

3B—Academic Freedom, Neutrality, and “Civil” Discourse: The Case of Stephen Salaita at the University of Illinois

Foucault, the “Facts,” and the Fiction of Neutrality: A Critique of Neutral Librarianship, Heidi Johnson (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).

Using Foucault, and Latour and Woolgar, I show how the discipline of bodies, and construction of “facts,” is similar to the process of molding information and information professionals to be neutral. Neutrality is intended to safeguard intellectual freedom. The argument is that neutral information professionals will serve people without imposing their own biases. Yet neutrality is perhaps a myth and, further, striving for it may be counterproductive. In fact, owning and disclosing one’s biases actually allows information seekers to search with greater awareness and thus with a greater degree of intellectual freedom—freedom to choose their own position.