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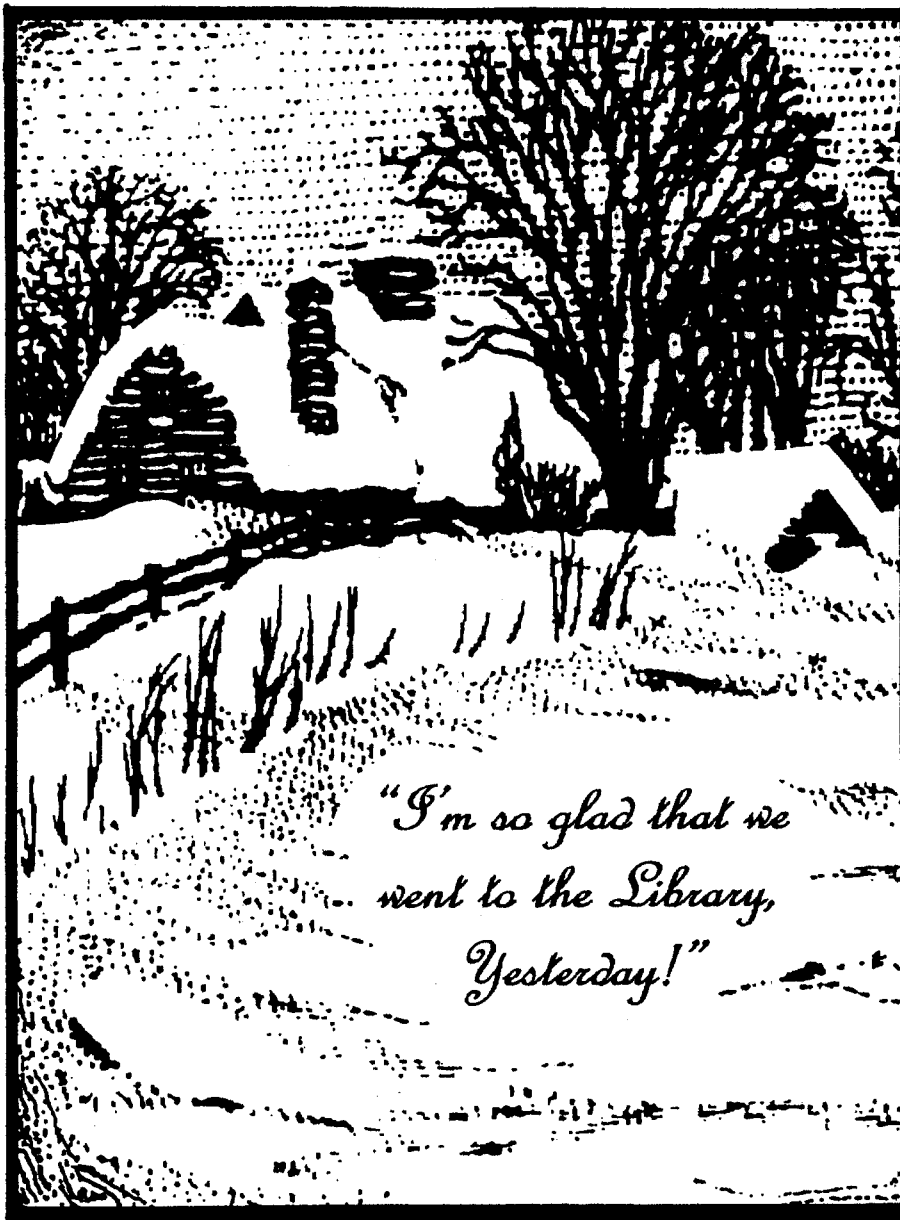
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# U\*N\*A\*B\*A\*S\*H\*E\*D™

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## Librarian

the "how I run my library good" letter sm



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dren earlier and more often about tough issues like sex, HIV/AIDS, violence, alcohol, and drug abuse. This site is a national initiative by Children Now and the Kaiser Family Foundation.

**Teenwire.** <http://www.teenwire.com/index.asp/> This web site created by Planned parenthood for teens where they can get information and news about teen sexuality, sexual health, and relationships.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases, NIAID Fact Sheet.** <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/stdinfo.htm/> An introduction to sexually transmitted diseases. A series of fact sheets about AIDs provided by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health.

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**BERMAN'S BAG: MUST "THE POOR" ALWAYS BE AMONG US?**

by Sanford Berman, U\*L Contributing Editor

As a donor to St. Stephen's Shelter in Minneapolis, I lately got a letter from the shelter director, Ed Murphy. He wrote, in part:

"It used to be that if a person worked in America they'd be able to afford a place to live. For many who worked cleaning offices, washing dishes, or any of a number of essential jobs, home was

a room at a downtown hotel or boarding house. Some lived most of their lives there, while others stayed long enough to save up for something better.

"But in the past few years, things have changed... Rapid downtown development destroyed hundreds of units of low-cost housing, leaving many workers with fewer options. Some people were able to double-up in apartments or find other housing. Others ended up in homeless shelters just to get off the streets and keep their jobs.. A recent survey of homeless men at St. Stephen's shoed that 810 are working, most employed full time. Yet they live homeless because there are so few low-cost apartments and wages aren't high enough to afford the available housing.

"As a result, shelters fill quickly, leaving many on the streets . At St. Stephen's alone, 80 or more sober, homeless men each night try for one of our 40 beds. That means too many are left to sleep outside or on the floor in downtown refuges. What's worse, the vulnerable mentally ill who most need shelters are unable to get in and left to fend for themselves on the streets, seeing their lives spiral further downward."

Despite an undoubted economic

"boom" and much-vaunted "prosperity," one in five American children remains in poverty (42% of Black kids!), food shelf and shelter use rises, a third of the workforce makes less than livable wages, and some 45 million people have no health insurance. It's not widely reported, but many homeless people are murdered (29 last year), some also decapitated, and laws--for instance, against panhandling or loitering--frequently criminalize poor people just for being poor. So celebration of our collective "good times" seems a little premature.

By contrast, the very rich are becoming ever richer. Fortune 500 CEOs typically "earn" 400 times more than their lowest-paid employees, that pay gap being 5 times wider today than in 1990 and 10 times greater than in 1980. And the wealthiest fifth of the population receives more than half of the nation's income. In this context of persistent and growing inequality, class-based discrimination, and lack of such taken-for-granted basics as shelter, food, and health care, I propose as an analog to the well-established concept of "institutional racism" that we now start talking about "institutional classism." In libraries, we'd then be looking at policies, practices, and attitudes that either keep poor people out altogether or treat them as though

they don't deserve equal, first-class service, and--in the realm of resources and bibliographic access--that banish or mute their voices and those of antipoverty allies.

To get specific: It may shock the innocent and idealistic among us to learn that fines for overdue materials are no longer collected to get the materials back or to promote responsibility among borrowers. They're levied to make money, to generate revenue. Indeed, if everyone returned materials on time, a library like Hennepin County in Minnesota would suddenly lose over \$800,000 a year. What does that have to do with classism? Simply this: Fines demonstrably keep some low- and fixed-income people from using the library. When it's a question of putting milk on the table or paying an overdue fine (or paying for transportation to return materials on time), milk wins. As it should. But the result is often that folks then stay away from the library. Or keep their kids out. In short, fines are discriminatory. So are fees for core services like video borrowing. Three or more ALA policy statements unequivocally proscribe fees, yet libraries continue to assess them, in effect censoring certain resources and services for people without the ability to pay. (Bestseller and audiotape rental programs also exemplify services denied to

persons strictly on an economic or classist basis. Jenna Freedman, incidentally, critically examined such programs in a recent *U\*N\*A\*B\*A\*S\*H\*E\*D™ Librarian*: "Express This--the Road To Ruin" no. 116 (2000), pages 28-31.)

Another form of institutional classism is the failure to provide catalog access to topics well represented in library collections but not yet sanctified by the Library of Congress, subjects like HOMELESS MENTALLY ILL PERSONS (explicitly mentioned by Ed Murphy), POOR PEOPLE--EMPOWERMENT, NONCLASSIST CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, LIVING WAGE LAWS (to complement the belatedly created LIVING WAGE MOVEMENT), FOOD SHELVES, STREET NEWSPAPERS (there are over 40 such tabloids--by, for, and about homeless people--in North America), and myriad "CLASSISM IN" forms, like CLASSISM IN EDUCATION and CLASSISM IN SOCIAL POLICY (which, as an example, perfectly fits such a work as Ruth Sidel's *Keeping women & children last: America's war on the poor* (Penguin Books, 1996).

The longstanding terms, PUBLIC WELFARE and PUBLIC WELFARE ADMINISTRATION, should be converted to the more readily findable WELFARE and WELFARE ADMINISTRATION.

(Since not all catalogs furnish adequate cross-references, the most common and familiar version

of a term ought always to be the primary form.)

And the Victorian-era descriptor, POOR, needs to be transformed into the more human, less objectified form: POOR PEOPLE. (Naturally, there's already a heading for RICH PEOPLE. In response to questions raised about the discrepancy between these two headings, an LC staffer explained: "'Poor' is an original subject heading, established in 1898, that followed a pattern, prevalent at the time, of referring to groups of people in this manner, similar to 'Blind' or 'Deaf.' 'Rich people,' however, was established in 1996 and follows the current pattern of including 'people' in the heading." So it seems that obsolete, dehumanizing terminology must be retained for the sake of historic preservation!)

Additionally, there needs to be more depth, breadth, and specificity in the cataloging of poverty and social policy titles. For examples of how LC typically under- or mis-catalogs such material and a comparison with Hennepin County treatments of the same works, have a look at my "Foreword" to Karen Venturella's *Poor people and library services* (McFarland, 1998), pages 7-13.

Still one more kind of institutional classism is the refusal to allow street papers to be dis-

tributed free in library foyers and entranceways. And there's the corollary failure to subscribe to, keep, and catalog local homeless and welfare rights periodicals, thus excluding the voices of the very people most affected by anti-panhandling laws, welfare repeal, and a host of other measures that further marginalize and oppress poor people. In the event there are few or no such local or regional publications, libraries should stock at least some representative titles from elsewhere, for instance:

+*Catholic Agitator*. 632 N. Britannia St., Los Angeles, CA 90033. 8 nos. \$1.00/year. ISSN 0045-5970. The feisty, fervent product of L.A.'s Catholic Worker movement. Heading a recent full-page review of *Word on the Street: Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context*: "Reader beware! This book could be dangerous. It may compel you to practice Christian compassion on the streets of your city and get you in trouble... just like Jesus. You may depart from the comfortable confines of the safe seminary and quiet church to discover the reality that God dwells among the poor."

+*Long Haul: Speaking Out About Poverty*. End Legislated

Poverty, No. 211, 456 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC, Canada V5Y 1R3, monthly. \$30/year. Contains information on British Columbia policies and politics, and how poor people and anti-poverty activists there agitate and mobilize to make life more dignified and fair for unemployed, homeless, and other low-income persons--together with Canada-wide and international reports, as well as spirited volleys against wealthfare and poor-bashing. Done with style, verve, and solid data, the whole paper's an inspiring example of powerless, downtrodden folks getting it together and fighting back. Also--like *Survival News* and *Welfare Mothers Voice*--it's an effective antidote to cynicism and despair.

+*Survival News*. Survivors, Inc., 95 Standard St., Mattapan, MA 02126. quarterly. individuals: \$10/year, organizations: \$25, low/no income people: free. A jumbo tabloid, partly in Spanish, featuring much Massachusetts news and opinion, but also many articles of general interest (e.g., in the Summer 2000 issue: "YWCA's Nazi tendencies?," "Hunger in the US," "Female poor getting poorer," "Which

way welfare rights?," and "Taking back Mother's Day") plus abundant survival tips and resource-listings.

+*Welfare Mothers Voice: a paper By, For, and About Mothers in Poverty*. Welfare Warriors, 2711 W. Michigan, Milwaukee, WI 53208. quarterly. individuals: \$15, organizations: \$25, mothers in poverty: free at distribution sites/\$4 by mail. A vital, spirited, outspoken panoply of letters, photos, cartoons, essays, and news with a Wisconsin accent but global reach, making important links between issues as apparently diverse as environmental protection, welfare rights, corporate crime, campaign finance reform, globalization, women's resistance, and the prison-industrial complex. Their mission: "We want to share our knowledge and strength with each other, to validate each other, and support each other until the poverty community is strong and unified with a VOICE in all systems that affect our lives. We are angry and bored with the lies and stereotypes about moms whose children receive government child support (TANF). We will no longer remain silent. We will unite and fight for the lives of all

mothers and children in poverty. We demand dignity."

+*By What Authority*. Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD), P.O. Box 246, So. Yarmouth, MA 02664. 3 nos, \$30/year (for newsletter & "contact kit"). "An unabashed assertion of the right of the sovereign people to govern themselves," POCLAD's organ contends that "a minority directing giant corporations privileged by illegitimate authority and backed by police, courts, and the military define the public good, deny people our human and constitutional rights, dictate to our communities, and govern the earth."

+*Dollars and Sense: What 's Left in Economics*. Economic Affairs Bureau, 740 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA. 02141. bimonthly. individuals: \$22.95/year. institutions: \$42. "Edited and produced by a collective of economists, journalists, and activists...committed to social justice and economic democracy," D&S "explains the workings of the US and international economies" in accessible prose "and provides left perspectives on current economic affairs." This is where to find understandable analyses of such

issues and developments as drug policy, corporate welfare, Third World debt, the clean-elections movement, neoliberalism, multinationals' influence, labor militancy, privatization, and income inequality. A necessary complement to *Business Week*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.

+*Kids Can Make A Difference Newsletter*, P.O. Box 54, Kittery Point, ME 03905. 3 nos. free (but \$5/year contribution welcome). "A program of World Hunger Year (WHY)," its goal is to "help young people understand the root causes of hunger and poverty and inspire them to end hunger in their communities, country, and world." This is the sort of priceless nugget often found in such out-of-the-mainstream sources, the first two paragraphs of Dan Zuckergood's "RESULTS Educators Network: Helping Teachers Empower Students" (Fall 2000, pages 1-2):

Before becoming a professor of education at Springfield College, I was a Jr. and Sr. High Social Studies teacher for twelve years. For the first few years, I taught about hunger as just another "world problem" that we all needed to solve. Like many other issues, it seemed like an issue

"too big" and "too unsolvable" to do anything about.

This all changed after a local church hosted an "Ending Hunger Briefing," put on by the Hunger Project. The speaker asked whether the crash of a plane carrying 400 children would make the headlines the next day. He then asked if the crash of two planes carrying 400 children would make the headlines the next day. After going through a few more "plane crash" scenarios, he informed us that on every single day, 40,000 children were dying as a result of hunger and hunger related diseases. That was the equivalent of 100 planes carrying 400 children! And this was happening each day! And no newspaper was carrying that as a headline!

(For more on the "street newspaper" genre, including details for several outstanding titles, see Terry Messman's "Dissenting Voices of the Street" and Chris Dodge's "Street Newspapers Create Lively Alternative To Establishment Media," both in *Alternative Library Literature, 1998/1999* (McFarland, 2000), pages 239-245.)

Finally, if we're truly committed to helping, empowering, and liberating low income persons, rather than passively accepting the hoary shibboleth that "the poor must always be among us," we have to get political. ALA's

"Poor People's Policy" mandates exactly that.

Stunningly absent from major-party election rhetoric in 2000 was an explicit commitment to genuinely aid low-income persons by fighting to *eliminate* low incomes, to dismantle poverty itself, to really achieve a more equitable "playing field." No citizen, no politician, no librarian can truly be neutral or passive about this, for within a context of inequity and injustice, neutrality and passivity invariably favor wealth and privilege, ensuring the continuing misery and hopelessness of the "less fortunate."

There's no mystery about what to do. Practically every social critic and antipoverty activist comes up with nearly the same "laundry list" of needed initiatives and policies, among them:

- +a much greater public investment in affordable housing (in Minnesota, 43% of renter households can't afford the \$591 Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom unit--and nowhere in the U.S. is the minimum wage adequate to afford a two-bedroom dwelling)

- +universal health care or national health insurance (perhaps based on the

excellent Canadian, Dutch, German, or Scandinavian models)

- +a higher--or living--minimum wage, guaranteeing that no working person stays below the poverty line (almost half of male workers in Minnesota earn too little to adequately support a family of four, while over 72% of women workers make less than what's required to maintain a single-parent family of three.)

- +provision of child care, educational benefits, and transportation subsidies to welfare consumers (the recent "welfare repeal" act actually forced many poor women *out* of college or vocational school, and in West Virginia, as merely one example, 80% of former welfare recipients annually make \$10,000 or less, almost half of those trying to exist on incomes below \$5,000)



+ample welfare payments  
for people who need them  
and a moratorium on  
heartless,  
family-destroying time  
limits and sanctions

The real "trouble" with poor or homeless people isn't mental illness or physical disability or drug use or personal irresponsibility. It's that they don't have enough money. Or a network to support them. Affluent people with mental illness, disabilities, addictions, or bad luck get taker care of. The big difference is bucks. And readily available services. Thus the full challenge isn't simply to furnish temporary band-aid programs or goods to poor people. It's also to treat them with the same dignity and respect as anyone else, and to remove such barriers of "institutional classism" as--for instance, in public libraries--fines, fees, and unreasonable residence requirements for securing a library card. And ultimately the challenge is to work like hell to consign poverty itself to the dustbin.

Americans intent on "doing the

right thing" might well emulate our Canadian neighbors, particularly the 160,000 individuals and 1,100 groups in Quebec who lately proposed legislation based on these three principles:

- \*The elimination of poverty is a priority
- \*Increasing the income of the poorest fifth of the population takes precedence over increasing the income of the richest fifth
- \*People living in poverty and their organizations must be involved in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of all future government initiatives.

Why not insist that every candidate, lawmaker, and public servant, including library boards and directors, embrace these sensible precepts---and act accordingly?

Sanford Berman, U\*L, Contributing Editor

### Holidays on the Web

The big end-of-year holiday season is over, but there are plenty of other holidays to find information on throughout the year. The Internet has lots of places to visit to get that information. Here are a few of them. As always, these are just a few examples of the many resources in the *free Librarians' Index to the*