

American Public School Librarianship

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AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOL
LIBRARIANSHIP

A History

WAYNE A. WIEGAND



Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
4 6 8 9 7 5 3

Open access edition supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.
ISBN: 978-1-4214-5066-7 (ebook, open access)

Johns Hopkins University Press
2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21218
www.press.jhu.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wiegand, Wayne A., 1946– author.

Title: American public school librarianship : a history / Wayne A. Wiegand.

Description: Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020045457 | ISBN 9781421441504 (hardcover) |

ISBN 9781421441511 (ebook) | ISBN 9781421450667 (ebook, open access)

Subjects: LCSH: School libraries—United States—History.

Classification: LCC Z675.S3 W68 2021 | DDC 027.80973—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020045457>

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

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*To the memory of
Jean Elizabeth Lowrie,
1918–2014*



*President of the American Association of
School Librarians, 1963–1964
President of the American Library Association, 1973–1974
Founder and First President of the International Association of School
Librarianship, 1971–1977
Director, Western Michigan University School of
Librarianship, 1963–1981
and
Valued Mentor*

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One of the benefits of historical research is that it is cumulative: research on one project often leads to another and thus helps to ground the second project. Thus, the funding that supported the first should also be acknowledged for the second, even though it was not specifically awarded for the latter project. For grants that fit that category, I thank the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin–Madison for a fellowship in the spring semester of 1998 that enabled me to undertake research for *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956* (2011), which shows up in this book’s coverage of the cooperative arrangement between the Sauk Centre, Minnesota, public library and school system; the New York Public Library for a Short Term Fellowship in October 2011; the National Endowment for the Humanities, which gave me a Fellowship for University Teachers in 2008–9; Dean Larry Dennis of Florida State University’s College of Communication and Information Studies, who agreed to match the NEH fellowship so I had a complete year for nothing but research; and the American Library Association for a Diversity Grant I used in May 2012 to research newspaper databases at the Library of Congress.

For grants that specifically funded research for the present project, I would like to thank the Spencer Foundation for a fellowship in the fall semester of 2000 that jumpstarted this project, and the John W. Kluge Center at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, for awarding me a Distinguished Visiting Scholar position that enabled me to exploit the library’s rich resources and services from January through May 2017. And to fund two month’s research in the summer of 2017 in the American Library Association Archives at the University of Illinois at Champaign–Urbana, I thank the American Library Association for awarding me a Gale Cengage History Research and Innovation grant and the National Endowment for the Humanities for awarding me a Summer Stipend.

Projects like this cannot be accomplished without the help of archivists and librarians. My thanks to librarians at the Wisconsin Historical Society and the

University of Wisconsin–Madison, and at the latter especially Michele Besant of the School of Information Library, where I screened thousands of early twentieth-century public library annual reports describing cooperative arrangements with local schools; librarians at Florida State University; librarians and archivists at the Library of Congress, where I mined most of the databases listed in my bibliography of primary sources; archivists at George Washington University in Washington, DC, where the archives of the National Education Association are located; and archivists at the American Library Association Archives at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (special thanks to archivists Cara Bertram and Anna Tramell).

My thanks also to Chris Dodge, who compiled the index (the fourth time he has done this for me) and provided proofreading assistance; Johns Hopkins University Press, the anonymous readers, and especially my editor, Kyle P. Gipson, who showed enormous patience with a sometimes fussy author and certainly made this into a better book; former students and colleagues with whom I have discussed ideas and conclusions that have found their way into this book; and Doug Zweizig, who reviewed for historical accuracy the section in Chapter 8 on Library Power. Last but not least, thanks to my wife, Shirl, who read through the entire manuscript with her usual critical eye and with whom this year I am celebrating fifty-five years of marriage.

Several paragraphs extracted from my previous publications appear in this book, including material on the Bryant Library of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, which is from *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011); and material on adolescent responses to reading serial fiction taken from *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and “Sanitizing American Library History: Reflections of a Library Historian,” *Library Quarterly* 90 (April 2020): 108–20. All of these publications have graciously given me permission to “reuse” bits and pieces of these previously published materials.

All royalties for this book will be donated to the Dr. Jean E. Lowrie Global Lecture Endowment, which helps fund the International Association of School Librarians' annual Jean E. Lowrie Lecture and the Florida Book Awards' annual Jean E. Lowrie Older Children's Literature Award Endowment. The Florida State University Foundation manages both endowments.

American Public School Librarianship

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Introduction

A Profession with No Memory

“Can I get a library pass?” Over the past 120 years, millions of American K–12 public school students have asked that question probably billions of times, yet we still know little about the history of public school libraries, which over the decades were pulled together and managed by hundreds of thousands of school librarians. This book is the first comprehensive attempt to recount that history. As I sit at my desk in 2020, there are more than 80,000 American public school libraries being managed by 88,500 full- and part-time school librarians, almost all of whom have little knowledge of the history of their profession beyond their lifetimes.

Essays marking anniversaries in American public school library history largely celebrate rather than analyze the past.¹ Textbooks that have served generations of school librarianship students generally contain a history chapter, but its narrative is usually tailored to the hopes of the present and told in an idealistic tone that mixes optimism for the future with regret at the loss of opportunity that school systems experience when they fail to support their libraries.² The thirteen essays in *The Emerging School Library Media Center* (1998) do address “historical issues and perspectives,” but because the book “is not meant to be read from cover to cover but rather as a reference for readers on topics relevant to their particular interests and needs,” it lacks a comprehensive approach to public school library history.³

More than twenty years ago, to counter the “ahistorical stance of our field,” the editors of *School Libraries Worldwide* solicited analytical essays that explored the profession’s history for one of their quarterly issues. What they got instead were mostly descriptions of school library developments in particular countries. Maybe, one editor speculated, school librarians did not believe they had a history, or they found it difficult to analyze that history because it resided in two fields—librarianship and education. Maybe school library workers so emphasized practical matters that they saw little value in knowing their own history. Whatever the reasons, the editors ultimately gave up. Only one of the three essays submitted on the history of school librarianship made it into the final issue.⁴

But school librarians are not alone in neglecting school library history; teachers, principals, superintendents, school board members, and state and federal education officials are equally as guilty. By largely overlooking this ubiquitous institution, educational historians have denied members of the nation’s education community opportunities to understand more deeply the roles of school libraries in educational history.

For a historian who has spent nearly fifty years researching American library history, the absence of a comprehensive history of school librarianship is inconceivable. How can education and school library leaders construct prudent policy and strategically plan the future of public school libraries without it? When school library history is mostly wrapped in myth and rhetoric, opportunities to grapple with problems inherent in its professional discourse diminish. It is my hope this book will stimulate policymakers from librarianship and education to reassess their perspectives about the American public school library and thus better recognize its opportunities . . . and its limitations.

As the first comprehensive history of American public school librarianship, this book is unlike most school library literature. It does not address the kind of “how” questions that dominate the discourse of contemporary school librarianship; it offers no guidance for improving school library practices. It is not primarily a history of librarians or library associations, although both get generous coverage because of their impacts on professional practice. Nor is my narrative filled with words like “should” and “must”—two imperatives much in evidence in school librarianship’s core documents, and especially in its regularly revised standards. This volume does not blindly celebrate the public school library nor does it assume it is (or has ever been) the “heart of the school.”⁵ Rather, by means of a historical narrative, this book seeks to address a crucial “why” question. Why did school librarianship turn out the way it did, and what can its history tell us about its limitations and opportunities in the twenty-first century’s coming decades? Here I do not look from the present into the past to dictate what gets most attention. Rather, I look from the past to the present in an attempt to explain how we got here. “To study the past,” argues historian Jill

Lepore, “is to unlock the prison of the present.”⁶ And to learn from that past, as Franklin Roosevelt wrote when establishing the first presidential library, enables people to “gain in judgment in creating their own future.”⁷

Central to this analysis is addressing the question of power relationships in the world of public school librarianship. When American school librarianship formed as a sector of both the education and library communities in the early twentieth century, its possibilities were already circumscribed by the structures formed around education and the practices developed by librarianship that educators were asked to support. Both imposed significant constraints on what public school librarianship could do for students. I attempt to identify where school libraries fit into formal education, and particularly to locate them within the power relationships existing in educational environments.

Because education is a cultural practice that takes place at many sites, I early on decided to extend my analysis beyond formal education. “In the ordinary course of living,” notes Lawrence Cremin in his classic *Public Education* (1976), “education is *incidental*; in schooling, education is *intentional*.”⁸ In my narrative, I pay attention to the historical role school libraries have played in the incidental education of public school students in order to document contributions heretofore largely overlooked.

This book is informed by five literatures: (1) the history of education; (2) the history of reading; (3) the history of childhood/adolescence; (4) the history of children’s/adolescent literature; and (5) the history of American librarianship. For the most part historians of the last have overlooked the first four, just as historians of the first four have largely overlooked the last. To understand the history of school librarianship, I focus on the elements of power the first four historical literatures identify and apply them to the history of school library practice. In librarianship, the location and use of power (social, cultural, economic, and political) is seldom analyzed. To understand the history of school librarianship, it has to be central to that analysis.

Like steel threads woven into the fabric of this narrative, however, I relate an untold part of women’s history in an attempt to understand the shifting power of patriarchy over women’s lives, particularly over professions that have traditionally attracted more women than men. Education and librarianship both opened up numerous professional opportunities for women at the turn of the twentieth century. So many took advantage that by 1920 these workforces were largely populated by middle-class women, most of them white mainline Protestants, except for management positions occupied mostly by men, such as school principal and superintendent positions and large public and academic library directorships, whose gender bias had to be dealt with by female teachers and librarians on a daily basis.

The history of library women was sparked by the library feminist activism that emerged in the 1960s. Most published American women’s library history

literature dates from that decade, much of it recovering and celebrating accomplishments of individuals and groups who challenged in many ways the patriarchal cultures in which they practiced their profession and, despite significant obstacles, made substantial contributions to librarianship. This was especially true for the women in public, academic, and special librarianship, who entered sectors controlled by men at the beginning of the twentieth century and confronted patriarchy not only at the building level but also throughout the profession's major associations. Successful efforts by several female public librarians to drive library icon Melvil Dewey out of the American Library Association in 1905 for offensive public behavior against women are an early example.⁹

The women in school librarianship have a slightly different historical profile, however. American public school librarianship was born as and continues to be a female-intensive profession (95 percent are women), and at the level of their professional associations school library women were largely in control of their own agendas, although at the local building level school librarians have been subject to all the effects of patriarchy (including those related to class and race) the male world of educational administrators could throw at them. How this historically played out is an untold story in library—and women's—history.

I do not automatically consider the exercise of power a negative or suppressive act. Instead, I focus on power relationships only to identify what happened and why. For example, *American Public School Librarianship: A History* is primarily a story of women and children, two groups that have historically existed on the margins of power. Add to that the fact that many male decision-makers holding the purse strings in formal education have traditionally viewed school libraries as more peripheral than central to classroom instruction, and one can readily see the systemic constraints on the power relationships built into the profession's discourse that automatically govern its horizons, and over which the community of public school librarians have little influence beyond the power of persuasion.

Professional Discourse

Making information accessible constitutes the core imperative in the professional discourse of library and information studies (LIS). What do I mean by "discourse"? Most scholars trace the concept to French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose definition is much broader than just language. It also includes an analysis of how the production of knowledge is historically influenced by power. As Foucault portrays it, discourse describes a culture's "way of thinking" and imposes cultural boundaries on what can be said about a specific topic.¹⁰ In many respects a professional discourse functions like an intellectual sandbox: it has plenty of room to play with ideas, but is nonetheless limited by cultural boundaries, through which leaders employ "a way of thinking" to educate and

enlighten incoming members of a profession who then implement what they learn to improve service for the public's greater benefit.

For school librarians, that translates into the services they institute and maintain, and collections, spaces, and resources they make accessible. It also includes the tone in which school library professionals communicate in meetings, conversations, and publications. "In general," library historian Christine Jenkins observes, youth services librarians, including school librarians, "did not confront directly or antagonize unnecessarily, but instead sought a path around possible obstacles . . . Their words were often mild, deferential, agreeable, optimistic and relentlessly positive."¹¹ Historian Jacalyn Eddy identifies communications between youth services librarians and children's literature publishers as a "gender discourse of politeness" existing in a "closed world" that manifested an "unwillingness to take risks" or confront controversial subjects. "Harshness had no place," she notes.¹² *American Public School Librarianship* will show how on occasion the idealized tone of the profession's discourse imposed limits on its responses to particular volatile social issues.

The roots of contemporary LIS discourse trace back to Benjamin Franklin, whose first order of books for the new Library Company of Philadelphia in 1732 emphasized "useful knowledge."¹³ By the time the American colonies declared their independence in 1776, Western nations were rapidly industrializing under capitalism. Unlike their rural counterparts, industrial workers found their day divided not by sunrise and sunset and their year not by seasons but by a clock their employers used to determine when "work" occurred. To capitalists, work time was always more important than non-work time, which evolved its own set of descriptors, including "leisure" and "recreation." Capitalists consistently privileged "useful knowledge" generated to improve work above any information considered leisure. Libraries serving the information interests of business and government understandably mirrored these priorities. Western states operating within capitalist economies also privileged "work" information, but to that they added "public information" and "stories" they regarded as so essential to the social order that they constituted a canon of relevant literature (fiction and non-fiction) to be communicated to citizens and taught in schools and colleges. Libraries serving state interests also collected and preserved these kinds of public information and stories.

Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century when Boston Public Library founders, funders, and managers developed an institutional set of goals and objectives we now call a "mission statement," those goals and objectives were based on the founders' cultural priorities and a set of library traditions they inherited that privileged useful knowledge. Grounded on the Jeffersonian belief that democracy could not exist without an informed citizenry, founders rationalized the existence of public libraries as essential to creating that citizenry. Ever since, in

the profession's rhetoric, public (and later school) libraries have been depicted largely as neutral agencies whose primary responsibility is to make accessible the kinds of information believed to be essential to democracy—itsself a legacy of the Enlightenment's faith in the power of knowledge. The majority of library history literature addresses the “mission statement” as historical fact and uses that discourse—an orthodoxy fixed in the profession's literature—to describe the institution's history largely through the words of library founders and managers.

In the late nineteenth century the emerging profession of librarianship adopted the tenets of that mission statement as a professional imperative, and in order to carry it out constructed a unique set of practices (e.g., cataloging and classification; reference services; collection development; management of the institution) and the tools to support them (e.g., the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme, and acquisition guides like *Booklist* magazine and *Fiction Catalog*) that separated it from other professions forming about the same time. What American public school library history literature exists builds on these assumptions and largely chronicles this evolution with a “top-down” focus that concentrates on particular school library associations, the biographies of famous school library leaders, the growth and development of collections over time, professionalized activities like reference, cataloging and classification, and services to youth. Thus, over the generations public school library history literature has largely replicated and echoed the discourse school librarianship inherited from the larger library profession at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the last quarter of that century, however, influential intellectuals began arguing that economies in Western industrialized nations were shifting from industry to services, and one of the most important services in this new economic order was the provision of “information.” In his *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Marshall McLuhan predicted “a paperless society.” In *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan said the book was “like a dinosaur just before he disappeared.” These influential books were followed by Daniel Bell's *The Coming of the Post-industrial Society* (1973) and Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970) and *The Third Wave* (1980). All these arguments were grounded on the perceived potential of the computer, which had a tremendous capacity to process rapidly what in the nineteenth century had been called “useful knowledge.”¹⁴

F. Wilfrid Lancaster recast these predictions specifically for librarianship in *Toward Paperless Information Systems* (1978), one of the most cited works of library literature.¹⁵ That Lancaster, a University of Illinois library educator, made these predictions should not be surprising. His professional experience in science and technology libraries led him to value most the kinds of “information” his professional forebears called “useful knowledge,” and because librarianship for

the most part shared these values, librarians were easily persuaded that newer information technologies held the secret to the future of the profession.

In the absence of an adequate historical understanding of how the phrase “useful knowledge” had morphed into “information,” however, many librarians feared predictions by information technology evangelists like McLuhan and Lancaster that books and libraries would not survive the twentieth century. In response to these worries, librarianship experienced “a large scale change” that not only made “literature less important than information”¹⁶ but also quickly transformed it from an “education” profession into an “information” profession (some even argued “*the* information profession”) and positioned it as, potentially, a major player in the “age of information” in which information was redefined—one might even say invented—by technology.¹⁷ The subtext to all this was a narrowed definition of information, one driven by technology and invented by influential people with substantial self-interest in defining the parameters of the so-called Information Age. Specific to school librarianship, however, in the last decade of the twentieth century “information literacy” moved to the center of its discourse and evolved into the profession’s primary imperative. It thus constituted the profession’s way of thinking, imposing cultural boundaries that profoundly influenced what can be said about a specific subject like the practice of school librarianship.

Drawing on my own research presented in *Part of Our Lives: A People’s History of the American Public Library* (2015), I use a much broader definition of “information” than librarianship’s traditional discourse allows, one that includes the information people acquire through cultural activities like viewing, listening, and reading. In addition, I am convinced that people form relationships with libraries for three main reasons. The first addresses librarianship’s self-assumed professional imperative to make information on many subjects accessible to their patrons and connects directly to what Lawrence Cremin calls “intentional” education. The second and third, however, more easily fall into what Cremin calls “incidental” education that can be explored much more deeply by analyzing “reading and librarians” and “library as place.”¹⁸ A comprehensive history of American public school librarianship has to include analysis of the latter two if it expects to address the “why” questions.

Reading and Librarians

Ironically, just at the time when librarianship rhetorically transformed itself into an information profession increasingly focused on technologies, scholars in the humanities and some “softer” social sciences began to question the historical traditions surrounding cultural definitions of reading. Where humanities scholars had previously concentrated largely on culture-as-text, they now began to

explore questions addressing culture-as-agency and culture-as-practice. Although elements of culture-as-text remained in the practice of librarianship (for example, rare books), the profession manifested little interest in or knowledge of culture-as-agency or culture-as-practice—an approach that might have deepened the profession's understanding of why library users consider books so central to library services. And largely because the profession's perspective had been “user in the life of the library” rather than “library in the life of the user,” LIS discourse in the last quarter of the twentieth century focused mostly on information access made possible by new technologies.

The conception of reading that public school librarians inherited at the beginning of the twentieth century largely saw readers as passive recipients of the messages authors located in their texts, and to explain the value of reading they harnessed metaphors that can still be found in contemporary library rhetoric. For example, reading is often considered to be a ladder: readers are expected to elevate their reading tastes by climbing from lower to higher forms of literature (as judged by those who claim authority to distinguish between the two). Or, reading is like eating, where overindulgence in its less desirable forms (again, determined by people claiming authority to know what these are) is assumed to effect harm, made obvious in use of words like “escape” and “addiction.” The most enduring example of this mindset is the profession's traditional attitude toward adolescent series fiction. If youthful public library patrons did not “improve” themselves, youth librarians often argued, such literatures should be discouraged.¹⁹

Through the traditions of their professional practice (e.g., utilizing bibliographic guides like *Booklist*, *Fiction Catalog* and *Children's Catalog*), librarians consistently sought to build collections that reflected the moral authority of learned professions on the one hand and of an emerging group of children's literature specialists within librarianship I here call a “clerisy” on the other. But in public libraries across the country, users of all ages had other ideas. Because they did not have to use public libraries, users applied pressures that public library managers could not ignore. By force of demand—a *vox populi*—users insisted that their public libraries acquire particular kinds of stories. As a result, they effectively shaped the public library into a popular place that among other services addressed their literary tastes. Within limits acceptable to the community at large, users eventually defined a style of literacy that helped them make sense of their worlds.

The traditions of school library practice were similar (e.g., utilizing guides like *The Elementary School Library Collection* and *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*), but because public school librarians had to prioritize the information needs of a curriculum they did not control, the style of literacy contained in their collections and services was mostly influenced from the top down

rather than the bottom up. School librarians often found themselves caught between what educators regarded as the “official knowledge” they built into curricula and what children and adolescents wanted in the form of extracurricular reading.²⁰

Among perspectives emerging from the new scholarship examining culture-as-agency and culture-as-practice were efforts to understand through the experiences of readers the social nature and act of reading, and particularly people’s use of stories, whether read, heard, or viewed. For example, Richard Nash writes that for readers stories constitute “recipes for the imagination.” They are born and thrive in “the swirl and giggle of idea and style,” and know no particular home among textual forms. All have “story-sharing” benefits.²¹ For most patrons of all ages, stories have always been the oxygen of public library services.

Literacy researchers offer a vocabulary that helps explain how the act of reading fosters agency. “Ideologies, a person’s ways of looking at things, influence a person’s engagement and participation in socially specific and culturally governed activities such as reading,” notes David E. Kirkland. One cannot understand what reading accomplishes for the reader without recognizing “the relationship between ideology and engagement.”²² Stories, Paul Richardson and Jacquelynne Eccles argue, function as arenas in which adolescents “can safely try on and contemplate future selves in the world of work, romantic relationships, adventure, risks, success and failure, come to terms with discrimination, find strategies for navigating personal and social relations, and settle on personal values and belief.”²³

But ideologies also lead to reading experiences that build walls against understanding. In her research on twenty-first century censorship attempts in public and school libraries, Emily Knox uses the term “monosemic interpretation” to explain the hardened positions people take on reading texts they want to ban. “There is no sense that people could read the same text and come away with different things,” she argues. “There’s only one way of looking at how texts work.”²⁴ Knox is one of the few LIS scholars to address reading as agency (others will be noted in subsequent chapters), but mostly school library literature has overlooked these new perspectives on reading, which largely exist outside the profession’s discourse.²⁵ In her 2016 research on reading communities in a Georgia private elementary school library, for example, Michelle Leigh Paino “found no research that investigated the role the librarian plays within a community of readers.”²⁶ LIS researchers seldom analyze why stories are essential to the everyday lives of millions of public and school library users—almost like it’s none of the profession’s business. A major reason for this lack of attention may derive from the library profession’s self-assumed positions on privacy, intellectual freedom, and censorship, all of which discourage librarians from being curious about what patrons do with their reading. To understand what school

libraries have meant to elementary and secondary students over the generations, however, is not only the profession's business but also central to understanding the greater value of libraries, school libraries included. Stories that over the centuries passed from oral transmission to manuscript and then into print and nonprint texts have always represented humankind's attempts to explain phenomena in the surrounding world. For most readers these stories constitute pedagogies of daily life by modeling codes of behavior; they also have great potential to stir fundamental emotions and foster a sense of unity.

Reading occurs within a social framework of inherited opinion. "Meanings depend on the interactions among readers, texts, and environments," concludes book historian Barbara Sicherman. "They are constructed through the practices of communities of readers and refracted through individuals. How one reads as well as what and with whom are of central importance to this cultural practice, even to the act of interpretation." But unlike the ideology of learned reading that grounds formal education and the institutional study of literature, commonplace reading has emotional impact by design.²⁷ "Fictional narrative has its impact primarily through emotions," argues psychologist Keith Oatley. Once emotional engagement occurs in "contexts of understanding," reading can be transformative and "affect a person's whole identity."²⁸

This is especially applicable to youth. Stories found in fiction "are so appealing because they relate to issues in readers' lives in emotionally powerful ways," notes Sicherman. "Starting even before they can read, fiction helps boys and girls sort out and control their fears and desires in fantasy; work out their relationships to the world through identification with hero or heroine; gain insight into the meaning of life; and, later, develop analytic thinking."²⁹ Anne Haas Dyson shows how reading superhero comics bonds youthful readers in play. Because they know the stories and understand the genre, they share a frame of reference that identifies their social roles and the rules of social interactions. By adopting these roles and following these rules, they know how to connect with people around them.³⁰

One reason cultural authorities objected so vehemently to series fiction over the generations, Deirdre Johnson argues, is that it empowered and gave young people agency in a way canonical literature did not. "Traditionally, in the more acceptable children's literature of the period, adults give children necessary advice and impose restraints on them. In series fiction, however, adolescents make their own crucial decisions," she notes. "They demonstrate intelligence, capability, and freedom from adults, in violation of this tradition. Children, not adults, become the moral arbiters and shapers of their fate. They willingly enter the adult world and compete on an even footing—fantasy, certainly, but one that appeals to almost every child."³¹ Emily Hamilton Honey argues that in the pages of series fiction "children act like adults, make responsible decisions under their own power,

and have voices and opinions that are often ignored in real life. Series books give young men and women a chance to make choices about who they wanted to be, what they wanted to do with their lives, outside of adult authority.”³²

While not directly connected to humanistic “reading” literature, recent neuroscientific research on reading has demonstrated how narrative activates particular parts of the brain, including the sensory and motor cortexes. In her summary of this research, Annie Murphy Paul notes: “The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated.” One researcher, she reports, found that fiction offered readers “the opportunity to enter fully into other people’s thoughts and feelings.” Another saw “substantial overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to navigate interactions with other individuals, in particular, interactions in which we’re trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others.” Other researchers note that reading fiction “is an exercise that hones our real-life social skills,” and that regular fiction readers “seem to be better able to understand other people, empathize with them, and see the world from their perspective.” Regular readers also report better sleep than nonreaders, lower rates of depression, and higher self-esteem. Fiction, notes Keith Oatley, “is a particularly useful simulation because negotiating the social world effectively is extremely tricky, requiring us to weigh up myriad interacting instances of cause and effect. Just as computer simulations can help us get to grips with complex [scientific] problems . . . so novels, stories and dramas can help us understand the complexities of social life.”³³

Research now shows that there are many kinds of reading, and in librarianship we do ourselves a tremendous disservice by consistently dividing reading into two groups: “reading for pleasure” and “reading for information.” This simplistic bifurcation automatically brings with it a set of values inherited from Western capitalism that for centuries has privileged work above leisure. This kind of thinking has also masked the fact that what we’ve labeled “pleasurable reading” does so much more than give pleasure, albeit in ways that are difficult to measure in the short term. Nonetheless, the fact that they are difficult to measure does not make their benefits any less valuable, particularly to children and young adults.

A key goal of this book is to challenge distinctions between “reading for information” and “reading for pleasure” that dominate the discourse of contemporary school librarianship.³⁴ By harnessing a new scholarship on reading that emerged in the last two decades of the twentieth century one can see how complex and deeply meaningful stories have been for generations of readers. One can also see the sociability of reading and the child-centered needs it addresses, which require a different set of criteria for judging that literature. Without deepening its understanding of reading, school librarianship can never uncover and identify all

the values users attach to school libraries. The importance this observation has for understanding the role public school libraries have played in the lives of millions of children over the years is incalculable.

School Library as Place

In researching *Part of Our Lives* I was surprised to discover the huge role library-as-place plays when the historical record is viewed from a “library in the life of the user” perspective. My analysis of library-as-place grows from the scholarly literature on the “public sphere,” defined by philosopher Jürgen Habermas as the discursive space in which people gather to discuss subjects of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach agreement. Habermas argues that during the eighteenth century the growing middle classes sought to influence government actions by assuming control of this emerging public sphere of deliberation that eventually found an influential niche between forces exercised by governments and marketplaces. Within it, middle-class individuals developed their own brands of reason and over time created their own institutions and sites (e.g., newspapers and periodicals, political parties, and academic societies). In and through these institutions and sites they refined an expression of the “public interest” that governments and markets dared not ignore.³⁵

Once Habermas laid the theoretical groundwork, others began analyzing the institutions and sites where communities and groups not primarily concerned with political ideologies or marketplace activities crafted this discourse. Out of these analyses a refined concept of the role of “place” as cultural space has emerged. In civic institutions, for example, people routinely “exchange social capital”—a phrase common in public-sphere thinking. In addition, culture converges in such institutions; they are places where people develop appreciation for cultural differences on the one hand and engage in culture wars on the other.

Given what my research on American public library users uncovered, it is not hard to understand why it also interested me for this project. In my research for *American Public School Librarianship* I deliberately looked for historical evidence documenting this perspective in American public school library history. I found some, but not as many as in public libraries. Because of my reading of public sphere literature, however, I consistently wondered whether the public school library was not missing opportunities stemming from children’s evolving and ever-shifting “place” needs because school library leaders could not see beyond their profession’s discourse. Like proms, athletic competitions, and science clubs, school libraries have provided places over the years for incidental educational experiences of many types. I am hopeful that this book will stimulate conversations among all stakeholders in public education to rethink the “place” needs of young people and reexamine whether the school library has a potentially larger role to play here.

Impact Studies

In industrialized countries across the world, the administration of school libraries falls into two broad categories. Each identifies four essential ingredients—a place, a collection, a person, and a program—but they differ because each also has its own set of structural and regulatory power relationships that must be addressed in efforts to secure funding. A British model combines school and public library systems, tends to emphasize “recreational” reading, and thus is regarded more as a cultural than an educational institution. An American model funds and administers school libraries through local school districts, which regard them as separate from public libraries and tasks them primarily to support formal education, thus rendering “recreational” reading secondary. History shows that supplementary federal and regional funding can also heavily influence the direction and expansion of American public school library services and collections.³⁶

Since the early 1990s impact studies conducted in twenty-three states and one Canadian province have analyzed standardized test scores and found a correlation between quality school library programs and student achievement. The highest common indicator was the presence of a certified full-time school librarian and a support staff, but other indicators included extended and flexible hours of opening, size and newness of collections, total school library expenditures, up-to-date technology, and cooperative instructional programs between teachers and school librarians. An additional twenty-five studies surveyed school librarians, and fourteen surveyed librarians, teachers, school administrators, and students for their perceptions about how school libraries affected learning. Researchers acknowledged connections between poverty and student academic success, but studies in “state after state showed that such socio-economic conditions could not explain away the impact of school library programs, especially school library staffing, funding, and quality collections.”³⁷

Given these facts, one has to ask: “Why aren’t school libraries better supported?” One answer, as historian Steven Mintz writes, is that “history offers no easy solutions to the problems of disconnection, stress, and role contradictions that today’s children face, but it does provide certain insights that might be helpful as we seek solutions to the problems of the present.”³⁸ Hopefully, *American Public School Librarianship: A History* will provide insights that will not only address the question of why school libraries aren’t better supported, but also establish a historical foundation for understanding why the impact studies of the last quarter century have not had greater effect.

Inheriting Pre-Twentieth-Century Traditions

School librarianship did not begin in the twentieth century. If we define a school library as a library attached to a school, the first dates back to ancient Sumer, where a library supported a school curriculum for scribes. By the end of the first millennium, Roman Catholic monastery libraries were serving the educational needs of resident and transient monks. There were libraries in elite eighth-century English religious schools like the one at York, where Adelbert collected the works of forty authors whose writings supported a medieval school curriculum. Subsequent centuries saw the establishment of similar school libraries across England. Generally, acquisition came by gift, and access to these treasured hand-copied manuscript books was strictly monitored. At one school the penalty for failure to return a book, which in any case were frequently chained to library shelves, was excommunication.

In *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole* (1660), Charles Hoole argued that a well-stocked library was central to any school providing a classical education. A 1707 catalog of a northern English school library reveals all were classical texts, five-sixths written in Latin. A government report issued a century-and-a-half later showed forty endowed English grammar schools had libraries of varying sizes; all were little used and lightly staffed.¹ The evolution of school librarianship in colonial America reflected similar patterns. As early as 1736,

one privately funded three-room Georgia schoolhouse had a collection of “200 Horn Books, 200 Primers, 100 Testaments, 100 Psalters, 200 ABCs with Church Catechism . . . and several hundred religious books, tracts and treatises.” Obviously, religious books dominated, and, like English school libraries, most were little used.²

Citizens in the new United States placed a high priority on education, although they defined it differently than we do in the twenty-first century. Historian Steven Mintz notes that before the nineteenth century, children were largely regarded as “adults in training,” and through didactic stories adults encouraged children to be obedient, hardworking, God-fearing, and moral.³ “Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind,” read the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, “schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”⁴ But these adults-in-training also learned from their environments. “Education, such as it is, is ever going on,” wrote one Boston journalist in the mid-nineteenth century. “Our children are educated in the streets, by the influence of their associates . . . in the bosom of the family, by the love and gentleness or wrath and fretfulness of parents, by the passions or affections they see manifested, the conversations to which they listen, and above all by the general pursuits, habits, and moral tone of the community.”⁵ Children in the early republic “lived in a world of mixed media,” notes book historian Robert A. Gross, “encompassing word of mouth, oral performances of all kinds, the composition and circulation” of manuscripts, “the display of signs and symbols in public spaces, and the enlistment of print in the service of—and occasionally the dominance over—them all.”⁶

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, school attendance in the United States was not compulsory. Town councils, urban churches, charitable societies, and neighbors often organized and supported schools through local taxes and tuition. Two-thirds of early nineteenth-century American students attended one-room schoolhouses, “where as many as seventy children from age five through sixteen were educated together, usually by just one overwhelmed schoolteacher, who was nearly always male,” writes one education historian. “School was held only twelve weeks per year, six in the summer and six in the winter. There were rarely any textbooks on hand, and the most frequent assignment was to memorize and recite Bible passages.”⁷ In many one-room schools what constituted a school library sat on the corner of the schoolmaster’s desk. But in a few schools book collections did evolve. In Georgia, for example, an Augusta academy had 3,000 volumes by 1816. By 1830 a Savannah academy had a library of 165 volumes freely accessible to students and housed a collection of maps and globes.⁸

The early republic also witnessed the golden age of social libraries, most established by adults pooling resources to purchase collections all investors could access. Improvements in publishing technologies, expanded availability of

printed materials and their methods of dissemination, artificial lighting, and the wider availability of eyeglasses also influenced the spread of social libraries, which reflected a faith in reading, social responsibility, community pride, and self-improvement for these locally controlled voluntary institutions. Their founders expected the printed materials they collected to mold the kind of character they themselves emulated. Although they remained intensely local (membership was self-selected), the act of reading the same texts provided by social libraries bound members together across communities and, because social library collections were so similar no matter where located, across the nation.⁹

An early nineteenth-century publishing revolution made possible a new market for printed texts. Innovations made paper cheaper, and the rapid rotary press pumped out thousands of inexpensive books. With diversity and choice much expanded, Americans' reading habits shifted from the primarily *intensive* (concentrating on a few texts read over and over) ones that characterized reading in previous centuries, to the *extensive* (absorbing more texts, in part to attain the cultural capital considered essential to particular socioeconomic groups) reading that remains characteristic of reading behaviors today. "With access to a vast array of titles for every taste, Americans cast aside old habits [and] embraced diversity and choice . . . to keep up with an outpouring of books and periodicals dealing with the contemporary scene," Robert A. Gross observes. "A premium on novelty and individuality, epitomized by the rising genres of the newspaper and the novel, displaced the old regard for tradition."¹⁰

The shift from intensive to extensive reading, particularly evident in the popularity of novels, was essential to the birth of the American public library a half-century later. More immediately, however, it led to a culture of reading that became what one historian calls "a necessity of life." In the early nineteenth century social libraries helped institutionalize reading motives and styles through selection, circulation, and preservation systems, and in the process became effective mediating agencies that helped identify and enforce acceptable community limits of literary taste. In multiple ways, they shaped the civic cultures evolving around them.¹¹

It is difficult to assess the extent to which ideas sparked by adult engagement with popular fiction reading impacted parenthood (particularly motherhood), but Steven Mintz notes that our perceptions of modern childhood were invented sometime around the middle of the nineteenth century, encompassing the years from birth to thirteen or fourteen. Middle-class mothers were responsible for monitoring childhood, which was to be free of labor and devoted to schooling. Many mothers believed the child's mind was a blank slate to be shaped by parents and the child's environment. These mothers harnessed a "liberal Protestant ideal" that regarded children as innocent, and gave parents responsibility for turning their children's "redeemable, docile wills toward God." They be-

lieved life was experienced in stages, and because children had not yet acquired adult inhibitions parents had to “ensure that their innocence was not corrupted.” Childhood constituted “life’s formative stage, a highly plastic period when character and habits were shaped for good or ill.”¹² Not coincidentally, it was to address this stage of life that a body of advice literature took root, and by the end of the century a highly moralistic, gender-specific literature aimed at children and young adults began to emerge, delivered by new institutions like schools, public libraries, and—much later—school libraries.

What books were available to children at the turn of the nineteenth century taught them that they lived in an orderly society dominated by the home, where disobedience and lying were not to be tolerated. Threatening this social order, however, were an increasing number of “bad books” made possible by an explosion of print resources—particularly works of “fiction, romance, infidelity, war, piracy, and murder” which, an early nineteenth-century leaflet from the Tract Society of New York argued, were “like ardent spirits: they furnish neither ‘ailment’ nor ‘medicine;’ they are ‘*poison*’ . . . and are much to be shunned as the drunkard’s cup.”¹³

In the midst of this growing culture of print a white, Protestant, male literary clerisy arose that celebrated solitary reading, assumed an authority to determine textual meanings and literary quality, and generally disparaged the reading of popular fiction. To the members of this clerisy who reviewed new titles, qualifying a novel as “an entertaining rather than a useful book” was a condemnation. And because they could not comprehend that what was merely “entertaining” to them might be “useful” to others, they often attacked the novel as a cultural form. One condemned novels as “puerile,” another insisted they inculcated “disgust for all serious employments” and nurtured “impure desires,” “vanity,” and “dissipation.” Yet another believed they inspired “ambitious excess.”¹⁴

More recent historical research on reading looks at these novels through the eyes of their readers, however, and reveals a much different effect. Novels, one reader observed in 1801, promoted virtue and happiness because in them readers experienced “a similarity of sentiments.”¹⁵ Novels “unconsciously reveal all the little household secrets,” wrote Elizabeth Gaskell, herself a nineteenth-century English novelist. “We see the meals as they are put on the table, we learn the dresses which those who sit down to them wear, . . . we hear their kindly family discourses, we enter into their home struggles, and we rejoice when they gain the victory.”¹⁶

In her analysis of late-eighteenth-century women’s reading diaries, literary historian Elizabeth Nichols notes readers used novels for multiple purposes: as filters for their experiences, to stimulate self-reflection that helped them make sense of their daily lives, to develop and strengthen social networks, to form and maintain a sense of identity, and to provide a focus for agreeable conversation

that connected them with others face-to-face and in written correspondence. In compositions about their reading, Nichols finds they “let references to reading function as indices of domestic calm or upheaval, . . . copied passages from published material, and pondered the association between an author’s expression and his or her character.” And by “reading everything from advice manuals to newspapers to biographies to sermons to novels, they readily availed themselves of the form and vocabulary of their reading matter as they penned letters and diary entries.” In personal correspondence, late eighteenth-century white, middle-class women often identified ways they appropriated fiction. About *Clarissa*’s chief protagonist one mother wrote in 1784, “her letters are full of sentiment—I must adopt some of her excellent rules.” “I delight to see flow from another pen the sensations I feel but am unable to express,” wrote a second in 1792 about a novel she recently read. “I cannot agree with her that Women are only born to suffer & to obey,” said a third in 1800 about another novel’s protagonist.¹⁷

School District Libraries

It was in this mix of forces that a nineteenth-century “school district library” movement took root. In 1812 a New York commission recommended that schoolchildren be provided access to a variety of carefully selected books. In the 1820s Governor DeWitt Clinton began advocating that the Empire State establish community libraries within local school districts. Like others, he was convinced that collections of good books had the power to elevate intellectual character, diffuse useful knowledge, inform and educate the citizenry, and improve one’s station in life. A convenient way to accomplish this was to harness the school district, an institution already authorized to tax citizens for educational purposes. Ultimately, he proved successful. In 1835—seven years after Clinton’s death—New York passed a law that gave permission to school districts to tax local populations for libraries that all local voting citizens could access and placed those libraries under the authority of district school superintendents. Because few districts bothered to establish school district libraries, however, in 1838 the legislature passed another law tapping a windfall from recent land sales to provide \$55,000 in annual matching funds for three years, as well as mandating that school districts establish libraries in schoolhouses and make teachers responsible for managing collections. Responsibility for selecting books was left in the hands of school district trustees.¹⁸

Other states followed New York’s example. Michigan passed a school district library law in 1837, Connecticut in 1838, Iowa and Rhode Island in 1840, Indiana in 1841, Massachusetts in 1842, Maine in 1844, New Hampshire in 1845, Ohio in 1847, Wisconsin in 1848, Missouri in 1853, Oregon in 1854, and Illinois in 1855. Preoccupation with the advent and early years of the Civil War prevented additional states from passing legislation until Pennsylvania did so in 1864, fol-

lowed by California (1866), Virginia and Kansas (1870), New Jersey (1871), Minnesota and Kentucky (1873), and Colorado (1876); twenty-two other states (mostly in the South) passed school library laws between 1890 and 1921.¹⁹

Publishers were quick to recognize a new market made possible by these laws. They began issuing collections of cheaply produced, previously published works, most of them unprotected by US copyright and thus requiring no payment of royalties, selling them as “libraries” through local representatives working on commission. For example, in 1837 the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge announced plans to market a “Library for Schools,” a fifty-volume collection intended to address “the increasing interest in the subject of school libraries in several of the States” that was “pervaded and characterized by a spirit of Christian morality calculated to refine and elevate the moral character of our nation.”²⁰

That same year Harper & Brothers began marketing a fifty-volume “School District Library Series” that over the next decade grew to six series, with 295 volumes of 210 titles, four-fifths of which were reprints of highly regarded British authors. Books were shipped in a box with lock, key, and a hinged door, on the inside of which Harper pasted a catalog of its contents. School superintendents across the country could not resist. Because funds for school district libraries were primarily used to purchase materials—not to staff, manage, and house them—many school district trustees took the easy way out and purchased whole collections from publishers. Such a carefully selected library “could not fail to prove an inestimable blessing,” concluded the Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1854, “both to the rising and risen generation . . . and a rich source of moral and intellectual elevation to the people of every township.” Most of New York’s school district libraries (by midcentury its 10,000 libraries contained 1,500,000 volumes) came from Harper’s School District Library Series.²¹

But New York’s school district libraries resembled public libraries more than modern school libraries; they were really township libraries sometimes located in common schools. “The School District Library is not designed as a Library for Children in any other sense than to place before them, if they desire to read and are of sufficient age to read profitably, such books as may exalt their taste, improve their intellect, and mature their judgment,” noted an 1843 report to Utica’s Board of Commissioners of the Common Schools. There a special examining committee reported that its 1,400-volume collection had 15,000 circulations the previous year, which certainly demonstrated the library was “an object of great interest and importance to the whole community” because on average, the committee speculated, three or four members of students’ families likely read each of those volumes as well. However, because “the main object of these libraries” was “improvement and information” that upheld “the dignity of usefulness,” the committee recommended against providing “amusements for

the people” in the form of novels. Specifically the committee mentioned avoiding popular authors like Jane Austen, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Tobias Smollett, and novels like *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist*.²²

But not all New York school district libraries abdicated selection responsibilities to publishers like Harper & Brothers. Collection profiles varied. On the one hand, in 1843 a Delaware County superintendent complained that “many libraries contain novels and some contain works of a still more objectionable character.” On the other, a Genesee County superintendent noted that “there would unquestioningly be a much greater circulation if a larger proportion of the books were suited to the taste and capacity of the younger class of readers. Quite too great a portion of the books are not sufficiently juvenile in their character for children.” Yet another superintendent complained that library books “should not be children’s books, or of a juvenile character, or light and frivolous tales and romances, but works of solid information, which will excite a thirst for knowledge and also gratify it.”²³

Rochester had different experiences with school district libraries. Initially, they were located in private residences, prompting complaints from officials about access problems. In 1842 the libraries were relocated in schoolhouses that opened Saturday mornings under teacher supervision. Eight years later, Rochester reported that just under 40,000 books were located in 240 district libraries. But they were little used. “Judging from the large numbers of books stowed away on the shelves, dust covered,” an 1863 report noted, “it is evident that the existence of a library is forgotten, or the taste for reading of high standard works is not cultivated among the youth of our schools.” As a result, Rochester consolidated the district libraries into a central school library of 7,000 volumes that in 1875 moved into the city’s first public high school. There it also functioned as a public library until the first decade of the twentieth century, when the city established a public library system. The central school library subsequently distributed its collections to schoolrooms across the city and then closed permanently.²⁴

Midcentury witnessed the high-water mark for New York’s school district libraries. In 1852, however, New York eliminated the requirement that school districts match funds, and permitted library funds to be used for other educational purposes. A year later nearly 9,500 of the state’s 11,239 districts showed their priorities by repurposing the library money to supplement teacher salaries.²⁵ Half a decade later New York officials reported: “As the inhabitants cease to resort to the libraries, the officers who are charged with their custody and preservation become careless and indifferent, and the books are stowed away like the forgotten lumber of a garret, to moulder and dilapidate.”²⁶ The state school superintendent found the libraries “mainly represented by a motley collection of books, . . . scattered among the various families of districts . . . crowded into cupboards, thrown into cellars, stowed away in lifts, exposed to

the action of water, the sun, and of fire.” Without adequate care, many books disappeared.²⁷

Experiences in other states with school district libraries were mixed. Some interpreted their mandate narrowly. North Carolina’s school superintendent saw school district libraries as central libraries for teachers managed by local committees.²⁸ So did Kansas. For its school district libraries, Kansas purchased an eleven-volume “School Teachers’ Library” in 1863.²⁹ In Oak Park, Illinois, in 1887 the high school janitor served as “librarian” for a teachers’ collection.³⁰ Baltimore teachers wanted their librarian to be “a womanly woman possessed . . . of culture and learning” and their library to contain samples of textbooks—hopefully donated by publishers.³¹

Massachusetts’ enabling legislation included matching funds for books to be selected by local school committees. By 1850 Massachusetts had 91,539 volumes in over 2,000 common school libraries. Educational reformer Horace Mann, who in 1837 had convinced his legislature to make school attendance compulsory for all Bay State children, wanted common schools to develop libraries that would balance the limitations of a textbook-dominated pedagogy; he also advocated for collections privileging useful reading materials over those he considered “amusing” or “fictitious,” thus limiting access to books thought to be sensational or immoral. “No one thing will contribute more to intelligent reading in our Schools than a well selected library,” he argued.³² Rhode Island school reformer Henry Barnard echoed these sentiments. “The establishment of a library in every schoolhouse,” he wrote in 1845, “will bring the mighty instrument of good books to act more directly and more broadly on the entire population of the state, . . . for it will open the fountain of knowledge without money, and without price, to the humble and the elevated, the poor and the rich.”³³

Positive evaluations of school district and common school libraries began to appear in the nation’s press. “If then these libraries are calculated to benefit the children,” the serial *Common School Advocate* remarked in 1837, “why not make their provision mandatory?” Certain learned men had recently admitted that “the accidental perusal” of *Robinson Crusoe* by youths not only encouraged them to read more, but also added to their knowledge. “The predominant passion of youth is curiosity,” the *Advocate* noted. “If we can blend useful knowledge with the gratification of this predominating passion, we bend the twig as the tree should grow.” Thus, not all novels were bad. Careful selection was essential; school district and common school libraries should, the *Advocate* believed, have a role here.³⁴

The reading experiences these school district and common school library collections made possible were mixed. Some resulted in good memories. Robert Underwood Johnson recalled that in his Hoosier hometown of Centerville the district school library was kept at a shoemaker’s shop. “I was much impressed

as a boy when I was sent on an errand to the shoemaker's to find a group of village wisecracks gathered about his bench as he worked, all discussing the character of 'Napoleon,' as set forth in the 'Life' by John S. C. Abbott, which had recently appeared." At the same time, however, he lamented what was in the collections. "In general," he recalled, "it may be said the selection was made from the point of view of scholarly men familiar with great libraries, not from the experience of the readers of the books." Author James Whitcomb Riley made heavy use of his district school library, which shifted locations during his Greenfield, Indiana, childhood from the schoolhouse, to a shoemaker's, to a grocery store, and finally was scattered among several houses, including his own. From its contents he read *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *Don Quixote*, *Robin Hood*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the *Arabian Nights*.³⁵

Other memories were not so positive. "Books were generally hidden away in the clerks' offices, like monks in their cloister, and valueless to the world," noted the Michigan State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1869. "And what kind of books were they? Some good ones, doubtless; but generally it were better to sow oats in the dust that covered them than to give them to the young to read. Every year, soon after the taxes were collected, the State was swarmed with peddlers, with all the unsalable books of eastern houses—the sensational novels of all ages, tales of piracies, murders, and love intrigues—the yellow covered literature of the world."³⁶ One Pennsylvania boy became so disconcerted in the late 1880s with "the kind of yellow-covered literature" his classmates kept secret in their desks at school that he complained to his mother, who then bought twenty-five "good books for boys," and through their teacher circulated them to his classmates. At the end of the year, the teacher reported that the books had circulated 500 times, and that the boys often reported their parents and siblings also read them.³⁷

Before passage of a 1887 state law that provided aid for common school libraries, Minnesota teachers made it a practice to contribute one or two dollars per year to purchase books only they could use, and locate them in the county superintendent's office. The 1887 law provided matching funds to purchase books from a state list. By the turn of the twentieth century Minnesota public schools had acquired 300,000 volumes.³⁸ To supplement these funds some Minnesota teachers also developed a "basket party" plan for public school libraries. Single women of marrying age prepared baskets of sweet-smelling food for two, upon which single men of marrying age could bid. "The stimulus of personal admiration and of local rivalries sometimes provoked the keenest competition."³⁹

In 1900 Iowa mandated that school districts annually set aside five to fifteen cents per child for school library books that could only be purchased from a list that excluded "anything that might be objectionable."⁴⁰ But enterprising booksellers sometimes got around state lists. In 1900 the Missouri state superinten-

dent of schools identified a north Missouri business “selling sets of books that can be bought in the market for fifteen dollars to school boards for forty-two dollars and fifty cents under the pretense that the list has been adopted by the state.”⁴¹

Before Ohio passed a school district library law in 1853, one Cleveland school system used \$500 from citizen donations to purchase books that were placed in two schoolhouses that were then opened to the public. Four years later the new Mayflower School included a library room on the third floor.⁴² Even after it passed the 1853 school district library law, however, Ohio communities did not follow New York’s and Massachusetts’ leads. Cleveland school officials, for example, used funds provided by the law to build a centralized 2,200-volume public school library collection. In 1869 it merged that collection with the 4,000-volume collection of the Cleveland Library Association to open the new Cleveland Public Library.⁴³

For most of the nineteenth century, Louisiana had no school district or common school library legislation, but that did not prevent Bayou State educators and philanthropists from beginning a few. When New Orleans’ Second Municipality Public School Library opened in 1847, it contained 5,100 volumes “selected with care and attention, comprising works in Theology, Jurisprudence, History, Belles Lettres, and the Arts and Sciences.” For an annual five-dollar subscription, all white citizens could withdraw from its collections.⁴⁴ Others in the Crescent City wanted to establish a public library, but they ran into some problems when discussing the possibility of absorbing the Public School Library; one senior resident pointed out that the library belonged to its original subscribers—the public school students of its municipality. When three municipalities consolidated into one school district years later, the new superintendent moved the library into City Hall, where it remained for the rest of the century.⁴⁵ For some New Orleans schools, that was not sufficient. In 1894 the McDonogh School No. 14 principal, who had made a habit of loaning her own books to students when she was first hired in 1885, hosted a lawn party attended by 1,000 people who donated \$300 to supplement her private collection for her students.⁴⁶

Some school districts were too small to support adequate library services, and because funding was too limited, responses varied. In Connecticut, for example, the state’s Society of Colonial Dames funded travelling collections to public schools through the state public library commission.⁴⁷ In Portland, Oregon, in 1894 school officials divided the public school library located in the high school into collections they then redistributed to local schools. Although this removed responsibility for maintaining a central collection it also reduced access and security, and volumes quickly began to disappear.⁴⁸ “When I reached the schoolhouse where I was to teach,” one teacher recalled on her first day in the 1890s in a South Dakota country school, “I found the door open and some

cattle had visited there. Only 6 books were on the library shelf.” At the time, less than 4 percent of South Dakota’s rural schools had libraries.⁴⁹

California gave control of district libraries it funded to local trustees who selected only from a state list. Thanks to that list, a state superintendent reported a bit hyperbolically in 1874, “No school director, however unfamiliar with books, can fail to make selections that will gratify as well as improve the tastes of pupils and parents alike . . . Our system of public school libraries has worked so satisfactorily that not even a wish for change has been expressed.” What the superintendent did not say, however, was that the list cited fictional series authors like Oliver Optic, Horatio Alger, and Martha Finley (author of the popular Elsie Dinsmore series), all of whom were much disparaged by librarians across the country. Not surprisingly, the list soon met criticism. In 1881 an Oakland High School teacher addressed the California Association of Teachers on “The Proper Use of School Libraries,” complaining about “trashy and objectionable items” on the list. The Department of Education temporarily dropped those books when the list was revised several years later, but somehow, except for Horatio Alger, they reappeared on a new list in 1892.⁵⁰

Some communities grew their own school libraries. In 1898 a Middleton, Georgia, mother convinced a Seaboard Air Line Railroad official to deliver travelling libraries she selected to white rural schools located near railroad lines in the state; just seven years later the service was delivering 5,468 books and 803 magazines to 125 rural schools.⁵¹ Ten miles outside Mattoon, Illinois, in 1901, a Whitfield school teacher led eleven female high school students into the cornfields to husk and market thirty-six bushels of corn to fund a library for their school.⁵²

Pennsylvania passed a law in 1864 that provided school library funds, but only for shelving. It also mandated that books placed there were only for “the study and improvement of the teachers.”⁵³ Lacking state funds to purchase books, Erie officials used fines on people found intoxicated in public to fund a common school library.⁵⁴ Parents of children attending Reading’s common schools organized their own library of 200 volumes, “all carefully selected books; new, bright, cheerful looking books—neatly covered with colored muslin by the girls—and books which are in constant demand,” one Reading citizen observed in 1852. In 1871 Colonel James Anderson, whose private library Andrew Carnegie used as a boy, donated his collection to the school district, which then became the Allegheny High School Library.⁵⁵ By 1890, Delaware County had several school libraries, one of which boasted a collection of 640 volumes, “all purchased by means of entertainments given by the children and by subscriptions given by the patrons of the school,” the superintendent reported.⁵⁶ Not until 1895 did the Pennsylvania legislature allow school boards to spend tax money for school library books students could access.⁵⁷

Perhaps the best-known nineteenth-century school library was in St. Louis. Under control of the local school board, in 1865 the Public School Library Society of St. Louis incorporated to establish a public school library and lyceum intended for both schoolchildren and adults. Life memberships cost twelve dollars, annual memberships three dollars. To encourage children to become members the librarian visited local schools, often telling stories. By 1869, the library held twenty thousand volumes. Five years later officials opened the reading and reference rooms to public use. In midafternoon on school days high school students arrived first, followed by grammar-school children “like a swarm of bees . . . clustered around the children’s desk, forming a border sometimes four or five children deep.” In 1884 the library dropped “School” from its title, and trustees began seeking tax support. Not until 1894 did the St. Louis Free Library Board take full control of the institution.⁵⁸

For recently freed African Americans living in the Jim Crow South in the late nineteenth century, publicly funded school district and common school libraries did not exist. Some black communities compensated as best they could: for example, the Colored Public Schools of Little Rock, Arkansas, charged ten cents to participate in an 1899 “gymnastic festival” consisting of field sports, with proceeds funding the public school library.⁵⁹ At the time, African Americans could not use the public libraries of the city. In 1901 Rose Thompson reported to the *Storer Record* of Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, that she had hosted “a Thanksgiving entertainment for the starting of a public school library. It was successful beyond my expectations.”⁶⁰ Just as in Little Rock, she was not allowed to use the local public libraries.

But district and common school and public libraries were not the only libraries serving children. In the mid-nineteenth century many American children not enrolled in common schools became literate through their Sunday schools. In 1838 the American Sunday School Union announced the availability of a library series “simple in style, adapted in matter and manner to the circumstances of schoolchildren, and most salutary in their influence on the order, prosperity, and morals of society.” Sunday school libraries specialized in highly moralizing fictional children’s books that school district libraries generally rejected. “The books of the nursery and Sunday School are valuable there,” a Utica, New York, educational committee wrote, “and to the nursery and Sunday School they should be confined.”⁶¹

The American Sunday School Union made no apology for its collections, however. “We do not think it arrogant,” the Union argued in 1839, “to claim that the influence of Sunday schools and Sunday school libraries is distinctly visible in the present demand for cheap popular libraries for common schools.” Other critics were not so kind. Late eighteenth-century religious writers “set the standard for the dreary books they contained,” which were then “imitated by a number

of American women of feeble genius and facile pen.” The sexist overtones of the criticism were obvious. These were the same authors Nathaniel Hawthorne referred to as “that d- - -d mob of scribbling women” against whom he competed for readers. Nonetheless, these libraries were numerous.⁶² The 1870 Census reported that 33,580 Sunday school libraries contained 8,346,153 volumes. All of this suggests the possibility that Sunday school libraries may have played a larger role in the literacy rates of midcentury American children than school district and common libraries.⁶³

The phrase “public school library” does surface in late nineteenth-century history. Sometimes it is simply the title of a subscription or social library that local citizens established but located in a public school.⁶⁴ When the US Bureau of Education published *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management; Special Report* for the nation’s centennial in 1876, however, it reported 826 high school libraries and no elementary school libraries. But a growing late nineteenth-century public library movement, whose rhetoric defined the public library as an educational institution, got most of the nation’s attention regarding libraries and, at least in the minds of public library leaders who established the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876, it was best that the connection between schoolchildren and library run mostly through the public library.

Best Reading for Children

Between 1850 and 1870 the number of schools in the United States increased from 87,257 to 141,629, the number of students doubled (leaping from roughly 3.5 million to more than 7 million), and school budgets soared from \$16,162,000 to \$95,402,726. One source estimated that schools spent \$18 million on textbooks in 1868. Although southern educators expressed their displeasure with northern textbooks that represented the South as the villain in the Civil War, northeastern and midwestern publishing firms still predominated. When the major textbook publishers merged into the American Book Company in 1883 (estimates suggest that it controlled between 50 and 90 percent of the market), the nation’s schoolbook trade was effectively nationalized.⁶⁵

Where school libraries existed they provided students more diverse information than textbooks, but at the same time selection practices placed significant constraints on that diversity. In one late nineteenth-century marketing pamphlet, publishers cited eight reasons to institute a school library; one trumpeted that the library “will stand as one of the bulwarks to stem the tide of baneful books and sensational story papers which tend to destroy all that is sweet and good in literature.” It included a list of recommended titles that reflected the dominant literary canon.⁶⁶ “Farm children who spent hours reading books

from their school libraries,” observes school historian Wayne E. Fuller, were “thoroughly indoctrinated in the period’s moral earnestness.”⁶⁷

Although by this time some authors of children’s books were challenging the heavy moralism their predecessors had written into their narratives, late nineteenth-century authors addressing this growing audience for children’s and young adult literature still penned their stories within carefully defined parameters. As editor of the highly popular *St. Nicholas* magazine (established in 1873), Mary Mapes Dodge followed carefully circumscribed principles when selecting stories for publication: “to give clean, genuine fun to children of all ages; to give them examples of the finest types of boyhood and girlhood; to inspire them with a fine appreciation of pictorial art; to cultivate the imagination in profitable directions; to foster a love of country, home, nature, truth, beauty, sincerity; to prepare boys and girls for life as it is; to stimulate their ambitions—but along progressive lines; to keep pace with a fast-moving world in all its activities; to give reading matter which every parent may pass to his children unhesitatingly.”⁶⁸ But coterminous with this shift in tone in “good books” for children came a rush of dime novels written by such notables as Oliver Optic, Horatio Alger, and Martha Finley, supplemented by publishers rushing to fill a desire for excitable stories contained in publications like *Police Gazette*—all sensationalist fiction children devoured in private and often in groups, and all opposed by a growing establishment of education professionals (including ALA) and by more and more public libraries across the nation. In an 1879 *Library Journal* article entitled “The Evil of Unlimited Freedom in the Use of Juvenile Fiction,” one Massachusetts public librarian lamented “the baneful influence of those desultory and careless mental habits engendered in pupils by this same inordinate consumption of story-books.”⁶⁹ Not all librarians agreed with her, however. Worcester (MA) Public Library Director S. S. Green argued that dime novels were not morally suspect but instead simply “rational entertainment.” Admittedly, he said, “they have little literary merit and give us incorrect pictures of life,” but “poor as they are . . . they have a work to do in the world.”⁷⁰ Although Green’s public library perspective was more forgiving regarding popular literature, he nonetheless saw no place for it in a world of formal education.

Many educators agreed. In 1867 the Kansas State Superintendent of Public Instruction declared: “The Bible is the best text book on moral instruction ever published,” and he recommended not only that it be included in district library collections but also “that it be read once a day, without note or comment, in every school in the state.”⁷¹ Another midcentury educator said a satisfactory school collection was one comprised of “a Bible, book of fables (without illustrations, particularly any representing the Devil), and the Child’s Book of Soul.”⁷² In 1897 a Wisconsin school superintendent seized “bad books” from

several of the district's school libraries. It represented the second time the superintendent had gone through public school library collections, a "crusade" he determined to continue because he was convinced it was better to "make the pupils read either good books or none." He also forwarded samples of the "trashy literature" to the state superintendent.⁷³

Similarly, Pennsylvania school officials and parents who helped build school libraries were motivated by fear of the sensational dime novels their children found so easy to obtain. "Our common schools which feel this evil should collect good and well-selected libraries for . . . their students," argued one county superintendent in 1882. "Much more could be done to counteract the vile literature which finds its way into the hands of our boys and girls, corrupting their characters and perpetuating vice and immorality," lamented another that same year. "If they have access to good, wholesome reading, it will cultivate in them a taste for pure, healthy reading," echoed a third in 1886.⁷⁴ "If a bright boy who has learned to get thought from a printed page does not have access to books containing valuable and interesting information," wrote the state superintendent in 1894, "he will seek the excitement of objectionable literature."⁷⁵

To counter the temptation to read such questionable books, some teachers began promoting reading circles in the 1880s to encourage the reading of what they considered to be better literature. In Indiana, a "Teacher's Reading Circle" organized in 1883, in part to advocate for the revival of district township libraries.⁷⁶ Four years later its directors instituted the country's first "Young People's Reading Circle," which thereafter annually recommended twenty books for students between grades two and twelve. Purchased for children with a mix of public and private funds, annual sales in Indiana averaged 50,000 books. When Indiana began consolidating its rural schools at the turn of the century, many of these books found their way into school library and classroom library collections. Ohio, Kansas, Alabama, and Illinois established similar reading circles.⁷⁷

South Dakota's Pupils' Reading Circle grew out of an 1892 South Dakota Educational Association initiative. The association issued lists of approved books and set up a reading program, then challenged students across the state to send summaries of their reading. For successfully completing the program they received a diploma. In 1896 a Day County country schoolteacher with twenty-five students reported her efforts to start a Pupils' Reading Circle. She and her students began by raising money for a bookcase, and she crafted a subscription list that students used to solicit contributions from their parents. In short order they raised \$14.35, which they used to buy thirty-eight books. "We have elected a librarian, and books [like *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *Tale of Two Cities*] are now being read by the children and by the people of the district." One South Dakota school superintendent acknowledged in 1897 that where reading-circle-inspired school libraries prospered, it was usually because teachers wanted them. "The

experience of the past years has demonstrated the fact that, with proper direction, the general reading of every pupil is a very valuable auxiliary to the regular work of the schools," wrote one reading circle administrator in 1900. "All that is needed is a school library, and this should be considered a necessary adjunct to every school in the State." In 1901 South Dakota passed a law mandating a library in every school district. To the chagrin of some educators, however, many were filled with what a former state superintendent called "light works of fiction" that might evolve into a "mass of vicious, impure and worthless literature." As an antidote to this tendency, in 1903 the state superintendent began issuing lists of "worthy" books from which schools had to select.⁷⁸

As librarianship assumed professional authority in the late nineteenth century for developing systems to efficiently access the "useful knowledge" that libraries had been acquiring for years, compiling bibliographies of the "best" books became central to librarians' professional responsibilities. In 1882 Hartford (CT) Public Library Director Caroline Hewins published *Books for the Young: A Guide for Parents and Children*, and in the same year started a children's read-aloud program that became a model for the ubiquitous public library children's story hour still with us today. "Books have . . . been rejected," Hewins said in her preface, "when they make 'smartness' a virtue, encourage children in cruelty, rudeness, or disrespect to their elders, contain much bad English, or make their little everyday heroes leap suddenly from abject poverty to boundless wealth." She specifically detested what she called "the Immortal Four"—Horatio Alger, Oliver Optic, Harry Castlemon, and Martha Finley. In 1883 Hewins also began a column in ALA's periodical *Library Journal* entitled "Literature for the Young," in which she listed books with annotations "showing their character and suitability for reading." Pioneering library advocates like Caroline Hewins—whose "strong, noble face with a searching gaze" often showed contempt for "those who chose the lesser roads in reading"—looked for ways to discourage the kind of youth series fiction local newsstands routinely peddled.⁷⁹

But many children resisted the efforts of librarians and educators to control their reading. In 1887 one librarian had become so frustrated with endless requests from girls for series fiction that he not only tore up their request slips, he then handed them slips for biographies he recommended instead. To this one girl responded "with a scowl" and a protest: "I don't want any *Lifes*." Similarly, when the Los Angeles Public Library director instructed her staff in 1889 to deny young users books that librarians thought harmful (the library had Hewins's bibliography), several parents protested. One insisted the practice cease. Only then, she argued, "may we see what ought always to be as much a matter of pride as a 'well-kept library'—a well-used library."⁸⁰

Even the Hartford Public Library, run by the very woman whose bibliography castigated the "Immortal Four," bowed to public demand by adding duplicate

copies of many series fiction authors. “The boys have not left off their *Optic*, *Alger*, and *Castlemon*, or the girls their *Elsie*,” Caroline Hewins reported in 1891. “I wish that I could tell you that the children of Hartford had marched in procession to the part and there, *Savanarola*-like, burned their idols, but unfortunately my regard for the truth prevents any such statement.” Her board president added: “It is no longer a question of whether a large supply of novels prevents readers from becoming familiar with English classics. It is whether they shall find at the library pleasant, wholesome stories, or go away without them to buy at news-stands and railway counters such stuff.”⁸¹

But readers’ accounts of interactions with late nineteenth-century series fiction often reveal a different effect one might label *incidental education*. In his 1917 autobiography, Hamlin Garland noted that as an Iowa lad in the 1860s he regularly traded scores of “*Beadle’s Dime Novels*” and borrowed many titles from *The Seaside Library* series from one of his father’s employees. “The pleasure I took in these tales should fill me with shame, but it doesn’t—I rejoice in the memory of it,” Garland reminisced.⁸² Frank E. Kellogg remembered reading Mayne Reid’s books as a boy “and discuss[ing] them with delight,” he later wrote series fiction publisher Edward Stratemeyer. “Boys love the smell of the woods and waters; it is the breath of their nostrils, and when they get the essence of a good strong lively hunting, fishing, or trapping story, they care little for plot.”⁸³ Noted nineteenth-century cultural authority Thomas Wentworth Higginson defended *Oliver Optic*, who, he believed, promoted desirable cultural attitudes. “It is not a bad impulse but a good one that makes the child seek” sensational reading, he argued. “The motive that sends him to *Oliver Optic* is just that love of adventure which has made the Anglo-American race spread itself across the continent.”⁸⁴ In an Ohio school in the early 1880s young Zane Grey sequestered in his geography textbook the dime novels he preferred to read. None were available to him at his local public library or his school library. So taken were he and his friends with this genre that they collected, shared, read, and protected them in a cave near his home.⁸⁵

In an 1879 sermon, a Cincinnati clergyman recalled the “intense delight in this class of stories, devouring with glistening eyes and beating heart the narratives.” The sermon, titled “How to Be Happy,” continued in this vein: “I can understand what it is that makes yon school girl trip shyly” into the public library to

obtain a fresh installment of the long drawn agony to dream, and sigh, and cry over; can feel a fellow sympathy for the ‘prentice boy eagerly devouring the romance and sentiment that seem to him all the more admirable because so unlike anything he has ever encountered in life; can understand why the shop girl is glad to exchange the bleakness of her daily experience for an hour’s sojourn in the

brighter realm of the imagination; and can rejoice over the staid matron full of household care, and her snatching a moment, here and there, out of her domestic routine, to warm her heart again with the old time sensation. Ah! Do not smile at them, for in so doing you condemn yourself.⁸⁶

Public Library Services to Schools

The public library movement that commenced in the mid-nineteenth century sealed the fate of the school district library and likely delayed the birth of the modern public school library for half a century. As long as the common school curriculum remained primarily textbook centered, funding school libraries remained a low priority. But some educators nonetheless preferred a diversity of reading materials for their students, and believed that public libraries, growing in number nationwide, were a good venue to address those preferences. So did several leaders in the nation's library community. In a "stirring speech" that provoked much discussion at the 1876 ALA conference, Charles Francis Adams (a public library trustee, among his many accomplishments) addressed the great possibilities of cooperation between public libraries and schools. His speech marked the beginning of efforts to extend public library services to local schools.⁸⁷

As public librarians watched growing numbers of common schools appear in their communities, many designed services to respond to students' needs for useful information, which, by the late nineteenth century, had morphed into the phrase "good books" that the bibliographies librarians compiled sought to identify. For some, the transition seemed natural. "The name public school library is suggestive," wrote a San Francisco newspaper correspondent as he observed activities at his public library four years after it opened in 1879. "Here the names of two great factors in education are linked together. In the instances of this name the library has been incorporated with the public school system, and by use for reference and general information is made to work hand in hand with the teacher and text-book."⁸⁸ Similarly, a Massachusetts high school principal noted in 1880: "As an ally of the high school, the public library is not merely useful—it is absolutely indispensable. By this I mean that without the library our work would have to be radically changed for the worse, and would become little better than mere memorizing of textbooks."⁸⁹

Evidence of cooperative partnerships began to emerge in professional practice. In a paper delivered at the American Association of Social Science's 1880 conference, Worcester (MA) Public Library Director S. S. Green described successful cooperative efforts between his library and local public schools. The article circulated widely among the nation's librarians and was often cited as a blueprint for cooperation. In it Green described how teachers brought classes to the public library so that students could use reference materials to find information

on particular subjects. He also reported on collections (as large as fifty books) pulled out of the library's closed stacks that school principals had requested their students be "allowed to examine freely, with the object of selecting from them such as they find interesting to take away from the building to read at home." Green described other services too: for example, some high schools gave squads of ten students baskets to carry books on subjects they were studying from the library to their schools. The school superintendent thought this initiative so successful he thereafter sent a wagon to each school every two weeks to deposit new public library collections and pick up old ones. Green encouraged urban public libraries to initiate similar activities through recently opened neighborhood branches.

Always lurking in the background of these new services was a subtext countering young readers' desire for the kinds of series fiction written by Alger, Optic, and Finley. "In doing the work I have been describing," Green said, teachers hoped that children would learn from their contact with public libraries that "there are many books which are interesting and yet not story books." Two teachers in particular, he reported, "stated that boys who were in the habit of reading New York story papers and dime novels, have gratefully received wholesome books recommended to them."⁹⁰ In Dover, New Hampshire, the public library director lauded a similar effort to augment textbooks with library books: "the testimony of both teacher and pupil is readily given to the success of the plan," he noted. "All of this work tends to the development of young minds, in the right direction, and to the awakening and quickening of the judgment and critical faculties, while the tendency to specialized rather than aimless reading, which is the natural outcome of such work, is greatly to be desired."⁹¹

In the late nineteenth century, cooperation between public libraries and schools took on three service patterns. In some schools the local public library provided collections children were permitted to take home. In others, library-provided collections remained in the classroom. Finally, sometimes the school itself became a site for a public library deposit station from which children and adults could borrow. An 1885 report noted that of seventy-five public libraries surveyed thirty-seven reported "an official connection" that fell under one of these three categories of service.⁹²

In Chicago, for example, beginning in January 1883, every Saturday morning one preselected public school teacher brought his class to the public library for a demonstration of information resources the institution had on a particular subject students were studying. "The standard books and illustrated works in the library on that subject are laid out on the table in the director's room, the teacher supervising the selection, and preparing himself to speak upon it, and especially with reference to the books before him, indicating such as are of the best authority, and describing the best methods of using them." The librarian

then welcomed students to the library, invited them to make use of all these resources for their schoolwork, and toured them while demonstrating arrangement, appliances, and catalogs.⁹³

In 1886, Milwaukee public school teacher Lutie Stearns looked over her fourth grade class of seventy-two students, most of them children of German immigrants. Because her school had no library and her classroom had but one reader, she repurposed soapboxes into bookcases, and every Thursday evening took three boys with six large baskets on the horse car to the Milwaukee Public Library. There she was allowed to borrow two books for each of her students, one of “wholesome fiction,” and the second “along the lines through which the child might discover his life interest.”⁹⁴ Her initiative had a ripple effect: in 1888 the library began to circulate books through local high schools (Stearns had by that time become a library employee). The initiative proved so successful the library allocated \$1,000 specifically for these circulating collections.⁹⁵

In an 1894 survey of ninety-five American and Canadian public library services to local school teachers, Stearns reported that one-third of the public libraries made no distinction between teachers’ cards and other borrowers’, and among the remaining two-thirds practices varied. Some allowed teachers two books per issue, others up to twenty. Some restricted use of these books to the classroom, while others gave teachers authority to decide circulation practices. Most teachers favored reference books that supported the curriculum “rather than good literature for children.” In Milwaukee the public library invited every teacher to select a book for every one of her students that would be forwarded to her classroom as a collection. “If, in the judgment of the [library] assistants in charge, the teacher has by chance included anything unsuitable for the purpose, she is written to and helped to find other and better books.” Librarians in Milwaukee and elsewhere regularly checked these requests against Caroline Hewins’s bibliography.

As for sending collections of books to the schools, most required students to get a library card. During the 1893–94 school year the Los Angeles Public Library sent out 14,000 books to local schools, the Cleveland Public Library sent 4,700 that circulated 38,000 times—“a remarkable showing,” Stearns said. At her own library, the 15,000 books sent to local schools (private and parochial) circulated 49,000 times. To spark interest, said Stearns, “we visit the classrooms of our public schools and tell the children stories, thereby arousing a desire for books; we urge upon the teachers the necessity of furnishing the young with the best literature.” And not just books; several public libraries also circulated picture collections to supplement curricula. In Milwaukee, teachers organized “pasting and cutting bees” to post and circulate 2,000 mounted pictures extracted from extra copies of periodicals like *Harper’s Weekly* and the *London Illustrated News*. Nearly half the libraries surveyed also reported library visits organized

by teachers. "The topics selected" for these visits were "generally supplementary to the school work."⁹⁶

In 1896 the Raleigh (NC) *News and Observer* reported on schoolrooms with travelling public library collections. There students could study, as well as be exposed to books and periodicals "calculated to strengthen the[ir] minds and characters." But, the *News and Observer* also noted, because these local public library collections specifically focused on southern authors and southern characters, they "will inculcate in these southern youths the quality of the grand old people whom they will succeed in this life of the same old South."⁹⁷ Here racism joined literary elitism as a service subtext.

Sometimes schools came under criticism for the kinds of books public libraries supplied. When the Chicago Public Library began allowing school principals to select collections for their schools, principals chose from among the most popular books the library circulated. When a city commissioner investigated in 1890, he asked the school superintendent, at a public forum, what the superintendent thought his principals were choosing. It was a "gotcha" question; before the superintendent could answer, the commissioner observed: "Do you know that out of eighty books drawn by one principal this week only four were not works of fiction?" Most, he noted, were works by Castlemon, Alger, and Optic. Teachers were no better, the commissioner continued. They were checking out titles like *Wife In Name Only*, *Her Dearest Rival*, *Lady Damar's Secret*, and *Married, but Not Mated*. Days later the *Chicago Herald* announced, "Novel reading in the public schools is to be abolished." Teachers who "loll[ed] in luxurious indolence," it reported, "are to be reprimanded severely" for their reading habits.⁹⁸ Such experiences may explain why that same year the New York City school superintendent told his teachers not to withdraw books from city libraries for classroom use.⁹⁹

Elsewhere public libraries were more careful about the titles they sent to schools. Within a decade of establishing a cooperative arrangement in 1887 the Detroit Public Library had circulated 7,000 books in the city's fifty-five school buildings.¹⁰⁰ "A collection of fifty books in a room, chosen with reference to the age and ability of the pupils in that room," the library reported in 1893, "is the most satisfactory means of forming a taste for good literature."¹⁰¹ In 1884 the Cleveland Public Library developed a cooperative plan to locate books in schools, two years later establishing a branch in the Central High School. The school provided a room and 75 percent of the collection, while the library placed one of its assistants in charge to manage the room and select the remaining 25 percent.¹⁰²

When Melvil Dewey became Secretary to the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York and at the same time Director of the State Library in 1888, he was in a position to influence legislation addressing school libraries. Little wonder, then, that a law passed that same year required all districts

to submit annual reports to the state school superintendent, house extant libraries in school buildings, and place them under the care of a teacher. The law also authorized matching state funds to purchase books from an approved list. Dewey carefully controlled what went on these lists, which prioritized “the best reading.” By this time the ALA motto Dewey had crafted—“the best reading for the greatest number at the least cost”—was more than a decade old. “Said school libraries shall consist of reference books for use in the schoolrooms,” read the law, “suitable supplementary reading books for children, or books relating to branches pursued in school, and pedagogic books as aid to the teacher.” In 1892 the New York Department of Public Instruction created a School Libraries Division to oversee implementation of the law.¹⁰³

In Minnesota, legislation facilitated cooperation between local public libraries and schools. In 1880 in Sauk Centre, for example, several board members of the Bryant Library Association—a social library organized by town leaders in 1868—wanted to take advantage of a recently passed state law permitting Minnesota communities to establish village libraries. In April the village council voted to organize a tax-supported public library. When the newly appointed directors met later that month, they appointed a committee to solicit the Bryant for its books and property, and the school board to locate the library in the school building. On May 7, association board members voted unanimously to cede its collection to the village library. Five days later (and two days after the school board joined the project), the association turned over to the new library property “consisting of a library cabinet and desk and library books . . . and catalogue of the books of said association numbers from one to 390 inclusive.” The new institution was named the Bryant Library. As a result, Sauk Centre became the third Minnesota town to organize a public library and the second to organize one under a law permitting a combined public and school library.¹⁰⁴ As the collection grew, space continued to be a problem. In 1900 the school board gave the Bryant \$500 to make it “the auxiliary to the public school system,” and matched the city’s monthly \$5.99 to keep the reading room open evenings for high school students.¹⁰⁵

A 1912 law required all Minnesota public schools to have a “separate room for a library,” but if the superintendent of schools was a member of the public library board, schools having cooperative agreements with a public library did not need to establish a school library. When Sauk Centre’s superintendent told officials it would cost taxpayers \$2,000 to set up and maintain a separate school library to conform to the law, the council quickly agreed to a cooperative arrangement. On October 29, 1913, school officials offered to cover the cost of opening the library every weekday morning, and with money given them by the state to select books for schoolchildren only from lists furnished by the Minnesota Library Association. In turn, the Bryant promised to catalog, classify, and manage the

collections acquired, and agreed to furnish classroom collections if requested. "The Sauk Centre school is the pioneer in consolidating under the new law," the *Sauk Centre Herald* reported, "and if it works out well here it will, no doubt, be followed generally by the schools of the state." Collections and circulation grew significantly, and increasing numbers of teachers participated in Saturday story hours. One problem, however, that the *Herald* noted later: "How to get the kids to read books they ought to read instead of the ones they want to read."¹⁰⁶

The nation's education community also addressed the issue of extensive reading. In 1892 the National Council of Education of the National Education Association (NEA) established a Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies to investigate the status of the nation's public high schools. Organized as the National Teachers Association in 1857, the NEA's membership included administrators, teachers, college professors, and college presidents. As a genteel professional association, like ALA it had a history of politely lobbying for school funding. Unlike ALA, however, its theoretical foundations reached deeper than a professional philosophy of service.

The National Council of Education's nine subcommittees of ten members each investigated various parts of the educational system and its curriculum, and reported their findings to the Committee of Ten. The subcommittee on history, civil government, and political economy argued that newer curricula and teaching methods required a "considerable school library" of reference books. The subcommittee on English was even more forceful. Students bound for college needed access not only to the best books of English literature, but also to supplementary books a student could read "cursorily and by himself."¹⁰⁷ Although much disparaged by educators who wanted high schools to develop more practical curricula addressing students' work lives, the Committee of Ten's recommendations nonetheless provide an early rationale for a separate school library movement. Consistent with conventional thinking, however, in 1893 the National Council of the Parent Teacher Association issued a report that called for improved relations between public schools and public libraries.¹⁰⁸

At the 1895 ALA conference Chicago's Armour Institute Library School Director Katharine Sharp addressed the issue of "Libraries in Secondary Schools." Up to that time *Library Journal* had not published an article on school libraries, she noted, and all the data she generated for her address came not from librarianship but from state departments of education. She concluded that high schools needed their own libraries for the exclusive use of students and teachers, and disagreed with the growing practice of public libraries supplying schools with collections. "Is it the opinion of the members of this conference that the public library can furnish all the books needed in high schools?"¹⁰⁹ Consensus in the profession at the time strongly suggested the answer was yes. A year later Melvil Dewey presented the NEA with a petition, authored by Denver Public

Library Director John Cotton Dana, asking NEA to form a “Library Section” to discuss and encourage library services in the nation’s schools. Because Dewey saw all libraries primarily as educational institutions, he asked NEA not to attach the word “school” to any title if it chose to create a library section.¹¹⁰

That Dana and Dewey’s efforts initiated a discussion among educators about schools and libraries was quickly obvious. Before 1896 NEA had published only three papers on the library and the school. In the decade after 1896 it published sixty-nine. Entries in H. G. T. Cannon’s *Bibliography of Library Economy* (1927), which covered library literature in professional periodicals between 1876 and 1920, also suggest that the NEA, through its journals, had much more interest in public school libraries than ALA. Part of this response may also have been sparked by requirements of new regional accrediting agencies forming at the time. When the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools organized in 1896, for example, it specified that every secondary school have “sufficient equipment consisting of a library, suitable rooms, and a laboratory or laboratories.”¹¹¹

NEA did establish a “Library Department” in 1896, but as structured it initiated an evident but gentle tension between the nation’s library and education communities. At the time the former generally looked to the NEA Library Department to nurture school library systems under public library control. The latter instinctively preferred to maintain its own libraries, however, but lacked the funding to do so. In 1899 the NEA Library Department and the ALA Committee on Cooperation with the NEA (also established in 1896) issued a report that advocated for cooperative efforts favoring public library services to schools rather than separate school-run libraries. Librarians rather than educators dominated the membership and leadership of the NEA group, and to a criticism from an educator that the reason few educators participated was because librarians seemed aloof, Mary E. Ahern, *Public Libraries* editor and ALA committee member, responded, “Far from preserving a distant attitude towards teachers,” librarians “had been chasing after them for 20 years and only lately were beginning to catch them.”¹¹²

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the status of school librarianship had shifted from indifferently funded and managed school district libraries established near midcentury to (on occasion) classroom libraries started by students, teachers, school administrators, or parents, to efforts by public libraries to attract teachers and students to the public library and to provide lists of books librarians thought “suitable” for public school students, to the establishment of classroom or school libraries managed by local public libraries—for which the branch public library movement of the late nineteenth century served as a model.

Librarians especially saw a bright future for (and had a vested interest in promoting) the branch public library model. In their minds public and academic library services were paramount for their emerging profession, and the library

interests of the growing number of public schools were best served as extensions of public library service. This “plan is in the long run better,” argued John Cotton Dana in 1902. Public librarians were better positioned to select, purchase, and circulate books than schools. “In fact,” Dana wrote, “the ideal condition seemed to be that in which the public library, under the general sanction and supervision of the superintendent, and with constant consultation with individual teachers, extends its system of lending books to every school room in the city, making the system as flexible as conditions demand.”¹¹³

But the “ideal condition” Dana described was rare. One master’s thesis author studying early twentieth-century high school libraries in North Carolina noted that if they existed they were either in “principals’ offices where punishment was wont to be inflicted” or in “little rooms often open to rats but closed to students.”¹¹⁴ In 1900 the editor of *Education* described what he routinely found in schools he visited: “a close, stuffy room, almost windowless, the books piled in confusion, at which I am not surprised, for frequently most of them are musty, abandoned, dog-eared, out-of-date textbooks.”¹¹⁵

Most schoolteachers were still tightly bound to the textbook in the late 1800s, but the milieu that influenced connections between schools and libraries began to change when progressive educators began adopting principles articulated nearly a century earlier by Swiss educational reformer Johann Pestalozzi, who argued it was the state’s and not the church’s responsibility to develop in schoolchildren the habit of reading good literature. Married to this new concept was the influence of early nineteenth-century German philosopher Johann Friedrich Hebert, who argued that education needed to develop character in youth through good books that drew their interest.

The Service Traditions of Late Nineteenth-Century Librarianship

The system Dana and Dewey held in such high regard, however, brought with it professional practices that greatly influenced the future of school librarianship as it was exposed to these new educational concepts. For example, by the turn of the century public libraries across the country had adopted the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, which was strategically designed to privilege a white, male, Western perception of “useful knowledge” by organizing nonfiction books into ten main categories (and hundreds of subcategories and sub-subcategories almost ad infinitum). In addition, the DDC treated all fiction as less valuable by simply clustering it in the same category and distinguishing it only by author surname. (One mid-twentieth-century librarian called fiction DDC’s “bastard stepchild.”) Any twentieth-century child introduced to the world of knowledge in a school library organized by the Dewey system automatically and unknowingly processed information already refracted through a white, male, Western lens.¹¹⁶

Many issues marking twenty-first-century school librarianship also have their roots in the late nineteenth century. For example, as early as the 1840s the Utica School District Library initiated a practice that marks the entire history of American public school libraries: “Whenever a book comes under the doubt or censure of any reputable sect or party,” district officials recommended, “the prudent course, to avoid heat and controversy, is to reject it at once; whether the doubt or censure be really justified or not.” One superintendent, the committee noted, went even further. “Works imbued with *party politics*, and those of *sectarian character*, or of hostility to the Christian religion, should on no account be admitted; and if they are accidentally received they should immediately be removed.”¹¹⁷

The traditions passed on from nineteenth-century librarianship required a librarian to manage the physical facility in which the library resided, to organize it so that people using it could quickly access information, to provide reference services by leading users to the printed materials containing the useful knowledge they desired, and to select the materials that not only provided useful knowledge but also the “serious” literature that when combined with “useful knowledge” now constituted the “best reading” that a growing number of outside experts helped identify. Absent from these traditions at the turn of the century, however, was a core of experts positioned to judge a growing body of literature intended for young people, about whose development new ideas had begun to take root.

School librarians inherited many of the ideas they adopted in the early 1900s from fellow professionals who established the foundations of youth services in the late nineteenth century. Working in a cultural milieu that included the development of the kindergarten, the growth of settlement houses, and the emergence of research on childhood, these librarians worried much about the quality of literature to which children were being exposed and their perception of reading’s effect on children’s morals and character. Fiction titles meriting inclusion as “best reading,” library historian Christine Jenkins notes, contained “the elements of character, plot, setting, dialogue and theme” that marked the canons of adult literature. On the other side of this divide stood dime novels and series fiction, which children’s librarians believed led to a variety of social ills.¹¹⁸

To address this situation librarians began building a bibliographic structure to identify what they thought was “best reading,” and for the most part to ignore—and certainly not to collect—what they thought was bad.¹¹⁹ Certainly Caroline Hewins’s 1882 bibliography and her *Library Journal* column constituted a step in this direction, but another was the *Catalog of the A.L.A. Library*, a listing of 5,000 books based on a collection ALA proudly exhibited as a “Model Library” at its 1893 Chicago World’s Fair conference. A year later the Bureau of Education published it as a bibliography and printed 20,000 copies as government

documents that congressmen then sent free to requesting libraries.¹²⁰ The *Catalog* immediately became a standard acquisitions tool for public libraries across the country (for example, the Bryant Library of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, received a copy in 1895).

The *Catalog* was based on a simple concept. To identify “best reading,” librarians looked to experts in the late nineteenth century’s emerging research communities like the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association, and the largely white, male, Protestant literary establishment located in New York and Boston, each of which began publishing journals that also evaluated new additions to a growing body of literature. Unlike librarians, members of these communities possessed pedigrees considered essential for sound evaluations of newer cultural texts. Most shared an ideology of reading. “Good” reading, this ideology dictated, led to good social behavior, “bad” reading to bad social behavior. Sometimes these authorities disagreed (was *Huckleberry Finn* “good” or “bad”?), but mostly they were comfortable with the Western literary canon they had inherited, and their recommendations for best reading were more alike than different. Combing through published book reviews by the literary establishment and newer expert communities and compiling “best reading” bibliographies based on these reviews became central to librarianship’s practice.

With librarianship’s service traditions and priorities firmly in place at the turn of the century, with a group of public youth services librarians determined to seize the authority to define the canons of children’s literature, and with an emerging group of educational philosophers ready to challenge formal education’s status quo, in 1900 public school librarianship was about to be born into two professional cultures, each of which was already full of challenging power relationships that would heavily influence its future potential and development.

“To Prove By Her Work”

Establishing the Profession of School Librarianship, 1900–1930

As Americans began to think of childhood as qualitatively different than adulthood in the late nineteenth century, they crafted a series of institutions (like kindergartens and nurseries), practices (like child labor laws and public health measures), and places (like playgrounds) that segregated and protected children in various ways. They also extended the definition of childhood to include adolescence as a unique stage of life, located between puberty and adulthood and supporting what Stephen Mintz calls a “separate, semiautonomous youth culture.”¹ The child study movement sparked by G. Stanley Hall also took root in the first decades of the twentieth century, and university education departments began researching and teaching child psychology, language comprehension, and children’s reading development. A variety of emerging professions (e.g., social workers, correctional officers, and child psychologists) arose to exert influence over children’s lives and inject themselves between parents and their children, often on the premise that they were better positioned to know what was best for both. And all this took place in a nation experiencing massive social changes brought about by urbanization, industrialization, and immigration.

Americans also self-educated through a growing number of institutions, including employers, the military, government-funded programs, and a variety of public-sphere institutions such as mass media, churches, settlement houses,

rehabilitative and correctional agencies, museums, and schools—not to mention the growing number of public libraries. All accounted for a chunk of the whole process through which Americans learned incidentally and intentionally, for good and ill. Compulsory attendance laws also had a huge impact. Between 1870 and 1915 public school enrollment increased from seven million to 20 million, while school expenditures soared from \$63 million to \$605 million. By 1918 thirty-one states required school attendance up to the age of sixteen. High schools grew even more rapidly. Between 1890 and 1918 attendance “soared by over 700 percent, from 200,000 to 1.6 million, while the number of graduates doubled,” notes Mintz. “A new high school opened every day in the first thirty years of the twentieth century.”²

New ideas about childhood also created new markets. “The late Victorian middle class found a place for both sheltered and wondrous innocence,” writes historian Gary Cross. “This dual relation with the next generation was given fresh meaning in the twentieth century, especially when childhood delight was wed to the world of consumption . . . as children were sheltered and removed from the producers’ market, they became an essential part of the market of consumerism, a world of delight.” When parents began “to use gifts of entertainment and goods to express the priceless of their children in their love and care for them,” children’s books were frequently among the gifts.³

High schools may have increased exponentially in numbers, but their quality did not necessarily increase along with their quantity. An informal 1909 survey of 500 school dropouts in Chicago who were in the labor force asked if they would rather attend school or work in a factory; 412 chose the latter. “They described school as a joyless place of ethnic bigotry, corporal punishment, and mind-numbing rote memorization,” writes education historian Dana Goldstein. “The typical poor urban child experienced school as ‘sheer cruelty’ and a ‘humiliation,’” the surveyor concluded, adding, “no wonder they dropped out in droves.”⁴ And this was particularly problematic in school systems that emphasized memorization. The “school machine,” one historian argued in 1930, was not a pleasant place: “from the lowest grade to the highest, pupils followed an endless succession of book assignments which they learned out of hand to reproduce on call.” Meanwhile, teachers “under the automatic control of a printed course of study” required students to master facts. Children were forced to be “submissive to the rule of the drill-sergeant in skirts who unflinchingly governed her little kingdom of learn-by-ear-and-recite-by-rote.”⁵

As the twentieth century progressed, more and more children and young adults spent increasing amounts of time in schools, which exercised varying levels of custodial influences, and crafted and shifted peer groups in which they interacted. And over time those schools became increasingly influential in pointing students toward particular jobs and professions, all carrying race, class,

and gender biases. Yet across the country these changes were not uniform, since Americans largely experienced life through their neighborhoods and communities, and the institutions serving them. Often these neighborhoods and communities were nearly shut off from one another, so the contours of life—and the contours of the educational forces that influenced life—varied from one community to the next. External influences exercised by institutions like the media, schools, and libraries were sometimes treated as intrusions. In addition, each of the agencies and institutions funded by tax dollars in these communities had to fight for a piece of the public pie, and each was limited by the size of that pie. In fact, sometimes the pie was so small that public institutions were barely able to support minimal services. And the fights themselves often gave rise to tribal responses.⁶ Early-twentieth-century school librarians, library services, and collections, not surprisingly, were subject to all of these pressures, nationally and locally.

At the turn of the century, control of formal teacher education was shifting from presidents and liberal arts professors at colleges and universities to teachers, school superintendents (of states, districts, and cities), and professional educators at colleges where schools of education had newly taken root. Influencing this mix of educational forces were the US Bureau of Education, newly established foundations like the Southern Education Board (founded in 1898), the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board (1902), the Carnegie Foundation for Teaching (1906), and the Carnegie Corporation (1911), professional associations like NEA and ALA, school library interest groups that formed in state and regional education and library associations, and the National Council of Teachers of English (1911). Regional accrediting agencies like the Southern, Northwest, and North Central Associations of Colleges and Secondary Schools were perhaps the most important outside institutions influencing teacher education. As early as 1902, the latter had agreed upon a set of standards to accredit secondary schools that included an admonition to schools to provide suitable library facilities.⁷ In 1900 the country's public education system supported 5,211 high school libraries with just over 3 million volumes. Twelve years later that number had nearly doubled to 10,329, with more than 6 million volumes.

In addition, the 1920s witnessed wider adoption of ethnically, racially, and culturally biased intelligence testing to identify gifted students (children born to elite white Protestant families always had an advantage with such tests). The Progressive Education Association (PEA), established in 1919, quickly became a voice for social efficiency in education. Together with the professional education community, these organizations and associations combined to standardize school administration and make the curriculum more "socially efficient" by adding subjects like physical and business education, hygiene, home economics,

and industrial arts at the same time it sought to standardize college entrance requirements. After World War I many educators shifted from a belief in the social efficiency of formal education to advocating for social control, and as students compelled to go to school found a third of their day more and more tightly controlled, they often looked for less educationally prescribed activities that afforded them more freedom and individuality.

The organizational shifts that took place within the NEA between 1910 and 1920 reflected many of these changes; so did a huge increase in membership, from 6,909 in 1910 to 220,149 in 1931 (or about one-fourth the total number of elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States).⁸ The American Library Association, on the other hand, had 4,464 members in 1920 (30 percent of the total) and 12,712 in 1930 (43 percent of the total).⁹ And because ALA was a smaller organization representing a noncompulsory educational institution, it had considerably less lobbying clout nationally and locally.

A Professional Discourse Solidifies

The vast majority of individuals who entered librarianship at the turn of the century were single middle-class women, mostly Protestant, whose zealotry and evangelism characterized their professional services and practices. Along with teaching and missionary church work, library service to children constituted one of the “mothering” professions that emerged in the late nineteenth century. It was in this milieu that school librarianship formed the contours of its jurisdictions, and assumed responsibilities for the professional tasks allowed by the structures of formal education. To a great extent, school librarianship derived its pedagogical philosophy of service from the tenets of progressive education. The profession’s leaders sought to harness progressive educational ideas like instruction at the time of need, collaboration with teachers, emphasis on the needs of individual students, and collaborative groups whose learning took place in the library. Although early twentieth-century school librarians embraced progressive ideas emphasizing the importance of child-centered exploration and hands-on learning advocated by educational reformers like Jean Piaget, Friedrich Froebel, and John Dewey, none participated in the movement as leaders. Services followed philosophy.

Intentional education still carried with it a Jeffersonian sense of responsibility to mold an informed citizenry, an imperative perceived to be even more compelling because of the millions of immigrants pouring into the country. John Dewey’s efforts to modify the curriculum by harnessing the interests of children and the knowledge they brought to new experiences fit comfortably within shifting attitudes toward childhood. Dewey’s progressive educational philosophy assumed children would develop analytical and literacy skills no matter what they studied. Convinced Dewey was right, more educators stressed child growth

rather than the memorization and recitation of subject matter. They saw the school as a social institution in which children harnessed their interests to learn through experience.

"Recent changes of stress in the subject matter of instruction from form to content," one education official said to a 1904 NEA audience, "make the library an indispensable factor in the public school."¹⁰ "Changing methods in teaching, a broader conception of education, and efficient arrangement of libraries by expert and trained librarians," wrote Lucy E. Faye in *Instruction in the Use of Books and Libraries* (1919), "have been prominent factors in establishing the important place now held by the school library."¹¹ Although school librarians had by this time evolved a philosophy of service, their theoretical justification for that service seldom extended beyond the concept that the reading materials they provided would address curricular information needs or function as a ladder to elevate reading tastes—and thus improve learning. For example, in 1928 Hannah Logasa, who served as librarian of the University of Chicago's University High School from 1914 to 1939, identified serving the curriculum as the school library's primary responsibility.¹²

After Mary E. Hall graduated from the library school of Brooklyn's Pratt Institute in 1895, Institute Library Director Mary Wright Plummer hired her to head Pratt's reference room. The following year Plummer added Anne Carroll Moore to the staff to take charge of the new children's room. Together Hall and Moore began visiting Brooklyn's five high schools where, Hall noted, the libraries "were very little used." At each they met stiff resistance to change. Generally they were given a rushed tour of the school and not allowed to address classes. "How might one hope to penetrate walls of apparent impenetrability and really come to know the inmates?" Moore wondered. To improve connections between public libraries and public schools, she recommended ridding oneself "of an aggressive or a too retiring personality," adapting one's self "completely and cheerfully" to the school's power structure, and having "pleasant talks" with children and teachers.¹³

It was in this mix of forces that Mary Kingsbury became the first library school graduate appointed to develop and manage a high school library. Recommended by Plummer, Kingsbury took her position in 1900 at Brooklyn's Erasmus Hall High School, where she inherited "a box-like room with shelves reaching to the ceiling" that held several hundred books. The room had a single long table, around which Kingsbury gathered with students.¹⁴ Several more appointments of school librarians followed in metropolitan New York high schools, including Mary E. Hall's appointment at Brooklyn Girls' High School in 1903.

As she had with Kingsbury, Plummer recommended Hall for the post. Unlike Kingsbury, however, Hall became one of the nation's most forceful advocates for high school libraries in the century's first two decades. Short, nondescript, and

usually plainly dressed, Hall later admitted she was "sometimes accused of seeking the lime light" because she was "always writing and speaking" about high school libraries. She later acknowledged that Anne Carroll Moore's concept of library service to children not only inspired her definition of an "ideal for a high school library," it also motivated in her "a zeal for trying to bring about High School Libraries that would be joyous reading rooms."¹⁵

Hall defined her ideal library in a still-referenced 1915 *Library Journal* article. In it she first thanked leaders of the children's library movement for developing "many characteristic features" of youth services she considered essential. Her words reflected the missionary attitude—the "library spirit"—Anne Carroll Moore advocated all her life. "To have as your visitors each day . . . boys and girls of all nationalities and all stations in life, to see them come eagerly crowding in," Hall wrote, "and to realize that for four of the most important years of their lives it is the opportunity of the library to have a real and lasting influence upon each boy and girl, gives the librarian a feeling that her calling is one of high privilege and great responsibility."

Then she got into details. The high school library should consist of two rooms: a reading room and a classroom. The "lure" of the former would include "pictures, plants, interesting bulletins, walls lined with books in attractive bindings, tables strewn with magazines, and fascinating illustrated editions of the world's great books, and, best of all, a pervading joyous atmosphere of freedom." The adjoining library classroom "should be fitted up to have as little of the regular classroom atmosphere as possible." Like the reading room, the library classroom should be decorated with pictures and plants, but it should also contain tables and chairs for note-taking and "spread materials like maps and charts out for their observation." It should provide audiovisual services, and function as a "center for club work" after school—particularly reading clubs. The library classroom would also "be used by the librarian for all her classes in the use of reference books and library tools," including instruction in use of the Dewey Decimal Classification that governed the organization of most public and school library collections.¹⁶

In a 1918 essay Hall described "A Day in a Modern High School Library." Between opening at 8:00 a.m. and the start of classes at 8:30, she reported, students return books they had checked out the previous evening, "on some days as many as 800 [books]." The librarian keeps an "eagle eye" on students, and "the narrowness of the desk makes it possible for her to put out her hand on either side and call a halt if some absent-minded pupil (or even a teacher) has forgotten to stop and have things 'properly charged.'" But the librarian also manages the equipment within the library, including a Bausch and Lomb Reflectoscope with screen to project lantern slides, a vertical file for pamphlets, a green cork bulletin board covering the front wall, a "Bulletin Rack" for storing

charts and mounted pictures, and a Victrola record player mounted on a wheeled carriage (with a record collection to match). From a central desk she monitors a book collection housed in low double-faced shelving with open walls, a magazine rack large enough to display twenty-five periodicals with their covers out, a display case for special exhibits, cases for atlases, the card catalog, and a special reference book collection. She also reports that two clubs—the “Travel Club” and the “Poets’ Corner”—meet regularly in the library after school.

The word “modern” in Hall’s title was code for “best,” a set of practices aimed at a goal she thought all high school libraries should seek. Nowhere in her library was there a sign marked “Silence” that characterized the services of some school librarians, who often, she wrote, acted “as policeman” and walked “up and down the room to see that pupils were doing what they ought to and reading what they ought.” Instead, Hall indulged her students ten minutes of talking to “let off steam,” and trusted her girls to discipline themselves. In each of nine daily periods, 120 to 140 students were in the library; in total, more than the daily attendance at the British Museum, she bragged. These young women kept “the room so quiet you can hear a pin drop after the time set for quiet. It is a triumph for the principles of self-government.” Hall also conducted classes for freshmen on the use and care of books and libraries. Students were courteous and thoughtful—so thoughtful, Hall noted, that “students who are standing for lack of chairs are offered seats by girls who are just reading for pleasure if others need to do important reference work for the next period.” Here Hall parroted the profession’s discursive priorities; the answers to reference questions she identified as examples would have been characterized as “useful knowledge” a century earlier and were certainly more important than pleasure reading.

In orientation sessions for entering freshmen Hall spoke of “the joys of reading and the happy hours” they would spend there “with all the charming illustrated books and pictures during the next four years. . . . Whatever the school library means in the Girls’ high school today,” she concluded, “is due to the splendid cooperation” of teachers, pupils, and especially her principal. At her high school Hall’s principal was a former English teacher with a deep belief in progressive education and a conviction that schools should craft curricula to address society’s needs. Because school libraries fit comfortably into his concept of formal education, Hall prospered. It was a “delight to help this principal’s dream of a twentieth century library come true.”¹⁷ More than a half-century later one ALA luminary called Hall’s philosophy of school library service “universal, as valid now as then.”¹⁸

Other high school librarians emulated Hall’s model. When she was appointed Los Angeles High School librarian in 1903, Ella Morgan walked into a building that had a library with books housed in locked cases. When she asked permission to remove the bookcase doors her principal resisted, worried the books

he treasured would get dusty or, worse, stolen. Morgan negotiated a compromise: during hours the library was not open a janitor would place canvases over the bookshelves.¹⁹ Within a decade she had improved collections, extended library hours from an hour before to an hour after classes, and worked so closely with English and history teachers that their students crowded the facility. “As a matter of fact,” she told an NEA audience in 1915, she “not infrequently finds it necessary to decide between two demands for the same chair—to decide whose work is most imperative.”²⁰

“The consciousness of the high school librarian has . . . two phases of the work she is trying to develop,” noted Marion Lovis, Detroit’s Supervisor of School Libraries, in 1920. The first was the organization of the library and its relationship to the school board, including issues of appropriations, equipment, supplies, and expenditures. The second was the organization of the library “as a vital department of the school itself, which demands the continuous work of trying to establish the library idea with teachers and pupils, systematizing and teaching the use of the room and the books, keeping in touch with the work of the classroom in order to work in harmony with their methods and school policies, and trying to create in the room itself something of the gracious atmosphere of a library in which the books are well loved.” As part of this effort, Lovis taught classes on the Dewey Decimal Classification and the ALA *Catalog*, as well as *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature* and *Children’s Catalog*, two publications first issued between 1900 and 1910 that had quickly become staples in library practice.²¹

But Kingsbury, Hall, Morgan, and Lovis were the exceptions. The school librarian “is something of an anomaly, and boards of education and school superintendents do not know exactly where to place her,” Hall wrote in 1909. “Shall she be ranked as teacher, clerk, laboratory assistant, or what? . . . Her status is not yet determined, and it remains for her to prove by her work where she shall eventually be classed in the school system.”²² Along the same lines, in 1915 one high school librarian lamented the fact that “in the average school the library is not a vibrant personality . . . There prevails the mossy idea that the library is a place wherein you look up articles in an encyclopedia, and that the librarian is the spinster who charges your books after school, and keeps track, by some sort of diabolical bookkeeping, of the fines you owe.” And in most of the nation’s school districts, she believed, superintendents and principals felt a greater need for clerical help than for school library staff.²³

In 1913, reported the US Bureau of Education’s Edward D. Greenman, most high school libraries had “small collections of reference and antiquated textbooks, poorly quartered, unclassified, and neither cataloged nor readily accessible for constant use.” Not more than 250 had collections over 3,000 volumes; only 130 had collections of 5,000 volumes or more. However, he observed, larger

high school libraries were generally well arranged, located in attractive quarters, and well managed, "frequently under the supervision of a trained librarian."

Greenman perceived four types of high school libraries. The best was "maintained strictly as a piece of school apparatus for the use of the student and teachers alone." It was housed in the school building, open only during school hours, supervised either by a teacher or, in the best of circumstances, a trained librarian, and funded by a board of education that often benefitted from matching state aid. The second best was a central public school library, usually found in large cities, often housed in the city's high school or annex, and "organized for the purpose of supplying books to all the schools in the city." It was sometimes managed by a trained librarian, who, depending on funding, established classroom libraries. The third was a branch of the public library located in the high school building, in which the public library supplied books for general circulation or special topics being studied, while the school furnished physical space and some reference books. Sometimes teachers monitored collections; sometimes the public library assigned an assistant for that duty. "This close cooperation between the school and the library has found favor among librarians, since it makes the public library the controlling influence in the dispensation of literature, obviates too frequent conflict between the work of the school and the work of the library, and concentrates all library administration in the hands of the public library." The final type, common in smaller towns, was a combination school and public library. Almost always housed in the town's high school, it was generally supervised by a teacher and open for student use during the day and the general public after school hours.²⁴

From its beginnings, as physical space the school library—whether typical or atypical—automatically qualified as something other than a classroom. In 1926 one Los Angeles high school librarian encouraged her colleagues to exploit the library as place. "That we can have a different atmosphere in our room is one of the great benefits of the library," she noted, in large part because it differed from the conventional schoolroom. "We have dignified furniture of good design; the arrangement is orderly, but at the same time less formal than that of the desks, and the decorations are often artistic." More important, however, "we give the student a freedom of action and a liberty impossible in a recitation. And that atmosphere of wellbeing we must, by all means, strive to keep." While discipline must be a feature of the room, she argued, never should a school library become "a place of punishment." Instead, it should be a place where the librarian's "most important qualification of all is a sympathy with the adolescent mind," where she had to exercise her "personality and persuasive powers" to "sell" teachers on the library's value, and where both students and teachers should "feel that technique is but the means to an end."²⁵

For some, the school library sometimes became a place of solace. In 1915 Amelia Earhart often read alone in her Chicago high school library rather than attend an English class in which she felt she was learning little.²⁶ For others, it offered alternatives to an often maddeningly boring daily routine. Ruth Ersted remembered the school library she visited as a thirteen-year-old in 1917: "As pupils we had no reason for going, either before or after we got there. Our teachers didn't send us, at least not very often, and the book collection guarded by a librarian seated firmly behind the desk was a conglomeration of sample texts, sets of books, and many classics in fine type and drab bindings." But she and her friends nonetheless loved the library. "Dingy and dull as it was it offered an opportunity to meet our friends and to talk about boys and clothes and parties."²⁷ In 1928 California librarians surveyed the state's ninety junior high schools and found that "the atmosphere of the library differs from the workaday atmosphere of the classroom." Students liked the library because it was a place of "free reading" that reflected "a very commendable lack of excessive regulation."²⁸

In the century's first two decades a number of urban school systems experimented with new ways to schedule classes that affected high school libraries. In Gary, Indiana, the school superintendent put the ideology of progressive education into practice with a "platoon school program," in which students spent half their day in conventional classes and the other half in "special activities" rooms for subjects like music, art, and physical education. Under this system students usually visited the library once a week in grades one through three (often sitting on a rug for storytelling) and twice a week for grades above third, during which time most students experienced at least one "free reading period" per week. In platoon schools, children were encouraged to do their schoolwork in the library, in part because school officials recognized most lived in neighborhoods where home study was difficult.²⁹

The "Dalton Plan" attempted to achieve educational objectives by giving students freedom to work without interruption. Developed in a Dalton, Massachusetts, high school, the plan positioned the school as a laboratory in which students contracted with teachers to explore particular subjects, resulting in written assignments graded by teachers. The "Winnetka Plan" (developed in the 1920s for Winnetka, Illinois, elementary schools) focused on individual instruction and adapted that instruction to each student's abilities. Reading played a large role in the curriculum. "Intelligence tests, subject matter tests, proper method, Dalton Plan, Winnetka Plan, the laboratory system, the platoon, and the development of the library in charge of trained workers," wrote one NEA official in 1924, "are phases of our attempt to deal with the child as a human being to be developed by freedom rather than compulsion."³⁰

Birth of a Children's Literature Clerisy

In America's patriarchal culture, raising children had always been considered women's primary responsibility. "Men have a thousand imperative outside interests and pursuits, while Nature has set her seal upon woman as the caretaker of the child," wrote the president of the National Congress of Mothers (forerunner of the PTA) in 1897. "Therefore it is natural that woman should lead in awakening mankind to the sense of the responsibilities resting upon the race to provide each new-born soul with an environment which will foster the highest development."³¹ To monitor this environment the nation witnessed the establishment of kindergartens, settlement houses, the federal Children's Bureau in 1912, and new kinds of professionals like social workers, child psychologists, and juvenile correctional officers.

This environment also extended to the growing numbers of public libraries across the country that Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy was making possible. Because children's librarians selected reading material for the growing numbers of youth coming to their public libraries, they were strategically positioned to influence what was available to millions of young patrons—who also constituted a huge new market for the publishing industry. As a result of this unique set of circumstances, a children's literature clerisy formed within librarianship that claimed authority to determine "best reading." Patriarchy offered no resistance. Male cultural authorities who defined the canon of "serious" literature for adults readily encouraged these lesser-paid women to harness their "natural instincts" to identify "best books" for children. At the 1899 annual conference several ALA members formed a Club of Children's Librarians; the next year the club changed its name to the Section for Library Work with Children, and later yet to the Children's Library Section. Almost all of its members were single women from the middle class, and typically white Protestants as well.

By becoming a mediator between the child and the book, members of this clerisy—located largely in urban public libraries near major publishers they held suspect for prioritizing profit—not only sought to influence book production and distribution, they also actively manipulated children's choice of books by controlling availability in the library collections they acquired. Before 1930 they formed cooperative if sometimes testy arrangements with the book publishing industry to influence the juvenile book trade, in part through book lists from which youth librarians—including the growing number of school librarians—would make their selections. Publishers naturally wanted to get on these lists, thus allocating to the clerisy an influence that extended nationwide. That these selections also reflected the dominant culture's race, class, gender, and other biases the nation's publishing industry replicated in its products drew little comment.³²

At the center of this clerisy was Anne Carroll Moore, appointed in 1906 as Superintendent of the Department of Work with Children at the New York Public Library (NYPL), which put her in charge of NYPL's children's programming and Room 105, the new central children's room that NYPL opened in 1911. Room 105 quickly became the hub for an evolving children's literature clerisy, at which editors, authors, and illustrators of children's books sought Moore's advice and approval of their work.³³ "Lay us down a law," one children's book editor wrote to her in 1929, "and we'll try to follow you."³⁴ Moore habitually paged through publishers' catalogs and next to cited titles she did not like stamped "Not recommended for purchase by expert" with an appliance she had made.³⁵

Moore's evangelical professionalism was contagious. She was so revered that many of her followers could not bring themselves to call her anything but "Miss Moore." The job of the children's librarian, Moore argued, was to find "the right book for the right child at the right time." The phrase quickly became an imperative for librarians serving the nation's youth. What constituted the "right book," however, was carefully circumscribed. Among her first actions at NYPL was to purge library system shelves of series fiction written by authors like Castlemon, Optic, and Finley, whose works she considered "trash." During her NYPL tenure, New York's children found no copies of Horatio Alger, Nancy Drew, or *The Wizard of Oz* on library shelves. The yellow brick road did not lead to Room 105.³⁶

But Moore also had her detractors in librarianship. Mid-twentieth-century ALA officer Mildred Batchelder remembered Moore possessed "a very distinctive, lowish, strange, not exactly pleasant voice," a "thin body," and an imperious attitude that reminded Batchelder of an "old witch." Batchelder also noticed Moore shared the attitudes of the cultural authorities in the Eastern establishment that dominated the nation's media, and regarded people from the Midwest (where Batchelder lived most of her life) "with condescension." Some of Moore's other detractors found her eccentric behaviors and prickly manner off-putting.³⁷

Moore was only the most prominent in a group of exclusively white female children's librarians who celebrated reading as an aesthetic experience, evaluated books based on their potential to stimulate a child's imaginative life, and viewed children more sentimentally than an emerging group of professional child psychologists investigating the social problems of youth. This clerisy claimed authority as experts on children and their reading, not on teaching reading skills. From their strategically important spot in the emerging children's publishing and library worlds, Moore and her allies and successors evolved the criteria for judging the literary quality of children's books, which, by their standards, had to show "good values" and contain "messages regarding life conduct (speech, behavior, ethics, moral reasoning, choices of activity, companionship, and so on) that were respected and valued by women of that time, class and educational

level.”³⁸ These became the standards the clerisy cemented into the bibliographic structures they created, and from which school librarians tended to make their selections. The canon of children’s literature Moore and her allies developed, however, “generally reinforced—or at least did not challenge—prevailing social norms, and avoided topics generally considered unacceptable for children’s books,” notes historian Jacalyn Eddy.³⁹

That structure grew rapidly in the early twentieth century. In 1901, for example, the H. W. Wilson Company began issuing *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature*, an indexing tool that greatly enhanced access to the information contained in major periodicals. Initially it covered twenty periodicals (e.g., *Atlantic Monthly*, *Current Literature*, *North American Review*, *Scribner’s Magazine*, *American Review of Reviews*, and *World’s Work*), each edited by an authority dedicated to publishing material fitting the developing literary canon—white, male, and largely determined by social class. And because *Readers’ Guide* facilitated information access to important magazines, librarians understandably favored the periodicals it indexed. As a result, the “best reading” the *Guide* indexed effectively influenced the parameters of periodical collections that libraries provided.⁴⁰ Modifications to the *Guide*’s scope came slowly, thus placing periodicals issued by marginalized groups at a disadvantage; they could not get indexed in *Readers’ Guide*, so librarians tended not to subscribe. In 1910, 288 black periodicals with a combined circulation of 500,000 served 10 million African Americans; not one was indexed in *Readers’ Guide*. On the other hand, *Readers’ Guide* did index *National Geographic*, which until the 1960s, its editor readily admitted in 2018, not only “all but ignored people of color who lived in the United States, rarely acknowledging them beyond laborers and domestic workers,” it also depicted black people elsewhere in the world “as exotics, famously and frequently unclothed, happy hunters, noble savages—every type of cliché.”⁴¹

For library collections, *Readers’ Guide* had an impact that extended far beyond periodicals. Perceiving a budding market gathering in the hundreds of new public libraries in communities across the nation, Wilson began issuing bibliographical aids such as *Fiction Catalog* (1908) and *Children’s Catalog* (1909), both of which included citations to books favorably reviewed in periodicals indexed by *Readers’ Guide*. Eventually, Wilson issued revised editions of *Fiction* and *Children’s Catalog* every five years, with annual supplements. Librarians loved these guides, in part because it made their jobs easier, but also because materials these guides cited already carried the approval of cultural authorities. And because members of the committees that made final selections for these guides were composed largely of library professionals Wilson consulted, librarians generally felt comfortable they were not being unduly influenced by a publishing industry whose highest priority was profit.

ALA also continued to exercise a self-assumed professional responsibility to identify “best reading.” In 1904 the association published a second edition of its *Catalog* that contained a special section of titles recommended for children, and in 1905 began *Booklist* magazine, a monthly acquisitions serial containing only reviews of books ALA recommended. When the *Catalog*’s second edition appeared, the Louisville Public Library reported, “All works of fiction in that list and not then in our library should be purchased.” Librarians at the Sedalia (MO) public library regarded *Booklist* as “our best guide in the purchase of books.” In columns they wrote for local newspapers on “best reading at the library,” many librarians simply copied *Children’s Catalog*, *Fiction Catalog*, and *Booklist* annotations.⁴²

In 1915 the Clinton, Iowa, public library reported its readers regularly came “with clipped lists that have appeared in papers several weeks previous.” That many of the public libraries using these bibliographies were also responsible for acquiring, circulating, and managing collections they sent to their local schools demonstrates how deeply these practices reached into American public schools.⁴³ Six years later the NEA’s Library Department and the National Council of Teachers of English endorsed *Booklist* “and urged that it be used by all English classes and kept upon the reading tables of all high schools . . . It is disinterested public service and is not published for financial gain.”⁴⁴

The clerisy’s influence was also evident in 1919 when librarians and publishers organized Children’s Book Week, an annual event eagerly celebrated by public and school libraries across the nation.⁴⁵ The event demonstrated an alliance between publishers and librarians to support a particular group of children’s writers whose work they favored. Three years later members of ALA’s Children’s Library Section began selecting winners of the Newbery Medal, intended to recognize the best children’s book published the previous year. Children’s librarians responded excitedly to this opportunity in a telling comment. “We feel strong and powerful because you believe in us,” they told *Publishers Weekly* editor Frederic Melcher, who had established the award, “and you are putting in our hands a weapon, one of the most potent of our times—publicity of the best kind.”⁴⁶

In 1924 the clerisy added another selection guide to its toolkit: *Horn Book* magazine, which grew out of recommended booklists Boston’s Bookshop for Boys and Girls routinely prepared for its customers. *Horn Book*, historian Jacalyn Eddy notes, “became the fulcrum for bookwomen’s community of practice and a critical site of affirmation for them at a time when no other such forum existed.”⁴⁷ Collectively, all these guides embraced a set of selection criteria privileging the kinds of stories librarians believed developed children’s “natural” goodness, and avoided stories librarians thought would encourage antisocial, unreal, and deviant behaviors.

In the 1920s Wilson and ALA also began publishing selection aids for the growing number of high school libraries, including *Books for the High School Library* (1924), a list of 1,500 recommended titles put together by a Joint Committee of the NEA's Library Department and the ALA's School Libraries Section. Although librarians at small schools continued to favor briefer lists ALA published like *500 Best Books for the Senior High School Library* (1930), more valuable to librarians of larger schools was the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries* (*SCHSL*), first published by Wilson in 1928 and revised every five years thereafter, with additional annual supplements. *SCHSL* recommended 2,600 books and 470 pamphlets, and included an annotated list of sources for pictures and a list of recommended maps. For the first edition compilers crafted an initial bibliography of 6,000 titles they sent to "specialists and educators for votes and suggestions." A "group of experienced school librarians" (all of them women) analyzed the list against student use, often consulted teachers, and then submitted their comments to Wilson editors, who checked them against reviews in Wilson-indexed periodicals. "Every school ought to own this book, and the supplement," emphasized the Illinois Department of Education's supervisor of school libraries in 1931.⁴⁸

Thus, by 1930 a well-developed bibliographic structure existed to ground most of school librarianship's acquisition responsibilities. Like members of the children's literature clerisy, school librarians also sought to provide "the right book for the right child at the right time," and, for the most part, where budgets allowed they adopted an emerging professional discourse that focused on what the clerisy considered best. In some high schools, for example, librarians simply posted *Booklist* and *SCHSL* annotations on bulletin boards to promote reading.

But unlike public library children's specialists, school librarians, in their efforts to build collections, were heavily influenced by curricula and the educational bureaucrats—state and local—who monitored and managed public schools. Many state departments of education had developed lists from which school librarians had to select (*SCHSL* compilers checked every one as they worked on the first edition), but librarians sometimes found them constraining, even suspect. In 1928 Virginia high school librarian Mary Gaver noticed her state education department supervisor had pressured publishers to give him steep discounts in order to have their titles listed, "and he deliberately kept some 'controversial' books off the lists."⁴⁹ That same year Hannah Logasa reported that although over 50 percent of the citations on state lists "were made up of largely the tried and true classics, and are, as a consequence, eminently 'safe,' their conservatism limited their value because they often cited no "really good modern books . . . to fill the needs and arouse the interest of the pupils." To address that need she recommended *Booklist's* "Books for Young People" section. "The reviews . . . are fair and unbiased, and really review the book."⁵⁰

The children's literature clerisy in librarianship also directly attacked the youth series fiction industry. When a 1926 ALA poll of 36,000 children in thirty-four cities revealed that 98 percent named a series fiction book as their favorite, alarmed children's librarians fought back. To counter, some developed programs for Children's Book Week. Children's librarian Mary Root, who had served on the Newbery Award's very first jury in 1921, took another approach. For *Maryland Library Notes* in 1926 she compiled a list of sixty-one separate series "Not Recommended for Circulation," including all books by Horatio Alger, Martha Finley, Harry Castlemon, Oliver Optic, and Edward Stratemeyer. The following year several state library association journals reprinted Root's list; Minnesota's *Library News & Notes* even called it "a warning" to librarians.⁵¹

But sometimes series fiction authors pushed back. After the Newark Public Library withdrew his books in 1901, Edward Stratemeyer observed to the board president that the young people's department "was now only patronized by a few school children, instead of being crowded from opening to closing, as is the case in juvenile departments in many other free libraries." In 1915 William Heyliger argued his books were good for adolescents, and cited three librarians who applauded them. Yet *Booklist* would not review them. "So there we are," Heyliger concluded. "Men who ought to know say that my books are worth while. Librarians of the A.L.A. who ought to know say, by the inference of not recommending them, that they are not worthwhile. Which camp is right?"⁵² There was more than a whiff of gendered subtext in Heyliger's reaction.

And Mary Root did not speak for all librarians. In a 1929 essay, Margery Bending questioned the ability of librarians to define what reading materials would or would not harm young people. "What do we, as a group really know about life anyway—and how much of the deep secrets of the human heart can we fathom?" she asked. Librarians were a "very homogeneous group; with negligible exceptions, we come from the same sort of families, have had the same sort of (and here's the pity) sheltered upbringing, moved in the same protected and genteel circles all our lives, and to crown it all, our ranks consist overwhelmingly of one sex; very, very largely of unmarried members of that sex." All of this "limited experience" influenced librarians' ability to "lay out specific, definite, and detailed rules to cover every" library book, she argued. "O, my sisters, we have thought that upon us lay the heavy burdens of guarding the morals of the youth, 90 per cent of whom could tell us many things, and funniest of all, we really thought we had the wisdom and ability to do it!"⁵³ No one responded to her in the library press.

As is obvious from Root's bibliography, the library community's attitude toward censorship in the early twentieth century differed from today's standards. During World War I, for example, the Butte, Montana, school board "voted that all German books in the school libraries be burned in the center of

the city on Saturday night."⁵⁴ In 1919 the North Dakota legislature suspected a socialist was in charge of the state circulating library that supplied books to country schools. Included were Leon Trotsky's *The Bolsheviki and World Peace*, Upton Sinclair's *The Profits of Religion*, and Ellen Key's *Love and Ethics*, which questioned the sanctity of marriage. "The affair . . . has been a tremendous shock . . . to members of the legislature, many of whom have expressed their wrath at the apparent attempt to spread Bolshevist and free love doctrines among the school children."⁵⁵ For "undermining the economic principles of America," *The Nation* and *The New Republic* were banned from Los Angeles school libraries in the post-war Red Scare. *The New Republic* and *Survey* were banned in Portland, Oregon, high schools as "too radical to be placed in the hands of 'callow youth.'"⁵⁶

Uncle Tom's Cabin may have found favor in late-nineteenth-century public libraries outside the South, but it met considerably more resistance in the early twentieth century when the North and South tried to improve their relationship by revising perspectives on the Civil War. In 1903 the New York City school superintendent banned the book from the city's public school libraries because "it tells of times that have passed, of evils that have perished, of slavery and brutality that the present day knows nothing about."⁵⁷ At the time, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the third most popular book in New York City school libraries; how Mary Kingsbury and Mary Hall responded to the ban is unknown. They did agree, however, with a position the Board of Education articulated in 1908: "With half a million carefully selected and graded children's books, the Board . . . carries on an active campaign against the cheap and sensational literature of the news-stand and the indifferent trash that has long masqueraded as 'good books for boys and girls.'"⁵⁸

By 1930 the clerisy had established the canon of children's literature and, alongside the library press sector of the publishing industry, set up a system to profile books for possible inclusion. Young people often experienced their reading differently, however, and the historical record shows some school library users rebelled. Although his teachers "preferred us to borrow books from the tiny school library," in 1918 Dee Brown and his classmates would instead secretly exchange serial fiction like Tarzan and books by Zane Grey during study hall. Brown was particularly appalled when one of his teachers caught a friend reading serial fiction during class, ripped it from the student's hands, and dropped it into the room's wood-burning stove.⁵⁹ Brown was not alone. In the century's first decade a young Dashiell Hammett devoured "swashbucklers and mysteries" he could not get at his Enoch Pratt library branch or his high school library in Baltimore. Similarly, Baltimore teenager Zora Neale Hurston read through a "whole slew of dime novelists" the Pratt and her high school library did not stock. "I do not regret the trash," she wrote later. "It was a help, because acquiring the reading habit early is the important thing." In 1909, as an eight-year-old

boy in Kansas City, Walt Disney disliked classroom reading assignments but “made good use of the public library,” his biographer notes, to read Mark Twain, Horatio Alger, and Jonathan Swift.⁶⁰

The American Library Association and the National Education Association

As the foundations of school librarianship took shape in the twentieth century’s first decade, the ALA Committee on Library Training decided in 1903 that developing professional programs for training school librarians belonged not in librarianship, but in the nation’s growing number of normal schools. The committee also made no mention of normal school library training in its 1905 standards. “By dismissing the responsibility, the committee failed to anticipate the impact of an emerging school library program,” argues library historian Sarah Vann, “and to realize that school library training might be regarded as an area for specialization in the regular library school or as indicative of the need for a new type of library school.”⁶¹

The NEA Library Department made some attempts to fill the void, however. At the time three types of normal schools existed, explained Willis H. Kerr, (Emporia) Kansas State Normal School Librarian in 1913. The first was little more than a high school where, with a few additional professional courses, graduates could find jobs in small, mostly rural schools. The more numerous second type was the two-year normal school, which trained students to be elementary and secondary teachers, also generally for smaller schools. Less than ten of the third type existed in 1913: four-year normal colleges, whose graduates frequently taught in larger high schools and often later became principals and superintendents.⁶² While the ALA Committee on Library Training had abdicated responsibility for monitoring school librarians’ training programs, some ALA members nonetheless expressed concern about the quality of education received by graduates of school library training programs in the first and second types of normal school, many graduates of which were subsequently appointed as “teacher-librarians.” It was to this issue that Kerr directed the NEA Library Department’s attention, particularly by focusing on courses in library administration and children’s literature.⁶³ Although these conversations took place at NEA conferences they had little impact on the NEA’s larger organization, in which the Library Department remained a bit player.

That became evident when an NEA reorganization effort in early 1910 threatened to dissolve the Library Department. Members reacted quickly. Edwin Gaillard of the New York Public Library, chair of both the NEA Library Department and the ALA Committee on Cooperation with the NEA, carefully choreographed the summer conference meeting to counter the threat. When the Library Department met on July 5, 120 people showed up to unanimously pass

a resolution to the NEA Board to keep the Library Department. Later that day the board buckled, perhaps because its members thought the Library Department too insignificant to merit a fight.⁶⁴ At the department's last session on July 8, Mary Hall took to the podium. A year earlier, she had organized a Library Section of the New York State Teachers Association at the same time she chaired a New York Library Association's Committee on High School Libraries. In a report to the latter, she had noted not only "marked progress" in New York's development of high school libraries, she also reported "so many demands" for information from across the nation about developing high school libraries she was sure a "general awakening of interest" had occurred that justified the creation of a national committee within NEA's Library Department. When the department established the committee she called for at its 1911 conference, it effectively located professional discussions of high school libraries in NEA rather than ALA.⁶⁵

The year 1911 introduced another voice to conversations about high school libraries. That year, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) began compiling bibliographies of reading materials its members considered suitable for students. *Your Reading* and *Books for You*, lists published in 1913 by the NCTE Committee on Home Reading, were two examples. That same year NCTE also established a "Library Section."⁶⁶ As a group, English teachers became some of high school libraries' strongest advocates, and often became part- and full-time "teacher-librarians" in schools lacking trained professionals. At the same time, however, except for curricular imperatives imposed by state and local boards of education, these English teachers retained their authority to determine best reading for their students, and exercised that authority through classroom assignments and bibliographies recommended to their school librarians—if they had any.

But ALA interest in school libraries was not entirely dormant; 1914 witnessed several initiatives. First, Mary Hall reported to NEA that ALA Headquarters was noticing an increased number of letters from principals across the country asking how to put their high school libraries "on an efficiency basis according to modern library ideas and methods."⁶⁷ In addition, several ALA members who were school librarians decided to organize a Normal and High School Librarians Round Table within ALA, perhaps because the NEA Library Department primarily addressed school library training instead of practices. And because they were concerned about standardizing school library curricula in the nation's normal schools, several ALA members asked the NEA Library Department to address the issue. The former agreed to gather information that quickly became recommendations for three core courses considered essential for any aspiring school librarian: (1) "Reference work, or the use of the library and books;" (2) children's literature; and (3) "technical subjects" like cataloging and classification, book

selection, and library management.⁶⁸ Finally, that year ALA and NEA adopted a resolution that the school librarian “should compare in scholarship, talent, and in teaching power equally with the head of any other department of instruction, should be enabled by having necessary equipment and assistants to do progressive work; and should be recognized equally with the supervisors of other departments as an integral part of the educational system.”⁶⁹

Not everyone approved, however. A recently organized NEA Committee on Elementary School Libraries resolved in 1915 that school libraries should be administered by the public library. And *Library Journal* was especially concerned about high school library management. Where high schools could not benefit from “an independent trained librarian,” an editorial argued, “it is then far better to come into relation with the public library than to attempt half-good work independently.” As for elementary school libraries, “with few exceptions the school will do better to depend directly on the public library.”⁷⁰ And at ALA’s 1915 conference, the Normal and High School Librarians Round Table petitioned the ALA Council to establish a School Libraries Section. Its statement of purpose emphasized the need to introduce professional practices in school libraries of all kinds.⁷¹ Although Hall was not present, the meeting’s twenty-nine attendees elected her chair. But section membership remained small for more than a decade. “There weren’t so many active people,” Mildred Batchelder later recalled. “Everybody knew well . . . the relatively few emerging school librarians in the country.”⁷² Nonetheless, the section became yet another group in the mix of voices exercising influence over an evolving school librarianship.

High school libraries got the most attention before 1925, but in 1927 a group of elementary school principals and librarians met at the University of Washington after an NEA conference to discuss “the aims and possibilities of the elementary school library.” ALA Headquarters staff member Lucile F. Fargo attended. Some school systems and public libraries, she later reported, regarded the elementary school library as an “extra-curriculum activity,” a “wholesome and desirable provision for leisure time” but “not part and parcel” of the school program. It was also obvious that those schools with functioning elementary school libraries showed two kinds of service, one replicating the public library children’s room, the other mirroring classroom procedures. Principals (almost always men) spoke of “teacher-librarians” with responsibilities for diagnostic and remedial reading in educational processes that “envisaged” the librarian “as a teacher of literature.” Librarians (always women) saw themselves as liaisons responsible for “making rapid, stimulating, and well-advised connections between an organized collection of printed materials on the one hand and children and the teachers of children on the other.” Basically, Fargo concluded, participants could not agree on what an elementary school library was for.⁷³

Certain Standards

During the 1913–14 school year, high school English teacher C. C. Certain conducted an experiment with two of his freshman classes at the all-white Central High School in Birmingham, Alabama. In those classes he had students identify broad interests, then encouraged them to self-select books whose subjects matched those interests with books from their school and/or public libraries. Certain asked his students to keep a reading diary, and told them that rather than writing book reports every two weeks one class would be devoted to discussing their reading based on their diary entries. Students grew to love these classes, and “never failed to remind me when the day came around for voluntary reports.” He was so impressed with the experiment he looked for ways to augment these reading experiences, and particularly focused on the high school library. “In the high schools especially libraries are being operated too exclusively according to the workshop method,” he concluded. “This neglect is a serious educational blunder, for in the public school libraries there are facilities not elsewhere afforded for training the great masses of American school children in habits of a saner and a more intelligent use of leisure than has been known in the past.”⁷⁴

At an April 1915 meeting of the Southern Conference for Education and Industry, Certain convinced several colleagues to establish a Committee on High School Libraries (with himself as chair) and conduct a survey. A year later he reported his committee’s findings from seventeen southern states (there is no indication black high schools were included). In its September 1915 issue, *Library Journal* published a symposium on school libraries that included a summary of Certain’s report, in which he cited recent changes in the “ideals and methods” of teaching that made the improvement of high school libraries imperative. The survey revealed that southern high school libraries contained “more than a million obsolete, unclassified text-books . . . stacked away as so much worthless trash.” One correspondent, in charge of surveying five states, was quoted in the report as criticizing the typical rural high school library, which “consists usually of a shelf or two of poorly selected books . . . in reality a pathetic collection and in no sense a library.”

The rest of the South fared little better in the report. In too many schools, teachers, principals, and school superintendents “fear that children will idle away precious minutes if privileged to read books during school hours.” To improve this situation, Certain argued, “the securing of trained librarians is of the greatest importance,” yet he also reported that less than forty “trained” librarians worked in the 3,729 southern high schools he surveyed.⁷⁵ At the time, the nation’s high school libraries employed only fifty library school graduates, and 20 percent of those were in New York. Four years later an effort to compile a

nationwide directory of high school librarians came up with 388 names, most of whom probably had little or no training for the work they were doing.⁷⁶

In 1915 Certain moved to a Detroit high school, and a year later spoke to the Michigan State Teachers Association's Library Section. In his remarks he noted the social tension between efficiency and culture that influenced primary and secondary education, and he lamented that efficiency received more attention in most schools. To correct this, he looked to the public school library, which had the potential to improve student lives through reading stories that addressed their "real experiences." "Where are the joys of reading?" he asked rhetorically. "The printed page revives past joys, and past sorrows, only when there is kinship between the book and the reader. The reader interprets in terms of his own life experiences; and he visualizes in terms of familiar imagery . . . Reading is a creative act," Certain said, "depending not only upon natural endowments but also upon past experience. In the building of public school libraries, it is as important to know, therefore, what the child brings to the book as it is to know what the book may bring to the child." Unfortunately, Certain concluded, advances in public school librarianship focused primarily on work efficiency, not on cultural participation.⁷⁷

By that time Certain had also become chair of a North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (NCACSS) committee tasked to prepare accreditation standards for high school libraries. Among his committee's twenty-three members were fourteen librarians and nine teachers. Simultaneously, he was also president of the NEA's Library Department and chair of a new NEA Department of Secondary Education Committee on the Problems of High School Libraries, established in 1915. Other members of the latter committee included Hannah Logasa and Ella Morgan. It was out of this committee that the "Certain Standards" emerged, establishing for the first time a set of guidelines that high school administrators could use to evaluate their libraries.⁷⁸ In 1917 NEA issued Certain's report under the title "Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes." A year later the standards were more widely disseminated when ALA, NEA, and the NCACSS published them jointly (they were reissued in 1920).

The Certain Standards were based on the assumption that the library was "the very heart of the school," and although for Certain that was a goal, not reality, he nonetheless gave the profession's rhetoric a phrase school librarianship seldom questioned or examined. The standards established numerical goals fitting the discourse of school librarianship which a growing group of professionals with a vested interest in their successes could harness to advocate for greater support of high school libraries. They also advocated that high school libraries be supported by boards of education and monitored by state departments of education through state school library supervisors, and recommended annual

expenditures at one dollar per pupil for books, and for every 1,000 students a full-time "professionally trained" librarian with the primary responsibility to address student reading needs.⁷⁹

As a physical space in the school building, the standards also specifically separated the high school library from classrooms. Students would have direct access to all materials, selected not only for reference and class assignments but also for the recreational reading Certain hoped would become the high school library's most valuable contribution to a student's education. The library should consist of suites of rooms, "spacious, pleasant, [and] centrally located" to be "used exclusively for library purposes," including meeting rooms for student group work and a "library classroom" for media use and instruction in the use of the library. It would also contain a small stage for student practice of plays and poetry.⁸⁰ It was surely not a coincidence that the description of a school library's physical space Mary Hall wrote about in "A Day in a Modern High School Library" she published a year later so closely matched what Certain described in his standards.

Because Certain had worked out his standards through a North Central committee he chaired, North Central became the first regional accrediting agency to set a deadline—March 1923—for high schools to meet them. ALA Executive Director Carl Milam noticed the impact immediately. "The school library movement is getting into full swing," he reported in 1922. "High schools have made most insistent demands upon Headquarters for help and advice in the development of their libraries. The Certain report . . . has been used constantly." Milam even forecast the need for a school library specialist on the Headquarters staff.⁸¹ Several years later ALA developed a survey instrument based on Certain's standards that accrediting agencies could adopt to evaluate their school libraries.⁸² North Central immediately picked it up to survey high schools it accredited, and when schools returned the surveys, North Central issued a "Report on Standards of Library Organization and Equipment for Schools of Different Sizes" that became a model for other regional accrediting associations.⁸³

Although ALA and NEA had adopted Certain's standards, a diverse set of state laws addressing public school libraries often posed insurmountable obstacles to meeting those standards. By 1920, for example, seven states had declared school libraries available for public use, five had authorized school officials to use the public library instead of creating a school library, and two had enacted legislation authorizing school districts to contract for library services from the public library. Ohio specified that its school library law did not apply to districts containing a public library. Most states had also made arrangements for travelling public school library collections through their state libraries or library commissions, and in almost all such collections books had to be selected from state department of education lists.

By 1925 twenty-two states had authorized their education boards to provide services to public school libraries, but they often did not define those services. Sometimes services were delivered through state libraries, sometimes through state library commissions, and sometimes through local public libraries. Funding for any of these arrangements could be funneled through any of these agencies (Texas created forty county school circulating libraries, and ran them through each county's school superintendent). In thirty-eight states, the principal state education officer had some connection with public school library service, but powers and duties were ill-defined and inconsistent. Sometimes responsibilities were as light as serving *ex officio* on state library or library commission boards, sometimes as onerous as making, adopting, approving, or executing "rules and regulations for school library management, book purchase, selection and care, administration of state aid, school library reports, school library service, certification of school librarians, state library or library commission management, and public school library standards."⁸⁴ Because state agencies were involved with public school libraries in so many different ways, one researcher concluded that methods for reporting data varied so much it "precludes any possibility of presenting comparative measurements of school library service for all the states."⁸⁵

Nonetheless, many state education departments purchased multiple copies of Certain's standards and, like New York, sent them to every high school principal, district superintendent, normal school teacher, and librarian (both school and public).⁸⁶ The Southeastern Library Association used them to press southern schools and the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACSS) to establish and support school libraries throughout the region. Several years before, the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board had given five southern states grants to hire state school library supervisors, who in turn also pressured SACSS to meet the Certain Standards. These efforts had little success. A 1930 study by the SACSS's Joint Library Committee (which ignored black schools) reported that none of the region's 922 high schools met the standards. Forty percent had the required number of books (it said nothing about their quality), and although 53 percent met the appropriations requirement, only 5 percent had professionally trained librarians.⁸⁷ In poorer states the situation was even worse. Standards developed by Kentucky's Department of Education for high schools seeking state accreditation said a "third class" high school library should have a "large dictionary" and "at least \$30.00 worth of carefully selected books," a "second class" library a large dictionary and \$45 worth of books, and a "first class" library a large dictionary and a collection valued at \$60.⁸⁸

Although Certain also published *Elementary School Library Standards* for NEA and ALA in 1925, outside librarianship interest in school libraries waned after

World War I.⁸⁹ Due to a dearth of leadership, the National Council of Teachers of Education killed its Library Section in 1920, then in 1923 NEA's Library Department died a quiet death through lack of interest. That same year NEA established a Department of Visual Instruction (DVI) to focus on education's newer audiovisual technologies.⁹⁰ But into the vacuum left by NCTE and NEA stepped ALA. In a 1923 Carnegie-funded report, C. C. Williamson noted, "Probably the most important group for which specialized training should be provided at once are the school librarians, and particularly the high school librarians."⁹¹

Williamson's report led ALA to establish a Board of Education for Librarianship (BEL) to craft guidelines for training library professionals. A year later BEL issued its first national standards, including *Standards and Curricula in School Librarianship* (1927). BEL's recommended thirty-hour curriculum for librarianship included courses in school library management, cataloging and classification, reference and bibliography, library work with children, methods of teaching library usage, a practicum in an actual school library, children's literature and storytelling, and book selection.⁹² But BEL also cited a second set of courses that Lucile Fargo, a decade later, called a "professional library curriculum in miniature." It consisted of sixteen semester hours at normal schools. ALA made no secret about which curriculum it preferred. The *Standards* called graduates of library schools who took positions in school libraries "professionals," and graduates of normal schools "semi-professionals."⁹³ Yet in 1936 there were 142 training programs for school librarians—only eleven of them accredited by ALA.

State departments of education differed in their responses to *Standards and Curricula in School Librarianship* and, depending on the funding available to them, tended to look past ALA's recommendations. One response was "the teacher-librarian," or, in Fargo's words, "teaching positions with a small amount of library service attached." Because "teaching was the main issue," she said, and "library service is collateral—a variant of the teaching function," service in school libraries inevitably suffered. The battleground for this issue was how much library training the "teacher-librarian" needed for state certification, and whether to certify her as a "teacher" or "librarian."⁹⁴

Public Library and Public School Cooperation

Despite evident progress, despite the Certain Standards, most schools across the nation wanting library services for their students had to rely upon local public library systems. That was just fine with many public library leaders. "The school should teach the use and value of books," argued *Public Libraries* editor Mary E. Ahern in 1920, "but the supplying of books is not properly a school activity."⁹⁵ And some public librarians opposed the establishment of public school libraries altogether. As Pennsylvania's Director of School Libraries crossed the Keystone

State advocating for school libraries in the 1920s, she met the most resistance from public librarians who “distrusted and feared me because I insisted that the school library must be a school project, *owned* and *controlled* by school authorities and specifically to meet *school* needs on the same basis as the other school laboratories.” When Pennsylvania’s Department of Instruction became a target of political attack, complaints made by public librarians were cited as reasons to fire her in 1927. Her position was not refilled until 1953.⁹⁶

Cooperative arrangements between public libraries and schools varied. Classroom collections supplied by public libraries usually fell into two categories. In the “block” system school teachers would select titles in three blocks of twenty-five to fifty, circulating each for a two- or three-month period. In the “fixed collection” system, teachers and/or librarians selected and graded collections into A (“more advanced”) and B (“best book”) groups; these collections (of thirty-five to forty books) then remained in the classroom year-round. Because the block system required greater management, by 1925 public libraries monitoring classroom libraries increasingly favored the fixed system.⁹⁷ Libraries located in primary schools serving local populations experienced the most success; fewer successes occurred in high schools serving larger regions. Failures were almost always traced to the inability of public library and school officials to work together; this was particularly true, Arthur Bostwick observed in 1925, with teachers who “as a body, have not been particularly enthusiastic and have manifested little desire to meet the libraries halfway.”⁹⁸

The District of Columbia Public Library sent collections to public schools that students could access for a designated two-hour period each week (teachers had to monitor these periods), but also supplemented those collections with an educational bulletin recommending “best reading” available to students at public library branches.⁹⁹ In Rochester, New York, schools had fixed collections owned by the schools but selected by public librarians who reviewed collections once per year.¹⁰⁰ This did not always work out well. Public librarians seldom studied the curriculum teachers taught. As a result, argued one critic, collections “fail to connect in a helpful way with the children’s school work.” At the same time, “books for school libraries selected by teachers exclusively sometimes lack literary merit.”¹⁰¹ In Terre Haute, Indiana, the public library managed school branches open to children and adults in three high schools, two junior high schools, and nine grade schools. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the public library chose to build no branches, instead using school buildings exclusively. As a result, it managed community branches in twenty-three public schools and traveling library collections in thirty-seven school classrooms.¹⁰²

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1902 the Woman’s Club asked the public library to purchase collections to be placed in schools. Collections remained there for a month and then rotated. Fifteen years later the public library opened a branch

in Fort Wayne's Central High School, staffed by public library employees. "Practically every one of the 84 seats . . . is filled during the busy periods of the day," the librarian reported in 1919, "and a long line of students line up for books to take home overnight." Several years later the library also opened branches in North Side and South Side High Schools. In 1930 public library trustees shifted management of the high school libraries to the schools. Services continued through rotating classroom libraries (in 1931, the public library was supplying 377 schoolroom collections), but were also supplemented by public library bookmobiles.¹⁰³

During the academic year 1909–10 the Cleveland Public Library monitored 229 public school classroom libraries (mostly in high schools) that circulated more than 75,000 books. Public librarians not only visited these schools more than 750 times, they also supervised strategically located library collections in neighborhood houses to meet summertime reading desires. "The possibilities of service by means of classroom-libraries is exceedingly great," the 1910 annual report concluded, but lamented that the library had 225 applications for additional classroom libraries they could not fill.¹⁰⁴ Despite successes, however, in the seven elementary schools that had them "the library and the librarian are not really accepted as belonging to the school and its work," a 1916 survey noted. Librarians in Cleveland's high schools could attend faculty meetings only at the principal's invitation.¹⁰⁵

Close cooperation between small-town public libraries and public schools also showed mixed successes. In the first two decades of the twentieth century some rural school libraries benefitted from travelling library systems organized by state library commissions. In these activities some rural school officials saw promise. In 1905 an NEA official hoped that schools consolidated in rural hamlets would develop libraries that would "make it in the best sense the intellectual center of the community." In 1908 the federal Country Life Commission looked to the rural school library as "one of the most promising of these newer agencies" being established in rural America.¹⁰⁶

In 1914 a reporter in Hobart, Oklahoma, visited his public library one evening. There he found the local history teacher's students reading "the best books on continental history and diplomacy," positioned by the library on separate tables, while "Miss Wilson's class in domestic science" perused "especially attractive list of books on food values, dietetics, household economy, and kindred subjects."¹⁰⁷ In Winnebago County, Illinois, 3,200 books packaged in fifty-nine boxes circulated to rural schools. Once every year teachers met in the Rockford Public Library, where teachers and librarians discussed book selection, care, and use, examining new titles and sharing information on successful and unsuccessful reading assignments.¹⁰⁸ In Midway, Texas, students tossed parts of lunches they did not eat through a "receptacle" in the school wall, on the other side of

which was a fenced-in pig a farmer donated that children were fattening up for market. Proceeds from the porker purchased books for a school library.¹⁰⁹

When her Hanley Falls, Minnesota, high school principal asked her in 1920 to make a library out of the “chaos I found piled floor to ceiling in a corner of our laboratory,” a recently appointed “teacher-librarian” tried to pull a book about three-fourths of the way up, only to have books on the top shelf fall on her head. Because she had inherited no checking system, much of the collection had disappeared by the time she assumed responsibility, including a large dictionary one boy had “borrowed” one summer’s day by climbing through a window. She and fellow teachers selected books from lists prepared by the state department of education. Her library served 110 grade school students, thirty high school students, and eighty-eight “community readers.” The staff consisted of six teachers, including her and the principal. “We spend very little for library equipment and get along with home made things which serve our purpose nicely”—a grocery store box for the picture collection, and bulletin boards, book shelves, and magazine racks constructed by high school boys from materials left in a basement storeroom. Because she could not secure her collection of 1,512 volumes, “nothing but the halo which we have tried to create about the library alcove has kept the books there and in order.”¹¹⁰

A 1912 California law empowered school districts to pool their library funds and channel them through California’s county library system, which then built a central collection of books and services. Forty-six of the state’s fifty-eight counties had libraries, which served 2,848 elementary and high school districts. Of the latter (many of the “little red schoolhouse” type), 2,423 had joined county library systems in which supervisors visited schools at least once per year. “In most of the counties the service includes books for home reading and supplementary books, maps, globes, charts, magazines, stereographs, music records and pictures to be used in schools.”¹¹¹ And two years after the California School Library Association organized in 1915, the state legislature legally recognized a certified school librarian as a professional, recommending that her salary be comparable to that of teachers.¹¹²

Some rural areas had little to no success, however. In North Carolina, educators generally considered the high school library a desirable but hardly essential adjunct to high school instruction, a situation that did not change until the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools fixed the minimum requirement for high school libraries at 500 volumes in 1921. Thereafter, collections grew, although they were poorly managed. In his 1929 master’s thesis, one author reported that North Carolina had about 600 high school libraries containing 600,000 volumes, “fifty thousand to one hundred thousand of these books . . . worthless, since thousands have been received by gift.” Across the state North Carolina employed only sixteen trained school librarians. The

author blamed this sad state of affairs on indifference in the education community, book selection emphasizing quantity more than quality, and lack of trained librarians. "Until these deficiencies are supplied, similar mistakes will continue to be made; for state aid without state supervision is abortive and state supervision without state aid to stimulate is futile."¹¹³

Race Issues in School Librarianship

In the South, all roads lead back to race, and the history of American public school librarianship was no exception. In 1915, notes education historian Dana Goldstein, "Southern states spent three times more on education of a white child than on the education of a black child."¹¹⁴ A decade and a half later the national average for school expenditures per pupil was \$99; in the South it was \$44.31 for white children, \$12.57 for black children.¹¹⁵ In 1925 Kentucky's Department of Education reported that the value of libraries in the state's white public high schools was \$161,174, compared to \$7,443 in black schools.¹¹⁶ Because so many whites in the Jim Crow South found the prospects of touching a book an African American had read repulsive, main public libraries and branches that catered to white readers hardly ever supplied black schools with classroom collections, unless they were discards. Elizabeth Howlett remembers her 1929 elementary school experiences in Richmond, Virginia, where students received "leftover" textbooks from a nearby white school with names already printed in them. "Now that was really hurting. Sometimes I received a book with so many pages torn out I couldn't keep up with my lessons unless I looked at someone else's book."¹¹⁷

Control of the content of student reading materials was as unfair as unequal funding. For subjects like history, local chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans policed high school textbooks for any deviations from southern orthodoxy. Library collections addressing the history curricula of southern high schools were subjected to similar policing, and echoed that orthodoxy. "Two distinct histories are taught" in the nation's schools, declared historian William Dodd in 1913: one below the Mason-Dixon Line, and one above it.¹¹⁸ And the divide went beyond history. Publishers often referred to textbooks on any subject marketed to the South as "mint julep editions." All too frequently these were the same textbooks passed to black schools when white schools bought newer editions.

The status of black public school libraries fared no better. While the rest of the nation was building significant numbers of new high schools before 1930, almost all southern rural communities lacked high schools for black students. More than half of urban communities in the South lacked them.¹¹⁹ In Texas the state librarian could only get traveling library collections to local black citizens by placing them in four black high schools.¹²⁰ In 1925 the 146 school libraries in

Georgia that served 2,988 black schools with 164,087 students contained just 13,013 volumes.¹²¹ In 1925–26, South Carolina’s total expenditure for school library books was \$26,982.89 for whites, \$205.32 for blacks.¹²² In a survey of North Carolina’s education, a Baltimore *Afro-American* correspondent noted in 1927 that Tarheel State communities were always “broke” when it came to funding black schools. In Wilmington, for example, “a hole in the wall and a few second-hand books” constituted a library in the local black high school. Across the state, the newspaper concluded, it was “easier to get pots and pans, saws and hammers” for black schools than “libraries and laboratories.”¹²³

From its beginnings in 1898 the District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL) served both blacks and whites. But when the DCPL proposed to locate public library branches in local schools after World War I, the white-controlled Board of Education, worried about racial violence, attempted to segregate those new branches based on whether they were placed in white or black schools. Black residents protested vehemently. “If patrons go into the [central] public library to receive books without regard to color, why should the Board assume there would be any friction or conflict in receiving similar service at a branch library,” argued an attorney representing eighteen black civic organizations. “There is not and has never been any friction attendant upon children of the two races standing at the counter of the central library to receive books.”¹²⁴ Eventually, the board backed down.

Despite often-insurmountable obstacles to establishing public school library services, black history nonetheless records a few successes. In the first decade of the twentieth century the Colored Branch of the Louisville Free Public Library managed to get thirty-five classroom collections into local African American schools.¹²⁵ In 1927 the Julius Rosenwald Fund and the General Education Board initiated funding programs that significantly improved black school library services in the South. In Charleston, South Carolina, for example, school librarian Ethel Bolden remembered as a child the R. L. Bryan Book Company on Main Street had “three boxes of books called Negro History Libraries.” The first box contained “simple books,” the second more advanced, and the third were at the fifth–to-seventh grade reading level. “If your school could match the Rosenwald Fund, you could get that R. L. Bryan library through a matching grant.”¹²⁶ Many did. Among the Rosenwald-funded demonstration projects the Louisiana Library Commission ran between 1925 and 1930 was a series of public libraries located in African American schools also supported by Rosenwald. Headquarters library for the Webster Parish (over 50 percent African American) was in Minden, which monitored eight separate branches that in March 1930, had 981 registered borrowers; 460 were school children. “Students from the illiterate classes are coming into the library asking that their branch be continued through

the summer so that they will be able to carry on their work and read when the schools open again next fall," the commission reported.¹²⁷

Many of the platoon school systems organized above the Mason-Dixon line in the late 1920s were also responding to population explosions caused by the Great Migration, during which millions of black people moved to northern cities from the Jim Crow South. In 1928, for example, Eva Schars wrote about her day in a Detroit platoon school library that served these "very dark complexioned visitors from the land of cotton." Library periods were one-half hour, during which students selected and read their books. One school librarian described her black users as "completely lost in the delights of imaginary realms."¹²⁸

White librarians in the Jim Crow South said nothing about this dismal situation. When Mary Gaver wrote in her 1988 autobiography about her years as a Danville, Virginia, high school librarian in the 1930s, she acknowledged "with shame that we did little for the segregated black schools."¹²⁹ Hers was one of the few public admissions from anyone in school librarianship about the issue of segregated schools and their libraries, a subject that still remains unexplored in the profession's history.

As the nation entered the Great Depression, school librarianship had made significant advances since Mary Kingsbury assumed her position at Brooklyn's Erasmus Hall High School in 1900. The set of practices she and other pioneers inherited from late-nineteenth-century librarianship had become the foundation for building a bibliographic structure a new children's literature clerisy used to identify what they considered the best reading for children, which reflected the dominant white, Protestant culture overseen by men in which schools and libraries existed. While many schools continued to obtain library services for their students through cooperative arrangements with local public library systems, scores of new high schools pressed by regional accrediting agencies used the Certain Standards to establish libraries and hire school librarians, almost all of whom were middle-class white women. In 1900 NEA functioned as school librarianship's national, albeit feeble, voice. Thirty years later, however, ALA—and particularly its Section on School Libraries—had filled a vacuum left by NEA indifference to assume that role.

Weathering the Great Depression and World War II, 1930–1950

“The Depression marked a watershed in childhood experience,” notes Steven Mintz. “The economic crisis of the 1930s not only ended child labor; it ultimately made high school attendance a modal experience for adolescents.” Henceforth, a high school education became the norm for young adults. The era also witnessed the introduction of comic books, children’s radio shows, movie serials like Batman, and products capitalizing on mass media stars, such as Shirley Temple dolls and Mickey Mouse watches. “One of the Depression’s lasting legacies was nationalizing and commercializing childhood,” Mintz observes, and by decade’s end “a new age category, the teenage, had emerged.” Economic pressure to remove young people from the work force meant that high school populations boomed. “The expansion of high school enrollments carried profound consequences for the future,” Mintz writes. “It institutionalized the teen years as a distinct stage of life.” By 1945 use of the word “teenager” was commonplace.¹

At the same time, childhood experts continued to believe in the idea of the innocent child who needed to be sheltered from and gradually introduced to the adult world, all the while, of course, with adult guidance. “The free child was to play, but with objects and in places selected by parents,” notes historian Gary Cross. “The guiding concepts were indirect control and sublimation, not intru-

sive regulation. But play was only a means to an end, never the goal itself.”² Through their collections and services America’s public school libraries were another of the educational institutions that sought to exercise “indirect control and sublimation.”

Many school libraries benefitted from Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, including the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the National Youth Administration (NYA). The PWA helped many southern schools enlarge existing school libraries, and in North Carolina built seventeen new library rooms. North Carolina’s School Library Advisor Mary Peacock Douglas (whose position was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation’s General Education Fund) made sure they were designed to be functioning school libraries rather than just rooms to warehouse books.³ In Texas 1,120 school libraries employed WPA workers in 1939; they were assistants in 673 while establishing and operating a further 447.⁴ In Houston, WPA workers directed thirty-four of the city’s sixty-five elementary school libraries.⁵ A WPA School Book Repair Project returned 210,438 “clean, patched, trimmed, and cased” books to New York City school libraries at the beginning of the 1938 school year.⁶

In 1938–39, Virginia employed 779 NYA in-school and 172 NYA out-of-school adolescents to assist in public elementary- and secondary-school libraries.⁷ In Dickinson County, the school board pooled money collected from participating schools and began a circulating library with the “reference books and pleasure reading” it purchased, all with the assistance of a WPA worker.⁸ The Appomattox County Circulating Public School Library, authorized as a demonstration project by the Education Department in 1936, was even more successful. Consisting of two 6,000-volume collections, it circulated one collection by bus from the white high school to the county’s other ten white schools, while the second collection, housed in the county’s black training school, circulated to the county’s ten black schools. A white librarian supervised both collections, with the help of four WPA workers in the white high school as well as a black WPA worker and a part-time NYA worker, who monitored the black collections.⁹

When the US entered World War II, however, the federal government quickly withdrew funds for social programs. As a result, school libraries not only lost personnel and students who quit school to join the armed forces or work in war industry jobs, they also suffered diminished acquisitions because of paper rationing’s effect on the book publishing industry. During the war, school librarians, like most children’s and youth librarians, talked and wrote much not only about the power of books in the battle against totalitarianism, in defense of democracy, and for international understanding, but also of librarianship’s responsibility to fight the kind of censorship on public display in Germany, Italy, and Japan—censorship that ALA also addressed when it passed a

Library Bill of Rights (LBR) in 1939. But beyond the power of persuasion, however, LBR could do nothing to punish transgressors, whether librarians or non-librarians.

In 1938 the US Office of Education (USOE) published a statistical study of school libraries in the United States. It found that the 3,130 school systems reporting (just under half the total) supported 66,101 schools; 93 percent of those 66,101 had centralized libraries or classroom libraries. Of the 12,578 librarians in those centralized libraries, 3,808 were full-time, 8,770 part-time.¹⁰ That same year the USOE established a Library Services Division to promote library development nationwide, and to it appointed Nora Beust as its first school library specialist. At the time Beust also chaired the ALA's Board on Library Services to Children and Youth. Beust spent much of her time working with professional education and library associations and with officers in the USOE's other thirteen divisions to keep them aware of what school libraries were (or could be) doing. School library advocates foresaw opportunities for federal funding stemming from her unique position.¹¹

Public Libraries and Public Schools

During the Depression, the American public school library "was one of those 'unnecessary' items that school boards felt could be done without," recalled one Iowa student years later. "Had it not been [for] my Dad's trips to Des Moines to transport books" back and forth from the state library, "my reading and that of my schoolmates would have been limited."¹² As a Nebraska sixth-grade student in 1931, another remembered: "The teacher used to pick two boys and we used to get a wagon and pull it to the library. The librarian there would put a certain number of books in the wagon and we would take it back to the school and the teacher would set it up on the windowsill and we would have a class library." Two weeks later two other boys were selected to return the books and pick up another batch.¹³

Cooperative arrangements between public libraries and public schools continued, despite budget decreases. In Evanston, Illinois, the high school library functioned as a branch of the Evanston Public Library; when the school librarian finished her work at day's end, public library staff came in and closed up.¹⁴ The District of Columbia Public Library sent classroom collections to DC schools in laundry baskets; in 1933 it distributed 478,315 volumes.¹⁵ The Louisville (KY) Free Public Library circulated a portable puppet show to Jefferson County schools. The Jefferson Township School near Logansport, Indiana, welcomed the local public library's popularly named "Bibliobus" once a month.¹⁶ In Gary, Indiana, which still operated a platoon system, the school board controlled all school library service except for one black branch administered by the local public library. Gary supported two types of school libraries. Elementary

schools generally had reading rooms where the activity most encouraged was free reading, while in high schools libraries were generally located next to and considered part of the study hall.¹⁷

Cleveland supported one of the nation's most successful cooperative arrangements. The public library administered classroom collections in more than eighty elementary schools and central libraries in thirteen high schools, sixteen junior highs, and seven elementary schools. The board of education furnished the physical plants of the junior high and high school libraries, including furniture, reference works, and circulating collections. The public library covered the salaries of most school librarians, and furnished the equipment and collections of the centralized elementary school libraries, which also doubled as public library branches. However, unlike Cleveland's teachers, public librarians staffing school libraries had to work through Christmas, Easter, and summer vacations. Understandably these kinds of arrangements caused friction and tension, and because public librarians did not meet school requirements for teaching certificates, they were often treated as second-class citizens in their workplaces.¹⁸

The board of education administered all school library services in Los Angeles. Its Division of Library and Textbook Activities supervised high school libraries, including planning, equipment, budgeting, cataloging, and book selection not tethered to a prescribed list. All titles, however, had to be approved by a library advisory committee consisting of board members, the division director, and several librarians representing junior and senior high schools. All school librarians had faculty status with salaries comparable to other staff members of equal training. For library services to elementary schools, however, Los Angeles functioned differently. By means of classroom collections that had, on average, 150 volumes (including "free reading" titles), the Los Angeles City School Library served the city's 294 elementary schools by employing one traveling school librarian.¹⁹

In the late 1930s Tennessee appropriated \$100,000 for two years running to establish circulating libraries for elementary school students, to be selected from state-approved booklists and managed through county school superintendents' offices. The goal was two books per child. Not everyone was happy with the initiative. "From a professional librarian's point of view, we are beginning at the wrong end, by first buying the books without having . . . trained personnel and proper administrative setup," reported the state's supervisor of school libraries, adding, "we have learned from experience that most of these rural counties do not see the necessity of a trained librarian and proper quarters and equipment until a deluge of books descends upon them and they find out it is not so easy a task as they thought."²⁰

In 1934, 83 percent of America's rural residents had no public library service, but where public libraries existed they often became partners with schools,

sometimes successfully, but much more often unsuccessfully. A 1934 study of Iowa's rural school libraries found thirty of the fifty-four books in one were *Iowa Official Registers*, books of poetry unsuitable for children, and a variety of turn-of-the-century series fiction titles.²¹ An early 1930s USOE study of rural school library conditions in twenty-four states showed a lack of books suitable for elementary school children, rules and practices restricting accessibility to collections, "the failure of recreational reading to become an integral part of the school program," and a lack of trained personnel to manage the libraries.²²

In addition, there was little consistency in where library collections were housed in rural schools. Some were in staircase balconies, others in basements, still others in small rooms that only a few children could use at a time. Smaller high schools often had study hall/library combinations. Generally, when elementary and secondary grades were housed in the same building, "very little use was made of the library by children in the elementary grades," a 1934 USOE survey reported. "Usually the elementary teachers preferred to withdraw from the library the books to be used in their classrooms." The room used for library purposes in a rural New York school was also used as a conference and workroom.²³ In one rural Wisconsin schoolroom in the 1940s students found "two cabinets built into the wall. One was all fiction, the other all nonfiction." Located between two classrooms in another county school was a library that also served as a kitchen.²⁴

In response to a 1933 survey of California's forty-six county libraries, forty-three reported services to 2,300 elementary school districts with 192,413 students. Ninety percent received not only books, but also periodicals and records, and a majority also circulated stereographs, maps, globes and charts.²⁵ Two rural California counties (Tuolumne and Calaveras) reflected the difference between school libraries managed by trained librarians and those without. In the latter, which had no county library service, books were packed into small places and often stacked two deep. Collections were "a vast accumulation of unused supplementary books, reference books, and general reading which had outlived its usefulness." But when a trained librarian supervised services, books, magazines, maps, and records were carefully selected to match the needs of the curriculum. The county was especially proud of its home reading program: "good books have solved the question of leisure time for these children," an observer noted. "Teachers find that pupils who have the reading habit advance more rapidly in their studies than those who do little general reading."²⁶

In 1950 Mary Scott Hair recalled the first day her new Stone County (KS) Library bookmobile visited a country school. "I knew you were coming 'cause I heard it on the radio!" shouted one little boy. "They all came outside," Hair recalled, formed "a row on some old lumber and listened appreciatively to the story we told them by means of records and illustrated storybooks with extra

large pages.”²⁷ For many early 1950s rural Wisconsin children, public library bookmobiles transformed their reading opportunities. In Door and Kewaunee Counties, 3,321 schoolchildren borrowed on average 23.3 books per year from bookmobiles during the 1951–52 school year. An adult who used the service as a child later recalled she was “*very* excited . . . I’m sure we were hard to contain for the teacher because it was such an event for us to think that they were bringing books out to us.”²⁸

In many places the Great Depression also witnessed shifts in responsibility for managing public school libraries. In 1945 the Portland (OR) Board of Education severed a relationship with the public library extending back to 1904, for three reasons. First, the school system had shifted its curriculum from textbook-based to a method of inquiry that required access to a variety of information sources the public library could not provide. Second, the board had assumed management responsibilities for the public librarians serving in the city’s high schools and given them salaries and vacations equal to teachers. Finally, because the public library could not afford to put librarians in each elementary school, the board decided instead to fund classroom libraries that exceeded the public library’s ability to support.²⁹

Other public library and education leaders waffled on who should administer school library services. Studies yielded conflicting recommendations. Some saw school libraries as a wasteful duplication of services already provided by public libraries; others, like the Joint Committee of NEA and ALA, argued that although school and public libraries should work together to provide “complete library service to school children without unnecessary duplication of activities,” the school library was nonetheless “an essential element in the school program [and] basically a responsibility of the board of education.”³⁰

In 1934 *Library Journal* ran an article entitled “The Taxpayer and Reading for Young People: ‘Would a Library in Every School’ Justify the Cost?” Coauthored by the District of Columbia’s Supervisor of Work with Schools and its Director of Work with Children, the authors criticized several NEA and ALA leaders for promoting the idea of “a library in every school in the country”—a proposition, they argued, that could only come at “terrific cost.”³¹ The article sparked a flurry of responses both pro and con, but had little lasting impact. ALA Executive Director Carl Milam asked that ALA’s Board on Library Services to Children and Youth in Public Libraries and Schools study whether schools should limit library collections to the curriculum, whether public libraries or school boards should control them, and ultimately whether taxpayer money could be saved if public libraries served schools. The board chose not to take up the task, however.³²

Squabbles between children’s librarians and school librarians continued. “School libraries have their place,” one Pennsylvania children’s librarian snipped

in 1939. "They are bound to revolve around the school curriculum with the school point of view, and for that reason their sphere is more limited." Another wondered why the school librarians did not affiliate with NEA instead of ALA.³³ Some children's librarians complained school librarians did not show enough desire to promote reading and chose their vocation to get summers off; they also resented higher salaries for school librarians who increasingly were being certified as teachers in states across the country. On the other hand, some school librarians complained that children's librarians were less professional and deserved less pay because they had no responsibility for curriculum and instruction.³⁴

Some school librarians also began to criticize the selection patterns of the children's literature clerisy. "School librarians are well aware of the sentimental streak in children's librarians," one wrote to *Elementary English Review* in 1940. "Why it continues to flourish in this cold scientific age is a mystery." To solve this she recommended that more school librarians be appointed to *Booklist* selection committees. "A situation discussed in private but not aired in public is that divergent views of juvenile literature and fear of professional elimination enter into all relationships between school and children's librarians," she noted. "The schools have accused the librarians of being high-hat. The children's librarians fear that we are going to gobble them up as surely as Red Riding Hood met the wolf." Another school librarian complained that children's librarians considered her "incompetent when it came to a matter of choice of titles."³⁵

Replicating the Profession's Discourse

By the Great Depression, it was easy to identify school library successes. Anyone visiting her library in 1937, wrote the librarian of the University School of The Ohio State University, "would see a room filled with boys and girls working quietly on library material in preparation of work assigned, or browsing among the many books and magazines which are there for their pleasure reading." That person would also see "teachers working at tables with groups of pupils . . . He would notice pupils working together and conferring with others. He would not notice any deathlike stillness, but he would observe that over the entire room there was an almost imperceptible hum of busy activity. If alert to modern educational theories and procedure, this observer would recognize this library as a most vital and significant part of the school."³⁶

In most American communities, however, Certain's "heart of the school" rhetoric from the 1920s was still far from reality. "We all pay lip service to the statement that 'the library is the heart of the school,'" concluded an Illinois high school principal in 1945, before lamenting that even in high-performing schools that was not the case. Often a teacher "moves from the class room to the library because she can keep order and [she] becomes a combination study hall proc-

tor, repairer of books, giver-out of books and above all guarder of books.” Although the school administrator may have said “he believes in the library as the heart of the school,” he actually spent “more for sports each year than he does for that heart.”³⁷ “Despite its potential, the library method was not a major concern of most progressive educators,” one educational historian has remarked, adding that between 1924 and 1957, *Progressive Education* published only a dozen articles about school library service. In fact, the vast majority of the hundreds of articles on school library service cited in *Education Index* since it began in 1929 “are of the how-to-set-up-the library variety.”³⁸

But school library leaders kept pushing. In 1930 ALA published Lucile F. Fargo’s *The Library in the School*, an early attempt to summarize the discourse of this emerging field of library specialization.³⁹ *The Library in the School* was one of several texts on library types, specific library activities, and particular clientele that the ALA Committee on Education commissioned in the late 1920s. “Each text’s author worked with an ALA-appointed advisory committee of librarians, and consulted with librarians at ALA headquarters,” notes Christine Jenkins. “Preliminary versions . . . were sent for review to library schools, where they were used and critiqued,” and for comment “to more than twenty-five practicing librarians.”⁴⁰

The school library’s very existence was “a twentieth century phenomenon, explicable only in the light of the [progressive] educational development of the last quarter century,” Fargo explained. “The ideal school librarian is the one who builds a solid foundation compounded of the knowledge and techniques known as library science and of the arts and skills known as the theory and practice of education,” she wrote. “On the library side are book evaluation and acquisition, and the techniques involved in handling books as the tools of information and recreation, including cataloging and classifying. On the school side are knowledge of school organization and methods and the psychology of education.” Fargo ended her description with a flourish. “School librarianship is the superstructure, an edifice erected for specialized service.”⁴¹

The library science that school librarians practiced included use of the Dewey Decimal Classification system (or, as one frustrated high school student complained in 1936, the “Dizzy Decimal System”) and the reference tools that detailed the useful information students were expected to learn from a prescriptive curriculum. Books and magazines they acquired generally reflected the dominant patriarchal canon, and the now well established bibliographic structures made acquisitions relatively easy. School librarians could consult lists that cited only “good” books that developed “correct” reading tastes, and then place them on library shelves for students’ serendipitous reading. “The librarian who chooses a title from any standard finding list may be pretty certain she is securing an excellent book,” Fargo noted.⁴²

Many school library systems adopted these selection practices. For example, to select books circulated from the local public library, New York teachers were told in 1935 that “the *Children’s Catalog* is the authority” they should consult.⁴³ In 1939 the District of Columbia school system adopted the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*, thus establishing it as the standard against which all DC high school library collections were measured in the accreditation and re-accreditation processes.⁴⁴ By that time education departments in Louisiana and Tennessee had adopted the *Catalog* as a state-approved buying list, and the latter adopted *Children’s Catalog* for elementary school library guidance.⁴⁵ “Although the catalogs were the production of a commercial publisher, and thus subject to the decision-making authority of the editors and to company policies,” observes Jenkins, “in their work as reviewers, selectors, and collaborators” ALA librarians “viewed the Wilson catalogs as an extension of their own work in selecting and evaluating the best books.”⁴⁶

Fargo divided her chapter on book selection into three categories: reference books, factual or information books, and “recreational reading.” The first was intended to address the prioritization of “useful knowledge” that the curriculum demanded and that the profession inherited from nineteenth-century practices. The second was intended to supplement and enrich the school’s curriculum. Factual books should be “free from prejudice,” she argued in her first edition. Controversies surrounding particular texts in the 1930s (to be discussed later), however, had an impact, and by the 1947 edition Fargo was arguing for the acquisition of potentially controversial materials addressing “both sides of moot questions, or at least presenting issues dispassionately . . . Under the guidance of a skilled instructor, the obligation of the library to supply such literature has to be considered frankly.”⁴⁷

But Fargo failed to acknowledge that the universe of selection possibilities for books containing facts and information was already constrained. The textbook industry is a case in point and offers another example of the power relationships affecting school libraries that automatically influenced selection. History texts sold to schools nationwide in the 1920s, for example, “reflected the prevailing racist and imperialist outlook, what one scholar at the time termed ‘integral nationalism,’” writes historian Joseph Moreau. To maximize their chances of capturing large segments of the market, publishers carefully controlled the content of textbooks. “If any [textbook] author tells you he is not influenced by such pressure that he tells ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ as far as he knows it, don’t you believe him,” complained one textbook author; “he is a conscious or unconscious liar.” James Harvey Robinson, prominent historian and advisor for Ginn and Company’s textbook department, admitted as much: “No publishers of text-books for the schools would venture to permit a writer to give children the best and most authoritative knowledge that we have today.”⁴⁸

Inevitably, the narratives that textbooks contained and teachers taught in prescribed curricula also had an influence on the books school librarians acquired.

Shortly after ALA published Fargo's textbook, the ALA Committee on Education asked Howard H. Hicks, principal of a California junior high school, to write an article on the junior high school library for the 1932 *School Library Yearbook*. As part of his assignment Hicks reviewed school library literature. In it he saw "conformity to public school goals . . . There is little difference of opinion among leaders of this field. They have great faith in the library. Writers on this subject are so imbued with the love of books, so loyal to their profession and so certain of the mission of their institution that toil and routine have not dulled their enthusiasm." In an attempt to become "more practical," however, "the framers of school library objectives have been inclined to conform with school practice." But the philosophy of public education was changing, he noted. While formalism was losing ground, curricula were becoming more integrated, and creative experiences and exploration encouraged. These new approaches promised to bring the library and the school closer together. Unfortunately, however, these new approaches "have been omitted from [school library] literature . . . They should be expressed."

Hicks also reported a survey he took of 166 junior high school librarians asking them to evaluate various library tasks and services. In rank order, school librarians regarded as their most important responsibilities: (1) helping students find reference materials; (2) teaching them use of the library; (3) knowing the individual student's reading needs; (4) encouraging student reading interests; (5) helping them find "recreational reading;" (6) collecting reference material for classroom use; (7) circulating books; (8) selecting and ordering books; (9) cataloging books; and (10) training student assistants.

Although Hicks did not say so, his findings showed that school librarians practiced a set of services based on connections between providing the "useful knowledge" the curriculum addressed and the "best books" a clerisy identified for students' free reading. It represented a service more than an educational philosophy. Where children's librarians were free to craft a philosophy of service based on their concept of child development, school librarians were always subservient to whatever educational philosophy prevailed in their local school. School librarians also agreed, Hicks reported, that they were asked to do too much "clerical work," including monitoring library passes, checking out books, keeping library attendance and circulation records, and preparing new acquisitions for the shelves. Unlike many other school principals, however, Hicks acknowledged the value of library as place. "Librarians have done their best to beautify the place, no matter what type of room the community has provided. It has more of an atmosphere of comfort, freedom, and welcome than the typical classroom."⁴⁹

Like the pioneering generation of school library leaders that preceded her, Lucile Fargo still believed the school librarian had to have the right personality. She had to be approachable, enthusiastic, resourceful, cooperative, alert, and adaptable, with an ability to understand and organize the behaviors of children at all ages, and stimulate them intellectually. "The school library is no place for the bookworm, the recluse, or the half-alive." The librarian also had to possess a "strong, balanced personality capable of leadership," and a "wide knowledge of and enthusiasm for literature for boys and girls."⁵⁰ "The library in its functioning is but the lengthened shadow of the librarian," noted one Indiana superintendent in 1946.⁵¹

Too frequently, however, school librarians did not live up to the ideal. In the 1940s one Virginia high school freshman was "warned to watch out for" the librarian. Students were often sent to the library as punishment, where the librarian "would sit you in a special section near her desk and the only time you could move was when you had to go to the toilet." While incarcerated in the library, students were not allowed to use the library's books and magazines.⁵² When she was a third grader in an Alabama elementary school in the late 1940s, Judith Patterson remembers walking into the school library. "Miss Hall, the ghostly librarian, demands absolute obedience from behind a heavy wooden desk at the front of the room." But that memory, she reported, was trumped by another that "changed my life." Because they were "allowed to look at as many books as we liked for as long as we liked," Patterson remembered a time when "faint with pleasure, I am reading a book about a dog named Chip" in a room that had the "musty, ripe-apple smell of small children before air-conditioning" and was full of "sunlight so bright you can see a million specks of dust floating in the warm air."⁵³

In 1937 ALA's Board of Education for Librarianship defined a school librarian as "a person . . . satisfactorily completing a year of study in a recognized college or university library school as part of or in addition to a bachelor's degree," while a "teacher-librarian" was "a person trained primarily as a teacher and qualifying for part-time service in the school library by completing at least one-half year in library science."⁵⁴ The board forwarded these definitions to the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. In schools of 400–800 students, "the one in charge of the high school library is either a high school librarian," read the revised North Central standards published shortly thereafter, "or a TEACHER-LIBRARIAN, namely, a person who is qualified as a member of the teaching staff and who has completed a minimum of eight semester hours of training in library methods, including instruction in classification of books." Schools staffing their libraries tended to follow the recommendations of regional accrediting agencies more than ALA recommendations.⁵⁵

In contrast to the lofty expectations outlined in textbooks and accreditation standards, a different reality existed for many school librarians whose lives were

still most affected by their principals. "The 'powers that be' and I do not agree about a 'library atmosphere,' and I cannot maintain a death-like quiet insisted upon and at the same time do other things," complained a first-year school librarian in the mid-1930s. "I'm a policeman who scowls menacingly when a child moves to get another book or wants to browse, for I have to answer for any and all noise." Since she had no chance to practice "book selection[,] because all books are sent to my desk and my only task is to accession, classify, and catalog them," this novice wondered if she had chosen the right profession.⁵⁶

In one South Carolina high school library in the late 1920s, the school librarian was often ordered to substitute teach because, she later admitted, her responsibilities did not keep her busy as librarian. Her successor spent time knitting and babysitting students with disciplinary problems.⁵⁷ In 1935 a part-time librarian in Texas complained that in addition to her library responsibilities she was required to teach English and algebra courses and to oversee a grade-school study hall. Another reported she had been hired at a local high school "as librarian and study hall teacher," but she found otherwise upon her arrival. "I was expected to teach junior and senior history as well. The library has never been organized or classified and the only time I have to work on the books is on holidays, Saturdays and after school hours." She loved her superintendent, she said, "but he does not realize the work and time required for this task."⁵⁸

Shifting the Parameters of Student Reading

In her 1930 edition Lucile Fargo did not cover recreational reading extensively. The five pages she allocated to the subject parroted conventional thinking by public library leaders (like them, she specifically condemned series fiction) and were supplemented by a five-page bibliography of selection sources. The 1947 edition, however, showed a slight shift in attitude. Fargo still warned against "reading 'debauches'—prolonged and gluttonous indulgence in one type of reading, usually fiction, that is no more stimulating than forever skating in a small circle," but by that time she had come to accept what she called "mediocre" reading.⁵⁹ Howard Hicks also covered what he considered recreational reading in his 1932 article by summarizing a survey he conducted at his junior high school. Children preferred fiction to nonfiction by 85 to 15 percent, he reported. Most students recognized as directed reading what teachers assigned; because they had choices in the school library, however, they considered that to be free reading. But, Hicks also acknowledged, "all library reading is directed because it is carefully selected [and] supervised."⁶⁰

Others agreed about problems with assigned reading. One New York public librarian wondered in 1936 why "the thrill of reading" was often lost in high school, concluding that required reading was an important cause. "Most of the studies of voluntary reading of high school pupils reveal that many of their

favorite authors and titles are not usually found on required reading lists . . . Are we not defeating the purpose of required reading by making it unpleasant?" she asked. She described a recent visit to a high school English class: after she gave a brief talk about using books, the teacher announced that book reports were due in several days, and that for the book they selected students had to identify where it took place and address how many "important" characters the story contained. The students groaned. "It may sound like heresy," this librarian concluded, "but I would prefer that a pupil read a mediocre book and enjoy the process than read one from a required list which is too advanced for his literary ability and ever after hate the process."⁶¹

A 1936 survey of eighty-one libraries in junior and senior high schools across the country revealed that half of all students had no record of library attendance. Thus, teaching "the use of books," the author concluded, "is not adequately carried out." The survey also showed that 87 percent of students' reading in junior high school took place at home, and that 62 percent of that reading was voluntary. Eighty percent of senior high school students read at home, and 54 percent of what they read was voluntary. At both levels, visits to school libraries for the voluntary reading of novels, newspapers, and magazines were twice as numerous as visits for reference purposes. Because the survey also revealed that "more than anything else" trained library personnel encouraged reading and stimulated library use, the author recommended that "efficient library personnel" be hired in all high schools, and that they initiate "a free-reading program" in each. And because the school library, "like all other school agencies, has for its purpose the socializing and civilizing of the pupil," as a place it "should be made the center of the social life of the school."⁶²

Arguments still arose over what constituted acceptable "free reading." When Walt Disney's animated *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* spun off several children's picture books in 1937, Anne Carroll Moore lamented that one of those books "smelt as bad as it looked and provides a striking example of let's have fun with anything we can use in our business state of mind."⁶³ When Simon & Schuster began issuing its highly popular Little Golden Books series with its extremely successful *Poky Little Puppy* in 1942 and distributing them not through bookstores but through chain stores like Kresge and Woolworth, clerisy staples like *Horn Book*, *Booklist*, *Children's Catalog*, and the annual holiday list issued out of the New York Public Library's Room 105 simply ignored them. Despite this willful blindness, however, Golden Books had become the biggest money-maker for Simon & Schuster before 1950, with more than 300 million copies of over 200 titles in American homes across the country.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, armed with Mary Root's "Not for Boys and Girls" list and a literary canon defined by the children's literature clerisy, school library leaders and many educators continued to oppose series fiction.⁶⁵ On January 25, 1934,

for example, the Bryant Library Board of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, met with officials of the State Department of Education's Library Department, who made several suggestions for improvement. At the time the public library was still receiving funds from the local school board and thus, under state law, also functioned as the town's school library. State officials thought that although the Bryant Library had a good circulation rate, its collections lacked "quality" and "up-to-date fiction" for children and young adults. To address this shortcoming, they recommended "a complete checking first with the Minnesota School Library lists and supplements, and with the ALA Catalog and Wilson standard catalogs." Addressing cooperation between the school system and library, they argued for hiring a "trained librarian." The trustees agreed, and in 1934 hired Mynette Lindeloff, a graduate of the University of Minnesota Library School.⁶⁶

Because the Bryant's previous library directors had been untrained and largely unacquainted with acquisition tools like the Wilson guides, the collection intended for Sauk Centre school students had not been filtered through the clerisy's bibliographic structure. At the time of Lindeloff's appointment, for example, Bryant patrons could choose from thirteen *Algiers*, twenty-one *Optics*, thirty-four *Stratemeyers*, and nineteen *Finleys*. However, it had no *Nancy Drews*—a wildly popular series *Stratemeyer* had just begun publishing. The Bryant did not, in fact, acquire *Nancy Drew* titles until the 1970s. Why? Probably because Lindeloff's training at the University of Minnesota Library School taught her to use the clerisy's bibliographic aids, and her state library association journal had just warned her against acquiring series fiction like *Nancy Drew*. If Sauk Centre's female adolescent readers wanted to read *Nancy Drew* they (or their mothers) had to get copies from the corner drugstore.⁶⁷

While she served as librarian, Lindeloff also had contact with Ruth Ersted, who served as the state's School Library Supervisor from 1936 to 1974. From that position, her biographer notes, Ersted would descend "like an avenging angel" on a school, "sweeping books that did not meet her high standards from the shelves, sometimes terrorizing the school librarian but more often the superintendent, who dreaded her next visit unless improvements she suggested in the follow-up letter had been made." Forceful and filled with a missionary spirit, Ersted's activities over the next four decades made her into "a kind of folk heroine" whose fame lived on in a series of "old Ruth legends."⁶⁸

But resistance to clerisy selections was also evident. "We will save ourselves many heartaches if we think of our children's reading not in terms of 'culture'—of good books or bad," wrote the Child Study Association of America's Josette Frank in 1936, "but rather as an avenue of expression and inner satisfaction for each according to his needs."⁶⁹ Between 1939 and 1941 *Elementary English Review* (journal of the National Council of Teachers in English) published several articles and letters to the editor critical of Newbery and Caldecott winners for not

being popular with children. Part of the reason for their unpopularity may have been content, which, some argued, did not appeal to all demographic groups. “Newbery books predominantly reflected the traditional American system of values characteristic of WASP ethos,” noted one 1974 dissertator; they mirrored “values cherished by Middle Americans.”⁷⁰ Argued another in 1968: “Children’s librarians . . . have been censoring, selecting, recommending, and collecting a literature which sustains their vision of a child’s world. It is this vision which defines the ‘best’ literature for American children.”⁷¹

And sometimes clerisy leaders got it wrong. In 1945 Anne Carroll Moore wrote E. B. White, whose *Stuart Little* she read in proofs: don’t publish it, she said. The book “was non-affirmative, inconclusive, unfit for children, and would harm its author if published.” White resolved to push forward. Once published, the clerisy gave *Stuart* a “cool reception.” Millions of readers, however, loved him. “Like little springboks,” White said, children “can sail easily over the fence that separates reality from make-believe,” while “a fence that can throw a librarian is nothing to a child.”⁷² Anecdotal evidence left by actual readers also suggests the clerisy was wrong about the effects of reading series fiction. As adolescents, future Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O’Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg each read *Nancy Drew*; so did Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. “I read every single *Nancy Drew*,” recalled a National Organization of Women president about her 1940s adolescent reading. “She had the kind of freedom that I wasn’t allowed. She was an independent, together young woman.”⁷³ None of the women mentioned above got their *Nancy Drews* from their school libraries.

Stratemeyer fan mail also shows that readers critically engaged these stories in many ways, often accomplishing for readers what the clerisy projected was possible only with reading books it considered more appropriate. “You could have done much better,” wrote two girls after reading *Betty Gordon at Mystery Farm*. “It sounds as if you wrote it in ten minutes.” One character was “stingy and treated his wife shabbily . . . Uncle Dick never shows any affection toward Bobby, never scolds Betty, or hardly ever refuses her for anything. Please get some new ideas.” About the Dan Sturdy series a New York boy reported he “learned very much about animals, reptiles, and Indian customs,” and subsequently “pulled my geography mark in school up from 70% to 95%.” An eight-year-old California girl asked for more Sturdy books “to satisfy my insatiable love of thrilling and exciting adventure,” but “please emphatically” begged the author not to “make Mrs. Sally Sturdy and Ruth so weepy and weak.” A Baltimore grandmother noted she and her grandson shared the Sturdy series, and although “he is nine and fully capable of reading them alone,” he “enjoys them more when I read aloud to him and we hunt up the various places mentioned, discussing each chapter as we progress.”⁷⁴ For their readers, series like *Nancy Drew* and *Dan Sturdy* celebrated individual opportunity, provided hope, offered variety, pro-

voked passion, created emotional energy, and fed a need for heroes. In all this 1930s fan mail—much demonstrating series fiction’s ability to inform, inspire, bond, entertain, socialize, authorize, validate, empower, and educate—school libraries were never mentioned.

Little wonder. As the revised standards for Louisiana’s elementary school libraries in 1932 specifically stated, “books in series as the *Bobbsey Twins*, the *Elsie* books, the *Miss Minerva* books, and the *Tom Swift* books will not be accepted as meeting the library requirements.” At the same time, however, when the Louisiana State Department of Education dropped the requirement that high school students read and report on six books a year for English classes and instead make selections from any book in the library, officials noticed students enjoyed reading more. “Not only are required books no longer necessary with good libraries, progressive teachers, and librarians who can lead the children to the best,” one official noted, but reading and reporting on specifically assigned titles were also “responsible for creating an undesirable attitude toward the reading that should be the child’s greatest pleasure.”⁷⁵ Apparently, giving students a choice in their reading and not requiring them to subsequently report on specific elements in their reading made a difference. And not all school librarians followed Mary Root’s advice. Enough complaints exist about series fiction found on shelves by visiting state school library supervisors to strongly suggest that some school libraries stocked this kind of fiction. One former student traced his love of the sea to the Horatio Hornblower books he checked out of his New Jersey school library in the 1930s.⁷⁶

Like series fiction, comics of any kind were a major cultural force in the lives of young adults during this period. School librarians seemed even more opposed to comics than series fiction, however. “After today,” announced a California tenth grader at a 1938 family dinner, “we can’t read the funnies in the school library newspapers,” because the librarians were cutting them out. His parents asked, “surely you didn’t put in any time on ‘funnies’ at school in addition to the time you—er—put on them at home?” Yes, he responded, and rattled off a list of newspapers he read during library hour. He also told his parents any students who brought funnies to school “have to serve detention.”⁷⁷

Because of their format, separately published comics presented particular problems for school libraries. “They hide the well-fingered comics inside huge encyclopedias. In some strange manner, they know that what they are reading would not be approved by either the school teacher or the librarian,” wrote one school librarian in 1940, “and they are right.”⁷⁸ “A severe case of comics often leaves a serious aftermath of disinterest and disability in other reading,” grumped another in 1949. “There are no good comics . . . If we could stamp out the comic virus we would be rewarded with healthier imaginations and a greater capacity for enjoying good reading.”⁷⁹ The library profession’s hostility towards comics,

one historian has written, “hampered its ability to contribute meaningfully to any dialogue about children’s reading that took place outside the profession’s boundaries.” School librarians seldom stepped outside those boundaries, even when comics were selling 65 million copies a month—copies that adolescents exchanged with friends millions more times.⁸⁰

School librarians discouraged series fiction and dismissed comics, but on occasion they were perplexed by magazines. In 1926 Lucile Fargo had warned of the dangers youth were exposed to from newsstand magazines.⁸¹ Over time, however, Fargo shifted her position from condemning the bad to mostly profiling the good. As with books, however, defining “good” was sometimes problematic. When Laura K. Martin published the first edition of *Magazines for High School Libraries* in 1941, she took a proactive, user-centered stance. “When the librarian has established a safety zone of literature separating her domain from thought currents of an unpredictable world,” she wrote, “she has emasculated the entire venture of guiding youth into permanent paths of choice reading.” Although she recommended against pulps highly popular with youth like *Red Book*, *True Story*, and *Detective Stories*, which, she opined, satisfied the adventure and fantasy needs of “working class youth,” she cited 170 magazines in twenty-four categories that ranged from *The Nation* and *New Republic* to *U.S. News*, from *Soviet Russia Today* to *New Masses*, *Life*, and *Look*, from *Christian Century* to *American Hebrew*, and from the NAACP’s *Crisis* to the Chamber of Commerce’s *Nation’s Business*. About one hundred were starred as “recommended.”⁸²

By changing the title of her second edition (1946) to *Magazines for School Libraries*, Martin acknowledged the growth of elementary school libraries. She mentioned but did not condemn comics, increased the number of titles cited to 265, but retained about one hundred as “recommended.” Most were indexed in *Readers’ Guide* or *Abridged Readers’ Guide*, the latter by now considered essential for all high school libraries. Magazines, Martin was convinced, could bring people together. “For students in the public schools, learning to work with students of other races is often a problem. Fed by prejudice of all degrees at home, students often find their dislike of Negro or Jew or Oriental a serious barrier to their own happiness when young people of these races sit next to them in the classroom.” She said nothing about segregated school libraries, however, several of which existed in Lexington, Kentucky, where she taught at the all-white university’s library school.⁸³ In the second edition, “subtle changes in annotations and recommendations suggest a heightened awareness of the primary importance of reader appeal in selecting magazines,” writes Christine Jenkins, “as well as an increased awareness of the political aspects of topics not generally thought of as political.”⁸⁴

When it published the sixth edition of *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries* in 1952, the Wilson Company noted in the preface that the magazine list

had been prepared by the Magazine Evaluation Committee of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), “on whom rests the sole responsibility for selection.”⁸⁵ Although Wilson did not say so, the committee had recently experienced several fights between members of two ALA divisions: AASL and the Division of Library Service for Children and Young People (DLCYP). At one point, Laura Martin asked the DLCYP chair to remove two public library representatives from the committee because they believed that the magazines selected should be ones young people wanted and were not required to read. Martin found “their attitude towards school libraries unfits them for work of a cooperative nature.” This “reflected an equation of school reading with coercion,” notes Christine Jenkins, “and, by extension, of public library reading with choice that school librarians found particularly galling, and which certainly would be a roadblock to school-public [library] cooperation.”⁸⁶

In 1948, the Carnegie Corporation funded a “Public Library Inquiry” to analyze the public library’s purpose and especially the “library faith” that grounded it. The project eventually led to seven books and five reports. In these publications authors argued that instead of supplying popular reading desired by large populations, public libraries should instead address the information needs of a smaller but more influential combination of “serious” readers, community leaders, and adult education students. In *The Library’s Public* (a major inquiry volume) Bernard Berelson concluded: “From existing research, it would appear that librarians have had little effect upon the reading tastes and interests of the adult public, who in their choice of reading are most widely influenced by their own personal interests, friends, reviews, and advertisements.” Berelson showed little understanding of how readers appropriated the commonplace reading public libraries had been providing since 1854.⁸⁷

The inquiry also largely ignored young people in its coverage, including those who used school libraries. Although this age demographic accounted for more than half the books circulated in public libraries across the country, University of Chicago Graduate Library School faculty member Frances Henne noted, they merited less than 1/250th of the inquiry’s attention. Inquiry researchers had concluded public libraries could do little to influence adult reading tastes but, they argued, children were different. Surveys showed the public library “supplied 67% of all the ‘quality’ books read by children,” Berelson reported, and “only 43% of ‘nonquality’ books.” Of course, public libraries pushed for “quality” books in guides like *Children’s Catalog* and *Horn Book*, which once referred to series fiction as the “subliterary” genre.⁸⁸

The Inquiry also entirely overlooked differences in literacy practices. For example, in her analysis of a 1950–52 Wisconsin Regional Library Demonstration Project that also served rural schools, Christine Pawley finds a “variability of reading practices” even for this homogeneous rural population. Literacy practices

were “intensely local . . . deeply enmeshed in organizations and communities.” The bookmobile driver Pawley interviewed noted that people on the region’s south end read different popular authors than people on the north end. The bookmobile was also heavily patronized. “Teachers and 92% of all rural students have used the services,” a local weekly wrote in 1951. “Standard achievement tests showed rural children gained two and one-half years in grade level”—a gain, a local teacher concluded, that was “largely due to the wider range of books and materials available.”⁸⁹

Censorship in School Libraries

By the time Fargo had published the 1939 edition of her textbook, her belief that the school library should contain materials on all sides of controversial subjects had become a professional imperative that ALA cemented into its 1939 Library Bill of Rights. Not everyone agreed, however. In his 1942 *Book Selection in the Secondary School Library*, library educator Willard Heaps argued that the school library had a responsibility to censor. “Ideally and sensibly, no book would ever be considered for purchase where there were suspected elements to which objection might be made,” he wrote. “Yet books that are purchased in good faith and subsequently placed in the hands of pupils may contain two or three lines that would render an otherwise valuable book undesirable.”⁹⁰ Elsewhere he argued: “School librarians are not to be bound by the Library Bill of Rights” because they were obligated “to protect immature minds from vicious propagandistic material.”⁹¹ School library practices show he had many followers in the trenches.

How school librarians addressed these issues in their everyday practice varied. When conservative groups like the American Legion and the National Association of Manufacturers began attacking Harold Rugg’s social studies textbook series “Man and His Society” in the 1930s for being un-American, the attacks received national attention. The library press, however, was nearly silent. The *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries* had cited seven Rugg titles in its 1932 edition, four of them receiving one star, which signified “recommended for first purchase.” When the 1937 edition was published, six received one star. After the brouhaha, however, as schools across the country dumped the series, the 1942 *Catalog* edition cited no Rugg titles.⁹²

In the narratives of their replacements, textbook historian Joseph Moreau notes, students saw “a present-day America united across class lines, and sometimes one that appeared entirely middle-class in make-up.” Several southern state legislatures not only attempted to force textbook publishers to certify that none of their authors was “a known advocate of communism or Marxist Socialism,” education departments in these states also negotiated “an unwritten system of rules” addressing the content of books that school systems were allowed to purchase. For example, the war over slavery that tore the nation asunder

eighty years earlier was to be called the “War Between the States,” not the “Civil War.” And on issues of race, adult blacks could appear with whites in textbook illustrations only when blacks were “in subordinate positions.” Black children could not be in the same illustration with white children, and although textbooks could discuss equality and democracy, there could be no “direct attacks on de jure segregation.”⁹³

These kinds of pressures inevitably affected school library practices. When the American Association of Adult Education’s Marion Humble toured the South during the Great Depression to study rural library services, she noted that in Louisiana “books that describe the emancipated Negro are sometimes excluded from the school-community libraries for Negroes.” In Mississippi, one librarian erroneously stated, “the circulation of books that portray social equality between Negroes and whites is illegal.”⁹⁴ Geography textbooks, notes Dana Goldstein, “portrayed European colonialism as a benevolent force bringing culture to ‘backward’ countries like Nicaragua and Guatemala, whose populations one textbook called ‘quarrelsome and therefore lacking in progress.’”⁹⁵

In 1948, New York City’s Board of Superintendents banned *The Nation* from all public school libraries for articles critical of the Roman Catholic Church.⁹⁶ Newark followed suit. Along with *The New Republic*, the magazine had not only been listed among the one hundred starred titles in Martin’s *Magazines for School Libraries*, it had also been recommended in the latest edition of the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*. The ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee chair promptly protested the ban as “an act that is a threat to freedom of expression and contrary to the Library Bill of Rights and the United States Bill of Rights.”⁹⁷ The superintendent ignored the protest. His reaction demonstrated the limits of the Library Bill of Rights’ ability to influence collections in the nation’s school libraries, even for “recommended” materials. Apparently, no New York City school librarian openly challenged the order, and none were criticized by the profession or ALA for complying with it.

In 1948, when a local citizen challenged the inclusion of *The New Republic* in public high school libraries in Los Angeles, the City School Libraries Supervisor managed to get school officials to admit the magazine contained nothing “of a communistic or subversive nature . . . nor was it antagonistic to religion.” Nonetheless, she reported, the magazine was sequestered and students were only allowed to read it “under adult supervision.”⁹⁸ This was an obvious compromise with school officials to keep the magazine in school libraries, at the same time satisfying the concerned citizen that its circulation was under careful control. Again, there were no protests from ALA, and no evidence exists to show that any Los Angeles school librarian refused to comply with the new practice.

In the late 1940s, a *Booklist* committee consisting of an equal number of school and public youth services librarians experienced a minor brouhaha about

specific books for “mature young people.” On the committee were Winifred Jackson of the Brooklyn Public Library and Margaret Edwards of Baltimore’s Enoch Pratt Free Library representing public libraries, and Mabel Turner of the University of Seattle and Louise Meredith of Tennessee’s State Board of Education representing school libraries. At the center of the dispute was whether *Booklist* should include young adult titles that dealt with or had scenes containing sexual situations. Jackson and Edwards were for it, while Turner and Meredith hesitated. “In these days when our very existence is threatened by narrow mental outlooks,” Edwards later wrote, “it seems to me it is high time to cease withholding valuable novels from young people because of a frank sex passage or two that after all have little new to tell them. The emphasis . . . should be on the development of intelligent world citizens rather than on protection.”⁹⁹

The result was a compromise: an “Adult Books for Young People” section *Booklist* introduced to its readers in 1948. “The following titles may be used with mature young people in some libraries,” it read, “but these are not recommended for purchase without careful consideration.”¹⁰⁰ For Jackson, listed titles carried “the sanction of ALA.”¹⁰¹ Shortly thereafter *Horn Book* began publishing “Outlook Tower,” a column edited by Margaret Scoggin of the New York Public Library, which took a similar position on adult novels for young readers. These initiatives came from leaders in the public library community, and public librarians themselves echoed these criticisms. Because they lacked adult novels, the ALA Young People’s Reading Round Table chair declared in 1949, too many high school library collections were “insipid and superficial.”¹⁰² Such openly expressed criticism widened the breach between public and school librarians.

Nonetheless, on some issues the two groups worked in concert. Mabel Williams, who managed NYPL’s young people’s services from 1916 to 1951, had been central to compiling initial editions of the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*. In subsequent editions Jean Roos, Cleveland Public Library’s Head of Young People’s Service from 1925 to 1959, had a major role. Neither of them were school librarians, although both were employed by public library systems that provided services to public schools. Because the Catholic Library Association had protested that several citations in *SCHSL*’s third edition did not reflect Catholic “faith or morals,” the Wilson Company accommodated their protests in the fourth (published in 1942) by appending to objectionable titles “not recommended by the C.H.S.C.” This upset youth services librarians in ALA’s Division of Library Services for Children and Young People (DLSCYP), who met in September 1943 to discuss the issue. “Criticism was centered on the undesirable feature of designating books disapproved by one minority group,” read the meeting’s minutes. The statement overlooked or ignored what the process of selection and inclusion did to other minority groups like African and Hispanic Americans, as well as political parties like the Socialists and Communists.

When Wilson said the company did not consider the “criticism valid,” the president of the American Association of School Librarians appointed a committee to study the *Catalog*, and after working with the DLSCYP’s Committee on Evaluation of Book Selection Aids, the two bodies convinced Wilson not to cite CHSC annotations in subsequent *Catalog* supplements and editions. Instead, reviewers of children’s and young adult literature who wrote for the library press crafted their own coded language to forewarn public youth and school librarians about potentially controversial titles. Books conveying a “mature theme” usually contained sex or profanity, while others having left-leaning political content, or poor role models as chief protagonists, were often “limited in their use,” or even “significant for limited use.”¹⁰³ Such code words effectively facilitated prior censorship.

Public School Libraries and Race

Sometimes, issues of race intersected with overt censorship. At a 1941 press conference, Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge waved a copy of Marion Cuthbert’s *We Sing America* (1936), sent to him by a county school superintendent, in front of reporters. “We are going to get rid of that book and all books of that kind,” he said. “I am going to turn them over to the legislature and ask them to pass a resolution to burn them.” Talmadge “chuckled frequently,” an *Atlanta Constitution* reporter noted, as he read passages from the book “describing Negro and white children attending school together.” At his side was the state school superintendent, who explained *We Sing America* was not on Georgia’s approved school library list. Instead, he explained, it was “one of a series provided by the Rosenwald Fund for distribution in libraries of Negro schools.”¹⁰⁴

Because they were contrary to “the traditions of Georgia,” Talmadge also ordered other books off library shelves in the state’s public schools. “Sure, we took a lot of books out of school libraries,” Talmadge explained in a subsequent interview. “I don’t think Negroes should read about co-education. It puts ideas in their heads.” But, he told reporters, he did believe in education and advocated for “every able-bodied man in Georgia” to obtain a diploma, including black men. “Sure we’d give the Negroes diplomas,” then added with appalling condescension, “We’ll dress it up with ribbons and make him proud. Any kind will do.”¹⁰⁵ At its December meeting, the Metropolitan Library Council of New York condemned Talmadge for setting a “dangerous precedent” by purging “books dealing with the betterment of race relations.”¹⁰⁶ The American Library Association (which had passed a Library Bill of Rights two years earlier), the Southeastern Library Association, and the segregated Georgia Library Association said nothing.

During the Great Depression many southern black schools had no libraries, and the few that existed were routinely underfunded compared to white school libraries—which were also underfunded when compared to national standards.

Historian Isabel Wilkerson describes how one black southern high school acquired its textbooks: “Every few years” in the early 1930s, a teacher from Louisiana’s Monroe Colored High School “loaded a band of students into the flat bed of a pickup truck and rattled across . . . railway tracks” to the back of Monroe’s white high school. There, the students “jumped out and began stacking the truck bed with the books the white school was throwing away . . . The boys loaded the truck with old geography and English texts, some without covers and pages torn out and love notes scrawled in the margins, and headed back to their side of town.”¹⁰⁷

Black experiences elsewhere were not dissimilar. Jurl Portee Watkins, born in 1932, remembered her grade school experience in a rickety building in rural Georgia reading with “books handed down after whites used them.” North Carolina school librarian Georgia Glasper Sutton remembered “when the white children had the new books and the old books were sent to the black schools. I remember that vividly. I resented it. I highly resented it.”¹⁰⁸ When Hallie Beachem Brooks examined southern schools for the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes in the 1930s (the Southern Association did not begin accrediting black schools until 1931), she found libraries “had become dumping grounds for old junk that somebody didn’t want any more . . . books that children couldn’t read.” She advised schools housing these useless collections to have “a little book burning in the back yard somewhere.”¹⁰⁹

But even the discards they were able to obtain carried predominantly white narratives that did not match the life experiences of the vast majority of African Americans. In 1929 the board of supervisors in Mississippi’s Coahoma County began sending “automobile libraries” to rural black high schools that contained titles from the typical canon recommended in *Booklist* and Wilson catalogs, plus local white newspapers and national magazines. None included black publications like the *Chicago Defender* or *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*.¹¹⁰ And newly published literature often replicated the racist stereotypes inherited from previous generations. Shirley Motley Portwood remembered the school library in her segregated southern Illinois school in the early 1950s, with its several hundred books and handful of magazines like *Life*, *Look*, and *National Geographic*. She found the information on Africans (including in *National Geographic*) highly objectionable. She and her classmates “were embarrassed by the scanty attire and unfamiliar customs of these people to whom we were related in the yesteryear.” Her teachers did little to mitigate their confusion. “One of my teachers once said that slavery had been a ‘blessing in disguise’ for Negroes because it had brought us to America, where we had become civilized.”¹¹¹

In her second edition (1948) of *We Build Together*, a bibliography of works for elementary and high school students that presented black people in a positive light, Charlemae Hill Rollins noted that “three words in particular—‘darkey,’

'nigger,' and 'pickaninny'—humiliate and infuriate every Negro who reads or hears them." One school librarian, she reported, "either blotted, erased, or cut" these words "from all the books in her collection." In Rollins's account a black child, picking a new title off the shelf, said, "another book, I suppose, to make fun of us." Rollins also complained about books with illustrations that depicted black children as "ragged, barefooted, with lips that are thick and red," including the 1946 Caldecott Medal winner, *Rooster Crows*, by Maud Petersham.¹¹² "It is possible that if Negro children had a literature of their own there would be a marked change in the amount of reading they would do," observed Ruth Theobald, who taught courses in children's library services at Morehouse and Spelman Colleges in 1930. "The most representative and most successful type of illustration has not yet been found for use in books about Negro children for Negro children," she concluded.¹¹³

In her 1945 University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, Virginia Lacy Jones analyzed twenty black high school libraries in seven southern states. Her research was made difficult by the sloppy ways states gathered statistics on black schools. "In four states statistical data about [black] school libraries were not available, and in one state no distinction was made in statistical records between Negro and white school libraries." Southern blacks "tend to receive social benefits long after they have been accorded the white group," she observed, and when the white establishment allocated library funds for secondary education, black high schools generally received "the crumbs which have fallen from the table of the whites."¹¹⁴

Statistics available for some of the southern states Jones did not study validate her conclusion. Per capita funding for South Carolina's public elementary school libraries in 1945 was \$82 for whites, \$36 for blacks, for public high school libraries \$140 for whites, \$52 for blacks.¹¹⁵ "After surveying the literature of Negro education in North Carolina [where AASL leader Mary Peacock Douglas was state school library supervisor from 1930 to 1949] and corresponding with officials in Raleigh," one student reported in her 1954 master's thesis, "it was revealed that no information is available on Negro school libraries in the state."¹¹⁶

Complicating the situation for black high school libraries, Jones reported, many states provided state aid for education on a matching funds basis. "Therefore, the Negro schools, which are less able to match funds, are not assured their due share of the state-aid money."¹¹⁷ She found most collections had "too many old, out-of-date encyclopedias and sets of books," and lacked standard reference works. And because black high school libraries that took state money routinely had to select from the *SCHSL* and subscribe to periodicals indexed in *Abridged Readers' Guide* they automatically acquired printed materials that carried a white bias.

To counter this bias some black school librarians managed to find funds to subscribe to the NAACP's *Crisis* and one or more black weeklies like the Baltimore

Afro-American, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* and Norfolk (VA) *Journal and Guide*. They also checked Charlemae Rollins's *We Build Together* (1941) and a list of books by African Americans put together by the Chicago Public Library's George C. Hall Branch librarians.¹¹⁸ After building a list of 110 titles cited in these sources that she checked against the collections of the twenty high school libraries she studied, Jones discovered "three-fourths of the schools lacked pertinent books, magazines and pamphlets by and about Negroes."¹¹⁹

Like librarianship in general, the American Association of School Librarians largely ignored the issue of segregation in the Jim Crow South. Where school systems were segregated, the historical record yields no evidence that any white school librarian publicly protested. The pages of *School Library Journal's* predecessor *Junior Libraries* (1954–1961) reveal no discussion of segregated libraries and their impact on school children. Many school library leaders, like Mary Peacock Douglas, Lucile Nix, Laura K. Martin, and Cora Paul Bomar came from the South, where they had observed first-hand the effects of Jim Crow laws and practices. Were these librarians racist? Assuredly some were. At the same time, however, they experienced workplace environments that forced them to choose between challenging Jim Crow or being silent about the humiliations it exacted on black people in order to advance the kind of school librarianship they championed—even if it was segregated. Part of the problem may also have been the idealized tone of school librarianship's discourse. "In general," Christine Jenkins notes, school librarians "did not confront directly or antagonize unnecessarily, but instead sought a path around possible obstacles."¹²⁰

But challenges to Jim Crow practices in library services that were clearly separate and not equal could not be stifled entirely. In 1939 Augusta Baker, recently hired children's librarian at the New York Public Library's 135th Street branch in Harlem, began pulling titles off her shelves that were "racially insulting to Blacks" and depicted them as "servile buffoons." She included *Little Black Sambo* in that group. Ultimately, Baker judged as "acceptable" only forty-one titles in her collection. At the Chicago Public Library's George Cleveland Hall Branch, Charlemae Hill Rollins found just thirty books in her collection without racial stereotypes that she could "wholeheartedly" recommend to black children. That Baker and Rollins could find only a few acceptable titles speaks volumes not only to racism's ability to root itself in the cultural products public school libraries had been handing over circulation desks to millions of children for half a century, but also to the greatly limited universe of possibilities from which they had to make those selections.¹²¹

In her 1941 first edition of *We Build Together* (which cited the book *We Sing America* that Georgia's governor had found so objectionable) Rollins specifically named and criticized books containing racial stereotyping. Her criticisms kicked off a rare public debate in school librarianship. Over the decades many mem-

bers of the clerisy, including Caroline Hewins and Anne Carroll Moore (by this time often referred to within the profession as the “grande dames”),¹²² had all endorsed *Little Black Sambo*, which had also been cited in the ALA *Catalog* from 1912 through 1936, when it ceased publication. *Children’s Catalog* listed it from its first edition (1909) through its eleventh (1966), and from 1930 through 1960 marked it as “especially recommended.” In 1940 Nora Beust listed it in her *500 Books for Children*, published by the US Office of Education. Frances Clark Sayers (Moore’s successor at NYPL and author of her biography), highly recommended *Sambo* in a 1942 *Horn Book* article identifying the best picture books for young children. In her several editions of *Children’s Books Too Good to Miss* between 1948 and 1953, Mary Hill Arbuthnot listed *Sambo* as one of the “turning points in children’s literature.”¹²³

By 1942 so many members of the clerisy had recommended *Sambo* that reaction to Rollins’s criticism was inevitable, if out of the ordinary for a professional discourse that generally avoided controversy and public disagreement. *Sambo* was “inspired writing,” wrote one children’s librarian in a letter to *Top of the News*.¹²⁴ The head of the Atlanta Public Library’s children’s services division condemned “the attempts of various organized minority groups to censor books for children,” and her letter carried endorsements from all of the white members of her department, branch libraries, and library system staff. It was not, however, signed by the black librarians in charge of the library’s three segregated black branches.¹²⁵ At the time Atlanta had forty-one white and thirteen black elementary schools; twenty-nine of the white and four of the black schools had public library services. “The head of the boys and girls department is responsible for all book selection for those schools using funds allocated by the public library,” noted one library employee, but whether the four black schools with public library services had copies of *Sambo* endorsed by library officials who selected titles for them is unknown.¹²⁶

Did *Sambo* do damage? In the 1948 edition of her bibliography Rollins reported that “in some cities . . . Negro children mutilate and destroy this book, showing in their own way their rejection and disapproval.”¹²⁷ One African American—the only one in his school—later remembered “the very painful experience of hearing it read” at storytime in a Connecticut grade school in 1947. “I remember how some of my classmates would refer to me as Black Sambo after hearing the story (they were too sophisticated to say nigger) and how for the first time I didn’t want to go to school ever!” he recalled. “To this day I hate that teacher and the principal who told my mother it was harmless . . . No, the book can only be used as an example of how to destroy a child.” A black man in Nebraska remembered sitting through *Sambo* at grade school storytime. “Since I was the only black in the room I became Little Black Sambo . . . If my parents had taught me bad names to call the little cracker kids—and I use that term on

purpose to try to get a message across to you—you don't like it," he told a federal commission on race issues in the late 1960s.¹²⁸ These were voices the white women of the children's literature clerisy generally did not hear—and certainly did not quote—in their professional literature. *Sambo* remained on many lists of recommended books for years.

Looking past *Sambo*'s impact on black children was only part of the profession's general propensity not to engage with conversations about race in school librarianship. The historical record, however, documents many cases of "separate but not equal" that school library leaders chose to ignore. One involves Carrie Robinson, born in Mississippi in 1906, graduated from the historically black Tougaloo College in 1934, and who, after attending library school at Hampton Institute, served black schools in South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana as librarian. In 1946 Robinson interviewed to become Alabama's School Libraries Consultant in the Division of Negro Education, "a segregated piece of machinery embodied within the State Department of Education," she later recalled. At her interview for the position the department's white director asked, "Mrs. Robinson, do you know how to talk to white folks?" "Why of course I do," she responded. The question and answer reveals much about the Jim Crow world that whites and blacks had to negotiate on a daily basis. "Being a black librarian . . . has been challenging," she said at the end of her career. Although Robinson did not get the job, she was hired part-time by Alabama State College in Montgomery as School Libraries Consultant and Assistant Professor of Library Education with a charge to build a library training program. In 1947 she helped organize a black librarians' section of the black Alabama State Teachers Association, which later became the Alabama Association of School Librarians. At the time blacks could not become members of the Alabama Library Association.

That same year Alabama's white school librarians organized an association with the same name (it is not clear whether from racist spite or ignorance of the black organization); only after the black association protested did their white colleagues "reluctantly" rename their organization the Alabama School Library Association. The two existed separately until the late 1960s, when they merged. That the black Alabama Association of School Librarians had also protested to ALA (which Robinson joined in 1946) shows ALA knew about the conflict. Neither ALA nor its school library section responded, however.¹²⁹

Some school library services improved for some black southerners during the Depression, primarily because of outside intervention. By 1932 the Rosenwald Foundation had given aid to 944 black elementary and 245 black high school libraries in 567 southern counties. "The value of even a small collection of books to a rural [black] school is almost beyond exaggeration," the foundation's president wrote in 1935. "In many cases it represents the only supplemental reading in the school or the community. In certain cases, where textbooks are not

furnished, the books of these little libraries are the only volumes that are available for use either in or out of school.” He estimated that Rosenwald-funded demonstration schools increased black readership in the South by 200 percent.¹³⁰ In Tennessee, Rosenwald matching funds worked so well for black schools that their collections were better than underfunded white school libraries.¹³¹

Between 1928 and 1938, Rosenwald funds underwrote 4,709 school libraries containing 273,086 books (which included thirteen books per library “by and about Negroes”) for Georgia’s black rural schools. In 1941 the director of Georgia’s Division of Negro Education wrote the foundation that the school libraries the foundation had funded had reached every black student in Georgia. But this growth was short-lived once Rosenwald funds ceased. Between 1940 and 1950 white school libraries increased by 716,200 volumes, black school libraries by 114,666. None, however, met the ALA standard of five books per pupil. In white schools the average was 3.4, in black schools only 0.9.¹³²

Funded by the General Education Board and sponsored by the ALA, NEA, USOE, the Rosenwald Fund, and state library supervisors and state agents of “Negro Education,” 300 teacher-librarians attended training programs at Fisk and Atlanta Universities, Prairie View College, and Hampton Institute that began in 1936 and continued for four successive summers. The programs not only improved library services in black schools across the South, reported the ALA’s Board of Education for Librarianship, they also “contributed markedly to the improvement in teaching in many schools.” However, the board made no mention of how poorly black school libraries fared against white school libraries.¹³³

In 1937 the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) provided a small collection of books to a black school in Huntsville, Alabama, and assisted other black schools in Madison and Jackson Counties through the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation’s Negro Rural School Fund.¹³⁴ In 1939 the South Carolina WPA Statewide Library Projects office reported twenty-nine African American units, most of which were run by “Negro Library Aides” out of black schools.¹³⁵ And in 1942 the Carnegie Corporation funded a Field Service Program through Atlanta University’s School of Library Service (successor to Hampton, which closed in 1939) to improve African American school libraries across the South, appointing Hallie Beachem Brooks to head the program. Faculty member Virginia Lacy Jones often accompanied her on visits, and acknowledged that the program “made some impact towards improvement.” Travelling and finding housing, however, was “sometimes hazardous,” and the two women “often endured physical discomfort and great inconvenience.”¹³⁶ One wonders if Jones and her colleagues used *The Green Book* to find accommodations and guide their travels.

In 1949 the black Georgia Teachers and Education Association passed a resolution petitioning the state board of education for improvements in the state’s

black schools. "Schools maintained for Negroes are greatly inferior in construction, equipment, facilities, libraries, transportation services, curriculum, length of day, and accreditation status," it read, and included a demand that the state allocate funds for free textbooks and library books on a racially equitable basis.¹³⁷ At the time, Lucile Nix was employed by the Georgia State Department of Education, which had responsibility for public and school library work. Nix spearheaded lobbying efforts to increase funding for rural public libraries in 1945, which by 1951 included state aid for school libraries. Very popular in the South, "outsoken, deceptively hard-boiled, a cigarette usually in her hand, with a wit that, when inspired, could be mordant," her biographer James V. Carmichael notes, she seemed destined for ALA higher office—except for her attitudes toward racial integration, her colleague Cora Paul Bomar believed. Nix was "unable to abandon the conservative credo of segregated interracial cooperation," Carmichael writes. "Like many white southerners of her generation, she could not understand the cultural biases inherent in a system dominated by one race, and perhaps accepted as inevitable the fact that separate facilities would necessarily be unequal."¹³⁸

Contrast Nix, however, with Inez Mae Graham, who as the Maryland State Department of Education's first school library supervisor after World War II went out of her way to visit black school libraries and their black school librarians. She was once asked how was she able to get permission to visit these segregated schools; "by not asking," she responded.¹³⁹ Other school library leaders in the South were less enlightened. School librarians serving the "other" part of town that was "culturally retarded," wrote South Carolina native and University of Kentucky library school faculty member Azile Wofford in *Book Selection for School Libraries* (1962), needed to tailor-make their collections to the abilities of their students.¹⁴⁰

As midcentury approached, school librarians had successfully weathered the Great Depression and World War II. Collections they acquired with the help of standard bibliographic guides, as well as the traditional services they provided, generally reflected the life experiences of the dominant culture running their schools. And like the pioneering generation they followed in the century's first quarter, they found their ability to influence librarianship was limited by a set of power relationships built into formal education. Their varied experiences were often determined by their relationships with teachers, principals, and superintendents, the rules and regulations of state departments of education, guidelines and standards adopted by regional accrediting agencies but unevenly and often lightly enforced, and federal funds from New Deal programs. And at midcentury, school librarianship still lacked a strong national voice. That was about to change.

Organizing the American Association of School Librarians, 1930–1952

Pressure to improve school libraries between World Wars I and II came largely from regional accrediting agencies and state departments of education, not the National Education Association. If there was a national voice advocating for school libraries, it was the American Library Association. Because NEA seemed relatively unconcerned with school libraries, several ALA officials saw an opportunity for school library leaders to fill the vacuum and perhaps bolster ALA's role in their development. Executive Secretary Carl Milam feared that "if Headquarters did not assume responsibility for school library work, school librarians, already under considerable pressure from superintendents and principals to join NEA, would feel that NEA rather than ALA was the association to turn to for help." As early as 1928 Milam had drafted a proposal to fund a school library specialist at Headquarters. His assistant drafted another. Milam forwarded both for comment to relevant ALA committees, including ALA's Department of Children's Work. Responses revealed significant territorial sensibilities; children's librarians especially showed irritation that Headquarters had focused its proposal on school librarians, a move that to them seemed to undervalue their work with schools.¹

Tensions Between Children's and School Librarians

But others within ALA pressed for greater cooperation between children's and school librarians. "Perhaps the time has come to recognize that both groups are working with the same children and with practically the same books," an ALA Education Committee chair wrote in 1931. "It may well be that combining the forces of the school library and the public library work with children under one major department would bring united strength and bring mutual benefit to all." Although its purpose was to advocate for children's, young adult, and school librarians, ALA's existing Advisory Board on Library Service to Children and Young People reflected the public library community's belief that regardless of the host institution all library work with children was largely the same. In 1932 the ALA Executive Board appointed a committee to study the matter.²

Within ALA, other groups concerned with school libraries organized in various ways. City and state school library supervisors often met for breakfast during ALA conferences in the 1930s. In 1935 city school librarians established a School Libraries Section Round Table for Work with Teachers and School Administrators (it existed indifferently until 1945) and, in 1939, state supervisors organized their own small group, which generally met informally at ALA conferences. ALA continued to cooperate with NEA (mostly through its Joint Committee), the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Progressive Education Association (PEA) on a variety of activities, including sending representatives to their conferences.

In 1935 ALA created a new Headquarters office titled the School and Children's Library Division, which answered to Julia Wright Merrill, head of ALA's Department of Information and Advisory Services. Under the arrangement ALA created a new position: a School Library Specialist whose time would be divided between school library services and reviewing children's books for *Booklist*. The School Library Specialist would work with Merrill's subordinate, Children's Library Specialist Jessie Gay Van Cleve, with similar responsibilities for children's services in public libraries, in addition to reviews. "School librarians will probably resent this since Merrill's work at Headquarters" seemed to be primarily for public libraries, remarked one state school library supervisor. Placing "a young school librarian" with the veteran Van Cleve "makes school libraries and school librarians subordinate to the children's librarian and the point of view of library work with children," complained another.³

The "young school librarian" chosen for the new position was Mildred L. Batchelder, hired away from an Evanston, Illinois, school where since 1928 she had been Elementary and Intermediate School Librarian. "A small, dignified woman with her head up, chin in, and back straight, steady dark eyes, glasses, high forehead, and generous mouth," as Batchelder's biographer describes her,

“she would shake hands firmly, looking one straight in the eye. But it was her voice—her cultivated, resonant, and sometimes imperious voice—that filled the space, that made one recognize ‘a presence.’” Batchelder was no shrinking violet. “Mildred was not the least bit subtle,” her biographer notes. “She was determined, creative, and aggressive—and she did not tolerate fools gladly.” One public librarian Batchelder worked with found her “so authoritative and full of suggestions . . . some of the staff dubbed her ‘Mother-God’ or ‘mother-superior!’”⁴ That Milam had advocated for Batchelder’s new position at a time ALA was hiring no new staff—sometimes, indeed, cutting salaries—demonstrated his commitment to school libraries.

Shortly after Batchelder started, she and Van Cleve took two month-long field trips—one to Ohio, the other Louisiana—and hosted a series of meetings that brought school and public librarians together. These meetings had an immediate effect on the volume of Headquarters mail, which showed a spike in correspondence from school and children’s librarians and forecast workload problems for the new division. “Many school and children’s librarians are passing on their most difficult questions, with a feeling, evidently of relief, that there is now someone at Headquarters to answer them,” Merrill wrote Milam in late April.⁵ But workload issues spiraled quickly. Several months later she wrote: “The demands have been so pressing even in the first few months,” Merrill told Milam, “that I very much question whether the Booklist has had half the time of Miss Van Cleve and Miss Batchelder. I think that the demands will increase rather than decrease.”⁶

In April 1937, Van Cleve took ill for six months. Then, shortly after she returned, she suffered a stroke that ended her career. Ultimately, the ALA Executive Board agreed to eliminate responsibilities for *Booklist* from both positions, which were then merged into one. In January 1938, Batchelder became “Chief of the School and Children’s Library Division,” responsible, among other things, for planning and monitoring conference meetings and for compiling the annual reports of the Board of Library Service to Children and Young People and its three sections, the School Libraries Section, the Section on Work with Children, and the Young People’s Reading Round Table.⁷

Batchelder’s appointment did little to reduce the tension between children’s and school librarians within ALA. Early twentieth century changes in ALA’s organization came through four Activities Committees appointed to study its structure and make recommendations for improvement (the First Activities Committee met 1928–30, followed by similar bodies in 1933–34, 1937–39, and 1946–48). While the Third Activities Committee deliberated, School Libraries Section Chair Mary Peacock Douglas warned that if ALA did not find ways to welcome “teacher-librarians” rather than treating them as “step-children,” an organization of teacher-librarians might form within the NEA. Douglas had

been hired in 1930 as the North Carolina State Department of Education's first "School Library Advisor." She was by all accounts a forceful personality and talented public speaker; not surprisingly, her biographer notes, like "many [school library] leaders before her, librarianship was only incidentally a job and a salary check. It was a mission, and the overtones of evangelical Protestantism are never far from the surface of their conduct and their writings."⁸

The Third Activities Committee largely ignored Douglas's warning, however, and instead recommended that all ALA organizations serving school-age youth merge into a single division. Plans to consolidate proceeded. Irritated with the Third Activities Committee's response, Douglas mailed postcards to 800 School Libraries Section members in the summer of 1940; 414 responded, and of that number 276 supported a separate division; 138 called for a combined division, but those 138 also voted 74–64 to insist that the word "school" be included in the joint division's title.⁹ That same year Batchelder attended a two-day preconference institute for school librarians in Cincinnati. There she had discussions with Ruth Ersted, Minnesota School Library Supervisor, and Frances Henne, who had just succeeded Hanna Logasa as the University of Chicago High School Librarian and was beginning her doctoral work in library science at the University.¹⁰

That Douglas's warning and the results of her survey had little impact became obvious in 1941, when ALA established its new Division of Library Service to Children and Young People that included a School Libraries Section and a Public Library Section, the latter to also include the Young People's Reading Round Table and the Section for Library Work with Young Children. Batchelder became division head. The merger effectively combined two types of library activity groups with one type of library group, and smacked of organizational convenience more than logic. To many leading members of the school library community active in ALA, this made little sense; they saw themselves as "type-of-library," not "type of library-activity," which they thought held less prestige in ALA. They also disliked that public librarians dominated the new division. What they wanted was separate representation in ALA.

Despite territorial feelings, school librarians nonetheless had much in common with their DLSCYP sisters. The vast majority were white, middle class, similarly educated career women (many of them single) dedicated to getting "the right book for the right child at the right time." They tended to love ALA annual and midwinter meetings, where they could share information and discuss issues more freely than at their home institutions. These meetings also provided opportunities for social activities that did not require male partners, and offered these eager librarians tempting opportunities for leadership. In addition, through their meetings, conversations, and publications, they honed a common tone in their discourse. This tone was also reflected in their literature. In her 1968 dissertation on the ideology of children's librarians between 1900 and 1965 Ju-

lia Lord observed a professional literature largely “untroubled by scholarly apparatus.” It was “remarkably homogeneous in style and opinion,” and offered its authors a “relative privacy of their medium of expression” that was “largely uncriticized by scholars outside the field of library science.”¹¹

Despite these common characteristics, however, territorial instincts persisted. It was immediately obvious that the merger had strained relationships between the School Libraries Section and other DLSCYP groups. Although she recognized the possibilities “for strengthening and integrating the contributions of the three groups,” one DLSCYP member worried about such a “mechanical union of sections.”¹² In October 1941, the DLSCYP president told a colleague about a Toledo librarians’ luncheon she attended at which “a group of the school people . . . blew into me because of the name of the Division and said that unless the word school was included they would work to get separated again. They thought it was dreadful that the school people were not given more than they were and that their work was not recognized.”¹³ Some School Libraries Section members also tried to leave open the option of eventually creating their own ALA division. “The School Libraries Section may, by vote at any regular business meeting,” read a 1941 proposed amendment to the DLSCYP constitution, “organize as a division or unite [with other ALA sections and groups] to form a division . . . and may adopt a divisional constitution in accordance with its needs and with requirements” of any ALA organization. The DLSCYP parliamentarian ruled the amendment invalid.¹⁴

At the time Batchelder became DLSCYP Executive Secretary, her national profile as spokesperson for school and children’s library interests had grown significantly, and within ALA she was the go-to person for school, children’s, and young people’s library services. Lacking much guidance from the membership, she was largely able to determine her own priorities. Because she thought the children’s librarians had become a “self-conscious group . . . so well organized, so drawn together in its bigger imagination and activities” that it largely “worked energetically and independently of the Division,” and because she believed the Young People’s Reading Round Table “was still so new at that time that it was still almost privately in the hands of the New York area,” she decided to focus most of her office’s attention on school libraries. Although it “was much less mature and less experienced,” the School Libraries Section held out more promise, she thought. Besides, “that was what I was best at then and . . . there was so much to be done in the field.” At the time, she later recalled, a school librarian “had to be a considerable self-starter if she was to get to ALA conferences, while in the children’s field there were public library directors who were interested in urging and encouraging the activity of children’s librarians in ALA.”¹⁵

Batchelder also wanted school librarians to get involved with national organizations of formal education like the American Association of School

Administrators, the NEA's Department of Audio-Visual Instruction (successor to the Division of Visual Instruction, founded in 1947), and the Association for Childhood Education. Although she did not have much success, she persisted. "I bled, fought, and died to get school librarians involved in the mainstream of the national educational community," she later recalled. Many school librarians who considered themselves overworked and underpaid found her persistence irritating.¹⁶

Because of the war, DLSCYP did not meet between 1942 and 1946. "That one fact might well have been reason enough for a backward, slow-growing organization," wrote Mary Peacock Douglas in 1945.¹⁷ In 1944, however, the School Libraries Section revised its bylaws and changed its name to the American Association of School Librarians, in part to raise its profile with other education organizations (this was accomplished through the mail, since the group was not meeting in person). The new AASL also discussed several ideas for a journal after its reorganization, but none were financially feasible. Instead, the association agreed to share expenses with other DLSCYP sections for an expanded *Top of the News*, which with Volume 3 in 1946 shifted from an eight-page newsletter to a sixteen-page magazine containing articles and photographs. A year later it expanded to twenty-four pages.

However, the AASL remained a DLSCYP section. In 1944 it had 1,042 members, while the Children's Library Association (CLA; which had changed its name from the Section for Library Work with Children in 1941) and Young People's Reading Round Table—the two groups comprising the Public Library Section—had a combined membership of 1,239. But when a concerted membership drive increased AASL membership to 2,236 in 1949, thus passing the Public Library Section and constituting 51 percent of the DLSCYP's total membership, many in AASL began to wonder if being associated with its Public Library Section was a problem more than a solution.

In 1945 AASL published *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow: Functions and Standards*, the first effort to revise the generation-old Certain Standards.¹⁸ The standards were carefully monitored through the ALA bureaucracy by Mary Peacock Douglas, immediate past chair of the School Libraries Section and chair of the DLSCYP Committee on Postwar Planning for School Libraries. Some later teased that the standards had been written by an exclusive group that Douglas had "closeted in a Chicago hotel room on a snowy weekend."¹⁹ To get them passed, a colleague later recalled, Douglas stood before a "fiery" ALA Council session in October 1944 to request approval of new standards for school library programs. "Objections ranged from frivolous to ignorant," her colleague chuckled; Douglas "incisively disposed of each."²⁰

Like the Certain Standards, *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow* remained primarily quantitative in content, and, like its predecessor in an era of limited

budgets, had only a marginal effect on school library development. "Our major difficulty," Frances Henne noted several years later, "seems to center around translating objectives and standards into programs of action and accomplished facts."²¹ Also, like its predecessor, the new standards embraced responsibility for managing new instructional technologies, many of which were sparked by a postwar audiovisual movement that recent training methods for WWII servicemen and women had initiated. Like many of her colleagues, Douglas had taken note of the "GI way of teaching" through educational films that had "opened the eyes of millions of Americans to the tremendous potentialities" of these media.²²

As one of a series of library standards the ALA Postwar Planning Committee published, *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow* specifically called upon local school boards to take responsibility for school library services. Among its new prescriptions, it maintained that the school library should be "an active service agency integrated with the learning program of the school, not . . . an adjunct to it." It should be a reading and an information center, a guidance agency, and a department of instruction. But more than that, Douglas's new standards functioned as a declaration of independence, fitting the mood of many members who bristled at what they perceived as too much control over AASL by ALA staff members. In addition, through regional accrediting agencies the very existence of the standards was one way to pressure schools to improve library services, thus reducing a perceived need for public libraries to fill a vacuum.

Douglas had not only involved school librarians in constructing what she sometimes openly referred to as "the Douglas standards," she had also solicited commentary from the Joint Committee of the NEA and ALA. And she capitalized on the push for divisional independence to stress the uniqueness of the school library profession. On the one hand, she emphasized a partnership with teachers, and on the other she listed a series of principles and purposes designed to put strategic distance between school librarianship's commitment to educational programs and the reading guidance priorities of public librarians who worked with children and young people.

In the wake of these developments, in November 1947 the Joint Committee of the NEA and ALA passed a resolution that acknowledged two problems. First, AASL membership constituted only a fraction of the nation's school librarians. Second, although more school librarians belonged to NEA than AASL, the former had no division that spoke for them. To address these problems the Committee expressed a desire "for school librarians as a national group to have active identification with education's professional group on the national level," and recommended that AASL "consider the matter of its relationship" to NEA because "strengthening that relationship . . . may seem desirable."²³

Committee member Ruth Ersted forwarded the resolution to the AASL Board with a recommendation that the board consider several options at its next

meeting. Instead of considering Ersted's options at its January 1938 meeting, however, the board decided to appoint a committee to identify the objectives and functions of a national organization, weigh how well these functions had been served by an AASL located within the DLSCYP since 1941, and provide recommendations for improving this situation in the future. It also appointed Frances Henne to chair the committee.²⁴ At the time Henne was an assistant professor (and first female faculty member) at the University of Chicago's Graduate Library School (GLS) with close ties to school library leaders like Douglas, Ersted, and *Top of the News* editor Margaret Walraven, a Dallas school librarian. Henne deliberately selected Walraven as her vice chair because her position as a building-level school librarian countered criticism that AASL was being run by an elite group of library school educators and state, county, and city school library supervisors.²⁵

Two years previously Henne had organized a GLS conference entitled "Youth, Communication, and Libraries." In her keynote address at the conference, she argued that for elementary school children the school library—not the public library—should be the primary conduit of service.²⁶ For Henne, this was not a new position. A charismatic speaker with a high-pitched voice, when she lectured she usually donned colorful hats that came to mark her image as a school library icon.²⁷ John Cory, her fellow GLS doctoral student between 1938 and 1940 who succeeded Carl Milam as ALA Executive Secretary in 1948, remembered many discussions with Henne that were "hot and heavy about the respective responsibilities of schools and public libraries." He and Henne agreed that public libraries should not provide a complete range of services for schoolchildren, but they disagreed "as to whether it was proper" for the school library to provide such a full suite. Cory said, "I didn't deny that it might be proper, but I did deny that it would happen in my lifetime."²⁸ Years later another colleague recalled: "It wasn't just Henne's fight for a separate AASL, but also her expressed belief during those years that all library service for children should be handled by the schools, that made children's librarians see her as an enemy and a villain."²⁹ For most of her adult professional life, Peggy Sullivan later recalled, Henne "championed the idea that school libraries should be the source for all library services to elementary school children."³⁰

Children's librarians in public libraries understandably did not take kindly to her agenda, but Henne was ready to do battle. For several years she had been advocating that AASL should have divisional status and its own executive secretary at ALA headquarters. In part she was driven by her frustrations as AASL president that forced her to focus on "organizational matters" rather than "the development of school libraries—which is what an association should be doing." Margaret Walraven, Henne's successor as AASL president, was equally forthright about the circumstances she inherited when she took office. "We couldn't see beyond that."³¹

Shortly after her appointment, Henne and Chair of the Fourth Activities Committee Ralph Shaw had occasion to visit NEA Headquarters in Washington, DC. "What can school librarians do to get represented on the programs of national associations?" Henne asked NEA officials. Their response was not encouraging. To move AASL from ALA to NEA would require an executive salary, a secretary, and a yearly expense account of \$10,000, money AASL did not have. Knowing many school librarians did not want to leave ALA, Henne came away from the meeting convinced that in order for AASL to, at a minimum, achieve NEA affiliate status, it had to strengthen its membership and increase its stature within ALA. AASL also must, Henne thought, persuade NEA that school librarians were members of the education community as much as they were librarians, and declare that school librarians were teachers—just the same as classroom teachers. Because it was essential, she later recalled, "to get AASL out from under the DLSCYP troika," to accomplish this goal her committee endorsed Shaw's Fourth Activities Committee recommendation that AASL become an autonomous division within ALA.³²

As another of her goals, in late 1947 Henne informed Ersted she intended to establish an AASL advisory "council" to consist of one school librarian from each state who would function as a liaison between AASL and the state school library organization, if one existed. The new council met for the first time at ALA's midwinter conference in January 1948, the same conference at which the AASL Board established the committee, chaired by Henne, to identify the objectives and functions of a national organization. By the subsequent summer conference all but thirteen states were represented.

When the Fourth Activities Committee issued a preliminary report in June 1948, it proposed more autonomous ALA membership categories focused on type of library (e.g., public and academic libraries) and type of library work (e.g., reference and cataloging). It also recommended that the DLSCYP realign public youth librarians into a Department of Services to Readers and that ALA elevate AASL to divisional status. The committee urged the DLSCYP membership to discuss these recommendations at regional meetings to be held in the summer of 1949 instead of discussing them at an ALA annual conference. As DLSCYP members prepared for the fall regional meetings, Henne identified "presidential" goals for AASL to democratize the organization, counter perceptions it was controlled by a closed group of school library supervisors and educators, and identify the school library as unique from other types of libraries.³³ In subsequent months she pressed the AASL Board and the chairs of the regional DLSCYP meetings to declare support for Fourth Activities Committee recommendations to decentralize ALA by forming units for types of library work and for types of library and particularly for establishing four federated associations, including one for school librarians.³⁴

A Clash of Personalities and Priorities

Mildred Batchelder, who for years had functioned as DLSCYP Executive Director without much direction from the sections she represented (and seemed to follow a top-down rather than a section-based, bottom-up perspective in her work), had other plans for the regional meetings. The ALA reorganization efforts were upsetting to many, especially children's and school librarians within DLSCYP who already shared a testy relationship. Batchelder was hopelessly caught in the middle. "I believe that the 1948–1951 problems would not have existed at all if the ALA reorganization had been more realistic," she later lamented.³⁵ But because the same children used public and school libraries, she believed it was in the best interests of both that library professionals working with children and young people cooperate in efforts to clarify special roles and professional jurisdictions. Thus she tended to support the status quo, in which she was a major player.

On August 17, 1948, just prior to the first regional meeting, Henne issued a memorandum approved by an AASL Board majority that called for an autonomous association within ALA having its own periodical and full-time executive secretary. "For many leaders in DLSCYP and some in AASL itself," AASL historian Patricia Pond wrote, "the statement was viewed as the opening of hostilities between friendly nations. So it was, and by the time AASL had won its war for independence, the wounds were deep and slow to heal." Most disturbed were members of the Children's Library Association, celebrating its fiftieth anniversary that year. CLA leaders feared their own position within ALA would be weakened if AASL was given divisional status; if that happened, CLA would likely be shunted aside into an Association of Public Libraries (as recommended by the Fourth Activities Committee), where they would be distinctly subordinate to other sectors in public librarianship. Already, they argued, school librarians were enjoying better pay, better hours, and summers off.³⁶

At the August 24 Far West regional meeting, the DLSCYP member in charge—who was also incoming CLA chair—limited discussion to one hour, and focused it entirely on an analysis of Fourth Committee recommendations. One school librarian expressed worry about "uncharted seas." Separation of the organizations "defeats the thing we are working for," commented another, effectively "butchering children" in the process. "It would be unthinkable to divide the schools from people working in public libraries," carped a third.³⁷ At the Midwest meeting several days later, Henne argued forcefully for a separate division for school librarians. However, a large majority of those present (mostly from CLA) supported the existing DLSCYP structure and passed a resolution supporting Fourth Activities Committee principles with the provision for fur-

ther study. The Trans-Mississippi regional meeting endorsed the Far West position on September 3.

The Southeast region voted "that no official action on the Fourth Activities Report be taken at this time," while the Southwest region asked for further study.³⁸ At the Middle Atlantic meeting held October 4, Robert D. Leigh, whose Public Library Inquiry book *The Public Library in the United States* was in press and who publicly acknowledged a "cold war" between public and school librarians in which the latter were being led by a "highly articulate minority," tried to reassure public librarians that the Inquiry was not part of an AASL plot to take over all library services to children and young people. He urged both groups to work together rather than at cross-purposes.³⁹ At the same time, however, Leigh recognized "the rise of a new group of school librarians who had not come up through the ranks of children's or young people's departments of public libraries and were devoid of past loyalties to those departments."⁴⁰ The reference to people like Henne and Ersted was unmistakable.

When concluded, six of the seven regional meetings called for further study; none recommended divisional autonomy. The subsequently published reports strongly suggest that most participants were looking for a way to avoid a schism and end their meetings as politely as possible.⁴¹ The lack of support for AASL autonomy at regional meetings and in the AASL membership at large may have led DLSCYP leaders to think they had stopped Henne's momentum. "There was spunk in the feeling that we need not accept fate as a minority group," noted the New England regional recorder.⁴²

Despite opposition, however, Henne and her AASL allies pressed on. Incoming AASL President Margaret Walraven declared that because the regional meetings held the previous year had denied AASL the opportunity for an annual meeting, AASL's annual business meeting would be at the midwinter conference in Chicago (in January 1950) rather than the summer annual conference. She also announced two sessions addressing the topic "What Status for AASL?" At the first session, AASL would discuss regional reports; at the second it would vote on AASL divisional status.⁴³ The latter move met substantial opposition, particularly from West Coast and New England state school library associations and state school library supervisors. Batchelder took no public position on AASL autonomy.

AASL's midwinter meetings turned into raucous affairs. At the first, Henne asked: "Has ALA considered AASL members for nominations?" Her answer was "very few." Board members then strategized a plan to identify potential AASL nominees and ways to promote their candidacy for ALA offices.⁴⁴ Thereafter Walraven led discussions outlining the merits and demerits of separate divisional status and reviewed the regional meeting reports. Mary Peacock Douglas then surprised

attendees by moving that AASL petition ALA Council for separate status; Henne quickly seconded. To many attending, the effort seemed choreographed.

Considerable discussion followed, carrying on into the second meeting, at which an amendment to postpone discussion of autonomy until the summer conference lost by a vote of sixty to forty. One DLSCYP children's librarian later recalled conversations in conference hallways and cloakrooms. "Some of the school librarians seemed to be so bitter and vicious in their statements . . . They thought they were more important and needed their own division . . . They were putting administration above service to children."⁴⁵ Walraven described it differently, referencing the "drama, excitement, and suspense that characterized all the meetings."⁴⁶ Shortly thereafter those at the AASL membership meeting voted 74–27 to petition the ALA Council for divisional status. Very few of the voting members were building-level school librarians; most were state supervisors and school library educators.⁴⁷

As months passed until the ALA Council took up the petition at the summer conference, *Top of the News* published reactions for and against divisional status. One protester complained the petition had been forced through by a small group, primarily from the Midwest, who were easily able to attend the Chicago meeting. "If this is in some ways a new issue," she asked, "why was it presented to a mere 100 of our 2,200 members? What was the hurry?"⁴⁸ In a *Top of the News* article one library school faculty member regretted that DLSCYP members were considering "a separation of the three groups interested in library service to children and youth."⁴⁹ She privately complained to Batchelder about Walraven's "antipathy towards the [DLSCYP] Board and toward me personally."⁵⁰ Publicly, Walraven noted that although "transition stages often have their difficult moments," AASL's actions reflected the "natural healthy growth of an organization . . . AASL intends to be a powerhouse. Watch us grow!"⁵¹ Privately, Walraven complained to Batchelder that AASL representatives on the ALA Council were "stacked with people from [the] far west and New England who are dead set against division status for A.A.S.L." She also thought it seemed "sort of foolish for people to be making such a fuss."⁵²

After the midwinter meeting Henne, Ersted, Douglas, and Walraven deluged the school library community with speeches and articles. All argued that school librarians were more part of the education system than the library community, and that AASL services were unique. Although she acknowledged the "mental and emotional anguish" the AASL petition caused the school library community in a March *ALA Bulletin* article, Walraven also noted that AASL's "growing pains, aggravated by the Report of the Fourth Activities Committee, became so acute that they could no longer be ignored."⁵³

To deal with this controversy ALA decided to appoint a special committee to report on AASL's petition to Council at the summer conference. Walraven

had wanted a vote at the first Council meeting on July 17, but the ALA President, sensing the possibility that she and her allies were steamrolling the process, postponed the decision until July 21—after the DLSCYP and AASL had held their conference meetings. At AASL's first business meeting, Walraven and her allies were able to vote down a motion to reconsider the petition. At the second meeting a University of Washington library school faculty member tried to get AASL to commit to a mail vote, but Walraven ruled her out of order because the membership had already addressed the issue three times (twice at midwinter; a third time on July 17), and *Robert's Rules of Order* did not allow further discussion beyond that.⁵⁴

On July 21, the special ALA committee recommended that AASL be given divisional status, but only after the membership affirmed the decision by mail vote. Several committee members were concerned that this hotly contested issue should not be decided by the 5 percent of the AASL membership attending the conference, and particularly referenced the way it had been brought to the Council. "Much of the discord which has resulted from this petition might have been avoided if the constitution and bylaws of the A.A.L.S. had provided more adequately for actions of such gravity," the committee chair told the Council before its vote. The Council then approved the recommendation.⁵⁵

Some interpreted the move as an effort to shift momentum; justified or not, others saw Batchelder behind machinations questioning member eligibility and the timing of the vote.⁵⁶ Walraven did not see Batchelder as an obstacle, but wrote her after the conference that if a mail vote "will satisfy the minority, then AASL can well afford the poll. And coming from the Council, as the mandate does, we will not be delayed in accomplishing our Division status."⁵⁷ *Top of the News* opened its pages to a point-counterpoint between New York state school library supervisor Anna Clark Kennedy and Mary Peacock Douglas. Kennedy argued for the importance of AASL continuing as a DLSCYP section, while Douglas countered, "other educational associations . . . would find our organization an autonomous group who could work directly with them instead of a dependent group as at present . . . School superintendents would have more respect for an autonomous association . . . than for a segment which cannot act entirely independent of its larger unit."⁵⁸

On October 15 ballots were mailed to 2,393 AASL members; 58 percent responded. Two weeks later Batchelder reported the results to Walraven; 996 for separate divisional status, 401 against.⁵⁹ An analysis of the vote Walraven undertook to quell "rumor and gossip" about regional pressures for AASL autonomy showed that the strongest opposition came from California, Maryland, and New York, while support was strongest in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio. Thus, Walraven inadvertently proved the "rumor and gossip" were well grounded—the Midwest had turned the vote.⁶⁰

As AASL moved toward divisional status, “most people believed that Mildred Batchelder would be the school person at Headquarters,” AASL board member Jean Lowrie later recalled. “Certainly Mildred believed it.”⁶¹ Ever since the School Libraries Section changed its name to the American Association of School Librarians in 1945, Batchelder had had complicated relationships with the corps of AASL leaders who were pressing for divisional status. In the public library community, Batchelder was seen as “tremendously useful,” one long-time ALA staffer observed. “It was only some of the school librarians who were disaffected,” and Henne, Walraven, Ersted, and Douglas were among them.⁶²

Years later Walraven remembered Batchelder as “charming, pleasant, and hospitable, but with a steel purpose to hold these groups together. I felt Mildred wasn’t as helpful as she could have been to school librarians because of her determination to keep us together . . . so we just went ahead and worked around her.”⁶³ Batchelder’s biographer noted she was “up against a small, strong group of individuals who were fired by an almost fanatical zeal to see their dream materialize,” and who were not above “inappropriate haste and railroading tactics” to get their way.⁶⁴ Henne knew that those inside AASL opposed to divisional status were among Batchelder’s closest friends. “There was no real break between Henne and Batchelder, just determination on both sides,” Walraven later recalled. “Batchelder was domineering, but I always thought she had met her match in Frances Henne and in some of the rest of us.”⁶⁵ Walraven later referred to Henne and Ersted as “my valuable supporters in our fight to break away from the children’s librarians. How we did fight to get that separate division!” ALA officer Ruth Tarbox also later recalled that several school library leaders “thought Batchelder didn’t know about school problems.”⁶⁶

On November 3, Batchelder (who was at the time both AASL Executive Secretary and DLSCYP Executive Secretary) wrote Walraven: “You remember there was talk of a possible AASL request for a full-time executive secretary in order to get the fast membership growth AASL should have.” Such a request, she noted, would require a detailed budget for ALA Executive Board consideration, and Batchelder offered to draft it.⁶⁷ Walraven accepted Batchelder’s offer four days later. “Personally (this is not an official statement) I hope you will want to be our executive secretary,” Walraven wrote, “and that such arrangements can be made. Some of our members, I must admit, have been unhappy about your attitude over our efforts for division status, but I know you have been in a difficult position with divided loyalties.”⁶⁸

But Batchelder found it difficult to prepare the proposal for two reasons: first, AASL had yet to identify a set of responsibilities for a full-time AASL Executive Secretary; second, funding for the position not only depended on an increase in membership (AASL had under 3,000 members, but needed a minimum of 4,500 to support an executive secretary), it also required a sub-

sidy from the ALA Executive Board, which had not yet approved the allocation. An ad hoc committee appointed to define those responsibilities issued a one-page document at the summer conference that on the one hand avoided identifying specific duties—the “responsibilities and activities” of the executive secretary would be “as the Board may direct”—but on the other said that the office’s “primary responsibility be to the professional organization of school libraries which is the Association rather than to the profession of school librarianship.” In other words, the executive secretary would serve AASL as a whole, instead of specializing in largely unsupervised activities that promoted school library services and the profession of school librarianship—as Batchelder had been doing for a decade.⁶⁹

Ousting Mildred Batchelder

During the spring of 1951 Batchelder worked on the subsidy proposal, fully convinced she would become AASL’s first executive secretary. “I knew all kinds of things were going on,” she later recalled, “but no one discussed them with me.”⁷⁰ In May AASL President-Elect Laura Martin journeyed to Chicago to review the proposal. At the time both knew the current ALA President had reservations about subsidizing an AASL executive secretary; they also knew expectations for an increase in membership were optimistic given the fact that it cost school librarians more to belong to ALA (AASL had no control over membership fees, and school librarians had to join ALA if they wanted to participate in AASL activities and receive its publications) than to NEA or NCTE. AASL’s final request to the ALA Board was a \$12,000 subsidy over two years.⁷¹

Because AASL was no longer part of the Division of Library Services for Children and Young People, AASL leaders had to reconfigure their thinking about the executive secretary position as they prepared for the summer conference. Further complicating their situation was the fact that ALA was at the time crafting a new classification and salary level for Headquarters staff, effective September 1, 1951. The subsidy proposal was on the agenda for discussion at the July 8 ALA Executive Board meeting, scheduled for the same time as the AASL Board meeting. Because they were committed to replacing the position of a half-time with a full-time executive secretary selected by and responsible to the AASL Board, Henne, Walraven, and Martin met with ALA Executive Secretary John Cory in advance of the July 8 meetings to clarify Batchelder’s situation. Cory reminded the trio that Batchelder was an ALA employee at the top of her salary grade; if terminated, her tenure contract required six months’ notice. And if terminated, he added, it was unlikely another position for Batchelder existed at Headquarters. During the AASL Board meeting, which Batchelder attended, Cory entered the room to announce the ALA Executive Board had approved the \$12,000 subsidy.⁷²

That evening the AASL Board held a closed meeting attended by Walraven, Henne, Martin, and several others. The meeting had a subtext. "A few AASL leaders," Batchelder's biographer was subsequently told in a private communication, "insisted that independence from Batchelder was necessary for real AASL autonomy."⁷³ After Walraven explained the impact of the new ALA Headquarters classification and salary grades on AASL's proposed budget, Board members agreed—ingenuously, as events later proved—that AASL could not afford Batchelder as a top-salaried employee. The best they could do under the circumstances, they said, was cover the lower-level salary ALA paid the new executive secretary they were planning to hire. Unanimously they voted to ask Batchelder to stay on as a half-time AASL Executive Secretary beyond her current contract year (which expired September 1, 1951) to February 1, 1952 (thus honoring her tenure requirements), after which AASL would hire a full-time person at a lower salary level.⁷⁴

For the next two days Board members worked on a letter detailing their decision, and pledged themselves to secrecy in hopes Batchelder would choose to say she resigned as AASL Executive Secretary rather than have it look like she had been "fired"—a word Board members used regularly in their deliberations, signaling their determination that AASL would become an autonomous division within the ALA structure. Strong egos and fiercely independent personalities certainly factored into the situation. On July 11, as her first official act as incoming AASL President, Martin mailed the letter to Batchelder's office address (copying John Cory on the letter) and left for home before the conference ended.⁷⁵

Two days later, Cory approached Batchelder at the conference and handed her Martin's letter, which he brought from ALA Headquarters. He had already read the copy Martin sent him. Cory waited for Batchelder to open it and, as he read the shock on her face, said: "Mildred, your friends are cowards—they have left town without telling you that they don't wish to have your service any longer."⁷⁶ Instead of accepting her fate quietly Batchelder immediately chose to broadcast its contents to friends and colleagues. Most reacted negatively. "AASL unconsciously had a guilty conscience about Mildred; they couldn't or wouldn't work with her," one AASL leader wrote in another confidential communication to Batchelder's biographer. "They saw her as cast in a mold, someone who had been there too long, who made lots of decisions which should have been made by the Board . . . The school people handled the whole matter of Mildred Batchelder highly unprofessionally."⁷⁷

At an ALA Executive Board meeting later that day, Cory read Martin's letter, then proposed that the Board take a \$5,000 allocation from the endowment for a membership promotion campaign and assign Batchelder to head it. With her half-time position as DLSCYP Executive Secretary, she could thus retain her

full-time ALA employment. Board members approved his proposal the next day, but at the same time asked ALA's Board on Personnel Administration to investigate whether AASL had violated Batchelder's tenure protections. Until they received clarification, they agreed to hold up the AASL subsidy.⁷⁸

On July 17 Batchelder resigned as AASL Executive Secretary, and accepted the ALA Executive Board offer to become half-time head of an ALA membership drive while retaining her half-time position as DLSCYP Executive Secretary. With that act Batchelder left the AASL without the services of an executive secretary at Headquarters. Incoming ALA Executive Director David Clift mailed a letter to Martin that same day informing her that the Executive Board was withholding its subsidy pending further information on Batchelder's dismissal. Because none of the AASL leaders had anticipated this move by the Executive Board, Martin had to scramble. She dashed off a letter to Clift, asking for clarification. When he failed to answer quickly (he had not yet assumed full responsibility in his new position), she contacted the ALA president, who reassured her in mid-September that the Executive Committee would take up the issue of the subsidy grant at its October meeting.⁷⁹

Clift invited Martin and Henne (who at the time held no AASL office) to attend the board meeting, but in preparation for it wrote a long memorandum summarizing misunderstandings, obligations, and protests to AASL action. He was particularly irritated that the AASL membership had not received sufficient information to help them analyze actions directly affecting them. In the meantime the ALA Board on Personnel Administration reported that AASL had violated Batchelder's tenure provisions.

At the meeting Henne and Martin assured Board members that any fear they had that AASL intended to leave ALA for NEA was groundless. (Interestingly, Martin later admitted she and her allies wanted "to have affiliations with both organizations," and that several in her group offered "suggestions that if ALA did not make it possible for us to function as we needed to, an NEA connection would be the next possibility.")⁸⁰ Henne and Martin tried to clarify AASL actions point by point against the shifting set of circumstances in which it found itself, and at the conclusion of the meeting the board voted to release the subsidy grant, judging that Batchelder's tenure had not been violated because she was serving on an "acting" basis. Martin and Henne had been allowed to remain in the room for the vote; two members abstained, however, to protest the treatment AASL had accorded Batchelder.⁸¹ Martin later surmized that because Clarence Graham, ALA President that year and Director of the Louisville Public Library, "felt duty bound to pull another Kentuckian out of a hole; . . . he was a tremendous help."⁸² Elsewhere in the building Batchelder was working "in a state of shock—or more exactly one of terror," she later recalled to her biographer. "I was afraid that Laura Martin would come up to talk with me about the

vote. She never came.” Nor was Batchelder appeased when she learned of the two abstentions—“an empty gesture,” she called it.⁸³

Although the board’s action effectively made AASL an autonomous division, it hardly smoothed feelings both in and outside the association. School library communities in New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, and California were especially irritated. The New England School Library Association authored a “Tribute to Miss Batchelder” published in the January 1952 *ALA Bulletin* that read in part: “We are proud to note that you are well-known wherever educators meet, and that your work in the school library field is held in high esteem. We are cognizant of the fact that because of your enduring work, school libraries have gained momentum, and school librarians added prestige.”⁸⁴ The School Library Association of California sent a letter to the ALA Executive Board in that same month protesting Batchelder’s dismissal. “We regret . . . the way in which her services were discontinued. This was unfair to her as a librarian, and unfair to the members of the AASL, who were not informed at the time of the Chicago meeting and misinformed as to her resignation.”⁸⁵ The board chose not to share this memo with Council, however, instead sending it to AASL officers in hopes the two organizations could address the issue outside the library press.

“It was Mildred’s control that the school people didn’t like,” one AASL member told Batchelder’s biographer in confidence. “They wanted to run the show.”⁸⁶ “They did her in because she was calling the shots,” noted another years later.⁸⁷ Recalled a third: “The AASL leaders were busy trying to cut themselves loose. Mildred just happened to be caught in it, and her way of operating didn’t help.”⁸⁸ Batchelder remained convinced AASL leaders wanted to get rid of her because of her personality, and their determination “to have their own full time executive secretary starting with a clean broom.”⁸⁹ She remained outraged and vocal, and often functioned as a catalyst to perpetuate mixed feelings between children’s and school librarians. Laura Martin came to believe Batchelder had been ill-informed and naïve about AASL factions when she got involved with the movement for autonomy, and dedicated the remainder of her AASL presidential term to mending fences. For example, she appointed a Californian to chair the nominating committee that would identify candidates to succeed her. Martin’s efforts to appease recalcitrant members received a significant boost when Henne and Walraven withdrew from active involvement in AASL.⁹⁰

When AASL failed to respond to an invitation to continue cooperation in publishing *Top of the News*, DLSCYP decided to assume total control of the periodical. At the time AASL was issuing an *AASL Newsletter* under Laura Martin’s editorship. Most recognized the *Newsletter* was only a step toward a school library quarterly, “so cherished a dream of our members,” as Martin told *Newsletter* readers in 1952.⁹¹ At the annual conference in New York City, AASL announced the first issue of *School Libraries* would be out in October. And on

August 15, 1952, Rachel DeAngelo, Supervisor of School Libraries in Yonkers, New York, became the new AASL Executive Secretary.⁹²

Although battles for ALA divisional status left bitter feelings, outside ALA it was AASL—not NEA—that provided most of the leadership in the school library profession, despite the fact that AASL had among its members less than 10 percent of the country’s school librarians, and despite the fact that more school librarians belonged to the NEA than AASL.⁹³ Inside ALA, however, things looked different. At the beginning of ALA’s seventy-fifth anniversary year in 1951, AASL had become a full-fledged division with 2,703 members; that represented 14 percent of ALA’s total membership and a substantial increase from just 4 percent of the total in 1942. An analysis of ALA office holders, however, showed AASL was vastly underrepresented: AASL members held only 3 percent of the offices, while public librarians held 35 percent and academic librarians 33 percent.⁹⁴

At midcentury, AASL had pressing issues to address. Among its initial goals as an autonomous ALA division were reorganizing its management structure, increasing membership, establishing its own periodical, and breaking in a new full-time executive secretary. A revised constitution approved at the July 1951 conference placed as the first of its “purposes” the “improvement and extension of library services in schools as a means of strengthening the educational program,” and replacing an AASL council with a “State Assembly,” a body consisting of representatives of school library organizations from each state that advised the board but had little power.⁹⁵ While each state merited one representative, in states with segregated school library associations black and white associations were allowed to appoint one representative, each of whom would get half a vote.⁹⁶ This preceded by several years an ALA decision to admit only one library association per state that had to admit all members who applied, regardless of race. Several Deep South states refused to comply with this directive and lost their chapter membership.

After Mildred Batchelder’s departure, AASL struggled along with part-time secretarial assistance at ALA headquarters until Rachel De Angelo assumed her responsibilities as Executive Secretary on August 15. Only after clearing the appointment with AASL elected officers, obtaining agreement from its Board of Directors, and conducting a mail vote of State Assembly members for their approval, did AASL make the appointment public.⁹⁷ Her duties remained ill defined, however; mostly she helped prepare for midwinter and summer conference activities. De Angelo did not remain long, and resigned April 15, 1954. In early 1953, the AASL Board asked ALA to restore AASL’s Executive Secretary position to the classification level Mildred Batchelder held when she was fired two years before.⁹⁸ The act convinced Batchelder she was not fired because as a new division AASL could not afford her salary.⁹⁹

Struggles continued. Nine of the fourteen AASL representatives on the ALA Council failed to attend the 1953 conference, thus denying AASL voting power at Council meetings. State Assembly delegates, selected by local school library organizations to communicate with the AASL Board, frequently came to meetings ill-informed and unready to address issues of concern, but quite eager to attend the funded annual State Assembly Breakfast. "No unit within the AASL has been more futile than the State Assembly," noted AASL historian Charles Koch in 1975. "It was created without power, and it has purposely been perpetuated without power."¹⁰⁰

Newer Audiovisual Educational Technologies

Yet another rivalry for professional jurisdiction loomed at midcentury. During the 1940s school library leaders—not local building-level school librarians—recognized that improved audiovisual methods of instruction found so successful in training World War II servicemen and women would impact the post-war future of public education, and quickly began to advocate that those methods become part of school library service. In the 1930s many school librarians had rejected the idea of providing films as part of their responsibilities. Similarly, the School Libraries Section had said little about newer audiovisual materials and equipment that better-funded schools across the country were adopting. "It is harder to get school librarians to give up their fears of the machinery," Mildred Batchelder later recalled. "Early machines frequently broke down while someone was trying to present a program. Librarians were reluctant to learn about the equipment and thus to be in control of the situation." School librarians "did not then seize the opportunity to examine, evaluate, select, and recommend the materials to be used with the equipment . . . They were slow in getting into this area," Batchelder observed.¹⁰¹

ALA's Joint Committee on Educational Films and Libraries did, however, engage New York Public Library employee Gerald McDonald to study the issue. Librarians generally "look tired and budget-harried when this new service is proposed," he reported in 1940. "Their lack of information about films convinces me that a report pointing out certain responsibilities in the distribution of films is not enough. They require a handbook on how to start and maintain a film library." McDonald did conclude that the school library was an ideal location for centralizing audiovisual services in the school. "Not all schools have libraries," he observed, "and if the librarian can look after all audio-visual materials as well as books, there is added reason to establish such a position."¹⁰² Although NEA did harbor a Department of Visual Instruction, the department spent most of its time before World War II in survival mode, instead of implementing its objectives.

At the end of World War II professional responsibility for the educational use of audiovisual materials and equipment in the teaching process remained con-

tested turf, and early claims for jurisdictional boundaries quickly began to surface. One emerged with the 1949 ALA publication of Margaret Rufsvold's *Audio-Visual School Library Service: A Handbook for Librarians*, which staked the AASL claim.¹⁰³ Frances Henne quickly made it a point of discussion at the 1949 AASL midwinter conference.¹⁰⁴ That same year the National Society for the Study of Education published *Audio-Visual Methods of Instruction*, edited by Stephen M. Corey, the University of Chicago's Director of Audiovisual and Instructional Materials. In an op-ed piece for *Top of the News's* May 1949 issue, Corey forewarned school librarians of a jurisdictional dispute about to emerge.¹⁰⁵ All this occurred two years after the NEA's Department of Visual Instruction changed its name to the Department of Audio-Visual Instruction (DAVI), which a year later formed a joint committee with AASL. At the time, however, DAVI was a conference-only organization with no journal and about 1,000 members, almost all of them men. AASL, on the other hand, consisted almost entirely of women, with a set of strong-willed leaders driven by their ambition for the school library.

In many respects, the battle to separate AASL from DLSCYP was a pyrrhic victory. Upon taking office in 1952, new AASL Executive Secretary Rachel DeAngelo wrote a friend that school and children's librarians "were split across the country like the Civil War."¹⁰⁶ And if the clique led by Frances Henne, Margaret Walraven, Ruth Ersted, and Laura Martin that turned AASL into an ALA division thought the shift would quickly stimulate growth in membership and influence, they were sorely disappointed. Rather than "making the association's services so valuable" that AASL would "have little difficulty in persuading school librarians" they could not "afford to stay out," as Laura Martin rosily predicted in January 1952, pitches to non-members were generally couched as appeals to professional pride and identity.¹⁰⁷ Such appeals did not, however, meet with much success. Of the estimated 12,000 certified school librarians in the United States in 1951, 3,125 were AASL members, 26 percent of the total. That percentage dropped to less than fifteen when uncertified school librarians were included in the numbers. AASL continued to be controlled by a board of directors, a small and close group of white, middle-class, female library school educators and school library supervisors. In 1951 all AASL officers and committee chairs were women, and even though the number of committees had increased from ten to thirty over the subsequent decade, all were still chaired by women. And in 1959 twenty-nine states had at least one state supervisor, all of them women.

Consolidating Gains, 1952–1963

Postwar America witnessed a shift in thinking about public education. Rather than focusing on the student's individual needs, many educators argued that schools needed to address mental and moral discipline and improve teaching of traditional subjects, particularly in science and math. In some cases, recommended teaching methodologies shifted from textbook-based instruction to inductive reasoning marked by use of words like "discovery" and "inquiry," and assisted by multimedia packages. "The most important education research of the 1950s and 1960s had been conducted not by testing experts, but by psychologists and sociologists," notes Dana Goldstein, who "had looked at a broad range of factors that influenced children's school performance and overall well-being: how many books their parents owned, what toys they played with, whether schools had science laboratories, or libraries."¹

Elementary and secondary education became divided over time by different educational outcomes. Students in the top 10 percent, largely located in affluent suburbs and highly selective urban schools serving mostly white children, exceeded state academic standards and scored highly on standardized achievement tests. Students in the middle 50 percent often met state academic standards and scored average or above on achievement tests. Generally, they were from small towns and suburbs. The bottom 40 percent, however, seldom met aca-

demographic standards and performed below average on achievement tests; generally, these students came from poverty-stricken or minority-dominated big cities and rural areas.²

For many American school librarians, the educational world in which they worked shifted after World War II. In addition to some altered teaching methodologies and uneven distribution of available funds that created the three sectors mentioned above, school systems were now flooded with the Baby Boomer children of returning GIs eager to have families, which impacted many school libraries. “Modern school architects regularly provide for a library room in their plans for a school,” Norma E. Cutts explained in *Teaching the Bright and the Gifted* (1957), but “almost as regularly, the school becomes overcrowded and the administration converts the library into a classroom.”³ In addition, newer educational technologies and media sources like videotapes, closed-circuit television, projectors for slides, filmstrips, motion pictures, and multimedia auditoriums all held out possibilities and imposed limitations on school librarianship’s efforts to find a place in that world. In particular, the buzz coming out of the Second World War about educational media caught the attention of AASL leaders.

Some school library leaders saw opportunities to capitalize on “forces of change” brought by newer teaching methods focusing on student learning that had been championed by educational philosophers like John Dewey earlier in the century. “Librarians realized for the first time that a new and more comprehensive community-wide solution to the problem of school library service had to be found—and quickly,” recalled two school library leaders in 1966. Physically, libraries designed into newer school buildings erected to meet the demands of the Baby Boomer generation increasingly resembled “gracious home living room[s].” Tables and chairs remained, but to them were added individualized reading carrels, group study rooms, and comfortable lounge chairs separated from noisier areas.⁴

In response to shifting teaching methodologies in the 1950s, some school libraries rearranged physical spaces. In Evanston, Illinois, for example, schools commissioned a series of “Consensus Studies” in 1952, one of which addressed the high school library. By that time the circulation desk had been moved to the front of the library, thus releasing space for lounge chairs surrounded by magazine racks. Asked for feedback on ways to improve the library, teachers, students, and other constituents offered thirty-two recommendations, including the assumption of responsibility for audiovisual and non-print materials.⁵ It was to meet these challenges that AASL leaders like Frances Henne, Margaret Walraven, Ruth Ersted, and Laura Martin had risked so much to reposition AASL as an ALA division rather than section.

Adjusting to Divisional Status

Despite its separate divisional status, AASL battles over professional jurisdiction continued within ALA. A reorganization of division responsibilities in the mid-1950s appeared to allocate to the Children's Library Association and Young Adult Services Division (YASD) professional responsibility for evaluating children's and young adult books as well as non-book library materials. For example, when an organization representing state chief school officers asked AASL to identify guidelines for educational materials that could be funded by the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) passed by Congress in 1957, by ALA mandate AASL first had to consult CLA and YASD. Similarly, a joint committee on standards for school library media (comprising AASL and several outside entities) found their work complicated by constantly having to consult relevant ALA divisions (like the Reference and Adult Services and Cataloging and Classification Divisions). To distinguish themselves, AASL leaders claimed that within the nation's library community school librarians had professional responsibility for evaluating and selecting books *and* non-book materials pertaining to curricular needs, but because the issue remained unresolved relations between AASL, CLA, and YASD were often strained.⁶

A 1960 revision of AASL bylaws failed to clarify these responsibilities. This set of circumstances likely reflected "a prevailing attitude that school librarians were not fully qualified professional librarians," AASL historian Charles Koch concludes, "a recurrent theme" about school librarians in ALA "and one not without foundation."⁷ Not until 1963 did AASL successfully pass a bylaw that positioned it as ALA's voice in all matters related to school libraries, which, the bylaw read, had responsibility for "evaluation, selection, and interpretation of books and non-book materials as they are used in the context of the school program."⁸ But the bylaw also had another, less beneficial, effect. In an effort to defend and clarify its jurisdiction, AASL stepped further away from discussions within the profession about "leisure" reading, and in their professional practice increased the influence of acquisitions bibliographies that excluded some of the most popular materials read by the nation's children and young adults.

Because school librarians had so many taskmasters, educating them continued to be problematic. At a 1951 University of Chicago training workshop, consultants Frances Henne, Ruth Ersted, and Margaret Rufsvold of Indiana University's library school argued that school librarians had needs different from those addressed in ALA-accredited graduate library programs, which were grounded on a broad undergraduate liberal arts education. Instead, they recommended an undergraduate program modeled on teacher training programs in which students could take undergraduate professional education courses specifically designed for school librarians. They also recommended that the program

be five years in length and that all school librarians—elementary and high school, part-time and full-time—meet the same standards for certification.⁹

About the same time AASL revised its constitution, ALA shifted its accreditation rules to include only graduate library science schools offering master's degrees in North American colleges and universities. The move further divided training for school librarianship by shutting out scores of specialized school library programs in education departments at state institutions that were transitioning from normal schools and teachers colleges into universities. Because school librarians were school employees, they were subject to state certification requirements. By crafting those certification requirements, states held power ALA could not match. And while states retained their power to certify, they generally operated under no mandate compelling them to follow those requirements, which could be overridden during times of financial exigency.

Those seeking entry into school librarianship now had four options across 600 programs nationwide: (1) one of thirty one-year graduate programs accredited by ALA; (2) several undergraduate four-year programs; (3) hundreds of four-year training programs in education departments at universities growing out of normal schools; and (4) a few programs at these institutions offering a weaker curriculum designed to graduate “teacher-librarians” who would teach a subject and work part-time in school libraries. The vast majority of school librarians were graduates of the last three options, each of which also had to answer to regional accrediting agency standards and individual state certification requirements.

Although many of these programs survived after ALA shifted its accreditation rules, they still were not offering an ALA-accredited degree. On campuses that had graduate library schools and education departments, the move forced students wanting an ALA-accredited degree to take courses in both. The problem was exacerbated because both ALA and NEA had school library units, and building-level school librarians who were alumnae of school library programs in departments of education often experienced divided loyalties. Then, when ALA responded to a 1952 request from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education—predecessor of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)—to recommend standards for education units with school library programs, the resulting *Standards for Library Science Programs in Teacher Education Institutions* effectively endorsed these separate training programs. Certifying school librarians quickly evolved into a messy process subject to the often-conflicting interests and agendas of a variety of associations, institutions, and government agencies.¹⁰

AASL leaders also believed that becoming an NEA department was crucial to its future, but this required approval from the ALA Executive Board. To build a case, in late 1958 AASL polled its 4,391 members about establishing an affiliation

with NEA. Only 1,635 (37 percent) responded, with 1,562 for, and 73 against; 64 percent of those in favor were also NEA members. After ALA voted its approval of affiliation, AASL petitioned the NEA Executive Board for departmental status in June 1959. But NEA balked. At the time it was considering an amendment to its bylaws requiring all members of departments to also be NEA members, and the ALA constitution specifically forbade any of its divisions from requiring membership in non-ALA organizations.

As chair of the NEA-ALA Joint Committee, Rutgers University library school faculty member Mary Gaver began pressing NEA board members to support the petition and revised it by adding the words "that AASL would urge but not enforce its members to be NEA members." When the NEA Board met on February 14, 1960, AASL representatives had already decided to recommend that AASL withdraw its petition if the NEA Board did not approve departmental status. Fortunately for AASL, the NEA Board did approve the petition, albeit with the new wording.¹¹

On June 30, the NEA Assembly voted departmental status to AASL but left the details necessary to cement this relationship for subsequent discussion. On September 26 AASL Executive Secretary Eleanor Ahlers met with Lyle Ashby, NEA Headquarters liaison to AASL, and told him she would prepare a proposal outlining these details when she returned home. Days later Ashby received the proposal, which called for the NEA to fund an AASL office at NEA Headquarters in Washington, DC, and two positions to support it: an AASL assistant executive secretary and an office secretary. It was a cheeky move. Ashby responded on October 20 that he had no memory of any firm NEA commitment to fund an AASL office, only an offer to assist in drafting a cooperative arrangement. He suggested AASL's proposal might be more favorably considered if AASL required its members to join NEA. Several weeks later the NEA Budget Committee promised \$500 to fund an AASL employee to work at NEA Headquarters. AASL would have to cover any additional costs.¹²

On February 3, 1961, the AASL Board voted "to initiate steps" to establish an AASL departmental office at NEA's headquarters that would also coordinate efforts with AASL's headquarters in Chicago. In a memo to the NEA Board, AASL requested financial support for the assistant executive secretary position, and in the memo specified the occupant's expected qualifications, insisted that AASL would appoint the person "subject to the approval of the NEA," and mandated that the occupant be a member of both ALA and NEA. In return, AASL promised to press school librarians across the country to join NEA. At the time AASL estimated that more than half of its 5,500 members (about 18 percent of school librarians in the country) also belonged to NEA. The NEA Executive Board approved the request, but, lacking the numbers of new members this initiative had anticipated, its Budget Committee denied it.¹³ To this Ahlers

responded with another proposal that outlined several options: (1) NEA would fund an office for school librarianship with professional and clerical staff at their headquarters; (2) NEA would fund staff and office expenses but receive free office space off-site (both parties understood this would be ALA's Washington Office); and (3) NEA would pay up to \$1,200 to cover the AASL assistant executive secretary's expenses while they were working part-time at NEA Headquarters. NEA chose the third option—the least expensive one.¹⁴

But AASL's rosy projections that it would increase NEA membership among school librarians never materialized, and quickly forced AASL to scale back its plans. At its 1962 midwinter meeting the board recommended as a temporary solution the appointment of a half-time "professional assistant" to work at NEA Headquarters. To pay for the position they proposed reducing the Chicago assistant to half-time. "It was further decided that a study should be made of the possibility of working out some kind of a package deal for dues to encourage membership of school librarians in both ALA and NEA."¹⁵ Months later the ALA Executive Secretary accepted the recommendation and approved the arrangement. In September 1962, AASL appointed a half-time assistant in the AASL-NEA office. A year later the position became full-time, but in subsequent years it experienced significant turnover.¹⁶

Passage of the 1956 Library Services Act (LSA) occasioned some introspection for the school library community. At the time, just over a third of public schools had a library, but nearly two-thirds of schools with a library had no qualified librarian. The act provided \$7.5 million over a five-year period that enabled public libraries to purchase 5 million books and 200 bookmobiles, many of which then regularly visited schools. Because LSA so heavily favored bookmobile funding, some school districts saw this as an efficient way to make more books available to their students; Ohio even adopted it as a state plan.¹⁷ Not everyone in the school library community was happy with LSA funding of public library bookmobiles, however. Although she met substantial resistance inside AASL by members who saw the funds as an opportunity for schools without libraries, Mary Gaver nonetheless pressed AASL to issue a statement clarifying that LSA was intended to extend public library services, not school library services. The principle the statement articulated subsequently found its way into the 1960 *Standards for School Library Programs* (to be discussed later).

School librarians got another taste of federal funding when Congress passed the 1957 National Defense Education Act, a response to the Sputnik satellite scare with its fears that the Soviet Union was beating the United States in the space race because its citizens were better educated than Americans. For school libraries, the act provided funds on a matching basis through state departments of education for printed materials (but not textbooks) in science, mathematics, foreign languages, and vocational education. That states without school library

supervisors (40 percent of the total) tended to allocate fewer funds to school libraries than those with supervisors demonstrated the value of having an advocate at the state level.¹⁸

The Practice of School Librarianship

Despite AASL's shift from ALA section to division and its new relationship with NEA, as well as the muddled status of school library training programs and the influence of new federal dollars, at the building level all these changes had little effect on the power relationships governing the school librarian's workplace. In 1952, 90 percent of school libraries reporting statistics to the US Office of Education were under the control of boards of education (a situation the 1945 Douglas standards had advocated).¹⁹ In *The Library in High School Teaching* (1961), Brooklyn high school librarian Martin Rossoff acknowledged that three educators were essential to the success of a high school library: (1) a classroom teacher who "initiates and follows up on library assignments"; (2) a school administrator who "even more than the classroom teacher must possess a clear understanding of the library's role in the school"; and (3) a school librarian whose "attitudes and personal outlook . . . shape the pattern of library service in a given school."²⁰ Without the cooperation of each, Rossoff argued, the school library would have limited impact. Power relationships affecting school library services clearly had not changed from previous generations.

In some places, school libraries were very successful. For example, in 1960 the Evanston, Illinois, high school library described itself as "a service agency" providing "all types of materials, non-print as well as print" to "all departments of the school, for all students, including the mentally handicapped and those on the college level, for all teachers and administrative and clerical personnel." The library opened a half-hour before school, remained open an hour and fifteen minutes after, and also opened on Saturday. Librarians furnished teachers with classroom collections if they wanted, visited classes with carts of books and non-print materials on particular subjects, and offered teachers workshops on how to operate instructional media. This was, an *ALA Bulletin* author concluded, what a well-supported high school library could accomplish. Not coincidentally, it was also located in a white, middle-class, highly educated community.²¹

But Evanston was the exception rather than the rule. When he took the position of library consultant in Michigan's Bureau of Social Services in the early 1950s, Ken Vance observed that Michigan's school libraries "were, for the most part, a sorry lot." In most small and middle-sized schools "the library was part of the study hall," and "about one-half of the book collection was obsolete, back issues of periodicals were non-existent and the English or social studies teachers . . . labeled 'Librarian' usually had little or no knowledge of organizing a library or promoting a service and little or no time to devote to the library except for his/her

free (preparation) period each day.”²² In *The School Library* (1965), Ralph Ellsworth painted an equally gloomy picture. Before 1960, “cell-and-bell” teaching methods fostered a combination of textbook study and classroom presentation with little need for library services. The typical school library was a rectangular room (often a converted classroom located some distance from the school’s center) with bookshelves lining the walls and several tables and chairs in the middle. School librarians monitored this physical space either from a charging desk (where the conversation it occasioned “caused a maximum amount of distraction to the readers”), or from a small office with glass walls overlooking the room. “There was no architectural character or dignity or individuality in these libraries. They seemed to be designed as a kind of reading prison in which student misbehavior could be kept to a minimum by a librarian who could see everything that went on in a library as she sat in her office.”

Problems inherited from previous generations of school librarianship persisted: administrators mired in the “cell-and-bell” world who constantly interfered with library management and saw librarians as clerical workers or housekeepers; a worry that librarians would select books that would embroil the school in community controversies; administrators and teachers who thought that combined study hall/libraries or classroom libraries would somehow stimulate student reading; a belief that the school library was about books, not all types of media; and futile arguments over whether to call the revised facility a “materials center,” “instructional media center,” or “school library.” To have a successful school library one had to have a supportive school administrator and a self-starting librarian, Ellsworth concluded. “Without the right kind of librarian, a school library seldom becomes more than a glorified study hall.”²³

Nor did all school librarians agree with the concept of a central school library. One librarian in a Minneapolis junior high school preferred decentralized classroom libraries, in large part because the teachers she served opposed a separate library. “It does not furnish immediate and present use of books and materials in the classroom,” she reasoned. The arrangement brought her into closer contact with teachers, she said, allowing collaboration on specific assignments that deepened educational experiences. “Under the plan . . . the librarian is released from her teacher responsibilities and functions as administrator of the materials center.”²⁴ By abdicating those “responsibilities,” however, this librarian stepped away from AASL discourse and adopted an alternative philosophy of service.

And too often, school libraries lacked “the right kind of librarian.” For example, in later life one student vividly remembered the high school librarian he had as a junior in 1954. “I hated and feared” her, he said. “She loved books but hated children . . . The first week I was there I pulled a book off the shelf . . . I hid it and every week I’d go back, pull it off the shelf, and read it right there so

I wouldn't have to check it out. That way, I never had to deal with her."²⁵ In the 1950s many school librarians also continued efforts to control the childhood reading of their students.²⁶ "I can remember having a fight with a librarian over a book," recalled one student. "She said . . . it was for third graders and I wasn't. I was very stubborn and I read it." Another recalled that her librarian "continually" used "her authority to bar me from certain books." Not a problem, however. "I merely asked the older girls to check them out for me."²⁷

Students pushed back against librarians in other ways. As a 1961 transfer student to the white Beaufort High School in Charleston, South Carolina, Pat Conroy walked into the school library on his first day at lunchtime, sat down, and pulled a copy of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* from the shelf. "What on earth are you doing here?" barked school librarian Eileen Hunter who, Conroy later learned, "was famous among both teachers and students for her legendary temper and her need for absolute control of her book-lined fiefdom." "It's against the rules for a student to use the library during lunchtime," she snapped. She then queried him about *Les Mis*. "This book's never been checked out. Are you reading it for the dirty parts?" Checking a book out of her library "required a swashbuckling, adventurous spirit, as Miss Hunter patrolled those aisles with the austerity of a knight-errant," Conroy wrote in his autobiography. "Whenever she checked out a book, she treated the poor student as she would a visiting pirate."²⁸

Sometimes, however, the services of a caring school librarian enlightened students. In 1957 rural Arkansas sixteen-year-old senior high school student Olly Neal—"a poor black kid with an attitude"—cut a class at his segregated school and wandered into the library set up by his black "teacher-librarian" Mildred Grady, whom he had brought to tears in English class with his disrespectful behavior. There his eye caught a book with a sexy woman on the cover, a practice pulp paperback publishers commonly used in the 1950s to sell series fiction. The book (titled *The Treasure of Pleasant Valley*) was by black author Frank Yerby. Because he didn't want his classmates to know he was reading a novel, Neal chose to steal the book rather than check it out, and he took it home. There he had a transformative reading experience and found himself loving the book. He sneaked it back into its rightful place in the library, where he found yet another Yerby, which he also stole. Twice more this happened, and gradually Neal began picking up other books. "Reading got to be a thing I liked."

After graduation Neal went on to college, then law school, and in 1991 became Arkansas's first black district attorney, later a judge, and then appellate court judge. At his 1970 high school reunion, however, Mildred Grady approached Neal and told him she had seen him steal the book in 1957, but thought better of confronting him. Instead, she drove seventy miles to Memphis to find another Yerby, and twice more made the trip as Neal repeated his thefts, each time purchasing the books with her own money and "all in hopes

of turning around a rude adolescent who had made her cry,” wrote Nicholas Kristof in a subsequent *New York Times* op-ed.²⁹ In 2009 Neal told National Public Radio: “I credit Mrs. Grady for getting me in the habit of reading, so that I was able to go to law school and survive.”³⁰

In contrast to secondary school library development, the future of elementary school libraries at midcentury remained clouded as their development stagnated. Not until 1941 did ALA produce a summary of elementary school library statistics, which showed few elementary schools had trained librarians, and less than half had central library rooms. Some blamed public librarians for this sad state of affairs. “Because public librarians were giving excellent book selection and advice, because they were sparing all the time they could, because they were willing year after year to assume financial responsibility which should have been a part of the educational resources budget,” one city school library supervisor reported in 1952, “they lulled the school people into inaction and the elementary school library was stunted in its growth.”³¹

In 1960 the USOE reported that only 34 percent of the nearly 60,000 elementary schools surveyed had centralized libraries, while 97 percent of the 13,500 high schools surveyed had central libraries. School librarians managed only 42 percent of the libraries in public schools that took part in the survey, however, and of these only 66 percent had fifteen semester hours or more of library science.³² “If we met [ALA] standards for school libraries . . . we would need one hundred and ten thousand school librarians,” the USOE Children’s Library Specialist wrote in 1962. “We actually have about twenty thousand with a minimum of training,” she teased, “so we are just ninety thousand short this year.”³³

Indifference toward school libraries was still evident in the larger world of formal education. In early 1959, Mary Gaver told the AASL Executive Board of her efforts to convince James B. Conant of the importance of school libraries as he readied a second edition of his famous study of the American high school. She asked him if he would like a statement from AASL, then appointed a committee to prepare that statement before he answered—all efforts to no avail.³⁴ When Conant’s book came out without a discussion of the high school library, the board directed the AASL president to “write to Dr. Conant urging him to give attention to school libraries in his forthcoming study of elementary schools.”³⁵ Conant again left libraries out. Professional associations serving various sectors of the educational community also seemed indifferent to school libraries. In 1958, for example, the NEA’s Research Division issued a report entitled *The Secondary Teacher and Library Services*. Although it recognized the library as a part of the school, it concluded the high school library was a marginal contributor to student education because not only did teachers seldom use it themselves, only one-fourth of those responding bothered to include instruction in library use in their teaching practices.³⁶

By the early 1960s a consensus had formed within librarianship that the school-housed public library was not an effective use of public resources and that the interests of neither the public nor public school students were well served.³⁷ Changes in the curricula of many schools across the country from textbook-based learning to a focus on individual inquiry had placed increased pressure on public libraries via visits from high school students during evening and weekend hours, when school libraries were not open. This pressure was so great that by 1963, 13 percent of public libraries had restricted usage by students from public schools. Public librarians “complain particularly about the teacher who gives a mass assignment on one topic,” wrote a California high school teacher, “creating difficulties for both the librarian and the students in trying to find adequate reference material. All the while, the material may be lying in the closed school library.”³⁸

In their collecting practices, school librarians continued to rely on standard acquisition guides. “The librarian’s courage may be bolstered by the use of the almost universally accepted standards for book selection,” noted the Director of the Council for Basic Education in 1962.³⁹ Although one children’s literature specialist felt most late-1950s reviews of children’s books were “just plain sugary,”⁴⁰ school librarians continued to look to *Booklist*, *Horn Book*, and Wilson catalogs for recommendations. But a new periodical appeared shortly thereafter that reviewed a much larger number of children’s books, and for the first time offered negative reviews of new publications. *Junior Libraries* had grown out of a “School Libraries” column Ruth Ersted and Frances Henne had convinced *Library Journal* editor Daniel Melcher to begin in 1948, and for the next seven years *Junior Libraries* toed a delicate line between reporting on school and public library interests.

In September 1961, however, Melcher changed the title of *Junior Libraries* to *School Library Journal (SLJ)*, in part to increase circulation because “principals and school district comptrollers refused to . . . purchase periodicals that did not carry the words ‘school’ or ‘education’ in their main titles.”⁴¹ Unlike ALA-produced journals, however, *SLJ*’s editorials and journalistic slant reflected a critical tone considerably different from the profession’s traditionally rosy, idealistic, and upbeat discourse. Complaints and criticisms about AASL from people inside and outside the profession were much more likely to show up in *SLJ* than anything ALA or AASL published. An AASL executive secretary once criticized *SLJ* as “the most divisive” professional periodical in school librarianship. Over the years other AASL insiders agreed.⁴²

Even with the addition of *SLJ*, however, school library acquisition guides and reviewing media continued to ignore the series fiction read by millions of young people. A review of Stratemeyer Syndicate fan mail shows the many ways in which its readers benefited that librarians ignored. In 1952 a father wrote he was

“brought up on Tom Swift” and when he spotted *Tom Swift and His Motor Boat* at a bookstore, he took it home. “Rereading it gave me great pleasure.” His nine-year-old son “liked it as much as I did.” As they bonded over Swift novels, his son asked, “Do you know why Tom Swift named his sky racer the HUMMINGBIRD?” The father scratched his head, “and then of all things I recited practically verbatim the paragraph on page 45” that gave the reason. “Not bad after thirty-five years,” he noted.

“You make the stories really interesting,” wrote a fourteen-year-old Syracuse boy in 1959, “when you make Tom go to strange and exotic places like the jungles of Africa, New Guinea, and Mexico, to the wastes of Antarctica, to the shimmering depths of the ocean and to the far reaches of space.” As a Boy Scout he found it “very interesting to read about fish, mamals [sic], flowers, and delicious fruits and nuts, because I have and will be getting Merit Badges in Astronomy, Forestry, Weather, Fishing, Nature, Fruit and Nut Growing, Gardening, Zoolgy [sic], Geolgy [sic], Bird Study and Botany.” After reading the Tom Swift Jr. Adventure series, a thirteen-year-old Ohio boy noted three factual errors. The publisher acknowledged he was right; future editions carried the corrections.⁴³

Months after her father died in 1963, future Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, just nine years old, buried herself in reading at her branch library and in the Bronx apartment she shared with her family. “Nancy Drew had a powerful hold on my imagination,” she recalled. “Every night, when I’d finished reading and got into bed and closed my eyes, I would continue the story, with me in Nancy’s shoes until I fell asleep.” Her mind “worked in ways very similar” to Nancy’s. “I was a keen observer and listener. I picked up on clues. I figured things out logically, and I enjoyed puzzles. I loved the clear focused feeling that came when I concentrated on solving a problem and everything else faded out.” Her reading that summer, she later admitted, was her “solace and only distraction” that got her through such a difficult time. Sotomayor got the Nancy Drew books as gifts from her mother—her school library and NYPL branch did not stock them.⁴⁴

While series fiction may have challenged the canon of children’s literature that school librarians tried to support, the contents of these cultural texts nonetheless seldom challenged the systemic biases built into America’s dominant cultural practices at midcentury. For example, from her analysis of a 1950–52 Wisconsin library demonstration project that served rural schools, Christine Pawley finds almost all novels represented an “official picture of a homogeneous white America” that told “a standard tale” about its “production . . . as a nation.” Stories depicted women and children in domestic settings and biographies featured men as adventurers, thus replicating patriarchy. Works of history framed their narratives to celebrate white conquests and white settlements, thus reinforcing a systemic racism. Class differences were also apparent.⁴⁵

Censorship in School Libraries

Besides the gender, class, and race biases systemically built into their acquisition guides they generally failed to see or to address, school librarians also had to weather repeated overt censorship attempts. Much of this was sparked by Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, who in the first half of the 1950s conducted a campaign against Communists and what he perceived as communist literature. In many places, responses to McCarthy's rhetoric took the form of loyalty oaths. Where school librarians were employed by systems demanding loyalty oaths after World War II, the historical record yields no evidence that any school librarian refused to sign. At the same time, however, neither ALA nor AASL followed the lead of NEA, which passed a resolution denying membership to communists.

At the height of the McCarthy era the *American Legion Magazine* published an article that argued communists had infiltrated America's educational system to subversively influence children in classrooms.⁴⁶ The article sparked censorship battles in school systems across the country that led to changes in curricula, teacher dismissals, and the removal of suspect books from school libraries. For example, after reading the article one Virginia school board member "went to the school libraries," a student later remembered, "took books off the shelves, read excerpts from them," and demanded they be removed.⁴⁷

The 1953 ALA conference focused much attention on the challenges McCarthyism was bringing to libraries and intellectual freedom. It was held shortly after President Dwight Eisenhower told Dartmouth College graduates "don't join the book burners! . . . Don't be afraid to go to the library and read every book so long as it does not offend your own ideas of decency." Most interpreted his remarks as a direct challenge to McCarthy, whose trumped-up campaign was beginning to wear thin because of lack of evidence. At that conference the ALA president read a letter to members from Eisenhower citing the importance of preserving intellectual freedom. On June 25, the ALA Council adopted a "Freedom to Read Statement."⁴⁸

Because a number of the titles attacked by groups like the National Association of Manufacturers, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Daughters of the American Revolution were on the shelves of America's public school libraries, some school library leaders felt compelled to respond. The Illinois Association of School Librarians (IASL) took an initial step by crafting a "tentative statement" on intellectual freedom in April 1953. At a June 26 AASL Board meeting, Supervisor of the Webster Parish (LA) Schools Material Center Sue Hefley reported on the Second Conference on Intellectual Freedom held at Whittier College June 20–21. She had served as chair of the School Libraries Discussion Group there, and delivered the group's final report, "Book Selection in Defense

of Liberty in Schools in a Democracy.” (Although she worked in a segregated school system, she failed to connect the existence of segregated schools to the issue of defending intellectual freedom. Apparently, the subject never arose at Whittier.) The board moved to establish an ad hoc committee to discuss the advisability of “a statement on book selection in defense of liberty in schools of a democracy,” and to report at a later AASL conference. By November the committee had crafted a preliminary statement, fairly close to but slightly more forceful than the IASL version.⁴⁹

At the 1954 ALA conference the committee presented a draft of a “School Library Bill of Rights.” Although the four subsequent discussion sessions focused on the expertise of school librarians and their understanding of children, school curricula, and school library materials and arrangements, the record shows no discussion of the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, issued several weeks earlier. Among those discussing censorship were school librarians from states with segregated school systems, to which AASL had made no formal objection. In researching this book I found no direct efforts to confront the issue of segregated school libraries as a form of censorship, but it is highly likely some discussions did take place quietly in hotel rooms and conference hallways. What little opposition existed in the profession’s discourse, however, was subtle. Because school librarians generally do “not confront directly or antagonize unnecessarily,” notes Christine Jenkins, they often used phrases like “outdated attitudes and expressions” as “veiled references to racism or anti-Semitism” in annotations included in their acquisition guides.⁵⁰

Although these kinds of phrases found their way into the lexicon of school librarianship, no one in the profession addressed, analyzed, or evaluated school library practices at segregated schools in the context of defending intellectual freedom or opposing censorship. In research for this book, I found no effort by the library press to investigate and report on what was happening in the libraries of schools being integrated after the *Brown* decision. The subject did not appear on the conference program in 1955, the year of the Montgomery bus boycotts and Emmett Till’s murder, in 1957, when federal troops had to protect nine students integrating Little Rock, Arkansas’s Central High School, or in 1960, when six-year old Ruby Bridges (later memorialized in a Norman Rockwell painting) was the lone student in a New Orleans elementary school from which all white parents had pulled their children to avoid integration.

But hints of concern surfaced. For several years the ALA-NEA Joint Committee published in the monthly *NEA Journal* an annotated bibliography section on subjects like citizenship, juvenile delinquency, and international relations. In February 1955, however, it began a section on “Brotherhood” and included in it citations to titles discussing segregated schools and racial prejudice. Citations of books addressing all of these subjects also included authors

being challenged by McCarthyites, and constituted what Christine Jenkins calls “positive responses to the threat of censorship that was favored by the members of the ALA-NEA Joint Committee and favored in general by the ALA youth services divisions.”⁵¹

It was within this historical context that AASL adopted a School Library Bill of Rights (SLBR) on July 5, 1955.⁵² Like the relationship between general library practitioners and the Library Bill of Rights, however, school librarians were never able to comply absolutely with the School Library Bill of Rights, which was a set of guidelines for what librarians “should” do, not what they “must” do. No school librarian was ever censured for violating any SLBR principle; no school administrator ever suffered consequences for forcing a school librarian to violate them. By taking an absolutist perspective of the LBR and the SLBR in subsequent years, the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom effectively placed an impossible burden on school librarians, always caught in a set of power relationships considerably beyond their control that influenced acquisition and retention decisions.

In her analysis of censorship among school and public youth services librarians in the decade following the end of the Second World War, Christine Jenkins argues that the librarians (still mostly white middle-class women) confronted by censors sometimes buckled to the pressure, but in some cases harnessed an “assertive gentility” made manifest in several levels of response: “quiet resistance” (ignoring the attack), “positive resistance” (citing positive reviews of the item being attacked), and “active resistance” (turning the attacker’s rhetoric back on itself).⁵³ Missouri school librarian Nancy Polette saw the situation differently, however. “In practice, librarians are accused of lacking the guts to order controversial materials or of purchasing materials which might prove objectionable to one group or another, or hiding them under the counter,” she wrote in 1975. “In case after case,” however, “public and school librarians who have placed the value of intellectual freedom above their need for a paycheck have found themselves without a job. When academic theory meets community reality, something has to give.”⁵⁴

Examples of the school library community’s conflicted responses to the challenges of censorship abound. In 1954 the Board of Education in Galion, Ohio, voted unanimously to ban Richard Wright’s *Native Son* from the high school library as “not proper reading material for the students.”⁵⁵ A year later in Pennsylvania, the Superintendent of Instruction in McKees Rock near Pittsburgh ordered a local elementary school library to destroy three unnamed titles that “contained provocative epithets and stereotypes offensive to Negroes.” The mother of the child who discovered these books expressed satisfaction with the decision, and noted that the superintendent had promised her “that all books will be screened in the future.”⁵⁶

In Mississippi, according to the black daily *Chicago Defender*, an Ellisville circuit court grand jury issued a “sensational report” in March 1956 that said Jones County elementary school students were “coming in contact with school library books which support integration.” School officials assured white parents “decided action would be taken to screen” them in the future.⁵⁷ After a brouhaha targeting a novel that depicted blacks and whites as equal, the South Carolina General Assembly passed a resolution in 1956 requesting the State Library Board “to remove from circulation such books as are antagonistic and inimical to the traditions and customs of South Carolina and be further requested to screen more carefully all publications before circulating the same.”⁵⁸ That same year local school boards in Louisiana’s Claiborne and Bossier Parishes banned *Time*, *Life*, and *Look* magazines from local high school libraries. All three, one school board resolution read, waged “a systematic campaign to prejudice the American people against the South by presenting in their columns biased and distorted views on the institution of segregation of races in our schools.”⁵⁹

Also in 1956 the Mississippi state legislature directed its Library Commission to spend \$5,000 of its annual LSA appropriation for books on “ethnology,” a code word for tomes purporting to prove the inferiority of black people. Among those purchased was Judge Tom Brady’s *Black Monday*, which attacked the 1954 *Brown* decision and argued for white supremacy in highly degrading terms: “You can dress a chimpanzee, housebreak him, and teach him to use a knife and fork,” Brady argued, “but it will take countless generations of evolutionary development, if ever, before you can convince him that a caterpillar or a cockroach is not a delicacy. Likewise the social, economic and religious preferences of the Negro remain close to the caterpillar and the cockroach.”⁶⁰ Copies of Brady’s book were sometimes included in the LSA-funded bookmobile collections that circulated to Mississippi’s rural schools.

Months after AASL passed its Bill of Rights, C. Waldo Scott, the Newport News (VA) School Board’s only African American, recommended removal of a title on the library shelves of three city schools, two of which were white and one “colored.” *A Hornbook of Virginia History*, he complained, espoused “the doctrine of white supremacy,” and to prove it he quoted several sentences like “Virginia took a backward race of savages, part cannibal, civilized it, and developed many of its best qualities.” In response, the superintendent said it was difficult to find a history book everyone could agree upon; one white board member argued it would be bad precedent to remove a book from school libraries. “The board took no action on Dr. Scott’s recommendation,” reported the black weekly Norfolk (VA) *New Journal and Guide*.⁶¹ Neither did the AASL or any Virginia library associations or school librarians.

In California concerns about literature promoting “world understanding” drove some citizens to call for banning materials written by authors suspected

of being communists or fellow travelers. Much of this pressure was channeled through the state legislature's Committee on Un-American Activities. To counter this pressure the School Library Association of California and the California Library Association, especially its Intellectual Freedom Committee, spearheaded successful efforts to defeat legislative bills that violated principles of intellectual freedom. But these vocal librarians constituted a minority in California. When sociologist Marjorie Fiske undertook a study of library censorship practices in California at mid-decade, she discovered that although the 204 school and public librarians she interviewed from twenty-six counties had "unequivocal freedom-to-read convictions," nearly two-thirds practiced self-censorship and one-fifth refused to acquire controversial titles. More than four-fifths of libraries she analyzed had circulation restrictions on some materials, and one-third had actually removed controversial materials from their collections.

Sparked by these findings, Fiske also examined the attitudes and relationships behind such censorship. School librarians, she discovered, felt teachers and administrators misunderstood their educational roles. They lacked self-esteem, felt isolated within their buildings, and felt unsupported by their state and national associations. "I have avoided buying" books identified as communist "because I don't trust my own judgment," one librarian told Fiske. "Librarians are probably not trying to suppress so much as they are trying to stay out of trouble," editorialized the Pasadena *Independent-Star News* when Fiske's findings were published in 1959—almost half a decade after AASL's School Library Bill of Rights and *Brown v. Board*.⁶²

The situation was the same for librarians in other states. In a 1964 dissertation exploring censorship practices in Nassau County (NY) senior high school libraries, for example, the author discovered that about 30 percent of school librarians "rarely censored," 10 percent "usually or habitually censored books which they considered as controversial or questionable," and 60 percent fit into a middle group that censored to avoid potential controversy or because a book conflicted with their personal morals.⁶³

From her research Fiske also concluded that two themes were dominant in school library practice: "isolation and subordination—isolation both from the profession of librarianship and from faculty colleagues, and subordination to the concepts and practices of the school administrators . . . School librarians feel like second-class members of their own profession and like second-class members of their own faculties."⁶⁴ One scholar later commented upon "an undercurrent of disappointment between the idea of the school librarian as being at the hub of a creative instructional program, and the actuality—the school librarian has frequently had only a marginal role."⁶⁵

Censorship efforts persisted. In 1961 the Georgia Library Association (GLA) appealed to Chatham County grand jurors who had recommended the removal

of four books from Savannah schools, and asked them to protect their libraries from “witch hunts.”⁶⁶ Ironically, at the same time GLA was protesting this effort at censorship it still refused to admit black librarians as members. In Downey, California, an elementary school librarian removed Tarzan books from school library shelves “not (as some of their critics had alleged) because they are communistic,” a Baltimore newspaper reported, “or because they encourage young people to swing on the furniture, but because Tarzan and Jane lived together without being married.” The librarian also removed Zane Grey books because they contained “hells” and “damns.” AASL made no comment on the Downey school librarian’s action. Her board of education, on the other hand, unanimously voted to return all banned titles to school library shelves.⁶⁷ Not so in Amarillo, Texas, where in 1962 local John Birch Society members pressured the high school to remove nine novels from its library, including four Pulitzer Prize winners.⁶⁸ In late 1964 the Lincoln, Nebraska, superintendent of schools banned *Little Black Sambo* from school libraries. Public pressure forced him to reverse his decision shortly thereafter.⁶⁹

School Libraries and Audiovisual Media

Shortly after Jurl Portee Watkins became librarian in the late 1950s at the black J. W. Holley High School in Sylvester, Georgia, she noticed school librarians were being given more and more responsibility for managing audiovisual media, thus transforming themselves into “media specialists . . . That means the librarian had to take care of all the equipment and everything because all of it was housed in the library.”⁷⁰ Elsewhere in the midcentury world of American formal education, however, two different groups of professionals were battling for jurisdictional control of the newer educational technologies that Watkins was forced to manage because her school could not afford an AV specialist.

One of those groups was part of NEA: the Division of Audio Visual Instruction (DAVI). “Audiovisual communications” was, according to a 1963 document that articulated its professional jurisdiction, “that branch of educational theory and practice concerned primarily with the design and use of messages which control the learning process . . . its practical goal is the efficient utilization of every method and medium of communication which can contribute to the development of the learner’s full potential.” Nowhere in this document did DAVI mention the word “book.”⁷¹

But AASL leaders had ideas of their own about managing audiovisual media, and in the 1950s sought to expand their professional jurisdiction to include it in school library practice so Jurl Portee Watkins’s experience became the norm rather than the exception. To do so, however, they had to battle opposition inside and outside the profession. How AASL leaders negotiated this contested process was manifest in efforts during the 1950s to revise the 1945 Douglas standards,

efforts led by Frances Henne (who had moved to Columbia University in 1954), Mary Gaver of Rutgers University, Margaret Rufsvold of Indiana University, and Carolyn Whitenack of Purdue University—all formidable school library educators who argued vehemently that school library service needed to incorporate audiovisual media.

After attaining divisional status within ALA, AASL established an Audiovisual Committee that began laying the groundwork for inevitable turf battles with NEA's DAVI. (The Children's and Young Adult Library Associations AASL left behind largely remained focused on printed texts.) When the AASL revised its constitution in 1951, it placed a new phrase—"improvement and extension of library services in schools as a means of strengthening the education program"—ahead of statements calling for high standards of library service and cooperation with other organizations.

Because the 1945 standards were out of date, Henne and Ruth Ersted initiated an effort at the 1954 ALA conference to revise them and started by inviting representatives of twenty educational organizations (including DAVI) to meet on the matter that fall.⁷² Central to Henne's thinking was one immense concern: "If school librarians failed to embrace audiovisual media, would they be replaced by those trained in audiovisual technology?" She was determined to prevent this, and pushed for the adoption of terms like "materials specialist" and "instructional materials center" in discussions about standards. But many in and outside the school library community were opposed to these efforts and, observers noted, offered "considerable resistance to them on many levels."⁷³

Turf battles were inevitable. By 1955 work accomplished by an ALA-NEA committee established two years earlier had engendered a "latent mistrust in the audiovisual field toward school librarians." In a report to the membership one DAVI official argued that the "trend toward the relabeling of school libraries into instructional material centers" was "a tragic mistake" that "would divide the audiovisual field into a number of small, ineffectual and competing groups." Some tried to ignore the turf battles. In a series of essays on DAVI's history across several issues of *Audiovisual Instruction*, for example, authors did not even mention cooperative efforts with AASL.⁷⁴

When AASL Executive Secretary Mary Helen Mahar attended the annual NEA DAVI meeting in April 1955 (a year into her tenure), she watched an accreditation committee recommend that in DAVI's *Evaluative Criteria* all references to audiovisual materials be dropped from any questions having to do with school libraries. Like Henne and other AASL leaders, Mahar believed the practice of school librarianship was (and this history shows always had been) more than organizing, housing, and circulating print collections, and for it to prosper had to include other types of instructional materials. She also witnessed the DAVI Board pass a resolution that listed the competencies audiovisual special-

ists ought to possess. That none mentioned “school library” showed Mahar that the DAVI evaluation standards and certification requirements generally ignored print. It was obvious to her that DAVI leaders saw their educational responsibilities as something separate from the school library. Upon her return to ALA Headquarters she immediately called a meeting of AASL’s Audio-Visual Committee and urged members to develop a statement defining the school library as a materials center that the AASL Board could pass at its next conference and subsequently circulate to educational associations. At the conference, however, the board instead decided to publish a draft statement in the AASL journal, *School Libraries*.⁷⁵

On December 2, 1955, New York City School Library Service Director Helen R. Sattley (who in 1950 had strongly opposed making AASL an ALA division) wrote C. Walter Stone, a faculty member at the University of Illinois library school and an AASL AV Committee member, about the statement *School Libraries* had published in October. To have made the statement “before canvassing members to find out what their composite opinions would be,” she argued, was a “most unfortunate step.” Sattley believed that the library and audiovisual fields should be distinct entities. “The educational scene has need of two thoroughly developed fields, the library and the audio-visual ones, and it should be encouraged to finance and develop both. For one group to be anxious about the boundaries of the other’s territory is to act defensively.” Additionally, she argued that educators should prevent the two disciplines from encroaching on each other’s territory. “We have passed the stage where such thinking is excusable or practical,” she concluded.⁷⁶

Sattley probably spoke for hundreds of others in the school library community, but unlike her, they failed to protest publicly. As a result, she lost the argument to the same elite AASL corps that had steamrolled the association into a separate ALA division. In May 1956 Henne and Gaver began meeting to brainstorm the future of school librarianship they saw emerging in their discussions to revise the standards. They dubbed their efforts the “Ford Fantasy Project,” and their intent was to spend anticipated Ford Foundation money to fund projects implementing a set of standards that included responsibility for managing AV equipment and materials. Out of their meetings Henne wrote a working paper citing why it was necessary to revise school library standards, and Gaver drafted a school library curriculum proposal for Rutgers’ consideration that supported it.⁷⁷ Obviously, the AASL elite was still in control.

On June 21, 1956, the AASL Board unanimously passed a “Statement of AASL’s Philosophy of School Libraries as Instructional Materials Centers.” It was less a philosophy, however, than a description of services. “In addition to doing its vital work of individual reading guidance and development of the school curriculum,” the statement read, the school library “should serve as a

center for instructional materials” that included motion pictures, sound recordings, and filmstrips. “The well-trained professional school librarian should anticipate service as both a teacher and as an instructional materials specialist.”⁷⁸

That same year DAVI, AASL, and the ALA’s Association of College and Research Libraries established a joint committee to discuss the role of audiovisual materials in college and school library services. Henne and her AASL colleagues entered the discussion determined to redefine the school library as an instructional materials center and to redefine the school librarian’s role as an instructional materials specialist. There “is no basic competition between media,” read the initial committee statement later adopted by the three organizations and largely written by committee member C. Walter Stone. For essential instruction, “all media are required.” Stone’s efforts helped establish a working (albeit often frosty and testy) relationship between AASL and DAVI.⁷⁹ It was, one DAVI official later noted, a relationship “in whose professional company both groups sometimes regretted finding themselves.”⁸⁰

The resulting 1960 ALA *Standards for School Library Programs* constituted a bold effort to extend the professional jurisdiction of school librarianship by declaring the use of audiovisual materials a professional school library responsibility. Pittsburgh school libraries supervisor Ruth Davies regarded the *Standards* as a “declaration of independence,” not only because it claimed responsibility for newer media, but also because it “set forth the philosophy that the school librarian is, and by rights ought to be, a teacher directly involved in the teaching and learning process” and “frees the school librarian from the tyranny of professional educational noninvolvement.” The *Standards* also shifted the terminology from “school libraries” to “school library programs.”⁸¹

Like previous standards, however, this was more wish than reality at the time. The *Standards* called for school librarians to have teacher training, and required one full-time librarian for every 400 pupils, an average collection of ten books per pupil, and an average annual budget of five dollars per pupil.⁸² Yet in 1960, 75 percent of elementary schools lacked libraries, 84 percent lacked school librarians, and only 37 percent of all public schools—primary or secondary—had centralized library services. Nearly half of public schools relied on classroom collections, and per-pupil expenditure for school libraries across the nation averaged \$1.05.

On December 21, 1962, DAVI Executive Secretary Anna Hyer complimented AASL Executive Secretary Dorothy McGinnis on an article explaining the *Standards* that McGinnis had recently published in the *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals*. She agreed with McGinnis that school libraries “can very well handle the storage distribution and related use problems of both book and non-book materials,” but she was “shocked” to see McGinnis use “interchangeably the terms ‘learning resources center’ and ‘instructional ma-

terials center.” The latter, she argued, had evolved to mean “a ‘modern library’ that handles book and non-book materials.” The former, however, was “much broader,” and applied “only to school system centers” or university departments “that are coordinating all media.” At an ALA-DAVI meeting not long before, Hyer reminded McGinnis, DAVI members had stated that “the director of a learning resource center might be a person who had come up through any of the media channels but would be administering programs that involve the library, the audiovisual, radio, television, possibly programmed instruction, computer use instruction, and many other such activities.”⁸³ Hyer’s reaction reflected clear jurisdictional disputes that one school library leader later characterized as the battle between “the AV guy and the library lady.”⁸⁴

Knapp School Library Project

Unlike its two predecessors, the 1960 *Standards* had the extreme good fortune to emerge when foundations and the federal government began allocating large amounts of money for education, much of which benefited school librarianship. Shortly after the *Standards* were published, for example, a \$100,000 grant from the Council on Library Resources (supported by the Ford Foundation) funded a project to implement them.⁸⁵ The new standards seemed to be having an impact, as reports from the state chairmen of an AASL Standards Implementation Committee (funded by the same grant) demonstrated. By 1961 fourteen additional states were either pushing for or had created supervisory school library positions at the state level (several had already made the appointment), twelve were undertaking or planning school library surveys, fifteen had either passed or were in the process of revising certification requirements, and seven had launched legislative campaigns for additional support for school libraries.⁸⁶ At the beginning of the 1960s, the future looked bright for school librarianship.

Then, in early 1961, *This Week* editor and National Library Week Chairman William Nichols forwarded to Clarence Stouch, Chairman of the Knapp Foundation, a copy of an article he had just published entitled “Is Your Child a Victim of the Book Gap?”⁸⁷ The article reported that 10.6 million public school children lacked school libraries, as did 66 percent of elementary schools. Stouch was astonished, and after giving the situation some consideration, asked AASL to craft a plan showing, as Peggy Sullivan later reported, “how a demonstration project might help to solve this problem.”⁸⁸

A year and a half later ALA announced a \$1.2 million grant from the Knapp Foundation to develop a five-year project to demonstrate the value of school library services. AASL quickly put together a fifteen-member Knapp School Libraries Project (KSLP) Advisory Committee whose composition reflected the AASL establishment; Peggy Sullivan directed the project. The grant provided for funding two elementary school libraries in the first year, three in the second

year, and three high school libraries in the third year. Applications would be evaluated against the 1960 *Standards*, and it was hoped that filling out an application would encourage applicants to meet them. All successful applicants would work with a nearby teacher education institution to help with the development of in-service educational resources. “Goals of the project,” the *Chicago Tribune* reported, “are to demonstrate the educational value of school library programs, promote understanding and use of library resources by teachers and administrators, guide and encourage educators and citizens in developing their own library programs, and increase interest and support for school library development.”⁸⁹

As Project officials began reviewing the applicants, however, they were surprised by the overall low quality of the applications. They cited as an “extreme” example a high school “which reported that one of its basic needs was a card catalog because, uncataloged, the books and materials were hard to locate.” At the same time, the process showed applicants how far they had to go to meet the 1960 *Standards*.⁹⁰ “We’ve been caught Knapping,” one librarian who observed a demonstration project later quipped.⁹¹ Two applications out of 115 were successful that first year: Marcus Whitman Elementary School in Richland, Washington, and Central Park Elementary School in Plainview, New York. “Each school is representative of a median socioeconomic and cultural group in its community,” Sullivan noted.⁹²

In 1964 the Project selected three additional schools: Casis School in Austin, Texas (whose head librarian was a former AASL president), Allison School in Indianapolis, and Mount Royal School in inner-city Baltimore. In 1965 it added three more: Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon, Farrer Junior High School in Provo, Utah, and Oak Park–River Forest High School in Oak Park, Illinois. In addition to reports in professional and popular periodicals, the Project produced a filmstrip entitled *Living School Libraries* and a film entitled *And Something More*, produced on site at school libraries in North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg County to show “that a school library is *something more* than books, that the librarian is *something more* than a custodian, and that the school is *something more* because of what goes on in the library.” By its conclusion the Knapp Project’s eight demonstration schools had welcomed 16,000 visitors, and before the end of the decade *And Something More* had been seen by more than 11 million television viewers.⁹³

The Knapp Project had far-reaching effects, in large part because it began just prior to passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA—to be discussed in the next chapter), which made \$100 million available to improve and increase the number of public school libraries. “While I do not claim that we were responsible for the recent federal legislation [ESEA],” Clarence Stouch said in 1966, “I am naïve enough to believe that it may have contributed

to this result.” The demonstration centers Knapp funded, he claimed, “should reduce the time lag between legislative action and the actual implementation of the program by years, for we have shown at first hand what is required, the cost involved, and the future improvements of our teaching methods and procedures.”⁹⁴ However, relatively few school systems implemented Knapp Projects with internal funding. “None of the school districts wanted to carry on the program by spending as much money as was required,” opined one AASL president years later. A former AASL executive secretary agreed. Administrators felt replication “was just financially out of reach, so they made no attempt to duplicate it.”⁹⁵

School Libraries and the Civil Rights Movement

Throughout the period AASL was working to revise and publish its 1960 *Standards* and the Knapp Foundation was funding demonstration projects, the civil rights movement blanketed the nation’s media. School libraries were not untouched by it, but the history of their reactions is a story never before told. Eighteen months after the Supreme Court handed down its 1954 *Brown* decision, W. A. Robinson, principal of Carver High School in Phoenix, Arizona, published an article in *The School Review* entitled “The Functions of Libraries in Newly Integrated Schools.” As Phoenix began integrating its schools in the fall of 1954, Robinson described the experience of Carver’s 475 black students as they integrated into the city’s much larger white high schools. At least two Carver teachers were placed in each of the white high schools, he explained, in order to systematically integrate faculties.

But integration, he wrote, brought “a new teaching responsibility, and teachers and counselors will be forced to rely upon the school libraries for the materials they will need.” Because the white press, Robinson continued, “generally restricts its news about Negroes in such a way that, in many communities, readers could get the idea that crime is the most extensive Negro activity,” black publications “afforded the only trustworthy and incisive interpretation of American and world events as they affect Negro Life.” He noticed, however, that in Phoenix high school libraries “Negro students were not finding Negro newspapers and periodicals, and books of special interest to them.”⁹⁶ Although he did not say so, all these high school libraries were run by white women who relied on the racially biased bibliographic aids and acquisition tools inherited from previous generations of school librarians. Robinson’s piece represented the only article I found published on the subject of integration and public school libraries before 1967.

Through the early 1970s school librarianship persistently looked the other way on issues of race. On those few occasions when AASL addressed racist practices in school librarianship, its responses were weak and muted. In 1951, for

example, AASL quietly decided that in its Assembly, states with segregated black and white library associations could each appoint one representative, but those representatives would only get half a vote.⁹⁷ In crafting its School Library Bill of Rights, as has been shown in previous pages, it only obliquely referenced the censorship practices inherent in the existence of segregated schools.

AASL action during the civil rights movement (1954–1968) contrasted sharply with the NEA. At its 1963 summer conference, NEA passed resolutions that endorsed President John F. Kennedy's legislative proposals to strengthen civil rights, agreed in principle with desegregation efforts of NEA affiliated associations, and encouraged further desegregation. The NEA, which had "no racial restrictions on membership," nonetheless recommended that "those state and local associations where membership restrictions are still in effect to establish consultative committees to facilitate their removal."⁹⁸ Despite being an NEA affiliate, AASL did not follow suit. In fact, when the Executive Secretary of AASL reported on her November 1963 visit with the segregated Virginia Education Association's school librarians' section at a segregated hotel, she said nothing about segregated schools or their impact on school library services. She did mention, however, conversations with an NEA DAVI official about "our mutual concerns."⁹⁹

For school librarians in southern states, the issue of race had always complicated their professional practice. Criticizing Jim Crow had consequences for white librarians. While many in Alabama's white community were outraged by the *Brown* decision, Montgomery Public Library reference librarian Juliette Morgan, though white, saw things differently. Eleven days after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to move to the back of a Montgomery bus, for example, Morgan wrote the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the city's major white newspaper, objecting to the harsh treatment she had observed white bus drivers accord black riders. "Three times I have gotten off the bus because I could not countenance treatment of Negroes . . . Twice I have heard a certain driver with high seniority mutter audibly, 'Black ape.'" Morgan paid a high price for this letter. Segregationists "called her at the library. They called her at her home, where she lived alone with her mother. They threatened her. They harassed her. They insulted her with vulgar and obscene accusations," noted a black *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist. Her stress became so great she took a leave of absence, but "she could not sleep, she could not eat." On the morning of July 17 her mother found her dead, an empty bottle of pills by her bedside with a note that read: "I am not going to cause any more trouble to anybody." "Plain murder," the *Courier* columnist called it.¹⁰⁰

Black school librarians were equally vulnerable. In 1961 Ernestine Denham Talbert, a resident of Mississippi's George County, was hired as school librarian at Greene County's black high school, just over the county line. In April 1962

she unsuccessfully attempted to register to vote in her home county. In response, Talbert filed a complaint with the Justice Department which filed suit two weeks later against George County to require her registration. When the white Green County superintendent found out about it, however, he informed Talbert her contract would not be renewed for the next year. The Justice Department then filed suit against Green County to have Talbert reinstated. Although the Department pursued the case to an unsuccessful conclusion in 1964, Talbert never worked as a school librarian again.¹⁰¹ The nation's library press paid no attention to the case.

Incidents like these had a chilling effect on school librarians, black and white. While many Deep South school librarians still had the *Standard Catalog* at their elbows, purchasing race-related titles it recommended—like Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and Rachel Maddox's *Abel's Daughter*—was problematic for libraries in all-white schools. In a 1962 *School Library Journal* article entitled "Race Relations in Recent Writing: Sensible Reviews of Some Sensitive Books," authors argued these particular three titles presented "an honest, objective, and literate view of the problem" and thus were "useful and necessary in young adult collections."¹⁰² How many segregated school libraries acquired them—especially in those communities pressed by civil rights activism—is unknown. And where activism did take place, black school librarians had to be on their guard. As a black librarian at a southern Georgia high school when it integrated in the early 1960s, Jurl Portee Watkins recalled what her white superintendent told her faculty when civil rights demonstrations drew national attention in nearby Albany: "If you march, you will not have a job . . . Ain't no Nigra going to come down here and tell me what to do about my schools." Watkins and all of her colleagues obeyed. "If we saw a camera come in, well, we knew to go."¹⁰³

Some racist practices inherited from the early twentieth century continued. "I came to realize," one black Virginia student later recalled, "that . . . by providing schools that were grossly unequal to the ones white children attended, the white power structure was programming us to fail."¹⁰⁴ Across the South white schools continued to dump their old textbooks on poorly funded black schools. As a teenager in Durham, North Carolina, in the late 1950s Sandra Moye Wilson recalled, "what we read about in school books was very derogatory about my own people."¹⁰⁵ After becoming a school librarian in New Bern in the early 1960s, she noticed the curriculum forced black students "to learn about white America," but not black America. "It was never included in the textbooks . . . you'd have to sneak that in."¹⁰⁶

"We didn't have a library," Tony Baugh said, recalling his experience as a young student in a segregated elementary school in Richmond, Virginia, in the early 1960s. He also remembered how his seventh grade teacher taught the state

required “Virginia History” course. She told her students to put away the assigned textbook, “because in that book we were ‘darkies’. It had a lot of fallacies: black people were slaves, they were very happy to be slaves, blah, blah, blah.” Instead the teacher “got another book that the school system didn’t approve of, but that’s the book we learned from, because she would type out certain assignments that we learned from that book.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, one Tuscomb, Alabama, black teenager outfoxed the educational establishment in the early 1960s. Her father was the janitor at the white high school, and he let her into its library evenings and weekends while he was working there to read books and do research. And for assignments that required more intense reading, her father often “borrowed” relevant titles from that library and brought them home.¹⁰⁸

In the early 1960s publishers continued issuing “alternative versions of readers, math texts, histories, and other books—one with blacks and other racial minorities, one without,” notes textbook historian Joseph Moreau. “Dual editions, sometimes called star editions or, more colorfully, ‘mint-julep’ editions to indicate their southern origins, were an open secret in the industry.” In a textbook intended for northern and western markets, for example, publisher Scott Foresman & Company issued a fourth-grade reader “with a story about the African-American scientist Benjamin Banneker and a sixth-grade one with information on the slave trade.” The publisher’s mint julep editions included neither of these stories. “You got any niggers in your book?” asked a member of the Louisiana textbook adoption committee in the early 1960s when visited by a Silver Burdett textbook salesman. “No, sir,” the salesman responded.¹⁰⁹

Carrie Robinson’s experiences in the 1950s and 1960s represent a case study in the racist practices of southern school librarianship. Appointed “Negro School Library Supervisor” in Alabama’s Department of Education in 1962 (roughly the same job she did not land in 1946), she was in a position to know how school segregation and integration affected school library practice in her state. Although she had returned to the University of Illinois (where she had obtained her master’s degree in 1949) to pursue a doctorate in library science, family problems and an intransigent Illinois doctoral advisor who insisted she write her dissertation on a particular school program in *de facto* segregated Indianapolis (“I could not work for that school system . . . because I was black,” she recalled) forced Robinson to return a year later to Alabama. Once back in Montgomery, she was among a group of black professionals who provided rides to black citizens boycotting the buses after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in December 1955.

When an Alabama Library Association president concerned about civil rights activities in the state appointed a biracial committee (which included Robinson) to consider integrating the association in the 1950s, one black librarian quickly sent in her dues to join the association (which she anticipated would integrate)

before the committee held its first meeting. At the first committee meeting, however, a white member—a university librarian—protested when he found out a black librarian had joined the association: “Who is it that is stuffing these Negroes down our throats?” he shouted. Another member, “a dear school librarian,” Robinson later recalled, “with tears in her eyes and a tremor in her voice, expressed willingness to have black librarians attend the convention, provided they used the freight elevator at the hotel and refrained from attending the dinner meeting.” Robinson immediately informed the group “of the impropriety and uselessness of their utterances . . . Under no circumstances would black school librarians ride their freight elevators or join their association unless they were welcomed,” she fumed.¹¹⁰ Integration of the Alabama Library Association would have to await a more propitious time.

At the end of 1963, school librarianship could look back on a decade of demonstrable progress. Spearheaded by an elite corps of school library educators located at some of the nation’s premier universities, school library leaders had successfully turned the AASL from an ALA section in a division dominated by public library youth services professionals into its own division with its own executive secretary. It had also opened an office in NEA headquarters in Washington, DC, revised a set of standards that claimed an expanded jurisdiction to include audiovisual materials, and won outside funding for a series of demonstration projects designed to profile school librarianship at its best. At the same time, however, it was also a period during which the profession rather quietly experienced multiple censorship attempts, to which its responses varied greatly. And although it had approved a School Library Bill of Rights, school librarianship mostly looked past the issue of racism—systemic or overt—in its professional practice at a time when reports of civil rights activities and violations saturated the nation’s media.

Despite successes, however, school librarians also carried with them the burdens of the past. “The school librarians had always felt themselves to be in a minority position,” one high-ranking ALA official later recalled. “They had a minority psychology . . . They seemed to experience a continual identity crisis.” In the education community, she argued, “nobody ever felt a school librarian was as important as a teacher”; within ALA school librarians “often felt overlooked or forgotten as a group. And in a public library-oriented association, they were always in a ‘fighting for life’ position.” Children’s librarians in public libraries, on the other hand, “never seemed to be as belligerent or as arrogant as the school people.”¹¹¹

“The Golden Era of School Library Development,” 1964–1969

Between 1930 and 1972, consolidation drastically decreased the number of US school districts from 128,000 to 16,960. Although high school enrollment tripled, the number of high schools nonetheless declined 50 percent. Historian Sarah Reckhow has observed that the loss of local control evident in these statistics—control that “promoted close identification between local communities and public schools”—removed much of the “shelter” they had against education’s ideological battles on the national level.¹ Ironically, the act of consolidating schools often led to an increase in the number of school librarians employed, since the economies of scale that accompanied the consolidation of learning materials budgets worked to their advantage. School districts aiming to satisfy regional accreditation standards and eager to qualify for federal funding, where possible, also positioned school libraries to benefit.²

In 1964 AASL had 7,312 members (22 percent were institutional), an increase of nearly 1,000 from the previous year thanks to a membership drive to enlist school librarians who were also members of NEA. Still, it was only a fraction of the estimated 56,000 the US Office of Education listed as school librarians across the country, and by one estimate only 12 percent of the school librarians who were also NEA members. The AASL executive secretary was convinced the membership problem could be traced to ALA’s “high dues,” and because “they did not

want to join two organizations, more often than not" school librarians opted to join NEA. In June 1964, she asked an ALA Headquarters colleague: Would it be possible for school librarians who were NEA members to receive *School Libraries*, serve on committees but not run for office, and join AASL "only by paying dues of perhaps \$8.00?"³

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Historian James T. Patterson has called the end of 1964 "a buoyant time for the majority of Americans . . . that promoted high expectations about the future." The economy was doing well, Americans continued to buy suburban houses, the NASA mission *Ranger 7* signaled thousands of photos back to Houston demonstrating that the moon's surface was flat enough to land a spacecraft, and Congress approved a Wilderness Act that added more than 9 million acres to national forestlands. The Supremes, Beatles, and Beach Boys dominated the song charts. Lyndon Baines Johnson continued to benefit from the mood of the country after John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963; he was *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" for 1964.⁴

Johnson wanted to accomplish big things in 1965. Although plagued by a long conflict against what he perceived as a communist threat in Vietnam, he positioned a sympathetic Congress to pass Medicare, and, by focusing on education reform aimed primarily at poverty-stricken students, crafted a set of legislative initiatives dubbed the War on Poverty, part of the larger Great Society. To win the favor of conservatives worried about big government (and particularly Southern Democrats who championed "states' rights"), Johnson had language inserted into an education bill that read: "Nothing in this act shall be construed to authorize" any federal agency or employees "to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel" of any school system, or over "the selection of library resources, textbooks, or other printed or published materials by any educational institution or school system."⁵

Assisting with the legislation was USOE Commissioner Frederick Keppel. In November 1964, *McCall's* published an article he authored on "Schools without Libraries." "A school without a library is a crippled school," he began, noting that 60 percent of the nation's elementary schools, serving 10 million children, lacked libraries, and 84 percent of schools nationwide lacked librarians. "This is a national disgrace." He mentioned improvements in Washington DC and New York City school libraries—after parents and schools had mobilized to address the problem—and cited the 1960 *Standards* as a guide for all to follow.⁶

A major initiative to emerge from Johnson's War on Poverty was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As it wound its way through Congress one conservative Republican called it "one of the most dangerous measures

that has come before us in my time.” Another predicted the bill’s passage would “radically change our historic structure of education by a dramatic shift of power to the Federal level.” Their predictions may have been accurate, but they failed to persuade. On March 26, 1965, the bill passed the House 263 to 153; on April 9 it passed the Senate 73 to 18. Johnson signed it days later, just outside the dilapidated one-room schoolhouse in Stonewall, Texas, that he had attended as a child.

The law “left a permanent imprint on American educational policy” by injecting the federal government directly into local school practices. It united “the Left and center around a new role for Washington as a standard setter for state education agencies and local schools,” notes Dana Goldstein. It set a precedent that led to the establishment of the federal Department of Education (1979), the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the Common Core (2010), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Because federal politicians henceforth could direct matching funds to their states and districts, local school systems directly benefited from the law and, for the most part, willingly followed federal mandates in order to get those funds. ESEA funded “compensatory education” instead of being aimed at the best and brightest, like its predecessor, the National Defense Education Act. Federal aid “would now be offered or withheld depending on whether local policy makers followed national directives, such as supplying low-income schools with up-to-date textbooks, establishing school libraries, and pulling at risk students out of class for supplemental tutoring,” Goldstein explains. “States that offered their low-income students more state-level funding would be rewarded with more money from the federal government.”⁷

For America’s public school libraries, federal funding proved a godsend. Cora Paul Bomar, North Carolina Department of Education’s Division of Educational Media Director who had sported the “saddest face one could ever imagine” when informing the US House and Senate Education Committees in 1964 that 10 million children attending 40,000 public schools had no access to a school library, acknowledged that ESEA marked “the beginning of active federal participation in school library development.”⁸ The federal definition of library and instructional materials made possible by ESEA legislation and funding, she later noted, “did more than any other one thing to bring all media formats into school library collections, thus laying the foundation for unified media services.”⁹ Federal funding “gave the kind of visibility to school library media programs that we would not have enjoyed before,” former AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson later recalled, “and this in turn gave an impetus to AASL.”¹⁰ *SLJ* editor Lillian Gerhardt believed ESEA “changed the whole course of school library service in the United States.”¹¹ “More than anything else,” Mary Gaver commented, this “landmark legislation . . . brought us close to providing services to every child in *every* school. The seed which had been planted” in 1900, she claimed, “could now

grow."¹² For school librarianship, the most important part of ESEA was Title II, which authorized annual appropriations of \$1.3 billion, \$400 million of which was for textbooks and library books. Mary Mahar, who had replaced Nora Beust as USOE Coordinator of School Libraries in 1963, had drafted guidelines that eventually became part of Title II.¹³ Once funded, she often chuckled to friends, "I'm spending \$100 million dollars a year for school library collections."¹⁴

The impact of the legislation was huge. A 1968 USOE report summarizing the first year of funding noted nearly two-thirds of the more than 43 million children affected by Title II benefited from new or improved school libraries. ESEA funded 3,378 new elementary and 259 new high school libraries, and expanded the collections of 61,923 more. Before 1965 per pupil spending for elementary school libraries was \$2.70; after 1966 it jumped to \$5.00, an 85 percent increase. High school libraries went from \$3.72 to \$6.42 per pupil, a 73 percent increase. Between 1966 and 1976 ESEA Title II provided nearly \$900,000,000 to school libraries. Little wonder that between 1965 and 1968 their numbers grew from 39,000 to 63,000.¹⁵ "It was like launching a new profession from scratch," *School Library Journal* wrote.¹⁶

The ESEA legislation was the capstone to a year of good news. On October 16, AASL Executive Secretary Dorothy McGinnis was on hand to watch President Johnson sign an amendment to the National Defense Education Act. Title III of that act extended funding for school library collections in history, civics, geography, English, and reading; Title XI helped local school districts plan institutes to upgrade the skills of school librarians. Johnson used fifty pens to sign the amendment, and when he gave one to McGinnis, she responded: "Thank you for all school librarians."¹⁷ "Thrilling times for those of us who have struggled so long to get school libraries accepted as an important part of the educational picture," McGinnis wrote in *School Libraries*.¹⁸ Encouraged by all this progress, Eleanor Ahlers (Supervisor of Library Services at the Washington Department of Public Instruction) asked ALA Executive Director David Clift if money could now be found to revise the 1960 *Standards*.¹⁹

ESEA provided a lot of money for books but, much like the nineteenth-century school district libraries, hardly any for staffing. Problems that caused were obvious. "Here I am—one librarian, 1,800 students, and books stacked up to be catalogued!" complained one high school librarian in 1967. "I've been working weekends and vacations but can't seem to make a dent in the back log plus keeping up with current work."²⁰ "If only government authorities could see what has happened to the millions of dollars that have been poured into materials and to see how under-staffed all school libraries are," complained one library school faculty member, "I'm certain they would give second thought to the inadequate provisions for training of school librarians."²¹

Not only were school libraries understaffed, many assigned to manage them were also undertrained. In 1964, a year before passage of the ESEA, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Director had written McGinnis that NCATE was now accrediting undergraduate programs for school librarians, but only on the assumption that library science courses served as minors and that students enrolled in these programs also had to have a teaching major in a subject field.²² In 1966, a year after passage of ESEA, only 56 percent of school librarians had a graduate or professional degree, and of that number just under two-thirds had completed their professional education before 1949 and thus had little training with nonprint materials.²³ In some schools with new libraries but no librarians, principals often “ended up buying every ridiculous book in sight before the annual spending deadlines.”²⁴ In 1968 48,000 schools still lacked a qualified librarian.²⁵ In addition, a USOE study showed that white schools had significantly more books and full-time librarians per pupil than those serving largely black, Hispanic, and Native American populations.²⁶

Federal funds provided by ESEA’s Title II had to be run through state education agencies—probably to placate southern legislators in order to get their votes. ESEA’s Title V also provided funds to state departments of education, and some states used these funds to hire library and media supervisors, many of whom promptly busied themselves with revising state standards for school library media centers and establishing certification requirements for school library media specialists. By 1970, all states had at least one supervisory position for school library media programs; forty-seven had passed standards for school libraries.²⁷ As a group, “these brave souls” had been “set adrift on stormy bureaucratic seas without a compass,” school librarian Nancy Polette noted in 1975. Without them, she argued, ESEA funds “could easily have been channeled into thumbtacks and workbooks for individual classrooms.”²⁸ Four years earlier state school library supervisors had organized themselves into the American Association of State School Library Supervisors (AASSLS—do give voice to this acronym, dear reader).

School Library Experiences

History reveals consistencies, and among the consistent threads in school librarianship’s history is that a school library’s success depends heavily upon the person running it. Once ESEA funding established new libraries or grew existing collections, teachers and principals sometimes criticized their own librarians for not being self-starters. “Send something to my librarian to bring her out of the dark ages,” was a comment occasionally heard by AASL officers hosting booths at educational association conferences in the 1960s.²⁹ On the other hand, there were successes. In 1968 Nicholas County (KY) High School student Barbara Kingsolver developed a good relationship with her librarian, Miss Richey. “For

reasons I can't fathom," Kingsolver later wrote, "she discerned potential." One day Richey took Kingsolver by the arm and said, "Barbara, I'm going to teach you Dewey," and set her to cataloging and shelving school library books. That introduced her to *Gone with the Wind*, Edgar Allen Poe, and William Saroyan's *Human Comedy*. "What snapped me out of my surly adolescence and moved me on were books that let me live other people's lives."³⁰

Some students came to cherish the challenges the school library offered. One day in Seattle in 1965 a fourth-grade teacher approached View Ridge School Librarian Blanche Caffiere about a precocious student, Bill, who finished his work so quickly he needed a new challenge. "Could he slip into the library and help?" she asked. Caffiere agreed, first teaching him Dewey, where Bill immediately noticed fiction was treated differently—arranged by the author's last name. When given the assignment of finding books with mismatched cards, he asked: "Is it kind of a detective job?" That afternoon he found three books with the wrong cards. Next morning he arrived at school early, wanting to find more misplaced books. Weeks later Caffiere was invited to dinner at Bill's home, where his mother announced the family would be moving to another district and Bill would be changing schools. "I can't leave the View Ridge library," he objected. "Who will find the lost books?" Bill did transfer, but only for a short time. One day he showed up again at View Ridge and announced to Caffiere, "The librarian over there doesn't let boys work in the library. My mother got me transferred back to View Ridge for the rest of the year. My dad will drop me off on his way to work. And if he can't, I'll walk!" Bill's last name was Gates.³¹

Some schools still hosted classroom libraries. Anita Hill remembers a seating system her grade school teachers crafted to reward achievement: gradually move high-achieving students who finished their assignments early from seats located on an inner schoolroom wall to seats located on an outer wall where, under the windows, teachers had placed the classroom library. After finishing her assignments ahead of her fourth grade classmates, Hill recalled, she loved the freedom to "simply reach out and pull whatever I wanted from the shelf without leaving my seat or drawing attention to my idleness." She specifically mentions encyclopedias, geography and history books, and Nancy Drew mysteries she and her friends frequently shared.³²

No matter the school librarian's personality and energy, however, there was still the principal to deal with, and most of them appeared to have limited views on the value of school libraries. "Teenage children and long suffering wives share one thing in common with the school librarian," Nancy Polette wrote in 1975. "Each feels that he is without doubt the most misunderstood person in God's Universe. Teenagers are certain they are not listened to by parents; wives have rarely been listened to by their husbands; and many librarians feel that their only recourse to obtaining the school administrator's ear is to break down his office

door, sit on his lap, grab an ear in each hand, and SHOUT.”³³ Overlooking the sexist stereotyping in these statements, her words nonetheless reflect intransigent power relationships in which building-level school librarians had to operate.

Besides principals, others in formal education continued to look past the school library. In 1967, for example, Mary Gaver wrote Little, Brown & Company about its recently published *Forward to Teach*, which focused on “the fun and inspiration to be found in elementary school teaching.” But, Gaver continued, “Imagine my chagrin, bewilderment, and sorrow when I discovered . . . a book so traditional in tone—so backward in point of view—as not to recognize that all really good elementary schools now have a school library! Really,” she wrote, “if publishers have any notion of helping us librarians ‘grow the market’ for their books, the most direct way they could do so would be to see that authors of their books (where appropriate) include mention of school libraries!”³⁴

A 1966 survey Gaver and a colleague conducted to identify essential school library practices concluded that “the great bulk” was concerned with “the physical means for providing school library services, i.e., collections, quarters, personnel,” and those common to all school libraries surveyed fit into three categories—“library instruction, service to faculty, and reading guidance.”³⁵ The survey thus showed the profession’s jurisdiction had not changed substantially over the decades, and although it had assumed responsibility for new information-delivery platforms, it still constituted a profession in service to teaching that got little support from other educational associations. In a 1969 study, Gaver surveyed a sampling of high school librarians to determine what instructional services they provided. Those services reported most often included orientation for new students, instructions for groups and individuals in how to use the media center, assistance in using the library targeted to specific English classes, and scheduling class visits for reference work instruction.³⁶ Hardly any participated in curriculum development or instructional design, two of the major imperatives written into the 1960 *Standards*.

Like C. C. Certain, some educators challenged attitudes toward what school librarians continued to call “pleasure reading.” In 1938, for example, Louise Rosenblatt published *Literature as Exploration*, a pioneering study written for the Progressive Education Association’s Commission on Human Relations. In it she argued that because reading was not “a passive process of absorption” but “a form of intense activity,” researchers needed “to find out what happens when specific human beings, with their interests and anxieties, participate in the emotional and intellectual life” made possible by reading.³⁷ All of librarianship, so concentrated on improving professional expertise and management, and so comfortable in a library faith steeped in a literary canon supported by a well-developed bibliographic structure, overlooked Rosenblatt. *Library Literature*, a Wilson index to “current books, pamphlets, and periodical literature relating to

the library profession," has no entries for or reviews of *Literature as Exploration*, which quickly became a standard in literary criticism and went through four more editions in the twentieth century.

Nearly thirty years after Rosenblatt's first edition was published, English teacher Daniel Fader described his efforts to transform the largely illiterate students he taught at a Michigan school for juvenile delinquents into readers. He first found a local paperback vendor willing to donate popular paperbacks and magazines, then displayed them face out rather than spine out in the school library. Most of the books and magazines had little to do with supporting the school's curriculum; all were selected to encourage "pleasure reading." Driving his pedagogy was a conviction that the approach to literature should be social rather than literary, and that teaching language skills should come "through organic rather than mechanic or descriptive means." Most public school libraries, he lamented, "are disaster areas, and librarians who do not display books attractively must share the blame with teachers who do not make reading pleasurable."³⁸ By surrounding them with daily newspapers, popular magazines, and paperbacks they liked, not only did his students augment their literacy skills, they also showed increases in self-esteem and less anxiety about school as the year progressed.

Adding to School Librarianship's Bibliographic Structure

What school librarians were allowed to "select" (a more positive word than "censor," although the process of "selecting" for a school library had the same effect on a child's universe of possibilities) was directly influenced by reviewing media and acquisition guides, some of which were new in the 1960s. In 1965, for example, the H. W. Wilson Company issued its first edition of the *Junior High School Library Catalog*, consisting of 3,278 citations. It also identified highly recommended titles with stars; 395 received single stars, 204 double stars. Edited by two women, its citations were selected by a panel of twenty-three people (twenty of them women) of "the highest professional standing," all nominated by AASL.³⁹ Until the next quinquennial edition was issued in 1970, annual supplements promised to identify recommended titles published in the interim.

Also in 1965 the Bro-Dart Foundation issued the first edition of *The Elementary School Library Collection, Phases 1-2-3*. Edited by Mary Gaver, it recommended 1,748 titles as a minimum collection based on the 1960 *Standards*, with an increase to 5,592 in Phases 2 and 3 if elementary schools could afford more. Subjects covered included religion, sex education, foreign languages, and local history (all "areas emerging in new practice") and cited basic reference collections, periodicals, and audiovisual materials. Selections also addressed several culturally sensitive areas, including a "new emphasis on city life to fit the change from a rural to an urban society, a shift from middle-class backgrounds

exclusively to a more realistic admixture, and a new emphasis on the contributions made by Negroes to the history and development of the United States," as Gaver stated in her preface.

For school librarians, this constituted exciting new turf that challenged the status quo. One also sees in its citations some evidence that the influence of the early twentieth-century children's literature clerisy was softening among newer generations of school librarians. In addition to "those titles of real literary merit which all children should have a chance to read," Gaver noted, her bibliography also included "titles of immediate appeal, interest and social value."⁴⁰ That a growing number of school librarians were also acquiring Golden Books lauded by the American Institute of Graphic Arts for the quality of their illustrations offers additional evidence that school library collections were becoming more culturally inclusive.⁴¹ And by this time leaders in school librarianship had become more comfortable with the relationships they had built with children's book publishers.

To help her compile the bibliography Gaver had asked former student Ethel Richards, a New Jersey middle school librarian and a black woman, to select fiction. Richards balked. She was particularly concerned about the Dr. Doolittle books, which were full of racial stereotypes. Gaver, however, insisted, giving Richards *carte blanche* to decide on exclusions for herself. Among others Richards and Gaver excluded were *The Five Chinese Brothers* and *Little Black Sambo*; *Mary Poppins*, however, made it, despite criticism. Richards later told Gaver that had she been forced to include Dr. Doolittle titles in her selections, she would have resigned from the project. Pennsylvania immediately adopted *The Elementary School Library Collection* as a guide for spending ESEA Title II money; other states followed suit.⁴²

No matter how hard editors and publishers of school library acquisition guides tried, however, many books they recommended still carried systemic racial, gender, and class biases. Having these shortcomings pointed out to them was often embarrassing and sometimes irritating. In 1965 the *Saturday Review of Books* published "The All White World of Children's Books," an article in which Nancy Larrick looked at 5,206 children's books sixty-three publishers had issued between 1962 and 1964, some of the most violent years of the civil rights struggle. Larrick found only 6.7 percent included one or more black people. "Integration may be the law of the land," she concluded, "but most of the books children see are all-white."⁴³ Her article startled many in the world of children's literature, including the clerisy of children's librarians who had assumed primary responsibility for constructing the literary world from which generations of public and school librarians had been making selections. "Literature," argued the *Horn Book* editor in response to Larrick's conviction that children's book authors had to address the politics of race, "is not put together like a casserole and seasoned with a pinch of this and a dash of that."⁴⁴

Some school librarians also bristled at Larrick's conclusions. In late 1965 one AASL officer wrote the Dade County Public Schools Library Services Supervisor (a copy also went to the AASL Executive Secretary) that she was withdrawing her suggestion to have Larrick address the forthcoming ALA-NEA Joint Conference in Miami. "I have learned that at present she is not popular in some quarters because of her controversial article." In the same letter the AASL officer complimented the Miami librarian on her "feeling about censorship" as a program topic, but forewarned that she "would certainly not wish to use a topic which would leave a negative feeling."⁴⁵ Neither person seemed to realize that not inviting Larrick to address a group of librarians was also a form of censorship.

But Larrick also had supporters in the school library community. In 1967 a black high school librarian in Cleveland, A. Grace Mims, declared Larrick's criticism justified. "In all the words written and spoken on the subject of neglecting or distorting the Negro's place in our culture, very little criticism has been directed at the school library," she wrote. "School librarians have come off practically unscathed and uncriticized and, in all fairness, I wonder if we deserve this." Mims referenced a survey of high school librarians in Oakland County, Michigan. Of the thirty-one who responded only five saw the need for including black history and literature in their collections. "We have no need for books on integration here—we have no problem," said one librarian. In response, Mims pointed out the insular nature of communities like Oakland County, citing numerous surveys of white high school students who displayed negative feelings toward people of color without ever having interacted with them. Books covering black history and literature offered opportunities to correct this problem, she argued. "I feel that we as school librarians can make a great contribution to democracy and justice by becoming leaders instead of lemmings in the area of book selection . . . We owe it to this generation to help them prepare to live in a complex, multiracial, and many colored nation and world."⁴⁶

In her 1971 Columbia University dissertation Dorothy Broderick used editions of *Children's Catalog* to identify titles containing stereotypical and demeaning images of black people in children's books, then chased down reviews contemporary to their publication. For example, Broderick described as "grotesque" the depictions of the chief characters—black twins Atlantic and Pacific and their babysitter Magnolia Blossom—in Ellis Credle's *Across the Cotton Patch* (1942). But Anne Carroll Moore had reviewed the book as "an American picture-storybook in which Negro children of the South are drawn and written about with spontaneity, humor and affection." Moore's review reflected what Broderick called a "fundamental flaw in the orientation of many children's librarians, namely that books can be evaluated 'internally,' without reference to the society in which they are produced."⁴⁷

Such reevaluations went beyond race to encompass other biases. Inspired by the women's rights movement of the 1960s, several feminists began to analyze children's literature for gender stereotypes. After reading a 1971 *Woman's Day* article arguing that "the feminine image" in children's literature was "loaded" with "stereotyped characters and outmoded situations . . . foisted upon small girls at an age when they are just beginning to formulate an idea of themselves and their worth," Linda Greenburg visited three Boston Public Library branches whose children's literature collections had been guided by *Children's Catalog*. In the books she analyzed, most had girls as central characters but none had commented on or problematized the patriarchal literary worlds they inhabited.⁴⁸

In 1971 *School Library Journal* editor Evelyn Geller lamented that even in Newbery-Caldecott winners "male characters outnumber female characters by almost three to one. Girls are shown as helpless, 'feminine.' Boys are aggressive and stoic. When the mold doesn't fit they are 'sissies' or 'tomboys.' Children's books usually picture mommy as housewife." Her effort demonstrated an increased willingness among some leading women in the school library community to give voice to issues of gender that the larger American women's movement nurtured.⁴⁹ And like issues of race in school librarianship, most of that voice came through the pages of *School Library Journal*.

While children's and school librarians generally ignored the fact that their reliance on the profession's standard acquisition guides and "best reading" bibliographies may have perpetuated systemic racism and patriarchy, many within the profession empathized with cultural shifts occurring in the larger society and took these criticisms to heart. In February 1965, for example, a group of New Yorkers established the Council on Interracial Books for Children to press the publishing industry for more diversity in children's literature. "Its impact on children's literature was profound," notes cultural historian Julia Mickenberg. "Publishers, librarians, parents, educators, nonprofits, and government agencies turned to council members for their expertise as they sought children's books that were more representative of the nation's diversity."⁵⁰ Moving forward, leading members of the school library community increasingly addressed race, gender, and class biases. Publishers also began issuing children's books that were more realistic and reflective of American cultural diversity, which enabled librarians by the mid-1970s to circulate selection lists for different age levels with titles like "Cinderella Comes Out of the Kitchen" and "Mary Is Not Contrary Anymore."

Censorship Issues

Censorship efforts—both overt and covert—continued to plague professional practice. In January 1966, after a Hanover, Virginia, County School Board member complained that Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* was "immoral lit-

erature," the board banned from school libraries not only this book, but also George Orwell's *1984* and John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, all of which were on the Virginia Board of Education's approved list of school library books. The *Richmond News Ledger* editor complained the decision had "validated the kind of small-bore stupidity that deserves to be readily condemned." Harper Lee had fun with the incident. She sent the *News Ledger* \$10 with the suggestion that it be used to enroll Hanover School Board members in first grade. "To hear that the novel is 'immoral' has made me count the years between now and 1984, for I have yet to come across a better example of double-think." Public pressure on the board eventually returned the books to the county's school library shelves.⁵¹

One Arizona high school principal pointed out to *School Library Journal* that the *Story of the Negro*, a young adult history text written by Arna Bontemps and recommended by *SLJ*, "contains distorted information." Not only did Bontemps infer that African Americans were "stolen" by white Americans, he had dedicated his book to Langston Hughes, "a dedicated Communist," and in his book referenced as a "great" American W. E. B. Du Bois, someone "as un-American as you can get." The principal questioned whether the book should be on school library shelves. *SLJ*'s response was unequivocal. Because so much of what Bontemps had in his narrative was absent from most US history textbooks, the *Story of the Negro* was essential.⁵²

But *SLJ*'s response did not match professional school library practice in the Grand Canyon State. In a 1968 survey of 277 secondary-education English teachers and librarians in Arizona about censorship practices, one librarian responded, "Nobody here ever taught anything remotely worth censoring. And if you think that's bad, you ought to see our library," which had "even less to offer than the English classes." Another argued that because librarians and teachers were public employees, the public "has the right to ask any of us to avoid using any material repugnant to any parent or student." One teacher responded: "Our librarian advises that we do not have a problem because she anticipates that if such books as *The Catcher in the Rye* were in our library . . . she does not put them on the shelves." If students wanted such books, the librarian would tell them to buy the paperback version themselves.⁵³

Some efforts to control access were more overt. When a 1967 *Newsweek* issue sported a provocative cover with the caption "Anything Goes," a Pennsylvania school librarian refused to place it on her magazine rack. "This is not censorship, but guidance," she told the editor. The librarian also asked AASL to formally protest to *Newsweek*. "Otherwise, it can be assumed that we also agree that 'anything goes.'" "Letters like the attached one are not numerous," the AASL executive secretary wrote the AASL president, to which the president replied, "Thank goodness."⁵⁴ "Upon the advice of our principal and the better judgment of the faculty members," an Indiana high school librarian wrote

McCall's in 1970, "we have pulled your November 1969 issue out of our classrooms and off the library shelves. We have found your feature article 'Whither the Bra' hardly a bonus, and we do not wish to give it a nod of approval for our students." A Michigan librarian who subsequently reported the *McCall's* article in the *SLJ* lamented, "Censorship from within the profession is the most dangerous of all forms of censorship that we librarians face."⁵⁵

Contesting Professional Jurisdictions Continued

As schools increasingly adopted innovative teaching practices emphasizing independent learning in the 1960s, and as educational materials took on increasingly nonprint forms made affordable by federal funding, many school libraries followed the rhetoric of the 1960 *Standards* and whether by choice or force of circumstances transitioned into "instructional materials centers" by centralizing the acquisition, organization, and circulation of these materials in one facility. Nonetheless, the professional discourse school librarians inherited from previous generations inclined many to continue favoring books over audiovisual media. One North Dakota high school librarian acknowledged the changes that the 1960s and 1970s brought to her job, but noted that "print and nonprint-oriented librarians" were "'different breeds of cat'—more often than not of different sexes." She later admitted, "most librarians still prefer one area over the other."⁵⁶ And sometimes the push to include nonprint media in school librarianship created distorted impressions. "In our move toward 'media' as an all inclusive term, our attention has been focused on certain aspects of the total picture, namely the *Standards*," AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson wrote a colleague in 1968. Many believed AASL was "losing our concern in the book area."⁵⁷

All was not well between AASL and DAVI, which in 1965 published its own *Quantitative Standards for Audiovisual Personnel, Equipment, and Materials*. DAVI's membership had grown from 3,000 in 1958 to 11,000 in 1970. In early May 1966, AASL President Eleanor Ahlers reported that school librarians had been "clobbered" in some of the last DAVI conference sessions. Days later she wrote the ALA Washington Office Director monitoring federal legislation affecting libraries that "A.V. people wanted to get the word 'library' out of" ES-EA's Title II. "That would be dreadful because we really are having this accepted in the field as a library title," she argued.⁵⁸ However, she failed to acknowledge that AASL had not even consulted DAVI when drafting language for Title II.⁵⁹

In a 1966 report to the Knapp School Libraries Project Advisory Board about an educational media conference she recently attended, Peggy Sullivan said she "was unprepared for the hostility, confusion, and ignorance about ALA and its several activities, divisions, etc., which these people expressed." By what authority does ALA "think it can set standards for audiovisual materials and equipment?" complained one attendee. "Why didn't ALA have the guts to give credit

to the associations who helped draft its standards?" griped another, confusing ALA with AASL, as was not uncommon. "While we're sitting around here talking about nuts and bolts, the school librarians are down in Washington telling their congressmen how to vote!" said a third. Media people who had "some or all responsibility for the school library program thrust upon them" were particularly confused. Sullivan suggested hosting institutes coordinated through ALA and DAVI to address the problems.⁶⁰ Still, when Sullivan reported on an AASL-sponsored meeting at an NCATE conference, she found hope. Based on reactions there she speculated that "school librarians have really come of age and been accepted in professional groups of this kind . . . What I really feel is that as a professional group we have received the recognition and 'absorption' that we have been searching for." She recommended the board give this some thought as it made future plans.⁶¹

But matters between the two professional groups did not improve. In April 1967, *SLJ* editor Geller attacked the "separate but equal" theory DAVI put forward at its most recent conference, which made school librarians responsible for evaluating both print and nonprint content, but allocated responsibility for managing equipment to a "media specialist." In this Geller saw a "pervasive and damaging anti-book bias" that militated against the goal of school librarians to form "one instructional mosaic." Geller argued that "the twin approach will [not] succeed at the system or building level: the loopholes are too convenient." School librarians and media specialists had to work together "by coordinating their programs."⁶²

The new federal funding certainly pleased the nation's school library community, but, speaking for DAVI, Assistant Executive Secretary Mickey Bloodworth argued in 1968 that too many school librarians were spending too much Title II money on books and not enough on nonprint instructional materials. As the US Senate considered a new version of the Educational Technology Act (ETA), Bloodworth insisted it was "very short-sighted for librarians to feel that *print* must be written into a Bill before it's acceptable to AASL." Bloodworth reminded Geller that DAVI had not been consulted when drafting the ESEA's original Title II. "If we can obtain funds from ETA for nonprint materials without in any way affecting ESEA Title II it will certainly be helpful in our common goal of providing the amounts of instructional materials suggested in our joint standards."⁶³ One month later the AASL Executive Secretary requested the senator sponsoring ETA to change its title to "Educational Media Act."⁶⁴ She did not copy Bloodworth. The twenty-year-old cat and mouse game over professional jurisdiction between the two organizations continued.

To some degree, negotiating a set of guidelines had brought DAVI and AASL together in the late 1950s, and as chair of the AASL Standards Revision Committee Frances Henne was determined that the same would happen when AASL

received a \$25,000 grant in 1966 to update the 1960 guidelines. That November she met with DAVI officials in Washington, where the two organizations agreed to coauthor and publish the new standards.⁶⁵ As a member of the nation's library community in the mid-sixties, Henne was aware of an initiative at Wayne State University to integrate library skills into courses across the curriculum and successes at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, in promoting active collaboration between faculty and librarians. She firmly believed school librarians had to increase their instructional role in curriculum delivery. Resistance to the idea within school librarianship persisted, however. "Too many librarians . . . want nothing to do with audiovisual materials," reported one Iowa elementary school librarian. Progress would occur only "when librarians and media specialists quit being jealous of each other's importance and learn that both are essential to a good learning program."⁶⁶

When the AASL-DAVI standards committee met on November 27–28, 1967, twelve of the fourteen AASL members were women, while twelve of the thirteen DAVI members were men.⁶⁷ Negotiations on the revised standards did not go well. On January 25, 1968, NEA Executive Secretary Anne Heyer wrote Henne she had just received a petition from the New York State Audiovisual Council urging DAVI to "immediately withdraw" from the joint project. The petition, she lamented, inferred that AASL thought "the audiovisual field was not needed, unwanted, and soon, hopefully" would be "absorbed by the library field. In addition, the audiovisual field was made to look somewhat foolish and to be a 'foot-dragging' lot as far as high standards were concerned." Such talk made it difficult to work together on joint projects, she argued.⁶⁸

Despite their disagreements, however, AASL and DAVI still managed to publish *Standards for School Media Programs* in March 1969. The new *Standards* emphasized information access and focused more on people and programs than materials and their arrangement. In part, AASL leaders had been driven by concerns that if the school library world did not embrace newer educational technologies, the school library would lose its standing in formal education and perhaps even disappear. Depending on school size, the *Standards* required minimum collections of books, filmstrips, 26-millimeter films, records, art prints, transparencies, plus assorted other media like televisions, copying machines, record players, globes, microfilm, and vertical files. To manage all this schools would need one full-time "media specialist" for every 250 students.

About the same time, AASL's relationship with NEA shifted when the latter changed its rules so that AASL could no longer qualify as an NEA department unless its members also joined the NEA. Because ALA bylaws prohibited AASL from requiring its members to join another organization, AASL's only option for a formal connection with NEA was as an associated organization, which did not qualify it for the free office space at NEA Headquarters it had

previously enjoyed.⁶⁹ In September 1969, AASL officially became an associated organization of the NEA (“the weakest link among the three possibilities,” wrote *SLJ*’s Geller), and funded an assistant executive secretary to occupy an NEA office it rented.⁷⁰

Integrating Public School Libraries

Between 1950, when AASL became an ALA Division, and 1969, when it issued *Standards for School Media Programs*, the nation experienced the Montgomery bus boycotts, the murder of Emmett Till, hostilities surrounding the integration of Little Rock’s Central High School, lunch counter and public library sit-ins, bombings of schools and churches, and the assassinations of Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King Jr. The catalyst for most of this activity was *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which determined that segregated schools were separate but not equal and ordered American public schools to desegregate. Throughout this period AASL—whose membership included librarians in segregated schools, school library supervisors in states supporting segregated systems, and faculty members teaching in library schools at segregated universities—took no action to support *Brown* or oppose segregated school libraries.

An analysis of *Library Literature* between 1954 and 1969 shows no entries for the 1954 *Brown* decision. As a subject heading, “Segregation and the Library” did not appear until the 1958–1960 edition; its ten entries included none addressing segregated school libraries. Under the subject heading “Negro and the Library,” *Library Literature* listed under a subheading “School Libraries (Negro)” the forty-two theses on school libraries authored by library school students at the historically black Atlanta University, but nothing else before 1969. During this entire period *Library Literature* had no entry for “segregated schools” or “segregated school libraries” listed under the “American Association of School Librarians.” Seven of the twenty-two AASL presidents between 1950 and 1971 were from the South, including Virginia McJenkin (1964–1965), Director of the Fulton County (Georgia) School Libraries (which desegregated in 1961) and from 1943 to 1947 President of the Georgia Library Association, which refused to admit blacks as members until the late 1960s.

Thus, except for Atlanta University students, school librarianship and its professional associations—including AASL—almost entirely ignored the subject of segregated school libraries in its literature during the Civil Rights era, in the midst of which it passed (and revised) a School Library Bill of Rights. Although segregated school libraries may have been a subject of conversation in conference cloakrooms and hallways, AASL never publicly debated the subject. That so many AASL leaders were from Jim Crow states could not have been unrelated to AASL’s deafening silence on this issue of national importance. In order to generate evidence of racial inequalities in librarianship, Atlanta University

School of Library Service Dean Virginia Lacy Jones encouraged many of her students to undertake master's theses that surveyed black libraries of all types against the standards each sector of the library profession had crafted and revised. From a reading of forty-two theses written by Atlanta students on southern public school libraries after *Brown* and before the 1964 Civil Rights Act, several consistencies emerge.⁷¹

One 1959 thesis on the Williamson High School Library in Mobile, Alabama, is typical. As Alabama's second largest city, Mobile supported 113 schools (public, private, and parochial), twenty-seven of which were exclusively for blacks. Only one of those twenty-seven was a public high school—Williamson—which had no facility large enough to house the entire student body, in large part because its library occupied space that was originally designed as an auditorium and stage. Parents of the students were in low wage-earning groups and on average had completed only eight years of school. The high school offered three courses of study: general, academic, and vocational. The library, like most black public school libraries surveyed by Atlanta students, largely failed to meet AASL standards for size of collection, number of staff, and annual budget per pupil.⁷²

Most high schools described in the Atlanta University theses, however, did teach a black history course, and most of their libraries had special collections of "Negro" materials, including books by and about African Americans not cited in standard acquisition guides. Many also subscribed to un-indexed black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, the *Atlanta World*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the Baltimore *Afro-American*, and to black periodicals like *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Negro Digest*, and the *Journal of Negro History*, most of which were not indexed in the *Abridged Readers' Guide*. Many black students loved these collections. In his autobiography, future civil rights activist and Georgia Congressman John Lewis recalled that his Troy, Alabama, segregated school library "became like a second home for me." There he read *Jet*, *Ebony*, the *Courier*, the *Afro-American*, and the *Chicago Defender*.⁷³

Most southern library and education associations were segregated from the beginning. AASL not only said nothing and took no public position against these racist practices, it continued to accept delegates from segregated school library associations as AASL representatives. Sometimes, however, regulations that came with federal funding forced the school library community to confront Jim Crow. In 1960, for example, the School Library Development Project's Advisory Committee (funded by the Council on Library Resources) that had been charged to implement the new *Standards* insisted that any projects for standards implementation had to be designed by and be of benefit to both segregated and integrated associations—a tacit approval of "separate but equal."⁷⁴ And in response to demands that Knapp Project applicants had to guarantee open accommodations in hotels and restaurants for visiting team members, sev-

eral Deep South school representatives responded that they were "unaccustomed to having nonwhite visitors in schools."⁷⁵

From its beginnings, ESEA funding had been tied to desegregation guidelines published by the US Office of Education. Some compliant school systems reported successes. In 1967, for example, Los Angeles' mostly black 20th Street School, located twenty-five blocks away from a public library branch, not only opened its first school library, it also welcomed a new librarian, two reading specialists, and a clerk. In the new library students found slides, filmstrips, tape recorders, phonographs, and earphones. "The selection of books in the new library is excellent," wrote the city's black weekly. "It includes 400 books in which Negro children and their families are portrayed in urban life, a welcome contrast to the all-white readers used in the past."⁷⁶ Other California minorities were not so lucky. In his late-1960s survey of Mexican American school library services in Sacramento and East Los Angeles, Robert Haro discovered that Mexican American parents had "no voice in the types of library materials secured, and receive poor service for their children in school libraries."⁷⁷

In the South, educators at all levels accepted ESEA funding but tried to skirt regulations governing its distribution. In 1966 the USOE initiated steps to terminate funding to noncompliant districts and by September had identified 164.⁷⁸ Title II provided funding for school libraries to purchase "multi-racial" books, but because many southern schools continued to acquire "mint julep" titles, Congress conducted hearings on the subject, at which black educators asked that all ESEA funding be withheld from these schools. But because of America's tradition of local control of education, argued the USOE commissioner, federal officials could not "dictate" or "censor" content. Other witnesses worried about the impact of mixed-race textbooks. One North Carolina superintendent told congressmen he worried educators would be "forced to integrate [textbooks] beyond what they want to."⁷⁹ Throughout the hearings AASL made no statement about the subject.

AASL's quiescence about segregation contrasted sharply with NEA, whose history—although hardly a model for civil rights activism—nonetheless shows a professional association open to debate about the issue of segregated schools. Already by 1926 an NEA dominated by whites formed a joint committee with the National Association for Teachers in Colored Schools (which in 1937 changed its name to the American Teachers Association) to discuss matters of mutual concern. The 1954 *Brown* decision complicated relationships between segregated NEA state affiliates in the South and led more white NEA members across the country—not to mention black members who historically were peripheral participants in the organization—to demand that the association live up to its rhetoric about democratic ideals. Although NEA passed a weak resolution on segregated public schools shortly after the *Brown* decision, the effort effectively

introduced the subject into the profession's discourse. In subsequent years, notes education historian Carol Karpinski, "conventions became the scene of protracted and discordant debates on integration" as many NEA members openly expressed their shock at the association's lethargy in addressing the plight of black schoolchildren in the South.⁸⁰

In 1965 NEA had more than a million members who belonged to 8,500 local affiliates, most in rural areas. By that time most NEA units had addressed segregation issues. For example, its DuShane Foundation was directly involved in litigating cases for black teachers who had lost their jobs because of integration. Its Department of Elementary School Principals focused a 1965 conference on southern school mergers. It supported five regional conferences that addressed the issue of integrating faculties, and numerous NEA publications directly addressed practical problems that schools encountered when they attempted to integrate. A joint NEA-USOE 1965 report showed 688 black teachers in the Deep South had lost their jobs because of racial discrimination. In 1966 NEA ordered all state education associations to desegregate and merge within two years. That same year NEA and the black American Teachers Association merged.⁸¹ And in 1967, the *NEA Journal* published the most articles on black education in its history. According to one NEA historian, this showed NEA had now taken an "aggressive civil rights stance."⁸²

In 1970 the NEA's Commission on Human Rights and Responsibilities sent a fact-finding team to investigate how federal court civil rights decisions were being implemented. Among their findings was evidence that at certain public schools whites and blacks could not sit at school library tables unless there was an empty chair between them, and in others blacks were scheduled for library visits at separate times from whites. For a two-week period in 1970, an NEA task force visited seventy school districts in Louisiana and Mississippi, two states that still refused to integrate their schools. The task force discovered a pattern of displacement and demotion of black educators, discrimination against black students, a lack of black representation on school boards, and abuse of federal funds allocated to eliminate school segregation.⁸³ At its 1970 convention the NEA membership resolved by voice vote that there should be "no diversion of federal funds, goods, or services" to nonpublic elementary and secondary schools.⁸⁴ It was clear that as a professional association NEA was confronting the issue of segregated schools.

To avoid integration, by 1970 southern states had opened over 700 private schools. Many officials in southern states attempted to funnel federal funds to these private academies in various ways. In addition, public libraries benefitting from federal funds were frequently supplying these private schools with library services. In Virginia's Lunenburg County, for example, the public library provided service to private academies even while "its librarians [were] very rude and

hostile towards black students and black people" trying to use it. Similarly, the Savannah (GA) Public Library provided bookmobile service to the new private schools in Chatham County. Although ALA had voted to censure public and school libraries that provided services to segregated private schools at its 1970 midwinter meeting, it took no action against these libraries, despite protests from the ALA Black Caucus. Throughout, AASL said nothing.⁸⁵

E. J. Josey, Library Director at Georgia's historically black Savannah State College, led protests inside ALA. In 1964 Josey pressured ALA to pass a resolution preventing its officers from speaking at segregated state library association meetings. Upon hearing about it, AASL President Virginia McJenkin wrote the ALA Executive Director that she felt obligated to honor her commitment to a July 9–10 Alabama School Librarians Association (a white organization) workshop made before the resolution was passed, but would reject an invitation from the Louisiana Association of School Librarians for a July 20–23 conference. "I assure you and the ALA Executive Board that, as President of AASL, I will make every effort to comply with the interpretation of this resolution."⁸⁶

In the mid-1950s ALA had voted not to allow more than one library association per state to represent its interests and insisted that membership in any chapter admitted be open to all. Several Deep South state library associations refused, and withdrew from ALA. AASL did not follow suit, however, and continued to admit segregated state school library associations as Assembly members.⁸⁷ "If it kept its goals in mind, AASL would long have barred segregated school library associations from official delegation to its own state assembly," *SLJ's* Geller wrote in 1970. "In this respect, AASL has neglected not only to formulate policy but to enforce ALA's own ban on segregated chapters."⁸⁸

In 1967, however, AASL formed a Committee on the Treatment of Minorities in Library Books and Other Instructional Materials, and named David Cohen its Chair. Cohen, a school librarian in Queens, New York, had been a member of the leftist Progressive Librarians Council's Civil Rights Committee in the 1940s. He quickly called for an informational meeting to include representatives of the Children's Services Division, the Young Adult Services Division, the National Council for Teachers of English, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers. But the AASL Board balked, authorizing only a meeting of AASL groups like the Supervisors Section and the Large City School Libraries Committee. Because of costs, the board argued, the committee would have to work within AASL. Cohen acquiesced, and at the 1969 conference presented the board with a draft of "Guidelines to Publishers Reflecting Positive Treatment of Minorities in Library Materials" and a series of bibliographies. Still the board hesitated; it accepted the guidelines, but delayed accepting the bibliographies by instead creating a standing committee to deal with the issue in the future.

Undeterred, Cohen arranged for an open meeting at the 1969 ALA conference to discuss “Quality Interracial Books: Criteria for Selection and Guidelines to Publishers;” 1,000 people attended, and listened to a panel of publishers and librarians. The meeting, however, brought protests not only from AASL but also from other ALA units that considered Cohen’s efforts an infringement on their professional jurisdictions. At the 1970 annual meeting the AASL Board censured Cohen for exceeding his committee’s charge. “It became clear that the drive of the chairman to get materials out for use was abrasive . . . to the Board,” observes AASL historian Charles Koch. Cohen served out his term, and then quit AASL. The incident showed that “if an issue of concern arises in which” the Board’s “in-group . . . feels strongly, the AASL goes to bat for its position,” even though the issue might infringe on the jurisdiction of another ALA unit, Koch argues. If, however, “an issue is pursued by one outside the in-group, the AASL Board conveniently resorts to procedural questions and protocol, reminding advocates that the issue may well be one in which others have an interest and should be involved.”⁸⁹

At its 1971 midwinter meeting, AASL passed a resolution calling on publishers, editors, and reviewers to promote accurate material on minority groups, and to enroll more of them in producing books school libraries would consider.⁹⁰ *School Library Journal* called the resolution “not very strong.” It probably reflected AASL board members’ ambivalence about being seen to order publishers around, *SLJ* surmised, and “the underlying fear of embarrassment if they didn’t listen.” As the *Journal* sardonically put the board’s stance: “who are we as librarians to tell publishers what to do?” The Dial Press editor cut to the heart of the issue. If you want these books published, she pointed out, “interest white people in them.”⁹¹ Although she didn’t say so, she included as consumers of her publications school librarians who continued to be servants to school curricula, state reading lists, and standard acquisition guides.

But public school integration eventually did come to the South, and southern school librarians and library organizations had to deal with it, whether they wanted to or not. Often, the process of integrating white schools was extremely painful for black students. In *A Girl Stands at the Door: The Generation of Young Women Who Desegregated America’s Schools* (2018), Rachel Devlin describes some of the experiences of young black women who integrated schools. Almost always, white students moved away from them in the lunchroom. “Students practically flew out of their chairs if a black student sat down at a lunch table—even if it was on the opposite end of the table from white students.” That usually guaranteed black students a seat—“indeed, a whole table”—and if there were enough black students to occupy one table each, white students would eat standing on the lunchroom periphery. “The N-word was constant,” and teachers often “implicitly or explicitly gave white students the green light to use” racial epithets.

After attending a few months, "the harassment became violent." Hallways were dangerous; black students, especially women, were pushed, jostled, and knocked into walls, mostly by young white men. The worst, however, was the isolation. "We didn't have the dogs," noted one black student, "we didn't have the water hoses . . . but the [isolation] was . . . insidious."⁹²

But specific to public school libraries Devlin also uncovered evidence that a few "sympathetic teachers" sent black students to the school library "as a safe place when the classroom got too rowdy." She also interviewed one Louisiana high school student "who used to go to the library, before school started, to get away from the white students." There she discovered books, especially art history books, that inspired her to become an artist.⁹³ When integrating one Mississippi high school in 1965 with her six siblings, one student recalled her first day on the bus. White children "started throwing all kinds of stuff, paper, chalk. And they called us all these names and talked about how much we stinked and said things like, 'Don't get close to that nigger.' We were terrified and uncomfortable." To counter this abuse she looked for quiet places to read in school. "When we had a library period I would put my head in a book and not look up and just study and study. I would block everything out and just focus."⁹⁴

Progress toward integrating teaching staffs proved extremely slow. A 1964 US Court of Appeals ruling forbidding Florida's Duvall County schools from assigning teachers to certain schools based on race had some effect, but Georgia, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, and Alabama refused to follow the ruling. "It's a tradition in Mississippi," noted one black high school principal demoted to assistant principal in an integrating school in 1969, "that no Negro has authority over any white."⁹⁵ In Jackson, school administrators attempted to integrate faculty by moving Lily Cooley, the black school librarian at Blackburn Junior High to the white Whitten Junior High, and the white librarian at the latter to Blackburn. But the Whitten school librarian refused the arrangement, and when Cooley was then told she would be "co-librarian" with her intransigent white colleague at Whitten, she also turned it down.⁹⁶

"They think librarians can't affect students much, so we're the first ones they use to integrate white schools," one black school librarian in Mississippi told *SLJ's* Pat Schuman in 1971. "They think all we do is check out books, and they're less scared of us than black classroom teachers." Said another, "We are continually moved around and shoved around. We are sacrificed first." In some schools, Schuman noted, black teachers were assigned to the library to keep them out of the classroom. Besides being in the front lines of integration, Schuman reported, her telephone survey showed that black school librarians were "largely left out of the power structure," no matter their education and experience.⁹⁷

"Any black librarian in a leadership role in Alabama has lessons to learn, one of which is always to keep his guard up," Carrie Robinson, Negro School Library

Supervisor in Alabama's Department of Education, later recalled. The entrenched power system of white politicians and educators blocked any progress, Robinson insisted, calling them a "devastating force" in Alabama. "A case in point is the present [1969] circumstance of black school librarians. They were the first used, not primarily to provide service, but as a pretense of a satisfactory means to integrate schools," Robinson noted. "In all too many instances they have been placed in subordinate positions to white librarians who are less competent, or in schools where effective library programs are non-existent." Even more frequently, "the black school from which the black librarian is taken is left without a librarian. Many good situations in our schools have been shattered in this way, and hundreds of black boys and girls are being deprived of their most effective teaching-learning facilities and opportunities." But "even more crucial," she lamented, was the "wholesale closing of black schools under the pretense of federal take-over." Some library programs "I have wanted to develop have been prostituted or prohibited because many people in positions of authority refuse to accept black leadership," Robinson wrote. "My professional growth and, in my opinion, some talent, have been stymied on both the local and national levels simply because I am black."⁹⁸

Virginia Lacy Jones noted that black school librarians were not civil rights activists. "Did you participate in the freedom marches?" Jones would often ask them. Almost always, they responded, "No, that's not my thing." "Then it is your thing, your contribution to the improvement of black opportunities," Jones insisted, "to make the programs in the white schools as good as yours in the black schools."⁹⁹ Incoming ALA President Mary Gaver reached out to Jones at the 1966 midwinter meeting to see what ALA could do to help black school librarians being transferred to white schools. Gaver later admitted nothing ever came of her discussion with Jones, and neither ALA nor AASL ever publicly addressed the practice of transferring black librarians to white schools to "integrate" their faculties.¹⁰⁰

And then there was the issue of school library collections. "Our textbooks have made the black population of America invisible," Carrie Robinson wrote in a 1969 *ALA Bulletin* article. "They have minimized or ignored the long history of violence between the races, leading many to believe that race relations have been harmonious and mutually satisfying." These textbooks also perpetuated "an image which typifies black people as artless, unsophisticated, and spineless creatures," and ignored the "excruciating deprivations to which black Americans have been subjected." Robinson could have made the same case against the collections acquired by many public school librarians across the country since the turn of the century. Although she provided a bibliography of materials to help school librarians make wise choices regarding race issues in American history, the article was accompanied by two photos depicting com-

mon activities in school libraries—all five people represented in the two photos (four children, one adult) were white.¹⁰¹

At the time she published the article, Robinson was deeply enmeshed in a debate with her employer. When ESEA funds were made available in 1966 to supervise secondary school libraries, Alabama's Department of Education appointed a white employee whose name had been on a list of qualified candidates to administer those funds; the appointment carried a Rank III. Robinson's name was not on that list because, it was later discovered, Department officials routinely "failed to advertise and recruit for applications from among Negroes as they do among comparably situated white persons."¹⁰² Although better qualified than the white hire, she was instead appointed to supervise elementary school libraries at Rank II.¹⁰³

On May 14, 1969, Robinson filed a complaint in US District Court that she had been denied equal protection as an Alabama State Department of Education employee because of her race.¹⁰⁴ Months later Robinson suffered yet another humiliation during a reorganization of the education department, when without explanation she and her secretary were moved from a previously occupied roomy office into a fifteen by sixteen foot room containing five desks for the five people assigned to work there. Except for the top of her desk Robinson had no other room to store materials. "This situation is most disturbing," she complained.¹⁰⁵

About the time she had been shifted to this cramped office Robinson had another surprise, this one foisted on her by AASL. When AASL President John Rowell learned that the state of Alabama had decided to use \$7,500 from ESEA Title III funds in 1969 to host a program on a special "Library Learning Center" project at the Jacksonville public schools, he suggested it instead take place at AASL's next annual conference. Rowell told the Jacksonville Superintendent supervising the project that he anticipated an "attendance of 800 participants representing all 50 states." If the superintendent agreed, Rowell noted, planning had to begin right away and he suggested a committee of six to oversee the program, including Nina Martin, Alabama's school library consultant and Robinson's superior, and Ruth Waldrop, the University of Alabama's library school director. The fact that all Alabama members were white "will probably" cause "complications," one ALA official penned at the bottom of the superintendent's acceptance letter, "but what doesn't? It will be an exciting day for participants."¹⁰⁶

Three months later AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson invited Robinson to join the program planning committee. Robinson flashed anger when she received the invitation: "why was I not included in the initial planning stage?" she responded. Even though Waldrop and Martin had crossed paths with her in previous months, and despite the fact that "the partition between my office and Nina's is less than ceiling high," she wrote, Vinson's letter "was my first knowledge of such plans." Robinson also objected to the program itself.

There was “no school library development in Alabama that merits [the] national recognition” an AASL program would bring, she told Vinson, and the project in question had already been tainted by a racial conflict. “This whole matter is, in my opinion, inconceivable,” she lamented. “I find it difficult to believe that the Association can so easily be ‘taken in.’” Robinson refused to serve on the committee “because of existing conditions in Alabama and the seemingly surreptitious nature of this whole matter.”¹⁰⁷ As a result of her objections, AASL scrapped plans to host the program at its annual conference.

Because her employers’ response to her May 14 complaint was not satisfactory, on December 23, 1969, NEA and the black Alabama State Teachers Association Robinson helped organize in 1947 filed a class action suit against the department on Robinson’s behalf for racial discrimination in hiring, arguing that her First, Fifth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights had been violated. To support her, NEA’s DuShane Emergency Fund authorized legal fees of \$2,259.38.¹⁰⁸ Her case represented the first time NEA filed a racial discrimination suit against a state department of education. At the time the department employed 270 professionals; only three were black, and none had ever been promoted above Rank II in a system of rankings from I to IV. The suit argued Robinson had been passed over for the ESEA-funded state school library supervisor’s position, and the department had instead hired a white woman whose qualifications were “far inferior” to Robinson’s. She asked for \$100,000 in compensatory damages, \$25,000 in punitive damages, plus attorneys’ fees.¹⁰⁹

Although the suit received little attention in the nation’s library press, New York State Library employees E. J. Josey (who had moved from Savannah State College in 1967) and a colleague asked AASL to file an amicus brief on behalf of Robinson, who at the time was also an AASL board member and a second-term ALA Councilor at Large. The NEA suit was “a positive step toward both the eradication of racism and the defense of members of our profession,” they wrote AASL President Rowell on January 13, 1970. ALA and AASL involvement “would immeasurably strengthen it as well as offering tangible evidence to the members of both associations and to the profession as a whole that we are seriously committed to democratic principles.”¹¹⁰

In the previous decade ALA chose not to file amicus briefs in any of the court cases brought by black southerners who had been denied access to segregated public libraries.¹¹¹ Similarly, regarding libraries at segregated schools, ALA, its Office of Intellectual Freedom, and AASL chose not to investigate race discrimination in southern school libraries, and ALA choose not to censure schools in which they took place. Even after an ALA Black Caucus investigation supported by the NAACP identified five southern public libraries providing bookmobile service and collections to schools deliberately established to evade integration, OIF’s Director Judith Krug would only write “letters of inquiry” to the librar-

ies' directors (most responded with denials) instead of gathering evidence to substantiate a censure case. "Libraries helping other institutions evade the law are accessories," argued Josey, and ought to be censured.¹¹² Consistent with past practice, ALA and AASL chose not to file an amicus brief in the Robinson case. Instead, at the 1970 midwinter meetings—after a resolution commending NEA for supporting Robinson was introduced—AASL President Rowell, pointing to AASL's NEA and ALA affiliations, noted that Robinson was on the AASL Board of Directors. "With these allegiances to AASL" in mind, Rowell then identified what he called the "consensus of the AASL Board" in a statement to the ALA Council. "I request that it be recorded that I support the resolution that ALA commend the NEA for its action on behalf of Mrs. Carrie Robinson."¹¹³

The statement was unprecedented. "This teaparty attitude was an injustice to everyone involved," complained *SLJ* Editor Evelyn Geller. "What is missing . . . is a corporate voice representing the AASL board rather than of an individual correctly assuming responsibility for an entire organization." AASL's "lethargy on the Carrie Robinson case—the alacrity with which it abdicated responsibility for regarding this matter as a divisional issue—is especially disturbing."¹¹⁴ At the midwinter meeting, however, ALA did pass a resolution to censure public libraries providing services to segregated schools. AASL did not comment on that resolution. On October 6, 1970, both parties in the Robinson case reached an agreement. The state agreed to promote her to Educational Consultant III with a salary increase commensurate to the rank, and pay all her legal fees.¹¹⁵ Relying on an article the *NEA Journal* published November 27, *American Libraries* announced in its April 1971 issue that "Justice Comes to Carrie Robinson."¹¹⁶ Other than Rowell's statement, AASL had given her no help or support.

Although ridding school librarianship's professional practice of Jim Crow did not happen quickly, there were successes. In 1968, when she opened her library at a newly integrated elementary school in Charlotte, North Carolina, Grace Lane Wyche discovered it had but two books about black people. Over the next two decades she worked closely with black and white teachers and became known as "Mama Grace" to her students. Besides increasing the black literature and history collections, she also kept the school library open during summers.¹¹⁷ That same year an Arkansas school superintendent determined to eliminate the run-down George Washington Carver High School for Negroes and integrate its one hundred students into the better-equipped white high school. He then built and furnished a new school library building that welcomed all students by combining Title II with the Title I ESEA funds his district qualified for because 1,036 of his 1,700 students were "educationally deprived."¹¹⁸

But the vestiges of Jim Crow were still much in evidence. When she conducted a Mississippi workshop on children's literature to address "the black

experience,” Augusta Baker noticed white librarians in the audience were “almost hostile.”¹¹⁹ Although education officials in several states hired state university school of education faculty members to conduct workshops to help black and white teachers deal with integration, no faculty member from an ALA-accredited southern library school stepped forward to help with school library integration.¹²⁰ After graduating from college Pat Conroy returned to his old South Carolina high school as a teacher when the high school was desegregating. The school librarian he had come to know as a student was still there, and her contempt for black students was obvious. “They’ve no right to be in my school,” she told Conroy. “They’ll get no special treatment from me.” Conroy couldn’t resist. “I only ask you to treat them as badly as you do the white students,” he teased. “That’s not too much to ask.”¹²¹

That *Brown* and its aftermath in the South sparked so little debate at AASL conferences and in its literature reflects the high priority AASL placed on image. In general, the AASL leadership failed to support black school librarians and failed to address the sad state of segregated school libraries. It had never changed its 1951 decision that Assembly members representing segregated black and white school library associations got half a vote each.¹²² All of this reflected a tremendous gap between AASL rhetoric and reality, and between AASL ideology and its actual practices. Its actions regarding segregated schools in the Civil Rights era show it had not actualized the democratic perspectives articulated in the School Library Bill of Rights, which by 1969 had gone through a second revision.¹²³

As an issue, segregation is largely invisible in the history of American public school librarianship. When Cora Paul Bomar, North Carolina’s State School Library Advisor from 1950 to 1969 and AASL President in 1962–63, recorded her AASL memories for its Silver Anniversary in 1976, she said nothing about race.¹²⁴ She did the same when recalling the history of the Tarheel State’s school libraries for *North Carolina Libraries’* fiftieth anniversary issue sixteen years later.¹²⁵ When AASL President Judith Letsinger drafted her introduction to *School Media Quarterly’s* twenty-fifth anniversary issue in 1976, she wrote: “Remember that you cannot find in the entire world a stronger history of successful support and action for intellectual freedom than you find in the American Library Association.”¹²⁶ And in the many essays on southern school library leaders in *Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth: A Biographical Dictionary* (2003), only those by James V. Carmichael Jr. address the issue of race. To all the other biographers of southern school library leaders, the segregated Jim Crow public school libraries over which their protagonists presided were invisible.¹²⁷

On the occasion of its sixtieth birthday in 2014 the *School Library Journal*, as maverick as ever, reflected on its history since beginning publication as *Junior Libraries* in 1954—coincidentally the same year the Supreme Court issued its

Brown decision. The 1960s showed a "growing concern for social justice," the editors noted, and to support that statement proudly included reference to A. Grace Mims's 1967 article, "Nervous Nellies on Race Relations." Quoting Mims, it reprinted: "Is it that librarians are more concerned with having safe, sterile book collections than with having books that reflect realistically the true make-up of this diverse and ever-changing democratic nation?" Mims's focus was on books, however, not the racist segregation practiced in the nation's schools that had driven the *Brown* decision. For its capsule summary of the 1970s *SLJ* noted "librarians grappled with the reality of school desegregation," and referenced a 1971 *SLJ* editorial taking ALA "to task for not doing more to address lingering Jim Crow practices in southern school libraries."¹²⁸

Nowhere, however, was there a word of criticism for AASL's and school librarianship's silence on the issue of segregated schools that had accompanied much of the Civil Rights era between 1954 and the publication of Mims's article. Thus, even in recounting its own history of these years, *SLJ* had not recognized the school library profession's silence and invisibility—and, as a result, complicity—on one of the nation's major social issues. It is sadly ironic to note that a profession advocating for more attention to race issues in the books they purchased for their students has little to no record of its own history on racial issues, particularly for that chapter of its history some have labeled "the golden era of school library development."¹²⁹

Despite its poor record on race issues, by the end of the decade school librarianship had made tremendous progress evident in the increased number of elementary and high school libraries and the hugely increased size of their collections. Space requirements specified in the AASL-DAVI *Standards for School Media Programs* became guidelines for school architects who exhibited at educational association conferences. In 1960 few of the architectural drawings had included a school library; after 1970 most models for elementary and secondary schools had media centers.

At the same time, however, the effects of these efforts were not uniform, in large part because federal legislation did not include enough funds to staff the increased numbers of libraries with their much larger collections. "The successes and plights of the school library media center may well represent American education's greatest paradox," AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson testified before the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science on September 27, 1972. "School administrators acclaim its need and importance. A thorough search of educational literature 1950–1972 reveals not one treatise (book or article) denying the value or necessity of a central resource center in the school." Yet, she noted, as the Baby Boomer generation moved through the ranks, while public school enrollment had gone up more than 18 percent and the

number of classroom teachers had increased by 36 percent, the number of certified library media specialists had grown less than 4 percent.¹³⁰

Ellsworth Mason found too many high school librarians still burdened by a “heavily structured” schedule that limited students’ ability to get to their school libraries, which were often “closed promptly five minutes after the last class is out, and closed evenings and weekends.” Too many school libraries still functioned as “hollow sound-boxes with books on wall shelves” and contained “seating massed at sterile-feeling tables to ease supervision, reading rooms in which not one can move, let alone whisper, without disturbing someone else, . . . bland pale-oak, ill-shaped furniture that, as a witty friend of mine remarked ‘feels like yogurt,’ in short, uninspired, deadening libraries.”¹³¹

Mason’s observations were validated in Charles Silberman’s best-selling *Crisis in the Classroom* (1971). In it Silberman charged that America’s schools were generally grim and joyless places mostly concerned with order and control, evident also in school libraries, where students experienced mostly assigned library periods and required library passes, and were seldom able to go to the library during free periods. In one recently built school, Silberman noted, voluntary reading was not permitted in the library because it was regarded as a place to teach students how to check out and return books.¹³²

On the heels of publication of Silberman’s book, Carolyn Leopold published a scathing article in *School Library Journal*. Leopold had been a Maryland school librarian, but at the time was librarian with the American Council on Education. As she scanned the world of American school librarianship, she saw reason for despair. Although school libraries ought to be central to the process of education, “the idea that any large proportion of the educated population is taught by the school to use them is a monumental bureaucratic myth . . . Our school libraries are really only expensive book museums” staffed by “teaching failures” who became professionals by earning the requisite number of credits and were then placed in “command of the school media center,” where they “are content to play their roles as clerks and technicians and administrators of books.” There they were supervised by administrative superiors who “deep down in their hearts” see the school librarian as “a degreed clerk, who serves the small task of putting things out where the customer can find them.” The rosy world depicted in *And Something More* (the 1967 film viewed by millions of television viewers by 1971), she lamented, “I have never seen in operation anywhere.”¹³³

Battles for Professional Jurisdiction, 1969–1981

Of the 3,500 public schools in fifty states that the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed in 1973, 2,975 (or 85 percent) reported having library facilities. These libraries averaged 7,000 books per school and twenty-eight loans per year per student; 94 percent were open five days per week. The mean number of seats available for student use was fifty-seven. Secondary school librarians averaged 1.2 full-time equivalent certificated staff, elementary school libraries 0.7. In public schools with fewer than 300 students, however, 92 percent of secondary schools and 61 percent of elementary schools did not have libraries.¹ ESEA Title II funding obviously had had a huge impact on the number of libraries and the size of collections, but its impact was unevenly felt across the nation.

The “golden era of school librarianship” was about to change, however. As attention to the issues of school integration that grounded the Civil Rights era before 1972 diminished, opposition to continued federal funding of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs took center stage. Cuts in that funding came in the first years of the Richard Nixon administration. After he released a budget proposal in January 1973 calling for impounding existing funds for Title II programs and eliminating future funding, states across the nation sued, ultimately successfully. Then, in 1976, Congress shifted funding to ESEA Title IV, which combined funds with other programs in block grants that covered

educational equipment and guidance, counseling, and testing. Henceforth, the school library community had to fight with other professional groups for its piece of the federal pie, and funding decreases in subsequent years made that pie even smaller.²

The impact was immediate, and school librarians across the country lost jobs. Nassau County, New York, for example, released forty-two state certified elementary school librarians and replaced them with clerical workers.³ The school library created by ESEA II funds in the early 1970s in rural Soulsbyville, California, had “made a difference in the lives of the children,” recalled one school librarian. After funding dried up and she left, however, “the entire collection was squeezed into one room . . . the unusual materials we had like art prints, walk-on maps, and models of the human body were stuck in closets or stored in classroom cupboards.” They still bought books, she noted, but “there’s no library program.”⁴ Elsewhere, the collections Title II made possible sometimes found their way into school basements and under hallway stairs.

AASL and ALA

The rocky relationship between AASL and ALA continued. When the ALA president appointed an Activities Committee on New Directions for ALA (ACONDA) in 1968, none of its thirteen members was a school librarian, despite the fact that school librarians accounted for a substantial fraction of ALA’s membership. At its 1970 midwinter meeting, AASL officially protested the absence of school librarians on the committee, but to no avail. In subsequent years AASL members complained loudly and bitterly about recommendations ACONDA and its successor committees made that they thought inhibited AASL opportunities. Despite objections about being consistently overlooked in the ALA hierarchy, however, AASL members nonetheless generally stuck to their own organization. They seldom participated in ALA activities, seldom ran for ALA Council, and seldom spoke up at ALA Executive Board meetings.⁵

In 1970 several AASL board members petitioned ALA to nominate a high profile representative of the school library community for ALA president. “It is unthinkable,” wrote one board member, that ALA “could not identify more than two school library oriented members in 10 years as being qualified for its highest office or could not identify more than two school library oriented members for inclusion on the current ballot of 26 for possible election to Council in 1970.” These facts, he wrote, “substantiate these and other inequities which can only be labeled as undemocratic.” He then nominated Maryland school library supervisor Richard H. Darling for the office.⁶

Mary Gaver disagreed, however. Darling was not qualified because he had not served on the ALA Executive Board—a necessary experience to understanding ALA’s “inner workings,” she wrote. Better to “begin *now* working on the

next nominating committee to get Dr. Jean Lowrie nominated as a candidate.⁷ A close friend of Gaver, Lowrie was Director of the Western Michigan University Library School, a former AASL President, and as an ALA Executive Board member the kind of ALA insider Gaver favored. There may also have been a whiff of gendered subtext grounding her objections to Darling. Gaver's admonitions, however, fell on deaf ears. Darling did become a candidate for ALA President, but lost by only thirty-one votes out of thousands cast.

In June 1969, incoming AASL President John Rowell acknowledged in his inaugural address that many AASL members were dissatisfied with ALA and "the voices of separation" had become "more insistent." Too much of AASL membership dues went to help run ALA, argued some. Separating from ALA would likely increase membership—perhaps even to the tens of thousands of school librarians who were not ALA members, argued others. School libraries did not have enough in common with other types of libraries to be comfortably located in an "under-the-tent association of libraries," and closer connections to NEA's Division of Audio-Visual Instruction (DAVI) made more sense, reasoned some. Rowell, on the other hand, argued against separating from ALA.⁸

In 1970 one high school librarian wrote ALA that she was discontinuing her membership because school librarians were not adequately represented. "Perhaps we would be better off to separate A.A.S.L. from A.L.A.," she added. "Then we could set our own dues and our own policy." ALA Deputy Director Ruth Warncke quickly shot back: the ALA Council had established AASL, and "can be dissolved only by that body. There will always be an AASL equivalent in ALA."⁹ She wrote AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson that rather than "crying over what is considered an injustice" like an absence of representatives, "school librarians should be less provincial and consider what they can contribute to the national library scene and ALA. Could librarians be heard better as a part of NEA instead of as a part of the largest association of librarians?" she asked. "Have AASL councilors spoken up on controversial issues? Maybe all of us have too much of a feeling that we aren't appreciated."¹⁰

When he reviewed ALA's budget recommendations for AASL at the 1971 summer conference, one member crafted a resolution that said if ALA did not take "immediate steps to fund the programs of AASL at the level requested" that AASL "take immediate steps to withdraw from the ALA and form an independent national organization for school librarians."¹¹ The resolution drew heated debate. Some favored it. Within ALA "you are not considered professional," said one audience member. Some counseled patience and warned about losing ALA's Washington lobby. Still others were ambivalent. "I want to keep the door open," argued one member, "because later I might want to change my vote." Another then moved to table the resolution, and while Frances Henne was standing at the microphone to address the membership the motion to table quickly received

a second and was immediately approved. Some interpreted the unusually quick action as an effort to deny Henne an opportunity to speak in favor of the resolution before a vote. It may also have been motivated by anger at the compromises she had made with DAVI as chair of a joint committee tasked to compile the 1969 *Standards for School Media Programs* (to be discussed later in the chapter).

When the chair finally recognized her, Henne introduced herself as a member of “the older generation, a few minutes too late again.” She made no secret of her position. “School librarians are a sleeping giant whose strength will be recognized only when they move out on their own. We don’t have time to wait two years while some bureaucratic organization decides what to do,” Henne argued. Here she was referring to ALA’s decision to hire an outside firm to consider reorganization, a move many in AASL opposed. Henne had many enemies within AASL, but she also had strong allies. “You have just heard the courage that saved our organization a few years before,” said Ruth Davies, a Pittsburgh school libraries supervisor. “If it weren’t for the courage of Dr. Henne, we’d still be buried.”¹²

Other matters between ALA and AASL also came to a boil at the conference. Because the increases in numbers of school libraries and their collections that ESEA’s Title II made possible had created huge unmet staffing needs at the building level, in 1970 the Knapp Foundation funded a five-year School Library Manpower Project at \$1 million through AASL “to attack three aspects of the problem of developing fully and utilizing properly school library manpower—task and job analysis, education for school librarianship, and recruitment from specific manpower pools.”¹³ Robert N. Case became its Director. But in April 1970, *American Libraries* published “Library Education and Manpower,” a statement authored by ALA’s Office of Library Education Director Lester Asheim that, if adopted, would require anyone defined as a library “professional” to have a master’s degree. Protests from the nation’s school library community were immediate. That the report had been submitted to ALA’s Library Education and Library Administration Divisions but not to AASL irritated many in AASL.

“In all fifty states, a school librarian who has earned a bachelor’s degree and is certificated as a teacher is recognized as a professional,” Case complained to AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson after he read the article. Adoption of the policy would have an “adverse effect” on the association. “First, it implies that perhaps one-half of the AASL membership may not be recognized” by ALA “as professionally educated and competent.” Second, it put AASL and ALA in an “untenable position” with NEA, “which recognizes the professional status of a school librarian who holds an undergraduate degree.” Third, the policy statement would adversely affect the attitude “of a high percentage” of ALA members who were school librarians. From his perspective, Case said, the policy ran counter to the goals his Knapp Foundation–funded project had set for itself

because it offered “little hope for professional recognition” of the three hundred undergraduate programs educating school librarians.¹⁴ Less than a month later the Project’s Advisory Committee unanimously passed a resolution “to halt the passage and implementation” of the Asheim report because its “inflexible class structure . . . would deter library development by severely curtailing recruitment for school librarians from the teaching profession.”¹⁵

Others in the school library community were equally vocal. “I am appalled to find the obvious lack of consideration” in the Asheim report “for our needs in the school fields,” one Florida school library supervisor wrote the AASL-President-Elect.¹⁶ “School librarians in several states are having a difficult time establishing and maintaining their professional status,” a senior high school librarian wrote Asheim on behalf of the New Jersey School Media Association. “To confront them with a statement from their own professional organization that they are considered supportive staff unless they have a master’s degree is . . . a disservice to the thousands of teacher-librarians now serving in our schools.”¹⁷ “I for one am switching from the ALA to the NEA this year,” reported a Massachusetts junior high school librarian. “Not only does NEA provide legal assistance in case of censorship problems, but my status as a professional is not questioned.”¹⁸

Even AASL Board candidate A. Esther Bronson decided to leave ALA and thus give up her membership in AASL: “The attitude of the Asheim Report toward school librarians and the condescension and disregard of ALA toward AASL makes membership in ALA quite meaningless.”¹⁹ In her May 1971 report to the AASL Board, President Roberta Young wrote that “many school librarians have left ALA because they believe [the report] repudiates them as professionals.”²⁰ Probably as a result of a 1970 ALA dues increase and the Asheim report, in 1971 AASL membership dropped 30 percent from 12,693 to 8,983, or just over 17 percent of the number of certified school librarians in the nation.²¹

At their 1971 conference, AASL’s State Assembly delegates were still “in a fury” over the Asheim report, *School Library Journal* editor Evelyn Geller reported. Delegates proposed that AASL “repudiate” the report “until it can be modified to return certified school librarians to their rightful professional position.”²² Despite the bitter reaction, however, *SLJ* noticed among the delegates “no organized move to split from the association.” And when the AASL Board considered it, members chose not to support the Assembly’s proposal because, Geller surmised, there was “an evident fear of a showdown.”²³

At the same conference the AASL membership unanimously passed a new “Statement of Purpose” based on sociological models that drew distinctions between a profession and an occupation. *SLJ* approved. The new statement “moves away from the old traditional organizational busy work and an emphasis on public relations . . . to militance on behalf of the individual professional.”

It promised to “provide social and moral support, develop employee practices which encourage professionalism,” and help “police the profession.” It also incorporated “very specifically and for the first time a defense of intellectual freedom.” Finally, it argued that the purpose of research was not to improve standards and practice but instead to “build an intellectual base on which a profession theoretically rests.”²⁴ Like most statements, however, it rested on a definition of “profession” created elsewhere. It also failed to address power relationships governing school library practice at the building level that were highlighted in a 1972 AASL self-study identifying “the AASL and ALA’s neglect of the individual practitioner” as its major finding.²⁵

ALA rules and regulations also frustrated school librarians in ways that pulled them away from AASL. In some states, separate school library associations had memberships larger than the state library association, but because ALA allowed representation from only one organization in each state—always a state library association that included all types of librarians—members of those state school library associations felt unrepresented. Even in state library associations, school librarians often felt disadvantaged. For example, relations between the Arizona Library Association and its school library members had “worsened over the past year,” one Arizona school librarian wrote Lu Ouida Vinson in 1973. She especially complained of constraints on active school librarians from “Public and Academic Librarians controlling the purse strings and program direction (or lack of it).”²⁶

To more formally embrace the concept of school librarianship’s responsibilities for audiovisual materials, in 1972 AASL changed the title of its journal from *School Libraries* to *School Media Quarterly*. Some celebrated. One library school faculty member crowed: “High Time! . . . for more than twenty years AASL has given strong leadership in defining the school library as a media center, learning resources center, or instructional materials center.”²⁷ But others complained that eliminating the word “libraries” from the title was “most dangerous,” as a Los Angeles school librarian argued. Given that administrators, school boards, classroom teachers, and the general public were already unaware of what school librarians did, the LA librarian continued, “the path of ‘media’ could only be catastrophic! Do away with ‘Libraries’ and you eventually do away with librarians.”²⁸ Still others carped about the periodical’s contents. “If it’s going to attract a big membership and subscription from 40,000 school librarians and 88,000 schools,” argued a Dallas librarian, it needed to focus on the needs of practitioners. An analysis of the preceding five issues showed twenty-three articles written by professors, five by school library supervisors, four by school supervisors, and two by doctoral candidates. “Not even one article by a practicing librarian!” she noted. Not only did these librarians feel isolated on site, she concluded, they also

felt isolated within their profession, and “isolationism” explained “most of the ills of the profession.”²⁹

And in many states, school library and media associations began merging. In 1971 the Oregon Association of School Librarians announced it was merging with the Oregon Instructional Media Association to become the Oregon Educational Media Association. As a new organization, it intended to remain an affiliate of both the AASL and NEA.³⁰ Similar library and media organizations in Florida and Indiana followed suit over the next several years.³¹ That the word “library” was not included in the titles of any of these successor organizations displeased many school librarians. When school library and audiovisual organizations in individual states merged, Lu Ouida Vinson reported to ALA’s Executive Director in late 1972, “they are immediately offered . . . affiliation” with the NEA. Complicating the problem, most building-level school librarians were required to pay dues to local teacher associations affiliated with education associations, not library associations. Vinson further explained that the overall membership count of building-level school librarians in AASL—still run largely by library school faculty and school library supervisors and administrators—was “slight.” Media specialists in NEA recognized them as a target group for recruiting members. And within ALA, building-level librarians who were AASL members often regarded themselves as “stepchildren.” She concluded that “AASL has strong national identity but very little regional and local identity. ALA is not making impact with school personnel.”³²

An April 1973 AASL internal review concluded that “AASL is seriously hampered in achieving its objectives because of its lack of adequate control over (a) its programming and activities, (b) its secretariat, and (c) the financial resources generated from its membership.” Having “greater autonomy” to allow members to affiliate “only with AASL” and avoid paying dues to ALA, it concluded, would enable AASL to increase its membership (at the time about 10 percent of the nation’s school librarians).³³ A Proposal on Affiliation submitted to the AASL Board two months later was equally shrill. “With the merging of state library and A-V organizations,” adoption of a plan to enable school librarians to join AASL without also paying ALA membership dues “is a vital necessity.” The proposal noted that merged state organizations already had a national affiliation with NEA and that unless AASL could offer similar affiliation, school librarians in media associations would find themselves with “no national leadership.”³⁴

In a memo submitted to the ALA Membership Committee on June 18, 1973, the AASL President and Executive Secretary both noted that 33,000 American school library media specialists annually paid between \$75 and \$200 either “voluntarily under pressure” or as a required payment to a teachers’ organization recognized as the official bargaining agent by the local board of education, while

“great numbers” of them “have never received any communication or membership appeal from ALA.” As an “experiment with ALA dues for school libraries,” they suggested that these media specialists be allowed to join ALA for \$25 (a third the cost of a joint ALA/AASL membership for school librarians).³⁵

At the conference that summer, Jean Lowrie became ALA President—only the second time in its nearly hundred-year history that a member of the school library community occupied ALA’s highest office. At the same conference ALA’s Executive Board approved AASL’s proposal that for a two-year period school librarians could join ALA and AASL for a flat rate of \$25. “This should provide a very interesting springboard for a move toward closer affiliation with state groups,” the incoming AASL President noted.³⁶ “A breakthrough introductory offer,” said another AASL official. It represented “our chance to prove that we can provide the numbers to make up the difference in cost and at the same time bring School Media Professionals up to their full stature in ALA and the total educational community.”³⁷ The “experiment,” *SLJ* wrote, “has the potential to double, even triple, AASL’s membership and could provide a model for other ALA divisions.”³⁸

The plan brought quick results. In March 1974, *SLJ* reported that AASL had added nearly 3,000 new members to make it (at 11,600) the second largest ALA division. And those new members had also added \$75,000 to ALA coffers, the *Journal* noted. But that good news came on the heels of bad news. Because ALA continued to experience budget shortfalls, at its January 1974, midwinter meeting the ALA Council voted not only to increase individual ALA membership fees to \$35, it also added \$15 for each divisional membership, thus doubling the cost of AASL membership for the forthcoming year.³⁹ The move so threatened gains in membership the AASL President protested: “We cannot accept the 1974–75 Budget.” As a result of AASL’s strong resistance, ALA agreed to a compromise—for the 1974–75 year divisions could recruit new members for a flat \$35 per member, but AASL also had to agree to a budget cut of \$21,000.⁴⁰

The compromise still did not solve ALA’s larger budget problems, however, and on July 19 ALA Executive Director Robert Wedgeworth announced he was closing the AASL-NEA office in Washington, DC and consolidating all AASL work in ALA’s Chicago offices. Weeks later the AASL Board held a special meeting to challenge the decision. They were only partly successful. On August 16 Wedgeworth agreed to keep the NEA office open, at least for another year.⁴¹ It was a temporary solution to a much larger problem. “AASL will continue to have trouble in achieving valid and visible selfhood unless ALA gives greater support in coping with its special challenges,” observed Lu Ouida Vinson. “These differences go beyond the budget; they call for a basic recognition of the issues it faces and the support and flexibility needed to accomplish its goals.”⁴²

Complaints also continued from building-level school librarians. In a 1975 letter to *SLJ* a school librarian “who has had it” asked why ALA was not as “effective” as NEA. Within ALA, public and academic librarians, she noted, generally ignored school librarians, who were treated as “inferior citizens” and “a step below garbage collectors.” At the building level, too many school librarians were called upon to substitute for absent teachers and too frequently forced to transform the library into “a study hall, meeting room, election day voting center, social hall—the only room in the school where teas, Christmas parties, guidance conferences, school board meetings, movie theatre shows, etc. can be held.” If she resisted these incursions on her professional responsibilities, she asked, “would the ALA stand behind me as a teacher’s organization would?” She signed her letter “Fed-Up.”⁴³ Her complaints brought responses from three school librarians. Stop “whining,” snipped one whose “philosophy has always been that to cooperate is imperative.” Another harrumphed that “communication is the key . . . Obviously [Fed-Up] . . . has a problem communicating.” Fed-Up had “a very narrow view of [her] role in [her] school,” protested a third. “It is so narrow, in fact, that the role you conceive may well be declared obsolete unless you change.”⁴⁴

The dues increase had an immediate impact. By the 1976 conference, AASL had shed 1,000 members. To address the resulting budget deficit it had to reduce expenditures by \$17,000—about the cost of supporting its NEA office. Although AASL closed the office in September, budget woes continued. The incoming president lamented: “We are going to have to have additional revenue or we are going to have to cut all our programs in half.” By midwinter 1977, she predicted, AASL would have to “make a decision . . . whether to remain a division within ALA.”⁴⁵ Her subtext was a potential merger with the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), DAVI’s successor when the organization voted in June 1969 to become an NEA national affiliate. Several AASL leaders openly advocated for the merger. The Vermont Educational Media Association had even passed a resolution asking AASL to initiate merger discussions with AECT.

But financial matters improved by the midwinter conference. AASL had retained enough members (about 6,000) to stabilize its budget. At that conference the AASL Board also formalized a new structure and role for its Assembly, which required two representatives from each state or regional AASL-affiliated association, and mandated that the president of each and at least 10 percent of the members in their association also had to be AASL members in order to qualify for Assembly representation. For most associations desiring to affiliate, meeting those requirements was not a problem. By that time thirty-nine organizations had already been approved for affiliate status.

When ALA Council proposed yet another dues increase in 1979, AASL President Philip Baker labeled it “very bad news for AASL . . . Every past dues increase has resulted in a steady erosion of our membership,” he wrote the AASL Executive Secretary in October, “and we should assume that this will be the case again.” AASL members often felt obligated to belong to local, state, and national education and library associations, and if forced to decide based on cost alone, Baker noted, they would choose education. He recommended an ad hoc committee to consider the possibility of “withdrawal from ALA and establishing a new national association . . . Things cannot continue as they have in the past with AASL completely at the mercy of every ALA policy decision.”⁴⁶

As American librarianship prepared for the White House Conference on Library and Information Services scheduled for October 1980, in June 1979 the AASL Board adopted a Statement on Goals, which read in part: “AASL recognizes that school library media services are integral to the teaching/learning process. It is with this in mind that AASL seeks to have school library media centers designated as essential school services, rather than as support service, in the schools of our nation.”⁴⁷ In large part the statement was a reaction to the lack of attention school libraries were getting from the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS), which had a major role in planning the conference. The “feelings toward the priority of the school library” of the NCLIS chairman, one school library administrator complained, “are at best uninformed, and somewhat distressing.”⁴⁸ And while it did not make comparisons between the midcentury Public Library Inquiry and the planning process for the White House Conference, *School Library Journal* did notice in the proposed ALA position paper for the conference “the almost total failure . . . to clearly support school and public library services to children.”⁴⁹

Because so many members had debated whether AASL should pull out of ALA, AASL President Baker decided to solicit ideas about the direction the organization ought to take in the next three years. Reactions showed little consensus. “AASL must be seen as making a difference in the lives of school librarians,” wrote the Delaware School Library Media Association president. “I do not believe AASL is seen this way and that is why not one school librarian” at a Mississippi workshop she recently attended “belonged to the AASL . . . And that is why only 16 school librarians out of 150 belong in the state of Delaware.”⁵⁰ She warned another AASL official: “If the AASL pulls out of ALA because of dues it will be setting an example that will have serious repercussions. . . . It seems kind of futile if on the state level we try to work closely together and then we see the organization breaking up on the national level.”⁵¹ Most AASL members believe, one AASL Board member wrote Baker, that “we spend too much time dealing with internal affairs and not anywhere near enough with programs that would directly affect on the membership at large.”⁵²

School Library Journal's 25th anniversary occasioned a variety of reflections on the prospect of separation. "How Long, Oh Lord, Do We Roam in the Wilderness?" library school faculty member Marilyn Miller lamented in the December 1979 issue: "We have lost the momentum of the last decade . . . (when many of us surely thought the professional millennium had arrived)" and instead accepted "service and support roles . . . but not as easily the leadership role—that of planner, manager, and process person."⁵³ In his analysis of AASL history from 1950 to 1970 Charles Koch identifies AASL's persistent "distrust of ALA" and "the almost total absence of respect for the integrity or knowledge of any other unit of ALA in AASL matters of concern and the disregard of established procedures." In librarianship, AASL "feels strength in numbers," he notes, but because of ALA neglect over the years AASL was, nonetheless, "abrasively defensive." As a professional association, Koch argues, AASL was "the product of alienation" caused by isolation from both the teaching and library professions.⁵⁴

Conflicts between "The Library Girls and the A/V Boys"

Tensions between ALA and AASL were exacerbated by jurisdictional battles between AASL and DAVI over building-level control of audiovisual materials and equipment purchased through Title II in school systems across the country. In 1969 AASL and DAVI had published *Standards for School Media Programs*, which unlike their predecessors emphasized information access and focused more on people and programs than materials and their arrangement. Under Frances Henne's leadership, the *Standards* had been put together by a committee of twenty-eight (fourteen from each organization) and advised by a committee of more than twenty outside organizations. In part, AASL leaders had been driven by concerns that if they did not embrace newer educational technologies, school libraries would lose their standing in formal education and perhaps even disappear.

To win DAVI support for the *Standards*, Henne had agreed to use the terms "media specialist," "media center," and "media program" throughout. Library historian Budd Gambee described the 1969 standards as a compromise "between book and non-book interests" that created a hybrid media center in "essentially a return to the philosophy of the standards of 1920." Had school librarianship followed the precedent Certain laid down—had it not followed "the siren call of the book," as Gambee wrote in 1970—the school library "would long since have established its image as a media center without any need to change its name or its functions."⁵⁵ As Gambee saw it, Certain had embraced audiovisual technologies as part of school library service, but subsequent generations abandoned that embrace in favor of the book. He was right. At the same time, however, Gambee overlooked the fact that Certain saw in books the power of agency that made the act of reading joyful, empowering, and educational, whereas

subsequent generations of school librarians largely crafted their professional service by addressing the book as an object to be selected from lists recommended by state authorities and a youth literature clerisy.

After jointly publishing the 1969 *Standards*, AASL and DAVI publicly pledged to press for its nationwide adoption, and in their efforts used the terms “media program” and “media specialist” exclusively. Although publicly praised as a model of organizational cooperation, the new standards masked jurisdictional battles taking place between the organizations. Many school librarians were particularly angry because the term “library” had been “expunged from all references to the center, program, or professional,” library school educator Dan Barron later recalled.⁵⁶ *SLJ* editor Geller worried that adhering to them might make school libraries “fastidious brides of DAVI members in the new media marriage.” She commended AASL for collaborating with other professional organizations, obtaining foundation and federal grants, and “assiduously, cooperatively, smilingly, indefatigably . . . worming their way into the educational power structure,” thanks to their “political shrewdness” in previous decades. But it came at “a terrible price,” she concluded, because by “following education under the guise of educational leadership” and “continually avoiding controversy,” they had often submerged “their own interests and ideals in deference to political efforts.”⁵⁷

Others questioned the value of the standards themselves. “We are so concerned . . . about standards and keeping them up to date, but our lack of interest in and inability to make progress along the road of applying them makes them rather useless,” argued one Chicago high school librarian. “I have worked hard in AASL for some years, but the leadership up to now and the attitude of the majority on the Board in general has seemed mostly frustrating, blind and inept.” He was prepared to fight budget cuts the Nixon administration was proposing, he said, “but beating one’s head against the wall with one’s own professional colleagues sort of undermines incentive.”⁵⁸

But what significantly accelerated the conflict between the two groups occurred a few months after the *Standards* were published. In January 1970 angry AASL members pressed their Executive Board to adopt a nomenclature different from the *Standards* for use in all AASL correspondence: instead of “media specialist,” “media center,” and “media program,” it would be “library media specialist,” “library media center,” and “library media program.” What had been a “latent conflict” between audiovisual specialists and school librarians “became open warfare,” Dan Barron noted, setting “book types against audiovisual types, humanists against behaviorists, and very importantly, women against men.” The battles also effectively reduced possibilities that the new *Standards* would have much impact.⁵⁹

Although for school librarians it was often less expensive and more convenient to belong to DAVI rather than AASL, DAVI remained one of the smaller

NEA associates. For NEA in general, cooperation with AASL was always of secondary interest, in large part because AASL could not force its members to join NEA and thus had little impact on NEA revenues. Within AASL, cooperation with NEA was almost exclusively pushed by a few AASL leaders (not the rank and file) who were more willing to challenge AASL's ties to ALA. Generally NEA decisions determined AASL reactions, not the other way around. As an NEA department between 1960 and 1968, for example, AASL got office space but no funding for its two staff members, who were paid by AASL. As an associate thereafter, AASL even had to pay rent in the NEA building.

Some AASL members questioned any relationship with NEA. At a 1969 summer conference membership meeting one attendee asked, "What has NEA done for us?" "A shocked murmur went through the audience," *SLJ* reported. "I've looked through the exhibit catalog and I haven't seen any evidence of NEA presence," she continued. "I don't see an NEA speaker on the program. There are no NEA representatives here." The issue was not what NEA did for AASL, President Richard Darling responded, "but what we do for ourselves through the more than 30 organizations that are part of the NEA complex." Because of AASL interactions with these organizations, Darling argued, "today we stand ten feet tall in their eyes."⁶⁰ To many rank and file AASL members, that was hyperbole.

AASL's relationship with DAVI was a different matter, however. In 1969 DAVI had nearly 10,000 members (the largest category was college "audiovisualists") and fifty-nine affiliates in forty-nine states. In June 1969 the organization became an NEA associate and in 1970 changed its name to the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). Just over a third of its members were school librarians who by organizational regulation also had to be members of their state audiovisual association. At the time AASL—also an NEA associate—had just over 6,000 members. Friction between the two organizations continued, and many had reason to view the ensuing battles through gendered lenses. At the time 87 percent of school librarians were women, while 88 percent of audiovisual professionals were men. One supervisor of school libraries in an urban area openly complained about the "fairly overt male chauvinism which appears to color the activities of the AECT." She reported on an AECT conference in the early 1970s at which a "Wives Hospitality Program" included "Betty Crocker Tours, a Riverboat Excursion, Theater and Shopping."⁶¹ That chauvinism was also evident in a January 1970 *Audio-Visual Instruction* article. Hiring a media center director, the author wrote, would be difficult. That individual would have to be "a person knowledgeable about different media (probably a woman), and have administrative ability (probably a man)."⁶²

In November 1970 the AECT President wrote affiliate and divisional presidents that some of his New York colleagues "feel their jobs are threatened due

to documents being prepared” by AASL (this was probably a reaction to the nomenclature AASL had approved in January) and the Knapp School Library Manpower Project. A board member from New York had asked AECT, he wrote, “to send a letter to AASL asking them to cease and desist from issuing documents in a field where our profession has responsibility.” He also asked to be informed of “attempts in your state being made to eliminate certain non-print positions by virtue of certification requirements.”⁶³ Months later AECT’s New York State affiliate officially disavowed the *Standards*.⁶⁴ AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson fretted the act was “not in line with the philosophy of unified media services,” and saw it as “an effort to move our members into an AECT-related organization.”⁶⁵

After attending the 1971 AECT national conference, Bernard Franckowiak, chair of AASL’s standing committee on standards revision, reported to his president that the committee was “deeply concerned” AECT had concluded AASL “is not interested in joint standards revision, and has begun to revise on their own.”⁶⁶ At the conference one AECT member even proposed a resolution to repudiate the 1969 *Standards*. Although the resolution was soundly defeated, the mere fact that it had been introduced demonstrated that several AECT members were looking to put distance between their organization and AASL. Months later an AECT insider told an AASL Executive Board member that many in the “AV audience . . . richly damned DAVI for ‘selling out’ to AASL” on the *Standards*.⁶⁷ Franckowiak was frightened. AASL had to participate in any standards revision process involving school library media centers because, he said, “if this support is not forthcoming from AASL, the AECT is fully prepared to proceed with unilateral formation and revision of standards.”⁶⁸

AECT did not appear to be as unified as Franckowiak feared, however. *SLJ* had also attended the AECT conference. Amongst its members, *SLJ* observed condescendingly, “you will find pervasive, repetitive shop talk, or a blatant opportunism, an obsession with hardware, deals with commercial manufacturers, a general lack of concern with education.” Further, the few members who were looking to define a philosophy of service felt “powerless.” About his colleagues one noted, “They don’t know who they are, they don’t know where they’re going. There is no body of discipline here, not even a concept of education, which we are supposed to be talking about. There is only this gadgetry and gimmickry and the illusion of innovation.”⁶⁹ On November 12, 1971, the AASL President wrote the AECT Executive Director to complain about a string of incidents like the New York AECT affiliate’s action, all of which proved a “not unintentional” pattern of slights. “Not true,” the AECT Executive Director responded. “Neither I nor any of the elected officers have any intent to slight the AASL leadership or to inhibit the participation of the AASL representatives in the building level standards revision task force.”⁷⁰

Two weeks later, the AECT President sent an open letter to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) applauding a November 17 resolution that the Council “go on record as favoring the integration of library and educational services at all levels in the field of education.” He failed to forward a copy to AASL offices, however. AASL only learned of the letter when an official from the New York Bureau of School Libraries forwarded a copy she obtained from her superior at the state’s department of education.⁷¹ At its June 1972 conference AASL passed a resolution applauding the November 17 CCSSO statement and offering to work with that organization in the future.⁷² It was a clear effort to counter AECT’s move.

Despite the friction, in 1975 AASL and AECT managed to jointly publish *Media Programs: District and Schools*, a set of standards that had only one reference to “books” in its 128 pages.⁷³ That same year the State School Library Supervisors Association merged with the Association of Chief State School Audiovisual Officers, in part because of the work the two organizations did cooperatively in publishing *Media Programs*. At the time, eighteen state library agencies monitored school media programs. In all others, supervision of school libraries came from state departments of education. Few states, however, outlined the qualifications required of professionals in charge of school library media centers. By the mid-1970s public school teaching had become the nation’s most unionized profession; 90 percent of teachers were either American Federation of Teachers (AFT) or NEA members.⁷⁴ Many school librarians welcomed the security, protection, and better salaries these unions won for their members. They perceived no similar benefits in ALA-AASL membership.

Given all these pressing issues, *SLJ* reported, “It is going to be an up-hill struggle for AASL to continue to attract and keep the loyalties of school media specialists who are being wooed” by NEA, AECT, and AFT. “In this recessed economy, the battle of who gets the highest number of members may be won by the organization who offers the most for the lowest membership fee.”⁷⁵ The AASL Executive Secretary warned that if AASL did not develop a plan to address these pressures, “it will have little hope of becoming THE national association for the media specialist on the K-12 level.”⁷⁶

Despite cooperation on *Media Programs*, AASL and AECT continued to squabble. When in 1975 the AASL Board adopted as its official nomenclature the terms “library media specialist” (the professional person), “library media center” (the place where the professional works), and “library media program” (what the professional does), the AECT Executive Director protested. He preferred “media specialist,” “media center,” and “media program.” Upon reading his objections, *SLJ*’s new Editor Lillian Gerhardt pressed AASL “to bite back.” Her words brought a quick response from her readers. “When the California Association of School Librarians and the California Association for Educational

Media and Technology merged last year," one high school librarian wrote, "some of us had to take a really tough stand or the word 'library' would not have appeared in the new name: California Media and Library Educators Association, a poor choice even so, to my way of thinking."⁷⁷ But what to call these professionals and places remained problematic. At the building level, professionals might answer the phone "Library," "Media Center," "Library Media Center," "Library Multimedia Center," or any one of several other designations. One high school librarian avoided the problem altogether by answering "Extension 52."⁷⁸

In 1977 AECT surveyed its members about merging with AASL. Fifty percent of respondents opposed; school librarians who were also AECT members were the only subgroup to favor it.⁷⁹ At the AASL 1978 summer conference, the incoming president made it clear she supported cooperation with AECT, but not a merger. Nonetheless, advocates of a merger managed to press AASL to "extend a letter of invitation" to AECT's president "to attend the open meetings of the AASL Board as an official observer."⁸⁰ AECT agreed, and for a while open bickering between the two organizations receded.

At AASL's 1980 midwinter meeting, however, President Rebecca Bingham reported that she had attended a recent AECT conference and "expressed concern," *SLJ* noted, that the incoming AECT president "seems far removed from the concerns of the school library media centers."⁸¹ AECT initiatives worried AASL even more. In 1979 it had become a constituent member of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), thus positioning itself as the only organization with authority to develop national standards for school library media programs in university departments of education. Then, at its September 1980 conference, AECT quietly made a decision to form a Division of School Media Specialists (DSMS) that would begin publishing a quarterly titled *School Learning Resources*, and among others selected "Librarians, AASL Membership" as a target group for new members. In effect, once officially established on April 7, 1981, the DSMS would become the second national organization to claim responsibility for providing school library media specialists with support and professional development. AECT made no effort to inform AASL about this decision.⁸²

Two weeks after the AECT conference concluded, and before AASL leaders heard anything about the new AECT division, AASL hosted its first national conference separate from a larger ALA summer conference. Final registration at the conference (in Louisville, Kentucky) was 2,549; 68 percent of attendees were building-level school librarians, while 51 percent were not members of ALA or AASL. Evaluation returns indicated that "the conference was a great success and that future conferences should be held."⁸³ "It was in every way for me an informative and rejuvenating experience," one attendee listed as a "Media Center Consultant" later wrote the ALA executive director.⁸⁴ Another response re-

corded at the AASL Board meeting was more assertive. "The meetings must continue to be held to attract, inspire, and coordinate school librarians—WE HAVE BEEN OVERSHADOWED TOO LONG!"⁸⁵

Incoming AASL President Phil Baker was even more effusive. An association "in desperate need of a definition of its psyche and a distillation of its purpose" found in the separate conference a "symbolic crossing of the Rubicon, special rite of coming of age, and ritual passage from special interest group to a national association that is THE voice and presence of school library media specialists for the entire nation."⁸⁶ It was no coincidence he included the word "library" in naming his fellow professionals. A survey of school librarians conducted in 1981 showed that of the 1,814 responses 43 percent wanted to be called "library media specialists" and 38 percent preferred "librarian." Similarly, 52 percent wanted to work in a "library media center" and 32 percent in a school "library."⁸⁷ Full of optimism and hope for the future, AASL began planning for the next separate conference two years later.

Then, however, Baker learned about the new AECT division. "I am angered at the clear targeting of our membership for their recruitment drive," he wrote a colleague. Other AASL leaders only learned of it when they read the AECT's January 1981 newsletter, just before AASL's midwinter meeting. For AASL, an AECT Division of School Media Specialists was more than a threat to its own membership. Among AECT's targets was that larger group of "school library media" professionals that over the years neither organization had been able to recruit. That many of them had recently attended the Louisville conference led AASL to believe they might eventually become members. Establishing the DSMS was a clear threat to that possibility.⁸⁸ AASL had ample reason to worry about the new division.

At its 1981 midwinter meeting AASL Board members confronted AECT President Wes McJulian, who was attending the AASL/AECT Joint Committee meeting. AASL Executive Director Alice Fite told McJulian she felt "betrayed," but McJulian pushed back. He had informed Phil Baker and Rebecca Bingham, he said, at the 1980 AECT conference that several members were thinking about establishing a new division for "school media specialists." When asked later, Baker and Bingham said they had no memory of that communication.⁸⁹ Next day the AASL Board issued a statement: "There is one national association for school library media specialists (AASL) and the creation of a division within another association which purports to speak for the school library media specialists can only serve to weaken the profession nationally." AASL was committed to maintaining "its position as the preeminent national association for school library media specialists."⁹⁰

Alice Fite saw the Louisville conference "as a turning point for the Association" because AASL "took on more of the characteristics, responsibilities, and

directions of a national association,” and had “developed an attitude of confidence, a willingness to speak out without hesitancy and without fear.”⁹¹ And probably because the AECT’s journal *School Learning Resources* was about to begin publication, the AASL changed the title of its own quarterly from *School Media Quarterly* to *School Library Media Quarterly*. By that time even Frances Henne had come to regret the compromises she had made in the 1969 *Standards*. “The decision to move away from ‘school library’ and ‘school librarian,’” she later admitted, was a “mistake.”⁹² “Library” was not only back in vogue, use of the word now helped rally the troops.

At the Building Level

“I consider the environment of my library of prime importance,” one Nashville elementary school librarian wrote *School Library Journal* in 1976. She arranged furniture to create nooks and corners where children could “hide,” decorated the walls with children’s artwork and book posters, and in the center placed a Snoopy doghouse she had built. “Many a child has drifted away to the land of Narnia, propped up on pillows in Snoopy’s house.” A “Kid Power Center” housed books children made themselves (“you would be surprised to see how the children love to read books made by their fellow students”), and once per week she hosted a book talk for teachers before school hours.⁹³ All of this was on her own initiative.

As many school libraries across the country transitioned into “media centers,” their physical spaces shifted. For example, the newly christened Cleveland Heights (OH) Library-Media Center stepped away from the concept of a school library as a research center and rescued enough space from adjacent storerooms, corridors, and broom closets to craft a glassed-in media area used for viewing and listening and a browsing room used for programs addressing special subjects like the Vietnam War, Earth Day, and issues of race. “Such programming has a definite place in the school media center,” concluded the librarian. “It enlarges horizons, supports the emphasis on individualized instruction and independent study, and gives students an opportunity to express themselves and gain new ideas in a more relaxed and informal atmosphere than the classroom usually offers.”⁹⁴

Not everyone was happy with the shift, however. Some school systems questioned the cost of audiovisual materials and equipment and their value to education. In many cases, school systems had purchased AV materials with Title II funds without a clear idea of how to incorporate them into classroom instruction, then foisted them on school libraries for storage and care. “When you’re spending all this money on expensive items like media equipment and the results are so poor, then something isn’t working,” complained one Massachusetts mother of two fifth-grade students. “I think the school library should be a place

where mainly books are found and the main thrust should be reading.” One of her school board members agreed. “I want the emphasis right back on the written word,” he said. “I would like to see the library become a library again and not a resource center. If the library were emphasized, maybe reading would be emphasized. These kids can’t read.” Elsewhere in the area, school administrators complained that the cost of maintaining media centers, including staff, could not be justified, and in some cases they eliminated media specialist positions altogether.⁹⁵

Many school library media specialists also split time between schools. Eva Von Ancken’s experience between 1978 and 1980 as a shared librarian at two different schools was typical. She split her time between two New York elementary schools, working two days a week at the smaller one and three at the larger. Between the two she taught over 700 children in thirty-one regularly scheduled library classes of thirty to fifty minutes. For both libraries she selected the books, periodicals, and supplies, managed the media collections (materials and equipment), prepared bibliographies, addressed teacher requests, and provided reference service. On days she was not present, “highly competent and reliable library aides” kept the libraries open, but only half the day.⁹⁶

Some school library leaders also took on “heart of the school” rhetoric. In 1972 *SLJ* Editor Lillian Gerhardt groused about the “complacent clichés” she heard keynote speakers invited from other fields repeat again and again at library conferences. “The school library is the nerve center of the school” was a “siren song . . . most often sung by speakers who come from departments of education.” Others gushed: “The school librarian is a full partner in the educational team.” Librarians “repeat this as though it was a fact,” Gerhardt argued.⁹⁷ If school libraries were “the heart” of a good school, one New York school board member complained, “principals and curriculum administrators would not recommend their being cut.”⁹⁸ Not the school library, but textbooks and more recently “curriculum packages” and “instructional kits” are “in reality . . . the heart” of most schools, complained one Georgia library school educator, adding, “assigning librarians to curriculum committees will not affect the increased use of a media center unless the specific purpose of the curriculum committee is to find ways to increase usage.”⁹⁹

Others traced problems to the school librarian herself. “Despite real achievements in selecting, organizing and making printed materials accessible to school-adjusted students and their teachers in traditional educational environments,” a New York school librarian observed in 1970, “the school librarian is suffering from a paralysis of will. He has failed to develop the political sophistication and manipulative expertise needed to get and keep a decision-making role in the highly competitive educational establishment.”¹⁰⁰ In 1972 a Michigan educator noted that in her twenty-seven years of teaching she had “seen

school libraries functioning as mere storehouses, with librarians content to serve as storekeepers, isolated from the educational activities around them, their roles dictated by administrators and classroom teachers.”¹⁰¹ Too many of “our secondary school libraries have existed as citadels of the librarian, presided over by a grumpy old lady who frowns on any noise or disturbance, such as being taken away from her cataloging by requests for help,” argued a Michigan junior high school librarian. “And since these little old ladies have usually been quite content with the status quo, they have made no noises about inadequate budgets or being unable to provide materials to support the curriculum.”¹⁰² In 1971 another library school educator argued, “We have been conservative in our approach to building collections, maintaining that we can buy audiovisual materials only after we have adequate numbers of books . . . we have participated in the myth” that AV materials only supplemented books.¹⁰³

In 1973 New York City school libraries supervisor Lillian L. Shapiro identified educational bureaucracies as a major problem for school librarians. “Programs are planned, steps are approved—nay, mandated—by those who are rarely, if ever, involved on a visceral level with what goes on in a school library, media center, classroom, et al.” She identified a “ladder of communication” in public school systems: superintendent, associate superintendent, assistant superintendent, director, assistant director, principal, and finally, “at the bottom,” school librarian. And since “numbers equal strength, school librarians rank low in the esteem of an organization in which they are vastly outnumbered by teachers, and even by secretaries, counselors, and paraprofessionals.”¹⁰⁴ Many building-level school librarians agreed. “Countless librarians face unsympathetic administrations, unenlightened school boards, textbook-oriented faculties, no clerical assistance, and burdensome non-professional assignments,” a Pennsylvania high school librarian asserted in 1970.¹⁰⁵

Exercising Bibliographic Control

Some educators still advocated for the free reading a school library could facilitate. “Let’s put the joy back in reading,” Arizona State University Education Professor Jeannette Veatch advocated in a 1970 *SLJ* article. Harnessing what she called “humanistic, nonbehavioristic learning theories,” she criticized both the “basal-reader-skill-builder” model of teaching reading and a mentality among many that supported it as counterproductive because it viewed learning as an unpleasant chore: a “lockstep, often painful, certainly mechanistic, operation.” When children choose books—especially trade books—on their own, “such children demonstrably, statistically, become better readers, more enthusiastic readers, more voracious readers . . . To the degree that choice is promoted, learning becomes absorbing and exciting, and the learner needs no extrinsic push to keep him going.”¹⁰⁶ “The majority of students hate the reading the skills-teaching

is supposed to help,” one Ohio elementary school librarian wrote in 1972. “These hesitant, ego-less students must be wooed by every possible means—*Peanuts*, *Nancy Drew*, and the *Hardy Boys*—until they are sure enough of their ability and pleasure-gain to want to read the excellent literature.”¹⁰⁷

The social activism that marked the 1960s helped transform the field of children’s literature scholarship in the early 1970s, thus challenging the library clerisy that had controlled it for most of the century. Scholars interested in promoting works that were more socially and politically relevant and addressed issues of race, class, and gender began to press university education, English and journalism departments to open up children’s literature positions. To facilitate their efforts they organized the Children’s Literary Association in 1972. To publish the results of their research they began periodicals like *Children’s Literature in Education* (1970), *Children’s Literature Quarterly* (1975), and *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1977), all academic peer-reviewed journals that examine children’s literature from a theoretical perspective.¹⁰⁸ Many in school librarianship read these journals, but few within the library community did the kind of research fitting the profiles of these periodicals.

In the mid-1970s sociologist Barbara Heyns followed the summer reading of 3,000 Atlanta fifth and sixth graders. Regardless of socioeconomic status, children who read at least six books during the summer either maintained or improved their vocabulary test scores and reading skills. Children who read no books over the summer lost up to an entire grade level. Public library summer reading programs, which at the time had more participants than Little League baseball and a tradition dating back to the turn of the century, had data to prove their value.¹⁰⁹ In 1977 eight-year-old Michael Buckley was being “force fed” books like *The Yearling* and *Little House on the Prairie* at his Ohio elementary school, and did not like it. Noticing his reluctance to read, his school librarian handed him a copy of Beverly Cleary’s *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, a book that was “funny, full of adventure and most importantly—it was pointless.” After reading it, he later recalled, “I went back to the library, hoping there were more books like it.” His school librarian “changed me overnight.” Buckley went on to become a successful author of popular children’s book series *Sisters Grimm* and *N.E.R.D.S.*¹¹⁰

During the 1979–80 school year, Missouri junior high school librarian Larry Dorrell conducted an experiment. To improve the school library’s image among the students, he acquired a collection of non-circulating comic books and without fanfare put them on the periodical shelves. “If the students’ interest in leisure-time activities could be used to create an interest in their library,” he reasoned, “an important and valuable ally would be available for education.” Students quickly discovered the comic books, and within weeks school library traffic increased by 82 percent and circulation of non-comic book materials

increased by 30 percent. Comic books, Dorrell concluded, helped create a perception that the school library possessed “an open climate.” He also noted no parents or teachers complained about the service; in fact, many supported it. He made no effort, however, to understand students’ intellectual engagement with the contents of these comic books, and like the vast majority of his colleagues labeled them “leisure” reading.¹¹¹

As editor of *School Library Journal* (circulation 42,000; read by more than 100,000), Lillian N. Gerhardt took issue with Dorrell’s experiment; “user bait,” she called comic books.¹¹² A year later Gerhardt complained about “taking trash lightly.” The “current craze among paperback publishers to produce innocuous, interchangeable love stories for girls” was so upsetting she listed “Ten Commandments of Trash Novels” to discourage the purchase of “comic books, *Nancy Drew* (and company) . . . and the latest jag of love stories without consequences.”¹¹³ *SLJ* Book Review Editor Pamela D. Pollack was equally dismissive of paperback romances. “If librarians purchase these books at all, it will be for the same reasons that they’ve bought Nancy Drew books—as literary loss leaders.”¹¹⁴ Neither Gerhardt, Pollack, nor Dorrell looked beyond the limited and labeled categories of reading they had inherited from previous generations of professionals.

In their everyday practice, school librarians continued to look to several reviewing organs for recommendations. *SLJ* reviewed 95 percent of children’s and young adult titles published during a calendar year. *Horn Book* and *Booklist* only published reviews of juvenile books they recommended, while the *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books* and the *New York Times Book Review* were even more selective. Staff members reviewed for *Booklist*, *Horn Book*, and the *Bulletin*, while librarians wrote most of the *SLJ* reviews. Children’s authors and some staff wrote *NYT* reviews, which tended to be longer than other reviewing media. For the most part, reviewers were white middle-class professionals, and were usually women; in 1983, 85 percent of *SLJ* reviewers were professional librarians. Except for *SLJ*, which practiced an “early warning system” by requiring reviewers to identify “controversial subjects” that might bring “protest,” reviews in all were overwhelmingly positive.¹¹⁵ And consistently, all reviewing organs avoided serial fiction.

“*School Library Journal* and *Booklist* are the most used professional guides in school libraries,” noted a 1981 study examining the reading preferences of 10,000 middle school students. Researchers identified favorite titles, pared them to a final twenty-four (they deliberately excluded highly popular series fiction, however), and analyzed reviews of these titles in *SLJ* and *Booklist*. The study found that “when professional reviewers endorse a juvenile title, they tend to focus on literary aspects, favoring the kinds of books they think children *should* read.” On the one hand, “students . . . taking part in the balloting were not impressed

with the books favored by the professionals.” On the other, “just as the children were not overly enthusiastic about the professional reviewers’ favorites, the adult critics gave the youngsters’ choices a mixed report card.”¹¹⁶

In 1975 Gerhardt alleged that *Booklist*’s practice of reviewing a limited number of children’s books and citing others received in a list as “Considered but Not Reviewed” constituted “slam listing”—in other words, “an expression of considered opinion that the books did not live up to their intent.” It violated ALA policy on labeling, she argued.¹¹⁷ She could just as easily have made the argument against *Children’s Catalog*, *Junior High School Library Catalog*, and *Senior High School Library Catalog*, which in its latest edition had removed *Huckleberry Finn* from its list of recommended titles because black parents found certain words “morally offensive . . . degrading and destructive to black humanity.”¹¹⁸ And she had no comment when a 1980 dissertation showed that the kind of early warning systems *SLJ* built into its reviews heavily influenced the acquisition practices of school librarians.¹¹⁹

Just as the second edition of *Junior High School Library Catalog* was published in 1971, Bothell (WA) District Library Supervisor Barbara Plucker was given the onerous responsibility of purchasing an opening day collection for a new junior high school. “Smiling, I clasped the *Catalog* to my bosom, sure that relief had arrived.” Then reality struck. After reviewing the contents she became convinced titles “have been selected *by* little old lady librarians *for* little old lady librarians,” and that “kids need not expect to find much of interest to them.” The *Catalog* cited a high proportion of historical fiction rather than “the contemporary fiction children want to read,” noted only two titles on alcohol addiction and none on drug addiction, tiptoed around issues of sexual ethics, and in the biography section emphasized “deceased presidents, scientists, and rulers whose peccadillos are carefully glossed over.” Plucker saw an effort “to list only non-controversial titles on non-controversial subjects,” and judged it “not helpful.”¹²⁰

In 1973 a Wisconsin high school senior complained that only eighty-three of her school library’s 3,175 biographies were about women, and of that number only two were about “feminists.” And as she passed the library’s periodical shelves she saw the faces of white women staring at her from the covers of magazines like *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *McCall’s*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *American Girl*. “None of the models had pimples,” she noticed. “It makes you feel bad about eating that candy bar.” Also, she observed, “being a high school woman means needing information on sex, birth control, and abortion,” but in her school library books like *Our Bodies*, *Ourselves* and the *Birth Control Handbook* were “on closed shelves.”¹²¹

“I do feel that many busy librarians find a list like ‘Best Books for Young Adults’ and order them all without consulting original reviews or reading questionable books themselves,” noted a Kansas high school librarian in 1978.¹²²

“Most of the book buying for children in school and public libraries is influenced by a few major book reviewing agencies and periodicals,” argued another from Ohio. She questioned the criteria by which the reviewing establishments evaluated new books: “Is it necessary to foster a *love of good reading* or is it more realistic to foster the enjoyment of books and being comfortable with them? Would this point of view change reviewing, selection, and thinking about children’s books?”¹²³

A subtext for these perspectives rested in divisions that emerged in the 1960s between children’s and some young adult librarians in public libraries. “Those of us who had not come out of children’s services . . . were desperate to free ourselves of the sort of hidebound excessive deference kind of crap you got in children’s librarians,” young adult public librarian Mary K. Chelton said. Children’s librarians “wouldn’t know a real kid if they fell over them. They loved children’s literature, and that was it, and it drove us crazy. No matter what we did we were always seen as irreverent non-deferential outcasts.”¹²⁴

“My first major purchase as Rhinelander [WI] children’s librarian in the mid-1970s was three complete sets of *Nancy Drew*, *Hardy Boys*, and *Bobsey Twin* mysteries,” noted Kris Wendt, who read Nancy books as a child. “Not everyone, however, shared my enthusiasm.” Several months later “a rather formidable” colleague—“incensed that Rhinelander broke ranks to acquire such ‘trash’”—“accosted me in the ladies room during a regional children’s services workshop . . . Arms folded across her ample monobosom and glowering as though she would like to alphabetize my internal organs,” her colleague “cornered me against the sinks. In a voice like a silver dime she declared, ‘You have lowered the standard of children’s literature for the entire Wisconsin Valley!’” Wendt held her ground; Nancy books stayed in the stacks, much to the delight of Rhinelander children.¹²⁵

The debate in the public library community between children’s and young adult literature over “good reading” inevitably spilled over into school librarianship, in which camps representing both sides engaged in similar battles. Some school librarians also embraced the practice of book selection as a form of “bibliotherapy,” the idea that librarians selected particular titles they believed addressed—and hopefully corrected—problems they perceived specific students were experiencing. But “much of what passes for bibliotherapy” in school library services, argued one freelance writer in 1980, “is thinly disguised preaching aimed at teaching children to behave the way adults want them to.”¹²⁶

Although publishers recognized the power that reviewing sources had for librarians, and although they crafted ways to get their books noticed for inclusion, they did not always like existing practices. “The librarians are led around by the reviewers,” complained some. “If the reviewers and the librarians would get out of the way, the kids could be their own judges for selection and especially

for awards.¹²⁷ Perhaps this is what concerned librarians most, in large part because it constituted a significant threat to one of their most important professional imperatives. They knew *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* stood a much better chance of being selected by adolescents than the latest young adult titles reviewed in *Booklist*.

In 1978 the Follett Library Book Company (a national book marketer) began placing pink bookmarks in particular books containing potentially objectionable content. "Some of our customers have informed us of their opinion that the content or vocabulary of this book is inappropriate for young readers," it read. "Before distributing this book, you may wish to examine it to assure yourself that the subject matter and vocabulary meet your standards." When journalist Nat Hentoff heard about Follett's practice he called it "appalling" and "disgraceful." What Follett was doing so disturbed Judith Krug of ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom that she wrote the company president. He responded by sending copies of seventy-eight letters he had received from Follett customers, seventy-two of which supported the practice.¹²⁸

A study of self-censorship practices conducted in 1979 sampled high school librarians who were also AASL members, a group researchers assumed was "obviously more professionally concerned . . . as demonstrated by their membership in the association." Responses to lists of frequently challenged books, however, showed that these librarians generally either avoided acquiring controversial titles, or, if acquired, limited access to them. As to the latter, researchers said: "Although some might defend this practice, it is questionable that so many of these titles should be available only to a restricted audience." The study concluded that although "library media specialists often feel they have succeeded in their attempts to select all kinds of materials covering varied subjects, many of them, in fact, unilaterally failed . . . By not owning those materials that are controversial, they are practicing censorship."¹²⁹

"We do not believe that librarians can or should supply anything and everything that is produced to children," argued Lillian Gerhardt in 1973. "Librarians to children have always known that the name of the game in selection for children is not intellectual freedom; it's 'Who's in charge here?'"¹³⁰ One *SLJ* reader agreed. "Children are not born with innate standards of good taste and judgment," she wrote. "They must be guided by adults in materials for the mind just as they must be in materials for the body . . . There are hundreds of thousands of children in this country who have no parent or parents, or irresponsible or ignorant parents. Someone must help to guide these children in their learning."¹³¹ When it came to controversial books, one high school librarian proudly declared, "In my library censorship lives, and I'm not ashamed or afraid to say it either."¹³²

Efforts to censor from outside the profession did not wane in the 1970s, especially after a 1973 Supreme Court ruling left the definition of "pornography"

up to “contemporary community standards.” In its wake, a Kentucky principal removed from his school library an issue of *Time* whose cover displayed a bare-bottomed streaker. Representatives of seventeen local Richmond, Virginia, churches objected to John Steinbeck’s “pornographic, filthy, and dirty” *Grapes of Wrath* on high school library shelves, and in Drake, North Dakota, the school board burned all school library copies of Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five*.¹³³

Professional Frustrations

While many school library leaders worried about negative publicity, some pointed to school librarianship’s low profile within the nation’s formal education community. “When booklets on the open classroom in elementary schools fail to mention the library media center,” AASL Executive Secretary Lu Ouida Vinson wrote in a January 1973 report to the AASL Board, and “when descriptions of schools without walls, non-graded experiments, new vocational programming, plans for compensatory education, and the 12-month school concept do not include vital information about the role of the library media center, its staff and its services, I have to wonder whether educational leaders are hearing different drummers . . . Do others see us as we see ourselves?” Furthermore, because state certification officers were being pressured by a variety of professional groups, they were confused about how to certify professionals working in these educational facilities—were they librarians, library media specialists, media coordinators, “or what?”¹³⁴ To that issue AASL provided no help, snipped Lillian Gerhardt. “Without a peep from either AASL or ALA’s Committee on Accreditation, the various state departments of education by their certification requirements have thoroughly scrambled the conditions of education and training for library service in schools.”¹³⁵

In 1970 public schools enrolled almost 46 million students; fifteen years later enrollment had dropped below 40 million. Declining enrollment resulted in decreased funding, directly impacting school libraries and leading to reduced budgets, staff eliminations, and increased workloads. In 1980 three million students (7 percent of the total) attended public schools that had no library, and most elementary school libraries lacked librarians.¹³⁶ That same year AASL had 4,770 members, less than 8 percent of the 62,000 school librarians in the country. Sixty percent of AASL members were building-level professionals, 20 percent were library school professors and district-level supervisors, and the remaining 20 percent were state media consultants and coordinators. And almost all of the organization’s leadership came from the last two categories, just as in previous decades.¹³⁷ When the Carter Administration overhauled the US Office of Education into the Department of Education in 1979, school library leaders “hoped the new department would give the School Library Media Program Office a more vigorous role in supporting the development of school library media pro-

grams within the federal government and at the national level.” But that did not happen. When the Department closed its School Media Resources Branch in the Office of Library and Learning Technologies in 1982, school librarianship lost its representative.¹³⁸

Although the period between 1960 and 1980 constituted what he called “the first revolution” in the history of school library media centers, in 1982 David Loertscher identified systemic problems that had to be addressed in the future. “We have considered ourselves as ‘enrichment’ for the basics rather than as the fodder on which learning can thrive,” he noted. “Enrichment, like butter on bread, can be scraped off or done without when times get tough.” He also recognized flaws in school library practices. “We have organized rigid schedules, created restrictive rules, and clamped tight disciplinary rules on patrons to the point that our library media centers are empty and we complain about unwilling teachers, disinterested students, and non-supportive administrators.” And finally, Loertscher noted, “we have created national standards that are so poorly understood by our colleagues that they are dismissed and ridiculed. For example, what school could even spend the full ten percent of the per-pupil operating cost on media each year?”¹³⁹

Lillian Shapiro saw the end of the decade as a “time of reckoning” for school librarians. Efforts to “win respect via the application of technology” had not helped. “I do not see any enduring changes that have come into our profession by this route, nor has it gained us the professional acceptance we seek.” School librarians’ “greatest misfortune” was “the lack of acceptance, understanding, and respect on the part of teachers and administrators,” she opined. On the one hand, teachers “are the stopping place when the buck is passed around.” On the other, “the majority of principals (mostly men in a profession which has mostly women practitioners) remain quite unaware of the contributions, possible or performed, of school librarians.” Some administrators were even actively hostile toward and had “minimally concealed disrespect” for school librarians, perceiving them as “necessary” only because they were “legally imposed.” School library problems could not “be solved in a vacuum,” and she worried school librarians across the country were “losing a common sense of purpose.”¹⁴⁰

Despite disputes over professional turf and disappointing statistics, school library textbooks nonetheless painted a rosy picture of the profession’s status. “The school library media specialist is the energizing force that powers the educational thrust of the instructional media program,” wrote Ruth Ann Davies in the second edition of her text, *The School Library Media Center: A Force for Educational Excellence* (1974). “Direct involvement of the school library media program in the instructional process has changed the status of the library media specialist from passive spectator to active participant in the drama of teaching and learning.”¹⁴¹

But this was more wishful thinking than everyday reality for most school librarians. In a 1986 review of the literature on the changing instructional role of the high school library media specialist, Kathleen W. Craver found that in the 1970s “practitioners were still only marginally involved in the programs of the school and were practicing an instructional role more characteristic of the mid-sixties.” Craver also noticed that although each new edition of “standards” published over the years gave added prominence to the instructional role of the library media professional, at the building level “the evolution had not totally occurred.” She cited one researcher who “noted a dichotomy between the actual role of the school library media specialist and the one proposed by the profession in publications.”¹⁴² Based on a late 1970s survey of 224 Texas school librarians, one researcher found them “much more interested in administrative management than instructional design.”¹⁴³

In late 1979 Charlotte Mugnier summarized a study on public school libraries conducted by Houston’s Institute of Urban Affairs. The study queried thirty-four education administrators for their opinions on the value of media centers and the library media specialists who ran them. Findings were disappointing. “When economic pressures forced them to set priorities, the media center was not among the top ones.” These administrators thought library media specialists generally well prepared, “but frequently found them to be lacking in personal drive and charisma.” Many resisted new responsibilities and lacked curriculum development skills. The “emphasis” these school leaders “placed on personality was extraordinary,” Mugnier reported, in part because they recognized a series of systemic barriers in formal educational practices that only “personal diplomacy” could overcome. These barriers included: “a psychological resistance to innovation by teachers; hostility to alternative methods of education; a strong traditional belief in the self-sufficiency of teachers; competition from other support staff for limited funds; the stereotyped image of librarians; the pressure from some groups to eliminate ‘educational frills’; and teachers’ anxieties about claims for positive cost-benefit ratios for independent learning through the media center complex.”¹⁴⁴ Unknowingly, perhaps, Mugnier had just identified barriers built into formal education’s power structures that had handcuffed the development of school librarianship for its entire history.

“Information Literacy”

Old Wine in New Bottles, 1981–2000

In 1987 the US Department of Education reported that 93 percent of the nation's 78,455 elementary and secondary schools had libraries (up from 85 percent in 1978), employing 96,324 full-time-equivalent staff. Only 58,057 libraries had certified school library media specialists, however, and 79 percent of public schools were served only by a part-time professional. Adjusted for inflation, expenditures on libraries nationwide had declined 16 percent in the previous four years. The Department estimated forty-eight million students used a school library at least once per week. Book collections averaged 8,466 (up from 2,972 in 1958). Half the libraries, however, had collections smaller than the 8,000 volumes that AASL standards recommended as a minimum. In 1974 public school libraries had acquired an average of 502 new books per year; ten years later that number had dropped to 315. The median number of books per pupil was seventeen, videotape collections averaged twenty-eight per library, while 40 percent of libraries housed computers students and teachers could use.¹ “The most frequent service provided by the staff was assisting students in locating information and resources,” *SLJ* reported in 1986.²

In the spring of 1983 President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, “one of the most influential federal documents ever published,”

education historian Dana Goldstein argues, because it helped Washington secure a “toehold for the national standards and accountability education movement” that was focused largely on teachers.³ In part prompted by concerns that the decline of productivity and loss of market share to Germany and Japan could be traced to inefficient and ineffective public schools that graduated students unprepared for the workplace, the report concluded American education was failing its students. Between 1963 and 1980, SAT scores dropped fifty points in the verbal section and forty points in mathematics. When compared to students in other industrialized countries on nineteen different academic tests, Americans were never first or second.

The Commission made thirty-eight recommendations to improve American education that sparked reform efforts across the nation. To make educators more accountable, many involved a system of testing that forced teacher-centered patterns of instruction to move away from independent learning and toward teaching to the test. And because subjects like civics and history—the kinds of subjects school libraries were especially well positioned to serve—were not easily tested, school libraries automatically lost stature in a narrowed curriculum driven by math and science. Commission members paid little attention to the central role of humanities subjects in improving critical thinking and intellectually stimulating students at all ages.

Because none of the thirty-eight recommendations addressed school libraries, AASL reaction was immediate. At its June 28, 1983, meeting the AASL Affiliate Assembly passed a resolution calling school library media specialists “leaders in educational planning and development,” and declaring school library media programs “a vital force for excellence and an integral part of the total educational program,”⁴ and in October published a rebuttal to *A Nation at Risk*.⁵ ALA also felt *A Nation at Risk* slighted libraries, and like AASL published a response.⁶ AASL leaders, however, felt the ALA response was “passive and imprecise” because it did “not address the major aspects of our role within the educational community.” They called for “a more dynamic and assertive response . . . to educate the nation as to the role of the library media specialist.”⁷

A glimmer of hope that the federal government recognized its neglect of school libraries occurred in April 1985, when the nation celebrated its first “School Library Media Month,” an annual event AASL had promoted that President Reagan made official a year later in a proclamation which stated that “historically libraries have been an accepted part of schools . . . but their contributions are often taken for granted.”⁸ But that hope proved to be misplaced. A 1986 report from the administration (called *What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning*) omitted mention of library media centers and delegated to teachers responsibility for the storytelling activities school librarians had been conducting for generations. “Doesn’t it seem incredible that the U.S. Depart-

ment of Education can promote homework in quantity and quality," *SLJ*'s Lillian Gerhardt wrote, "without ever mentioning that school library media centers and public libraries hold the tools for getting it done?"⁹

American Association of School Librarians

When the Association for Educational Communications and Technology began plans to revise the 1975 standards in 1981, instead of contacting AASL first AECT officers wrote directly to the ALA president to solicit cooperation from the library community. AASL "considered itself bypassed," *SLJ* reported.¹⁰ Rumors started immediately. Just prior to the 1982 summer ALA conference AASL Board member Dale Brown wrote the AECT Acting Manager, pointing out that many AASL members had a "strong feeling" that AECT "made an error in judgment in approaching ALA directly" about revising standards instead of working through AASL. Others saw the formation of AECT's Division of School Media Specialists as an effort to "raid" AASL membership, and still others suspected that AECT's representative to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) had recently "attempted to block" an effort by AASL to obtain NCATE affiliate status. Because "many state associations have passed resolutions deploring the present conflict between two national associations," Brown hoped AECT and AASL could resolve their differences and indicated he was recommending an ad hoc committee to examine relations between the groups. Shortly thereafter, AECT President Elwood Miller wrote the AASL Board to express his desire to heal "the wounds of recent years."¹¹

While AECT and AASL were attempting to work out their differences, however, some AASL leaders ramped up efforts to separate AASL from its parent organization. "It is time for school library media specialists to have a national organization of their own!" argued University of North Carolina library school faculty member Marilyn Miller. ALA was considering a dues increase that would negatively impact AASL membership, she said, at a time when the federal government was withdrawing funds for school library media programs and, across the country, media specialists were losing positions. AASL's potential had "outgrown ALA's ability and willingness to support and foster the unique identity and needs of the school library media center." AASL had less than 10 percent of the nation's school library media specialists as members, Miller noted, and being a division within a parent association that did not share the division's priorities made it difficult to reach the other 90 percent. "I believe an intelligently conceived plan for a new national organization would work and could capture the loyalty of many of those who now belong only to a state association."¹²

Response to Miller's argument was immediate. "Just what we've been waiting for," wrote University of Pittsburgh library school professor Blanche

Woolls, “another association to join . . . and a new one.” University of South Carolina library school Dean F. William Summers noted that ALA would be “injured” but not “irreparably harmed” if AASL pulled out. He also warned that AASL “could not for a very long time hope to be more than a small and struggling organization as it sought to carry out the enormous management and fiscal services now provided by the larger organization.”¹³ Former AASL and former ALA President Jean Lowrie agreed: “AASL has not covered itself in glory lately in working relations with other groups.” To Lowrie, a separate organization was not the answer.¹⁴ Miller responded to some of these criticisms. Woolls, she said, wrote “a nasty letter” that showed a “defensive attitude toward self examination” characteristic of “AASL governance of late. One has only to attend . . . membership meetings to note the disapproval of dissent, resistance to requests for more information, and the suppression of debate.” Summers, Miller argued, was an ALA “apologist.” That AASL was not a power within ALA was obvious from “the strange, poorly conceived and, possibly, politically disastrous” ALA response to *A Nation at Risk*.¹⁵

Because Miller had forced the issue, AASL issued a fifteen-page *Future Structure Report* outlining three options for the future: improve “AASL’s ability to work within the present structure”; work “to achieve a federated structure” for ALA divisions; or form an independent association. “AASL is at a crossroads,” the report began. “Members and nonmembers are asking for a dynamic professional association that will speak forcefully and authoritatively” for school libraries. “For AASL to achieve such a status requires renewal and reform in the Association’s purposes and services, and a reorganization of its structure.” Plenty of complaints populated the document to justify each option. AASL did not receive an adequate return on dues its members paid to ALA and was underrepresented on the ALA Council, a policy-making body that showed little interest in school library media centers. Jurisdictional problems forced by the ALA constitution’s treatment of type-of-library (e.g., public and school libraries) and type-of-activity (reference and cataloging) divisions forced AASL to share recommendations for book selection with two other divisions and thus mute its ability to bring focus to the school library media center’s unique instructional roles. AASL also found the scope of its programs constrained by ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom, Public Information Office, and its Washington Office. Because of these structural circumstances, AASL was “hindered by its inability to speak . . . as the voice for the school library profession.”¹⁶

After issuing the report AASL hired a consultant to survey 2,000 school librarians. Overall, the consultant reported, a majority (69 percent) of its 811 respondents “believed that AASL is preeminent . . . and effective” among associations representing school librarians, that “the present structure is most desirable,”

and "separation least desirable or workable." The consultant also said AASL needed to work more closely with building-level school librarians and make itself more affordable and visible.¹⁷ A similar survey Miller herself conducted with a colleague showed only 6 percent of AASL members favored merger with AECT, and just under 20 percent favored a separate organization.¹⁸

On June 21 an ALA Executive Board subcommittee reviewing the *Future Structure Report* met with the AASL President and two other AASL Board members. Also in attendance were ALA Executive Director Robert Wedgeworth and AASL Executive Director Alice Fite. Although "the cast was a small powerhouse," *SLJ* reported, "results were light" because in their discussions it became obvious AASL's representatives had not reviewed either the ALA Constitution or its Operating Agreement with Divisions. Nor did some AASL members perform well. When one complained about how costly it was to attend ALA's two conferences a year, an ALA representative asked: "What is your suggested remedy?" She got no response, probably because the complainant was stymied by systemic limitations about which she could do nothing. Unlike members of ALA divisions like the Association of College and Research Libraries, most AASL building-level school librarians were neither funded by their home institutions for travel to ALA conferences nor given professional credit for service to ALA.

The subsequent AASL Board meeting, however, became volatile. Incoming President Judy King "unleashed a tirade directed at the library press" (*SLJ* noticed it was the only press representative there) sparked by a late night phone call she got suggesting "Alice Fite was leading AASL out of ALA." King shouted, "I am not a sheep . . . AASL is facing problems that are not new; they have been around since 1971." Feeding the controversy was a belief by some that AASL leaders who had graduated from ALA-accredited programs looked unfavorably on building relationships with NCATE, while those from schools unaccredited by ALA wanted closer relations with that organization. The board directed King to appoint a subcommittee to elaborate on the *Future Structure Report's* federation option and directed the AASL Executive Committee to "initiate with haste a personal visit with the ALA Executive Board to clarify the rampant rumors" about Alice Fite that were circulating at the conference.¹⁹

By the time the two subcommittees considering the *Future Structure Report* met September 26, the AASL subcommittee had isolated seven points as "conditions to be met by ALA and as the basis of negotiations" with ALA. Its highest priority was that "AASL will be allowed to act as the singular voice for school librarians on all matters pertaining to the professional and to the profession of school librarianship." Motivating this demand, *SLJ* said, was a belief that the ALA Council's response to *A Nation at Risk* was a "turf invasion" because it failed specifically to mention AASL. Other points addressed dues, the ability to set employment requirements for its executive secretary, and

authority to invest AASL's unexpended balances and conduct separate conferences to generate revenue. Although each side clarified its position, *SLJ* noted, "none of AASL's conditions were met at this meeting."²⁰

Matters only got worse. The night before the ALA Executive Board was scheduled to discuss the report on October 24, members were greeted with an "eleventh hour" AASL memorandum that "took . . . exception to five of the seven points" raised at the September 26 meeting. The board felt blindsided. And although Executive Director Wedgeworth had directed Alice Fite to be present at the meeting the next morning, when it began, he reported, she was "not in the building." The "air of cordiality and indulgence" board members brought to the meeting quickly dissipated, *SLJ* reported. One called it "an insult" to ALA. After several hours of discussion Alice Fite unexpectedly walked into the room to explain that she thought AASL's report would not be discussed until that afternoon. But now that she was there, she explained, she would be happy to answer any questions. *SLJ* reported "the apology, the explanation, and the offer were received in unsmiling silence." "Alice, we spent about half the morning on this report," commented ALA President E. J. Josey. The board had no questions for her, he said, and he indicated it had already decided to report its discussion to Council at the midwinter meeting.²¹

Marilyn Miller then jumped back into the mix, concluding in an *SLJ* article that the *Future Structure Report*, the ALA/AASL subcommittee meetings to address it, and the survey of the membership "have not been handled well . . . It is obvious that [AASL] is being structured and led by a very small group of people," and needed to "be democratized." Agendas for membership meetings were "dreadful," allowing for little input from members. Complaints identified in the *Report* were more a function of AASL's "failure to work within the [ALA] system—this can be documented over and over again." The problem was not ALA, she argued. "If AASL is to remain viable within ALA as representative of the school library media profession, I believe the membership will have to become more vocal in making its wishes known."²² Thus, Miller laid much of the blame for AASL's failures at the doorstep of an insulated elite group leading a relatively apathetic membership that comprised a small fraction of the total profession.

Prospects for some kind of battle at the 1985 midwinter meeting loomed. After a separate but financially successful Atlanta conference in October, the AASL Executive Committee met in mid-December to draw up twenty-two proposals designed to "move the profession forward through an effective national association." Many dealt with outreach that did not directly involve ALA, including cooperation with AECT to develop a new set of standards and pushing to reestablish a school library media specialist position the federal Education Department had eliminated the previous year.²³

By the 1986 midwinter meeting, however, tempers had cooled. "Peace has broken out between" ALA and AASL, *SLJ's* Lillian Gerhardt announced. At ALA's Executive Board meeting the ALA president pronounced AASL an essential part of the larger organization. The AASL president then followed by declaring AASL's commitment to its parent group. "This pledge was greeted by silence," Gerhardt observed. Although she welcomed ALA's concession to allow divisions to invest their unexpended balances and roll returns into division budgets, Gerhardt paid most attention to explaining the silence: "AASL is individually and collectively hard to talk to." While the line "*We are teachers first*" might work with local school boards, she said, it did not work with librarians. Another line—"We are the teachers of teachers"—was "groundlessly self-inflating nuttury." The argument that "*We can't leave from our institution*" to attend ALA meetings also begged the question: "If you haven't enough clout with your administration to get the time necessary to pursue the ends of a national professional association, should you accept a leadership role?" And finally, the "Poor Me" argument: "*You people aren't forced to pay dues to NEA or a union, and we are.*" To that Gerhardt replied: "If you're going to submit to coercion, then shut up and pay your head taxes, or start a class action suit, but don't complain to me." Such lines, Gerhardt argued, killed any attempt at dialogue.²⁴

Thereafter, talk of pulling out of ALA diminished; instead, AASL concentrated on improving relations with its parent. In 1985, Alice Fite resigned as Executive Secretary and long-time AASL critic Marilyn Miller became a petition candidate for the presidency—and won. At the 1986 summer conference at which Miller took office *SLJ* reported: "The direction and morale of the division has improved for the better . . . AASL directors seemed determined to put to rest all conflict that has slowed AASL's progress over the last decade."²⁵ In her first publication for *School Library Media Quarterly* in the "President's Column," Miller asked her readers to "be unwilling to jump to conclusions" and instead be "willing to check out rumors."²⁶

In subsequent years AASL accepted ALA's broader support for legislative lobbying, intellectual freedom, accreditation of its professional programs, and connections to local, regional, state, and national library organizations. But an undercurrent for going it alone always existed, in part due to the successes AASL was now experiencing with its separate biennial conferences. At the 1986 AASL conference in Minneapolis, for example, 85 percent of attendees were building-level media specialists, 52 percent had never attended an ALA conference, and 55 percent had never attended an AASL conference. A sizable majority of AASL members did not want to secede from ALA, but they did want to continue separate conferences that provided added revenues for other AASL programs and activities.²⁷

AASL continued to act as the school library profession's most vocal cheerleader. For example, when serving as president Marilyn Miller appointed an

AASL task force to liaise with the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Science (WHCLIS II). Remembering that WHCLIS I gave youth services little attention, she also encouraged the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and the Young Adult Services Division (YASD) to cooperate with AASL to prepare a position paper eventually titled “Kids Need Libraries” that was distributed in pamphlet form at the 1991 conference. The statement became the basis for a WHCLIS II recommendation urging an Omnibus Children and Youth Literacy through Libraries Act.²⁸ It also showed the improved relations between AASL and ALSC that crossover leaders like Peggy Sullivan, Marilyn Miller, and Lillian Gerhardt—all of whom eventually served as presidents of both organizations—made possible.

In April 1993 AASL blanketed its members with letters that began: “This is the year we must make a difference.” Recipients were reminded that as governor, recently inaugurated President Bill Clinton “placed a library in every school in Arkansas.” An Executive Committee circular asked recipients to identify a spokesperson in their areas who could contact senators and representatives to lobby them for increased support and to deliver a copy of “Kids Need Libraries.”²⁹ A primary goal was passage of legislation that would reestablish a school library services office in the Education Department. “We’re gonna get this legislation passed if I have to go and live in Washington to do it,” incoming AASL President Blanche Woolls told members at the 1993 conference. At the time, AASL had 7,900 members, less than 10 percent of the nation’s school librarians, “making it difficult for AASL to make a case that it speaks for the entire profession,” *SLJ* reminded its readers.³⁰

In the summer of 1994, however, the Senate passed an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that prohibited use of federal funds to acquire any materials that accepted homosexuality as normal. Although “concerned about anything that jeopardizes First Amendment rights,” the AASL President commented, AASL initially took no public position.³¹ When Congress passed the bill later that year, on the one hand it included language specifically earmarking funds for school library media resources, on the other it failed to appropriate funds for this provision in fiscal year 1995. And although the amendment addressing homosexual materials made the final bill, the legislation provided no means of enforcement. “We got on base,” Blanche Woolls remarked; it was a “major victory” to get language for future funding earmarks for school libraries “on the books,” noted the ALA Washington Office Director.³² The funds never came, however, and in 1997 Congress voted to delete all unfunded sections of education laws. The only remaining part of ESEA available to school libraries was Title VI, a block grant listing them as one of seven funding choices.³³

Besides its interactions with AECT and ALA, AASL continued to struggle with nagging issues surrounding professional training programs. Because it perceived an opportunity brought by a recent NCATE reorganization, in January 1987 the AASL Board unanimously passed a resolution to join NCATE and sent it to the ALA Executive Board for approval. Should the affiliation take effect, AASL President Marilyn Miller stated, "for the first time AASL will have an impact" on professional programs training school librarians in university education departments across the country.³⁴ In her pitch Miller noted that ALA-accredited programs graduated only a fraction of the nation's school librarians, and because NCATE "provides quality control" for the vast majority of teacher education programs it was essential for AASL's parent ALA not only to join, but also to "delegate to AASL the responsibility for participation in the NCATE accreditation process as it relates to school library media education programs not eligible" for ALA accreditation.³⁵ At first the ALA Executive Board hesitated, but eventually it endorsed the proposal and promised to forward it to ALA Council for approval. In May, however, ALA's Standing Committee on Library Education (SCOLE) protested. The ALA-accredited master's degree "is the appropriate degree for librarians," it argued. SCOLE, Miller complained to a colleague, largely consisted of ALA-accredited "school diehards."³⁶

When Miller showed up at the Board meeting that summer, she came with endorsements from all other ALA divisions. Still the board hesitated. One member worried about bypassing ALA's Committee on Accreditation and SCOLE, while another suggested that a connection with NCATE would reduce ALA's ability to control its own accreditation process. State chapter councilors came to Miller's defense, however, arguing that school libraries far removed from ALA-accredited programs depended on schools of education for new hires.³⁷ Ultimately, AASL prevailed. On July 12, 1988, ALA approved an AASL resolution that the ALA-accredited master's degree "or a Master's Degree with a specialty in school library media" from an NCATE-accredited program "is the appropriate first professional degree for school library media specialists."³⁸ ALA also delegated responsibility for participation in NCATE activities to AASL.

Yet AASL would take cooperation with NCATE only so far. When AECT invited AASL to participate in efforts to revise its standards for NCATE in 1988, AASL refused, despite NCATE pressure to work with AECT to develop a single set of standards. Marilyn Miller made no secret of her opposition. As she told an interviewer years later, a single set of standards "was *never* going to happen. Because philosophically there was just such a difference in what they wanted from the media specialist and what we wanted . . . At some point I said 'over my dead body!'"³⁹ And because many ALA-accredited library school deans

were “very exercised” about the possibility of having their program reviewed by an outside accrediting committee, Miller considered any cooperation with AECT on developing new guidelines “the kiss of death.”⁴⁰ She was right. “I do not want us ever to make a statement that NCATE approval equates to accreditation for those non-accredited programs,” one library school dean wrote the ALA executive director in 1990. ALA-accredited programs were “automatically exempt—with stamp of approval—from the NCATE institutional program review,” he insisted.⁴¹

But accreditation, whether by NCATE or ALA, helped the beginning school library media specialist only a little. To get a job, she still had to satisfy state education department standards to be certified, and those departments in turn were subject to regional accrediting agency standards. As of 1983 states identified twenty-three different designations for school library positions ranging from “Basic Specialist” in Hawaii to “Unified Media Specialist” in Massachusetts. After getting the job, the new professional often had to join a teacher’s union (in some districts union contracts mandated entire classrooms of students had to be sent to the library to give classroom teachers preparation time), and had multiple options for joining professional associations in librarianship and education. All of these organizations and agencies wanted to preserve their independence, often at the expense of the school library media specialist, who frequently felt part of neither the teaching nor the library profession. AASL and ALA were partly to blame, Lillian Gerhardt complained. AASL had “done nothing about its field’s title confusion except add to it,” and ALA had not forced its accrediting committee to protect children’s library courses as programs shifted their titles from schools of library science to “schools of information.”⁴²

Matters were made considerably worse when the federal government reduced funding for school libraries in the 1980s. Caught between reduced funding and the need to staff school libraries, many state departments of education loosened certification requirements to qualify paraprofessionals and even volunteers as “school librarians.”⁴³ In 1990, Georgia’s Board of Education eliminated teaching certification requirements for media specialists, only to replace them with “technicians” and “cart jockeys,” as one critic argued. Protests by the Georgia school library community, ALA, and AASL—all citing AASL standards—had no impact.⁴⁴ Because districts needed to comply with new legal requirements to place a library media specialist in each school building, in 1992 Oklahoma granted a continuing emergency certificate to teachers with only nine hours of library science coursework. That same year Texas allowed any teacher to take an examination for endorsement as a library media specialist without any library science coursework. One district coordinator reported that fifteen teachers who passed the exam and subsequently took positions were “clueless” about how to order books and provide reference services.⁴⁵

"Whether or not a child has access to a certified school library media specialist," *SLJ* concluded in 1993, "is often a matter of geography."⁴⁶ In 1996 *SLJ* cited statistics on the ratio of students per public school media specialist in all fifty states. They showed a national average of 870, with wide ranges of 476 for Kansas and 482 for Montana to 6,361 for California. In the late 1990s interns in New York's St. John's University library classes reported rumors "that some principals in large schools intentionally underestimate their student populations to state officials so they will not have to hire an additional school librarian."⁴⁷

The isolation building-level school librarians had experienced for decades broke down a bit in 1992, when school library media specialists launched LM_Net, an electronic discussion group designed to give school librarians opportunities to share information. Within two years it hosted over 1,000 active participants and many others "listening in."⁴⁸ In 1995 AASL began ICONnect, a website that quickly became "the largest continuing education activity [AASL] has ever developed." By 1998 ICONnect included online courses providing lessons on Internet use in schools; "Curriculum Connections," which allowed users to identify resources for specific project; "KidsConnect," a two-day reference service of over 200 volunteers for children and young adults; "FamiliesConnect," aimed at guiding families and caregivers to safe use of the Internet by children and young adults; and "ICPrize," which recognized collaborative curriculum initiatives developed by teachers and librarians using new communications technology.⁴⁹ The Internet also helped school librarians improve services. By 1997, 95 percent of Pennsylvania's public school libraries were connected to "Access Pennsylvania," a website that identified 3.3 million books in 1,400 Keystone State libraries, many of which students could access via inter-library loan.⁵⁰ In subsequent years similar websites came online in most other states.

Information Power

Like the library profession at large, school library leaders worried about scenarios pop-futurists predicted as certainties because of the computer's capacity to store and retrieve increased amounts of information. In 1980 Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave*—which said the nation was moving from an "industrial" to an "information age"—was on the bestseller list. By that time his *Future Shock* (1970) (which popularized the term "information overload") had sold 7 million copies in fifty languages. The library world was listening intently. In *Toward Paperless Information Systems* (1978), University of Illinois library school Professor F. Wilfrid Lancaster, who had a background that privileged the kind of "useful knowledge" Benjamin Franklin had celebrated 250 years earlier, predicted books would disappear as a basic feature of library service. Lancaster expected the traditional library's "disembodiment" by 2000. Other evangelists of information

technology, echoing Lancaster, formed a priesthood of library and information science scholars who focused primarily on the concept of information. "Librarianship must separate itself from the institution of the library," said one such scholar, who went on to argue that the field should concentrate professional education on systems and technology that could organize information in new ways.⁵¹ Many school library administrators and board members were drawn to this kind of argument; meanwhile, school library leaders worried.

"The Information Age, an age in which the ability to access and use information effectively is requisite, is upon us," wrote Karen Whitney as she explained to *School Library Media Quarterly* readers the significance of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* that AASL and AECT released in April 1988. Library media specialists had three roles under the new guidelines: information specialist, teacher, and instructional consultant. "An information studies curriculum must be defined and implemented in each school to achieve this mission. Students must learn to select with care the information that is relevant to their needs. They must be able to define clearly what they need to know and develop a strategy for locating it," she wrote. "The information must be in an appropriate format with a content level they can understand. The abilities to detect bias, to differentiate between fact and opinion, to weigh conflicting opinions, and to evaluate the authoritativeness" of the information "are essential."⁵² Some called *Information Power* a "rite of passage, signaling to educators and librarians that the specialized field of school librarianship had come of age." The new standards "created a new face for school librarianship, with the goal of helping practitioners (as well as teachers and administrators) put aside old-fashioned and frequently negative stereotypes, thereby gaining a new understanding and appreciation for the educational potential represented by proactively presented library programming."⁵³

Like previous such standards, however, much hyperbole and unsubstantiated rhetoric followed in the wake of *Information Power*. One librarian declared that "school library media specialists are information experts, in contrast to those who are subject experts . . . media specialists understand how knowledge is most effectively communicated by teachers and most effectively received by students."⁵⁴ She offered no evidence to support these statements. In addition, advocates of "information power" largely ignored the few voices that questioned the validity of their agenda.⁵⁵ They neglected, for example, to address the disturbing links between "knowledge" and "power" that many educational philosophers were at the time openly exploring, and that, critics said, undermined democratic education.⁵⁶ Finally, *Information Power* left many questions unanswered. For example, how would school librarians determine who became "information literate" and who did not? What rewards would the former receive and what shortcomings would the latter suffer?

While *Information Power* claimed school library media specialists were integral members of instructional teams, research suggested otherwise. One researcher found New York school librarians forced to integrate AV services into their practice angry about these new responsibilities. Complained one, "I am now a technocrat, not a librarian. I spend so much time trouble shooting equipment that I have very little time to spend working with teachers and kids." Groused another, "Because of mandates for technology, I am now using \$36,000 worth of equipment to check out 25-year-old books. We need to be maintaining the resource collection at an adequate level, but are not given the money to support both, or even the choice of which to support first." Argued a third, "How can I even attempt to implement" AASL standards, "network, and become an instructional consultant when I have to be the laminator, shelver, book stamper, and photocopier monitor for the building. I need another warm body to HELP!!!"⁵⁷

In 1983, one scholar wrote that "the notion that the school library media center supports the curriculum of the school . . . is utter rot." Instead, the textbook and teachers' manuals drove the curricula at schools he visited. That was the reason so many school librarians "questioned their worth, their necessity in the school setting," he concluded.⁵⁸ "As is true of education in general," Birmingham (MI) Coordinator of Instructional Media Lucy E. Ainsley argued in 1984, "most school libraries have not changed significantly in the past 50 years." School librarians had generally received their training in a professional world oriented to print that did not anticipate the electronic explosion. "Yes, we have added quantities of audiovisual materials and equipment to the collections," but "the quality of our services and programs is not significantly different or better."⁵⁹

In a 1986 survey of 207 Nassau (NY) School Library System elementary, junior, and senior high school librarians, researchers "were shocked to discover that few of the media specialists . . . wrote or spoke of integrating the library media program into the curriculum of the schools," and when several of them gathered that summer to help researchers construct a staff development program, "they spoke about feeling powerless, isolated, and ignored . . . They spoke of supervisors who had no notion of what it is to be a school library media specialist, no knowledge of how to use the media specialist as a resource in building the school's instructional program, and no interest in learning about media specialists and the library media program's potential."⁶⁰

A 1988 survey of Arizona elementary and high school principals showed they rated selection, management, reference, and reading promotion as the school librarian's most important skills; they ranked instruction seventh, curriculum planning ninth, and audiovisual production tenth.⁶¹ In her analysis of the instructional role of the high school library media specialist, Kathleen W. Craver concluded in 1988 that recommendations built into guidelines and standards

were not reflected in professional practice.⁶² In a 1996 study of forty-eight New England public school library media centers, Cheryl McCarthy discovered that none had “fully implemented all the [*Information Power*] guidelines yet.” Reasons varied. Most were underfunded, many had no staff support and less than supportive administrators. Elementary school media centers were often staffed by librarians responsible for two or more schools on fixed schedules, schools at which teachers generally believed “real learning is what goes on in the classroom” and viewed “library class” merely as “enrichment.” “Without change,” McCarthy concluded, “*Information Power* will remain an ideal, not a reality for the majority of library media programs in New England.” McCarthy urged her colleagues “to stop talking amongst ourselves and stop making unrealistic demands on individuals.”⁶³

In the 1990s, however, several research studies took broader perspectives. In 1992, for example, the Colorado Department of Education published a study that showed the best predictor of high academic achievement by students was the size of a school library collection and staff.⁶⁴ This study and several others—subsequently referred to as “impact studies”—quickly became ammunition to fight efforts to furlough school librarians. In 1993 one AASL official cited the Colorado study in her letter to a New York superintendent who was poised to lay off twelve of the district’s sixteen school librarians. Her effort failed, however. The superintendent replied he had to restructure library services rather than cut other programs and services.⁶⁵

From 1988 to 1998, the DeWitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fund subsidized a “Library Power” project that provided \$45 million to nineteen communities to refurbish space and improve school library services in nearly 700 public and mostly urban elementary and middle schools. Library Power represented the first large-scale foundation-funded effort to improve school library media centers since the Knapp Project. Participating schools had to follow *Information Power* guidelines, employ a full-time library media specialist, follow flexible scheduling, increase their materials budgets, and provide teachers and library media specialists with adequate planning time. More than three-fourths of Library Power schools added school library space for comfortable reading, use of computers, and small and large group meetings. Unlike *A Nation at Risk*—which led to teaching to the test—Library Power instead emphasized an inquiry-based approach to education that addressed critical thinking skills and teacher-librarian collaboration.⁶⁶

Like the Knapp Project, Library Power funded success stories. “Not long ago, we had a bedraggled library with books dating back to the ’60s, ’50s, even ’40s,” said a principal in Brooklyn’s tough Bedford-Stuyvesant section. “With Library Power’s help, we’ve made it the kind of place that children love to read.” Another school administrator noted: “Three years ago, parents didn’t want to send their

kids to P.S. 3. Now they're fighting to get in." In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, teachers and librarians worked together "as an instructional team," one Library Power project director noted, and turned "dark, dismal, and crowded" school libraries into "warm and friendly places for children."⁶⁷ Because Library Power mandated that a participating Tucson elementary school increase its half-time librarian to full-time, "the librarian changed from being an itinerant resource to being an integral part of curriculum implementation," she reported. "Therefore, teachers have begun to incorporate the library program in their planning automatically."⁶⁸

In their assessment of the program, Dianne Hopkins and Douglas Zweizig found that "fully adapted" school library media programs shared seven characteristics: "a shared vision, professional development programs, ample planning opportunities, leadership from the school's principal, a support staff, complementary school reforms, and community and district advocates." School environments that provided fertile soil in which library media centers could prosper emphasized "student inquiry, in-depth understanding, critical thinking," and collaboration. Environments not conducive to harnessing the potential of the school library media center, they found, "are heavily weighted toward increasing student scores on standardized tests or . . . emphasize learning through rote memory."⁶⁹

But Library Power also had mixed results. Of the forty-six collaboratively planned units analyzed in Atlanta, "only 6 to 11 were judged to involve students in higher levels of problem solving and critical thinking." Some teachers complained that pressure to increase test scores competed for their attention with Library Power demands. Others resented the time Library Power took from their normal schedules.⁷⁰ At one school teachers loved it when the librarian pulled together a multitude of materials," but that "made her a 'gopher' rather than a [collaborating] professional," Hopkins and Zweizig reported. "In the absence of a strong professional community that endorses, legitimizes and reinforces" efforts to improve critical thinking skills and information literacy, they concluded, "it is difficult to imagine" a school librarian could achieve Library Power's goals.⁷¹

Other evaluators pointed to the limits imposed on school library practices by formal education's power relationships. For example, one found only 5 percent of teachers and principals believed collaboration represented Library Power's most important contribution. As that evaluator noted, "librarians' major responsibilities remained identifying and gathering resources in support of instruction, teaching information skills, and helping students create products. Teachers retained sole responsibilities for evaluating students and grading." The principal usually "determined whether teachers made Library Power a central component in their instruction" by pressing for changes in an "institutional routine" that supported a series of "unquestioned and taken-for-granted automatic practices."⁷² Ultimately, another project evaluator concluded, "If teachers don't

have an interest in drawing on library and information resources, integrated practice is unlikely to make it into the classroom. Superintendents and principals are the decision-makers, and even if others buy into a program, superintendents and principals have to support it.”⁷³

In observing a school librarian from Denver, the evaluator noted her

genuine desire to learn . . . [and] . . . high regard for teachers’ knowledge and expertise. And, she brought her own set of skills and knowledge of resources, in use of technology, in the ability to work collaboratively and her genuine enjoyment of and respect for children. She exhibited a high degree of flexibility, fitting her teaching around the schedule and style of each teacher. She exhibited initiative in reaching out to teachers to help them understand the benefits of the library for their students. She exhibited excellent organizational skills; she invested a high level of energy in her work.⁷⁴

What the evaluator did not say, however, was that Library Power funding helped create the environment in which this librarian could work her magic and gave her significant leverage the vast majority of school librarians working in less advantaged environments did not enjoy.

During the Library Power project AASL and AECT were working on a revision of *Information Power*. In 1998 they jointly published *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*.⁷⁵ Nicknamed *IP2*, it reaffirmed the school library’s mission and value to the school’s curriculum, declared “information literacy” an essential skill school libraries would teach, and expanded the role of the library media specialist as a teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator. Like its predecessors, *IP2* was filled with words and phrases like “must,” “should,” and “need to,” and like its predecessors, the extent to which building-level media specialists could respond to its recommendations was greatly circumscribed by constraints built into the power relationships within their specific educational environments.

Just before it was published, *School Library Journal* invited a six-member panel to evaluate the revised standards. Five of the six responded positively, but still found room to criticize. One Illinois high school librarian foresaw that *IP2* would be “a hard sell because the standards” came from a profession “not generally known for having a curriculum,” she wrote. “Many school administrators will just put the recommendations in a file, while teachers might view implementing the standards as yet another responsibility for which they’ll receive no training, no support, and no time.” Keith Swigger, Dean of the library school at Texas Woman’s University, was especially critical, however. *IP2* “overstates the importance of ‘information,’ without defining the term,” he argued. “The text treats information as nuggets, the successful accumulation of which solves problems.” The standards also disguised the fact that “curriculum is

a battleground on which teachers, parents, administrators, legislators and special interest groups (like AASL and AECT) battle for control of children's minds." School librarians did not have much ammunition in that battle, he concluded.⁷⁶

Swigger's criticisms drew quick responses. Barbara Stripling, an Arkansas school libraries supervisor, former AASL President and one of *IP2*'s authors, said Swigger "does not understand the fundamental shift in school librarianship that is taking place." No longer focused on collection development and library service, the new school librarian taught students to "find, evaluate, and use information in order to develop their understanding about subject-area content." New professionals also taught students "how to learn—by reading for understanding, by using information literacy skills and technology, and by thinking about ideas and communicating conclusions."⁷⁷ She neglected to identify ways these new professionals would evaluate and prove their successes.

But Swigger would have none of it. "It's time for school librarians to focus on librarianship—not teaching," he argued in a follow-up article. "Abandon zealotry and hyperbole. Information isn't life. It isn't even power. The library isn't the center of the school—it's an integral part of a system."⁷⁸ His article drew a quick response from Michael Eisenberg, an "information" educator at Syracuse University who argued that "information is essential to almost every endeavor in life—to learning, various work activities, even recreation. . . . In my mind, there is nothing any more important than what we do as school librarians: ensuring that students are effective users of ideas and information." Like Stripling, he said little about how the school library community could prove they had accomplished that goal.⁷⁹

Before *IP2* was published, AASL announced a five-year effort to capitalize on the Colorado study and other impact studies to convince the nation's education community that quality libraries and full-time librarians improved student learning. AECT chose not to participate, however, "apparently due to earlier disagreements between the two associations over [*Information Power*'s] content," *SLJ* surmised.⁸⁰ To implement the campaign AASL asked each state association representing school libraries to appoint a coordinator to be trained in program advocacy and implementation. "If we truly have learned and believe that our 'Information Literacy Standards' are applicable to all areas of the curriculum and will improve student learning, then we will tell everybody about it, every day, in every way we can," wrote the AASL President. "For our profession, the status quo is becoming a velvet trap—a place to languish in comfort while we succumb to irrelevance."⁸¹ Her worries reflected the boundaries of school librarianship's discourse, which now privileged information literacy over reading.

Except for impact studies, the status of research in school librarianship remained problematic. "Research in the school library field has decreased

dramatically over the past three decades,” *School Library Media Quarterly* admitted in a 1989 editorial, “and no upswing in scholarly activity seems imminent.”⁸² A 1993 summary noted that “questionnaires are still the overwhelming research method used,” and such research as existed, largely contained in dissertations, “clustered around five topics: technology, clientele, information resources, the library media specialist, and managing the library media center.”⁸³ In 1989 David Loertscher, Blanche Woolls, and Philip Turner organized the first of a series of retreats designed to acquaint library professionals with research. “Involving library professionals in the retreat was thought to be key in ensuring that basic research could produce benefits and applications with meaning and value,” one press release noted. Held at roughly two-year intervals, subsequent retreats focused on a variety of themes, but ultimately appeared to have little impact on school library practice.⁸⁴

Some library educators made significant attempts to craft theory for school library instruction. Most successful was Carol C. Kuhlthau, who advocated for a new approach based on cognitive learning theory that developed an instructional program “directly connected to what students are learning in various areas of the curriculum” instead of teaching sources—a model that, she argued, librarianship had yet to move past. “Developing realistic, productive perceptions of information systems and information problems,” she concluded, “is the goal of library instruction in our schools.”⁸⁵ Her definition of information traces directly to the concept of “useful knowledge” that had shaped the discourse of the American library profession since the nineteenth century.

While some made efforts to research school library instruction, few analyzed “school library as place,” a subject that also received little attention in *Information Power* and *IP2*. In a review of the literature on “the human environment” in schools, one scholar concluded, “Little of the writing in this area deals directly with school library media centers.” Environmental psychologists had much to say about personal space, territoriality, and the effects of color, carpeting, and furniture on the use of space, but the school space calling itself the “heart of the school” had scarce research of this kind available to it. The scholar urged school librarians “to exploit the experience of environmental psychologists and educators in order to enhance the effectiveness of the library media program.”⁸⁶

In 1994 the *Wilson Library Bulletin* published “The School Library as Place” by Sara Snyder Crumpacker, a Virginia organizational consultant. Yes, she argued, the reading and information needs satisfied by the school library were obvious, but its “intangible qualities are less evident and less well known.” In many schools the library functioned not only as a gathering place that became, in effect, “the family room of the school,” but also as a “hospitality center” that hosted meetings and receptions. Many provided a place where students could “choose to get lost in a world of their own” and “be alone with their thoughts.”

The school library offered them choices not available in the classroom. "According to my studies, school libraries are making significant contributions to the quality of living in schools," Crumpacker concluded. Besides "the learning libraries offer, they are satisfying deeply personal needs as well as providing people with vivid, healthy, and lasting experiential impressions."⁸⁷

"Family room of the school," "gathering places," a place to "choose" what to do among several available options, "a place to be alone and enjoy some peace and quiet." Because all these terms resided outside the contours of the profession's research agenda, the question of how the "school library as place" might be impacting the lives of millions of students in multiple ways was seldom addressed. Some hints of the possibilities emerge from the literature, however. For example, when students arrived at a Lakeland, Florida, high school at the beginning of the 1999 academic year, they discovered the media center had been renovated to include the Tribal Grounds Café. Students took to it immediately. "You can come here and relax while you do your work," said a senior. "You can come here to read or talk to your friends." Media specialists admitted their "main goal is to make the media center the hub of the school." It appeared they were succeeding; library visits at this school had increased 300 percent.⁸⁸

But school library as place also experienced tragedy. At lunchtime on April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold burst into the Littleton (CO) Columbine High School Library armed with shotguns, explosives, and knives. As they entered, they looked for particular people. "There's that little nigger son of a bitch right there," said one. "Let's get him." They then shot Isaiah Shoels, who had just signed on to a computer to do research. Thereafter they approached Cassie Bernall, who carried a Bible to school every day. "Do you believe in God?" she was asked. "Yes," she said; then they shot her. Other students overheard one of the killers say to the other, "Get anybody with a white hat on," because "a lot of jocks wear white hats." They then proceeded to kill Matt Kechter, defensive end on the high school football team, at the time wearing a white baseball cap. And so the killing went; ten students were killed in the library, twelve in all and one teacher (twenty-one others survived their wounds) before Harris and Klebold killed themselves. After Columbine, one *Los Angeles Times* columnist wrote, "the middle-class parent may well decide that the public school library is too dangerous a place for her daughter or son."⁸⁹

Building-Level School Library Experiences

In 1992 at Deer Park Elementary School in New Port Richey, Florida, the media center served as the central location for the school's closed circuit TV system, housed the school's darkroom and greenhouse, and managed three computer systems that served all of the school's 1,000 students. "Pasco County is the only county in Florida . . . that has gone to this level of progression in the

media program,” noted the media specialist proudly. “With the state picking up 80 percent of the tab, we’ve been able to acquire a lot of material.” She also complimented media aides and volunteers who performed routine tasks that “made it possible for us to get out to the classroom and teach students the skills they need to use the media center.”⁹⁰ Like Library Power schools, what allowed Deer Park Elementary to move toward AASL mandates was outside funding.

Most other school libraries across the nation were not so lucky. In some states, conditions were especially dismal. A 1987 report issued by the California’s Department of Education showed that more than two-thirds of the 984 schools sampled had no certified librarian. The report attributed this to Proposition 13 (passed in 1978 to cap real estate taxes), reduced federal funding, scant support from school administrators and the lack of a “shared vision of the role of an effective library media program in the overall instructional program.”⁹¹ Unlike most states, California did not require school districts to hire credentialed school librarians; most were staffed by paraprofessionals, clerks, and volunteers. A 1992 effort in California to add a tax on the sale of pornographic films to fund school library materials failed.⁹² When the state provided \$158.5 million in 1999 to update collections and information technology (but not hire librarians), school officials across the state undertook a massive campaign to weed out outdated books, most of which had been purchased with federal funds before 1973. From titles culled in the campaign, the state superintendent of public instruction kept a collection of sixty books she labeled her “little shelf of horrors,” including “books on the nonexistent Belgian Congo, African savages, and one called ‘I’m Glad I’m a Boy! I’m Glad I’m a Girl!’” As one reporter noted, this last “inform[ed], children: ‘Boys are doctors. Girls are nurses. Boys are presidents. Girls are first ladies. Boys fix things. Girls need things fixed.’” “And we wonder why our students aren’t doing well,” mused the superintendent. Although the additional funding was “a godsend,” noted one superintendent, “it’s a drop in the bucket . . . We’re dying out here.”⁹³

Many still complained about the practice of scheduling classes in the library every day. “Rigid or inflexible scheduling, mainly in elementary school, occurs when the media specialists, fully burdened with classes as a contractual part of the teachers’ planning period, are locked into fixed schedules” of “25 to 35 or more classes per week,” griped one New Jersey librarian in 1987, leaving them very little time to set up “meaningful lessons to coincide with classroom instruction.”⁹⁴ A 1994 federal survey found 57 percent of elementary schools had fixed schedules, 27 percent mixed, and only 17 percent fully flexible.⁹⁵ Not everyone complained about fixed scheduling, however. Some enjoyed “the comfort of knowing what to expect from week-to-week and day-to-day lockstep schedules.”⁹⁶ “I *enjoy* my scheduled library classes,” wrote one Pennsylvania elementary school librarian. To help children “realize the pleasures of reading” she kept

her class lessons short and allocated time "for the children to start to read their books so that they will want to continue reading at home."⁹⁷

"Children's perceptions" of school libraries "are affected by the perceptions and behavior of individual librarians," concluded one researcher who studied sixth graders at three eastern North Carolina public school libraries in 1994. "Children whose librarians genuinely like them will enjoy coming to the library." On the other hand, however, librarians "can turn children off by 'snappy' behavior, by setting rules that they do not follow themselves, by failing to learn names, and by making children wait too long for access to new material."⁹⁸

Book Selection and Censorship

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, publishers of children's literature significantly diversified their lists by issuing more materials dealing with real-life issues such as (among others) racism, sexism, and sexual orientation. In 1982, for example, Farrar, Straus and Giroux published Nancy Garden's *Annie on My Mind*, a story of two seventeen-year-old girls experiencing a romantic relationship. In 1989 Alyson Books published Leslea Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies*, and a year later issued Michael Willhoite's *Daddy's Roommate*. All three were well reviewed in the library press. They were also challenged in numerous school systems.

By this time many school librarians had found new ways to contest censorship attempts, if they even chose to acquire controversial titles like these. A large percentage had crafted collection development policies incorporating the Library Bill of Rights into a set of guidelines that they then asked their school boards to approve. Policies usually outlined a set of procedures that students, parents, and school officials had to follow in order to challenge particular texts on school library shelves that they found objectionable. By forcing those challenges to go public, the policies often served not only as a deterrent but also as a defense for the school librarian. To counter challengers willing to weather the publicity, school librarians could argue they were simply following a policy approved by the school board, which proved particularly helpful when challenges evolved into court cases. Some did, and successful attempts to turn back censorship challenges in public school libraries were regularly celebrated in the library press. Always, however, final decision for dealing with censorship challenges rested with local school officials, including principals, school superintendents, and school board members.⁹⁹

School librarians continued to use standard acquisition guides in their selection practices. In 1990 the H. W. Wilson Company published the sixth edition of *Junior High School Library Catalog*. An advisory committee of seven librarians (five women, two men) compiled a list that was then shared with nine experienced librarians (eight women, one man) who helped pare the original list

to 3,219 titles. *JHSLC* did not include nonprint materials, textbooks, or periodicals.¹⁰⁰ When the *Catalog* arrived on their desks, thousands of junior high school librarians checked its contents against their collections, then considered acquiring new titles and getting rid of titles the *Catalog* did not include.

But the guides also helped perpetuate systemic biases in collections. Jane Aldrich, a Wisconsin high school librarian, recounted meeting a former student who in the late 1970s had asked for a book on homosexuality. She lamented that literature on the subject identified in “standard selection criteria” was “depressing” and “full of dark foreboding, and tragic endings.” None said: “Feel proud of yourself and your sexuality,” while many, she continued, took an insidious approach: “In the event you are a homosexual take courage. It is no longer considered an illness. BUT (and there is always the BUT laced with overtones of pity) it is not an easy life. Beware.” She then recounted her efforts in the early 1980s to purchase a filmstrip entitled *Thursday’s Child* that addressed homosexuality in a positive way. Although the school psychologist approved, her principal passed the request to the superintendent, who recommended Aldrich refer students to the public library instead. Aldrich also wrote “several prominent school librarians across the nation, and received guarded answers. They were uncomfortable in their answers to me, lest they be quoted publicly.” About her profession she concluded, “There is a conspiracy of silence surrounding the subject of homosexuality.”¹⁰¹ *SLJ* Editor Brian Kenney’s adolescent experiences were similar. While serving as a high school library page “I doggedly scanned” the library “for anything with the word ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay,’ never turning up anything in books.” Then one day he came across “the cage”—a “locked stack separated . . . by a metal fence.” There he discovered art and photography books, but also “gay gold!” such as E. M. Forster’s *Maurice*, James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*, and Gore Vidal’s *The City and the Pillar*.¹⁰²

Some school librarians were more creative. In response to an exam question for a course I taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, one student wrote that in the mid-1980s his high school librarian was being pressured to remove titles about homosexuality. At the time, he was a sophomore struggling to identify his own sexual orientation, and he desperately wanted those books. Then something unusual happened. Title by title the librarian reported the books “lost,” thus appeasing parents and school superiors uncomfortable about their presence in the collection. However, my student reported, he and other gender queer students soon discovered these “lost” books had actually been “misshelved” behind others in a remote part of the library. There they could access the books freely, and all understood that any book taken (which need not be checked out since it was officially lost) had to be returned to the same place. The collection was still there—intact and including a few newer titles—the day he graduated.

Elsewhere, book banning was more public. Armed with a list of books questioned by an upstate group, two school board members in Island Trees, New York, entered their junior and senior high school libraries after hours in 1976 and pulled nine books they considered objectionable. A subsequent board press release declared these titles "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic [*sic*], and just plain filthy." Five students, including Steven Pico, challenged the board in a case that eventually got to the Supreme Court as *Pico v. Island Trees Board of Education*. The plaintiffs argued the board had denied them their First Amendment rights and that the board's act cast a "pall of orthodoxy" on the Island Trees school community. The defendants argued they had the legal right to determine what was taught and read in the school system, and that students' First Amendment rights were circumscribed by existing law and common sense.¹⁰³ On June 25, 1982, the court handed down seven separate opinions. A narrow majority of five rejected the school board's claim to "absolute discretion" to remove school library books. At the same time, however, students' First Amendment rights, the court said, were not absolute. Because they were not yet adults, students were not entitled to access all books. Months later the school board quietly returned the titles to its high school libraries.¹⁰⁴

At the local level the *Island Trees* decision did nothing to alter the power structure school librarians faced every day in selecting controversial titles, for which they had a professional responsibility but not a constitutionally defined right. In 1985 the American Civil Liberties Union's Georgia chapter did a study of eighty-four public libraries and 290 public school libraries in four southern states. One school librarian admitted that many of her colleagues had an attitude of "let's do it for them before they do it to us." Another wrote: "Books questioned are immediately removed . . . Anything found with four-letter words is usually questioned. Principal demands removal from shelf. Librarian is given no voice to defend the material."¹⁰⁵

In Racine, Wisconsin, school officials routinely rejected titles like *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Rolling Stone* magazine, William Blatty's *The Exorcist*, and Judy Blume's *Forever*. But for "a few minor exceptions," noted one Racine school administrator, library media specialists had been "indoctrinated with patriotic zeal into an ultra-liberal selection philosophy promoted across the country by intellectual freedom committees."¹⁰⁶ The Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) Intellectual Freedom Committee conducted an investigation, and after submitting its findings to the WLA Board, the latter censured the district. That censure brought no penalties, however, and did not alter the school system's position; it was "much ado about nothing," the superintendent said. "We have been unfairly taken to task by an outside group that appears intent on forcing their viewpoint on the school district," said another administrator.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps in reaction to these practices and incidents, on July 2, 1986, the ALA Council unanimously approved an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights drafted by the AASL Intellectual Freedom Committee. "The school library media program plays a unique role in promoting intellectual freedom . . . It serves as a point of voluntary access to information and ideas and as a learning laboratory for students as they acquire critical thinking and problem solving skills needed in a pluralistic society."¹⁰⁸ A year later, in her dissertation on censorship in Virginia senior high school libraries, Laura Smith McMillan found that all participated in some form of censorship, censoring fiction more than nonfiction and frequently avoiding controversy by simply not purchasing controversial materials. She also concluded that librarians' personal convictions were more influential in their decisions than the threat of outside censorship.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, mid-1980s research on censorship among secondary school librarians in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin showed that although librarians with ALA-accredited degrees were more likely to recognize the importance of defending intellectual freedom, "the responses of the school librarians in this study did not reflect the values of their profession."¹¹⁰

The creation of the Internet in the early 1990s brought other challenges. "All public and school libraries should have filters on their Internet connections," argued one school librarian.¹¹¹ "A public school takes the [place] of a parent. Full intellectual freedom is not our role," said another. "Intellectually I object to it," but "I like my job," wrote a third. In 2000, 75 percent of school libraries filtered Internet access, and 86 percent had a "tap on the shoulder" practice when librarians determined inappropriate use of school computers.¹¹² When Congress passed the 2001 Children's Internet Protection Act mandating filters in school and public libraries receiving federal funds, ALA filed suit on behalf of public libraries, but not school libraries. *SLJ* noticed no "outcry from school librarians over their exclusion" from the suit. AASL's Intellectual Freedom Committee chair complained that "too few school librarians are up in arms about the filtering mandate and may just go along with whatever their district does."¹¹³

Reading: Missed Opportunities

While AASL pursued "information literacy" as school librarianship's primary imperative in the twentieth century's last two decades, a parallel universe of scholarship was growing around "reading as agency." Many school librarians intuitively recognized inherent values in student reading, and the Colorado impact study and its successors made convincing connections between student achievement and the acts of reading school libraries made possible. Unfortunately, however, AASL leaders for the most part did not follow the research. Certainly, social movements from the 1960s addressing gender, race, class, and sexual orientation had diversified subjects covered in youth literature, but most

school librarians could not see beyond the two categories cemented into librarianship's traditional discourse: "reading for pleasure" versus "reading for information." Members of the youth literature clerisy still railed against the former. "Perhaps the greatest menace" to children's literature, wrote a *Booklist* editor in 1985, "is the series," specifically naming Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys. Such series were "racist and sexist"—mere "junk food," argued a Colorado librarian.¹¹⁴ And complicating efforts of school librarians who wanted to favor "reading for pleasure" programs was opposition from colleagues who thought them old-fashioned and out of sync with the "Information Age."

Multiple cues existed that school library leaders overlooked. In 1986, for example, President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of Education William J. Bennett announced publication of a booklet entitled *What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning*. It argued that "children improve their reading ability by reading a lot" and that a key to "promoting independent reading is making books easily available to children through classroom libraries. Children in classrooms that have libraries read more, have better attitudes about reading and make greater gains in reading comprehension than children in classrooms without libraries."¹¹⁵ Months later Bennett released *First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America*. The report included a special section on "Libraries," in which Bennett said he thought it "of critical importance that girls and boys acquire the habit of **reading**. School librarians should find children reading biographies and histories and novels and science fiction—not simply looking for a fugitive fact or random quotation." Certainly "the librarian should be an integral part of the instructional staff," he concluded, but primarily "by leading children to good books."¹¹⁶ Other research showed that "pleasure reading" increased vocabulary ten times faster than intensive vocabulary instruction.¹¹⁷

In 1985 the always maverick *SLJ* published an article on series fiction by Susan Steinfir and Barbara Moran, who sought to uncover how young adults interacted with these texts rather than judging them against adult-imposed standards of literary quality. They found that "young people may very well find comfort in these repetitious plots, and guidance from the strengths of the series characters who, despite the silliness and cocksureness of it all, are competent, autonomous young men and women, successfully poised on the brink of adulthood."¹¹⁸

Steinfir followed up their article a year later with a brief explanation of "reader-response criticism" which, she noted, had grown out of a challenge to the twentieth century's dominant literary theories. It emphasized "the reader and the text rather than the author and the text." The reader, "who has historically and ironically been the most overlooked element in the author-text-reader triad, becomes the center of critical attention." Without saying so, Steinfir was directly challenging the way youth librarians had been approaching—and

reviewing—youth literature since Anne Carroll Moore and her successors crafted a canon and established literary appreciation of those works as a major professional priority. This new theoretical model allowed “for children to be just as active readers and interpreters as we, and no better or worse,” Steinfirst concluded. “We have found in reader-response criticism a sorely needed and welcome ally in our search for a viable critical method.”¹¹⁹ Some found Steinfirst’s argument convincing. In a 1990 *SLJ* article entitled “From Sweet Valley They Say We Are Leaving . . .,” Doris Fong wrote: “Young adults may find qualities in the formula romance that we, as adult readers, do not perceive,” and cited one study arguing “that the formula romance actually provides young readers with a sense of ‘empowerment’ as they struggle to resist and challenge societal pressure.”¹²⁰

Although reader-response criticism invited opportunities to understand why children and young adults found texts like *Poky Little Puppy* and series fiction like Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys so engaging, school librarianship continued to divide reading into categories that overlooked the ability of young people to learn from “pleasure reading.” In her 1986 study of rural youth reading, for example, Constance Mellon labeled the books most read by teenagers “leisure reading.” She acknowledged that her colleagues generally believed “library collections should consist of the ‘best’ books, ‘best’ being defined by selection guides and reviews rather than by readers’ demands.” But beyond “give ‘em what they want,” she did not have the vocabulary provided by theories like reader-response to help her explain why.¹²¹

Evidence of the power and value of what school librarians continued to call “pleasure reading” abounded, however. *New York Times* columnist Anna Quindlen, whose speech at a Betsy-Tacy Society meeting *SLJ* reprinted in late 1993, recalled her own adolescent reading of the very popular midcentury Betsy-Tacy series. “Do you realize that not once, in any book, does any individual, male or female, suggest to Betsy that she cannot, as she hopes to do, become a writer?” Her mother had one choice in life, Quindlen noted, “that of wife and mother.” But “that was never going to be enough for me.” Where did she get the idea? “I learned it from books, and none more than from the stories about Betsy, Tacy, and Tib. Because the most important thing about Betsy Ray is that she has a profound sense of confidence and her own worth.” In a sidebar, Betsy-Tacy Society Board Member Peggy Sullivan noted the series “encourages appreciation of multicultural values in a small town setting; focuses on girls who exercised independence while functioning in diverse family situations; touches on social issues, including financial hardships, substance abuse, and the effects of war on society; and provides good adult role models, including men who exhibit parenting skills and share domestic responsibilities.”¹²²

That same year Stephen Krashen published *The Power of Reading*, which demonstrated that “free voluntary reading”—including the voluntary reading

of series fiction—was the best predictor of reading comprehension, spelling ability, increased vocabulary, grammar usage, and writing style. The more access children had to books in school and public libraries, the more likely they would increase their linguistic ability.¹²³ School library leaders often cited Krashen's conclusions, but the school library research community largely chose not to participate in his research agenda. Instead, school library researchers bent on an "information literacy" agenda missed opportunities to look beyond the informational versus leisure reading dichotomy.

But not all building-level school librarians celebrated the profession's new "information literacy" imperative. In 1986 *SLJ* ran a story about a ten-year-old "booktalk" program for fourth and fifth graders from different classrooms at a New York school. Students self-selected their books and then gathered to discuss them. "One of the goals of our school's total reading program is to have children make connections with books, and come to view reading as a pleasurable experience, during which the book's contents is [*sic*] understood by the reader, and through his or her interaction with the book, he or she sees the world in new ways," wrote the teacher and librarian who co-ran the program. "I like listening to what other people think against what I think," said a fifth grader. "Thinking about, listening to, comparing, and reevaluating one's understanding of a book reaffirms a child's sense that his or her thoughts have value," program leaders concluded. "One takes from the book not only tangible facts or main ideas, but new understandings and insights."¹²⁴ Their observations about the agency of youth reading mirrored those of C. C. Certain more than seventy years earlier.

Every Tuesday afternoon in 1995 at a Massachusetts middle school, 400 sixth through eighth graders opened books they had selected from the school library to read for forty-five minutes. It was part of a program called DEAR ("Drop Everything and Read") that school media specialist Lisa Anne Kalapinski had worked out with teachers and her principal, who also read with the students. "Reading together," she wrote, "establishes the message that reading is a socially acceptable and fun activity. Students and teachers alike have been reaping the benefits from this motivational program." To spark interest Kalapinski had purchased mystery and science fiction series like Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys (which "fly off the shelf," she noted), and authors like R. L. Stine and Marilyn Kaye. "The DEAR program is easily implemented when you have a faculty set on improving reading." Perhaps more important, however, "It requires no meetings, workshops, administrative paperwork, written proposals, time constraints, or outside support from the superintendent's office."¹²⁵

The power of a professional discourse that privileged information over reading was most evident in 1992, however, when incoming ALA President Marilyn Miller proposed to her executive board a new program she called "The Great

American Family Read-a-Thon.” Miller wanted to get every American student to read one hundred books over a two-year period. She would ask families, friends, organizations, and philanthropists to contribute one dollar for each book read, all cumulating in a trust fund that would generate interest to be distributed to school and public libraries. She called the initiative “A Billion Bucks for a Billion Books.” “A great idea for which time has come,” *SLJ* commented. Miller got the idea from incoming AASL President Blanche Woolls, Libraries Unlimited Editor David Loertscher, and former AASL President Retta Patrick, who dreamed it up at the 1991 ALA summer conference.¹²⁶

But on February 24, 1993, Miller suddenly cancelled the initiative. The consulting firm ALA hired to evaluate it cited “two primary reasons . . . the internal dissension in the ALA over the proposed project and the difficulties in implementing such a complex campaign.” ALA’s Public Library Association, for example, refused to endorse the project because it would be too expensive, would compete with local public library fundraising efforts, and did not fit PLA priorities. The Social Responsibilities Round Table criticized it as a “gimmicky public relations campaign sponsored by corporate interest and the banking establishment.” Miller sadly concluded: “I think it was doomed from the beginning because we wanted to do it for children. . . . We all bemoan the problems, but we don’t seem to be willing to make the kinds of investments that are needed.”¹²⁷

From the ashes, however, Blanche Woolls came up with an AASL “Count on Reading: The First Billion Books” initiative that instead of fundraising would focus on developing research strategies to help assess the role of school libraries. She specifically cited the recent Colorado impact study that found a correlation between well-funded school libraries and student achievement.¹²⁸ Not everyone was happy with Woolls’s initiative, however. “If AASL hinges its future just on the promotion of reading” while under-promoting technology and information literacy, AASL Board member Michael Eisenberg argued, “I think we’re in a lot of trouble.”¹²⁹ His concerns pointed to a split among school library leaders who “see things as either/or,” and worried that those endorsing a reading program were “focusing on an old issue and are avoiding the electronic challenge,” one AASL official wrote a colleague. “I for one am getting tired of the debate . . . It is time to recognize that the two areas are not only of equal importance in education but are also mutually reinforcing.”¹³⁰

AASL Research Committee Chair Sue Eason had other worries about “Count on Reading.” “This program . . . assumes particular answers and seeks to gather evidence in order to ‘prove’ them,” she wrote the AASL Board on September 17, 1994. “To call the effort described here as ‘research’ is not only inaccurate but may ultimately call into question the true research done in our field.” Implicit in her comments was an assumption that she knew what “true research” was. Eason suggested that AASL remove the “research” section from the document

and refocus the initiative as a reading advocacy program. Weeks later the Count on Reading Committee Chair reassured Eason that the program was not calling for "experimental research," but "action" and "locally-based research . . . for use at the local level—in one school, one class, one grade level, or with one child."¹³¹ Absent from any of these discussions was reference to germinal works published in the late twentieth century that informed new perspectives on reading—perspectives that Susan Steinfurst had referenced in 1986 as a "welcome ally in our search for a viable critical method."¹³²

In 1998 Jeff McQuillan published *The Literacy Crisis: False Claims, Real Solutions*, which showed that access to print greatly influenced reading achievement, and that the amount of reading students accomplished was one of the best predictors of reading scores.¹³³ A year later *Knowledge Quest* published an article describing a successful reading initiative at a Maryland elementary school. Its three authors identified relevant research that documented the benefits of reading to increase student achievement, and detailed children's motivations for reading and the role the school library media center played in sparking those motivations. The article provided a blueprint for a successful reading program school library media centers across the country could replicate.¹³⁴

As the calendar turned to the year 2000, school library media centers looked different than they had in 1980. Computers had enabled them to automate many library processes. Card catalogs had given way to publicly accessible online catalogs, while circulation systems had gravitated from cards and book pockets to computer-read bar codes. Nationwide, school librarians were thankful that automation had reduced many of their routine clerical tasks.¹³⁵ Ironically, however, by automating their services some school librarians had even become their school's expert on computer technology, thus raising their campus profiles.¹³⁶

But computers also threatened. In 1996 the *Poughkeepsie* [NY] *Journal* quoted a consultant from a Minneapolis company named Education Alternatives, Inc. about recommendations he made regarding local school libraries. "Would there be a negative impact on children" if elementary school libraries were eliminated? he was asked. "We don't think so. We think the savings would well outweigh any kind of negative impact that would exist." Like many outsiders to librarianship, the consultant had clearly bought into predictions that newer communications technologies would make libraries obsolete. He showed little understanding about the role of library as place and the educational impacts of reading books.¹³⁷

This kind of thinking was also evident among some members of the nation's school library community. One school librarian feared her very profession would disappear, and another complained that "the library is one of the top areas to cut in elementary [schools] because it's not mandated." A third lamented a

“feeling of isolation” in schools, adding, “We’re deluged with low funding levels and lack of help to move forward in a technical world.”¹³⁸ And when the jobs of several of her colleagues were threatened in an adjacent school district, one New York library media specialist noted they had practiced “the tenets of *Information Power*” and “done all the right things. We can be as proactive as possible,” she said, “but when it comes to saving money, the agenda of school boards and outside agencies . . . we have no hope.”¹³⁹

Despite efforts by an AASL coterie of leaders to push “information literacy” to the center of the profession’s agenda at the end of the century, power relationships in formal education that school librarianship had inherited at its beginnings had not substantially changed. The practice of school librarianship at the building level largely remained a combination of managing the library as place, supplying reading materials largely recommended by standard acquisition guides that addressed formal education’s prescribed curricula, and attempting to teach library skills to access information that was becoming increasingly electronic in format. And school librarianship’s successes were still directly tied to two things: adequate levels of funding, and the persuasive powers of the school librarian.

A New Century

Adapting to Shifting Educational Environments

In 2000 the United States accommodated 84,000 public schools, down from 129,000 in 1953 largely because of consolidation. Those 84,000 schools supported 76,807 library media centers. Ninety-five percent of elementary and 87 percent of secondary public schools had school library media centers, notable increases from the 75 percent of secondary schools and just 24 percent of elementary schools with media centers in 1953. Similarly, 86 percent of public schools had a school library media specialist in 2000, more than doubling the 1953 figure. School library collections averaged seventeen books per pupil, a vast increase from three books per pupil in 1953. Per pupil expenditures for public school libraries averaged fifteen dollars; adjusted for inflation, that was up from six dollars per pupil in 1953.¹

The world of American school librarianship—heavily influenced by federal funding, foundation-supported demonstration projects, public support, and pressures brought to bear on formal education through AASL standards—had obviously grown significantly in the previous half-century. But at the beginning of the twenty-first century the school library still prioritized the traditional services it had inherited at the beginning of the twentieth. It continued to be a place that provided access to information and contained a collection maintained by

people who managed a library program intended and largely designed to provide support for the school's formal education processes. The profession's demographic profile had not changed much either. Seventy-four percent of public school libraries were run by a state certified librarian whose mean age was 47. Ninety-two percent were women, 90 percent white, 73 percent married, 15 percent divorced, and 12 percent never married. Sixty-seven percent were full-time, 21 percent full-time itinerant, and 12 percent part-time.²

American Association of School Librarians

By the turn of the century fewer people in AASL were arguing for an organization separate from the parent American Library Association. The older generations of AASL members led by Frances Henne, Mary Gaver, and Marilyn Miller had died or retired, and newer school library leaders appeared to have less stomach for going it alone. AASL was still led by an elite group consisting mostly of library (now "information") school faculty members and state and district school library supervisors. Within ALA it had evolved into a comfortable bureaucracy with a 63-page *Board Orientation Handbook*, a 40-page *Committee Handbook*, a 60-page *Committee Chair Handbook*, and a 27-page *Publications Manual*. In 1998 it had renamed its periodical *Knowledge Quest*, an upbeat magazine targeted largely at building-level library media specialists. AASL also began an electronic journal entitled *School Library Media Research*. In 2000 AASL had 8,000 members, less than 10 percent of the nation's estimated 95,000 library media specialists (public and private). Of all head school librarians 18 percent were AASL members, 41 percent belonged to the American Federation of Teachers or the National Education Association, and 61 percent belonged to state and local library and education associations.³

But dissatisfaction with ALA still was still evident. In 2007 several AASL leaders argued that ALA continued to treat school libraries as "the red-headed step-child of the library world." Another complained: "I have never, ever heard of a legitimate reason for why we are so consistently overlooked, neglected, and omitted from *American Libraries* [ALA's monthly magazine]." To test the accuracy of this accusation *SLJ* Editor Brian Kenney analyzed *AL*'s contents for the previous two years and discovered only three feature articles on school libraries. Even "in most of its 'big picture' stories," he concluded, "the school library perspective is missing."⁴ A few argued—again—for secession from ALA.⁵ But Kenney disagreed. "Trust me, I know (and agree with some of) the gripes about ALA," he wrote in a 2006 editorial. "It's bloated and slow, expensive to join, run by old geezers, and preoccupied with national issues at the expense of local ones—and its council appears more concerned with developing foreign policy than addressing core library issues." But ALA also provided school librarians with a nationally "powerful voice when we need it" and created opportunities

to meet with others at its national conferences, where, he said, friends and mentors challenged him and continued to provide him with guidance.⁶

And at the turn of the century AASL was no longer doing battle or coordinating standards revision with the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), which since the mid-1980s had been suffering losses in membership. The shift from analog to digital media was at the core of AECT's membership problems, as the number of computer coordinators employed at the school building and district levels who cared little about film and video media quickly grew into a critical mass that founded the International Society for Technology in Education (ITSE) in 1989. In 1999, AECT moved its headquarters from Washington, DC to Indiana University as a cost-cutting measure. Thereafter, both ITSE and AECT maintained relatively distant contacts with AASL.

During this time period AASL worked cooperatively with several other ALA divisions on projects of joint interest. Through a joint Task Force on the Educational Role of Libraries shared with the Association of College and Research Libraries, for example, AASL encouraged partnerships between academic and school libraries for information literacy projects. Among partnerships it cited were a two-year pilot program the University of California at Irvine established with several Orange County high schools to improve student information literacy skills, three in-service workshops for teachers alongside twenty sessions for area schoolchildren (grades three through twelve) conducted by the University of Maine at Farmington, and a workshop on information literacy skills for teachers at two high schools in Michigan hosted by Wayne State University.⁷

In the fall of 2000 Mansfield University of Pennsylvania enrolled 120 online students pursuing a master of education in school library and information technologies. "One of the things we found out in the research is that a number of people who come out of the library science schools are ill-prepared to handle a school library teaching situation," program director Debra Kachel told *School Library Journal*. Her curriculum took *Information Power* "as our Bible" and designed ten courses around it, to be taught by library practitioners with "enough experience to give students some really good advice."⁸ A major reason driving Mansfield's effort were projections that 68 percent of school librarians would be retiring in the twenty-first century's first decade. On the one hand, not enough graduates were coming out of "information" schools, many of which no longer offered curricula for school librarians. On the other hand, state after state was crafting strategies to minimize the problem, like certifying teachers who promised to take library science courses in the future.⁹ In 2002 the Educational Testing Service initiated a one-year evaluation process for school librarians that, if successfully completed, qualified them as nationally certified educators.¹⁰

Included among the eighteen sets of program standards the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) approved at the turn of

the century were school library media certification standards NCATE had worked out with AASL. "School library media specialists are instructional consultants, and they can assist teachers in designing instruction and producing resources to meet learning needs of students," the introduction stated. "School library media specialists can provide leadership in developing and implementing a program to integrate learning and information skills into the curriculum."¹¹ "Can," not "will"—the standards described expectations, not imperatives; what could be instead of what should be. And because the programs NCATE approved still took place at the state and not the national level, the standards themselves varied, and an individual state's power to modify, undermine, or override them to meet perceived emergencies remained. In 2006, in fact, 74 percent of states did not require graduate degrees in either education or library and information studies for school library certification.¹²

The passage of time did not improve these percentages. In response to a 2018 inquiry about school library curricula and guidelines, Michigan's Library Grant Coordinator noted that all of her state's guidelines were advisory only, not required. Oregon's School Library Consultant complained that her state had a very weak rule: "So long as a district has any level FTE of licensed librarian on staff or on contract, the entire district is in compliance," she summarized. "That means a district could contract for a few hours of consulting, and it would be in compliance." South Dakota's School Library Technology Coordinator reported, "There is no state requirement to employ a certified or endorsed librarian." Many of South Dakota's larger districts had certified librarians, but the problem was particularly acute in rural and tribal libraries. State school library officials from Texas, North Carolina, and Arkansas also answered that curricula and guidelines were voluntary, and variously followed.¹³ In California, only 9 percent of public schools with libraries had a credentialed teacher librarian.¹⁴

In 2010 NCATE's Specialty Areas Studies Board (SASB) approved the ALA/AASL *Standards for Initial Preparation of School Librarians*, which had grown out of AASL's *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (2007) and its *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs* (2009). Like the 2007 version, the 2010 *Standards* were developed without input from other educational technology organizations like AECT and ISTE, thus limiting school librarianship's ability to integrate digital technology into its professional services.¹⁵ Also in 2010, AASL officially adopted "school librarian" as the title "which reflects the roles of the 21st century school library professional as leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator." Some objected, arguing the new title suggested a passive rather than active practicing professional. Some states stuck with titles they had evolved over the generations; Florida still used "media specialist," California "teacher-librarian."¹⁶

All of AASL's revised twenty-first-century standards attempted to refocus a professional agenda around nine tenets that addressed "the learning process." In effect, these standards stepped away from the "more limited concept of information literacy" that had ultimately failed to improve the professional status of school librarianship.¹⁷ Those beliefs were: (1) "Reading is a window to the world;" (2) "Inquiry provides a framework for learning;" (3) "Ethical behavior in the use of information must be taught;" (4) "Technology skills are crucial for future employment needs;" (5) "Equitable access is a key component for education;" (6) "The definition of information literacy has become more complex as resources and technologies have changed;" (7) "The continuing expansion of information demands that all individuals acquire the thinking skills that will enable them to learn on their own;" (8) "Learning has a social context;" and (9) "School libraries are essential to the development of learning skills."¹⁸ Beyond the power of persuasion, however, these beliefs had little force to compel compliance from the nation's education community. In 2020 the school library's position in the power structures of formal education was not much different from the position it occupied in 1920, when a similar set of beliefs and an evangelical spirit drove the profession's pioneers.

New Initiatives

The school library community experienced a few encouraging initiatives at the turn of the century. In July 2001, First Lady Laura Bush—a former school librarian herself—announced the establishment of the private Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries to provide grants for school libraries nationwide. She set up her foundation to be run by an advisory board appointed without regard to political affiliation, and with full authority to determine policy and award grants. Lillian Gerhardt called it a "Big Idea," then reflected on another "Big Idea"—the "Billion Bucks for Books" initiative Marilyn Miller pushed a decade earlier that had become a "victim of institutional and organizational turf wars." This time, Gerhardt argued, "American librarians concerned for young people and their reading should stand ready to help, not hinder, the first school librarian to lead from our White House."¹⁹ Like the Knapp Project, ESEA Title II, and Library Power, the Laura Bush initiative gave school libraries new external funding opportunities.

On January 9, 2002, Bush announced she was recommending that the federal government provide \$10 million to recruit a new generation of librarians. During George W. Bush's presidency, the budget of the federal government's Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) increased from \$190 million in 2000 to \$280 million in 2005, which in turn enabled IMLS to initiate new programs and increase funding for school libraries. Among them was a program to help develop "a workforce of librarians to better meet the changing and learning

information needs of the American public” that Congress later named the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program.²⁰

Despite these initiatives, however, AASL remained cool toward her husband’s administration. For the most part, ALA and AASL still manifested a center-left attitude identified with Democrats that dated back to passage of ESEA Title II in the 1960s. AASL never thanked Laura Bush for establishing the Foundation (which as of this writing continues to provide grants²¹), never invited her to deliver a keynote address at an annual conference (“we don’t want any Bush money” was sometimes heard in conference hallways), and on the one occasion when she did appear at an AASL meeting to announce grants to school libraries, the meeting was not only lightly attended, it was also picketed. “No good deed goes unpunished” by ALA and AASL, said some on her White House staff. “While building level school librarians and principals were most appreciative of the LBF grants received,” reflected one Foundation Advisory Board member years later, “the AASL and ALA leadership missed a tremendous opportunity.”²²

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into the law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which reauthorized the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Facts favored a change, Bush argued. Despite a 90 percent increase in the last three decades in public spending per student, public education had made almost no progress in raising student achievement levels.²³ Motivated in part by a belief (reinforced by anti-union bias) that school administrators and teachers did not want to be held accountable for students’ academic progress and that only the federal government had enough authority through funding to force the issue, NCLB relied heavily on standardized testing to measure student achievement, particularly in reading, math, and science. States and schools that failed to make acceptable progress to improve student achievement (as measured by test scores) would lose federal funding.²⁴

Only in the “Improving Literacy Through School Libraries” section did NCLB specifically highlight school librarians and certified school library media specialists. Although NCLB authorized \$250 million for this program, it ended up allocating a paltry \$12 million in 2002, rising to just \$19 million in 2010. “This funding makes very clear what was already implicit in the organization of the legislation,” wrote one educational policy expert in 2010. “Buried at the bottom of the reading skills section, school libraries were seen as peripheral to the law’s stated central purposes of giving all children the opportunity for high-quality education and closing the achievement gap.”²⁵

Not only were school library media specialists not listed among the categories of “highly qualified” teachers considered essential to meet NCLB requirements, the library was also overlooked in NCLB’s “Reading First” and “Enhancing Education Through Technology” sections, two educational arenas school librarians considered core professional imperatives. “Reading First” focused in-

tensively on phonics and phonemic awareness, and regarded as unimportant the “free voluntary reading” practices so many in the school library community found attractive and effective. “Enhancing Education Through Technology” sought to ensure that students would become technologically literate. But being “technologically literate,” one school librarian argued, “is a small part of being information literate.” To qualify for funding the school library community would have to make the case that technological literacy was part of a bigger world of information literacy, which remained one of AASL’s “common beliefs.”²⁶

Testing mandates, however, were highly problematic for school libraries. In 2001 *SLJ* publisher Fred Ciporen complained that “testing hardly develops a love of reading, the very subject it purports to measure.”²⁷ “We now live in a test-based world,” wrote an *SLJ* editor in 2003, “thanks to the troubling trend toward the standardized test that was exacerbated” by NCLB demands.²⁸ In 2009 Kelly Gallagher coined a new term—“readicide”—as “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing [testing] practices found in schools.”²⁹ Once NCLB passed, “more schools adopted scripted or so-called teacher proof curricula,” notes education historian Dana Goldstein. These scripted curricula standardized “lesson plans and materials across all the classrooms in a school” and provided “prescriptive day-to-day, even minute-to-minute schedules for teachers to follow.” A subsequent survey of school administrators “found that 65 percent of all districts, and 75 percent of those with at least one school in danger of ‘failing,’ increased instructional time for reading and math while decreasing time for social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and even recess.”³⁰ In 2004 *USA Today* reported that “teachers squeezed by demands for ever-higher test scores” had been “pushing aside time once spent [in free] reading.”³¹

Because of the narrow scope of its mandates, NCLB left school libraries with fewer opportunities to qualify for funding. Nonetheless, some school librarians found ways to take advantage. Capitalizing on NCLB’s requirement for district and school improvement plans at the same time her high school was up for re-accreditation, Danbury (CT) High School Librarian Julia Roberts designed a “sustained silent reading” program in collaboration with several of her teacher colleagues that harnessed “popular books”—those titles considered “leisure reading,” she noted—to get students reading. Test scores improved, especially among students who had been underachievers.³²

Matters did not improve for school librarians in subsequent years. In 2010 members of the National Education Association, the International Reading Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the National Council for Teachers of English agreed to draft the standards for language arts and literacy for K–12 students that eventually were rolled into “Common Core Curriculum

Standards,” an initiative of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. Within three years forty-five states adopted the standards, and when the Obama Administration yoked its Race to the Top initiative to Common Core in the wake of the Great Recession, states across the country quickly began competing for the federal funding that, like NCLB, was linked to improved test scores. To qualify for a grant, states had to adopt Common Core’s education reform remedies (thus imposing de facto national standards), including a mandate to expand charter schools and teacher evaluations.

Although school librarians across the country already taught several Common Core skills, AASL had not been invited to help draft the new standards, and no library media specialists were represented in the deliberations that produced them. Once again, the nation’s school library community argued its relevance from the periphery of the conversation.³³ Although AASL *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* (2007) were “based on the premise that learners use skills, resources, and tools, and that school libraries are essential to the development of these learning skills,” noted Blanche Woolls, Anne Weeks, and Sharon Coatney in *School Library Manager* (2014), they lamented that No Child Left Behind and Common Core State Standards had forced “an era of testing student performance. Teachers teach to the test, and anything not related to potential questions has little interest to teachers, especially because salary increases in some districts are based on students’ test performance.”³⁴ Within this educational environment school librarians were at a distinct disadvantage.

By that time the impact studies Keith Curry Lance and others had started in 1993 in Colorado extended to twenty-three states.³⁵ Most showed that increased professional staffing in the school library was correlated with higher student test scores, while staff reductions tracked with declines. A 2003 Florida study found that test scores were 20 percent higher in elementary schools in which libraries were open at least eighty hours a week versus sixty or less. A 2004 Minnesota study of elementary schools demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between book budgets, access to electronic resources, and higher reading scores. Similar studies in Illinois, Indiana, and California found that students attending schools with newer collections had higher test scores, and that test scores also increased with additional clerical support in libraries. Finally, principals in such better-performing schools were more likely to value instructional delivery collaboration between librarians and teachers. Findings like these that demonstrated the positive impact of school libraries continued over the years. A 2012 study in Pennsylvania showed that poor, minority, and disabled students were nearly three times as likely to have “advanced writing” scores with full-time librarians on staff than without.³⁶ A 2015 impact study in Washington—the culmination of an advocacy effort started in 2008 by a group of “Spokane Moms” who fought an effort

to close their children's school libraries—showed once again that “students who attend schools with certified teacher-librarians and quality library facilities perform better on standardized tests and are more likely to graduate, even after controlling for school size and student income level.”³⁷

But as he watched these impact studies come out, David Loertscher complained in 2005 that many school librarians failed to capitalize on all this research. At an *SLJ* Leadership Summit held that same year, he reported, “conferes discussed what has become an open secret in the school library world: that some school librarians just don't put much into their jobs.” Said one Texas school library coordinator, “The three things that keep me awake are the principals who don't get it, the librarians who don't get it, and the constant advocacy we have to do.”³⁸

After investigating these results in 2010, one researcher found that the impact studies appeared to have “no overall effect on teacher or principal behavior toward school library media programs . . . nor was there any reported evidence of changes in teacher education programs or principal education programs to incorporate information about school library media programs into those education curricula.”³⁹ Why did school administrators seem unimpressed? asked library educator Gary Hartzell. First, impact studies weren't published where school administrators would see them. Second, even if school administrators read the impact studies, they had reason to doubt that correlation statistics proved causation, and “without comparative evidence that library investment can deliver more than some alternative,” particularly one as costly as school libraries, administrators facing decreased budgets tended to default to past experience and assumptions, which for school libraries were “historically . . . deadly in this situation.”⁴⁰

Overlooking Agency in the Act of Reading

Instead of emphases on reading and the appreciation of literature that marked priorities for most of the twentieth century, at the beginning of the twenty-first school library leaders placed more emphasis on information access skills and information technology. They paid little scholarly attention to the library as place in a larger educational environment, and regarded the supply of “recreational” reading as secondary to accessing “information” as defined by the discourse it inherited from the twentieth century. The profession still had not developed an understanding of reading beyond the simplified and objectified categories of “informational” and “recreational.”

Evidence of the limits this imposed on the profession's discourse abounds. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, some school librarians who wanted to counter emerging anti-Islamic feelings recognized their collections were often woefully inadequate on information about Arab cultures. “There's definitely a dearth of

good English-language materials, particularly fiction, on Muslims and Arab-Americans," a *Booklist* editor noted.⁴¹ The systemic biases of the publishing industry and reading public certainly handcuffed the ability of school librarians who cared about the issue to address this need, but librarianship's traditional "book as object" response to social issues also demonstrated a thin understanding of human agency in the act of reading.

As he thought about the horror of 9/11, twelve-year-old Zach asked of his neighbor, children's literature consultant Connie Rochman, "How could anybody do such a thing?" While discussing the question, both gravitated toward literary characters to help them understand: Voldemort, Harry Potter's "ruthless nemesis"; Arawn, Death Lord of Lloyd Alexander's Prydain series; and the "menacing" Dark Rider who populated Susan Cooper's books. Much like Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Sonia Sotomayor appreciated and learned from the independence of Nancy Drew several decades earlier, Zack harnessed his reading of the characters in the fantasy books he loved and read regularly to develop a deeper understanding of this traumatic event.⁴²

In the fall of 2002, Sandra Hughes-Hassell and Christina Lutz analyzed the "leisure reading" habits of 245 mostly African American students, twelve years old on average, at an inner-city middle school (61 percent of these students qualified for free or reduced lunches). "Leisure reading is defined as the reading teenagers do by choice as opposed to the reading teenagers are assigned by teachers," they noted. While male students in the survey obtained 53 percent of their leisure reading from their school library, the school itself no longer employed a librarian. Overall, 73 percent of the students read in their leisure time, which closely tracked the amount of student leisure reading in rural and suburban schools. The study also validated previous research that personal choice was the most important factor in student reading. Like most other reading research cited in school library discourse, however, connections to research on the agency of reading were largely absent from their analysis and discussion, even though student responses showed many were trading books they bought at bookstores, and making statements like "reading calms me" and a desire to read about "characters my age wrestling with tough issues, like drug abuse or crime" pointed them in this direction. Like much other school library research on reading, this study focused more on what students read (book as object) rather than why (human agency in the act of reading).⁴³

This limited understanding of the wider benefits of reading showed in other ways. Contrary to the conventional thinking of many educators that students experienced a "fourth-grade reading slump," researchers Stephen Krashen and Debra Von Sprecken found in 2002 that students read less because parents and teachers were telling them the comics, magazines, horror, and joke books they liked were not worthy reading.⁴⁴ In the summer of 2004 the National Endow-

ment for the Arts released “Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America.” Generally, it concluded that in the previous ten years Americans were reading less. But because it defined reading as book reading and narrowed its scope to “literary” texts (however ill-defined), it overlooked other kinds of reading materials like magazines, comics, graphic novels, and the Internet, which also hosted complex texts like blogs.

In a 2004 *SLJ* editorial, Evan St. Lifer lamented the inability of school and children’s and young adult librarians to work together with reading specialists toward a common goal. He acknowledged that school librarians disliked that reading specialists advocated for classroom libraries, but he argued that was no reason to work in “parallel universes.” Thousands of libraries across the nation were “avidly” conducting reading programs, but “in most cases there is no reading research tied to these initiatives and, thus, what the reading establishment doesn’t know is hurting them, and us.”⁴⁵ What St. Lifer did not acknowledge, however, was the power of discourse inherited from previous generations that shaped the profession’s boundaries. Most school librarians appeared to see their jurisdiction as identifying and providing good books from a central facility. Understanding reading’s capacity to function as an agent in students’ everyday lives did not seem to factor into their professional practice.

In her 2008 dissertation on the reading habits of sixth through eighth grade students at eleven Texas schools, Paula E. Griffith found students ranked comics, graphic novels, series books, and particularly scary stories as their favorites. “They use these books to gain self confidence by their ability to read the book successfully and improve their self esteem because these characters act and think independently of adults.” The novels’ characters allowed adolescent readers “to understand they are not alone and that what they feel is normal, validating their emotional upheaval.” Because librarians often objected that series books were not “quality” literature, they missed an important point. “Series books are very linear,” Griffith argued, “allowing readers to focus only on achieving emotional independence and understanding their changing family roles.”⁴⁶

After reading Arthur Tatum’s *Reading for Their Life: (Re)building the Textual Images of African-American Adolescent Males* (2009), which argued that traditional literacy programs did not work for black youth because they lacked access to texts they found meaningful, Durham (NC) school librarians initiated a program in 2010–11 designed to incorporate Tatum’s ideas into their daily work. First they removed works depicting black stereotypes from their collections and replaced them with enabling books selected by students. They followed this up by hosting events like book clubs (some of them in partnership with the public library) in which the kids led discussions of the texts. “It’s a beautiful thing when I have to tell my black male students to stop reading in class so that they can pay attention,” noted one middle school teacher, “and that has happened several

times once we started” a book club.⁴⁷ In a 2008 Toronto *Globe and Mail* article entitled “Socially Awkward? Hit the Books,” correspondent Hayley Mick reported on research that showed “readers of narrative fiction scored higher on tests of empathy and social acumen than those who read nonfiction.”⁴⁸

A three-year study released in 2010 validated what Barbara Heyns had discovered more than thirty years earlier: public library summer reading programs benefited their participants by significantly improving their reading skills and countering the normal loss of skills over summer months often referred to as “summer slide.”⁴⁹ But a 2012 *SLJ* survey showed only 9 percent of public librarians worked “directly with school librarians and teachers,” and only 30 percent collaborated with local schools “to coordinate book purchases that support curriculum.”⁵⁰ Less than a year later an *SLJ* article documented the successes of several cooperative public/school library systems, including Denver, Philadelphia, New York City, Nashville, Portland (OR), La Crosse (WI), and Monterey (CA). In Nashville, for example, the public library loaned 97,000 items to the city’s fifty-four public middle and high schools in 2011–2012.⁵¹

In his book *Free Voluntary Reading* (2011), which updated information in previous editions of the *Power of Reading*, Stephen Krashen argued: “Free voluntary reading looks better and more powerful than ever.” Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) “means reading because you want to. For school-age children, FVR means no book report, no questions at the end of the chapter, and no looking up every vocabulary word. FVR means putting down a book you don’t like and choosing another one instead. It is the kind of reading highly literate people do all the time.” Krashen capitalized on new studies of voluntary reading to contend that FVR improved students’ writing, writing fluency, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar, that surfing the Internet actually helped second-language acquirers, that Accelerated Reader (North America’s most popular reading management program at the time) did not work, and that phonics had too many shortcomings. At the same time, however, he continued to label FVR (often referred to when practiced in schools as “sustained silent reading”) as “pleasurable” and “recreational.”⁵²

Paulette Rothbauer, one of the few faculty members in schools of information to focus research attention on the act of reading, did explore its deeper dynamics, and in *Reading Still Matters* (2018) advised the North American library community to “create time and space for conversations about reading—face-to-face when possible but also online when appropriate.” In libraries “this can be done through formal book clubs, through scheduled light socializing about books and reading, or via ‘passive programming’ by creating ways for teens to encounter venues for sharing thoughts about what they read.”⁵³ Despite Krashen’s and Rothbauer’s findings, however, efforts to promote reading routinely met huge obstacles. In a 2012 study, for example, researchers found that

less than half of principals they surveyed believed school librarians should encourage “recreational reading,” and almost all the librarians surveyed who worked under their direction said “achieving success without their principals’ backing is impossible.”⁵⁴

Accelerated Reader (AR) was another problem because it defined reading levels for particular books for which the program had developed thousands of quizzes, upon which student achievement in reading comprehension would then be measured. School systems that adopted AR in effect pressured teachers to teach mostly to those books for which quizzes existed, and teachers wary of lower scores would press their students to select titles based on their assessment of student reading levels. One school librarian overheard a conversation between a teacher and several of her third-grade children. “1.5? No, that’s too easy for you. Get a 1.9. A 2.2 is too hard for you. Choose a book with a lower number.” The system thus robbed students of choice, a major motivating factor in encouraging reading. It also placed pressure on the school librarian to label books by reading level. Another conversation that one school librarian overheard starkly illustrated the constraints on students that arose from this kind of structured reading; it began with a student pointing to a book about stock cars and saying, “I want that one.” The librarian told him to check it out, but the student said he couldn’t; “it’s below my AR reading level.” Standing next to him his teacher added: “You do have to get your two AR books today. We want you to improve your reading, don’t we?”⁵⁵

School Library as Place

Elementary school libraries built in the twentieth century’s last four decades were for the most part centrally located in schools; they were filled with bookshelves with perhaps a few lounge chairs scattered about, and at century’s end often contained an area dedicated for computer use that school librarians used for instruction. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, some new school libraries began to be built on a pattern set in academic libraries a decade earlier: they became an “information” or “learning commons” containing space for individual students who wanted quiet places for reading, but also spaces for multiple classes engaged in cooperative activities. In 2011 in Concord, New Hampshire, for example, three newly constructed schools housed light-filled, two-story “learning commons” surrounded by classrooms. Within the commons students had quiet spaces for books and reading, open spaces for storytelling and other media-based “learning process” activities, and designated areas for reading specialists and special needs students.⁵⁶

Ten years earlier the New York City Board of Education had joined with the Robin Hood Foundation to remake school libraries in ten of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. A team of ten New York architectural firms agreed to donate

their services, and after consulting with principals, school librarians, and teachers (not with students, however), all agreed that each library have at least 1,400 square feet of space, two-thirds of which would contain a librarian's station and an instructional section, one-third an open space for a variety of activities. All agreed to abandon "form follows function" for "form follows flexibility." Beyond that, architects could tap their own creativity at each school. What they could not tap, however, was any body of research that the school library profession had generated to study use of the school library as place from a user's perspective; that subject had not been part of the profession's discourse. "We wanted to give kids a chance to discover space on their own," said one architect. "If everything is in line or regimented, there's no sense of discovery."

At the Clara Barton School in the South Bronx, which served mostly African American and Hispanic students, the architect expanded the 1,000 square-foot room he inherited into a 2,100 square-foot space with comfortable seating and furniture kids liked to touch. At the Newport School in Brooklyn the architect installed large photomurals of the students above the bookcases to "reinforce their sense of belonging in this special place." At the Marino Jeantet School in Queens the architect crafted eleven "mini-environments" to "allow individual children to be alone in their own discovery trove." Common to all was pushing bookshelves to outer walls to create a sense of space, replacing tables seating three on a side with more flexible seating (including soft lounge chairs and special furniture for newer information technologies), and choosing a color palette pleasing to the eye.⁵⁷

Some members of the school library community echoed these ideas. "I believe strongly that librarians who focus on the library as place will save it," wrote *SLJ* editor Renee Olson in 2000.⁵⁸ In *Teen Spaces: The Step-by-Step Library Makeover* (2003), author Kimberly Bolan recommended that public and school libraries repurpose existing space to accommodate the space needs of teenagers. Invite teen participation in designing the space, she advised, and "create a space that's truly teen-friendly" by crafting "multiple environments for different activities." She advocated comfortable furniture, attractive floor coverings, and visually appealing colors.⁵⁹ Close attention to library as space was echoed by a public librarian and architect team who argued for the importance of "gather[ing] as much information as possible about the library's core philosophy of patron service and how it is to be reflected in the design of children's and teen spaces" during the planning process.⁶⁰

By focusing on what she identified as two kinds of "isolated students," however, Wisconsin high school library media specialist Lynn Evarts demonstrated a broader perspective. "Self-isolated students," she noted, were often troubled, insecure, and sometimes unsure of their sexual identity; "they are frequently the invisible students in the school." Similarly, "peer-isolated students" were shunned

by other students, sometimes for the way they dressed, their race, their lack of social skills, even their acne—and they were often bullied. Because the school library was not a structured classroom environment, it offered opportunities for these isolated students to find a safe space. But that might mean stretching traditional library rules, Evarts said. “Library lunches are one of the most effective ways to draw in isolated students, because the scariest place in any school is the cafeteria at lunchtime.”⁶¹

A few others also pushed the limits of professional thinking about library as place. School library media centers “tend to be built with close attention to easy sightlines to avoid blind spots where children can cause mischief,” Brian Sturm wrote in 2008. But children, and particularly young children, also needed “secret spaces” where they could feel empowered and could exercise their imaginations: “small spaces, nooks and crannies, and areas not in the direct sightlines of adults if they are to feel sheltered enough to imagine freely.”⁶²

Georgia elementary school librarian Andy Plemmons took a different tack. After reading Henry Jenkins’s *Confronting the Challenge of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (2009), he decided as much as possible to turn his library into a place for participatory culture by offering a space “where students have a voice, a space where they are free to create, and a space where they feel connected to a global community.” In the culture he created, some students selected the books, others created weather reports, still others developed blog posts on the school’s history (for which they interviewed alumni), and many participated in poetry workshops. Plemmons discovered that “you don’t need to be an expert in something to use it as a creative tool for learners. You just need to be willing to offer the space for students to develop their expertise and pass that learning on to others.” At the end of the year his principal wrote: “Even though I know you are the leader in what takes place in our library, you have created a space that truly feels like our library rather than your library.”⁶³

Sometimes national tragedy brought attention to the school library as a discrete place. After the second plane struck the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Monica Adams opened her media center at the Robinson Secondary School in Fairfax, Virginia, to students and faculty to watch TV coverage. Some students cried; others watched in silence. Across the nation school librarians made differing decisions about whether to do the same. “The big fear,” one Manhattan school librarian said, “was we’d break down in front of the kids.” She and her colleagues discussed “modeling calm and control, being aware of our own feelings but not acting on them,” and most of all “reassuring children that they’re safe.”⁶⁴

Pressures brought by No Child Left Behind and Common Core Standards worked against exploring new uses of library as place. “Unfortunately, we are currently immersed in a culture of passing tests and getting grades,” lamented

school librarian Margaret L. Sullivan in 2015. “We are teaching students to focus on grades rather than learning. It should be your goal,” she told readers of *High Impact School Library Spaces*, “to focus on creating a school library environment that champions lifelong learning rather than a semester grade.” Plan the library to appeal to student senses, she urged. Consider including quiet zones, individual personal space for reflection and downtime that is also designed for comfort, one-on-one space for mentoring, team spaces for collaboration, maker- and tinker-space for projects, and perhaps even a “social media lounge.” Finally, consider an opening to outdoor space that in good weather invites students to go outside the school to enjoy learning in sunlight.⁶⁵ Wise advice, but, unfortunately, none of what a school library could accomplish in crafting this learning environment would find its way into the accountability measures demanded by NCLB and Common Core.

The Practice of School Librarianship

In 2000 school libraries purchased 65 percent of all books published for children and young adults, thus constituting a huge market for the nation’s publishing industry.⁶⁶ And to help them select titles, school librarians continued to look to standard acquisition guides like the Wilson Company’s 16th edition of its *Senior High School Library Catalog* (2002), which listed 5,321 titles recommended for any high school library. “Recommended” books carried a star, books “highly recommended” a double star. Instead of the CD-ROMs recommended in the previous edition, however, the 16th listed “essential Web-based reference sources.” An advisory committee of seven (six of them women) enlisted the participation of twenty-three school librarians (all women) in recommending titles, then ran their selections through a group of fourteen consultants (thirteen women) to make final selections. That professional attitudes toward the literary canon were changing, however, was obvious; “recreational” reading and “genre fiction” were among cited titles.⁶⁷

School libraries were also as busy as ever; 83 percent of public school students visited their library at least once per week. By the turn of the century many school libraries had harnessed newer technologies to improve information access and routine services. One-third had automated circulation systems. “The Follett library system is the literary conscience” of the high school, one librarian noted in 2004. “It reports overdue books, checkout statistics, and OPAC [online public access catalog] search records.”⁶⁸ Although one-third also had computers offering database access, the school library’s role in Internet research appeared marginal. A 2001 Pew Internet and American Life Project survey found 71 percent of teens used the Internet to research their most recent school assignment, but only 24 percent used the school library as their major information source.⁶⁹

And despite increased support for education from federal government initiatives, limited funding continued to be a major obstacle. In 2000 the Baltimore *Sun* reported that “Lashawna,” a Baltimore third-grader, generally visited her school library twice a month for less than an hour each time. A retired teacher filling in for a furloughed librarian taught her the parts of a book at one class session, but mostly Lashawna and her classmates would watch videos, play hand games, or do their hair. Although the shelves surrounding them were filled with books, many were a half-century old, including encyclopedias dating to the 1970s. At the time less than 7 percent of Baltimore’s elementary school libraries met state standards (and only 17 percent met them statewide). Some were managed by a part-time librarian who hand-carried books to the four schools she served, a common practice the *Sun* called “the librarian sleight of hand, which moves the system’s few certified library media specialists between schools each year like checkers.” Contrast this with Alaska, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, the *Sun* noted, where students at schools with “strong library programs and adequate, qualified staff” scored ten to fifteen points higher on state standardized tests. Little wonder that 85 percent of Baltimore’s students rated “unsatisfactory” on the Maryland School Assessment Program tests, the *Sun* reported, and “as long as principals are left to choose between a reading teacher and a librarian, the librarian is at risk.”⁷⁰ Ten years later another study concluded: “Students in most need—those attending schools with the highest concentrations of students living in poverty—had the fewest library resources to draw upon.”⁷¹

And educators continued to overlook school libraries. After reading Elinor Burkett’s *Another Planet* (2001), which detailed her observations of a Minneapolis suburban high school, *School Library Journal* columnist Walter Minkel asked her why the library played almost “no role in the life of the school, other than as a place students reluctantly go to for study halls.” The administration and faculty had determined the high school librarian was a “relief teacher,” Burkett responded, “She was wildly busy with what I’d call nonsense work”—clerical tasks like policing the room and checking books in and out. “With so many more important things” like field trips and testing, information literacy “wasn’t a priority.”⁷²

In June 2002, the National School Board Foundation (NSBF) released a survey of 800 technology coordinators in school districts across the nation about their Internet use in classrooms. NSBF concluded seven of ten teachers were either average or below expected levels of competence and often, the report concluded, teachers knew less about technology than their students. In its report, NSBF made no mention of any efforts by school librarians to integrate technology into the curriculum, despite the fact, *SLJ* Editor Evan St. Lifer noted, that “nearly all of the top instructional uses of technology—Internet searches, teacher

research, lesson planning, demonstrations/presentations, utilizing Internet services, student projects, and student research—fall under the purview of the school librarian.⁷³

In addition, the educational research community ignored school libraries. Of the American Educational Research Association's 8,000 programs at its 2005 conference, "not one was about school libraries," reported one attending library school professor. "It's like we don't exist."⁷⁴ And in a national initiative First Class Education (FCE) launched in 2005 to advocate that schools adopt a policy of allocating 65 percent of their overall spending to "in-classroom" purposes, school librarians were left out because FCE considered them "out-of-classroom" personnel. Misguided, argued Keith Curry Lance. The research he and others had done on impact studies in states across the nation showed that "library expenditures are a better predictor of how well students will do on tests than the amount spent on in-classroom instruction."⁷⁵

But insiders were also responsible for school libraries' low profile. When he asked 110 school librarians attending a 2001 AASL preconference whether they perceived improvement in the information literacy skills being taught elementary school students as they moved into middle and high schools, David Loertscher reported "not one person . . . could attest to knowledge that the young people were becoming more and more proficient across the grade levels."⁷⁶ If Loertscher's observations could be generalized to others, the nation's school library community was not tracking the impact of its agenda to see if its rhetoric matched reality.

In her 2001 dissertation analyzing the job competencies 450 Georgia school library media specialists valued most, Brenda S. McCoy found the practical aspects of the job dominated; school librarians focused largely on administration, collection development, and information access and delivery. Secondary school library media specialists placed stronger emphasis on technology than those in elementary and middle schools, who favored reading activities.⁷⁷ Similarly, in her 2005 study of South Dakota school library media specialists Lila M. Morris found "the greatest amount of time was spent performing basic library functions" (an average of just over seventeen hours per week) "with less than one hour per week, on average, offering reading incentives and planning instructional units."⁷⁸

Because of what *SLJ* said were "severe problems now facing media specialists nationwide," in 2001 the US National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) hosted a day-long hearing entitled "School Librarians: Knowledge Navigators Through Troubled Times." Twenty-two witnesses shared their concerns, including one librarian from Cincinnati who lamented: "I haven't been able to buy books for my high school library for three years."⁷⁹ In a summary of the hearing for its Board of Directors, one AASL official noted that for

the most part school libraries were not part of the nation's conversation about literacy, school improvement, and educational technology, and that in discussions about standards that took place in professional education associations, information literacy standards were not viewed as important. AASL's advocacy efforts were also impeded by several problems. Too many decision-makers at all levels had "never experienced personally the instructional impact a modern quality school library media program has on teaching and learning. Given this general lack of experience it is little wonder that school library programs are losing out in this time of increased demands for decreased funding." Shining "a national spotlight on school library issues was important, but to a large extent," she concluded, "we were talking to ourselves."⁸⁰

And concerns about professional invisibility continued in the new century. A 2002 *SLJ* survey showed that only half the 242 responding principals saw "a direct link between an effective media center and increased student achievement," only 41 percent "say the school library has a positive impact on students' standardized test scores," and only 26 percent "say their librarians teach regularly scheduled classes in the library." At the same time, however, the survey noted only 37 percent of the principals said their librarians kept them informed about studies connecting library media programs to student achievement (the reference here was to the impact studies of Lance and others), only 35 percent communicated research on "reading development," and 81 percent had no policy requiring collaboration between librarians and teachers.⁸¹

For its annual conference meeting in 2003, the AASL Board solicited a list of concerns from representatives of its Affiliate Assembly—"the grassroots organization of AASL." The Midwest's Region III cited a "lack of knowledge" among teachers and administrators who did not "generally understand the role of the library media specialist" and "the importance of information literacy and the impact of the school library media program on academic achievement." The South's Region IV identified a "lack of state support for school library standards" and "no mention of library media programs or support for school library resources" in *No Child Left Behind*. The Middle Atlantic's Region II pointed to a lack of sustained federal funding that led to a "downward spiral of accurate and up-to-date resources." New England's Region I not only worried about the "endangerment, elimination, and reduction in the force of school librarians, library assistants, library directors, and state-level coordinators," but also that "many regional accrediting agencies have established evaluation practices and school improvement guidelines with fading focus on the importance of quality school library media programs within their criteria."⁸²

In a January 2003 research report commissioned by AASL to assess awareness of school libraries and librarians, researchers conducted six focus groups in Baltimore, Indianapolis, and Phoenix that consisted of K–12 parents, teachers,

principals, and middle and high school students. Among other things, they found nearly all thought school libraries “important,” especially at the elementary level. But unlike teachers and principals, parents and older students (who were doing much of their research on the Internet—at home) did not think school libraries and librarians were “a critical component of education.” High school students, in fact, tended to view their school library negatively: “a nagging/yelling librarian, absolute silence required, an irritating need to show their ID in order to use the school library, and restricted Internet access and checkout limits.” Further, parents and students did not like what they perceived as overstated messages like “school libraries are technological **innovators**” or “school librarians are **active** partners in student education.” Finally, researchers concluded, most parents, students, teachers, and principals “believe school librarians primarily play a supportive role.” Principals often brought to their jobs stereotyped perceptions of school librarians based on their own student experiences. Bad experiences with school librarians when they were students made it easier for principals to eliminate the position when they were faced with budget shortfalls.⁸³

One New York school library media specialist criticized administrators who saw the library as “nothing more than a room where books are” and who told her it was “not my job to teach research skills.” She reported that despite a petition submitted jointly at a public meeting by a group of parents, students, and teachers asking to restore the position of library coordinator, administrators listed it behind groundskeeper and lunch monitor in their budget priorities. No matter the wishes of teachers, parents, and students, she lamented, “one or two administrators and a superintendent . . . make all the difference.”⁸⁴ A veteran elementary school media specialist in Indiana reinforced that idea: “It’s been my experience that being a library advocate is only successful when one works with a principal willing to take a stand . . . I work with willing teachers who are powerless to influence colleagues who show no interest.”⁸⁵

In April 2003, *School Library Journal* sent questionnaires to 3,000 school librarians to assess perceptions of the school librarian’s instructional role in teaching information literacy; only 783 responded. The *SLJ* survey found that 70 percent of teachers and 85 percent of students who responded did not recognize the importance of information literacy skills. “If your principal isn’t a supporter of collaboration, you can try your hardest,” said one respondent, “but you won’t succeed.” “If you’re not connecting with teachers,” said another, “nothing happens.” Those 783 also ranked collection development, recommending materials, and providing students and teachers with essential resources as more important than the information literacy instruction emphasized in the latest standards.⁸⁶

One Montana media specialist complained about being “continually ignored” during her fifteen-year career because teachers saw her as a threat and the

principal could not figure out how she fit in. She blamed university education departments that failed to teach educators and administrators about the importance of school libraries. “The whole realm of education needs to be changed,” she said. The survey also revealed that responding school librarians taught 13.6 classes per week, 54 percent shared Internet and software service decisions, and 90 percent perceived as “highly collaborative” their relationship with the school technology coordinator. Less than half of those surveyed, however, said their principal was “very informed” of the school library’s potential.⁸⁷

And not all school librarians agreed with the priority AASL had given to information literacy. It was just a “buzzword,” a “misnomer,” one complained, “because what it is really about is mastering computer skills, not promoting a love of books and reading.”⁸⁸ One Ohio librarian, implicitly lamenting the latter, asked “Why don’t Americans care about their school libraries . . . And why have the professional literature, professional associations, and grassroots librarians spent so much energy to so little avail trying to convince them that they should?”⁸⁹

The narrative did not change much in the century’s second decade. A 2012 survey of 102 media specialists and sixty-seven principals revealed that just under one-fourth of the principals considered their school librarians “visible leaders”; even more surprising, only 28 percent of the school librarians perceived themselves as “in a leadership role.”⁹⁰ One principal urged an audience of librarians in 2012 to pay more attention to their visibility: “If you’re not at the table, you could be on the menu.” School librarians, he said, needed to exercise leadership throughout the system. “Don’t settle for just having a great library. Ask, How can I help the District?”⁹¹ In a 2013 letter to *SLJ*, a Connecticut high school librarian complained that only two librarians managed the nineteen school libraries in her district. “No one at the Central Office level takes responsibility for the libraries; we have no advocate at the top.” On the first day of the school year she had learned that one of her principals had decided to use the school library for large study halls every period of the day. At another school the year previous she lost part of her space to an in-school suspension program. She and her colleague complained, but for their efforts they were “considered argumentative” by school administrators.⁹²

But school librarianship also experienced successes in the twenty-first century. At the Moore Elementary School Library in Spaulding, Georgia, Pam Nutt served a minority student body (20 percent of whom were labeled “transient” and likely to relocate during the school year) in a school regularly on the state list of failing schools. When she arrived in 1998 she immediately reached out to a faculty and administration receptive to new ideas that had potential for improving student performance, and collectively they designed projects that capitalized on library holdings and services. Four years later Moore was off the list of failing schools, students were reading at higher levels, and the school library’s

circulation rate had tripled. The school library “is the focal point of the school,” Nutt’s principal said. “We can’t teach in isolation any more.”⁹³

Harry Bull of Grandview High School in Aurora, Colorado, was another case in point. While working on his education doctorate, he “came in contact with some terrific librarians who had a real impact on my learning.” When he subsequently became Associate Principal to help plan for Grandview’s opening in 1998, he made sure his teacher-librarian was part of the planning process. “Harry defied conventional wisdom in . . . allocating a disproportionate amount of available funds for the library,” noted his teacher-librarian, but he also “endorsed the decision to use a substantial part of those funds toward a quality reference collection rather than sheer number of books.” Although some teachers resisted collaboration with school librarians, Bull reminded them, “repeatedly, but gently, how crucial information-literacy and critical-thinking skills were,” observed *SLJ*, which did a feature article on Bull as the “*SLJ*/Greenwood 2005 Administrator of the Year.”⁹⁴

A 2003 survey of more than 13,000 K–12 students in thirty-nine Ohio schools found that 99.4 percent believed the services their school libraries provided made them better learners. In their analysis of survey comments researchers Ross J. Todd and Carol C. Kuhlthau noted: “These voices testify to school librarians as dynamic rather than passive agents of learning.” Their survey focused only on schools they “identified as having effective school library programs,” however, and thus only on the places and professionals meeting AASL’s most recent guidelines.⁹⁵

When Cecelia Freda was hired as Middletown (NJ) High School Librarian in October, 1999, she discovered that students in this upper-middle-class suburb lacked most of the research skills she regarded as essential for information literacy. She approached her principal and assistant principal who, because the school was just beginning a reaccreditation process and administrators needed to identify two objectives for improving student achievement, seized upon “library research” as one of those objectives. “We would never have gotten the district’s approval for [mandating library research skills] if it wasn’t for” reaccreditation, the assistant principal admitted. Alongside a group of local college librarians who had complained about New Jersey’s high schools sending them students with no library research skills, Freda developed workshops for school administrators and teachers to address the problem. Because most bought into the concept, Middletown became a model program for collaboration.⁹⁶ Not so fast, however, wrote former Middletown elementary school librarian Amanda Power to *SLJ* several months later. One reason those Middletown High School students had such poor research skills was because from 1990 to 2002 Middletown had no elementary school librarians. The district hired them back in 2002, only to let five of the six go in 2005, leaving just one to serve the district’s twelve

elementary schools. "This was done in order to hire additional reading specialists to boost reading test scores."⁹⁷

In 2009 Shirley Bleidt surveyed 1,500 predominantly Hispanic students from lower income families in ten rural South Texas middle schools who had limited access to public libraries or reading materials outside of school. Three of the school libraries were staffed by a full-time certified librarian, four by full-time library aides supervised by a district coordinator, and three only by library aides. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents said they used the library at least four times during the school year. What students liked most was the availability of "good books," and their most common recommendation for improvement was "more good books," particularly fiction. Seventy-three percent of students said the library helped them "enjoy reading" and just over half used school library spaces for reading—a figure that might have been larger but for insufficient seating in the school library.⁹⁸

A 2012 *SLJ* survey of technology and school librarians also showed significant improvements over turn-of-the-century circumstances. By that time 87 percent of school librarians were responsible for their library's technology, 60 percent had introduced technology to school classrooms, 44 percent were on the school's technology team, and 55 percent believed their technology skills had raised their profile with their administrators, and thus may have increased their job security.⁹⁹ Pressures exercised by a generation of AASL leaders through revised standards and professional advocacy programs had obviously had a significant impact, although the fact that three of four students were using the Internet to do research outside the library showed that school libraries were not central to increasing their "information literacy."

One of the consistencies in the profession's twentieth-century discourse began to meet resistance in the twenty-first. When students found it much easier to gather information via Google than negotiate the school library's online public access catalog, some school librarians questioned the value of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). In 2009 Colorado's Rangeview Library District decided to abandon DDC for a subject and genre-based classification scheme similar to a commercial bookstore. The St. Vrain Valley School District gave permission to Red Hawk Elementary, a new school just being built, to adopt the new system for its school library. Within six weeks the arrangement's impact was obvious. A comparison of school libraries at Red Hawk to two others in the district showed circulation had not only substantially increased (particularly for nonfiction), it also showed differences between library use as fourth graders became fifth graders. At Red Hawk use increased; at the other two schools use decreased. The experiment was such a success that multiple schools in the district adopted it: one high school, four middle schools, and eight elementary schools shifted to the new system the following year.¹⁰⁰

Melvil Dewey may have turned over in his grave, but for the St. Vrain Valley School District the system he crafted in the late nineteenth century to facilitate access to information had proved a greater hindrance than help. Shifts in the organization of school libraries played out differently elsewhere. Some kept Dewey for nonfiction, but switched to genre categories for fiction. Others who surveyed their faculties and district media professionals chose no change. “Why would we want to completely change a system that has worked for us for years and continues to work without fail or problem?” asked one of those surveyed.¹⁰¹

Systemic Prejudices in Professional Practices

Most school librarians appeared to give little thought to the systemic biases and prejudices built into their profession’s organizational practices. “Libraries are simply institutions that tell a story,” wrote Winnebago tribal member and California librarian Michael McLaughlin in 2005. It was clear to McLaughlin that librarianship placed Native Americans at a distinct disadvantage in the “story” libraries told about them. For example, neither the Library of Congress Subject Headings nor the DDC “adequately addresses the histories and contemporary realities of American Indians.” Neither had a category for “tribal sovereignty” that enjoyed equal status with other systems of government. Similarly, while Picasso and Monet were classified “Art,” Indian sand paintings, pottery, and basketry were classified “Crafts” or “Primitive Art,” and while Protestantism and Catholicism found comfortable niches in “Religion,” Indian spiritualism was found in “Mythology,” “Folklore,” and “Other Religion.” “In short,” McLaughlin concluded, “every American Indian perspective, accomplishment, or cultural belief, practice, or material product, according to these classification systems, is of a subordinate or inferior nature.”¹⁰²

In her 2013 dissertation analyzing El Paso, Texas, school libraries serving 64,214 students (82 percent of whom were Hispanic, 25 percent of whom were predominantly Spanish-speaking), Aurea L. Galindo found “an inordinately low” level of library materials in Spanish. She attributed this to a district acquisitions policy that “offers scant guidelines for acquiring books that address the information and literary needs of diverse student populations,” and to school librarians relying too heavily on “teacher requests at the expense of Spanish-speaking library patrons.” One school librarian complained that her collection decisions were largely “teacher-driven.” As a result, El Paso school library services were not “equitable”—in fact, for Spanish-speaking English language learners (ELL), they were outright “exclusionary.” Galindo also recounted some of her experiences working as a librarian in El Paso schools: librarians telling ELLs to speak only in English in the library because “we are not in Mexico,” and directing ELLs only to the “easy” book collections for K–3. When Galindo asked one librarian why she checked English language books out to predomi-

nantly Spanish-speaking middle school students who could not read them, the librarian responded that “what matters is that students are checking out books—it is good for our numbers.”¹⁰³

Challenges to systemic prejudices in children’s and young adult literature continued. Many came from inside librarianship. For example, in 2012 ALA published a collection of thirteen essays discussing cultural and racial diversity in children’s and young adult literature.¹⁰⁴ In 2018 Rowman & Littlefield published *Representing the Rainbow in Young Adult Literature: LGBTQ+ Content since 1969* by Christine Jenkins and Michael Cart, an update of their 2006 book *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian Queer Content, 1969–2004*.¹⁰⁵ In 2020, Sarah Jorgenson and Rene Burress coauthored an essay in *Knowledge Quest* which outlined a set of steps school librarians could follow to analyze diversity in their high school library collections.¹⁰⁶

At the same time, however, challenges from outside librarianship continued. In 2014, several authors and publishing industry insiders organized We Need Diverse Books, a nonprofit that immediately began pressuring the children’s book industry to move beyond its largely white profile.¹⁰⁷ Children’s literature scholars continued to reexamine classical children’s texts through a variety of lenses. For example, Marah Gubar challenges the concept of nineteenth-century children as passive readers of canonical texts that adults authored to keep them innocent. Rather, she argues, children were “artful dodgers” who used the texts to help them collaborate with the adult world.¹⁰⁸ Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, meanwhile, has put the spotlight on the problematic nature of black characters in children’s and young adult literature who, she argues, lack both representation and imagination.¹⁰⁹

Despite such challenges, however, the landscape of children’s and young adult literature has been slow to change. In a 2007 study of two hundred award-winning picture books researchers discovered that adult women were not only underrepresented but also often portrayed as “nurturers who often had no occupation.” Boys were often “outside doing rugged things and the girls are inside playing with dolls.”¹¹⁰ In their analysis of children’s board books published between 2003 and 2008, Sandra Hughes-Haskell and Ernie J. Cox discovered that books depicting people of color were “rare and often present inauthentic and monolithic representations.” As a result, they concluded, “lack of board books featuring children of color denies these children an important resource for developing positive self-concepts.”¹¹¹ In a 2014 *SLJ* article analyzing children’s literature for racial diversity, Kathleen T. Horning concluded that in the fifty years since Nancy Larrick’s 1965 *Saturday Review* article appeared “children’s literature still represents a mostly white world.”¹¹²

In 2019 another study of children’s books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds published the previous year showed 1 percent were Native Americans,

5 percent Latinx, 7 percent Asian Pacific Islander, 10 percent African American, 27 percent animals and other creatures, and 50 percent white.¹¹³ It is from this universe of possibilities that editors would make their recommendations in forthcoming editions of the H. W. Wilson Company's *Core Collection* catalogs, from which thousands of school librarians across the country would then make their selections.

And often, research demonstrates, they chose not to acquire what they perceived were potentially controversial books. What to do about materials addressing issues of sexual orientation is a case in point. Reading gay literature "gets me in touch and makes me feel better knowing that there are other people out there like me," one Kansas senior high school student told *School Library Journal* in 2006. Books like Michelene Esposito's *Night Driving* (2007) and Marilyn Reynold's *Love Rules* (2001) made her feel "very comfortable coming out." Fortunately for her, she was able to get these titles from her high school library, where Arla Jones, an out lesbian, had founded the school's Gay-Straight Alliance. But her experience was the exception rather than the rule. Why? Admittedly, some school librarians had personal objections to gay literature, but more likely, they avoided the titles "because they dislike controversy," author Debra Lau Whelan noted. And for those "media specialists who claim they don't have enough money or insist they're restricted to buying books that support the curriculum," she quoted a school librarian she interviewed for the article, "those are just excuses."¹¹⁴ Her accusations checked out. "Spend your entire budget on regular (which is to say, non-controversial) materials," advised one school librarian in 2010. "Then when someone comes asking why you don't have *And Tango Makes Three*, you can just say you're out of money."¹¹⁵

When researchers surveyed Arkansas media specialists in 2007 (only thirty-seven of the state's 499 responded) and checked the online catalogs of school libraries across the state for twenty-one popular gay-themed titles, they found less than 1 percent had a single title from the list.¹¹⁶ In a 2010 study of the library collections of 125 high schools in one Southern state for the presence of LGBTQ titles, researchers found the average number was 0.4 percent.¹¹⁷ For her 2008 dissertation, Susan Partin Cordell interviewed twelve Alabama high school librarians in twelve separate school systems to determine if they self-censored, "particularly regarding books with homosexual themes." Although all "expressed compassion and concern" for "marginalized students," most harnessed their own interpretation of "educational suitability" to justify their refusal "to purchase potentially controversial titles that would be beneficial to these students."¹¹⁸

That same year a gay fifteen-year-old posted to the blog *Pinched Nerve* that he had recently searched his school library for LGBTQ titles, and found none. "It was pathetic," he reported. When he asked the librarian about it, she replied: "This is a school library. If you are looking to read inappropriate titles, go to a

book store.” One school library media specialist responded to the post: “I have colleagues who will not order LGBTQ literature because they are worried about challenges from parents and organizations. Don’t let folks in my profession fool you or anybody! Self-censorship happens all the time in libraries when materials are being ordered!”¹¹⁹ In 2012 the US District Court for the Western District of Missouri considered an Internet filter used by the local school district and its libraries to block websites classified under “sexuality.” The court found that the filter effectively blocked access to websites that positively represented gay groups, but still provided access to websites classified under “religion” that were hostile to them. The filter, the court ruled, thus violated students’ First Amendment rights.¹²⁰

And not just about issues of sexual orientation. Every February, school librarians had to deal with the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. Place it on the periodicals shelf face out, as was the practice with many other popular magazines? Put it under the circulation counter and make it available only to those who ask for it? Remove it altogether? Across the nation school librarians addressed the issue differently. In 2007 *Sports Illustrated* decided not to send the swimsuit issue to libraries and classrooms after fielding several complaints from irate parents. When ALA and AASL complained (“outrageous—patronizing and paternalistic in the extreme,” the ALA president said; “I worry about the next step—will it be *National Geographic* or *Science News*?” the AASL president asked) *Sports Illustrated* changed its mind. “We won’t be doing it going forward,” said one *Sports Illustrated* spokesman. “It was inappropriate to hold it back.”¹²¹

In 2009 *SLJ* surveyed 655 media specialists about censorship practices and found that 70 percent “won’t buy certain titles simply because they’re terrified of how parents will respond.” Debra Lau Whelan summarized the survey and also noted that school librarians often categorized books with African American characters as “street lit,” which one author said was “an easy way for some librarians to label a book that they can quickly dismiss as being inferior.” But Vicki Palmquist, Children’s Literature Network cofounder whom Whelan interviewed for the article, warned about being too judgmental. Because of budget cuts and job losses in school districts across the nation, school librarians had to choose their battles carefully. “Each librarian has had to reflect on his or her own situation to determine if they can afford to speak up for their beliefs,” she said. “They may be sole income earners, parents, [or someone] dependent on medical insurance.”¹²²

Whelan’s article angered some school librarians. “Your article takes the stance that self-censorship is unethical,” argued one Maryland school librarian. “I firmly believe that it is unethical for me not to make an effort to protect our students from content that may be harmful to them . . . How dare you assume that you know what’s best for our students and school communities?”¹²³ Another

librarian announced she had created “mature” shelves to isolate potentially controversial materials. Still others offered different solutions to persistent problems. “I draw black bikinis on pictures of prehistoric men and women in books because they gross me out,” said one. “I have my limits and believe that children and teenagers should have some limits set too.” In referencing the Library Bill of Rights, another school librarian complained: “ALA doesn’t address the real world.”¹²⁴

In 2016, 91 percent of public schools hosted libraries (a decrease of 3 percent over a decade), including 96 percent of elementary schools and 95 percent of middle schools. The number of senior high schools with libraries had, however, dropped to 80 percent. School library collections averaged 22 books per student, up 9 percent from the previous decade. Students averaged one library visit per week, when they checked out an average of 1.1 books per visit. Most schools (89 percent) permitted students to use the library/media center during regular school hours, and more than half allowed students to use it before and after regular school hours. Almost all school libraries (96.6 percent) had computer workstations; nearly all (95.3 percent) had Internet access.

In 2016 AASL membership hovered near 7,000, or roughly 20 percent of full-time library media specialists in the nation (12.6 percent when part-time library media specialists were added to the numbers). Although 65 percent of school libraries were managed by at least one full-time state-certified library media specialist in 2016, in the previous sixteen years the nation’s 82,300 public school libraries lost nearly 20 percent of their full-time librarians (from 53,659 to 43,367), and nearly 45 percent of school library staff. At the same time, however, schools across the country had increased their numbers of counselors by 11 percent, instructional aides by 19 percent, and full-time administrators by 28 percent. Most of the losses in school librarianship occurred after the Great Recession of 2008, and most took place in nonwhite inner city school districts.¹²⁵

Hindsight

Factors Influencing the Contours of School Librarianship

After researching and writing American library history for nearly a half-century I've come to a conclusion about the relationship librarians have with their history. Generally, they like historical narratives of progress with uplifting endings. I have no problem with that and certainly have celebrated many of these kinds of endings in books and articles I've authored over a long academic career. At the same time, however, I observe that because librarians have often overlooked—even ignored—the systemic limitations built into their professional discourse, they have not fully understood how these limitations have impacted professional policies and practices that have shaped their successes and failures over the years.¹ In this book, I have attempted to identify, analyze, and contextualize school librarianship's historical limitations as they have influenced its successes and failures. It is my hope that a balanced portrait of the profession's history will help clarify its limitations and thus increase and deepen our understanding of the school library's potential in contemporary education. It is also my hope that school library and education policymakers will find this narrative informative and illuminating as they contemplate future plans for this ubiquitous educational institution.

School Librarians

American Public School Librarianship: A History is very much an untold part of women's history. In the process of recovering that history I have profiled a remarkable group of colorful personalities and legends within the profession who were deeply committed to school libraries and frequently fought vigorously with each other and other library and education professionals about school librarianship's future directions. This book is a record of their successes and failures; the portraits it paints include their haloes, and their warts.

From its origins, school librarianship has been a women's world subject to the same kinds of historical pressures as other professions dominated by women as they interacted with the patriarchal cultures in which they operated. Overwhelmingly, its female leaders—and the hundreds of thousands of women who have worked as building-level librarians—have been middle-class whites sharing particular cultural perspectives. Over the generations, these constrained perspectives were reflected in the collections they acquired and the services they provided. To the extent that biases of gender, race, and class affected the thinking and actions of these librarians, they also shaped the existing contours of school librarianship's practices.²

The agendas that governed educational bureaucracies at any given moment in history also imposed limitations on what school librarians could accomplish, and forced them to find space within these agendas to exercise their professional responsibilities. Some agendas, like the progressive education philosophy John Dewey advocated that emulated a model of citizenship celebrating debate and deliberation, provided relatively comfortable space; others, like No Child Left Behind and Common Core, did not. As a result of these shifting agendas, school librarians have had to alter and adjust their professional roles more than any other type of librarian, alterations and adjustments reflected in what they chose to call themselves. And because school librarians had to work with educators owning power over important components of the educational enterprise, the degree to which these educators chose to share their power largely determined how much school librarians could participate in any school's educational practices.

For the most part school library leaders—largely located in the leadership ranks of the American Association of School Librarians—outpaced school library practitioners in advocating and implementing change in policy, and in the twentieth century successfully carved out a niche for school librarianship despite substantial lethargy and indifference from the larger library and education worlds. But school library thinkers seldom participated in larger debates about the contours of formal education that defined the agendas. Almost always they reacted from the periphery, and because school librarianship's professional prac-

tices were primarily designed to serve formal education, its leaders adjusted the profession's responsibilities to circumstances crafted by these outside forces.

As a result, American public school librarianship evolved a philosophy of service. To meet the curricula formal education emphasized, in the early twentieth century school librarianship prioritized two service imperatives: providing access to the "useful knowledge" librarianship had been privileging for centuries; and acquiring the "best reading" an emerging children's literature clerisy identified and celebrated. Both were captured in standard bibliographic indexes like *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and acquisition guides like *Booklist*, *Children's Catalog* and *Senior High School Library Catalog*, all of which tended to reflect the biases of their compilers and editors and in effect help homogenize a growing number of school library collections across the country. Although *American Public School Librarianship* shows that many public school students benefited from these collections and services, it also shows that many of those residing outside the white middle-class world of formal education did not. Add to this mix of limitations the fact that school librarianship has served a politically powerless group, school librarians have not given grades, and use of school libraries has for the most part not been compulsory, and the barriers limiting the contours of professional practice within educational bureaucracies become even more obvious.

School librarians have historically been most successful in relatively well-funded educational environments that are collaborative, participatory, and democratic at the grassroots level; that understand the limits of quantitative data to measure often immeasurable successes; and that are nurtured by administrators harnessing participative management models that develop trust with teachers and students. The funding of school libraries has also been a good barometer of how much local government supports education. "The quality of the library is the clearest sign of how much a school values reading, teaching for independent thinking, and life-long learning," wrote Minnesota school library supervisor Doug Johnson in 2003. "A trained school librarian and a welcoming environment with a well-used collection of current books, magazines, and computers with Internet access tell a parent that the teachers and principal value more than the memorization of facts from a text book, that a diversity of ideas and opinions is important, and that reading is not just necessary, but pleasurable and important."³

In a perfect world, the school librarian has a sympathetic and supportive principal; open, flexible, and engaging teacher colleagues; sufficient staffing; adequate budgets that support access to information and allow the acquisition of reading materials that interest children and young adults; curious students eager to hone their critical thinking skills and wanting to use the school library; all pursuing learning in physical spaces that are inviting and offer both common areas and

places for individuals. In a perfect world, school librarians would be subject to evaluation measures that are far-reaching and extend well beyond the narrow testing limits initiated by *A Nation at Risk* and reinforced by No Child Left Behind, Common Core Standards, and the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act.

But school librarians have not lived in a perfect world. Oftentimes their successes (many are documented in this book) depended on their negotiating skills, powers of persuasion, and persistence. Shortcomings in any often resulted in accepting the situation one inherited, abandoning or reducing attempts to collaborate, and engaging primarily in those practices the local educational environments permitted. “One of the struggles we have in the profession,” observed school librarian Carl A. Harvey in 2010, “is that the library program is so dependent on the personality of the librarian. We can’t seem to separate the program from the person. The librarian could be the most knowledgeable professional, but if he/she doesn’t have the knack for working with students and teachers, the library program will suffer.”⁵⁴ At the building level, history shows that school librarians can be as narrow-minded or forward-thinking as the rest of the population, having biases, prejudices, behaviors, attitudes, and ideologies every bit as petty or friendly, as common or unusual, as other people. School librarians have also ranged from ambitious to lazy, grumpy to happy, brave to fearful, extroverted to introverted, shy to gregarious, motivated to unmotivated, dogmatic to easily persuaded, rigid to flexible, accepting of newer technologies to resisting them, charismatic to boring, tyrannical to subordinated—just as in other professions.

Arguments over the curricular role of the school library weave their way through the history of American public school librarianship. “Throughout the literature on school libraries there runs an undercurrent of disappointment,” observed Elaine Fain in 1978. “It is over the disparity between the idea of the school library (and the school librarian) as being at the hub of a creative instructional program, and the actuality—the school library had only a marginal role.” Debating who is to blame for this disparity “appears to be endless and rather futile, perhaps because so many unstated premises about education are assumed by all participants.”⁵⁵ Nearly thirty years later Ross Todd noted that for too long school librarians have “played the victim.” Their attitude was: “Well, nobody understands what I do, nobody appreciates me, and [referencing Lance’s impact studies and Krashen’s research] look, here’s all this data out there that says school libraries are good and important and impact student achievement.”⁵⁶

Professional Associations, Professional Research, and School Library Standards

Professional associations and the standards they crafted over the generations also helped shape the contours of school librarianship. If, as Carolyn Heilbrun sug-

gests, “power” is defined as “the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter,”⁷ local, state and national school library associations—particularly the AASL—have provided welcoming places for the women who have dominated this profession to exercise power. Over the years these associations have provided social platforms where school librarians could enjoy emotionally supportive woman-to-woman relationships, share woman-identified experiences, develop female support networks, and reinforce female value systems. They have presented opportunities in which school librarians could harness personal strength, exercise leadership, and become effective professionals with meaningful lives. Research for this book also reveals that over the years this woman-dominated profession also enjoyed several significant victories over patriarchy within the worlds of librarianship and education.

Since reorganizing as an ALA division in 1950, AASL has raised the professional profile of school librarians across the country and, on the national level, been the loudest, if not always the most politically savvy or socially courageous, advocate for school libraries. Not so much at the state and local levels, however, where AASL’s structural machinery has had only limited influence. And at the building level, local power relationships affecting school librarians have greatly constrained AASL’s ability to improve their welfare. Perhaps that explains why throughout its history AASL membership comprised only a small fraction of certified school librarians across the country.

After researching this book, I also have to wonder whether all of public school librarianship might have been better positioned in the twenty-first century if twentieth-century school library leaders like Mary Hall, Frances Henne, Mary Gaver, Marilyn Miller, Blanche Woolls, and David Loertscher had exercised their considerable leadership skills within NEA rather than ALA. Would working primarily within NEA have offered greater opportunities for school librarians to improve their profile within the world of formal education, to develop a stronger political lobby, to create more powerful alliances with educators, and to craft a larger and more effective national organization?

Efforts to define the field, including the standards the profession revises about every decade, account for a substantial proportion of the field’s research literature.⁸ For a 1985 forum entitled “Can Research Contribute to the Design of New Standards for School Library Media Programs,” nine prominent researchers responded.⁹ One contributor hoped to “establish systematically developed procedures that professionals could use to determine what is most effective for their situation.” David Loertscher was more prescient. “Professions such as ours which are so experience-based often find that research follows practice and is self-serving, not innovative.” That the question of whether or not standards should be based on research was even asked, he argued, “shows how immature our

profession really is . . . We need a program of research that would . . . question the very basis of our philosophy and methods.”¹⁰ The editor of *School Library Media Annual* agreed. He saw “no evidence that a cadre of experienced researchers is systematically examining basic problems in the field, nor are researchers seriously investigating various paradigms.”¹¹ *American Public School Librarianship* strongly suggests this situation has not changed.

In all versions of its standards AASL has overstated the importance of school libraries to formal education. Words like “critical,” “essential,” and “central” have been used to justify goals. Admittedly, efforts to meet those goals did bring positive change, but not, as this book shows, universally or evenly across school library practice. Because they could not force compliance, over the generations the modal “should” has marked language used to outline school library standards rather than declarative factual statements that detail “must.” Historically then, the main purpose for issuing standards was to craft the “should,” and then push the profession to make it “must.” Revised standards certainly pushed the profession forward and helped school librarians better establish their positions in formal education, but, at the same time, widespread failure to meet these standards proves that expectations of success have consistently been exaggerated.

AASL standards have from the beginning been based on a belief that inquiry was central to educational pedagogy, that teachers preferred to eschew textbooks and rote memory and privilege curiosity, and that students actively participated in their own education. But most school systems have not met AASL standards. Even more, federal and state officials and local school administrators have consistently failed to adequately fund school libraries as if they were essential parts of the formal education the standards were designed to define.

The latest set of AASL standards, published in 2017, differed from its decade-old predecessor by emphasizing “inquiry,” identifying six core values, and outlining a set of “common beliefs” that mark the learning process. It also shifted from listing “outcomes” for student learners to identifying “competencies” they would acquire in the learning process. However, except as they support “inquiry” the revised standards largely ignored Stephen Krashen’s research on the role of free voluntary reading, and they make only passing reference to the physical spaces of school libraries, especially as they relate to the concept of a “learning commons.” After the new standards were released David Loertscher was particularly critical of their “jargon, jargon, jargon” and troubled by vague definitions of “collaboration,” which he argued had been school librarians’ “number-one complaint” for a half century. “Both the fear of being rejected by a teacher or actually being rejected causes many librarians to do the best they can as an independent entity. Such isolation from the classroom further reinforces the notion that we don’t actually make a difference in teaching and learning.”¹² He echoed criticism of what ten years earlier Ross Todd called the

“mantra” of collaboration. “My sense is that collaboration actually takes place at a very low level,” Todd noted. “In many respects, I think it has been a ‘guilt-ifying’ word for our profession.”¹³

Nonetheless, many gushed over the revised standards. Kimberly McFall told readers of *Knowledge Quest*:

You now have a document and loads of resources to support you as you strive to make—or keep—your library indispensable to your school . . . It means that you have research readily available for your administrator that will prove how you should be at the table when it comes to planning for curriculum support. It means that you have to step up, step out of the library doors, and make the effort to connect with teachers and prove that you want to support their instruction with instruction of your own. It means that you have to push yourselves before you can expect others to push themselves. . . . Most importantly, it means that you are living in an exciting time to be in the library.¹⁴

“Indispensable,” “should,” “have to.” McFall’s rhetoric is very similar to the “call to arms” rhetoric following the release of each of the standards dating all the way back to C. C. Certain.

Finally, ALA’s Library Bill of Rights has also influenced the contours of school librarianship. Since the middle of the twentieth century the library profession has assumed that the defense of intellectual freedom (however defined) and an opposition to censorship constituted a professional imperative. Because of limitations built into the environments of formal education that I describe in *American Public School Librarianship*, however, I question the viability of forcing ALA’s purist LBR perspective on school library practice. To a great extent the practices school librarians engage in having to do with LBR-defined issues of censorship are dictated by a desire to avoid controversies that might threaten not only their libraries’ funding, but even their jobs. The school library’s collections and services have always reflected the compromises communities have had to make to enable their educational systems to function. At the same time, LBR imperatives have not merited unqualified support in historical jurisprudence on the First Amendment rights of America’s youth, and efforts to implement these imperatives over the generations have frequently led parents to raise a question about school librarians: “Aren’t they supposed to be protecting our kids?”

The Educational Environment

America’s public schools have always been battlegrounds for shaping society. Over the generations many Americans have looked to public schools to reform society by changing their mission statements, curricula, teaching practices, and organization. They have been expected to “strengthen the moral character of

children,” observes education historian William J. Reese, “reinvigorate the work ethic, spread civic and republican values, and along the way teach a common curriculum to ensure a literate and unified public.”¹⁵

In the quarter-century following publication of *A Nation at Risk*, however, a coalition of corporate philanthropists, public education bureaucrats, and educational technology “edupreneurs” who generally disdained teachers’ unions and public education (“government schools,” many called them) pushed for a kind of school reform that focused on standardized outcomes-based testing and overvalued the potential of newer educational and communications technologies. Matters changed little in 2015 when Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The major difference between NCLB and ESSA was that oversight of the testing and measurement environments shifted from federal to state governments.

In recent decades the organization of public education in the United States has increasingly mimicked a hierarchical, top-down corporate model that distrusts educational cultures at the local level (especially local teachers and their unions) and crafts “canned curricula” that Andrea Gabor argues has “sucked the joy and creativity—and often the purpose—out of teaching and learning.” It offers incentives to educators who meet the goals that the corporate model sets—with little or no input from teachers forced to address them, and students forced to meet them.¹⁶

Evidence of what these “reforms” have done to classroom teaching abounds. In 2009, for example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded research to evaluate teacher effectiveness in random locations across the nation. The study included 1,333 videos of classroom educators in the act of teaching that were analyzed by highly trained evaluators. Results were disappointing. “The experts found that only a third of the classrooms showed evidence of teachers promoting intellectual growth beyond rote learning,” reports Dana Goldstein, who also notes the findings aligned with previous research that focused on elementary school classrooms in Baltimore. That research showed “the majority of teachers failed to use challenging vocabulary words, failed to ask questions that probed for conceptual understanding (as opposed to simply correct answers), and rarely led their classes in whole-group discussions.” And in the weeks before students took standardized tests Baltimore teachers devoted increased time to test preparation and reduced the time they spent personally interacting with their students.¹⁷

And for all its promise, a half century of federal funding of education still has not accomplished its original goal of closing the gap between the middle class and working class, nor ameliorated oppressions historically associated with poverty, racism, and domestic abuse.¹⁸ “The same children who were being left behind before the passage of NCLB in 2001 were being left behind in 2015,”

Dianne Ravitch notes.¹⁹ A 2019 report that analyzed state and local funding across the nation for differences between predominantly white and nonwhite public school districts found a disparity of \$23 billion favoring the former. “The funding gap is largely the result of reliance on property taxes as a primary source of funding for schools,” the report noted.²⁰ A Center for American Progress study done that same year showed that “at least 4.5 million students from low income backgrounds are in schools that receive roughly \$1,200 less per child each year than wealthier schools in the very same district.”²¹ Political philosopher Danielle Allen has also noted that forcing education funding to move in lockstep with property taxes “has allowed the socioeconomically advantaged to establish a near-monopoly on genuine educational opportunities.”²²

Thus, more than anything else, it is poverty—almost always exacerbated by systemic racism—that explains many of formal education’s failures. The impact on public school libraries is obvious. Among elementary schools, a 2016 NEA report notes, “the wealthiest schools in low ethnic minority status districts have five times more library/media specialists per school than do the poorest schools in high ethnic minority status districts.” In secondary schools, evidence of systemic racism is even worse: according to the NEA report, “the poorest schools in low ethnic minority status districts have 31 times more librarians/media specialists than the poorest schools in high ethnic minority status districts.”²³

As the politics of education play out within local, state, and federal jurisdictions, as agendas are implemented at the building level and are subject to issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation (among other variables), school librarians and school libraries are easily buffeted about because of their position within the power structures of educational bureaucracies. Given their indeterminate power bases, their fortunes and futures are directly subject to the compromises made by other powerful groups and individuals inside and outside the school—compromises that define educational communities. In the real world, school librarians face an environmentally structured cluster of forces largely beyond their control. Unless school districts choose to emphasize a well-rounded education that includes elements outside the world of subjects to be tested and measured, school libraries will suffer. Teaching to the test has significant limitations, notes Diane Ravitch. “The ability to guess the right bubble,” she points out in *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, “cannot measure originality, imagination, character, honesty, industriousness, integrity, persistence, creativity, diligence, kindness, courage, and scores of other traits and skills that matter more for making a good life.”²⁴ In an unevenly and inequitably funded educational environment grounded on the conviction that skills are more important than understanding and that teaching to the test is good pedagogy, school librarianship has a tremendous disadvantage.

The recent movement toward charter schools has only added to this inhospitable environment. Enrollment in charter schools grew from 300,000 students in 2001 to 3.2 million in 2017, and half of those students were in elementary schools. Only half of charter schools had libraries, however, and only one-third employed full-time certified librarians. Because so many of these charter schools—unburdened by certification requirements and recommendations and funded by deep pockets whose goals are as much profit as pedagogy—prioritized the improvement of test scores, supporting school libraries was secondary. To compensate for a lack of school libraries, some charter schools entered into partnerships with public library systems to provide collections and some staffing, unknowingly replicating arrangements schools and public libraries had negotiated in the first half of the twentieth century. The “Limitless Libraries” program in Nashville, for example, recognized student ID cards from charter schools as library cards, allowing their students to select books from a shared catalog for delivery to the school.²⁵

School libraries are also caught between the forces of local control (which historically underfunds them when measured by AASL standards) and federal and state controls (which routinely place restrictions on their flexibility by forcing a set of priorities that too often run counter to what school libraries have historically done best). Over the years citizen resistance to increased taxes, higher teacher salaries, and teachers’ unions; the desire of many in and out of formal education for schools to promote conformity rather than inquiry into controversial issues; and opposition to diversified reading—all have hampered the school library’s ability to participate in the educational process. Add to that a corps of administrators always looking for ways to reduce expenditures to meet strained budgets, and one can easily see how power relationships within educational bureaucracies influence the school library’s potential.

Altering Professional Priorities

Members of the profession still debate whether the “school library-media-information-specialist” is a teacher. The very fact that the debate continues, however, also suggests the school librarian has opportunities to pick and choose which priorities to pursue among a limited number of options in order to maximize the educational value of her shop. Ironically, the school library’s greatest strength and educational value may derive directly from the distance between it and the hegemony of the classroom and the curriculum.

For example, in a recent study of American history textbooks published since 2016 for California and Texas eighth and eleventh graders, the *New York Times* observed different emphases. The subject of white resistance to black progress was covered differently in textbooks adopted by the two states, with the California textbooks addressing the inaccessibility of the suburban dream to Afri-

can Americans in the 1950s, while those in Texas ignored the subject. The California versions included historical material on gender and sexuality that was absent in Texas; and the former were also more critical of wealth inequality while the latter tended to celebrate free enterprise and legendary businessmen like Andrew Carnegie.²⁶ It would be naïve to assume some librarians serving the curricula of schools in each of these states have not replicated these differences in their acquisitions (existing research on sexuality titles in school library collections suggests this is happening). Like the school itself, school libraries have always promoted particular political and ideological agendas through their professional practices, collections, and services—agendas that are a reflection of broader social class discourses.

But what is permitted and not permitted in the classroom is not necessarily what is permitted and not permitted in the school library, and students have more opportunities to feel a degree of freedom in the latter because of these different agendas. Much of what occurs in the classroom is viewed by students as work; some of what occurs in the library is viewed by students as the pursuit of personal satisfaction, even though the parameters of this satisfaction are circumscribed by the culture of school library traditions and the social climate the school librarian establishes. No grades in the library, just “guidance” toward reading choices and information sources by a person in charge of a facility in which the student spends limited time—often just one hour per week. No fixed, individual pre-assigned desks, but a room that, in recent decades and in many school libraries, began to take on the look of a middle-class living room with comfortable chairs, low tables, and attractive wall decorations.

But the perception of “what a library should be” that twenty-first century school librarians inherited from their predecessors is still grounded in a set of rationalized practices that privileges two self-assumed professional imperatives. One focuses on “information literacy,” a direct descendent of what in the eighteenth century was called “useful knowledge.” The other traces back to the early-twentieth-century influence of a children’s literature clerisy advocating for “good taste” in reading materials that “elevate,” and is still characterized by the dictum “the right book for the right child at the right time.”²⁷ Unfortunately, because the professional mindset school librarianship inherited from the nineteenth century separated reading into two broad categories (“reading for information” and “reading for pleasure”), school librarians’ understanding of how reading functions as agency in the lives of children and young adults is still limited. And because the contours of school librarianship have traditionally been governed by formal education, the definition of “school library as place” librarians bring to their practice has been a compromise between a professional mindset they inherited from the nineteenth century and the spaces formal education currently allows it to occupy that functions with only a partial understanding

of the broader (and ever-shifting) space needs of the children and young adults it seeks to serve.

In daily life, education is incidental; in the public school, it is intentional. On a continuum, the education that occurs in school libraries is more intentional than incidental, but because the latter is a possibility students can feel more free there than in the classroom. In general, the agenda of the school library is different from the agenda of the classroom. Students perceive this. History shows that school libraries can be significant in the lives of public school students, in part because students enjoy autonomies there that other parts of the school do not allow. Where school librarians humanized their spaces and services, they created one set of student memories and loyalties. Where they exercised what one mid-twentieth century youth services librarian called the “tyranny of petty authority” over patrons and prioritized professional agendas, they created another.²⁸ At the building level, school librarians generally have the power to determine what behaviors they will celebrate and reinforce, what behaviors they will discourage and police. And the extent to which school librarians develop human relationships with their students is a benefit of their service that standardized tests cannot measure.

On balance, history demonstrates that public school libraries have benefited their patrons, often in ways intended by the profession’s discourse, and sometimes unintentionally and in ways unforeseen by that discourse. At the same time, they are imperfect institutions that have sometimes failed, and when perceived through a single lens like race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, they have too often caused harm. School libraries have often been caught in the crosshairs of culture wars, where ideologies ignore facts that do not fit a particular set of beliefs, tribalism influences the pursuit of information, and achieving “information literacy” as defined by the school library or formal education communities is complex and difficult. Yet because they have more flexibility than the curricula they serve, school libraries have also frequently filled in information gaps textbooks and classroom instruction overlooked, and provided ways students could increase their understanding of issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation, among many others. “Culture itself is a debate, not a monologue,” notes historian Gerald Graff, and teaching to that debate requires critical thinking skills on the part of those debating it.²⁹ History shows that school libraries have sometimes played a beneficial role here.

History also shows librarians should be wary of predictions made by the evangelists of information technology. For example, dazzled by a newly connected virtual world, a *Wired* editorial announced in 2000, “we are, as a nation, better educated, more tolerant, and more connected because of—not in spite of—the convergence of the Internet and public life. Partisanship, religion, geography, race, gender, and other traditional political divisions are giving way

to a new standard—wiredness—as an organizing principle for political and social attitudes.”³⁰ Eighteen years later historian Jill Lepore pronounced that observation dead wrong. Instead, many of the new information sources the unregulated, unaccountable, “anonymous and impatient” Internet provided “tended to be unedited, their facts unverified, their politics unhinged.” Rather than emulate a model of citizenship that fostered civil debate and careful deliberation, the model of citizenship the Internet facilitated was largely “driven by the hyperindividualism of blogging, posting, and tweeting, artifacts of a new culture of narcissism, and by the hyperaggregation of the analysis of data, tools of a new authoritarianism.”³¹ Rather than less, the Internet and the social media it supported have produced more partisanship and divisiveness.

By highlighting information literacy as school librarianship’s primary imperative in the 1990s, school library leaders placed the profession at a competitive disadvantage as the Internet evolved largely unchallenged and unchecked, its users valuing for themselves what information they found there. Within formal educational settings it is the classroom teacher who checks the quality of information students gather for classroom assignments, and unless school librarians somehow participate with classroom teachers as evaluators in the formal educational practices set up to test student use of information sources they find on the Internet, they will continue to be on the periphery of the educational process. To “explain the neglect of [school] libraries in current efforts to increase reading achievement” in the twenty-first century’s first decade, Victor Sensenig perceived conflicting agendas. On the one hand he cited “changes in the mission and functions of the library” brought by the emphasis on information literacy starting in the 1980s. On the other, he noted “changes in conceptions of the fundamental nature of reading achievement” evident in a particular kinds of “scientifically based research” that addressed the question “What are the best practices in the teaching of reading?”³²

Unfortunately, serious and informed discussions concerning the human agency of reading—and its benefits—that the school library is especially well positioned to facilitate have largely been absent from school librarianship’s professional discourse. We now recognize that readers who engage in voluntary reading bring their own experiences to the text and manufacture new meaning in highly satisfactory ways that they then often seek to share with others. Understanding the social nature of reading requires one to rise above the narrow definitions of literacy currently governing testing and measurement, and to move beyond the kind of thinking that simplistically divides this deeply complex process into two categories—leisure and information. It also requires a deeper understanding of what the socially constructed event of shared voluntary reading accomplishes. “There is an intimacy to reading, a place created in which we can imagine the experiences of others and experiment with new ideas, all

within the safety and privacy of our imaginations,” writes Duncan White in a 2019 *New York Times* op-ed piece. “Research has proved that reading a printed book, rather than on a screen, generates more engagement, especially among young people. Books make us empathetic, skeptical, even seditious.”³³ Ironically, what the grande dames did for reading in most of the twentieth and what Keith Curry Lance’s and Stephen Krashen’s research has proved in the last twenty-five years demonstrates the importance of reading in the school library. But this is nothing new. By 1963 Mary V. Gaver had shown that children exposed to libraries and librarians read more than children with libraries but no librarians, and much more than children with no libraries at all.³⁴

Epilogue

Since the beginning of the twentieth century school library leaders have been driven by a belief that if they can convince enough people of the merits of the school library (either through rhetoric or research or both), they will achieve a secure place for it in formal education. They have achieved much against tremendous indifference and inertia, but as of this writing they are convinced they still haven't reached the Promised Land. I look at the situation differently, however. Given the constraints on the profession imposed by the power relationships that I have discussed here, the marvel is not that school librarianship has not arrived; the marvel is that it has managed to get as far as it has, especially in the testing and measurement climate of the last twenty-five years.

When I sent this manuscript to press in the summer of 2020, the United States was in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Schools across the nation had been closed for months, while the state income and sales tax revenues that helped fund them had dried up. What that would mean for the immediate future of public education in the vast majority of states constitutionally mandated to maintain balanced budgets was frightening. "A Looming Financial Meltdown for America's Schools," Cory Turner titled his May 26, 2020, *NPR Morning Edition* segment. "At first, experts say, school cuts will mirror the Great Recession. Districts will trim spending on buildings and transportation, supplies

and equipment. Then will come staff cuts, beginning with librarians, nurses and counselors.”¹ If Turner is right, without substantial federal intervention *American Public School Librarianship* will probably be published in the midst of an educational environment even worse than the Great Recession, and if that is the case, the nation’s school library community will be suffering accordingly. Dire though the situation may be, however, it might also offer an opportunity for the nation’s school library community “to question the very basis of our philosophy and methods” that David Loertscher called for in 1985.² *American Public School Librarianship* could inform these kinds of discussions.

As the effects of the pandemic eventually pass and national, state, and local economies improve, it is also my hope that principals, superintendents, and school board members will begin to think differently about the potential their public school libraries have to improve student lives. “We now have a quarter century of studies that document three findings,” reading expert Nancie Atwell told an audience at the Clinton Global Initiative in 2015. “Literacy blooms wherever students have access to books they want to read, permission to choose their own, and time to get lost in them. Enticing collections of literature—interesting books written at levels they can decode with accuracy and comprehend with ease—are key to children becoming skilled, thoughtful, avid readers.” The key here is that children get to select, she argues, based on their own interest. “Because they decide, they engage.” She also quoted reading researcher Richard Allington on the importance of classroom libraries. “If I were working in a high-poverty school and had to choose between spending \$15,000 each year on more books for classrooms and libraries, or on one more [teaching assistant],” he argued, “I would opt for the books.” Atwell agreed. “If I had funds beyond my dreams, I’d fill the classrooms of the world with books that tell stories, because engagement in reading them is the single most powerful method of fostering reading growth.” And actual books, Atwell argued, “not electronic devices that store books.”³

By investing in school libraries, principals, superintendents, and school board members can support one place in the public school that won’t suck “the joy and creativity—and often the purpose—out of teaching and learning,” which too often happens in educational environments focused on testing and measurement. Education leaders should ask the kids in their schools if they like visiting the school library, and why. If they say they don’t like the library, it shouldn’t be assumed that it’s the school librarian’s fault.

In this book I have offered a kind of checklist of historical limitations that are built into the educational bureaucracies in which school libraries are embedded. I encourage leaders to ask themselves if the school culture they helped create and sustain is a major part of the problem, and, if so, to figure out ways to deal with it. Hire an empathetic, qualified school librarian who is more in-

terested in fostering a learning environment than enforcing rules, one who understands reading as an act of human agency and cultural practice. Empower the librarian to create physical spaces kids want to visit and to buy reading materials kids want to read. Research that has largely been ignored for decades shows that these efforts will increase children's reading abilities, and not only improve their critical thinking skills but also develop in them more empathy for others and a higher tolerance for diversity, both qualities that our current political climate demonstrates too many adults in our nation sadly lack.

Introduction

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Chapter 1 • Inheriting Pre-Twentieth-Century Traditions

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Chapter 2 • “To Prove By Her Work”

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Chapter 3 • Weathering the Great Depression and World War II, 1930–1950

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