

May - The Friends File: The Library as Change Agent

From the outset one of the things I've intended is to reflect on the purpose, meaning, and function of libraries. I want to dig into this question of what it is we're doing in libraries and why.

At the beginning of each monthly meeting I share a reading or poem that touches on this. Below is an excerpt from one. It gets at this notion of the way libraries can reach us, touch us, even change us. Its ironic title is *If Librarians Were Honest*. The author, Joseph Mills, was once described as "a nomadic poet who gets a library card every time he moves in order to root himself in each new city."

If Librarians Were Honest

If librarians were honest, they wouldn't act welcoming.
They would say, *You need to be careful...*
They would say, *These rooms house heathens and heretics.*
They would say,
 each book is a Pandora's box,
 so why would you want to open one.
They would post danger signs warning that contact
 might result in mood swings,
 severe changes in vision,
 and mind-altering effects.

If librarians were honest they would admit
the shelves contain a scandalous, permissive mingling
of Malcolm X, Marx, Melville,
Merwin, Millay, Milton, Morrison...

And anyone can check them out.
If librarians were honest, they would say,
No one spends time here without being changed.
Maybe you should go home.
While you still can.

Humorous...but true!

We are living through challenging times: times when all kinds of institutions find themselves under threat. This includes libraries. The fact is that libraries are inherently democratic, with a small “d”. They are “open source.” As our librarian, Adam, reminds us the mission of a library is not to provide answers but access. The good news is, as Joseph Mills notes, libraries can enable changes in vision and mind altering effects. They can be agents of change. I would add: it’s all for good.

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Our next Friends meeting is Monday May 13 from 6:30 to 7:30 pm.
Come join in the conversation.