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Research Revolution

Over the years that I have served in the Westmoreland Library Network there have been programs promoted and funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). One of them, which I facilitated at WLN Libraries, was entitled "Research Revolution: Science and the Shaping of Modern Life." It is a film program for adults and teens. There are six films in all, which I showed and discussed with participants at numerous Libraries from 2003 to 2011, and then in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Pittsburgh from 2012 to 2014. I never tired of watching those films or talking about them.

They are all, despite being about 20 years old now, as relevant and fresh today as they were then, so I still want to talk about them. Here are their titles:

- (1) Atomic Age - I Am Become Death: They made the Bomb
- (2) Genetics - Our Genes, Our Choices: Who Gets to Know?
- (3) Robotics - Into the Body
- (4) Forensics - The Gene Squad
- (5) Global Warming - What's Up with the Weather?
- (6) Biodiversity - Stewardship of the Planet

The first, about the Atomic Age, has rare film footage of Manhattan Project life in Los Alamos, as well as of the first nuclear detonation at the Trinity test site, and then of the dropping of an atomic bomb from the Enola Gay over Hiroshima near the end of the war with Japan. There were only three actual Manhattan Project bombs of that time, all assembled in Los Alamos; one remained for Nagasaki. The film shows the horrors, in case one can only imagine a mushroom cloud and its aftermath, in case one thinks atomic bombs are "just bombs."

The Genetics film is of a roundtable discussion about the ethics of gene manipulation. Recently retired Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer is one of several participants representing a good cross-section of interests. CRISPR Cas9 gene editing isn't known until 2012, but the debate around the table is just as relevant as if it were then or 2022.

Global warming and Stewardship of the Planet were no less relevant around 2000 as today. Progress has been prevented to a large extent of course by unscientific nonsense being spewed by people who have their own agendas. The films explain the science in plain terms. All the films speak in plain terms. That is what makes them exceptional.

When the Murrysville Community Library earned the right to have and use these films, it was the only Library in Pennsylvania to do so. The NSF allowed one award winner per state, and then it trained all 50 of us at its home base in Arlington, VA. I was the facilitator trained for Pennsylvania. The films are still in the MCL collection, and available for viewing. They have been converted from tapes to DVDs, so they are

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accessible in both media. There are book reading lists too, but those are in my possession.

The Research Revolution Film Clubs, however, have long since gone silent. I think that we finally ran out of interested participants to view the films, and to debate about them. Consider this article an invitation to watch them anew, either on your own or in a group airing. Ask for them at your Library.

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