

The Study of American Censorship: An Interview with Louise Robbins

Interviewed by Yoshitaka Kawasaki

1. Introduction

The question of censorship in American libraries is not only key to American library history, but also to international scholars in a variety of fields since it was out of this experience that many of our current concepts of intellectual freedom have arrived.

Louise S. Robbins, Associate Professor and Director of the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1996 published



Censorship and The American Library: The American Library Association's Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969 (Greenwood, 1996)⁽¹⁾. In July of 1998 I had just finished translating this into Japanese. I was pleased that while on a research trip to the U.S., Robbins agreed to allow me to interview her in order to promote scholars' understanding of library censorship history and the importance of her pioneering volume.

Professor Louise S. Robbins was born in the capital of the United States, Washington D.C., and went to public schools and college in Virginia. She was awarded an M.A from East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, where she mainly studied English and then taught English. She taught and worked as a reading specialist at Byng School in Ada from 1975 to 1983.

Robbins became interested in librarianship in 1981 while working in Ada, and pursued an MLS while continuing to teach and work in the school library. It was a 135 mile commute from her home in Oklahoma to Texas Woman's University, but she persisted and received her M.L.S in 1984. Later, Robbins worked for the East Central University Library from 1985 to 1991. At the same time she was a doctoral student in library studies and obtained her Ph.D. from Texas Woman's University. Her dissertation is titled "Toward Ideology and Autonomy: The American Library Association's Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969."⁽²⁾

In the same year, 1991, Robbins accepted a position at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She taught some classes and served as director of the library of the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS). She ran the library as a laboratory, supervising various projects for practice and research. In 1997, she was tenured and was selected as Director of the School of Library and Information Studies, a position she continues to hold. In 1996,

Greenwood published a revised and expanded version of her dissertation as *Censorship and the American Library*.

2. Interview Schedule

The interview was conducted on the afternoon of July 29, 1998 and lasted three hours in her office on the fourth floor of Helen C. White Hall, which houses SLIS. Her office features a gorgeous view of Lake Mendota outside a large window.

I had not conveyed a detailed set of questions for the interview to her beforehand, so it was carried without rehearsal in order to solicit her immediate impressions. The conversation was recorded on tape, and was directly transcribed by a student in the doctoral program at SLIS, Andrew B. Wertheimer. Noriko Asato, Assistant Professor of Japanese at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, also accompanied them in order to help the interviewer's understanding of English.

The interview was both a pleasant talk and also a fine example of scholarly communication on questions of methodology, interpretation of research and a variety of other topics. With that in mind, the interviewer thought that a more complete English version would be of interest to other researchers.⁽³⁾

The following interview does not replicate the entire dialogue. Topics such as discussion on the meaning of the concept of "intellectual freedom" and some personal details have been omitted.

3. Interview

3.1 Reasons for Translating Robbins into Japanese

Kawasaki Before the interview, you asked why I chose to translate your book. There are three reasons. First, my own research centers on American library history, especially the development of intellectual freedom in libraries. In writing my 1995 study *Toshokan no Jiyu towa Nanika* (*The American Public Library and Intellectual Freedom*)⁽⁴⁾ I utilized your dissertation "Ideology and Autonomy." I also translated the third and fifth editions of the ALA *Intellectual Freedom Manual* published in 1991 and 1997 respectively by the Japan Library Association.⁽⁵⁾ As I mentioned, during my writing of *Toshokan no Jiyu towa Nanika*, I consulted your dissertation heavily. More and more, I wanted to translate your scholarly book on the history of the intellectual freedom in libraries.

Robbins Now, I would like to ask you a follow-up question. Where did your initial interest in American libraries and intellectual freedom begin? How did you become interested in this in the first place?

Kawasaki My initial interest came from my adviser, Professor Chikao Ogura of Kyoto University, who was scholar of the history of American libraries. It is also important to understand that American ideologies and practices of librarianship have been a significant influence on those of Japan. After a short time lag, many philosophies, ideologies, and practices from all of the fields of library and information science have been introduced in Japan. So when we think of the future of the Japanese librarianship or society, generally it is very

helpful for us to learn from the U.S. example.

My second reason for translating your book to was highlight your methodology; how you conducted research. You didn't just look at secondary materials and journals, but also you explored the ALA Archives and other depositories, conducted interviews and gathered personal letters, etc. I believe that this could serve as a useful methodological example for Japanese library researchers.

Finally, in Japan, we have "Toshokan no Jiyu ni Kansuru Sengen" (A Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries), a Japanese version of the Library Bill of Rights -- and many of the ideas came directly from the American Library Bill of Rights. I wanted to show Japanese librarians what was the background to American Library Bill of Rights. I wanted to show what social contexts and struggles are behind those words.

Robbins Yes, that is very important. I would assume that this influence of American librarianship is mostly in the post-war period.

Kawasaki Yes, in 1954 Japanese librarians took the American model of intellectual freedom. This is why I think it will be important for Japanese readers.

3.2 Background of Robbins' Research

Kawasaki I hope that you will not mind some critical questions on your work. I believe that your work is an important one and we should follow this up with an academic exploration.

I also want to ask a few general questions on your book and then present more detailed questions. But, first I would like to collect a few details on your background. In 1983, you switched from being a reading specialist to an elementary school librarian. Why did you do this and didn't you need some certification for this?

Robbins I started back in school in 1981 to get an M.L.S. There was a librarian with an M.L.S. and I worked under her, doing half-time reading and half-time library work--and also went to school at the same time. The commute to school was 135 miles each way, so my schedule was designed so that I could go to university every other Saturday. They had classes on every other Saturday for 3 hours of credit. So, I could take 6 hours of credit in a semester if I was willing to drive to school every Saturday. I also went in the summer-time.

In 1984, I had my M.L.S., but I also had a problem, which was that because I took my degree in Texas, the state of Oklahoma would not add the library certification to my teacher's certification unless I took a course in Texas government documents. Now, this won't make any sense to you, and it didn't make any sense to me, but it was the result of a reciprocal agreement on transferring certification. I thought that was ridiculous. I had been teaching in Oklahoma for ten years, why couldn't they just add my library certification. But they wouldn't do that, so I found a job in an academic library. I did it because I was mad at the State Board of Education, not because I didn't like school libraries, and thought I shouldn't have to take Texas government. Of course, my M.L.S. was recognized at the college, and I was very happy doing college library work.

Kawasaki Did you write a thesis for your M.L.S.?

Robbins Texas Woman's University has an optional professional paper, which isn't as

difficult as a thesis. I didn't write a historical paper, but instead wrote on managing microcomputer laboratories, as that was one of my tasks at the time. I didn't have anything to do with history at the time, and didn't actually get into historical research until I was working on my dissertation. I was led to that because I had started approaching the topic from a policy approach. I was looking at censorship and intellectual freedom first from a policy perspective, and then I became increasingly interested in the historical approach to that question. So, I kind of came at it from the back door, but I have always been a lover of history.

Kawasaki The names of your dissertation committee members (B. Keith Swigger, Frank Turner etc.) are not so well known for library history or research on intellectual freedom. What was it like working with them?

Robbins The person who had been my adviser all the way through graduate school was Frank Turner, and he is a historian, but he was very ill. He did not want to be my dissertation adviser because of fears he would not make it to the end. So, although Frank was on my committee, I picked Keith Swigger, who has a degree in American Studies, as I knew that he would give me good advice and keep me on schedule. I knew that Keith would help me to get finished because he would trust me to do the research adequately and wouldn't check every detail. He also wouldn't have me drive the three hours to show him the next two pages. It was a very practical decision as the only historian on the faculty was the one who was ill. Frank was the historian on my committee. I also had a political scientist on my committee who had a great interest in intellectual freedom, constitutional law, and the McCarthy period, which as you know is the period I am focusing on. The two of them and my dissertation adviser were the ones who helped the most.

Kawasaki Was Texas Woman's University a good environment to study in?

Robbins For me, it was very good for a few reasons. One is Frank Turner, who was a person -- you know how sometimes you have a "meeting of the minds" where something happens so that you can understand each other very well. He was such a person for me, one with whom I could talk very easily. He made me think. I took every course he offered. I am sure that I became interested in conducting historical research partly because of him. For another reason, even though at the graduate level, Texas Woman's University isn't just for women, it was a very good environment for working women. For example, during my master's work, as I told you, I could take courses on Saturdays and summers. I finished all of my degree work while I was working full time. When I was working on my Ph.D. I could leave my office around 3:00 on a Monday afternoon, drive to Texas and take a class that night. I could then stay at the university dorm for \$13. I'd get up the next morning and take classes and do research, and then be home by midnight. I took 9 hours of credit a semester that way.

Kawasaki You came to Madison in 1991. What did you do before becoming Director of the School of Library and Information Studies?

Robbins I taught one class and was the Director of the Teaching Library, supervising many projects as a laboratory for research. It was a new position and I was the first person to hold it. Unless we get lucky with funding, I may have been the last person too. I had that job

until last year, when I received tenure and was promoted to SLIS Director.

3.3 *Censorship and The American Library* - General Questions

3.3.1 Purpose of the study

Kawasaki When you started doing historical research, what was the original focus of what became an eight year study?

Robbins When I first started I had read Evelyn Geller's *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries* (1984)⁽⁶⁾, which brings the concept to 1939, and I was very much interested in how we got from 1939 to 1969. How did we get from that Library's Bill of Rights, which in 1939 doesn't even mention censorship, to the Freedom to Read



Foundation in 1969? I had done a little reading. Actually, the timeline which is in the back of the book, is almost the first thing that I did, although it obviously had much less detail in it. I thought it would be fascinating to be able to see what made all of these different ALA statements happen. Why did they say this at a particular time? How did the Vietnam War effect this? How did X effect this? I really wanted to see how this debate had occurred and how it effected the profession. Evelyn Geller is much more sophisticated in her treatment than I am in mine; she had a much better theoretical background in sociology certainly and she had looked at intellectual freedom as a way of saying "keep your hands off my library." Librarians were saying this is our job, not your job to select books. It was a way of establishing professional autonomy and I wanted to see if that was still part of the language librarians used or if there was something else going on instead. In my time in librarianship, we have been very much focused on intellectual freedom issues. I mean this is what you read about if you pick up any library publication--the issues are censorship cases and Internet filtering. I wanted to know when that change happened.

Kawasaki Besides Geller, what else motivated you to do the study? Had you ever been involved in a censorship case?

Robbins I've always been a civil libertarian. I guess that's part of it. I have a strong personal belief in intellectual freedom. I knew that I would be living with my dissertation topic for a long time and wanted something I would feel good about investing my time and energy in.

3.3.2 On a Chapter Title

Robbins One little item. There is a mistake in this book and I don't know whether you found it or not. Do you see "No Bark, Very Little Bite." This should say "No Bite, Very Little Bark" and nobody ever caught it, even me.

Kawasaki I noticed this because I read both your dissertation and the published book

thoroughly and compared each other. The chapter name "No Bark, Very Little Bite" doesn't make sense. So I pointed out this typesetting error in the Japanese version.

Robbins I think it was changed in the typesetting. I think that now you are the only one who knows. I haven't said anything about this to anyone and no-one has mentioned this to me.

Kawasaki Now, all Japanese [and English speaking] readers will know, thanks to this interview.

Robbins Good.

3.3.3 Focus on ALA

Kawasaki When I first read your dissertation, I thought that it was written by a former ALA staff member as you focus so much on the role of the organization. Also, you use a very orthodox historical technique, which was one reason why I was interested in your book.

Robbins I use an orthodox historical descriptive technique because it is the one I know. I rely heavily on ALA materials, largely because that was what was available. I added materials from David Berninghausen and Archie McNeal, although they were ALA committee members. The people who would have known about ALA statements were people within ALA. Other things happened, but I wanted to know how the official statements were made, so I had to look through the organization which built this response.

Kawasaki I recognize the importance of focusing on the ALA, but might that not also be a limitation of your study in that you focus on the organization rather than the profession at large? Maybe a better way to phrase this would be to ask you what weaknesses do you see in the work, or what areas need further research?

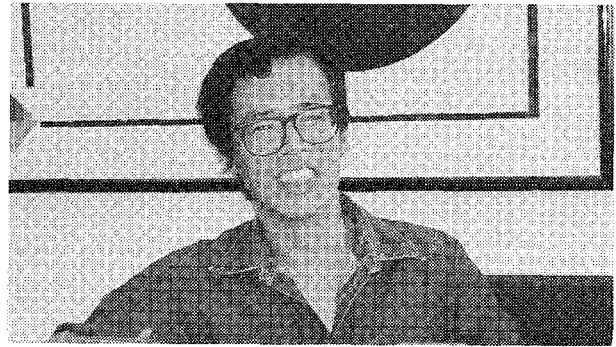
Robbins Well, I don't know how you'd get a hold of the rest of the profession. How would you study it? I think that a study like Marjorie Fiske's study (1959)⁽⁷⁾ of California librarians, which is a sociological investigation, certainly tells what librarians were doing, and tells the differences between those who belongs to professional associations and those who don't. I think that it would be hard to trace this historically--how to gather records or determine how representative any one librarian was. However, if you look at the professional associations, they at least ostensibly speak for their members in some way. No, we don't really know how much in the long run, though people like Paul Bixler and Bill Dix, and other chairs of the Intellectual Freedom Committee knew very well that they weren't speaking for everyone and that there was a big gap between the statements and practice. I think the only way to look at what may or may not have been a part of the profession would be to do case studies. I would love to have more ideas about this.

Kawasaki I asked you this question because in library history studies I think it is necessary to employ the bottom-up approach with wider a social perspective in mind. As you pointed out, case studies and biographical studies with social contexts as well as social history approaches would contribute much to this direction.

3.3.4 The Dissertation vs. the Published Work

Kawasaki When you changed the text from the dissertation to a published work, I noticed that chapter five, "the Ideology of Librarians" was greatly expanded and revised. What other changes did you make?

Robbins Do you see these things [green tabs]? When I went up for tenure, I had to send my book up, and I had to say how it



had been expanded from my dissertation, so everywhere I added something I put stickies and explained the changes, so the committee wouldn't have to guess. The last chapter is actually expanded a great deal by the request of the publisher. Greenwood Press wanted to have me bring it up to date. I didn't feel entirely comfortable with this as I would have to just skim a lot of years.

The part on loyalty investigations was greatly expanded because I did the research in the Library of Congress, and I expanded the section on propaganda in public libraries quite a bit with the Ralph Ulveling papers. I think those were the two main areas where I made changes along with the use of the term jurisdiction, which is Abbott's concept. In terms of interpretive framework Andrew Abbott becomes more important than Michael Winter in the book *The Culture and Control of Expertise*, whereas Abbott wasn't even in my dissertation.

Kawasaki Did the publisher dictate how they wanted chapter five to look like?

Robbins No, they just said please bring it up to date, so we know what happened since 1969. Obviously, you can't analyze that many years historically in such a few pages, but they only wanted a quick capsule to bring it up to date.

3.3.5 Periodization

Kawasaki Generally, an American dissertation includes a statement of the problem, a review of the literature, and so on. However, your dissertation doesn't contain much of a review of the literature. Was that mostly a reflection of the literature at the time?

Robbins There was no literature; I mean no secondary sources other than the few I mention in the introduction. Geller's book certainly was primary and there are some sources outside library literature which deal with the history of intellectual freedom. There are tons of them, but it would seem somewhat pointless to review all of them. You'd have to go into constitutional law and history, and they don't really deal with my topic at all. I really did a very thorough literature search and there really wasn't any research literature to critique on this topic at all--certainly not for the time period I was interested in. David Berninghausen's writings, his *Flight from Reason* (1975)⁽¹²⁾, that was about it.

Kawasaki I agree. I found *The Flight from Reason* interesting but not so much as research. The other reference can be more general, such as the opening article of the ALA *Intellectual Freedom Manual* by Judith F. Krug and James Harvey.⁽¹³⁾

You know how important the question of periodization is for historians. Your books has the

following chapters;

Chapt. 1: No Bark, Very Little Bite, 1939-48

Chapt. 2: Book Banning and Witch Hunts, 1948-52

Chapt. 3: Belief Meets Practice, 1952-60

Chapt. 4: More Than Lip Service, 1960-1969

I am wondering why you divided chapters two and three, which both seem to deal with the same period, and are the key period of the book.

Robbins I had a big debate on the chapter two-three division. In a way, I wanted to have them together, but that wasn't exactly right either. It was just one of those things where I had to make a decision -- not a perfect one -- but a decision. This was a kind of pivot time. Berninghasusen was the pivot time; his leadership really got the Intellectual Freedom Committee off dead center and forced it to deal with issues. His leadership came at a time when such leadership was called for. If he had been an "institutional type" it might not have happened, but Berninghausen was a "young Turk;" he was somebody who wasn't a part of the establishment and so he wasn't afraid to take on the more conservative people in the organization. That I think is the main reason why ALA responded with the IFC to so many specific McCarthyist efforts (such as Resolution on Loyalty Programs (1950), revision of the Library Bill of Rights (1948), the Statement on Labeling (1951)). So many things were responses to specific McCarthyist kind of events happening at that time. It is almost like the first part of chapter three could have gone in there too and then gone somewhere else, but there wasn't an easy breaking point, so I chose one. That date changed back and forth from 1952 to 1953 about ten times as I was writing. I don't have an easy answer for that and you might find another way of doing that.

Kawasaki The Statement of Labeling (1951) was included in chapter two and the Freedom to Read Statement (1953) is in Chapter three.

Robbins Right, there are just two years difference between them.

Kawasaki These came from the same socio-historical background. If we take a look at Chapter four, you cut off this year according to the new theme, which is free speech. What are your justifications for the periodization? Your periodization confused me by cutting off sometime by person (e.g., Berninghausen), another time by social movement (e.g., civil rights movement).

Robbins In chapter three, "Belief Meets Practice," again, there are lots of possible ways to divide this and I changed this more than once. I saw this as a place, where, after Beninghausen sort of got statements made, a huge challenge, one which had national or world attention in the Overseas Library controversy comes along and librarians get this (Overseas Libraries Statement, 1953), as someone said, swift public eminence (with the Freedom to Read Statement). They became sort of famous overnight and they were congratulating themselves and the rest of the chapter asks if they really should have been congratulating themselves. In a way, chapters two and three should have been one chapter. They are all McCarthyist, or intense Cold War era responses.

Kawasaki Generally, historians write that the McCarthy period or the Cold War era are

one period (or set of periods), but that they are distinct from other periods, such as Civil Rights. Actually both eras fall on each other but are divided at the same time, as your book's timeline shows.

Robbins My experience as I read the literature is that this is a false break. For example, the weapon of McCarthyism was used against integrationists. There is a very close relationship between segregation and McCarthyism. That's very much a feature of the next book—how they went hand in hand [This book, titled *The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown*⁽¹⁴⁾]. You can see this in the Warren Court (1953-1969), where Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren was called a Communist because he overturned school segregation in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, so there is a close relationship. But integration didn't surface in the library literature to any extent at all until 1960. It is there in society, but librarians were not paying attention to it. So, in terms of looking at library history, it is an undercurrent, but it is not surfacing and it is not soliciting a response in the professional association, so yes and no.

The McCarthy Era, and maybe we should call it something else, but when I am talking about McCarthyism personally, it reflects my own reading of the early years of the Cold War, up until about 1960. The Cold War is a much longer period. McCarthyism started before McCarthy and went after him, but the kind of tactics probably began waning in 1954 - 1956 and were sort of out the door by 1960, but at least to any great extent. I am now reading Ellen W. Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (1998)⁽¹⁵⁾ and I know that some people were still suffering from the effects of McCarthyism in 1968 - 1970, so it wasn't a clear break by any means.

Kawasaki I understand what you mean. As I said before, I can see the importance of Berninghausen, too. But still, the break in 1952 does not provide clear criteria to satisfy me.

3.4 *Censorship and the American Library* - Specific Questions

3.4.1 Definition of "intellectual freedom"

Kawasaki In your book's introduction, you utilized Beninghausen's definition of "intellectual freedom." If we discuss the concept of the term, it will make our discussion much more complex. So I will only touch on the "use" of the term briefly. I was wondering how you see this term used outside of the library field. After all, it is neither in the *Oxford English Dictionary* nor is accepted as a legal term. On the other hand, we sometimes find the term in the education field and in civil liberties discourse, but these fields use the term much more infrequently than we do in librarianship. Would you say that "intellectual freedom" is "jargon" for library science alone.

Robbins I'm trying to think where else I've heard it. I hear for example, the American Civil Liberties Union using it, but I wonder. I had wondered about the origins of the term before and should go back to the sources as to where the term gained currency or became popular. I mean the name of the committee established in 1940 was the Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry. That's long, long term. It may be that is the origin of the term. I wonder if it is, and if it was used freely before that time. If so, it should show up in the literature of Nazism, for example.

Maybe it came out as a reaction to it. Perhaps the term is as much a "creature of that time period" as the Library Bill of Rights is.

Kawasaki Did the library field invent the term intellectual freedom then?

Robbins That might be the case. I don't know if they might have borrowed it from the literature on Nazism. There is a book I really like, Robert B. Fowler's *Believing Skeptics* 1975,⁽¹⁶⁾ which talks about the intellectual history of this time period and the way liberals saw themselves, or the U.S. saw itself as being free of ideology and actually as afraid of ideology and wanting to be free of them as it was seen as contrary to intellectual freedom.

3.4.2 Library's Bill of Rights (1939) and World War II

Kawasaki Concerning the Des Moines Public Library's "Bill of Rights for the Free Public Library" adopted in 1938, I was wondering if you looked for archival materials when you wrote this part?

Robbins The Des Moines Public Library was undergoing asbestos abatement and they said that maybe they had something and looked what they could find - and they sent me some things. Later, I found a little more elsewhere.

Kawasaki You cited Christine Jenkins' dissertation, "The Strength of the Inconspicuous,"⁽¹⁷⁾ in that section, and wrote in the footnote that you had received information from Jenkins personally. In the text itself, you only mentioned Des Moines Public Library as an active center of adult education. Those seem to be somewhat weak as a rationale to explain why the Des Moines Public Library adopted the "Bill of Rights for the Free Public Library." Did a specific incident at the Des Moines Public Library occur which led the library to adopt the statement? I would appreciate if you could give us a more detailed explanation of the background.

Robbins What Jenkins identified in the archives for me were materials pertaining to an adult education committee of which Forrest Spaulding was a member.

Kawasaki Does "an adult education committee" mean the Adult Education Board of the ALA?

Robbins Yes, and they are the ones who proposed the Library's Bill of Rights, adopted it for themselves and actually proposed it with more teeth than the way it was finally approved. They were using the Public Affairs Pamphlets, for example, which dealt with controversial topics and they were apparently getting into a little bit of trouble themselves. We don't have enough evidence to know that, but that is our hunch. Basically, they were discussing these controversial pamphlets in the library adult discussion groups. This was part of the reason why they wanted this Library Bill of Rights, to protect and say that it was the right thing to do. So, what she identified is quite relevant.

Kawasaki I understand what you mean. But, it seems to me that there is no evidence that the Des Moines Public Library actually used those controversial pamphlets and received complaints which may have led to the adoption of the intellectual freedom statement. In any case, do you think that there is more there to be unearthed on this question?

Robbins I don't know the answer to that question. I think that Patti Becker may have

gone to Des Moines. She is [a dissertator under Wayne A. Wiegand and is] working on American public libraries in World War II. She talked about Des Moines with me, so she may have gone there.

Kawasaki On a related question. Why don't you deal very much with library issues during WWII? Is that because of your focus on the IFC perspective rather than ALA's?

Robbins Well, I didn't try to encompass everything that was happening in ALA. That's at least one whole book, maybe even two or three. I wanted to look at what was happening in terms of intellectual freedom issues and because librarians didn't travel since there was rationing of gasoline and not much was published due to paper shortages. People just laid low until the war's end. They were quite occupied by the war effort and seemed not to have been thinking or talking about much else. So, there isn't much to discuss about this period in terms of intellectual freedom.

Kawasaki As you know, during World War I the ALA was active in censoring books for its Army Camp libraries etc., which has been brought out, for example, by James Martins' *An American Adventure in Book-Burning* (1988)⁽¹⁸⁾, which analyzes this. Between WWI and WWII, ALA adopted the Library Bill of Rights. There was a big change in between the two wars, in terms of the ideology or the *raison d'être* of libraries. Do you think that ALA changed its overall attitude to censorship in this period?

Robbins I understand what you are asking. But there is no written record that I have been able to find. Now, I didn't look at every file, but concentrated on the ALA Executive Council and other likely places, along with published library literature in those three main journals (*Library Journal*, *American Library Association Bulletin*, *Wilson Library Bulletin*), and the IFC. When I had a hint that there might be something elsewhere I'd go pursue it. I also used the files of people who chaired the IFC to the extent available. I know, for example that the Armed Forces Editions had books that had titles that were later censored in the Overseas Libraries, which were distributed very widely. I don't know what happened to them. Not much emerged from the literature about censorship. For example, in WWI, German language books were pulled off of library shelves. I don't have evidence of this kind of activities although it might have also happened in WWII.

Kawasaki The ALA papers for WWI are well organized, but the WWII papers seem to be much more poorly done. Does this situation affect your research?

Robbins I didn't spend a lot of time on records pertaining to ALA's war activities. As I said, I concentrated on the IFC and looked elsewhere when I had hints of related events. So, I can't speak from first-hand knowledge, and you might want to check with Patti Becker on this. I do know that for example, libraries became more information centers and did promote different kinds of things, such as rationing (e.g., ways to cook without sugar), and the like. I know that this happened during the war. I don't know about censorship.

Kawasaki I understand how the general progress of a research and the excavation of materials can influence the whole research itself. On the other hand, as you entitled the book "Censorship and the American Libraries," I wish more explanation could have been offered about the WWII period.

3.4.3 On the "Statement of Labeling."

Kawasaki On page 53 of your book, you reproduce the entire text of "Statement of Labeling" adopted in 1951. At the end of the text, there is an expression that "We are, then, anti-communists." Do you think that it was meant literally or simply as a line to protect librarians?

Robbins That was a very common assumption. That was the only safe thing to say. You should look at the July 1996 *Library Trends* ⁽¹⁹⁾ article, which deals with this. I think it was literal in that they were opposed to Communists. ALA really bought into the notion that we don't have ideologies and Communism is an ideology. I don't think it was an effort to place themselves on the political spectrum. It was just saying that we oppose any ideology that seeks to undermine the United States. However, I think they also meant that they really were anti-Communist. That entire sentence reads "Because communism, fascism, or other authoritarianisms tend to suppress ideas and attempt to coerce individuals to conform to a specific ideology, American librarians must be opposed to any such 'ism.' We are, then, anti-communist." That is as clear a statement of civil libertarianism as you could make in that period. It is kind of a capsule of what almost all of the liberal intellectuals would have said in that time.

3.4.4 Racial Segregation

Kawasaki In the history of education, the Brown decision (1954) is a major event; however, in library literature and the ALA there seems to be no suggestion of the problem of segregation until 1960. Do you think that this is because ALA officials were uninterested or didn't want to become involved in local issues or why was this so? Of course, there were a few exceptions to this situation. For example, the racial problems that occurred at the ALA annual conference (1936) in Richmond, Virginia led the ALA to decide not to hold a meeting in a city where racial segregation would be enforced in the facilities under ALA control.

Robbins I think that officially it was because they didn't want to get involved in local issues, and perhaps in some cases that was the actual reason. It also partly is because if they made too much of a fuss about it the Southern states would all withdraw and they would lose members and that means money. Money seems to have driven ALA for about half of its life. It was scared to death that it was going to spend too much money supporting intellectual freedom. They were scared to death they would lose members. In fact, though, they found that when they supported their own beliefs they gained members, but they didn't have faith in themselves in that regard. In some cases though I think that it was simply that some were racist. Finally, it was southerners who brought it up. It was Dan Lacy and Archie McNeal who were the people within ALA who carried the ball. It was a British editor, Eric Moon, who brought it to the top of the agenda.

Kawasaki I want to clarify a bit more on what you said regarding the idea of local issues. The ALA said many times that they wouldn't intrude on local issues. Was this done so Southern librarians would not have to violate state or local segregation laws?

Robbins There were actually laws in the Southern states that forbid whites and blacks from using the same facilities, and they said we can't encourage librarians to violate the laws. It was legal separation of the races and the expression that we use to talk about this is "Jim Crow Laws," laws which were designed to legally separate the races in education, and transportation, public accommodations, and all places---restaurants, hotels, water fountains, trains, whatever.

3.4.5 The Richard Kreimer Case

Kawasaki In Chapter Five, you extended your book to a summary of the current situation. I thought that this more capsulized examination distracted readers from your earlier historical narrative.

Robbins Well, as I told you before, it is because the publisher asked for it, but of course, people do want to know what the significance of a research is, and it seems that if you can relate in to the present, they can understand an issue's significance.

Kawasaki The last half of this chapter has much less analysis than the others. For example, you dealt with the Richard Kreimer case. According to your book the FTRF (Freedom to Read Foundation) and Intellectual Freedom Committee supported Kreimer. The decision was to strengthen the importance of the library by judging the public library as a "designated" public forum. These are undisputed facts.

On the other hand, throughout your book, what you are examining is the jurisdiction and autonomy of the professional librarian, and how they defended, expanded and deepened these concepts. In order to achieve and realize this vital aim, the library profession agreed that it must share the same philosophy and cooperate. I think you emphasize these points in your book.

From this viewpoint, I think you could have approached this differently. It is critical that the Intellectual Freedom Committee or FTRF didn't support the Morristown Public Library or the New Jersey Library Association. Roughly speaking, we still don't share a basic concept concerning the jurisdiction and autonomy of our profession. If you would have emphasized this aspect, your book's conclusion might have ended somewhat differently. In short, the profession didn't support the librarian. This means the profession still hasn't established jurisdiction.

Robbins Kreimer as far as I know is the only case that--there might be one more recent one-- ALA has entered opposing a librarian. It was pretty sensational because of that. I understood the question, I just haven't gotten to that point. One of the things which I think has happened is that, and I might not have quite gotten this across in the book, and perhaps this might not have happened until more recently where the book ends, is how the question of the jurisdiction of librarians has moved to support of intellectual freedom rather than simply to the support of building collections, where it originally was focused. It is focused much more broadly now. While a particular library was opposed by the IFC, you could say that the profession was not opposed by the IFC in this case, if in fact what it did was say that a library is a public forum which has broad implications for intellectual freedom of the people

who use the library and the contents of the library and the librarians. Apparently the rules in this particular library were framed not at giving the librarian control of the library, but giving the librarian control over Kreimer. I think they decided, that just as in other cases, we know that libraries don't uphold standards of one kind or another. Standards are designed for the profession and the professional association has to uphold the standards. If I go out and catalog any way in the world, I can't participate in the big databases because I don't follow the standards. I think it is the same kind of thing, that if you don't support the tenets of intellectual freedom in a sufficiently broad way, a professional association can't support you. They have to support the standards which they embraced. So, I don't see this as contradictory.

Kawasaki I agree.

Robbins I see that as the individual librarians frequently don't uphold the professional standards in terms of intellectual freedom -- and this is one of the big complaints today--such as librarians who hide books on sex education or other topics they don't want kids or adults to see. If something is very controversial they won't buy it. These things are condemned in the library press constantly. This is just like this. The profession had to maintain the standards even if it opposed a particular library or librarian. That's what happened in the South with integration. They weren't supporting those librarians, they were supporting the principal that access to information should be available to all.

Kawasaki What you are saying then is that professional librarians need further education of the principles of intellectual freedom on a consistent basis. Is this right?

Robbins Oh yes, and they have to have education on those standards. Without education of the standards the profession goes off in a different direction. There is a lot of evidence now that says that library workers in the US who are educated in accredited library schools are more likely to support intellectual freedom than workers with undergraduate certificates and school librarians without an MLS--because they haven't been educated on the standards.

4. Overall Impressions

Kawasaki You show us ALA's responses and reactions to threats to intellectual freedom for the thirty years. Certainly ALA "reacted." However, after reading this book I still wonder if ALA's reactions were positive independent actions or forced reactions. The *Wilson Library Bulletin's* editor Stanley Kunitz on the Library's Bill of Rights, David Berninghausen on the Cold War era and Eric Moon and John Wakeman on desegregation, played active and sometimes key roles to promote intellectual freedom. Kunitz is a poet and Berninghausen wasn't an ALA "insider" and both Moon and Wakeman (originally English editors, especially Moon who had just arrived) are, so to speak, outsiders. They seem to have been a force on library profession generally and the Intellectual Freedom Committee and the ALA particular. Furthermore Moon strategically asked Rice Estes to write an article "Segregated Libraries" (1960)⁽²⁰⁾ to stimulate discussion of the racial segregation issue.

In short, this situation was set up by outsiders, Some librarians were within ALA, like Archie McNeal, LeRoy Merritt or Eli Oboler, but if you agree with this wouldn't you say that

ALA was forced into action?

Robbins Moon and Wakeman became editors of library journals after being librarians. Kunitz was actually a poet. I tried to find him, but he never answered any of my letters. He certainly urged the library community to adopt the Library Bill of Rights. But by itself, I don't think that this would have done it.

Kawasaki I also don't think Kunitz's role was a major one in ALA's adoption of the Library's Bill of Rights. However, he popularized the idea of the Library's Bill of Rights in his column in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and diffusion of ideas are very important when one looks at the larger profession.

Robbins I think that Moon and Wakeman were very important in bringing pressure on the ALA. I think, however, that there were other important players, some of whom I already mentioned--Dan Lacy, Archie McNeal... In other words, yes, I think that ALA frequently had to be pushed before it responded (sometimes more so than in some cases), but I think that is the way that change happens. I think that people feel a threat and then respond - regardless whether the threat is positive or negative.

Kawasaki I have the impression that ALA officials didn't take actions on their own will, but that outside forces pushed them into action.

Robbins I think that it is largely true, and it is especially true of the Executive Board, which was very conservative and didn't want changes.

5. Further Research

Kawasaki In the area of intellectual freedom, the core issue is of censorship of published materials in libraries.

Robbins That has historically been true.

Kawasaki But other areas of concern, such as free access to library materials, the librarian and intellectual freedom, and the library and intellectual freedom (advocacy vs. neutrality) have emerged from the end of 1960's, when your work terminated. On that point, the end of your book could be the beginning of another work. Are you going to study these developments?

Robbins I don't have any particular plans at this point (I am trying to remember the issues I have on my research agenda) because I am mainly interested in the McCarthy era. I just can't get that out of my head. As you know, I am also very interested in integration. Those two issues are of great interest to me, and now I have an opportunity to look at the relationship between libraries and publishers from 1951 to the 1970s. The American Association of Publishers, which in its original name, the American Book Publishers Council, was the group which joined the ALA in the Freedom to Read Statement, has asked me to consider writing a history of the American Book Publishers Council. Since that would give me access to their papers, I am thinking it might lead me to additional issues of copyright (how librarians and publishers work together on this), because that is in contrast to what is happening now--and this is actually an intellectual freedom issue, along with the current concentration of publishing in a few firms. I am interested in perhaps moving my approach to looking at what the structural publishing constraints are on intellectual freedom, but first

I have to look at where we came from and how this has evolved. I do not know where this will lead me. It may be that the papers are boring and I won't want to do that, but I haven't seen them yet. I'm also still very interested in loyalty issues and I am not sure where I will go with that.

Right now, I am devoting myself to the study of the Bartlesville (Oklahoma) case. In this case, librarian Ruth Brown was fired. Both McCarthyism and racial segregation intensively appeared in this case. Also, this case is often referred to, but the facts have not been examined.

Kawasaki The Bartlesville case is also on my mind, too. That was why I appreciated your article "Racism and Censorship in Cold War Oklahoma," shortly after it was published in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in 1996.⁽²¹⁾

I read through the manuscript of your second book, *The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown*. I found it extremely interesting. The perspective of the book includes the whole city of Bartlesville, and gives consideration to the significance of the Brown case in the city, then in the library world, and in the society at large at that time.

I would have enjoyed asking you more about collecting information, the present situation and problems of the research in library history, the teaching of library history in American library schools and so on, but I think we have already run out of time. So, I thank you very much for your time today.

Notes

- (1) Louise S. Robbins, *Censorship and The American Library: The American Library Association's Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood, 1996); Yoshitaka Kawasaki (tr.) *Kenetsu to Amerika no Toshokan* (Osaka, Nippon Association for Librarianship, 1998).
- (2) Louise S. Robbins, "Toward Ideology and Autonomy: The American Library Association's Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom, 1939-1969," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Woman's University, 1991).
- (3) An edited Japanese version of the interview appeared in the November 1 issue of *Toshokan-kai* (1998), but this is the first time the complete three hours interview has appeared in the English original.
- (4) Yoshitaka Kawasaki, *Toshokan no Jiyu towa Nanika* (Tokyo, Kyoikushiryo Syuppan, 1995 [*The American Public Library and Intellectual Freedom*]).
- (5) Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association (comp.) *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, Third Edition (Chicago, American Library Association, 1989); Yoshitaka Kawasaki (tr.) *Toshokan no Gensoku* (Tokyo, Japan Library Association, 1991).
Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association (comp.) *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, Fifth Edition (Chicago, American Library Association, 1996); Yoshitaka Kawasaki (tr.) *Toshokan no Gensoku: Shinpan* (Tokyo, Japan Library Association, 1997).
- (6) Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1984).
- (7) Marjorie Fiske, *Book Selection and Censorship: A Study of School and Public Libraries in*

- California* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1959).
- (8) Louise S. Robbins, "The Library of Congress and Federal Loyalty Programs, 1947-1956," *Library Quarterly*, 1994.
 - (9) Louise S. Robbins, "Segregating Propaganda in American Libraries," *Library Quarterly*, 1993.
 - (10) Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay of the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988).
 - (11) Michael F. Winter, *The Culture and Control of Expertise: Toward a Sociological Understanding of Librarianship* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1988).
 - (12) David K. Berninghausen, *The Flight from Reason: Essays on Intellectual Freedom in the Academy, the Press, and the Library* (Chicago, American Library Association, 1975).
 - (13) Judith F. Krug and James Harvey, "ALA and Intellectual Freedom: A Historical Overview," in Office for Intellectual Freedom, *Intellectual Freedom Manual* (Fifth Edition), *op.cit.*.
 - (14) Louise S. Robbins, *The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown: Civil Rights, Censorship, and the American Library* (Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 2000).
 - (15) Ellen W. Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston, Little Brown, 1998).
 - (16) Robert B. Fowler, *Believing Skeptics: American Political Intellectuals, 1945-1964* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1975).
 - (17) Christine Jenkins, "The Strength of the Inconspicuous: Youth Services Librarians, the American Library Association, and Intellectual Freedom for the Young, 1939-1955," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1995).
 - (18) James J. Martin, *An American Adventure in Bookburning in the Style of 1918* (Colorado Springs, Ralph Mules Publisher, 1988).
 - (19) Louise S. Robbins, "Champions of a Cause: American Librarians and the Library Bill of Rights in the 1950s," *Library Trends*, 1996.
 - (20) Rice Estes, "Segregated Libraries," *Library Journal*, 1960.
 - (21) Louise S. Robbins, "Racism and Censorship in Cold War Oklahoma," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 1996.