

Against the Grain

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An Idea of Openness

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An Idea of Openness

by **Dean John Smith** (Director of Cornell University Press) <djs486@cornell.edu>

*“The diffusion of culture — knowledge, an appreciation of the beautiful, perhaps wisdom — to the common man...is declared to be a new factor in history which should be viewed optimistically.” — Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread & Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (1983)*

Cornell University Press began with an idea of openness in 1869. **President Andrew Dickson White** believed in the diffusion of learning and in the vision of a university press as an “intellectual organ” that would provide a publication outlet for scholarly achievements. **Cornell University** had been founded four years before as an institution where “any person can find instruction in any course of study.” **Ezra Cornell** and **A.D. White** designed a place where students without means could pay their tuition through labor, where practical pursuits were ranked equally with studying the classics, where women and African Americans could also earn a degree, and where a university press would be established — the first university press in the United States.¹ As we celebrate our 150th year, our experiments with open access have generated exciting results.

I arrived at **Cornell** with an idea of openness in the Spring of 2015. I’d worked on OA initiatives in prior professional lives and discovered a Sage House staff with a willingness to experiment on a deep and rich backlist of 6,000 titles. There were new grants available from the **National Endowment for the Humanities** Open Book Program to digitize classic texts and we had published several groundbreaking works in our history. **Cornell Library** quickly became a valuable partner as we used circulation statistics, subject area selectors and faculty to determine the books we wanted to bring back. We’ve republished more than 100 open access books in Anthropology, Classics, German Studies, Literary Theory, Medieval Studies, Political Science, and Slavic Studies. We’ve recorded more than 200,000 article downloads in 150 countries on **Cornell Open**, **Project MUSE** and **JSTOR**. We’ve seen more than 30,000 full book downloads from Kindle and we’ve reopened lines of communication at home and abroad — re-engaging authors, scholars, librarians, faculty, presidents, provosts and the next generation of students around the world.

We stressed that an idea of openness for classic texts extends to the classroom. For our second **NEH** grant, entitled a “Celebration of the Humanities,” we emphasized the use of our literary theory titles in courses and engaged **Caroline Levine**, Chair of English Department at **Cornell** and **Cornell President Hunter R. Rawlings**. We also contacted global consortia including **Lyrasis** and **ICOLC** members to drive course use.

We applied an idea of openness to our frontlist titles as well and we currently participate in **TOME** and **Knowledge Unlatched**. We’ve opened access to the Press’s vast repository of knowledge on the way to digitizing our entire backlist through partnerships with **NEH** and **The Internet Archive**. We believe that what has been called “the low-use monograph” was simply undiscoverable and inaccessible. Open or not, our digital monographs are being used around the world.

We discovered that an idea of openness is a critical core value for university presses in the age of fake news. Openness leads to the discovery and access of peer-reviewed scholarship published by university presses. Some of the most heavily downloaded classic titles — *Proletarian Peasants*, *Revolution of the Mind* and *Revolutionary Acts* — from our **NEH** experience focus on life in Russia during the time of the Bolshevik Revolution. We noticed a surge in Kindle full book downloads after the 2016 Presidential election.

Our recent frontlist open access book, *Communicating Climate Change* is the number one downloaded title from the **Cornell Open** site. **Brantlinger’s** *Bread & Circuses* is the most heavily accessed OA title across all platforms.

The book discusses how the media can best be used to help achieve freedom and

enlightenment on a democratic basis. A reader’s comment on Amazon states, “[The book] shows the clear path to how we are inclined to embrace toxic media.”

These OA texts compliment general interest books that are helping to effect positive change in the world such as *Wounds of War* about why all of us should be concerned about the privatization of veteran’s healthcare and *Deadly River* revealing the UN’s role in the cover up of the cholera epidemic in Haiti. University Presses represent a wealth of reliable, peer-reviewed knowledge in an age where truth is being challenged every day.

Cornell University librarian **Gerald Beasley** and I regularly discuss ideas for openness. We talk about having an access option for our titles and about giving back to the world. All publishers have claimed that the dissemination and discovery of knowledge is a major objective.

This goal is now achievable on a global scale and the revolution will not be televised — but accessed.

Our marketing department published our first OA catalog last month for the **Modern Language Association Meeting** featuring 40 titles in literary theory. On social media, information about this catalog and a link to the titles reached 80,000 individuals, recorded 12,000 engagements and was shared 800 times. The books were downloaded in 6,000 times in PDF form and 1,500 in EPUB in five days. Readers in the Philippines topped all countries.

Fostering ideas of openness and access to knowledge are, we believe, why universities and their presses exist. 🌱

*Dean Smith is the director of Cornell University Press and has recently made his book of poems *American Boy* open to all on **The Internet Archive**.*

Endnotes

1. Laun, Karen, Cornell University Press, Est. 1869, (Ithaca, Cornell, 2019), 1.

Rumors from page 15

Wiley’s journals. **Projekt DEAL** was set up by the **Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany** representing the vast majority of the most important science and research organisations there. The consortium includes nearly 700 mostly publicly funded academic

institutions in Germany such as universities, universities of applied sciences, research institutions and state and regional libraries. As part of the project, national licensing agreements are to be implemented for the entire portfolio of electronic journals of large academic publishers. To support the overall advancement of scholarly research, **Wiley** and **Projekt DEAL** are together launching three important new initiatives as part of the part-

nership. First is a new flagship open access journal. This interdisciplinary journal will publish top-tier scholarship from the global research community and will serve as a unique forum for the development of new open access publishing models. In another key aspect of the agreement, **Wiley** and **Projekt DEAL** will establish an open science and author services development group focused on innovating and

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