



# **Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian**

*Alison Lewis (Editor)*

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## **Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian** Alison Lewis (Editor)

Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian presents essays that relate to neutrality in librarianship in a philosophical or practical sense, and sometimes both. They are a selection of essays originally published in Progressive Librarian, the journal of the Progressive Librarians Guild, presented in the chronological order of their appearance there. These essays, some by academics and some by passionate practitioners, offer a set of critiques of the notion of neutrality as it governs professional activity, focusing on the importance of meaningful engagement in the social sphere.

## **Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian Details**

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# **From Reader Review Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian for online ebook**

## **Mira says**

I skipped through this at work...in a library...and found it a bit dry. Who would've thunk?

Pretty much argues that there is no such thing as a neutral librarian. I'll say hahaha and it's true they might possibly be pro-censorship in some cases.

Like the bit about libraries not purchasing little press titles and so they aren't recorded on databases. I'll be spending the rest of my shift making book suggestions from small publishers bahahaha.

I got paid in apples today to type something up in word for a student. Seriously...

She offered me lunch and gave me a hug. Warmed the cockles of my heart. But maybe I'll start charging actual monetary fees, I can't live off fruit.

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## **Benjamin says**

Just finished reading this a second time... this book is a lifesaver for librarians committed to social justice and wrestling with perceived professional ideals... the chilly whiteness of past libraries.

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## **Lydia says**

This collection of essays, while an interesting look at challenging the concept of neutrality in libraries, is very one-sided and does not allow for even the possibility that neutrality is actually a good thing when it comes to libraries and archives.

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## **Amanda says**

Good and scholarly. Questions I like to read about but can't necessarily articulate the importance of when I am done. Though I feel the importance in every ounce of my bod. Various essays about people who question the idea the professional is neutral, claiming nothing is neutral. Normal? is a choice. Racist is a choice. Anti-racist is a choice. Awakening the profession to theory instead of technology. Trying to understand and progress the systems of organizing information. All of these things. And fists. The US Patriot Act allows the goverment to access your library check outs. Librarians can fight this. We can fight this.

AAA

Reread. Preparing a scholarly work. Wore bow tie for the occasion. Against Neutrality coming soon to a zinester near you

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## **Patrick Frownfelter says**

A critical text for librarians. The idea of "neutrality" in librarianship needs to die, and this book will provide plenty of reasons why.

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## **Jerome says**

Culling from the pages of *Progressive Librarian* journal, this collection of articles are united in their stance against library neutrality, a particular take on academic objectivity which holds that libraries should be agnostic towards the social value of library material in the selection process. Librarians generally hold to the notion that by remaining "objective" in the selection process, they are giving equal voice to all parties. What these Progressive Librarian's Guild members argue is that the library selection process is already unfairly weighted due to the inclusion of special interests (wholesalers, vendors, and other capitalists) in the selection process. Librarians who rely too heavily on vendors are already exhibiting bias against small & independent publishers, or against particular voices which the vendors themselves are biased against (and hence do not carry, or at least do not advertise). While I agree with the sentiments of the authors, the articles themselves read like typical library literature, and were not reworked to focus in on the theme of the book. Hence, the book is a bit lacking cohesion. Still, as a sampling of what one might find in the pages of *Progressive Librarian* this is a good collection.

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## **LaJuan says**

Are librarians really neutral (services, programming, collection development) or is that just a myth? Here's a book that argues excellently that it's the latter and that using neutrality as an argument for the services we provide really supports the status quo. Libraries should be better than that!

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## **chelsea says**

So far this is the best of the essays about LIS collections I've read. I was particularly inspired by Andersen's "Information Criticism: Where is it?" and "Towards Self-Reflection in Librarianship: what is Praxis?" (oops forgot the author's name). Maybe I liked this one because it jives with my personal belief that neutrality/objectivity is impossible and we need to own up to that and explore it. If it were up to me, I would add Mark Rosenzweig's "Aspects of a Humanist Approach to Librarianship" from Library Juice Concentrate to this book to make an ideal reader.

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## **Rachel says**

Are librarians neutral? Should they be?

Some essays in this collection were more useful/educational/entertaining than others. I wouldn't call it a cover-to-cover read, but I think many teachers and librarians could use certain essays to highlight issues in

their own classrooms/libraries.

My conclusions after reading/skimming: neutrality is a myth, and even if libraries themselves could pull it off (they can't), librarians definitely aren't neutral. And that can be a good thing.

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### **amy says**

A good time to pick this one up — some librarians are just now realizing (audible gasp) that they and their institutions aren't neutral. Especially appreciate the chapters on ALA's history with social responsibility; corporations and libraries; and information criticism. The writing and the arguments aren't super polished, but they hang together all right. Reading this now highlights many long-standing problems in libraries and other information spaces that are about to be swept under the rug in response to alarming new developments, even as they, in many ways provide the root causes of said developments. That's a coded way of thanking neoliberal "values" for helping us get where we are today.

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### **Michelle America says**

Finally got around to reading this. Well worth it. Of course every essay in the collection has a thorough Works Cited. Ha.

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### **Garren says**

An uneven collection of essays about the role of librarians in social justice, whether it be making statements as librarians that go beyond libraries or how social justice and librarianship directly intersect.

Two key points I took away from this:

\* The book publishing and distribution industry is driven by commercial interests. This has a narrowing effect on what is available for reasons other than writing quality or audience interest. It's inconvenient to work around this by purchasing things from independent presses, but doing so is part of what can and should set public libraries apart from chain bookstores.

\* When creating displays and programming, librarians will find it easier to exclude marginalized ideas and marginalized demographics. Again, easier isn't better.

For those of you in the area, I donated my copy to the Nebraska Library Commission's collection. It's worth checking out this library-for-librarians if you're in downtown Lincoln!

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### **Don says**

This book of essays is 10 years old and a bit dated. Favorite: "Neutral libraries perpetuate such social ills as racism and sexism." and many other ...isms both intentionally and unintentionally. "...burying one's

prejudices in a bureaucracy does not qualify one as neutral."

Biggest conversation starter: library and information science programs concentrate on practice and procedure and do not prepare librarians to discuss scholarly criticism.

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## **Jenny says**

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The librarian is part of society; which means the librarian participates in society and is shaped by it. Therefore, it is impossible for the librarian to remain neutral in every sense of the word. Remaining "neutral" would simply mean that the librarian chooses the status quo, and to side with the privileged and powerful.

This was quite an interesting read. Despite being 10 years old (and some of the articles included being 20 years old), this book is still relevant to librarians everywhere. Steven Joyce's *A Few Gates Redux* analysis of the outrage over librarians "choosing sides" - that is, promoting the well being and pride of homosexuality - in the 70s and 90s is still incredibly relevant in North America today. *The Professional is Political* by Shiraz Durrani and Elizabeth Smallwood brings up a project at Merton Libraries (UK) that is quite close to the Canadian *Working Together*, an initiative that can be adapted to any library wanting to be connected and to really take part in its community.

There are still many instances in libraries when librarians need to question whether they are remaining neutral or staying true to their profession. The Library Bill of Rights requires that we make available every point of view, for the public to be well informed and able to access verified information on whatever subject. That means making displays that represent all points of view, not only that of the "majority". It also means questioning the material acquired and whether or not the classification method used is working with the material present in the library: e.g. if a book about the Holocaust is surrounded by books from Holocaust-deniers or if a documentary about climate changes is immediately followed by a research about climate funded by oil companies, is this really the best way to make sure patrons can develop a clear and informed opinion on the matter?

Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, stigmatization of disability (both physical and mental) are all things that are still happening today. Librarians need to take part in de-neutralizing themselves in their libraries, so that all patrons are welcome and all feel inherently part of their community.

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## **Camille says**

Excellent book of essays from the "Progressive Librarian". Thinking about a new "way" in librarianship.

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