

Publishing the Long Civil Rights Movement at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

by **Sylvia Miller** (Director, the Long Civil Rights Movement Project, University of North Carolina Press) <skm@email.unc.edu>

Why Collaborate

Much has been written about the epic clash between commercial publishers and libraries over the price of serials and the resulting decreased access to journal content. The open access movement that was academia's response has certainly had significant and far-reaching consequences, and many publishers regard it negatively, placing it somewhere on a scale between a minor annoyance and a serious threat. Yet it is important to recognize that many scholarly publishers have whole departments of people — editorial, production, marketing, sales — whose careers have been built upon the relationship of the publishing house with libraries. These professionals have a detailed appreciation and understanding of the workings and the needs of libraries and often regard libraries as partners in the publication process. Formal collaboration between scholarly publishers and libraries might be seen as an extension of a relationship that already exists but needs to be explored and revised.

Librarians' and publishers' roles are changing, and the possibilities offered by the online medium have caused us all an identity crisis. We used to know how our roles fit together, and now that relationship is up for reinterpretation.

Publishers have been accustomed to creating an archivable product (usually a book or journal), which included universally understood navigational tools (a table of contents, for example, page numbers, cross-references, index) and turning it over to libraries, which made the product accessible and archived it. Now these roles overlap: many libraries expect publishers to host the digital book and provide perpetual access to it. Publishers create aggregations



of content because library cataloging has not yet made federated searching possible at a level granular enough to make all the different types of published content easily and seamlessly discoverable. Publishers invest millions of dollars in digital conversion, software, retooling production workflows, staff retraining, search engines, Website design, information architects, developers, hosting, online security and access management, online subscription systems, and standardized user statistics, often without a concrete prediction of potential returns (the business equivalent of a high dive without knowing if water awaits below), only to have library customers complain that online publications are too expensive.

Meanwhile many librarians wonder whether the library will be needed in the future to provide access to scholarship. What about its role as archive, since bits and bytes are inherently so ephemeral? What about the librarian's role as guide, educator, detective, gatekeeper; will those services be automated and replaced by online portals? Are publishers' aggregated services taking away librarians' independence in choosing which publications to acquire? Will accuracy, authority, indeed truth win the battle for eyes and minds? Libraries find negotiating price and license agreements onerous and identifying duplication challenging or impossible. They conduct usability studies on their Websites to figure out why patrons are not aware of the existence or value of the e-resources that librarians have so painstakingly chosen and negotiated to license or purchase. Librarians daringly move into new territory, creating online collections, providing publishing services, and challenging the prevailing subscriber-pays model with Open Access publishing.

We all wonder where scholarly publishing is going and who will pay for it in the long term: customers, authors, scholarly societies, libraries, end-users, taxpayers, foundations, advertisers? In our collective desire for sustainability, we try hybrids of all of the foregoing in a vast, fragmented experiment. Many of us wonder whether, ultimately, libraries and scholarly publishers will survive at all and, if so, what they will look like at the turn of the next century. The institutions, publication models, and business relationships that we know will surely have morphed into something we would not recognize today.

One thing we can see clearly right now is that roles are increasingly fluid and overlapping: publishers are providing more and more library-like services while librarians are turning into publishers. Who knows where we will end up; perhaps our roles will disappear, or perhaps they will merge. We are on a journey in the same boat; we may not have a map, but we might as well gather on deck and look at the stars together, take turns at the tiller, and share ideas and skills in facing the adventure that comes to us. No one project can become a new compass, but perhaps a number of collaborations will collectively help us make some useful discoveries.

Project Beginnings

It is important to note that the foregoing description is based on my own twenty-plus years of experience in scholarly publishing and does not represent the official view of the **University of North Carolina**. However, this collaborative project grew out of a collective recognition that roles need to be reexamined and perhaps reinvented.

Initiated by **Kate Douglas Torrey**, Director of **UNC Press**, the **Publishing the Long Civil Rights Movement Project** was based on some of the principles and challenges outlined by the widely read *Ithaka Report* "University Publishing in a Digital Age" (July 26, 2007). Bringing the partners together to agree upon the narrative in the grant proposal took many months and many meetings, but everyone could see the potential synergies among the groups, ideas, and topics of common interest and lasting importance, and the potential to bring them to audiences in new ways. The support of the **UNC-Chapel Hill Provost**, **Bernadette Gray Little**, and **UNC Vice President for Academic Affairs**, **Harold Martin**, was key; ultimately, the project budget included a significant contribution from the press, the **Chapel Hill campus**, and the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. The project plan takes seriously the strong advice of the *Ithaka Report* that principal investigators are necessary for an innovative project but not sufficient: a staff, in particular a dedicated director, was funded, by the Foundation.

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Proposing a collaboration with the university library, where twenty-first century technology was already being used to create online collections that were beginning to look more and more like publications, was natural. **Rich Szary**, Associate University Librarian for Special Collections, and **Kate Torrey** recognized ways that the two entities could learn from each other. It is perhaps unusual in that there are two additional partners: (1) the **Center for Civil Rights** at the **UNC Law School**, headed by **Julius Chambers**, and (2) the **Southern Oral History Program**, headed by a historian, **Dr. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall**. **Dr. Hall's** article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past" (*Journal of American History* 91:4) provided the intellectual scaffolding for the project, which seeks to open up conventional definitions of the civil rights movement demographically, geographically, and chronologically to encompass burgeoning areas of academic study across disciplines. The subject represents an area of strength for both the press and the library's collections, as well as an area of ongoing research and scholarship for the academic partners. All recognized that there would be a benefit for each entity in talking to each other regularly about ideas and priorities. In addition, the work of the **Center for Civil Rights** brings in not only an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship on civil rights but also real-life activism and the awareness that the struggle for civil rights continues.

The grant narrative outlines investigations and processes (conduct an inventory of content; choose or develop a content-management system or "publishing platform"; hold a conference) but deliberately does not describe specific publishing outcomes. The entrepreneurial nature of the project is exciting and appealing but also a great challenge, as it would be all too easy to spend three years thoroughly researching and planning without producing anything more concrete than an interesting report on the software tools, both proprietary and open source, that we have examined; the model projects that we have investigated; and the many possible directions that we have brainstormed.

Since a number of collaborative projects of university presses and libraries have been tried and are described in this issue of *Against the Grain*, I will focus on the aspects of the project that appear to be unusual or unique.

Four Partners

While certainly adding layers of logistical complexity to the project, having two academic centers as partners roots the project firmly within the scholarly life and mission of the university. As we consider various specific directions, priorities, and phases for the project, the project team has confidence that essentially there can be no doubt about the consistent and concrete relevance of our activities to core groups of the university. With these crucial partners, it will be impossible to create publications or services that are not useful and relevant to the university community.

against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born in California; lived early life in Massachusetts, South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee.

FAMILY: Husband **Robert B. Miller** is an executive editor with **Oxford University Press**; daughter **Lia Xin Mary Miller** was adopted in China in 2003 and is six years old.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: 23 years in scholarly publishing, with **Macmillan**, **Scribner**, and **Routledge**, specializing in encyclopedias for libraries.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: I make art with **Lia** and dance flamenco.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *Mrs Dalloway*, *Middlemarch*.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: No spelling tests in today's elementary schools; misuse of the apostrophe.

PHILOSOPHY: The glass is half full.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Working on nine **Dartmouth** award-winning encyclopedias over the years.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To help libraries and publishers to survive and thrive and contribute significantly to solving the trust problem on the Web, and to find new ways to bring the work of scholars and experts to students and the general public.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Still continuing its excruciatingly slow transition from print to electronic. Now, ask me where I see it in 100 years; that's more interesting... 🐾

Of course the history scholarship carried out by the **Southern Oral History Program** and the legal cases and community organizing carried out by the **Center for Civil Rights** are different in nature, but the connections and overlaps that we have already identified might provide direction for parts of the project. In his installation address given on October 12, 2008, the new chancellor of **UNC-Chapel Hill**, **Holden Thorpe**, expressed pride that "for the last 215 years we've had leaders who refused to choose between knowledge and service." One of our many interesting and worthwhile challenges on this project will be to find a way to continue to express and facilitate that connection.

For the press and the library, some things that we do not have in common also make collaboration advantageous, because we can learn from each other. The library team would like to learn more about how publishers tailor publications and collections toward targeted audiences and then market and sell them. The team at the press would like to move more rapidly and thoroughly into the digital world that the library already has entered in sophisticated ways, including complex data structures, multimedia formats, and Web interfaces. Both the press and the library are interested in new models for sustainability: must scholarly resources forever jump, more or less desperately, from one grant to another, or might the market savvy of the press and its familiarity with profit

and loss in business terms bring a new outlook and new revenue streams to the library?

An Open-ended Thematic Focus

Our subject area is potentially quite wide. The danger is that it could become diffuse. The advantages of its large scope, however, are, first, that there are a number of questions, even controversies, about what the "Long Civil Rights Movement" means. Our topic has the potential to encourage scholarly debate and exchange, involve multiple disciplines, and engender new research and publications. Currently we are considering the best way to jumpstart an online conversation, some threads of which might eventually move into online collaboration and publishing, especially if we are able to support that evolution of ideas with useful guidance and online work flows.

A second, related, advantage is that we have the opportunity to focus on subtopics in which our already-existing work is strong. We are carrying out an inventory of unique content related to the "Long Civil Rights Movement" held by each of the partners with a view toward (1) creating an online searchable resource and (2) identifying subject clusters in which we already have particular strength, such as school desegregation and re-segregation in the American South. The "Long Civil Rights Movement" could serve as an umbrella lending coherence to a variety of activities and publications.

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Dedicated Staff

In addition to myself as project director, reporting directly to the director of the press, a number of project staff were funded by the **Mellon** grant and the university. The digital production specialist is a position shared by the press and the library. The director of oral history digital initiatives works at the **SOHP**, and the project's programmer works at the library. Graduate students to conduct research and support the project were funded at the **SOHP** and **CCR**, and there is a full-time project assistant. In addition, thirty percent of the time of an experienced acquisitions editor at the press is officially dedicated to the project. The press committed to making its new positions permanent, even though the grant covers only three years (2008–2010).

The challenge is to bring everyone together to work toward common goals; the advantage is the built-in reach that the project has. For example, the library team has already provided valuable technical advice and helped us to work with the library's IT and Web services departments. Another example is the work of the acquisitions edi-

tor, **Mark Simpson-Vos**, to analyze the press's backlist and identify current or potential authors who are interested in participating.

Mechanics of Collaboration

A year or two from now, it will be interesting to analyze how ideas were expressed, recorded, concretized, and brought to fruition in a project with many players. The project listserv keeps growing; there are twenty-three people on it now, and they are all invited to our monthly meeting. For now, I will simply point out what is probably already obvious: we proceed via meetings, meetings, and more meetings. Some meetings go exactly according to plan, and others veer away from their purported agenda and end up somewhere else. Meetings set up with a core group around a particular topic are open to all, so that ten or fifteen people might show up where only five were expressly required. I find it important to give time to questions and brainstorming, take detailed notes, and follow up with collective emails, schematic drawings, charts, or any written form of summarization. A "next steps" conclusion to each meeting is essential. It ought to be a strong advantage for the project that so many people are interested in it; surely open, clear communication will be the key to successfully harnessing the enthusiasm.

Our Ideas So Far

We have quickly recognized that our ideas are larger and more ambitious than our budget will allow us to fulfill during the three-year grant period. However, we hope that thinking big first and then prioritizing the pieces of our plan will allow us to create an architecture that is poised to grow over time. At this point it is possible to articulate four overlapping pieces to the plan: (1) a searchable resource of unique content; (2) online communities/forums; (3) online publishing services; (4) interrelated online and print publications, possibly prioritizing a new journal and set of monographs.

The project is a pilot project that can be extended to other topic areas and replicated at other institutions. You are invited to check on our progress and participate at <http://lcrm.unc.edu>. 🌸