The Political Librarian

The Political Librarian

CONTENTS

A Love Letter to Libraries in Our Darkest Hour: An Introduction to a Special Issue of *The Political Librarian*, "Libraries After the 2024 Vote: The Future of Libraries in a Divided America"

ALLISON JENNINGS-ROCHE AND PAUL T. JAEGER

Values. A set of universalizing concepts that were once so much a given in that it nearly felt provincial to discuss them within librarianship; of course, we all supported access, inclusion, and the freedom to read; of course, the American public "just loved libraries" and would support our work. And yet, here we are—our pretense of shared values has been shaken to its core, and the foundations of librarianship are crumbling beneath our feet.

From local boards and councils to state legislatures and governors to the White House and Congress, power in many places is now in the hands of people who support book bans and censorship, devalue information access and literacy, and seek to undermine or outright destroy libraries. While much anti-library activity occurred during the first Trump administration (Douglass et al. 2017), the second Trump administration has a clear and public plan, *Project 2025*, to dismantle fundamental democratic norms and institutions, including all government support of libraries, archives, and museums.

To those still attempting to serve and uphold values-based democratic norms and defend libraries and other cultural heritage institutions, the current political moment is demoralizing, threatening significant emotional burnout of librarians, civil servants, and concerned citizens. *Project 2025* is being implemented with an efficiency heretofore unheard of in American history, as a small, vocal, concerted group of ideologues are flooding the zone with discriminatory and hateful policies that seem likely to bring shame to our nation for generations.

Rather than succumbing to helplessness, the response is to do something, take a step, find your work, and commit to it. In librarianship, some part of that work is uplifting voices, educating ourselves, and sharing strategies for change in writing and in conversation in each of our workplaces. We (Allison and Paul) became the guest editors of this special issue after we approached the wonderful folks at the EveryLibrary Institute with the idea of harnessing our networks and the existing deep wealth of expertise and passion in libraries in order to

offer a timely and practical issue of the journal that would serve library workers, scholars, and academics alike. In the wake of the election, library workers immediately began to approach each of us with questions like, "How did this happen? Why now? What can I do?" And perhaps most tellingly, heart-wrenchingly, "How do I not lose hope and slip into despair?"

When we put out the original call for proposals, we sought hope and perhaps some small remedy to the despair and cynicism plaguing American library workers today. We do not blame those who are losing hope in these turbulent times and know that, ultimately, "cynicism is the great mask of the disappointed and betrayed heart" (hooks, xviii). Librarians have every right to feel disappointed and betrayed—by the larger political sphere, our institutions, and our communities—but there is a path forward, both in the wise words of those who carved out the time to contribute to this special issue and in the utterly essential work performed by librarians across the country every day.

In responding to the CFP for this issue, our esteemed contributors are offering their best ideas and insights for libraries—despite the burnout, demoralization, personal attacks, and sometimes very real threats to their safety and mental and professional stability. There were those whose voices we would have loved to foreground who were unable to contribute because of the above conditions or because they were just too darned busy doing the work and serving their communities and the American public to write. To those who contributed here and to those who are contributing every single day to the field, we are beyond grateful.

In admitting and recognizing the real-world toll on our contributors, we do not wish to advance savior narratives or claim stolen library valor from the workers on the front lines of increasingly perilous conditions. Rather, we seek to highlight the very real human toll of this kind of work in America in 2025. Library workers across the country and the spectrum of cultural heritage institutions are struggling to find the courage to face the enormous real-world consequences of the extreme—and often legally questionable—political decisions of the new administration a mere two months into its four-year term.

The paths before us are rocky and perilous. There are absolutely no guarantees that we will be able to preserve and protect libraries in a form that we would recognize as true to our shared mission. As such, "values-based librarianship is vital now. Solidarity around our mission, our role in society, and our partners that share that mission is essential, and is the source of the infectious passion that libraries are capable of inculcating" (Anonymous/ Liberator 2025, 179). We need to move through despair and into the kind of passionate, determined, and sustained work that will be required to protect the very idea of the public good in the United States.

Librarians and their supporters who are struggling to maintain energy and passion would do well to remember that "the opposite of love is indifference. Apathy. Giving into emotional fatigue. Being somewhere on the denial spectrum (turn your eyes away; don't look), and not being courageous enough…" (Nunez and Teng 2019). Library workers, scholars, advocates, allies, and accomplices need to recommit to the work and each other in ways that will be mentally and emotionally sustaining for the long struggle ahead. Libraries simply will not survive if we succumb to our exhaustion and let those who would destroy our institutions have their way.

We, as guest editors, wish to reiterate our gratitude to our contributors for digging deep in the wells of their mental and emotional reserves to help us put forward a truly exceptional special issue. As editors, we have the privilege of knowing—at least for now—that our careers are not endangered by sharing our positions. However, the same cannot be said for each writer willing to share their perspectives and serve the public good. While this may be a

journal in the technical sense, in pulling this together and working with the contributors, we have come to envision this issue as a multifaceted love letter to libraries in their remarkably embattled conditions. A vibrant reminder of what they are at their best and what they can be for their patrons, their communities, and library workers themselves.

As much as we hope that dissent is the highest form of patriotism, logically, we can assume that one of the highest forms of love is thoughtful critique. Holding our institutions accountable is uncomfortable, and there are challenging positions within the digital pages of this issue, but we invite you to sit with those challenges and consider them in the spirit with which they were offered. Libraries will only survive if we truly wrangle with the internal and external threats to our institutions AND if each library worker feels empowered enough to keep showing up, mentally and physically.

There is no love without accountability, and love is the antidote to injustice (Nunez and Teng 2019), and we mean that very seriously. We need to love our communities and the people we serve enough to rumble with the legacies of oppression, political missteps, and mistakes that have contributed to dismantling the institutions that only exist to serve their communities. Understanding the ways in which this hate-fueled and unforgiving new political reality will impact libraries, archives, and museums is the goal of this special of *The Political Librarian*. "The 2024 Election and the Future of Libraries" provides twenty-one articles discussing and analyzing what the 2024 election may indicate for the future of libraries and library work, offering a wide range of perspectives and ideas from educators, researchers, administrators, and professionals.

After this introduction and the thoughts of *The Political Librarian*'s editor, Andrew Sulavik, the issue intentionally opens and closes with the voices of those on the metaphorical "front lines" of the battles of the war on libraries and public institutions. "On Moving Forward," an impassioned and thoughtful piece submitted by an anonymous public librarian working in a county where over 75 percent of their community chose to vote in favor of the Trump administration, closes the issue and resituates the reader in the values-based principles that may likely be our only path forward. Each of the pieces that build to that final article offers us perspectives on the innumerable, but not unsolvable, problems facing libraries in the aftermath of the 2024 election.

The issue opens, with intention, with the perspective of a recently fired federal librarian (Price), as we want to ensure that we do not lose sight of the immensely destructive consequences of these policies on the committed library workers who seek to serve the public good. From there, the issue does not have a rigid structure either in sectioning out articles by style or content; rather, we arrange the pieces to move through thematic (and very loose) categories. There are thoughtful and interesting perspectives that speak to those who teach librarians and librarians who teach (Bibealt, Durney, and Kiel). The next series of articles includes clear-eyed analysis from advocates and policymakers who will help us collectively make sense of the legal and political battles we are facing (Klosek, Curliss et al., and Halperin), and the issue moves into perspectives from political strategists who offer ideas for library leaders and advocates facing organizing challenges (Chrastka, Crowley, Carpenter, and Jaeger and Jennings-Roche).

Each section is porous, and there are overlapping and complementary themes, but we next see the articles flowing into deep and reflective analyses of the legacies of anti-intellectualism, race, class, gender, and Western homogeneity on the destabilization of the field (Buschman, Williams and Cooke, Mehra, Jennings-Roche, and Ndumu and Park). Specific forward-thinking notes of strategy and hope from librarians and scholars who have dedicated

their careers to access, inclusion, and the freedom to read offer some resolution and provide direction to the work we all must do if we want libraries to survive until the next election (Kranich). Closing the issue is first the voice of a working public librarian reaffirming our original vision of offering grounded hope to all library workers seeking to hold on to their values in these bleak times (Anonymous), and then an article from Paul Jaeger provides both a high-level view of the current reality grounded in his decades of advocacy and a hopeful path forward with specific suggestions for steps each kind of library champion could take to protect their institutions, freedom, and democracy. He reminds us that "The processes of rebuilding trust of and respect for cultural heritage institutions, information professionals, and the values so central to the field will require those working in the field and those who care about the institutions to commit to this work for the very long haul" (Jaeger 2025, 192).

Our hope is that this issue of *The Political Librarian* is both practically useful and thought-provoking for the long term as we all attempt to strategize and prioritize our attention for the next few years of likely unending attacks on libraries, archives, and museums. Ultimately, we hope that each person reading this remembers that your voice matters and that every small action can build a larger social change for the better.

Library workers: Your voice matters, your work matters, your community matters, your agency matters. Ours is a profession driven by kindness, compassion, and education; each action of kindness, compassion, and education is a refutation of the hatred, book bans, and threats to send librarians to jail. As editors, we do not have all the answers, or even many answers, but we do hope some part of this issue is usable, hopeful, or interesting—and perhaps all three—to you as you fight, advocate, and show up for your communities every day. As you keep showing up, remember to find your community, use your voice, and protect the values you hold dear; only by that may we ever hope to achieve the kind of cultural transformation necessary for beating back the rising tide of authoritarianism.

***

References

Anonymous/Liberator, "On Moving Forward," in "The 2024 Election and the Future of Libraries," ed. P.T. Jaeger and A. Jennings-Roche, special issue, *The Political Librarian* Special Issue, vol. 8.1 (2025): 179. https://journals.library.wustl.edu/pollib/.

Douglass, C., U. Gorham, R. F. Hill, K. Hoffman, P. T. Jaeger, G. Jindal, and B. St. Jean. 2017. "Information Access and Information Literacy Under Siege: The Potentially Devastating Impacts of the Proposed 2017 White House Budget on Already-Marginalized Populations in the United States." *First Monday* 22 (10). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i10.8088.

hooks, bell. 2000. *All About Love: New Visions* (1st edition). William Morrow. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1308/99035253-b.html.

Nuñez, S., and S. Teng. 2019. "Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper." Issue Lab. Candid, July 19. https://search.issuelab.org/resource/measuring-love-in-the-journey-for-justice-a-brown-paper.html.

Jaeger, P. T., "We Are Not Helpless: Some Lessons for Libraries, Archives, and Museums from a Lifetime of Researching Policy, Political, and Legal Processes," in "The 2024 Election and the Future of Libraries," ed. P. T. Jaeger and A. Jennings-Roche, special issue, *The Political Librarian* Special Issue, vol. 8.1 (2025): 192. https://journals.library.wustl.edu/pollib/.

Zinn, H. 2002. "Dissent In Pursuit Of Equality, Life, Liberty And Happiness." Interview by Sharon Basco. Howard Zinn, July 3. https://www.howardzinn.org/collection/dissent-in-pursuit-of-equality-life-liberty-and-happiness/.

Contextualizing This Issue: Events Affecting the Institute of Museum and Library Services Since January 20, 2025

EVERYLIBRARY INSTITUTE

APRIL 16TH, 2025

The following issue contains articles written between December 1, 2024, and February 23, 2025. Since then, events at the federal level have rapidly unfolded, and the landscape of library funding is changing daily.

On day one of his new Administration, President Trump revoked President Biden's Executive Order 14084, "Promoting the Arts, the Humanities, and Museum and Library Services", a 2022 action that elevated the importance of the arts, humanities, museums, and libraries as critical to democracy and public life. It emphasized federal investment in cultural and educational infrastructure. This Order recognized the vital role of the arts, humanities, museum, and library services in strengthening democracy in the United States. It emphasized their importance in fostering creativity and community cohesion, promoting equity in underserved areas, and bolstering the creative economy. A President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities was established within the Institute of Museum and Library Services to support these initiatives. The revocation of Executive Order 14084, which is part of President Trump's expansive 'Day One' Order, is a direct blow to the recognition and support of libraries, museums, and cultural organizations as pillars of society. It risks undermining their ability to serve as equitable access points for education, cultural preservation, and civic engagement, all while signaling a broader dismissal of their importance.

On January 28, 2025, President Trump demanded a freeze on all federal grants and for all agencies to "temporarily pause all activities related to obligations or disbursement of all Federal financial assistance." The memo also called for each agency to perform a "comprehensive analysis" to ensure its grant and loan programs are consistent with President Donald Trump's executive orders, which aimed to ban federal diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and limit clean energy spending. Programs affected are "including, but not limited to, financial assistance for foreign aid, nongovernmental organizations, DEI, woke gender ideology, and the Green New Deal." Represented by Democracy Forward, the National Council of Nonprofits (NCN), the American Public Health Association (APHA), and SAGE – Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ Elders sued to challenge the policy. As a result, the Office of Management and Budget rescinded its memo that had previously paused all agency grants and loans.

On January 29, 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order 14189, titled "Celebrating America's 250th Birthday," to coordinate federal efforts for the 250th anniversary of American Independence on July 4, 2026. This order established the White House Task Force on Celebrating America's 250th Birthday (Task Force 250), chaired by the President and including key cabinet members and agency heads such as the Secretaries of State, Treasury, Defense, Interior, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Education, and the heads of the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Task Force 250 is responsible for organizing a grand celebration and ensuring that federal agencies contribute to commemorating this milestone in American history.

On March 15, President Trump issued an executive order naming the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) along with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the United States Agency for Global Media, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the Smithsonian Institution, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, and the Minority Business Development Agency. The Order states that IMLS must be reduced to its "statutory functions" and requires that "non-statutory components and functions …shall be eliminated to the maximum extent…"

Congress was clear in the 2018 Museum and Library Services Act that IMLS is statutorily required by Sec 9133 to send federal funding to state libraries under the Grants to States program (Sec. 9141). Without this core federal funding for state libraries, museums, and archives, we risk losing critical programs and services in every state.

On March 20, Trump appointed Keith E. Sonderling as Acting Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. In the press release announcing his installation, Mr. Sonderling said, "I am committed to steering this organization in lockstep with this Administration to enhance efficiency and foster innovation. We will revitalize IMLS and restore focus on patriotism, ensuring we preserve our country's core values, promote American exceptionalism, and cultivate love of country in future generations."

On March 23 and then again on April 3, the Institute of Library and Museum Services Advisory Board issued two formal letters to the Acting Director outlining IMLS's legal obligations under the Museum and Library Services Act. These letters plainly and directly advised the Acting Director about the agency's required duties and the scope of its lawful operations. They received no response. On April 4, 2025, the President dismissed the board.

On March 26, U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), joined by U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), sent a letter to Keith Sonderling. They urged him to continue The Institute of Library and Museum Service's mission as Congress intended when it created the agency. "As the lead authors of the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA) of 2018 (PL 115-40), which was signed into law by President Trump, we write to remind the Administration of its obligation to faithfully execute the provisions of the law as authorized," the Senators wrote. In addition to the Reed Letter, U.S. 127 House of Representatives members wrote a letter to the Trump Administration supporting the Institute of Museum and Library Services. They expressed grave concerns about dismantling the Institute of Museum and Library Services. "Eliminating the IMLS would not only jeopardize these essential services but also dismiss the everyday needs of millions of Americans who rely on libraries and museums for learning, job opportunities, and community engagement," the representative stated.

On March 31, Institute of Museum and Library Services staff were placed on administrative leave. While on leave, the staff are prohibited from continuing their duties. All

employees were required to turn in government phones and other property before leaving the building, and their email accounts were disabled. Libraries and museums were no longer able to contact the IMLS for updates.

Beginning April 2, state libraries and other grant recipients began receiving official notices from the Acting Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services terminating their grants, effective April 1, 2025. This includes authorized and approved Grants to States projects, National Leadership Grants, and Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian grants. In 2024, 633 grant recipients entered into legally binding plans with IMLS, delivered services, and fulfilled obligations in good faith, and are now being denied reimbursement by the federal government. The reason given is that the grants are "inconsistent with IMLS' priorities" and that President Trump's Executive Order of March 14, 2025, "mandates that the IMLS eliminate all non-statutorily required activities and functions." The Grants to States program, authorized under Section 9141 of the Museum and Library Services Act (20 U.S.C. § 9141), is the largest source of federal library funding, distributing over $180 million annually to every state and territory library administrative agency. The program also requires states to submit five-year plans outlining goals and measurable outcomes, which are reviewed and approved by IMLS under statute. This abrupt termination of Grants to States comes in the middle of the federal fiscal year and will create sudden, significant shortfalls in nearly every state library budget.

On April 4, 2025, twenty-one State Attorneys General filed suit to stop the dismantling of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The lawsuit argues that President Trump's Executive Order of March 14, 2025, unconstitutionally overrides Congress's power of the purse by directing IMLS to eliminate programs for which Congress has explicitly authorized and appropriated funds. As the suit states: "Neither the President nor an agency can take any action that exceeds the scope of their constitutional and/or statutory authority." The attorneys general of New York, Rhode Island, and Hawaii lead the lawsuit. Joining the suit are the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. In addition to IMLS, the suit includes a request for an injunction about President Trump's actions against the labor organizing staff and programs of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) and the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), which has been forced to cut its grant programs that support small business owners. A hearing is scheduled for April 18 in U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island (following the publication of this Issue).

On April 10, the American Library Association and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the largest union representing museum and library staff, filed a motion for a preliminary injunction in a lawsuit represented by Democracy Forward. They requested that a federal judge intervene to prevent the Trump administration from undermining the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

At the time of writing, we do not know how Congress or the Courts will respond to these events. We call on both to help safeguard library funding and halt the dismantling of The Institute of Library and Museum Services. We cannot imagine a scenario where the Acting Director has the authority to nullify a duly enacted federal law or cancel the distribution of funds that Congress has directed to states. We call on the Congressional committees of jurisdiction, including the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, along with members from both sides of the aisle, to exercise their oversight powers immediately.

Sentiments on the State of Libraries After the Election

ANDREW T. SULAVIK

ABSTRACT

The recent reelection of President Donald Trump will likely result in continued multifaceted attacks upon libraries and librarians by partisan political operatives emboldened by the election results. Libraries, librarians, and their partners must continue to repel all attempts to create an environment of censorship, whether through legal statutes or social intimidation, in order to preserve their critical role within our society as beacons of light that unite our communities with the luminescence of intellectual freedom and critical thinking.

The election of the forty-seventh president is over. For some, the election results clearly underscore one fragile part of our democracy: the election process. Within the context of American political history, there has seldom been a pronounced need for libraries to serve more than merely as polling stations for elections. They must be places where an informed and educated electorate can turn to—and count on—for unfettered information about the candidates themselves, their political platforms, and their proposed legislation and policies, untainted by political partisanship. But, more than that, libraries must remain our cultural home and moral compass. Their critical purpose within our society is to make their depositories available to all who seek a better and more comprehensive understanding of our rich collective past and present, including our cultures, traditions, scientific discoveries, theories, struggles, and aspirations. Inside their walls (both physical and digital) are housed inherited facts, knowledge, theory, and diverse opinions that span millennia and are available to all. They, therefore, are the keys to transcending our present state of affairs and making informed decisions about how to accept, reject, or integrate that past—for better or worse.

Whatever President-elect Trump does, two things are certain. His surrogates and supporters will feel they have a mandate for continued multifaceted attacks upon libraries and librarians in both blue and red states, and *The Political Librarian* will continue to be a journal of public record that defends against these unprecedented attacks. The blight of legislation, local policies, and rage politics of ideologues who seek to restrict content (both through book censorship and database filtering) and intimidate librarians to self-censor has dialed up the stress and fatigue in our profession. Yet, we cannot expect such tactics to abate. Librarians and our partners must continue to repel these assaults. Libraries must remain beacons of light—places to reflect, nourish the mind, and unite our communities with the luminescence of intellectual freedom and critical thinking. We shall not permit the hollowing out of our libraries by base, political operatives. What John Winthrop said of New England in 1630 is

applicable to us today: "For we must consider that wee [sic] shall be as a citty [sic] upon a hill. The eies [sic] of all people are upon us".

Author

Andrew Sulavik has spent most of his professional library career as a cataloger and an ILS administrator at university libraries but has also worked at specialized and government libraries along the way. He is serving a three-year appointment as the editor in chief of ATLS's journal *TCB: Technical Services in Religion & Theology*.

Thank You for Your Service to the American Public: A Perspective from a Fired Federal Worker

CARRIE PRICE

ABSTRACT

From its outset, the Trump administration has haphazardly decimated federal agencies and institutions, creating chaos, fear, and confusion among federal employees. Securing a federal job is no small feat. It requires time, effort, skill, luck, and the investment of others. It carries the expectation of political neutrality no matter who occupies the White House. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) (and its employees) has been one of the institutions targeted by the Trump administration. The NIH, a pillar of scientific advancement, impacts the lives of all Americans through its research funding, initiatives, and programs.

As a recently hired biomedical librarian, I dedicated my work to supporting the mission of the NIH, but I experienced firsthand the Trump administration's bullying and vilification of federal workers. I was ultimately fired, but my commitment to advocating for change has grown stronger. I believe librarians have a role to play in a brighter future.

As of February 20, 2025, just one month after the US presidential inauguration, the Trump administration fired or otherwise eliminated tens of thousands of federal employees from a wide range of departments and agencies (Hsu 2025; Reinstein 2025). Around seventy-five thousand employees may have accepted a deferred resignation offer (Reinstein 2025; US Office of Personnel Management 2025), while the remainder have been removed from their positions through emails arriving after-hours starting in late January (Reid et al. 2025). On February 26, 2025, the Trump administration released yet another communication that promised to initiate even more large-scale reductions in the federal workforce in the coming months (Megerian 2025).

Anyone who has ever applied to the federal workforce knows that it is not an easy task. It is even harder to get one of those jobs. An applicant's resume must adhere to a very specific format and provide copious amounts of detail on past work. If referred to the hiring manager, interviewed, and selected, the process to start the job can take months due to background checks, reference checks, and paperwork. Once a candidate accepts the final job offer and agrees to a start date, the onboarding process adds more time while the employee completes required trainings and gets to know the organization. During onboarding trainings, all new feds are taught about the Hatch Act, a law passed in 1939, which restricts employees from

engaging in political activities "on behalf of or in concert with a partisan political group or candidate" (US Office of Special Counsel 2024). This includes soliciting donations for candidates, sharing invitations to campaign fundraisers, and even liking or sharing messages from political candidates on social media (US Office of Special Counsel 2024). It is emphasized that there will be repercussions for an employee's failure to comply. Political neutrality is expected of federal employees, both at and outside of work.

Within the web of government agencies stands the National Institutes of Health (NIH), part of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The NIH began as a one-room lab in 1887 (National Institutes of Health). Today, it encompasses over twenty-seven institutes and centers with staff working in chronic and infectious diseases, precision medicine, cancer immunotherapy, rare diseases, health technologies, and more (National Institutes of Health). It also funds research across the country. In fiscal year 2024, the NIH awarded over eighty-three thousand research grants totaling over $35 billion in funding (National Institutes of Health RePORT). Nearly 83 percent of that funding is awarded to researchers in higher education and research institutions in every state of the US (National Institutes of Health). The NIH supports science at every level and provides career development opportunities for scientists through its intramural and extramural funding (National Institutes of Health Grants & Funding).

At the heart of NIH's main campus in Bethesda, Maryland, stands the Clinical Center, known as the "House of Hope." The Clinical Center is "the nation's largest hospital devoted entirely to clinical research" (National Institutes of Health Clinical Center). Every patient who walks through its doors is a participant in a research study, entrusting the outcomes of their own lives to the advancement of medical knowledge and the development of new treatments (National Institutes of Health). For the patients and their families, the Clinical Center represents perhaps their last and only hope and is sometimes the sole place in the world where they can receive the care they need (National Institutes of Health 2018).

Tucked in a small corner of the sprawling three-million-square-foot Clinical Center is the NIH Library (National Institutes of Health). To clarify a common misconception, the NIH Library and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) are two distinct entities—the NIH Library serves the scientific community of the twenty-seven institutes and centers of the NIH, while the NLM serves the public through training, outreach, and platforms like MedlinePlus and PubMed. The NIH Library staff of initially nearly fifty are multidisciplinary, collaborative, highly skilled, and, more than anything, a cohesive team working to support and advance the scientific research that the NIH supports.

Much like that research, the contributions of the library can sometimes be nebulous, ambiguous, indirect, and not immediately impactful. Other types of library support are more tangible and more quantifiable. How many downloads, books, journals, classes, and PDFs were delivered? How many people were at the library, attended the class, were on the website, or used a particular service? Customers—that's what the NIH Library staff typically call them, not patrons, users, or clients—came in and out of the library to use the 3D printers to print models of a cell or an organ, to get reference help, to read and research, or to use a study carrel. Incidentally, there were more virtual customers from any number of the NIH research facilities spread across the US who, at any given time, were using the website or communicating with their library points of contact. In 2023, there were over five million journal article or book chapter downloads and half a million website visits to the NIH Library's online presence (National Institutes of Health Library 2024).

In early 2024, I applied for a biomedical librarian position on USAJOBS. As a medical librarian of a dozen years, it seemed like an ideal way for me to use my passion for research to have a real impact on people's lives. It was also an appropriate and exciting next step in my career. Seven months later, I joined the staff at the NIH Library. My first day was August 26, 2024, and I was thrilled. It was a Monday. I hesitate to call any job a dream job, but this one truly was. I was a member of the Bibliometrics, Evidence Synthesis, and User Engagement Teams. I collaborated with these teams to serve customers in these main areas, in addition to being a point-of-contact liaison for a handful of institutes, among them the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR), the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and others.

In January, I began to formally colead the Evidence Synthesis Team with a colleague. Six librarians, myself included, with methodological expertise and extensive training supported researchers in all stages of their systematic and scoping review projects, from refining the research question to guiding the literature searches and the writing of the publication. Librarians often saw the projects through to completion as coauthors. Systematic and scoping reviews are considered important in health care because, by the nature of systematically collating, aggregating, and synthesizing broad swaths of evidence without bias, the conclusions and analyses made can help support patient care, policy, and decision-making. These published reviews are considered a high level of evidence and have the potential to drive medical progress and improve patient outcomes (Higgins et al. 2024; Aromataris et al. 2024). Evidence synthesis projects require a multidisciplinary team and usually take over a year to fully complete (Borah et al. 2017). Research continues to suggest that librarians are necessary members of that team and that reviews with a librarian coauthor are correlated with a lower risk of bias and significantly higher quality search strategies and reporting (Aamodt et al. 2019; Pawliuk et al. 2024; Meert et al. 2016; Rethlefsen et al. 2015; Schellinger et al. 2021; Whitney et al. 2024). I certainly felt that way, as many clinical experts needed assistance navigating unwieldy biomedical databases and documenting reproducible search methods. In my bibliometrics work, I used multiple proprietary and nonproprietary resources and visualization tools to create deliverables, giving customers an overview of the impact of their research in their field. I offered bibliometrics support and training and created detailed reports and presentations for customers and departments.

The NIH Library also maintained a significant training program covering a wide variety of topics, from artificial intelligence to data analysis, literature searching, software, and more. In 2023, library staff offered nearly 270 classes with over 16,000 attendees, and that number has only grown (National Institutes of Health Library 2024). I had the chance to develop and offer an interactive class called Biosketch: Telling Your Research Story, where I walked attendees through the Biosketch, a specific document that is utilized by NIH grant applicants, grant recipients, and for internal project reporting (National Institutes of Health Library). It was a popular and well-received class.

Aside from bibliometrics and evidence synthesis, NIH Library staff supported printing (both 3D and paper), bioinformatics, data, document delivery, editing, literature searches, communications, protocols, publications, and language translations (National Institutes of Health Library). For one week every September, the NIH Library participated in the NIH Research Festival. I spent a couple of hours with my colleagues at our photo booth, where enthusiastic researchers visited the library to have their pictures taken against virtual backgrounds of *Yersinia pestis* or cancer cells (NIH Intramural Research Program).

Management at the NIH Library invested in the talented workforce by supporting learning opportunities and professional development to advance career growth. My manager had nominated me for a Management Seminar Series, a seven-month training program set to begin on February 20. I was also enrolled in a weeklong March course on visualizing science with a software called VOSviewer to support my work in bibliometrics. These opportunities came at a cost, reflecting the library's commitment to fostering my career progression and skill set.

Because I was new, I was on a probationary period of one year. Most employees who are new to the government or who find themselves in new roles are on a period of probation before gaining full civil service job protections (Hsu 2025; USAJOBS). Beginning in late January, very shortly after the inauguration, almost every employee in every federal agency began receiving after-hours emails from a newly created email account in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). These emails' subjects were "Government Wide Email Address System – Test" and "Government Wide Email Address System – Second Test," asking recipients to reply "yes." Because of their atypical presentation, many people reported them as spam (King 2025). One email, the "Fork in the Road," offered employees a deferred resignation. A follow-up to the "Fork" encouraged federal employees to "find a job in the private sector as soon as you would like to do so. The way to greater American prosperity is encouraging people to move from lower productivity jobs in the public sector to higher productivity jobs in the private sector" (Office of Personnel Management 2025). Other emails came from administrators within the HHS, mandating a return to fully in-person work and also demanding that we notify management of anyone disguising their roles in diversity, equity, or inclusion initiatives "through coded or imprecise language" (Rowell 2025). There "will be no adverse consequences for timely reporting this information [sic]. However, failure to report this information within 10 days may result in adverse consequences" (Rowell 2025). Not only did these relentless emails begin to sow discontent, but the tone was insulting, condescending, and so unlike government communications that it made colleagues question who was writing them. It is now known that many of those emails came from the Musk youth (Elliott 2025).

In federal employment, there are what are known as bargaining unit positions, where the job is or can be represented by a labor union (USAJOBS). My position was bargaining unit eligible, which meant that I could join a union if I wished. On January 28, 2025, I joined Local 2419 of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE). I had never been part of a union before, but the general climate and mood within the NIH made me fear for my job. I thought the union might be able to help.

On the evening of Saturday, February 15, 2025, I received an email with the subject "Read this email immediately" (National Institutes of Health Office of Human Resources). The body of the email read, "Hello, Please read the two (2) attachments to this email immediately. Thank you for your service to the American public" (National Institutes of Health Office of Human Resources). In one of the attachments, on official letterhead from the HHS Office of the Secretary, signed by Jeffery Anoka, Acting Chief Human Capital Officer, were the words that every federal probationary employee received:

> "Unfortunately, the Agency finds that you are not fit for continued
> employment because your ability, knowledge and skills do not fit
> the Agency's current needs, and your performance has not been

adequate to justify further employment at the Agency" (National Institutes of Health Office of Human Resources).

And with that email, I was fired. Twenty-four hours later, I was locked out of my workstation. My own performance appraisal, completed by my manager just a couple of weeks before, evaluating my first four months on the job, praised my work and gave me a number rating of four, which means that I "achieved more than expected results" (Department of Health and Human Services). In my appraisal, my manager wrote, "[Carrie has] already made significant contributions to the success of the NIH Library in her first months working here. She has established herself as a reliable and collaborative co-worker that colleagues recognize for her expertise and seek out for advice on their own projects" (Department of Health and Human Services). I was one of eight people fired that weekend, including my manager. That's around 15 percent of the NIH Library staff. With our termination, entire service teams disappeared. Entire skill sets are gone. No one within the library was able to stop the layoffs.

On President's Day 2025, just two days after I was removed from my job, I attended a peaceful protest in Baltimore, Maryland, at City Hall. It was part of the 50501 movement (50501). At 46 years old, it was my first protest. I went because I was angry, angrier than before. I was struck by the words of one of the protesters, who said he would rather be at home, on his couch, watching television, but he was compelled to attend the protest instead. On that extremely cold and blustery winter day, I felt the same. My sign, made at the last minute in red, white, and blue capital letters, read "FIRE ELON INSTEAD." I am going to keep it handy.

Ten days after I was fired, I attended a job fair at Howard County Community College's Academic Commons. It was a job fair held specifically for federal workers (Payne 2025). One woman standing in line next to me for headshots recounted how she had given up an established career in research to take a job at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in September. She was fired on the same day as me. A federal employee with ten years of service at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was dismissed over the President's Day weekend due to his recent transition to a new role and the associated probationary period. In addition to being surreal, the job fair felt tragic. It was attended by more than a thousand dazed, confused, hurting, and probably angry people (Payne 2025).

At the time of my termination, I had already completed half a dozen systematic or scoping review searches. One was about serious blood transfusion reactions, and the other was on the state of evidence for a particular gene duplication that causes developmental abnormalities and learning disabilities. I had five more reviews waiting in my queue. I will not be able to attend the Management Seminar Series or the science visualization course. Besides continuing to offer my Biosketch class, I was in the midst of developing classes and videos to support the work of the Evidence Synthesis Team. My bibliometrics work came to a halt, with a dozen customer requests waiting in the wings. A former bibliometrics customer from NIGMS wrote on my LinkedIn page, "Carrie had just started consulting with us on a major evaluation of a long-standing national program our institute supports. She did a phenomenal job with a pilot analysis that we will be using for all the projects in the program. [The] NIH has lost a talented librarian" (Zarcone 2025).

Friends and family ask me if I would take my job back if it were offered. The job that I was hired for does not exist anymore. It ceased to exist at noon on January 20, 2025. The new HHS Secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is moving quickly to advance his anti-science and anti-evidence agenda while also drastically cutting funding for research, Medicaid, and

Medicare and ending public input on any agency affairs (Cueto 2025; BBC Verify Team 2024; Jaffe 2025). The funding cuts are going to have repercussions that ripple far beyond the NIH campus in Bethesda. All of higher education will be affected (Knott 2025; Haney 2025).

The work my colleagues and I had the privilege of doing for the American people was not the waste, fraud, and abuse that the Trump administration refers to so often. The government is a service provider. It is not a for-profit business. It most certainly isn't Twitter. The work of the NIH Library staff, supporting the researchers within the NIH by providing reference, access, printing, editing, publishing, reproducible and unbiased literature searches, instruction, training, impact analytics, and more, directly impacted the NIH's mission to "seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and [to apply] that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability" for our nation (National Institutes of Health).

Now, I, along with tens of thousands of others, am left to pick up the shattered pieces of my career. We are a spectacle in an atrocity exhibition. I am a librarian with no library. I am a researcher with no research. I have often spouted the line that we are not defined by our job titles. The unique skills that we have acquired to do our jobs, when we have one, are the same skills that will allow us to drive change in our professional networks, families, and communities. We are the last line of defense against this reprehensible administration's censorship, propaganda, disinformation, and anti-intellectualism campaigns. We get to play a vital role in what lies ahead. The future that we build together will be shaped by the power of our collective actions.

In the meantime, let me know if you're hiring.

Acknowledgements

References

50501. n.d. Home Page. Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.fiftyfifty.one.

Aamodt, M., H. Huurdeman, and H. Strømme. 2019. "Librarian Co-Authored Systematic Reviews are Associated with Lower Risk of Bias Compared to Systematic Reviews with Acknowledgement of Librarians or No Participation by Librarians." *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* 14 (4): 103–27. https://doi.org/10.18438/eblip29601.

AFGE. n.d. Home Page. Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.afge.org/.

Aromataris, E., C. Lockwood, K. Porritt, B. Pilla, and Z. Jordan, eds. 2024. *JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis*. JBI. https://jbi-global-wiki.refined.site/space/MANUAL.

BBC Verify Team. 2024. "RFK Jr: Fact-Checking His Views on Health Policy." BBC, November 15. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0mzk2y41zvo.

Borah, R., A. W. Brown, P. L. Capers, and K. A. Kaiser. 2017. "Analysis of the Time and Workers Needed to Conduct Systematic Reviews of Medical Interventions Using Data from the PROSPERO Registry." *BMJ Open* 7 (2). https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/7/2/e012545.

Cueto, I. 2025. "RFK Jr. Moves to Eliminate Public Comment in HHS Decisions." *STAT*, February 28. https://www.statnews.com/2025/02/28/rfk-jr-eliminating-public-comment-hhs-decisions-richardson-waiver/.

Department of Health and Human Services. 2025. "HHS Employee Performance Plan." Personal communication.

Elliott, V. 2025. "The Young, Inexperienced Engineers Aiding Elon Musk's Government Takeover." *WIRED*, February 2. https://www.wired.com/story/elon-musk-government-young-engineers/.

Haney, T. 2025. "What National Institutes of Health Funding Cuts Could Mean for U.S. Universities." NPR, February 12. https://www.npr.org/2025/02/12/nx-s1-5292359/what-cuts-to-nih-funding-could-mean-for-american-universities.

Higgins, J. P. T., J. Thomas, J. Chandler, et al., eds. 2024. *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*, version 6.5. Cochrane. https://training.cochrane.org/handbook.

Hsu, A. 2025. "A Military Vet and a Scientist Were Securing America's Food System. Trump Fired Them." NPR, February 20. https://www.npr.org/2025/02/20/nx-s1-5301150/trump-federal-employees-fired-veteran-food-agriculture.

Jaffe, S. 2025. "Robert F Kennedy Jr's Promises." *The Lancet* 405 (10480): 684–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)00398-8.

King, J. 2025. "Elon Musk's DOGE Flooded With Spam After Email Threat to Workers." *Newsweek*, February 25. https://www.newsweek.com/elon-musk-doge-spam-threat-workers-2035702.

Knott, K. 2025. "Colleges Restrict Graduate Student Admissions After NIH Proposes Rate Cut." *Inside Higher Ed*, February 25. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/science-research-policy/2025/02/25/facing-nih-cuts-colleges-restrict-grad-student.

Meert, D., N. Torabi, and J. Costella. 2016. "Impact of Librarians on Reporting of the Literature Searching Component of Pediatric Systematic Reviews." *Journal of the Medical Library Asociation* 104 (4). http://jmla.pitt.edu/ojs/jmla/article/view/139.

Megerian, C. 2025. "Trump Administration Sets Stage for Large-Scale Federal Worker Layoffs in New Memo." AP News, February 27. https://apnews.com/article/trump-elon-musk-federal-workers-layoffs-d295d4bb2cdd5023c27d9cb03754e81b.

National Institutes of Health. n.d. "About NIH." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/about-nih.

National Institutes of Health. n.d. "Fast Facts." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.cc.nih.gov/history/hatfield-crc/fast-facts.

National Institutes of Health. n.d. "What We Do: Budget." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/budget.

National Institutes of Health. n.d. "What We Do: Mission and Goals." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/mission-goals.

National Institutes of Health. n.d. "Who We Are: History." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/history.

National Institutes of Health. 2018. "What Happens at the 'House of Hope'?" *NIH MedlinePlus Magazine*, January 25. https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/what-happens-at-the-house-of-hope.

National Institutes of Health Clinical Center. n.d. "America's Research Hospital." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.cc.nih.gov/.

National Institutes of Health Grants & Funding. n.d. "Funding Categories." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://grants.nih.gov/funding/funding-categories.

National Institutes of Health Library. n.d. "Biosketch: Telling Your Research Story." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nihlibrary.nih.gov/training/biosketch-telling-your-research-story.

National Institutes of Health Library. n.d. "NIH LIBRARY." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nihlibrary.nih.gov/.

National Institutes of Health Library. 2024. "NIH Library Statistics." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://www.nihlibrary.nih.gov/about-us/nih-library-statistics.

National Institutes of Health Office of Human Resources. 2025. "Read this email immediately." Personal communication.

National Institutes of Health RePORT. n.d. "Budget and Spending." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://report.nih.gov/funding/nih-budget-and-spending-data-past-fiscal-years/budget-and-spending.

National Institutes of Health RePORT. n.d. "RePORTER." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://reporter.nih.gov/.

NIH Intramural Research Program. n.d. "NIH Research Festival." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://researchfestival.nih.gov/2024.

Office of Personnel Management. 2025. "Fork in the Road FAQs." Personal communication.

Pawliuk, C., S. Cheng, A. Zheng, and H. H. Siden. 2024. "Librarian Involvement in Systematic Reviews Was Associated with Higher Quality of Reported Search Methods: A Cross-Sectional Survey." *J Clin Epidemiol* 66: 111237. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2023.111237.

Payne, R. 2025. "Federal Workers in Howard County Rush to Career Fair to Find Jobs." WMAR2 News, February 25. https://www.wmar2news.com/local/federal-workers-in-howard-county-rush-to-career-fair-to-find-jobs.

Reid, T., N. Layne, and K. Freifeld. 2025. "Thousands Fired in US Government as Trump, Musk Purge Federal Workers." Reuters, February 13. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/mass-firings-federal-workers-begin-trump-musk-purge-us-government-2025-02-13/.

Reinstein, J. 2025. "Here Are All the Agencies Federal Workers Are Being Fired From." | ABC Audio, February 20. https://digital.abcaudio.com/news/here-are-all-agencies-federal-workers-are-being-fired.

Rethlefsen, M. L., A. M. Farrell, L. C. Osterhaus Trzasko, and T. J. Brigham. 2015. "Librarian Co-authors Correlated with Higher Quality Reported Search Strategies in General Internal Medicine Systematic Reviews." *J Clin Epidemiol* 68 (6): 617–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2014.11.025.

Rowell, S. 2025. "Information: DEIA Office Closure." Personal communication.

Rowell, S. 2025. "Information: Return to In-Person Work." Personal communication.

Schellinger, J., K. Sewell, J. E. Bloss, T. Ebron, and C. Forbes. 2021. "The Effect of Librarian Involvement on the Quality of Systematic Reviews in Dental Medicine." Wieland LS, editor. *PLoS One* 6 (9): e0256833. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0256833.

USAJOBS. n.d. "Probationary Period." Accessed February 28, 2025. https://help.usajobs.gov/working-in-government/fair-and-transparent/probationary-period.

USAJOBS. n.d. "What Are Bargaining Units?" Accessed February 28, 2025. https://help.usajobs.gov/faq/job-announcement/bargaining-units.

US Office of Personnel Management. 2025. "Original Email to Employees." January 28. https://www.opm.gov/fork/original-email-to-employees/.

US Office of Special Counsel. 2024. "Hatch Act Overview." May. https://osc.gov/Services/pages/hatchact.aspx.

Whitney, R., M. C. Shih, T. Gordis, S. A. Nguyen, T. A. Meyer, and E. A. Brennan. 2024. "Effect of Librarian Collaboration on Otolaryngology Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Quality." *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 112 (3): 261–74. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2024.1774.

Zarcone, T. 2025. LinkedIn Post. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/carrieprice78_i-was -removed-from-my-position-as-a-biomedical-activity-7297044452454420480-Nd fR/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAAbag9Q B7jpUy7_GN3xpjiaA_Eci0c-MY2Y.

Author

Carrie Price began her career in medical librarianship in 2012 at the Welch Medical Library of Johns Hopkins University and Medicine. She is a skilled information specialist and expert searcher committed to enhancing the foundations and reporting of research. With expertise in evidence synthesis methods and health research, she has supported students, scientific staff, and healthcare professionals alike throughout the research lifecycle. In addition to her role as a Biomedical Librarian at the National Institutes of Health, Carrie was also the Research Impact & Health Professions Librarian at the Albert S. Cook Library of Towson University.

Dear Professors: Teaching Archiving in Times of Continued Uncertainty and Unrest

BRITNEY BIBEAULT

ABSTRACT

This opinion piece is written in response to Ricky Punzalan's "Dear Students: Becoming an Archivist in Times of Uncertainty and Unrest" and in the wake of Trump's second nomination as the US president in 2024. This piece pushes against the idea that students should inherently be able to know the necessary skills needed to be an ethical and supportive archivist and calls on professors in LIS programs to actively teach these skills to their students. This letter reflects the author's own experiences in MLIS and PhD programs and conversations with peers, both students and practitioners, as the structures of archives are changed to better align with decolonial and anti-colonial sentiments of young rising archivists.

Dear Professors,

It is now seven years after Ricky Punzalan wrote his response piece to Trump's election in 2016, "Dear Students: Becoming an Archivist in a Time of Uncertainty and Unrest." Since then, we've seen the steep rise, once again, in anti-immigration beliefs, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, transphobia, anti-women's rights sentiments, anti-Blackness, and many other harmful ideologies. In the wake of Trump's second term, these harmful ideologies are expected to be even more present, and their expected impacts on archives are coming to the forefront. As new practitioners are trained in LIS programs, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level, Punzalan's letter provokes a deeper question for the LIS field: How are professors teaching rising and established LIS practitioners to react and navigate the ever-growing tensions within sociopolitical and public realms?

As someone who entered their MLIS program in 2020 and completed it in 2022, I read Punzalan's open letter for a course where it sparked conversations about our roles as practitioners in LIS fields. My colleagues were mostly practicing public librarians and a few people switching mid-career into LIS to become practitioners, largely in libraries or archives. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, my courses were entirely online even though I enrolled as an in-person student. Taking courses online meant I never fully integrated with my peers or professors, as we met for short periods via Zoom and rarely met each other face-to-face, greatly reducing the possibility of conversations about coursework outside of class meetings. Courses were focused on how to understand literature and theory, how to be a manager in

libraries, and how to serve patrons ethically. What we rarely, if ever, talked about was how to navigate the tensions now common in LIS workplaces. We learned that libraries are meant to be neutral but not what to do if our state decided that certain perspectives, lifestyles, and viewpoints were illegal to teach, share, and learn about. We learned about the pride librarians place on patron privacy but not how to interact with those who want to invade that privacy or protect patrons from the physical presence of police or security while in libraries. In some courses, we learned that libraries and archives are inherently political sites, carrying out the government's will, but we did not learn how to safely push against these constraints to ensure our communities can access the information they need and see themselves reflected in the materials we house.

As I moved into my PhD program in information studies, the disconnection between academic teachings and LIS practices grew more and more apparent to me. How was I, a graduate of an MLIS program focused on teaching practitioners and scholars alike and now a PhD student with the goal of becoming a practicing archivist, supposed to take up the call to action laid out by Punzalan if my professors are unable or unwilling to teach how such actions can be taken? Surely, there is some way for professors to go beyond the goals of fostering critical thinking in students and begin to create curricula showcasing examples of how to push against a system that inherently violates LIS norms and ethics. While libraries, archives, and other institutions were created under colonial and racist systems and are expected to uphold them, upcoming practitioners and scholars are increasingly working to change these systems but need to learn skills from established, experienced LIS professionals.

I'm not calling for professors to risk their careers and prestige by becoming radicals, but I do believe more can and should be done by professors to show students how they can protect the rights of their patrons and communities in their work in the face of budget cuts, discriminatory laws, and pushes for information restriction in the forms of book bans and surveillance. Courses like crisis management, which would teach students how to engage with their communities after a human-caused crisis occurs (see Gibson et al.'s 2017 article "Libraries on the frontlines: neutrality and social justice" in which the authors call for courses on how to respond to crises and keep patrons safe); social justice storytelling (see McDowell and Cooke's 2022 article "Social Justice Storytelling: A Pedagogical Imperative"); and courses on ethical leadership and community outreach so LIS professionals can work with their staff and patrons to ensure their institutions are positive, integrated parts of their communities would go a long way in improving LIS training. These are subjects I have heard peers in MLIS programs call for, especially as we recognize the need to physically safeguard materials from climate-change-driven disasters and people who strive to control us through information restrictions. While many of my peers are doing what they can within their communities, it is difficult to apply the goals of creating a better, more inclusive, and more ethical archives to the current reality of archives as an arm of the colonial state and under fire for having made some progress toward reparative archiving work. One of the main ways we can work toward these goals is through improved curricula in LIS programs to match the needs and interests of students. In doing so, professors are not only training archivists to be more resilient and better at their jobs but also acting as role models.

As of the writing of this piece in November 2024, the recent election results have weighed heavily on the minds of people worldwide. In my circles, there are questions of personal and community safety under Trump's second term as well as questions of job security, or even availability, among those of us hoping to be archivists. Instructors who know how to navigate the system and teach students the skills necessary to do so will be invaluable

moving forward. To echo Punzalan's words in his open letter to students, we should not fall into despair, although conditions are ripe for losing hope. Professors, take notice of the causes your students are interested in, find ways to connect with them on these issues, and encourage them to apply their skills, both learned and experienced, to their archival careers. Show students they can uphold their morals in their archival careers, even under oppressive regimes, and give them hope for when times change to be more favorable, even if not in the near future. Now is the time to build solidarity if you haven't already. Now is the time to show upcoming professionals that their work is important and can be done in a plethora of ways, and even though we don't know what the future holds, we are responsible for helping shape it in whatever small ways we can.

References

Gibson, A. N., Chancellor, R. L., Cooke, N. A., Park Dahlen, S., Lee, S. A., & Shorish, Y. L. (2017). Libraries on the frontlines: neutrality and social justice. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *36*(8), 751–766. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-11-2016-0100

McDowell, K., & Cooke, N. A. (2022). Social Justice Storytelling: A Pedagogical Imperative. *The Library Quarterly (Chicago)*, *92*(4), 355–378. https://doi.org/10.1086/721391

Punzalan, R. L., & Punzalan, R. (2017). Dear Students: Becoming an Archivist in a Time of Uncertainty and Unrest. The Library Quarterly (Chicago), 87(4), 303–305. https://doi.org/10.1086/693486

Author

Britney Bibeault is a PhD candidate in the College of Information at the University of Maryland. Her studies focus on community archiving practices and structures and archival policies. Two central goals of Britney's research are to provide resources community archivists can use in their own practices and to create guidelines to facilitate positive, non-extractive avenues of information exchange between practitioners and researchers with an emphasis on following community-led practices and protocols.

The Urgent Need for Political Literacy in LIS Education

SONYA M. DURNEY

ABSTRACT

Libraries are essential institutions, yet they face escalating threats from political pressures, ideological attacks, and unstable funding. Despite libraries' reliance on public support, current library and information science (LIS) programs often fail to adequately prepare graduates to navigate the complex political and financial landscapes required to secure sustainable funding and advocate effectively. This white paper examines these gaps in LIS education, underscoring the urgent need for LIS education reform. This reform would include adding political literacy as a learning outcome for LIS programs. Political literacy is being "knowledgeable of basic political concepts and facts" (Cassel and Lo 1997, 321).

The stakes for libraries have never been higher. The Trump administration has moved aggressively to restructure federal education funding and dismantle long-standing protections for marginalized communities—threatening the stability, autonomy, and future of libraries nationwide. The White House has issued an executive order to shut down the U.S. Department of Education and return authority to the states, undermining federal education programs and services. Simultaneously, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)—the primary source of federal library funding—has begun terminating grants and laying off staff. At the time of this writing, states including California, Connecticut, and Washington have already received official notices of IMLS grant cancellations, cutting off critical funding for library services in real time.

These actions come alongside a broader political agenda that denies the existence of book bans (book bans are NOT a hoax), rolls back diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, freezes federal research funding, and emboldens efforts to criminalize librarianship at the state level. Across the country, politicians who promote censorship, restrict access to information, and target the very communities that libraries exist to serve are shaping local, state, and federal government bodies.

This paper briefly synthesizes existing literature to highlight gaps in MLIS curricula related to advocacy, policymaking, and funding strategies. It proposes actionable reforms for LIS educators, accreditation bodies, and policymakers to better equip LIS graduates with the skills needed to navigate today's political climate and safeguard libraries' indispensable role in society.

Why Reform Is Urgent: Advocacy and Policy in LIS Curricula

The absence of comprehensive training in funding, advocacy, and policymaking in LIS curricula has left graduates unprepared to address library work's financial and political realities. While some MLIS programs offer relevant courses, they are rarely mandatory.

Over 90 percent of library funding is derived from local, state, and federal sources, yet these funds are subject to frequent fluctuations and political pressures. A recent informal poll of Maine Library Association members revealed that sustained funding is the largest advocacy concern among librarians, emphasizing the urgency of addressing these gaps in LIS education. Without proper training, library professionals lack the tools to counteract these threats and secure sustainable funding, making library advocacy a matter of social equity.

Studies such as "The Library Advocacy Gap" highlight these deficiencies, revealing that librarians with higher political self-efficacy (LPSE) are more likely to engage in advocacy activities such as building relationships with stakeholders, educating the community on information policy issues, and advocating for library funding. Political self-efficacy describes a person's belief that they possess the skills to influence the political system (Caprara et al. 2009). Librarians' political self-efficacy reflects their confidence in influencing political decisions to benefit libraries and their communities. A national survey of professional librarians found a strong correlation between high LPSE and active participation in advocacy efforts, yet only 27 percent of respondents felt their MLIS curriculum provided sufficient advocacy training, and just 31 percent believed they received adequate instruction on how public policy impacts libraries (Durney 2023).

This study also includes a 2022 review of LIS programs in the US, which found that only two explicitly list advocacy-related courses, while six offer policy courses. Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) data showed that few programs highlight advocacy or policy as concentrations or core areas of study, and policy courses, while more common, are rarely required. Where included, advocacy education is often limited to single lectures or optional courses, failing to provide comprehensive training (Durney 2023). The ALA Core Competencies, revised in 2023, outline the foundational knowledge expected of MLIS graduates, including the ability to identify significant social and economic policies affecting libraries, understand the legal framework in which libraries operate, and effectively advocate for libraries, patrons, and services (American Library Association 2022). How can students obtain these core competencies if relevant coursework is not available?

Scholars such as Jaeger, Bertot, and Gorham have called for LIS curricula to engage more directly with policies and politics, arguing that LIS graduates should have the skills necessary to effectively engage policymakers, politicians, funders, and community members. In "Wake Up the Nation," Jaeger, Bertot, and Gorham stress that public libraries are deeply affected by political and policymaking processes that shape funding, services, and roles within communities. They argue that increased engagement in policy research and advocacy is necessary for libraries to navigate these challenges successfully (Jaeger, Bertot, and Gorham 2013).

Despite ongoing debate about the role of politics in the classroom, scholars such as Diana Hess and Lauren Gatti assert that political issues should be included in academic discussions. They argue that classrooms should allow students to build deep knowledge about critical controversies affecting the profession and learn to engage in political discourse productively (Hess and Gatti 2010). Similarly, Jaeger and Sarin emphasize the need for LIS programs to inspire future librarians to become activists and advocates, ensuring they are prepared to fight for the library services their communities depend on (Jaeger and Sarin 2016).

In addition to MLIS programs, professional development is a key avenue for filling gaps left by LIS curricula. In "The Library Advocacy Gap," 64 percent of survey respondents felt that professional development provided sufficient training on advocacy skills, while 57 percent believed these opportunities offered a solid foundation in public policy. Participation in professional development programs, including webinars, legislative library days, and professional associations such as the American Library Association (ALA) correlated positively with librarians' political self-efficacy. Organizations like the EveryLibrary Institute, ALA, and state library associations provide workshops, training, and action guides to enhance advocacy skills. It is important to note that advocacy skills across various library responsibilities, from leadership and marketing to fundraising, use many of the same skills as advocating with elected officials.

Jaeger and Taylor reinforce the urgency for librarians to "engage, advocate, agitate, repeat," stressing that "without exaggeration," the world needs librarians' expertise regarding information literacy and information policy "more than ever" (Jaeger and Taylor 2019, 191). Bertot and Sarin note that LIS education has a long history of self-reflection and self-doubt regarding its effectiveness (Bertot and Sarin 2016). As libraries face mounting political and financial challenges, reforming LIS curricula to include structured advocacy education is essential to preparing future professionals for the realities of library work.

Recommendations for Reform

Assess LIS Curricula

- Conduct comprehensive research to evaluate current LIS curricula, focusing on gaps in training related to funding, advocacy, and policymaking.
- Identify best practices from programs that successfully integrate advocacy and funding education.
- Develop evidence-based recommendations to incorporate these competencies into LIS accreditation standards.

Expand Advocacy and Policy Education

- Introduce more advocacy and policy courses in LIS programs, offering a mix of required and elective options to ensure all graduates gain foundational knowledge in these areas.
- Emphasize experiential learning through activities like legislative advocacy days, service-learning projects, stakeholder role-play, and classroom debates.
- Integrate political literacy into program learning outcomes, ensuring graduates understand how to influence stakeholders, navigate policy landscapes, and advocate effectively.

Enhance Faculty Expertise in Political Literacy

- Increase the number of LIS faculty with expertise in political literacy and the intersections of libraries and public policy.

- Promote collaboration and resource sharing within the profession to strengthen educational approaches to advocacy.
- Encourage professional organizations to lead initiatives in developing political literacy education.

Cultivate Lifelong Advocacy Skills

- Recognize that advocacy training is ongoing by providing professional development opportunities tailored to different career stages.
- Encourage library associations, state libraries, and nonprofits to collaborate on offering advocacy training through webinars, conferences, and strategic programming.
- Develop continuing education programs focused on lobbying, coalition-building, nonprofit management, and policy impact.
- Incorporate experiential learning opportunities, such as legislative advocacy days and workshops with subject matter experts outside the library field.

Conclusion: The Path Forward: A Dual Approach

The omission of advocacy, funding, and policymaking training from LIS curricula has far-reaching consequences. Libraries are vital institutions, yet they remain vulnerable to budget cuts, political pressures, and public misunderstanding. Equipping MLIS graduates with advocacy and policy skills is essential to ensure libraries' sustainability and their ability to serve diverse communities effectively. Expanding advocacy education in LIS programs is not merely a curricular improvement—it is a critical step toward safeguarding the future of libraries and the communities they serve.

The future stability and sustainability of libraries depend on the ability of their leaders and staff to advocate effectively and secure funding in an increasingly politicized and challenging environment. Programs like Project 2025 demonstrate the urgent need for library and information science (LIS) education to evolve, ensuring graduates are equipped to navigate these pressures. LIS education must evolve to prepare librarians for immediate political threats and long-term systemic challenges. Programs like Project 2025 demonstrate that libraries are at risk unless LIS graduates have advocacy and policy skills. By embedding advocacy coursework into MLIS programs and strengthening professional development, LIS educators can ensure that future librarians are not only information experts but also advocates who can protect and sustain the institutions that uphold democracy and social equity. This is not just a curricular improvement—it is a necessary transformation to secure the future of libraries.

Bibliography

American Library Association. 2022. "Core Competences." https://www.ala.org/educationcareers/careers/corecomp/corecompetences

Bertot, John C., and , Lindsay C. Sarin. 2016. "The Value of American Library Association-Accredited Master's Programs in Library & Information Studies: Serving Our Communities Through a Professional Workforce." American Library Association, September 1. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/educationcareers/content/ALAWhitePaper_01September2016.pdf

Cassel, Carol A., and Celia C. Lo. 1997. "Theories of Political Literacy." *Political Behavior* 19 (4): 317–35. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024895721905

Durney, Sonya M. 2023. "The Library Advocacy Gap: Increasing Librarians' Political Self-Efficacy: A Mixed Methods Research Study." PhD diss., University of Southern Maine. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2810739309/abstract/A9F6EF6A0399476CPQ/1

Hess, Diana, and Lauren Gatti. 2011. "Putting Politics Where It Belongs: In the Classroom." *New Directions for Higher Education* (152): 19–26. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.408

Jaeger, Paul T., John Carlo Bertot, and Ursula Gorham. 2013. "Wake Up the Nation: Public Libraries, Policy Making, and Political Discourse." *The Library Quarterly* 83 (1): 61–72. https://doi.org/10.1086/668582

Jaeger, Paul T, and Lindsay C. Sarin. 2016. "All Librarianship Is Political: Educate Accordingly." *The Political Librarian* 2 (8). https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/pollib/vol2/iss1/8/

Jaeger, Paul, and Natalie Greene Taylor. 2019. *Foundations of Information Policy*. American Library Association.

Author

Sonya Durney (she/her) is a librarian, policy advocate, and past president of the Maine Library Association. She is a member of the American Library Association's Policy Corps and serves on the executive board of the Maine Freedom of Information Coalition.

Sonya holds an MLIS from Simmons College, a BA in Political Science from Framingham State University, and a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the Muskie School at the University of Southern Maine. Her research focuses on how public policy impacts libraries and access to information.

When she's not working or reading, she enjoys the Maine outdoors with her husband, son, and very spoiled chocolate lab.

Information Literacy Should Be About Democracy, Not Databases

STEPHEN "MIKE" KIEL

ABSTRACT

The author reflects on his views of the implications of the 2024 United States Presidential election for librarians' conceptions of information literacy work. These conceptions have largely focused on immediate needs and skills, rather than supporting the development of information literate democratic citizens. Ideas are explored for how both public and academic librarians could develop a more explicitly prodemocratic information literacy practice.

Do People Know What They Want?

As an academic librarian who teaches information literacy sessions focused on thinking critically about information, I'm always on the lookout for interesting or provocative statistics to start a class discussion. I bookmarked something in this vein early last year, examining the following question: Do the American people want an authoritarian ruler? Certainly, some do, but the number of people who do is **far** less than the majority, at least according to a survey published by the Pew Research Center (Silver and Fetterolf 2024). Only about 30 percent of those surveyed expressed support for an authoritarian system, and, unlike in some other nations, this support was relatively evenly distributed over the political spectrum in the US. That seemed really encouraging to me at the time, but it wasn't what I needed for class, so I just filed it away for later.

Over the past few years, I've noticed that it's become, let's say, fashionable to attribute the behavior of voters to information silos caused by algorithmic gatekeeping on social media. You've probably seen books and articles referencing this idea in your collections, no matter what kind of library you work in. Setting that aside for a moment (we'll come back to it later), we have quite a conundrum if we think about the 2024 presidential election in terms of authoritarianism and information in the context of the article I saved. It seems like most citizens don't want an authoritarian ruler, and yet the guy who whipped up a mob live on TV to try and overthrow the government when he lost an election wasn't found to be utterly disqualified. In other words . . . someone basically did one of the most dictator-like things you can do, everyone saw it, and then a whole swath of the citizenry who, again, mostly don't want a dictator sort of said, "Seems fine to me!" I don't know about you, but I find this result to be surprising.

But when I started reflecting more on this disconnect between what people say they want and the outcome, I wondered…Should it really have been that surprising? People might

(I think the jury is out on this) be motivated to vote if they believe democracy is threatened, but do they have the information or skills to recognize what a threat to democracy looks like in practice? I think it's pretty probable that they don't. Cast your mind back, back into the mists of time to your high school social studies or history class. Ask yourself, what does the average person learn about the most well-known authoritarian movement in Western cultural memory, the Nazi party led by Adolf Hitler?

If your experience was anything like mine more than two decades ago, you learned a good bit about the Second World War itself and how important America was in resolving it. You **certainly** learned about the Holocaust. But I'm willing to bet you probably didn't learn very much detail about how Hitler actually came to overthrow the Weimar Republic in the first place, nor about how fascism worked in practice to gain control of the government. I definitely don't remember taking a deep dive into ideas about how propaganda "uses virtuous ideals to unite people around otherwise objectionable ends" (Stanley 2018, 24) or how fascist ideas of corruption are about "purity rather than law" (Stanley 2018, 26).

Librarians Teach!

Now at this point, maybe you're thinking, Wait a minute, is this a piece about librarianship or not? Yes, yes it is. My experience has been that librarians, and especially academic librarians, tend to think of themselves as educators generally and **especially** educators about information. In higher education, many librarians are involved in teaching class sessions or whole courses about information. In all kinds of libraries, when we engage in reference work, we try to point people toward truthful information that is of high quality. We think we are providing a public good by participating in a system that allows people access to information when they otherwise cannot afford it and that (when we can) we provide people with the tools, both technological and intellectual, to understand that information. The $64,000 question[*] to me is: Are we doing that last part well?

When I look around at what my fellow instructional librarians in higher education are doing, I tend to see a lot of lessons focused on things like:

- Choosing a research topic
- Navigating to and searching databases
- Contrasting scholarly work with non-scholarly work

And all of these activities are great! Academic librarians are really good at these sorts of things, and they absolutely add value to students' academic experience. But if we think about it a little differently, an awful lot of what we are doing seems based on helping a student meet their immediate need to complete an assignment or, perhaps if we're a little more generous, helping a future graduate be an effective worker in their chosen field through a *little bit* of critical thinking about information. This seems to hold true in public libraries as well where, generally, I find that librarians are mostly focused on quickly meeting an immediate information need. In other words, it seems like, in practice, we have a fairly limited or blinkered extent to which we are trying to help people find and understand information. Even when we're firing on all cylinders, there's just some information we aren't giving our patrons the tools to fully understand. We aren't, by and large, planning our work around information

---

[*] The $64,000 Question was a ludicrously popular mid-twentieth-century game show. Just go with it. Watch some old episodes on YouTube later.

literacy for the purposes of being a citizen in a democracy. Maybe we should be. What would that look like?

A More Democratic Information Literacy

Reorienting our ideas of information literacy toward being fundamentally about equipping people to live, participate in, and even potentially defend democracy probably sounds like a big swing. It definitely can be if you want, but I think it could also start with small changes. For example, let's talk about that algorithmic gatekeeping again now. The rapid rise of generative AI and its incorporation into general search tools has given all of us in the profession a perfect layup to score points for team democracy when talking about the algorithmic filtering of information as part of searching. So, let's take it. For those of us in higher education, we can constantly ask students to reflect on the total lack of transparency in these systems and where their information comes from. A more democratic information literacy practice can be as simple as discussing the idea that a small number of companies have a great and invisible influence on what we see while also being totally opaque about how they do so. If democracy is about sharing power and creating systems accountable to the people . . . this ain't it. For those of us in public libraries, the opportunities might be different (I'm imagining a program in a meeting room or classes about technology and computing), but the general idea is the same. Simply discussing with our patrons and communities what **they** think a better information system would look like and how we could get there reinforces both that they have agency and that they can advocate for change.

A more moderate step toward democratic information literacy for someone in academia might be keeping some of our same old lessons but going out of our way to have students research democracy-focused topics, even to the point of stretching out of the comfort zone of the course. For example, at our university, there is a science lab course that the library faculty started teaching a session in several years ago. The goal has always been to help students write better literature reviews first and to understand scientific information second. Traditionally, we've just researched a topic related to the course (think tinnitus in human biology), but perhaps instead we could research why our fellow citizens continue to believe misinformation about health and vaccines despite ample evidence to the contrary. Then, we could discuss how **public** health information should be shared in a democratic society and what the role of the government and individuals would be. In a public library, maybe this might look like hosting a moderated community discussion on public health information, how that information is created, and how it benefits citizens with local health workers.

And now to go big or go home. If we really think democracy is potentially in trouble, that democracy is, in fact, "the worst form of Government except for all those others," as Winston Churchill said, **and** that librarians could help . . . we should consider rethinking our entire approach to information literacy. That would mean wildly altering the kinds of discussions, activities, and programs we engage in. For those in higher education, it might also mean reframing or rewriting our learning objectives. This might look like:

- In an academic library, having students research and discuss why being accurately informed is vital to a functioning democratic system and owning that this is not something we can be "neutral" about

- Doing reading and research to equip ourselves for **way more** discussions in our professional library worker spaces as well as with our patrons, boards, or others about:
    - How empirically based information and knowledge systems are vital parts of liberal democracy[**]
    - How values inform the way we interpret information, and the way in which some values can be in tension with democratic governance while others enhance it
    - What propaganda looks like in the twenty-first century and how that can differ from ideas we've carried over from the twentieth century
    - How economic and political power relate to information and its production and consumption
- Explicitly creating opportunities to model democratic behavior debate and civic engagement in our libraries of all kinds, including events focused on individual and collective democratic advocacy and evidence-based debate

Rethinking our approach to information literacy to be focused on democratic citizenship won't be easy, but it's probably necessary if we want to have a world where people can recognize that the ground is being laid for a dictatorship before it arrives. If our patrons can learn more about how information systems and democracy are intertwined, they will be more equipped to act on that knowledge when the need arises to defend a republic and keep it.

References

Silver, L. and J. Fetterolf. 2024. "Who Likes Authoritarianism, and How Do They Want to Change Their Government?" Pew Research Center, February 28. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/28/who-likes-authoritarianism-and-how-do-they-want-to-change-their-government/.

Stanley, Jason. 2018. *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (1st ed). Random House.

Author

Stephen "Mike" Kiel is currently the Interim Head of Reference an instruction for the Robert L. Bogomolny library at the University of Baltimore. He was previously the Head of Information Literacy Initiatives and lead an overhaul of the library's information literacy curriculum. He received his MLS in 2009 and a BA in linguistics 2005, both from the University of Maryland College Park. He helped start the library's game collection and is an enthusiast of trivia, stories in all forms, and dogs.

[**] One possibility to explore this might be Jonathan Rauch's 2021 book *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth*

Recognizing and Resisting Censorship in Online Safety Bills: A Framework for Libraries

KATHERINE KLOSEK

ABSTRACT

This paper explores historical and contemporary efforts to regulate internet content under the rationale of keeping kids safe online, with a particular focus on the implications for libraries and intellectual freedom. Using the Children's Internet Protection Act as a historical example, the paper demonstrates how filtering mandates have resulted in the overblocking of constitutionally protected speech. Resistance to CIPA, spearheaded by the American Library Association, highlights the dangers of using vague and expansive terms like "harmful to minors" to justify censorship by government enforcers. Decades later, federal and state laws raise similar concerns about advancing censorship agendas under the pretext of protecting children online. The paper concludes with a framework for librarians to evaluate legislation for potential threats to intellectual freedom and advocate for balanced approaches to online safety that preserve access to information. The framework is based on questions that the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) asks when analyzing legislation.

A Brief History of Legislative Overreach: Lessons from CIPA

Tensions between online safety legislation and the unintended consequences of censorship are illustrated in the implementation of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which Congress enacted in 2000 to address the government's "concerns about children's access to obscene or harmful content over the Internet." CIPA requires schools and libraries that receive federal support for internet access (in the form of discounts through the federal E-Rate program or Library Services and Technology Act grants) to filter access to pictures that are: (a) obscene, (b) child pornography[*], or (c) harmful to minors. "Obscene" speech and "child pornography" are statutorily defined and regulated in the United States Code. But the last category—"harmful to minors"—includes constitutionally protected speech that is nevertheless often blocked by web filters that libraries install to comply with CIPA (Jaeger and McClure 2004).

---

[*] "Child pornography" is the term used in the CIPA statute and many other state laws, but because that term implies consent, the US Department of Justice and children's advocates like the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) recommend the term "child sexual abuse material" (CSAM) to accurately refer to sexual abuse and exploitation of a child.

Automated web content filters are imprecise tools that block content according to broad categories without the capability to parse the meaning or context of a text (Duarte and Llansó 2017). In 2024, The Markup found that the broad, proprietary categories that filters use often restrict access to educational materials and critical support services on websites like The Trevor Project, Planned Parenthood, and NASA (Mathewson 2024). Access to health information, in particular, is inconsistent, depending on the specific filtering product as well as the settings implemented by a school or library (Kaiser Family Foundation 2002). In 2012, the ACLU won a lawsuit against a school district in Missouri for its use of a "sexuality" filter that blocked positive material about LGBTQIA+ issues while failing to block CIPA-prohibited sites (American Civil Liberties Union 2012). In that case, *PFLAG v. Camdenton R-III School District*, a federal judge held that the filter did not comply with professional standards of librarianship, in part because the filter lacks clear criteria for categorizing websites (American Civil Liberties Union 2012).

Censorship is incongruous with the mission of libraries, which is to curate and provide access to reliable, age-appropriate information sources. The American Library Association (ALA) challenged CIPA on the grounds that it induces unconstitutional speech restrictions on internet access in public libraries (American Library Association 2003). In a brief to the US Supreme Court, ALA pointed to evidence that filters often block entire categories of websites containing valuable information while failing to restrict access to websites that fall within CIPA's definitions (American Library Association 2003). ALA argued that the government's interest in preventing patrons from accessing illegal speech "cannot justify blocking a large amount of speech that is legal and constitutionally protected. The state may not censor protected speech in order to suppress unprotected speech." Unfortunately, the Supreme Court upheld CIPA in 2003, finding that it did not violate the First Amendment rights of adult library patrons because they could request that the filters be disabled when they used the libraries' terminals.

Some state legislatures have enacted so-called "Son of CIPA" laws, with CIPA-like requirements for libraries or schools to install filtering software (Jaeger et al. 2005). A law in Utah, HB 341, prohibits a public library from receiving state funds unless that library filters internet access to certain types of images (Utah State Legislature 2004). The Salt Lake City Library Board enforced its no-filter policy in the face of this law, explaining that the state grant funding is less than the cost of installing and maintaining the filters (Hamilton 2004). But refusing to comply with state or federal requirements linked to grant funding is a difficult decision for library systems that are under-resourced (Oder 2010).

Contemporary Concerns: Censorship Under the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)

More than two decades after the Supreme Court upheld CIPA, federal lawmakers are still attempting to restrict children's access to content that the government deems to be "harmful to minors." The Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) was first introduced in 2022 with a duty of care clause that would have required covered platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent and mitigate "harms to minors," e.g., self-harm, eating disorders, online bullying, sexual exploitation, illegal drugs, or alcohol.

Historically, "harmful to minors" is a vague term that has been used to ban books related to LGBTQIA+ topics and sex education (ACLU of Indiana 2023). That this remains true in the current political context is not conjecture, paranoia, or hyperbole; in 2023, the Heritage Foundation explicitly stated that KOSA would be used to keep "trans content" away

from children as a way of "protecting kids" (Masnick 2023). A few months later, Senator Blackburn (R-TN) said "protecting minor children from the transgender in this culture" should be among the top priorities of conservative lawmakers (Lavietes 2023).

Civil liberties groups oppose KOSA, in part due to concerns that it could limit the ability of individuals to access valuable, lifesaving information. In a letter, the groups explained that "filtering used by schools and libraries in response to the Children's Internet Protection Act has curtailed access to critical information such as sex education or resources for LGBTQIA+ youth" (Center for Democracy & Technology 2022).

KOSA also raises concerns about self-censorship; to avoid being sued under the bill, websites might preemptively remove information about topics like abortion or transgender health care that government enforcers could target if they determine it to be harmful to minors under the law (Mackey and Kelley 2024). In a May 2024 hearing, Representative Frank Pallone (D-NJ) described how KOSA could lead to censorship if platforms "over-filter content" due to fear of legal risks, potentially causing young people to "lose access to helpful and even life-saving content" (Energy and Commerce Committee 2024).

Censoring the Internet Won't Keep Kids Safe

Today's censorship bills are reminiscent of the moral panic that gripped lawmakers and the public at the dawn of the internet. But even then, some lawmakers recognized "the danger of government censorship of the Internet" (Congressional Record 1995). In 1995, Senator Feingold opposed the Communications Decency Act (CDA), which would have required websites to verify the age of visitors to their sites. Feingold argued that government attempts to restrict access to "obscene" or "indecent" content could have a chilling effect on socially valuable online forums (Congressional Record 1995).

In 1997, the Supreme Court struck down most of the CDA in the case *Reno v. ACLU*, ruling that "the governmental interest in protecting children from harmful materials…does not justify an unnecessarily broad suppression of speech addressed to adults." Section 230—which safeguards libraries and other interactive computer services from liability for third-party content—was not affected by the decision and remains the law today.

Framing legislation as a measure to protect children is a powerful political tactic to galvanize support for a lawmaker's agenda, even if a proposed law would lead to censorship. This strategy has been employed effectively in recent years, with twenty-one states enacting "educational gag orders," a term that PEN America uses to describe bills that restrict the freedom to teach concepts like diversity, equity, and inclusion (PEN America 2021). Many educational gag orders falsely label materials by and about LGBTQIA+ people as "obscenity," a term that has historically been used as grounds for censorship (PEN America 2024). As restrictions on what can be taught, read, and discussed increase at the state and federal levels, libraries and other stakeholders must protect the free flow of information online and be wary of legislation that would erode the fundamental right to access information under the pretext of protecting children.

What to Expect in 2025 and Beyond

KOSA did not pass in the 118th Congress, but its original sponsors, Senator Blumenthal (D-CT) and Senator Blackburn (R-TN), have pledged to reintroduce the bill (US Senate Committee on the Judiciary 2025). House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) and Energy and

Commerce Committee Chair Brett Guthrie (R-KY) have signaled that kids' online safety is on the agenda for the next Congress (Politico 2024). In a twist, Johnson weighed in against KOSA in late 2024 due to concerns that the bill could be used to censor conservative voices (Nazzaro 2024). However, other attempts to legislate restrictions on access to certain types of websites or content have already resurfaced in 2025.

In January 2025, Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Ted Cruz (R-TX) reintroduced the Kids Off Social Media Act (KOSMA), which threatens loss of federal funding if schools do not prevent students from accessing social media platforms. In a February Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on "Children's Safety in the Digital Era," Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-IA) referenced "a number of" online safety bills that are being considered and refined by this Congress (Grassley 2025).

Child online safety legislation will remain a priority for state houses in the coming years as well. In 2024, Texas enacted the Securing Children Online Through Parental Empowerment ("SCOPE") Act, which is like CIPA in that it requires platforms to "prevent harm to known minors" by using filtering technology to enforce the blocking of certain content. Computer & Communications Industry Association (CCIA) and NetChoice filed a lawsuit against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, seeking to block enforcement of certain provisions of the law (*CCIA Netchoice v. Paxton*).

Some state legislatures are attempting to implement age-verification requirements to prohibit minors from accessing certain websites, similar to the original intent of the Communications Decency Act. Presently, a Texas age-verification law is before the Supreme Court, whose decision will likely affect similar laws in other states; the law was challenged on the basis that it violates the First Amendment by placing an unconstitutional burden on adults seeking to view lawful content (*Free Speech Coalition, Inc. et al., v. Ken Paxton*). The California Age-Appropriate Design Code Act is currently before the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which heard challenges that the law could lead to over-moderation of the internet and restrict users' access to constitutionally protected speech (*NetChoice v. Bonta*).

A 2024 version of KOSA excluded schools and libraries from the bill's requirements, but there is no guarantee that KOSA or a similar bill in the next Congress would include a library carve-out. Regardless, libraries should be concerned about the broader censorship implications of any internet regulation bill.

A Librarian's Framework for Evaluating Potential Censorship Implications of Legislation

This section provides a framework designed to support libraries in staying vigilant about lawmakers' attempts to impose unconstitutional prohibitions on speech or otherwise impede libraries' ability to provide unrestricted access to library materials or the internet under the guise of keeping kids safe online. The framework is based on questions that ARL asks when analyzing legislation; the questions are not exhaustive, but they are meant to encourage libraries to imagine the implications of legislation on their library and community. Even librarians who are not in a position to lobby can track these bills and share stories about the potential impact of the bill in their libraries and communities with other stakeholders and coalitions.

Figure 1: A librarian's framework for evaluating potential censorship implications of legislation

A librarians' framework for evaluating potential censorship implications of legislation	
Bill name and number: Sponsor(s):	
Questions about the bill	**Questions about the bill's impact on your library/community**
Implementation and compliance	
• Does the bill explicitly require libraries or platforms to monitor, filter, or censor materials? • If the bill prohibits materials or content, does it employ vague terminology to describe the prohibited materials (e.g., "harmful," "inappropriate," "controversial," "sensitive," etc.)? Does the bill define these terms? • Would the bill prohibit content that is protected under the First Amendment? • Could the bill's requirements conflict with existing state or federal legal rights or protections for libraries or their patrons, students, or faculty, e.g., the right to free inquiry?	• In what ways could this bill impede faculty and students from using library collections and platforms to conduct research, particularly on topics pertaining to health or sexuality? • How would the bill restrict librarians' ability to collect resources that support academic coursework and research? • Could this bill potentially limit access to teaching and research materials that represent diverse perspectives, identities, or communities? • Do the bill's provisions conflict with library collection policies and practices, including laws that protect patron privacy?
Enforcement	
• Which entities are authorized to enforce the bill's requirements (i.e., does it grant individuals a private right of action, or can it be enforced by the state attorney general)? • Does the bill include protections for libraries acting in good faith? • Would the bill require libraries to restrict access to the internet and/or categories of materials for people of certain ages?	• Could the bill incentivize self-censorship by libraries or platforms to avoid penalties or liability? • Could the legislation be misused by enforcers to remove or challenge materials in library collections or platforms?
Engagement and advocacy	
• Was there consultation with libraries, educators, students, researchers, and other stakeholders during the legislative process? • Did the bill go through regular order, e.g., hearings and markups in the appropriate committee?	• Which coalitions, consortia, or other groups is your library a member of through which you could share your concerns about this bill or propose revisions to safeguard intellectual freedom? • Would the bill be more acceptable if libraries were not beholden to its requirements?

References

ACLU of Indiana. 2023. "Indiana Chooses Censorship Over Freedom." March 15. https://www.aclu-in.org/en/news/indiana-chooses-censorship-over-freedom.

American Civil Liberties Union. 2012. "PFLAG v. Camdenton R-III School District: Order for Preliminary Injunction." February 15. https://www.aclu.org/cases/pflag-v-camdenton-r-iii-school-district?document=pflag-v-camdenton-r-iii-school-district-order-prelminary-injunction#legal-documents.

American Library Association. 2003. "Brief of Appellees American Library Association et al." February 10. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/content/advleg/federallegislation/cipa/meritsbrief.pdf.

Center for Democracy & Technology. 2022. "Re: Opposition to S. 3663's Threats to Minors' Privacy and Safety Online." November 28. https://cdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Coalition-letter-opposing-Kids-Online-Safety-Act-28-Nov-PM.pdf.

Computer & Communications Industry Association. 2024. "CCIA Files Case Challenging Constitutionality of Texas's User-Restriction Law." July 30. https://ccianet.org/news/2024/07/ccia-files-case-challenging-constitutionality-of-texass-user-restriction-law/.

Congressional Record. 1995. "Censoring the Internet." *Congressional Record* 141 (192). December 5. https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/volume-141/issue-192/senate-section/article/S17963-1.

Duarte, N., and E. Llansó. 2017. "Mixed Messages? The Limits of Automated Social Media Content Analysis." Center for Democracy & Technology, November 28. https://cdt.org/insights/mixed-messages-the-limits-of-automated-social-media-content-analysis/.

Energy and Commerce Committee. 2021. "E&C Republicans Announce Next Phase of Their Effort to Hold Big Tech Accountable." July 28. https://republicans-energycommerce.house.gov/posts/ec-republicans-announce-next-phase-of-their-effort-to-hold-big-tech-accountable.

Energy and Commerce Committee. 2024. "Innovation, Data, and Commerce Subcommittee Markup Recap: Monumental Step Forward for Data Privacy and Kids' Online Safety." May 23. https://energycommerce.house.gov/posts/innovation-data-and-commerce-subcommittee-markup-recap-monumental-step-forward-for-data-privacy-and-kids-online-safety.

Grassley, C. 2025. "Ensuring Children's Safety in the Digital Era." United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, February 19. https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/grassley-opening-statement-on-ensuring-childrens-safety-in-the-digital-era.

Hamilton, L. 2004. "S.L. Libraries Snub Filters." *Deseret News*, May 3. https://www.deseret.com/2004/5/3/19826685/s-l-libraries-snub-filters.

Heins, M., C. Cho, and A. Feldman. 2006. *Internet Filters: A Public Policy Report*. Brennan Center for Justice. https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Report_Internet-Filters-2nd-edition.pdf.

Jaeger, P., and C. McClure. 2004. "Potential Legal Challenges to the Application of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in Public Libraries: Strategies and Issues." *First Monday* 9 (2). https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1117.

Jaeger, P.T., C. R. McClure, J. C. Bertot, and L. A. Langa. 2005. "CIPA Decisions, Implementation, and Impacts." *Public Libraries* 44 (2): 105–09. https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/pla/content/publications/publiclibraries/pastissues/marchapril2005.pdf.

Kaiser Family Foundation. 2002. *See No Evil: How Internet Filters Affect the Search for Online Health Information*. https://www.kff.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/see-no-evil-how-Internet-filters-affect-the-search-for-online-health-information-executive-summary.pdf.

Kids Online Safety Act, S. 3663, 117th Cong. 2022. https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th
    -congress/senate-bill/3663.

Lavietes, M. 2023. "Senator Appears to Suggest Bipartisan Bill Will Censor Transgender Content."
    NBC News, September 5. https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-politics-and-policy/
    senator-appears-suggest-bipartisan-bill-will-censor-transgender-conten-rcna103479.

Mackey, A., and J. Kelley. 2024. "Analyzing Kosa's Constitutional Problems in Depth."
    Electronic Frontier Foundation, March 15. https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2024/03/
    analyzing-kosas-constitutional-problems-depth.

Masnick, M. 2023. "Heritage Foundation Says That of Course GOP Will Use KOSA to
    Censor LGBTQ Content." Techdirt, May 24. https://www.techdirt.com/2023/05/24/
    heritage-foundation-says-that-of-course-gop-will-use-kosa-to-censor-lgbtq-content/.

Mathewson, T. G. 2024. "Schools Were Just Supposed to Block Porn. Instead, They Sabotaged
    Homework and Censored Suicide Prevention Sites." The Markup, April 13. https://
    themarkup.org/digital-book-banning/2024/04/13/schools-were-just-supposed-to-
    block-porn-instead-they-sabotaged-homework-and-censored-suicide-prevention-sites.

Nazzaro, M. 2024. "Johnson Pours Cold Water on KOSA Push." *The Hill*, December 10. https://
    thehill.com/policy/technology/5032362-house-republicans-cautious-online-safety/.

NetChoice, LLC v. Bonta, 9th Cir., No. 23-2969, 2024 WL 5000278 (Aug. 16, 2024). https://
    www.courtlistener.com/docket/66636540/netchoice-llc-v-bonta/.

Oder, N. 2010. "CIPA Deadline Looms, Large Pls in Poorer Areas Squeezed." *Library Journal*,
    May 21. https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/cipa-deadline-looms-large-pls-in-poorer
    -areas-squeezed.

PEN America. 2021. *Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and
    Teach.* November 8. https://pen.org/report/educational-gag-orders/.

PEN America. 2024. "The Discriminatory Impact of Book Bans and Educational Gag Orders
    on LGBTQ+ Expression." February 14. https://pen.org/the-discriminatory-impact-of-
    book-bans-and-educational-gag-orders-on-lgbtq-expression/.

Reader, R. 2024. December 10. "Last-Ditch Pitch for Social Media Bill May Fall Short."
    POLITICO. https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2024/12/10/congress/social-media
    -bill-may-fall-short-00193592.

Supreme Court of the United States. 1997. *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union, 521 US 844.*
    https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/legal-documents/reno-supremecourt-decision.pdf.

Texas Legislature. 2023. *HB 18 final text*. https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/
    html/HB00018F.htm.

US Government Accountability Office. 2021. *Sex Trafficking: Online Platforms and Federal
    Prosecutions* (GAO-21-385). https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-385.pdf.

US Senate Committee on the Judiciary. 2025. "User Clip: Blackburn on KOSA." C-SPAN, January 15.
    https://www.c-span.org/clip/senate-committee/user-clip-blackburn-on-kosa/5149590

Utah State Legislature. Children's Internet Protection Act, House Bill 341. 2004. https://
    le.utah.gov/~2004/bills/static/HB0341.html

Author

Katherine Klosek has led the Association of Research Libraries (ARL)'s information policy and advocacy portfolio since 2020 and serves as staff lead to ARL's Advocacy and Public Policy Committee.

"Heritage Is More than a Job": Implications of Project 2025 on the Future of Libraries, Archives, and Museums

LYDIA CURLISS, QADIRA LOCKE, AND PAUL T. JAEGER

ABSTRACT

For most of the 2024 presidential campaign, Donald Trump publicly claimed to be unfamiliar with or even to have never heard of the report, *Project 2025*, created by the Heritage Foundation, a far-right advocacy group. With the proposed budget cuts presented by this project, the future of LAMs remains a major concern for those who are in or are planning to go into these professions. With much in question about the future of LAMs, the rest of this article will describe the role of the government historically with these institutions, the implications of *Project 2025* for the LAM space (with some specific attention to museums and museum education), and what are the interventions we as scholars, practitioners, and students may engage with to continue to support these spaces.

Introduction

For most of the 2024 presidential campaign, Donald Trump publicly claimed to be unfamiliar with or even to have never heard of the report, *Project 2025*, created by the Heritage Foundation, a far-right advocacy group. As virtually everyone involved in assembling the report had worked in his first administration or were his current advisers, these denials were rather difficult to believe. The Heritage Foundation, the parent organization and creator of *Project 2025,* claims that its mission is to "formulate and promote public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense" (The Heritage Foundation, 2025).

The first Trump administration (2017–21) leaned heavily on the Heritage Foundation for ideas, including virtually copying their proposed federal budget and using it as the White House's proposed federal budget each year. All the Heritage Foundation-derived proposed budgets from the White House in Trump's first administration proposed eliminating all federal funding for libraries, literacy programs, and internet access funds, among others related to education and information (Douglass et al. 2017). These proposed budgets would have eliminated the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the one federal agency dedicated to libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs).

IMLS is one of the leading funding agencies for many libraries and museums across the US. Their stated mission "is to advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development" (IMLS 2025c). The IMLS's granting ability and other activities have been formalized into law through the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996, which is included within the US Code (Chapter 72 Title 20). As such, its budget and requests for funding are dictated by the federal government, particularly through the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (IMLS, Legislation & Budget 2025).

For 2024, the IMLS requested a budget of $294,800,000 to support their ongoing granting programs, administrative fees, and supporting funds for activities related to acts such as the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), the Museum Services Act (MSA), the National Museum of the American Latino Act (NMALA), and others (IMLS 2023). For 2025, the IMLS requested $280,000,000 to operate their budgeting costs (IMLS 2024). As the Trump administration moves forward with the slashing of federal budgets, primarily related to libraries, museums, archives, and education, what will this mean for the future of the institutions the IMLS has supported? For many smaller institutions and community-based projects, the IMLS provides important grant funding that supports the ongoing efforts of these institutions.

While these are unsettled and unsettling times, with much in question about the future of LAMs, the rest of this article will describe the role of the government historically with these institutions, the implications of *Project 2025* for the LAM space (with some specific attention to museums and museum education), and what are the interventions we as scholars, practitioners, and students may engage with to subvert and continue to support these spaces.

Positionality

In writing this piece, it is important to explicitly state our positioning in the research and where our priorities lie regarding the issues at hand. All three authors are members of a College of Information, representing different constituencies that put them all at differing levels of risk. As the first author of this paper, my responsibility is to speak up for those who may feel unseen or unable to speak their truths, as has become an intended part of these policies and practices. In my research and work, my identity, specifically in this case as Indigenous and neurodivergent, and as a past and future scholar, researcher, and practitioner, impacts how I relate to and see the importance of the programs and funding that enables this type of work to continue. Among the authors in this group, as LAM professionals, we offer here our perspective on matters concerning the field in hopes that both our current colleagues and those around us can continue utilizing critical educational practices that represent a diverse group of stakeholders who are a key part of the future of these spaces and professions, all while being informed about the implications that actions being taken by the current government will have on said practices and how the effects of these programs will hit members of the LAM profession who belong to marginalized communities the most.

LAMs as Federal Institutions

The formation of LAMs has always been tied to the agendas of the state in terms of their official capacities and formation and institutionalization. The history of the institutionalization of cultural heritage memory institutions is explicitly tied to the formation, docu-

mentation, and memory of the state. Examples of these types of federal and government-related institutions include the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the Library of Congress (LOC), and the Smithsonian Institution (which accounts for many of the museums on the National Mall, the National Zoo, and the Smithsonian Gardens). In these ways, the creation of these early institutions, therefore, acted on behalf of the state to push narratives forward that aligned with the United States as a nationalistic project. These examples demonstrate that, in many ways, the ties between cultural heritage memory institutions (CHMIs) and government are strong and deeply entwined in these institutions' long histories and legacies.

Museums represent a wide range of organizations created as spaces of public education and cultural heritage preservation, designed toward different ends and to showcase a wide range of material culture, art, and science. Particularly focused on institutions of cultural heritage, CHMIs represent a wide range of institutions that, in their formation and institutionalization, have become key players in the preservation of the culture or histories of humankind. As defined by the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), cultural heritage includes artifacts, monuments, sites, and museums with symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, anthropological, scientific, and/or social value as tangible or intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2009). Included within this definition of CHMIs are institutions such as museums, libraries, and archives responsible for holding these objects and educating the public on these histories (Stainforth 2017). In the last several decades, pushes to increase visibility of underrepresented groups with new museums on the mall has been an ongoing effort, with the creation of the National Museum of the American Indian (created via the NMAI Act of 1989), the National Museum of African American History and Culture (which opened to the public in 2016), and more recently with a campaign to formally create the National Museum of the American Latino (NMAI Act 1989; Towle 2017; National Museums of the American Indian 2025).

For many communities represented by these newer institutions, the silencing of diverse perspectives, challenges to intellectual freedom, and the ability to tell our own stories is not new, nor is it surprising. In recent history, education, art, and humanities, as well as efforts for equity and diversity, have been seen as less important than the military-industrial complex, often emphasized by the ways in which governmental resources are allocated. In practice, this was demonstrated immediately by an executive order signed on day one of this new presidency titled "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" (Executive Order #14151, 2025). Only days after the release of this EO, the results are already beginning to be felt across CHMIs, with the Smithsonian Institution only days later announcing that it will be closing its DEI office (Small 2025; Ulaby 2025). As one of the more well-known and often thought of examples of cultural heritage institutions, the Smithsonian's moves indicate far more problematic moves and indications of what is coming for the field at large.

IMLS Funding and LAMs

Many smaller institutions, including those that support community LAMs, Tribal LAMs, and projects, can provide key services due to their ability to receive funding from federal sources. IMLS's stated mission is to "advance, support, and empower America's museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. The agency carries out its charge as it adapts to meet the changing needs of our nation's

museums and libraries and their communities. IMLS's mission is essential to helping these institutions navigate change and continue to improve their services" (IMLS 2025d). Their strategic goals include "Lifelong Learning," "Strengthen Community Engagement," "Advance Collections Stewardship and Access," and "Demonstrate Excellence in Public Services" (IMLS 2025f). Compared to Project 2025, these goals demonstrate how even though the IMLS supports the future of learning and education through LAMs, they stand in direct contrast to the propaganda pushed forward by conservative organizations.

Additionally, while many of these institutions are inherently tied to promoting DEI either through intentional programming or development or in their nature, IMLS's strategic areas include a wide range of areas central to supporting institutional goals and the communities they serve. Included in their priority areas are things such as "Civic Engagement," "STEM," "Accessibility," "Broadband," "Professional Development," "Veterans," "Early Learning," and many others (IMLS 2025e)[*]. For example, for their "Civic Engagement" priority area, the IMLS has worked toward, partnered, and funded some of the following: (1) Partnering with the US Citizenship and Immigration Services to help libraries and museums support information seeking on immigration and citizenship; (2) Funded the Edward M. Kennedy Center in Boston to support the expansion of civics education; (3) Supported seventeen libraries in Oklahoma as polling places for the election (IMLS 2025b). In another example, "Broadband" remains an essential output of IMLS support in providing internet access through libraries for communities that may lack access to these types of services in their homes (IMLS 2025a).

While the IMLS remains at risk under the objectives of *Project 2025*, so do all of the programs and goals it supports toward providing communities with essential services. As previously mentioned, many of these services work toward equity and access in these institutions while supporting their role as knowledge institutions for their communities. Without these federal funding sources, however, many of these programs cannot continue or would not exist in the first place. This is why we must consider how we, as practitioners, educators, and professionals, can continue to think about and consider our responsibilities to these institutions and maintain how they continue to work.

Future of LAMs and Project 2025

The ideas in *Project 2025* comprised roughly seven hundred policy proposals to deport all undocumented immigrants and revoke the citizenship of many immigrants who have legally been admitted to live in the US, defund much of the federal government that is not related to the military, outlaw birth control, revoke rights to many marginalized populations, end environmental regulations, shut down the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), weaken the Department of Education (DOE), and greatly enhance the power of the presidency and weaken the rest of the government that had not already been eliminated.

For education and information professionals working in schools, libraries, and museums, the report recommends not just sending them to jail but also forcing them to be registered as sex offenders if banned books or other banned content is found in their collections or displays. Such titles that would lead to imprisonment and registration as a sex offender under *Project 2025* would include works by such terrifying authors as Maurice Sendak and Judy

---

[*]   It's worth mentioning here that many of these areas represent things and categories that fall into DEI or work that supports increasing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Unfortunately the agendas of the current administration have made it so that DEI equals race and gender and have mobilized the hate and fear associated with these aspects to get rid of important programs and funding that provide information equity and access.

Blume. While some of the other proposals in this report would be very hard to achieve, the notion of librarians and teachers being jailed as sex offenders for having a copy of *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* or *Where the Wild Things Are* is alarmingly realistic. In 2024, seventeen state legislatures seriously considered laws that would imprison education and information professionals for banned content in their institutions.

Those states considering creating such laws in 2024 were in addition to those that already had such laws (EveryLibrary has resources that allow you to track all of this legislation of concern at https://www.everylibrary.org/billtracking). States like Florida, Indiana, Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas already have laws that ban books and other materials, creating legal jeopardies for violating those laws for librarians, teachers, museum professionals, and other educators. Depending on the state, these legal threats can be up to five years in prison and $10,000 in fines for each offense (Jaeger et al. 2022; Jennings-Roche 2023).

It is imperative to note that such legal jeopardies are not normal in terms of US history. The United States has previously gone through prolonged periods of intense censorship. However, the greatest threat to information professionals for defending banned materials or ideas was that they would potentially lose their jobs (Jaeger et al. 2023). Thus far, public and school librarians have received the most attention from the threats created by these new laws, as they work with the most significant portion of the public. However, these laws create the same potential legal liabilities for information professionals in other kinds of institutions as well, even if they have not been pursued yet.

The current censorship movement is targeting an extensive range of marginalized populations—most especially Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and beyond (LGBTQIA+) communities, but also women, Jewish, and disabled populations in various locations—in a similarly wide variety of venues, indicating that it will continue to grow in scope and ambition (Jaeger 2025). The expansiveness of the current censorship movement makes an extension of the active application of these laws into museums and archives quite realistic. One recent example of this occurred at New College of Florida, where large-scale book removals not only discarded collections featuring LGBTQIA+ topics and many books from the religious studies section but also resulted in the elimination of former student theses and the dismantling of the student-run Gender and Diversity Center's (GDC) book collection due to topics related to DEI. The gutting happened during a period when many students were not on campus to bring the books into their collections, resulting in the loss of so much academic history and resources for future student research.

It took only a few months for the second Trump administration to begin shuttering IMLS; the agency received $295 million in funding in fiscal year 2024. Of those funds, roughly $65 million were distributed in grants to museums for programming, research, collections, and professional education programs. The loss of such funding for museums, libraries, and archives would significantly negatively impact information institutions and professionals. For Indigenous institutions in particular, the closure of IMLS would mean the loss of financial support to Indigenous libraries, archives, and museums through the Native American Library Services grant programs.

Beyond the shutting down of particular institutions that rely on federal funding, there is also growing concern about the impacts of decreased funding for universities, particularly state and other public institutions whose budgets rely not only on federal granting agencies (such as IMLS, NSF, NEH) but also on what will be allowed to be taught and what will be allowed in curriculum. For example, the Museum Scholarship and Material Culture (MSMC)

graduate certificate program at the University of Maryland, of which all three authors are a part, focuses on building engagement with critical museum studies and social justice (MSMC 2025). Such a pedagogical commitment may cause problems with funding and even existence in the face of potential threats of withholding federal funds to university programs that continue to focus on issues of justice. However, as a program, holding steadfast and teaching these skills and ideas will be particularly crucial in the subsequent phases of *Project 2025* and training for current and future graduate students interested in becoming library and museum professionals.

Conclusion: Looking Toward the Future

The lack of specifics and ambiguity regarding the ways in which this administration is moving creates an ongoing struggle in writing about issues plaguing the LAM sector. In moving toward the future of these institutions, trying to account for the variety in access and equity to resources, whether fiscally or labor-wise, will remain a key concern, especially in regard to potential federal budget cuts and campaigns against the types of work these institutions are tasked with taking on. While many administrations make it clear that programs that help develop equitable programs are frequently listed as cuts, there should be a level of personal onus to continue being critical of hegemonic narratives in your institutions and continue including the perspectives that show the dynamic ways people live.

Institutions making community-oriented efforts for inclusion despite systemic withholding of financial support for such programs is something that can be combated by the types of people brought into the museum space professionally. A collective understanding of the issues that impact marginalized people both in the professional and visitor aspects of libraries and museums is not nearly enough. There needs to be joint action toward retaining diverse perspectives in the decision-making process, from creating programming to collections development, especially now and going forward. Without that, we will only see resistance through a narrow lens. As future practitioners and educators within museums and libraries, there is a lot of possibility amidst what may feel like unending doom in this current moment. As we move forward, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves what we want museums to be and what they should be. How do we build communities to make sure we continue toward equity and inclusion in these spaces? Moreover, we can channel our frustration and anger into work and scholarship, which helps us sustain these spaces.

As stakeholders in the preservation of historical memory, it is paramount now more than ever to find ways to continue to do and support the work of these institutions. Notably, as we consider the possibilities of what DEI work will look like in these institutions, we must consider how to prepare ourselves and future generations of leaders and practitioners in the field. At the same time, we must hold space for the ongoing trauma and confusion purposefully being imposed by this administration. As is and has always been the case, if we continue to work together, we will be stronger and, therefore, more able to continue to engage and fight against threats to our field.

References

Douglass, C. L., U. Gorham, R. F. Hill, K. M. Hoffman, P.T. Jaeger, G. Jindal, and B. S. Jean. 2017. "Information Access and Information Literacy Under Siege: The Potentially Devastating Effects of the Proposed 2017 White House Budget on Already-Marginalized Populations in the United States." *First Monday* 22 (10). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i10.8088.

Heritage Foundation. n.d. The Heritage Foundation. Retrieved February 23, 2025, from https://www.heritage.org/.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2023. *IMLS Fiscal Year 2024: Appropriations Request to the United States Congress*. https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/fy24cj.pdf.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2024. *Fiscal Year 2025: Congressional Justification*. https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/fy25cj.pdf.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025a. "Broadband." https://www.imls.gov/our-work/priority-areas/broadband.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025b. "Civic Engagement." https://www.imls.gov/our-work/priority-areas/civic-engagement.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025c. "Legislation and Budget." https://www.imls.gov/about/learn-about-imls/legislation-and-budget.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025d. "Our Mission / Vision." https://www.imls.gov/about/learn-about-imls/our-mission-vision.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025e. "Priority Areas." https://www.imls.gov/our-work/priority-areas.

Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2025f. "Strategic Plan." https://www.imls.gov/about-us/strategic-plan.

Jaeger, P.T. 2025. "The Immortality of Hatred and Revenge: The Interconnections of Censorship, Disinformation, and Cultural Erasure in the Book Bans Targeting Marginalized Populations." *The Library Quarterly* 95 (1): 4–41. https://doi.org/10.1086/733171.

Jaeger, P. T., A. Jennings-Roche, and O. J. Hodge. 2023. "Criminalizing Librarianship: State Legislatures Creating Legal Jeopardies for Librarians." *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy* 8 (1): 17. https://journals.ala.org/index.php/jifp/article/view/7869/11343.

Jaeger, P.T., A. Jennings-Roche, N. G. Taylor, U. Gorham, O. Hodge, and K. Kettnich. 2023. "The Urge to Censor: Raw Power, Social Control, and the Criminalization Of Librarianship." *The Political Librarian* 6 (1): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8711.

Jennings-Roche, A. 2023. "Delegitimizing Censorship: Contending with the Rhetoric Of An Anti-Democratic Movement." *The Political Librarian*, 6 (1): 21–33. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8747.

Museum Scholarship and Material Culture. 2025. "Welcome to the Museum Scholarship and Material Culture (MSMC) Graduate Certificate Program." https://msmc.umd.edu/.

National Museum of the American Indian. 2025. "About the Museum." http://americanindian.si.edu/about.

Small, Z. 2025. "Smithsonian Closes Diversity Office After Trump's Executive Order." *New York Times*, January 28. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/28/arts/design/smithsonian-diversity-office-trump.html.

Stainforth, E. 2016. "Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23 (5): 488–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1274671.

Towle, A. 2017. "National Museum of African American History and Culture." *American Journalism* 34 (1): 119–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2016.1275249.

Ulaby, N. 2025. "The Smithsonian Will Close Its Diversity Office and Freeze Federal Hiring." NPR, January 29. https://www.npr.org/2025/01/29/nx-s1-5279225/smithsonian -diversity-office-president-trump-executive-order.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2009. *2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics*. https:// uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/unesco-framework-for-cultural-statistics-2009-en_0.pdf.

Authors

Lydia Curliss (Nipmuc) is a PhD Candidate at the University of Maryland, College of Information. Her research interests include Indigenous Knowledges, cultural heritage memory institutions and their collections, accessibility, ethical care, and community centered research practice. Her dissertation research will focus on the interactions and relationships between Indigenous communities, their Knowledges, and Cultural Heritage Memory Institutions. She has been involved in various projects focused on Indigenous collections, communities, and access, such as the Reclaiming Heritage (a project funded by the Omohundro Institute, in conjunction with the American Antiquarian Society) and Stolen Relations Project at Brown University. She holds both a MLS and MIS from Indiana University, and a BA in Geology from Oberlin College.

Qadira Locke (They/Them) is a master's student at the College of Information and a descendant of the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina. Their research interests intersect on trans-indigenous material culture and archival arrangement. More specifically, strategies for indigenous self-determination in museums and archives. They are currently a member of the 5 College Consortium's Cultural Advisory Council, a Graduate Assistant for the Including Disability Global Summit, and formerly served as a member of the Decolonization and Reciprocity working group at Hampshire College.

Paul T. Jaeger, PhD, JD, MLS, MEd, is a Professor and Distinguished Scholar-Teacher in the College of Information, Director of the Museum Scholarship and Material Culture (MSMC) graduate certificate program, and Associate Director of the Maryland Initiative for Digital Accessibility (MIDA) at the University of Maryland. He is the author of more than 220 journal articles and book chapters, as well as 20 books. He is Co-Editor of the journals Library Quarterly and Including Disability, and Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Including Disability Global Summit.

A Service as Easy as Ordering Takeout: Tech, Start-Ups, and the Business Ontology

JENNIE ROSE HALPERIN

ABSTRACT

The theorist Mark Fisher describes "the business ontology" as a dominant political orientation where "It is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run like a business." This pervasive viewpoint has infiltrated every aspect of culture, including and particularly government services. This paper explores the business ontology surrounding digital government services, from the Obama-era USDS technocracy to DOGE's current kleptocratic power grab alongside the history of the phrase "government should work like a business." I also reflect on my own experience as a technologist in the age of "doing work that matters" as part of open source startup communities and "women in tech" gatherings during the nascence of online government services. In startup parlance, the central fact of government bureaucracies behaving like bureaucracies are "features not bugs," and we must resist the fundamental misalignment of incentives between government and capital by moving public services more firmly into the public sector, with a strong orientation toward justice and service to communities, not customers.

Government Should Act Like a Business?

While for some, the latest, aggressive turn toward fascist-leaning authoritarianism feels shocking, public servants and community advocates have confronted an increasingly undemocratic milieu in their own communities for years. Librarians and educators bear the brunt of this, as book bans and other forms of neo-censorship have formed a playbook at the center of the current culture wars over identity and bodily autonomy (Library Futures 2025). The playbook usually involves harassment on social media, a barrage of illegitimate and illegal demands and orders at a local administrative level, state-level censorship bills, and expensive lawsuits. There is currently chaos within the federal government as threats, moving targets, mis- and disinformation, and billionaire entitlement to public bureaucracies take over the day-to-day operations of the administrative state. The chaotic shock and awe playbook at the federal level resembles the neo-censorship playbook in more ways than one, but even after years of attacks, the public sector's response remains weak.

A fundamental issue at hand is that the American public is increasingly brazen in its treatment of public bureaucracy as scrip for service, and the power of the private monied individual has become more pronounced. Trust in government has always followed party lines and

like most issues, it has diverged and become more partisan over time (Anderson and Rainie 2022). While it is commonly understood that liberals tend to put more trust in government, it generally varies by administration. Liberals trust more during Democratic administrations, and Republicans trust more during Conservative administrations. But trust overall has gone down, with only 34 percent of Democrats trusting the government during the Biden administration, and 11 percent of Republicans, as compared with 61 percent of Republicans and 35 percent of Democrats twenty years prior during the Bush administration.

One of the most obvious changes from 2004 to the present is computerization and the rise of tech oligopolies. Obama, the first "digital" president, brought a "start-up mentality" to the federal digital service that is now being weaponized. The Obama-era technocratic imaginary was one in which "politics isn't really about opposing material interests or even clashing ideological preferences. It's about problems that are solved when the best, smartest, and most dedicated people come together to devise the cleverest solutions" (Burgis 2024). But the government is not a set of problems to be solved, and the complexity of most public bureaucracies cannot be handled like a start-up or business problem. As a case in point, look at the many terrible "solutions" for the public sector put forward by consulting firms like McKinsey, Bain, and Deloitte, from botching France's COVID vaccine rollout to deep and unethical entanglements with the Saudi government. While the "McKinsey way" might arguably work to bail out troubled companies, its reliance on business logic ultimately perverts the purpose of government. As Mariana Mazzucato and Rosie Collington write, "In government, big consultancies promoted and profited massively from the push toward privatization, management reform, private financing, outsourcing, digitalization, and austerity" (Mazzucato, M., and R. Collington 2023).

The scholar and theorist Mark Fisher coined the term "business ontology" in 2009 in the book *Capitalist Realism.* In this framework, "It is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run like a business." "It is worth recalling," he continues,

> that what is currently called realistic was itself once "impossible": the slew of privatizations that took place since the 1980s would have been unthinkable only a decade earlier, and the current political-economic landscape (with unions in abeyance, utilities and railways denationalized) could scarcely have been imagined in 1975. (Fisher 2009, 17–18)

Although echoes of "running the government like a business" can be found in early twentieth-century writing on public administration and took shape over the years, the modern conception of government "acting like a business" was first put forward by Ronald Reagan. In "Running Government Like a Business . . . Then and Now," Jon D. Michaels writes, "Modest calls during the 1990s and early 2000s to 'reinvent government' have given way to more insistent cries to run government like a business — to harness the principles, practices, and infrastructure of the market economy to save money, increase efficiency, overhaul the bureaucracy, and reduce so-called red tape." Michaels's article discusses how the nascent twentieth-century administrative state understood the "specialness" of public bureaucracy, discussing Nicholas Parillo's book on the professionalization and salarization of government employees. "In this rush to re-embrace business-like government, we're either forgetting or affirmatively repudiating the principles and practices that legitimized American public

administration as a distinct normative and legal enterprise," he writes (Michaels 2015). The professionalization of the bureaucratic class is a decidedly *public* way to run a public bureaucracy, one in which, he writes, government runs like a government.

Ninety-three percent of Trump voters claimed that "the economy" was a primary reason for their vote in November's presidential election (Doherty et al. 2024). Drilling down, a not insignificant number of these voters claimed that they trusted Trump because he is "a successful businessman." Even though Trump's businesses are not successful by any actual metric, this perception of success carried voters to the polls, and those voters elected their "change candidate" whose administration took the reins of the economy in an era marked by extreme wealth inequality (Inequality.org 2025).

Michaels writes that the new wave of "running government like a business" stems from post-World War II reforms concerned with issues of agency capture, bureaucratic drift, and waste understood through an oppositional lens to collectivism, socialism, and communism. These reforms ultimately served to destabilize the three pillars of the American administrative state: salarization (or professionalization), tenure, and public participation. While these three elements of public administration are crucial to its workings, his argument overlooks the ways in which public administration theory is bound up in Taylorism and other business theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The argument that government is "special" and should therefore not be run like a business is persuasive to experts but difficult to explain to a public that sees government as wasteful, bureaucratic, and unresponsive. In this public imaginary, firms are seen as competent market players and responsive to people's needs because they depend on profits to survive. But firms can fail, they can make corporate decisions that are antithetical to human flourishing in the service of capital, and they can suddenly close without warning. While governments and administrative states can make decisions that are antithetical to human flourishing—the carceral system, the genocide in Gaza, any number of dictators or oppressive regimes—none of these decisions are made in service of profit, with exceptions made for autocratic enrichment, much like we have seen in the new administration. The government can also never close shop, no matter how hard the current administration tries to do so. Even nonprofits and NGOs operate significantly differently than governments: Unlike NGOs, governments can never focus on a single problem, and they are funded by their constituents rather than foundations or the wealthy.

The approach to "running government like a business" over the past forty years has been to outsource or privatize individual government capacities, for example, the rise of charter schools over public education or the rise of insured 401(k)s over government-backed pensions. The first pillar, professionalization, can be undermined by moving government tasks to private companies, which serves to bring into question the legitimacy and neutrality of the administrative state by outsourcing traditional government tasks to private actors. While the prevailing logic is that the profit motive is the only incentive to succeed or produce at work, this has not been borne out by over one hundred years of professionalized government. The second pillar, tenure, is playing out in the potential reorganization of government under the second Trump administration. Tenure fosters political insulation as administrators move from regime to regime without halting their job responsibilities. Even though the roots of public administration lie in the hyper-hierarchical Taylorized business approach, agencies tend to be significantly less hierarchical and controllable than businesses. A nontenured workforce under threat of being fired is much more likely to make unsound decisions at the urging of an administrative head or corporation rather than a professionalized civil service with a culture

of checks and balances to power. Destroying the final pillar, public participation, is perhaps the most dangerous. Public participation, which often causes red tape or bureaucratic slow-down, is nonetheless crucial to a functioning bureaucracy. Private firms are not subject to the same rules as federal agencies that are intended to keep people safe, like the right to privacy, freedom of information, or participation in rulemaking. A government without public partic-ipation is, like capitalism, a system that is accountable to no one.

A Personal Coda

I went to library school shortly after college because I could not find a job in the post-2008 recession economy. I wanted to become an academic, but I needed a job that would allow me to slough off economic precarity. My goal was to work in public libraries or as an archival researcher, but those jobs were hard to get and paid poorly.

Tech was everywhere in 2012-13; everyone seemed to be promising women (mostly white women) that learning to code would change their lives. Tech people believed that librarians were "secret coders," and library schools started to offer classes in Python, Human-Computer Interaction, and User Experience. I took some coding classes and found that I was interested in computers, though largely on a theoretical level. I found coding difficult, overly literal, and boring. But I was persistent and scrappy enough to get hired at Mozilla in a paid internship program for Women in Tech. I worked three jobs and attended classes until I got hired full time in spring 2014.

That summer, I attended a women's tech conference called Ada Camp in Portland, OR. I felt like we were regressing into second-wave capitalist feminism as mostly white women talked about the "pipeline" for women in tech, urging us to get jobs at big start-ups, Google, or Facebook to improve representation without intersectionality or critique of capital. I went to a local PyCamp, where I was the only female attendee. I was so violently harassed by mul-tiple men that I had to file a formal complaint. I did all the modules on Code.org and took a few classes until my coding skills became serviceable. I felt like I was, as Anna Weiner writes in her memoir *Uncanny Valley*, "not really a woman in computing—more a woman around computing; a woman with a computer" (Weiner 2020).

Over the course of about eighteen months, until I was reorganized out, Mozilla paid for me to travel to give talks at their various offices, attend community meetups, and become a coding instructor with a curriculum that I later adapted for information professionals. The first time Mozilla flew me to San Francisco in late 2013, I called my mother in disbelief. "There are so many snacks," I told her. "And I've never stayed in such a nice hotel."

Even though most of this work now seems pointless and even embarrassing, I fully believed that public good, open-source online communities were the future of computing. I have a photo of myself standing in front of a wall text in 2015 at my next job, a prominent publishing start-up. "Do work that matters," it says. Never mind that we were hawking pro-gramming manuals, business books, and self-help guides.

I idolized the team at 18F and the US Digital Service (USDS), the newly formed "start-ups" within the federal government that were rethinking online services, investing in "open government," understanding citizens as customers, and moving fast and breaking things as more government services digitized. Formed in the wake of the HealthCare.gov debacle, where the new Obamacare site crashed immediately upon launch, 18F was made up of tech experts who would "act as digital task forces to teach concepts like agile modern development

and deploy modern tech" as a "technology consulting firm" (United States Digital Service 2024).

The shiny new digital services they launched were supposed to transform people's relationship with government services. Around the country, digital services teams were patterned after their model, bringing tech in-house, committing to open data dashboards, and partnering with volunteer organizations like Code for America. At the time, the White House wrote on their blog, "As technology continues to evolve, we will continue to look for ways we can strengthen our efforts along with it – to make sure we're applying new and innovative tools as we continue working to expand opportunity for the American people" (Cobert et al. 2014). Despite being a "permanent part of the government" and somehow riding out the first Trump administration, in January 2025, USDS was renamed "the Department of Government Efficiency," and at midnight on March 1, 2025, the 18F staff was abruptly fired (Meyer 2016).

From REGO to DOGE

The USDS and 18F team did an incredible amount of work to modernize government services and did ultimately save taxpayers an enormous amount of money. A blog post just two years after their founding lists thirty-four accomplishments ranging from "Streamlining VA disability compensation" to "Developing a common identity management platform" (United States Digital Service 2016). They wrote open, accessible guides for any number of tech processes, and they recruited some of the best tech talent in the country.

From the perspective of public administration, the USDS and 18F were part of a wave of global "open government" initiatives that took hold in the 2010s. Often called "new public governance" or "networked governance," these new digital-first government initiatives aimed to bring transparency, efficiency, performance, and innovation to the public sector. There is a wide range of literature on the subject; scholars disagree on the name and aims of this moment in public administration, but it grew out of New Public Management, a series of 1990s-era reforms that focused on public/private partnership and brought a "business-like" or entrepreneurial lens to governance. NPM is the backbone of most of the Clinton- and Bush-era neoliberal reforms and was focused on public/private partnership and efficiency over democracy and participation, best typified through Clinton's REGO (Reinventing Government). REGO, which ultimately cut 351,000 positions from the federal government, was positioned to "solve the 'root problem' of modern government—its excessive reliance on 'large, top-down, centralized bureaucracies'" (Wolf 2024). REGO brought a "start-up mentality" to the federal government, ostensibly to improve participation and responsiveness and "cut red tape." But, as James Q. Wilson writes in *Bureaucracy*,

> putting people first is hard to do in a government that, ultimately, has the power to command people and even send them to prison. A business may put people first because businesses compete with each other in order to attract customers, but the government competes with nobody. And cutting red tape may be possible in a business firm that can tell whether it is doing a good job by looking at its sales and profits, but cutting it in a government agency is much harder because (ordinarily) government agencies deal with neither sales nor profits. (Wilson 2000, 1–2)

New Public Governance, the next phase in public administration, shared many of the elements of NPM but with a new focus on openness and transparency. On Obama's first day in office, he declared, "My administration is committed to an unprecedented level of openness in Government. Openness will strengthen our democracy and promote efficiency and effectiveness in government" (Greve 2015). The market-based and efficiency elements of NPM, combined with the new focus on openness in NPG, were supposed to bring a greater emphasis on cross-sector collaboration and digital services. In their article "Developing New Public Governance as a Public Management Reform Model," Andreas Hagedorn Krogh and Peter Triantafillou write, "NPM reforms aim to enhance public sector efficiency and performance by increasing market-based competition and performance management . . . while NPG reforms attempt to enhance public value creation by advancing collaborative relations across sectors and levels of society." But NPG lacks attention to the structure and reconfiguration of government, eliding the special ways in which management differs from business. This lack of attention to the structures of government has ultimately enabled many in the new administration's most problematic modes of takeover. As Rebecca Williams writes on *Tech Policy Press*,

> From its start until it effectively transformed into DOGE, USDS leaders insisted that the agency must bypass bureaucratic processes to inject Silicon Valley innovation into government services. This marketing strategy has effectively shrunken the imagination in civic technology circles away from solving the root causes for poorly functioning government services—like complex means-testing and underfunding—to a narrower Overton window where administrative rules . . . are the main problem and technology is the only counterbalance to bad policy. (Williams 2025)

A primary issue with this mentality is that the problems that public bureaucracy solves are significantly more wicked than those of any start-up. Avinash Dixit writes,

> In principle, all these principals can get together, negotiate their interests, and create one goal - a suitable weighted average of their distinct goals - that the agency would then be mandated to serve. The agency problem unavoidably created by information asymmetries and monitoring costs would remain, but the one-dimensional goal would make government bureaucracies more like firms, which are closer to having a single goal, typically profit. (Dixit 2012, 4)

Of course, this never happens. According to Wilson, "One cannot explain the behavior of government bureaucracies simply by reference to the fact that they are bureaucracies; the central fact is that they are government bureaucracies" (Wilson 2000, 125). Public bureaucracies, including libraries, have a few central attributes, summarized from the work of Wilson, Dixit, and other scholars:

1. The goals of public bureaucracy are usually vague. For example, while the USDS was ostensibly created to "improve digital services," there is no singular metric (like profit) that the service could fall back on to point to improvement. This is ubiquitous across all public bureaucracies. For example, if the goal of the library

is to provide access to materials, how do we judge that we have succeeded? If it is to increase literacy, how do we know that it is the impact of the library?

2. No government, library, school, or other public institution could possibly attain every metric mandated by the public and usually must choose a few. For example, the USDS chose "efficiency" over almost any other metric. When choosing technology, libraries cannot possibly weigh every single metric that could be important to their patrons. Generally, libraries must weigh the metrics of efficiency, cost, robustness, effectiveness, privacy, and other metrics and choose a few based on their judgment.

3. The primary reward of public bureaucracy is adherence to professional norms rather than profit. This means that incentives are limited, but derived pleasure from work is usually higher due to the professional's feeling of purpose.

4. Public bureaucracy solves significantly more difficult problems than the private sector, and considering the two as equal creates an intense misalignment. For example, "improving literacy" is significantly more complicated than "selling more books to line Jeff Bezos's pockets." "Ending homelessness" is more complicated than "buying real estate."

A chart reproduced below from Dixit's lecture illustrates the inverse relationship between complexity and efficiency in markets, firms, and bureaucracies (2012, 6).
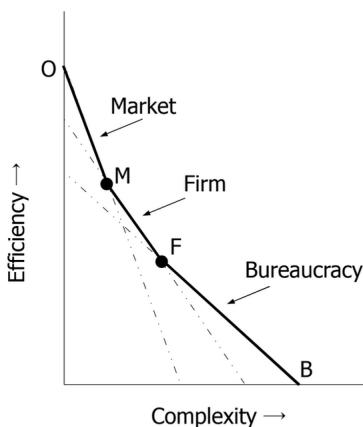
Figure 1 - Discriminating alignment of tasks and institutions

To be clear, in the words of start-ups, these attributes of public bureaucracies are "features, not bugs." Despite the ubiquity of the "business ontology," privatizing services in public bureaucracies almost always has the same outcome: Misaligned incentives lead to measurably poor outcomes. For example, the first HealthCare.gov was built by a patchwork of federal contractors, most notably CGI Federal Group of Canada. The costs spiraled to almost three times their estimate, and the site failed at launch (Anonymous 2016). While the rollout was blamed on the government agency's procurement processes, the contractors and the govern-

ment were at cross purposes. While the government wished to offer a service to taxpayers, the contractors make their business on these contracts. There is an argument to be made that an on-time, effectively delivered project would eventually have led to more profit for the contractors due to more contracts, but most firms of this type operate with alarmingly short-term incentives. As Wilson writes,

> Control over revenues, productive factors, and agency goals is all vested to an important degree in entities external to the organization -- legislatures, courts, politicians, and interest groups. . . . As a result, government management tends to be driven by the constraints on the organization, not the tasks of the organization. . . . [W]hereas business management focuses on the 'bottom line' (that is, profits), government management focuses on the 'top line' (that is, constraints)." (Wilson 2000, 115)

One does not need to look far afield for a library example. While vendors have set themselves up as friendly community members seeking to support libraries by selling them products, the behavior of vendors is nearly always in their self-interest. From Clarivate's recent decision to cease individual title sales to Hoopla's loading of AI-generated slop into their catalog to pad their offerings, profit always rules in the vendor landscape (Maiberg 2025). A rare example of the inverse has been the individual suits brought forward by the major publishers against the "book ban" legislation in multiple states. In challenging states, publishers are challenging censorship in an effective manner, often at great expense (Closson 2024). At the same time, these suits remain at least partially in the best interest of publishing companies—schools and libraries represent a significant amount of their revenue.

As Easy as Ordering Takeout

The internet is often analogized to a mall: free to enter, often the only place where young people can hang out, and a marginally public space. But ultimately, the purpose of a mall is capital. It is heavily surveilled and invisibly policed. In too many ways, the internet works like this as well, but while you would not expect to find essential digital services at the mall, the internet must serve multiple purposes. Rebecca Williams cites the example of civic technologists claiming that government digital services should be "as easy as ordering takeout" while pushing consumer tech solutions on their constituents. In a similar vein, the ebook vendor Overdrive's CEO Steve Potash has said, "Each week [we] curate the best ways each community can maximize their taxpayers' dollar . . . this is like coming into the front door of Costco" (Gross 2021).

To be clear, I am not advocating for ineffective civic tech or for libraries to stop providing digital services to patrons. But public bureaucracies should not be at the service of the market or the firm. Instead, we must commit ourselves to providing a robust understanding to the public of how library and government services work, be willing to step away from negotiations with bad market actors, invest in open-source and in-house technology, and transition our understanding of our patrons and users away from "customers" and toward citizens. The business ontology can be overcome if the future is faced with a strong orientation toward justice.

The Obama-era technocracy sought to bring a business mentality to government technology, complete with its misaligned profit incentives, leading to an even more pervasive sense that government should work like a business. The capture of USDS by the Department of Government Efficiency or the treatment of libraries as "bookstores but free" is a logical outcropping of digital services turning everyone into a customer. After years of privatization of government services, both digital and not, it is time to reclaim public bureaucracy for the public and reject the vision of Elon Musk, who recently said, "I think it's a false dichotomy to look at government and sort of industry as separate . . . government is . . . the ultimate corporation" (Scipioni 2020).

References

Anderson, J., and L. Rainie. 2022. *Visions of the Internet in 2035*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2022/02/PI_2022.02.07_Visions-of-the-Internet-in-2035_FINAL.pdf.

Anonymous/ABC123. 2016. "The Failed Launch of www.HealthCare.gov." Harvard Business School, November 18. https://d3.harvard.edu/platform-rctom/submission/the-failed-launch-of-www-healthcare-gov/.

Burgis, B. 2024. "Obama's DNC Speech Was the Same Old Technocratic Liberalism." *Jacobin*, August 21. https://jacobin.com/2024/08/barack-obama-dnc-speech.

Closson, T. 2024. "Major Publishers Sue Florida Over Banned School Library Books." *The New York Times*, August 9. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/29/us/florida-book-ban-lawsuit.html.

Cobert, B., S. Vanroekel, and T. Park. 2014. "Delivering a Customer-Focused Government Through Smarter IT." The White House: President Barack Obama, August 11. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/08/11/delivering-customer-focused-government-through-smarter-it.

Dixit, A. 2012. "Bureaucracy, Its Reform and Development." Princeton University, February 3. https://www.princeton.edu/~dixitak/home/VarmaLec2.pdf#:~:text=In%20principle%2C%20all%20these%20principals%20can%20get,to%20having%20a%20single%20goal%2C%20typically%20profit.

Doherty, C., J Kiley, and C. Deane. 2024. "What Trump Supporters Believe and Expect." Pew Research Center, November 13. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/13/what-trump-supporters-believe-and-expect/.

Fisher, Mark. 2009. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books.

Greve, C. 2015. "Ideas in Public Management Reform for the 2010s. Digitization, Value Creation and Involvement." *Public Organization Review* 15, 49–65. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-013-0253-8.

Gross, D. A. 2021. "The Surprisingly Big Business of Library E-Books." *The New Yorker*, September 2. https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/an-app-called-libby-and-the-surprisingly-big-business-of-library-e-books.

Inequality.org. n.d. "Wealth Inequality in the United States." Accessed April 1, 2025. https://inequality.org/facts/wealth-inequality/.

Library Futures. 2025. *Neo-Censorship in U.S. Libraries: An Investigation Into Digital Content Suppression*. https://www.libraryfutures.net/neocensorship-report.

Maiberg, E. 2025. "AI-Generated Slop Is Already in Your Public Library." 404 Media, February 4. https://www.404media.co/ai-generated-slop-is-already-in-your-public-library-3/.

Mazzucato, M., and R. Collington. 2023. "Consultants and the Crisis of Capitalism." *Project Syndicate*, March 2. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/consultants-bring-more-problems-than-benefits-by-mariana-mazzucato-and-rosie-collington-2023-03.

Meyer, R. 2016. "Obama's Tech Reforms Are Now Permanent." *The Atlantic*, May 5. https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/05/18f-becomes-a-permanent-part-of-the-government/481260/.

Michaels, J. D. 2015. "Running Government Like a Business . . . Then and Now." *Harvard Law Review* 128 (4): 1152. https://harvardlawreview.org/print/vol-128/running-government-like-a-business-then-and-now/#footnotes-container.

Scipioni, J. 2020. "Elon Musk: Government Is the 'Ultimate Corporation.'" CNBC, December 10. https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/10/elon-musk-government-is-the-ultimate-corporation.html.

United States Digital Service (USDS). n.d. "How We Work." Accessed April 1, 2025. https://www.usds.gov/how-we-work.

United States Digital Service. 2016. "Two Years of the U.S. Digital Service." Medium, August 9. https://medium.com/the-u-s-digital-service/two-years-of-the-u-s-digital-service-e14af5ce713b.

Wiener, A. 2020. *Uncanny Valley: A Memoir*. MCD.

Williams, R. 2025. "How Congress Can Delete DOGE." *Tech Policy Press*, February 26. https://www.techpolicy.press/how-congress-can-delete-doge/.

Wilson, J. Q. 2000. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*, 2nd edition. Basic Books.

Wolf, Z. B. 2024. "DOGE, Meet REGO. 32 Years Before Elon Musk, Al Gore Did It." CNN, December 6. https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/06/politics/doge-musk-gore-rego-what-matters/index.html.

Author

Jennie Rose Halperin (MPA, MLIS) is Director of Library Futures, a project of NYU Law's Engelberg Center on Innovation Law & Policy.

Culture War by Executive Order: President Trump's Cultural Directives and the Threat to Libraries and Museums

JOHN CHRASTKA

In the first 100 days of his second administration, President Donald Trump issued several executive orders targeting important federal cultural institutions. These included the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) (Trump 2025b), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), and the Smithsonian Institution. Framed under themes like "restoring patriotism," "ending woke ideology," and "restoring American exceptionalism," these directives represent an unprecedented use of executive authority aimed at reshaping the mission, governance, and funding of America's cultural institutions, including libraries, museums, and archives.

This situation is not simply an examination of the unitary executive theory or a new form of federalism (Chrastka 2017). Instead, it is a coordinated attempt at cultural capture, a kind of deliberate effort to reconfigure public institutions to reflect and promote a fixed ideological narrative of American identity. These executive orders, especially in the context of the approaching 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026, pose a significant threat to the intellectual neutrality and civic trust that libraries, museums, and archives have maintained for a long time.

Institutional Alarm and Response

Several organizations are emerging early in this term as key voices of opposition to this shift: EveryLibrary and the EveryLibrary Institute, PEN America, and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). Each has issued clear and forceful critiques of the administration's cultural directives, identifying threats not only to funding but to foundational democratic values.

EveryLibrary condemned the reduction of IMLS to only its "statutory functions" and called out the politicization of the agency under Acting Director Keith Sonderling, who framed his appointment as an opportunity to instill patriotism and American exceptionalism into federal cultural work (2025b). The EveryLibrary Institute provided complementary policy briefs outlining the legal limits of executive overreach, affirming that Congress's appropriations to IMLS cannot be nullified by ideological fiat (2025).

PEN America has been equally vocal, warning that content-based restrictions imposed on NEA and NEH grantees constitute an unconstitutional ideological litmus test (2025). Their analysis draws parallels to historical episodes of state censorship and government propaganda, noting that the administration's actions pose a clear and present danger to artistic and intellectual freedom.

The American Alliance of Museums, representing institutions held in uniquely high regard by the public, warned that dismantling IMLS would not only defund a vital infrastructure of support but also break the centuries-long trust between cultural institutions and the communities they serve (Van Balgooy 2025). AAM's data-driven advocacy highlighted that over 90% of Americans view museums as nonpartisan educators and their status is now imperiled.

The Cultural Litmus Test in K–12 and DoDEA Schools

The executive orders affecting federal cultural institutions do not stand alone. They are part of a broader strategy that includes a March 2025 executive order requiring public K–12 schools to self-certify that they have eliminated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs or risk losing federal funding (Schultz 2025). State education agencies and local districts were given just ten days to comply or face the loss of Title I and other essential funding streams. Though enforcement has been temporarily halted by litigation led by the NEA and the ACLU, the threat remains active and unresolved (Jotkoff 2025).

In parallel, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) issued directives ending identity-based student clubs, canceling cultural heritage observances, and mandating the review and removal of school library materials deemed non-compliant with the administration's views on gender and race. EveryLibrary described these actions as an "unprecedented campaign of censorship," particularly alarming given their impact on military-connected youth who already experience instability and high mobility (2025a).

These developments amount to a soft censorship regime, wherein access to federal resources is conditioned upon ideological conformity. Already, federal agencies such as the NEA and IMLS have begun revising their grant guidelines to reflect the administration's priorities, disfavoring projects that center on equity, inclusion, or contested histories. If the K–12 litmus test and DoDEA models are a proving ground, then federal support for local and state libraries, museums, and archives may soon hinge on their willingness to adopt and amplify an officially sanctioned narrative of American identity. As these policies take root in K–12 education, it is reasonable to forecast their extension into higher education, libraries, and museums.

The National Archives, the Smithsonian, and the Contest for Historical Authority

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), long regarded as the impartial steward of America's documentary heritage, has not been immune to political pressure. In 2025, executive actions and administrative guidance reshaped the scope and tone of NARA's public-facing work, particularly in its exhibits, educational resources, and partnerships (Swenson and Fields 2025).

One such directive required all federal historical content, including NARA's exhibits and online materials, to reflect the triumphs of American greatness and eliminate messages

of national shame or decline that undermine patriotism. The Smithsonian Museum was the focus of an Executive Order to "restore Federal sites dedicated to history, including parks and museums, to solemn and uplifting public monuments that remind Americans of our extraordinary heritage, consistent progress toward becoming a more perfect Union, and unmatched record of advancing liberty, prosperity, and human flourishing" (Trump 2025c). In practical terms, this could force these institutions and others like them to remove or reframe slavery and segregation-era documents, pause or revise exhibits focusing on protest movements, civil disobedience, or critical interpretations of founding-era policies, and even mandate the religious values of actors in major American historic and cultural moments.

While some of these moves have been presented as "balanced storytelling," critics, including former agency staff, academic historians, and advocacy organizations, warn that they constitute a narrative purge of inconvenient truths. This aligns with other agencies' shifts toward a government-sanctioned historical orthodoxy. The executive order also instructed that all partner institutions participating in America250 programming must certify alignment with the administration's messaging principles in order to receive grant support. This effectively imposes a compliance requirement for access to foundational documents, both digitally and through outreach exhibitions.

Orchestrating a Singular Narrative: The America 250 Executive Order and Task Force 250

On January 29, 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order 14189, titled "Celebrating America's 250th Birthday," establishing the White House Task Force on Celebrating America's 250th Birthday (Task Force 250) (2025a). This task force is charged with planning and executing a grand celebration for the 250th anniversary of American Independence on July 4, 2026. Task Force 250 is chaired by the President, with the Vice President serving as Vice Chair. The task force includes key cabinet members and agency heads, such as the Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The inclusion of leaders from cultural and educational agencies underscores the administration's intent to align the celebration with its ideological vision.

Task Force 250 is tasked with coordinating federal agency efforts to plan, organize, and execute the 250th-anniversary celebrations. Centralized planning for the 250th anniversary, as outlined in Executive Order 14189, could lead to ideological litmus tests for federal funding of local and state archives, museums, and libraries. This centralization allows the administration to align funding priorities with its ideological objectives. For instance, the NEA has revised its grant guidelines to favor projects that celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary, effectively sidelining initiatives aimed at underserved communities (Cascone 2025).

These actions suggest a shift towards funding criteria that prioritize alignment with a specific narrative of American history and identity. Consequently, local and state cultural institutions may find themselves required to conform to these narratives to secure federal support, thereby compromising their autonomy and the diversity of perspectives they represent. The composition and directives of Task Force 250 may lead to a homogenized portrayal of American history, sidelining diverse or contrarian perspectives, and minimize complex narratives. The centralization of planning within the executive branch raises concerns about the potential politicization of the Semiquincentennial celebrations, transforming them into vehicles for ideological messaging rather than inclusive historical reflection.

The 2026 Reauthorization of the Museum and Library Services Act

A particularly vulnerable inflection point for the American culture capture is the upcoming reauthorization of the Museum and Library Services Act (MLSA) in federal fiscal year 2026. Reauthorizations are typically procedural, reaffirming the federal role in supporting library and museum services nationwide. But under this administration and this Congress, reauthorization could become the vehicle for radical restructuring.

There are three plausible scenarios for the 2026 MLSA Reauthorization. One would be to effectively reauthorize the agency out of existence. Congress could sunset the MSLA entirely or fail to renew it in any meaningful form, effectively hollowing out IMLS. A second scenario is a statutory rollback, where the MLSA could be revised to limit IMLS to only formula-based grants, ending discretionary programs and national leadership activities. A third and necessarily more draconian model would be to use this reauthorization as a vehicle to consolidate IMLS, NEH, NEA, and others into a single federal "Cultural Authority" with the power to direct funding only to state agencies that align with the administration's ideological vision of patriotism, American identity, and historical truth.

This would not be without precedent. In the 1980s and early 2000s, efforts to politicize NEA funding were successful in narrowing its scope. The 1990s saw similar attempts to realign public broadcasting with federal messaging. President Trump's 2025 executive orders extend and formalize this strategy across sectors. To date, no major legislative proposal has been filed to restructure MLSA in this way, but the precedent and the political conditions are aligned.

Call to Action for Library, Museum, and Archives Professionals

For libraries, museums, and archives, the ramifications are significant. We cannot serve democracy by sanitizing its history. To rewrite the record is not patriotism — it is propaganda. Until very recently, libraries, museums and archives relied on the resources and partnership of federal agencies like IMLS, NEH, NEA, NARA, and others for the funding and technical assistance necessary to showcase primary sources, conduct educational programming, and host traveling exhibits. If our federal cultural agencies becomes a gatekeeper of "acceptable history," the ripple effect will reach into every institution that hopes to tell America's authentic story with complexity and care.

Library, museum, and archives professionals must approach this moment with clarity and resolve. These executive orders are not merely policy disagreements; they are attempts to repurpose public institutions as tools of ideological enforcement. Our sectors must come together in a shared discussion about the impending culture capture. Our professions must reaffirm their commitment to historical truth, free expression, and cultural pluralism. As the next phase of the administration moves toward the 250th, we must monitor federal funding guidelines, particularly through IMLS and related agencies, for signs of ideological conditioning. We should be prepare to defend the integrity of cultural agencies and oppose legislative efforts that would restructure federal cultural support along ideological lines.

The upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States should be a time to celebrate the complexity, diversity, and resilience of our national story. But that story must be told honestly, with all its contradictions and triumphs, not filtered through a singular lens of state-sanctioned virtue. The cultural institutions of the United States have long served as spaces of inquiry, refuge, and connection. Their strength lies in their independence and their

embrace of complexity. The Trump administration's 2025 executive orders seek to reverse that tradition, substituting plurality with conformity.

As professionals and as citizens, we must decide whether we will serve as stewards of culture, or as instruments of the state. The future of libraries, museums, and archives depends on our answer.

References

Cascone, S. 2025. "NEA's New Grant Rules Imperil Funding for Arts Programs in Underserved Communities." *Artnet News*, February 10. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cancelled-nea-grants-for-underserved-audiences-2606683.

Chrastka, J. 2017. "What a Renewed Federalism Means for Libraries." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (4): 342–49. https://doi.org/10.1086/693491.

EveryLibrary. 2025a. "EveryLibrary Statement on Censorship and Political Interference in Department of Defense K-12 Schools." February 17. https://www.everylibrary.org/everylibrarydodeastatement.

EveryLibrary. 2025b. "Statement on Trump's Attack on Federal Funding for Libraries." March 15. https://www.everylibrary.org/statementimls2025.

EveryLibrary Institute. 2025. "Understanding IMLS's 'Shall' and 'May' Language." March 15. https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/imls_shall_may_language.

Jotkoff, E. 2025. "NEA and ACLU Sue U.S. Department of Education over Unlawful Attack on Educational Equity." National Education Association, March 5. https://www.nea.org/about-nea/media-center/press-releases/nea-and-aclu-sue-us-department-education-over-unlawful-attack-educational-equity.

PEN America. 2025. "Warning That New Federal Grant Guidelines Risk Art and Culture Being Used as a Tool for Government Propaganda." February 26. https://pen.org/press-release/pen-america-is-among-seven-organizations-warning-that-new-federal-grant-guidelines-risk-art-and-culture-being-used-as-a-tool-for-government-propaganda/.

Schultz, B. 2025. "Trump Admin. Tells Schools: No Federal Funds If You're Using DEI." *Education Week*, April 3. https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/trump-admin-tells-schools-no-federal-funds-if-youre-using-dei/2025/04.

Swenson, A., and G. Fields. 2025. "The National Archives Is Nonpartisan but Has Found Itself Targeted by Trump." Associated Press, February 26. https://apnews.com/article/trump-national-archives-firings-layoffs-historical-recordkeeping-559027fdd2f634263bea7774a78d66fe.

Trump, D. J. 2025a. "Celebrating America's 240th Birthday." *The White House*, January 29. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/celebrating-americas-250th-birthday/.

Trump, D. J. 2025b. "Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy." *The White House*, March 14. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/.

Trump, D. J. 2025c. "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." *The White House*, March 27. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history/.

Van Balgooy, M. 2025. "IMLS Targeted for Elimination—How Museums Can Prepare and Advocate." *Engaging Places*, March 15. https://engagingplaces.net/2025/03/15/imls-targeted-for-elimination-how-museums-can-prepare-and-advocate/.

Fight if You Can Win. Otherwise, Negotiate.

BILL CROWLEY

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the possibility of avoiding the negative consequences often resulting from progressive public library defeats in disputes over maintaining or establishing inclusive collections and services. Such unfortunate realities, usually in conservative or mixed-ideology communities, may be a seemingly inevitable result when a progressive director is attacked or fired or otherwise driven to leave, and the library's new director has a more conservative orientation. Such negative outcomes for collections, programs, and staffing can be the result of successful protests by influential members of a public library's service community, acting with or without outside help. This essay is grounded in the reality that some progressive librarianship is better than no progressive librarianship. In consequence, it seeks to provide a professional justification for an inclusive library board, director, and staff to negotiate with opposition leaders in their localities to preserve as much as possible of a progressive approach to inclusive library collections and services.

A Parental Rights Encounter

Several years ago, the author arrived early at a public library for an interview with a library manager and a Dominican University School of Information Studies student doing a library practicum. It was an end-of-practicum review to discuss how well the placement had worked for both the student and the hosting library. While waiting for the manager and student to return from lunch, the author, who was standing by the new bookshelves, was approached by a woman who asked if he was a librarian. A "yes" response led the woman to demand that he look at the young adult book with sexually explicit material that she was holding. She then pressed for an explanation as to why the library owned the book. The author immediately realized that it was too late to evade further discussion by handing over the question to a librarian actually employed by the library. Resigned to that reality, he pointed out that the library tried to meet the reading needs of all members of its inclusive community. He then pointed out that she had the option of telling her daughter not to borrow such books.

Obviously frustrated by the answer, the woman pointed out that she had been given the same response when raising an earlier concern. She then stressed that her daughter liked to go to the library with her friends after school. That meant her daughter could read that book and others like it at the library, and she would never know about the reading.

"I am a single mother," she pointed out. "Do I have to quit my job to go to this library to be with my child after school in order to make sure that she does not read the library's pornography?"

The complaining mother looked at her watch and then informed the author that she had to get back to work.

Librarians who work public service desks know how badly complaining parents can receive even the most politely phrased "It's your job as a parent to guide your child's reading" statement. It often solves nothing. Unfortunately, it can be perceived as a negative response that seems to blame the parent for any perceived problems resulting from their child's use of the library's book collection. For some readers, it is only a slightly better response than "Why don't you just go away?"

Calzada, Edwards, and Heindel in *Prepared Libraries, Empowered Teams* (2024) have recently provided a first-rate work with more reassuring ways of responding to book removal requests. Nevertheless, the fact remains that even their intensely planned process can frustrate a complaining library user when books perceived to be negative remain on the library's shelves. Many such do not care how a book was acquired. They just want it gone. The restraints of *Prepared Libraries* in dealing with disputes that have gone public will be discussed later in this essay.

Recently, there took place what can be considered an episode of political irony for librarians pushing for parental responsibility for children's reading. A bill was passed by the South Carolina legislature that included a section mandating public library support for parental choice. In order to receive state aid, South Carolina public libraries were instructed to "certify to the State library that their county libraries do not offer any books or materials that appeal to the prurient interest of children under the age of seventeen in children's, youth, or teen book sections of libraries and are only made available with explicit parental consent" (South Carolina State Library 2024).

Although quite problematic for younger readers, in retrospect, this legislative action can be considered an almost inevitable conservative state approach to supporting parental rights with their children's public library use. When public librarians do not respond as demanded to parental concerns, a state may be pressured to do so. If in doubt, readers working in institutions with a library attorney might ask about the legal basis for such action in their own state. The response might be disconcerting for a number of progressive librarians. Among other things, "although censorship violates the First Amendment right to freedom of speech, some limitations are constitutionally permissible. The courts have told public officials at all levels that they may take community standards into account when deciding whether materials are obscene or pornographic and thus subject to censor" (Webb 2024).

Advice from a State Legislator

Following his years as a consultant with a southern state's library administrative agency, the author took a position heading a library cooperative located in an almost equally conservative Midwestern state. Within a year, he was also chairing a joint librarian-trustee state legislative committee. During one trip to the state capitol for a committee meeting, he met again for lunch with a local state legislator and discussed the committee's legislative agenda. As he had several times before, the legislator stressed that, at the time, public libraries were positively viewed by his Democratic and Republican colleagues. Consequently, they might be

able to preserve some of the library taxing authority that the powerful Republican Speaker of the House was seeking to take away.

"If you have the votes, you can even fight the Speaker and win. If you don't have the votes, try to negotiate. You may have something he wants."

Readers who wish to learn about a past time when conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats united in support of public libraries are invited to read the author's 1994 *Public Libraries* article "Library Lobbying as a Way of Life." It really is not fiction. While it may be inspirational to read about past library victories, accounts of public library legal actions in the current culture war are more likely to involve tales of increasing state control over collections, local book bans, and the loss of library jobs.

The Problem

This essay seeks to further the discussion of how public librarians in conservative or mixed-ideology communities can preserve the greatest amount of inclusion in collections, programs, and staffing without engaging in unsuccessful public disputes. It is thereby hoped that a more negotiated approach will limit the loss of progressive librarian jobs; the hiring of more conservative, even professionally unqualified, replacements; and the removal of books and programs deemed to be offensive by some community members. Since such actions are much less likely to take place in progressive communities, discussion of matters will be limited to conservative or mixed-ideology localities. Nevertheless, it is understood that problems affecting progressive libraries are more likely to relate to disputes over public library budgets (New York City Council 2024).

While it is beyond the specific aims of this consideration, it should be recalled that attacks on public libraries have been an inevitable part of US culture. They did not suddenly arise in reaction to the presence of progressive librarianship in local public libraries. As stressed by the political scientist Jacob Sutherland,

> Public libraries in the United States have historically been sites of political contestation. From early efforts to contest using local taxes to fund libraries, to grassroots movements to expand library services to rural communities, to efforts to ban books uplifting minority voices, public libraries have always been political institutions with duality: they provide community services while remaining venues for controversy. (Sutherland 2024)

Being both providers of respected community services and ongoing sources of controversy has made any general statements regarding defending progressive public library programs more than a bit problematic. Conditions supporting or opposing such defense will simply vary by locality.

Defining the Conditions of Libraries in the Current Culture War

Distrust of Institutions

Jacob Harold of the Urban Institute has identified four major critiques relevant to the growing distrust of American institutions. These include the Justice Critique, held by those

who have been and are yet exploited; the Managerial Critique, asserting that institutions have become ineffective; the Populist Critique, stressing the aims of dominating elites; and the Decadence Critique, identifying organizations that have abandoned their originating aims to become self-serving.

A review of the literature would indicate that the Populist Critique seems to best capture the motivations of many library protestors. With relevant adjustments, Harold's observations about the Populist Critique can be narrowed to the problematic perception of public libraries. For some conservative protestors, their local public libraries are "led by elites. Those elites [professional librarians] use institutions as vehicles to impose their agenda upon the rest of society. These organizations [public libraries] become weapons that magnify the power (particularly the cultural power) of a small subset of the population" (Harold 2024, 5).

Here, it is worth knowing that conservative America is divided. Traditional mainstream conservatives can even be concerned about the negative direction of present-day populism. Published in the conservative *Deseret News*, Michael Kofoed's "Perspective: Is Populism Worth the Soul of Conservatism?" warned that "populism seeks to divide the 'people' from the 'elites' — never mind that the people elect the elites. *Since small 'l' liberal democracy won't give the populist what he wants when he wants it, then grievance and victimhood must replace prudence and moderation*"[emphasis added] (Kofoed 2022). Here, several points are worth highlighting. First, while this observation was an opinion, the *Deseret News* is ultimately owned by the religiously conservative Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often termed Mormons. Second, even communities in conflict may have conservatives who are concerned about a public library's operations but are willing to discuss them in a negotiation context.

The above-cited Populist Critique can summarize the perceptions of many library protestors regarding library collections and programs. Their outrage can be complicated by the reality of librarian employment. As is often the case, librarians, particularly directors, may not be native to the communities they serve. In consequence, their ideological opponents may see their progressive management of public libraries as an unwanted imposition by outsiders. While facts should be important in discussions of library and other community matters, it is often perceptions, frequently in error, that can be the basis for action (Smith 2019).

Challenges for Librarian Professionalism

Too often, disputes over library services take place in a context where the backgrounds of the matters involved are not considered. This often results in a lack of understanding that can complicate searches for a common basis of understanding that can be of benefit in problem-solving (Community Tool Box n.d.).

Relevant Library History

At times, an objective consideration of the development of American public libraries requires going beyond the library literature. In this context, research on public libraries in the economics discipline supports the reality that the developing American public library was, in part, an institution devoted to education, civic engagement, and morality. Analysis by Kevane and Sundstrom concluded that in the 1880–1929 period, "public libraries were often local initiatives and reflected a variety of local conditions. But the public library movement was enabled and supported by state legislation and organizations. Library boosters hoped these efforts *would increase the establishment of libraries and thereby spread their purported salutary influence on education, civic engagement, and morals*" [emphasis added] (Kevane and Sundstrom 2016, 17).

The roles of the twenty-first-century public library in supporting contemporary education, perhaps termed lifelong learning, as well as civic engagement, will vary by library and may be locally disputed. However, it is now being argued that library education trains future public librarians to view a commitment to moral development as a service negative.

In a 2025 article entitled "Are Librarians Being Trained as the New Culture Warriors?" published in the conservative *Public Square Magazine*, Krista Cook asserted that

> Librarians' elevation of "free speech" and "privacy" over their other obligations seems to have severed their perceived obligations to those who pay their salaries and provide their buildings and the materials they circulate. They seem to feel they have no obligation to taxpayers or the standards that exist in their communities. Their commitment to free speech and privacy supersedes these obligations.

> Unanswerable to law enforcement, governing entities, and the communities they serve, librarians act as if they exist on a higher plane and are a law unto themselves. This subtle shift in loyalties has enormous consequences. (Cook 2025)

Dr. Cook's four degrees include an MLIS from an ALA-accredited program. Her admittedly well-constructed article clearly seeks to transform her individual perceptions into a national indictment of what she sees as the results of the problematic education provided to future public and other librarians. Clearly more than a compilation of attack slogans, Cook's perceptions can be expected to be used, in part, as the basis for local critiques by educated conservatives on the problematic mental framework of their professional librarians. As a result, the reader is encouraged to read Cook's attack on the profession in any calculated risk analysis (see below) of possible threats to progressive library services and programs.

In this context, the innovative Illinois effort to use tax funds to encourage inclusive public and school library collections through the use of library state aid (Nanos 2023) has also been attacked as immoral in another critique from the right. Writing in the conservative *National Review*, Scott Howard (2023) stressed that Illinois was forcing its libraries to act immorally:

> As the community depository of literary wisdom, public libraries definitionally convey public moral standards. To suggest, as Illinois has done, that the community has no right to set such standards is to suggest that there is *no standard at all* (emphasis in original).

> This is preposterous. Not only should these libraries be permitted to select which books they have on their shelves….it is right and good for them to do so on moral grounds. These libraries are places for the public to learn and think. The moral standards of the bookshelves the libraries contain are both instructive to and reflective of the public. (Howard 2023)

Wayne A. Wiegand, perhaps the foremost historian of the American public library in the last half-century, found a number of engagements, not always positive, with public libraries by those advancing their own moral standards (Wiegand 2015). In his *Part of Our*

Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library, Wiegand stressed something that might not be emphasized in studies for the MLIS degree. Simply stated, for most of the history of US public libraries, there existed a widespread collaborative reality involving the development of library collections and services in the nation's smaller cities and towns. In this context, the obligation of professional librarians was not to impose on their communities a professionally approved menu of library programs and services. Instead, their role was to educate community members concerning the value of a strong and inclusive range of library resources, programs, and material, preferably delivered by staff whose ranks were knowledgeable of the needs and interests of their community's population. Such an aim was not always achieved, with the mid-twentieth-century reality of segregated public libraries being the most negative example (EveryLibrary 2020).

To the extent that the library as a community educator system worked, it tended to involve an ongoing mix of formal and informal discussions by library personnel with members of the local community. The result was often supported as a worthy expenditure of tax money. In this process, the librarians negotiated "a community's acceptable literary boundaries" (Wiegand 2015, 168).

This process of librarians using their professionalism to instruct and educate community members was not considered censorship. Instead, it was a means for developing responsive services that coexisted with less directive interpretations of the 1939 and later versions of the Library Bill of Rights. In recent decades, this collaborative process was gradually replaced in many professional mindsets by prescriptions offered by ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) and its long-serving Director Judith Krug. Over time, partly through the education for the ALA-accredited master's degree negatively critiqued by Cook (2025), joint decision-making was replaced by the librarians' prescription on what had to be done. In short, it was no longer professionally acceptable for librarians to educate local residents during discussions on the best library services and, following such exchanges, live with the results. Instead, regardless of their community's dominant beliefs, library collections and services were to be developed and used according to ALA requirements (Wiegand 2015).

In these new limitations on what was acceptably professional, library directors, boards, and staff were now expected to adhere to Krug's emphasis on fighting all limitations in service. Although Krug could not be held solely responsible for the result, it is arguable that the groundwork for the contemporary hardline ALA stance (reprinted below) reflects her own professional philosophy. Unfortunately, adherence by librarians to ALA's requirements for professionalism now seems to be the root cause of many of the firings of progressive librarians and the resultant hiring of their more conservative replacements.

It is now the case, according to ALA, that

> Libraries and their governing bodies have a legal and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the communities they serve have free and equitable access to a diverse range of library resources and services that is inclusive, regardless of content, approach, or format. *[This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults]. Lack of access to information can be harmful to minors. Libraries and their governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors* [emphasis added]. (American Library Association updated 2019)

It is not the reality that all public librarians in conservative communities are committed to defending, for example, purchasing certain controversial children's books and keeping them in the children's room or even in the library. Given this reality, this analysis will borrow relevant theory to examine the possible nature of the public librarians who were and are willing to put their careers on the line for total youth access to library collections and programs.

Self-Sacrificing Librarians

In 2018, Fobazi Ettarh published an influential article entitled "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves" in which she addressed how librarians developed an ethic of self-sacrifice which she termed "vocational awe." When analyzed, Ettarh has supplied a theoretical approach that uniquely describes why librarians, for example, would sacrifice their jobs and livelihood over the placement of challenged children's books in their libraries.

As described by Ettarh,

> "Vocational awe" refers to the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique. . . . I would like to dismantle the idea that librarianship is a sacred calling; thus requiring absolute obedience to a prescribed set of rules and behaviors, regardless of any negative effect on librarians' own lives. (Ettarh 2018)

In the midst of this increasing disputation over library collections and programs, it has been argued that librarians forced to violate ALA standards are increasingly suffering from "moral injury." This affliction has been defined as "the phenomenon whereby a person experiences a strong negative cognitive and emotional response after enduring exposure to a traumatic situation that violates their ethical values" (Hazelton-Boyle and Hazelton-Boyle 2023, 4). Moral injury for public librarians facing challenges to professional standards is seen as causing depression and anxiety, as well as causing librarians to leave the profession (Hazelton-Boyle and Hazelton-Boyle 2023, 6).

When Complaints About the Library Become Public Disputes

A Lack of Effective Guidance

As a philosophical pragmatist, the author believes it is necessary to deal "with a problem in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist, rather than following fixed theories, ideas, or rules." In consequence, this involves undertaking "an approach to problems and situations that is based on practical solutions" (*Cambridge English Dictionary* n.d.). It needs to be conceded that "practical" is a word that can have a number of meanings, few of which involve getting oneself fired. As one library director informed the author, those opposed to a fully inclusive library collection in her conservative community had secured enough support from municipal and other political leaders that she did not dare follow ALA's instructions. As a result, purchasing and shelving a number of the often-protested children's and young adult works in the children's and YA sections of her library, endorsed by the few leading progressive residents of her locality, seemed to her to be professionally suicidal.

At the time the director spoke with the author, she was investigating whether or not purchasing the works and placing them in the adult stacks might somehow be acceptable to both the community's conservatives and progressives alike. For her and this author, taking ALA-required actions would seemingly lead to her dismissal as director, which was neither sensible nor a practical solution for solving a problem in collection development. It might well be the cause of a severe case of moral injury even, and if fired as progressive director, she would go on to win a significant lawsuit. Almost certainly, it would mean that the director would be replaced by a more conservative librarian who would have no problem placing further restrictions on challenged works even if they were ordered.

It is an unfortunate reality that the conservative solution to library problems for populist objectors can often be firing the director who supervised the library. Along with replacing the library board that authorized the library's progressive efforts, it is a faux solution that needs to be avoided if possible. In this context, given the rise in library litigation, the principal source for advice on censorship issues should be the public library's attorney. If at all competent, this lawyer ought to be familiar with state library laws, applicable municipal ordinances, and local social and political contexts.

Ultimately, "all politics is local" (American Bar Association Governmental Affairs Office 2016), and local circumstances can and will vary. It is particularly the case where library protest is on the edge of becoming part of a populist conservative political platform. However, the sage advice contained in *Prepared Libraries, Empowered Teams*, as well as other useful sources (Harvard University Gutman Library 2024), may be less effective when populist conservatives control local politics. It is especially the case when data can be marshaled by protestors to demonstrate that the public library is staffed by progressives spreading a progressive agenda while discriminating against a conservative counterpart (Terr 2023).

When Communication Does Not Work and Library Support Is Lacking

By definition, the public library functions as a government agency, regardless of the laws under which it is created (New York State Library 2023). In consequence, it is useful to examine the research on independent public agencies for ideas regarding what determines their public support. In this context, a recent study by Rimkutė and Mazepus endorsed long-standing public administration understanding that "both expertise and reputation-based authority bases are crucial in shaping the perceived legitimacy of government agencies among citizens" (2025). In short, perceived professional expertise needs to be associated with a positive public perception of public agencies, a category that includes public libraries, to secure positive local backing.

On the surface, it appears that librarians, with parents at least, are overwhelmingly recognized for their collection expertise and enjoy a fine reputation on a national level (EveryLibrary Institute 2023). Nonetheless, "traditional-values groups are demanding the removal or restriction of books with explicit sex education, and books that unflinchingly document LGBTQ realities and the Black American experience" (Burnett 2022). Although helpful in raising issues, generalized research is seldom conclusive on a local basis since a public library's reputation, a notoriously fact-resistant perception, simply varies in a given municipality, state, or region. The result, in areas where the public library is distrusted, can be a roadblock difficult to remove.

Summarized in the work of Rimkutė and Mazepus is a fundamentally important finding regarding perceptions of institutional legitimacy:

> The impact of agency reputation on citizens' perceptions of legitimacy is asymmetric: A positive bureaucratic reputation does not notably affect legitimacy, while a negative reputation undermines it significantly. This suggests that government agencies should prioritize managing reputational threats to prevent legitimacy loss in the eyes of citizens." (Rimkutė and Mazepus 2025)

To restate this finding in a library context, whenever a public library's collections and services are successfully attacked, it is likely that the library has lost the perceptual backing of critical elements of its service community. In consequence, prior to such conflict, public libraries should work on reinforcing their community reputations if they want to ensure their place as a valuable part of their municipalities or counties. Facts should not be overlooked when making the case for public library value. However, there seem to be times when the distribution of facts about the library should take second place to the management of perceptions of the library. This actuality reflects a basic human reality recounted by Adrian Bardon (2020):

> A human being's very sense of self is intimately tied up with his or her identity group's status and beliefs. Unsurprisingly, then, people respond automatically and defensively to information that threatens their ideological worldview. We respond with rationalization and selective assessment of evidence—that is, we engage in "confirmation bias," giving credit to expert testimony we like and finding reasons to reject the rest. (Bardon 2020)

The very different ideological worldviews of progressive librarians and conservative protestors underscore the need for librarians to consistently work to enhance their community reputations prior to and during protests over collections and services. Facts can reinforce the commitment of a library's supporters. They are considerably less likely to change the perceptions of the library being held by protestors.

Planning, Calculated Risk, and Compromise

Public libraries in progressive localities often enjoy the ability to operate in full observance of the many progressive standards promulgated by the American Library Association. However, in conservative and mixed-ideology communities, there are often indicators that emerging or growing protests may lead to a reality where library staff are unable to defend the full spectrum of ALA-endorsed intellectual freedoms. In such circumstances, open conflict may lead to staff firings, the winnowing of inclusive library collections, and the loss of valued public programs. In 2024, this was reported as a situation where "librarians around the country are struggling to reconcile their desire to serve their communities with their need for self-preservation, especially as libraries have become hubs for social services and battlegrounds for the culture wars" (Schinsky 2024).

Even in the midst of a culture war, it may be possible for a library in a conservative locality that is only slightly red to promote progressive library collections and services. The

positively polite *Prepared Libraries, Empowered Teams* (Calzada, Edwards, Heindel 2024) is likely to be of use in such circumstances. If reacted to in time, and protestors are not dismissed as mere irritants, it may be possible to negotiate an acceptable response to the critical question: "Is there any hope that cultural communities [in conflict] can achieve a sufficient degree of coherence so that the claims they make on each other can lend themselves to compromise-making?" (Gerber 2020, 15).

Although public libraries should undertake studies of their service communities on an ongoing basis, the need to acquire local knowledge in the midst of a national or local culture war, or when such a conflict looms on the horizon, is critical. In the midst of political and social disturbances, there arises one dominating imperative. It becomes essential for public libraries serving conservative communities not to insist on total adherence to progressive library standards endorsed by ALA unless they are favored locally. It thus becomes necessary to determine the level of such support. To that end, the librarians' understanding of the valuable planning tool of calculated risk becomes an imperative.

Calculated Risk

Calculated risk is a military and business term that seeks to make the best possible choices in a given set of circumstances. The reasons for such calculations are generally well known but worth restating.

According to Bernhardt (2020),

> Decision-makers cannot make a decision without some degree of risk. This is true because no one has complete information. If a decision-maker had complete information, the necessity for a decision-maker would cease to exist. With complete information, one could simply implement decision rules, which identify decisions with the greatest expected value. However, we live in a world of bounded rationality, meaning that we must make decisions based on what we know and what we do not know. Since no one can accurately foretell the future, uncertainty exists as a critical variable to rational decision making. (Bernhardt 2020, xiii)

It is worth noting that the American Library Association, in the conditions thus described, would expect librarians to defend public library collections and programs on the basis of its standards. On reflection, these can be seen as seemingly very close to Bernhardt's automatic "decision rules." As such, they can be self-defeating in serving municipalities and counties dominated by conservatives.

For its part, "calculated risk," as described in the business context, is "about making informed decisions that align with organizational goals while considering potential outcomes. It involves a detailed evaluation of the risks involved, including financial implications, market conditions, and operational impacts. This approach ensures that decisions are not only bold but also backed by data and strategic insight." (Rauch 2024)

It is necessary to stress that in the matter of maintaining the highest possible level of progressive library services and programs, it may be necessary to negotiate compromises. This is becoming increasingly difficult, due in large part to the multiple effects of social networking on firming up group beliefs and identities.

As stressed by Colin M. Fisher,

> Humans are biased in how they evaluate information. People are more likely to trust and remember information from their in-group — those who share their identities — while distrusting information from perceived out-groups. This bias leads to echo chambers, where like-minded people reinforce shared beliefs, regardless of accuracy. (Fisher 2025)

Although the American Library Association is seemingly against negotiating anything less than full library compliance with its standards (Wiegand 2015), there are times when the alternative to negotiation may be open conflicts that the public library may not win.

The Value of Negotiation

Plamen Ralchev (2023) has summarized the value of negotiation for the Center for Conflict Research in a particularly useful way:

> Negotiations are a process of communication aimed at reaching a joint decision on an issue that was initially associated with incompatible interests. In negotiations, there are at least two parties who communicate with each other on issues that are of interest to both parties. The following objectives can be set in the negotiation process:
>
> - reaching a mutual agreement on the issue in which their interests clash;
> - overcoming confrontation, which inevitably arises due to conflicting interests, without destroying the relationship.
>
> To achieve this, we must be able to:
>
> - establish interpersonal interaction;
> - manage our emotions. (Ralchev 2023)

The commendable approaches (team building, planning, developing a resolution mindset, etc.) outlined in *Prepared Libraries, Empowered Teams* (Calzada, Edwards, Heindel 2024) are particularly helpful in low-level discussions seeking to prevent minor complaints by local library stakeholders from escalating into major disputes. They are likely to be most successful in progressive communities. However, the matter may be very different in conservative or mixed-ideology communities when the public library and its supporters lack the political and social backing to win arguments for totally supporting ALA's inclusive standards. In less progressive communities, legal actions defending such standards can be successful, but a public dispute may poison library-community relations for a considerable period of time. In consequence, the less incendiary option of formal discussions with the philosophical opposition might prevent small local disputes over library collections and services from escalating into job-threatening power plays.

When the director and board of trustees open the public library to potential negotiation in order to save staff jobs and the greatest possible level of progressive services, several realities will become clear. First, while many library staff and board members may have been

involved in negotiating salaries and home purchases, they may not have been included in nego-tiating the future of an entire community's library services. Under such circumstances, it may be best to bring in an outside facilitator.

As stressed by Crowley (2023b),

> Even short of a crisis, public library representatives and protestors may be at loggerheads and are unable to come to an agreement over matters such as suitable children's books, videos, and programs, as well as the proper roles of parents and librarians. In order to avoid decisions based solely on power differentials, which may not favor the library, it might be effective to bring in a neutral facilitator to assist the disputants in coming to the least objectionable solution. (Crowley 2023b, 14)

There is yet another bit of irony in setting up discussions that might lead to a public library reluctantly negotiating some limitations on its services. ALA has published a partic-ularly relevant explanation of what meeting facilitators can help achieve in negotiations. Its *Leading Conversations in Small and Rural Libraries: Facilitation Guide* (2020) should be used as a valuable source to understand the likely duties of a neutral facilitator in leading discussions (2020).

Additionally, although *The Librarian's Guide to Negotiation: Winning Strategies for the Digital Age* (Ashmore, Grogg, and Weddle 2012) has been around for over a decade and brings thoughtful concepts to discussions, it was published before the more recent intensification of the current culture war and must be used with that reality in mind. Elsewhere, there is a fundamental issue with many of the articles in the contemporary library and information professional journals dealing with fights over intellectual freedom. They are understandably so grounded in ALA's progressive and commendable worldview that they offer little help for negotiations with opponents when such negotiations may result in less than full compliance with ALA's standards. Although more likely due to availability than for any other reason, recent publications of the author, written in response to pleas for help from public library directors and managers, have been downloaded hundreds of times (Crowley 2021; Crowley 2023a; Crowley 2023b; Crowley 2023c).

Calculated Risk Again

The author first learned the value of a calculated risk approach when he took the position of administrator of a multitype library cooperative in a Midwestern state. After he arrived, the cooperative's vice president, who was also the chair of the planning committee, told the author that he needed to prepare three budgets for use because of the uncertainty of the federal and state dollars that supported the cooperative. The first budget was the public budget adopted by the cooperative's board of directors. The other two budgets were to be kept secret and made public only if the cooperative lost either its state or federal support. Unfortunately, since the cooperative's budget went primarily to support its staff, losing fund-ing from either source would result in layoffs. The knowledge that the administrator was preparing for just such a possible outcome would result in plummeting staff morale.

This realization of financial vulnerability for his organization led the author to increase his commitment to library lobbying and the larger area of advocacy. After spending his first months on the job traveling around the state, teaching librarians and trustees how to lobby, he

continued his advocacy work while administering the cooperative and its services. Eventually, he chaired the state-level librarian and trustee legislative committee and assumed the role of Federal Relations Coordinator.

In the process of legislative work, the author learned a crucial aspect of library advocacy. Under no circumstances should libraries personally attack protestors. Under the less irritating heading of "opposition research," developing such attacks could involve finding out negative facts about library protestors, a process that tends to emphasize an "opponent's ideological inconsistencies or reveal a more salacious personal indiscretion" (MasterClass 2021). While it might be emotionally satisfying to respond in kind to vicious attacks on library staff, it would be self-defeating to do so. A library where the staff was known to attack on the same level as its most vicious opponents would undermine its very positive perceptions as the workplace of that "really nice children's librarian."

Conclusion

The author clearly prefers following the guidance of the legislator who advised librarians to "Fight if you can win. Otherwise, negotiate" over approaches more likely to lead to librarian martyrdom. Nonetheless, he is well aware that the circumstances of individual public libraries, including responses to attacks, can and will differ. In the past, while working full-time in public information at the New York Public Library (NYPL), the author also studied part-time for his library master's degree at Columbia University. There, he had the privilege of taking a course in library administration taught by John Mackenzie Cory, the NYPL director. Once, after the author sat in on an interview on censorship with Cory by a local reporter, the director took the time for an out-of-class talk. He shared with the author a situation where the library had been attacked for years after it refused to censor communist and other radical material. To borrow the words of Stephen Francoeur, in the mid-twentieth century, NYPL's "employees found themselves embroiled in battles with self-proclaimed '100% loyal Americans' eager to remove materials they deemed subversive" (Francoeur 2022, 2).

Although he did not mention it to the author at the time, Cory, who was a self-described "extremist" in defending the Library Bill of Rights, went along with a general library position that it needed to avoid promoting its communist holdings.

As summarized by Francoeur,

> While the library was more than happy to accept into its collections all sorts of controversial material, it did not go out of its way to tell the world about such items. Although some of its staff members were particularly outspoken about defending intellectual freedom, they hesitated in having the institution needlessly become a lightning rod in an era where the political atmosphere was highly charged. (Francoeur 2011, 19)

In recounting the NYPL story to conclude this essay, the author is not advocating censorship, the differential treatment of what some populist conservatives might consider controversial library materials or programs. Instead, the reader is being asked to recall that not all public libraries have the luxury of being in progressive communities. At times, even a library in progressive New York City can handle certain works differently out of self-protection. Instead, as stressed throughout this essay, when library political power and alliances are insuf-

ficient to win a censorship dispute, there will be times when negotiating for the most inclusive range of collections and services is a necessity. It should never be a preference but only the result of a calculated risk analysis based on thorough community knowledge. Fighting and losing a battle that an appropriate calculation of risk deems to be unwinnable is an approach that is more likely to cost librarian jobs and minimize collection and program inclusivity.

Bibliography

American Bar Association Governmental Affairs Office. 2016. *"All Politics Is Local": A Practical Guide to Effective Advocacy for State and Local Bars*, edited by Denise Cardman. https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/GAO/allpoliticsislocal.pdf

American Library Association. Updated 2019. "Access to Library Resources and Services for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights." https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/minors

American Library Association. 2020. *Leading Conversations In Small And Rural Libraries: Facilitation Guide.* https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/tools/content/PPO_LTC_Fac_Guide%20-%20revised%20v3_0.pdf

Ashmore, Beth, Jill E. Grogg, and Jeff Weddle. 2012. *The Librarian's Guide to Negotiation: Winning Strategies for the Digital Age.* Medford, New Jersey: Information Today, Inc. https://archive.org/details/librariansguidet0000ashm

Bardon, Adrian. 2020. "Humans Are Hardwired to Dismiss Facts That Don't Fit Their Worldview." *The Conversation,* January 31. https://theconversation.com/humans-are-hardwired-to-dismiss-facts-that-dont-fit-their-worldview-127168

Bernhardt, Kevin M. 2020. "Risk And Decision Making 1n Military Operations." MS thesis, Naval Postgraduate School. https://calhoun.nps.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/4ed95573-06a3-4fa2-aa1e-33d3340e75ce/content

Burnett, John. 2022. "Local Libraries Have Become a Major Political and Cultural Battleground." NPR, August 31. https://www.npr.org/2022/08/31/1119752817/local-libraries-have-become-a-major-political-and-cultural-battleground

Calzada, Becky, Val Edwards, and Maegan Coffin Heindel. 2024. *Prepared Libraries, Empowered Teams: A Workbook for Navigating Intellectual Freedom Challenges Together.* American Library Association.

Cambridge English Dictionary. n.d. "Pragmatism," accessed January 15, 2025. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pragmatism

Community Tool Box. n.d. "Chapter 17. | Section 4. Analyzing Root Causes of Problems: The 'But Why?' Technique." https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/analyze-community-problems-and-solutions/root-causes/main

Cook, Krista. 2025. "Are Librarians Being Trained as the New Culture Warriors?" *Public Square Magazine,* January 20. https://publicsquaremag.org/media-education/librarian-ethics-growing-controversy/

Crowley, Bill. 1994. "Library Lobbying as a Way of Life." *Public Libraries*, 33 (2), 96–98.

Crowley, Bill. 2021. "Progressive Librarianship in 'Red' America." *New Librarianship Symposia: Symposium 1: Post-Neutrality Librarianship*, October 28. https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/newlibrarianshipsymposia/newlibrarianshipsymposia/post-neutrality/10 /

Crowley, Bill. 2023a. "Allies, Cobelligerents, and the Political Realities of Pursuing Social Justice Librarianship in Conservative Republican Communities." *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).* https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/7766

Crowley, Bill. 2023b. "When Librarians Talk with Conservatives about Libraries." *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).* https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/7944/

Crowley, Bill. 2023c. "Socially Just Library Management in Conservative America." *The Political Librarian* 6 (2), 57–76. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8848

EveryLibrary. 2020. "Libraries, Segregation, and Civil Rights." October 26. https://action.everylibrary.org/libraries_segregation_and_civil_rights

EveryLibrary Institute. 2023. "Parents' Perceptions of Librarians Survey 2023." https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/parent_perceptions_librarians_survey_2023

Ettarh, Fobazi. 2018. "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The Lies We Tell Ourselves." *In The Library With The Lead Pipe,* January 10. https://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/

Fisher, Colin M. 2025. "The Dynamics That Polarise Us On Social Media Are About to Get Worse." *The Conversation,* January 13. https://theconversation.com/the-dynamics-that-polarise-us-on-social-media-are-about-to-get-worse-247027?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=bylinecopy_url_button

Francoeur, Stephen. 2011. "Prudence and Controversy: The New York Public Library Responds to Post-War Anticommunist Pressures." *City University of New York (CUNY): CUNY Academic Works.* https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?httpsredir=1&article=1012&context=bb_pubs

Harold, Jacob. 2024. "Understanding the Crisis in Institutional Trust." *Urban Institute.* https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Understanding_the_Crisis_in_Institutional_Trust.pdf

Harvard University Gutman Library. 2024. "Banned Books." https://guides.library.harvard.edu/c.php?g=1269000&p=9306841

Hazelton-Boyle, Josephine K., and Michael J. Hazelton-Boyle. 2023. "Public Librarians in the Hot Seat? Moral Injury in the Post-Truth Era." *Public Integrity* 27 (1): 112–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2023.2281726

Howard, Scott. 2023 "The Moral Standards of a Bookshelf." *National Review,* June 16. https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/the-moral-standards-of-a-bookshelf/

Kevane, Michael J., and William A. Sundstrom. 2016. "State Promotion of Local Public Goods: The Case of Public Libraries, 1880-1929." *Economics.* Paper 57. http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/econ/57

Kofoed, Michael. 2022. "Perspective: Is Populism Worth the Soul of Conservatism?" *Deseret News,* December 26. https://www.deseret.com/2022/12/26/23517027/populism-conservatism-elites/

Masciotra, David. 2022. "The Growing Religious Alliance to Ban LGBTQ Books." *New Republic,* October 19. https://newrepublic.com/article/168180/growing-religious-alliance-ban-lgbtq-books

MasterClass. 2021. "What Is Opposition Research? Understanding the Tactics Used by Political Campaigns to Conduct and Use Opposition Research." September 29. https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-opposition-research-understanding-the-tactics-used-by-political-campaigns-to-conduct-and-use-opposition-research

Nanos, Elura. 2023. "'Regimes Ban Books, Not Democracies': Illinois Governor Signs Historic Law Prohibiting Book Bans." *Law & Crime,* June 14. https://lawandcrime.com/first-amendment/regimes-ban-books-not-democracies-illinois-governor-signs-historic-law-prohibiting-book-bans/

New York City Council. 2024. "Speaker Adams and Mayor Adams Announce Full Restoration of Libraries, Cultural Institutions in Upcoming Fiscal Year 2025 Budget." June 27. https://council.nyc.gov/press/2024/06/27/2637/

Ralchev, Plamen. 2023. " Negotiations. Key Concepts and Characteristics." *Center for Conflict Research,* April 22. https://conflictology.org/articles/negotiations-key-concepts-and-characteristics/

Rauch, George. 2024. "Calculated Risk-Taking: The Art of Confident Decision-Making in High-Stakes Industries." *George Rauch,* December 25. https://georgerauch.com/calculated-risk-taking-the-art-of-confident-decision-making-in-high-stakes-industries/

Rimkutė, Dovilė, and Honorata Mazepus. 2025. "Citizens' Perceptions of the Legitimacy of Independent Agencies: The Effects Of Expertise-Based and Reputation-Sourced Authority." *Public Administration Review* 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13916

Schinsky, Rebecca Joines. 2024. "The Librarians Are Not OK." *Riot Headline,* November 1. https://bookriot.com/librarians-mental-health-community-service/

Seidman, Louis Michael. 2022. "Can Free Speech Be Progressive?" *Columbia Law Review* 118 (7). Accessed September 4, 2022. https://columbialawreview.org/content/can-free-speech-be-progressive/

Smith, Mark. 2019. "Top Ten Challenges Facing Public Libraries." *Public Library Quarterly* 38 (3): 241–7. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01616846.2019.1608617?scroll=top&needAccess=true

South Carolina State Library. 2024. "Press Release - Proviso 27.1 - Aid to Counties Libraries Allotment." https://www.statelibrary.sc.gov/news/press-release-proviso-271-aid-counties-libraries-allotment

Sutherland, Jacob. 2024. "Categories of Political Contestation in Public Libraries." *State and Local Government Review.* https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0160323X241280220

Terr, Aaron. 2023. "America's Public Libraries Must Not Take Up Arms in the Culture War." *FIRE,* June 30. https://www.thefire.org/news/americas-public-libraries-must-not-take-arms-culture-war

Webb, Susan L. Updated 2024. "Book Banning." *Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University,* September 20. https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/book-banning/

Wiegand, Wayne A. 2015. *Part of our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library.* Oxford University Press.

Author

Bill Crowley has worked in New York, Alabama, Indiana, and Ohio public, state, and cooperative libraries and library organizations as everything from part-time clerk to public relations consultant, administrator of public services and deputy state librarian. He is currently a professor with Dominican University in Illinois.

As of this writing Bill authored fifty-six (56) articles/book chapters and two books, while editing a third. He has a BA in history, an MS in library service, an MA in English (with a folklore thesis) and a PhD in higher education (with a dissertation on the research university library). In 2023, Bill Crowley's paper titled "Allies, Cobelligerents, and the Political Realities of Pursuing Social Justice Librarianship in Conservative Republican Communities," published in *Library Philosophy and Practice*, was awarded the 2023 Annual Library Juice Paper Contest.

Safeguarding Libraries, Schools, and Communities from Political Threats: A Strategic Framework for Engagement, Advocacy, and Sustainable Organizing

KACEY CARPENTER

ABSTRACT

This white paper presents a three-step framework to counter escalating political threats to libraries, schools, and community organizations. These institutions face unprecedented challenges, including funding cuts, book bans, and censorship, all intended to undermine their mission to foster education, equity, and democracy. The reelection of President Trump and Project 2025 pose an imminent danger, threatening intellectual freedom and access to diverse perspectives.

It provides an introduction to *READY, SET, GO! Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes,* tailored for libraries, schools, and community organizations. This playbook empowers library professionals, educators, and advocates to navigate challenges, build coalitions, and protect these vital spaces through strategic planning, compelling messaging, and proactive action. Featuring real-world success stories and practical tools, it serves as a road map for safeguarding the rights, freedoms, and opportunities that libraries and educational organizations provide.

Introduction

For centuries, libraries, schools, and community organizations have been the backbone of our communities and the foundation of our democracy. They promote education, inclusion, and the free exchange of ideas. Today, they face increasing threats, including censorship, defunding, and political interference.

Libraries play a crucial role by providing equitable access to knowledge and fostering community engagement. The history of censorship is a relentless battle, representing a continuation of challenges faced over time. This fight isn't new, and it isn't easy, but it's absolutely critical. We must stand firm and protect our right to read, write, and learn. The current political situation demands an urgent and immediate response in this moment of heightened extremism.

The second term of President Trump demands an urgent response. The shift from campaign promises to executive orders poses a direct threat to libraries, schools, and community

organizations. These actions amplify censorship, worsen funding challenges, and institutionalize policies that restrict intellectual freedom and equitable access to resources. This crisis demands swift and strategic action from advocates. The misuse of power to suppress dissent and control narratives is not new, but it has taken on alarming forms in recent years. Efforts to ban books, restrict educational content, and undermine public institutions are growing. Lawmakers have weaponized legislation and funding decisions to target libraries and schools, especially those promoting diversity, equity, and critical thinking. This escalating environment requires proactive measures to safeguard these spaces of learning and community.

Libraries and schools are more than educational spaces; they are centers of civic engagement and inclusion. They provide resources for marginalized communities, host programs that bridge divides, and offer safe spaces for dialogue. Defending these institutions is critical to ensuring every community has access to knowledge, opportunity, and empowerment.

As libraries face unprecedented challenges, it is important to stay committed. Don't give up. Narratives that frame libraries or schools as political battlegrounds must be met with strong resistance that reaffirms their importance as neutral, inclusive spaces. Community leaders, educators, and advocates must work together to counter misinformation and highlight the positive impact of these institutions.

As the author of *READY, SET, GO! Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes,* the goal of this white paper is to share best practices, tips, and success stories from experiences from books, training, and coaching. Just as political campaigns require strategic planning, messaging, and actions, so too must advocacy efforts to protect these public resources. The *READY, SET, GO!* framework offers a practical road map.

- **READY**: Create a Strategic Plan
- **SET**: Craft a Message and Engage the Community
- **GO**: Take Action and Empower People

Situational Analysis

The reelection of President Trump and the implementation of Project 2025 are likely to significantly impact libraries and schools and contribute to increased book censorship. Project 2025 is a comprehensive policy agenda for the new administration, with several provisions directly affecting libraries and educational institutions.

- **Reduce federal funding:** Project 2025 proposes eliminating the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the primary federal agency supporting libraries. This would lead to severe budget cuts, forcing many public and school libraries to reduce services, staff, and programming.
- **Codify book bans:** The initiative seeks to implement nationwide book bans, particularly targeting materials related to critical race theory and LGBTQ+ topics. By codifying censorship into federal policy, this plan would drastically limit access to diverse perspectives and critical educational content.
- **Censor educational content:** Project 2025 advocates for removing topics such as critical race theory and gender identity from public school curricula. This form of censorship would not only impact classrooms but also affect the availability of related resources in schools and public libraries.

- **Increase legal risks:** A growing number of state-level legislative efforts are enabling the prosecution of librarians and educators who provide access to materials deemed controversial. This fosters a climate of fear, leading to self-censorship among library professionals and reduced access to information for communities.
- **Decentralize oversight:** The plan includes proposals to reduce federal oversight and shift responsibilities to state and local levels. This decentralization risks creating inconsistencies in library services and significant disparities in access to information across the country.

The situation is urgent, with the potential for major policy changes in education, including dismantling the Department of Education. This would eliminate essential data and weaken the federal government's capacity to address key educational issues. Recently, the Trump administration has dismissed complaints related to book bans.

PEN America warns that proposals like Project 2025 could severely impact the freedom to read, learn, and teach. Free expression in public education is under threat as state legislators pass educational gag orders and facilitate book bans, weakening students' freedom to learn and read. Project 2025 proposes to replicate these efforts federally, using all available levers of federal power.

Challenges To Libraries And Schools Across The United States

Across the United States, many states are experiencing a rise in book challenges and bans, often targeting materials related to race, gender, and sexuality. As the 2025 state legislative sessions begin, EveryLibrary is tracking twenty-six prefiled bills in five states focused on banning books or criminalizing librarians, with Texas and Missouri leading the count and anticipates more bills in the coming weeks, reflecting the 120 negative bills introduced across twenty-nine states in 2024.

Florida banned the most books in the 2023–24 school year; around seven hundred titles were removed from school libraries, with PEN America estimating 4,561 removals since July 2021. Texas has also seen a significant number of book challenges, but voters in some districts have rejected candidates who ran on platforms of banning books. With the new Texas Legislative session kicking off, State Rep. Fallon has filed HB 183, a bill that would give the State Board of Education the authority to review and ban any book it deems inappropriate from school libraries statewide, further intensifying the battle over book bans in North Texas schools. Utah has a law requiring schools to remove titles deemed to contain "objective sensitive materials," and the state has a list of fourteen banned books. South Carolina and other state education committees recommend the removal of books from school libraries, including *The Perks of Being a Wallflower, All Boys Aren't Blue, Flamer, and Push.* Arkansas has a law that would have subjected librarians and bookstore owners to criminal prosecution for making materials available to minors, which was declared unconstitutional.

Beyond book removals, libraries and schools are facing other forms of challenges. In some states, school districts are making policies that give school boards more power to block librarians from putting certain books on shelves. In Utah, students are no longer allowed to bring personal copies of banned books to school. Online censorship is also impacting education, as school internet filters frequently block access to websites needed for assignments. In Indiana, a bill has been proposed that would remove the tax levy authority of library boards, potentially impacting their funding. Additionally, some libraries are facing challenges related to displays and programs, with some seeing the removal of pride banners, displays being torn

down, or homophobic graffiti being found. A few libraries have imposed additional security and insurance fees on room bookings in anticipation of protests, which resulted in the cancellation of events.

In response to these challenges, some states are taking measures to protect libraries and intellectual freedom. New Jersey, along with other states such as California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington, have passed legislation aimed at preventing book bans based on subject matter or the author's background. California's Freedom to Read Act requires libraries to develop policies for choosing books that do not ban books based on race, nationality, sexual orientation, or gender identity. In some areas, librarians are updating their policies to better address book challenges, and library boards and city councils are discussing and revisiting library policies. Additionally, some libraries are working to strengthen their relationships with their communities by engaging in conversations about censorship.

In Oregon, challenges to individual items reached a record high of 151, a 62 percent increase from the previous year, reflecting the national trend. These challenges often target books by or about marginalized communities, such as racial and ethnic minorities and people identifying as LGBTQ. For example, the Grants Pass School District removed *All Boys Aren't Blue*, a memoir about a Black and queer identity, and *Lucky*, a memoir about sexual assault, from their high school library. Notably, the individuals who submitted these challenges did not have children in the school district and had not even read the books. These challenges are frequently driven by conservative political beliefs.

Librarians in Oregon are under increasing pressure due to rising book challenges and attempts to restrict access to materials. In response, they are becoming more resilient by clarifying and strengthening library policies, ensuring that materials are selected, reviewed, and potentially removed based on intellectual merit, age appropriateness, and educational value rather than political or ideological pressure. They are also engaging in dialogue with community members, hosting town hall meetings and forums to hear and respond to concerns while emphasizing the importance of free access to information and intellectual freedom.

Community groups are playing a crucial role in supporting libraries. Organizations like the Oregon chapter of Unite Against Book Bans advocate against censorship and book bans by raising awareness and mobilizing community members to take action. Local citizen groups are also actively supporting libraries, creating public outcry, circulating petitions, and encouraging community advocacy. These efforts have led to increased public engagement, with citizens attending board meetings and successfully recalling officials who attempt to undermine library policies, exemplifying the effectiveness of community action in defending the role of libraries.

The situational analysis for states and local organizations demonstrates the need for a proactive response. The first step is to create a strategic plan.

Step One: Get Ready And Create Your Plan

"By failing to plan, you are planning to fail."–Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin, born in Boston in 1706, was a man of many talents. He began as an apprentice to his brother James, a printer, which led to his success in Philadelphia. His curiosity and ingenuity made him a famous scientist, known for his experiments with electricity and inventions like the lightning rod, bifocals, and the Franklin stove.

Beyond his scientific achievements, Franklin was a civic activist at heart. In November 1731, he founded the Library Company of Philadelphia, considered by some to be the first public library in the United States. This subscription-based library allowed members to share books, making knowledge more accessible. Franklin also played a pivotal role in establishing Pennsylvania Hospital and what is now the University of Pennsylvania. He served in various leadership roles, from a clerk in the Pennsylvania Assembly to a commissioner to France during the Revolution. Notably, Franklin was a key figure in drafting and signing the Declaration of Independence, helping to shape the foundation of the United States.

Now, more than ever, we must heed these words, especially when confronting threats to our libraries and schools. This is not a time to be complacent; it's a call for bold, strategic action. Every great purpose, every movement for change, begins with a plan. This plan must not be static; it must be a living, breathing document, reviewed and adjusted as we move forward.

A plan empowers you to be creative and design a strategic approach as you navigate challenges, constraints, and conflicts. With a clear plan in hand, you can evaluate roadblocks, anticipate challenges, and consider alternate courses of action. By setting milestones and deadlines, you hold yourself accountable and can allocate resources effectively. Your plan provides a high-level view of strategies and necessary tactics, empowering you to make decisions aligned with your long-term goals.

It is also your most valuable tool for communication and collaboration. It helps provide a common understanding of your objectives and milestones, encouraging unity and engagement in your community. Clear deadlines and objectives promote effective task delegation, accountability, and teamwork. Share your plan as it evolves with your team for feedback, understanding, and collective ownership. This transparency will encourage open conversation and new ideas, leading to a better plan to achieve your goals.

Gather your people, your fellow advocates who share your passion for knowledge and freedom. Work together to forge a clear mission, a shared purpose that guides every action. Then, set goals, not with vague hopes but with sharp, clear objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding, Timely, Inclusive, and Equitable. Use power mapping to identify allies and understand those who seek to undermine our cause.

These are the steps to create your plan:

- **Define your vision and strategy**: Develop a strategy that aligns with your purpose and mission, considering your goals and available resources.
- **Engage your team**: Establish a structured organization with clear roles, community agreements, and a well-defined agenda to foster a respectful and collaborative environment.
- **Set goals**: Create goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable.
- **Identify target audience**: Determine your target audience for your campaign, candidate, or cause to help segment your audience and tailor your goals and objectives.
- **Outline tactics**: Develop a balanced mix of tactics and actions suitable for your campaign or cause plan.
- **Measure success**: As you transition from planning to implementation, set metrics for your goals and expected outcomes, reviewing them periodically to reassess your objectives.

A vision statement should answer the question: "What is the desired future state?" It should paint a picture of what the organization or community will look like in the future if the plan is successful.

- **Sample vision statement:** "To ensure libraries remain vibrant centers of learning, equity, and civic engagement, empowering every individual to access knowledge and opportunity."

A mission statement should answer the question: "How will we achieve our vision?" It describes how the organization will achieve its vision by outlining the main activities and strategies.

- **Sample mission statement:** "The Library is a strong community partner, providing programs and services that bring people together, foster creativity, and encourage lifelong learning. We defend intellectual freedom, ensure equitable access to information and resources, and empower people through literacy, education, and open dialogue."

Goal statements should answer the question: "What specific, measurable steps will we take to achieve our mission and progress toward our vision?"

- **Sample goal statement:** Increase Community Engagement
  - Specific: Increase library program attendance and participation in community engagement activities.
  - Measurable: Achieve a 30 percent increase in attendance at library-sponsored events and a 20 percent increase in participation in community outreach programs within the next year.
  - Achievable: This goal can be reached by actively partnering with local schools, community organizations, and leaders, as well as offering diverse and relevant programs that appeal to various community interests.
  - Rewarding: This goal is rewarding because it fosters a sense of community and ensures that the library is a hub of activity and a valuable resource for people.
  - Timely: This is a goal to be achieved within one year of implementation.
  - Inclusive and equitable: Ensure programs are accessible and welcoming to all members of the community, including marginalized and underserved groups, by offering programs at various times and locations and providing accommodations as needed.

The plan should include a calendar with quarterly tactics to accomplish your goals.

- **Q1: Legislative Advocacy**
  - Launch grassroots campaigns to engage legislators.
  - Host library tours for policymakers to showcase services and programs.
  - Advocate at school board and city council meetings.
- **Q2: Community Engagement**
  - Organize National Library Week events to highlight the library's role.
  - Conduct workshops on fighting censorship and promoting intellectual freedom.

- Apply for grants to support community programs and library enhancements.
- **Q3: Volunteer Training, Digital Advocacy, and Summer Reading Program**
  - Implement a summer reading program to engage students and promote literacy during school breaks.
  - Advocate for bond measures and secure funding for school and library improvements.
  - Plan educational events for Banned Books Week
- **Q4: Elections and Public Mobilization**
  - Register voters and provide information on candidates' stances on library funding.
  - Host candidate forums and distribute voter guides.
  - Continue advocacy efforts at school board and city council meetings to influence policy decisions.

Success Story: Philadelphia Free Library System Strategic Plan

In 2024, the Philadelphia Free Library system launched *Charting our Future Together*, a strategic plan funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The purpose of the plan is to combat censorship and secure sustainable funding through active stakeholder engagement and community input. The library gathered input through town hall meetings, surveys, and forums, ensuring the plan reflected community needs. The strategic plan included rebranding, communication, implementation, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans, and a business plan. By fostering collaboration and focusing on transparency and accountability, the library successfully addressed censorship and funding challenges, serving as a model for libraries nationwide.

Success Story: Lake Oswego Library Strategic Plan

The Lake Oswego Library's strategic plan illustrates the power of community-focused planning. By expanding services, creating modern spaces, increasing awareness, and prioritizing staff development, the library has become a hub for civic engagement. The Lake Oswego Public Library embarked on a visioning project to ensure its services met the evolving needs of its residents. Through a comprehensive community engagement process, they collected extensive input via interviews, surveys, focus groups, and community forums, resulting in significant participation, including one hundred key informant interviews and nearly 2,800 survey responses. This community engagement provided valuable insights into the needs and aspirations of Lake Oswego residents. It highlighted the library's crucial role in addressing challenges like affordability and infrastructure struggles while serving as an educational and cultural hub. The feedback shaped a new visioning framework, defining the library's core values and roles within the community and ensuring it remains an inclusive, adaptable, and accessible resource.

Checklist: Create Your Plan

1. **Collaborate with your team**: Define clear roles and share best practices among library staff, school educators, and community organization members.

2. **Align strategy with purpose**: Ensure your strategy aligns with the mission and purpose of promoting intellectual freedom in libraries, schools, and communities.

3. **Set goals**: Establish goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding, Timely, Inclusive, and Equitable, focusing on protecting the right to read, write, and learn.

4. **Apply power mapping and theory of change**: Understand the power structures and dynamics affecting your library, school, or community organization's issue or goal.

5. **Outline tactics**: Identify tactics that will help libraries, schools, and community organizations achieve their outcomes, such as hosting awareness events or creating educational materials.

6. **Measure success and track progress**: Use data and evidence to measure success and track progress in advocating for intellectual freedom.

7. **Gather community feedback**: Test your plan and gather feedback from your community, including library patrons, students, parents, and community supporters, through listening sessions, surveys, polls, and market research.

Step Two: Get Set And Craft Your Message

> *"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."—Martin Luther King Jr.*

Martin Luther King Jr. was a minister, activist, and a preeminent advocate of nonviolence. His legacy as a leader in the civil rights movement is a demonstration of the power of a clear, compelling message. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, King followed his father and grandfather into the ministry, earning a doctorate from Boston University. Inspired by his Christian faith, the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, and the influence of Howard Thurman, King led a nonviolent movement in the late 1950s and 1960s to achieve legal equality for African Americans in the United States.

King's principles of nonviolence and civil disobedience were the foundation of his movement. He led the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, a peaceful protest against racial segregation on public buses that lasted over a year, ending with a Supreme Court ruling that made segregation on buses illegal. His influence extended beyond this landmark event. In 1963, King and various civil rights groups rallied over 250,000 people in Washington, D.C., to advocate for the rights of Black Americans. His "I Have a Dream" speech on the Lincoln Memorial steps amplified the civil rights movement's message to a broader audience.

Despite facing arrests and threats, King's commitment to nonviolent resistance won him the Nobel Peace Prize. Though his life ended abruptly when he was assassinated in 1968, his legacy continues to inspire equality and justice movements worldwide.

This next step is about turning your dream into reality, your ideas into words, and your plan into action. It guides you to craft your key messages, build a platform that caters to your

community's needs, and effectively communicate your message through important channels and events.

- **Define a clear and compelling message and story:** The message should be clear and compelling. It should resonate with your community's values and interests. It is the story to articulate the vision, mission, and goals of the plan.
- **Develop a platform:** A platform, processes, and digital strategy is needed to deliver relevant and impactful messages to reach your community.
- **Communicate your message effectively:** Follow best practices and tips to communicate your message effectively through various channels and events, both in-person, online, and in virtual hybrid formats.

Define A Clear And Compelling Message

When discussing the issue of censorship in libraries, it's crucial to communicate clearly and concisely about the importance of different ideas and access to diverse perspectives. Develop a clear and compelling message that emphasizes the critical role of libraries and schools in fostering democracy and opportunity. This message should frame libraries as neutral, inclusive spaces and counter misinformation that frames libraries as political battlegrounds.

Begin by framing the issue of censorship in terms that resonate with the values of your community. For example, rather than using jargon or complex legal terms, emphasize that the role of libraries is to foster curiosity and critical thinking. Your message can reflect the core belief that "libraries are for everyone" and that everyone—regardless of age, background, or belief—should have access to information that allows them to form their own opinions. Use concrete examples of how banning or restricting access to books and resources limits the ability of students, teachers, and library patrons to engage in meaningful, independent learning. Focus on the idea that when certain viewpoints or ideas are silenced, the entire community loses access to the richness of diverse thought.

Political framing is about shaping the way people perceive and understand issues. Lakoff emphasizes that effective framing involves connecting with people's values and emotions rather than relying solely on facts and logic. By framing your message in a way that aligns with the community's core values, you can create a more compelling and persuasive argument against censorship.

A clear, concise message might be, "Censorship silences voices, restricts learning, and limits the freedom of expression that libraries are meant to protect." This type of message helps demystify the issue and allows people to relate it to their everyday experiences. Whether it's a banned book that might open new perspectives for a student or a library program that offers access to important ideas, this message should emphasize the central role libraries play in a free society. Ensure your message speaks directly to parents, educators, and library supporters about the positive impact of having diverse resources in libraries, framing it as a commitment to fostering free thought and open inquiry.

In addition to clarity, your message should reflect the broader implications of censorship. When crafting the message, remember to emphasize that censorship isn't just about limiting specific books—it's a broader issue that impacts the very foundation of democratic societies. A strong message could also frame censorship as a danger to democracy itself, reinforcing the idea that when people are not free to read, learn, or think for themselves, they lose their autonomy and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Use language that

frames censorship as a harmful force that undermines the freedom and diversity of thought that libraries stand for.

Develop A Platform

Once you've crafted a compelling message, the next step is to develop a platform that actively resists censorship and protects our freedoms. This platform should clearly articulate the library's role as a space for unrestricted access to diverse ideas and viewpoints. In building this platform, engage with your community—particularly parents, educators, students, and local leaders—to ensure that the library's position on censorship aligns with their values and concerns. Hosting informational sessions, open forums, and collaborative meetings will create opportunities for the community to better understand the importance of keeping libraries free from external censorship and build support for maintaining a diverse and inclusive collection.

It's important to be proactive in addressing concerns about specific materials, whether books, media, or other resources. Develop policies and procedures for addressing book challenges in a fair, transparent, and inclusive manner. Establish clear guidelines that demonstrate the library's commitment to evaluating materials based on intellectual merit, age-appropriateness, and educational value rather than on political or ideological pressure. Educate your community about how these materials are selected and the role of the library in fostering diverse perspectives and viewpoints.

An important element of this platform is education. Host workshops and public discussions about freedom of ideas and censorship to help raise awareness of the issue. Libraries can offer resources about the history of book banning, the dangers of censorship, and the importance of defending freedom of expression in both public libraries and schools. Schools and libraries can work together to create joint initiatives aimed at preserving access to educational resources, highlighting how important it is for students to engage with a wide variety of viewpoints to develop critical thinking skills.

Engage authentically with the community by listening to concerns, understanding needs, and responding respectfully. Town hall meetings or forums where community members can discuss concerns about specific books or resources can also be beneficial. Libraries should also foster a sense of shared responsibility by encouraging families to engage with library collections and programming. Engaging authentically means inviting community members—parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders—into a dialogue about the importance of different perspectives.

A great place for engagement is town hall meetings and forums where individuals can discuss their concerns about specific books or resources while also hearing from librarians, educators, and experts on intellectual freedom. These conversations should emphasize respect for diverse opinions while reinforcing the value of free access to information. Use these forums to educate the community about the long-standing role of libraries in supporting freedoms and the history of book banning as a practice that has historically been used to suppress marginalized voices.

By creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue, you allow for the clarification of misunderstandings and the opportunity to address concerns directly. For example, if there are concerns about a particular book or resource, explain why it was chosen for the library and how it fits into the broader context of educational materials. Ensure that the community

knows that there are clear processes in place for addressing book challenges and that every effort will be made to ensure that all perspectives are heard in the process.

It is also important to foster a sense of shared responsibility for defending intellectual freedom. This doesn't just involve librarians, educators, and school administrators but the entire community. Encourage families to engage with library collections and programming and to become advocates for open access to information. Partner with local organizations, such as parent groups or civic associations, to advocate for the library's role in fostering critical thinking and independent inquiry.

Communicate Your Message Effectively

Use a range of communication channels to reach as many community members as possible. In today's digital world, social media, email newsletters, local media, and virtual community meetings all provide unique opportunities to spread the message and engage different segments of the community.

Use social media, community events, and public forums to share success stories and mobilize support. For example, libraries can use social media to share information about the dangers of censorship, promote events, and highlight books that are important to intellectual freedom. Email newsletters can provide in-depth information, and community meetings allow for in-depth discussions. Traditional media, such as local newspapers and radio programs, can be used to spread the message about censorship.

Email newsletters are a valuable tool for community engagement and in-depth information about the library's position on censorship and intellectual freedom. Newsletters can be used to outline the library's policies, provide updates on book challenges, and offer educational resources on the history of censorship. These emails should be crafted to be informative yet accessible, encouraging parents, educators, and community members to stay informed and involved.

Community events are critical for engaging people in a face-to-face setting. These meetings, whether in person or virtual, allow for more in-depth discussions and the building of relationships between library staff and community members. Whether you're hosting a lecture about censorship or a book discussion group, these meetings are a great way to emphasize the role libraries play in supporting open access to information and diverse ideas. Additionally, consider collaborating with local schools to host joint programs and discussions on the importance of freedom of expression in education.

Traditional media, such as local newspapers and radio programs, can also be used to spread the message about censorship. Opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and interviews with library staff can help raise awareness and provide a platform for library advocates to share their viewpoints on the importance of maintaining freedoms in libraries and schools.

Libraries have a unique and essential role in facilitating open discussion about censorship and the right to read, write, and learn. They are safe spaces where people can access a wide range of materials and engage in discussions about challenging topics. Libraries should embrace this role by hosting events, book clubs, and discussion groups that focus on the impact of censorship on education, free thought, and democracy.

One effective strategy for using the library as a platform for dialogue is to host book discussions around commonly challenged books. These discussions can provide an opportunity to understand the themes of the books, examine the reasons behind the challenges, and discuss the importance of maintaining access to such books. By framing these discussions

around the broader context of intellectual freedom, you allow the community to engage in a constructive, informed conversation about why access to diverse viewpoints matters.

Additionally, libraries can support the development of critical thinking skills by offering workshops on media literacy and information evaluation. These programs can help students, teachers, and parents understand the importance of considering multiple viewpoints and developing the skills to critically analyze information. Libraries can also provide resources that allow individuals to explore a wide variety of topics, offering access to materials that might not otherwise be available in mainstream media or educational settings.

Finally, libraries must be seen as champions of free expression, working tirelessly to protect the right of every individual to access the information they need. Whether it's protecting access to books, advocating for the right to read, or engaging the community in discussions about censorship, libraries are on the front lines of defending intellectual freedom. Through thoughtful messaging, active engagement, and a commitment to preserving the diversity of ideas, librarians can ensure that their communities continue to enjoy the rich, unfiltered access to knowledge that libraries are meant to provide.

Checklist: Craft Your Message

1. **Craft a clear, concise, and compelling message:** Ensure your message resonates with your target audience and articulates the vision, mission, and goals of your campaign to protect the rights to read, write, and learn in libraries, schools, and communities.

2. **Engage authentically with your audience:** Listen to the concerns of library patrons, educators, students, and community members. Understand their needs and respond empathetically and respectfully, maintaining transparency and accountability.

3. **Utilize effective communication channels:** Reach your target audience through social media platforms, email newsletters, community meetings, and public events, emphasizing the importance of intellectual freedom and access to information.

4. **Address important community issues:** Your message and platform should highlight the critical issues impacting libraries, schools, and educators. Propose solutions to protect the freedom to read, write, and learn.

5. **Inspire unity and forward movement**: Communicate your message through various channels and events, both in-person and online, in a way that inspires unity and forward movement within the community.

Step Three: Go! And Organize A Movement

"When you see something that is not just, not fair, or not right, you have to do something. You have to say something. Make a little noise. It's time for us to get into good trouble, necessary trouble."–John Lewis

John Robert Lewis, the son of Alabama sharecroppers, was an American politician and civil rights activist who served in the US House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Lewis became a central figure in the civil rights movement, participating in sit-in protests, the

Freedom Rides, and leading the Selma to Montgomery marches. His dedication and courage, exemplified during events like Bloody Sunday, continue to inspire people today.

Lewis's life offers invaluable lessons on organizing communities and building movements. His journey teaches us that building power with people is critical for a sustainable movement. Relationships are the foundation of change, and leaders like Lewis, driven by a deep commitment to justice and equality, can inspire others and sustain a movement. By hosting events, engaging the community, and building alliances, you can mobilize support and foster resilience in the face of setbacks. Following these principles, you can effectively organize your community, build a movement, and create lasting change.

You've created your plan and crafted your message and story. Now it's time to recruit, onboard, train, and scale your base of supporters and volunteer leaders to organize your community and build your people-powered movement.

- **Build power with people:** Relationships are fundamental to creating a lasting movement. Community organizing principles emphasize the power of connecting with individuals, listening to their concerns, and building trust.
- **Train and organize:** Provide opportunities, both in-person and online, to engage, onboard, and train people in the community.
- **Build alliances:** Identify key stakeholders and build relationships with them, including educators, librarians, parents, and community leaders. Form coalitions with diverse groups, such as parents, teachers, students, and local leaders. Collaborate to ensure diverse perspectives are included.
- **Mobilize support:** Mobilize volunteers and community members to advocate for policies that protect libraries and schools. Train advocates in public speaking, digital organizing, and grassroots outreach to amplify their impact. Share stories of communities and campaigns that have effectively protected their libraries and served their communities.
- **Scale with digital tools:** Utilize digital tools to track legislation, engage stakeholders, and coordinate advocacy efforts.
- **Be resilient in the face of setbacks:** It is important to anticipate challenges and be ready to adjust strategies. Public narratives that frame libraries or schools as political battlegrounds must be met with strong advocacy. Stay committed and continue to move forward, even when facing setbacks.

Success Story Profile: Marshall Ganz

Marshall Ganz, a respected community organizer and scholar, highlights the need to form strong relationships with people in communities for successful and sustainable organizing. Ganz created a social action framework focusing on the heart (story), the head (strategy), and the hands (action). This approach, translating values into action, building relationships, collaborative leadership, strategic thinking, and turning commitments into results, has played a key role in many successful campaigns. According to Ganz, success goes beyond immediate goals; it involves people and uplifts communities. This highlights the essence of grassroots organizing—building relationships, fostering community engagement, and empowering individuals for change. Each campaign contributes to a broader movement by strengthening networks, promoting active participation, and nurturing a shared sense of purpose.

Advocacy And Political Action

- **Launch grassroots campaigns**: Engage legislators, submit funding proposals and impact reports, and organize "lobby days" to demonstrate how libraries, schools, and community organizations serve their communities.
- **Share stories with decision-makers**: Encourage supporters to share their personal stories directly with Congress to influence policy changes impacting libraries and education.
- **Advocate against harmful policies**: Oppose policies that undermine intellectual freedom, equitable access to resources, and the rights of marginalized communities.
- **Support legislation and candidates**: Advocate against book bans, support protective legislation, track relevant policies, and back candidates who promote intellectual freedom and equitable access.

Community Organizing And Engagement

- **Create diverse coalitions:** Form inclusive groups with educators, librarians, parents, community leaders, and students. Define roles, develop an inclusive strategy, and ensure a respectful space for collaboration.
- **Empower community members:** Build relationships, raise awareness, and inspire collective action by encouraging community members to take ownership of initiatives.
- **Build volunteer networks:** Train volunteers in effective advocacy techniques, empower them to lead initiatives, and build alliances with key stakeholders using both digital and in-person methods.
- **Host engaging events**: Organize town hall meetings, forums, and workshops to address community concerns and educate about intellectual freedom and the history of book banning. Collaborate with local schools and nonprofits for workshops on fighting censorship.

Libraries, Schools, And Community Groups

- **Create book sanctuaries:** Establish policies that foster intellectual freedom, such as book sanctuary resolutions and declarations of democracy, to preserve libraries' role as spaces of open inquiry and diverse ideas.
- **Protect students:** Protect LGBTQ+ students with safe and inclusive learning environments and provide resources for activities that support LGBTQ+ students. They should also protect students' access to resources that affirm their identities.
- **Support undocumented students:** Take steps to protect undocumented students from changes in immigration policy that could impact their education. Ensure that schools remain safe havens for immigrant families.
- **Support local nonprofits:** Become a volunteer, donor, or board member for local nonprofits that align with your mission and purpose.

- **Film documentaries and host watch parties:** Organizations can use film screenings and watch parties as an effective action to educate and motivate people. Film events can serve as a platform for discussion and community engagement; for example, the documentary *The Librarians* follows librarians who have resisted book bans.

A multifaceted plan is critical to effectively organize and mobilize a people movement for libraries, schools, and communities in response to attacks on the freedom to read, write, and learn. Combining digital and in-person advocacy tactics can create a robust defense against censorship and empower communities to uphold their right to access diverse information.

Checklist: Organizing A Movement

1. **Empower your community:** Put people at the heart of your efforts, transforming libraries, schools, and community organizations into constituencies committed to a common purpose.
2. **Practice organizing strategies:** Implement strategies such as public narrative, relationship building, team structuring, strategizing, and action, which are critical for building a movement.
3. **Engage supporters**: Discover and engage supporters by funneling them through engagement phases and training leadership to high levels of power.
4. **Mobilize action:** Focus on power dynamics and use digital tools to mobilize your people both in person and online, building scale and power over time.
5. **Sustain your movement:** Understand the importance of long-term effort, as real change can take years or even decades to achieve.

Conclusion: Call To Action

Libraries, schools, and educational spaces are more than just places to read—they are community hubs that inspire learning and connection. Every great movement begins with a single step. By following the READY, SET, GO! framework, you can engage, energize, and empower your community to protect and sustain these critical resources.

References

American Library Association. 2024. "Arkansas Book-Banning Law Declared Unconstitutional." December 23. https://www.ala.org/news/2024/12/arkansas-book-banning-law-declared-unconstitutional.

Bertram, Cara S. 2024. "Censorship Throughout the Centuries." *American Libraries*, September 3. https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2024/09/03/censorship-throughout-the-centuries.

Camarillo, Emmanuel. 2024. "Did Chicago-Area Libraries Give In to 'Heckler's Veto'?" *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 30. https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/2024/12/30.

Carpenter, Kacey. 2023. "Chapter 6: Craft Your Message," 140. In *READY, SET, GO!: Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes*. Carpenter Publishing.

Carpenter, Kacey. 2023. "Chapter 6: Create Your Plan," 53. In *READY, SET, GO!: Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes*. Carpenter Publishing.

Carpenter, Kacey. 2023. "Chapter 6: Organize a Movement," 163. In *READY, SET, GO!: Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes*. Carpenter Publishing.

City of Lake Oswego. 2023. *Library Strategic Plan.* Updated July 2024. https://www.ci.oswego.or.us/library/library-strategic-plan.

City of Seaside. 2024. "Seaside Public Library Board Declines Reconsideration Requests." January 3. https://www.cityofseaside.us/public-library/news/seaside-public-library-board-declines-reconsideration-requests.

Clarey, Brendan. 2025. "Meet Mary: Online Groups Are Showing What Explicit Content Is on School Shelves." Chalkboard News, January 14. https://www.chalkboardnews.com/issues/cultural-issues/article_58ca04fa-d2c9-11ef-bbec-3f8571ed32db.html.

Clark, Sophie. 2024. "School Book Bans: Texans Reject Pro-censorship Hopefuls." *Newsweek*, November 14. https://www.newsweek.com/texas-book-banning-candidates-1985683.

Crimmins, Peter. 2023. "Philly's Free Library Gets $1 Million from Pew to Plan Its Future." WHYY, July 19. https://whyy.org/articles/philadelphia-free-library-pew-charitable-trust-grant-strategic-plan/#:~:text=The%20Pew%20Charitable%20Trusts%20also,archive%20and%20make%20it%20accessible.&text=The%20Free%20Library%20of%20Philadelphia%20will%20soon%20begin%20a%20strategic,from%20The%20Pew%20Charitable%20Trusts.

Downard, Whitney. 2025. "Libraries Fire Back on Bill to Remove Taxing Authority." *Indiana Capital Chronicle*, January 22. https://indianacapitalchronicle.com/2025/01/22/libraries-fire-back-on-bill-to-remove-taxing-authority.

EveryLibrary. 2024. "Legislation of Concern in 2025." December 20. https://www.everylibrary.org/billtracking.

EveryLibrary. "STATEMENT: Project 2025 and Libraries." July 18. https://www.everylibrary.org/statementproject2025.

Ganz, Marshall. 2014. "Organizing: People, Power, Change." Action Network. https://actionnetwork.org/user_files/user_files/000/041/455/original/organizing_people_power_changeadaptedfromMarshallGanz.pdf.

Garcia Mathewson, Tara. 2025. "Online Censorship in Schools Is 'More Pervasive' than Expected, New Data Shows." *The Press Democrat*, January 16. https://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/news/online-censorship-in-schools-is-more-pervasive-than-expected-new-data-sh/.

Harris, Martha. 2025. KUER 90.1. "Utah Students Can No Longer Bring Personal Copies of Banned Books to School." KUER 90.1, updated January 22. https://www.kuer.org/education/2025-01-21/utah-students-can-no-longer-bring-personal-copies-of-banned-books-to-school.

Harvard Kennedy School. 2024. "Libraries & Democracy Initiative." https://www.hks.harvard.edu/research-insights/library-knowledge-services/libraries-democracy.

Herenda, Devin. 2025. "California's Freedom to Read Act to Put a Halt on Book Bans." KRCR, January 1. https://krcrtv.com/news/local/californias-freedom-to-read-act-to-put-a-halt-on-book-bans.

Lakoff, George, Howard Dean, and Don Hazen. 2004. "*Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: The Essential Guide for Progressives*." Chelsea Green Publishing.

LaVigne, Dominique. 2025. "New California Law Aims to Prevent Book Bans in Libraries Statewide." FOX 5 San Diego, January 6. https://fox5sandiego.com/news/local-news/new-california-law-aims-to-prevent-book-bans-in-libraries-statewide.

Lee, Jiselle. 2024. "From Angelou to Vonnegut, Florida Schools Pulled Hundreds of Books Last Year." *Washington Post*, November 13. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/11/13/florida-book-ban-school-libraries.

Lennon, Lauren. 2025. "State Education Committee Recommends Removal of Four Books from SC School Libraries." ABC4 News, January 13. https://abcnews4.com/news/local/state-education-committee-recommends-removal-of-four-books-from-school-libraries-wciv-abc-news-4-2025-perks-of-being-a-wallflower-all-boys-arent-blue-flamer-push-bronx-masquerade-the-house-on-mango-street-book-ban-instructional-material-review-committee.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. https://thekingcenter.org.

Peet, Lisa. 2025. "Arkansas Act 372 Declared Unconstitutional in District Court." *Library Journal*, January 10. https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/arkansas-act-372-declared-unconstitutional-in-district-court.

PEN America. "Project 2025 and Its Threat to Free Expression." September 12. https://pen.org/report/project-2025.

Project 2025. "About Project 2025." https://www.project2025.org/about/about-project-2025.

Salazar, Lexi, Andrea Lucia, and Scott Fralicks. 2025. "How the Battle over Book Bans Is Playing Out in North Texas Schools." CBS News, updated January 22. https://www.cbsnews.com/texas/news/how-the-battle-over-book-bans-is-impacting-north-texas-schools.

Singh, Kanishka. 2025. "Trump Administration Dismisses Complaints Related to Book Bans." Reuters, January 24. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-dismisses-complaints-related-book-bans-2025-01-25/.

Snyder, K. A. (Director). 2025. *The Librarians*. United States: English.

State Library of Oregon. n.d. "Oregon Intellectual Freedom Clearinghouse." Accessed March 5, 2025. https://libguides.osl.state.or.us/oifc.

Texas House of Representatives, 89th Legislature. *House Bill 183*. Retrieved from https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/89R/billtext/html/HB00183I.htm.

Thomas, Erica. 2024. "Fairhope City Council to Reappoint Library Board Members amid Calls for Chairman's Resignation." *1819 News*, January 13. https://1819news.com/news/item/fairhope-city-council-to-reappoint-library-board-members-amid-calls-for-resignation-of-chairman.

Unite Against Book Bans. https://uniteagainstbookbans.org.

United States House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives. n.d. "John Lewis." Accessed March 25, 2025. https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/16948.

University of Pennsylvania Archives & Records Center. n.d. "Benjamin Franklin." Accessed March 5, 2025. https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/benjamin-franklin.

Vasilogambros, Matt. 2025. "Librarians Gain Protections in Some States as Book Bans Soar." *Raw Story*, January 13. https://www.rawstory.com/librarians-gain-protections-in-some-states-as-book-bans-soar.

Vaughan, Jane. 2024. "Grants Pass School District Removes Two Books from High School Library." OPB, December 10. https://www.opb.org/article/2024/12/10/grants-pass-school-district.

Waldroupe, Amanda. 2024. "Efforts to Ban Books in Oregon Libraries Are on the Rise; Library Patrons and Supporters Are Pushing Back." *Oregon ArtsWatch*, December 22. https://www.orartswatch.org/efforts-to-ban-books-in-oregon-libraries-are-on-the-rise-library-patrons-and-supporters-are-pushing-back.

fff

ffffffff

fffffff

fff

fff

ff

ff

Clarifying Intellectual Freedom, Neutrality, and Professional Expertise to Better Defend Libraries from Books Bans, Disinformation, and Defunding

PAUL T. JAEGER AND ALLISON JENNINGS-ROCHE

ABSTRACT

When the *Library Bill of Rights* was adopted in 1939, it represented a significant departure from the many professional goals and ideals articulated when the American Library Association had been founded in 1876. In creating new professional ideals of intellectual freedom and neutrality, the *Library Bill of Rights* reoriented the field and altered the responsibilities of libraries to their communities. However, the poorly defined nature of some of these ideals has created continuing problems for the field, problems that are particularly evident in the current political environment heavily defined by censorship and disinformation. As the 150th anniversary of the American Library Association will occur in 2026, this paper explores the ways these issues were debated at the time of the 100th anniversary of the American Library Association as a lens for examining the significant current ramifications of these unresolved issues.

Introduction

In 1976, as the 100th anniversary of the American Library Association (ALA) approached, library science journals and conferences were, not surprisingly, populated by discussions and debates on issues at the heart of the field. Multiple perspectives were offered on the implications of foundational ideals like intellectual freedom and neutrality and the professional missions and societal contributions that libraries should be embracing in the future.

In fundamental ways, the field was closer to being newly formed than well established as the ALA's centennial neared. The Master of Library Science (MLS) degree had been the standard in the field for about a fifth of the organization's existence. The *Library Bill of Rights*, which formalized significant changes in the field and signaled its entry into the modern conceptualizations of librarianship, had been adopted in 1939 and only in place for about one-third of the history of the organization. Encoded in the *Library Bill of Rights* was, for the first time, a statement of protection of the ability of patrons to access information presenting the widest range of perspectives possible about issues of current and historical political, economic, and social importance and a statement of opposition to all efforts to censor materials

in the library. These statements gave rise to the ideals of intellectual freedom and neutrality in the profession of librarianship, which have both been unsettled since their introduction.

Leading thinkers and educators at the time of the ALA centennial—such as David Beringhausen, Dorothy Broderick, Evelyn Geller, Michael Harris, Archibald MacLeish, and Wayne Wiegand—offered different potential paths forward for the field to answer yet unsettled questions and craft a more coherent vision for the future of the field following the adoption of the *Library Bill of Rights* in 1939. Unfortunately, these discussions around the centennial faded without resolution as the field was distracted by the economic upheavals of the later 1970s and the advent of the age of neoliberal economics with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, which cut into library budgets and began the process of undermining the social standing of libraries.

The 150th anniversary of ALA in 2026 is now looming, and libraries are under enormous pressure from book bans, disinformation, budget cuts, closings, threats of incarceration, and many other antagonisms from highly organized anti-library political action groups and anti-library politicians holding offices from the most local levels to the presidency (Jaeger 2025). The fundamental questions raised in the years leading to the centennial continue to remain unanswered, as well. The failure to adequately address these issues for the past half-century plays a significant part in the social and political difficulties that libraries—especially public libraries—currently face. This paper examines the core issues raised by the centennial debates and their implications for the current anti-library political environment. By finally engaging and answering these long-avoided challenges to foundational ideals of the field, we may be much better able to respond to external political challenges to the field.

From Proscription to Avoiding Information Evaluation Expertise

When the ALA was founded, there was no doubt among the founders about the role of librarians—particularly library leaders—as information evaluation experts who would provide the people of the local community what they needed to read rather than what they wanted to read. Librarians were there not only to provide access to reading materials but to provide access to the correct reading materials. A core belief shared among the elitist founders of ALA—white, socially conservative Christian men with exuberant facial hair—was that readers were not sufficiently skilled to pick out what they should read on their own. At the first ALA meeting in 1876, "Most agreed that the mass reading public was generally incapable of choosing its own reading materials judiciously" (Wiegand 1986, 10).

The original leaders and benefactors behind the public library movement saw the establishment of libraries as a means for both the betterment of the individual—by the definitions of the powerful—and for the betterment of the democratic society. The underlying hope was to draw people away from what were perceived at the time as immoral behaviors and forms of entertainment to education on how to be better citizens and better employees. The belief in the civilizing influence of public libraries extended so far as to view them as an important step in taming territories that were not yet states, educating residents of the territories on proper behavior once statehood was achieved; public libraries were even viewed as critical to ending practices of polygamous marriage in the Utah territory (Stauffer 2005, 2016).

This belief in libraries—especially public libraries—as a means by which to civilize the masses and uplift their morals extended so far as to view those who opted not to use the library as a drain on society. Andrew Carnegie, who donated $41 million for the creation of 1,679 public libraries at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth cen-

turies, wanted libraries to assist "the best and most deserving poor" (1965, 38). He believed that all the libraries he had financed would "make men not violent revolutionists, but cautious evolutionists; not destroyers, but careful improvers" (quoted in Frazier, 1970, 821).

The original leaders of the public library movement saw their mission of "improvement" without changing the values held as the status quo among the wealthy, white, educated classes. Because of access to appropriate public library materials, members of the public would be more educated and moral as citizens and better behaved and more skilled as workers.

To accomplish these goals, the ALA and state library associations provided detailed lists of the exact titles that public libraries should stock based on the size of their communities (Wiegand 1986, 2011). Books were selected based on the values of the library leaders and the wealthy backers of libraries, of course, meaning the book lists were focused on middle- and upper-class interests, with an emphasis on producing skilled workers and well-behaved citizens. Early public library collections emphasized reference materials, dictionaries, grammars, histories, books on political and moral issues, and books on practical sciences like agriculture, anatomy, astronomy, biology, chemistry, geometry, and mathematics (DuMont 1977).

Breadth and diversity of perspective were not concerns; promoting responsibility, temperance, and order were. At the time of the founding of the ALA, "Librarians wholeheartedly embraced the role of dedicated promoter of democratic values and responsibilities" (Halsey 2003, 18). It was a very specific conceptualization of democracy as reflecting elitist goals, but it was nevertheless an embrace of expertise and responsibility by the field. Public libraries were positioned as an alternative to saloons, pool halls, speakeasies, racetracks, and other spaces deemed morally corrupting; the library was the essential infrastructure of a more educated public and a better democracy. To get there, librarians had to determine what was best for the community to read.

One result of this proscriptive approach was the library being positioned as a highly knowledgeable arbiter of culture. A patron would ask for a book on a certain topic, and the librarian would hand them the book deemed most appropriate for their needs. Libraries and library workers offered reassurance that the materials provided correct information in a socially acceptable manner (Parker 1997). Potentially controversial materials were avoided as part of collections, and the definition of controversial was broad indeed. As one example, the immensely popular Oliver Optic novel series by William Taylor Adams was kept out of many library collections in the late 1800s and early 1900s because they were deemed to give too much hope to the poor for an improved life. In 1928, Charles Compton, the director of the St. Louis Public Library, offered hope that "in the far distant future—we shall have a public that will be sufficiently intelligent to select their own reading" (quoted in Luyt 2001, 451–52).

The fiction of a typical 1920s public library collection would have emphasized traditional Christian values, small-town life, and hard work in the face of life's hardships. We now remember T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Dorothy Parker, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf as key authors of the 1920s. Yet, eminently forgettable—and now pretty much forgotten despite some awesome names—authors like Coningsby Dawson, Warwick Deeping, Zona Gale, Zane Grey, Cosmo Hamilton, Knut Hamsun, Julia Peterkin, Mazo de la Roche, T. S. Stribling, Thyra Samter Winslow, and Harold Bell Wright ruled the popular reading available in libraries during the Roaring Twenties.

As Michael Harris (1973, 1976) explored around the ALA centennial, however, the adoption of the *Library Bill of Rights* and embrace of a much greater multiplicity of viewpoints and experiences in library collections did not inevitably mean that librarians needed

to entirely shift responsibilities regarding knowledge acquisition from the librarian to the patron. Librarians used the *Library Bill of Rights* as an opportunity to decide that the field was one devoted to technological and organizational issues of information: "The librarian need only provide access to the information; the user was responsible for coming to the library to acquire it" (Harris 1973, 2514). Except in certain kinds of libraries, such as large academic libraries with dedicated information evaluation experts, libraries generally provide a wide range of perspectives but minimal guidance. Beyond perhaps some readers' advisory services and a shelf of staff picks, the patrons must figure out what might be the correct answer. As the Master of Library Science (MLS) became the standard degree of the field, the ALA requirements for the degree emphasized technical competencies over information evaluation expertise (Swigger 2012).

While the original aggressively proscriptive nature of libraries was deeply condescending and unappealing, the 180-degree turnaround precipitated by the *Library Bill of Rights* did the field no long-term favors. It is not necessarily a benefit to patrons, some of whom might desperately want clear direction on the most accurate information for a particular question. Further, it has not only been used to reduce the perceived value of library science degrees and the competence of librarians (Bertot et al. 2012), it is now an extremely helpful tool for opponents of libraries. Why take the opinions of librarians seriously about what materials should be in a collection when the librarians themselves assert that they are not there to evaluate the information in library collections?

Neutrality and Intellectual Freedom

The decision to flee from information evaluation expertise was part of a larger, and currently very unhelpful, embrace of the broad ideal of neutrality. Providing materials representing a wide range of political, cultural, and economic issues would not necessarily preclude librarians from having professional opinions on the issues, especially issues related to topics of information. However, the ideal of neutrality became a staunch corollary of the *Library Bill of Rights*.

Neutrality was originally focused on the collection itself, providing many perspectives rather than the previous single perspective. However, it was quickly applied to the institutions and the workers as well, creating an implicit professional expectation of passivity toward accuracy. As Harris summarized the outcome of neutrality, librarians "were bound by the library's new philosophy *not* to try to influence the user's opinion," as "they were *obligated* to remain generally uninvolved in the patron's efforts to a make a decision" (1973, 2514, emphasis in original).

In contrast, David Beringhausen was one of the most vocal and unwavering proponents of neutrality the field has ever produced. He asserted that neutrality was the responsibility to "select materials from all producers, from the whole world of published media, to build balanced collections representing all points of view on controversial issues, regardless of their personal convictions or beliefs" (1972, 3675). The first problem with this should be obvious from a practical level, as what Beringhausen details would not be possible in terms of finances, infrastructure, or time. The larger problem is that neutrality instructs librarians to "keep quiet" about important issues, even those that directly impact other library values like literacy and access. Since the adoption of the *Library Bill of Rights,* the vast majority of librarians have fallen in line with this directive to "keep quiet," often to the detriment of libraries and their communities (Kent 1996, 212).

Harris, the most vocal challenger of Beringhausen's position on neutrality at the time of the ALA centennial, listed the appeals of neutrality to librarians as including avoidance of conflict with those possessing different views, avoidance of responsibility for patron decisions, limitation of interactions with patrons overall, and absolution from engaging issues outside the library building. None of these are particularly positive in general, and they are particularly detrimental in the current political climate.

Archibald MacLeish, to his lasting credit, was a strong opponent of neutrality from the adoption of the *Library Bill of Rights*, asserting as Librarian of Congress that the basic act of opening a library to allow people access to information that they would not otherwise have will always be an inherently political act (1940). Still advocating for libraries to be viewed as political institutions at the time of the ALA centennial, he declared that "the library, almost alone of the great monuments of civilization, stands taller now than it ever did before" in the face of failures of numerous other political institutions through the days of Watergate and the Vietnam War (1972, 362).

Since the centennial, the problems with neutrality have become increasingly evident, and the literature exploring its negative impacts on the institutions, professionals, and communities served by the field has grown exponentially, exploring problems from the technical and philosophical impossibility to the moral relativism to the fact that no materials are neutral (see Jaeger et al. 2014, 56–58 for a summary of the primary problems now identified with neutrality). Despite all these arguments against it, however, neutrality clings to the profession like a lamprey with its disk of teeth dug in deeply. Curiously, the ALA *Policy Manual* is actually full of clearly political positions—such as passing a resolution opposed to nuclear weapons—taken by the organization over the years.

Like the previously discussed issue, neutrality now haunts the field as it tries to respond to attacks based in censorship, disinformation, cultural erasure, and anti-intellectualism (Jaeger 2025). Nearly a century of telling librarians that it is their professional responsibility to be quiet and not have opinions has ineluctably created a situation in which librarians, as a whole, have serious difficulty defending the field and what it stands for, let alone their own personal expertise in collection development or information evaluation.

The trouble in articulating what the field stands for is demonstrated by another major issue that was in the discourse around the ALA centennial, most notably what the field actually meant by the goal of protecting intellectual freedom. Evelyn Geller noted that intellectual freedom had been taken as a "self-evident" pillar of the field since the adoption of the *Library Bill of Rights*, even though the meaning was never formally established and the ALA hoped that libraries would figure it out at the local level (1974, 1365).

The embrace of intellectual freedom was, again, like neutrality, a complete shift in direction for the ALA and the profession. Library leaders, including many presidents of ALA, were originally openly enthusiastic about keeping "immoral," "false," "unclean," and "improper" materials as they were variously described, with the role of "censor" being one of the primary contributions of librarians to their communities (quoted in Geller, 1976). Librarians even positioned themselves above other learning professions based on their careful selection of "proper" materials to shape the values of the public they served (Parker 1997). The public was not capable, in their reasoning, of making the kinds of choices that would support a more enlightened democracy. Intellectual freedom would be antithetical to the positioning of librarians as moral educators in the public sphere.

To Geller, however, intellectual freedom was an "unanticipated consequence" of the creation of public libraries, establishing a sense of social responsibility for the library to

ensure that more than just the powerful voices were heard both inside and outside the library (1974, 1367). In contrast, Dorothy Broderick (1971) claimed that intellectual freedom had a much different meaning. Broderick viewed it as a breach of the original notion of the library as having a "covenant with the community," moving from an active — if not always inclusive — participant in the intellectual life of the community by choosing materials that it thought best fit the local population to a passive neutrality that relinquished its local responsibilities. ALA itself was seemingly ambivalent or uncertain about the extent of intellectual freedom for a long time as well, only extending the concept to children and young adults in 1972.

Americans — members of the public, elected officials, and jurists — have long grappled with the interpretation and implementation of the First Amendment in the public sphere, and the profession's attempts to contextualize the concept for libraries into the idea of "intellectual freedom," has always been a site of contention within the field (Jaeger, Lazar, Gorham & Taylor, 2023). The field of librarianship would seem to have sufficient cogent explanation of intellectual freedom to enable members of the public and elected officials to understand what the field means by the term, but librarians themselves often lack the tools to apply such values in their everyday work.

The pliability of intellectual freedom as a concept has led to the recurring problem of ALA and its member libraries defending possession of materials in their collections that are dangerously wrong and pernicious — such as overtly racist or antisemitic materials — or, alternately, defending not having these same dangerously wrong and pernicious materials in their collections. ALA blundered in making itself the center of this problem the year after its centennial by producing an educational film called *The Speaker.* Presenting a fictionalized version of a speaker at a high school lecturing to students on the racial inferiority of non-white people to white people, the 1977 film was intended to demonstrate the reasons for promoting neutrality and protecting intellectual freedom but inadvertently instead made a terrific case for critical flaws in both neutrality and intellectual freedom.

Without contextualizing intellectual freedom and neutrality in line with other broader American or democratic values, they are simply tools to defend the presentation of materials that are blatantly harmful to parts or all of the community (Swan & Peattie, 1989). This failure to better define the meanings of both neutrality and intellectual freedom — and the accompanying failure to recognize that they can be inherently contradictory — has left libraries for nearly a century with little practical and actionable guidance on how to navigate the seemingly incompatible roles of neutral facilitator and interventionist promoting diverse viewpoints without promoting incorrect information (Heckart, 1991).

The Last 50 Years into the Now

The debates about these issues around the 1976 ALA centennial did not lead to any clear resolutions or even moderate clarifications. Subsequent major ALA documents like the *Code of Ethics* and the *Freedom to Read* statement both further enshrine theoretical ideals of neutrality and intellectual freedom without making them sufficiently practicable and precise to be readily understood by community members and government officials. These well-intentioned ideals are now causing difficulties for librarians — most notably public librarians — as they attempt to respond to censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure efforts.

To the people promoting book bans and seeking to remove entire cultures from collections, the ideal of neutrality means that librarians should not object to the bans. To the people promoting disinformation, the ideal of intellectual freedom means the librarians should not

object to their disinformation because it is just one more protected perspective. To all of those who oppose the library, the assertion by the field of librarianship that librarians typically are not information evaluation experts supports their beliefs that they have as much right as library professionals to determine what is in the collection.

And, of course, these issues also cause problems for the librarians themselves in knowing how to respond to book banners, disinformation purveyors, and other anti-intellectual and anti-library groups. If neutrality really does mean being quiet and intellectual freedom really does mean giving space for every view, then it is not especially clear how to professionally try to stop censorship or disinformation or cultural erasure.

None of this is to say that the belief in intellectual freedom is an inherently bad thing. But nearly a century of ambiguity of what intellectual freedom means and how it is supposed to be applied in concert with other professional values is an enormous problem. In an age increasingly defined by disinformation, for example, being crystal clear that intellectual freedom does not include harmful medical disinformation that might be fatal to patrons would seem to be a necessary step. Even better, a thorough articulation of what libraries should not be willing to defend as having intellectual or educational value would provide much more solid ground on which libraries could stand when confronting bigots, censors, and other anti-library factions. In the current political environment, the ideal of intellectual freedom – were it clearly defined – could be an extremely valuable defense against those who wish to purge certain ideas and certain populations from library collections.

The embrace of neutrality and the requisite distancing of librarians from assertions of information evaluation expertise are much harder to defend for in the current context, especially as they are incalculably detrimental to libraries in the now. If neutrality were strictly limited to the notion of collection that represents many viewpoints, that would be feasible. If it were to specifically mean that the library does not endorse individual candidates in elections, that would be reasonable. However, as a holistic, and still ill-defined, concept it is a massive self-inflicted wound for the profession. The broad sense of neutrality keeps libraries from explaining both their needs – in terms of funding, policy, and staffing – and their contributions to their communities effectively. Neutrality inhibits the ability of librarians to promote issues that would ultimately benefit each library and the community it serves.

Right now, our self-imposed ideal of neutrality is a gift to those who wish to undermine, defund, and disappear libraries, as it tells librarians they cannot even speak up to defend themselves. Similarly, turning the desire to avoid proscriptively telling people what they can read into the fear of asserting information evaluation expertise stands as yet another self-inflicted wound to the profession and a gift to its opponents. Refusing to articulate that being a librarian means knowing which sources are more accurate and more reliable only empowers those who peddle disinformation and those who claim there is no need for libraries. Again, if the librarian is not an acknowledged expert, then the opinion of anyone else about the accuracy of information sources could be seen as equally valid, even those arguing for the addition of more pro-flat earth materials to the collection.

When considering solutions to these festering problems, it is worth remembering that the problems are entirely of the making of the library profession. The *Library Bill of Rights* has no legal sway. The free speech protections enshrined in the US Constitution are not invalidated by choosing librarianship as a career. Courts have consistently held that librarians do not have limitations on their speech beyond that which interferes with their job and that which has been specifically limited under local or state law as it relates to their professional

duties (Jaeger, Lazar, Gorham, and Taylor, 2023). Neutrality is not and will never be a legal obligation.

During the debates around the ALA centennial, Archibald MacLeish wrote: "But what is more important in a library than anything else — than everything else — is the fact that it exists" (1972, p. 359). For the first time since the ALA was founded in 1876, we are in a political environment where that existence, especially of public libraries, is threatened across the United States. Many local government positions are now being held by those who seek to limit or close libraries; state governments in a majority of states have passed anti-library laws, including an alarming number that have created threats of incarceration for librarians; and the three branches of the federal government are now dominated by open supporters of censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure.

To endure what will likely be years of significant political strain at all levels of government, and across all branches of government, libraries will need all the strong defenses that they can muster. Clarifying these ideals, as statements, in practice, in the continuing education of current professionals, and in the education of future professionals is not only greatly overdue, it is now an essential survival strategy.

References

Beringhausen, D. 1972. "Antithesis in Librarianship: Social responsibility vs. the Library Bill of Rights." *Library Journal* 97 (20): 3675–81. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ067077.

Bertot, J. C., P. T. Jaeger, and L. C. Sarin. 2012. "Forbes Folly." *American Libraries* 43 (9/10): 30–33. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23280812.

Broderick, D. 1971. "Censorship Reevaluated." *Library Journal* 96 (November 15). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ047736.

Carnegie, A. 1962. *The Gospel of Wealth.* Harvard University Press.

DuMont, R. 1977. *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life*. Greenwood Press.

Geller, E. 1974. "Intellectual Freedom: Eternal Principle or Unanticipated Consequence?" *Library Journal* 99 (May 15): 1364–67. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ098143.

Geller, E. 1976. "The Librarian as Censor." *Library Journal* 101 (11): 1255–58. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ138374.

Harris, M. 1973. "The Purpose of the American Public Library: A Revisionist Interpretation of History." *Library Journal* 98 (16), 2509–14. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ086396.

Harris, M. 1976. "Public Libraries and the Decline of Democratic Dogma." *Library Journal* 101 (19): 2225–30. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ146991.

Heckart, R. J. 1991. "The Library as a Marketplace of Ideas." *College & Research Libraries* 52 (6): 491–505. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_52_06_491.

Jaeger, P. T. 2025. "The Immortality of Hatred and Revenge: The Interconnections of Censorship, Disinformation, and Cultural Erasure in the Book Bans Targeting Marginalized Populations." *The Library Quarterly* 95 (1): 4–41. https://doi.org/10.1086/733171.

Jaeger, P. T., U. Gorham, J. C. Bertot, and L. C. Sarin. 2014. *Public Libraries, Public Policies, and Political Processes: Serving and Transforming Communities in Times of Economic and Political Constraint*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Jaeger, P. T., J. Lazar, U. Gorham, and N. G. Taylor. 2023. *Foundations of Information Law*. ALA Editions.

Kent, S. G. 1996. "American Public Libraries: A Long Transformative Moment." *Daedalus* 125 (4): 207–20. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20027394.

Luyt, B. 2001. "Regulating Readers: The Social Origin of the Readers' Advisor in the United States." *The Library Quarterly* 71 (4): 443–66. https://doi.org/10.1086/603315.

MacLeish, A. 1940. "The Librarian and the Democratic Process." *ALA Bulletin* 34 (6): 385–88, 421–22. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25690467.

MacLeish, A. 1972. "The Premise of Meaning." *The American Scholar* 41 (3): 357–62. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41208780.

Parker, A. M. 1997. *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-censorship Activism, 1873–1933*. University of Illinois Press.

Stauffer, S. M. 2005. "Polygamy and the Public Library: The Establishment of Public Libraries in Utah Before 1910." *The Library Quarterly* 75 (3): 346–70. https://doi.org/10.1086/497312.

Stauffer, S. M. 2016. "Supplanting the Saloon Evil and Other Loafing Habits: Utah's Library-Gymnasium Movement, 1907–1912." *The Library Quarterly* 86 (4): 434–48. https://doi.org/10.1086/688032.

Swan, J., and N. Peattie. 1989. *The Freedom to Lie: A Debate About Democracy*. McFarland.

Swigger, B. K. 2012. *The MLS Project: An Assessment After Sixty Years*. Scarecrow Press.

Wall, J. F. 1970. *Andrew Carnegie*. Oxford University.

Wiegand, W. A. 1986. *The Politics of an Emerging Profession: The American Library Association, 1876–1917*. Greenwood Press.

Wiegand, W. 2011. *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956*. University of Iowa Press.

November 5, 2024: Three Sources of Lessons for Libraries

JOHN BUSCHMAN

ABSTRACT

The CFP for this special issue is responding to a set of nested, documented phenomena, each of which is politically problematic and deserving of debunking. The effort being urged is to oppose or reverse these. But all this takes place in a context and forms a context, too. It is worth reminding ourselves that it has been a tumultuous decade since the election campaign of 2016, with reversals and re-reversals. Meanwhile, the United States has become more inegalitarian due to neoliberal policies over the last five decades, and the relationship between the public and democratic institutions like libraries has been reset, to the damage of democracy. Contemporary events are only accelerating these phenomena. Reciting and critiquing them again is comforting, but something different needs doing. By tying itself to democracy, modern librarianship is open to the deep currents to which democracy has always been subject. The paper explores them: 1) the Greeks, Democracy, Domination, and Rhetoric; 2) Anti-Intellectualism in American Life; and 3) Reaction to Progress or Revolution Never—Ever—Goes Away, followed by a conclusion.

Introduction

Schematized, the Call for Papers (CFP) of this special issue of *The Political Librarian* would look like this:

- The US federal government "*will be controlled by politicians who support book bans and other limitations on access to information.*"
- Politicians "*vilify many of the communities that libraries have long worked to support and empower.*"
- Those "*who crafted the laws that threaten to jail librarians faced no consequences from voters and those who pushed for even more regressive agendas were voted in … to ban books, incarcerate library workers, and even shut down libraries.*"
- This special issue seeks to discuss and analyze what the "*results of the 2024 election may indicate for the future of libraries and library work,*" and the "*key … is trying to determine and examine the political, policy, economic, legal, advocacy, and cultural lessons*" for the institution and profession to "*reestablish … support … and succeed in addressing future political challenges.*"

In other words, the CFP is responding to a set of nested, documented phenomena, each of which is politically problematic, rankly unjust, false in itself, clearly opposed to the

democratic values to which librarianship's core commitments are keyed, and deserving of debunking, opposition, and analytic energy in parts or as a bundle. The effort being urged is to oppose or reverse these.

All this takes place in a context and forms a context, too. It is worth reminding ourselves of the tumultuous and razor-thin 2016 election and its wake (Bump 2016), heavily influenced by the intertwined effects of fake news from varying sources and the technology enabling it (Buschman 2019, 2024b), followed by the equally razor-thin November 3, 2020, election, which went in the opposite direction (Fowers et al. 2020)—falsely declared "stolen" and the subject of the ginned-up insurrection on January 6, 2021 (Browning and Gold 2024)—and was followed by a re-reversal in the small-but-real majority for the winner of November 5, 2024 (McDaniel 2025). The winning campaign narrative that mocked "others" in 2016 (Buschman 2018) became "The people that came in, they're eating the cats. They're eating—they're eating the pets of the people that live there" in 2024, playing on a fear of immigrants as well as gender anxiety and other differences (Ulloa 2024; Dowd 2024). And while these phenomena did not initially target libraries or the underrepresented people they service, they *were* consciously swept into the 2024 election campaign. The narrative of "problematic" reading materials for children begat library censorship—opposition to which equaled advocating for pornographic or pedophilic literature, which equaled grooming the very young—and widespread threats of violence, criminal penalties, and prison sentences for librarians' distribution of obscene or harmful texts, along with a widespread war on "woke" in many institutions (Jaeger et al. 2022; Natanson 2022; 2023; Natanson and Kaur 2024; Fleishman 2023). As of this writing, federal agencies and cabinet members are directly restricting books on shelves in a widespread offensive against diversity, equity, and inclusion ("woke") initiatives or perceived initiatives (Lamothe 2025).

Panning further out, the "United States has become noticeably more inegalitarian … from the turn of the twentieth century … [and] quantitatively as extreme as in old Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century" (Piketty 2014, 292–93). Why? Because neoliberal policies over the last five decades have fostered a re-redistribution of wealth upward through policy and sought to reset the relationship between the public and democratic institutions, like schools and libraries, to the damage of democracy (Piketty 2014; Buschman 2012; 2021). The very, *very* wealthy are, more than usual, publicly occupying seats of political administrative power and are directly involved in federal efforts to further these agendas (Stein et al. 2025; Bumiller 2025). Finally, while there were long-standing worries about media consolidation in book publishing, bookselling, media, and news outlets for decades (Miller 2001), social media "platformization" has further consolidated control without accompanying publisher-style responsibilities, e.g., liabilities for rank falsehoods on platforms (Habermas 2022). Illustrative is that the owner of Twitter-now-X has politically partnered with the winner of November 5, 2024 (Stein et al. 2025). The result? A closing of the circle: an explosion of fake news and political lies salting the communicative landscape, making it hostile to both democracy and libraries, generating an epistemic crisis (Buschman 2019; 2024b). An entire volume surveying contemporary political theory was written around this premise (Chambers 2023).

These phenomena are undoubtedly familiar to readers of this journal. Reciting and critiquing them again is comforting, but something different needs doing. By tying itself to democracy, modern librarianship is open to the deep currents to which democracy has always been subject. This is not an exercise in "seen it all" or "this too shall pass." The dangers are real and persistent, with far-reaching consequences (e.g., Yourish et al. 2025). After all, the November 3, 2020, elections were a sweep for the *other* side—presumably against book bans,

harassing minority communities, and for capacious understandings of reading and inquiry. But simply winning an election did not end the currents operating beside, behind, and inside the democracy that won a majority on November 5, 2024. What has been happening before and since November 5, 2024, are durable currents that we must recognize in order to adjust our approaches accordingly. This paper seeks to reset our outlook and identify three of those currents. The remainder of this paper will explore them.

Current One: The Greeks, Democracy, Domination, and Rhetoric

I know. It makes me sigh, too, when I pick up a promising title, and I am immediately thrust into a scene of tunics, agoras, temples, symposia, and festivals to ground an idea, often at length—a tic among many authors that seek to bridge the scholarly-popular divide. Circumstances then were, of course, quite different: Ancient Greece was a direct democracy (when it was a democracy); slaves, women, and non-Greeks were excluded; and Greek identity, war, and the fate of the vanquished were frequent examples of weighty decisional topics (Harris 2017). But excellent modern scholarship has plumbed Greek texts (drama and comedy as well as philosophical) for subtle ironies, lessons, and paradoxes, as well as different authors in dialogue with one another about the same events, persons, or issues for contemporary democratic insights (e.g., Mara 2018; 1997, 249–50; 2008; Euben et al. 1994). For instance, Plato may be highly critical of democracy, but he has Socrates dismantle many arguments deleterious to good democratic citizenship and speak to civic virtues needed for it (Mara 2008, *passim*). But in plain terms, the Greeks (and their modern interlocutors) tell us that, from the beginning, democracy will be prey to phenomena we are now experiencing: oligarchy and misleading/self-serving/false rhetoric.

Oligarchy: Domination by the Rich

This warning is highly relevant to us now: "Men of business" will exploit the poorer populace and, as "governors, induced by the motives which I have named, treat their subjects badly [and] care only for making money," bringing about political instability and/or violence (Plato 1947, 558–59). That is, "oligarchy's practice reveals a city divided between the self-indulgent rich and the vengeful poor"—certainly a version of our contemporary circumstance (Mara 1997, 142). It is not that *only* democracy has fundamental weaknesses but that *all* political arrangements have them, and an unjust and unwise oligarchy can rise from democracy's decline (Mara 1997, 137–45). The rich—of which we have a plethora today—absent sound democratic checks will use their wealth to dominate: to accrue power to accrue more wealth, and then more power, undermining democracy. This has been a concern of contemporary democratic theorists who observed this pattern in the present day (Dahl 2006). This is not a phenomenon that just now jumped three thousand years to the present but rather a recurring theme:

- Elites (Martin Luther among them) undermined the social revolution of the German Peasants' War in the 1500s (Meaney 2025).
- There has long been an active interpretation of the American Revolution that argues elites compromised only just enough for public support to retain political control—and slavery (Dunn 2006, 80–84).

- Elites (e.g., lawyers and the wealthy) abandoned professional ethics and actively helped to dismantle democracy and individual rights in 1930s Nazi Germany (Snyder 2017, 38–41).
- The wealthy vehemently opposed New Deal progressive reforms to protect and assist the economically struggling (Lepore 2018, 444–48), and elites have long sought—and often captured—the quintessentially democratic experiment of American public education for their purposes (Apple 1987).

The varying forms of equality that libraries pursue fly directly in the face of this current (Buschman 2024a)—and may be an underappreciated generative factor in the blowback libraries are now receiving.

The Sway of Rhetoric: Greek Fake News

Oligarchy does not simply bull rush democracy to take over. There were and are techniques of rhetoric to sway opinions and political decisions. The Greeks wrote much on rhetoric and made many distinctions between types—such as for public occasions (festivals), the courts, and in political venues (the assembly) with differing audiences for each (Harris 2017). Following Mara (2018), we will "treat rhetoric as the language of politics, particularly … as the language of democratic politics … extend[ing] the scope of rhetoric beyond the technical skills" here.[*] Plato thought rhetoric the "art of enchanting the soul" (Plato n.d.)—that is, though it could be used to teach virtue, just as or more often, it is deployed to deceive or sway toward destructive or unvirtuous ends. "Rhetoric's … psychic effects reinforce the sovereignty of experiences of pleasure (gratification) and pain (deprivation) and thus the status of power as the most significant primary good … all too easily aggregated into the powerful moves of an appetitive and aggressive society" (Mara 2008, 133). For example, while Pericles' famous funeral oration is widely considered an encomium to democracy, it is also "crafted to combat … dissenting voices" of grieving families or those in Athens opposing the war and seeking peace (Mara 2008, 115) or even as simple flattery and a power move (Mara 2018). Implied in that, rhetoric can be a technique of "mastery over others"—the ability to persuade "whatever it may be" or a striving "to gratify … fellow-citizens and … seeking their own private interests"—a particular weakness of democracies (Raaflaub 1994, 122).

Democracy's decisions are ever-changing because of a passion for novel speeches. Those in the assembly are often "simply overcome by the pleasures of hearing … and [are] like those who sit by and watch the displays of sophists" rather than taking seriously political matters of the city (Mara 2001, 825). Technical decisions in democracies (e.g., for the Greeks, maintaining a navy) "are inevitably politicized … heavily compromised by rhetorical appeals to the passions eclips[ing] both expertise and deliberation" (Mara 2001, 835). That is, rhetoric can persuade "without teaching" and can simply rely on outright deception or fail to persuade those "devoted to power and rule" (Mara 2018; 2001, 830). Finally, rhetoric deployed "with a view to the best" and most virtuous behaviors—the didactic goal of much Greek writing on the topic—can "replace crass manipulation with [a] haughty paternalism of non-democratic or aristocratic eloquence" (Mara 1993, 169). That is, like Pericles, the wealthy and powerful were often in position to deploy rhetoric toward their desired ends (Mara 2001, 833; 2018). Like today's fake news, Greek rhetoric came as many different wolves disguised as many different kinds of sheep. The subtleties of defending platform-amplified fake news as free inquiry

---

[*]   This is a particular take on Greek use of rhetoric, which was more rounded than this account—hence the variety of moves and countermoves implied in rhetorical strategies.

(Habermas 2022) were matched by the Greeks' "misleading and manipulative speeches that distort reality with devastating consequences for civic life" (Mara 2008, 23, see also 42, 140). This, it can reasonably be concluded, is baked into democracy.

Current Two: Anti-Intellectualism in American Life

The section title is taken from Richard Hofstadter's 1963 book, quite famous in its time. Hofstadter—a distinguished mid-century American historian—probed the rootstock of American anti-intellectualism throughout his published writings. But we must first start with the question of anti-intellectual vs. what? The "classical and early modern thinkers … took revolution to be a simple upsetting and reordering of society on new principles. But the French Revolution was taken by its partisans and critics alike to have revealed a principle of historical unfolding, and not necessarily a progressive one" (Lilla 1998). As a result, "overcoming monarchism and the Catholic Church … and then … Marxist challenges to … legitimacy in [the 20th] century" was a live, vital and persistent struggle; consequently "writers and thinkers [we]re held in an esteem unimaginable in the States" (Lilla 1989, 261, 264). France led the way: Their patterns were, more or less, those of intellectuals and intellectualism throughout Europe up until the twenty-first century. In contrast, Hofstadter "stress[ed] the lack of serious ideological conflict in American society" in its history, directly challenging historians prone to a more dramatic narrative (Lasch 1973, xiii; Hofstadter 1973, xxxvii). For instance, in the late nineteenth century, the US "saw its own image in the tooth-and-claw version of natural selection and … its dominant groups were therefore able to dramatize this vision of competition [and] ruthless business rivalry" (Hofstadter 1955, 201). Hofstadter (1955, 5) argued that the era was characterized by a conservative settlement and widespread consensus "that the time had now come for acquiescence and acquisition, for the development of … the continent … and the immense new industries."

Given Hofstadter's (1963) bent of looking for stabilizing and persistent elements in American society, it is unsurprising that he finds a variety of sources of anti-intellectualism. For example, the emotionalism of American Protestantism—prizing religious enthusiasm over institutional or analytical approaches—fostered "a society [un]likely to produce poets or artists or savants" (Hofstadter 1963, 80). Second, the highly practical ethos of business—"the more thoroughly business dominated American society, the less it felt the need to justify its existence by reference to values outside its own domain"—was also a wellspring (Hofstadter 1963, 251). Third, the tradition of the educated, reforming gentleman farmers quickly subsided in America, giving way to a population of dirt farmers gobbling up surplus land and a consequent class "opposition to science and book farming, … there was great reluctance … to accept the idea that education … could do much for their children" (Hofstadter 1963, 277–78). Finally, intellectual wit was simply unpopular with the public, held against a then-recent notably intellectual candidate for president (Hofstadter 1963, 225). His book was written largely in response to McCarthyism and its aftermath, and Hofstadter (1964) went on in later work to point out that American anti-intellectualism was highly congenial to the right wing, contributing to a "paranoid style in American politics" (again, quoting the title of the piece) that conjured an ever-present enemy, perfect in his malice and methods, sapping the vitality and morality of American society. Persistent similarities to the present cannot be missed.

Current Three: Reaction to Progress or Revolution Never—Ever—Goes Away

"The revolutionary spirit that inspired political movements across the world for two centuries may have died out, but the spirit of reaction that rose to meet it has survived and is proving just as potent" (Lilla 2016, ix). Mark Lilla has made a scholarly career of pointing out that substantial scholarly attention is paid to revolutions and their sources, but "we have no such theories about reaction" (2016, ix). His work and that of others set out to correct that. For instance, in the face of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church simply reacted (slowly) with condemnation/excommunication, leaving the intellectual fields it formerly dominated untended and open to secular and Protestant thinkers and a residual of simmering reactionary discontent that is still present (Lilla 2016, 71; 2024). Religion—the organized belief in and worship of God—and its decline has been a point of contention for centuries, fueling reaction from the Islamic world (Lilla 2007) to fundamentalist Christians (Fleishman 2023) to opposition to secularized Judaism (Lilla 2016, 3–23) to name three instances. The French Revolution has long been the Ur-generator of reactionaryism—the term was conceptualized then and led to two centuries of conflict over the combination of its political and (anti)religious legacy, among other issues (Brown 2011; Lilla 1998; 2016). Finally, as a contemporary example, there were the cultural transformations of the sixties: of the family, personal morality, and public authority, bringing sustained reactionary responses we still experience (Lilla 1998; 2016, 92–95). The "political discourse of reaction is … pervasive, … formed by an earlier cultural and political situation [now] ingrained" (Lilla 1998). In other words, and in our terms, many of our assumptions about cultural change and progress in our field have been blinkered (Wiegand 2020), perhaps overinformed by the 2008 election of Obama. What overtook us in 2024 has always been there.

Conclusion

To recap: Democracy has been prey to domination by the rich and slippery/devious oratory from the beginning, and that continues to the present day. American culture has a strong and persistent anti-intellectual streak that shrugs at rampant political mendacity in favor of a constant sifting for simple, pragmatic solutions amid distrust of many forms of learning. And the reactionary impulse to oppose progress and revolutions never goes away— it only fades from view at times and temporarily at that. So what? What possible practical outcomes can come from this brief examination of verities? I would argue that there are benefits to this exercise. The first is that librarianship is not now facing something wholly new. If we are caught flat-footed, it is because we ignore lessons *we urge on our library publics all the time*: that libraries are windows to past experiences and other perspectives that can provide guideposts. Second, if the headwinds have always been there, it is intuitively obvious that, as they are prevailing now, they've been overcome before. Progress is possible because it has happened in the past, most probably aided by persistence. Third, if nothing else, political judgment and skill should be valued by and cultivated in the profession, especially at leadership levels—right now (Buschman 2016). Fourth, we are reminded that librarians are not alone. Those in political opposition to the winners of 2024 are floundering, unable to process or cope with their unexpected losses in 2016 and 2024 and the policy defeats along the way (Balz 2025). Finally, one more verity: The price of liberty is constant vigilance. That rights, freedoms, and liberties have been won on library and other fronts does not mean they are permanent. These three historical lessons and their ancillaries are unsatisfying, but unlike

12-Step Programs or the Six Pillars of Success, the likes of which so many motivational and self-help consultants pitch, they have the virtue of being durable and true. True is a solid first step to grappling with November 5, 2024.

References

Apple, Michael W. 1987. *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Balz, Dan. 2025. "Democrats Are in Trouble, and a Provocative Analysis Offers Ideas to Repair the Party." *Washington Post*, February 2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/02/02/democratic-party-losses-assessment/.

Brown, Frederick. 2011. *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus*. New York: Anchor.

Browning, Kellen, and Michael Gold. 2024. "On Jan. 6 Anniversary, Trump Repeats Lie That 2020 Election Was Stolen." *New York Times*, January 6. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/06/us/politics/trump-jan-6-speech-election.html.

Bumiller, Elisabeth. 2025. "A Trump Oligarchy Is Moving to Washington, and Buying Up Prime Addresses." *New York Times*, January 19. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/19/us/politics/trump-billionaires-washington-homes.html.

Bump, Philip. 2016. "Donald Trump Will Be President Thanks to 80,000 People in Three States." *Washington Post*, December 1. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/12/01/donald-trump-will-be-president-thanks-to-80000-people-in-three-states/.

Buschman, John. 2012. *Libraries, Classrooms, and the Interests of Democracy: Marking the Limits of Neoliberalism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield/Scarecrow Press.

Buschman, John. 2016. "On the Political Nature of Library Leadership." *The Political Librarian* 2 (9). https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/pollib/vol2/iss1/9.

Buschman, John. 2018. "Between Neoliberalism and Identity Politics: Academic Librarianship, Democracy and November 8, 2016." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44 (2): 287–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2017.12.020.

Buschman, John. 2019. "Good News, Bad News, and Fake News." *Journal of Documentation* 75 (1): 213–28. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-05-2018-0074.

Buschman, John. 2021. "Actually-Existing Democracy and Libraries: A Mapping Exercise." *Advances in Librarianship* 50: 9–43. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0065-283020210000050001.

Buschman, John. 2024a. "Equal Respect: The Civic Engagement Libraries (Already) Perform for Democracy." *The Library Quarterly* 94 (1): 101–16. https://doi.org/10.1086/727817.

Buschman, John. 2024b. "Fake News as Systematically Distorted Communication: An LIS Intervention." *Journal of Documentation* 80 (1): 203–17. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-03-2023-0043.

Chambers, Simone. 2023. *Contemporary Democratic Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Dahl, Robert A. 2006. *On Political Equality*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dowd, Maureen. 2024. "Donald Trump's Insatiable Bloodlust." *New York Times*, April 6. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/06/opinion/trump-election-blood-bath.html.

Dunn, John. 2006. *Democracy : A History*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Euben, J. Peter, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober, eds. 1994. *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

EveryLibrary Institute. 2024. "Call for Papers - Special 2025 Issue of The Political Librarian." December 2. https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/call_for_papers_special_2025_issue_tpl.

Fleishman, Jeffrey. 2023. "School Librarians Vilified as the 'Arm of Satan' in Book-Banning Wars." *Los Angeles Times*, January 27. https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2023-01-27/school-librarians-vilified-as-the-arm-of-satan-in-book-banning-wars.

Fowers, Alyssa, Atthar Mirza, and Armand Emamdjomeh. 2020. "The Votes That Won Joe Biden the Presidency." *Washington Post*, November 13. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/elections/vote-margin-of-victory/.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2023. *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Harris, Edward M. 2017. "Rhetoric and Politics in Ancient Greece." In *The Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, edited by Michael J. MacDonald. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1955. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, rev. ed. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1963. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. New York: Knopf.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1964. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." *Harper's Magazine*, November. https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/.

Hofstadter, Richard. 1973. *The American Political Tradition*. New York: Vintage.

Jaeger, Paul T., Karen Kettnich, Shannon M. Oltmann, Natalie Greene Taylor, Jane Garner, and Jordan S. Sly. 2022. "Exuberantly Exhuming McCarthy: Confronting the Widespread Attacks on Intellectual Freedom in the United States." *The Library Quarterly* 92 (4): 321–28. https://doi.org/10.1086/721397.

Lamothe, Dan. 2025. "Trump DEI Crackdown Targets Books in Pentagon Schools." *Washington Post*, February 7. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/02/07/defense-department-hegseth-books-schools/.

Lasch, Christopher. 1973. "Foreword." In *The American Political Tradition* by Richard Hofstadter. New York: Vintage.

Lepore, Jill. 2018. *These Truths: A History of the United States*. New York: Norton.

Lilla, Mark. 1989. "The French Revolution Is Dead." *Partisan Review* 56 (2): 257–65.

Lilla, Mark. 1998. "A Tale of Two Reactions." *New York Review of Books*, May 14. https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1998/05/14/a-tale-of-two-reactions/.

Lilla, Mark. 2007. "The Politics of God." *New York Times Magazine*, August 19. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/19/magazine/19Religion-t.html.

Lilla, Mark. 2016. *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction*. New York Review Books.

Lilla, Mark. 2024. "The Tower and the Sewer." *New York Review of Books*, June 20. https://marklilla.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NYRB-postlib.pdf.

Mara, Gerald M. 1993. "Cries, Eloquence, & Judgment: Interpreting Political Voice in Democratic Regimes." *Polity* 26 (2): 155–87. https://doi.org/10.2307/3235027.

Mara, Gerald M. 1997. *Socrates' Discursive Democracy: Logos and Ergon in Platonic Political Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mara, Gerald M. 2001. "Thucydides and Plato on Democracy and Trust." *The Journal of Politics* 63 (3): 820–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00089.

Mara, Gerald M. 2008. *The Civic Conversations of Thucydides and Plato: Classical Political Philosophy and the Limits of Democracy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mara, Gerald M. 2018. "Interpreting Political Rhetoric in Plato and Thucydides." Paper presented at the Tocqueville Forum Conference: "Political Rhetoric: Ancient and Modern," Georgetown University, Washington, DC, April.

McDaniel, Justine. 2025. "Election Results Don't Support Trump's Claims of a Landslide and Mandate." *Washington Post*, January 20. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/01/20/trump-election-results-popular-vote/.

Meaney, Thomas. 2025. "You Can't Trust Elites. Just Ask a 500-Year-Old German Peasant." Review of *Summer of Fire and Blood* by Lyndal Roper. *New York Times*, February 11. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/11/books/review/summer-of-fire-and-blood-lyndal-roper.html.

Miller, Mark Crispin. 2001. "Reading in the Age of Global Media." *Progressive Librarian* 18: 18–24. http://www.progressivelibrariansguild.org/PL/PL18.pdf.

Natanson, Hannah. 2022. "A Mom Wrongly Said the Book Showed Pedophilia. School Libraries Banned It." *Washington Post*, December 22. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/12/22/lawn-boy-book-ban-pedophilia/.

Natanson, Hannah. 2023. "Objection to Sexual, LGBTQ Content Propels Spike in Book Challenges." *Washington Post*, updated June 9. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/05/23/lgbtq-book-ban-challengers/.

Natanson, Hanna, and Anumita Kaur. 2024. "Red States Threaten Librarians With Prison — As Blue States Work to Protect Them." *Washington Post*, April 16. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/04/16/library-legislation-restrictions-protections/.

Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Plato. n.d. *Phaedrus*. https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/phaedrus.html.

Plato. 1947. "Selections from *The Republic*." In *Greek and Roman Classics in Translation*, edited by Charles T. Murphy, Kevin Guinagh and Whitney J. Oates. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.

Raaflaub, Kurt A. 1994. "Democracy, Power, and Imperialism in Fifth-Century Athens. In *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, edited by J. Peter Euben, John R. Wallach, and Josiah Ober. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Snyder, Timothy. 2017. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. New York: Tim Duggan Books.

Stein, Jeff, Elizabeth Dwoskin, Hannah Natanson, and Jonathan O'Connell. 2025. "In Chaotic Washington Blitz, Elon Musk's Ultimate Goal Becomes Clear." *Washington Post*, February 8. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/02/08/doge-musk-goals/.

Ulloa, Jazmine. 2024. "'They're Eating the Cats': Trump Repeats False Claim About Immigrants." *New York Times*, September 10. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/10/us/politics/trump-debate-immigrants-pets.html.

Wiegand, Wayne A. 2020. "Sanitizing American Library History: Reflections of a Library Historian." *The Library Quarterly* 90 (2): 108–20. https://doi.org/10.1086/707669.

Yourish, Karen, Eric Rabinowitz, Ashley Wu, Lazaro Gamio, Aishvarya Kavi and Minho Kim. 2025. "All of the Trump Administration's Major Moves in the First 27 Days." *New York Times*, February 16. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/us/trump-agenda-2025.html.

Author

John Buschman: Dean of University Libraries at Seton Hall University and since 2021 Associate Provost for Research & Innovation. Buschman is author of *Dismantling the Public Sphere: Situating and Sustaining Libraries in the Age of the New Public Philosophy* (2003) and *Libraries, Classrooms and the Interests of Democracy: Marking the Limits of Neoliberalism* (2012), and four edited or co-edited books as well as numerous articles in *Library Quarterly*, the *Journal of Documentation* and other leading LIS journals. He holds an M.L.S. from Ball State, an M.A. in American Studies from St. Joseph's University and a Doctor of Liberal Studies from Georgetown University. Email: john.buschman@shu.edu.

Mapping Racism, Charting Change: A Regional Approach to Incorporating the Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS Model

RACHEL D. WILLIAMS AND NICOLE COOKE

ABSTRACT

Focusing on anti-racism efforts within library and information science, this reflective essay applies our recently introduced Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) model (Cooke and Williams, forthcoming) to examine geographies of racism in the United States. Our paper explores how regional distinctions—ranging from "Midwest nice" to "Southern hospitality" to "New England progressive whiteness"—both reflect and reinforce entrenched structures of racism in the US. With a reelected convicted felon in chief, the sociopolitical landscape has shifted even further toward fostering and incentivizing racism in various ways depending on geography. Through a thematic approach, we examine how racism manifests differently across regions by exploring these interconnected dynamics. We consider how the STAR model illustrates the geographic dimensions of racism and how individuals may feel out of place within these contexts. This approach highlights the contradictions and connections among different regional expressions of racial tension and shows how they both shape and are shaped by the political landscape of the US. We build on this analysis by considering how the STAR model informs the library and information science (LIS) profession, specifically by encouraging both reflection and action because of a deeper understanding of how regional and cultural biases influence library practices, policies, and user experiences. We conclude by suggesting mazeways, counter-storytelling, and broader disciplinary action as strategies for resistance and change. By applying this framework, LIS professionals can better understand and address how geographic and cultural contexts perpetuate racism within communities and how we can fight back.

Introduction

The 2024 election has cast a long and troubling shadow over the field of librarianship. In the aftermath of a deeply divisive presidential election, marked by the ascent of a convicted felon who weaponized hate, disinformation, and deceit, our profession finds itself grappling with profound challenges. As we process the implications of these events, we recognize the critical need to redouble our efforts as library and information professionals. The current

political climate compels us to consider how libraries must stand firm in their values and reestablish support for these vital community institutions. Libraries and librarianship are at risk, and standing firm in our mission to serve and advocate for truth, equity, and intellectual freedom has never been more important.

Focusing specifically on anti-racism efforts within our profession, our paper uses our recently introduced striving towards anti-racism (STAR) model (Cooke and Williams, under review) to examine geographies of racism in the United States. Our paper compares how geographic differences—everything from "Midwest nice" to "Southern hospitality" to "New England progressive whiteness"—reflect and reinforce existing structures of racism in the US. The 2024 election has created a US landscape that promotes and rewards racism in a variety of ways based on geography. Our essay interrogates this phenomenon by examining regional manifestations of racism through a thematic lens. We explore how the STAR model illustrates the geographic dimensions of racism and how individuals may feel out of place within these contexts. This approach highlights the contradictions and connections among different regional expressions of racial tension, revealing how they both shape and are shaped by the political landscape of the US. We build on this analysis by considering how the STAR model informs the library and information science (LIS) profession, specifically by encouraging both reflection on and action as a result of a deeper understanding of how regional and cultural biases influence library practices, policies, and user experiences. We conclude by suggesting individual, regional, and broader implications of this discussion. By applying this framework, LIS professionals can better understand and address how geographic and cultural contexts perpetuate racism within communities.

The Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS Model

The Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS Model (Cooke and Williams, under review) draws inspiration from the Competent Humility Model (CHM) developed by Cooke (2025). The CHM integrates the principles of cultural competence and cultural humility and represents an ongoing, reflective journey of understanding, appreciating, and learning about diverse cultures and identities. Furthermore, the model transforms that understanding into meaningful action and advocacy through that journey. Like the CHM, the STAR model emphasizes that individuals may exist within a specific category, transition to another category, or find themselves in between. This process is continuous, nonlinear, and often uncomfortable, with the goal of fostering growth, advocacy, and action. Rather than following a fixed, linear progression, the model allows for dynamic movement across and within its categories, reflecting the fluid and context-dependent nature of the journey. The STAR model identifies six core categories (fig. 1):

- Strategic Harm is the willingness to do harm to others who are different from you and/or disagree with you if the figurative and/or literal price is right.
- Defiance and White Victimhood plays on the notion of reverse racism, where white people claim disadvantages because their *advantages* and privilege related to economics, class, and other characteristics are called into question and critically examined. Defiance and white victimhood are at the heart of the current political hellscape discussed earlier.
- Non-strategic Harm describes those who do not knowingly or purposefully engage in harmful behaviors (strategic harm) but reap the benefits of their priv-

ilege and power and that of other white people without considering or speaking out against the impact of said harm.

- Emergent Awareness and Growth occur when new cultural knowledge is acquired but is not yet acted upon.

- Allyship is "when a person of privilege works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalized group of people to help take down the systems that challenge that group's basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society" (Dickenson 2021). Allyship is situational, not necessarily a way of life.

- In contrast to an ally, an Accomplice is someone who uses the power and privilege they hold to challenge the systems and structures that oppress marginalized individuals or groups, often *risking* their time; physical, financial, or mental comfort; or social or professional position in the process. Being an accomplice is less situational and is a way of life.

Figure 1. Striving Towards Anti-Racism (STAR) in LIS model.
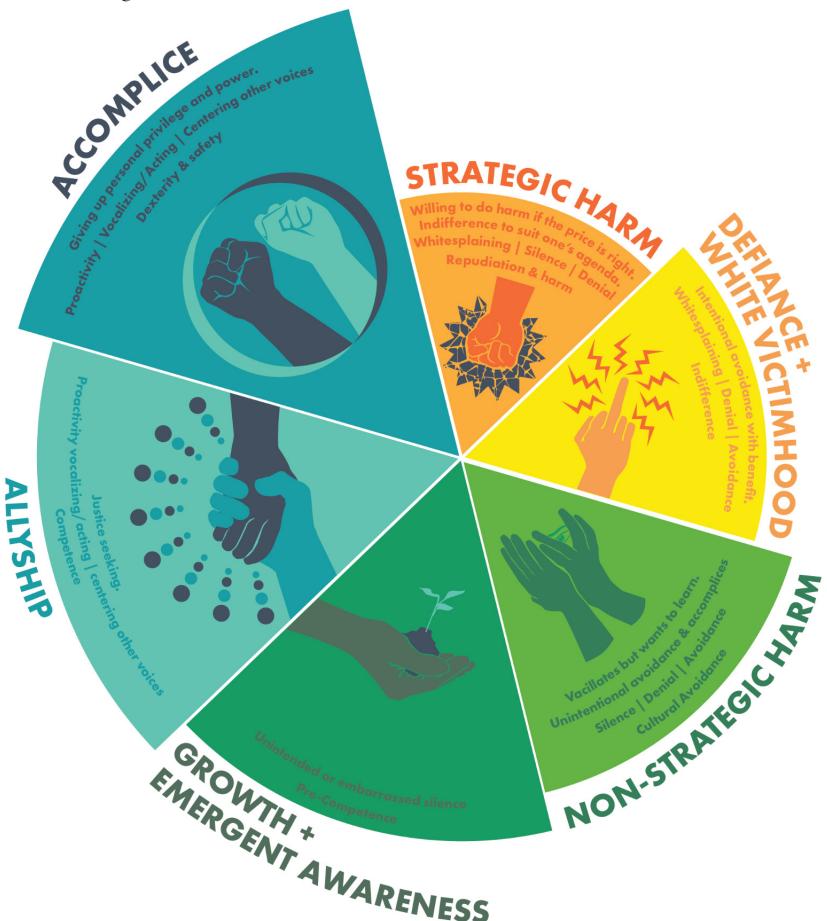
The Current Political Hellscape

On November 5, 2024, the United States reelected Donald Trump, a convicted felon and adjudicated sexual abuser, to a second presidential term. This development has catalyzed a new surge in anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion executive orders, related sentiment, and a marked increase in hate crimes reported across various states nationwide. Additionally, these election results have significant implications for the future of libraries and library professionals in the United States. Libraries faced legislative attacks, book bans, and violence even before the election—postelection, these are more rampant than ever before. As Albanese (2024) pointed out, voters "elected many politicians who have proposed defunding libraries and have targeted library workers." Trump's executive order "ending radical and wasteful government DEI programs and preferencing" ordered government offices to "terminate, to the maximum extent allowed by law, all DEI, DEIA, and 'environmental justice' offices and positions (including but not limited to 'Chief Diversity Officer' positions); all 'equity action plans,' 'equity' actions, initiatives, or programs, 'equity-related' grants or contracts; and all DEI or DEIA performance requirements for employees, contractors, or grantees" (Whitehouse. gov 2025). Many federal agencies, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), have been decimated, not just in terms of their DEIA efforts but their existence as a whole. Similarly, as companies like Meta, Google, and Target roll back fact-checking and abandon EDI programs, we see an outward shift toward oppressing marginalized people to appease this new regime. In response to the election, the American Library Association (ALA) made a postelection statement reaffirming its commitment to intellectual freedom, access to information, and its core values and released a tool kit to help professionals "Show Up for Our Libraries" (2024). However, within the field, everything from microaggressions to blatant and continual racism is common, and the recent election only emboldens racist behaviors within the field (LIS Microaggressions 2025). The field continues to be predominantly white: In 2023, only 7 percent of all librarians identified as Black/African American, and 11 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino of any race (Department for Professional Employees 2024). Beyond statements reaffirming values comes a need for us as professionals to respond, particularly related to anti-racism. How can we counter this oppression and the resulting challenges to our values, funding, and, ultimately, our existence as a profession?

We posit approaching anti-racism efforts within library and information science (LIS) by examining how racism emerges and varies, especially postelection, in regions throughout the United States. The map below breaks the country into four regions, including the West, Midwest, South, and Northeast (fig. 2). While we approach this paper assuming these four geographic regions, we recognize that nuances exist and that some areas may operate more similarly to regions in which they aren't categorized (for example, southern Illinois may align more with the South, but Illinois as a whole is categorized as Midwest). While recognizing that these are broadly defined regions, this typology and characterization can be useful to tailor approaches to anti-racism efforts using the STAR model.

Figure 2. Map of 4 regions of the United States ("Regions of the United States" 2022).
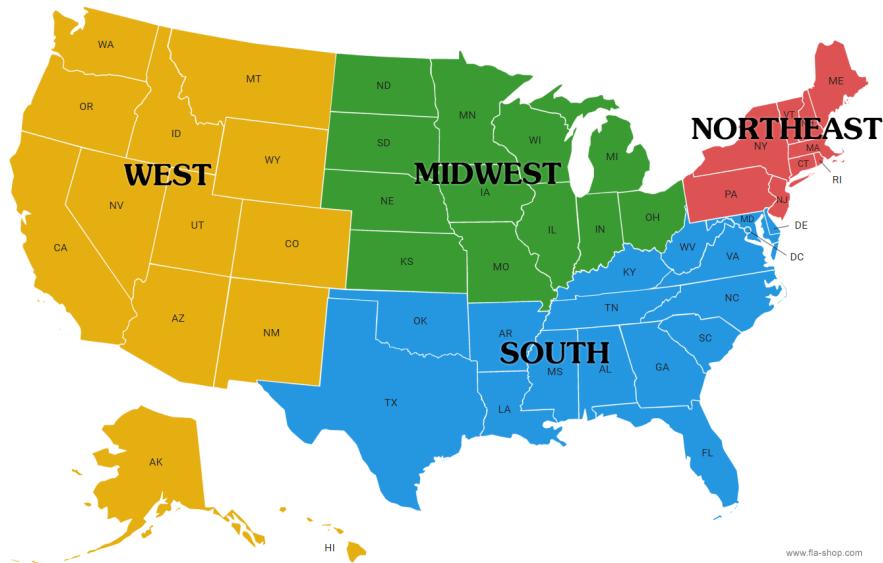
In the subsequent sections, we work to map how racism operates in these four regions. It is worth noting that each of these regions is culturally rooted in a kind of nostalgia from which racism emerges. As Hopkins (2004) asserts, "[n]ostalgia distorts the past by idealizing it," covering over unpleasant or shameful memories, and this idealization has "moral consequences" (20). In the western United States, the region is perceived as a "bastion of liberalism" and democratic values (Williams 2021). This form of nostalgia, combined with the comforts of crushing whiteness for white people unwilling to address racism, characterizes the West and operates as a blanket permission slip for denial of racism in the region. The Midwest pairs colorblindness and erasure with a nostalgic embrace of "American values," constructing an idyllic, predominantly white regional identity that marginalizes diversity and denies the existence of racism. The South relies on charm and chivalry to obscure a racist legacy. Finally, the Northeast's nostalgia for colonialism celebrates American values and its history of slavery and colonization. Overall, this nostalgia functions as a sentimental and misleading story that shapes collective memory and the hellscape that is our present.

> White Americans have fostered techniques, such as false narratives that coerce others and themselves to remember the façade of manipulated historical events, all the while slowly forgetting or refusing to acknowledge the truth of the past. This is how the American collective memory functions, ebbing and flowing with events that have their meaning either altered or forgotten altogether. (Szczesiul 2017, 7)

We comfort illusion over the dark truths of racism, and the selective remembrance that emerges as a result of this nostalgia allows history not just to be rewritten but also forgotten.

Mapping Inequality: Tracing Regional Manifestations of Racism in Scholarship

While research specifically addressing the intersections of geographies, racism, and library and information science (LIS) remains sparse, adjacent disciplines offer a rich body of scholarship that examines how racism and whiteness manifest geographically. This literature gives attention to regional narratives, behaviors, and functions of whiteness and racism throughout the United States. The scholarship considered here spans education, psychology, sociology, and physiological anthropology and provides significant implications for the application of our STAR model in various regions throughout the United States.

Racism Everywhere: Regional and Cultural Geography

When considering how racism manifests geographically throughout the United States, we must first confront the reality that, unfortunately, racism is everywhere; that's just a fact. But it can manifest in different ways, in different places, around the world and across the United States. Racism is "in the air we breathe" (Woody 2023, 983). In order to interrogate racism in the smaller—and not-so-small—corners of the US, we must first look at the bigger picture, the larger context(s) that shape racism.

> Any meaningful comparison of mean levels across groups must take into account the range of variation within groups. In particular, cross-cultural comparisons must avoid … the uniformity assumption. That fallacy was at the heart of the classic but discredited concept of the modal personality, which assumed that all members of a culture had internalized the same ethos and thus shared the same distinctive personality. (Allik and McCrae 2004, 17)

All groups have intracultural variation in the form of subgroups that may show distinctive personality traits based on sex, age, social class, religion, etc. (the subgroup's culture). In simpler terms, while the United States endures systemic racism, that racism may be demonstrated in different ways in different places by different groups. Traits are further molded by people's worldviews and self-views, which are how people perceive and interact with the world.

> World-views, collective, and/or group personalities are how we are socialized; they are, taught by society for the purpose of maintaining its own standards are social values, concepts to which we attach the terms good or bad, right or wrong. They can also be defined as moral scruples, the basis for how we react to social situations. (Campbell 1968, 753)

Self-view, further derived from worldview, encompasses how an individual moves within the world. Wallace (1961) refers to this as a mental map or mazeway. A mazeway is a person's "total experience, his private picture of the world" (Campbell 1968, 750). A person's mazeway consists of their outlooks on life, "many of which he does not perceive as being his"

because of cultural and societal socialization. The person "interprets his daily experience with himself and with others; it is in terms of these attitudes that he evaluates his ability to cope with such experiences. These character traits not only determine how he sees the world but also how he responds to it" (750). A mazeway is to the individual what culture is to a group.

Race takes place, or permeates place, regardless of region. It is clear that regardless of place, people of color feel out of place, alone, underrepresented, and emotionally crushed by racism. Woody's (2023) interview study highlighted the experiences of one Black woman, a transplant from the South who had moved to Portland, Oregon. In comparing her experiences, she likened the Pacific Northwest to the underground railroad in the sense that one has to find the right channels and groups to find community. She contrasted this to her experiences in the South, where she was able to ask casual questions to get to know people and then more quickly became part of the community. These different feelings about the two places were both a result of racialized experiences she had felt, but they manifested very differently.

Additionally, it seems that all regions share a cultural dynamic where individuals may present themselves as liberal, progressive, and socially conscious. However, they struggle to confront the ingrained realities of white supremacy within their communities and themselves, often refusing to see it entirely. Articles addressing all regions describe a superficial friendliness and outward commitment to progressive ideals, which mask a deeper discomfort or resistance to self-examination regarding race and privilege. Whether it's colorblindness in the Midwest or defensiveness in New England, the result is that people of color feel alienated or dismissed, and oppressors face tensions when attempting to align their self-professed values with meaningful self-awareness and action against systemic racism.

"Midwest Nice": The Polite Facade of Whiteness and Racism

During a live recording of "Today, Explained" at South by Southwest, Tim Walz commented that "the racism is quieter, but meaner here. And that [breaks] my heart." This quiet racism can be attributed to a phenomenon referred to as "Midwest nice." Midwest nice encompasses the way in which whiteness perpetuates systemic racism through white innocence and victimhood. Midwest nice, or Minnesota nice, refers to a behavior where people go out of their way to be helpful, polite, and nonconfrontational, which can come off as passive or overly deferential with the goal of making others feel welcome (Dictionary.com 2024). This includes both white guilt and microaggressions that, while often subtle, reinforce exclusion and inequity. The Midwest embraces colorblindness by dismissing the realities of structural racism by framing racism as an individual responsibility where one's outcomes are the result of personal failures or poor decisions.

Much of the scholarship examining racism and education centers on the intersections of regional social norms, whiteness, and education, particularly within K–12 contexts in the Midwestern United States. Within the education literature are several themes, including the use of Midwestern niceness as a tool to obscure racism and uphold white supremacy, experiences of racialized educators, and efforts to construct anti-racist counternarratives and pedagogy.

Baker et al. (2024) provide a definition of Midwest nice, explaining that it is "the manifestation of pleasantries, in earnest or not, that attempts to negate, redirect, or mask difficult conversations or issues and/or avoid confrontations altogether. This definition of Midwest Nice explains how Midwesterners may engage or avoid controversial, complex issues, such as systemic racism, whiteness, and White fragility" (2). These "pleasantries" are not so pleas-

ant—they not only obscure racism but encourage it. Baker et al. (2024) further describe Midwest nice as "a race-evasive version of social and political politeness that only seems harmless," situating it within education by demonstrating how it perpetuates silence around systemic racism and white fragility (2). These work together, ensuring that white supremacy is maintained as a Midwestern value that guides K–12 education. Similarly, Vlach et al. (2022) argue that this veneer of civility derails equity initiatives in schools by "chilling hotly contested issues" and reinforcing whiteness (7).

Midwest nice also supports the idea of *public civility*, often framed positively as a concept describing social norms of respect, politeness, empathy, active listening, and decorum when interacting in public spaces (Washington 2024). Unfortunately, the public civility associated with Midwest niceness prioritizes surface-level politeness over substantive engagement and can suppress discussions about racism, framing such conversations as impolite, divisive, or inappropriate. Building on this idea, Drake and Rodriguez (2022) explain ways in which this regional culture creates barriers to anti-racism efforts, explaining that niceness uses public civility to prioritize comfort over disruption, thereby sustaining white mediocrity and villainy. As a result, microaggressions, implicit biases, and blatant racism persist unchallenged in this environment because anyone who speaks out risks being labeled disruptive or uncivil. They further highlight how whiteness is normalized in K–12 education. By maintaining "polite" discourse, one is also able to maintain the status quo, and "ineffective equity and diversity initiatives may be the result of Midwestern educational niceness" (Drake and Rodriguez 2024, 11).

Other scholars note the role of white fragility in maintaining Midwest niceness within education. As White et al. (2024) note, white fragility provides a "mantle of niceness" through which "we have become socialized to believe that discussions about race are impolite, unfair, or even offensive" (6). After describing the resistance they've faced as educators working to create more anti-racist pedagogy, the authors offer concrete recommendations for teachers seeking to decenter whiteness and challenge white liberalism. Furthermore, Miller (2024) critiques the intertwined roles of whiteness and niceness, explaining that both "frame racism as a problem of individual bias and bigotry" rather than a systemic one (3). This allows white individuals to maintain a sense of comfort and innocence while evading accountability for perpetuating racial inequities. Building on this, scholars such as Kenyon (2022) argue that we need to shift from "safe spaces" to "courageous spaces" in addressing whiteness in schools. Dismantling the "nice white lady box" that encapsulates many white educators in the Midwest is a vital step in engaging in more critical and transformative practices (Kenyon 2022). Midwest nice in K–12 education is designed to ensure public civility, white innocence, and white supremacy persist by positing racism as an individual, uncomfortable issue that needs to be erased rather than challenged.

Similar to K–12 contexts, educators in higher education encounter systemic racism that is reinforced by the Midwest region. For example, Sharma (2022) documented her experiences as a racialized female professor teaching multicultural education courses at a United States Midwestern university between 2017–19 during Trump's first presidency. She recounted fervor regarding Trump's recent inauguration, outright aggressions and microaggressions, including comments about her appearance and identity, and resistance to her anti-racist pedagogy. Sharma (2022) observed that racialized students were often discounted or silenced in the classroom, despite her efforts to include them and counter white students' beliefs with questions, evidence, and narratives. White students vehemently resisted discussions on systemic inequality by characterizing their white privilege as hard work and poverty

as laziness. Despite her efforts to facilitate dialogues that encouraged introspection on systemic and blatant racism and their cultural manifestations, she faced many challenges.

Sharma's reflection highlights how a region like the Midwest can influence how students respond to anti-racist pedagogy. Alderman (2021) challenges us to ask what a region is, explaining that "regions play a central role within popular and academic understandings of racial differences and identities and regional story-telling is envisioned as a way of bringing attention to the regional context of many popularly held ideas about race and racism" (187). Understanding how race takes place—for example, looking at erasure, how tools like *The Green Book* help racialized people navigate geographies, and the role of regional storytelling—can help us counter racism. Teaching nonracism or ignoring racism altogether may be common in the Midwest, but it's not enough, especially for white educators. The literature on K–12 classrooms and higher education underscores the importance of developing practices that disrupt the comfort of whiteness and foster courageous, anti-racist narratives. This shift requires educators to move beyond politeness and embrace transformative approaches that challenge "long unquestioned and state-sanctioned bodies of regional knowledge and [expose] how the power of racism undergirds the very questions we ask and answer about people and places" (Alderman 2021, 191).

Additional studies explore how racism in the Midwest presents in community life, particularly through studies of municipal government and life. Bohonos and Johnson's (2021) ethnographic study of a Midwest municipal government revealed ways in which Midwest niceness led to differential treatment of Black community members, pervasive microaggressions, resistance, and solidarity. The authors highlight the challenges Black community members face when navigating predominantly white spaces to access essential resources while recognizing that "obtaining local government resources often depended on a readiness to endure mistreatment in such spaces" (Harris, 1993, as cited in Bohonos and Johnson, 2021). Often a key department in municipal governments, public libraries are no exception here. While purported as welcoming spaces for all, they are often spaces of mistreatment and microaggressions at best and blatant racism as the norm.

As can be seen through examples of niceness in municipal government, avoiding direct conversations about racism is the mechanism through which it persists. This niceness creates the illusion that treating everyone politely is enough to camouflage racism. In local governments, including libraries, this mindset can lead to passive inclusion efforts that fail to address barriers marginalized communities face, such as a lack of diverse collections or unwelcoming environments. Surface-level kindness without evaluating policies, programming, and representation just creates spaces for racism to thrive.

New England's [Not] Nice: Where Kindness Meets Complacent Racism

It is considered a notoriously liberal region with kind, down-to-earth, progressive people and values. However, as a region, New England relies on a form of "progressive whiteness" that masks racism. The history of racism in New England runs deep. Smith's (2023) *Harvard Political Review* piece examined the racist roots of Boston's top universities and the role of the city as a hub of slavery in the 1600s. Unlike the South, where enslaved people formed a majority population, slavery in Boston was a part of the ingrained structural racism of the area and a "constant but unnoticeable truth" to outsiders (2). This visibility versus invisibility reflects harm that has been centuries in the making, a dynamic rooted in complacency that relies on an unwillingness to challenge racism. The area clings to an idealized self-image

of progressivism, reflecting the persisting "strangeness" of racism in politically blue areas, where its existence seems contradictory yet undeniably pervasive. Additionally, holding on to positive presentations of its colonial and racist history is used as a strategy to eschew challenges to this progressive whiteness. It is easy to claim to be anti-racist when you do not acknowledge the prevailing whiteness of your community or the contemporary segregation underlying it. By "cropping down" racism in New England and stripping it of its broader context and history, it is more difficult to fully confront (Greer & Reamer 2021). This complacency exists alongside alarming recent developments: White supremacist propaganda activity reached an all-time high in 2022, with a 96 percent increase from 2021. Groups promoting anti-Semitic, racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-LGBTQ+ messages have targeted spaces like bookstores, libraries, theaters, shelters, and hospitals across Boston, Cambridge, Providence, and Portsmouth (Anti-Defamation League 2023).

While there is limited scholarship examining racism in New England, recent media coverage highlights the ways in which existing in this region is fraught for people of color, many of whom navigate a sense of displacement. For example, the narrative of a Massachusetts woman who moved to northern New Hampshire and felt like a perpetual tourist in her community illustrates the hostility faced by people of color in the region (Beaupre 2011). She was not only ignored but also targeted—once, a white man flicked a cigarette at her while she was visibly pregnant. Beaupre described racism in the area as a chronic condition: treatable but incurable, flaring up unexpectedly and eventually becoming something that manages the individual. She also compared her experiences living in the South to living in New England. For her, the delineated racial lines in the South offered some small sense of belonging and anonymity that feels absent to her in New England, where whiteness dominates and people of color often feel out of place.

Others have faced attempts to dismiss or silence their lived experiences, for example, a Black man from Fall River, Massachusetts, who faced blatant racism by a "friend" who told him that white privilege has somehow been "taken away." Rather than addressing the issues he raised, he was labeled the problem for recounting his experiences with racism. He argued that it is important to "remain faithful to the truths about racism in our world, with no need for fillers or buffers" (Greer & Reamer 2021, 1). These incidents highlight the tension between New England's self-proclaimed progressivism and its reality as a predominantly white space that embraces complacency over meaningful change. The region's approach to social justice often centers on discussions of how to be "more progressive" while upholding white supremacy.

In contrast to Midwest Nice, New England is characterized by a pervasive, outwardly confrontational attitude that results in complacency. Confrontations have no meaning and go nowhere to allow individuals to refuse accountability. There is always someone else to blame for racism, even when that scapegoat is the person of color. Thus, on the one hand, in the Midwest, there is a failure to confront anything, and in New England, there is the leveraging of conflict as a smoke screen to hide complacency and lack of accountability.

Southern Hospitality? How About Southern Hostility!

"Southern hospitality, whether real or perceived, is a cultural stereotype tied to the Southern region of the United States" (Neill 2023, i), and "regions are largely rhetorical creations, shaped by the symbols that surround these places – the words that describe the area, the stories that are told, the images that are connected to the region." And in the Southern

United States, that rhetorical creation is Southern Hospitality (SoH). The South is known for its genteel citizens, porch sitting with cocktails, good food, and lots of friendly visits with family and friends. SoH depicts "a supportive environment; if we care for others, offer help and support, create a friendly and inviting atmosphere, give generously to strangers and friends alike, we open doors for others" (Atkins-Sayre 2023, 396). While this depiction is not untrue or disagreeable, it has become a single, contradictory, and stereotypical story, one that has been weaponized and used to erase history. As scholar Anjali Vats (2015) argues, SoH privileges a "romanticized view of the region," which ignores and sugarcoats "Southern hospitality's antebellum roots" and the role of capitalism, racism, and slavery.

> The problem with this stereotype of the South is that the familiarity of the construct eclipses its historical reliance on racial, economic, and gendered structures, and these structures have rendered Southern culture hypocritically exclusive, hostile to people whose embodiment deviates from the normative white, male, heterosexual, Christian subject. This stereotyped view of culture is rooted in a selective way of remembering the past, consequential for our present and our future. Appeals to Southern hospitality are often appeals to racial, economic, and gendered hierarchies with an air of nostalgia for the times when these hierarchies were more pronounced. The concept might seem benign, but it is laden with racist, classist, and sexist implications. (Ritter-Conn 2019, 278)

Neill (2023) concurs in his discussion of Southern hospitality actually being Southern *hostility*; they suggest that SoH can and is used to disguise racism, facilitate public posturing, and provide the "blurred lines" between genuine and performative actions (1). He says that "through White performance of hospitality, allyship, and victimization, individuals are able to act as if they have good intentions for Black White relations yet conceal their true intentions of White solidarity and power perpetuation" (2). SoH also relies on politeness, honor, and hierarchy (Cohen et al. 1999); that socialization, that honor must be defended and fought for, easily opens the door for violence and other measures used against interlopers and outsiders that threaten status and privilege. "Historically considered, then, southern hospitality has functioned primarily as a white mythology, produced by whites, directed to a white audience, and invested in the project of maintaining white status and privilege" (7). Southern Hostility is an extreme, but very real, antithesis to SoH.

Southern hospitality is a mask and a myth, especially within libraries and librarianship. Unmasking the myth reveals a terrifying truth regarding racism in the Southern United States. For example, Freeman (2024) shares his experiences as a Black librarian at the University of North Carolina, drawing parallels between civil rights activists and attempts to desegregate libraries and the realities of today's efforts to distort, censor, and weaponize information as a tool for oppression. Similarly, recent attacks on librarians center on banning books, including those focused on anti-racism. In 2023–24, 44 percent of banned books featured people and characters of color, and Florida has the most instances of book banning in the country (PEN America 2025).

West Coast Chill, "California Casual," or "Pacific Northwest Friendly"

In October 2024, library staff and community members responded to a hate crime in which a mural celebrating community diversity was defaced using racist slurs and white supremacist symbols at the South Tacoma branch of the Tacoma Public Library. City council member Jamika Scott stated, "We cannot deny the fact that racism continues to plague our community, just as it does in cities across our country" (Bsanti 2024). There is a dearth of research examining how racism manifests geographically on the West Coast, but one may hear phrases such as "West Coast chill," "California casual," or "Pacific Northwest friendly" to describe regional expressions of friendliness. On the surface, these terms sound like Midwest nice and are quite similar in many ways. However, a couple of articles have characterized the nuanced expressions of racism in the Western United States using phrases such as *ambient racism, hostile shores,* and *bastions of white supremacist visions*. As Camhi (2020) explains, Oregon was founded to center whiteness, and racist language from its constitution was not removed until 2002, although 30 percent of voters voted to keep that language. From its original Black exclusion laws of 1844, as described by Taylor (1982), to Crawford's (1994) book describing the Northwest Imperative, a separatist movement for white supremacists, it is clear that the West, and particularly the Northwest, have a long history of racism. Both the physical and sociopolitical infrastructure of the West (from the railroad to the government) were built, in addition to Irish immigrants, largely by people of color, including Indigenous people, Chinese immigrants, and slaves, but not *for* them (Brice 2023). Almost a century later, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II exemplifies how pro-American racist discourse and physical structures of racism were enforced, paralleling social and institutional systems that marginalized these communities then and perpetuates anti-Asian sentiment in this region now (Nagata, Kim, and Wu 2019). The West is characterized by the intersection of economic, physical, and social infrastructures in perpetuating racism. Today, people of color in the West experience "benevolent racism" and often feel "regarded as abstractions in the racial justice discourse" (Murphy and Jones 2024).

Woody (2023) underscores the idea that regional racial dynamics intersect with individual experiences, explaining that the racialized production of space creates meaning. The author also introduces the concept of *ambient racism,* a concept that links structural racism and the emotional dimensions of racism by "illustrating how racial structures are felt by racially subordinated groups" (981). Woody interviewed forty Portlanders of color to gain a deeper understanding of what it feels like to work and live in the whitest city in the United States with a population of over 500,000 people and to explore what it means for a place to *feel* racist. The author argues that "subtly isolating and exclusionary characteristics are 'baked into' the culture, built environment, and daily interactions in (seemingly progressive) majority white contexts" (982). Jen, a Korean American woman, compared her experiences with ambient racism in Portland to that feeling "when you're in a bar or in a building and you're like, this place is not earthquake proof" in the sense that "this place is full of white people and if anything happened to me, like harassment, discrimination," no one will help (Woody 2023, 987). That inability to count on anyone to help results in a feeling of being trapped, and "there is just no getting out of the situation" (ibid). The West Coast chill is chilling, indeed: People of color must strategically move through public spaces, pass when possible to come off as less of a threat in predominantly white spaces, and perform "likeability" for white people by catering to white norms (Woody 2023).

From Models to Mazes: Navigating Tactics and Crafting Counterstories to Strive Toward Anti-Racism in LIS

After first outlining the STAR model and then examining how racism manifests across various geographical regions in the United States, we will now explore the connections between these concepts and discuss potential strategies we can implement within LIS to strive toward anti-racism. The STAR model was designed with the individual in mind but also links more broadly to manifestations of racism across geographies.

The STAR model, while widely applicable across the four geographic regions we have described here in this essay, does provide some insight into some of the patterns of racism we see within them. For example, the Southern hostility of the South region maps well onto the strategic harm category of the STAR model. One instance of this can be seen in Texas, which recently banned *Colonization and the Wampanoag Story* by Linda Coombs while determining whether to categorize the book as fiction or nonfiction, ultimately deciding it was fiction (Grunau 2024). Advocates of intellectual freedom and the author spoke out against the decision, arguing that it was an accurate, fact-checked, historical account written by a historian and author from the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah. The decision here to ban the book first, then later erase this history of colonization by labeling it as fiction, is strategically harmful and aligns well with the category of the STAR model. On a more acute level, racism actively impacts employment and people's ability to live and thrive. In Brannon (2025), Aliyah Jones (a Black woman) describes her experience trying to find a job on the LinkedIn website. She was told that she didn't fit the corporate image. As an experiment, she changed the *demographics* of her profile, not the content—she became a blonde, blue-eyed white woman named Emily— and suddenly, she was inundated with messages and job leads. Aliyah's experience coincides with previous studies about employment inequality (Gerdeman 2017; Stockstill & Carson 2022). In the next sections, we discuss ways to challenge racism, both individually and within our communities, and then discuss how the STAR model can help guide us in these efforts.

Mazeways: Navigating Our Assumptions to Chart a New Path

Wallace (1961) posits that mazeways are to the individual what culture is to the group; they are the personal schemas or "mental maps" people use to navigate through the world (750). Mazeways are conditioned by a person's environment and take on the characteristics of the larger culture(s) around them—there is a certain level of groupthink involved in mazeway development. Mazeways are also influenced by place and/or regional characteristics and beliefs about privilege and racism that can manifest in how people regard those who are different from them. Hence, racism and discrimination look different in the Northeastern United States than they do in the Southwest because the mazeways of the individuals in those places reflect the subcultures in which they exist.

The challenging part of a person's mazeway is that it is implicit and entrenched because it is a personal mechanism of control and coping:

> Character structure, or the totality of traits which determine the broad, consistent patterns of man's behavior from one situation to the next. It is according to these outlooks, many of which he does not perceive as being his, that he interprets his daily experience with himself and with others; it is in terms of these attitudes that he evaluates his ability to cope with such experiences. These character traits

not only determine how he sees the world but also how he responds
to it. (750)

Mazeways are not permanently immovable. As people travel and move around geo-
graphically, mazeways are subject to change, and new cultures and norms are experienced.
Education can also reshape and expand mazeways by providing new information and dis-
pelling disinformation and stereotypes; this is one of the goals of the STAR model.

Crafting Counternarratives to Regional Racist Contexts and Structures

As Neill (2023) argues, "White Americans have fostered techniques, such as false nar-
ratives that coerce others and themselves to remember the façade of manipulated historical
events, all the while slowly forgetting or refusing to acknowledge the truth of the past. This
is how the American collective memory functions, ebbing and flowing with events that have
their meaning either altered or forgotten altogether" (7). We have a choice to *reject* false nar-
ratives. We also have a choice to *create* counternarratives that allow us to shape the American
collective memory and future, particularly in relation to libraries and librarianship.

The STAR Model as a Tool for Confronting Racism and Strategizing for a Battle Against Fascism

The STAR model is a useful tool for considering how racism appears in geographic
regions throughout the United States. The model helps us understand old and new behaviors
and trends in racism that are now intensified as a result of the election. The model explains
how we got to this point and that we can learn from some of these broader patterns. We are
unable to stand up against racism if we can't name it. This essay calls attention to and spe-
cifically names racism, and the model provides context, nuance, and language to use moving
forward. It also provides us with coping mechanisms, with the possibility that we can incite
change within our institutions, profession, and communities.

Using the STAR model as a framework provides valuable insight into the social psy-
chology and information behavior displayed by people with privilege. It also helps validate the
lived experiences of racialized people and sees how we are all impacted by racism. The model
gives us a tool by which to ask questions of ourselves, our profession, and scholarship to help
address racism. Although we may not yet be able to anticipate what this new fascist regime
will bring to the United States, we at least have the tools necessary to cultivate resilience,
strategically prepare for the challenges that lie ahead, and build our capacity for advocacy and
resistance.

Conclusion

This article introduced us to ways in which racism manifests regionally throughout
the United States, including examples of emboldened racist acts as a result of the election.
From this analysis, we can see that libraries are microcosms: They reflect their communities,
are influenced regionally, and suffer under this new administration. Libraries are embedded
within communities, and they are also embedded within white supremacy. They are at the
heart of racism in many ways. It is, therefore, our responsibility to go beyond saying we think
our community should challenge this new regime. The STAR model gives us a lens to exam-

ine ourselves, our institutions, and our profession more closely and consider the nuanced ways in which racism manifests and undergirds the United States.

While the recent election has cast that long and troubling shadow over the field of librarianship, we are not powerless. When it comes to community engagement, we recognize the power of storytelling as a tool for resistance and community building. As professionals, we must work to intentionally create spaces for crafting and sharing stories that reflect the reality we live in now and the hope we have for a more just and anti-racist future. Additionally, within the profession, we must challenge the use of vocational awe as a mask that conceals the "profession's very real flaws of institutional oppression and exploitation" (Vander Kooy et al. 2022). We have an opportunity to create stories that center truth, confront racism head-on within our institutions and our communities, and work together to dismantle white supremacy. We reject neutrality as complicity and recognize that a future rooted in social justice depends on our courage to create it.

Acknowledgments

References

Albanese, A. 2024. "EveryLibrary Warns That U.S. Election Results Mean More Uncertainty for Libraries." *Publishers Weekly*, November 6. https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/96418-everylibrary-warns-that-u-s-election-results-mean-more-uncertainty-for-libraries.html.

Alderman, D., R. Narro Perez, L. E. Eaves, P. Klein, & S. Muñoz. 2019. "Reflections on Operationalizing an Anti-Racism Pedagogy: Teaching as Regional Storytelling." *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 45 (2): 186–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2019.1661367.

Allik, J., & R. R. McCrae. 2004. "Toward a Geography of Personality Traits: Patterns of Profiles across 36 Cultures." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 35 (1): 13–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022103260382.

American Library Association. 2024. "ALA Vows to Defend Intellectual Freedom and Access to Information Against Political Threats." November 6. https://www.ala.org/news/2024/11/ala-vows-defend-intellectual-freedom-and-access-information-against-political-threats.

American Library Association. 2025. "Show Up for Our Libraries." https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries

Anti-Defamation League. 2023. "White Supremacist Propaganda Incidents Reach an All-Time High in 2022 and Surge in New England." March 9. https://newengland.adl.org/news/white-supremacist-propaganda-incidents-reach-an-all-time-high-in-2022-and-surge-in-new-england/.

Baker, J. S. 2024. "Midwest Nice and Whiteness: Poetic Exploration of Geographical Psychology Influences on Preservice Teachers in the United States." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 139: 104455. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104455.

Bohonos, J. W., & M. Johnson. 2021. "Observing Whiteness and Black Resistance in a Midwestern Municipal Government: An Interracial Ethnography." *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development* 33 (3): 41–51. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20333.

Brice, A. 2023. "They Built the Railroad. But They Were Left Out of the American Story." UC Berkeley News. November 13. https://news.berkeley.edu/2023/11/13/american-railroad/.

Bsanti, P. 2024. "Tacoma Library Mural Showcasing Diversity and Community Targeted with Racist Imagery." *The News Tribune*, October 11. https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article293793389.html.

Camhi, T. 2020. "A Racist History Shows Why Oregon Is Still So White." Oregon Public Broadcasting. June 9. https://www.opb.org/news/article/oregon-white-history-racist-foundations-black-exclusion-laws/.

Campbell, R. D. 1968. Personality as an Element of Regional Geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 58 (4): 748–59. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2561716.

Cohen, D., J. A. Vandello, & S. Puente. 1999. "When You Call Me That, Smile!" How Norms for Politeness, Interaction Styles, and Aggression Work Together in Southern Culture. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62 (3): 257–75. https://doi.org/10.2307/2695863.

Cooke, N. A. 2025. *Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals, 2nd Edition*. ALA Editions/Neal-Schuman USA.

Cooke, N. A., and R. D. Williams. Under review. Chapter 3: "Man, Becky, Bear! Surviving White Mediocrity and Striving Towards Anti-racism in LIS." In *A Critical Look at Information Science and Librarianship in a New Age: Constellation of Insanity*, eds. Wade Bishop, Renate Chancellor, and Joe Sanchez.

Crawford, R., S. L. Gardner, J. Mozzochi, & R. L. Taylor. 1994. *The Northwest Imperative. Documenting a Decade of Hate*. Coalition for Human Dignity.

Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO. 2024. *Library Professionals: Facts, Figures, and Union Membership*, June 18. https://www.dpeaflcio.org/factsheets/library-professionals-facts-and-figures.

Dickenson, S. R. 2021. "What Is Allyship?" National Institutes of Health. Accessed November 24, 2024. https://eeo.nih.gov/the-EDI-pulse-blog/what-allyship

Dictionary.com, "Midwest nice," accessed 2024, https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/midwest-nice/.

Drake, R. D., & G. Rodriguez. 2022. Nice to Whom?: "How Midwestern Niceness Undermines Educational Equity." *Berkeley Review of Education* 12 (1). https://doi.org/10.5070/B812153038.

Fla-Shop.com. 2022. "United States Regions." May 17. https://www.fla-shop.com/resources/us-regions/.

Gerdeman, D. 2017. "Minorities Who 'Whiten' Job Resumes Get More Interviews." *HBS Working Knowledge* 17, May 17. https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/minorities-who-whiten-job-resumes-get-more-interviews.

Greer R., and F. Reamer. 2021. "Truths About Racism." *This I Believe — New England,* The Public's Radio, April 6. https://thepublicsradio.org/episode/this-i-believe-new-england-truths-about-racism/.

Grunau, S. 2024. "Montgomery County Committee Incorrectly Categorized Historical Book as Fiction, Publisher Says." Houston Public Media, October 22. https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/education/books-libraries/2024/10/22/503643/

montgomery-county-committee-incorrectly-categorized-historical-book-as-fiction-publisher-says/.

Hopkins, D. N. 2004. Foreword. In J. Harvey, K. A. Case, & R. H. Gorsline (Eds.), *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*. (pp. vii–x). The Pilgrim Press.

Kenyon, E. 2022. "You Can't Be a Nice White Lady and Do Anti-Racism Work: A Self-Study on Teaching Against Racism." *Studying Teacher Education* 18 (1): 23–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2022.2033970.

LIS Microaggressions. 2025. "Microaggressions in Librarianship: About." https://lismicroaggressions.com/about.

Miller, E. O. 2024. "The (Im)Possibility of Interrupting Midwest Nice in a Predominantly White, Small-Town School District." *Education Sciences* 14 (4): 412. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14040412.

Murphy, P., & V. Jones, V. 2024. "'Hasaan Hates Portland' Humorously Depicts the Benevolent Racism of the Pacific Northwest." KUOW, October 2. https://www.kuow.org/stories/hasaan-hates-portland-humorously-depicts-the-benevolent-racism-of-the-northwest.

Nagata, D. K., J. H. Kim, & K. Wu. 2019. The Japanese American Wartime Incarceration: Examining the Scope of Racial Trauma. *American Psychologist* 74 (1): 36–48. https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000303.

Neill, S. S. 2023. "Bless Your Heart: A Deconstruction of Southern Hostility Disguised as Southern Hospitality and Its Effects on Black Identity in 'Blues for Mister Charlie' and the Vanishing Half." MA thesis, Georgia State University. https://doi.org/10.57709/36396231.

PEN America. 2025. "Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor." https://pen.org/book-bans/.

Ritter-Conn, B. 2019. Guests at Our Own Tables: Privilege, Paradox, and Southern Hospitality. *Review & Expositor* 116 (3): 275–91. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637319867405.

Sharma, M. 2022. "Endemic Racism in Trump's America: A Racialized Female Faculty Member's Experience." *Studying Teacher Education* 18 (1): 5–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/17425964.2022.2057464.

Stockstill, C., & G. Carson. 2022. "Are Lighter-Skinned Tanisha and Jamal Worth More Pay? White People's Gendered Colorism Toward Black Job Applicants with Racialized Names." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45 (5): 896–917. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1900584.

Szczesiul, A. 2017. *The Southern Hospitality Myth: Ethics, Politics, Race, and American Memory.* University of Georgia Press.

Taylor, Q. 1982. "Slaves and Free Men: Blacks in the Oregon Country, 1840-1860." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 83 (2): 153–170. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20613841.

Trump, D. J. 2025. January 20. "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing [Executive Order]." The White House, January 20. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/.

Vander Kooy, S., H. Hill, D. Pawlick-Potts, A. Matthews, & J. Allen. 2022. "A History of Unquestioning Faith: Vocational Awe and the Hope for a Future of 'Bad' Librarianship." *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of CAIS/Actes du congrès annuel de l'ACSI*, August. https://doi.org/10.29173/cais1372.

Vlach, S. K., A. D. James-Gallaway, & B. L. Frieson. 2024. "Nothing Nice About It: Critiquing Midwest Nice in Teacher Education." *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy,* 21 (4): 467–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2022.2136804.

Wallace, A. F. C. 1961. *Culture and Personality.* Random House.

Washington, E. F. 2024. "The Need for Civility in Public Discourse." LinkedIn, May 21. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/need-civility-public-discourse-dr-ella-f-washington-oxree/.

White, K. L., S. Degener, A. Tondreau, et al. 2024. "Nice Girls like Us: Confronting White Liberalism in Teacher Education and Ourselves." *Education Sciences* 14 (6): 610. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14060610.

Williams, B. 2021. "Hostile Shores: Racial Exclusion Laws and the West Coast." *Cardozo Journal of Equal Rights & Social Justice* 28 (3): 559. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3819014.

Woody, A. 2023. "Emotions and Ambient Racism in America's Whitest Big City." *Social Problems* 70 (4): 981–98. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spab074.

Authors

Nicole A. Cooke is the Augusta Baker Endowed Chair and Professor at the University of South Carolina. Her research and teaching interests include human information behavior, critical cultural information literacy, LIS Education, and equity and social justice in librarianship. She is the Founding Editor of ALA Editions/Neal-Schuman's Critical Cultural Information Studies series.

Rachel D. Williams is an assistant professor in the School of Information Science at the University of South Carolina. Her research interests include examining public library services for people in crisis. Williams' work addresses boundary work/boundary management, professionalization social work skills, and social justice. She also leverages virtual reality for understanding and developing training for communication skill development between library workers and patrons.

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

BHARAT MEHRA

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 politicalized 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 italicization 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 (Goad 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 (Paplekaj 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). Spotlighting 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.

References

Ackoff, R. L. 1989. "From Data to Wisdom." *Journal of Applied Systems Analysis* 16: 3–9. https://faculty.ung.edu/kmelton/Documents/DataWisdom.pdf

Alper, H. P. 1991. *Understanding MANTRAS.* New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass.

Allen, J., M. Khader, and A. Rosellini. 2019. "Investigating Wisdom: Call for Research" (poster). *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 56 (1): 599–600. 82nd Annual Meeting of the Association for Information Science & Technology. Melbourne, Australia, October 19–23. https://doi-org.libdata.lib.ua.edu/10.1002/pra2.102open_in_new.

Amar, A. R. 2015. *America's Unwritten Constitution: The Precedents and Principles We Live By.* New York: Basic Books.

Anastaplo, G. 1992. "Amendments to the Constitution of the United States: A Commentary." *Loyola University of Chicago Law Journal* 23 (4), Article 3: 631–865. http://lawecommons.luc.edu/luclj/vol23/iss4/3.

Ansell, A. 2022. "On Calling Donald Trump 'Corrupt.'" In *Corruption and Illiberal Politics in the Trump Era*, edited by D. M. Goldstein and K. Drybread. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Arnsdorf, I. 2024. *Finish What We Started: The MAGA Movement's Ground War to End Democracy.* Hachette, United Kingdom: Little, Brown and Company.

American Library Association. 2015. "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education." https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

Austad, J. A. 2024. *The (Dis)Information Age: From Post-Truth to Post-Postmodernism* (Series in Sociology). Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.

Bang, H. P. 2023. "Donald J. Trump's Politics: A Mix of European Populism and Athenian Democracy: On Trump 'Backward' and 'Forward.'" In *U.S. Democracy in Danger: The American Political System Under Assault* (Springer Studies on Populism, Identity Politics and Social Justice), edited by A. Akande. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36099-2_24.

Birdi, B., K. Wilson, and J. Cocker. 2008. "The Public Library, Exclusion and Empathy." *Library Review* 57 (8): 576–92.

Blokdyk, G. 2024. *The Operational Excellence Library: Mastering Value Proposition Design.* Toronto, ON, Canada: 5STARCooks.

Brissett, A., and D. Moronta. 2022. *Practicing Social Justice in Libraries* (Routledge Guides to Practice in Libraries, Archives and Information Science). Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Buckland, M. K. 1991. "Information as Thing." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42 (5): 351–60. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-4571(199106)42:5<351::AID-ASI5>3.0.CO;2-3.

Buschman, J. 2016. "On the Political Nature of Library Leadership." *The Political Librarian* 2 (1). https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8510.

Buschman, J. 2017. "The Library in the Life of the Public: Implications of a Neoliberal Age." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (1): 55–70. https://doi.org/10.1086/689314.

Buschman, J. 2024. "Democracy: A Modern Definition for the Library Field." *Journal of Documentation* 80 (6): 1384–95. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-01-2024-0021.

Buschman, J., and D. A. Warner. 2016. "On Community, Justice, and Libraries." *The Library Quarterly* 86 (1): 10–24. https://doi.org/10.1086/684146.

Chomsky, N. 1999. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order.* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Chrastka, J., and P. "PC" Sweeney. 2019. *Before the Ballot: Building Political Support for Library Funding.* Chicago, IL: ALA Neal Schuman.

Clements, R. J. 2017. "Trump's 'Big-League' Tax Reform: Assessing the Impact of Corporate Tax Changes." *Michigan Business & Entrepreneurial Law Review* 7 (1): 1–48. https://doi.org/10.36639/mbelr.7.1.trumps.

Cole, D., and M. W. Stinnett. 2017. *Rules for Resistance: Advice from Around the Globe for the Age of Trump* (Fearless Books for Perilous Times). New York: The New Press.

Conway, G. 2019. "Foreward." In *The Cult of Trump: A Leading Cult Expert Explains How the President Uses Mind Control*, edited by S. Hassan, vii-viii. New York: First Free Press.

Cortez, N. 2019. "Information Mischief Under the Trump Administration." *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 94 (2): 315–48. https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/cklawreview/vol94/iss2/5.

Dandolov, P. 2024. "The Importance of White Identity When It Comes to Trumpism – A Reconsideration?" *KNOWLEDGE - International Journal* 67 (1): 229–34. https://ikm.mk/ojs/index.php/kij/article/view/7181.

Denton, Jr., R. E., and B. Voth. 2017. *Social Fragmentation and the Decline of American Democracy: The End of the Social Contract.* Hampshire, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

DeSilver, D. 2016. "Trump's Victory Another Example of How Electoral College Wins Are Bigger than Popular Vote Ones." Pew Research Center: Short Reads, December 20. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/12/20/why-electoral-college-landslides-are-easier-to-win-than-popular-vote-ones/.

Diamond, L. J. 1990. "Three Paradoxes of Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 1 (3): 48–60. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.1990.0047.

DiMaggio, A. R. 2019. *Political Power in America: Class Conflict and the Subversion of Democracy.* New York: SUNY Press.

DiResta, A. E. 2024. "The Expected Impact of the Election and Republican Control of Congress on the FTC." *Holland & Knight Alert*, November 19. https://www.hklaw.com/en/insights/publications/2024/11/the-impact-of-election-and-republican-control-of-congress-on-ftc.

Douglass, C. L. 2022. "The Quest for i-Literacy: Identifying and Addressing Gaps in Information Literacy Education in Information Science Undergraduate Programs." PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park. ProQuest (29397991).

Doyle, K., and V. Hillyard. 2025. "Trump Suggests He Could Use Military Force to Acquire Panama Canal and Greenland and 'Economic Force' to Annex Canada." *NBC News*, January 7. https://nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-suggests-use-military-force-acquire-panama-canal-greenland-econo-rcna186610.

Drabinski, E. 2024. "Facing Cuts Likely to Worsen Under Trump, Academic Librarians Urgently Organize." *Truthout* (Op-Ed: Education & Youth), November 17. https://truthout.org/articles/facing-cuts-likely-to-worsen-under-trump-academic-librarians-urgently-organize/.

Drutman, L. 2020. *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Durrani S. 2008. *Information and Liberation: Writings on the Politics of Information and Librarianship.* Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press.

Enns, P. K., J. Colner, A. Kumar, and J. Lagodny. 2024. "Understanding Biden's Exit and the 2024 Election: The State Presidential Approval/State Economy Model." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096524000994.

Entman, R. M. 1989. *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Epstein, R. A. 2011. "Direct Democracy: Government of the People, by the People, and for the People?" *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34 (3): 819–26. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2260&context=journal_articles.

Eskridge, W. N., and S. Levinson. 1998. *Constitutional Stupidities, Constitutional Tragedies.* New York: New York University Press.

Fallows, J. 2011. *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Feuerstein, G. 2003. *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga.* Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

Fisher, K. E., and C. M. Naumer. 2006. "Information Grounds: Theoretical Basis and Empirical Findings on Information Flow in Social Settings." In *New Directions in Human Information Behavior* (Information Science and Knowledge Management, Vol. 8) edited by A. Spink and C. Cole, 93–111. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3670-1_6.

Frances, S. 2020. *Libraries amid Protest: Books, Organizing, and Global Activism* (Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book). Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Fritz, C. G. 2004. "Fallacies of American Constitutionalism." *Rutgers Law Journal* 35 (4): 1327–69.

Froehlich, T. J. 2022. "American Democracy Under Siege: Business as Usual in Libraries?" *Journal of Information Ethics* 31 (2): 118–37.

Garry, P. 2007. *An Entrenched Legacy: How the New Deal Constitutional Revolution Continues to Shape the Role of the Supreme Court*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Gehl, K. M., and M. E. Porter. 2020. *The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Gerston, L. N. 2023. *Trumpism, Bigotry, and the Threat to American Democracy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Goad, R. J. 2019. "Founding Fathers: Constitutive Rhetoric and Discourses of Masculinity." PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin. http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/5268.

Hall, K., D. M. Goldstein, and M. B. Ingram. 2016. "The Hands of Donald Trump: Entertainment, Gesture, Spectacle." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (2): 71–100. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau6.2.009.

Hanell, F., H. Carlsson, and L. Engström. 2023. "The Public Library as a Political Symbol: A Post-political Reading of the Demise of the Consensus-Model in Swedish Cultural Policy." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 30 (7): 899–913. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2023.2289174.

Jones, N. H. 2020. "Our Democracy's Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written. Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True." In *The Best American Magazine Writing 2020*, edited by S. Holt. New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/holt19801-018.

Hayden, J. R. 2024. *A History of Disinformation in the U.S.* New York: Routledge.

Hennen, Jr., T. J., and P. Czapla. 2005. "Stand Up for Libraries." *American Libraries* 36 (6): 46–50. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25649609.

Higdon, N., and M. Huff. 2019. *United States of Distraction: Media Manipulation in Post-Truth America (And What Can We Do About It).* San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books.

House Committee on Oversight and Accountability Democrats. 2024. *Room Rates May Vary: How Donald Trump Violated the Constitution by Fleecing Taxpayers with Unlawful and Exhorbitant Hotel Charges: A Glimpse Into President Trump's Domestic Emoluments Rackets and Pay-to-Play Schemes.* Stat Reports, October 18. https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/

democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-10-18COA-DEM-Staff-Report-Domestic-Emoluments.pdf.

Hylton, K. 2020. "Black Lives Matter in Sport . . . ?" *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion* 40 (1): 41–8. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-07-2020-0185.

Iannuzzi, P. 2000. "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education." *Community and Junior College Libraries* 9 (4): 63–7. https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib_articles/332.

Jaeger, P. T., U. Gorham, J. C. Bertot, and L. C. Sarin. 2014. *Public Libraries, Public Policies, and Political Processes: Serving and Transforming Communities in Times of Economic and Political Constraint.* Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jaeger, P. T., U. Gorham, U., L. C. Sarin, and J. C. Bertot. 2013. "Libraries, Policy, and Politics in a Democracy: Four Historical Epochs." *The Library Quarterly* 83 (2): 166–181. https://doi.org/10.1086/669559.

Jaeger, P. T., K. Kettnich, S. M. Oltmann, N. G. Taylor, J. Garner, and J. S. Sly. 2022. "Exuberantly Exhuming McCarthy: Confronting the Widespread Attacks on Intellectual Freedom in the United States." *The Library Quarterly* 92 (4): 321–8. https://doi.org/10.1086/721397.

Jaeger, P. T., E. Zerhusen, U. Gorham, R. F. Hill, and N. G. Taylor. 2017. "Waking Up to Advocacy in a New Political Reality for Libraries." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (4): 369–90. https://doi.org/10.1086/693492.

Järvenpää, S. 2021. "Elephant in the Room: Donald Trump's Populism." In *Populism: Interdisciplinary Considerations of an Interdisciplinary Phenomenon* (*Populismus: Interdisziplinäre Betrachtungen eines interdisziplinären Phänomens*), edited by N. Brandstetter, S. Järvenpää, and B. P. Peral, 57–72. Munich, Germany: AVM.

Jervis, R., F. J. Gavin, J. Rovner, and D. N. Labrosse. 2018. *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Kapadia, P. 1997. "Bastardizing the Bard: Appropriations of Shakespeare's Plays in Post-colonial India." PhD diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst. ProQuest (9737547).

Kingkade, T. 2023. "Top Librarian Calls 'Marxist Lesbian' Tweet Backlash 'Regrettable.'" *NBC News* (U.S. News), August 7. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/american-library-association-president-marxist-lesbian-rcna98254.

Kitzie, V., D. Floegel, S. Barriage, and S. M. Oltmann. 2022. "How Visibility, Hypervisibility, and Invisibility Shape Library Staff and Drag Performer Perceptions of and Experiences with Drag Storytimes in Public Libraries." *The Library Quarterly* 92 (3): 215–40. https://doi.org/10.1086/719915.

Klassen, T. 2024. "What's Ahead in Politics in 2025: Elections, Economic Angst and Enduring Conflict." *The Conversation*, December 17. https://theconversation.com/whats-ahead-in-politics-in-2025-elections-economic-angst-and-enduring-conflict-245136.

Kolchin, P. 2003. *American Slavery (1619-1877)* (10th Anniversary Edition). New York: Hill and Wang.

Kotnik, V. 2021. "The Rise of Transparent Manipulators and Countless Trumps in the Age of Deep Manipulation: What Have They Done to Manipulation?" *Italian Sociological Review*, 11 (2): 391–442. https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v11i2.447.

Lankes, R. D. 2012. *Expect More: Demanding Better Libraries for Today's Complex World*. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Lawson, S., K. Sanders, and L. Smith. 2015. "Commodification of the Information Profession: A Critique of Higher Education Under Neoliberalism." *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 3 (1): eP1182. https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.118.

Leitzke, D. 2024. *Fixing Government Flaws: Amending Our Constitution to Save Our Representative Democracy*. Forks, WA: Concerned Citizens.

Leung, S.Y., and J. R. Lopez-McKnight. 2021. *Knowledge Justice: Disrupting Library and Information Studies through Critical Race Theory.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Locke, M. E. 2022. *The Perils of Populism, Racism, and Sexism: The Trump Lesson Plan for African Americans and Women*. In *Get Your Knee Off Our Necks*, edited by B. E. Johansen and A. Akande, 83–110. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85155-2_2.

Lupton, M. 2002. "The Getting of Wisdom: Reflections of a Teaching Librarian." *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 33 (2): 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048623.2002.10755184.

Mariita, P. 2024. "Trump's Potential Reelection and the Fate of Immigrants." *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies* 6 (3): 137–148. https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v6i3.1766.

Mathiasson, M. H., and H. Jochumsen. 2022. "'The Soup We are In' – Reflections on Post-neutrality Librarianship." *Public Library Quarterly* 42 (6): 602–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2022.2149017.

Matsusaka, J. G. 2008. *For the Many or the Few: The Initiative, Public Policy, and American Democracy.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Matzko, P. 2020. "Talk Radio Is Turning Millions of American Into Conservatives." *The New York Times,* October 9. https://politics.media.mit.edu/papers/TalkRadio2020.pdf.

McChesney, R. W. 2000. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times.* New York: The New Press.

McNamara, R. H. 2024. *Everyday People: Understanding the Rise of Trump Supporters.* London, United Kingdom: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

Mehra, B. 2017. "Mobilization of Rural Libraries Toward Political and Economic Change in the Aftermath of the 2016 Presidential Election." *The Library Quarterly* (Special Issue: Aftermath: Libraries, Democracy, and the 2016 Presidential Election) 87 (4): 369–90. https://doi.org/10.1086/692303.

Mehra, B. 2019. "Information ACTism in 'Trumping' the Contemporary Fake News Phenomenon in Rural Libraries." *Open Information Science* (Special Issue: Fake News in Library and Information Science, edited by R. L. Chancellor and S. A. Lee), 3 (1): 181–96. https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/opis/3/1/article-p181.xml.

Mehra, B. 2021a. "Enough Crocodile Tears! Libraries Moving Beyond Performative Antiracist Politics." *The Library Quarterly* 91 (2): 137–49. https://doi.org/10.1086/713046.

Mehra, B. 2021b. "Libraries Reclaiming 'Social Justice Warriors' during 'Miss Rona's' Global Pandemic Crises." *The Library Quarterly* 91 (4): 385–401. https://doi.org/10.1086/715919.

Mehra, B., ed. 2022. *Social Justice Design and Implementation in Library and Information Science.* Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Mehra, B. 2023. "(Dis)information, Dysfunctions, and Democracy During the Global Pandemic: Is the Vision of Social Justice a Mirage (for Libraries) in the Neoliberal Age?" *The Library Quarterly* 93 (1): 110–25. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/722549.

Mehra, B. 2024a. "Community Informatics & I: Identity, Intersections, Growth, and More." *Journal of Community Informatics* (20th Anniversary Issue) 20 (2). https://doi.org/10.15353/joci.v20i2.5938.

Mehra, B. 2024b. "Using Critical Race Theory to Deconstruct 'One Brick at a Time' and Dismantle the White-Centered Power Structures in the Entrenched Citadel of the LIS Academy." *The Library Quarterly* 94 (4): 337–99. [InfoCrit: Moving toward Critical Race Theory in LIS]. https://doi.org/10.1086/731842.

Mehra, B., and K. Dali. 2020. "Extending the Framework for the Benefit of Praxis: A Strategic Literacy-Based Approach to Diversity Education (SLADE)." In *The Information Literacy Framework: Case Studies of Successful Implementation* (Association for Library and Information Science Education Book Series), edited by H. Julien, M. Gross, and D. Latham. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mehra, B., and L. Gray. 2020. "An 'Owning Up' of White-IST Trends in LIS to Further Real Transformations." *The Library Quarterly* 90 (2): 189–239. https://doi.org/10.1086/707674.

Mehra, B., and B. Jaber. 2021. "Opioid Consumer Health Information Literacies (o-CHIL) in Alabama's Public Libraries: An Exploratory Website Content Analysis." In *Roles and Responsibilities of Libraries in Increasing Consumer Health Literacy and Reducing Health Disparities* (Advances in Librarianship Series, Vol. 47), edited by B. St. Jean, G. Jindal, Y. Liao, and P. Jaeger, 61–82. Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing.

Mehra, B., and B. S. Jaber. 2023. "'Don't Say Gay' in Alabama: A Taxonomic Framework of LGBTQ+ Information Support Services in Public Libraries, An Exploratory Website Content Analysis of Critical Resistance." *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 74 (8): 954–70. http://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24768.

Mehra, B., K. S. Rioux, and K. S. Albright. 2017. "Social Justice in Library and Information Science." In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* (4th ed.), edited by J. D. McDonald and M. Levine-Clark. Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.1081/E-ELIS4.

Mehra, B., and J. Winberry. 2021. "'Politic Talks' in Academic Libraries of the South to Address a Global Democracy Recession: An Exploratory Website Analysis." In *Libraries and the Global Retreat of Democracy: Confronting Polarization, Misinformation, and Suppression* (Advances in Librarianship: Vol. 50: November 2021), edited by N. G. Taylor, K. Kettnich, U. Gorham, and P. T. Jaeger, 183–210. Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing.

Mehta, P. B. 2011. "The Politics of Social Justice." *Review of Development and Change* 16 (1): 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972266120110101.

Mele, D. 2024. *The Humanistic Person-centered Company* (Eminent Voices in Business Ethics, Volume 55). New York: Springer.

Mercieca, J. 2020. *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump.* College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "wisdom," accessed 2024a, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wisdom.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "acumen," accessed 2024b, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acumen.

Million, A., and J. Bossaller. 2020. "Lobbying and Political Advocacy: A Review of the Literature and Exploratory Survey of State Library Associations." *The Political Librarian* 4 (2). https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8535.

Moghadam, M., and N. Jafarpour. 2022. "Pragmatic Annotation of Manipulation in Political Discourse: The Case of Trump-Clinton Presidential Debate." *Linguistic Forum: A Journal of Linguistics* 4 (4): 32–9. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14790035.

Momen, M. 2019. *Political Satire, Postmodern Reality, and the Trump Presidency: Who Are We Laughing At?* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Mongrain, P., and M. Stegmaier. 2024. "Introduction to Forecasting the 2024 US Elections." *PS: Political Science & Politics,* 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096524001008.

Moreland-Capuia, A. 2021. "The Role of Fear in Politics, Politicians, Government, and Society." In *The Trauma of Racism*, edited by A. Moreland-Capuia, 35–61. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73436-7_3.

Morgan, K., M. Barker, A. Dinscore, et al., eds. 2024. "Academic Libraries Creating Global Community: Operating Outside of Traditional Roles and Spaces (Special Issue)." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 46 (1).

Naiman, A., ed. 2011. *Noam Chomsky: How the World Works.* Columbus, OH: Soft Skull.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. 2022. *Incompleteness: Donald Trump, Populism and Citizenship.* Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group.

O'Donoghue, G. 2024. "Trump Has Full Control of Government - But He Won't Always Get His Way." *BBC News,* November 13. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn42dzejpjvo.

Oliphant, T. 2015. "Social Justice Research in Library and Information Sciences: A Case for Discourse Analysis." *Library Trends* 64 (2): 226–45. 10.1353/lib.2015.0046.

Page, B. I., and M. Gilens. 2017. *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It.* Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Paplekaj, Etleva. 2019. "The History of the Constitution of United States of America and Its Amendment Process." *Social Science Research Network*. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3450547 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3450547.

Paraskeva, J. M. 2021. *Critical Transformative Educational Leadership and Policy Studies – A Reader: Discussions & Solutions from the Leading Voices in Education).* Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press.

Piedra, L. M. 2025. "Navigating Uncertainty." *Qualitative Social Work* 24 (1): 3–6. https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250241305438.

Porter, P. 2020. *The False Promise of Liberal Order: Nostalgia, Delusion and the Rise of Trump.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press.

Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, Association of College & Research Libraries. 1989. *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report.* http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential.

Prince Michael of Liechtenstein. 2025. "Greenland, Canada, the Panama Canal and Donald Trump". *Geopolitical Intelligence Services: Comment,* January 15. https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/greenland-donald-trump/.

Prior, M. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (3): 577–92. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2005.00143.x.

Quinn, T. 2016. "Throwing the Rascals Out? Problems of Accountability in Two-Party Systems." *European Journal of Political Research* 55 (1): 120–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12118.

Robinson, L. 2024. "Gen Z's Gendered Divergences in the U.S. 2024 Election: Digital Engagement, Education, and Politics." *First Monday* 29 (12). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v29i12.13865.

Rebe, R. Y. 2021. *The Partisan Court: The Era of Political Partisanship on the U.S. Supreme Court.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Regilme, Jr., S. S. F. 2019. "The Decline of American Power and Donald Trump: Reflections on Human Rights, Neoliberalism, and the World Order." *Geoforum* 102: 157–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.04.010.

Rowley, J. 2007. "The Wisdom Hierarchy: Representations of the DIKW Hierarchy." *Journal of Information Science* 33 (2): 163–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551506070706.

Savolainen, R. 2009. "Small World and Information Grounds as Contexts of Information Seeking and Sharing." *Library & Information Science Research* 31 (1): 38–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2008.10.007.

Serwer, A. 2021. *The Cruelty Is the Point: The Past, Present, and Future of Trump's America.* New York: One World.

Seymour, R. 2024. *Disaster Nationalism: The Downfall of Liberal Civilization.* London, United Kingdom: Verso.

Shannon, B. M., and J. S. Bossaller. 2015. "Storing and Sharing Wisdom and Traditional Knowledge in the Library." *IFLA Journal* 41 (3): 211–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035215596026.

Shearer, M. 2022. "Mantras and Monetization: The Commodification of Yoga and Culture." *Virginia Sports and Entertainment Law Journal* 21 (1): 38. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4190057.

Shook, N. J., H. N. Fitzgerald, S. T. Boggs, C. G. Ford, P. D. Hopkins, and N. M. Silva. 2020. "Sexism, Racism, and Nationalism: Factors Associated with the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Results?" *PLoS ONE* 15 (3): e0229432. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229432.

Smith, P. J., and R. W. Tuttle. 2013. "Biblical Literalism and Constitutional Originalism." *Notre Dame Law Review* 86 (2), 693–764. https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol86/iss2/5/.

Springer, S., K. Birch, and J. MacLeavy. 2016. *Handbook of Neoliberalism.* Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Stratton, C., and J. Spohnholz. 2020. *Power Politics: Carbon Energy in Historical Perspective* (Roots of Contemporary Issues). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Thayer-Bacon, B. J. 2020. "Vulnerable Children and Moral Responsibility: Loss of Humanity." *Educational Theory* 70 (6): 701–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12459.

Ting, G. 2024. "The 2024 U.S. Presidential Election and Its Impact on the World." *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 28, 130–9. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48794585.

Trump, I. 2010 *The Trump Card: Playing to Win in Work and Life.* New York: Touchstone Books.

Tsondu, G. N., and B. Dodson-Lavelle. 2009. "Wisdom and Method: Extraordinary Practices for the Realization of Longevity and Optimal Health." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1172 (1): 344–7. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2009.04408.x.

Tushnet, M. V. 2011. "Entrenching Good Government Reforms." *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 34 (3): 873–8. https://journals.law.harvard.edu/jlpp/wp-content/uploads/sites/90/2013/10/34_3_873_Tushnet-1.pdf.

Ware, A. 2009. *The Dynamics of Two-Party Politics: Party Structures and the Management of Competition.* Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Wayne, S. J. 2024. *The Road to the White House 2024: The Politics of Presidential Elections* (12th Edition). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Weissert, W. 2024. "Trump Again Calls to Buy Greenland After Eyeing Canada and the Panama Canal." The Associated Press: Politics, December 23. https://apnews.com/article/trump-greenland-norway-panama-canal-canada-a52858e3075f9b5ad95e78753293fc1f.

West, D. M. 2022. *Power Politics: Trump and the Assault on American Democracy.* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

West, T. G. 1997. *Vindicating the Founders: Race, Sex, Class, and Justice in the Origins of America.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Wheeler, M. B., and S. Muwanguzi. 2022. "Mapping Intersections of Politics and Information in Twenty-First-Century Cyberculture." *The Library Quarterly* 92 (1): 24–38. https://doi.org/10.1086/717231.

Yoo, K. 2021. "Academic Law Libraries' New Frontier—The Post-truth Cognitive Bias Challenge and Calls for Behavioral and Structural Reforms." *Law Library Journal* 113 (2): 129–54. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3911932.

Zulli, D., K. Coe, and Z. Isaacs. 2023. "News Framing in the Aftermath of the January 6 Attacks on the U.S. Capitol: An Analysis of Labels, Definitional Uncertainty, and Contextualization." *American Behavioral Scientist* 67 (6): 702–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221096333.

Author

Bharat Mehra is a Professor and EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama. His community-engaged action research implements social justice and inclusion advocacy as a knowledge domain in academic scholarship while operationalizing critical paradigms and bridging theory-practice-impact divides in ways that are intentional, systematic, constructive, and outcome driven. His extensive community-engaged activities in library and information studies (LIS) apply community informatics or the use of information and communication technologies toward the empowerment of underserved populations as intellectual and action-focused pursuits, challenging the epistemological, ontological, methodological, and axiological roots of traditional discourse. His scholarship integrates research-teaching-service intersections in the academy to provide strategic and community-embedded solutions that address significant social problems across local, regional, national, and international boundaries. Over the years, his community-engaged collaborations have included partnerships with racial/ethnic groups, international diaspora, sexual minorities, rural communities, low-income families, small businesses, and others to represent their experiences and perspectives in the design of community-based information systems and services. He has developed a national and international reputation as a scholar with >175 peer-reviewed authored/co-authored publications on equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and international (EDIA+I) social justice content (including >65 in peer-reviewed refereed journals). He is the Series Editor of Emerald Publishing's *Advances in Librarianship*.

Author's CV: https://sites.ua.edu/bmehra/

Gender, Politics, and The Public Library: How Polarization and Feminization Conspired to Destabilize One of "The Most Trusted Professions"

ALLISON JENNINGS-ROCHE

ABSTRACT

On January 24th, 2025, not one week into the new administration the United States Department of Education Office of Civil rights issued a statement that it was dismissing all investigations related to book bans, calling the investigations a "hoax." The Trump nominated Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Craig Trainor described this is as "restoring the fundamental rights of parents to direct their children's education," which is the fullest expression so far that we have seen in the public sphere of the rhetorical dominance of ideas like "parent's rights" being weaponized to subvert information access and undermine libraries across the country (*U.S. Department of Education Ends Biden's Book Ban Hoax | U.S. Department of Education*, 2025, Jennings-Roche, 2023).

While this is very obviously just the opening salvo in wide scale dismantling of civil rights protections for librarians, teachers, and the communities they serve—a reckoning within the library world is long overdue. Neutrality, or half-hearted approximations of it, has never been an effective advocacy strategy nor has it ever reflected the true work being done by librarians across the country. By ignoring the shifting political contexts outside our library doors while underpreparing library workers for the reality of community-engaged work, librarianship, writ large has not only failed to meet the moment but allowed neo-liberal and reactionary political forces to openly undermine the public's trust in libraries for decades with little resistance (Jaeger & Sarin, 2016; Durney, 2023).

The "self-imposed voicelessness of libraries" has long been highlighted by a small subsection of LIS scholars and roundly ignored by our larger organizations in favor of comfortable, often "cute" branding campaigns that assert value while failing to demonstrate the material or political value of our institutions in the minds of those who set policy agendas (Jaeger et al., 2013, p. 372). Much like the valorization of all other types of "women's work" in the public sphere (to loosely quote EveryLibrary's John Chrastka): everyone loves libraries, but no one cares.

Non-partisan does not have to mean non-political. Libraries, by their very nature, are political.

People and communities have engaged in public life to advocate for their own interests, needs, and ideals since before the founding of modern nationstates. The idea that the state, or any collective governing body, should be responsive to the demands of those living there is well established to the point of being taken for granted in modern democracies, though that assumption is currently shifting in the many democracies that are taking a strongly nationalist turn, including the US.

With the entrenchment of the modern two-party dominated political system, conversations attempting to define the limits and parameters of caring for our neighbors and our communities became polarized along party lines. This party alignment is what defines the distinction between political causes and partisan ones, partisanship is concerned with promoting one party or politician, whereas politics is just the method by which resources are allocated in the public sphere. While specific party alignment on each issue can often fluctuate community by community, the past few years in American political discourse have become defined by extreme forms of cultural backlash and polarization (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Stanley, 2018).

Contending with the impact of this polarization is increasingly difficult for library advocates as the field has never had a strong grasp on the distinctions between "political" and "partisan." While partisanship may mean support of a particular party or candidate, "political" engagement within LIS can often be painted with a sweeping brush that glosses over the very real needs of our communities in favor of neutrality and non-engagement. Until librarians can comfortably contend with traditional forms of political discourse and engagement, we will never be able to fully navigate the treacherous waters of extreme polarization that defines the American political, and the partisan, sphere in 2025.

Cultural backlash

Traditionally, political party alignment within the United States was broadly defined along an incredibly centrist left-right axis, with Republicans favoring small government, financial individualism, and often Christian faith-based issues, and Democrats supporting issues related to collective social welfare and individual moral judgments and expression. Often these lines would be drawn between the professional white-collar class (Republican) and the blue-collar working class (Democrats), largely influenced by educational and wealth based disparities as well as distinctions between suburban and urban communities.

What we have seen in the past decade in the United States is in some ways an inversion of the traditional alignment along party lines. We see those working in the skilled trades, who historically strongly voted Democratic due to the party's support of strong labor unions, have turned to the Republican party due to its stance on various social issues. Higher education has ceased being a respectable bastion of conservative early adulthood that once served to reproduce class status, and instead, is now viewed with extreme skepticism from those in right-wing information spheres.

Attacks on libraries, schools, and universities are not surprising given the nature of the far-right's ongoing work to delegitimize expertise, the public sphere, and communities that oppose their revision of American history in favor of creating a new national mythos (Stanley, 2018, 2024). Intentionally undermining public trust in educational institutions and scholars

is a keystone of authoritarian regimes throughout history, as scholars are often the first and loudest voices willing to stand in the way of social and political repression (Stanley, 2018). Libraries and librarians, while targets in their own right, are also included in the push to silence free-thought and dissenting voices.

Complimenting the social delegitimization of scholars, teachers, and librarians are the gendered perceptions and dynamics of each of these fields. While K-12 education has nearly always been considered the province of women, higher education had up until very recently been valued as a traditionally masculine profession, a fact which is still borne out when looking at the numbers of tenured professors in the US . However, educational attainment has evolved and women are now outpacing men in nearly all levels of higher education. The very idea of a college degree has become feminized and pink washed, where being a student or a professor has been branded as markedly feminine in many right-wing discourse spheres and communities (Mireles, 2020; Hoff, 2024). This is not a mere coincidence or an accident of changing social conditions. Instead we can see how the regression of women's rights, and respect for women's contributions to society, is playing out in real time as bulwarks of respectable masculinity are transformed in the minds of the American public into something that is shameful for real American men to openly pursue (Davis, 2024).

Women, education, and politics

Politics, as a part of the public sphere, has long been considered the province of men; women were relegated to the domestic sphere and to highly specific, and feminized roles, in the public. Despite clear advances in women's educational and career attainment, the discrepancies between whose voices are respected, uplifted, and taken seriously persist between the public and the private, with gaps widening, even in places where women's participation has risen (Acker, 1990; Ozer, 2023). We can see this disconnection, such that even when controlling for variables like marriage, education, and income women are less likely to participate in partisan politics and public campaigns and are more likely to participate in civic life in ways that are less institutional (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010).

As we think about the perceived gender roles of various public service professionals, we can easily see some of the consequences of this disparity when looking at the effectiveness of advocacy for classes of workers that are viewed as traditionally masculine versus those that are coded as feminine. Blue collar public servants, like firefighters and police officers, are valorized AND rewarded with material support for their needs and working conditions (Barnes et al., 2021). Whereas pink collar public servants, like librarians and teachers, are rhetorically patted on the head while the stability of labor conditions erode beneath their feet. This is not new, and studies have been done about how the gendered social expectations of teachers and even social workers undermine their practical concerns in the workplace (Puzio & Valshtein, 2022). Librarianship is one more example of the renewed social devaluation of women's work and expertise in the United States.

Relatedly, because women have been outpacing men in higher educational attainment - in combination with the increased attainment of racialized minorities - the very value of a college degree has been degraded. This is unquestionably also tied to the general undercurrent of "anti-intellectualism in American life," but it is also a reflection of how ideas around gender can transform the perceived value of something that was previously considered an unquestioned cultural and social good (Hofstadter, 1966).

The backlash of anti-feminist, ultimately anti-women's, participation in public life, cannot be ignored when considering the challenges of defending and advocating for libraries and librarians in the political sphere. Librarianship is both a pink-collar field, and a field that, by and large, requires the attainment of not only a college degree, but a graduate one. The push for de-professionalization, and the recurrent attempts to undermine the value of the MLIS degree itself, go hand in hand with the objectives of the right-wing, antidemocratic movements that seek to weaken the foundations of our informational and educational institutions (Berry, 2017).

In a profession dominated by women, 82.4% of the workforce was made up of women as of 2017, cultural conditioning that inhibits political engagement, as well as outside forces that delegitimize the expertise of the professionals in the field, have all coalesced in ways that threaten the very idea of public, and professional, librarianship (*Librarians | Data USA*, n.d.).

Gendered pillars of these problems in libraries

Librarians are routinely and uncritically feminized in both self-perception and external portrayals, from overly "cute" portrayals of professionals in pop culture to the overheated rhetoric of right-wing politicians, it is impossible to separate the idea of the "librarian" from ideas of womanhood in American society . We know that the expertise of women in politics is taken less seriously no matter their level of involvement and yet, as a field librarianship has not taken the time to grapple with this reality, let alone to untangle to historic and pernicious ideas of "Lady Bountiful" from our self-perceptions and outward facing personas (Ozer, 2023).

Historically, librarians have explicitly defined their role in society as one of "guardians of the public morality" and even sought to control and curate access to materials in ways that would uphold whatever the perceived moral standard of the time (Parker, 1997, p.76). Librarians fought to define their legitimacy in the public sphere and in doing so often imagined themselves in opposition to other feminized professionals, like teachers (Parker, 1997). The freedom fighter archetype, a librarian that is committed to protecting patron privacy and freedom to read, is a relatively recent invention and not a concept that reflects the historic reality or the everyday working conditions of librarians (Albanese, 2023; Parker, 1997).

Many working librarians today may gesture towards ideas of intellectual freedom, but the profession and our communal norms have not moved too far afield from the guardian/guide/mother/cultivator ideal entrenched at the very outset of professionalization in the United States (Parker, 1997). Neutrality may have replaced benevolence in our self-identification, but the concept itself is not nearly as transformational as it seems based on the plain meaning of the word.

When examining the politically harmful, yet pervasive, concept of neutrality it is essential to place it in relationship with the legacy of "Lady Bountiful" and the civilizing impulses undergirding the foundations of librarianship (Parker, 1997; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016, 2017). We can look to historical examples of how "nice white women" sought to modify the world-views of immigrants, racial minorities, and lower-class people by cultivating collections, and subtly educating those communities on the norms of the majority culture (Parker, 1997). White women were often the standard bearers of dominant culture, offering soft forms of domination through books, lessons, and social shunning for those who stepped out of line (Parker, 1997). The veneer of respectability, like neutrality, allowed for this kind of

subtle control to be wielded in service of larger cultural and political aims (Maack, 1982; Watson, 1994, 1996).

Neutrality, vocational awe, and gender performance

Neutrality itself, once thought to be a pillar of librarian ethical theory, has been proven to be a tool by which dominant cultures uphold their own perspectives and ignore those that make the "majority" uncomfortable (Gibson, et. al. 2017), and yet, little work has been done to trace the impacts of gender on the idea of the library in larger political consciousness.

In a similar vein, vocational awe (the modern expression of the civilizing, white savior visions of lady bountiful), continues to oppress library workers by encouraging them to sublimate their perspectives, needs, and voices in favor of "serving" their communities (Ettarh, 2018). Librarians are expected to sublimate their own perspectives and even bodily and emotional needs in the workplace in order to represent an idealized version of the modern librarian/savior, the idea of librarianship being anything less than calling is anathema to those who would like to preserve this self-identity. The pressures of vocational awe can be pernicious and hard to escape with more established librarians exerting implicit and implicit pressures on newer library workers, with evidence that female librarians are more likely to exert this gendered pressure on their peers.

Vocational awe itself is a form of gender performance, a mode by which librarians not only undermine their political effectiveness, but ultimately participate in the kind of "self-objectification" that has come to modern, regressive notions of womanhood (Traister, 2024). To this way of thinking, a woman's highest calling is care and motherhood, and what better way to demonstrate excellence in care work than by being all things to all people and rising to meet the demands of all community members, while never clearly advocating policy positions or exerting pressure on legislators (Jabour, 2021).

At a national scale, library advocates often - and correctly! - place the blame for the modern challenges facing the profession and our communities on the far-right extremists seeking to dismantle the public sphere, however it cannot be denied that we undermine our own legitimacy and expertise when we double down on our own feminization by acting like we, librarians writ large, do not have clear and defined political positions. Instead of claiming our power, and describing our impact in civil society, we rely on weak tropes and unsupported assertions of our value in a democracy.

Value demonstration vs value assertion - What do we actually do and what impact does it have?

Scholars in library information studies have argued for over a decade that librarianship has been hobbled in the public sphere when it attempts to assert the value of our libraries instead of demonstrating value in a way that resonates with policy makers (Jaeger et al., 2013, 2017; Jaeger, Jennings-Roche, & Hodge, 2023; Jaeger, Jennings-Roche, Taylor, et al., 2023) . Assertions of the critical role that libraries play in supporting a healthy and functional democracy are repeated ad infinitum while few librarians or advocates are able to define what that actually means, or by what mechanism libraries advance the aims of a more democratic society (Popowich, 2019; Buschman, 2024). We have some strong professional intuitions that we could possibly tie things like library card holder numbers to objectives like voter turnout and how increased connectivity can increase labor participation in a few specific case studies. But,

what we as a profession do not have is a clearly identified democratic role in the minds of the public or even in the minds of library workers themselves (Popowich, 2019). It is all well and good to say we support information access and democratic engagement, but until lawmakers can recite back to us the exact mechanism by which that happens, our self-aggrandizing slogans will continue to come up short in the face of overwhelming rhetorical, political, and legal assaults (Jaeger, 2024; Jennings-Roche, 2023).

Instead of focusing our collective energy on effective message discipline, or even intentional political campaigns, librarians have instead returned to the impulses of Lady Bountiful, "guardians of public morals," and white saviorshood. While the world outside our hallowed halls has rapidly polarized, librarians have convinced themselves that by narrowing the parameters of what makes a "good librarian" we may somehow "save" our communities from their lack of proper social justice values/language (Crowley, 2023b, 2023a). Librarians film themselves on right-wing social media burning books they disagree with, or make public statements that paint a target on the backs of their colleagues in red areas, and sometimes even push for events and programming without the proper plans in place to keep presenters and attendees physically and emotionally safe. Up and coming library workers see these performances and may build an identity around being "radical librarians" without having done the work of understanding what community organizing and safety plans look like in real life and without considering how to approach these topics in their own local contexts (Crowley, 2023b, 2023a).

Through this collective identity formation around what makes a "good" librarian, library workers can lose sight of the public nature of our jobs. While political opinions are good and should always be respected, losing sight of how libraries actually operate in the public sphere, often as institutions wholly or partially funded and overseen by local government, will only harm our ability to collectively advocate for our libraries, peers, and communities.

While educating ourselves, and advocating for inclusion at every turn, is absolutely at the core of good librarianship and community service, the idea that every form of public facing library communication must rise to the narrow, and constantly evolving, rhetoric of college-educated, and often highly-urbanized social justice discourse is remarkably misguided. The right-wing has done such an incredible job of setting the rules of the rhetorical game that there is genuinely no way for the zero point seven percent of the American population that is a library worker to completely reeducate on topics like "critical race theory," even if we assumed that every librarian agreed with the principles of the theory.

The concepts, precepts, and principles demonstrated by Kimberlee Crenshaw and others are inarguable, but when it comes to public opinion working librarians are unlikely to shift the right-wing interpretations of that language and no one fight over academic language is more important than meeting the needs of our communities and finding ways to materially redress historic harms and inequalities (Patin et al., 2021). Much the same argument can be made for any number of progressive causes and ideas. The American public largely supports the progressive policies when they are described on their merits, but reject them when they are called by the names that have become politically charged (ie. Obamacare). The polarized and extremely partisan rhetoric that dominates right-wing media outlets has transformed reasonable policy positions on any number of issues into threats in the minds of their audiences.

Fixing the disconnect between policy and rhetoric is unbelievably important work, but it is not the work of the library. The library exists to be responsive to the needs of our communities, provide access to all forms of information, serve as democratic forums for education and speech, and offer third spaces for communal connection. When we lose sight of that and

jump on the trends that will make us momentarily "library-famous" (for better or for worse), we damage more than just our personal reputations or that of the library we work for.

This impulse to "educate" about social justice can be viewed as the enduring legacy of lady bountiful and cultural moralization, and is ultimately a new form of self-objectification that defines the field along the lines of vocational awe. Library workers have become so enamored with the idea of portraying the "righteous warrior" librarian that we have begun to lose the ability to offer the core functions of the library. Librarianship is not ministry and unlike most religious institutions, librarians offer access to all, no matter what beliefs are in their hearts. We don't need to convert, evangelize, or morally instruct, we need to serve the people in front of us, everyday.

Performing librarianship

The increasingly narrow parameters of what it means to be good at "performing" the identity of librarian—one who has perfected the mores a specific kind of urban, educated, progressive class orientation—has served to not only alienate many in our communities who may share our values but not our language, but also to undermine our ability to build coalitions that could advocate for larger political wins. Performativity in pink collar, and otherwise feminized forms of labor, often encourages women to focus on the boundaries of their righteousness rather than the shared goals and principles that could lead to the kind of solidarity needed to advance the interests of their communities. We can see ideas of what defines the "ideal mother" can shift from micro-community to micro-community, perhaps defined by religious expression or food choices in one or limits on screen time and gender neutral clothing in others, but what none of these definitions offer is the kind of public sphere challenging engagement that might make society better for mothers and their children (Bryant & Marin Hellwege, 2019; Jill Greenlee, 2014; Modigliani, 1986; Watson, 1994). This focus on private value demonstration where we define success by the measure of those "in the know" in whatever way that means for our various communities - the hippest librarians, most virtuous mothers, revolutionary teachers - distracts from the kind of big-tent pluralistic coalition building that would be necessary to fundamentally redefine the value of that kind of labor in the minds of policy makers.

Performativy at the expense of coalition building may have been relatively harmless in the past—despite Bertot, Buschman, Gorham, Jaeger, Taylor, Kranich, Meera, and others warning about the collapse of our collective political status for decades—but in the current moment it is a poison pill that only serves those seeking to undermine libraries and the public sphere (Buschman, 2022, 2023, 2024). Librarians and advocates have defaulted to perfecting our insider language and definitions and passing self-imposed purity tests, while allowing others to define our value to civil society. All of those internal conversations/trainings/articles/workshops/etc are valuable and important, but the reluctance to take up space rhetorically and politically by communicating in ways that will appeal to the broadest base possible is perhaps the most harmful outcome of the inward turn in librarianship.

Inter vs. intra communal communication

We can see the disconnect between inter-librarian language and effective political communication in the data collected by various groups in recent years. The drums we, librarians, keep beating around performative social justice and ideological change have crashed into

the reality of the political sphere that has long been dominated by reactionary right-wing, and in the best of times, rhetorically center-right to moderate ideological frames. Frame-warfare has been waged for so long, and with such success, it will likely take many years and a ton of concerted effort to reclaim certain words and phrases from the ideological morass they have become mired in the minds of the American public (Mercieca, 2019).

Again, shifting the discourse is important work, but not the work of librarians. We need to use the tools and data currently at our disposal to defend, buttress, and advocate for our values and our communities across the country. Certain terms have become politicized to the point of being actively harmful to effective communication, and we as librarians are not in a position to "civilize" society into the viewpoint that we want them to share, instead we can find rhetoric and communication strategies that appeal to both the general public and policy makers alike (Lakoff, 2014; Mercieca, 2019; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2016a, 2016b) .

Politics have shifted rapidly and library advocates must understand that the far-right has shown its strength in manipulating jargon against us. Until/unless we have our own propagandists we must be honest with ourselves and rely on the things we actually do when communicating with the public. We can see evidence of this in the data collected for EveryLibrary in 2022, where "arguing that proponents are simply scared of anyone different is least convincing," and even "centering our arguments or key points in the areas of sex/lgbtq+/gender/race will activate support for book banning while weakening most peoples' general impulse to NOT ban books" (EveryLibrary Institute, 2024). While it is inarguable that books on those topics are essential to our communities, library messaging does not need to focus on that, and instead find ways to demonstrate value and activate support by aligning our messaging around ideas of freedom of speech, access, community engaged collections, and the First Amendment—widely accepted ideals which may have a high chance of success.

Librarians need to avoid slipping into lady bountiful type frameworks, even when it seems like those frameworks are the best way to uphold the values many joined the profession to uphold, like equity, access, and inclusion. In political communication, attempting to moralize or change the perspectives of the general public is not our job—our job is to provide access for all and wherever possible to encourage self-education and critical thinking. Feminized norms around engagement and private sphere advocacy at the expense of public sphere engagement are likely at least part of the root of our over-reliance on ideological purity over collective political engagement, but it does not need to define our political communication moving forward.

Libraries will always be political.

Although libraries have always been and will always be a part of the political sphere within the United States, this does not mean that advocating for collections, funding, staffing, or our communities is partisan. Many librarians themselves of course have strongly held political, and even partisan, viewpoints, but that does not mean that our very institutions or services are defined as such. In a functioning democracy public servants are allowed to have and express private political opinions while the institutions they serve remain resolutely non-partisan. Libraries serve every person who walks through their door or accesses their resources. Party affiliation, voting record and the like have no bearing on the level or quality of service, just like all public and/or governmental institutions serve the American public. The far-right wants the American public to forget that libraries serve them too, and we cannot let them continue to define our mission in the minds of the public we serve. By continuing

old, gendered patterns around communication, moralization, and self-identity, we weaken the foundations of the institutions we cherish and allow the far-right to exploit those weaknesses to serve their exclusionary and anti-democratic interests.

If we can't face it, we can never fix it.

"Frame warfare" as so eloquently described by scholars like George Lakoff and Jennifer Mercieca, illuminates the nature of our current political environment, and the threats posed by the far-right cannot be underestimated (Lakoff, 2014; Mercieca, 2023). Unfortunately, not all material and rhetorical threats can be laid squarely at the feet of library opponents. Librarianship itself has remained steadfastly unprepared for the current political moment and in many ways our self-identity and communication norms have contributed to that lack of preparations.

When it comes to frame warfare, it is essential that we do the work and tell whatever stories that let us keep doing it. Letting go of rhetorical and ideological purity in the face of overwhelming threats is the only path forward for the field. By unpacking the legacy of gender on self-perceptions and the public profile of librarians, we can perhaps develop new tools and frameworks that allow for effective political advocacy in the public sphere while not losing sight of our core values. The way we talk about things in our external messaging and political actions does not need to directly align with our current internal social justice frameworks. Those are important, but not useful for broad political messaging. The world should absolutely change and bend towards justice for all, but in the meantime, we need to communicate effectively the political reality that currently defines nearly all mainstream discourse spheres (Jennings-Roche, 2023, Lakoff, 2014, EveryLibrary Institute 2024).

Sadly, little of our internal growth as information professionals will matter if all librarians quit or are fired; and ideological purity in the face of criminalization, job losses, and closed doors is handing our opponents even more tools to dismantle our libraries. By the very nature of the work and our shared values, librarianship draws in workers who are eager to increase access to information and to help people, however historical legacies and frameworks like neutrality, vocational awe, and feminization often subvert that work. Librarians would be better served by rhetorics and political engagement that supports their role in the public sphere.

We can still accomplish the mission and align our actions to our values while speaking the language voters and community members respond to positively. But to do so we need to reckon with our past, unpack the pernicious forms of gendered expectations and ideologies that pervade our professional norms, and work together to build coalitions, draw in allies, and protect ourselves. It is going to be a long, uphill battle, but we can persevere with the right friends and the right tools.

References

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. *Gender & Society*, *4*(2), 139–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002

Barnes, T. D., Beall, V. D., & Holman, M. R. (2021). Pink-Collar Representation and Budgetary Outcomes in US States. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *46*(1), 119–154. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12286

BER staff, B. E. R. (2024, April 27). *Gender Demographic Disparities Between Teachers and Professors*. https://econreview.studentorg.berkeley.edu/gender-demographic-disparities-between-teachers-and-professors/

Bernhagen, L., & Gravett, E. (2017). Educational Development as Pink Collar Labor: Implications and Recommendations. *To Improve the Academy*, *36*(1), 9–19. https://doi.org/10.1002/tia2.20053

Bryant, L. A., & Marin Hellwege, J. (2019). Working Mothers Represent: How Children Affect the Legislative Agenda of Women in Congress. *American Politics Research*, *47*(3), 447–470. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X18808037

Bryant, T., Bussell, H., & Halpern, R. (2019). Being Seen: Gender Identity and Performance as a Professional Resource in Library Work. *College & Research Libraries*, *80*(6), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.6.805

Buschman, J. (2022). Of Architects and Libraries: A Simple Discourse Analysis. *The Library Quarterly*, *92*, 296–310. https://doi.org/10.1086/719911

Buschman, J. (2023). Libraries, Democracy, and Citizenship: Twenty Years after 9/11. *The Library Quarterly*, *93*(2), 181–201. https://doi.org/10.1086/723850

Buschman, J. (2024). Equal Respect: The Civic Engagement Libraries (Already) Perform for Democracy. *The Library Quarterly*, *94*(1), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.1086/727817

Caraway, T. L. (2005). The Political Economy of Feminization: From "Cheap Labor" to Gendered Discourses of Work. *Politics & Gender*, *1*(3), 399–429. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X05050105

Carole, L., & Barbara, R. (2008). *Gender And The Changing Face Of Higher Education: A Feminized Future?: A Feminized Future?* McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Challenges to Democracy: The 2024 Election in Focus | PRRI. (2024, October 11). *PRRI | At the Intersection of Religion, Values, and Public Life*. https://www.prri.org/research/challenges-to-democracy-the-2024-election-in-focus-findings-from-the-2024-american-values-survey/

Coffé, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2010). Same Game, Different Rules? Gender Differences in Political Participation. *Sex Roles*, *62*(5), 318–333. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9729-y

Crone, L., Brunel, L., & Auzoult, L. (2021). Validation of a Perception of Objectification in the Workplace Short Scale (POWS). *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.651071

Crowley, B. (2023a). Allies, Cobelligerents, and the Political Realities of Pursuing Social Justice Librarianship in Conservative Republican Communities. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-Journal)*. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/7766

Crowley, B. (2023b). Socially Just Library Management in Conservative America. *The Political Librarian*, *6*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8848

Davis, C. (2024, October 6). Why aren't we talking about the real reason male college enrollment is dropping? [Substack newsletter]. *Matriarchal Blessing*. https://celestemdavis.substack.com/p/why-boys-dont-go-to-college

Durney, S. (2023). The Library Advocacy Gap: Increasing Librarians' Political Self-Efficacy. *The Political Librarian*, *6*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8771

EveryLibrary Institute. (2024). *The Demographics of Book Bans. The Political Librarian, 7(1)*. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8899

Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation. (n.d.). UN Women – Headquarters. Retrieved January 25, 2025, from https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures

Geiger, A. (2016, April 26). *A Wider Ideological Gap Between More and Less Educated Adults*. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/04/26/a-wider-ideological-gap-between-more-and-less-educated-adults/

Goncalves, M. S. O., Langrock, I., LaViolette, J., & Spoon, K. (2024). Book bans in political context: Evidence from US schools. *PNAS Nexus*, *3*(6), pgae197. https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae197

Gothreau, C. (2020, August 31). *The Objectification of Women in Politics and Why it Matters*. https://cawp.rutgers.edu/blog/objectification-women-politics-and-why-it-matters

Grossman, B. (2012). The feminised service sector: From micro to macro analysis. *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, *6*(1), 63–79. https://doi.org/10.13169/workorgalaboglob.6.1.0063

Hicks, D. (2014). The Construction of Librarians' Professional Identities: A Discourse Analysis / La construction de l'identité professionnelle du bibliothécaire : Une analyse de discours. *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*, *38*(4), 251–270. https://doi.org/10.1353/ils.2014.0017

Hicks, D., VanScoy, A., & Julien, H. (2022). Librarians' Conceptions of Expertise: An Intersectional Exploration. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *59*(1), 701–702. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.708

Higgins, S. (2017, November 10). *Embracing the Feminization of Librarianship*. https://doi.org/10.31229/osf.io/q6zbw

Hildenbrand, S. (2000). Library Feminism and Library Women's History: Activism and Scholarship, Equity and Culture. *Libraries & Culture*, *35*(1), 51–65.

Hoff, L. (2024, January 4). *When college was male: Higher education and the war against women*. MinnPost. http://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2024/01/when-college-was-male-higher-education-and-the-war-against-women/

Hofstadter, R. (1966). *Anti-intellectualism in American life*. Knopf. https://archive.org/details/antiintellectual0000unse_l9q4

Ingram, M. (2023, October 23). *How Librarians Became American Free Speech Heroes*. The Saturday Evening Post. https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2023/10/how-librarians-became-american-free-speech-heroes/

Jaeger, P. T., Gorham, U., Bertot, J. C., & Sarin, L. C. (2013a). Democracy, Neutrality, and Value Demonstration in the Age of Austerity. *The Library Quarterly*, *83*(4), 368–382. https://doi.org/10.1086/671910

Jaeger, P. T., Gorham, U., Bertot, J. C., & Sarin, L. C. (2013b). Democracy, Neutrality, and Value Demonstration in the Age of Austerity. *The Library Quarterly*, *83*(4), 368–382. https://doi.org/10.1086/671910

Jaeger, P. T., Jennings-Roche, A., & Hodge, O. J. (2023). Criminalizing Librarianship: State Legislatures Creating Legal Jeopardies for Librarians. *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, *8*(1), 17. https://doi.org/10.5860/jifp.v8i1.7869

Jaeger, P. T., Jennings-Roche, A., Taylor, N. G., Gorham, U., Hodge, O., & Kettnich, K. (2023). The Urge to Censor: Raw Power, Social Control, and the Criminalization of Librarianship. *The Political Librarian*, *6*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8711

Jaeger, P., & Sarin, L. (2016). All Librarianship is Political: Educate Accordingly. *The Political Librarian*, *2*(1). https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/pollib/vol2/iss1/8

Jaeger, P. T., Zerhusen, E., Gorham, U., Hill, R. F., & Taylor, N. G. (2017). Waking Up to Advocacy in a New Political Reality for Libraries. *The Library Quarterly*, *87*(4), 350–368. https://doi.org/10.1086/693492

Jill Greenlee. (2014). *The Political Consequences of Motherhood*. University of Michigan Press. http://proxy-ub.researchport.umd.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=800343&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Kjellberg, A. (2024, November 17). Notebook: Libraries and the Election [Substack newsletter]. *Book Post*. https://books.substack.com/p/notebook-libraries-and-the-election

Lakoff, G. (2014). *The all new Don't think of an elephant!: Know your values and frame the debate* (Revised and updated edition). Chelsea Green Publishing.

Leap, B., Kelly, K., & Stalp, M. C. (2023). Me? A Hero? Gendered Work and Attributions of Heroism among Volunteers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sociology (Oxford)*, *57*(5), 1209–1226. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385221136035

Levitz, E. (2022, October 19). *How the Diploma Divide Is Remaking American Politics*. https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/10/education-polarization-diploma-divide-democratic-party-working-class.html

Librarians | Data USA. (n.d.). Retrieved February 21, 2025, from https://datausa.io/profile/soc/librarians

Maack, M. N. (1982). Toward a History of Women in Librarianship: A Critical Analysis with Suggestions for Further Research. *The Journal of Library History (1974-1987)*, *17*(2), 164–185.

Mars, P. (2018). Gender Demographics and Perception in Librarianship. *School of Information Student Research Journal*, *7*(2). https://doi.org/10.31979/2575-2499.070203

Mercieca, J. (2023, February 8). *How To Save Democracy: Weirdify Fascism*. https://resolutesquare.com/articles/7HrpkvP9PbGn0vMlnVhQjo/how-to-save-democracy-weirdify-fascism

Mercieca, J. R. (2019). Dangerous Demagogues and Weaponized Communication. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02773945.2019.1610640

Mireles, A. A. (2020). *The Constraints of Progress: College Feminization and the Value of the College Degree* [Ph.D., Stanford University]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2734696986/abstract/B133D04E95F94AACPQ/1

Modigliani, K. (1986). BUT WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF THE CHILDREN? CHILDCARE, WOMEN, AND DEVALUED LABOR. *Journal of Education (Boston, Mass.)*, *168*(3), 46–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748616800307

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108595841

Nuttall, A. (2021, October 18). Women's Work, Women's Words: Feminist Library History. *BOOK RIOT*. https://bookriot.com/feminist-library-history/

Ozer, A. L. (2023a). Women Experts and Gender Bias in Political Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *87*(2), 293–315. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfad011

Ozer, A. L. (2023b). Women Experts and Gender Bias in Political Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *87*(2), 293–315. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfad011

Pandey, E. (2024, November 7). *America's diploma divide: States with fewer grads went for Trump*. Axios. https://www.axios.com/2024/11/07/college-degree-voters-split-harris-trump

Parker, A. M. (1997). *Purifying America: Women, cultural reform, and pro-censorship activism, 1873-1933*. University of Illinois Press. http://www.h-net.org/review/hrev-a0a8u0-aa

Parker, K. (2021, November 8). What's behind the growing gap between men and women in college completion? *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/11/08/whats-behind-the-growing-gap-between-men-and-women-in-college-completion/

Popowich, S. (2019). *Confronting the Democratic Discourse of Librarianship: A Marxist Approach*. Litwin Books, LLC. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2265813

Puzio, A., & Valshtein, T. (2022). Gender segregation in culturally feminized work: Theory and evidence of boys' capacity for care. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *23*(3), 271–284. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000397

Schlesselman-Tarango, G. (2016a). The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library. *Library Trends*, *64*(4), 667–686.

Schlesselman-Tarango, G. (2016b). The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library. *Library Trends*, *64*(4), 667–686. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0015

Schlesselman-Tarango, G. (2017). How Cute! Race, Gender, and Neutrality in Libraries. *Partnerships: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, *12*(1). http://dx.doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v12i1.3850

Scott, D., & Saunders, L. (2021). Neutrality in public libraries: How are we defining one of our core values? *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *53*(1), 153–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000620935501

Stanley, J. (2015). *How propaganda works*. Princeton University Press. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1512/2014955002-t.html

Stanley, J. (2018). *How fascism works: The politics of us and them* (First edition). Random House.

Stanley, J. (2024). *Erasing history: How fascists rewrite the past to control the future* (First One Signal Publishers / Atria Books hardcover edition). One Signal Publishers / Atria.

Traister, R. (2024, June 17). *Are Republican Women Okay?* Intelligencer. https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/conservatives-republican-party-women-rebecca-traister.html

U.S. Department of Education Ends Biden's Book Ban Hoax | U.S. Department of Education. (2025, January 24). http://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-ends-bidens-book-ban-hoax

Valtorta, R. R., & Monaci, M. G. (2023). When Workers Feel Like Objects: A Field Study on Self-Objectification and Affective Organizational Commitment. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, *19*(1), 15–26. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.5549

van Leeuwen, A. (2022). Useless Mouths: Value, Women's Work, and the Struggle against Exploitation. *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, *32*(2), 325–344. https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-bja10052

Watson, P. D. (1994). Founding Mothers: The Contribution of Women's Organizations to Public Library Development in the United States. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, *64*(3), 233–269.

Watson, P. D. (1996). Carnegie Ladies, Lady Carnegies: Women and the Building of Libraries. *Libraries & Culture*, *31*(1), 159–196.

Upholding Trust in Library Partnerships with Immigrants: Reflections on the Impact of Trump 2024

ANA NDUMU AND HAYLEY PARK

ABSTRACT

Trump's 2024 election win simultaneously disrupts, contradicts, and reifies what we know about immigrants. This article describes how anti-immigrant political leaders capitalize on the practice of polarizing and marginalizing immigrants. The return of a populist leader and his characteristically divisive approach has magnified how immigrants contend with divisions and oppression. Trump relies on powerful immigrant loyalists to advance his objectives while vulnerable immigrants face tantamount harm. The technology sector plays a part in this, and the library profession can as well.

When it comes to the 2024 election, immigrants' political participation and social inclusion presented an antinomy. The far right's America-first campaign messaging, on the one hand, continuously vilified immigrants. To be sure, xenophobic US leaders have long scapegoated immigrants of all backgrounds, who are perceived as "poisoning the blood" of United States society (Lee and Ueda 2006; O'Brien 2024). Yet, anti-immigrant sentiment has not been this mainstreamed since the Know Nothing party's mid-nineteenth-century ascendancy and eventual demise. Although the 2024 Republican presidential candidate targeted immigrants of all kinds, including Asian and Black diasporic immigrants such as those from China and Haiti, respectively, those of Central American Hispanic heritage were especially singled out (Zheng and Zompetti 2023). To some, immigrants are beyond our national imagery. An "all-American" monocultural ideal now prevails in the highest levels of government; this purist ideology relies on exclusionary views of US citizenship, broadly construed. It results in the suppression of educational curricula, cultural heritage celebrations, established terminology, and the arts. Mandates to establish a single US story have brought changes to how the public perceives classic literature, celebrates Black History Month, and learns about the US government (Fairfax and Akande 2023; Journell 2024). These restrictions jeopardize trust in our institutions, including schools, libraries, archives, museums, and governance.

At the same time, it *is* true that immigrants are changing United States society. Immigrants are indeed transforming the nation's demographic composition and cultural richness. Hispanics of all races now comprise the largest ethnicity in the United States (US Census Bureau 2023)—so much so that the US Census Bureau now recognizes this segment

of the population as a racial group, which poses myriad political and social challenges. In this moment of extreme political polarization, it is therefore not a matter of whether it is true that the immigrant segment of the population is growing and diverse but whether this really poses a threat. That the US is home to the most diverse immigrant population, with new neighbors from every other country in the world, is either a source of honor or worry for many (Moslimani and Passel 2024).

Multiple things can thus be true at once: Immigrants can be disenfranchised by the powerful majority who seek to define the nation's racial, social, and cultural consciousness. It is also possible that constituents of immigrant heritage uphold this assimilationist ideology. Further still, immigrants can belong to the status quo to the extent that they perpetuate anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. Here, we reflect on how the library workforce can better comprehend the multiplex that is immigrant sociopolitical identity. We can no longer rely on simplistic framings such that immigrants are cast as politically and informationally dispossessed. Some immigrants hold, enact, and abuse power. These dynamics are not divorced from the information sector and, as we will argue, emanate from remarkably fraught structures that have long limited the United States' capacity to truly be a plural society.

We identify as a generation 1.5 (who immigrated as a teenager or adolescent) Asian immigrant and an Afro-Latina Central American former asylee. Our positionalities and studies bring us to problematize assumptions about immigrants' political capacities. We therefore ask: *What aspects of immigrant identity formation, information determinism, and public trust has the LIS field overlooked? What are the paradoxes around immigrants' political power, anti-immigration, and information access?* Our goal is that these provocations, presented as intertwined facets, will inspire strategies for library-immigrant community partnerships rooted in realism.

Looking Back

To explore whether and how the LIS field discussed the impact of the first Trump administration on immigrant communities, we turned to articles related to serving immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers published around the first presidency of Donald Trump (2017–21). Our goal was to trace topics, trends, and themes about Trump's first term to contextualize library engagement and pinpoint the conceptual changes thereafter, notably during Biden's 2020–24 term. Our review revealed substantial coverage in *The Political Librarian, The Library Quarterly, and The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJIDI)*.[*] Following the 2016 election, *The Library Quarterly* published a two-part special issue titled "Aftermath: Libraries, Democracy, and the 2016 Presidential Election." These special volumes included topics related to immigrants, namely information sources (Adkins et al. 2017) and civic education (Bossaller 2017). Some pieces used Trump's presidency as a case study to reflect on key issues in the field of LIS. Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard (2017) explored the resurgence of divisive politics and the need to move beyond neutrality. Gibson and Hughes-Hassell (2017) noted the importance of continuing support for diversity, equity, and inclusion, while Mehra's (2017) reflection focused on the implication of Trump's presidency on political information literacy and economic development in rural America. Beyond these special issues, there were occasional one-off information science publications, such as Worrall and colleagues' (2022) examination of Trump's birthright citizenship Twitter speech acts and Ceja-Alcalá, Colón-Aguirre, and Alaniz's (2018) action research with the Latinx community

---

[*] For LISS, we used the query strings: immigra* OR refuge* OR asyl* OR migrants AND librar* AND trump and limited the search from 2016 to 2025.

in Boston in response to Trump's Executive Order 13768, emphasizing the importance of record literacy for immigrant rights advocacy in information organizations.

Yet, in the years following Trump's first term, few LIS articles focused on his political dominance. There was, however, gradual growth in works on immigrants' information behavior. A sample of topics include gatekeeping factors in engaging with Latin American immigrants in rural areas (Adkins and Sandy 2018), participatory game strategy to protect migrants' privacy (Gomez et al. 2020), young refugee women's migratory experience in post-secondary education (Luck and Santamaria 2020), and situation-focused approach to understanding refugee integration (Oduntan and Ruthven 2017). Kosciejew (2019) emphasized the important role that public libraries hold in providing refugees access to the tools they need to navigate unfamiliar information landscapes.

Nonetheless, we posit that, collectively, the LIS field's focus on immigrant information behavior or LIS service to immigrants was not proportionate with the outsized attention to immigration in the media and politics. The research was meager. Further, gauging by the number and types of publications after Trump's loss in 2020, the field was relatively silent on Trump's normalization of anti-immigrant rhetoric. Despite initial efforts to make sense of the 2016 election, this topic of conversation—and that of immigrants' information realities—was hardly sustained. We wonder whether the LIS field perceived Trump's first presidential term and its attendant nativist and racially charged politics as a one-hit-wonder fluke that opposes US mores. We now know that much of the nation preferred a populist and absolutist political leader. Our field has not examined the lasting impact of Trump's first administration's frenzied, hardline handling of immigration policy. Apropos, the available literature appears to characterize immigrant and refugee groups as marginalized and at risk without attending to much-needed in-group distinctions. In doing so, the LIS workforce ignores the power differentials within. In what follows, we describe the harm caused by immigrant underestimations and homogenization broadly enacted by actors on either side—distinctly, immigrant advocates and xenophobic demagogues.

Facet 1: Immigrants' Voting Patterns Defy Notions of and Attempts at Immigrant Disenfranchisement

The 2024 election solidified that immigrants are a powerful and complex voting bloc. Bureaucratic naturalization and voter registration processes historically undermine voting propensity among naturalized citizens, but those who were able to cast ballots play a key role (Frimgpong and Sanchez 2024). Fifty-three percent or 23.8 million of all eligible naturalized citizens voted, according to recent Pew Research Center data (Schaeffer 2024). Put simply, not all immigrants are politically disenfranchised. A growing number choose to exercise their civic right in lieu of divesting from US governance. This reality is often overlooked, which reduces immigrants' political agency. In spite of repeated threats of hardline immigration and mass deportation during Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, the turnout among immigrant voters was relatively strong. Trump's rhetoric serves a perlocutionary purpose, as posited by Searle's (1969; 1979) speech act theory, in that it signals who should and can be members of a political community. It positions immigrants as "semi-citizens" (Chen and Knapp 2021). Rather than a chilling effect, the election energized many naturalized immigrants and US-born relatives of immigrants in both expected and unexpected ways.

To grasp the here and now, we should look back. The 2024 election pattern contrasts that of 2020, when there appeared to be election fatigue stemming from the COVID-19

pandemic and the 2020 census, of which anti-immigrant messaging demonstrably resulted in an undercount (Chen and Knapp 2021). For example, the Trump administration discouraged undocumented immigrants from responding to the census, though this duty is civically mandated for all permanent residents regardless of status. Notably, the eventual 2024 electoral map was influenced by 2020's unprecedented census enumerating challenges stemming from a global health crisis, dual response burdens, and long-standing problems with capturing transient and marginalized groups, including some migrants.

The 2024 election differed. When compared to 2020, it was fast-paced and unpredictable. In fact, the 2024 election broke many records, one directly linked to immigrant inclusion: The Democratic nominee, then-Vice President Kamala Harris, was the first descendant of Black and South Asian immigrants to run for office. Yet, she hardly held a gargantuan grip on voters of immigrant backgrounds. We touch on this fact further along.

Here, we bring attention to the duality of the promise and susceptibility of immigrant civic participation. Voter suppression often begins long before the polls open. This multifaceted inequity functions through census weaponization, including but not limited to reapportionment and gerrymandering battles; unnecessary and confusing voter registration requirements such as on-site, in-person proof of citizenship; predictable election-year naturalization backlogs; and unfounded rumors of noncitizens casting illegal votes (Chen and Knapp 2021). These are all means of intimidating would-be voters. We dial in on the census, citizenship, naturalization, and other legal definitions to emphasize the flaws in US race-making and social class stratification. In another venue, we (Ndumu and Orie Chuku 2023) write about how so-called "dry documents" are often used to paint a skewed picture of a nation's origin story—a type of machination that literally encompasses identity politics.

Many immigrants view voting and contributing to the public good as extensions of the quintessential American dream. At the same time, those opposing immigration seek to limit certain immigrants' full participation in the United States' political process. To be sure, this wanton redefinition of citizenship and belonging explains why it's possible to offer US citizenship for $5 million to wealthy immigrants through a "gold card" system (Spagat and Weissert 2025). When analyzed from a systems lens, the 2024 presidential (and concurrent congressional) election demonstrated that immigrants' political agency is strengthening in spite of, not because of, the country's democratic infrastructure. Under punitive circumstances, immigrants comprised a solid voter base. We cannot define immigrants by attempts to relegate them to the margins of US governance.

Facet 2: Trump's Populist Agenda Is Bolstered by Immigrants and Descendants of Recent Immigrants

Immigrants' growing political mobilization does not evince a collective and uniform experience. Wealthy and established immigrants may benefit from various social safety nets, while the most vulnerable are subjected to political suppression. The 2024 election revealed that established and powerful immigrants can very well be among the oppressors. Trump's nativist and populist messaging resonated with some, often established, immigrants. Thus, another quagmire lies in the fact that the immigrant community is not only diverse but also fragmented along political lines.

As a 2024 Brookings Institution report indicates, immigrant party affiliation and voter priorities are not uniform (Frimpong and Sanchez 2024). Historically, immigrants have leaned Democratic, but the 2024 election revealed new trends. A separate Pew Research

Center report makes important distinctions among immigrant groups. Drawing from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the 2000 IPUMS decennial census data, two racial groups with the most eligible naturalized voters were found to be Hispanic or Asian Americans (Schaeffer 2014). The Latino male votes were noted as a significant support group for Trump, contributing directly to the tight races in Arizona, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Among Asian Americans, though the majority voted along Democratic lines, polls reported increased Asian American support for Republicans, particularly Trump. Crucially, most support for Kamala Harris came from Japanese voters (75 percent), while the biggest support for Donald Trump came from Filipino voters (45 percent). Another change within the Asian voter group entailed Chinese American voters who shifted from 72 percent support for Biden in the 2020 election to 53 percent for Harris in the 2024 election, resulting in increased support for the Republican Party from 27 percent in 2020 to 39 percent in 2024 (Montanaro 2025).

Religious affiliation, ethnoracial identity, and socioeconomic status were reliable determinants of voting preferences among immigrants. According to postelection research (Vergara 2024), the high cost of living concerned working-class immigrants, while Trump's perceived capitalist and business zeal attracted wealthy immigrants. There's religious in-group variance, too, though not entirely relating to faith systems or beliefs. Compared to US-born voters not of recent immigrant heritage, immigrants are almost twice as likely to hold conservative/very conservative religious views and still identify as a Democrat, with the exception of evangelical immigrants who reliably vote Republican. Trump gained fourteen points among Hispanic voters in 2024; white-identifying Hispanic voters particularly comprise a substantial Republican base. Stated differently, immigrant voters who aligned with Trump's religious, economic, and white Eurocentric agenda were more likely to support the Republican platform, even if doing so materially upheld stringent immigration policies and hate speech.

Some prominent right-wing actors are, in fact, descendants of immigrants. Trump is a child of immigrants, and his wife, Milania, immigrated thirty years ago. Candace Owens, the granddaughter of a Caribbean migrant, falsely claimed that "immigrants living in the US illegally who come from Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador are 'twice as likely' to commit crime than US-born citizens" (Kelety 2022). Former Proud Boys' chairperson, Enrique Tarrio, is an Afro-Cuban who espouses "closed borders" and touts the group's mantra of "reinstating a spirit of Western chauvinism" (McBain 2020). FBI Director Kash Patel, himself of Ugandan-Indian heritage, has long identified as a loyalist of the "widespread breath of the MAGA and the America First movement" (Patel 2022). Immigrants of color and/or descendants of immigrants can, indeed, parrot xenophobic ideology. Librarians and knowledge workers should make note of this overlooked intersectionality among immigrants.

Facet 3: The Information Sector Is Monopolized by People of Recent Immigrant Heritage and Relies on Newcomer Workers

The information and technology fields are encompassed in this paradigm shift. We cannot discuss the 2024 election without spotlighting the role of technology juggernauts such as South African-born Elon Musk, whose Teflon grip on the social media platform X has reshaped political discourse and information dissemination. Musk notoriously contributed $300 million toward Trump's campaign. Early into Trump's second term, Musk and fellow immigrant-descending tech mogul Vivek Ramaswamy were tasked with heading up Trump's

ad hoc Department of Government Efficiency. Among their initial priority areas was support for H1-B highly skilled visa workers who are essential to the information workforce (Musk and Ramaswamy 2024).

The conflict of interest is undeniable. Technology companies have been able to recruit talented workers from all over the world thanks to this nonimmigrant visa. Proponents claim that this recruitment strategy not only alleviates workforce shortages but also advances science and information. H1-B visa holders contribute to scientific and technological innovation, helping to roll out groundbreaking innovations and successful start-ups. On the other hand, H1-B visa holders face many restrictions and are seldom guaranteed pathways to permanent residence, much less citizenship. Though these workers directly contribute to the tools that often enable public discourse and civic engagement—including but not limited to databases, social media platforms, statistical analysis tools, and multimedia software—they lack the political capital to help shape the country's direction. In actuality, H1-B visa holders are the recipients of recent backlash among nativists who propagate presumed immigrant jobs *and* social replacements. All the while, companies like Facebook are walking back the fact-checking mechanisms that debunk these very conspiracy theories (Saric 2024). As tech billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos celebrate their immigrant heritage, their products increasingly pose risks to vulnerable immigrant groups (Chirinos 2022).

The H-1B visa holder population is but one sample. Technology surveillance constitutes a powerful Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) apparatus. Civil liberties and immigration rights groups condemn ICE tracking, especially social media monitoring and biometric identification systems. They contend that these actions marginalize vulnerable groups and erect digital barriers for immigrants who use free or low-cost personal technology to remain connected to loved ones and resources. As librarian and law professor Sarah Lamdan (2022) writes, "Similarly, undocumented immigrants are more likely to be tracked by immigration enforcement the more they comply with US laws. They generate digital 'paper trails' by getting licenses and insurance, paying bills, sending kids to school, filing taxes, working and participating in society. Social participation makes people more findable… more likely to be snared by ICE." Companies like RELX are now bolstered even more by data mining abilities under the Trump administration. Some advocates worry that due process is being compromised and the distinction between criminal and civil actions is blurred as a result of the convergence of immigration enforcement and a technology-fueled justice system, as is the case with corporations like Secure Communities, Palantir, and Thomson Reuters. Immigrants' rights and protections are jeopardized by this trifecta.

Concluding Thoughts

Hate abounds. For more than a decade, Trump and his supporters have relied on immigrant caricaturing, appeals to American exceptionalism, and ethnocentric fearmongering to chip away at people's trust in US society. The erosion of public trust puts partnerships between libraries and immigrant communities at risk. Many immigrants find support in libraries. The library profession is comprised of immigrants, too. And our library colleagues around the world are watching as they absorb the ripple effects of what appears to be a global populist tidal wave.

Some library workers instinctively know how to respond: We must protect works by and about immigrants, sustain events celebrating world cultures, promote legal services and civic engagement in our spaces, and defend against attacks on library funding and governance. However, there are other less apparent steps we can take to reorient US democracy toward decency, reason, and human rights.

First, we should challenge typecasts suggesting immigrants are universally disenfranchised, downtrodden, and exploited. Immigrants, like other societal groups, demonstrate significant voting power and may exercise it in underestimated ways. We must question premises about immigrant identities. Just as xenophobes pedal essentialist or reductionist tropes, well-intending allies can do the same. There is no one universal immigrant identity, and one-size-fits-all assumptions mean we fail to recognize that immigrants, too, can find belonging among far-right extremists and align with propaganda. A conundrum about xenophobic misinformation is that some immigrants acquiesce. Thus, we must understand "upward assimilation" as a political locus of control among certain immigrants. For some, misperceptions of successful integration into mainstream US society shape their racial, political, and social identity formation. As we write elsewhere,

> Given the history of race-based immigration policy in the US, some immigrants are positioned as white assimilated "model minorities," a divisive stereotype that weaponizes notions of exceptionalism (Petersen 1966), while others are attributed to so-called maladaptive Americanization … fatalist cultural inscriptions based on racial constructions force minoritized immigrants of color into a US racial binary and inculpates their ways of being rather than the conditions that deepen poverty, displacement, and disruption. (Ndumu and Park 2025)

However, we cannot absolve dogmatic politicians of their responsibilities either. In addition to grasping their information tactics, expressly hate speech, censorship, and technology dominance, we must continue to uphold unfettered access to information. Library workers should still champion accurate, diverse, and democratized information *and* put it in the places most likely to reach far-right anti-immigrant extremists. Aside from our libraries, media spotlights and social networking content are possible avenues.

Our field must also model information literacy at this moment where anything goes. The information sector is moving away from debunking false information, and soon, moderators and fact-checkers may very well be as obsolete as phone operators. But our field can ensure that important concepts like *critical thinking* do not become extinct. We can start working now to reposition critical thinking as an essential post-Trump 2024 skill. Much like our well-known READ campaigns, we should get back to the basics of rallying caregivers, educators, and other leaders around evaluating the reliability and credibility of information sources. Our work should be about teaching all of society—immigrants, nativists, and everyone—to be discerning consumers of media who can distinguish fact from deceit. Critical consciousness also empowers immigrants to reject assimilationist ideology.

Finally, we must not let up in writing and researching about the Trump era's assault on immigrants. The lesson from the past is that Trump's ideology will be a mainstay in US politics for years to come. His dominance is not by happenstance. Restoring trust means counter-storytelling. In addition to wonderful special issues like this one, LIS leaders should publish widely and often so as to match stereotypes and bigotry with evidence, firsthand accounts, and substantiated knowledge. When it comes to contributing to the breadth of scholarship on immigrants' vast identities, the LIS field has a lot to offer. Several of our field's most vivid theories, such as Fisher's information grounds, emanate from studies alongside immigrants

(Pettigrew 1999). Community partners can and should join us in the work of documenting and publishing their information experiences.

References

Adkins, D., and H. M. Sandy. 2018. "Engaging Linguistically Diverse Populations: Gatekeepers in Rural and Sparsely Populated Areas of the U.S. Midwest." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 2 (1/2): 32–51. https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v2i1/2.32210.

Adkins, D., H. M. Sandy, and J. Derpic. 2017. "Information Sources of Latin American Immigrants in the Rural Midwest in the Trump Era." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (3): 243–56. https://doi.org/10.1086/692301.

Bossaller, J. S. 2017. "Alternatives to Apathy and Indifference: Civic Education in Public Libraries." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (3): 195–210. https://doi.org/10.1086/692297.

Caidi, N., J. J. Ghaddar, and D. Allard. 2017. "Negotiating Borders: Librarianship and Twenty -First-Century Politics." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (4): 391–409. https://doi.org/10.1086/693493.

Ceja Alcalá, J., M. Colón-Aguirre, and D. Alaniz. 2018. "Immigrant Rights Advocacy as Records Literacy in Latinx Communities." *The Library Quarterly* 88 (4): 332–47. https://doi.org/10.1086/699268.

Chen, M., and H. Knapp. 2021. "The Political (Mis)Representation of Immigrants in Voting." *University of Colorado Law Review* 92 (3): 715. https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/faculty-articles/1347.

Chirinos, C. 2022. "Jeff Bezos Gets Teary Remembering How His Father Fled from Cuba to the US at 16 in Speech Praising Immigrants." *Fortune*, May 13. https://fortune.com/2022/05/13/jeff-bezos-father-miguel-cuban-immigrant-story/.

Doyle, L. n.d. "Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg: Migration Makes Us All Richer." United Nations International Organization for Migration Blog. https://weblog.iom.int/facebooks-mark-zuckerberg-migration-makes-us-all-richer.

Fairfax, C. N. 2023. "Black Lives Matter in the Time of Trump and Beyond." In *U.S. Democracy in Danger* (331–56), edited by A. Akande. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36099-2_15.

Frimpong, K., and G. R. Sanchez. 2024. "America's Immigrant Voters and the 2024 Presidential Election." *Brookings*, November 13. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/americas-immigrant-voters-and-the-2024-presidential-election/.

Gibson, A. N., and S. Hughes-Hassell. 2017. "We Will Not Be Silent: Amplifying Marginalized Voices in LIS Education and Research." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (4): 317–29. https://doi.org/10.1086/693488.

Gomez, R., B. C. Newell, and S. Vannini. 2020. "Mind the Five Card Game: Participatory Games to Strengthen Information Practices and Privacy Protections of Migrants." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 4 (2): 116–22. https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v4i2.33216.

Journell, W. 2024. "Tackling Trump: Contemporary Politics and the Creation of Official Knowledge." *The Social Studies* 116 (2): 75–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2024.2361450.

Kelety, J. 2022. "Expert: Conservative Activists Get Facts Wrong About Immigrants, Crime." Associated Press, May 12. https://www.lexisnexis.com/community/insights/legal/

immigration/b/outsidenews/posts/expert-conservative-activists-get-facts-wrong-about-immigrants-crime?srsltid=AfmBOopfBQpBuuqiwDq3ZIsbo4v7VQ8DHekfnk67Qc-ZmWHRhGIHhbPV.

Kenes, B. 2021. *The Proud Boys: Chauvinist Poster Child of Far-Right Extremism*. European Center for Populism Studies. https://www.populismstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ECPS-Organisation-Profile-Series-1.pdf.

Kosciejew, M. 2019. "Information's Importance for Refugees: Information Technologies, Public Libraries, and the Current Refugee Crisis." *The Library Quarterly*, 89 (2): 79–98. https://doi.org/10.1086/702193.

Lamdan, S. 2022. *Data Cartels: The Companies That Control and Monopolize Our Information.* Stanford University Press.

Lee, E. 2006. "A Nation of Immigrants and a Gatekeeping Nation: American Immigration Law and Policy." In *A Companion to American Immigration* (3–35), edited by R. Ueda. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470997116.ch2.

Luck, C., and M. Santamaria. 2020. "From a 'Limited Space' to a Much Wider Future: Meaning-Making Practices of Young Refugee Women Pursuing Post-Secondary Education." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* 4 (2): 87–107. https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v4i2.33635.

McBain, S. 2020. "The Rise of the Proud Boys in the US." *The New Statesman*, updated October 8. https://www.newstatesman.com/long-reads/2020/10/rise-proud-boys-us.

Mehra, B. 2017. "Mobilization of Rural Libraries toward Political and Economic Change in the Aftermath of the 2016 Presidential Election." *The Library Quarterly*, 87 (4): 369–90. https://doi.org/10.1086/692303.

Montanaro, D. 2025. "In This Election, Demographics Did Not Determine How People Voted." NPR, updated January 9. https://www.npr.org/2024/11/22/nx-s1-5199119/2024-election-exit-polls-demographics-black-latino-voters.

Moslimani, M., and J. S. Passel. 2024. "What the Data Says About Immigrants in the U.S." Pew Research Center, September 27. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/27/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/.

Musk, E., and V. Ramaswamy. 2024. "Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy: The DOGE Plan to Reform Government." *The Wall Street Journal*, November 20. https://www.wsj.com/opinion/musk-and-ramaswamy-the-doge-plan-to-reform-government-supreme-court-guidance-end-executive-power-grab-fa51c020.

Ndumu, A., and N. Orie Chuku. 2023. "Anti-Black Racism, Anti-Immigrant Sentiment, and Misinformation: A Recipe for Profound Societal Harm." *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 60 (1): 677-80. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.838.

Ndumu, A., and H. Park. 2025. "From the Committee on Work with the Foreign Born (CWFB) to the Services to Refugees, Immigrants, and Displaced Persons (SRIDP) Sub-Committee: Chronicling U.S. Race Relations, Immigration Policy, and Library Engagement with Immigrants of Color." *The Library Quarterly.*

O'Brien, S. B. 2024. "Donald Trump's Rhetoric and How Eugenics Frames His World." In *Eugenics in American Political Life* (75–111). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-63553-3_4.

Oduntan, O., and I. Ruthven. 2017. "Investigating the Information Gaps in Refugee Integration." In *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 54 (1): 308–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.2017.14505401034.

Patel, K. 2022. "Special Guest Kash Patel is Partying with Us! #PPN #TRUTH." The Patriot Party News, June 16. https://thepatriotpartynews.com/special-guest-kash-patel-is-partying-with-us-ppn-truth/.

Pettigrew, K. E. 1999. "Waiting for Chiropody: Contextual Results from an Ethnographic Study of the Information Behavior Among Attendees at Community Clinics." *Information Processing & Management* 35 (6): 801–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4573(99)00027-8.

Phillips, K. 2021. "Lived Experiences of Haitian Immigrants in the United States During the Trump Administration." PhD diss., Walden University. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (11117). https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/11117.

Saric, I. 2024. "What to Know About the H1-B Visas Fueling Divide in MAGA World." *Axios*, December 27. https://www.axios.com/2024/12/27/h1b-visa-maga-trump-immigration

Schaeffer, K. 2024. "1 in 10 Eligible Voters in the U.S. Are Naturalized Citizens." Pew Research Center, September 19. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/19/1-in-10-eligible-voters-in-the-u-s-are-naturalized-citizens/.

Searle, J. R. 1969. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173438.

Searle, J. R. 1979. *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609213.

Spagat, E., and W. Weissert. 2025. "Trump Sees 'a Thirst' for His 'Gold Card' Immigration Visa Idea." Associated Press, February 26. https://apnews.com/article/trump-gold-card-visa-million-investors-1aa4585dc053e21c7d887f1fdb9eec13.

US Census Bureau. n.d. "The Hispanic Population in the United States: 2023." Last revised April 22, 2024. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hispanic-origin/2023-cps.html.

Vergara, J. 2024. "Understanding Hispanic Voters' Immigration Priorities in the 2024 Election." UnidosUS, December 18. https://unidosus.org/blog/2024/12/18/understanding-hispanic-voters-immigration-priorities-in-the-2024-election/.

Worrall, A., A. Ndumu, and L. H. Gerido. 2022. "Sentiment and Network Analysis of Twitter Reactions to the U.S. Birthright Citizenship Ban Debate." In *Information for a Better World: Shaping the Global Future* (Vol. 13193, 149–74), edited by M. Smits. Springer International Publishing AG. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96960-8_11.

Zheng, J., and J. P. Zompetti. 2023. "'I'm Not a Virus': Asian Hate in Donald Trump's Rhetoric." *Asian Journal of Communication* 33 (5): 470–503. https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2023.2246509.

Authors

Ana Ndumu: assistant professor, College of Information, University of Maryland

Ndumu's work focuses on the cross between social identity and information behavior, particularly how accessible and adequate information strengthens marginalized communities. Her studies are thus at the nexus of libraries, demography, and social inclusion. Her recent works examine the information worlds of African, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Latinx immigrants living in the U.S. Her publications include *The Black Librarian in America: Reflections, Resistance, and Reawakening* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022) and *Borders & Belonging: Critical Examinations of Library Approaches Toward Immigrants* (Library Juice Press, 2020). She has published in Journal of Documentation, Journal for Education in Library &

Information Science, and Journal of Library & Information Science among others. Email: andumu@
umd.edu.

Hayley Park: Ph.D. student, University of Maryland

Park is a 2022-2023 ALA Spectrum Scholar and a 2024 ALA Emerging Leader who has developed
a social justice-centered, participatory approach to qualitative research and librarianship. As a val-
ues-driven 1.5 generation bilingual librarian-researcher, she is drawn to ideas and practices that chal-
lenge cultural hegemony and structural inequities. She is dedicated to ensuring that all spaces libraries
create, maintain, and represent are welcoming and inclusive of all members of our shared communities.
Email: hp00@umd.edu.

Libraries: Guardians of Democracy

NANCY KRANICH

ABSTRACT

Libraries offer safe (and brave) community spaces—places where neighbors can express and amplify their voices. At a perilous time when the library profession confronts overwhelming trials, citizens* isolated after years of a devastating pandemic and disheartened by a contentious election have turned toward libraries—a place to seek refuge, reconnect with friends and neighbors, and work together to address common concerns. During the pandemic, librarians showed up for them, turning outward and deepening relationships with local communities. Now, faced with local, state, and federal challenges, librarians must galvanize those same citizens to show up across America as a bulwark in defense of democracy and their most cherished liberties—manifest locally through their libraries.

Libraries: A Community Gem

My local library reopened after reconstruction on the Sunday following Election Day, and I panicked, worried that no one would join the celebration. After all, residents—many discouraged by a contentious election—might withdraw and stay away. As a library trustee in Highland Park, New Jersey, over the last four years, I weathered the aftermath of a divisive debate over a program featuring the author of the children's alphabet book *P Is for Palestine.* Not long after, the library director retired. A new appointee brought hope, but COVID shutdowns came just a few weeks later. Even though the library reached out during the many months of the shutdown, remote delivery proved no substitute for on-site services. Reopening arrived just as Hurricane Ida hit New Jersey, inundating the library with a devastating flood. Following another eight months of closure with remote-only services, the library reopened just as the state library announced a much-needed renovation grant, requiring a third shutdown in less than four years. Another new library director sought temporary quarters. After four and a half years of being mostly closed, no one knew what to expect when reopening day finally arrived.

Yet, over one thousand residents from our small town of fifteen thousand joined the excitement. Crammed into the library's refurbished meeting room, residents gathered to hear local politicians praise the new facility and tell library stories. Even as the welcoming session broke up, young and old continued to stream in. Children delighted in games and climbed aboard the town's new fire engine parked outside. Reluctant readers relished reading to Daisy, the proud therapy dog. Adults swayed to local bands and sampled an international cookie bar

---

* For purposes of this discussion, it is helpful to define the term "citizens," which is used in its historic sense—all the people who live in a city, village, or community. They are the demos or collective citizenry in "democracy." The term is not used in the narrow, legalistic sense (Mathews 2019, 4).

donated by local restaurants. Everyone marveled at their first real opportunity to celebrate the fellowship of their neighbors after so many long delays. I savored reconnecting with many fellow citizens, some not seen for years. Indeed, the occasion elicited overwhelming joy from local residents, separated for so long by the pandemic and reeling from the aftermath of a contentious campaign. As an ardent champion of community engagement, I applauded the excitement of so many citizens who shed their loneliness and embraced the feeling of wholeness after so many years disconnected from each other.

By reimagining our space, we also reenvisioned our role in the community. Extensive engagement with community members during long closure periods paved the way for this revival. New leadership and remote services necessitated fresh relationships that spanned boundaries well beyond the traditional. Our librarians found novel ways to connect by rebuilding trust and developing a newfound appreciation for community building. As a facilitator of the library's community conversations, I uncovered much about our town, discovering we live and work in a place with many different stories—stories that sometimes conflict and require empathy to move forward together. Our board used the opportunity to revise key policies related to selection, reconsideration, conduct, exhibits, and displays in preparation for facing the kind of challenges proliferating throughout the state. To reinforce our commitment to the freedom to read, we unanimously voted to become a Book Sanctuary, proudly joining many libraries and towns in New Jersey and the nation.

Turning Outward

The reopening of the Highland Park Public Library epitomizes the best of the relationship between libraries and their communities. The physical space invites hope and fellowship in a society plagued by loneliness and alienation. Libraries like ours offer safe (and brave) spaces to exchange views and values, as recently affirmed by Pride Center members who rallied at a recent library board meeting with overwhelming support for several challenged young adult titles. When libraries turn outward to their communities, they advance not only an informed but also an engaged citizenry—essential to a strong democracy. In the era of fake news, libraries teach citizens how to seek truth. In the age of heightened censorship, libraries defend the freedom to read, view, and listen. In this uniquely inclusive civic space, citizens in a diverse community exercise their freedoms together. For democracy to flourish, libraries must step up and offer citizens free and open access to ideas. The salient tension of our times stems from those barriers that deny citizens their full information rights—barriers that libraries, like those in Highland Park, overcome. Their stories become our stories through a reciprocal process of engagement. When our library closed, we showed up throughout our community, rebuilding trust and relationships. When we reopened and needed their support, the community showed up for us.

Stepping Up

As we emerge from a portentous election and contemplate the implications of a new era, many of us have turned to our colleagues and library associations to unify our advocacy efforts. Our profession faces overwhelming challenges at a perilous time: the conspicuous targeting of libraries in Project 2025; attacks on school, public, and academic libraries; the proposed dissolution of the Department of Education; risks to federally funded research; cuts to financial support; threats to the E-Rate program; tidal waves of book challenges; endangered

national libraries; censored federal data; and state laws criminalizing librarians. Moreover, we face these challenges without permanent leaders in place at the American Library Association and its Washington Office, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the National Archives, and soon the Library of Congress when the librarian's ten-year term ends. By this time next year, the structure of librarianship as a national institution might well lay in ruins. Confronted with such challenges, we must unite, galvanize public support, and amplify our voices as never before. With an uphill battle pending, our mission remains clear: to champion our deepest enduring values.

Yet, as the national policy ground shifts under us, our essential strength remains our persistent local appeal in school, on campus, and in town. As we experienced in Highland Park, the public still loves and supports libraries. Libraries represent that quintessential "3rd space" (Oldenburg) in our communities ("places essential to the political processes of democracy")—trusted, safe (and brave) spaces, boundary-spanning, accessible for everyone, and respectful of all voices. Democracies depend on libraries as third places conducive to deliberative discourse—where citizens can talk and work together to solve public problems.

With national programs in jeopardy, we can still make a difference locally by acting intentionally to safeguard democracy itself. When states pass repressive censorship laws, we can apply best practices in our selection and reconsideration processes and assemble strong coalitions to resist book banners. If we cannot protect the public's privacy through federal legislation, we can still model strong local privacy practices and teach privacy literacy. If we cannot ensure a public voice in Congress, we can convene deliberative dialogues locally to enable citizens to work through public problems together. If we cannot convert to greener energy consumption, we can embrace prudent environmental practices and facilitate dialogue that ignites local sustainability. If we cannot fight fires or floods, we can help communities prepare, respond, and recover when disasters strike. If we cannot halt post-truth disinformation, we can teach the media and information literacy skills necessary to distinguish fact from fiction. If we cannot prevail in elections, we can close the civic literacy gap in schools, on campus, and in town. If we cannot stop the disappearance of essential information on government websites and databases, we can link to information captured during the end-of-term-crawl that preserved much of the historical record. Working together, we stand as hubs on a robust national network capable of delivering the kind of transformative library leadership that will communicate a narrative that sustains and ignites hyperlocal community support and participation.

Our library associations have prepared us well to navigate the political terrain as strong advocates for essential programs and services, as well as the freedom to read. The American Library Association (ALA) offers training initiatives to teach us how to counter book bans and transform our communities, starting with Turning Outward in partnership with the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, Models for Change, and a new program: Libraries as Leaders in Bridging Divides. We march in step with many other organizations, including the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Urban Libraries Council, the EveryLibrary Institute, and the Association of Research Libraries.

The election left me and many others in despair and uncertainty; my grief drew me toward retreat and surrender. Yet the reopening of our library and overwhelming support for retaining challenged titles instilled a sense of hope and purpose—a renewed belief in our calling as librarians as trustworthy guardians of democracy. Now, we must begin anew, renew our contract with our communities, and turn outward toward them when they need us most—and when we need them most. They will show up, just as they did at the reopening

of our library and the board's hearing about challenged titles. Across America, we can forge a path forward as catalytic and impactful forces that inspire hope in a disheartened populace.

Libraries Must Restore Our Communities and Democracy

But time is short. We face a referendum on the principles of our democracy. We must not despair but believe in ourselves and our essential civic role. We have the will and capacity to restore our communities and democracy. We are the ones we have waited for.

To succeed, we must:

- Flip the frame and force political systems to respond on our own terms,
- Give local community members an opportunity to tell their stories,
- Elevate and celebrate the role of local citizens,
- Build trust and social capital—help communities bond and bridge across differences,
- Strengthen relationships and partner across our communities and beyond,
- Join forces to share strategies and best practices,
- Network with other democratic institutions and advocates,
- Reframe the debate from book banning to the power of reading,
- Create a resounding narrative about the learning and trust we bring everyone in our communities, and
- Amplify our voices by letting representatives know that citizens of all ages and viewpoints value and depend on us.

As one of the most trusted institutions in American communities, libraries must remain special places where people feel safe to share each other's stories, value differences, and find common ground. We must reframe the debate to focus on the issues that define us: opportunity, learning, safety, honesty, fairness, justice, inclusion, understanding, and shared responsibility. As ALA president, I learned that we must believe in ourselves and the power of libraries. Never has that ethic been truer than today.

Across America's communities, people yearn to connect, collaborate, and cocreate possibilities to share and solve problems together. We librarians must reimagine our civic role and reaffirm our democratic purpose. The challenges we face today may tower above us, yet they also present new opportunities for us to connect. As President Biden addressed the US Conference of Mayors, "Each of us must be Guardians of Democracy. To restore the strength of our institutions of democracy…"

References

Biden Jr., Joseph R. 2025. "Remarks to the United States Conference of Mayors." Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, January 17. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-202500085/pdf/DCPD-202500085.pdf.

Mathews, David. 2019. "With the People: Making Democracy Work as It Should." Cousins Research Group Paper. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation. https://www.kettering.org/sites/default/files/product-downloads/with_the_people_crg.pdf

Oldenbourg, Ray. 1989. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day.* NY: Paragon House.

Author

Nancy Kranich is a teaching professor and LIS concentration coordinator at Rutgers University School of Communication and Information, Master of Information program. Kranich served as ALA president from 2000–2001, focusing on libraries and democracy. She founded ALA's Center for Civic Life and the Libraries Foster Community Engagement membership initiative group and helped launch ALA's Libraries Transform Communities initiative, for which she currently advises the design of the Libraries as Leaders in Bridging Divides program. Trained as a public innovator with the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, she has also served twice on the board of the National Issues Forums Institute, participated in democracy-focused learning exchanges with the Kettering Foundation, and co-led the US-Russia Dialogue on the Civic Role of Libraries in the 21st Century. She studies and teaches community/civic engagement, as well as intellectual freedom and information policy. She proudly serves as president of the Highland Park (NJ) Public Library Board of Trustees. Email: nancy.kranich@rutgers.edu.

For a longer biographical statement and curriculum vitae, see: https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/kranich-nancy-carol

Orcid: 0000-0003-3399-8949

On Moving Forward

LIBRATOR

ABSTRACT

The author examines likely scenarios pertaining to the world of librarianship that may arise from the incoming administration. They call for a retrenchment in values-based librarianship, examine what those values are, and encourage introspection among library professionals. The article closes with a series of recommendations for all levels of librarianship to meet the potential shocks the field will face in the years ahead, emphasizing the importance of solidarity.

> *"Hoping for the best, prepared for the worst, and unsurprised by anything in between."-Maya Angelou*

Anyone serving as a public librarian exists within the Venn circles of their personal values, our professional values, and the values supported by a majority of the community. There is room there, certainly, for a public library to succeed, but it can be much more difficult in some areas than others. Indeed, in a rural community that votes consistently red—an outlier in an otherwise blue state—it can be like walking a tightrope. A small rural community affords massive potential for valuable interpersonal and professional relationships, fruitful partnerships, and an overall much greater impact from its library, and I am very proud of what my team and I have accomplished here. It also, however, involves the ever-present threat of alienating the wrong people and becoming *persona non grata*—endangering the institution, whose face you are, in the bargain.

In this atmosphere, recruiting new board members is always a stressful prospect. I find myself wondering about the motivations of the people interested in the role: Are they here to help or to undermine our efforts? Do they genuinely care about things like open access and intellectual freedom, or do they have an axe to grind?

I am fortunate to have a board that is largely in step with library values and a generally supportive local government that views the library as a partner and conduit to the community. Stories abound of rural jurisdictions that have neither and the nightmare scenarios they have to face: political hijackings of key positions, defunding, harassment by reactionary groups, threats, vandalism, and much more. In this area, one neighboring jurisdiction is volunteer-run, another is facing painful cuts and potential closures, and others exist on the margins and scrounge materials as best they can.

The fact that my area voted for Donald Trump in 2024, while immensely disheartening, was not even remotely a surprise. Locally, support for Trump is taken as a given in conversation—flags and signs abound in varying degrees of tastefulness ("God, Guns, Trump"

being a favorite), and MAGA hats and shirts proliferate. Ultimately, this election saw 75 percent of the community vote to elect a man who cares nothing for their well-being, only for their fealty.

Through A Glass, Darkly

> *"If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit." -W.C. Fields*

And now, here we are. An ignorant, venal, vindictive authoritarian was chosen to lead us in a free and fair election, and the saints, the sinners, and everyone in between have to reckon with the consequences. It seems likely that anyone not primed to join the new oligarchy will suffer for their benefit and that the haves and the have-nots will continue to drift further apart, with certain groups scapegoated as un-American to redirect anger away from the abuses of the new Gilded Age's robber barons.

Since the inauguration, the new administration has already launched a blizzard of executive orders ranging from the poorly thought out to the blatantly unconstitutional, effectively flooding the media, public, and government with an unbalancing wave of fiat government designed to overwhelm both comprehension and resistance. While legal challenges strike at one power grab in the courts (themselves effectively subverted), twenty more will have been released in the meantime so that each has to make its way through the system. How effective this "flood-the-zone" approach will be in the long run remains to be seen, but without meaningful and coordinated opposition—which this is specifically designed to frustrate—anything is possible.

Of course, even the best of us can only hazard a guess as to what the future might hold in this environment for libraries, as well as the country. I think the following, however, are very likely possibilities:

- Heritage Foundation judges taking on First Amendment cases will be less willing to uphold the freedom to read and free speech rights. Challenges to library materials and programs could succeed, and more materials, particularly on LGBTQ+ subjects, could be declared obscene—the protections of the First Amendment cannot be taken for granted. The Foundation's Project 2025, the authors of which are being placed into power, equates materials on "transgender ideology" with pornography and says that "educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders." This is listed in that document as "Promise #1."

- In such an atmosphere, threats to libraries and staff will likely increase. There will be pressure to ramp up security without additional resources, and costs associated with a largely theatrical security presence will cut into the ability of libraries to fulfill patron needs, further undermining their value.

- The American Library Association, which already faces serious funding issues thanks in part to forced divestments for politically motivated reasons, will continue to find itself under attack for perceived radicalism by genuine radicals. ALA has already done itself no favors with its poor communication around these issues, which have alienated many in the divisions and round tables. Without the goodwill of its members and the perception that the organization is fighting for librar-

ies' fundamental values in a meaningful way, participation and, by extension, funding will further decrease.

- IMLS and LSTA are almost certain to be cut—their funding has been under threat for years, and the "slash-and-burn" attitude of the incoming administration already proposes to eliminate much bigger agencies than them. While this will not in and of itself close libraries, it will eliminate a major funding source for innovation and force state libraries to reshuffle and reprioritize the support they are able to offer. And state libraries will be dealing with challenges of their own—as of this writing, South Dakota proposes to eliminate theirs entirely, with more red states potentially following suit.

- The Internet Archive, one of the few remaining institutions online that share our mission and values, will find itself fending off constant legal challenges (and DDoS attacks) and possible injunctions from a hostile judiciary. Further legal loss in the pending suit brought by major music labels could result in literally ruinous penalties, as well as a redefinition of fair use that further empowers private rights holders over the public good.

- News media will divide into three major groups: the complicit, the cowed, and the largely irrelevant Cassandras screaming into the void. AI-generated slop will make up an increasing percentage of articles as the field of professional journalism continues to shrink correspondingly. Meanwhile, grassroots efforts on social media will try to pick up the slack, though how much success they will have operating under billionaire platform owners and wading through a morass of propaganda remains to be seen. The effect of all this will be to further delegitimize mainstream sources of information and cause people to coalesce around the bubbles that appeal to their biases, hampering the solidarity needed for change.

- DEI efforts will increasingly be met unsympathetically, if not with open hostility, as a form of "reverse racism" designed to disempower whites. Federal efforts have already been shut down by executive order. The protections granted by the Fourteenth Amendment are already being directly challenged by executive fiat, and standing up for the hard-won civil rights many of us take for granted in modern society will be ever harder and ever more critical.

- Social media will continue to become ever more toxic, exploitative, and subject to algorithmic manipulation. The government will seek additional controls over content and continue to monitor citizens' activity in increasingly chilling ways. Free speech questions in ostensibly private platforms that nevertheless serve as new "public" fora will prioritize the overlapping private and political interests that represent the new ruling class.

- The administration has already indicated its willingness to permit ICE raids in schools, churches, and hospitals. Libraries could very well be caught up in the middle of anti-immigrant sweeps as well, and staff will need to know what to do in such an event, especially as an executive order has stated that any officials interfering with ICE will themselves be prosecuted.

- The cry for "government efficiency" and pressure from the investor class will drive a push for the dismantling and/or privatization of public goods. Libraries will not be exempt from this, especially considering that the class of people push-

ing for such privatization are largely disconnected from the population that uses
the library and will not necessarily recognize or sympathize with the value librar-
ies provide them. Culture war issues, as described above, will be stoked as needed
to make an emotionally based case for defunding.

- Ham-fisted, speculative, and self-serving economic moves made for the benefit
of the investor class will lead to likely recession, resulting in budget cuts, layoffs,
and closures. Government positions and the funding that supported them will
be eliminated, and that, combined with the accelerating dehumanization of the
workforce thanks to artificial intelligence, will result in remaining library staff
assisting more patrons with unemployment-related issues.

- The disparity in educational opportunities between rich and poor communities
will increase further as federal money dries up and states are left to fend for them-
selves. Early childhood education and education for students with special needs
will be particularly hard-hit. Parents with the means will gravitate toward private
options as public schooling withers on the vine, assisted by voucher programs
designed to expedite that process. Poorer states will see significant educational
hardship, and free access to reputable educational resources will become more
critical.

Whither Libraries?

First, an important question.

What drew you to librarianship? A love of books and reading? Helping others? A partic-
ularly engaging program? The prospect of being able to make a difference to people? For some
of us, librarianship is a job, but for many, it is a calling—to the point that vocational awe is a
real problem in this profession that can turn toxic and impact our emotional well-being. What
causes this passion for our profession—and why is it common among both staff and patrons?

I would argue that a large part of it is the values we traditionally represent in the library
world. By defining and promoting those values in our communities, we can guide each other
through dark times. People and institutions that visibly stand for something and remain stead-
fast are, after all, in short supply and are all the more remarkable when found.

Values-based librarianship is vital now. Solidarity around our mission, role in society,
and partners that share that mission is essential—it is the source of the infectious passion that
libraries can inculcate.

The ALA has its own Core Values of Librarianship statement, of course, which iden-
tifies five values: access, equity, intellectual freedom and privacy, public good, and sustain-
ability (American Library Association 2024). These are, certainly, important values to our
profession, but I would view them as but a committee-sanitized starting point and offer this
as an alternative take on what, in my view, libraries stand for—often in the face of strong
societal headwinds:

Reading

Sometimes, I worry that we, as a profession, get too far away from this in our haste to
demonstrate our relevance by chasing trends. It cannot be emphasized enough that the mass
literacy we take for granted today is a historical anomaly—a fragile creation of a society that

viewed it as critical for participatory democracy—and that the overwhelming mass of humanity throughout history has been illiterate and often kept so deliberately. Indeed, compulsory public education itself is a child of the Enlightenment and only really took off in the mid-nineteenth century. With the rise of technology, starting with television and culminating in the smartphone, reading for pleasure has steadily declined (Iyengar 2024), and changes in media preferences to shorter articles and even shorter videos have impacted the ability of many to muster the attention to read a book at all (Baron and Mangen 2021).

But reading is important—if anything, more important than ever. Its benefits for physical and mental health are well known, and it fosters empathy, reasoning skills, vocabulary development, and a broader view of the world (Stanborough 2019). Reading also helps develop intellectual curiosity—the willingness to seek answers from the world around you, discover alternative ideas and perspectives, and appreciate humility in the face of all there is to be known. Some gave up on reading—and perhaps education itself—early on and came to rediscover it later—it's never too late to pick up a book, and we need to foster that mentality. Long-form reading enables one to engage with an argument at a meaningful level as opposed to flitting from one thing to the next. There is a reason that reading was denied to slaves—it showed them what freedom could be. Likewise, there is a reason that books (as well as public education itself) are being targeted by ideologues for the groups they represent and the ideas they contain. A culture of reading, of curious, educated, participatory citizens is a fragile thing that some might argue we never really achieved—but it's still our mission to pursue it, often in the face of those who view that as a threat.

Of course, all of this is preaching to the choir, but as has been pointed out, choirs only get better with practice.

Human Rights

EveryLibrary has done wonders for our profession, and one of their most powerful recent arguments has been to view the issues libraries face through the lens of human rights. In doing so, we see that so many of the values we hold are bound up in that framework. Libraries protect privacy—does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights not say, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation"? Libraries stand for intellectual freedom and collect accordingly, with "something to offend everyone"—does the Declaration not say, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers"? Libraries promote equal access for all—does the Declaration not say, "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized" (United Nations)? Education is a human right. Participatory government is a human right. Equitable treatment is a human right. All of these are traditional library values.

Those rights may be under siege right now, and the protections of the law and the Constitution are no longer as certain as they once were—but they still exist. In an increasingly oligarchical system, libraries must think not in terms of "left vs. right" but as "top vs. bottom" and continue to support the people at the bottom who need it most. Because our patrons, regardless of their background or circumstances, are an elite group—anyone choosing to read, participate in society, expand their horizons, and patronize libraries and appreciate them for what they are is elite in my book—and it's an elitism anyone can join.

Connection

Despite being ostensibly more interconnected than ever, it's a lonely world (Thompson 2025). Social media has only atomized us further and made our relationships shallower; as Eric Klinenberg reminds us, it's the social infrastructure of a community that determines its resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic shook us badly all over the world, undermining for many the already weak bonds that connected them with people and groups in their communities. The joy of reconnecting as restrictions eased was palpable for many—myself included—but the fear still lingers for others. Libraries have, for decades now, helped facilitate real-world connections with people. It's only now, with people splintered and retreating behind screens, that the value of those human connections is glaringly apparent. Now, we seek to get people back, not just in the library but in society generally, and as part of it, we should push back against the hollow promises and controlled, walled gardens of the online world. So many civic clubs, nonprofits, teams, and other groups in our communities share that mission. We should be working to collaborate with as many as possible to create participatory citizens and remind people of the good things they can have in a functioning society.

Truth

We are professionals, trained and tasked with parsing sources of information to find the best and most reliable for our patrons. What could be more valuable in the Misinformation Age? As AI-generated material proliferates, deepfakes are deployed to deceive, and algorithms prioritize the interests of their creators, it is incumbent on us to stay on top of these developments, develop the tools to tell good information from bad, and instruct our patrons (in schools, universities, and the public sphere) in their use. If we don't, who will?

Libraries must lean into the trust that our patrons confide in us and promote our role in giving disinterested and reliable resources upon which people can develop their worldviews. Stripped of the background noise of algorithmic content, advertisements, and distraction, libraries can provide a trusted anchor point for self-education, practical understanding, and intellectual curiosity. Online, we can work to create a network of trustworthy islands in the sea of bots, propaganda, and ads that make up so much of what the internet has become. Offline, we can encourage people to retrench in the real and discover the trusted partners already in their communities that can make a positive difference in their lives.

Good people can disagree on aspects of many of these, of course, but I feel they get at the core of our profession. But that is just one aspect—another is our own personal beliefs. And so, I would ask you, reader:

What do you stand for personally—not just positions you think you should take because of tribal or societal pressures? What matters fundamentally to you? Have you ever systematically thought that out? Could you articulate it if you had to?

What angers you in the world, and how does that reflect the things you care about?

Where do your values overlap with those of our profession? Where do they contradict each other? Does that represent a problem for you?

Values-based librarianship unites us, helps us navigate crises, and shows us where the lines are that we must defend. Based on these values, we have options and agency that we must never give up.

What We Can Do

> *"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something.*
> *And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that*
> *I can do."-Edward Everett Hale*

Abstract values often never get further than abstract discussion; to be effective, they must be channeled into real-world action. I would submit the following as action items to be pursued at any practicable level and invite readers to develop and share their own, with the watchwords being imagination and lateral thinking:

- First and foremost, be there. Be out in the community, at public events and functions, and volunteering on public boards; the library, as represented by you, needs to be seen as an active and omnipresent community partner and a source of positivity. Goodwill is itself a fungible resource—the investment you make in others will matter when trouble arises, and people who know you personally as a caring and helpful person will have difficulty believing unfounded accusations from bad-faith actors.
- Libraries without a foundation should look to establish one and conduct a donation campaign to create as large an endowment as possible to cushion against economic shocks. This campaign should include an active, planned giving initiative.
- Locate and stockpile legal funding and secure allies (whether elected officials, states' Attorneys General, the ACLU, PEN America, EveryLibrary, or others) to solicit support for legal challenges and potential punitive actions against librarians. Divided we fall.
- Likewise, an emergency grant fund could be created at the state or national level to cope with potential defunding efforts (for the short term, at least).
- Plan budgets now to account for the contingency in which IMLS funding is eliminated and redistribute existing funds accordingly.
- Develop arguments for libraries that resonate with a conservative audience. Suggested examples:
   - The library as the heart of a community
    - The library as a place for the self-made person
    - If you don't invest in your community, what business will? – Winning businesses invest in themselves
    - The library as the repository for our shared cultural heritage
    - Government shouldn't tell you what you can and can't read
    - Libraries are extremely cost-effective in the services they deliver to the community, typically with a 1:4 cost/benefit ratio
    - Access shouldn't only be for rich people – Libraries as levelers of the playing field
    - The library as a friendly place for people to get together in real life
    - The things you're passionate about, you learn about on your own – Libraries help people discover and develop their passions

- In a world of misinformation, librarians care about finding the best information and are trained to do it
- We help bridge the digital divide and connect people with low computer skills to online services in a trusted environment
- For some people, library staff are the only human connection they have
- No matter who you are or what you like, we have something for you – No matter how much education you had before, there's always something new, interesting, and valuable to learn at any time

- Conduct scenario planning institutionally. Obtain legal opinion letters and draft best practices for handling state-sanctioned abuses, including immigration raids.
- Position ourselves as supplemental educational facilities in an increasingly hamstrung public educational environment and as critical adjuncts to homeschoolers.
- Rethink our relationship with the technology that underpins the new authoritarianism. Libraries pride themselves on being connectors and instructors, and these are certainly important roles for us, especially now. However, we do tend to chase trends out of fears of irrelevance, and that tendency is leading us astray—we can teach without having to adopt. Indeed, it's important to ask: What are we enabling in our relationship with technology? Who benefits? Who suffers?
   - Algorithmic social media is intrinsically exploitative, and libraries should withdraw from platforms that use it if possible. The moment may be right—people are generally unhappy with the state of social media, specifically the larger platforms. They see that things are worse: the bots, the propaganda, the relentless ads, and the worst of humanity spotlighted for clicks. The platform and the principles underpinning it make a difference, yes, but as McLuhan said, "the medium is the message," and this medium is built to appeal to fear and anger.
   - Libraries should intertwine more with nonprofits that share our values, such as educational institutions, the Internet Archive, and Wikipedia, in order to carve out a true public square in the online world and provide a meaningful alternative to exploitation by sociopathic billionaires. One idea to explore may be to create our own Fediverse social media platform run on nonprofit/library values, with decentralized identity management to protect user data.
      - That said, even the best-run and best-intentioned platform still represents a reprioritization of the digital over the real, which I think is a major contributing factor to the unhappiness of the modern era.
   - Libraries and partners could reclaim the Internet Public Library from its current private owners or develop a new network of vetted sites that users could rely upon without fear of exploitation or misinformation.
   - I would also argue for a moratorium on the use of generative AI as an environmental and ethical nightmare that feeds oligarchy and denigrates humanity. We can and should teach without adopting.
   - Libraries should commit to purging all records that can be misused by bad actors in official positions. This hearkens back to the days of the

Patriot Act when such concerns were a serious issue, but now the stakes are even higher.

- Solidarity is critical, and greater unification of libraries and systems is a vital part of that. No library is big enough to stand alone against the threats we face. Consolidating in a way that gives small libraries access to the resources of the large ones and provides large libraries with the backing of the many helps all of us in the long term. It enables us to support one another against hostile local efforts (which effectively become meaningless in the face of an overarching system) and ensures access to all our users. Libraries should organize to leverage our massive economy of scale across the country, merge OPACs into a federated system as much as possible, and coordinate our resources and responses in a much more organized and cohesive way.

  - At the local level, start this process by reaching out to library neighbors, whether public, academic, school, or other. Meet regularly, share resources whenever possible, and develop the relationships that you will need to withstand assaults.

- Any larger initiatives must be overarching and not focused on particular groups. Tribalism got us into this mess, and the solution must be to expand our library tribe to meaningfully encompass and benefit "you," whoever "you" are. Again, divided we fall.

- Our values require dedication and a mindset that "as long as there is me and a book, there is a library." We will all lose things, and we must keep our focus on what cannot be taken away from us.

In the end, this woodcut made by a founding father of both our country and our profession still rings true.
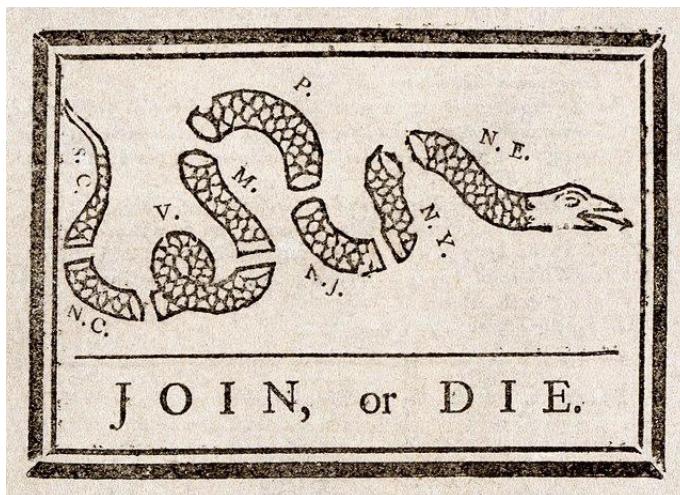
References

American Library Association. 2024. "Core Values of Librarianship." Accessed April 1, 2025. https://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues.

Baron, N. S., and A. Mange. 2021. "Doing the Reading: The Decline of Long Long-Form Reading in Higher Education." *Poetics Today* 42 (2): 253–79. https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-8883248.

EveryLibrary. n.d. Home Page. Accessed April 1, 2025. https://www.everylibrary.org/.

Iyengar, S. 2024. "Federal Data on Reading for Pleasure: All Signs Show a Slump." National Endowment for the Arts, October 3. https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2024/federal-data-reading-pleasure-all-signs-show-slump.

Klinenberg, E. 2018. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. Crown.

Stanborough, R. J. 2019. "Benefits of Reading Books: How It Can Positively Affect Your Life." Healthline, October 15. https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-reading-books.

Thompson, D. 2025. "The Anti-Social Century." *The Atlantic*, January 8. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/02/american-loneliness-personality-politics/681091/.

United Nations. n.d. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Accessed April 1, 2025. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

We Are Not Helpless: Some Lessons for Libraries, Archives, and Museums from a Lifetime of Researching Policy, Political, and Legal Processes

PAUL T. JAEGER

> "It is not a fragrant world, but it is the world you live in." – Raymond Chandler

Welcome to the Occupation

For many working in cultural heritage institutions—libraries, archives, and museums—the results of the 2016 presidential election were a shock. A candidate who campaigned against many of the values central to cultural heritage institutions—education, freedom of expression, civic engagement, inclusion, community service—had won the presidency. Donald Trump's first term was defined by the wholehearted embrace of "alternative facts," conspiracies, and hate groups. The budgets produced by the White House every year would have basically eliminated all federal funding for cultural heritage institutions, as well as the funds for literacy, internet access, and much else of great importance to the work of cultural heritage institutions.

With his reelection in 2024 by a much larger number of votes, any thoughts that his first election was an aberration or national arrhythmia were dispelled conclusively. This result was not a terrible surprise, though, as the time between the end of his first term and the beginning of his second featured thundering rises in attacks on cultural heritage institutions and other educational institutions, quickly spreading censorship movements, concerted efforts to dismantle civil rights laws, slurs against cultural heritage professionals as "groomers," exponentially increased reveling in disinformation, and, for the first time in the nation's history, many states passing laws that threaten librarians with significant jail time for having banned books in collections.

The first few weeks of the second Trump administration have been a rocket ride of slashes to government social programs and the government workforce, censorship in Department of Defense schools and libraries, the dismantling of programs for and protections of most marginalized populations in federal executive branch agencies, and many other changes that make clear that the commitment to gaining control over information and education will be much more sustained and draconian in the second Trump administration. The

massive cuts to funding for libraries, literacy, information and technology access, and education threatened in his first term have begun in earnest early in his second term.

The administration is utterly flagrant about its agenda to turn back time in terms of advances toward equity and justice and basic facts. While President Trump has a half-century record of making offensive and reality-free comments, of which his first term was a festival, he has filled his second administration with people who share this trait. Darren Beattie, under secretary of state, wrote on social media shortly before his appointment took effect: "Competent white men must be in charge if you want things to work." Craig Trainor, assistant secretary for civil rights in the Department of Education, calls the book bans that have overwhelmed libraries and schools nothing but a "hoax." Elon Musk, special advisor to the president in charge of firing much of the federal government workforce, bizarrely claims that wildfires are "part of a larger globalist plot" and that USAID—an international relief agency that he closed—was sending tens of millions of dollars of contraceptives to the displaced residents of Gaza instead of food. And that is just the tiniest sampling from the white male leaders of the executive branch of the federal government.

After years of growing pressures on libraries through budget cuts, pandemic shutdowns, and an empowered censorship movement, the results of the 2024 elections at the local and state levels generally further challenge the position of libraries in American society, as much as at the federal level. At the state level, politicians who crafted the laws that threaten to jail librarians faced no consequences from voters, and those who pushed for even more regressive agendas were voted in by wide margins. Many local government offices and boards that oversee libraries are now in the hands of those who wish to ban books, incarcerate library workers, and even shut down libraries. In just three years, national public opinion polls have swung from overwhelming opposition to book bans in libraries to roughly half of Republicans supporting the imprisonment of librarians.

This newfound power is being put to use just as rapidly at the state and local levels as at the federal level. In one heartbreakingly illustrative example, the Huntington Beach, California, city council decided in February 2025 to put a plaque on the public library stating: "Magical, Alluring, Galvanizing, Adventurous." Clearly, the resulting acronym is not only intentional but also boastful, rejoicing in their success at taking control of the local library and what information the members of the community will be allowed access to inside the library. Such actions echo the way in which conquering heads of state would often build a new palace or religious building right on top of the existing one of the conquered people to leave no doubt that they have been conquered and that the occupation is a reality.

Responding to Unfragrant Realities

So, where does this new political reality in this very real, very unfragrant world leave libraries, archives, and museums? Of key importance is trying to determine and examine the political, policy, economic, legal, advocacy, and cultural lessons that cultural heritage institutions and their supporters can learn from the current political climate to reestablish widespread public support for cultural heritage institutions, protect our institutions and communities in the coming years, and succeed in addressing future political challenges. This is the only world we have, and we have the ability to make it better.

For more than twenty years—practically my entire adult life—I have been writing about how cultural heritage institutions, most prominently libraries, are impacted by political, policy, and legal processes. I have also used these discussions to offer ways in which the

cultural heritage professions could productively engage political, policy, and legal processes and advocate for the benefit of cultural heritage institutions, cultural heritage professionals, and all the individuals and communities that rely upon them.

Across this work, my unwavering belief has been that our field would greatly enhance its ability to accomplish its goals by being much more attuned to and active in public discourse in these areas. Not to endorse specific candidates in a partisan manner but to proactively demonstrate the value of our institutions to communities and individuals, to clearly advocate for specific policies and laws that would support the public goods that cultural heritage institutions provide, and to educate the public about the ramifications of negative policy, political, and legal outcomes on their communities.

The results of the 2024 election should finally eliminate any remaining misplaced faith in the advocacy approach of blandly asserting the goodness of the institutions and hiding behind a protecting veil of neutrality. Assuming that everyone loves libraries so everything will be okay has never been a particularly strong advocacy strategy. It has become entirely self-destructive in the current political climate of growing censorship and disinformation movements, efforts to erase the presence of entire cultures from collections, and the creation of many state laws that would send librarians to jail over book bans. Voters at the local, state, and national levels primarily chose to support candidates with negative views of libraries, schools, literacy, and freedom of expression. More political power than not in the US is the control of those who devalue cultural heritage institutions or wish to reshape cultural heritage institutions to accord entirely with their own beliefs.

The current situation is terrifying. It cannot be understood any other way when many states have deemed the simple act of librarianship a potentially felonious act. But doing what the field has been doing for so long in terms of policy, politics, and law will only allow the situation to grow worse.

For all the scariness of the current situation, cultural heritage professionals and their institutions have options for responding effectively. Cultural heritage institutions of all types and in all places have amazing stories to tell about the power of their efforts in individual lives and entire communities. Public libraries, in particular, have traditionally tended to be well-respected community institutions, though that standing has been heavily battered in recent years. Historically, when librarians have emphatically, unequivocally stood up for rights and freedoms in a coordinated way over the last century—such as standing against book bans and the intellectual purges of the Red Scare—they have been rewarded with far greater public support and much more positive portrayals in popular culture (Jaeger and Kettnich 2020). Seriously!

Cultural heritage institutions need not be so counterproductively lashed to neutrality and so terribly afraid of actively advocating for freedom of expression and other human rights to protect the communities that rely on them. Hiding behind the myth of neutrality does not do any good either for the institutions or the people who rely upon them.

In 1940, Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish asserted that the simple act of opening the door to a library and welcoming the public in is inherently a daring political statement, exclaiming a belief in freedom, education, and democracy for all. More recently, Sir Terry Pratchett creatively articulated the same idea: "People were stupid, sometimes. They thought the Library was a dangerous place because of all the magical books, which was true enough, but what made it really one of the most dangerous places there could ever be was the simple fact that it was a library." (1989, 9). Such assertions are truer now in the US than when MacLeish or Pratchett first articulated them, sadly, but that does not excuse cultural heritage

professionals from being brave. For cultural heritage institutions, it's hard to imagine what could be more pressing than countering attempts to erase entire cultures from collections, classrooms, and communities (Jaeger 2025).

What Can Be Done

To reverse the current movements against cultural heritage institutions, librarians, archivists, museum professionals, their supporters, and their allies will need to directly engage political, policy, and legal processes more actively and effectively. To combat disinformation, censorship, cultural erasure, and other manifestations of hatred for the sake of libraries, freedom of expression, and democracy itself, cultural heritage institutions can publicly embrace and proclaim that they ineluctably are institutions that are providers of trusted and trustable information for *all* parts of the community.

Doing so will also simultaneously protect and promote the perspectives of marginalized communities and disallow their erasure. In his poignant fantasy novel that is a book-length plea for acceptance and compassion, *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, T. J. Klune wrote, "Hate is loud, but I think you'll learn it's because it's only a few people shouting desperate to be heard" (2020, 276). Right now, cultural heritage professionals and their supporters are far from being the voices most heard. That must change to rectify the current situation. Working to clearly demonstrate value and impact in all of their communities will help restore the narrative that libraries and other cultural heritage institutions are beneficial institutions and should be listened to and supported.

Looking back through my more than twenty years of researching and writing about these issues in the aftermath of the 2024 election (to avoid citing a ponderous list of publications here, please refer to the references that have my name on them), I firmly believe that there are tangible actions that can be taken to respond effectively now and to be better prepared to respond to future threats. Collectively from these publications, there are lessons to be found for coordinated and collaborative responses by libraries, museums, archives, and all their supporters and allies to the blossoming censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure movements in the US and worldwide:

1. Prepare for the predictable. As attacks on free expression and attempts to erase the marginalized are recurring, proactively remaining vigilant and ready to counter them before they gain traction offers a better chance of limiting the damage rather than waiting to react to them.

2. Articulate and demonstrate contributions in clearly understandable language. Library professionals cannot assume everyone knows or supports what they do. Library professionals and their supporters must tell the stories of their institutions more clearly and more widely, using evidence, to community members and government officials.

3. Encourage library, archive, and museum supporters to be actively involved. This censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure movement is a tiny number of people who are aggressive, boisterous, and committed, but their intensity can often vastly overstate their size. Encouraging supporters of cultural heritage institutions to be as vocal and committed as detractors is vital to leveling the field in politics and perception.

4. Collaborate and share resources when responding to threats. Cultural heritage professionals have a tendency to respond separately—for example, consider the thousands of redundant information literacy tools generated by as many thousands of libraries—when a unified message at every level offers greater clarity for the public.

5. Share expertises across different types of institutions to craft responses. Responding to existential threats should involve all institutions in the field, not just the institutions being most obviously threatened at one particular time. When combating disinformation about vaccines, for example, public librarians would certainly benefit from the knowledge of medical librarians. With the expertises of all types of librarians working together, the response to censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure will be much, much stronger.

6. Encourage more proactive and productive responses from national professional organizations. Other than the nonprofit EveryLibrary, the national professional information organizations are not on the ground in each state where the laws criminalizing librarianship are being debated and implemented. Pronouncements about the values of freedom of expression are not enough to counter censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure.

7. Build community coalitions. One of the great innovations by public libraries in recent decades has been building coalitions in their own communities with other service organizations to provide services to patrons they would not be able to on their own. These range widely depending on community needs and have included everything from groceries being delivered to libraries located in food deserts to assistance preparing tax forms and enrolling in government benefits programs. The same kinds of coalitions would be of enormous help in the political world. If cultural heritage institutions were allied in their messages and actions with other community organizations impacted by censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure, the reach of the messages and actions would be greatly extended. Such community coalitions could work together to focus more local political attention on the positive contributions of cultural heritage institutions as well.

8. Clearly name the threats. Rather than using clinical or technical terms to describe the goals of censors, cultural heritage professionals need to speak to their communities and governments in language that makes it unavoidably clear what threats the library is facing, why threats are occurring, and the real impact of the threats on patrons, communities, librarians, and other cultural heritage professionals.

9. Engage law, policy processes, and politics constantly. Libraries, especially, are ever vulnerable to politics, but what they do is also heavily shaped by more mundane law and policy processes. Cultural heritage professionals and their supporters need to be vocal presences at local board meetings and hearings to voice what cultural heritage institutions are contributing to the local community and what the institutions need in support. Greatly increased direct engagement with the worlds of law and policy that so much affect our institutions would allow us to better help shape what happens around and to our institutions and the communities that we serve.

10. Discard the myth of neutrality finally and forever. A collection can try to contain as many perspectives as possible, but an institution cannot be neutral. Worse,

attempts at neutrality serve only to support the hegemon that is looking to silence marginalized populations.

11. Avoid the trap of neoliberalism. When you package public goods as commercial entities, people eventually stop viewing you as public goods and have less compunction about devaluing and attacking the good you are doing.

12. Keep the institution open. The entire institution—people, collections, programs, services—and all it does for its community is far more important than preserving one or two individual titles in the collection. Closing the library over whether or not one single book gets banned causes far more damage than losing that one book.

13. Evaluate the curriculum offered to future cultural heritage professionals and those already in the field. Studies have repeatedly shown that these curricula often include little training about policy, politics, laws, advocacy, or funding. This must change dramatically to ensure those in the profession and those entering the profession are ready for the challenges that define their institutions. Such a curriculum needs to be available at all career stages.

14. Hire faculty who can teach in these areas. As Master of Library and Information Science degrees have increasingly come to be part of much larger colleges focused on information and technology, the hiring of faculty to prepare future librarians, archivists, and museum professionals has drifted further and further away from foundational professional skills to more esoteric interests, particularly in new technologies. If education programs are to be part of the response to the threats of censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure, they need to hire people with expertise to teach and research in these areas.

15. Educate accordingly. Librarianship, even if many library professionals wish it were otherwise, is a highly political profession. It has always been the case, but now there is absolutely no way to avoid that reality. Future cultural heritage professionals will be much better prepared when knowledgeable about the political nature of the career from the beginning of their education.

16. Frame these issues in terms of human rights. Freedom of access to information is a foundational human right and a right on which many other rights rely. Book bans and other forms of censorship are attempts to deny patrons their basic human rights and should be clearly labeled and confronted as such.

17. Engage threats in their complexity. It will be much more productive to engage the confluence of censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure rather than trying to defend a single book followed by another single book endlessly.

18. Focus on the big picture—always. If the fight is over individual books, the bans will never stop, and the cycle will be an endless struggle over a book, then another, then another. The focus must be steady on censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure.

There are undoubtedly other lessons that can be drawn from the important and insightful works of so many others, but these lessons listed above at least offer a starting point for practicable and achievable responses to reframe the discourse around cultural heritage institutions.

We Are Not Helpless

   The current struggle is certainly about principles like freedom of expression and freedom of access, but it also is about so much more. What is being censored matters just as much. Fighting against censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure now means fighting for equity, diversity, inclusion, representation, accessibility, and human rights, ideas as central to cultural heritage institutions as freedom of expression itself. These are not just important ideas in the abstract—they have profound impacts on the lives of individuals and entire communities.

   The road out of these circumstances is not yet clear, and it is probably a rather long one. We face the most energized censorship movement in more than a century, a world swamped with disinformation, and possibly the most anti-intellectual and anti-education political atmosphere since the McCarthy era in staggering combination, while the levers of power in most places are in the hands of those who do not respect cultural heritage institutions or the values at their foundations. The processes of rebuilding trust in and respect for cultural heritage institutions, information professionals, and the values so central to the field will require those working in the field and those who care about the institutions to commit to this work for the very long haul.

   Raymond Chandler was right, of course. The world is unfragrant, filled with hatred, chaos, disaster, and injustice. It has grown much less fragrant in recent years as the voices of hatred have grown much louder and become much more powerful. And yet, it is our world, too. Collectively, we have not been nearly loud enough or committed enough to counter the voices of hatred that have taken control of so much. It is long, long past time that the voices of justice and compassion make themselves clearly heard.

   When considering and responding to censorship, disinformation, cultural erasure, and other manifestations of hatred in the political tumult of today, cultural heritage professionals are anything but helpless. Toward the beginning of this explosion of censorship, disinformation, and cultural erasure nearly a decade ago, some friends and I described cultural heritage professionals: "We are clever, we are adaptable, and we are dedicated to the public good, even when there is not much interest in either the public or the good" (Jaeger et al. 2017, 194). Every word of it is still true.

   You are not helpless.
   I am not helpless.
   We are not helpless.

References

Chandler, Raymond. 1988. *The Simple Art of Murder*. New York: Vintage.

Jaeger, Paul T. 2025. "The Immortality of Hatred and Revenge: The Interconnections of Censorship, Disinformation, and Cultural Erasure in the Book Bans Targeting Marginalized Populations." *The Library Quarterly* 95 (1): 4–41. https://doi.org/10.1086/733171.

Jaeger, Paul T., John Carlo Bertot, and Ursula Gorham. 2013. "Wake Up the Nation: Public Libraries, Policy Making, and Political Discourse." *The Library Quarterly* 83 (1): 61–72. https://doi.org/10.1086/668582.

Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, John Carlo Bertot, and Lindsay C. Sarin. 2014. *Public Libraries, Public Policies, and Political Processes: Serving and Transforming Communities in Times of Economic and Political Constraint.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, Lindsay C. Sarin, and John Carlo Bertot. 2013. "Democracy, Neutrality, and Value Demonstration in the Age of Austerity." *The Library Quarterly* 83 (4): 368–82. https://doi.org/10.1086/671910.

Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, and John C. Bertot. 2015. "Teaching Information Policy in the Digital Age: Issues, Strategies, and Innovation." *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 56 (3): 175–89. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1074656.pdf.

Jaeger, Paul T., Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, and Karen Kettnich. 2017. "Aftermath of the 2016 US Presidential Election for Libraries: Axioms, Foxes, and the Urgencies of Now." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (3): 189–94. https://doi.org/10.1086/692296.

Jaeger, Paul T., Allison Jennings-Roche, and Olivia J. Hodge. 2023. "Criminalizing Librarianship: State Legislatures Creating Legal Jeopardies for Librarians." *Journal of Intellectual Freedom and Privacy* 8 (1): 17–25. https://doi.org/10.5860/jifp.v8i1.7869.

Jaeger, Paul T., Allison Jennings-Roche, Natalie Greene Taylor, Ursula Gorham, Olivia J. Hodge, and Karen Kettnich. 2023. "The Urge to Censor: Raw Power, Social Control, and the Criminalization of Librarianship." *The Political Librarian* 6 (1): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8711.

Jaeger, Paul T., and Karen M. Kettnich. 2020. "Libraries and Librarians Onscreen and in *Library Quarterly* Decade by Decade, Part 1, Or, Once Upon a Time…in Hollywood and in *LQ*." *The Library Quarterly* 90 (3): 249–63. https://doi.org/10.1086/708956.

Jaeger, Paul T., Jonathan Lazar, Ursula Gorham, and Natalie Greene Taylor. 2023. *Foundations of Information Law*. Chicago: ALA Editions/Neal Shuman.

Jaeger, Paul T., and Lindsay C. Sarin. 2016a. "All Librarianship is Political: Educate Accordingly." *The Political Librarian* 2 (1): 17–27. https://doi.org/10.7936/pollib.8515.

Jaeger, Paul T., and Lindsay C. Sarin. 2016b. "The Politically Engaged Public Library: Admitting and Embracing the Political Nature of Libraries and Their Goals." *Public Library Quarterly* 35 (4): 325–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2016.1245005.

Jaeger, Paul T., Lindsay C. Sarin, Ursula Gorham, and John Carlo Bertot. 2013. "Libraries, Policy, and Politics in a Democracy: Four Historical Epochs." *The Library Quarterly* 83 (2): 166–81. https://doi.org/10.1086/669559.

Jaeger, Paul T., and Natalie Greene Taylor. 2019. *Foundations of Information Policy*. Chicago: ALA Editions/Neal Shuman.

Jaeger, Paul T., and Natalie Greene Taylor. 2021. "Arsenals of Lifelong Information Literacy: Educating Users to Navigate Political and Current Events Information in a World of Ever-Evolving Misinformation." *The Library Quarterly* 91 (1): 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1086/711632.

Jaeger, Paul T., Natalie Greene Taylor, and Ursula Gorham. 2015. *Libraries, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Enabling Access and Promoting Inclusion*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jaeger, Paul T., Erin Zerhusen, Ursula Gorham, Renee F. Hill, and Natalie Greene Taylor. 2017. "Waking Up to Advocacy in a New Political Reality for Libraries." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (4): 350–68. https://doi.org/10.1086/693492.

Klune, T. J. 2020. *The House in the Cerulean Sea*. New York: Tor.

MacLeish, Archibald. 1940. "The Librarian and the Democratic Process." *ALA Bulletin* 34 (6): 385–88, 421–22. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25690467.

Pratchett, Terry. 1989. *Guards! Guards!* Gollancz: London.

Taylor, Natalie Greene, and Paul T. Jaeger. 2021. *Foundations of Information Literacy*. Chicago: ALA Editions/Neal Shuman.

Author Bio

Paul T. Jaeger, PhD, JD, MLS, MEd, is a Professor and Distinguished Scholar-Teacher in the College of Information, Director of the Museum Scholarship and Material Culture (MSMC) graduate certificate program, and Associate Director of the Maryland Initiative for Digital Accessibility (MIDA) at the University of Maryland. He is the author of more than 220 journal articles and book chapters, as well as 20 books. He is Co-Editor of the journals *Library Quarterly* and *Including Disability,* and Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Including Disability Global Summit.

Submissions

We seek submissions from both researchers and practitioners, that fall into one of three submission categories:

- Opinions/First Drafts – Editorial in nature; the first draft of an idea or argument.
- White Papers – Longer form discussions that may include research.
- Peer Reviewed – Long form articles that include original research and arguments, and are submitted for review by our Editorial Board and/or external reviewers.

Submission Guidelines

Who Can Write for The Political Librarian?

We want to bring in a variety of perspectives to the journal and do not limit our contributors to just those working in the field of library and information science. We seek submissions from researchers, practitioners, community members, or others dedicated to furthering the discussion, promoting research, and helping to re-envision tax policy and public policy on the extremely local level.

Submission Categories

- Opinions/First Draft – Editorial in nature; the first draft of an idea or argument (1000-2000 words).
- White Papers – Longer form discussions that may include research (2000-5000 words).
- Peer Reviewed – Long form articles that include original research and arguments, and are submitted for peer-review by our Editorial Board and invited reviewers. (2000-12,000 words).

Article Proposals

If you want to propose an article for The Political Librarian, please submit the following:

1. Article abstract: a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Be sure to include what category of article that you're writing.
2. Attach resume/CV or a link to an online version.
3. Writing sample: this can be a fully completed article, blog post, essay, etc. Our goal is to see your style and ability not judge where the writing comes from.

Completed Works

Completed submissions should include:

1. Article abstract: a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Be sure to include what category of article that you're writing.
2. Attach resume/CV or a link to an online version.
3. Full text of the submission.

If you are interested in submitting a work to our journal, please download our complete submission guidelines and style guide, at: https://journals.library.wustl.edu/pollib/article/id/8830/