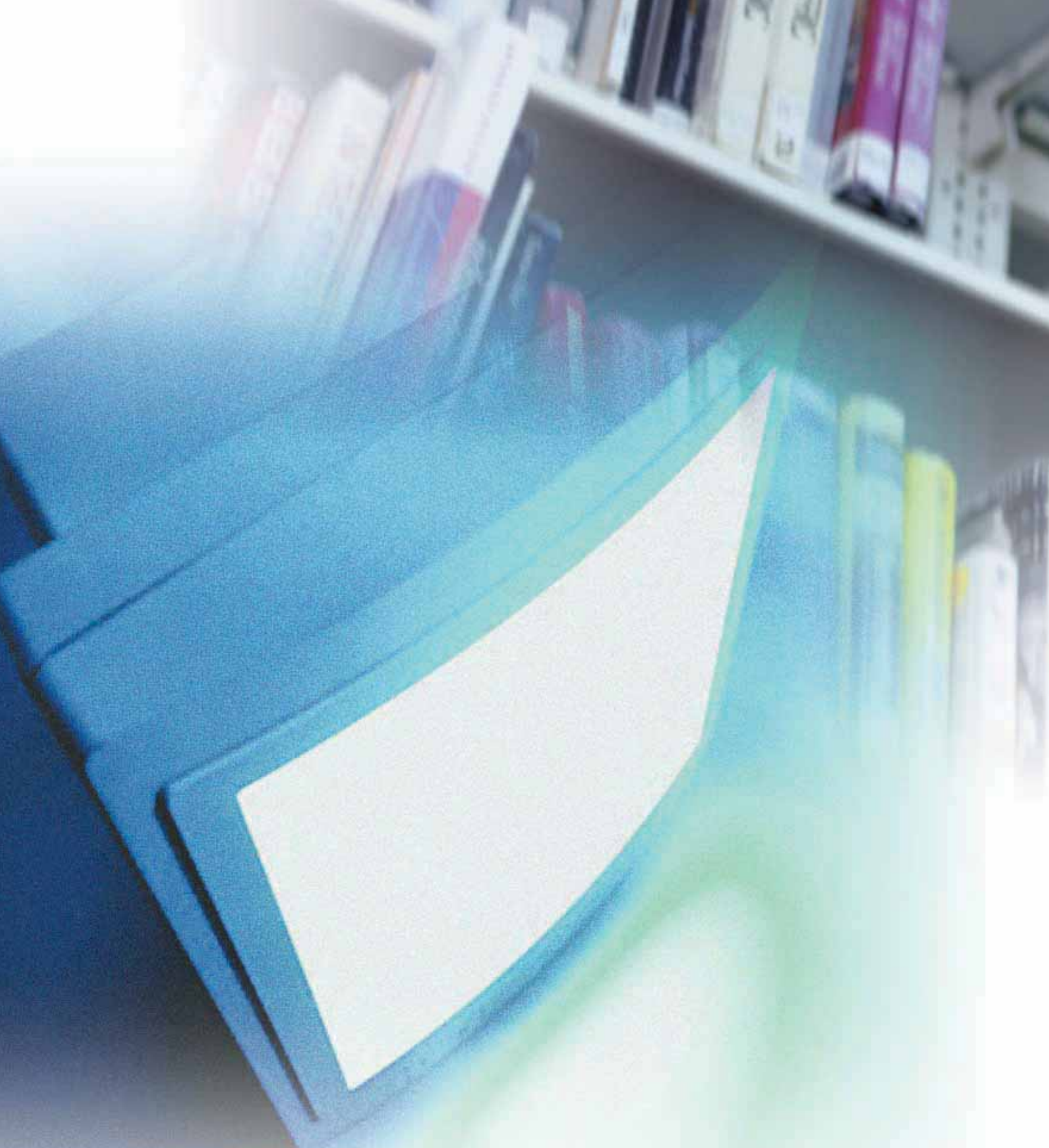

REDMOND KATHLEEN MOLZ AND PHYLLIS DAIN

CIVIC SPACE/CYBERSPACE

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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The American Public Library in the Information Age

Redmond Kathleen Molz and Phyllis Dain

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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Preface

This book chronicles two journeys: the first entailed a number of visits across the country to see and discuss the current state of public librarianship, and the second ventured into cyberspace and the ever-evolving dimensions of the information age. Explorers in the second of these terrains are many and their writings abound in bookstores and libraries, but outside the realm of professional literature for librarians there are few chroniclers of the first of these undertakings, an overview of the contemporary tax-supported public library in the United States. Established in the nineteenth century, brought to fruition in the twentieth, and about to enter a new millennium, the public library has for over 150 years proffered books, periodicals, and other media to countless users, answered innumerable patron inquiries, sponsored a litany of story hours and lectures, and afforded a multiplicity of viewpoints a voice and a hearing even in the silence of the stacks.

Although often ignored in analyses of contemporary American institutional life, the public library has of late been the subject of some scrutiny, largely stimulated by the advent of the Internet and other electronic media. While some commentators see a lessening of the dominance of print and the subsequent conversion of the library to electronic means of information delivery, others decry the potential loss of the literate experience exemplified by the very presence of the many volumes available on library shelves. Writing in the March 1997 issue of *Harper's Magazine*, Sallie Tisdale laments the undermining of the print-based public library that had so absorbed her as a child: ''In the last few years I have gone to the library to study or browse or look something up, and instead have found myself listening to radios, crying babies, a cappella love songs, puppet shows,

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juggling demonstrations, CD-ROM games, and cellular telephone calls. . . . Silence, even a mild sense of repose, is long gone.'' On the other hand, librarian Peter R. Young in the fall 1996 issue of *Daedalus* celebrates the postmodern digital environment, which ''requires that librarians add value to the use of information. Librarians working in digital information structures are creators of information through the assembly, organization, and generation of new knowledge. The authentication and validation of knowledge resources present new opportunities to the postmodern librarian.''

The traditional challenges involved in the library's promotion of reading and the book to successive generations of learners and the new opportunities afforded it in the dissemination of electronic information are the subject of this book. We conceived of this book as an essay based on our observations, our reading of numerous documents and reports, and our long-held interest as both teachers and researchers in the place of the public library in the social and civic structure. We focus on major trends and issues and take a broad national view of the public library as an American institution. In a work of this sort and with our limited resources, we could not cover all aspects of the public library and from all vantage points, and our site visits and interviews focused mainly on metropolitan areas, where the great majority of Americans now live. The book does not derive from a scientific survey of our own or from the kind of lengthy and comprehensive research investigation characteristic of the Public Library Inquiry conducted at the close of World War II. Our work does not replicate the Inquiry's breadth, nor can it be considered an update of its conclusions. The findings expressed here, however, do suggest that an extensive research effort similar to the Inquiry be undertaken to study an institution that is used each year by two-thirds of the American population, a rather surprising indicator of its contemporary utility and viability.

Historical perspective plays a large part in these pages. In this regard, the viewpoint of *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* by Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May proved useful. Its authors, both Harvard academicians, argue that political leaders need to cultivate the habit of ''seeing time as a stream,'' envisioning the present and future as emerging from the past and prefiguring how a new public policy, if adopted, would fit into the stream of history decades or even

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years later. For our purposes, ''thinking in time'' was one way to approach this examination of a venerable institution, now on the cusp of a revolution in communications media that many believe rivals the invention and development of printing.

The book illuminates two distinctive aspects of the public library: the first is the public library as a local institution empowered to sustain itself through taxation by the permissive legislation of the state; the second is the public library as a nationwide phenomenon, strongly identified with the national ethos of equality of educational opportunity. Historically, the public schools have also been instruments of social equalization, but the schools, unlike libraries, are almost totally responsive to their immediate environment, even though the standards for their services are mandated by the state. The public library, by contrast, has from its inception provided more than a local service. Out-of-town visitors freely browse through public library collections for which they pay no taxes; since 1917, an interlibrary loan code has made feasible a reciprocal lending of library materials from one location to another; some states encourage statewide library cards allowing the residents of the state to use any public library within its borders; and today the ubiquitous digitized catalog makes known the holdings of a given library collection to any surfer on the worldwide Internet. Speaking in 1936 before the American Library Association Council when the issue of federal aid for public libraries was being debated, one municipal librarian remarked that the proposed establishment of a minimum standard for library service sustained by federal revenues called up ''all sorts of pictures of a coast-to-coast program, all-American, a sort of NBC network.'' The activities of the public library progressively leading it in the direction of a larger area of service and furthering its responsibilities for constituents beyond its immediate borders provide a contrapuntal theme to the book's consideration of the public library as a unit of local government, whether Denver or Salt Lake City or Los Angeles County. However local their origins, public libraries are also shaped by a host of policy actors on the national scene. All three branches of the federal government have influenced their course, as has the work of an increasing number of public-interest groups concerned with the emerging national information infrastructure. The delineation of that infrastructure and the role that public libraries are playing in it are topics to which the book gives special attention.

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No one word can summarize our perceptions in observing the work of the public libraries that we visited, but a cluster of adjectives—eclectic, diverse, heterogeneous—comes to mind. The people who use these libraries and the purposes behind their use represent a kaleidoscope of contemporary American life—new immigrants seeking to learn English, students on the track of some school-related assignment, job seekers learning to write an acceptable résumé, persons in search of a ''good read,'' and a new cadre of technophiles anxious to have their first experience with using computers. Critics who perceive that the social fabric of the United States is unraveling might take heart from what we saw—a social institution with multifaceted missions but an overall sense of direction and a strong commitment to the ideals of public service.

It would have been impossible to write this book without a grant from the H. W. Wilson Foundation, which underwrote our travel and most of our related expenses. We are grateful to the late Leo M. Wiens, president of the H. W. Wilson Company, and the other members of the Foundation's board. Robert Wedgeworth, university librarian, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, has encouraged our work since it was first conceived at the late School of Library Service of Columbia University, where both of us were faculty members and he was dean. We appreciate his continued interest and support.

At Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs (where R. Kathleen Molz is now professor of public affairs), the then Dean of the School John G. Ruggie and Vice Dean Steven Cohen furthered the project with some very practical assistance, including clerical help and the assignment of teaching assistants. One of them, Pronita Gupta, was indefatigable in her pursuit of books and other materials from the holdings of the Columbia University Libraries.

Our work benefits from access to the resources of the New York Public Library and the generous provision of workspace in its Frederick Lewis Allen Room. Special thanks are owed for all sorts of assistance from the staff of the Leonia (New Jersey) Public Library, especially Director Harold Ficke and Assistant Director Deborah Bigelow, and to the Bergen County (New Jersey) Cooperative Library System, of which the Leonia Library is a member. The services now available in a small suburban community (where Phyllis Dain lives) exemplify the revolution wrought by technol-

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ogy—online countywide union catalog, quick interlibrary loan, Internet access, and online periodical and newspaper indexes and abstracts. All of these make feasible the research that in the past could have been done with difficulty even in large research libraries or not done at all in any library.

For arranging our invitation to attend the conference on ''The Transformation of the Public Library: Access to Digital Information in a Networked World'' held at the Library of Congress in 1995, we thank Eleanor Jo Rodger, president of Urban Libraries Council. Margaret Chaplan, librarian at the Labor and Industrial Relations Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, was helpful in searching for certain information sources. Ethel Himmel of Himmel & Wilson, Library Consultants, furnished recent information on the public library planning process. Claudette Tennant of the American Library Association's Washington Office reviewed the contents of the table dealing with federal library legislation.

We thank the MIT Press for its attention to our manuscript, with special appreciation to editors Douglas Sery and Deborah Cantor-Adams.

On a personal note, Norman Dain was always there with affectionate support, good advice, chauffeuring service, and critical reading of the text, and Bruce Dain was helpful and encouraging in many ways. Jean-Barry Molz, recently retired deputy director of the Baltimore County Public Library, served, as she has in the past, as proofreader par excellence but wisely and thoughtfully refrained from intruding her personal professional opinions on our own.

Most important to our work were the conversations we had with the many persons who agreed to be interviewed and whom we encountered on our visits to various libraries and other sites. Taking time out of their own busy professional schedules, they patiently submitted to all our questions, drove us around their communities to see libraries in both physical and virtual space, took us to lunch, plied us with coffee, and gave us piles of documents. In the list of site visits and interviews (see the appendix) we could not name all of the 160 or more persons with whom we spoke. But we are grateful to each of them for sharing with us their views and their visions of the public library in this new age of information.

A word on dates is in order. As our work on the contemporary scene progressed, we realized we were trying to hit a moving target, most espe-

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cially, though not exclusively, in the constantly changing arena of national public policy on information and information technology. Our data are as up-to-date as possible, but, given the time lags in preparing a manuscript for publication, they cannot be up to the minute. On most important national policy issues, our information is current as of summer 1998; the currency of other data varies, largely depending on the availability of information at the time of writing. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that subsequent developments will alter the course of the events we describe. As a case in point, in September 1998, as the book was going to press, the Internet became the vehicle for the global distribution, by congressional vote, of the full, unedited text of the Independent Counsel's *Referral to the House of Representatives*, with all of its graphic particulars regarding President Clinton's conduct. White House concerns about the dangers of access by minors to pornographic sites on the Internet and efforts in Congress to mandate filtering technology in schools and public libraries accepting federal funds, all of which we discuss in chapter 4, take on a certain irony in light of what occurred in September. At the time of writing we could not, of course, predict the future, but we trust that the trajectory we trace of the public library from its past to its present remains informative and valid.

R. Kathleen Molz
Phyllis Dain
September 1998

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[Librarians today] are new keepers of the faith. . . . I believe very strongly in public libraries as the foundation of a democratic society. . . . I believe very strongly in the common good. . . . I believe free access to information has to stand. I haven't lost the faith. I'm a little bit more cynical, a little befuddled, but I'm still finding that it's worth it.

—Librarian at the County of Los Angeles Public Library, July 1995

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Introduction

Quintessentially American institutions, symbols of American faith in education, public libraries are both diverse and similar. As local structures in local sites, they are as different as the communities they serve—in size, scope, governance, funding, clientele, appearance. The nearly nine thousand institutional public library entities in the United States operate under fifty sets of state laws and thousands of local ordinances. Still, each library is familiar. Anyone walking into any one library building will have to learn the layout and the scope, but it is not hard to feel at home. Collections vary in emphasis and specialties, but the core is similar; proportions of print to nonprint materials may differ, but books, magazines, newspapers, and audiovisual media—plus, increasingly, videotapes and CD-ROMs—are likely to be found almost everywhere; children's rooms may be here or there or reference desks up front or in back, but they are bound to be somewhere; magazines and newspapers may be shelved in a separate room or not, but the current issues will still be displayed for browsing. Basic services and techniques, the organization of materials, and librarians' qualifications are fairly uniform. The old card catalogs are gone (or going) mostly everywhere, replaced by banks of computer terminals with more or less similar approaches to information not only about library holdings and their availability but all sorts of other things. Bibliographic standardization, together with librarians' cooperative enterprise and the new electronic technologies, can reveal what repository almost anywhere has which items and then obtain them, through fax, photocopy, modem, trucks, vans, and the United States mail. Perhaps more than most public agencies, libraries have joined together in national, regional, state, and

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local networks, consortia, or cooperatives to share resources, technology, and expertise. Public librarians all speak the same language: there is a more or less common understanding of what their libraries are—agencies offering to the public the means of acquiring information, knowledge, education, aesthetic experience, and entertainment. This consensus, though not without contradictions and complications through history and at any one time, derives from the evolution of a nationwide library ideology promulgated in professional education, professional literature, and the pronouncements and publications of the major professional organization, the American Library Association (ALA).

The commonalities are applied in the different environments where public libraries first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. Local conditions have historically determined how much libraries could do, how, where, and for whom, and they continue to do so to this day. At the same time the emergence in the twentieth century of state and federal programs to aid and promote library service, in individual communities and through cooperative endeavors, brought to local library development monies, and, equally important, stimulation and standards.

The dualities present both problems and prospects for librarians. They are trying to offer full and free access to information and knowledge at a time of contradictory realities. Electronic technology and changing ways of life are eroding boundaries of space and time and transcending governmental jurisdictions, but the persistence of such jurisdictions, together with economic constraints, imposes limits on fulfilling visions of universal service. Still, the traditional public library—popular, nonpartisan, community based, and within real, not virtual, walls—carries important social value. It contributes to what social scientist Robert Putnam calls the "network of civic engagement" that anchors people to communities and fosters a sense of fellowship, civic participation, and democratic living.[1] As a civic space, devoted to cultural and educational purposes, the public library serves to reinforce social solidarity in an increasingly fragmented and market-driven culture. Some of the same social needs it was created to meet still exist but in different forms and in a very different environment: public libraries have both changed and remained the same. They arose as mediating institutions in a time of social transformation, then adapted to the needs of a modernizing world, and now, in a postmodern, postindustrial

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world, are navigating through changes whose impact we are only beginning to assess.

Creatures of the community and serving the entire community—people of all ages and conditions—public libraries have always mirrored trends in society at large. They can be viewed as microcosms of the macrocosm of American civilization, its social and governmental structures, economic conditions, political currents, and intellectual and cultural life. Not only are libraries best understood in relation to the larger society, but they can serve as lenses through which to see the effects of societal trends on community services, both historically and contemporaneously.

The first significant, influential tax-supported public libraries (with Boston leading the way in 1852) were organized in the growing antebellum and then post–Civil War northeastern and midwestern cities. The community leaders who founded public libraries conceived them first and foremost as educational agencies, supplementing the newly established public primary schools. In a representative republic extending the suffrage to all white male citizens and in a new and rapidly industrializing market economy, education was conceived as a civic necessity and a pathway to success. Public libraries would provide the intellectual wherewithal on which people could apply reading skills and further their education. The libraries had other purposes as well. They would be civilizing agents and objects of civic pride in a raw new country. Technological progress was making printed materials cheap and abundant, and a new American intelligentsia and scientific community demanded the intellectual and cultural accoutrements of the advanced civilization they hoped the United States would become. Libraries would preserve and transmit Western European culture and knowledge (and obviate the need for Americans to go to Europe to consult books) and, by collecting contemporary and historical records and publications, create an American archive for posterity. And (although not often expressed in the moralistic and utilitarian rhetoric of the time) libraries could offer means of (wholesome) amusement and diversion.

As the number of publications proliferated, librarians devised practical ways to organize the masses of printed matter for use—new cataloging and classifying systems and periodical indexes that remained standard until computers arrived in the 1960s. James Beniger, in *The Control Revolution:*

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Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society, calls nineteenth-century librarians ''the first information scientists.''[2]

Public libraries, like schools, came to be accepted as public responsibilities, civic goods benefiting the entire society and thus worthy of public support. This commitment was expressed in state laws as well as in library charters and educators' and librarians' speeches and writings. The legislation enabled rather than mandated communities to organize libraries. Until well into the twentieth century the states, while allowing and even encouraging municipal library service, did not substantially, if at all, fund it. Unlike schools, free public libraries have been voluntary in their establishment as well as use, and they were open in principle to the entire community, not just a portion of it. This made libraries popular and gave them a certain autonomy, but it left the library picture incomplete and uneven and left libraries without a clearly defined constituency.

The early public libraries, innovative as they were in their mere existence, had decided limitations. All adult residents (which would commonly include young people over fourteen years old) were theoretically welcome in public libraries, except until our own time African-Americans or other minorities subject to legal segregation or excluded by custom or inhibition. The libraries closed book shelves to browsing, offered limited opening hours, and restricted the number of books borrowed, especially fiction, which librarians, along with many other educated people, considered unserious and uneducational, if not morally and psychologically dangerous. Many librarians, taking to heart their professional obligations as educators and intellectual gatekeepers and believing in the power of words, accepted a role as moral, often narrow-minded, censors of reading materials. Nonetheless, interested, determined readers could find in urban public libraries the standard history and expressions of Western culture. Even when closely monitored, collections contained works that challenged the status quo and that offered alternative visions of human and social relationships that could stimulate and nurture original minds.

It was in the twentieth century that public libraries became the ubiquitous institutions that we now know. By the 1870s there were nearly three hundred public libraries in the United States, by 1900 almost a thousand, mostly in the North, and more than double that by 1923.[3] Not every American community had access to a public library by the 1920s and beyond,

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however, especially in rural areas, and there remained until midcentury and beyond sharp inequalities nationwide in library service and financial support. Still, the idea that a progressive city or town should have a tax-supported public library had taken hold.

Accelerating this trend was the unprecedented private-sector philanthropy emerging from industrial capitalism in the early twentieth century, exemplified by steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's largess. Neither the first giver of public libraries nor the last, Carnegie was the most famous and probably the most influential. In the current debates about private philanthropy versus publicly financed community services, it is too often forgotten that Carnegie's libraries represented partnership with government. Carnegie believed that the surplus of great fortunes, earned through superior ability, should be disbursed for the public good and thus redress the imbalances of modern industrial life and immunize against radical reform. Influenced by Social Darwinism, such philanthropy was not alms giving. Instead, it would allow talented and ambitious youths to acquire the knowledge and skill needed for success in the inevitable struggle for existence. The best place to do so was in public libraries, sites of self-education and civic enterprise. By 1917, when the awards ceased, Carnegie pledged more than $41 million for nearly two thousand public library buildings in the United States, all requiring the community to supply the land and promise perpetual operating support.

Many Americans of the time accepted the Progressive belief in the social power of knowledge and the positive potential of government, as well as the need to "Americanize" immigrants crowding into the country and to create a pool of educated workers to staff a modern economy. Expenditures for municipal services multiplied: in libraries in large cities local funding for operating expenses rose by two and a half times from 1902 to 1912 and nearly fivefold from 1912 to 1931, much more than price and wage rises.[4] Libraries in the major urban centers began to take their modern shape; they evolved into complex, multipurpose, multibranch, centrally controlled and coordinated systems. Managing this process were the librarians whom urban historian Jon Teaford calls "a fresh breed of professionals in American city government" who "asserted their authority and established their professional standing [and] . . . were seriously devoted to the task of making literature available to urban dwellers."[5] From the 1890s

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into the 1920s, municipalities, eager to show off their wealth and power and caught up in the City Beautiful movement that combined grand aesthetic design with city planning, built new monumental neoclassical/Renaissance/Beaux Arts central libraries in downtown Boston, Pittsburgh, Chicago, New York, Denver, San Francisco, Detroit, Cleveland, and St. Louis.

In 1910 Arthur Bostwick, a leading librarian of the ''fresh breed,'' described the ''modern library idea.'' It envisioned the public library as an active force, a ''community center'' striving to ''bring book and reader together'' and seeking to appeal to ''the entire community, not merely to those who voluntarily entered its doors.'' Among the novel offerings of the ''modern library'' were unrestricted access to shelves, longer hours of opening, ''cheerful and homelike library buildings,'' children's rooms, cooperation with schools, interlibrary loan, more useful catalogs and reading lists, lectures and exhibits, meeting rooms for neighborhood organizations, and deposit collections for homes, institutions, and workplaces—''the thousand and one activities that distinguish the modern library from its more passive predecessor.''[6]

This ''new'' institution was responding to the powerful modernizing forces of industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. The United States was being transformed from an agricultural to an urban, industrial nation, with a corporate and bureaucratic rather than individualistic economic structure and a population more diverse than the previously predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Nordic stock. Social dislocations and resultant reform movements notwithstanding, American society seemed to be still on the ascent, with traditional culture still generally held worthwhile and worth transmitting to new generations and new arrivals. What was wrong could be fixed—through radical social surgery, palliative social medicine, or efficient organization, all of which had education as an ingredient. In the great northern and midwestern cities librarians, seeing themselves as active participants in the educational process that Americans variously believed would be an ameliorative, stabilizing, or egalitarian force in a changing world, labored, along with social workers and teachers, to bring knowledge, culture, and civic virtue to the people. At the same time central public library collections in several cities were growing into substantial research resources and information banks for the general public, including comprehensive sets of government documents, patents, and

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scholarly works and primary sources. Libraries began to promote their ability to answer questions out of their store of knowledge and serve as clearinghouses of information about the publications flowing out of the world's presses. The civic reform movements of the day also heightened the felt obligation of libraries, as public knowledge institutions in a republic, to provide information about government and its activities and services.

The library profession, and many libraries, with egregious lapses during World War I, were also liberalizing their moral and political outlook. By the 1920s, when old rigid mores and morals were breaking down in the United States, many librarians surrendered their role as outright and self-righteous censors (albeit some had always been cosmopolitan and fairly free thinking). A new generation devised the Library Bill of Rights, adopted by the American Library Association in 1939. The profession here endorsed three principles: book selection should not be influenced by writers' race, nationality, politics, or religion; reading matter should represent all sides of controversial issues; and meeting rooms should be available to all community groups on equal terms. Later revisions and interpretations took a strong libertarian stance against censorship and for unrestricted use of libraries and materials by all clients, children as well as adults. Whether this commitment to intellectual freedom has always been honored in practice is a question. As we will see, at various times and in various communities it has been seriously challenged, and some aspects remain complex and problematic. Nonetheless the Library Bill of Rights, affirming ''all libraries as neutral forums for information and ideas,'' has come to serve as the library profession's credo.[7]

After suffering from the Great Depression of the 1930s, when budgets contracted and use expanded, and then the hiatus of the World War II years, public libraries shared in the remarkable overall postwar growth in the United States—in economic activity, population, education, and suburban development. Consistent historical as well as current statistics on libraries are hard to find, but we can see general nationwide trends. From 1945 to 1965 public library operating expenditures, mostly derived from local tax funds, multiplied fivefold. Capital outlays, mainly for constructing new buildings and refurbishing and extending old ones, went up more than eightfold in those years and from 1968 to 1986 by some twelve times. All these increases were far above inflation rates and cost rises.

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Communities built modernistic, inviting, and often architecturally distinguished public libraries; by the 1960s there was a discernible trend toward replacing old Carnegie libraries, while many others were renovated or expanded. This time there was no Andrew Carnegie around, and the money for construction and renovation came from the public purse—most substantially and consistently from local bond issues and tax appropriations, to a small extent from state aid, and more significantly from federal aid.[8]

By the turn of the century the states had begun to be more actively involved in public library development, but their role was heightened by the movement, begun in the 1920s and accelerated during the New Deal and after the war, to equalize and upgrade library service throughout the country. Public library promoters campaigned for state aid and, for the first time, federal funds, which were first legislated in 1956. That and subsequent congressional enactments offered libraries unprecedented federal subventions, largely through state library agencies, and encouraged more effective and efficient units of service through interlibrary cooperation.

All this library development did succeed eventually in bringing library service to most of the American population, and with the lowering of official racial barriers in the South, African-Americans could finally come in the front door. Public libraries evolved into the liberal, open, polymorphous, and highly popular institutions found all over the country today—stocking all manner of media and imposing few restrictions on use. Notwithstanding the advent of radio, sound movies, and especially television—all initially seen as potential threats to books and reading—various national surveys, though not strictly comparable, showed substantial increases in use of public libraries, much more so than population growth.[9] Behind the aggregate figures, however, are variations through the years and among different localities and populations. Studies consistently show that library use tends on the whole to correlate with users' years of education, which correlates with socioeconomic class, and Americans on the whole tended after World War II to be better educated and more prosperous than previous generations. Beginning in the 1960s, profound changes in the class and ethnic mixes in American cities had a decided impact upon urban public libraries, which saw much of their constituency move to the expanding suburbs, where public libraries as well as schools were being developed to suit.

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The story is familiar. In brief, many cities experienced middle-class ''white flight'' away from incoming poor white, black, and foreign-born residents. City downtowns might still be crowded with workers during the day, but at night and on weekends they were often deserted; retail stores followed residents out to the suburbs. The new outlying population centers encompassed corporate headquarters and other business establishments that found the suburbs, with their tax breaks, local workforce, and green acres, cheaper and more pleasant than central cities. The cities' tax bases eroded, but public services, including libraries, were needed more than ever by the leftover poor. Traditional library clienteles might have declined, but those users who remained, their children, and newcomers would still depend on the library as a quiet cultural haven, as a source of free information, and for help with homework and other pursuits. And with their large collections of retrospective and specialized publications and expert specialist librarians, the central libraries, like other older urban cultural institutions, could not be duplicated in the ''edge cities,'' as writer Joel Garreau terms the new suburban-exurban conglomerations of people and industry.[10] The old central cities, north and south, were becoming cores of what have been called ''citistates''[11]—a mix of multijurisdictional, urban, suburban, and exurban metropolitan communities in which by the 1980s most Americans lived, linked by roads, cars, telecommunications, and economic activity. However, traditional civic boundaries and jurisdictions, and therefore tax districts, remained for the most part the same, while political power, in terms of voting rolls, shifted to the suburbs.

The move from city to suburb and the decline of inner cities became intertwined with another profound demographic shift, a new internal migration, accelerated in the 1980s, from east to west, north to south. The entire country was becoming urbanized by the masses of people abandoning the Snowbelt—or the Rustbelt—for the Sunbelt (and certain areas in the Pacific Northwest), where new investment and new jobs in the growing postindustrial service, information, and high-technology economy, as well as in nonunion manufacturing, were to be found. Like their predecessors in the developing North and Midwest of the late nineteenth century, late twentieth-century southern and western communities built their public libraries—existing ones and new ones—into popular systems matching and even outdoing older libraries in scope and quality of service. All librar-

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ies were facing the ‘‘information explosion’’—the spectacular increase in the amount and cost of published information and then a technological revolution making printed matter, profuse as it was, only one component of a complex communication world. In the 1970s double-digit inflation and then in the 1980s a tax revolt among property owners and the rise of a conservative antigovernment mood coincided with libraries' imperative to buy into the new technologies that would make their technical processes more efficient and their resources universally identifiable in massive digitized data bases. Entering the information age would be expensive; computers and telecommunications promised better and quicker but not necessarily cheaper operations and services. Eventually even the prosperous Sunbelt cities and the suburbs, many with handsome new public library buildings, began to feel the pinch.

Going into the 1990s, when library budgets eventually managed to keep pace with inflation and urban libraries experienced a certain revival, potent new trends emerged. The new immigration from Asia and Latin America was placing new demands on libraries, just as all public agencies were feeling political and fiscal threats to their budgets. Libraries would have to function in a society in which education counted more than ever but where public education was under attack, English as a second language was widespread, and traditional Eurocentric culture and traditional print culture were becoming endangered species. Furthermore, deepening class and color divisions portended a population divided into information haves and have-nots. Rapidly advancing computer and telecommunications technologies and a powerful information industry were transforming the forms and economics of information. National public policy for the so-called information highway was uncertain and overtaken by events—the evolution of the Internet, for example. The digital information revolution seemed to be pointing to a new, immaterial library without walls in the ‘‘city of bits’’ visualized by William Mitchell, dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In a book published in both print and digital form in 1995, he predicted that the façade of the library ‘‘is not to be constructed of stone and located on a street in Bloomsbury, but of pixels on thousands of screens scattered throughout the world. . . . there is nothing left to put a grand facade *on*.’’[12] Cyberspace would replace civic space—or would it?

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