

What makes a librarian bad-ass? Joshua Hammer tries to explain that question in *The bad-ass librarians of Timbuktu and their race to save the world's most precious manuscripts*. The theme of this book is that the goals of librarians, mainly to preserve and share knowledge as in Gorman's commitment to literacy and learning goal, are more important to the world than the lives of the librarian and the consequences of defying invaders.

The first significant point the author makes is with a man wandering amongst families with a backpack and some cash trying to barter for rare items that were hidden in walls, trunks, and floorboards, knowledge so precious to that it is kept like a family secret. Hammer discusses the history of Timbuktu to show the value of the items being unique and obscure. The families of the Mali region where the story is set are convinced to preserve their books of lineage, philosophy, and culture, by keeping them hidden and not speaking about them publicly. Sadly, without proper care, the items were decaying. The traveling barterer, Mamma Haidara, works very hard, collects many books, starts to preserve and archives in a private library in his home. He spends his whole life collecting books that never get categorized in his lifetime and the role of the librarian passes to his son.

Abdel Kader Haidara moves his collection to Timbuktu to start a public library with the help of some foreign grants. War comes in and Timbuktu is invaded by Al Qaeda whose religious beliefs forbid controversial literature. The workers at the Haidara library, while acting like they are doing maintenance, slowly smuggle as many books as possible out of the library, into homes of friends and relatives, and eventually down the river to organizations that will help them move the books out of the country that is persecuting them. These actions risk the lives of the librarians and anyone who helps them, yet they persist.

In the 12th century, the region was a thriving trade route. In the 16th century, an Islamic University was established and the city became very popular until the Trans-Atlantic trade routes were established. Europeans arrived in the 19th century and converted the town to French rule. In the 21st century, the government of Mali and the French fought the Tuareg rebels which ended up in the burning of the Ahmed Baba Institute library. The literary finds from Timbuktu rewrote the known history of the region. The book references a conversation on Reddit so I followed the archived AMA thread to learn more. A quote from Diakite says, "We feel very strongly that every manuscript in the corpus is important to someone. During the evacuation we did not prioritize, we will not do so during the individual boxing work we are trying to finance now either. The corpus is extremely diverse - from cookbooks to holy [Qurans] with everything in between."

Personally, I loved this book. Although the history of the region, the librarian's journey, and the significant players in the conflict does slow down the real-life thrills and adventure portion of removing books that are in danger, I learned much about knowledge of this part of Africa and also about the importance of archiving. Without proper technique and organization, without a proper location to store artifacts, an entire culture can be lost and nearly was. Hammer

outlines what is beautiful about Timbuktu's books so that you, the reader, are engaged in finding out whether the books are saved or destroyed.

Major conflict of the book comes from changing values. As a new government tries to takeover Timbuktu, the values of privacy, democracy, equity of access, commitment to literacy and learning, and service, Gorman's core values, are discarded. When these values were not present for public libraries and government organizations as a whole, the precious collections of history that people spent their lifetimes putting together were threatened to be destroyed. If not for the quick and careful work of the librarians, hundreds of years of history would be gone today. Given our current political climate in America, where there is consideration to sacrifice privacy and confidentiality for government control, this book is extremely relevant to those who fear the current administration will destroy precious data. It is easy to draw a parallel from contraband books in Timbuktu to climate change data from the National Parks, EPA, and NASA that was saved through hacking and offsite back up. As a student, a citizen, and a member of the library science community, I feel very strongly toward preservation. I believe everyone in this profession or those who have a love for books would gain a greater appreciation for librarians and the processes and careers involved in library science- preservation, curation, digitizing, funding, and acquisitions by reading this book.

Gorman, M. (2000). "Our Enduring Values: Librarianship in the 21st Century". ALA Editions. ISBN 0-8389-0785-7

Hammer, J. (2016). *The bad-ass librarians of Timbuktu and their race to save the world's most precious manuscripts* (1st ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kader, A., & Diakite, S. (2014). *We are Abdel Kader and Stephanie Diakité and we are trying to save 300,000 ancient manuscripts and books from imminent destruction from the libraries of Timbuktu. Ask us anything! • r/IAmA. reddit*. Retrieved 21 April 2017, from https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/1faiis/we_are_abdel_kader_and_stephanie_diakit%C3%A9_and_we/