

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

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Did you see ...?

Information Professional

The Spring issue includes:

- Ayub Khan “A place to escape in prison”, which looks at the impact of design on prison libraries [pp10-11]
- Gareth Evans “Transforming libraries into hubs of Hands-On STEM learning”, which highlights the role that public and school libraries can play in organising, for example, coding workshops, maker spaces, and robotic clubs [pp34-35]
- Beth Montague-Hellen (interviewed by Rob Mackinlay) “‘If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing badly’”, which reflects on Beth’s new book, *Practical tips for equality, diversity and inclusion in libraries*^{1,2} [pp36-38]
- Morag Clarkson and Helen Alper “2025 and disability”, which looks at what the recent report, *Come rain or shine ...*³, includes about disability issues, and then asks for more ideas, comments and insights from *IP* readers [pp58-59]

The School Librarian

The latest issue⁴ includes:

- Alison Hicks “‘It does make me reflect ... on the nature of the profession’: experiences of book banning and censorship in school libraries”, which outlines findings from a small survey she carried out and makes a number of recommendations, including:

¹ See: <https://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/page/detail/practical-tips-for-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-in-libraries/?k=9781783306015>.

There will be an assessment of this in a future *Newsletter*.

² This – and a range of other new titles, including one from John Vincent – are noted on pp42-43.

³ Shared Intelligence. *Come rain or shine: preparing public libraries for the future in an age of uncertainty*. CILIP, 2024, https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip/future_libraries/horizon_scanning_report_-_co.pdf. This was assessed in *Network Newsletter*, 272, Oct 2023, <https://seapn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Newsletter-NS-272.pdf>, pp8-9.

⁴ *The School Librarian*, 73 (1), Spring 2025.

- The need to integrate work on challenging book bans into broader school advocacy campaigns
 - The need for a helpline or step-by-step good practice guide
 - The need for continuing monitoring and research. [pp8-9]
- Aaron Austin Locke “Experiences of a dyslexic librarian” [pp16-17], in which the author “[...] shares how his personal experience of having dyslexia drives him to make his school library a place where struggling readers can thrive.” [p16]

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

How libraries ~~survive~~ thrive: a guide for librarians ... and everyone else in Europe!

“This book [5] presents examples and best practices brought forward by dozens of librarians and communities involved in The Europe Challenge, an annual programme uniting teams from across Europe. Libraries and communities collaborate to tackle issues such as social isolation, inequality, disinformation, and climate crisis by developing creative solutions with support from the European Cultural Foundation and its partners. The initiative fosters a growing network of European libraries working together to enhance democratic participation and social and environmental well-being through citizen-led local change.” [p4]

It is divided into five sections, each packed with examples of terrific work from across Europe. The sections are:

- Libraries as Democracy Hubs
- Libraries as Living Rooms of Europe
- Libraries as Climate Oases
- Libraries as Houses for All
- Libraries as Hospitals for the Mind.

Each section has an introductory essay, case studies, some personal library stories (eg “From Kyiv to Wigan, a Journey of Hope” [pp182-185]) and conversations (eg between Luke Burton and James Urquhart from ACE [pp62-69]), top tips for creating the right sort of library space, and a collection of brief introductions to case studies – these are really interesting and wide-ranging, eg:

Fighting discrimination with books

⁵ *How libraries ~~survive~~ thrive: a guide for librarians ... and everyone else in Europe!* The Europe Challenge, 2024, https://culturalfoundation.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/How-Libraries-Thrive_digital_spreads.pdf.

“In southern Italy, this initiative is challenging discrimination by building a more inclusive library. Working with young people, they run workshops around LGBT+ and multicultural issues – leading to a new diverse library section and inspiring author talks.” [p32]

A creative hub for young refugees

“On Bulgaria’s Black Sea coast, this regional library has become a lifeline for young Ukrainian refugees, acting as a hub for art and cultural activities. Together, visitors are building a community and developing essential skills for the future.” [p140]

Queering Lublin

“In Poland’s shrinking civil society, Queering Lublin works with young LGBTQ+ people to create safe spaces. Through workshops, books clubs, and discussions, the goal is to make new connections with libraries and communities across Europe.” [p144]

There is a mass of information to read/dip into, and it shows both what libraries can provide and also that, whatever the political context, there are some inspirational developments.

Recommended.

LGBTQ+ issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

Banning of LGBTQ+ books and other library materials [continued] and Protests against Drag Queen Storytimes

Press release: “Relocation of 30,000 Young Adult Books in Louisiana Library Shows Harrowing Impact of Moral Panic Over Obscenity and Vague Laws that Lead to Book Censorship”

This new press release⁶ from PEN America highlights a major intervention in Louisiana Library:

“Sabrina Baeta, senior program manager in PEN America’s Freedom to Read program, said: ‘Any public library relocating 30,000 books from its young adult to adult section is simply astonishing. What’s happening in Livingston Parish libraries shows the harrowing impact that vague legislation and a manufactured moral panic around obscenity can have on a community. Even if only temporary in the long run, readers of YA

⁶ “Relocation of 30,000 Young Adult Books in Louisiana Library Shows Harrowing Impact of Moral Panic Over Obscenity and Vague Laws that Lead to Book Censorship”, PEN America press release, 26 Feb 2025, <https://pen.org/press-release/relocation-of-30000-young-adult-books-in-louisiana-library-shows-harrowing-impact-of-moral-panic-over-obscenity-and-vague-laws-that-lead-to-book-censorship/>.

books will lose access to shelf after shelf of books; not to mention the immense burden it places on the librarians tasked with reviewing more than a lifetime of reading materials.”⁷

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums, Archives and Cultural and Heritage Organisations

“Contested heritage” and “Culture wars”

“Smithsonian will continue to tell ‘multi-faceted stories’ of US history, says Lonnie Bunch”

This article⁸ is an important summary of the current US position (so I am quoting some significant parts of it):

“The secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Lonnie Bunch, has affirmed the organisation’s commitment to scholarship and research following an executive order from president Trump directing the removal of ‘improper, divisive or anti-American ideology’ from Smithsonian sites.

Published on 28 March, the Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History executive order [⁹] said the Smithsonian, which runs 21 museums and the National Zoo, had ‘come under the influence of a divisive, race-centred ideology’ that ‘promoted narratives that portray American and Western values as inherently harmful and oppressive’.

The order outlined plans to ‘restore the Smithsonian Institution to its rightful place as a symbol of inspiration and American greatness’, including the appointment of vice president JD Vance to the Smithsonian Board of Regents, where he will work to ‘remove improper ideology’ from the institution.

According to the executive order, Vance will review content particularly in relation to race and gender identity in Smithsonian museums.

The order said the vice president would ensure that future appropriations of the Smithsonian ‘prohibit expenditure on exhibits or programmes that degrade shared American values, divide Americans based on race, or promote programmes or ideologies inconsistent with federal law and policy; and celebrate the achievements of women in the American

⁷ Source: *Public Libraries News*, 2 Mar 2025.

⁸ Geraldine Kendall Adams “Smithsonian will continue to tell ‘multi-faceted stories’ of US history, says Lonnie Bunch”, Museums Association, 1 Apr 2025, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/04/smithsonian-will-continue-to-tell-multi-faceted-stories-of-us-history-says-lonnie-bunch/#msdyntrid=hu7qeMWFHhGwAV7J3LAamHs5OWtnAKO-BJ4FFEqDXyE>.

⁹ The Executive Order is at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history/>.

Women's History Museum and do not recognise men as women in any respect in the museum'.

In a message to Smithsonian staff following the order, Bunch said: 'We remain steadfast in our mission to bring history, science, education, research, and the arts to all Americans. We will continue to showcase world-class exhibits, collections, and objects, rooted in expertise and accuracy.

'We will continue to employ our internal review processes which keep us accountable to the public. When we err, we adjust, pivot, and learn as needed. As always, our work will be shaped by the best scholarship, free of partisanship, to help the American public better understand our nation's history, challenges, and triumphs.'

The Smithsonian would 'remain committed to telling the multi-faceted stories of this country's extraordinary heritage', said Bunch."¹⁰

"Mississippi libraries ordered to delete academic research in response to state laws"

This recent article¹¹ in *Mississippi Today* shows how key research resources are being deleted at the moment:

"A state commission scrubbed academic research from a database used by Mississippi libraries and public schools — a move made to comply with recent state laws changing what content can be offered in libraries.

The Mississippi Library Commission ordered the deletion of two research collections that might violate state law, a March 31 internal memo obtained by Mississippi Today shows [...]

The two research collections state officials ordered for deletion included material from professional journals, conference papers, books, student dissertations, periodicals and newspaper articles.

The Gender Studies Database included academic content from 377 peer reviewed journals. Subjects include, 'Gender inequality, Masculinity, Post-feminism (and) Gender identity.' The other deleted database, titled 'Race Relations Abstracts' focused on a wide range of subjects, including 'Ethnic studies, Discrimination, Immigration studies (and) Ideology.'"¹²

¹⁰ Source: Museums Association email updates, 1 Apr 2025.

¹¹ Michael Goldberg and Candice Wilder "Mississippi libraries ordered to delete academic research in response to state laws", *Mississippi Today*, 8 Apr 2025, <https://mississippitoday.org/2025/04/08/mississippi-libraries-ordered-to-delete-academic-research-in-response-to-state-laws/>.

¹² Source: LinkedIn.

Broader issues – Other Agencies

“Contested heritage” and “Culture wars”

“Why Trump Keeps Winning: The Truth No One Admits”

This is an important article which argues that:

“Yet, there is a crucial question missing from the broader conversation: What exactly has America’s liberal, democratic, and culturally engaged elite done to provoke such profound anger—indeed, outright hatred—from large sections of the predominantly white working class and lower-middle class, driving them towards a politician like Donald Trump? It is astonishing to consider that it was not long ago that Barack Obama secured a second presidential term in 2012, suggesting that something significant must have occurred in the intervening years to prompt this dramatic reversal in American politics.

Economic inequality and hardship have frequently been cited as explanations for Trump’s rise. However, this cannot fully explain his appeal, as Obama secured re-election just four years after the global financial crisis. Similarly, racism, though deeply embedded in American society, is hardly a new phenomenon. Immigration is another often-cited factor, yet the United States has always been a nation of immigrants. While these elements have undoubtedly contributed, there must be another critical factor that enabled Trump not only to win but to win again—even after orchestrating an illegal attack on the US Congress.”

Bo Rothstein suggests that:

“Surveys have also indicated that a majority of white Americans believe discrimination against themselves is a more significant issue than discrimination faced by Black Americans. Although I consider this perception disconnected from reality, it nonetheless shapes voter decisions, as perceptions, rather than objective realities, guide voting behaviour.

How has this perception become widespread? One critical factor is the Democrats’ extensive reliance, particularly from their left-wing faction, on identity politics. Practically, this has meant the establishment of targeted programmes designed to benefit various minority groups and sometimes women. Hochschild’s research [¹³] reveals that such programmes are

¹³ Arlie Hochschild. *Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American Right*. The New Press, 2016. According to Wikipedia:

“The core of the book is Hochschild's attempt to distill the worldview of Tea Party supporters, who formed part of the same constituency that heavily backed Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. According to Hochschild, Tea Party supporters have reacted against the changing face of America in the last few decades. They perceive a situation where women, immigrants, and racial minorities have been ‘cutting in line’ to achieve the American Dream. They also feel as though some government officials (such as President Barack Obama) have been waving these same

often viewed by working-class whites as unjust quotas for desirable jobs and educational opportunities. In response, many companies, universities, and public institutions have created specialised departments dedicated to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). It is significant that one of Trump's earliest actions upon returning to office was to dismantle these DEI initiatives across the US federal government.

Rather than adopting universal policies that would benefit broad sections of society, Democrats have inadvertently cultivated an image among white working-class voters of favouring minority groups—an approach perceived by many as akin to corruption. Targeted programmes frequently arouse suspicion of unfairness due to the complex and subjective nature of determining eligibility—deciding who qualifies as 'White,' 'Black,' or somewhere in between, and managing nuanced decisions regarding preferential treatment."

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

DEI = Diversity, Equality and Inclusion

STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

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groups to the front of the line through affirmative action programs and other kinds of support. As a result of these perceptions, the older, largely white, and disproportionately male supporters of the Tea Party increasingly feel, as Hochschild's title indicates, like strangers in their own land."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strangers_in_Their_Own_Land.