

Libraries Without Borders: New Directions in Library History,
edited by Stephen A. Knowlton, Ellen M. Pozzi, Jordan S. Sly,
and Emily Spunaugle; foreword by Renate L. Chancellor

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Volume 10, 2024

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1115627ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v10.44255>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians / Association
Canadienne des Bibliothécaires en Enseignement Supérieur

ISSN

2369-937X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bond, S. (2024). Review of [Libraries Without Borders: New Directions in Library History, edited by Stephen A. Knowlton, Ellen M. Pozzi, Jordan S. Sly, and Emily Spunaugle; foreword by Renate L. Chancellor]. *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship / Revue canadienne de bibliothéconomie universitaire*, 10, 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v10.44255>

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Book Review: *Libraries without Borders: New Directions in Library History*

Knowlton, Stephen A., Ellen M. Pozzi, Jordan S. Sly, and Emily Spunaugle, eds.
Libraries without Borders: New Directions in Library History. Chicago: ALA Editions,
2024, 191pp, \$69.99.

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Keywords: *academic libraries · library history · research · social justice*

The Library History Seminar, hosted by the ALA Library History Round Table every five years, exists to promote the history of libraries and librarianship. The fourteenth seminar, from which this volume collects its essays, expanded from the usual academic-focused sessions to include content for students and teachers that were new to the library history field. It appears to have been a vibrant and invigorating conference, but this slim volume of essays is hard to understand as an artefact removed from the context of the larger event. The seminar included fourteen research sessions that presented two papers each, as well as four invited speaker panels. Bookended by the text of the opening keynote and a chapter related to the closing address, this monograph includes expanded essays based on just five of the papers and one speaker from one of the panels. The introduction explains that so few papers made it to the final publication largely due to the pandemic, and the resulting small sample is not representative of the diversity of views presented in the seminar. The individual essays are all good but written for different audiences. This makes for an overall valuable but at times incoherent book.

The most perplexing entry is Tom Glynn’s “Getting Started”, which is expanded from his panel contribution on getting started in different types of library history research. While the chapter is a helpful step-by-step research guide, it feels out of place in the book. Explaining how an archive works or how to use a wildcard in a search term is jarring, as it appears after sophisticated essays by Henry Handley on the history of the Marian Library and Emily D. Spunaugle’s examination of library



Bond, Susan. 2024. Review of *Libraries without Borders: New Directions in Library History*, edited by Stephen A. Knowlton, Ellen M. Pozzi, Jordan S. Sly, and Emily Spunaugle. *Canadian Journal of Academic Librarianship* 10: 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.33137/cjal-rcbu.v10.44255> © Susan Bond, CC BY-NC 4.0.

responses to censorship in the fifties under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Further, while it may be useful in a synchronous venue like a conference to describe the placement of website features, that sort of content is likely to be obsolete almost immediately after publication .

I suspect this introductory material appears so late in the volume because it pairs well with the book's final essay: a call to action for library history researchers to begin filling gaps in the scholarly record around libraries that serve BIPOC communities as well as the lives of BIPOC librarians. Together with the foreword, the last chapter presents a strong argument for more library history research with a social justice framework. The first chapter by Gray et al, in a sense, answers this call: "Locating Activism and Memory: Reimagining 1960's Civil Rights Familial Communities in a Library and Information Context" looks at two local instances of the civil rights movement, problematizing the idea of the library as a universal good. Many papers presented at the seminar similarly responded to the social justice call, so Gray et al's work should be understood as standing in for all of them.

Geographic diversity, on the other hand, is not well represented in the book. Entire sessions devoted to libraries and librarians outside of the United States were part of the fourteenth seminar, however none of those papers made it into this collection. In their final chapter Roy and Simons tell a moving anecdote about a microaggression faced by a Latina student in a review from a self-identified white male European that considered her DEIJ-focused abstract too "American". It is unfortunate that a seminar on libraries without borders, which had good representation from international libraries and librarians, resulted in a publication that is limited to an examination of libraries within America's borders.

Taken as a whole, this slim volume works best as a promotional vehicle for the field of library history in an American context. Along with instructional and directional pieces pointing to future growth, it includes essays that operate at different scales. In addition to the essays focused on individual communities or specific historical moments like the red scare during the Cold War, it includes works examining how library practices and the profession impact institutional relationships with their host communities. For example, John DeLooper's chapter about media accounts of long-overdue books contains a nuanced analysis of how late fees shape the relationship between libraries and their borrowers. Similarly, Kelly Hangauer's history of bibliographic instruction's emergence as a professional sub-field demonstrates how the turn away from administration and toward teaching has shaped the relationship between academic librarians and the institutions. Canadian researchers might be interested in different topics and the databases Glynn suggests may be less useful for research not focused on American institutions, but the

collected essays can still inspire would-be library historians to pursue research into the field.