

**Liberatory Librarianship: Stories of Community, Connection,  
and Justice, edited by Brian W. Keith, Laurie Taylor, and  
Shamin Renwick**

Nicole Slipp 

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## Book Review: *Liberatory Librarianship: Stories of Community, Connection, and Justice*

Keith, Brian W., Laurie N. Taylor, and Shamin Renwick, eds. 2024. *Liberatory Librarianship: Stories of Community, Connection, and Justice*. ALA Editions. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2024, 192pp, \$64.99.

**Nicole Slipp**

*Mount Saint Vincent University*

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Libraries, as repositories of knowledge and cultural spaces historically reserved for members of dominant racial groups and higher socioeconomic classes, have been and continue to be a part of systems that oppress minoritized peoples. However, many librarians today work against this history and attempt instead to align themselves with social justice and to give support to marginalized people. When librarians apply their expertise and institutional resources to enable the work of the underrepresented in order to put values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) into practice, they are arguably engaging in liberatory librarianship.

*Liberatory Librarianship: Stories of Community, Connection, and Justice* follows work in liberatory education and liberatory archives and seeks to “define, recognize, and foster liberatory librarianship” (xiv). The definition of liberatory librarianship comes from biographies of remarkable librarians and from case studies, both of which the editors hope will provide tangible examples to inspire librarian readers in their own work. According to the editors’ introduction, the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC), a major project of the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL), has particularly inspired this book. dLOC, a collaborative, open-access digital library, uses the resources of ACURIL member archives and libraries to ensure the preservation of Caribbean histories (particularly challenging in tropical climates), serving local needs while also making these digitized documents accessible to users across a vast geographic area. dLOC is an exemplar of the principles of liberatory librarianship to which this volume seeks to contribute.



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*Liberatory Librarianship*'s fifteen chapters are divided into six sections along thematic lines, such as "The Personal as Professional" and "Liberatory Instruction and Training," but the book could be more straightforwardly divided as: introduction, biographical chapters (chapters 1-4), case studies on liberatory work in libraries (chapters 5-13), and a concluding theoretical chapter (chapter 14). Eight of the nine case study chapters are written by authors at American institutions, and the other by authors in the United Kingdom. Given the importance of the Caribbean to the project, the book could have been stronger by including at least one case study from the region.

In its introduction, *Liberatory Librarianship* invokes a "capacious" definition of librarianship, intending to include "all information professionals" (xiii). However, while the book intentionally employs a variety of formats and styles in its contents—some chapters are quite informal, others are traditional scholarly articles—only one profiled librarian worked in a public library, and of the case studies only one short chapter, "Liberatory Librarianship in a Public Library," is situated in a non-academic context. All three of the editors work for university libraries. While public librarians could still take inspiration from the theory of liberatory librarianship, the academic librarian is more likely to find applicable ideas in the case studies, and the book's focus ultimately feels more academic than not.

The content of this book is strong overall; the text is an enjoyable read. The four biographical chapters on liberatory librarians are engaging and make excellent cases for the positive impact library librarians can have on their communities and on the profession. The case study chapters detail admirable work across the board, and it is difficult to identify standouts as each chapter could easily inspire readers in their own work. Favourites may come down to alignment with each reader's professional focus, or cases that bring exposure to something totally new. "My Brother's Keeper", for example, recounts how the death of Tiffany J. Grant's brother Christopher Joffrion in April 2020 motivates her to research the intersection of racial inequalities and COVID-19 for Black Americans and strengthens her investment in DEIJ work. While Grant is the primary author of the chapter and it is her personal story, she demonstrates her commitment to mentoring early-career racialized information professionals by giving co-authorship credit to graduate students LaWanda Singleton and Clementine Adeyemi, for whom such credit will be significant. Bernadette A. Lear's "We Are...Library Users!" contains many practical tips for improving service to intellectually disabled users in a postsecondary library environment, a user-group that is highly underrepresented in scholarly and professional literature. In the final case study, Sarah Dorpinghaus and Ruth E. Bryan demonstrate the critical reflection anyone seeking to do liberatory librarianship must incorporate into their practice to avoid empty or performative allyship to the communities they seek to support.

In the concluding chapter, Sabine Jean Dantus writes compellingly about the ways in which empathy can enable social justice-minded librarians not just to resist by saying “no”, but also to say “yes” to opportunities to build community and relationships. *Liberatory Librarianship* exemplifies this kind of empathetic, proactive resistance as it celebrates positive practices among librarians. Two of the stated goals of this book are to be “meaning-making for the term liberatory librarianship and [provide] a platform for stories of this work and the workers involved in it” (xv). It achieves these goals and makes an edifying read, especially for academic librarians looking for inspiration for ways forward in their own DEIJ work.