

## From the Editor

By Lyn Miller-Lachmann

Once upon a time, though not so long ago, people viewed the library profession as a refuge for the risk-averse. In the inner-city high school where I taught, the library was an oasis of tranquility, its young users respecting the head librarian's famous "shush." My public library internship brought me into contact with several former social workers burned out from that field, who found satisfaction and low stress in a pleasant, well-air-conditioned working environment with a community that embraced their efforts.

Who would have thought that in a few short years, librarians would have found themselves on the front lines, exposed constantly to political and physical danger? But this has become the case, particularly after September 11. A provision of the USA Patriot Act, passed 45 days after the terrorist attacks, requires libraries and bookstores to turn over user or customer records. Several libraries have had computers or hard drives seized in the course of post-9/11 criminal investigations, some having nothing to do with international terrorism. The American Library Association (ALA) and most state library associations have passed resolutions condemning the library and bookstore provisions of the Patriot Act and lent their support to the Freedom to Read Protection Act under consideration in the U.S. House of Representatives. Rep. Bernie Sanders, Independent of Vermont and cosponsor of this bill, spoke at the recent joint conference of the American Library Association and Canadian Library Association in Toronto.

That meeting also highlighted other threats to the political and personal safety of librarians. While there, a friend from Minnesota informed me that because of new legislation that went into effect at the end of May in her state, patrons are allowed to bring guns into public libraries and academic libraries at public colleges and universities (though librarians and other employees may be barred from carrying firearms). More than 200 vendors withdrew from the conference because of the threat of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which sickened approximately 250 people in a city of 3 million. Fortunately, 17,500 librarians and vendors from the United States and Canada braved hysterical warnings in order to attend the conference and were rewarded with a full plate of sessions and keynote addresses that included Sanders, Gloria Steinem, and Ralph Nader. No one came down with SARS. On Monday, June 30, while the conference was still taking place, the U.S. Supreme Court voted 6-3 to uphold the Children's Internet Protection Act, which required libraries to install content-blocking filters on their computers or lose federal money. The ALA opposed such filters because of their poor quality, their tendency to block innocent sites, and the difficulties adult users would face in applying to have such filters bypassed. Librarians' legitimate concerns about freedom of speech, privacy, and scholarly inquiry led some opponents to label the profession as a refuge for pornographers—a long way from the old stereotype of librarians as bun-wearing, patron-shushing prudes.

So how did librarians suddenly become "cool"—or dangerous subversives, depending on one's political perspective? I can't answer that question, but our lead article, Bonnie Biggs's "Curriculum 'Materials' with a Pulse," sheds light on this issue. Biggs, a librarian at California State University, San Marcos, describes the progressive sentiments of those who founded the university, the most recent to join the California State system. Faculty, administrators, and library staff worked together to create programs that gave life to the curriculum and reflected the diversity of the campus and the state. Some of those programs outraged the surrounding community, or even people within the university. Programs garnered objections because of their political points of view or sexually explicit content, though a librarian objected to one exhibit because it could have attracted bugs into the library.

Those seeking tamer perspectives will find those in this issue of *MultiCultural Review* as well. Frank Alan Bruno and Patricia F. Beilke offer help for both teachers and librarians looking for information about Afghanistan, the nation whose Taliban

▼ continued on page 32

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**Teaching for Change** is a free catalog featuring hundreds of books, curriculum guides, posters, and other resources from mainstream and alternative publishers on cultural diversity, inclusion, nonviolence, equity, and social justice. Among the new products featured in the 2003 catalog are books and resource guides that critique militarism and war, a guide for teachers to math and science across cultures, a videotape by British journalist and filmmaker John Pilger on the

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▼ from the editor continued from page 5

regime offered a haven for the September 11 terrorists. Most of the books, videos, and web sites provide general information on the country and its people and ways of life, though several of the books use fiction to depict the harshness of life through two wars and under the Taliban.

"Multicultural Profiles in the Deaf Community" by professor Cynthia J. Plue examines cultural and language issues faced by Deaf persons from diverse backgrounds. She focuses on the needs of Deaf immigrants to the United States and Canada, people who may or may not use sign language in their first language and their need to learn American Sign Language as well as English. She also discusses the attitudes of different cultures toward Deafness and the position of multicultural Deaf persons in the United States and Canada as "multiple minorities."

The final two articles address diverse experiences of Latinos and Latin Americans. Poet and essayist Marjorie Agosín

remembers her beloved grandmother Hanna Josefina, who passed away last year in Chile at the age of 92. In her long life Hanna Josefina witnessed many changes in her adopted country (she was born in Argentina of Eastern European Jewish immigrant parents), and, as her two names symbolized, she felt the tug-of-war between her Jewish heritage and Catholic Chile. Agosín and her parents' exile in the United States after the collapse of the Allende government added another dimension to this cultural estrangement. She writes: "For expatriates, contact with a past life, with beloved places, helps to anchor ourselves, to define ourselves, but more than anything to navigate through the two worlds to which we belong—or rather, the two worlds in which we live. My dear Chepi belonged to Chile, to the land we left behind, and her weekly letters helped us to recapture our past, our childhood, which seemed suspended in an imaginary time."

Another kind of cultural dislocation appears in Danilo

H. Figueredo's interview with Susan D. Greenbaum, author of *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Univ. Press of Florida, 2002). Here, we see the Cuban community of Ybor City, Florida, immortalized in the novels of Jose Yglesias but as real people with real conflicts over race, money, and politics. Greenbaum's book chronicles the development of the multiracial Martí-Maceo Society, formed by immigrant cigar-makers in the 1890s. The existence of an organization named for black (General Antonio Maceo) and white (poet Jose Martí) heroes with both black and white members stood in contrast to the segregationist direction of the South as a whole, and in fact, as Greenbaum points out, pressure from the white power structure managed to peel off some of the society's lighter-skinned members. Still, the Cuban cigar-makers, who preceded the large post-Castro immigration by three full generations, stood at the forefront of American race relations—the defiant vanguard that one might say we librarians occupy today.



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