

Seven Mantras of Information Wisdom and Political Acumen for American Libraries in the Aftermath of the 2024 Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election, actions of political advocacy in predominant networks of American libraries need to go beyond traditional roles and responsibilities that we witnessed historically and in contemporary society. Such an approach requires deeper ethical, moral, philosophical, political, and action-oriented awakenings (i.e., “spiritual”) that are simultaneously inner (i.e., wisdom) and outwardly externalized (i.e., acumen). We cannot keep replicating the same patterns of the human condition repeatedly and expect different results. This opinion piece explores a typology of information wisdom and political acumen (i.e., mantras) for American libraries (and others) as they decipher the implications of the 2024 presidential election. Readers can consider the following mantras as propositions or assumptions in informing their library decision-making, policies, practices, and behaviors toward their diverse publics: American democracy (and American politics) is a business (mantra 1); American constitution is outdated and broken (mantra 2); President Trump’s “power politics” is an inherited and learnt legacy (mantra 3); people do have the power of resistance to navigate through the political games (mantra 4); President Trump represents different things to his different supporters (mantra 5); information wisdom (our humanity) MUST “trump” divisiveness (mantra 6); follow a strategic road map to self-awareness and action (mantra 7). This urgent call for engagement should inspire librarians to develop impact-driven political actions of resistance to inform themselves and educate their external public constituencies as we continue to experience more political chaos than what has been seen before, within and beyond the United States, thanks to the 2024 presidential election.

Introduction

I was delighted recently to receive an email invitation from Drs. Paul T. Jaeger and Allison Jennings-Roche to contribute an article in their edited special issue of *The Political Librarian* titled “The 2024 Election and the Future of Libraries.” This timely opportunity builds on my ongoing scholarship as a South Asian American educator-activist contesting political imbalances for more than twenty-five years via information-related work in tradition-

ally biased cultural settings (Mehra 2024a). It also reflects my recent social and political commentaries challenging insular American libraries, white-entrenched universities, and Anglo/Euro-advantaged society at large, steeped in its neoliberal complacencies, that have prevented the development of a fair and just democracy (Mehra 2021a). The occasion allows me to share my unique perspective to resist political Machiavellianism, especially in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election, situated through an intersectional identity and professional lens of engagement as an outspoken gay faculty of color in the American South. I strategically present select political insights in this opinion piece that might also destabilize intersectional hegemonies (e.g., sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.) in library and information science (LIS) that have stayed unchallenged owing to systemic institutional conditionings and cultural politicization around the world (Durrani 2008; Mehra 2024b). The goal is to push for greater community advocacy and social justice-inspired politicized actions in a problematized LIS (including libraries) that were traditionally limited in majority networks by sole political neoliberalism, culturally inherited in American white-IST (white + elitist) mores, still perpetuating deeply rooted colonial and imperialist inequities (Buschman and Warner 2016; Mehra and Gray 2020).

Within these interrelated realities, the article explores a typology of information wisdom and political acumen (i.e., mantras) for American libraries (and others) as they decipher implications of the 2024 presidential election's results that solidly placed Donald J. Trump as the forty-seventh president of the United States (POTUS) and bestowed control over both the chambers in Congress to the Republican Party (O'Donoghue 2024). Readers can consider the following mantras as propositions or assumptions informing their library decision-making, policies, practices, and behaviors toward their diverse publics: American democracy (and American politics) is a business (mantra 1); American constitution is outdated and broken (mantra 2); President Trump's "power politics" is an inherited and learnt legacy (mantra 3); people do have the power of resistance to navigate through the political games (mantra 4); President Trump represents different things to his different supporters (mantra 5); information wisdom (our humanity) MUST "trump" divisiveness (mantra 6); follow a strategic road map to self-awareness and action (mantra 7). We cannot keep replicating the same patterns of the human condition repeatedly and expect different results. I propose these typological elements of information wisdom and political acumen in the form of "mantras," a Sanskrit word meaning a sacred utterance with spiritual connotations (Alper 1991; Feuerstein 2003). Recent nonliteral meanings of "mantra" have been integrated into modern "non-Queen's" English, providing symbolically appropriate, rich, and eclectic constructions, possibly owing to broader neoliberal forces of commodifying colonized South Asian linguistics, languages, and cultures (Kapadia 1997; Shearer 2022). This urgent call for engagement should inspire librarians to develop impact-driven political actions of resistance to inform themselves and educate their external public constituencies, whether these populations traditionally engaged with library-related institutions or not (Blokdyk 2024; Frances 2020; Jaeger et al. 2014). Today, actions of political advocacy in predominant networks of American libraries need to go beyond traditional roles and responsibilities that we witnessed historically and in contemporary society (Morgan et al. 2024). Such an approach requires deeper ethical, moral, philosophical, political, and action-oriented awakenings (i.e., "spiritual") that are simultaneously inner (i.e., wisdom) and outwardly externalized (i.e., acumen). Emerging obligations will need traditionalist librarians (and others) to give up their embrace of a sordid insular past of staying passive bystanders as community dynamics unfolded (Shannon and Bossaller 2015). There is a need to shift these misguided notions as today's modern society and library com-

munities are drastically changing at unprecedented rates compared to the past. Yet, unhealthy tendencies to stay behind the curtains of public scrutiny or visibility and shy away from politically charged concerns have continued in predominant library leadership positions of power and privilege (Kitzie et al. 2022). They have dictated many contemporary library practices to stay solely cemented through blindly espousing logical and rationalized justifications that perpetuated inactions and maintained status quo conditions (Buschman 2016).

Readers should keep an open mind as they take deliverables of value from their reading of this text, tailored with information wisdom and applied with political acumen to their individualized information environments (Hennen 2005). The article's core agenda is to mobilize the resilience of libraries to develop greater community relevance and political impact external to their privileged spaces of authority and control (Jaeger et al. 2013). No longer do we have the privilege of staying disconnected from our local, regional, national, and international communities and/or hiding behind our library desks or virtual counters, shying away from people who are different from ourselves, fearful even of our own shadows for politicians' financial threats or public retaliations (Froehlich 2022; Wheeler and Muwanguzi 2022). This urgent call for engagement is pertinent as we continue to experience more political chaos than what has been seen before, within and beyond the United States, thanks to the 2024 presidential election (Klassen 2024).

Intertwining Concepts

The critical narrative would remain meaningless without a brief defining reference to two frequently occurring, intertwined concepts that clarify its scope and boundaries and contextualize the discourse. First, the article introduces the term "information wisdom" as the spirit underlying this reflective discussion. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2024a) selectively defines the noun "wisdom" (with its synonyms in brackets) as an "ability to discern inner qualities and relationships" [insight], "good sense" [judgment], "generally accepted belief," and "accumulated philosophical or scientific learning" [knowledge]. Wisdom has been an integral yet understudied part of the information science field, and in forming the highest end of Ackoff's (1989) data-information-knowledge-wisdom hierarchy, it remains "difficult to both investigate and understand" (Allen et al. 2019, 599; Rowley 2007). On the other hand, Michael K. Buckland (1991) recognized that "information has to do with becoming informed" to reduce ignorance and uncertainty; in his seminal work, he provided a pragmatic approach to understanding the tangible nature and dimensions of information based on characterizing groupings of its uses in terms of information-as-process, information-as-knowledge, and information-as-thing (351). This article's use of "information wisdom" brings together these two concepts with seemingly disparate yet connected meanings to facilitate deciphering implications in the contextualized political arena (i.e., the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election) for libraries to take effective actions accordingly (Buschman 2024). It acknowledges the need for an emerging (and revitalized) role of librarians, as well as all information professionals, whether educators, researchers, practitioners, students, and others (Hanell et al. 2023). Both wisdom at deeper philosophical and spiritual (i.e., humanistic) levels and the contextually based specifics of concrete information, in conjunction with each other, might reveal strategies of relevance for libraries to effectively respond to the current political realities, shaped within a biased American history that led to the debacle of the recent election cycle.

Second, in this article, the term “political acumen” represents a need for libraries to acknowledge and respond directly to the problematic dimensions of historical and contemporary practice and operationalize information wisdom to more effectively address the troublesome situation that American democracy drowning in neoliberal politics finds itself in today. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2024b) selectively defines the noun “acumen” as a “keenness and depth of perception, discernment, or discrimination especially in practical matters.” Political acumen in this article propounds a deeper and meaningful relevancy, reflecting a realization of the complexities surrounding the contemporary political reality in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election. The use of the term calls for developing concepts and constructs of information-related work that are more specific than those traditionally adopted and more responsive to users’ needs and wants, expectations, activities, and appropriate aspects of pertinence in different domains (e.g., politics, health, finances, education, etc.) (Mehra and Dali 2020; Mehra and Jaber 2021).

Information literacy is an example of a current approach that teaches information-related skills as a generalized (simplified), broad, and vague construct without addressing granular aspects of information-related work that are so different across varied contexts and disciplines (e.g., political literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, diversity literacy, educational critical literacy, etc.) (Mehra 2021b). This is not surprising. In the year 2000, an initially watered-down meaning of information literacy was first developed to help privileged students and faculty in white elitist academic libraries “be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” to enjoy the benefits of the information age (Presidential Committee on Information Literacy 1989). These white roots of information literacy to user instruction are highly problematic as their sole goal was to assist younger generations and privileged faculty in consuming information through fee-based exclusionary electronic databases provided by neoliberal publishers and vendors only in exclusionary settings (Iannuzzi 2000). Yet even today, we have white elitist LIS professionals cling to the term, as if for their dear lives, for their fears of nothing else to offer without simplification to be applicable to the largest “market” of information consumers. Maybe that is true for predominantly white administrators and managers in LIS, trying to maintain or replicate status quo conditions of their white (female) privilege at the cost of racial/ethnic minorities in similar positions of authority and acknowledgment. Thus, even when the privileged network of majority white members of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) developed the recently adopted superficial six frames of information literacy, they are so generalized to the extent of irrelevance, probably to further the popularity of the term (American Library Association 2015). However, the frames remain vague and abstracted, with no direct relevance to any specific domains of knowledge or focused information activity (Douglass 2022). No wonder information literacy was insufficient in generating greater public sensibility, engagement, and impact to make much of a difference in the political outcomes of the 2024 presidential election. As an information arsenal, it was unable to significantly shape public opinion directed toward preventing the political attacks targeted at libraries and others (e.g., book banning; use of equity diversity, inclusion, and accessibility language, etc.) or hold accountable those politicians who have perpetuated such movements against libraries and other democratic institutions.

Contextual Scoping in a Limited Library's Role

Some of the recently witnessed problems related to the past election represent a “dirty picture of American politics” painted through a manipulated enactment of American democracy (e.g., populist political and social legislations, partisan manipulation of the judiciary, etc.) and shaped by a ubiquitous immersion in dysfunctional neoliberalism (Buschman 2017; Mehra 2017, 376). Librarians (among others) must wake up and change from their outdated, insular, and entrenched modes of awareness and historical inactions that generated only limited external political benefits and possibly placed them in the recent vulnerable positionality of political attacks (e.g., book banning of nonconforming content, forced politicized pandemic shutdowns), plus more. For today, it might be a different story to tell if, over the decades, the American public (and politicians) had been historically more exposed to a vigorous and vibrant library activism, externalized outward toward their communities in major, white-entrenched networks, on behalf of democracy, intellectual freedom, human rights, and social justice (Mehra et al. 2017). It seems that majority librarians (or those predominantly white historians/scholars studying libraries) do not acknowledge this in their critiques of past developments in librarianship. Without this realization, their historical and contemporary narrative-building of library growth and privileged contemporary evolution stays marginal in reflecting a lack of critical self-assessment and poor reflective judgment.

Further, the unexpected moment of current surprise of privileged constituents in mainstream library circles (e.g., leaders in the American Library Association, ACRL, Public Library Association, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, etc.) is tragically funny and ironic in their response to the recent political threats, disempowering legislations, and unsympathetic public support evidenced from the election results in favor of politicians with repressive agendas against libraries. A critical scrutiny of a white majority library's historical and recent past would have logically provided no room for surprise if one objectively situated their continuously inward-looking agendas, white exclusionary practices, apathy to politics and minority communities, and externally directed inactions that remained a salient feature of most American libraries throughout their existence (Birdi et al. 2008). It reminds me of the story of the emperor wearing no clothes and walking down the street without much self-awareness and realization of his own actions (or inaction in his case to wear any clothes, thereby publicly exposing his vulnerable nakedness/madness). It is sheer foolishness now for libraries to continue in their passivity, neutrality, and other impotent modes of historically privileged traditional behaviors (conditioned over several centuries) and yet expect different results or outcomes (Mathiasson and Jochumsen 2023; Mehra and Jaber 2023).

In this context, there are some LIS professionals who might still argue that there were many external excruciating circumstances shaping the 2024 presidential election that were outside the periphery and domain of American libraries' roles and responsibilities as contemporarily practiced. I do not believe they are completely incorrect. However, I call for librarians (and LIS professionals) to take partial responsibility (at least) in the “owing of their dysfunctional reality” for accountability purposes. Additionally, they must openly recognize their poor externally applied contributions in the shaping of limited historical and present-day roles, as illustrated, for example, in their marginal impact on outward communities, poor placement in political decision-making, slow confrontation of the news-entertainment-politics relationship in American neoliberalism, finding alternate revenue streams freeing their sole dependency on the majority's political goodwill, spread of mis/disinformation, and more.

My Positionality Through a Social Justice Lens (Informing Political Activism)

My academic scholarship promotes social justice and social equity in LIS as a knowledge domain while operationalizing critical paradigms to bridge theory-practice-impact divides in ways that are intentional (deliberate), systematic (rigorous), constructive (asset-framed), participatory (inclusive), action-oriented, and outcome driven (Mehra 2022). My current work in an endowed chair professorship for social justice in LIS since January 2019 applies community informatics or the use of information and communication technologies toward the empowerment of underserved populations, both as intellectual and action-focused pursuits, dismantling the epistemological, ontological, methodological, and axiological roots of traditional discourse. A social justice-driven positionality in LIS and related disciplines requires us to promote fairness, justice, equity, change agency, and community development via information-related work with and on behalf of all people, especially those considered on society's margins. A critical imperative in operationalizing social justice identifies existing conditions of power imbalances and takes (or proposes) actions to change systemic hegemonic realities. It is but natural that such an approach to social justice will hit against the existing politics and political infrastructures that have historically perpetuated social, cultural, economic, and other forms of oppression and marginalization, generating gaps between the haves and have-nots (Mehta 2011).

Additionally, in recent years, my scholarship has also specifically focused on situating socially responsible politicizing actions in LIS and beyond to destabilize practices in contemporary rhetoric, news-generated infotainment, and public consumption behaviors manipulated by American political constituencies and vested stakeholders for many decades (Brissett and Moronta 2022; Oliphant 2015). For example, Mehra (2017) propounds rural libraries' mobilization in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election to advance political information literacy-fluency-advocacy intersections and economic development as "tools to nurture a more refined, responsive, respectful, and relevant form of democracy" than what the nation had experienced up till then (69). Further, Mehra (2019) introduces the gerund/present participle "trumping" in "mock homage to the fake news legacy" of President Trump's first regime (2017–21) as an "act of subversive and patriotic resistance" for libraries to counter his fake news rhetoric, "embrace a multi-pronged approach of information ACTism," and resist such politically motivated misbehaviors (181). Responding to the global retreat of democracy during the same political period, Mehra and Winberry (2021) illustrate promising practices of "politic talks" (i.e., political information) evidenced on the websites of academic libraries in land-grant state universities of the American South and how they were serving as key information providers during politically turbulent times. In the wake of recent racial atrocities by law enforcement, Mehra (2021a, 140) deconstructs performative antiracist politics of libraries in terms of a "performance in politics," "white fragility," and neoliberal commodification that advanced a false public image of sensitivity without "owning" their checkered racialized histories (Hylton 2020). More recently, Mehra (2023) calls for libraries (and others) to apply critical literacies and social justice interventions since the pandemic in response to unhealthy interlacing of (dis)information, dysfunctions, and American democracy operationalized via neoliberal news corporations, spineless politicians, and the manipulated publics seduced by social media distractions. The following sections exemplify seven "mantras" of information wisdom and political (information) acumen for libraries to consider in the wake of the 2024 presidential election.

Mantra 1: American Democracy (and American Politics) Is a Business

Like any other form of governance, American democracy has its flaws (Page and Gilens 2020). Within the churning of the economic wheels in neoliberal capitalism, American democracy (like everything else) continues to remain predominantly and hegemonically a money-making racket (Springer et al. 2016). This is orchestrated through the whipping of political news and circulation of political information to generate public interest (and consumption,) contributing solely to economic flows and profit margins (Chomsky 1999). The purpose of news about politics is to sell political communications (and information) so that its creators can exist (Paraskeva 2021). News companies cannot exist on love and fresh air; they must make profits to sustain their existence. They do so by communicating political information in ways people consume so that we buy, and the companies can sustain their existence (McChesney 2019). Keeping the public entertained is one way of doing this. Further, the news entertainment industry, with its increased media choices and information clutter, has widened gaps in political knowledge and turnout (Prior 2005).

No one knows this better than President Trump. His words shared through his political platform (or via social media and other channels) are meant to keep manipulating the public's adrenaline flow so that we continue maintaining and sustaining the news cycle. Taking back control of the Panama Canal, making offers to purchase Greenland, or considering Canada as the fifty-first American state are examples of the president's recent communications to illustrate this point (Weissert 2024). In the past, such statements would have sounded unbelievable coming from a POTUS, considering international laws and national sovereignties of each country around the world. The sheer reason for making them is for their entertainment value, plus other power games involved in global politics that President Trump has mastered based on past precedents (Jervis et al. 2018; Prince Michael of Liechtenstein 2025).

The wise role of libraries is to develop political (information) acumen in their communities so that they see through this political farce and orchestrated game. Deluding behind superfluous rhetoric such as the Constitution, American freedom, civil liberties, and the like is a brainwashing strategy that has clouded librarians' own visions (and that of the American public) of this reality for centuries (Porter 2020). Real democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people will truly emerge if we are trained via political acumen to become "wise" and see through the mirage of news-entertainment-politics consumption and distractions that President Trump and others generate (Bang 2023).

Mantra 2: The American Constitution Is Outdated and Broken

The Constitution of the United States is an enshrined/entrenched commodity in its unquestioned authority to form the basis of today's American democracy in principle and operationalization (Amar 2015). However, some scholars believe aspects of it are outdated and require urgently needed changes to develop contemporary relevance in shaping American democratic processes and truly representing sovereignty and the will of a sovereign people (Fritz 2004). The sole reliance in the American electoral process on the current form and role of the Electoral College (e.g., one party "wins all" despite the popular vote totaled in each state) when we know it as unfair and tainted is an illustrative example of its deterministic absolute power (DeSilver 2016).

Another instance is the orchestration of a two-party system via corporate investment in political campaigns that has curtailed a realistic possibility of any alternative to the

Democratic-or-Republican-Party-affiliated candidates emerging as viable options, leading to an entrenched predominantly “either-or” selection by the American public (Drutman 2020; Ware 2009). This makes the political slogan “of the people, by the people, and for the people” partly jingoism and incompletely true (Epstein 2011). Appointment of the judges of the Supreme Court (i.e., the judiciary) by the POTUS (i.e., the executive) is not a truthful representation of separation of powers in the federal government that is purported since the origins of American democracy as a structural protection of individual liberty, thereby, leading to the current partisan reality compared to bipartisan processes as loudly proclaimed (Garry 2007; Rebe 2023). There are numerous additional problems in America’s broken political democratic industry, inspired by the Constitution, owing probably to its tampering pure proceduralism and/or process-oriented contradictions, bottom line, incapable of delivering authentic, unbiased functioning of the interacting legislative, executive, and judiciary branches (Gehr and Porter 2020). Many of these have their origins in the conflicting, unclear, or (sometimes) absent information presented in a centuries-old source that is considered unquestionably authoritative in the contemporary enactment of American democracy (Hayden 2024).

The Declaration of Independence propounded that “all *men* are created equal” [my italization to spotlight the male bias] even as we find that the number of slaves in the new nation of 1810 nearly doubled from what it was in the 1770s (Kolchin 2003). The Founding Fathers were a bunch of white men of Anglo/European origins very specifically immersed in a biased, unfair, and unjust political, economic, social, and cultural world, raising complicated issues of inequities in race, sex, class, and justice as we challenge and resist their hegemonic impact even today (Hannah-Jones 2020). For however noble and well-meaning their intentions might have been, it is completely unreasonable and illogical to believe that their internalized dictums and externalized propagations were not informed (or influenced) within a sexist, racist, colonialist/imperialist, or privileged and imbalanced positionality at psychological, emotional, linguistic, or humanistic levels (Goat 2019). No wonder even the first few words of the American Constitution, “We the People,” defining the national purpose, also identified “people” solely based on exclusion as evidenced in its omission of the fundamental rights and freedoms, their disavowal of people of color, denial of citizenship, and restrictions of the right to vote for women, slaves, and others in American society of that time (Papekaj 2019).

Thomas G. West (1997) and others have called attention to accusations of hypocrisy charged at the Founding Fathers in the adequately lacking coherent statements around their views on the prevailing cultural mores and social issues and how they were related to their declared political principles. Yet, the rhetorical and political products of the labor of the Founding Fathers are today often accepted blindly without reason. An opportunity to make changes, revisions, or constitutional reforms is stuck in an archaic, clunky, and cumbersome amendment process, even as our understanding of humanity, human dignity, social justice, and other progressive considerations has changed (Leitzke 2024; Tushnet 2011). The semblance of change that can be made in the American Constitution through an extremely problematized, tedious process of amendments played out through the biased chambers of government is illustrated by the fact that there have been so few over the centuries (Anastaplo 1992; Eskridge and Levinson 1998). In the arena of policy and judicial politics, the Constitution stands almost at the level of the Gospels that are literally taken as the unquestioned “Word of God” despite the changing evolution and understanding of human beings; so is the undeniable faith in its principles shaping the implementation of American democracy today (Smith and Tuttle 2011).

There is much evidence of how President Trump and others have violated, misused, and manipulated the American Constitution to generate fervor or confusion and cloud judgments perpetuating unfair and inappropriate advantages taken from the pulpit of power; for example, “fleecing taxpayers with unlawful and exorbitant hotel charges” and other “domestic emoluments rackets and pay-to-play schemes” (House Committee on Oversight and Accountability Democrats 2024). A duty of wise librarians today should be to develop political (information) acumen qualities in their publics (and in themselves) to identify and discuss the problematics of American democracy and its biased principles and implementation processes in direct relationship to contemporary politics and political agendas of politicians who misrepresent and miscommunicate its portions to create public misunderstandings and mayhem. Proactive advocacy in calling for a simpler mechanism of change than the current reliance on a messed-up amendment process could be one valuable step in this regard. Venturing outside their spaces into the community (e.g., churches, social welfare centers, courthouses, etc.) and advocating for questioning biased Constitution-inspired practices is a must. Librarians can also help destabilize amendment processes and dismantle constitutional privilege in verbiage as well as the corrupt behavior of politicians to loosen biased controls of the past over contemporary practices in American democracy.

Mantra 3: President Trump’s “Power Politics” Is an Inherited and Learnt Legacy

Central to the concept of “power politics” is the idea that the current problems in American politics are related historically and contemporarily to the shaping of the political processes, ideas, institutions, motivations, and actions taken by political actors in their positions of power and authority (Stratton 2020). President Trump and others are not only aware of their cultural inheritance of the evolutionary flaws in American democracy and the outdated nature of the American Constitution but continue to often misuse, misrepresent, and manipulate the rules of the game to serve their political ambitions of seeking and maintaining democratic office at the cost of public interests (Trump 2009). The publics are also probably aware of these realities, yet we stay distracted, deluded, entertained, uncaring, or oblivious (and more) to how power politics shape the current political realities we experience (Nyamnjoh 2022).

President Trump and others have personally inherited and/or created opportunities to learn to master the bending of political rules and principled obligations that ethical people without his pedigree blue-collar upbringing and privileged social positionality would feel compelled to follow without question (Serwer 2021). Even conservative radio host Rush Hudson Limbaugh III openly recognized this when he quoted alt-right thinker Mytheos Holt (in Fedewa): “He [Donald Trump] has mastered the media with his combination of celebrity, glitzy lifestyle, outlandish language, and iconoclastic positions on so many topics. He freely uses all the terms which have been banned by ‘political correctness’ and unabashedly supports positions unthinkable by the Left. And the reaction is massive acceptance.” President Trump’s power and impact are, thus, undeniably real even when they are corrupt to their very core (Ansell 2022). Yet, his supporters overlook his perversion, fascinated by his craft refined over several decades as a performer and reality show comedic entertainer (McNamara 2024). President Trump has the masses firmly in his sway, translating his knowledge of the ins and outs of American politics and its manipulation as business merchandise via a masterful “unconventional political style,” caricature of his opponents, spectacle orchestrations dictated

solely by neoliberal values, signifying style over content via celebrity-driven theatrical performances and “exaggerated depictions of the sociopolitical world” (Hall et al. 2016, 71).

In this land where make-believe reality has mesmerized us all, wise librarians can serve as guideposts on this journey to information wisdom via the development of political (information) acumen in their patrons and the larger society. Their role is to actively showcase the real versus the drama that President Trump (and other politicians) thrive on (Drabinski 2024). Political acumen will involve librarians applying information ACT-ism, in its multipronged political information literacy-fluency-advocacy intersections, to focus on how President Trump’s rhetoric, behaviors, and policies in a post-truth media world damage public financial security, further gaps between the haves and have-nots, and propel corporations and big-money stakeholders to economically disenfranchise public interests (Clements 2017; Higdon and Huff 2019; Mehra 2019).

This role will be new to many traditional librarians (Lankes 2015). However, they will need to illustrate information value through evidence and articulate how exactly and where the shoe pinches the public and hurts them financially, resulting from President Trump’s corporate support and personal (or family) greed, facilitated by the current Republican control of the Congress in the years to come (DiResta 2024). This would mean that libraries (of all sorts) must become the voice of reason and serve as the authoritative checks and balances that have become eroded in American democracy in its current facilitation of hegemonic government power (Jaeger et al. 2022). Critical and action-oriented librarians can emerge as leaders in this political reality show, establishing themselves as THE mainstream authoritative sources that people across party lines seek as viable alternatives to their current reliance on the chatter of talk show hosts, news pundits, or social media and all the often experienced hyperbolic, distracting political rhetoric of chaos and confusion (Kingkade 2023).

Mantra 4: People Do Have the Power of Resistance to Navigate Through the Political Games

The events in American democracy over the past few years leading to the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election provide a politically problematized complex information grounds of power and abuse (Cortez 2019; Fisher and Naumer 2006; Savlainen 2009). They present possibly scary considerations when we make any implicational assessments of President Trump’s several politically charged statements that go beyond a realization of their solely entertainment and money-making value for news channels (Moreland-Capuia 2021). A rhetorical statement such as the use of “military force to acquire Panama Canal and Greenland and ‘economic force’ to annex Canada” and others could very well happen and become true facts based on past precedents, and many of President Trump’s supporters seriously believe his seemingly absurd claims to be real (Doyle and Hillyard 2025). There are also many political instances that illustrate how President Trump is quite conditioned through life’s experiences and opportunities to use his power, money, or whatever resources he can to make possible what he states or envisions (making his supporters believe him), even when it might go against the Constitution, law, ethics, or social responsibility (Kotnik 2021). For example, maybe just a decade back, who would have thought that one day, through a vehement speech, an outgoing president of the United States of (the Great) America (referencing MAGA) would inspire an assault on Capitol Hill by his violent supporters (as witnessed during the attack on Congress on January 6, 2021) (Zull et al. 2023). As a “cult of personality,” President Trump has established his stranglehold on the reins of the Republican Party and the American public using

mind control by creating “an alternate reality for the group and repeat[ing] it ceaselessly” (Conway 2019, vii). If it is one thing, President Trump has a pattern/script that is quite transparent in how he operates. He generates attention by making seemingly absurd statements posted on social media, etc., to have the press and public lap it up, thereby churning the economic wheels of commodification, consumption, and financial sustenance of a privileged few (Mercieca 2020). The fact of the matter might also be that President Trump himself might not be aware of which of his political rhetoric he seriously believes in, performing his role of throwing it out there and seeing “which fish would bite” and watching how power politics works to make his words and seemingly impossible realities sort themselves out in his favor (or not) (Momen 2019).

In the face of such hegemonic theatrics and transparent misuse of the political pulpit of American power, believe it or not, the people of this country do have more potential for influence than they might realize (West 2022). The American publics, in their intersectional pluralities, must not accept a simplification of themselves in categorical “blacks and whites” and realize their own worth to challenge, resist, and destabilize power games that solely grease pockets of self-serving politicians and their corporate supporters at the cost of public interests (Regilme, Jr. 2019). The wise information professionals (e.g., the librarians) are the agents who can facilitate political (information) acumen and public realization of their own capabilities and capacities in this regard (Leung and Lopez-McKnight 2021). A mobilization of the publics and action-oriented vision would require librarians to help the people deconstruct what they hear and see on the political (social) media platforms and filter the “noise” to zoom in on what are the emerging financial threats against their own interests through the politically motivated decisions (Cole and Stinnett 2017). In these problematic political scenarios, librarians must also create opportunities for the public to aggressively take action and confront their local, regional, state, and federal representatives across party lines to vocalize their economic needs and pressurize political authorities in the chess games of the political process to work in their favor (DiMaggio 2019).

Mantra 5: President Trump Represents Different Things to His Different Supporters

The wide margins in President Trump’s victory over his rival Kamala Harris during the 2024 presidential election were contrary to the predictions in the liberal press of close gaps between the two across the various states (Ting 2024). The miscalculating news channels and many in the public were taken by surprise since they were expecting different results, déjà vu to President Trump’s earlier victory over Hillary Clinton in 2016 that also went south for the Democratic Party contrary to the popular news pundits of the day (Enns et al. 2024). It would be foolish to continue expecting different results while doing the same thing again and again, right? What are some insights from this in the 2024 presidential election for the wisely astute librarian to offer training support to their public constituencies in the skills of political acumen? First, the evidence of the unpredictable severity in the election result gaps could be reasoned that many closeted Republicans did not disclose their vote in President Trump’s favor while proclaiming otherwise, even to their family members, work colleagues, or in election forecast surveys for embarrassment, amongst other reasons (Robinson 2024). The underlying implication of their choice to stay “invisible” could be that maybe President Trump does mean different things to different people, and his multiple personae that appeal to his vast voter base include his image as a self-made man, the wrestler, or a trickster dis-

guised as an identity politician, amongst several others (Järvenpää 2021). The reality of the matter also is that there are many single-issue voters who were (and are) concerned about one matter and one matter only, not necessarily troubled by any other aspects that President Trump might represent (Arnsdorf 2024). For example, right after the 2024 presidential election, I had conversations with several white, gay, blue-collar workers in rural Alabama who completely believed what they heard in the news media (e.g., Fox News) about President Trump in his support of working-class people and his stringent viewpoints on immigration issues perceived to be in favor of American workers (e.g., travel bans, border wall construction, family separation, etc.), irrespective of the truth or not (Dandolov 2024; Mariita 2024). Their support of him during the 2024 presidential election was categorical and independent of his supporters' legal attacks and book ban legislation against nonconforming gender content in libraries, issues that were mute to them compared to the economy and/or immigration (Seymour 2024). Similarly, in my conversations with some Black men with young children, President Trump's stance on the economy and solidarity with American families, as covered by the media, was a key factor in their support of him compared to his use of bigotry "as a tool for dividing society to the point of potential collapse, from which an authoritarian regime could appear" (Gerston 2024, 1). In another scenario, my discussions with several Catholic parents of gay children similarly revealed how they have always voted for President Trump and been ardent supporters of the Republican Party. The reason for this unquestionable backing is news coverage of Republican allegiance to traditional family values and conservative interpretations of religious doctrines on same-sex relationships, irrespective of their political attacks targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (including the parent's own children). Wise librarians can sharpen their political (information) acumen in public education by highlighting various complex (and sometimes contradictory) dimensions of single-focused issues important to voters instead of simplifying the concerns for their patron communities (Chrastka and Sweeney 2019). They can also present authoritative evidence in the news media about the ambiguities related to these matters as an important strategy for shaping the thinking of their stakeholders and the larger society (Matzko 2020). Spotting flaws in the research methods used by companies that conduct election forecast surveys and ways that those findings are translated into extrapolated results over the entire population would also be valuable (Mongrain and Stegmaier 2024).

Mantra 6: Information Wisdom (Our Humanity) MUST "Trump" Divisiveness

Building on the article's earlier political acumen, there is a need for further clarification of additional insights to provide a holistic understanding for wise librarians to act in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election (Piedra 2025). The strangling corporate ropes tied to the two-party system in the orchestration of American democracy have provided a flawed "either-or" option to the American public that is tightly controlled by vested economic interests (Drutman 2020; Naiman 2011). Within this imbalanced structure, the politicians really have no choice but to create divisiveness to survive and thrive by developing niched and segmented voters as they attempt to distinguish themselves from the one and only "other side" (Quinn 2016). The responsibility of the news channels is to report the immediate happenings of the political events as they occur (Entman 1989). Their staying in business is directly connected to creating consumers that stay emotionally "hooked" through the divisiveness and get their psychological needs met by staying entertained (Fallows 1997).

Bottom line, the divisiveness that is a dysfunctional consequence of a broken American democracy has now led to a complete memory loss (and erasure) in people across the party lines of their basic rooted humanity across the divided sides (Denton, Jr. and Voth 2017). It is such that we human beings cannot recognize our inhuman reactions anymore, say, to vulnerable children separated forcefully from their families owing to “zero tolerance” policies for immigration, as an indicator of principled ethics compared to a “caring ethical response” (Thayer-Bacon 2020, 701). If this is not a loss of humanity, what is? It is not surprising that we cannot even sit across from each other to understand our conditioned reasonings of the “other” (misshaped by the nature of (dis)information) so as to keep from falling prey to those who manipulate us only to fill their pockets at the hegemonic cost of the public good (Austad 2024). Wise librarians must engage with their patrons and the wider society about these dysfunctions, probably in the realm of discomforts, over and beyond what and how they have conducted their business in the past (Yoo 2021). In this process, it is the role of the wise librarians (and others) to remind people of their humanness, provide opportunities to recognize their conditionings, engage with each other in civil and mutually respectful ways, understand (and explain) the historical dependency of the political moment in its problematized political, social, cultural, and economic dimensions, and more (Lupton 2002). We have to remind ourselves that divisiveness is a natural outcome of flawed systems and processes, and they do not “trump” the humanity that connects us all as a species.

Mantra 7: Follow a Strategic Road Map to Self-Awareness and Action

In closing the discussion of the mantras urgently needed to facilitate information wisdom, a politically astute librarian must help conceptualize, develop, and operationalize a process of deconditioning what we know and how we know it (Mele 2024). This deconditioning of biased meaning-making processes is key to their own mind, language, and thinking, as well as that of their patrons and the larger society (Tsondu and Dodson-Lavelle 2009). This is what true wisdom will look like. To generate political acumen, a systematic, intentional, strategic, and honest approach is needed that might serve as a road map to create levels of self-awareness and generate mutual understanding. This road map would include well-laid-out milestones in a strategic plan of operationalization that helps in the dismantling of our understanding of politics and democracy in how it is currently practiced. The starting point to self-awareness of our community stakeholders is reflexivity and critical assessment when asking the question of what we know and how we know what we know. We also need to develop a conscious awareness of words used to describe and communicate what we know (including their limitations) and the role and process of politics and news media in the shaping and use of these by vested interests to achieve their manipulative agendas. Getting our patrons to specifically engage with finding answers to these questions as applicable to themselves is an important step for them to recognize the biases, shortcomings, and manipulations that have become possible because of these nuances. We also must create recognition of the imbalanced and biased processes of history and the colonialist and imperialist world order that has resulted in the contemporary globalized gaps between the haves and have-nots.

Conclusion

There is a natural tendency for abuse owing to an intrinsic outcome of power essential from human engagement in politics and its processes, activities, and discourse surround-

ing governance (Gehl and Porter 2020). Further, democracy is never easy, and it is chaotic and messy the world over (Diamond 1990). Brainwashed by superfluous political rhetoric about the sanctity of the American Constitution, individual freedom, civil liberties, etc., the American public believed their version of democracy was somehow clean and orderly (i.e., “better”) compared to the rest of the world (Matsusaka 2004). President Trump’s corrupt rise to power over the past few decades and his expert manipulation of the public (and the laws) has broken these illusions (Moghadam and Jafarpour 2022). Americans (and politicians) are as prone to representing the ugliness of human beings (e.g., sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, misuse of power, etc.) as anyone else (Locke 2022). Women, people of color, and marginalized others have experienced such ugliness of power differentials on a day-to-day basis in American society and know this from their lived realities. However, the power of the American political rhetoric has been so ingrained in us that these actualities were never allowed to emerge as predominant cultural representational narratives for mainstream public consumption (Shook et al. 2020).

Today, in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election, all is different. Hence, the message of this article is for librarians (and others) to recognize and advocate for the delivery of this realism articulated in terms of information wisdom and political acumen to help their communities critically reassess their own placement in the politics of the day (Wayne 2024). The brief listing of the seven mantras is just a start. Future work will provide more detailed refinements and analysis. The mantras might seem like common sense axioms to some. However, over many years, such political strategies have not been included in any foundational content in LIS, which is a severe gap (Jaeger et al. 2017; Million and Bossaller 2020). It is important for us to advance the role that libraries (or LIS as diverse professions within the field of information) can play to assertively lead political activism and advocacy in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election. It is key to challenge the orchestration of a dysfunctional democracy in the United States that has been dictated solely by a neoliberal global society tainting even the highest office of the land (Lawson et al. 2015). We cannot keep replicating the patterns of the human condition repeatedly and expect different results. That would be sheer foolishness, hence, this article’s imperative call for libraries to develop information wisdom and make politically astute choices in order to break the endless dysfunctional cycle.

The choice to take action is thus clear for the survival of human beings. As the mode of governance of a nation leading the free world, American democracy has to provide a new message that taps into our essential humanity with honesty instead of the discord, hypocrisy, and lack of accountability that we continue to see in the political arena on a daily basis. Social justice begins at home. What better way than applying the seven mantras toward carving a path forward? Librarians and information professionals (plus others) in the United States (and the world over) can play a significant role in this regard toward information wisdom via grounded political acumen in the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election. Hopefully, the readers of this article recognize the validity and urgency of the message to take action in political advocacy and prove the doomsday predictors wrong while steering us toward a positive reality in sync with progressive and collaborative visions of humanity for the future.

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