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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the somewhat uneven course of the public library as a knowledge institution in America and its relevance during the current information age, particularly in the United States, where there is a basic connection between access to knowledge and the political system. The public library situation is considered in terms of the dichotomy of consumption, (i.e., the assumption that services to the poor are in themselves a public good and should be provided to alleviate personal need), and investment (i.e., the assumption that the use of services provided to the poor will ultimately result in productive contributions to society). The history of access to information in public libraries is traced from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, and it is argued that the move from "knowledge" to "information" has been promoted by the business sector because substantial gains have been realized as a result of capitalizing on knowledge. This move from knowledge to information is seen as a threat to public institutions, particularly to public schools and libraries. In conclusion, it is argued that management policies of non-profit institutions and for-profit institutions should be different since technocratic systems are usually measured by tests of efficiency and effectiveness, whereas libraries should be concerned with accountability and legitimacy as they focus on the labor-intensive process of the inculcation of knowledge. (34 references) (SD)

THE KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTIONS IN THE INFORMATION AGE

THE SPECIAL CASE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

R. KATHLEEN MOLZ

AN ENGELHARD LECTURE ON THE BOOK

PRESENTED ON APRIL 7, 1987, AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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PREFACE

In this essay R. Kathleen Molz explores the "somewhat uneven trajectory of the public library as a knowledge institution" in America. She also reflects on the public library's relevance in today's "information age," particularly in a country where there is a basic connection between access to knowledge and the political system.

Kathleen Molz, Melvil Dewey Professor of Library Service at Columbia University's School of Library Service, is known for her thoughtful concern for public policy issues affecting libraries. Her most recent book, *National Planning for Library Service, 1935-1975* (American Library Association, 1984), was widely praised. Her book *Federal Policy and Library Support* (MIT Press, 1976) won the Ralph R. Shaw Award from the American Library Association as a distinguished contribution to the literature of the profession.

Established by law in 1977 to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the printed word, the Center for the Book sponsors a varied program of interest to both the general public and scholars. Its projects, lectures, symposia, and publications are supported primarily by private contributions from corporations and individuals. The center is grateful to Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard for a donation that made R. Kathleen Molz's presentation possible and which enables us, through this publication, to share her views with a wide audience.

John Y. Cole
Director
The Center for the Book
in the Library of Congress

Shortly before the Thanksgiving holiday in 1979, a year best remembered for the seizure of the American embassy in Iran, the nation's capital afforded its hospitality to the first White House Conference on Library and Information Services. It is not without irony that the thing that remains most tangible about that conference is the amount of paper it occasioned in the form of testimony, resolutions, and reports, at least some of which was generated by prognosticators of a paperless society.

Out of all these statements and speeches, one address remains quite pertinent, for the issues it raises are not easily resolved. In his presentation to the delegates Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress, asked a very pointed question:

> What has become of our knowledge institutions? These do not deal in the storage and retrieval of information, and in the instant flow of facts and figures which will be displaced by tomorrow's reports or bulletins. Rather, they deal in the enduring treasure of the whole human past. They include our colleges and our universities and, of course, our libraries. While the information industry flourishes and seeks new avenues of growth, while people compete for a chance to buy into them, our knowledge institutions go begging.
>
> Knowledge institutions do not pay the kind of dividends that are reflected on the stock market. They are sometimes called philanthropic, which means that they profit nobody, except everybody, and that their dividends go to the whole community. These knowledge institutions, and especially our public libraries, ask charity, the community's small change, just to keep their heat and their lights on and to keep their unrenovated doors open. We, the knowledge institutions, are the Nation's poor relations. We anxiously solicit and gratefully acknowledge the crumbs.[1]

These comments have stayed with me almost a decade, and because the thrust of so many of the other papers, including that of the President of the United States, emphasized information, rather than knowledge, I use them as a point of reference to look at the somewhat uneven trajectory of the public library as a knowledge institution and to assess its relevance in the information age.

In the development of social services, policymakers in such fields as welfare or education may hold two distinct but sometimes opposite assumptions. The first deals with consumption and the second with investment. Under the first assumption services for the poor are considered in themselves a public good and are provided to alleviate immediate personal need. These services, whether food, clothing, or shelter, are regarded by benefactors and recipients as items for consumption. On the other hand, the same services can be said to satisfy another purpose in that through their use the poor and needy are outfitted or refitted for some productive employment. Here, the services are perceived as an investment: not only are the recipients of the charity relieved of distress, they are also given the means to become self sustaining, thus eliminating the requirement for dependency upon the philanthropy or state that initially supplied the benefits. This dichotomy, implicit in the distinction drawn so often between the "worthy" and "unworthy" poor, has dominated the field of welfare for centuries, but it has its utility in clarifying the issues surrounding public support for education and libraries in this country.[2]

Certainly, in the development of libraries, policymakers considering the consumption investment dichotomy originally emphasized investment. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the series of debates that attended the founding of the Smithsonian Institution. Leaving in his will only the simple instruction that he wished his estate to furnish in Washington, D.C., "an Establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men," James Smithson, illegitimate son of an English noble family, unwittingly bequeathed a legacy of some eight years of often acrimonious debate over the purposes of the institution. Schemes for a national university, an observatory, a lecture series, a collection of seeds and plants, an agricultural experiment station, and even a normal school were put forth. One of the recommendations, however, called for "a grand and noble public library: one which, for variety, extent, and wealth, shall be, and be confessed to be, equal to any now in the world."[3]

In a grandiloquent speech, Senator Rufus Choate, an eastern Whig, argued the value of the library over time: unlike professorships or schools, the utility of which would be evanescent and hard to evaluate, the library would be

> durable as liberty, durable as the Union; a vast storehouse, a vast treasury, of all the facts which make up the history of man and of nature, so far as that history has been written, of all the truths which the inquiries and experiences of all the races and ages have found out; of all the opinions that have been promulgated; of all the emotions, images, sentiments, examples of all the richest and most instructive literatures; the whole past speaking to the present and the future; a silent, yet wise and eloquent teacher; dead, yet speaking.... Is that not an admirable instrumentality to increase and diffuse knowledge among men?[4]

Choate feared that lesser causes would simply lead to the evaporation of the bequest in appropriations that would not appreciate, whereas he believed the library, if founded, would serve as a permanent investment: "here all the while are the books; here is the value; here is the visible property; here is the oil, and here is the light."[5] Given the recently expressed views that information has the value of real property, Senator Choate's description of the proposed library as a visible and valuable property is particularly interesting.

Although the authorizing legislation finally passed in 1846 cast the Smithsonian Institution along different lines, the conceptualization of a library as an investment in knowledge for the increase of the community intelligence remained a dominant theme in nineteenth-century rhetoric. The idea permeated the deliberations of the first convention of librarians and bibliophiles meeting in New York City in 1853. The presiding genius of this conference, Charles Coffin Jewett, then librarian of the Smithsonian and a vigorous proponent of the idea of a great national library for public use, expressed the mission of the conference succinctly: "We meet to provide for the diffusion of a knowledge of good books, and for enlarging the means of public access to them. Our wishes are for the public, not for ourselves."[6]

This enlargement of access could be achieved, according to Jewett, by the use of stereotyped plates for the publication of a national bibliography containing the cataloging entries of many libraries and also, as advocated in a series of resolutions proposed by two clergymen and subsequently endorsed by the entire assembly, by the creation of new public libraries. Although the project for the stereotyped catalog failed, the cause of the public library gathered considerable support.

During the next year, two major libraries were opened to the public: the Boston Public Library, the first in a large municipality to be supported by public taxation, and the Astor Library in New York City, endowed through a bequest and the progenitor of the present New York Public Library. Writing in the *Annual Report* of the Astor Library for the first year of its operation, Joseph Green Cogswell, the librarian, stressed the scholarly aspirations of those erstwhile readers in the new collection, mentioning reading on such topics as "scholastic theology, transcendental metaphysics, abstruse mathematics, and oriental philology." The library, he noted, "has been little used for mere desultory reading, but for the most part with a specific view."[7] Yet in a personal letter written that same year to his Boston colleague George Ticknor, Cogswell had this to say about the value of books as consumables:

> Everything goes on very smoothly among the habitues of the Library. The readers average from one to two hundred daily, and they read excellent books, except the young fry, who employ all the hours they are out of school in reading the trashy, as Scott, Cooper, Dickens, *Punch*, and the *Illustrated News*. Even this is better than spinning street yarns, and as long as they continue perfectly orderly and quiet, as they now are, I shall not object to their amusing themselves with poor books.[8]

His views were not unlike those expressed by the Trustees of the Boston Public Library, who in an early report commented on their adherence "to the principles…of keeping the library supplied with the current literature and fresh reading of the day. They have aimed to add useful books to the library, rather than what is called 'light reading.'"[9] At the outset, the mid-nineteenth century public libraries eschewed the frivolous, the ephemeral, or what was sometimes called "bubble" literature. Indeed, William Frederick Poole, writing in 1876, particularly noted that in the emerging public libraries "fully four fifths of the money appropriated for books is spent in works adapted to the wants of scholars. In the larger libraries the proportion is even greater. It is hardly becoming for scholars, who enjoy the lion's share, to object to the small proportional expenditure for books adapted to the wants of the masses who bear the burden of taxation."[10]

The fiction controversy occupied much of librarians' deliberations throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is an indication of the seriousness with which the profession regarded its charge as a knowledge institution. At the great Columbian Exposition, the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, a model library was displayed in the U.S. government building, the volumes of which had been carefully selected by a panel of subject specialists and librarians as those most suitable for the average town library. The architect of this exhibit and its published catalog, which was printed at the expense of the federal government, was none other than Melvil Dewey.[11]

But the most dramatic recognition—a veritable apotheosis—of the public library as a knowledge institution did not occur until early in this century when the International Congress of Arts and Sciences was convened in 1904 in the City of St. Louis, the host that year to an exposition honoring the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase popularly known as the St. Louis World's Fair. Among those who served on the congress's administrative board were Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University; William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago; and Herbert Putnam, Librarian of Congress.

In setting forth the plan of this congress, Prof. Hugo Münsterberg of Harvard University defined the one desideratum of the new century as "the unity of human knowledge," which in a time of increasing specialization was desperately needed to reinforce "the too much neglected idea of the unity of truth." He commented:

> A reaction against the narrowness of mere fact diggers has set in. A mere heaping up of disconnected, unshaped facts begins to disappoint the world; it is felt too vividly that a mere dictionary of phenomena, of events and laws, makes our knowledge larger but not deeper, makes our life more complex but not more valuable, makes our science more difficult but not more harmonious. Our time longs for a new synthesis and looks toward science no longer merely with a desire for technical prescriptions and new inventions in the interest of comfort and exchange. It waits for knowledge to fulfill its higher mission, it waits for science to satisfy our higher needs for a view of the world which shall give unity to our scattered experience.[12]

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Speaking before the assembled delegates on topics of concern to the arts, the sciences, applied technology, and the social sciences was a galaxy of turn of the century savants: among the Americans, Woodrow Wilson, Jane Addams, Frederick Jackson Turner, G. Stanley Hall, and Charles F. McKim (of the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White) and from abroad, J. B. Bury of Cambridge University, Max Weber from Heidelberg, Emile Picard from the Sorbonne, and the Right Honorable James Bryce, who was within a few years to become the British ambassador to the United States.

The congress presented a classification of knowledge that divided it into 7 main branches, further subdivided these into 24 departments, and refined the whole into 128 sections. One of the 7 divisions of knowledge, "Social Culture" was divided into Education and Religion. The department devoted to Education comprised five sections: Educational Theory, the School, the College, the University, and, last but not least, the Library. The topics of each section were to be addressed by two principal speakers, the first of whom was to reflect on the relationship of the particular branch of knowledge to all other branches and the second to present the state of the art of the discipline being addressed.

Although the section on the Library was chaired by Frederick Morgan Crunden of the St. Louis Public Library, the two main speakers both came from abroad: from England, William E. A. Axon, a member of the literary staff of the *Manchester Guardian*, an author of many works dealing with libraries and a founding father of the Library Association of the United Kingdom, and from the Continent, Guido Biagi, a paleographer, who administered the Laurentian Library in Florence, a library founded by Lorenzo the Magnificent and designed by Michelangelo. In his introductory remarks, Crunden defined the library as "the repository, the custodian, the preserver of all the arts and sciences, and the principal means of disseminating all knowledge."[18] The confidence inherent in this rather sweeping assertion can be best assessed when it is read in conjunction with another statement from his address: "If charged with placing undue stress on the value of the library, I might urge its comparative newness and its consequent lack of recognition...."[19] Certainly the contemporary reader of his remarks is left with the feeling that if the library's claim to such a powerful mission had then been popularly

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accepted, its recognition would have already been definitively ensured.

In remarks that embraced the ambivalence of the library in meeting the needs of its clientele, Axon addressed the consumption side of the consumption investment dichotomy and rhetorically asked: "Would the ideal library include 'trash'? Must everything be preserved?" To these questions, the Englishman answered: "The most stupid production that ever flowed from a pen is at least a human document. And who shall decide what is and what is not 'trash'?"[15] In a gesture calculated to please both his American hosts and his foreign colleagues, Axon reverted to the investment perspective by reminding his listeners of "that remarkable gift from a son of the Old World to the sons of the New World," the Smithsonian Institution. In Smithson's superb charge relating to the diffusion of knowledge, Axon found the best of all definitions of a library.[16] "Reverence as well as the desire for knowledge," he said, "is inspired in generous minds by the sight of a great collection of books."[17]

The remaining speaker, Guido Biagi, was perhaps the most prescient. In his paper, written only months after the first flights of the Wright brothers from Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, he envisioned the day

> when the libraries of Europe and of America and of all the states in the Postal Union will form, as it were, one single collection, and the old books, printed when America was but a myth, will enter new worlds bearing with them to far off students the benefit of their ancient wisdom. The electric post or the air ships will have then shortened distances, the telephone will make it possible to hear at Melbourne a graphophone disc asked for, a few minutes earlier, from the British Museum. There will be few readers, but an infinite number of hearers, who will listen from their own homes to the spoken paper, to the spoken book.[18]

In a way, these addresses from the international congress form a link with the public controversy over the Smithsonian's prospective role as the great public library. More than a half century separated the two events, but Jewett's vision of the library as the instrument for the diffusion of knowledge still filled the air. Not

only did Axon define the public library exactly to fit the terms of Smithson's bequest, but Biagi too must have been familiar with Jewett's contributions, since his translation[19] into Italian of Jewett's *On the Construction of Catalogues*[20] is the only translated version of that visionary scheme for the universal bibliography.

Both of Jewett's ideas were to be realized, for today the Library of Congress, as a de facto if not de jure national library, fulfills the role of the nation's preeminent publicly supported library. And today's ever expanding bibliographical utilities foster the integration of cataloging and location data that Jewett had believed possible through the interfiling of stereotyped plates.

The International Congress of Arts and Sciences was, I believe, the last international convocation to be wholly devoted to the concerns of all knowledge and to the perception of knowledge as a conduit toward the unity of truth. By linking the school, college, university, and library as the essential components for the diffusion of knowledge, the congress's conveners and its participants acknowledged a faith in the progressive capacities of these institutions to yield the dividend of a better educated society. Emphasized here was the value of education as investment; as Diane Ravitch puts it, "To believe in education is to believe in the future...."[21] The course of the twentieth century, however, has not been witness to the fulfillment of the congress's noble and ambitious ideal.

The international congress was held at a time when, through Andrew Carnegie's enormous philanthropy, the public library was flourishing in the English speaking world. From 1897 to 1912, the wholesale period of his benefaction, Carnegie was literally donating two or three libraries a day. When, shortly after the First World War, the Carnegie Corporation decided to cease the philanthropy, it no doubt became imperative to take stock of the enterprise. The task was assigned to William S. Learned of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In his 1924 report, entitled *The American Public Library and the Diffusion of Knowledge*—probably the last time in which the purpose of the institution would be so defined—Learned commented: "Agencies that exist for diffusing knowledge tend to become perfunctory and conventional, and unless continually revitalized, they gradually cease to deal with the knowledge that is most important or else pervert its distribution."[22]

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Although we today would probably substitute the word information in the first part of his typology, Learned distinguished three different types of what he called "knowledge": first, "news—the flood of ephemeral print out of which is selected the limited group of facts that orients for each his daily life"; second, "knowledge, other than news, available in print," by which he meant "the whole range of verified scientific fact, matured judgement, and products of the constructive imagination generally incorporated into books"; and last, "knowledge and understanding derived from sources other than print," including lectures, museums, motion pictures and radio, and the fine arts.[23]

It is obvious that Learned wanted the public library to be something more than a repository of books. The library he proposed should serve as a community intelligence service for its locality "not only for 'polite' literature, but for every commercial and vocational field of information that it may prove practicable to enter."[24] Trade lists for merchants, technical manuals for builders and plumbers, the best books on religion for clergymen, touring guides for motorists, collections of pictures for artists, and, for students, materials in any important study. Realizing that very small libraries might not prove equal to this task, Learned suggested that they could rely upon photostatic copies or books sent from larger collections in the vicinity. Notwithstanding its serious weaknesses, the fiction collection should be retained "because of its service in relaxation and entertainment."

Singled out for his special praise was the Cleveland Public Library, then circulating over five million volumes a year to a city of eight hundred thousand people and responsive to the needs of ten thousand users of the Library each day during the work week.

Although Learned's comments were intended to be positive, and indeed larger libraries had been pursuing such a course for a number of years, the course he described was at odds with an earlier generation's linkage of the library with high culture. Much of the earlier rhetoric had been disposed to the view that once inducted into the library, the reader would move upward from mediocre books to an appreciation of significant literature or serious history.

The contemporary library career of the protagonist of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* is not without relevance here:

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> Carol was not unhappy and she was not exhilarated, in the St. Paul Library. She slowly confessed that she was not visibly affecting lives. She did, at first, put into her contact with the patrons a willingness which should have moved worlds. But so few of these stolid worlds wanted to be moved. When she was in charge of the magazine room the readers did not ask for suggestions about elevated essays. They grunted, "Wanta find the *Leather Goods Gazette* for last February?" When she was giving out books the principal query was, "Can you tell me of a good, light, exciting love story to read? My husband's going away for a week."
>
> She was fond of the other librarians; proud of their aspirations. And by the chance of propinquity she read scores of books.... She took walks, and was sensible about shoes and diet. And never did she feel that she was living.[25]

Unfortunately for the ambitions of this young librarian, her clients were primarily interested in books and journals as consumables, and their reading was in no way calculated to enable them to reach the higher realms of Parnassus.

Although the years of the Depression brought many new users to the nation's public libraries, these libraries received only a subsistence diet from their appropriating authorities, what Dr. Boorstin calls "small change." So anemic was the budget for public libraries during this period that a contemporary journalist labeled them "our starving libraries."[26] The years following World War II brought with them the Public Library Inquiry and Bernard Berelson's observation that the public library was serving a predominantly middle-class, better educated clientele,[27] a finding to which many public librarians strenuously objected. And the 1960s ushered in an era in which the public library was castigated for its irrelevance to the poor and its lack of effectiveness in distributing its intellectual wealth to minorities and other disadvantaged groups. Further exacerbating this already volatile situation came another wave of critics, decrying the public library's dependency upon the printed book, predicting that the form itself was doomed to obsolescence, to be replaced through new technologies by machine-generated information that would have the virtue of immediate delivery accommodated to one's own schedule and personal work space.

The knowledge worker, the information age, the knowledge industry, originally the concepts of economists, soon became the catchphrases that peppered the business pages of our leading newspapers and periodicals as well as the monographs and journals of any number of professions engaged in some form of informational work. Two writers of a text dealing with strategies to make better use of informational resources primarily within the corporate business world recently defined "an information or *knowledge worker*" as a "messenger, a file clerk, or a records manager who may…be simply a 'carrier' rather than a content analyzer." The authors continue:

> In sum, our definition of a *knowledge worker* is anyone, in any work context…who adds value either to a message or to the message's package (container). The nature of that "added value" may be as simple as facilitating its transport from one place to another, as complex as developing some entirely new theory of information science, or contributing some entirely new form based on information processing and formatting technologies (for instance, computer art).[28]

The authors' motives in this regard—that is, their wish not to perpetuate older distinctions, derived from an industrial age, between "blue collar" and "white collar" positions—may indeed be quite worthy, but the breadth of such a definition of a knowledge worker makes the term almost meaningless.

When Peter Drucker expounded some of the concepts of earlier economists regarding the knowledge economy and the knowledge society, he entitled his book *The Age of Discontinuity*; and he raised the question: "Does knowledge have a future?"[29] Such a question calls up a second: Do our traditional knowledge institutions have a future?

The outlook is rather bleak. *A Nation at Risk* points to serious deficiencies in our public schools.[30] *College*, a report from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, details how little real reading, thinking, or learning occupies the minds of the nation's undergraduates, excepting those in a very few privileged institutions.[31] The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education projects a decline in real resources available to colleges and universities and used by them.[32] In *Corporate*

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Classrooms, Nell P. Eurich depicts the threat presented to our nonprofit institutions of higher learning by the educational opportunities and even degrees afforded by America's businesses and think tanks.[33] And in his recent analysis of the contemporary university, the nation's most prestigious knowledge institution, Prof. Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago depicts an environment in which the natural sciences flourish, the social sciences limp along, and the humanities are "like the great old Paris Flea Market where, amidst masses of junk, people with a good eye found cast away treasures that made them rich.... The other two divisions of the university have no use for the past, are forward looking and not inclined toward ancestor worship."[34]

Nor can much comfort be derived from the sanctity of the book. Frances FitzGerald has analyzed current American history textbooks and found them so neutralized and watered down as to present history as a commodity, marketable because it is sweetened like a patent medicine or a toothpaste to make it more palatable.[35] In a treatise with the sobering title *The Tragedy of Political Science,* Prof. David M. Ricci points to a similar phenomenon in his own discipline, in which writers of texts are asked to drop from their discourse such words as *absolutism, justice, nation, patriotic, rights, society;* and *tyranny* and to adopt words such as *attitude, conflict, cross pressure, game, interaction, pluralism, socialization,* and *valuation.*[36] Diane Ravitch begins her thoughtful assessment of American education with a quotation from Thomas Jefferson's exhortation to diffuse knowledge and wage a crusade against ignorance. She describes that crusade in one word: "troubled."[37]

In light of these assessments, it is captious to speak merely of reform. In this country the trajectory of the knowledge institutions is firmly linked to the body politic. The early Republicans envisioned education and knowledge as guardians of the state. Even as late as 1904, Librarian of Congress Herbert Putnam, in his presidential address to the American Library Association, still expressed that view: "In a democracy of equal liberty and equal opportunity, the education of the citizen is the safety of the state, and the duty of our libraries, as of our common schools, is to let no guilty ignorance escape."[38] The early Republican vision of education as the preserver of liberty became commingled with the later goals of the common school reformers who perceived

the need for a utilitarian education designed to fit the young for productive roles in the American economy. This philosophy lay behind the movement for the land grant colleges and had its influence on the development of public libraries. But whether the objectives of education were perceived as an investment in democracy or as a contribution to utility, the knowledge institutions were always connected in some way to the sociopolitical vision of American society.

The processes of the acculturation of the young into that society were never regarded as anything other than labor intensive, for many nineteenth century Americans had before them the European example. Great universities and great libraries, like great oaks, simply do not grow from little acorns in a matter of minutes. With the coming of the twentieth century, however, the state became less identified with the aura of a body politic and more imbued with the technocratic competence that had made American business so profitable. No exact date can be assigned to this shift, but its portents lie in the promotion of scientific management, the enunciation of the intertwined aims of efficiency and effectiveness, the assumption made by presidents of the United States, beginning with Woodrow Wilson,[39] that the public administrator could be as efficient as the entrepreneur, and the expectation that the government of the country could be run along the lines of a hierarchical business corporation.

But the approach of the management of a for-profit corporation and a not for profit nation should be different, not alike. "A technocratic system is usually measured by tests of organizational outcomes – efficiency and effectiveness," observes Joseph L. Bower, while on the other hand, "a political system is usually measured by tests of the organization's process and by the pattern of distribution of benefits consequent upon its activity – accountability and legitimacy."[40] Neither PPBS, nor MBO, nor zero base budgeting, nor Reform '88, nor any other technocratic wrinkle, has succeeded as a means toward the determination of accountability and legitimacy. Such efficiency provoking reforms may work well in the delivery of goods and even some services, but they are inappropriately applied to the labor intensive process of the inculcation of knowledge.

The whirling tape drives of the computer, the instantaneous response in retrieval time, the convenience added to the process of research through xerography and facsimile may all facilitate activities of learning and informing. But knowledge, however generously nurtured by these devices, remains established as the principal citizen in the republic of the self.

Under attack by policymakers who want education to remedy long standing social dilemmas and problems, the knowledge institutions will never prove their legitimacy by a profit margin, for their ledger books are written in subjective, not objective, terms. Although many examples and illustrations could be used to support this thesis, one will suffice. During the mid-1960s, the author of an article dealing with the role of librarians in the War against Poverty described his experiences as a youth in the branch of the New York Public Library at 135th street in the heart of Harlem.

> I went to the library not only to escape the athletic competition, but also to escape the streets. There was something about the peace and the calm of the library that shut out the noise and dirt and conflict. The building's cleanliness and serenity brought me peace; a sense of rightness. The librarians smiled at us; they didn't call us names.[1]

Mounting the stairs, he dared to enter the reading room usually reserved for adults. Fully expecting to be rejected, he found to his surprise that a large man approached him, smiling:

> He didn't ask me what I wanted. He merely put one arm around my shoulder and assumed that I was interested in the books. We went over to a table and sat down and began to talk in those hushed tones associated with any conversation in the library. We talked about books. We talked about wonderful things: about the history of human beings, about the contributions of Negroes which were to be found in books. He showed me portraits of Negroes who had contributed something important, men like Ira Aldridge in his role as Othello. I am sure he knew he was teaching me.[2]

That large man was Arthur Schomburg, the distinguished black bibliophile, and the youth was Kenneth B. Clark, the psychologist whose research into the effect of segregation influenced the

Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education,* a decision Schomburg did not live to see. Of Schomburg's death, Clark wrote:

> He was a librarian who helped others to share his values because he lived them. When he died... my first reaction was that he couldn't die. I didn't grieve in the usual way, because I thought he still lived in his collection of books, even that he lived on in me. As long as books are important, as long as books are bridges from one person to another, Arthur Schomburg has his monument.[13]

For other children using that same branch library the bulk of books may have indeed been mere consumables, but in the encounter between Arthur Schomburg and Kenneth Clark there was an unmistakable investment. Can you imagine that encounter translated by the Office of Management and Budget into cost-effective terms?

Workers in the knowledge institutions of the world, unite! We cannot, we must not, lose the earlier vision of librarians as suppliers of the oil and keepers of the light. Writing of the university in sentences that bear on all of the knowledge institutions, Professor Bloom reminds us that "this is the American moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged.... The gravity of our task is great, and it is very much in doubt how the future will judge our stewardship."[14]

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NOTES

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2. For a fuller discussion of the consumption investment dichotomy, see Alfred J. Kahn, *Social Policy and Social Services*, 2d ed. (New York: Random House, 1979), pp. 101-6.

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13. "Section E—The Library," including a speech by Frederick M. Crunden, in International Congress of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis, 1904, *Congress of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 8 (Boston and New York:

Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1907), p. 201. (In printing Crunden's speech in an issue of *Library Journal*, which appeared before the printed proceedings of the Congress, the editors entitled his address "The Library: A Plea for Its Recognition"; see Frederick Morgan Crunden, "The Library: A Plea for Its Recognition," *Library Journal* 29 (Dec. 1904): [3]–7).

14. Ibid., p. 200.

15. William Edward Armytage Axon, "The Library in Relation to Knowledge and Life," in International Congress of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis, 1904, *Congress of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 8, p. 204.

16. Ibid., p. 208.

17. Ibid., p. 213.

18. Guido Biagi, "The Library—Its Past and Future," in International Congress of Arts and Sciences, St. Louis, 1904, *Congress of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 8, pp. 222–23. Biagi's speech had both its admirers and detractors. Praise for his "brilliant imaginative flight into the future" is included in one of the editorial notes for the October 1904 issue of the *Library Journal*; on the same page of the issue, however, an anonymous editor commented that phonograph records would not displace the printed book because they required more storage room and were too expensive and because the time required to hear them was longer than the seconds needed by the eye, "a superior organ to the ear," to "sweep a page." "We cannot," opined the editor, "therefore, follow Professor Biagi in his aerial flight, nor advise that the shelving of the modern stack shall be turned into warehouse bins for phonograph records." ("Editorials"), *Library Journal* 29 (Oct. 1904): [515].

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COMPOSITION
Type Studio Ltd., Alexandria, Virginia

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