Freedom of Information

From Remarks by Ryan A. LaHurd, Ph.D., V.P. for Academic Affairs and Dean of Augsburg College, presented at the State Capitol on Friday March 15, 1991 (Freedom of Information Day)

We have come to accept the phrase "freedom of information" as a useful shorthand to express accessibility to the kind of knowledge which, as Chief Justice Peter Popovich put it, "arms us with power" as citizens. But if you will allow me the kind of linguistic fussiness popularly associated with those of us educated to be professors of English, I would note that "freedom of information" is a misnomer. For only living things can truly be free. Information is not free; people are, or in this case are not. And that, I would argue, is the crux of the issue regarding "the information gulf." Because the American people were not free they did not demand of their press or their government access to the kind of information they needed to exercise their responsibilities as citizens.

More importantly, Americans suffered from the slavery that arises from ignorance. Because most Americans have not been educated at all about the Middle East and the complex history and relationships there, they did not even know what there was to know. They were relegated to seeking and being satisfied with simple explanations. Fearful of our ignorance, we often rely on others to make our choices.

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Upcoming Programs

June 14, 8 p.m., "Piano and Vocal Music of Women Composers: a Musical Presentation by Jim Reilly." Norwegian Memorial Lutheran Church, 10th and Franklin, South Minneapolis (See enclosed flyer)

June 30, 4 p.m. 'til late(?), MISF Picnic, at David Juncker's home, 16 E. Minnehaha Pkwy, Minneapolis. 824-2317 (See map on reverse.)

Bring meat for the grill, a main course dish-to-share (for eight), and a guest who might be interested in joining the Forum.

Also bring one or two "hot" books to "show and tell," and used books marked for sale. (Proceeds to benefit the Forum)
Message from the President
David Wiggins

The recent programs on the Middle East sponsored by the Forum caused me to take a look at what restrictions the I.R.S. might place on our sponsorship of discussion on issues that have a very political nature. To keep our tax exemption we must follow the rule that:

"No substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall constitute the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, or any initiative or referendum before the public ..."

A fellow Forum member recently commented that "Propaganda is a 'weasel word'": One person's propaganda is another's reasoned argument. We can allow the "propaganda" of individuals to be heard without endorsing a view as the official "propaganda" of the organization. We followed this procedure at the public discussions on the war. It was very successful and I would like to see this procedure repeated for subsequent important issues.

This sort of activity is consistent with our mission as defined in our articles of incorporation:

"The M.I.S.F. is a nonprofit organization formed to encourage and promote independent scholarship both outside and within formal institutions of higher education."

To accomplish its purpose, the Forum supports research, writing, and publication of independent scholars; fosters scholarly discussion; educates the public about the role and value of independent scholars and their scholarship; and engages in other educational and charitable services to meet its goals. This corporation is organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes within the meaning of section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code."

A wide variety of Forum activity can fall under this umbrella without endangering our tax-exempt status.

With the purchase of our first home and two consuming school residencies, I have not had much time to devote to the Forum in the last months, but The Forum has made some progress on many other fronts. The hard work of other board and committee members can be seen in other sections of our newsletter. For co-editors David Juncker and Lucy Brusic, the task of assembling the newsletter continues to grow with our activity. Sandy Sandell's volunteer effort maintaining on-going information about the members is a major job as well. Curt Hillstrom with the Membership and Fundraising Committee, and Laura Weber with the Program Committee have been working hard. Past President Susan Smith continues to develop the idea of a Board of Advisors and was key in a recent discussion of a potential major donation. Few realize how much time goes into these volunteer efforts, and we should not take them for granted.

My schedule looks a little freer in the coming months and I hope to be able to put more time into the Forum. I feel confident that we can make some good progress this year on programs that concern many of the members. For example, the board is discussing the Forum's role in helping independent scholars obtain grants, and the potential and pitfalls of a role as fiscal agent.
Program Reviews

"Women and Poetry"

The Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center Gallery lounge at Macalester College provided a gracious setting for the program "Women and Poetry: Bridging the Centuries," a reading by Forum members Joyce Fullard and Morgan Grayce Willow. This event took place May 15, 1991.

Some thirty people, many from the general public, listened to Fullard, editor of British Women Poets 1660 to 1800; An Anthology (Whitson Publishing: 1990) discuss the backgrounds and thematic concerns of women poets of the eighteenth century. She also read selections of the poems collected in her book.

Willow formed a "bridge" from the eighteenth century to the present by reading poems by Ann Bradstreet, Erica Jong and others. She discussed the influence of these poets on her work, and then read selections from her two collections currently in manuscript, The Yellow Memory Wire and Letters to Descartes. The Macalester Gallery cosponsored this event with the Forum.

The Information Gulf

MISF Forums on the War, which took place March 16, inspired a thorough discussion of important ideas. The first of these forums took place in the afternoon at the Stillwater Public Library. The discussion was led by Bob Huber (a disabled Vietnam veteran with an existential knowledge of the failures of the V.A.), Jan Spreeman (a local Junior High teacher,) and Behrouz Naderpour, a naturalized Iranian-American, studying at the University of Minnesota.

The evening program at Macalester College was led by Susan Smith (past-president of the Forum), Fatima Reda (who is a Palestinian-American psychiatrist teaching at the University of Minnesota) and John Finnegan (retired publisher of the St. Paul Pioneer Press.) The discussion ranged from problems with post-traumatic stress disorder, seen in returning troops (a result in most cases of the sight of the suffering that victory inflicted) to the problems of prejudice, threats, and outright hatred encountered by people of Middle Eastern origin living here, to the deeper myths and ethos that united most Americans in the war effort.

Following the evening program, a reception and book display was hosted by the Hungry Mind bookstore. Mary Birmingham of MetroNet, Lynn Bertram of Stillwater Public Library, and Macalester College were all key to the success of these programs.

Panel on Women's Biography

On April 6 a panel of six speakers, co-sponsored by the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum, Women Historians of the Midwest (WHOM), and the Minnesota Historical Society, discussed "Women and Biography: Telling Women's Lives." The program, which was held in St. Paul's historic Exchange Building (formerly St. Agatha's Conservatory) was supported by a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission. It was followed by a reception for the authors of chapters in the groundbreaking book Women of Minnesota, published in 1977. Also honored were the recipients of grants under the Historical Society's new Women's History Research and Grants Program.

The panel brought scholars from a variety of viewpoints and experiences to focus on the problems and contrasts encountered today in writing biographies of women. As suggested by the subtitle of the program "Telling Women's Lives," there are tensions between conventional biography, which is usually interpreted as examining the career and influence of an outstanding individual, and newer perspectives on women's life stories that have come with the development of social history and multiculturalism in the past fifteen years.

The speakers were Winifred D. Wandersee, a professor of history at Hartwick College; Susan Gelger, chair of women's studies at the University of Minnesota; Barbara Stuhler, who is working on a biography of Minnesota suffrage leader Clara Ueland; Peg Heier, well-known author and feature writer with the Star Tribune; Evelyn Fairbanks, author of the recently published autobiography Days of Rondo; and Gretchen Beltz, who was unique in having the subject of her biography, former Congresswoman Coya Knutson, in the audience. The panel was chaired by Gretchen Kreuter, first president of WHOM and co-editor with Barbara Stuhler of Women of Minnesota.

Six MISF members were included in the groups honored at the reception, a fact that clearly demonstrated the

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LaHurd-
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for us because we assume they know better. That approach is, in James Madison's words, "a prologue to farce or tragedy or perhaps both."

Americans suffer from a self-assumed ineptitude in dealing with information. We spend so much time telling ourselves about information overload and the vast quantities of information being produced that we have little time to examine the information itself. We relegate the management of information to others who will select and digest and abstract it for us, offering information in tiny doses with graphs and colored photos so we can handle it. How silly to use the prodigious amount of available information as an excuse. Hundreds of years ago the amount of available information was already too vast for any one person to manage. Yet people went about trying. Thousands of years ago, Socrates observed that the realization of ignorance was the beginning of wisdom—but it is not an excuse for turning over evaluation and management of information to others.

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Annual Meeting

The Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum is alive and growing, said President Susan Smith in her report to the annual meeting of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum, December 1, 1990. The meeting took place in the Heritage Room of the Minneapolis Public Library.

Smith recalled that in 1986, there were thirty-five people in the Forum. On Dec. 1, 1990, there were one hundred twenty members. The Forum is the largest of nine similar organizations in the country.

Membership in the Forum, reported Smith, is equally divided between men and women. The strengths of the Forum are its varied study groups and the fact that there are no earned degree or publishing requirements for membership. The members have varied professional interests.

In addition, Smith recounted, the Forum has been successful in publishing a newsletter with the help, first, of Susan Milnor and, later, of Merryalice Jones.

Moreover, through the courtesy of the Hennepin County Historical Society, the Forum is able to have a phone and a meeting space. MISF owns a copying machine and is in the process of acquiring a page scanner through corporate donation.

An important goal for the forum has been building relationships with other organizations. In the past year, the Forum has co-sponsored programs with: James Ford Bell Library, Roger Sweeney of the Library Outreach Program, the Hennepin County Center for the Arts, Minneapolis Public Library, Temple Israel, Adath Jeshurun, and the Minnesota Historical Society.

Sweeney briefly thanked the Forum and the Board for their participation in the Library services study.

Other business at the annual meeting included a treasurer's report and a discussion of the cost of producing the newsletter. Members were advised that volunteer help within the organization could help to hold down the cost of printing the newsletter.

The final order of business was the election of new officers and a new board.

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Quote without Comment:

"Carlson scoffed at the warning of education officials that the University Library was severely underfunded, suggesting instead at a meeting Thursday that those who need books can go to the public library."

From the Minnesota Daily, February 26, 1991
Editors' Note: A paragraph was omitted from this article in our Spring newsletter. It is here reprinted in its corrected entirety. We apologize to the author for our error.

Science and the Independent Scholar
by Roger Jones

A few months ago, I tuned into a radio talk. The topic was science and since I'm a scientist, it caught my attention. But this was not your everyday science talk—this guy was condemning science. He said (and I'm paraphrasing), "I used to think that science could get us out of our troubles. I really believed that pollution of the environment, nuclear weapons, information overload, and so on, were all technical problems that science would eventually solve. But with the passing years, I've lost my faith in science. If we don't stop science, it will stop us. The problems are multiplying much faster than the solutions, and we can no longer wait for the ethics of the scientific community to curb the researcher's obsession to do a thing simply because it's possible or because human curiosity must be satisfied."

"Strong language," I thought to myself. And yet, the guy didn't sound like a kook. He knew what he was talking about.

Despite his radical message, he reasoned carefully and agonized over the enormity of his position. "Who was he, anyway?" I wondered. "Could a scientist be so openly critical of science?" As the speaker concluded, he wisely proposed no simplistic solution, but urged serious thought about the future consequences of unbridled scientific research. The announcer came on: "You've just heard a talk by Pete Seeger." (I knew that voice had a familiar ring.)

"Pete Seeger," I mused. "Where does he get off advocating an end to science? What right does he..." But I caught myself. After all, Seeger has certainly spent most of his life struggling against the forces that oppress humanity. He is profoundly committed to using his art and fame in the service of what he sees as anti-human trends in our civilization. He's thought about such matters as much as, if not more than, most Americans. Besides—and perhaps of greatest importance to me—I believe that, as a reasoning and intelligent person, Seeger has as much right as any scientist (perhaps more!) to critique and evaluate science in the light of its effect on modern life.

Now, Pete Seeger may not be an obvious model for an independent scholar. (He'd surely chuckle at the very idea.) But in his way, he's certainly a wise and seasoned student of history, politics, and human nature. His voice deserves respect and consideration. And so do the voices of thousands of people—who may or may not call themselves scholars—but whose positions as outside observers and students of science give them an advantage over insiders in objectively judging the consequences, importance, and influence of science.

Independent scholars (not to mention independently minded people) whose principal interests lie in the humanities, and who have studied science from a conceptual, philosophical, historical, and aesthetic point of view, are in a position to make valuable contributions to the long-avoided (and even taboo) cultural and ethical evaluation of science. Unfortunately, we are unlikely ever to get such an evaluation from within the scientific community itself. Scientists need prodding and guidance, although they are often too arrogant and self-centered to see it. Here is an opportunity and an obligation that the community of independent scholars cannot afford to miss.

Ed. Note: Roger Jones is Professor of Physics at the Univ. of Minnesota and the author of Physics as Metaphor.

"Reviews" (Cont. from p.3)

relationship between women's history and independent scholarship. They are Susan Smith and Rhoda Gilman, who both wrote chapters for Women of Minnesota, and Jane Curry, Sarah Mason, Linda Schloff and Marianne Wargel, all of whom have received grants for new research.

The Impact of Tourism on the Teaching of Arts

Ethnomusicologist Cliff Sloane presented the lecture, "The Impact of Tourism on Art Education in Thailand" on March 21st, 1991. He illustrated the talk with videos taken in Thailand while on a Jerome Foundation study/travel grant. The talk was co-sponsored by, and held at, the Science Museum of MN. A guided tour by four members representing the special Hmong Odyssey Exhibit preceded Sloane's address.
Study Groups

Study groups provide members the opportunity to explore ideas through reading and discussion. Depending on the group’s interests, a familiar topic may be studied in depth, or an unknown topic may be investigated. The ideas offered by group members are often thought-provoking and helpful to the independent scholar.

You are invited to “sit in” or join an established study group. Membership is not mandatory. If you are interested in convening one or more of these groups or starting a group of your own, pending Board approval, please contact David Wiggins, 722-8643. Following is a list of active study groups:

18th/19th Century Study Group Contact Joyce Fullard 333-4605

This study group’s multidisciplinary interests include art history, literature, philosophy, history, and political science, from the Restoration period to the early 19th century. Anyone interested in sampling the activities of the 18/19th century is invited to call 377-0866 for time and location.

Patterns in Women & Spirituality, Convener Susan Smith

Chaos Study Group, Host and Convener Dave Megarry, 1885 W. University Avenue, #229, St. Paul 55104 646-8104

This group is composed of engineers and scientists, linguists, dramatists, business consultants and musicians. We have discussed Gleick, viewed graphics programs, and conducted and “open forum” on our interests in chaos theory. Many attended the October 1990 Nobel Conference in St. Peter. Following the Nobel, our study group organized a mini-conference with the Science Museum, St. Paul. We have discussed “Physiology and Perception” (Freeman: Sci Am) and are finishing up The Turbulent Mirror on June 12.

Intercultural Diversity, Convener Lucy Smith 698-9671

Discussers from social work, communications, history, and interreligious communication propose: awareness of each other’s pursuits, help with problems with those, a reading list to discuss, and explorations of perspectives. No longer melting in a pot, Americans now confront a “fashionable” concept of cultural diversity, but does preservation of one’s culture imply isolation? hostility? the right to judge? What aspects of preserved diversity can smoothly cohabit?

Science and Humanities Convener Huldah Curl, 625-8322 or 926-5988; Hostess Ginny Hansen, 374-5505

Over the years, a varying group has discussed Jones Physics as Metaphor; Hofstadter Godel, Escher, Bach; Bohm/Peat Science, Order & Creativity among others. Next session, June 11, will discuss Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality, pp 101-132.

The following groups are currently inactive:

International Feminism Group Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

Philosophy and Cultural Criticism Study Group Cont. Patrice Koelsch 722-3813

Social History Study Group Contact Jo Blatt 291-7048

Art Historians Study Group Cont. Catherine Vesley 789-5888

Philosophy Study Group Cont. Rod Haberman 421-0722

Family History Study Group Contact Susan Smith 871-112

Writing Support for Women Study Group Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

(Presently being formed)

Memes Study Group Contact David Juncker 824-2317
Wish List

At a recent meeting of the Board, the following wish list was generated:

File cabinet
Computer (IBM & Mac)
Typewriter
Postage stamps
Kinko's copy passes
Bookshelf
Laser Printer

In-kind contributions to the Forum are tax-deductible.

Opportunities

625-0727

October 17-19, 1991, Midwest Popular Culture/ American Culture Assoc. Meeting,
Popular Culture, Bowling Green State University,
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

Friends of the Forum

The following individuals have given money for the publication and distribution of the newsletter:

Eleanor M. Anderson
Victor P. Caliri
John Carmichael
Rhoda Gilman
David Megarry
Brian Mulhern
Magnus & Norma Olson
Susan Margot Smith
Wm K. & Jean Smith
Robert Thimmesh
David Wood
James Youngdale

While we are seeking funds to support the continued growth of the Forum, we need volunteers to help with a variety of administrative tasks. If you can volunteer even a small amount of time, your help would be greatly appreciated.

Contact anyone on the Board for information on the opportunities available.

Membership Application

to the
Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum

Regular

$15.00 (under/unemployed)

between $15.00 and $36.00

$36.00 (regularly employed)

Household

$18.00 (under/unemployed)

between $18.00 and $40.00

$40.00 (regularly employed)

Sustaining

$50.00 or more

Donor

$75.00 or more

Benefactor

$100.00 or more

Name________________________
Address________________________
City__________________________
State_________Zip___________
Telephone (home)_______________
(work)_____________________

Mail to: David Wiggins
4340 41st Ave. S.
Minneapolis MN 55406