Broker of Information, the "Nation's Most Important Commodity": The Library of Congress in the Neoliberal Era

Melissa A. Adler

This article examines the Library of Congress in the context of the neoliberal information economy in order to apprehend the limits to the Library's support of democratic principles and participation. Situating the Library of Congress within Foucauldian approaches to studying public institutions while building upon them, the article provides a broad overview of Library of Congress policies and actions since 1985 that signal a neoliberal turn. It also offers an analysis of some of the reports on knowledge organization issued and commissioned by the Library. The article calls for further critical analysis of the Library of Congress's policies and strategies.

On March 13, 1986, at the end of four days of protests organized by the "Books Not Bombs Campaign to Save the Library of Congress," fourteen people were arrested for trespassing in the Main Reading Room of the Library of Congress (LC). The demonstrations began on March 10, when over one hundred people refused to leave the Library at its new closing time. Due to budget cuts, the LC had reduced its reading room hours by 30 percent, closing at 5:30 instead of 9:30 p.m. on weekdays and for the entire day on Sundays. Over the course of the protests, the reading room was transformed into a speakers' forum on then president Ronald Reagan's policies, which, according to the protesters, committed billions of dollars toward defense spending at the expense of social programs and institutions like the LC. Demonstrator William Hirzy said: "Free access to information is a foundation of democracy, and the closing of the greatest library in the world on most weekday evenings and Sundays, combined with the cut in library services to blind and handicapped persons, the curtailment of acquisition of needed current

Melissa A. Adler is assistant professor of library and information science at the University of Kentucky. She is currently working on a book manuscript tentatively titled "Perverse Subjects: Libraries and the Organization of Sexuality Studies."

material and the cuts in cataloging, rendering much material inaccessible, drastically restricts the flow of information and serves to undermine democracy."[1] It was Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin's testimony before Congress on February 20, 1986, that brought notice of the dire situation at the LC to the public:

> This damage is accelerating, and to a considerable extent will be irreparable. These steps are abhorrent to us as citizens of a democratic nation. But I can assure you that we have spent more hours than I can count in meetings of our Library's staff devoted, not as I would have hoped, to discovering ways to be more serviceable to the Congress and to the nation, and to find rational and deliberate ways to secure economies—but rather to figure out how to meet the sudden demand for a Procrustes cut in each of our appropriations by an arbitrary percentage. How to find the least damaging ways to obey the law? . . . We have become the bewildered victims of a mysterious numbers game.[2]

The international writers' group PEN issued a statement to President Reagan, calling for a restoration of funds for the LC. It was reported that Kurt Vonnegut stated, "This teensy-weensy effort to reduce the national debt carries with it the big and unspeakably ugly message: 'Wisdom and information possessed by ordinary citizens is not considered in harmony with the national purpose at this point in time.'"[3]

That same year, the LC came under fire for censorship. The American Council of the Blind sued Boorstin when the LC ceased production of *Playboy* magazine in Braille. The discontinuation was the result of an amendment to the House Appropriations Bill to reduce the funding for the LC's Books for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Program by $103,000—precisely the amount it cost to produce Braille editions of *Playboy*. Ruling that the "defendant used a backdoor approach to a formalistic game that Congressmen were playing to eliminate future editions of *Playboy*," the judge ordered the librarian to resume production of both Braille and "talking books" editions of the magazine the following year.[4]

These two incidents at the LC were consequences of aligning a conservative agenda with an eighteen-million-dollar cut in appropriations for the LC as part of the 1985 deficit reduction program. In a postscript to the introduction of the 1985 *Annual Report* of the LC, Boorstin wrote:

> The fiscal 1986 budget reductions, however, have had such a major impact on the Library's operations that it would be inappropriate

not to mention them. The appropriations act itself, which was signed in November 1985, left the Library $8.4 million below its fiscal 1985 funding level. In addition, the passage in December of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 further reduced the Library's funds by nearly $9.9 million. This reduction of $18.3 million is the most drastic curtailment in funding in the history of the Library of Congress. It will affect every phase of the Library's activities, including acquisitions, cataloging, and preservation; services to Congress, to the copyright community, to publishers and scholars, and to the general public; funds for automation, for materials for the blind and physically handicapped, and for contracts, equipment, travel, and training; and most personally, the Library's work force, which will have to be reduced to achieve this lower level of spending.[5]

The budget cuts were the result of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Deficit Reduction Act of 1985 (more commonly referred to as the Gramm-Rudman Act), a measure designed to dramatically cut domestic spending in order to maintain tax cuts and an increasing military budget while reducing a massive deficit. The *Atlantic Monthly* quoted Rudman as saying, "'Did I ever expect it to work exactly as written? . . . Of course not.' But, he added, 'it had a tremendous intimidation factor on a lot of people.'"[6] The act was deemed unconstitutional and was rewritten the following year, but the intended effects were felt at the LC. Arguably, the measure set the tone for subsequent policy-making decisions in the following years. The budget cuts were meant to shock federal agencies, including the LC, into reorienting themselves toward austerity. As Boorstin wrote in the 1986 *Annual Report,* "In the winter of 1986, it seemed that the phrase 'Gramm-Rudman' was on everyone's lips every hour of every day: by year's end, it seemed more like a long-remembered echo."[7] Indeed, at the end of that year supplementary funds had been appropriated, and the LC resumed normal hours and the acquisition and cataloging of "urgently needed research materials."[8] The following year, funds were restored, with an increase to try to correct some of the damage done. Yet this moment marked a critical turn in LC policies regarding management of funds and materials.

Pressures from the federal government during this period resulted in choices ranging from the implementation of austerity measures to the search for other monies to meet budgetary demands. The LC was certainly not alone in this predicament. Indeed, libraries of all types turned to fund-raising efforts—seeking out donors, partnering with

corporations, marketing, and formulating business models—in order to strategically procure funds and cut spending. The LC deployed a variety of tactics with increasing tenacity from the 1980s through the first decade of the twenty-first century. These changes in approaches to management at the LC are best explained in the context of neoliberalism, which inheres a market-based rationality and value system in public life and public institutions.

Building upon existing Foucauldian analyses of public institutions, this article first situates the Library of Congress within the neoliberal era by using the frame of "governmentality." It offers a history of present practices and policies by tracing shifts in assertions about the role and mission of the LC over the past thirty years, placing these changes within the larger political and economic discourses circulating nationally and globally. The article draws attention to prevailing assumptions and approaches to managing information resources at the LC (and, by extension, academic and public libraries) and how such practices contribute to the cultural reproduction of state ideology.[9] Drawing from publicly available reports and documents, it highlights certain LC policies and actions since 1985 that signal a neoliberal turn. It then provides a closer analysis of publicly debated reports on knowledge organization issued and commissioned by the LC, including the 2006 "Calhoun Report." The article concludes by reflecting on the limitations neoliberalism imposes on democracy and calls for further critical analysis of LC policies and strategies.

Neoliberalism and Public Institutions

Echoing assertions that library-state power relations are undertheorized and responding to the call to critique "the power structures, technologies, histories, and ways of life of information societies," this article takes the LC as a starting point to examine the role of libraries in a democratic society.[10] In 1994 the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* published a special issue on the relationship between information and democracy, interrogating the taken-for-granted notion that "democratic political participation requires an informed citizenry, and that to be informed we must have ready access to the information we need."[11] Editor Leah Lievrouw concluded her introductory essay with optimism, suggesting that the technical potential for a shift from an informative to a discursive information environment was on the horizon, but she also cautioned readers about the potential for corporate interests to undermine democracy, realizing the growing presence of such

interests in libraries and information systems. Twenty years later we see significantly increased participation by private enterprises in American libraries, including the Library of Congress, and so the need for continued questioning is acute.

The Library of Congress—the United States' oldest federal cultural institution—is a special case through which we can apprehend the potential and the limits to information's support of democratic principles and participation in the present political and economic climate. The LC propels an unquestioned connection between democracy and an informed citizenry, as indicated by statements like the one issued in 2012: "The ideal of a knowledge-based democracy was a cornerstone of the new republic and has remained so for more than two centuries."[12] A federal agency whose first priority is to serve the US Congress while serving the public and supporting other libraries in the nation and around the globe, the LC occupies a role and space where discourses from every discipline in 470 languages are collected, preserved, organized, and disseminated for use.[13] Perhaps the most compelling role of the LC resides in its perplexing status: although it is not officially a national library, its actions and policies have positioned it as such. Its leadership in producing knowledge infrastructural and organizational standards and technologies has now become ubiquitous and firmly embedded in American libraries (and in many libraries worldwide).

The LC not only acquires the nation's and the world's knowledge but also sets the standards by which that knowledge is accessed. This means that almost all libraries—from the local Main Street public library, to the vast research collections in universities, to digital libraries on the web, and to libraries in other nations—are organized in some respect according to the point of view of the library whose primary mission is to support the US Congress. The predominance of the LC's role in this landscape would seem to call for interrogation. Critique of neoliberal governmentality opens the possibility of examining the extent to which institutions have been reshaped to foster the production of certain types of citizens. As Stuart Hall reasons, "Naming neo-liberalism is *politically* necessary to give the resistance to its onward march content, focus and a cutting edge."[14] By situating a variety of LC statements, reports, and policies within the neoliberal framework, I aim not to directly interrogate the efficacy of these practices but rather to reveal the ways in which neoliberalism has taken hold and to begin a dialogue about the implications of this transformation since the mid-1980s.

Much attention has been paid to LC cataloging and classification practices and their reproduction of hegemonic ideologies.[15] Still, these

practices need to be placed within the context of state power through a consideration of the LC as a neoliberal institution. Illustrative of the LC's role, Barbara Tillett, former director of the Cataloging Policy and Standards Office at the Library of Congress, has acknowledged that choices about subject headings and classifications tend to reflect the attitudes and beliefs of the federal government.[16] Given its position as the library whose primary purpose is both to serve the US Congress and to set the standards by which other libraries organize their collections, the relations of power and knowledge enacted at the Library of Congress should be regularly attended to. In order to understand the implications of this relationship, the LC should be situated within the political economy from which it operates. As Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna writes, "Libraries, especially national libraries, constitute what are known in the sciences as 'reduced models' of their country's social reality and ideological complexity."[17]

As a federal agency, the LC has had a direct role in providing access to information for Congress and the public. Of those who have accounted for the LC as a state agency, Samuel Collins and Ed McKennon stand out, as does Louise Robbins for her studies of the LC during the McCarthy era.[18] McKennon begins to flesh out the global influence of the LC's classifications, noting the problems derived from other nations adopting US-centric systems to organize their collections. Collins argues that "the work of the Library [of Congress] in the 'information age' is not only a matter of arranging and classifying 'information,' but about positioning 'citizen-readers' in relation to it and, by synecdochic extension, to the reins of government and the power of the State."[19] And Nicholson Baker's damning report on LC librarians' associations with defense agencies and misguided attempts at preservation practices provides a measure of insight into the rhetorics of library-state relations.[20]

There is a wealth of studies on the expansion of neoliberalism, and that history is not rehearsed here.[21] My approach will be to analyze the LC through a Foucauldian view of neoliberalism. This approach, as succinctly described by Wendy Brown, "carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action."[22] In this framework, all human and institutional actions are thought of in terms of rational entrepreneurial action, calculated according to utility, benefit, satisfaction in the face of scarcity, and supply and demand.[23] The state itself is a

market actor, and the market becomes the state's organizing principle. For Foucault, the concept of governmentality is the study of "conduct of conduct," or, in other words, the governing of self and others.[24] He semantically links governing with modes of thought, drawing attention to the political rationality underpinning technologies of power.[25]

When one considers the fact that the LC governs the way in which American citizens (and, increasingly, citizens worldwide) discover and use information and the connections between knowledge production, information technologies, and neoliberal ideology, the urgency of critical review becomes all the more apparent. A recent special issue of *Social Text* suggests that reading practices must be understood in relation to the historical moments in which they arise and offers a variety of articles that address ways in which reading practices can "be situated in relation to the temporal and territorial conditions of neoliberalism."[26] Simon Springer calls for understanding neoliberalism as discourse in order to understand power as a "complex, yet very specific form centering on knowledge production through the ensemble of rationalities, strategies, technologies, and techniques concerning the mentality of rule that allow for the de-centering of government."[27] Such an analysis enables us to understand how the constitution of the subject is tied to the formation of the state and how the LC is a key site in a network of institutions that reproduce and reinforce the neoliberal agenda.

What drives neoliberalism is the notion that each individual has the freedom to choose in a free-market economy. Libraries not only have adopted neoliberal management techniques but, more importantly, in a global sense, have significantly contributed to the production of a neoliberal ideology, propelling the notion that equity of access to information provides an avenue for opportunity and democracy. On the one hand, libraries fall into the category of public goods and have therefore faced serious budget cuts at the hands of government, thereby leading to strategic management practices. At the same time, libraries are a particular type of social good—one that delivers information, which Librarian of Congress James Billington calls the nation's "most important commodity."[28] It is too simplistic, however, to say that the LC deals with information. It would be more accurate to consider the work of libraries as belonging to the category of cultural activities, goods, and services that have a "uniquely *dual nature*," carrying more than commercial value, because they are also, as UNESCO describes, "'vehicles of identities, values and meanings'—they 'embody or convey cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have.'"[29] According to Robert Neubauer, "The fetishisation of information as the primary

economic resource of the information age" and the "lionisation of in-
formational citizenship" are central to neoliberal expansion.[30] He sug-
gests that technological and institutional consolidation is at the heart of
the mechanisms by which neoliberal ideology takes hold. The trick of
neoliberalism is the way in which it has installed the illusion of freedom.
The rhetoric expounded by libraries, which market themselves as keys
to democracy via free access to information, sounds eerily like that of
other agents of neoliberalism. Reducing library work to exchanges of
commodified information risks our neglecting the unquantifiable value
inherent in the dual nature of cultural goods and services.

Many scholars regard Nobel Prize winner Friedrich Hayek as a prin-
cipal founder of neoliberalism, particularly with the organization of the
Mont Pelerin Society in 1947.[31] According to Nicholas Gane, Foucault
undertheorized Hayek's writings, which provide a critical vantage point
for examining how neoliberal governmentality emerged. They also re-
veal the role information played in forming and circulating this form
of political economy. Hayek moved from Austria to the United States
in 1950 and taught at the University of Chicago, where he would be-
come Milton Friedman's mentor and partner. His polemic, *The Road to
Serfdom*, still serves as a core text among neoliberals. For the purposes
of this article I refer to his 1945 essay "The Use of Knowledge in Soci-
ety," in which he distills his argument for a substitution of knowledge
management with a price system. The piece serves to disabuse readers
of the notion that it is possible for an economy to succeed so long as
it is operating under the pretense that acquiring knowledge is the key.
What is striking about Hayek's claims is his declared appreciation for
local knowledges, specific to time and place, and how these influence
individual choices. He seems to suggest, however, that since it is impossi-
ble for one body to compile and evaluate all information, society is best
served and understood by looking to the market. Indeed, the "Shock
Doctrine" exposed by Naomi Klein is hinted at in this article, in which
Hayek writes, "I have deliberately used the word 'marvel' to *shock* the
reader out of the complacency with which we often take the working of
this mechanism for granted."[32]

The mechanism to which he refers is the price system, which, accord-
ing to Hayek, if left free to do its work, should eliminate any need for
conscious decision making. He suggests that this concept extends beyond
the economy and into everyday life, arising "in connection with nearly all
truly social phenomena, with language and most of our cultural inheri-
tance."[33] For Hayek, the most significant economic problem is a knowl-
edge problem, as "the 'data' from which the economic calculus starts are

never for the whole society 'given' to a single mind which could work out the implications."[34] Tacit knowledge is most effectively exchanged and utilized through "a competitive discovery process."[35] The ideal knowledge management system is, in fact, the price system. It is remarkable how little one needs to know when motivated by price, according to Hayek, and he makes a point to instruct his readers that "it is very significant that it does not matter" what causes price increases or decreases. What matters is that the price system is a type of information communication "machinery" that coordinates the actions of everyone in the economic chain. The solution to the local knowledge problem is to reduce it to a price system, in which every participant acts as an economic agent.

Accepting this as a foundational concept for neoliberalism orients one's analysis of the relation between nation building, the economy, information, and the LC. Indeed, this thinking mirrors some of the complaints launched at the LC for its reliance on a business model based on market share and demand rather than adherence to principles of access to information that ensure scholarly engagement and knowledge seeking.

The LC occupies an excellent position from which to participate in the formation of an ideal citizenry through the supply of information. As put by Trent Hamann, "That which gives an individual access to the truth is knowledge and knowledge alone, including knowledge of one's self."[36] What is key here, though, is that information and what counts as knowledge are governed by a "regime of truth." And so the way that people come by knowledge—how that knowledge is organized, named, and accessed, as well as the selection and determination of what counts as knowledge—has a bearing on how that knowledge is assimilated by the citizenry. Foucault writes,

> In societies like ours the "political economy" of truth is characterised by five historically important traits; "truth" is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to a constant economic and political incitation (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of an immense diffusion and consumption (it circulates in apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively wide within the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media . . .); lastly, it is the stake of a whole political debate and social confrontation ("ideological" struggles).[37]

In the case of neoliberalism, the regime of truth fixes "the question of subjectivity around the concept of the economic agent" as a "grid of intelligibility"—a point of contact between subjects and the government.[38] What is at stake is precisely what Foucault aims to understand: how it is that an institution, namely, the Library of Congress, participates in the production of regimes of truth. While the media, educational systems at every level, and other government and nongovernmental institutions have been the subjects of this kind of critique, libraries remain vastly underscrutinized, particularly when we consider their reach and influence. Some recent research has opened this line of inquiry. Siobhan Stevenson, for instance, problematizes neoliberal policies and rhetoric surrounding efforts to bridge the digital divide in public libraries.[39] Projects aimed toward the ideal of universal access, Stevenson argues, have actually served the neoliberal state, private enterprise, and information capital, while they insufficiently address critical barriers to participation among and across the public. Similarly, Maura Seale has written of the codification of neoliberal discourse in library science education and American Library Association core competencies for librarianship, arguing that *critical* information literacy "could work to challenge neoliberal discourse, rather than eagerly adopting it."[40]

Significant in this vein is John Buschman's research on neoliberalism and public libraries.[41] He warns that "the specific trends identified in librarianship that accommodate the new public philosophy of casting public cultural institutions in economic terms represent a further diminution of the democratic public sphere."[42] Further, he writes, "our acceding to economic models as a public philosophy results in an active deconstructing of the public sphere discourse that libraries represent. . . . Aping business rhetoric and models doesn't save libraries, it transforms them into something else. We're a profession and an institution in crisis because we have a structural contradiction between our purposes and practices as they've historically evolved and our adaptation to the current environment."[43]

One might note that the LC, like public and academic libraries in the United States, has long operated according to principles of "library economy." From the late nineteenth century on, efficiency has been a primary goal. The American Library Association's early motto, coined by Melvil Dewey—"The best reading for the largest number, at the least cost"—conveys the prevailing attitude of the founders of American librarianship. Neoliberal library management is distinct from that of our forebears not only by degree but by approach and form—neoliberalism has reorganized its priorities. What distinguishes these from their predecessors is

the extent to which these priorities contribute to the marketization of all aspects of everyday life and social services. Among the neoliberal strategies that have become integrated into the Library of Congress's operations over the past thirty years are the private sector's involvement and influence, strategic planning, information commodification and marketing, deskilling and downsizing labor forces, commercial-technological approaches to market research, and entrepreneurial funding structures. Some of these strategies are examined in the following section.

It goes without saying that this is a partial account. Each of the facets mentioned below deserves a much deeper treatment, and a vast array of projects and documents at the LC remain unexamined. The objective here is to draw attention to these dynamics and to begin a conversation about the relationship between the LC and democracy in a neoliberal economy. Since neoliberal ideology operates through a network of complex systems, the following section outlines some of the mechanisms and procedures through which we can begin to apprehend the production of neoliberalism in the LC, and it calls notice to a series of questions for further research. These include the implementation of strategic planning, increased global participation through digitization, and examples of engagement with the private sector at unprecedented levels.

The Library of Congress and the Information Marketplace

Among his first official acts as librarian, James Billington—appointed by President Reagan—initiated a comprehensive review of management and planning at the LC in December 1987. In his letter addressed to the president and Speaker of the House of Representatives in the 1988 *Annual Report*, Billington wrote: "In developing a long-range strategic planning process and a new management structure, we have begun our discovery of new ways to enhance and increase our service."[44] The report continues:

> The need for strategic planning, always pressing in an institution as large and complex as the Library, becomes increasingly more obvious in times of less-than-ample resources. The components of planning in 1988 included a management and planning (MAP) review of the Library, identification of special projects through the MAP review, selection of strategies to increase economy and efficiency, use of new technologies, as well as new applications of older ones, and a variety of other initiatives that will help the Library plan for the year 2000 and will guide its actions in the future.

Among the goals were to "broaden and rationalize the Library's national library service."[45] But for library staff, the resulting reorganization, designed by Arthur Young Consultants, threw the place into turmoil and confusion, raising anxieties about job security and motives for the changes after what Arthur Plotnik described as "purge-like" personnel actions.[46]

A number of scholars have examined ways that research institutions have resorted to business models, replacing a "professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate" with a culture that places an "emphasis on measured outputs: on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits."[47] Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy note that "new public management" has become the norm in state bureaucracies, redefining citizens as customers and cultivating entrepreneurialism.[48]

At the LC, the Processing Services Division was the first to implement a strategic planning initiative, precipitated in part by a vacancy in the position held by Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC) inventor Henriette Avram, which led to a reorganization of the department in 1985 and a reduction in funds.[49] Soon after, planning efforts began in the Office of Planning and Development and the Library's Committee on Automation Planning, and in 1986 a Strategic Information Systems Project Steering Committee was formed. At that year's end a contract was issued with accounting/consulting firm Arthur Young to assist in developing a strategic plan to guide automation programs.[50]

While the change in rhetoric and the implementation of strategic planning clearly signal a turn, underlying many of these efforts are larger questions surrounding the position, role, and mission of the LC in an increasingly globalized, digital information economy. "Our mission remains the same," stated Billington in the 2012 *Financial Statement*, "but it is more important than ever when set against a landscape of dynamism and intense international competition."[51] The LC has long held global projects and relations, but as of yet its overseas activities have met with little critical commentary. Since 1962, the LC has maintained offices overseas. Currently it has six overseas offices: in Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, New Delhi, Jakarta, Nairobi, and Islamabad. These offices acquire, catalog, and preserve materials "from parts of the world where the book and information industries are not well-developed." In 2012 alone, those offices brought in and distributed 259,840 items to the LC and provided 374,498 items to other US libraries.[52]

The LC partnered with UNESCO in 2005 to develop the World Digital Library, modeled on the LC's American Memory Project. Initiated

in part by a three-million-dollar gift from Google, the World Digital Library has been digitizing primary materials from research libraries around the world and making them freely accessible on the Internet.[53] Billington stated that the project would bring together "rare and unique cultural materials held in US and Western repositories with those of other great cultures such as those that lie beyond Europe and involve more than 1 billion people."[54] Google cofounder Sergey Brin stated his reason for contributing: "Google supports the World Digital Library because we share a common mission of making the world's information universally accessible and useful. . . . To create a global digital library is a historic opportunity, and we want to help the Library of Congress in this effort."[55] Billington promoted the project as one that would make international collections freely accessible on the Internet, bringing people and cultures from around the world into a "single global undertaking." In expressing gratitude to Google, he said, "We will seek contributions from other private sector companies with an equally enlightened self-interest."[56]

In the context of a global information economy, it bears asking whether and to what extent local knowledges around the globe digitized and launched by the World Digital Library will be collected and organized under Western eyes. To its credit, it is produced by a partnership among national libraries around the globe, offering content representing every UNESCO member country and working to offer translations of metadata in the seven UN official languages and Portuguese.[57] The LC and UNESCO lead the project, with the LC housing the staff and technology and determining the standards by which the collection is selected, organized, and accessed. It is classified with the Dewey Decimal System, which is currently undergoing internationalization to better classify collections of countries and cultures other than the United States.[58] Nevertheless, as Rafael Capurro rightly argues, "the danger of digital colonialism through global players in the name of free market principles and entrepreneurship cannot be ethically and even legally taken for granted."[59] Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that one of the problems with Western research methods is the assumption that there is such a thing as a universal history. What this type of enterprise may entail, in fact, is a "collective memory of imperialism," which "has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous people was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized."[60] McKennon's study of LC subject headings in Latin American and Canadian catalogs confirms the assertion that

classifications present ideologies and attitudes, depending upon the lens through which a classifier views the world. In the case of imperialist knowledge practices, various legitimatizing discourses play out, including those of salvation, economics, and health. Inherent in the idea of a universal collection is a universal organizing scheme for access.

Critical questions regarding the influence of the LC on the world's knowledge have yet to be publicly debated. There is, however, a major historical project under way in Denmark to investigate the impact of UNESCO's global cultural and education efforts.[61] A similar undertaking examining the LC is in order, as it provides an infrastructure for nation building at the same time that it promotes its agenda for providing universal access. These global efforts to accumulate, organize, and disseminate cultural knowledge should be viewed with a critical eye. Are these international projects a form of intellectual and cultural imperialism? How do these projects support the United States in a neoliberal, competitive, global information society? To what extent does partnering with private enterprises like Google contribute to the spread of a neoliberal ideology?

The LC's engagement with the private sector, particularly during the Billington era, has been a source of controversy and tension. The entry into the market, discussions of both cooperation and competition with the private sector, references to patrons as customers, and the adoption of entrepreneurial tactics were concomitant with and derived from strategic planning initiatives of the 1980s. As with research universities, the "focus on institutional restructuring and resource constraint has induced, or at least been paralleled by, the move . . . to enter into new relationships with business."[62] More difficult to comprehend are the implications and consequences of a federal government agency not only using a business model for its operations but also entering the market, as is suggested when talking about competing with Google and Amazon for market share, outsourcing various tasks, and, at the same time, collaborating with vendors and private enterprises in global information projects.[63]

In 1990 the LC struck a deal with Jones International, Ltd. (acquired by Comcast in 1999) to launch the Global Library Project, a program that created and marketed a series of video productions for cable television over five years, which some considered "a violation of the public trust."[64] A piece in *American Libraries* cited a 1992 *Washington Post* report, which distinguished this partnership from other private-public sponsorships based on the fact that, in this case, "its materials are controlled directly by Jones," which at that time was bringing in over $8 billion annually. Under the agreement, Jones was given exclusive distribution rights for all of the videos produced. According to Ronald K. L. Collins,

cofounder of the Center for the Study of Commercialism, the library "clearly crossed the line between public and private, commercial and nonprofit. . . . This is a commercial venture; what Jones is doing isn't charity, it's a business investment."[65] It should be noted that Glenn R. Jones is a founding member of the steering committee of the James Madison Council and was recently among the top contributors to the World Digital Library project described above.[66]

Also in 1990, Billington created the James Madison Council, the LC's first national private-sector advisory and support group. Major exhibitions and acquisitions have been funded by the council, which was "created to serve as the Library of Congress' primary link to the business community."[67] The purpose of this connection is an area of research that merits further investigation, as a former employee has publicly claimed that the James Madison Council is "the penultimate government-corporate 'charity' whereby some of the sleaziest billionaires buy access to Congress."[68] While such an assessment is speculative, we do know that David Koch, a controversial conservative figure in American politics, is a significant contributor to the James Madison Council and received special recognition in the council's 2011 *Annual Report.* The same report indicated that the council had raised $199 million since its founding, the majority of which has been designated for special acquisitions, exhibitions, and events.[69]

Indeed, the popular American Memory Project, begun in 1989 and launched in 1995, is funded largely by donors from business and industry, having "received several million-dollar donations from Kodak, Bell Atlantic, and other major corporations." The LC had aimed to raise $45 million from the private sector by the year 2000.[70] Similarly, the National Book Festival is funded largely by the private sector, with Target Corp., Wells Fargo, and AT&T among the donors who "gave more than $1.3 million to support the 2012 National Book Festival." Additionally, James Madison Council member and cochair of the National Book Festival board David M. Rubenstein, cofounder and co-CEO of the Carlyle Group, "donated $1 million to the National Book Festival as part of his $5 million pledge, in 2010, to support the festival for five years."[71]

These engagements with the private sector provide only a glimpse at some of the ways in which the LC has marketed itself, and they raise important questions. Inherent in information marketing is the production of products and services to meet the demands of customers. Just as public and academic libraries have turned to marketing to customers, the LC has transformed users and other public and private agencies into customers and stakeholders. The annual reports and strategic

plans from the first decade of the twenty-first century reveal a surge of language that depicts library and information products and service consumption by customers. The 2008–13 *Strategic Plan* specifies one of its five strategic goals as striving "to put knowledge and information at the fingertips of all customers—including members of Congress, the general public, librarians, scholars, students, authors, Library staff members, and researchers in the United States and internationally. . . . It inspires imagination and creativity among those customers, who are critical to the enlightenment that underpins our democracy and values."[72] This statement is revealing, as it ties the notions of democracy and national values to customers of information. The results of treating library users as customers and thus components of a business model are the tailoring of products and services that give customers what they want. We know that the ways that a majority of library users search for and use information do not reflect the needs of all users—particularly scholars. This conflict came into play with the 2006 "Calhoun Report" and related studies at the LC, as discussed in the following section.

Strategizing Knowledge Organization

If there is a question as to whether these developments at the LC (after all, it is the Library of *Congress*; it should come as no surprise that it would resemble other federal agencies as a nation-building enterprise) have any bearing on local libraries and library patrons, we need only look to the knowledge-organization tools and technologies created and maintained by the LC and distributed worldwide to find an answer. As Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey Bowker point out, information infrastructures (particularly classifications) are largely invisible to the public but carry tremendous consequences and implications for knowledge production.[73] It is the invisibility of such an apparatus underlying very public institutions that renders its discursive productions particularly acute. The LC is the site where MARC was invented, as were the classifications, subject headings, and cooperative cataloging technologies and standards that determine how we gain access to information. Currently, the LC is working with the private company Zepheira to develop the Bibliographic Framework Initiative, which will replace MARC and optimize Resource Description and Access (RDA) and linked data; the LC plays a major role in both projects.[74]

According to James Scott, states produce "radically simplified designs for social organization" by imposing norms and categories and obfuscating local knowledges that do not neatly fit within the grand scheme

designed for social control.[75] He likens the reductive methods of state social engineering projects to market-driven standardization by arguing that, while such organizational projects may be efficient and profitable in the short term, they overlook key sustaining factors and often invite disaster. With both the state and the market, an established order becomes normalized and internalized across its citizenry to the exclusion of minority interests. The LC brings order to the nation's (and much of the world's) knowledge, and, increasingly, it conducts its knowledge-organization activities and operations in accordance with business models of efficiency and marketability. Within the divisions at the LC that deal with cataloging and metadata creation, the neoliberal rhetoric peaked in the first decade of the twenty-first century, particularly with a suite of reports. Perhaps most notable among these is the controversial 2006 "Calhoun Report," which was followed by similarly economically minded reports, including one by Ruth Fischer and Rick Lugg on the "MARC records marketplace."[76] By positioning itself as a player in an information marketplace, the LS has oriented itself around a corporate identity—one that puts itself in competition with Google and Amazon.

The Changing Nature of the Catalog and Its Integration with Other Discovery Tools, more commonly referred to as the "Calhoun Report," is a 2006 study commissioned by the LC and conducted by Karen Calhoun of Cornell University Library. It "contains recommendations for the future of research library catalogs, a preliminary assessment of the technical and organizational feasibility of next steps, and a vision and blueprint for change."[77] There has been considerable public discussion around the 2006 report and the LC policies implemented at that time, so I refer readers to documents freely available.[78] Here I am offering a reading that finds a clear endorsement of neoliberal strategies. The report's argument for revamping the catalog is framed in terms of how it will compete in the marketplace, positioning users as customers and optimizing economy. Many of the thirty-two strategies Calhoun suggests would eliminate local libraries' control in their own cataloging practices, making it harder for them to optimally serve their communities. She finds libraries' local practices to be a barrier to implementing her strategy. Instead of recognizing these barriers as reflective of user needs, she sees the interest in local control as an impediment to progress.

Thomas Mann's scathing response to the report focuses on the problems with relying on a business model: "The Calhoun report is very much a latter-day Procrustean bed for the library field. It forces academic institutions into an inappropriate business model, and lops off the goal of scholarship if it does not fit the criterion of increasing

'market position.'"[79] At the heart of this problem with the economic model is the reduction of the LC's user base to a singular public. Hope Olson has pointed out that catalogs designed for a majority leave many users in the dark and critically underserved.[80] Nevertheless, Calhoun repeatedly refers to information users as if they are a uniform entity best explained by the majority, using examples of students' tendency to confirm the "Principle of Least Effort" to defend the elimination of local control and rich searching capability. Calhoun assumes a singular public that can be understood by counting transactions. While it is certainly a good thing to focus on user needs and desires, this report, through its methodology, seems to be constructing a particular need that in this context has been explained with a particular target market in mind. The report reveals that the LC is motivated by a fear of becoming irrelevant and losing market share but couches this in language that suggests the LC is interested in best serving its users.

By arguing for a simplification and reduction in cataloging efforts, based on the fact that people are accustomed to Google's search mechanisms, these studies fail to acknowledge the depths of the needs of researchers. In contrast, J. C. M. Hanson, director of the LC Catalog Division from 1898 to 1910 and overseer of the creation of the LC's subject access tools, distinguished two types of users: scholars and nonscholars. For Hanson, scholars viewed knowledge in relation to disciplines, but for nonscholars, ideas were unencumbered by fields of knowledge. In keeping with the LC's mission, the classifications were designed to serve scholars in their quest for depth across disciplines.[81] The twenty-first-century reports do not hold this distinction in mind.

The reports produced and commissioned by the LC from 2006 to 2011 reveal that LC leaders would like to see both more cooperation and contribution of catalog data from other libraries, and a relinquishing of local control from those same libraries. Indeed, a "widespread resistance to the idea of simply accepting the work of another library" and to more simplified cataloging practices is one of the key impediments to progress, according to these reports.[82] They indicate that much time and money is wasted because 80 percent of libraries locally edit copy catalog records, and that the library community would be better served by a pooling of collections, reinvesting materials funds for initiatives that meet the demands of users. In the face of budget cuts and staff reductions in the cataloging division, Fischer and Lugg's report states, "the market is in need of adjustment, if it is to create an incentive for producers while retaining the community ethic of free sharing of data. The ethic of the cooperative can only be sustained if the full costs of

production are borne by the community."[83] The conclusion is that the LC and its advisors want local libraries to become more active producers in the cooperative-cum-marketplace of catalog records, but at the same time, these libraries should cease practices that sustain local control over collections and metadata.

The critical assumption underlying these reports is that the LC should base decisions primarily on economics. The fallacy that follows from the business model is that, as Hayek proposed in 1945, it is preferable to reduce library services to a simplified price system; in this case, the numbers provide a balance sheet of costs and user transactions. One starts to see how the user is constructed in terms of cost and efficiency for the LC, resulting in a resemblance to Google's production of users and particular needs. To suggest that libraries are in competition with the likes of Google is a faulty comparison for a variety of reasons, beginning with the fact that Google users' needs are distinct from those of library users, and that for libraries to partner with the private sector would be a potentially dangerous enterprise. Google gathers personal data for the purpose of marketing and arrives at algorithms that will direct users to pages in ways that bring profits. Placing libraries in competition with the private sector carries the assumption that private companies can, in fact, accomplish what the public sector does. The very fact that they are motivated by profit margins precludes this possibility. Unlike Google, libraries are meant to have a fundamental respect for the protection of personal privacy. So without documentation and tracking of individual behaviors, librarians are somewhat limited in their capacity to measure user behavior and draw limited conclusions based on a market model. As Ron Day speaks to the point, "An ignorance of the personal and group positioning that these systems accomplish suggests the triumph of the worst of modern quantitative social science over critical thought in not only the study, but also the formation, of contemporary personal and social being. Far from making us more knowledgeable and careful toward other beings, information can give us a comforting stupidity."[84]

The Calhoun Report conscripts into a market model not only users but also authors and scholars, referring to them as manufacturers: "Scholars, authors, governments, and the wide array of individuals and organizations that participate in the creation and dissemination of knowledge serve as manufacturers, and until the last fifteen years or so, libraries, archives, scholarly publishers and societies, other content providers, and A&I [abstract and indexing] services provided the primary distribution services. New entrants—both suppliers and distributors—now crowd this space."[85] The degree to which the ideology of neoliberal

governmentality had permeated the LC in 2006 is made plain as human and institutional actions were transformed into economic actors.

Some of the strategies advised by the LC-commissioned studies have been discussed and implemented. For instance, in one of its more sweeping and controversial decisions, the LC discontinued its series authority service in June 2006.[86] Again, the efficacy of the objectives is of less concern for the purposes of this article than the discursive force behind them, the construction of arguments, and the assumptions they carry. The language identified with neoliberalism has tapered off significantly, with far fewer suggestions of the marketplace and competition in recent annual reports, as well as the reduction of references to patrons as "customers" in the 2011–16 strategic plan.[87] This may signal a turn away from neoliberal practices or a more finely tuned and subtle approach, but it should not at all be taken as an indication of a diminished need for critical review.

Conclusion: The Limits to Democracy

The Library of Congress considers the support of democracy to be one of its primary purposes, and all of its projects have ostensibly been carried out with this ideal in mind. Considering the reach and scope of the LC—its international offices, its leadership role in the World Digital Library, the extension of cataloging and classification standards to libraries of all types, and the American Memory Project—the magnitude of the LC's contribution to knowledge preservation and access is truly astounding.

Naturally, as a federal agency the policies and procedures of the LC coincide with those of the US government and the global political economy. The effects of neoliberalism on the LC's decision-making practices present challenges for its role as an institution that serves democratic processes and ideas. The answers to questions regarding the relationship between democracy and information depend on power relations and the extent to which an era's dominant ideology supports the tenets of democracy. According to Wendy Brown, "liberal democracy cannot be submitted to neo-liberal political governmentality and survive."[88] She further suggests that the submission of democracy to an economic calculus has not simply undermined liberal democratic principles; in fact, "democratic *morality* has been largely eviscerated."[89] If we take this to be true, and if it is true that libraries—ostensibly "America's last social good that offers equal access"—are being scripted into a neoliberal politics founded upon a theory that calls for an end to knowledge organization, then this

is a conversation that needs to continue among library and information professionals and scholars at all levels and locales.[90] And if, as Steger and Roy suggest, the economic recession that began in 2008 has shocked us into questioning the efficacy and justice of neoliberal strategies, then the time has come to reconsider libraries' policies.[91] Looking back at the past thirty years provides us not only with hindsight but also with information about the challenges and hopes for libraries that lie ahead.

It would seem that the plight of libraries, as well as other public institutions and the people they serve, has to do with intelligibility—that to obtain funding their practices and policies need to be carried out in terms that agree with a neoliberal agenda. There is a perceived inevitability among public service professionals to the way things are and a difficulty in imagining that the public sector could be anything other than a market player. Within the given "grid of intelligibility," the expectation of business models has become normalized across public sectors, and libraries are no exception. But as James Scott writes, "legibility is a condition of manipulation."[92] Just as democratic participation is compromised so long as citizens "are expressly encouraged to pursue 'democracy' as individual consumers, investors, or producers in the 'new economy,'" public institutions that operate like businesses, treat their citizens like customers, and turn the promotion of democracy into a marketing strategy are complicit in the erosion of democracy.[93] By adopting neoliberal ideology, the LC is enacting policies that carry direct repercussions for what and how we know by circulating political ideology through the bibliographic control technologies through which knowledge is organized, accessed, and consumed.

Scholars of information have struggled to arrive at understandings of what it means to live in an information society, confronting persistent questions regarding the future of libraries and of the book, definitions and challenges of access to information, globalization, security and privacy, and the role and requirements of digital infrastructures—all in the face of smaller budgets in a wider context of political and economic crisis. This article has located the threat to democracy in the political economy in which libraries reside, calling attention to the Library of Congress as a key site from which to examine the changing nature of librarianship over the past thirty years. More than anything, this is a call for further inquiry. As Gane clarifies, a critical or effective history "can be used to question the lines of descent that lead to the present while at the same time opening possibilities for thinking otherwise."[94] Critical histories of various aspects of the LC are in order, beginning with its earliest years and carrying through its various involvements in global and digital infrastructural initiatives with an eye toward finding the intended

and unintended consequences for local knowledge production, organization, and consumption. The question of the relationship between information and democracy remains open to discussion.

Notes

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