

Letter from the Chair and EMIERT Annual Report 2006-07

The EMIE BULLETIN is published quarterly.

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We've come a long way in our collective thinking about EMIERT programming for ALA Annual Conferences. During the 2006 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, members of the EMIERT Executive Board had a conversation about the timing of EMIERT events at the Annual Conferences. Board members expressed their concerns that attendance was disappointingly small at many well-planned programs and events since consecutive EMIERT-sponsored events were often scheduled either at the same time or many city blocks apart. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many members can only afford to attend the Annual Conference for a day and would not be able to attend EMIERT-sponsored events on the days they could not attend.

One idea that was warmly accepted was that EMIERT programs should all occur on the same day and in the same locale so that members could make plans to attend all EMIERT events, even if they are limited to one day's attendance, and it would not be necessary to traverse from one side of a conference city to the other to attend consecutive EMIERT events. The Board came up with the slogan—"Sunday is EMIERT day!"—to emphasize our commitment to planning a full day of EMIERT-sponsored events in the same locale for future ALA Annual Conferences. At Midwinter 2007 in Seattle the EMIERT Executive Board's planning session continued in this vein. A sense of renewal and commitment came through strongly in our deliberations.

The EMIERT General Membership Program for the 2007 ALA Annual Conference scheduled for Sunday morning, June 24, 2007, 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at the Grand Hyatt Washington (Hyatt) in Washington, DC, will be the first test of this new programming idea. Homa Naficy, Myra Appel, and I have served as coordinators for the program. The theme of the program is "Libraries, Immigrants, and the American Experience."

Generations of immigrants and peoples in crises and transition have turned to libraries to provide them with information, cultural resources, and a place of intellectual refuge. In turn the voices and literary contributions of these immigrants and their children have enriched the resources that libraries protect and provide for subsequent generations of patrons. A panel of librarians, educators, and activists will speak to the many roles and responsibilities that libraries have assumed. I will get the program going with a brief history of the American public library's services to help immigrants of various ethnic, minority, and national groups. Information for this history is based on my two books, *Libraries, Immigrants, and the American Experience* (Greenwood Press, 1999), from which this program gets its title, and *Still Struggling for Equality: American Public Library Services with Minorities* (Libraries Unlimited, 2004).

Sylva Manoogian, Chair of the EMIERT Armenian Librarians and Libraries Information Committee, examines "Armenian Immigrants and the American Library Experience." In "Hungry Hearts: Jewish American History in Fiction and Memoir," Rosalind Reisner, Program Coordinator, Central Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, focuses on the cultural and literary contributions of Jewish immigrants and their children. Reisner is the author of *Jewish American Literature: A Guide to Reading Interests* (Libraries Unlimited, 2004). Ladan Boroumand, Research Director at the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran, adds diversity to the discussion with "Libraries, a Resource for Promoting Human Rights."

The schedule for the EMIERT General Membership Program is as follows:

8:00 – 8:30	Welcome, Introductions, and Brief History of EMIERT (Al Jones)
8:30 – 9:45	"Armenian Immigrants and the American Library Experience" (Sylva Manoogian)
9:45 – 10:30	"Hungry Hearts: Jewish American History in Fiction and Memoir" (Rosalind Reisner)
10:30 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 11:30	"Libraries, a Resource for Promoting Human Rights" (Ladan Boroumand)
11:30 – 12:45	Questions and Answers: The speakers will entertain questions from the audience and Al Jones will serve as moderator

EMIERT**General Membership Meeting**

"Libraries, Immigrants, and the
American Experience"

Sunday, June 24, 2007

Grand Hyatt Washington
8:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

Refreshments available at 8:00 a.m.

The EMIERT Executive Board continually needs the ideas of the membership to keep us on target and to ensure that your needs are addressed. I urge all of you to sign up for the EMIERT listserv (EMIE-L@ala.org) so that together the EMIERT membership can share successes and accomplishments working with multicultural groups and pass along the good news to others dealing with similar problems and issues. For those of you who are looking for opportunities to serve and to get involved in EMIERT, please check out the EMIE Web site (www.ala.org/emiert) as well as the EMIERT pages in the *ALA Handbook of Organization, 2006-2007*, to locate officers, chairs of committees, and representatives and liaisons.

This is our seventh quarterly issue of the *EMIE Bulletin* appearing as an insert in *MultiCultural Review (MCR)*. Since the *EMIE Bulletin* continues to serve as an important forum for spreading the good news to librarians and library advocates that EMIERT is here to help, the Executive Board in Seattle voted unanimously to continue EMIERT's agreement with the publishers of *MCR*. Having the *EMIE Bulletin* insert in *MCR* has been an indispensable way to let the library community know that EMIERT is the new home of the Coretta Scott King Committee, which sponsors the internationally acclaimed Coretta Scott King Book Awards.

I would like to remind all of you who have served as officers or committee chairs in EMIERT throughout its history to send EMIERT materials for the use of library historians and researchers to the ALA Archives, housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. ALA Archives officials remind us that "it is each unit's responsibility to preserve the historical record of activities for future researchers by regularly transmitting unneeded archival materials to the ALA Archives in Urbana." Our founder emeritus, David Cohen, has collected and preserved EMIERT materials from EMIERT's beginning in 1972, when the Ethnic materials Information Exchange Task Force of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) was founded. He is committed to getting these invaluable historical records to the ALA Archives. For more information on the ALA Archives and how you can get EMIERT materials there, see web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/ala/info.asp.

Past EMIERT Chair and Nominating Committee Chair

Victor Schill presented the following slate of officers for the 2007-09 biennium for approval by the Executive Board at Seattle. New officers for the 2007-09 biennium will begin their terms at the conclusion of the ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC. At the close of the 2007 Annual Conference, Myra Appel will become the EMIERT Chair for 2007-09 and I will assume my new duties as Past EMIERT Chair and Nominating Committee Chair for 2007-09. The EMIERT election results just received in early May 2007 are as follows: Vice-Chair, Chair Elect, 2007-09: Homa Naficy; and Members at Large, 2007-09 (vote for two): Marty Goldberg, and Linda Mayo Teel. Congratulations!

Two EMIERT publications are in progress, hopefully to be available by the end of 2007. Doris Gebel, Chair of the Children's Services Committee, is spearheading the publication of the third edition of *Ventures into Cultures*, to be published by ALA. Myra Appel, Vice-Chair, Chair-Elect, is coordinating the publication of *Developing Culturally Diverse Collections for the 21st Century: Best Practices and Guidelines*, to be published by Libraries Unlimited. Thanks to Doris and Myra for their hard work on these significant publications to EMIERT's credit!

A very special event for EMIERT will be the awarding of an ALA Honorary Membership to EMIERT's founder emeritus David Cohen on Saturday, June 23, 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the first General Session of the ALA Annual Conference to be held at the Washington Convention Center (WCC), Hall D. In August 2006, EMIERT members Toni Bissessar, Vladimir Wertsman, and I officially nominated David Cohen for an ALA Honorary Membership. David's name was presented by the ALA Executive Board to the ALA Council at the 2007 ALA Midwinter Conference in Seattle last January. David was elected unanimously as an ALA Honorary Member and has been notified by ALA of this honor. Friends from EMIERT and ALA have been sending cards and letters of congratulation to him. We are hoping to be able to get David to Washington, DC, to receive this great honor in person! David celebrates his 98th birthday on May 28! Happy birthday, David!

Always,

Plummer Alston "Al" Jones, Jr., Chair, 2005-2007

THE INTERNATIONAL BOOK PROJECT

By Leah Mensah

The International Book Project (IPB) (www.intlbookproject.org) is a nonprofit organization paralleling the mission of libraries to advance literacy and respect the intellectual freedom of people. According to board member Kwaku Addo, one of the purposes of the IBP is to make the world a smaller place by bringing different cultures of the world together. Part of the IBP's mission is to promote intercultural understanding and create relationships with donors and supporters that strengthen the IBP. The IBP was founded in 1966 by Harriet Van Meter, a finalist for the Nobel Peace Prize.

I interviewed Dr. Kwaku Addo, an IPB board member and professor at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Addo told me that in 2006, the IBP sent books to more than 63 countries. India was the largest recipient of books, followed by Ghana and Uganda. Books were also sent to the Philippines and Indonesia. The IBP considers requests to send books to any country. One of the IBP's goals is to send more books to Latin America.

The IPB is operated under the direction of a board of directors, with the assistance of an advisory board. The board is responsible for directing the financial management, long-range planning and policy development, and personnel issues for the IBP. The board is made up of professionals and academics from diverse backgrounds.

HOW THE IBP WORKS

The IBP is contacted through the Internet by organizations interested in receiving books. In 2006, Makeree University in Kampala, Uganda, contacted the IBP. The IBP sent an application to the university asking members of the university to specify the type of books (fiction, nonfiction) it wanted so that the IBP could fill the request appropriately. The IBP attempts to obtain and send new and gently used materials that have been published within the last five years. Media material (CDs, DVDs) is requested and sent too.

The IBP utilizes two shipping methods: regular postal mail for small shipments and container shipping for large shipments of books. The shipments are sponsored by donors. A donor may request that books be shipped to a specific country. For example, the Christ King Church of Lexington, Kentucky, partnered with a Catholic Church in Asassan, Ghana. A book drive was held in Kentucky and a container of books was shipped to Ghana.

To gauge the success of its program, the IBP sends questionnaires that request feedback from the organizations receiving books. According to Dr. Addo, many of the responses reflect the fact that without the IBP, literacy goals would go unmet.

NEXT STEPS

The IBP needs more books and library materials and more donors. American universities and public libraries are especially needed to identify organizations, organizing book drives and shipping. For more information, please contact the IBP at 1440 Delaware Ave., Lexington, KY 40505; (859) 254-6771.

Leah Mensah resides in Kentucky with her husband and sons. She received an MSLS degree from the University of Kentucky in 2004. She is a business executive and independent librarian, and she enjoys writing and playing the cello. She currently serves on the executive Board of Directors for the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra, is a member of the Lexington Community Orchestra and a member of ALA. She can be reached at (859) 552-9070.

THE LONG EXILE OF AMERICAN POLITICAL FICTION

by Lyn Miller-Lachmann

As election seasons come and go, pundits seek to analyze every facet of the electoral process. Other topics—racial conflict, immigration, environmental degradation, and war—are nonfiction perennials in the publishing world.

Just as Americans seem most comfortable expressing their political views through the electoral process (if they express them at all), American readers take their politics straight up, as nonfiction.

Or do they?

There is a long tradition in the United States of epic social and political conflicts being expressed through fiction, from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the anti-war novels *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse Five* and the multicultural and feminist novels of the post-civil rights era. But in recent years, if political fiction—particularly of the progressive variety and depicting ordinary people as characters rather than political leaders—didn't disappear entirely, it went so far underground that it exists only through the efforts of small independent publishers such as Cinco Puntos Press, Curbstone Press, Soft Skull Press, and Zuckerman Cannon Publishers.

Why did this happen?

On the most basic level the lack of political fiction today is due to the decline of activism following the 1960s, which reduced the clientele for anything political—fiction or nonfiction.

When consumer culture replaced social consciousness, fiction followed. As the author of several reference books on multicultural literature and editor of *MultiCultural Review* for more than a decade, I have seen this most starkly in the evolution of multicultural fiction, which has addressed, in turn, the quest for justice,

the assertion of identity, and the pursuit of material goods. Characters of all heritages have turned inward and come to express themselves by what they own.

Literary writing, as taught in MFA programs, has privileged style over content, language over plot and characterization. When writers from these programs turn to broader social themes, they tend to approach them in ways that are interesting stylistically—through irony, for instance—but their language keeps readers at a distance and their fashionable cynicism discourages action.

Critics, in turn, have seized on the flaws of yesteryear's political fiction—flat or stereotypical characters, plots concocted for the sole purpose of making a political point, clumsy authorial interventions—to discredit all efforts. Why, editors and critics ask, do we even need political fiction when nonfiction does a much better job of exploring the problem and explaining the author's point of view?

The claim that only nonfiction can address political topics is also the consequence of the television news cycle and the Internet. Information from around the world is accessible 24 hours a day, even though we are coming to realize that what we hear is often not the entire truth—or even close to the truth.

Having taught middle school and high school, I know that teens seek information through fiction. So do adults. They want to know how people with whom they identify make decisions and react when confronted by ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. The deepest beliefs and loyalties are those held on an emotional level. Great fiction works by arousing those emotions.

Fiction is also capable of getting at deeper truths than those conveyed by nonfiction. Through literature of the imagination, we

can see reality in the context of what might have been—or what might one day be—if we make different choices. For example, Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* imagines what would have happened had Americans chosen as president in 1940 a folksy, charismatic leader with simple but extreme solutions to complex problems.

Today we face one of the most critical periods in the history of our country. We are mired in a “war of choice,” with a president using the war to undermine opposition and permanently alter constitutional liberties and checks and balances. Our destruction of the environment has resulted in the obliteration of a great American city, which, because of the costs of war, we are unable to rebuild. Our sanctification of individual wealth and its accoutrements on both a personal and a governmental level has led to the diversion of resources from education and health care—community goods vital to our children's and our nation's future. For the most part, our writers, publishers, and critics remain fatally disengaged from this reality.

Fifty years ago, writers throughout Latin America began to address their region's long struggle with poverty, violence, dictatorship, and corruption. Along with attention to craft—story, character, and language—these writers addressed the social upheavals in their countries and the challenges facing ordinary people. They created some of the most compelling fiction of the time, classic works such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, and *The House of the Spirits*. Readers in the United States embraced these books, which continue to be taught in high schools and universities. These works rose to literary prominence at the same time as our own fiction became increasingly self-absorbed and divorced from larger social and political events.

Perhaps fiction of the past three decades in the United States simply mirrored events in the larger society—the end of the Cold War and the general prosperity of the late 1980s and the 1990s. Today, we know that we are no longer safe and probably were never safe. It is only a matter of time before our own fiction writers, editors, critics, and readers begin to pay attention.

Lyn Miller-Lachmann is editor-in-chief of *MultiCultural Review*. Her debut novel, *Dirt Cheap*, an eco-thriller exploring the tragic consequences of environmental pollution, was published by Curbstone Press in 2006.

MULTICULTURALISM AND U.S. LIBRARIES 1876-2007	
Plummer Alston “Al” Jones <i>This chronology is the first installment; later ones will appear in subsequent issues of the EMIE Bulletin.</i>	
1876	American Library Association (ALA) founded in Philadelphia.
1882	First federal immigration law barred criminals, lunatics, idiots, and those likely to become a public charge, extending colonial and state traditions.
	Chinese Exclusion Act was the first U.S. immigration law to target a specific ethnic group for exclusion.
1886	Statue of Liberty dedicated.
	General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, 1887, was intended to assign a title to 160 acres of land to each Indian family head.
1892	Ellis Island immigrant depot opened in New York City.
1896	Plessy v. Ferguson U.S. Supreme Court decision established the legal principle of “separate-but-equal,” giving a constitutional basis to legal segregation based on race.
1907-8	Gentleman's Agreement with Japan restricts Japanese immigration.
1914-18	World War I
1916-19	Americanization movement, aimed at Anglo-conformity rather than cultural pluralism, at its height
1917	Literacy test for immigrants was made law by U.S. Congress.
	Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship.
1918-48	ALA Committee on Work with the Foreign Born established in 1918 and continued its thirty years of work with publications and services for immigrants until it disbanded in 1948.
1918	Filipinos were granted U.S. citizenship.
1919, 1924	American Indians granted U.S. citizenship.
1922-24	ALA Work with Negroes Round Table lasted only two years.
1924	National Origins Act, passed by the U.S. Congress, established the national origins quota system for immigration.
	ALA appointed the Commission on the Library and Adult Education, with funding from the Carnegie Corporation.
1925	Hampton Institute Library School in Hampton, Virginia, was the first school for blacks to award degrees in library science.
1929	President Herbert Hoover proclaimed new and permanent quotas based on the national-origins system, with the total to be admitted from the Eastern Hemisphere limited to just over 150,000.
1934	Philippines Independence Act restricts Filipino immigration.
	U.S. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act that established tribal governments
1939	World War II begins.
1941	Pearl Harbor bombing brings the United States into World War II.
1942	Evacuation of Japanese-Americans from Pacific Coast to internment camps, where library services, if available, were meager.