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People Profile: Sylvia Miller

Editor

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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

Sylvia K. Miller

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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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