# THE LIBRARIAN AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE*

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As I was preparing these remarks I was reminded of the compelling World War I poster featuring a giant Uncle Sam, with his arresting finger pointed directly at us...... summoning Americans to serve our country. I think the copy line was "Uncle Sam Needs You."

Fortunately we're not in a shooting war today. But we are in a war with change. Technological change and economic change are sweeping through our communications systems and affecting all our schools and libraries. Pressing social change is having new reverberations in most of our institutions and communities.

Today I want to talk with you about some of these changes. About the impact they have had or will have...... and what we—as professionals—might be able to do to shape these forces toward positive ends.

Your country needs you, your profession needs you, and your library needs you to become an agent of positive change.

Who wants to change ? Answering that question is one of the

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first battles we'll have to win and it's a battle with our-selves. Sticking with the status quo is comfortable. The poet Robert Browning summed up the opinion of many of us when he wrote, "I detest all change".(From Paracelsus)

And, indeed, in the practice of librarianship there are many things we do not want to change. We do not want to change or sacrifice our values, our ethics, or our high standards of service. These times pose a particular challenge for a profession grounded in principles of personal service, individual expression and the right of individual exploration, even for the youngest reader.

As we look at changes that have and will affect us, we need to be particularly alert to the impact on our professional value system. As agents of change we must protect these basic tenets.

With this caveat, and with all due regard for our natural reluctance to change, we would be wise to consider the comments that Marcus Aurelius made in his Meditations many centuries ago. He wrote......"the universe is change...... nothing can come of nothing...... any more than a thing can go back to nothing."

In more contemporary words, we can't go home ag-ain. Moreover, the world is not a tidy place. In his book *A Brief History of Time*, the physicist Stephen Hawking discusses the force of entropy. He defines entropy as the universal impulse toward disorder. We have a good case for saying that the role of the librarian is to attempt to thwart entropy and to bring order where there would otherwise be nothing but confusion. But we are not immune from the dynamics of a society which—like the physical universe—is constantly undergoing change. Returning to an earlier more simple time is probably not an option. We may find a way, as our president suggests, to be "kinder and gentler, but we can not become more simple or change more slowly".

Change comes in all forms. Much of it is good. I don't think any of us would want to go back to a world without antibiotics or labor-saving household devices like the washing machine. Or air

conditioning, or frozen foods, or jet travel. I recognize there may be some argument about television, rock music and the boom box, but we'll let those pass.

Some change, or attempted change, is a reflection of fear. Fear of freedom, fear of exposure. I'd put the attempts of the federal government to curtail access to information in this category.

And some change is certainly bad. Northing works as well as it should, and when it does—that's a surprise. We don't produce things the way we used to. Social changes have creeping and crushing impact: the growth of teenage pregnancy, in the number of homeless, urban blight, illiteracy, AIDS...... you can all supply additions to this list.

Change is rarely neutral. We don't need to become futurists, but we do have to learn to anticipate specific effects and to plot a course for ourselves and our institutions so that we are not feathers for every wind that blows.

Change that may ultimately have a tremendous impact on us may start thousands of miles away in boardrooms we've never heard of.

Let's touch for a moment on economic restructuring. The prediction that by the year 2000 about 500 companies worldwide would own most manufacturers and service providers is rapidly becoming true. Possibly the number will be fewer than 500. We have only to look at the international buyouts in publishing to have a model of what is happening in fields from food to banking to real estate.

CBS records is now owned by Sony of Japan. A Canadian real estate magnate now owns some of our best-known retail stores. The British own the largest advertising/communications company in the United States. (J. Walter Thompson, and other firms owned by Saatchi & Saatchi.) A Swedish company owns some of the best-known brand names in home appliances. (Eureka vacuum cleaners, Frigidaire appliances.)

The landmark Scribner bookstore in New York located in a building owned by an Italian ready-to-wear manufacturer is about to be redesigned for an undesignated purpose.

American companies are no longer the biggest. In the magazine field, for example, Hachette-Filipacchi passed up *TIME* as the world's largest magazine publisher. A key executive of *TIME* has suggested that on a worldwide basis there will emerge six to eight vertically integrated media and entertainment mega companies. He projects that at least one will be Japanese, two will be European, and several will be American. At least one will be British.

In our own country, we have a wave of new media owners who have little or no media experience. A real estate developer bought the *New York Post* from Rupert Murdoch; another New York developer now owns the *Atlantic* and *U.S. News and World Report.* There's nothing wrong with new media players, but we don't know yet how impartially they will play out their hands.

On the international scene there is the formidable Rupert Murdock with his vast holdings in Australia, the United States and Britain. And there is Robert Maxwell who is building an equally impressive media empire. These men, and others like them in France, Germany and Italy, will shortly be able to reach millions upon millions of people not only through print media, but through networks of television stations.

The key question is whether any commitment exists to deliver diverse messages, to let local stations and local media set editorial direction. How much control over editorial coverage will come from fewer and fewer owners ?

If there's an unfavorable story behind the scenes at General Electric, will that story get complete coverage on NBC ? And when there is an international threat to freedom of speech—as in Iran's barbarous call for the murder of Salman Rushdie—will the corporation exposed on many shores take a stand ? We have a chilling example in our own country when the three book chains that control

more than 2,000 stores took *The Satanic Verses* off their shelves.   Harry Hoffman, president of Waldenbooks, wrote in the *New York Times* in support of his suppression that defending freedom was the government's job.

We need to be aware of the shrinking communications world and alert to the enormous impact a few companies can have on access as well as diversity of expression.   Our own role is making sure all ideas are represented in library resources and that we maintain freedom of access under all legal circumstances.

The leveraged buyout also may seem remote to many of us.   But at the most basic level the result of this incredible accumulation of debt means fewer jobs in affected cities and less community support of institutions like schools and libraries.

Philip Morris has just bought Kraft.   Hundreds of people have already lost their jobs at Kraft.   The future of Kraft's support of the arts and a variety of nonprofit programs in education could be in question.   The effects of the multi-billion dollar buyout of R.J. Reynolds are still unclear.   What we do know about all these acquisitions is that the money to pay the interest on the debt will come from profit, and that any expenditure that does not directly contribute to the bottom line is in danger of being slashed.   Companies that were once major supporters of nonprofit institutions may be expected to curtail or narrow their contributions.

We should respond to these changes in our economic climate with programs that address community needs.   Shouldn't we be marketing the library as a resource center ?   Shouldn't we be reaching out to affected local companies to offer assistance ?   Can we provide meeting space for retraining courses, or at the very least, for lectures on other job opportunities ?   We ought to be partners with the city and the state in dealing with job shrinkage.   If we're going to lose good corporate citizens, let us step in to help fill the gap.

Now I'd like to talk more specifically about changes we deal

with on a daily basis in our own institutions. Let's start with technology. As I said earlier, no change is neutral, and that applies to technology. Nor is it necessarily a panacea.

I know of no study that shows the majority of library users think that the on-line catalogue is far preferable to the old-time card catalog.

Technology has certainly helped to solve certain problems —more efficient check-out and tracking—but it has created others. No matter how much we try, we inevitably end by doing things in a certain way...... not because it is necessarily the best way, or the most user sensitive way, but because the technological system demands it.

As technology improves, so will our flexibility...... but not without an even greater dollar investment. The great challenge we must meet in the future is to find ways to get all that we can from technology in the form of speed, convenience, accuracy, efficiency, lower unit costs...... all of the wonders it can bring us...... without having that technology alter basic values.

One of the things we do best is show respect to each individual who comes to us. We train, or try to train, librarians to accept the importance of that most limited inquirer with the fuzziest question. And we try to treat that unsure user with the same courtesy and attention as the most sophisticated scholar. We don't always succeed in inculcating this value, but we try. And that is perhaps what is most important.

It will be difficult—as we move to artificial intelligence systems—to ensure that we build these systems to be responsive to the timid, the inarticulate and the nonspecific inquirer. It will be difficult because the system will probably work best for the user who is knowledgeable, precise and clear. People have the capacity to adjust their behavior. The system will not have this capacity unless we build it in.

Librarians have done a good job thus far in ensuring that their

systems will protect the rights of privacy of individuals. However, as systems become more complex, and especially as they become more remote and more interactive, protecting the privacy of individual records will become more difficult. The ability to gain access to the on-line transaction records of a special or a research library could become valuable to our own local, state or national investigative forces.

Someone has said that the library is the one place to which an individual can go for their own purposes and not have to give an account of themselves. We have people in our libraries doing research that society would find both noble and ignoble. We need to preserve this freedom. A university librarian recently boasted to me that his new circulation system could print out a list of every book borrowed by a faculty member in the last year. He denied any intention to do such a research. But what if the request comes from the FBI, or the legislature, or the president of the university ?

We've had just such an experience with the FBI recently—when librarians in certain institutions were asked by agents to identify users who looked foreign or spoke with a foreign accent and asked for specific types of technical information.

Thanks to well publicized Congressional testimony by representatives of the ALA and the library community as well as others wedded to freedom of access, the FBI for the time being has backed down and claims it has curtailed this method of pulling suspected foreign agents out of the stacks.

Another area in which the librarians have served the public well is in providing access to information by and about the government. Now that information is increasingly being treated as a commodity, there is a growing tendency in government, cheered on by the private sector, to pass on the cost of disseminating that information to users in the form of user fees or via private sector vendors.

More and more publications and data bases are being

"privatized" and public access to this information is increasingly restricted to those who can and will pay for it. We can expect this trend to intensity.

As more of this material moves from hard copy to electronic storage the government will be pressured to cease publishing because it undercuts the market of the for-profit vendor. As that happens libraries too will be forced to pay higher costs to provide public access to information they once received free as a matter of public policy.

We can certainly expect that librarians in the future will have to wage strong on-going battles with government agencies and with the Congress to uphold the goal of the library as a principal point of access to information produced at the taxpayer expense.

Another aspect of the high tech world we're living in is the coming of CD ROM, and high resolution television. According to futurists, HDTV will open up all kinds of possibilities. Add a disk drive and a keyboard and the core television set becomes a powerful home work station with industrial strength graphics and design capabilities. Bringing fiber optic cable into the home and putting connectors on the set turns the HDTV into a central processing unit for an electronic mail copier, a more advanced telephone, and other systems.

With the telefax machine we already have an increasingly inexpensive direct library-to-user link. People who might never buy a modem for their computers are purchasing fax machines. This means that librarians will be able to fax hard copy directly to users from data bases or from resources in the library.

CD ROM disks offer the same benefits to home or office users as they do to librarians. I know of a doctor in New York who is a specialist on AIDS. He has just purchased a CD ROM disk that has every article printed to date on AIDS. But he's a busy man. At some point he will need someone to evaluate the growing amount of material available to him—even if it is at the touch of a computer

button.　We have arrived at a time when ready availability does not equal immediate relevance.　What the doctor in New York or any potential user of high tech access may not have is the time to evaluate the data, or to determine if—in fact—he has the best sources.

In the future we may elect to expend more effort in developing skills of information evaluation, and in actually extracting information directly from sources as our users request this type of reference service.　I think libraries will need greater subject expertise on their staffs in the future, and will need to develop new ways for staff to interact with users.　We'll do more complicated things in the future with a much stronger evaluative role as our delivery systems get more and more efficient and sophisticated.

Another change—pervasive in our society—is the trend toward poorer service in larger and larger facilities.　Think of discount stores, supermarkets where you bag your own groceries, gas stations where you pump your own gas.　It's all in the name of lower cost, but at the sacrifice of personal attention.　Is this the way we want to move in the institutions in which we work?

Are there new ways, beyond the technology we've just discussed, to provide service, and give a personal touch?　Can we use money that technology may generate for us to make the library warmer, more inviting and responsive?

Libraries used to offer much the same "standard" service.　But in the future it seems to me that librarians who sense change will be the particularly responsive to exactly what services best serve their constituencies.　Where should they be paring down?　Where expanding?　Should they be getting bigger, or more entrepreneurial.

This, of course, implies that you know your market.　You probably know well who you reach.　But who **don't** you reach, and why not?　And do you want to?　And what will this cost?　The word **cost** here is the key.　Because money drives what we can accomplish, who and how we can serve our publics.

The pressure brought to bear on such nonprofit institutions as hospitals, colleges and universities, and arts organizations has produced a phenomenon of the 80s: nonprofit marketing.

The result has been research and then more research to probe attitudes, expectations and ways to raise moeny. What will the public support? What is most appealing to foundations, to corporate donors? What can the institution do for itself that will decrease reliance on fund raising and give it more flexibility?

Some innovative services have emerged in the health care field. These include storefront clinics, more outpatient services in scattered citywide locations linked to one major teaching institution, and promotion of prenatal programs of education and care. There's much more marketing of specialized services. It's too early to tell how many of these innovations will help to cut financial losses but the directions are instructive for those of us who have tended to view ourselves as glued to one physical plant, and to serve only those who call or visit.

The most successful arts organizations in the country have helped to bail themselves out of the fiscal blues by selling more subscriptions rather than depending on single ticket sales. I don't think it's too far fetched to say that in our libraries we don't want one-time visitors, we want to increase the percentage of frequent users.

Subscription sales have been accomplished with insistent telephone campaigns, with direct mail marketing to targeted areas, and with new linkages to corporate America, corporate Europe and corporate Japan. New theater and dance companies are still alive thanks to exposure provided by companies like AT& T. Corporations have discovered there's considerable promotional mileage in underwriting the arts. It's time they discovered what might be accomplished by a library connection. And it is high time we started to sell the potential.

Educational institutions that are braving hard times are also

developing outreach programs. There is a growing demand for continuing education...... and those of us involved in colleges and universities know how successful these programs can be when designed to respond to community interests.

Ten years ago only a few museums in the country had well-developed retail operations. Today, retailing in museums has become big business and you can frequently find as many people milling about in the store as in front of exhibits. Some of these operations are further supported by full-color mail catalogs that have become another source of income. Now—in the library field—retailing is also beginning to emerge as a potential area of profit. More and more public libraries are opening retail shops—all of them profitable...... carrying everything from cards to canvas bags and posters to educational toys.

The message from these examples is that the public responds to new services, to services that pique their interests, or satisfy their needs. There are ways to raise money by making new connections and embarking on new ventures. As agents of change we should be exploring new avenues for funding and service.

To connect with some of the audiences we want to attract, we are going to have to make new affiliations. This is particularly true in reaching the semi-literate, the poor, the elderly, the handicapped, and the homeless. We all work in communities where there are public and private agencies that would be interested in discussing —if not eager to connect with us in—developing new cooperative programming.

Public libraries are accustomed to outreach. Should the school media center consider this approach ? And if so how ? If there a role for the special library ?

We all need to decide what business we are in, and then choose wisely among a group of objectives and programs what best we can do with our resources.

It may be that we want to continue to expand programs because
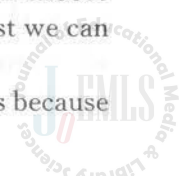
we can expect or know how to get funding. It may be that our market is an increasingly specialized one and that we can serve it best by becoming more specialized. This is happening in public libraries located in or near centers of industry. Business has become their focus.

If we're located in communities with large numbers of young children, maybe that's an area in which we should function more intensely.

Making these kinds of changes involves a good deal of heavy duty decision making. If we want to play in the same league as the successful nonprofit organizations I've just mentioned, we'll take our cues—as they did—from the profit-making sector.

Change in programming means doing research about our current "product". It means doing research to make sure who our customers are and what they want. I'm talking about research among all our publics—young people, teachers, students in colleges and universities, parents.

Decision making about changes in direction also means evaluating community services and judging the gaps. Can we—realistically—fill any of those gaps. And if so, how ?

I know that all of us are concerned about educational and social issues. But we won't be able to address them by sitting behind our desks alone. And we won't be able to tackle them all. The crisis in education—specifically in literacy—is surely one of the most critical problems we face as a democracy.

Some newly published data simply paint an even darker picture of the need to stimulate youngsters and adults. According to the latest survey by the U.S. Department of Education, only 73 percent of all students enrolled in the 8th grade in 1983 had graduated four years later. What can the media specialists do to help keep these young adults in school ? Surely there are more significant roles to be tried than we have aspired to in the past.

We've all read recently about the National Science Foundation

comparative study of 13 years old in countries around the world. American children scored at the bottom of the list on science and math questions. It doesn't help that 68 percent of the American students thought that they were good at math, compared to only 23 percent of the Koreans who actually scored far above them.

The words "critical thinking" have also been at or near the top of most educators' worry list. And closely connected to critical thinking is the ability to read and understand and judge...... not merely for youngsters of school age, but for the 20 million or more adults who can't read beyond the fourth or fifth grade level. The new ALA report developed by the ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy makes a number of recommendations I hope you will review. The report is available from ALA's Public Information Office.

As agent of change, what is our role in an admitted and growing national calamity？ In the school media center have we been aggressive enough and innovative enough to offer potential approaches and solutions？ How are our political skills in working within the school system？

At the public library level, I confess to a deep disappointment that more libraries have not gotten involved in literacy programs. ALA has given the problem unprecedented visibility through its catalyst role in developing the Coalition for Literacy. We can trace all the public service advertising—and there has been the equivalent of millions of dollars of it in print and on television—to the actions of ALA.

But most public libraries have not responded with programs. If you want to be an agent of change, I can think of **no area** in which you can be more effective than developing a program that addresses literacy.

As noted earlier, this may mean reaching out for new community connections to attract the nonreaders. And it may also

mean reaching out for funding you do not now have.

ALA will be providing additional initiatives in the months ahead, and I am hopeful the profession will continue to make progress in this area.

We all worry about the effects of television. But this is—by now—an old technological development that simply gets more and more central. We are bound to the tube as a monitor. We are bound to it for entertainment. And we ought to be bound to it for education as well.

Some 45 million homes own video cassette records and most public libraries loan video tapes. ALA statistics indicate that entertainment tapes may circulate as many as 250 times a year. Don't we wish we had books with the same kind of popularity that were not Harlequin novels.

As change agents we need to make sure that the best available video material is in our libraries. We're not in the business of competing with video stores in loaning ET or Rambo. We ought to have available—according to the library objectives—tapes that would not be readily available elsewhere. We shouldn't underestimate the lure of the videotape, or shrug off its educational potential. ALA is providing guidance in this area thanks to generous grants from the Carnegie Foundation.

Another opportunity with a challenge for us is the growth of cable television. An industry that was losing billions just a few years ago, it now is expected to earn some 8 billion in profits between 1985 and 1990. This means the cable viewer base has skyrocketed. Many cable systems were installed with public access channels. In some instances these production facilities are located in libraries, with resulting programs that involve students, interested library users, and staff.

As agents of change, what role should librarians be playing to gain additional access to these cable channels ? Do we know what we want to present ? Are we skillful enough to do the presenting ?

If not, how can we organize and recruit to develop programs that can address literacy at all levels and in all subject areas ?

We have a society in which people without funds or resources literally have no place to go.   This past year the homeless were one of the media's favorite subjects.   But the homeless will be with us after television has tired of covering men and women sleeping on sidewalks or in bus and train stations.   We have our share of the homeless during the day in the library.

A related concern—although for a shorter period of time— are the latchkey children who wait in the library until Mom can pick them up.   This was also a favorite media topic in 1988.

We did not come off well in the news coverage that I saw.   We complained about noise, food and interference with library routine.   I heard few librarians address the basic social issue —What to do about youngsters who have no place to go after school.   How many of us met with other community or civic groups and city departments to discuss the problem ?  Yes, there are inconveniences with food, noise and the library routine.   But if we are going to be agents of change we have to look beyond the coke bottle and the candy wrapper and ask if we want to be players in helping to solve community problems.

Are there programs we could offer with the help of schools and colleges or even professional groups ?  Are there businesses that would contribute funds ?  Have we thought about it ?  Have we asked ?

It is a dream for me to have a United States president not only address our educational needs but to recognize the librarians as key players moving aggressively ahead, arm in arm with school administators, local college, public and private educators.

To get this kind of attention means that our playing field is larger, and that we'll need better political skills.   We may know the bureaucracy of our own institutions, we need to understand the ways of the world outside.

We must develop new constituencies. I suppose no story of how to move from poor relation to shining star is more dramatic than the New York Public under the direction of Vartan Gregorian. Not only is he a charismatic and dramatic spokesperson for the wonders of reading and the library, he is an unsurpassed community player.

All our libraries need not become the smart place to have a formal ball, but we should all look at what Dr. Gregorian did in New York and how he did it. He changed the library's image, its budget and its future. He tapped not only the social lights of New York, but the business community—a much overlooked resource by all of us in all kinds of libraries.

All of us can work for change. Let's not be beaten by it. Let's put the flag where we want it. We can work at the level of our own institutions where we need—as I've already mentioned—less bureaucracy...... and more concern for people.

We can work in schools with the administration, with parents and teachers—and of course—students. Not an easy place to effect change—our schools—but an area where it is sorely needed.

The public library offers almost unlimited prospects for change on the high tech level, in service to groups of users, to the educationally disadvantaged.

And in academia, we can not only reinforce human values but help to turn out a graduating class that subscribes to more than number crunching and those five favorite words "what's in it for me ?"

We've covered a lot of ground today—from the inevitability of change to change in corporate ownership on a global basis and its potential consequences in the information field. We've talked about change that has a direct impact on the library community—from technology to latchkey kids to literacy. And we've talked about how important it is to maintain our basic humanistic values in the midst of ever more sophisticated technology and the ever more needy information poor.

I hope that the many questions I've raised and the opportunities suggested will encourage you to consider yourself an agent of change in your own institution and in the wider community.

There are a number of images or perceptions we need to shed in order to be agents of change.   We are seen as passive.   Let's not be passive.   We are seen as rigid.   Let's be more flexible.   We are seen as poor.   Let's let the riches of our resources give us the mantle of the well endowed.

Let's be better at network building—both within the library community and in our larger communitiers.   Join community organizations.   Serve on boards.   Get known.

Let's be socially sensitive and inventive about how our resources at the library can be put against social ills.

Let's not be negative.   Let's not say "no" until we've explored all the possibilites of dealing with opportunites.

I know it's a cliche—but let's talk about challenges instead of probelms.   A problem is something that's getting you down. A challenge is something that encourages you to act.   It's calling the glass half full instead of half empty.

Let's be risk takers.   Nothing ventured—nothing gained. Another four words our mothers taught us.   But ture nevertheless.

Let's not be afraid to sell ourselves—to market ourselves better.   Let's not be shy about the library and let's be skillful at packaging and promoting specific programs.   This is all a tall order.   And not all of us want to reach for the swinging brass ring.   But as I said at the beginning of this speech—change is inevitable.   Some change is simply unmanageable.   But some is not.

Being an agent of change means never standing still.   It means growing—personally and professionally.   It means thinking about what we want to achieve next year, or five years from now.   And planning how we're going to achieve our goals.

Among golfers there is a saying about putting which states

"never-up, never in" which simply means that if you don't shoot hard enough to reach the cup, the ball can never go in.    It seems to me a good slogon for us as we approach change.    If we fail, let's fail because we tried too hard rather than because we failed to act.    Let not some future library historian look back at our moment in time and say they could have adapted, they would have met change, but they failed to act.