

Liberatory Librarianship: Stories of Community, Connection, and Justice

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Book Information

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Are libraries freeing?

Brian W. Keith, Laurie Taylor, and Shamin Renwick's edited volume *Liberatory librarianship: Stories of community, connection, and justice* features people, programs, pasts, personal stories, and possibilities in the spirit of inspiring tangible interventions by libraries for justice. Where allyship includes leveraging people capacity and existing resources, then libraries continue to be called on to leverage their professional people power and infrastructures to support marginalized people in order to increase freedom, justice, and community. The editors understand liberatory librarianship to involve teaming such things as the knowledge, professional ethics, and personal commitments of librarians, and applying them alongside library resources to go beyond the dominant diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) model of librarianship. The editors define

liberatory librarianship as, “work that uses library capacity and expertise to uplift the spirit of freedom, justice, and community through shared contributions and collective benefits, and as work that supports the ability for minoritized and oppressed people to – with the collective support of the community – be better positioned” (Keith et al, 2024, p. xiv). The editors offer this definition, allowing readers to map it on to practical stories in the volume to see how it works, and what it might inspire.

The editors are oriented in their journey into liberatory librarianship through their connections with the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC). The dLOC is an open-access digital library of Caribbean and circum-Caribbean resources born out of the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL). References and ties to the dLOC feature prominently throughout the volume. In the introduction the editors acknowledge that over time they’ve told the dLOC’s story in different ways, with different concentrations. This book stands in for another telling of dLOC’s influence. In some ways, the book feels like a compilation event, a coming-together or commemorative showcase of dLOC’s trajectory. As such, it’s an event that comes with an invitation. Libraries and librarians are invited to seek out and action their own liberatory people, programs, and potentials. In celebration liberation can exist.

The volume is organized in six parts. Part one spotlights liberatory librarians, including Dr. Alma Jordan, Lillian Marrero, Rosa Quintero Mesa, and Judith Rogers. These entries read as short leadership summaries. Part two offers examples of programs that support liberation. This includes a speaking truth to power entry by Felicia A. Smith, the inaugural Racial Justice and Social Equity Librarian at Stanford Libraries. Smith shares the progress of the “KNOW Systemic Racism” (KSR) database project that maps historical and current institutionalized discrimination. Part three is themed around the personal as professional; these heartfelt stories placed at the mid-point of the collection successfully re-centres lived experiences for meaning and fortify the reader with courage to keep reading for liberation. Tiffany J. Grant’s personal narrative about the death of her older brother during the COVID-19 pandemic makes real the combination of health disparities and racial inequities that librarians can take up, including in their DEI work. JJ Pionke’s piece, “Disabled in the Library” starts in the bathroom, and chronicles the rampant unresponsiveness of accessibility compliance in

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libraries. Through personal advocacy, it offers that persistent emailing can be a liberatory tactic. Part four looks at liberation histories; blending DEI case studies, models, and resources in ways that help question how libraries are organized through decisions, belonging structures, employee resource groups, reading lists and more. Part five progresses to look at liberatory instruction and training, Entries open up how libraries listen and learn, and how that impacts liberatory relations. Part six, on imagining and enacting liberation together, anchors the collection in an emphasis on empathy. Sabine Jean Dantus' "Empathy as resistance? The concept of empathy in liberation librarianship" serves as the event keynote to the book. It champions empathy as a form of resistance. Empathy is a form of resistance that isn't about refusal, but about saying yes – yes to the importance of social justice – and yes to each other. In libraries, empathy is change-making.

Liberatory librarianship is a big concept, but the sections are short. Very short. Some entries are one or two pages. Most sections are two chapters only. The brevity may serve as an accessible entry point for the reader. The brevity may mirror any combination of the urgency, ease, or do-ability, with which librarians are encouraged to take up liberatory librarianship. Or, the brevity is by design – a starter pack for the possible future volumes hoped for by the editors.

Taken together, the editors amplify that liberatory librarianship is historic (librarians have always found ways to make it possible), is timely (needed now), and is future forward (what's needed next is more). For the reader, the book's structure across people, programs, and purpose works as a framework for librarians to document, map, and advance their own liberatory practices – or to influence new ones. The collection focuses on the tangible and the generative. An inspiring offering, it is relevant to librarians, educators, and students to engage as part of the necessary trajectory of these times, whether read or taken up as part of liberatory librarianship, critical librarianship, transformative librarianship, disruptive librarianship, DEIJ – or library change-making broadly. The editors and contributors offer examples that serve to boost and uplift collaborative efforts.

Conflict of Interest Statement

None declared.