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Asian American Librarians
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Activism, Collaborations, and Strategies

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

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Chapter Thirty-Four

Doing the Work You Want Your Library Work to Do

Reflections of an Academic Librarian

gerardo "gary" colmenar

What are the connections between librarianship and activism? What roles do we as Asian Pacific American librarians play in advancing and positively impacting Asian Pacific American communities and the larger society? I explore these questions in relation to my work as an academic librarian and an activist for social justice.

BECOMING AN ACTIVIST LIBRARIAN

Just as Thucydides believed that historical consciousness of a people in crisis provided the possibility of more virtuous action, more informed and rational choices, so do I.

—Cedric Robinson, interview with Chuck Morse

My time at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in the 1990s as an undergraduate student of Ethnic Studies and my participation in several student cooperatives on campus such as Groundwork Books, a cooperative bookstore, were major influences in my intellectual growth, activism, and eventually praxis. The education that I received pushed me to have a critical understanding of the histories and immigrant experiences of racial minorities in the United States, especially of Asian Pacific Americans (APA). To fully comprehend these historical periods and the impact of these experiences, one has to engage with the past and present, as well as examine the roles of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism in the historical de-

velopment of the United States and its paradoxical relationship with the world.

Although I had some sense of these historical relationships,¹ it was only after attending courses in my major that I began to learn them in a systematic manner, informed by a set of critical analytical tools, learned and acquired over the years (e.g., historical materialism, subaltern studies, critical theory, black radical tradition). It was in a literature class when I read *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* by Carlos Bulosan that I first encountered this historical connection and gained a deeper understanding of a collective historical self as a Filipino immigrant living in the United States.² A canonical text in Asian American literature, *America* is a personal narrative Bulosan wrote to lay bare the systemic problems of race and class in the US structure that deeply affected Filipinos in the late nineteenth century up to the present. Reading *America* deepened my understanding of Philippine history in relation to the United States as well as Third World peoples.

I was fortunate to learn from a number of scholar-activists who practiced critically engaged pedagogy with deep commitments to the students' well-being inside and outside the classroom. Working at Groundwork Books and other student co-ops at UCSD was crucial as well; I took part in the day-to-day activities in a cooperative-run business where decisions were made based on consensus. Members engaged in political discussions and participated in study groups that critically looked at power and institutional structures affecting people's lives.

It was also a time when there was significant attention given to the political events happening around the world, which raised the social and political awareness on campus. Professors and students spoke in public forums and held events regarding injustices in developing nations, such as the apartheid government in South Africa. I remember listening to Herbert I. Schiller, one of the founders of the Communication Department, who spoke passionately about the structural racism in South Africa and the complicity of governments, including the United States, in supporting the apartheid government. In 1989, he published *Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression*, where he discussed the corporate control of information.³ This argument informed my graduate admission essay for MLIS studies.

Immersed in this social and political milieu and the dilemma that Hannah Arendt calls "the human condition," I stepped into the public sphere and with "words and deeds" engaged in political action. I participated in my first election campaign for a Filipino American running for city council in San Diego, where I helped canvass in the community. Although the act of talking to people face-to-face was intimidating, the experience taught me that talking about political issues to strangers is a skill that need not be feared.

Connecting my activism to the library profession began when I joined the American Library Association's (ALA) Social Responsibilities Round Table

(SRRT) in 1998, the same year I started my first library job as the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) library minority fellow. This was one of the longest active residency programs to increase minority representation in the profession, and was active until the passage of Proposition 201, which banned affirmative action programs in the state. After learning about SRRT's mission and goals, I immediately was drawn to the group because it seeks to work within ALA to make it more democratic and to establish progressive priorities for the association and the entire profession. Specifically, I was attracted to their belief that libraries and librarians have a mandate to address human and economic rights, social inequities, and threats to the common good and advancing democracy. Subsequently, I joined APALA, where I felt "at home" in the cultural and linguistic sense and because it is an association that supports and mentors librarians of Asian heritage to succeed in the profession and take on leadership roles. APALA provided me the collegial and organizational support to work with APA communities by organizing program events at ALA conferences to bring attention to the information needs and issues facing APA communities, as well as organizing cultural tours to bring librarians to local APA communities to learn about the heterogeneity of the APA population.

My association with the SRRT led me to the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG), a network of librarians and institutions with a common interest in radical librarianship and a commitment to communicating and sharing vital information. PLG believes that libraries form one of the principal anchors that make a democratic civil society possible and must therefore be defended and extended. And this work is neither partisan nor neutral.

LIBRARIANSHIP AND PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

There is a shared understanding that progressive politics are guided by a set of beliefs and practices that advance equality, fairness, and justice while recognizing and sustaining the humanity in people. Librarians serve a diversity of people and communities that constitute a global public. So, absolutely, there is a role for librarianship in progressive politics. Fortunately, librarians have known this side of librarianship and have acted accordingly. Let me share some of these:

- Collection development is one example of this convergence. At a college and university setting, one has to engage in self-reflexive and intentional practice of collection development that goes beyond the traditional modes of acquisitions when building collections to support ethnic studies curricula taught in Asian Pacific American Studies programs and similar departments. I define self-reflexive as an attitude and disposition in the practice

of librarianship that extends to personal experiences that affect the work domain. For example, in collection development, self-reflexive collecting means being conscious of the end user or patron, especially in the digital age with the proliferation of e-books and digital resources in library collections. Will patrons be able to access these materials in various platforms (e.g., mobile devices, laptops, etc.)? There has to be a conscious effort not to depend primarily on mainstream trade and university presses but also to stay alert with publications from small/independent presses, community organizations, and independent scholars.

- The proactive and community engagement practiced by Anne Frank and the receptivity of the UCI Libraries to community interests in building the Southeast Asian Archive (SEAA) demonstrate that successful projects require collaboration and institutional support. The founding of the archive began when Dr. Pham Cao Duong, a member of the local Vietnamese American community, approached the UCI Libraries to establish the archive in 1987. At present, SEAA represents an impressive body of primary resources representing the Southeast Asian refugee community in Southern California, giving visibility and voice within the archives. In a special tribute issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement* to Anne Frank, Professor Linda Trinh Võ describes Frank's tireless efforts in building SEAA, forming networks among scholars, librarians, archivists, media representatives, and community members across the United States, thus bridging the university and the larger community.
- Librarians need to advocate for greater representation of minorities in literature that portrays them in all their complexities. APALA members are deeply engaged in this endeavor with respect to children's and young adult literature. They have organized programs and events at ALA conferences and at their local libraries, bringing attention to the need for greater representation of authors of color and diverse books in these genres. These projects are accomplished in collaboration with other ethnic affiliates. For example, Talk Story, a family literacy program supporting cultural awareness, is a joint project with the American Indian Library Association (AILA). The work of library and information science professor Sarah Park Dahlen on social justice and children's literature offers promise that these issues will continue to influence inclusive library practices and inspire a new generation of librarians.
- Librarian scholars and activists have called attention to the problems associated with library classification systems, such as the Library of Congress Classification System. In his classic work, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People*,⁴ Sanford Berman documented and offered suggestions to LC subject headings used to represent races, nationalities, ethnic groups, historical events, and other topics.

He objected to the use of the term "Yellow Peril" to represent people from Asia, which signified them as a threat to the West.

Another striking example is the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) entry related to the US occupation of the Philippines and the subsequent Filipino rebellion. The original entry—Philippine Islands—History—Insurrection, 1898–1898—failed to represent the actual and complex relationship between these two nations. Berman pointed to the fact that the Philippines was on the verge of wresting its independence from Spain after 300 years when it became a colony of the United States through covert negotiations and deception. Berman suggested the following subdivisions to capture this historical period more accurately:

- Colonial period (Spanish), 1521–1898;—Revolt, 1896–1901
- Colonial period (American), 1898–1946; 1946–⁵

Hope Olson's critical intervention on the structure of a library classification system makes visible the hierarchical structure and the universalizing effect of the "first terms" that, in the words of Emily Drabinski, "masquerade as neutral when they are, in fact, culturally informed and reflective of the [hidden] social power." As Olson points out, the use of subject headings presents a problem because LCSH is widely used around the world even though their intended audience is the United States. "LCSH's problems representing different cultures affect not only its intended audience, but also audiences in the cultures concerned. As the creators and primary users of LCSH we cannot abdicate the ethical responsibility of a world language."⁶

This brings us to bibliographic instruction or library one-shots area of academic librarianship for which librarians and professional institutions such as the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) have made revisions to information literacy standards, and is now called Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education. Based on a cluster of concepts, the framework provides librarians flexible options to implement these ideas based on expanded definitions of information literacy.

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning.⁷

Emily Drabinski's approach in teaching information literacy recognizes the role of the student as an active agent in the learning process. Using a Freirian approach⁸ in teaching critical information literacy, the librarian and the student both teach and learn to grapple with the problems that Freire calls

"problem-posing education."⁹ For Drabinski, this method allows us to "unveil the hegemonic production and reproduction of the problematic language cited by Berman and the troubling staticity of hierarchies of sameness articulated by Olson."¹⁰ In tackling these issues, Drabinski invites us to reconceptualize information literacy instruction by moving away from a "banking system," a passive form of learning, where knowledge exchange flows in one direction, to an active one where the students critically engage the resources for research. For example, "a critical library instruction program might instead teach students to engage critically with the classification as text, encouraging critical thought in relation to tools."¹¹

Likewise I take a critical approach when I teach Introduction to Library Research (Int 1) at UCSB. During the first class meeting, I ask students to expand their understanding of information and see it as a socially constructed process. I also ask them to view information from the perspective of the lived experiences of patrons like them but also of communities who use information for reasons beyond academic assignments. I end the quarter-long class with the reading of a chapter in *Policing the Crisis* entitled "The Social Production of News."¹² The chapter offers a brilliant analysis of the complex process of news-making whose end result is "News."

BUILDING THE COLLECTIONS AT UCSB ON AN APA SCHOLARSHIP

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism also taints the manner in which it was transmitted from owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it his task to brush history against the grain.—Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History

To choose means, in this context, to try and relate to the past by listening to and conversing with the myriad voices in civil society. These are small voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands. That is why we don't hear them. That is also why it is up to us to make that extra effort, develop the special skills and above all cultivate the disposition to hear these voices and interact with them. For they have many stories to tell—stories which for their complexity are unequalled by statist discourse and indeed oppose its abstract and oversimplifying modes.—Ranjit Guha, The Small Voice of History

Upon arriving at UCSB in 1998, I assumed collection and liaison responsibilities for the Asian American Studies Department, the first such established department in the University of California system. With an undergraduate background in Asian American Studies, and aware of the discipline's roots in the Third World Liberation struggles and civil rights movement of the 1960s,

I was able to build a solid relationship with the department and affiliates with whom I share the same commitment.

I purchase monographs and relevant sources in other formats such as DVDs, CDs, and microfilm. While many of these are direct requests from the department, I also spend time staying up to date with the discipline by attending academic conferences and reviewing catalogs, especially from academic and trade publishers that have long-term commitments to producing books by and about APAs. Indeed, being immersed in the discipline requires labor and time. The reward is the accumulation of knowledge in building a comprehensive collection with an eye toward future research areas. For example, I started purchasing Asian American jazz recordings for the music library as these materials are increasingly hard to find. However, due to stagnant collection budgets, space issues, and other factors, libraries and librarians have altered their collection development policies and practices to focus more exclusively on the current needs of the departments. Although this approach may be practical and necessary, it is reactionary, as a colleague at a collections meeting astutely pointed out. This practice undermines the intellectual labor of subject librarians in building collections that support colleges and research universities.

To be sure, collection budget problems are part of larger systemic budget problems public institutions of higher learning have been facing for years, due to neoliberal policies of privatization and the government's retreat from supporting public and cultural institutions. As Daniel Bailey argues in a blog post on the neoliberal policies guiding government spending in the United Kingdom, "the conceptual centrality of market values . . . predominates political discourse even in the case of libraries. Areas of the public sector which are proving profitable tend to be marketised or privatised. Areas of the public sector which are not are seen as taxpayer-funded, decadent indulgences and are thus put under pressure to make severe cutbacks."¹³

I also collaborate with Salvador Guereña, director of the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives (CEMA).¹⁴ The creation of CEMA took place at a historical conjunction, and is one of the significant gains from the long history of student activism at UCSB that began in the 1960s. In 1969, black students protested to demand a Department of Black Studies. The same year, the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) demanded a corresponding Chicana/o / Latina/o department, research center, and library. These two groups met with the library director and the discussion resulted in the creation of Black Studies and Colección Tloque Nahuaque (CTN) collections in the library. The simultaneous arrivals of Joseph Boissé, then University Librarian (1983–1998), and Salvador Guereña, the Chicana/o Studies Librarian who shared a similar vision for the library, in 1983, led to the formation of CEMA. As Boissé pointed out, East Coast university archives

were filled with papers of white male elites and few institutions on the West Coast were dedicated to the collecting of materials on Chicana/o / Latina/o literature, arts, and politics. Thus CEMA emerged from CTN and became a formal unit within Special Collections whose mission is to develop a multicultural archive. More importantly, the approach was different from the previous archival practices that Boissé identified as haphazard and accidental. Instead, he and Guereña actively identified individuals who were playing an important role in their communities to collect their papers even while they were still producing them.

Currently CEMA has over 200 collections of primary sources and archival materials on African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, and Native Americans in support of the research and teaching mission of the ethnic studies departments on campus. I assisted CEMA in the acquisition of the manuscripts of Frank Chin, a Chinese American writer and activist, and developed the finding aid for the poet Nellie Wong. The Asian American Theater Company and Kearny Street Workshop are also part of the APA collection, and have been used by scholars repeatedly. In a memoriam published in the *Lens* library newsletter for faculty and scholars, University Librarian Denise Stephens stated that Boissé left an indelible mark as his innovations live on today in the guise of the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, allowing future generations to learn about the contributions of our state's minority communities.¹⁵

I opened this section with epigraphs that speak to the complex and contradictory nature of archives and the challenges they present for both scholars and archivists. How archives come to exist and who they represent, such as colonial archives, reveal the subjective (and violent) act involved in the creation of archives. It is an inherent aspect of archives that was long ignored because emphasis was on processes and structures. As Gudmund Valderhaug observes,

Classical archival methodology focused on preserving—or recreating—the original physical structures of archives. . . . key concepts were often understood as physical, and not conceptual: provenance was understood as the concrete origin of an archive, in a physical office, while records were considered as physical objects. The functional and contextual factors that had been significant in creating these physical structures and objects were often ignored, and the analysis of the archive as an expression of the creator's social position and activities was neglected. This led to a situation where archival science in practice was reduced to normative procedures, methods and techniques for arranging and describing archives as physical objects.¹⁶

How do archivists and librarians attend to the blind spots? As cultural workers, how do we address the structural impediments that have rendered segments of the population invisible in the archives? To be sure, engaged, criti-

cal scholars have tackled these challenges—searching between the lines and “listening” for the small voices—brushing history against the grain. Notwithstanding the cunning of scholars, I believe we as cultural workers must assist in this process of discovery and knowledge production, of which CEMA and SEAA serve as models.

Indeed, in tracing the evolution of archival practice, Valderhaug notes the remarkable transformation of archival practice since the 1980s by pointing to the fact that archivists have recognized the role of political and economic power in the creation of archives. He writes, “the notion of the archive as a ‘natural, organic whole’ was challenged from another position: Foucault, Derrida and others had demonstrated that archives are constructed, created by human beings who transmitted their values and attitudes to the records. Thus, archiving is not a ‘natural’ process; it is a societal process influenced by political and economic power, by bureaucratic, legal, cultural and technological preconditions, and by the record creator's social position, intentions and purposes.”¹⁷

Let me end this section with a story. At a 2017 symposium on Native American Education and Scholarship, Professor Scott Manning Stevens retold a story that occurred while he was director of the Newberry Library's D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies. The Newberry Library is home to the Edward Everett Ayer collection, considered one of the strongest collections on Native Americans in the world. In the processing of the collection, a set of diaries by Jose Rizal was discovered within the collection. Understanding the significance of the documents as those belonging to the Philippine national hero whose sacrifice led to the successful Philippine revolt against Spain, Stevens suggested that a separate finding guide be created to make these historical documents discoverable and not buried within the larger collection of Native American materials.

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING APA COLLECTIONS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The fundamentals of collection development and assessment that we learn from LIS programs are a good starting point, such as evaluating the collection using established guides from institutions that support already existing departments. Learning the research and teaching foci of the departments, and knowing the landscape of knowledge production, are fundamental to this work. Notwithstanding the collection budget constraints and other institutional limitations, proactive collection development, one that keeps an eye on research trends in the discipline, and self-reflexivity are essential.

For example, for librarians working at institutions with a department or program in Asian Pacific American Studies or related disciplines such as

Ethnic Studies, American Studies, etc., collection development practices and policies are crafted to support the research and teaching needs of these campus units. As is the case for many disciplines, core materials exist for APA collections, which include different formats as well as primary sources (e.g., digital archives). One strategy is to peruse the collections of academic libraries with an established APA collection such as the one at the Ethnic Studies libraries at UC Berkeley and UCLA, as I did when I began collecting for UCSB. I also consulted Wei Chi Poon's *A Guide for Establishing Asian American Core Collections*.¹⁸ Though now dated, at the time, the guide was useful in identifying key reference materials related to the numerous Asian groups under the rubric of Asian Pacific Americans. This reference source has historical significance and serves as a marker to the growth and diversity of scholarship in the field, which is international in scope. Librarians today have more resources they can consult, such as subject research guides, independent websites, university press catalogs with an APA series, and academic professional associations, such as the Association for Asian American Studies.¹⁹ The *Resources for College Libraries* online database,²⁰ which is a key resource for building core undergraduate collections, has an Asian American Studies section for which I am the subject editor. I advocated for inclusion of Asian American Studies as a section to the *RCL* editor years ago because it had not been represented in the resource. When *RCL* finally decided to add Asian American Studies, I was invited to be the subject editor. With expert assistance from Janet Clarke and Sherise Kimura, fellow APA-LA colleagues, we created the taxonomy and compiled the list.

INFUSING DIVERSITY INTO LIS PROGRAMS AND CURRICULA

In the 2005 issue of the open access journal *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, Todd Honma, then an LIS student, offered this observation regarding the lack of racial discourse in LIS scholarship: "Despite a long legacy of race-based scholarship in many fields of the academy, as well as the ever-diversifying user population in the United States, the field of Library and Information Studies (LIS) has failed to keep up with the ongoing discussions and debates about race, and instead functions in a race-blind vacuum *while failing to recognize the disfiguring implications that such blindness embodies*" (emphasis added). Honma quotes a similar observation made by Professor Lorna Peterson about the profession when she wrote, "Although there has been scholarship in the area of race and racism, it has not been given the serious attention it deserves."²¹

At the Department of Information Studies at UCLA, which I attended in the late 1990s, Professor Clara M. Chu and other faculty of color taught most diversity-related courses. Eventually, Chu worked with a group of students,

who formed the Student Diversity Action Group. Led by ALA Spectrum scholars Chisato Uyeki and Todd Honma, it advocated for and successfully instituted a required course called Information Studies 201: Ethics, Diversity, and Change in the Information Professions.

Several years later, Chu obtained an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant to offer "praXis: A Pre-Doctoral and Recruitment Program for Tomorrow's Culturally Diverse Information Studies Faculty and Leaders" to encourage and prepare minority librarians for teaching and research careers in LIS to increase faculty of color. Although I was part of that pilot program, I decided not to pursue a PhD in LIS.

Unless students and concerned individuals who value these courses clamor for systemic changes at their institutions, substantial positive change will not take root. The problem also comes from the failure of LIS educators in seeing the relevance of these topics for librarianship. In a trenchant article published in 1999, LIS education professor Wayne Wiegand criticized the library profession as "trapped in its own discursive formations, where members speak mostly to each other and where connections between power and knowledge that affect issues of race, class, age, and gender, among others, are either invisible or ignored." Rather than consider these issues as constitutive of and central to library work, the profession is, according to Wiegand, much more interested in process and structure than in people, leading to tunnel vision and blind spots.²² This view is shared by Jack Anderson, who describes the LIS educational foundation as lacking in a critical view toward knowledge organization systems.²³

And yet books and journals on critical librarianship sit on library shelves waiting to be included in LIS curricula, as Wiegand lamented above. But all is not lost when historical consciousness becomes a driving force in the practice of librarianship. The discovery of these can become a reality as it did for me when I came across Berman's book while browsing the library shelves at UCSD in preparation to enter the LIS program. These issues and related resources are often discussed in listservs of library organizations such as PLG, SRRT, and APALA, as well as other ethnic library affiliates, including the American Indian Library Association, Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and REFORMA (The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking).

In 2013, the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) adopted the ALISE Diversity Statement to affirm that diversity is central to ALISE's mission and values.²⁴ The existence of such a document provides direction for LIS educators and scholars to take.

More recently, the Critical Librarianship movement has manifested as #critlib,²⁵ which launched its first Twitter discussion in August 2014 to discuss critical pedagogy and its role in libraries. The use of social media among

progressive librarians has been effective in opening up discursive spaces out of which concrete collective action can form.

SUPPORTING ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES AT UCSB AND BEYOND

Asian American Studies was born out of the Third World Liberation struggles and civil rights movement of the 1960s with the first Ethnic Studies Department formed at San Francisco State University. Specifically, the struggles for ethnic studies courses and content in colleges and universities were the impetus for the development of Asian American Studies curricula, which eventually led to programs and departments in various institutions. While the first Asian American Studies program and center were established at the University of California, Los Angeles, it was at the Santa Barbara campus that the first department came into being in the latter part of the 1980s, founded by Sucheng Chan. Under Chan's skillful leadership and deep understanding of UC academic policies, the program became a department. Since the 1980s, there has been a proliferation of departments and programs across the country, providing opportunities for new generations of scholars to teach and contribute to the body of knowledge on APAs, which constitute a heterogeneous set of immigrants, refugees, and a growing US population.

In her book, *In Defense of Asian American Studies: The Politics of Teaching and Program Building*, Chan shares with readers her experiences, as well as her concerns, on the future of the discipline and the larger APA community with which the field is deeply connected. She writes:

To those of us who still care about "progressive" politics—that is, struggles of racial equality, socioeconomic justice, and political empowerment—the historical legacy of Asian American studies must not be pushed aside because the political-cum-scholarly work that the first generation of Asian American, African American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American scholars tried to do still needs to be done.²⁶

Connecting that legacy with the present, she tells us that "What undergirded the foundation of those fields was a critique of American society. Today, our critiques must be directed not only at the American nation-state but also at an entire world dominated by a form of capitalism that is flexible, dispersed, transnational, and robust."²⁷

For Chan, maintaining the historical link between the present and the past²⁸ is crucial for the future of the field of Asian American Studies and the communities with which the field is connected. I believe that this is an area where cultural workers such as archivist and librarians can intervene.

Despite recognition through official proclamations such as Asian Heritage Month, Filipino Heritage Month, and similar commemorations, a sustained intervention requires changes in cultural and educational institutions. An example is the recent signing of AB 2016²⁹ into law by California Governor Jerry Brown to develop high school ethnic studies curricula, which has been called a historic moment in California education. Librarians have a central role in this project by making these stories and voices more visible beyond the classroom and bringing them to a wider audience through programs, exhibits, and collections.

THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARIAN IN A CIVIL SOCIETY

I had only one escape—The Los Angeles Public Library—Bulosan, America Is in the Heart

The stories shared in this musing offer examples of the types of roles archivists and librarians can assume and serve as models for the present and future. These critical engagements are informed by an understanding of the historical realities and an ethos of librarianship committed to serving the needs of communities, especially the marginalized. These roles require us to engage in praxis that is self-reflexive in nature, always aware of the historical and present conditions of the populations we serve. Our awareness must extend to the privileged position we have in the process of knowledge creation, as well as being conscious of the subjective dimension in the structures that undergird the profession.

The prevailing view of neutrality in librarianship has been debunked as a myth by librarians, including Candise Branum and David Jensen. In her inspiring words, Branum calls on us to recognize the librarian's position of power. "As the guardians of information in a society based around gaining access, librarians are in a powerful position, even though they continue to reject the political nature of the work they do. In this way, neutrality is much like a collar and leash to keep librarians from crossing over any abstract lines the profession has drawn."³⁰

I came upon the profession by accident and the idea of librarianship occurred to me during the same period when I encountered Bulosan's *America*. As I was approaching the last year of my undergraduate education and developing a political consciousness, I began to ponder the future. Coincidentally, I met Tami Echevarria Robinson, a librarian at UCSD who coordinated a program introducing students of color to the library profession. The program opened up a completely new profession, hidden from view. More importantly, the profession gave me the possibility to remain in the world of academia, which I preferred over other categories of employment.³¹ Still having doubts, it was with my discovery of Berman's classic book *Preju-*

dices and Antipathies that I began to comprehend the potential of librarianship as a viable means to engage critically in civil society. While the circumstances are radically different across time and space, like Bulosan, the library offered me an escape into a world where I could do the kind of work I want to do.

NOTES

1. In 1972, then-president Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and stayed in power until he was ousted by the "People Power Revolution" in 1986. During the Marcos dictatorship when democratic process had been suspended, the United States remained an ally of the Marcos regime. "Memorable Quotes about Marcos," https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/03/30/memorable-quotes-about-marcos/83e24b71-8ce2-4990-8203-be9c0fb782e/?utm_term=.e5ed98055b1b.
2. Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943).
3. Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
4. Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1971).
5. Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies*.
6. Hope Olson, "The Ethics of Naming and the Discourse of Globalization," in *Libraries: Global Reach, Local Touch*, ed. K. McCook, B. J. Ford, and K. Lippincott (Chicago: ALA, 1998), 213.
7. <http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.
8. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000).
9. Emily Drabinski, "Teaching the Radical Catalog," in *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, ed. K. R. Roberto (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 204.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
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In the fall of 2016, Janet Clarke e-mailed gerardo "gary" colmenar a set of challenging questions regarding the connections among librarianship, activism, and what roles they as librarians could have in advancing the Asian Pacific American communities and the larger society. The gravity and urgency of the questions compelled him to reflect on his work as a librarian/activist. Thank you, Janet, for the privilege to respond to your questions and share them with our colleagues.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The Imperative to Nurture Diversity

Interview with Miriam Tuliao

Editors: Thanks for speaking with us today! Can you tell us a bit about your professional work history? How did you get started in librarianship as a career?

Miriam: When I was living in Haverhill, Massachusetts, in my twenties, I was eager to find community work that was activist in nature. I tried different part-time positions in local nonprofit organizations, including working in a community center (which assisted low-income families), a group home (which supported persons with developmental disabilities), a community college (which offered writing tutorial services), a rape crisis center (which advocated for sexual assault survivors and their significant others), and a public library (which worked with youth, families, seniors, and working adults).

The part-time position at the public library turned out to be the most creative, meaningful, and fun. I enjoyed working with the public, helping patrons look for information or a book. I had an opportunity to host youth programs and help the Friends group. I relished working on a team. My supervisors were great. They loved the profession and encouraged me to pursue an MLS. I was, until recently, the assistant director of selections in BookOps, a shared service between the New York Public Library (NYPL) and the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL). I am currently the marketing manager for Penguin Publishing.

Editors: Has it been challenging to move up the leadership ladder? How did you decide to make the move from middle to upper management?