

## From the Editor: On Bibliographies

Law librarians exhibit a great deal of faith in the continued usefulness of bibliographies to legal researchers. Within our profession are many qualified and talented individuals, conversant in the literatures of specialized fields of law and skilled in the techniques of both traditional and computer-assisted literature searching. The pages of *Law Library Journal*, *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, and many law reviews frequently contain bibliographies, some of which are significant intellectual achievements. In both scholarly and practical legal research, the bibliography is acknowledged as an important tool, and the legal bibliographer's work is respected. We honor our most accomplished bibliographers annually with the Joseph L. Andrews Award.

Yet, one might wonder in this age of increasing reliance on electronic retrieval of bibliographic information whether the traditional research bibliography will continue to play so important a role in the research process. Today, a desktop computer with appropriate software and a modem can become a true "scholar's workstation,"<sup>1</sup> providing its user with assistance at all stages of the research and writing process, including literature surveys and the capturing of citations for later manipulation and formatting. Writers on the potential applications of computers to academic research are quick to note the advantages of end-user data-base searching over the library catalog and paper indexes.<sup>2</sup> Will bibliographies compiled by intermediaries become obsolete in an automated research environment, where each scholar can access a world of information through an electronic work station?

Of course, it is easy to overemphasize the usefulness of a quick and dirty on-line search of the literature, and to forget how much valuable information either is not indexed electronically or is accessible only through sophisticated search strategies. The particular value of a compiled bibliography has always been in the amount of digging the compiler has done in advance of the researcher and in the presentation of useful material from sources too dispersed for the researcher to cover without duplicating the bibliographer's time and effort. Even in an electronic age, excellence in bibliography will require a substantial human component. The need for quality bibliographic

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1. See Rosenberg, *The Scholar's Workstation*, 46 C. & RESEARCH LIBR. NEWS 547 (1985).

2. See, e.g., J. LAWRENCE, *THE ELECTRONIC SCHOLAR: A GUIDE TO ACADEMIC MICROCOMPUTING* 90-91 (1984). Lawrence does not discuss the role of prepared bibliographies in the research process.

work should expand as readers search for guidance through increasingly complicated literatures. Critical and evaluative bibliographies by subject specialists should become of greater value to researchers as the amount of potentially useful information grows.

It is puzzling, therefore, that the most recent guide to the compilation of bibliographies<sup>3</sup> does little to argue an affirmative case for the importance of compiled bibliographies at a time when the advantages of end-user searching are being lauded. D. W. Krummel's *Bibliographies: Their Aims and Methods*, however, does provide more than a nuts-and-bolts guide to bibliography. His book presents an elegant framework for the tasks of the compiler and creates an incentive to produce works that are both useful to others and capable of being viewed as scholarly achievements on their own. His thoughtful discussion of the aims and methods of bibliography supports a belief that bibliographies will continue to play an essential role in the research process. His advice on a number of topics is worth consideration by prospective compilers preparing works for publication or for in-house use.

We are all familiar with the questions that arise for the bibliographer in organizing a project: how to determine scope, deciding on annotations, developing a research strategy, and deciding how best to organize and present the finished work. Some of these matters may be more problematic than others. Determining scope, for example, can become a process of paring and adding that goes on much further into the actual compiling of entries than the bibliographer wishes. An important part of the initial decision on scope is whether to aim for a completed project that is comprehensive in coverage or one that is selective, based on stated criteria. Given the masses of available information on most subjects, today's bibliographer is faced with a significant challenge in reaching comprehensiveness. And, given the possible variations in quality (however measured) among the many items published on a subject, might not the reader be better served by a selective compilation aimed at specific needs? There are a number of arguments for and against comprehensiveness. Krummel, for one, concludes that the weight of the evidence favors it.<sup>4</sup> His point makes sense. Not only does the comprehensive bibliography preserve the reader's right to pass judgment on the worth of the materials, but the compiler has available the means for distinguishing among the entries within a comprehensive listing. Inferior titles can be relegated to an appendix. Better, the bibliographer can use annotations to show differences of quality as well as other features of the items cited.

Annotations are valuable to the reader for a number of reasons. An annotated bibliography probably is always more helpful than a simple listing

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3. D. KRUMMEL, *BIBLIOGRAPHIES: THEIR AIMS AND METHODS* (1984).

4. *Id.* at 33.

of titles. As Krummel notes, "If the kind thing to call a bibliography is 'useful,' its counterpart for an annotation is 'thoughtful.'"<sup>5</sup> There are many approaches to annotation, in terms of both content and style. Clearly, the annotation should provide information that is not found in the citation itself. Beyond this, annotations can be either informative (with substantive content, perhaps substituting for the cited text) or indicative (to let the reader know whether the text should be consulted). The author's credentials may be indicated in the annotation, the work may be compared to other works or editions, and, if the compiler has confidence in his or her expertise, value judgments can be expressed.

In style, annotations should be lean and spare and not repeat what is clearly expressed in the title. The more wordy the annotations, the more difficult it is to scan the bibliography. The compiler must also choose between constructing annotations in full sentences and sentence fragments. Fragments are most appropriate when a specific and direct message is to be communicated. As Krummel puts it, full sentence annotations "are clearly the more flattering to readers, but fragments show greater respect for their busyness."<sup>6</sup> Whichever approach is chosen, consistency is important. Krummel also provides guidance on questions of tense, grammar, laudatory comments, use of adjectives, and the relationships between terms used in the annotations and those in the indexes to the bibliography.

Another factor in the bibliography's success is its organization for presentation. Should the bibliography be sequenced alphabetically, chronologically, or under a classified system? Krummel provides a useful analytical frame for making organizational choices and the arguments pro and con, as well as advice on the use of cross-references and indexes. He also points out that in making choices about the sequence of entries, indexes, and other supplementary features, "the compiler should understand that the organization will be viewed as a coherent intellectual expression in its own right, and an important element in the justification for the list itself."<sup>7</sup>

What the book makes clear is that, to be effective, bibliographers must plan their work carefully with constant concern for the needs of the researchers who will use it. Compiled thoughtfully and with purpose, subject bibliographies will continue to occupy a useful and significant place in the process of scholarly research—even in an age where researchers are capable of doing much more direct searching for bibliographic information than in the past. And at times the work of the bibliographer can be raised from the drudgery of "burrowing" for factual information to the level of scholarship in its own right.<sup>8</sup>

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5. *Id.* at 76.

6. *Id.* at 80.

7. *Id.* at 98.

8. Krummel provides his own criteria for recognizing bibliographies that have achieved intellectual eminence. *Id.* at 147-48.

Achievement of scholarly contribution should be the goal of the bibliographer. Even in this age of increasingly easier mechanical access to information, there remains a role to be played by the skilled compiler and analyst of a specialized literature who is prepared to create a path for later researchers. As Krummel puts it:

The compiler's highest responsibility to his readers and to his literature, the noblest use of his faculties and his worthy duty to scholarship, is to promote the excellent, recognizing in passing the pedestrian and damning or suppressing the false and incompetent. A bibliography, if it deserves critical approbation, must itself reflect the critical process: fools and cowards are part of the problem, not the solution.<sup>9</sup>

His words may be tinged with hyperbole, but they point out the appropriate goals for the bibliographer in law, as well as in other disciplines. Those goals continue to be worth attaining.

Dick Danner

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9. *Id.* at 33.