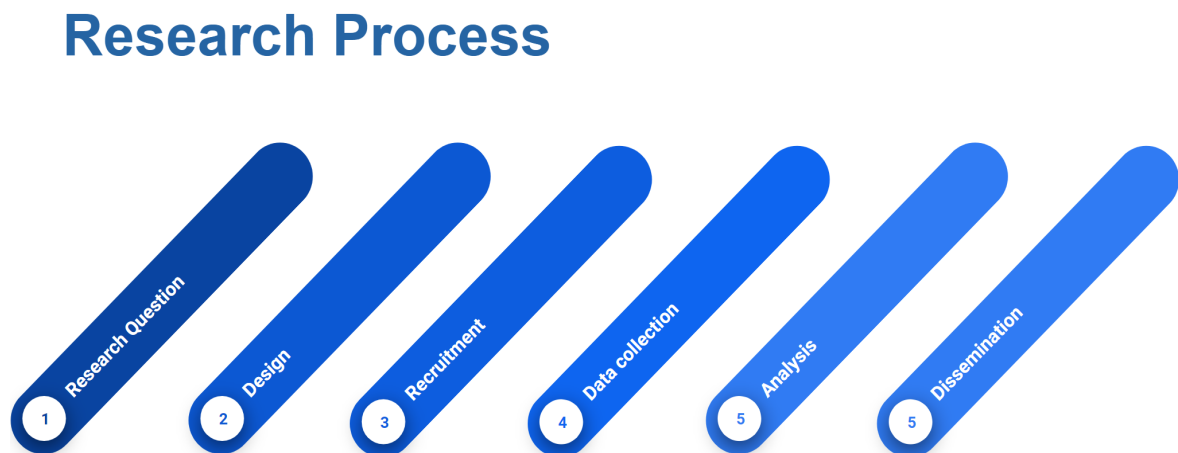
...capacity to recognize the significance of culture in one's own life and the lives of others; to acquire and respectfully use knowledge of diverse ethnic and cultural groups' beliefs, values, attitudes, practices, communication patterns, and assets to strengthen LIS programs and services through increased community participation; to bridge gaps in services to communities by connecting them with outside resources; to recognize socioeconomic and political factors that adversely affect diverse populations, and to effectively implement institutional policies that benefit diverse populations and communities. (pp. 89-90)

Mardis and Oberg (2019) edited a text which is an essential read for school librarians on this topic. In circling back to responses from participants, they each were correct. Cultural competence truly is an ongoing approach to really understanding the knowledge and skills of ourselves and others and requires awareness as a starting point. This means being empathetic, respecting and recognizing others, and not making assumptions about others.

Cultural Concerns in the Research Process

As we begin to think critically about how we apply the meaning of cultural competence in the research process, for us as researchers, we look to the research process (figure 2).

Figure 2. Research process



The first step is to consider where cultural considerations show up in the research process. As a researcher, the capacity to produce high-quality research that considers aspects of culture and diversity of the community across all points of the research process is essential. This means that from the beginning when a researcher starts to develop their research idea they need to be aware of possible cultural considerations and continue to throughout the research process. Considerations also need to be made when creating a study design, such as creating the research questions, recruitment methods to seek participants, consent processes, data collection, analysis of the data and findings, and when sharing the results.

One may first think, *why should research be culturally competent?* There are many reasons. First, there is a need for our study to be culturally competent because the landscape in which we live and work is multicultural. More and more organizations are now making it a priority to recognize and address inequities. Second, research alone has not been as focused on underrepresented groups in the past. Still, more and more scholarly literature encompasses the underrepresented, and more researchers are focusing on this area. If we are to be more inclusive, why hinder engagement with particular communities, such as the underrepresented or non-English speakers in our research. Third, we know that our biases may come out, and we may impose our beliefs, values, and behaviors upon those from other cultural backgrounds, so we need to ensure that we are acting culturally competently and that our research is culturally relevant and sound. Now that we understand the why and the wherein of the research process let's consider the what.

What is Not Culturally Competent Research?

Culturally incompetent studies that do not include cultural considerations in the research process result in consequences. For example, stereotypes can prevail and even tokenism if a researcher represents a different cultural group without valuing their input or giving them a voice. Culturally competent research is not research that merely provides data on how groups are different nor simply gathers information about a cultural group. It does not misinterpret or misrepresent results based on outsider perspectives. It does not overgeneralize data based on a limited segment of a group. It is not research based on the translation of instruments or protocols.

It is not culturally competent when it views others' realities from a deficit perspective or regards one group as superior to another. As a participant of the research, one may be afraid or even mistrust the profession or libraries. As researchers, we need to take the time to truly understand the elements of distinct populations and communities to develop trust and honor with these populations. All of this being said, the inability to engage specific groups can lead to poor research outcomes; this research could have invalid data, put one at risk, exploit vulnerable populations, be an invasion of privacy, and/or inadequately represent those being studied.

What is Culturally Competent Research?

According to a report and program of Harvard Catalyst (2017), cultural competence is essential for researchers to ensure 1) effective interactions between researchers and participants, 2) adequate analysis of results, and 3) appropriate engagement in study design and implementation. Researchers need to be culturally aware and sensitive to others' beliefs, attitudes, values, norms, behaviors, and experiences of the audience that is the focus of the research. Researchers need to be connected to the communities, engage the community they are researching and be aware of realities. Researchers need to incorporate knowledge of historical, environmental, and societal forces into the research process that forms participants' cultural backgrounds and realities. If we do this from the beginning, this promotes the development of awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity throughout the research process. We actively utilize our cultural competence and bring it into the research process. It starts with the researcher and the research team committing to becoming culturally competent. This means any partners, research assistants, and others involved with the research project need to take the initiative initially.

Let's think back to Cross' framework (1989). We as researchers need to 1) value diversity, 2) conduct a self-assessment, 3) manage differences, 4) acquire cultural knowledge, and 5) adapt to the cultural contexts of communities we engage with (this goes for our teams, the research process, and to ensure our research is culturally sound).

Criteria for Culturally Competent Research

Participants at the November session were asked what criteria they would recommend for culturally competent research. The responses included:

- Good institutional review board (IRB) rules that are based on cultural competence
- Self-awareness
- Knowledge of the community
- Breadth
- Including the community in the design
- Educate yourself about re-traumatization
- Collect feedback from a group about your language if you're unsure
- Use of culturally competent language throughout
- Slow down the research process; allow time to think through culturally competent elements
- Ask why the research is vital to the lives of the community being studied
- Think critically about why this research and why me (as the researcher)
- Think if the project would be better executed by or with someone else

Each of these fits in with the below criteria by Meleis (1996), where the author offered eight standards of culturally competent scholarship, each interrelated and all requirements required to be necessary for culturally competent research; however, they provided no specific strategies to apply such criteria in research methods as noted by Casado et al. (2012):

1. *contextuality*, an understanding of the sociocultural, political, and historical context of where the study participants live;
2. *relevance*, research questions that address issues faced by the study population and serve interests in improving their lives;
3. *communication style*, an understanding of the preferred communication styles of the research participants and their communities, and the subtleties and variations inherent in the language used;
4. *awareness of identity and power differences*, a cognizance of the researcher–participant power differences, the establishment of credibility, and the development of more horizontal relationships;
5. *disclosure*, the avoidance of secrecy, and the building of trust with the study population;
6. *reciprocation*, research that meets mutual goals and objectives of the researcher and the study population;
7. *empowerment*, a research process that contributes to empowering the study population; and
8. *time*, a flexible approach to time in the research process regarding quantity and quality of time spent. (Meleis, 1996, pp. 9-13)

In addition, Gil and Bob (1999) offered a list of criteria for competence dependent upon an area of concern (pp. 52-53). First, the failure to report or inform suggested looking at the beneficial treatments of the groups as recommended by Scott-Jones (1994). Second was diversity among researchers. How many of us have considered bringing together a diverse group of researchers when thinking about a research project? This goes beyond the traditional diversity elements and considers neurodiversity, roles, institutions, backgrounds, etc. Casas and Thompson (1991) focused on including diverse graduate students as co-researchers, while Atkinson (1993) focused on ethnic representation on research teams. Another area of concern, according to Gil and Bob (1999), is assessment. This relates to translations (Brislin, 1993) and considerations with tests to ensure that they include cultural information. This last piece could be for both the research team and their self-assessments and those instruments utilized within the research. Last, Casas and Thompson (1991) offer items for studying minority populations, such as engaging with the community where they are and learning about the specific community to understand what is important to them in the research project. Another criterion for competence is to develop an advisory committee made up of individuals from the community being studied so they can help monitor and inform throughout the research process. Next, this article explores two models for use in research.

Examples of Models used in Research

Papadopoulos and Lees (2002) first proposed a framework for developing culturally competent health professionals consisting of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence. They created this framework to address culturally competent research (p. 262). They emphasize that

combining and applying awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity is essential. With this, we cannot separate the challenges from our ability to recognize our biases and to fight against potential racism or discrimination that may become present in the research process.

As Papadopoulos & Lees (2002), in citing Brislin (1993), state, "researchers should ensure that they look for 'conceptual equivalence,' that is, asking whether the concepts being investigated and especially the way the concepts are being measured have the same meaning in the different cultures" (p. 262). For example, participants should be involved throughout the process to ensure a design is not only appropriate for a specific population but that it is sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of the participants. Some approaches can be taken with translation and transcription when it comes to data collection. Researchers should ensure that interviews are conducted in the participants' mother tongue if that is their preference and that translations are accurate through translation back to the original language by a second person. This is often known as 'back translation' (Papadopoulos & Lees, 2002, 261-262).

Another model worth exploring further was also developed in the early 2000s. First, 'cultural competencies' are a broad overarching term for concepts related to intercultural effectiveness. Ang et al. (2015) found more than 30 cultural competence models with over 300 concepts related to cultural competence. The concepts covered various topics from intercultural personality traits, attitudes, worldviews, or intercultural capabilities. The models also had differing scopes where some were focused on personality traits, perspectives, and worldviews, yet others concentrated on unique domains of characteristics.

As Ang et al. (2015) point out, the Cultural Intelligence model concerns intercultural capabilities only. Based on multiple loci of intelligences,

the cultural intelligence concept is parsimonious in that it focuses on only four abstract factors (e.g., metacognition) rather than a vast number of narrower dimensions...it considers all four factors simultaneously and thus lack the comprehensiveness offered by the cultural intelligence model for describing the capabilities domain. (Ang et al., 2015, p. 434)

The model consists of cultural drive, which relates to how motivated and confident one is in multicultural situations; cultural knowledge, which focuses on the understanding of your and other cultures; cultural strategy, which is about the awareness and planning for these interactions; and cultural action, which takes into consideration how one adapts when either working or relating in the context.

Conclusion

This article focuses on four aspects of cultural competence in research: 1) defining cultural competence, 2) examining the importance of including cultural concern in the research process, 3) offering examples of recommended criteria for culturally competent research, and 4) including models utilized in research. As much of the literature and research has focused on the healthcare and social work professions, library and information science can learn a lot from these professions to apply within LIS research. Therefore, this is an opportunity for researchers to examine

their approaches to research projects and how they use cultural competence within the research process.

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June 2022

Information: A Historical Companion Book Review

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Information: A Historical Companion Book Review

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Thank you to Professor Tunon for encouragement and feedback.

About Author

Lena Hernandez is a GLAM professional with over a decade of experience in museums and libraries.

Blair, A., Duguid, P., Goeing, A.-S., & Grafton, A. (Eds.). (2021). *Information: A historical companion*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691209746>

Information: A Historical Companion is a reference book that explores the history of information and the numerous ways that it has been created, documented, organized, shared, and stored. The book was edited by Ann Blair (Harvard University), Paul Duguid (University of California, Berkeley), Anja-Silvia Goeing (University of Zurich and Harvard University) and Anthony Grafton (Princeton University). At 904 pages, including the index and introduction, this tome is not meant for a casual read, though the editors have tried to create a book that is accessible to both academic and lay audiences. At its heart, *Information* seeks to demonstrate that rather than the “Information Age” being a distinct and new modern era of time, information has been a critical and growing field for centuries. The writers and editors make a convincing case that information is what ties us to the past rather than what separates us.

The first section of the book is composed of thirteen essays themed around various information related topics. The essays range between 15 and 26 pages long and are in roughly chronological order, though many essays cover decades, centuries, or even thousands of years. For instance, in Chapter 4, “Information in Early Modern Europe,” Blair pulls together threads from 800 CE to 1700 CE to set the stage for later more focused chapters such as Chapter 11. Richard R. John, in Chapter 11, “Publicity, Propaganda, and Public Opinion: From the Titanic Disaster to the Hungarian Uprising,” traces the role of news and propaganda in society over 34 years and two world wars.

The second portion of the book consists of 101 short entries on a variety of information keywords and topics, all organized in alphabetical order. It covers everything from accounting to xylography and includes a few surprise entries such as khipus, the knotting language and accounting system of the Inka. The short entries are between two and four pages in length. The short entries help fill in details that are glossed over in the essays and encourage thematic exploration.

The editors have laid out the book so that readers may explore in a variety of ways. The table of contents contains a list of the full chapter titles of the longer essays in roughly chronological order and a list of the shorter entries arranged alphabetically. The entries are also sorted thematically into concepts, formats, genres, objects, people, practices, processes, systems, and technologies. Cross-references, a glossary, and indexing all serve to further aid non-linear exploration of the book.

Exploration leaps beyond the book’s covers with an accompanying website which contains additional bibliographies for each entry. The site allows the authors to continue building and adding to the further reading lists for each area. These bibliographies could serve students and researchers in keeping up to date on the relevant literature for their topic. The current additional resource lists on the website are limited but have the potential to be an excellent resource if maintained.

In an unusual move, *Information* does not settle on any one definition of information, but instead lets each writer shape their definition within the work. This

was a successful choice on the part of the editors. Combined with the ability to explore themes across large swaths of time and geography, the lack of a single definition allows the authors to bring their varied expertise into their writing. The primary temporal focus on the early modern and modern periods and the thematic emphases on technology, the impacts of colonialism, globalization, and the “rise of the ‘information state’” all serve as strong threads throughout the essays.

The editors’ strengths in crafting a complex definition and discussion of information make the book’s weaknesses even more glaring. The first essay of the book, written by Anthony Grafton, begins in 1492, with Columbus sailing the ocean blue. This foreshadows the highly colonial perspective that runs throughout the book. The book has a strong focus on European and North American information. The global south, especially African nations, rarely appear. The Middle East, India, and China appear with only slightly more frequency. Fewer still are mentions of places and people beyond Europe and North America which are not framed by a colonial perspective. *Information* was written by 107 contributors from sixteen countries. Many of the authors are prominent in their fields and come from prestigious institutions: Harvard, Yale, Sydney, Bologna, Oxford, and many other leading institutions. The scale of contributors provides a large variety of viewpoints. However, this only serves to highlight the missing perspectives.

Interestingly, several of the essays acknowledge the gaps and missing perspectives. For instance, in Chapter 6 “Records, Secretaries, and the European Information State, circa 1400-1700,” Randolph C. Head notes,

A focus on written records, in turn, privileges literate societies – such as late medieval and early modern Europe – and literate individuals within them, while also drawing our attention to the institutions that enabled the creation and preservation of written records (2021, p.104).

Likewise, in Chapter 12, “Communication, Computation, and Information,” Duguid notes that writing revolves around white men and tends to hide the important roles of people of color and white women. Yet despite these and other self-aware moments, the missing perspectives were not actually addressed in any meaningful way. This is even more disappointing given how eloquently *Information* is written.

The compelling writing of the essays and entries leave the reader with a greater understanding of how our modern “Information Age” has grown on foundations centuries in the making. The editors have done an excellent job of weaving together work from a variety of disciplines into a cohesive whole. This book would be a useful addition to a university reference collection, especially one serving programs in library and information sciences, communication, technology, or history. The book is recommended with the caveat that the library should set aside additional funds to purchase texts that fill in the gaps of African, Central and South American, Asian, and Indigenous perspectives.

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Book Review: Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South by Mike Selby

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Book Review: Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South by Mike Selby

Keywords

civil rights movement, library history, Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee, voting rights, Black Panther Party, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Philadelphia, American history

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Selby, M. (2019). *Freedom Libraries: The untold story of libraries for African Americans in the South*. Rowman & Littlefield.

In *Freedom Libraries: The Untold Story of Libraries for African Americans in the South*, Mike Selby, the deputy director of Cranbrook Public Library in British Columbia, brings the phenomenon of Freedom Libraries during the civil rights movement to life through oral history interviews and archival research. The book won the Outstanding Academic Title of the Year by the Association of College and Research Libraries in 2020. It tells the stories—mostly missing from American and library history—of temporary community libraries staffed by civil rights voter registration volunteers and local citizens. Selby builds on scholarship documenting the Mississippi Freedom Libraries, while also elaborating on his own earlier discoveries of two Alabama Freedom Libraries—one in Selma and one in Haynesville (Selby, 2013). The book's focus on the Southern states (as indicated in the subtitle) includes discussion of a Freedom Library in Arkansas, but also extends north to tell the story of a Freedom Library in Philadelphia that was founded by a civil rights activist and Black nationalist. Selby's research and interviews will be essential for future LIS scholars interested in the civil rights period.

Throughout this book, Selby describes the history of makeshift Freedom Libraries that were founded and maintained by civil rights activists wherever they could find space—in rented buildings, homes, and basements. During the Freedom Summer of 1964, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) volunteers saw how African Americans in the South did not have access to information and were unable to pass literacy tests that were designed to prevent them from voting. In response, SNCC helped create Freedom Libraries as a political strategy. While the size of the library collections, length of existence, and experience of the staff at the Freedom Libraries varied, they all provided access to information for many Black citizens who were denied equal access to their public libraries, despite paying taxes for them. African Americans who attempted to enter segregated public libraries used by white people during this time faced violence, intimidation, harassment, and police brutality. Freedom Libraries thus served as both literacy centers and symbols of hope and courage in a terrifying climate of white supremacy.

The oral histories recounted in *Freedom Libraries* build on Karen J. Cook's thorough dissertation (2008), which provided the first documentation of the Mississippi Freedom Libraries, including the Greenwood Freedom Library, the Meridian Freedom Library, and the Hattiesburg Freedom Library, based on archival research in Wisconsin, Georgia, and Mississippi. Cook, like Selby, was a graduate of the LIS program at the University of Alabama. Her research focused only on the fifty Freedom Libraries in Mississippi that originated during the summer of 1964—groundwork that Selby enhances with activists' testimonials in *Freedom Libraries*. Through his use of direct quotes gained from his correspondence with SNCC volunteers, Selby adeptly conveys the ways in which they felt threatened, scared, and surprised by violence from hate groups in the South. The book portrays the bombings, kidnappings, arrests, and murders during the civil rights era in these towns, demonstrating the danger that organizers and workers for the Freedom

Libraries faced while attempting to provide information and resources to marginalized communities.

In addition to being a professional librarian, Selby also has experience as a newspaper columnist. He sometimes adopts a conversational tone when recounting these stories, dropping phrases like “a bit of history” or wondering “where to begin?” When explaining the positions of Mississippi Library Commissioner Lura G. Currier, he concludes, “Her actions regarding library services to African Americans remain questionable at best,” and interjects that “the logic of this is astounding” while describing her support for segregated libraries at a time when the American Library Association was not taking a stance on the issue (Selby, 2019, p17). The colloquial tone, while unusual in a scholarly context, matches the conversational nature of oral history. This book is clearly a passion project for Selby. His style and his dramatic storytelling skills will help it reach beyond an academic audience to a general audience as well.

Relying on letters, photographs, news clippings, typed book wish lists, diary entries, news accounts, and police reports, as well as his own interviews throughout the book, Selby pieces together a narrative of each Freedom Library’s story, which is often challenging due to limited documentation. Freedom Libraries often existed for only a short time, from months to a few years. For instance, Selby was unable to determine exactly how long the Selma Freedom Library lasted or what happened to the books that volunteers gathered for its collection. Alabama and Arkansas—like Mississippi—were particularly hostile to the Freedom Library project, as illustrated by the terrifying end of the Haynesville Freedom Library in Alabama. Pattie Mae and Leon McDonald, a Black couple who were residents of Haynesville, ran the Freedom Library out of their home until it was attacked and shot at by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) late in the night of September 1, 1965. After the KKK incident, Pattie Mae burned the book collection because the harassment and violence troubled her, and she wanted to protect her children. The destruction of the library’s collection is evidence of the difficulty of preserving the legacy of the Freedom Libraries. The book includes a photo of the author with Pattie Mae McDonald from 2013 when he went to visit and interview her; she was still living in the same home where the Freedom Library was housed. Thanks to Selby’s efforts, McDonald’s story is recorded for future generations.

While the SNCC organizing efforts in the South explain the existence of the Freedom Libraries in the Southern States of Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas, one of the most interesting chapters in the book—chapter six—describes the Freedom Library in Philadelphia founded by John Eliot Churchville, a Black nationalist and musician who was influenced by meeting Malcolm X in Harlem. He joined SNCC and volunteered in Georgia, where voter registration efforts in Black neighborhoods also focused on teaching African Americans to read so they could pass the literacy voting requirement. When he founded the Philadelphia Freedom Library, his fellow organizers wrote a letter to James Baldwin asking for book donations. Selby cites a Library of Congress oral history interview with John Churchville (Mosnier, 2011), but no direct correspondence. Churchville confirmed that Selby never contacted him for an interview (J.E. Churchville, personal communication, May 12, 2022). Selby apparently did not spend as much time

investigating Churchville's recollections for *Freedom Libraries* as he did for the Southern SNCC activists and Freedom Library workers. In a section titled "Growing Pains," Selby (2019) expresses discomfort with Churchville's brief identification with the Nation of Islam and later the Black People's Unity Movement. Similarly, Selby (2019) also suggests Stokely Carmichael's coinage of the phrase "Black Power" at a rally signaled that "the heroic phase of the movement had come to a close" (p.144). The author sometimes seems to lionize white civil rights activists while discounting organizations devoted to Black autonomy. This risks presenting a "white savior" narrative.

From an LIS perspective, *Freedom Libraries* presents stories that have been ignored in American library history, while leaving open the possibility that future scholars will continue to add to this research. In particular, future study might focus on examples of literacy programs operated by Black people themselves, such as the Black Panthers' famous free breakfast programs for children. *Freedom Libraries* nods in that direction at its conclusion. For example, the book *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, a definitive account of the Chicago Black Panther Party, mentions that the organization's chairman Fred Hampton, who was murdered by the Chicago police in his sleep in 1969 at the age of twenty-one, "helped to establish and run a cultural center on Madison Street in Maywood that contained books relating to the black experience" (Williams, 2013, p. 57). Hampton's cultural center could fit Selby's definition of a community-run Freedom Library responding to information needs. However, reconstructing its history, library collection, and community impact would be a daunting challenge for future LIS scholars. More recently, the poet, lawyer, and MacArthur fellow Reginald Dwayne Betts has demonstrated the ongoing necessity to address gaps in information needs with his initiative to bring collections of books he calls "Freedom Libraries" to prison inmates—another example worthy of LIS study (Hilton, 2022).

In addition to being a story of hope and struggle, *Freedom Libraries* offers a cautionary tale. It demonstrates the problems that can arise when LIS professionals address limits to information access with patchwork solutions rather than systemic change. Such issues are relevant today for those seeking to address widespread disparities evident in the "digital divide"—the reality that online access is limited in marginalized communities with "wide disparities in computer and Internet access along numerous demographic lines, including income, race, education, and geographic region" (Kinney, 2010). Selby declares in the book's introduction that "American libraries were born out of the twin ideals of democracy and hope; Freedom Libraries were their finest embodiment" (p. xiv). More libraries could embody these ideals of democracy and hope by acting as "public commons," therefore reducing the necessity for underserved communities to establish, as Mattern (2019) puts it, "their own independent, itinerant, fugitive libraries." Regardless, the temporary and fleeting nature of the Freedom Libraries recounted in this book illustrates how they have been instrumental tools for social movements, which makes their study and documentation that much more valuable. *Freedom Libraries* is an important contribution to civil rights and library history in the United States.

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