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# Twentieth-Century Perspectives for Librarians and Librarianship

Jessie Carney Smith

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What a delight to come home again—to North Carolina, my home state. I am delighted also because Phillip Ogilvie, in whose honor this lecture is named, was someone whom I respected very much. We met early in my Fisk career, often at meetings of the Southeastern Library Association and also at the American Library Association conferences. We always had something to talk about. Perhaps the discussion centered on libraries and librarianship, for, as those of you who had the honor of knowing him recall, those topics were dear to him. We might have discussed also world affairs, public policy, or the issues of the day. We always talked. We had mutual respect for each other. And so, whatever your reason for inviting me for this particular lecture, be assured that Phillip Ogilvie would be pleased.

We are moving into an era that is open for discussion all around us—the 1990s and the year 2000. There is no magic about these numbers, but the world is always curious when we move from one decade to another, from one century to another. Some are enchanted by the change; others are disturbed by it. The unknown is worth discussing, we say. We know that both the 90s and the twenty-first century are nearly here. We know that we will depart from some of our current thinking patterns and ways of action and face new ventures and challenges, some of which we are as yet unable to predict.

Your curiosity reflects the concern of North Carolina librarians, educators, scholars, policy-makers and others. Your conference theme, "Designing Libraries for the 90s," attests to a need that you recognize as worthy of exploration. Interestingly, the program announcement emphasized the word "designing" and suggests that some forward-thinking conference planners realize that revising, redirecting, inventing, and creating are the key words that will influence what happens in library programs in the 90s and

beyond. My topic, "Twentieth Century Perspective for Libraries and Librarianship," aims to satisfy that curiosity about the 90s and to present some of the directions that we must take to promote the smooth, effective transition from this decade to the next, from this century to the next.

As I explore this topic with you, we must first determine what the public's needs will be. This aspect will be addressed in my discussion of "A Planning Imperative." Once we know these needs, we must next identify some of the implications that these issues have for librarians and librarianship. This aspect will be addressed in a review of "The Impact of Change on Libraries and Communities." As we know how our libraries will be affected, we must identify some of the approaches for meeting those needs. This aspect will come in our discussion of "Designing Library Programs and Services." Your role as a bibliophile, a library financier, a library patron, or a library staff member will be called into question in my final discussion on "The Potential and Challenge of Change." Hopefully, these four points will give us ample food for thought as we move into another era.

## A Planning Imperative

Whether we like it or not, whether we are equipped to deal with it or not, our nation is faced with a planning imperative. The terms of this planning imperative are largely set by the actions of the federal government. The federal government is our largest agency. It must set planning imperatives or run the risk of losing control of the nation and failing to help the people cope with the changes that the future holds. Then, too, the federal budget must be dealt with, and growth and change in the country are impacted by federal dollars and federal spending. The federal government is our largest research unit. Red tape and bureaucracy notwithstanding, the federal government must be a planner and a doer.

There have been many studies and projects made for the next decade and the beginning of the next century. One of them, and an important

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one, was made in 1988 when Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Management John F. W. Rogers and a staff from a variety of federal agencies examined the work of their offices, set forth some assumptions, presented some opinions, made some analyses for the future, and made some projections regarding the shape of the nation to come and how change would affect the federal government's ability to deliver services and information toward the year 2000. "Meeting Public Demands: Federal Services in the Year 2000," is the final report of the review and discussion group. Where service is concerned, governments, like libraries, face great expectations from society. The ability of each to perform those services that are required of either group is often evaluated in very personal terms. How quickly are requests filled? Are expectations filled on time? People are concerned about their own conveniences as personal time becomes scarce—consumed by the very essentials of daily living and being.

The document "Meeting Public Demands" is a planning tool for shaping federal government services so that the needs of a changing America are more effectively and efficiently met. These goals are:

1. To provide a picture of the environment for federal services in the year 2000;
2. To assess the steps currently being taken to improve services; and
3. To recommend those steps necessary to improve service by bridging the gap between existing plans and probable future.<sup>1</sup>

To meet these goals, it follows that emerging demographic, economic, social, and technological trends must be identified before paths can be set for meeting needs and improving services.

The findings are interesting, challenging, disturbing, and useful. "While no one can precisely predict the future, it is not entirely unknown."<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of examining the climate for the growth of the federal government—and libraries as well—let us examine what the future holds for 1. the U.S. population; 2. the economy; 3. the work force and the nature of work; 4. the information technology revolution; 5. lifestyles; and 6. the federal government itself.

Since the government has a continuing concern for demographics and has made the taking of various types of censuses an essential part of its activities, demographic trends are relatively easy to project. Few surprises in demographics are expected to occur by the year 2000. Using 1988 as the takeoff point, by 2000 the population will probably increase from 238.6 million to 268 million, representing a 12.4 percent growth

increase. The median age will rise from 31.5 to 36.6 years. This will be the result of the aging Baby Boomers, as well as an increase in life expectancy for Americans in general. More than 70 million Americans comprise the Baby Boomer group—those born between 1946 and 1964. Scientific developments and improved health care will extend the life expectancy for all groups to an average of 72.9 years for men and 81.1 years for women. As the Baby Boomers become the Baby Bloomers, their wealth and political power will make them more influential. They will earn more, spend more, and become more assertive in their opinions and voting patterns. They will have a decidedly important influence on the shaping of the nation and the world.

Every segment of the population will be impacted by the growth in the elderly group. During this period, those aged 65 and over will grow by 22.1 percent, and those aged 75 and older will increase even more, from 11.8 million to 17.2 million, a 45.8 percent increase. This is three times the rate of increase of the whole population. Attitudes toward the elderly will change to accommodate the longer life span and the aging Baby Boomer group. People will plan better for retirement, live longer in retirement years than earlier groups, and remain more active in the community. In addition, as longevity is extended, those Americans who are over 65 may opt to work longer. Politics will become a more vital issue as the concern for medical care, retirement plans, and nursing homes become hotter topics.

There will be a marked change in ethnic makeup of the United States population. Ethnic minorities will continue to comprise a significant segment of the population, and they will account for more of the population's growth. Hispanics are now and will continue to be the fastest growing segment of the population; this segment will expand to 25.2 million, a 46 percent growth increase. The number of new immigrants will increase, averaging 450,000 persons each year. While this represents a decrease in the growth rate seen in 1980 and the level of undocumented immigration may also fall, the presence of large numbers of new immigrants with language and cultural differences clearly impacts on society and our planning strategies. The growing number of Hispanics (and in some cases the adherence to Spanish as the only language), and the effects of this growing group on the government, employers, educators, communities, and others will require great attention.

The Pacific, Northeast, and South will be affected by a greater share of geographic distribu-

tion of Americans. Smaller gains in growth outside the sunbelt will produce matters of concern for planners in those areas. The composition of households will change: if the current divorce rate persists, half of the young children in 1985 will live in single-parent homes during the 90s. Divorce and single motherhood affect the economy. Female heads of households will earn less annual income than male heads.

The economy may remain much like that of today. Increasing linkages with the world economy will impact the growth, inflation, and interest rates in the United States. Some industries will reduce drastically their work force, yet some service industries will grow.

The work force will grow more slowly than in recent years. The fastest growing segment of the work force will be women and minorities, and the nature of the work itself will change significantly. Since there has been a drop in the work force entrants following the passage of Baby Boomers into that force, the reduction in entrants is expected to keep unemployment below six percent a year. The female population in the work force will continue to increase as will working mothers. Men who are over age fifty-five will have a declining share in the work force. Women will comprise the greater share of the work force; there will be an older working class; and, as a result, the economy will benefit. Minorities, especially Hispanics, will make up a greater share as the number of black and other nonwhite workers increases.

Occupational changes will be significant. Most new jobs will be in the service industries regardless of the salary levels. "Almost 40 percent of new job growth through the year 2000 will be more highly skilled, higher paying jobs, such as health diagnosis and treatment, occupations . . . , teachers, librarians, counselors . . . , general managers and top executives . . ." <sup>73</sup> Advanced educational levels will not be required for many of the service jobs. Baby Boomers have caused career crowding and this could lead to stagnation of income. As more older people continue to work, Baby Boomers may retire earlier. Many employees and employers will choose to work at home.

Information technology is in a revolution. Some believe that there is now a greater demand for information, and that more Americans are working in what some economists call the information sector; for example, in fields that *produce* information, such as education, research and development, the media, design, and engineering, and in fields that *use* information, such as finance, government, insurance, and real estate.

We may predict an information infrastructure. The base of information technology has broadened with the development of microcomputers, and by 2000 from sixty to sixty-five percent of households will own one. This has widespread impact on the work force and libraries. There will be a proliferation of data communication networks (i.e., digital circuitry and electronics), and by the mid-90s from six to eight businesses and forty to fifty households will have direct electronic access to their political representatives in Washington and in their state capitals. The work force will be computer literate. Already we have seen more computers in schools and colleges and increased demand for training programs in computer applications.

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## **What are we to do with librarians and patrons who are allergic to change?**

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We can predict a powerful information infrastructure. Technology will reduce the numbers of clerical and middle managers; there will be flexible organizational structures (a new generalist class that can manage multi-functional systems); there will be portable expertise (robotics and other applications of artificial intelligence) [perhaps contracts will be issued to robots rather than to people]; and there will be electronic households with access to extensive consumer information and perhaps even access to information in libraries. More challenging than all of this is the fact that unforeseen developments in information technology will occur and will impact on work and on leisure.

Lifestyles will undergo drastic change driven in part by the technology revolution, the economy, and consumer preferences for immediate convenience. As more women have entered the work force, the foundation was laid for two-income families. We have busier lifestyles now; yet, increasingly, leisure time will become more valued. "The most pervasive difference for every American's lifestyle will be the demand for convenience . . ." There will be a marked change in the way households interact with businesses and other agencies. The interactive databases will mean that businesses will develop innovative ways to persuade people to buy goods and services. The information and technology revolutions will create more knowledgeable consumers. Computers will affect lifestyles even more. They will become easier to use and more economical, and more people will be computer literate.



People will become more mobile; there will be a resurgence in rural life, and commuting will increase. Attitudes toward education will change. We know that our best-educated people now are the Baby Boomers; they will, in turn, require the same of their children. More attention will be given to preschool and elementary education, and a greater percentage of these young people will go on to college. The trend has already begun. "As literary demands increase, in both the technical and written sense, the ability to function in an increasingly complicated society becomes more important. For this reason, the literacy of the population has and should continue to receive a high amount of attention."<sup>5</sup> As more immigrants come, as unemployment continues, and as some members of society fail to complete high school, our nation will still have a problem with illiteracy.

The federal government's ability to deal with these changes and revolutions will have a significant impact on society. The government's ability to increase its work force is threatened. Competition for the best prepared will be keen. Slower growth in the budget is expected to continue. Overall, the rate of output from the federal government is unpredictable because of the very issues and trends just discussed. Thus, these broad forces that shape the American society provide the impetus for libraries, governmental agencies, and other groups to work together to prepare for the 90s and beyond.

### **The Impact of Change on Libraries and Communities**

Where have we come from and where are we going? In the twentieth century alone we have seen astronomical growth in the size of our communities, in their ethnic makeup, in their political persuasions and activities, and in their need for information. We have seen phenomenal growth in the number and variety of responses to these needs. An impressive amount of this response has come from libraries. The century began with a handful of libraries scattered about, designed and administered in an awesome manner that led the few users to tiptoe around and painfully whisper their needs. Between 1881 and 1919, industrialist Andrew Carnegie financed the construction of 1,681 public libraries across the nation<sup>6</sup> and countless facilities in academic institutions. Those were state-of-the-art facilities, but those libraries also changed. They responded to the request for an increase in type, number, and location. They provided for the industrial communities that developed, and they met the needs of the rural

and elderly residents. They changed! They expanded so much that they could be used no longer as effective facilities. They were expanded or abandoned in favor of more up-to-date buildings. By the late 1960s we began to marvel over the predictions for the future. Transmitting documents electronically? Translating foreign language materials? Automated library catalogs? A computer on every desk? We were hardly able to envision these revolutionary activities or to predict how our meager budgets would pay for them. Time moved on, and we changed.

Change is frightening, uncomfortable, threatening to many Americans. Some people don't like change. Yet when we explore what probably will occur in the next decade, we see clearly the impact that change will have on nearly every segment of society. If the number of immigrants increases, they will need places to live and work. If the Baby Boomers take early retirement, they will need to find ways to fill the time once spent burning themselves out in the workplace. If others reach retirement age and opt to remain in the work force, they will still need to learn to live in a vastly automated society. If longevity continues on the upswing, people will want quality life and will need ways to provide that quality. If the generalist with little advanced education replaces the specialist in the work place, how much is the generalist likely to use libraries?

In the technological revolution of the 90s, when households increasingly add computers and become involved in home-connected databases and when the whole information and technological infrastructure expands, what controls will be required to ensure the proper distribution of information and the interpretation of it to the consumer? Our libraries, our communities, and a variety of agencies will need to stay on the cutting edge of fields from technology to the arts, from economics to politics, from medicine to social programs. *Newsweek* magazine, October 2, 1989, notes the importance of innovators, what they have done, and what they are likely to do in the 90s. They are on the cutting edge in their field, and they are the "spark of creativity that lights the way to the future."<sup>7</sup> Innovation is a number of things: it is creativity, visionary drive, and a way to advance ideas. Whether the reference is to computers or to educational and social programs, thinking and planning generally occur years before products and ideas are disseminated. Librarians, community planners, and others need to be in think-tank seminars, research laboratories and elsewhere, or see that they are represented there, to prepare ourselves for the 90s and

beyond. Ken Biba of Agilis Corporation, who is quoted in the *Newsweek* article, gives us a message that bears consideration: "It's easy to build products that are an extension of the past. It's harder to build a product that provides a bridge into the future."<sup>8</sup>

### Designing Library Programs and Services

The trendsetting ideas of the federal government discussed in the first section of this speech may have us far off base. One may use past and current data to make some predictions, but there are always those unforeseen variables that impact on progress and change. What about the viruses that invade the best laid plans and ideas, that force us to ignore predictions and deal with what becomes the reality? It is true that we have found ways to wipe out computer viruses in ways that appear now to be effective, but there is always that unforeseen problem in any entity, whether computer, social program, or library. We must not live under threat and with fear; yet we must be cautiously optimistic in designing for the 90s and flexible enough to adapt programs and plans to fit the circumstances and changed need.

We are entering one of the most challenging eras in our history. With the almost limitless use of computers and technology, with the cost

becoming more and more affordable, some of us will be in position to design new systems while others will be able to buy commercial packages that fit our special circumstances. As "micro" and "online" activities assume more importance in the library, the world of books will, too. Not everything will be "micro" and "online" and CD-ROM. Space will become more of a premium than it is now—for staff, for resources, for places in which to perform new and greater services, and, we hope, for patrons.

As I mentioned earlier, the flyer announcing this conference emphasizes the word "designing." The manner in which the word is presented clearly suggests the importance of planning, arranging, inventing, and effecting programs to address the needs of users, non-users and would-be users of libraries. We need not be uniform in the development of libraries and the delivery of services, for there is much to be said for meeting needs of the primary patron served. If our concern is with a national library—the National Agricultural Library, the Library of Medicine, or the Library of Congress (if we accept the fact that it functions as a national library), we know that the needs of the primary patron—the national public—are addressed. If our concern is with the State Library, St. Mary's College, or Charlotte-Mecklen-

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berg County Public Library, the needs are more localized.

Never before in the history of libraries in America has the potential for designing innovative library programs and services been more exciting and challenging than it is today. Many leaders recognize the need for additional research before moving into the future. The U.S. Department of Education, for example, proposes a library research agenda to examine some key issues that impact our future. What will happen to libraries? Will they become obsolete? Will they usher society into the Information Age of the future? These are some of the typical questions raised, and responses from some experts in the field are being published in *Rethinking the Library*, a proposed three-volume document from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Library Programs. Volumes I and II have been issued, while Volume III should be available in 1989. If you have not done so, I urge you to order the free set from the Department of Education. The project has an enormous research agenda, yet it is no more enormous than we need as we approach the year 2000. It also takes some great strides in clarifying issues for the profession.

*American Libraries*, January, 1989, summarizes quite succinctly the contents of the volumes.<sup>9</sup> The experts from the field developed the agenda in a series of meetings, and eleven experts were commissioned to write nine essays on broad issues emanating from these sessions. These include library education, library economics, and information policies. Questions and issues raised concern the effectiveness of the core curricular program in library education, practicums, and the length of degree programs. There is a discussion on the need for a unified view of librarianship, and less emphasis on vocational and more on intellectual activities. One expert is concerned with new technologies and challenges the problems that these technologies pose to librarians. Their self-perception as expert mediators between user and information is of great concern. There is also a call for more experimentation, particularly with controlled vocabularies and semantic networks. The final volume will give recommendations on improving the library research infrastructure.

The eighteen-month publication was initiated in 1986 and the agenda was set by "field-nominated" experts who identified areas that they considered "researchable." The essays that have been prepared or planned are especially important for those concerned with the future of librarianship. They also serve as evidence that group

after group is looking into the future trying to determine where we should be going, why, how we should get there, and what will happen when we get there.

My friends and colleagues, there are many questions regarding libraries in the 90s, but there are no easy solutions. I am reminded here of my favorite cartoon character, Ziggy, who often finds himself in a rather precarious situation. He too has been affected by new technology, and he has been known to associate with computers in public. In one instance, as Ziggy sat at the computer, a message on the screen read: "That's the third time you've punched the wrong button . . . . Why don't you just go watch some cartoons and let me handle this." As librarians, sometimes we will need to go away and let technology take over.

Ziggy also has been disturbed that PCs were too personal, and he has encountered signs that read "You are here," when everyone else thought he was somewhere else. As the public's leisure time increases and the need for different kinds of information intensifies, our library programs and services will become more personal. But we must avoid being *here*, one place, when all research and all odds say we should be somewhere else.

### The Potential for Challenge of Change

What are we to do with librarians and patrons who are allergic to change? To those who are afraid to push buttons or rock the boat? To those who think in old, slow, ineffective terms: "We used to do it this way." We win some and we lose some, as the saying goes; therefore circumstances will compel some of us to let old ideas give way to the new. The technology revolution will intensify and use of some technology will be a matter of survival. I am persuaded that technology will have the greatest impact on all of the changes predicted for the 90s and beyond. Technology will not replace the human touch entirely, but it will shape the way we deal with changes in society, leisure time, nature of the work force, the increasing elderly population, and the library programs and research activities that experts from the profession have identified.

The potential for libraries to become a more viable force in the community, the work place, education, and in leisure must be fully and effectively realized. The change that can occur will not happen in a meaningful way unless networks of people and agencies work to bring it about. The new and continuing partnerships in the information infrastructure will help make change meaningful. Into the 90s and beyond, I see the following developments:



1. There will be greater access to information. Our local, state and national associations will promote and ensure full access to libraries and information by all citizens. Barriers, whether physical, economic, linguistic, or other, will be removed, and libraries will become greater agents in the successful operation of the information infrastructure and megastructure.

2. Libraries will become more involved in the political process. As funding needs for libraries increase and the public demands more and more from us, we will become more involved in the lives of political candidates and what happens in Washington. The second White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services (WHCLIS), scheduled for July 9-13, 1991, will again give librarians a public political platform to make their needs heard and felt.

3. There will be more computer literate librarians and patrons. The almost limitless uses of new technology will set an imperative that everyone must meet in one way or another. From more user-friendly PCs to CD-ROMs; from online catalogs to a program as specialized as the National Archives' WORM (Write-Once-Read-Many) optical discs with a lifetime of up to one hundred years; from databases in households to a variety of technology that increases access to information—bibliographic, full text and full image; and to types of high-tech products still uninvented or unreleased from the drawing boards, the imperative for librarians and users will be met in one way or another.

4. Libraries and librarians will continue to place great emphasis on intellectual freedom. We will continue to deplore the FBI's invasion of our libraries and records to determine who uses what and why. Electronic access to data also has the potential for easy monitoring of users and their activities. As the composition of communities change and as the information infrastructure expands, we will ensure that one's freedom to read and learn is protected and maintained.

5. The public will have increased awareness of libraries and information resources. Promotional programs and the very nature of the way information is collected, preserved and disseminated will impact significantly on the public's need to know and ability to find out.

6. We will establish new linkages with the federal government in information access and delivery. Partnerships will include a variety of agencies, local, national and international. As a primary user of information, the government will take a more meaningful role in accessing and disseminating information, both for its own pur-

poses and to meet the needs of users here and abroad.

In the 90s, then, let the word go out that Carlyle, Addison, and other writers and philosophers of earlier times who are quoted so often in library publications for their insightful views of the world of books may be forced to give way to quotations from new philosophers whose experiences have been both in the world of books and in the world of technology. Let the key word be *information*, and let it be gained through the most appropriate means possible. Before the 90s are over, we will be searching for answers to what the decades of 2000 will hold for us. The search goes on; and so will libraries and information sources.

#### References

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# Happy New Year