HERE COMES THE BOOKMOBILE:
PUBLIC CULTURE AND THE SHAPE OF BELONGING

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the peculiar history of the bookmobile in the United States from the close of the nineteenth century to the turn of the twenty-first. In the process, it insists that a spatial politics of shared information was key to constructing and contesting community in twentieth-century America. Grounded in cultural geography, American Studies, and book history, it is an interdisciplinary investigation of the roles that bookmobiles played in efforts to build what some reformers called “common consciousness,” a sense of cultural and spiritual connection. Indeed, the bookmobile emerged not just as a tool for getting books into far-flung hands but also as a way to confront two persistent questions: What should our communities look like in this new century, and who should be included in them? This dissertation argues that the bookmobile’s answers to those questions both shaped and were shaped by three factors—racial segregation, imperial expansion, and consumer capitalism—that ultimately exposed the limits of the dream of a common consciousness.

Drawing on research in archival and published sources, this dissertation looks at a series of moments when bookmobiles, by moving purportedly public culture through supposedly shared space, forced Americans to consider what it would mean to hold ideas and objects in common. A set of five thematically distinct and roughly chronological chapters allows the dissertation to touch down in particular times in particular places—in Progressive-Era Kansas, in the Jim Crow South, in New Deal New Mexico and Cold War West Germany, in suburban supermarkets, and in Silicon Valley—while offering an expansive view of the relationship between community, space, and culture in America.
For Bodel, of course

“It is you talking just as much as myself”
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is very much a product of a time and place—of my years as a graduate student at the University of Illinois. Indeed, the project began in the excited, anticipatory weeks before my first semester, when I discovered a romance novel called *Books on Wheels* in the library catalog. And it ends, or perhaps begins again in new form, with the pages herein.

From the start, faculty at the University of Illinois have supported and challenged me, helping to make this dissertation what it is. My committee, of course, has been crucial. From my very first semester at Illinois, Tamara Chaplin pushed me to think hard about the history of media and supported my work in myriad ways. Kristin Hoganson made my writing clearer and my arguments sharper. Ray Fouché supervised my first foray into bookmobiles and encouraged an imaginative approach to technology and American Studies. Lori Newcomb kept me thinking about books and readers, and about print culture before the 1890s. And Kathryn Obderdeck, my advisor, encouraged me to think creatively and pushed my ideas to be both more capacious and more precise. In addition to my committee, enormous thanks go to other Illinois faculty—including Sharra Vostral, Clare Crowston, Dana Rabin, Bonnie Mak, Rebecca Ginsburg, Megan McLaughlin, and Adrian Burgos—for contributing to this work and giving me opportunities to present and discuss it with others. The History Department staff make everything that happens in the department possible, including this dissertation. So thanks to all of the staff, especially to Tom Bedwell, Elaine Sampson, and Stephanie Landess.

I would not have made it to Illinois, and I would not have managed to write this dissertation, without the teachers and professors who taught me before I came here. Ellen Joyce and Catherine Orr at Beloit College, in particular, were instrumental in the development of my
thinking about books, ideas, institutions, and identities. And, before that, it was Jeanne Hanigan who taught me how to really read a text and encouraged me to write.

This project benefited significantly from institutional support within and beyond the University of Illinois. A Twentieth Century History Grant from the Massachusetts Historical Society funded the research that made a large portion of Chapter Two possible. The project incubated and developed through collaborations with the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois and during my time as a Google Policy Fellow at the American Library Association’s Office for Information Technology Policy. Fellowships from the History Department helped support the research and writing processes, and a Graduate College Dissertation Completion Fellowship gave me the time and space to finish.

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More thanks than I can articulate to the dear friends who kept me sane (and, if we’re honest, drove me productively crazy) while I researched and wrote. Thanks to Ariana Ruiz, Irina Spector-Marks, and Eszter Sápi for making Urbana home and to Rose and David Robertson for creating a home away from home. And thanks to Rose Pink for, well, everything.

Reading to me every night, telling me stories as I fell asleep, my parents first taught me that books could connect, that stories could link people together. Without that lesson, and without decades of support, I could never have done this.

And—“(Shall I make my list of things in the house and skip the house / that supports them?)”— incalculable thanks to Bodel, the foundation of everything.
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“These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me, If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing, If they are not the riddle and the untying of the riddle they are nothing, If they are not just as close as they are distant they are nothing, This is the grass that grows wherever the land is and the water is, This the common air that bathes the globe.”

—Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (1855)
INTRODUCTION

On Common Consciousness and the Politics of Public Culture

“Have you reckon’d a thousand acres much? have you reckon’d the earth much?
Have you practis’d so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?”
–Walt Whitman (1855)

In twentieth-century America—in newspapers and magazines, novels and children’s books, memoirs and annual reports—a certain phrase appeared over and over again. “Here comes the bookmobile!” children shouted, headlines blared, book covers declared. The phrase captured the intense optimism the bookmobile represented in the face of staggering and often discomfiting change. And, indeed, confronted by a host of transformations that challenged older ways of thinking, Americans repeatedly mobilized books in search of solutions. More than traditional libraries, and differently than the car itself, their combination in the bookmobile captured the minds and eyes of Americans and encapsulated their hopes (and fears) about the

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new world they were helping to create. The bookmobile embodied a faith—a particular, peculiar fantasy—that mobile print could provide a perfect answer to questions that arose again and again across the century: How do you build coherent communities in a place, and a time, marked by expansion, acceleration, fragmentation, and upheaval—and, most importantly, what shape will those communities take? Promoting a North Dakota bookmobile program in 1959, for example, librarian Hazel Webster Byrnes tied the bookmobile to what she cast as a glorious march into a beautiful future: “Just as people are catching thrilling new visions in many aspects of living, so this expanded library program is offering its share of hope and promise in a wonderful new outlook on life.” But the odd thing about “Here comes the bookmobile,” as with Brynes’s offer, is that the realization of its optimism was perpetually deferred. The phrase kept the bookmobile’s promise always just over the horizon, always just about to arrive.

Bookmobiles themselves did, of course, actually arrive at schools and crossroads and parking lots across the country (and around the world), and this dissertation is about what happened when they did. It is, in other words, about how the grand fantasy that the bookmobile embodied fared when, well, the rubber hit the road.

Common Consciousness: Imagining Coherent Communities in National Space

This dissertation uses the story of the bookmobile as a lever into larger conflicts in modern American life. It is a story of geography and belonging. It is a story of what it meant to be an American in an uncertain landscape. It is a story about the ways that fantasies about space and identity played out, and failed to, in the movement of books across uneven ground. It is, in

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3 North Dakota Farmers Union, 15th Annual Ladies Camp, Farmers Union Heart Butte Camp, June 14-17, 1959, State Library Commission – Miscellaneous Files (Series 1064), North Dakota Historical Society, Fargo, North Dakota, 38.
its way, about a clash of images, about what people thought symbols (lines on a map, words on a page) could do, about their reading and their rereading, about their imposition and their appropriation, about their travels across America’s cultural and physical geography. To begin, then, I want to offer two stories, each a tale of symbols, circulation, and consequences.

First: lines and borders. In 1958, the Catawba County Public Library made a map [FIGURE 1]. Showing the routes the library’s bookmobile traveled, “over rugged and smooth roads,” as it brought “cheer through books to the county people,” the map appears less a practical document than a symbol of the bookmobile’s reach. In this vivid image of networked information, the mapmaker offered a stark vision of print in space, one in which all other features (rivers, topography, even cities) fade into the background as the dark, bold, thick lines of the bookmobile’s route rise to the surface, marking the county like ink on a page. The visual space of the county is filled up with the movement of books across its landscape. (Even the border is not rendered in sharp lines; it is, rather, largely an effect of the bookmobile’s route, of its limits and its ends.) This map offered a fantasy that was, we will see, incredibly influential: a dream that filling up space with print would connect people as well as it connected areas on a map. Books on the move would make the county into a community.

Second: houses of people. In the early 1970s, the El Paso Public Library began to send a bookmobile to a largely Latino neighborhood in an effort to expand library use and, it would seem, to connect the city together. Chicano nationalists and other activists in the neighborhood banded together to paint the bookmobile with symbols that the poet Ricardo Sánchez later said

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were something that “kids in the barrio can identify with.”\textsuperscript{5} Despite the fact that “the Chicanos in El Paso are over 56\% of the population,” Sánchez pointed out, “we have no voice.” But the symbols, and thus the bookmobile as appropriated and adapted by the activists, refused the narrow legal question of representation—and, even more importantly, any similarly narrow conception of political geography. “Those symbols represent[ed] houses of people,” Sánchez explained. “The eagle that is there represents the different Chicanos throughout the Southwest, the five southwestern states. We are one people.”\textsuperscript{6} Containing political geography (“the five southwestern states”) but reaching beyond it to articulate a common racial identity (“one people”), this was, as you might imagine, not exactly what the El Paso Public Library had in mind. And so the library’s board of directors met and voted to repaint the bookmobile, erasing the symbols. “We’re trying to build up a meaningful community for all those who participate and share,” Sánchez declared. But what “community” meant, and what it meant to “share,” was not in the end very clear at all.

One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that the bookmobile embodied the principle of “common consciousness”—at heart a\textit{will to connect}, a conviction that it was possible, and ultimately desirable, to share a mind, a spirit, a culture with those around you—which crystallized in the 1890s and had a strong, if varied, influence in the century that followed. Common consciousness was the ideological underpinning of a larger effort that emerged in the Progressive Era to link Americans physically, emotionally, and politically—to build across the

\textsuperscript{5} All quotations from Delgado and Sánchez come from Interview with Abelardo Delgado and Ricardo Sánchez by Manny A. Escontrías, 1972, “Interview no. 91.1,” Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

\textsuperscript{6} The official transcription of this interview renders the beginning of this passage as “the people that are there represent,” but in the actual recording of the interview, Sánchez refers to an “eagle” (and later to a “Mestizo head,” another phrase absent from the transcription). “Interview no. 91.1,” Digital Commons @ UTEP, http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/interviews/91/.
nation what Terry Eagleton calls the “thick mesh” of social democracy.\(^7\) As different as the two cases are, it was this idea, this devotion to building a connective web in space, that linked Catawba and El Paso. Officials in Catawba County had a deep faith in political geography; the activists in El Paso had a deep skepticism about it. But both groups believed that it was possible to hold objects and ideas in common (and that geography had something to do with it) even as they disagreed about what shape that sharing might take. If common consciousness was a belief that you could share a culture with those around you, one of the central disagreements was about what “around” really meant. Was common consciousness a matter of geographic proximity and political units, as the Catawba library seemed to insist? Or was it a matter of like finding like, across space, as El Paso’s Chicano nationalists imagined? This was a conflict—between competing geographies of belonging, between different ideas about what it meant to be American, between contending interpretations of common consciousness—that played out over and over across the century, as the idea of common consciousness was adapted at various moments and in various places. It is this conflict that lies at the heart of this project.

Common consciousness was influential throughout the twentieth century, a relative consistency that was unusual given its progressive origins. After a zenith in the 1910s, many progressive ideas and ideals had a rather rough century, at some moments attenuated by shifting circumstances and at others abandoned, wholesale, in the name of free markets and rugged individuals. But common consciousness had a longer, stranger life. This was in part because library training and librarianship remained deeply influenced by progressive thought, particularly in the form of the two Deweys (Melvil and John), long after the rest of the country fell largely out of love with progressivism. As a consequence, it was picked up at various moments

\(^7\) Terry Eagleton, “What is the Worth of Social Democracy?” *Harper’s*, October 2010, 78.
throughout the century. Those particular contexts, and the particular concerns that impinged upon and emerged from them, changed how common consciousness was imagined and enacted. In the South under Jim Crow, for example, the will to connect that marked common consciousness was inflected by massive resistance to certain kinds of cross-racial connection. And during the New Deal and Cold War, the increasing power of the federal government changed the scales on which it was possible to imagine (and manage) belonging. But despite these differences, the fundamental idea remained largely the same, reworked for new eras but with the bones still visible underneath. And so, as contexts shifted and ideas changed, common consciousness remained central to how librarians were trained and bookmobiles deployed.

It would have a long career, but the idea of common consciousness began as a very progressive idea, indeed. On June 19, 1902, Washington Gladden—a pastor and chief proponent of the Social Gospel—gave a commencement address at the University of Michigan, explaining what he hoped would come out of the “anxious and perilous days” ahead, on the way to a “new order.” In the speech, Gladden laid out his vision of how human community should work in that new order:

A tree is not an individual, but a republic rather, thousands of individual lives coordinated in a community, each bud being an individual life, so man is in himself a society, a combined group of living cells united in a common consciousness. But this is only the beginning of interdependencies and co-operations. For this human personality, whom we wrongly name an individual, finds its life only in vital union with other lives. … We are parts of a whole, and can no more consider our interest separately from the rest, than one of the wheels of a watch or one of the links of a chain can set up a separate interest and figure out its rights and liberties and possessions without reference to the other wheels and the other links.

It was a speech dense with incredibly material metaphors: community is a tree, a body, a watch, a chain—it is not just a feeling but an object whose individual parts are physical and inextricable,

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8 Washington Gladden, Rights and Duties (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Board of Regents, 1902), [1].
9 Gladden, Rights and Duties, [3].
whose commonality is necessary, and whose common cause is absolute. In this context, the idea of a “social bond” which can be made (or “ruptured,” as Gladden threatens) takes on a newly tangible cast. Common consciousness is community, corporealized. Josiah Royce’s 1898 declaration that “[l]ife is expansive, goes beyond itself, lives in social relations” was echoed by Gladden and other progressive organizers. But it seems that such a going beyond might involve something more than just words or feelings to facilitate the connection, commonality, and belonging that would be such an important part of the progressive project. In Human Work (1904), for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman proposed her own solution, celebrating “the extending light of common consciousness as Society comes alive!—the tingling ‘I’ that reaches wider and wider in every age, that is sweeping through the world to-day like an electric current, that lifts and lights and enlarges the human soul of kindling majesty.”

Drawing again and again on the “storage battery” to capture both human potential and its realization in the world, Gilman describes a process by which “the human brain and the human hand have made force incarnate” in objects and the networks that connect and circulate them.

As striking as they were, both of these attempts to make the abstraction of “common consciousness” matter nevertheless still lacked a physical, not just metaphorical, manifestation. It was librarians who most fully took up the dream of common consciousness, materially. “Libraries must be mobilized,” Melvil Dewey declared in 1901. “Books must travel more.”

And they did. The practice of taking public books out of library buildings and into

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10 Gladden, Rights and Duties, [3].
communities—a practice that came to be known, in a fascinating phrase, as “library extension”—began with the emergence of traveling libraries in the 1890s. Particularly popular in states with strong progressive politics (like Kansas, New York, and Wisconsin), these were usually boxes packed with books from a central library that were sent, usually by train or wagon, to outlying communities. And when a horse-drawn traveling library in Washington County, Maryland, was struck by a train in 1910, and replaced by a truck shortly thereafter, the bookmobile was born. Over the next several decades, wider (and cheaper) availability of internal combustion, and increasingly smooth infrastructures of roads and highways, put this new tool for library extension in the hands of libraries big and small across the nation. Not long after their introduction and with greater and greater intensity over the decades, bookmobiles became iconic, embodying an outsized faith in the possibilities of community and connection. This was because books—as ideas incarnate—appeared an ideal and mobile material for creating a thick and connecting mesh. And thus they seemed the best chance for the actual realization of common consciousness. If you put books on a truck and drove that truck through an area, it seemed, that area could become a community.

“Common consciousness” was, ultimately, a fantasy of cultural coherence—of a thick, layered, and even mesh—on scales running from neighborhood to nation (and, at times, to empire). William Sewell has identified two particularly popular ways of conceiving of culture: a system of signs and as practices on the ground. While these have tended to be taken up by opposing camps in the anthropological culture wars, Sewell argues forcefully that “[s]ystem and practice are complementary concepts,” that they cannot be effectively understood apart from one
another. In that they are semiotic systems, he asserts, cultures “must in some sense be coherent,” even if the requirement for relatively mutual comprehension “actually only implies…a thin coherence.” Cultures are constantly contested, only loosely linked, porous boundaries, and always contradictory, but they are, simultaneously, coherent and “powerfully constraining.”

Cultural coherence is the product of symbolic systems, but also of “the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or…transform it.” In large part, this dissertation is an attempt to understand how this cultural coherence was practiced—and contested—in space in the twentieth-century United States. Taking one sort of symbol quite literally out into the world, bookmobiles were powerful (if often inadequate) tools for practicing coherence on the ground. This project is, thus, an investigation of the bookmobile as what Arjun Appadurai has called a “technique[ ] for the spatial production of locality,” a practice that requires “hard and regular work…to produce and maintain its materiality”—but where the sense of the coherently local, of the possibility of common consciousness, could expand to include a range of spatial and emotional relations beyond those of immediate proximity.

The question of who gets to imagine, articulate, and construct this coherence—The state or the people? The majority or the marginalized?—hinges on who gets to control space and determine the scale of belonging. As Neil Smith argues, “the production of geographical scale is the site of potentially intense political struggle,” with the state claiming a monopoly on scale and

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16 Sewell, *Logics*, 166.
various others challenging that monopoly both ideologically and practically. Deciding where a bookmobile would travel, what it would carry, and what it would look like were all ways that power could be asserted and contested. Will common consciousness take the shape of a county, in other words, or that of Chicano identity?

In the hands of state-run public libraries, bookmobiles were used to embody what Ernest Gellner described as the “political principle” of nationalism, “which holds the political and national unit should be congruent.” In other words, governmental agencies used the bookmobile to assert geographies of belonging that were perfectly mapped onto the administrative units of the state (city, county, state, federal). Deploying print as a tool for the construction of imagined communities, these public programs sought to control the distribution through space of the system of signs that produces cultural coherence, and to channel those signs in ways that reinforce the nested loyalties of federalism. We can see this in the Catawba County map, where the filled-up space of books and belonging stops, abruptly, at the county line. The Catawba library, like so many others, attempted to organize the emotional and political experience of space, using the bookmobile to map the contours of the county and chart the possible communities within it. “Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common,” wrote John Dewey, whose work powerfully influenced librarians and educators for much of the century. Thus, he continued, “[s]ociety not only continues to exist by transmission,  

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by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication.”

By transmitting particular information in particular spaces, state-run bookmobile projects aimed to shape “the things which they have in common” to promote a friendly orientation to the state as the proper scale for community and belonging. In other words, they tried to orchestrate what Sewell calls “the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or…transform” culture as a coherent system of state-produced and state-distributed signs.

But, the state does not have an absolute, uncontested monopoly on what people have in common—and thus on the scale and coherence of communities. Indeed, in the “new condition of neighborliness” that Appadurai argues has emerged with new communication and transportation technologies since the late nineteenth century, the congruence of community and nation-state has been challenged on a number of fronts. Smith has urged scholars to look at “the concrete production and reproduction of geographic scale as a political strategy of resistance.” By “jumping scales,” he argues, people can wrest “political and cultural access to, and production of, the space of community” from the exclusive control of the state. In the twentieth century, the bookmobile was one tool for doing so—for challenging the clean lines of “common consciousness,” for contesting political geography as the sole shape of belonging. The El Paso activists, for example, were scale-jumpers par excellence, moving between the local and the regional with relative ease. Their symbols said, in effect, that people in the barrio had more in common with Chicanos living hundreds of miles away in Arizona or California than they did with white citizens living just across town. If, as Sewell insists, a culture’s coherence is a product of the need for its system of signs to be mutually legible, then the barrio bookmobile illustrates a

failure of coherence on the borders—political, racial, cultural, spiritual—that divided American society. At the same, it offers a paradigmatic example of how some marginalized people used the bookmobile as a tool for building what Patricia J. Williams calls “a constituency of souls united in allegiance to an ideal of community, an egalitarianism of society, the mutual shelter of a nation”—but in ways that insist that nation is not necessarily the same as state.

Conflicts over the relationship between culture and belonging were not, of course, unique to America. But the problem at the heart of fights over common consciousness—Can you really build a coherent community in a large and diverse country?—was especially troubling in the U.S., where vastness has been a defining spatiality and a cobbled-together, contingent, but supposedly universal fraternity its defining affect. Over and over again, building a cohesive nation on the scale of the United States has required confronting, and either overcoming or pointedly ignoring, the problems of distance and diversity. From the imagined landscape of Manifest Destiny to the vinyl-sided fantasyland of suburbia, from the interstate highway system to the World Wide Web, from the occupation of the Philippines to the High Commission for Occupied Germany, from Progressivism to Jim Crow, Americans have struggled to resolve fundamental tensions between distance and proximity, between difference and commonality. As we will see, bookmobiles were there at all of these moments, in all of these places. This is because, as a technology that made it possible to physically transport the stuff of culture over the geographic distances that separated Americans—and thus, theoretically at least, over the psychic and emotional gaps between them—bookmobiles were tools for answering two questions that

\[^{27}\text{Patricia J. Williams, “Corpus Ex Machina,” The Nation, 15 February, 2009, 9.}\]

\[^{28}\text{For instance, debates over the relative merits of “cultural democracy,” on the one hand, and “cultural democratization”—between expanding access to a culture and fundamentally changing that culture—were a key part of public life in postwar France. See Tamara Chaplin, Turning On the Mind: French Philosophers on Television (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 9.}\]
have haunted the nation since the 1890s: What should our communities look like in this new century, and who should be included in them? This dissertation will insist that the bookmobile’s answers to these questions both shaped and were shaped by three elements—racial segregation, imperial expansion, and consumer capitalism—which ultimately exposed the limits of the dream of cultural coherence in national space. Other elements, like questions of gender and sexuality, were crucial to how bookmobiles worked, and they are threaded throughout the history this dissertation offers. But a focus on race, empire, and economic inequality, while taking account of other factors, allows us a field of vision both sweeping and precise.

“Lines That Bind”: The Politics of Public Culture and the Circulation of Community

The stuff of culture, and the way it moves through space, are central to this project. The bookmobile, more than most any other institution or tool in use in the twentieth century, makes obvious the fact that so much of culture is bound up in physical objects that must travel (across various scales) in order to have any effect at all. Nevertheless, many theorists of reception and the public sphere often discuss the “circulation” of texts without always or actually talking about their movement. Reading is privileged, leaving its very conditions of possibility unanalyzed. Toby Miller, for example, asserts that “texts accrete and attenuate meanings on their travels,” without really confronting the fact that texts must and do literally travel in order to make meaning.29 For Michael Warner, who declares that “a public is a social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse,” the experience of being hailed by texts you consume (and knowing others have precisely that experience, as well) is the fundamental constitutive feature of

But despite referring to “the space of circulation” where publics take shape, Warner is able at the same time to declare definitively that “[s]pace and physical presence do not make much difference” in the constitution of publics. (Even D.F. McKenzie, who insisted so passionately on the material forms of meaning made a similar elision in his influential 1985 Panizzi lecture, describing “the transmission of texts as the creation of the new versions which form, in turn, the new books, the products of later printers, and the stuff of subsequent bibliographic control.” But “transmission,” for McKenzie, refers primarily to the reproduction of texts across time and not to their movement through space.) David Henkin has taken reception and public sphere theorists to task for ignoring “physical space” by rendering the public sphere as “decidedly abstract and dispersed” and reading as only ever private. But Henkin, who relentlessly and brilliantly spatializes the concept of the public sphere, often seems more interested in how humans were mobilized by text than in the ways in which print itself moves. Understanding the way texts forge connections between people without confronting the fact that texts are material, and that people live in space, is often ultimately ineffective. But by shifting our gaze to questions of circulation, without leaving problems of connection and community behind, we can uncover new avenues in the history of print.

Book historians have, of course, long thought physically about print. Examining the importance of the circulation can reveal the material prerequisites—capital, presses, roads, vehicles, labor—that must be met before discourse can create what Warner calls a “text public,”

requirements that affect who has access to it, physically and intellectually.  

Robert Darnton’s influential “communications circuit,” for example, pays careful attention to carters and flooded rivers and paper manufacturers. 

And, much more recently, Janice Radway argues that it is only due to certain printing, binding, and circulation technologies (and the idea of intellectual property) that “we can pose the question of what any book ‘says’ or ‘means’ and what it ‘does’ to those who ‘read’ it.” Additionally, since Natalie Zemon Davis’s call to “consider a printed book not merely as a source for ideas and images, but a carrier of relationships,” scholars have investigated the real-world process that links authors and readers (among others) in what Radway calls a “cacophonous, chaotic, ongoing social conversation.” Indeed, thanks to several decades of work in the history of the book, these material contexts of circulation, and their social consequences, have been more and more thoroughly studied.

But the history of libraries, and of public libraries in particular, has tended to be rather isolated from the rest of book history and the larger field of cultural history. (When Darnton laid out his circuit, and in the process essentially founded the history of the book in America, for example, he left libraries out of the picture.) This is, in part, because library historians have often

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34 Warner, Publics, 66.
focused internally on the profession—on the politics and practices of librarianship, from training regimens to collections management—sometimes to the exclusion of other, larger questions and contexts.\textsuperscript{39} At the same time, scholars of twentieth-century America generally ignore libraries. Indeed, aside from the occasional mention of Carnegie libraries as examples of Gilded-Age philanthropy, libraries don’t appear at all in many large-scale histories of the modern United States. Even as corporate cultural institutions (department stores, radio stations, film studios, television networks) ascended, so did public libraries. But, perhaps too eager to buy into a narrative in which the birth of a raucous, electronic, consumerist mass culture spelled the inevitable death of older forms and measures cultural value—in which film, radio, television, and the internet each, in turn, killed the book—historians of twentieth-century America tend to ignore the coexistence, however strained, of libraries and mass media. As a consequence, in this scholarship, you are more likely to find a discursion on an obscure radio broadcast or relatively minor brand than you are to stumble upon a mention of these institutions which were crucial to both the fantasy and the function of a shared, public culture.

This project is thus, in part, a call to take libraries seriously as influential and illuminating parts of American life over the past century. Sara Ahmed writes that emotional and political connections “depend[ ] on how objects move around,” that “[t]he lines that bind are also ones

\textsuperscript{39} The fate of the journal once known as Libraries & Culture is indicative of this problem and of attempted solutions to it. In its 40 years (1966-2006) under that title, the journal published fascinating, thoroughly-researched articles about library collections, policies, and so on, that were historically grounded but which spoke largely to librarians and library scientists and only rarely to a wider field. In 2006, the journal’s name was changed to Libraries & the Cultural Record in 2006, and then six years later to the even more general (and library-less) Information & Culture: A Journal of History. “The journal honors its (45+ year) heritage by continuing to publish in the areas of library, archival, museum, conservation, and information science history,” the editors explain. “However, the journal’s scope has been broadened significantly beyond these areas to include the historical study of any topic that would fall under the purview of any of the modern interdisciplinary schools of information.” “About,” Information & Culture: A Journal of History, http://www.infoculturejournal.org/about.
that are created by the movement of objects that circulate as common goods." All objects are meaningful, certainly, but there is something particular and peculiar about books, about objects filled with symbols which signify so directly and multiply and wildly, about objects which contain their own worlds as they move through ours. Books contain claims for connection and, in moving through space, assert yet more, as Benedict Anderson, for one, has argued. Libraries are the places where we can most clearly see how this happens. Not simply purveyors of a sort of vaguely common cultural experience, libraries are funded by taxes—which literalize a sense of mutual obligation central to the idea of community—and filled with cultural resources to which anyone is at least theoretically meant to have access. This is quintessentially “public culture”: a set of objects and ideas acquired with public funds, quite literally held in common, and thought to constitute a shared patrimony. Public culture is, thus, material (the actual shared stuff) and imaginary (the fantasy of common consciousness) at the same time. It is, as we will see, a material fantasy played out in space.

The content, language, and ideas embodied by these materials did, of course matter. As Bernadette Lear writes, “choosing items for public library shelves was an intricate calculus, a constant distillation.” And bookmobiles, having fewer shelves for fewer books, required distilling this distillation even further. Bookmobile collections were, consequently, carefully

41 See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, esp. 9-46. Other scholars have argued that print is insufficient, as well, because it is often inadequately circulated; if people cannot or do not access the print that supposedly brings them into being as national subjects in particular times and places, then how is that process actually supposed to work? See, for example, Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation-Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 33-104.
43 Eleanor Brown wrote in her 1967 survey of the field that “the physical size of a bookmobile limits the range and kind of material to be carried.” Eleanor Brown, *Bookmobiles and Bookmobile Service* (Metuchen, NY: Scarecrow Press, 1967), 80.
chosen, and often quite conservative. One sample policy from the 1960s, for example, said that collections should be made up of “highly-readable, attractive, popular general books,” and that only “the very finest, most highly-recommended titles for children” be offered, because of limited space.\(^{44}\) Collections decisions were shaped by this need to appeal to the greatest number of patrons with a small selection, but also by competing ideas about race, class, gender, sexuality, language, ability, and more.\(^{45}\) In one 1956 romance novel, for example, all hell breaks loose when a bookmobile staffer accidentally sends a child home with a “particularly unsavory ‘mystery’ of the hard-boiled type.”\(^{46}\) And as we will see, Civil Rights activists explicitly chose to stock their mobile collections with books emphasizing African American experiences, and American propagandists in postwar Germany chose carefully (if ineffectively) the books they thought would best encourage sympathy with America’s cause. When questions of content and selection boil over, when they highlight gaps between the ideas and intentions of different actors, I will take them up and explore their contours.

But this dissertation is, for the most part, not a story about content. This is because bookmobiles, by highlighting books’ materiality, made content less important than you might expect. For many of the people you will encounter in these pages, in fact, it was more important \textit{that} books were shared (and where they were shared) than it was \textit{what} books took part. Discussions of and debates about content were remarkably infrequent among the proponents and operators of bookmobiles, a fact that a narrow focus on literacy and content would obscure. (This infrequency itself will be the subject of analysis later on, since it tended to result from and reproduce the assumptions and preferences of middle-class, white librarians.) Rather than issues

\(^{44}\) Brown, \textit{Bookmobiles and Bookmobile Service}, 81.


of content, it was questions of space and symbolism—about where bookmobiles would go, who they would serve, and what meaning they would make along the way—that were much, much more common. The idea of public books, and their presence in public space, more than the actual content of any of those books in particular, was what mattered. As the El Paso conflict over the bookmobile’s paint job makes clear, bookmobiles were themselves important and contested symbols that “flagged” (in Michael Billig’s words) a particular, if perpetually uncertain, kind of belonging.\(^47\) A fantasy of collective reading, produced by the both solidly material and symbolically fraught movement of books through shared space, was enough, it seems, to allow organizers to imagine a sense of community, a universal culture, a common consciousness.

While bookmobile administrators seemed somewhat ambivalent about which books found their way onto the road, content may have mattered more to patrons and readers. But it’s hard to know for sure; as is often and unfortunately the case in media history, evidence of reception is fragmentary, unclear, or simply nonexistent. While production is often lavishly documented (through authors’ correspondence, scripts, studio notes, and so on), the vast majority of individual experiences of media are fleeting: brief, rarely documented, and even more rarely preserved. In its focus on circulation—what happens \textit{between} production and reception—this study of bookmobiles offers a complication of this dichotomy, even as it cannot entirely escape it. Librarians do not produce the cultural objects they circulate, but they do, importantly, choreograph and facilitate encounters with them. The key feature of these interactions aboard the bookmobile—the ability to meet people face to face, where they live—meant, though, that evidence of its reception was even more ephemeral than usual. The sort of in-person interaction

\(^{47}\) Billig argues that in stable, modern states, nationalism has become banal, everyday—“unnamed” and “unnoticed.” This is because belonging to the nation is “‘flagged’, in the lives of its citizenry”—with literal flags, but also with language (“we,” “our”)—and thus “the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations.” Michael Billig, \textit{Banal Nationalism} (London: Sage, 1995), 6, 8.
the bookmobile encouraged is precisely the sort of response that tends not to make it into the archive. Most bookmobiles, for example, invited patrons to make requests for books not in the bookmobile’s collection, which the librarian would find and bring around next time. But those requests, while shaping individual experiences of the bookmobile and its contents, were almost never preserved. (Additionally, the primary way that people could resist a bookmobile was simply to not use it in the first place, a strategy that usually left little mark in the archive.48)

Where there are moments when audience reception is discoverable, as in a careful survey of patrons undertaken by American bureaucrats in West Germany or in controversies like those in El Paso, I will carefully analyze these responses to mine what they can (and cannot) tell us about everyday experiences of the bookmobile by its users and non-users. In other cases, when information about collections and circulation trends allow it, I will make informed deductions about the messy relationship between administrative intent, collection content, and audience.

In this focus on circulation and space, on objects and feelings, this dissertation proposes a somewhat unusual path into the history of libraries in America. The robust scholarship on the “library as place” that has emerged over the past decade and a half suggests a turn toward issues of space and geography, even if the focus tends to be on space in libraries rather than on libraries in space.49 But despite this turn, an understandable if problematic trend in library history is a relentless focus on questions of literacy and reading. The only monograph on the history of the bookmobile, Christine Pawley’s case study of bookmobiles in two rural Wisconsin counties during the Cold War, exhibits exactly that emphasis, narrowing the implications of a fascinating

49 For a sense of the range of this scholarship, see the essays in John E. Buschman and Gloria J. Leckie, ed., The Library as Place: History, Community and Culture (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006).
Pawley creatively and elegantly shows how the counties’ bookmobiles emerged from and remained enmeshed in the long history of literacy and education in the United States. But despite a titular interest in “place,” Pawley’s work does not thoroughly take up the spatial questions—of networks, of cartography, of political geography, of distribution, of segregation and separation—that the bookmobile raised in the twentieth century. This dissertation explores the place of the bookmobile in the larger culture, as opposed to how that culture impinged on a single local context. It also approaches the bookmobile outside of an institutional history framework, examining a range of programs, including those not undertaken by public libraries. It thus expands upon Pawley’s work, and upon the subfield of library history more generally, while at the same time opening up a range of new possibilities for thinking about public culture in the United States.

“Earthquakes of Change”—and the Shape of Things to Come

In 1959, popular and influential sociologist C. Wright Mills described his sense of a world being transformed around him:

And now our basic definitions of society and of self are being overtaken by new realities. I do not mean merely that never before within the limits of a single generation have men been so fully exposed at so fast a rate to such earthquakes of change. I do not mean merely that we feel we are in an epochal kind of transition, and that we struggle to grasp the outline of the new epoch we suppose ourselves to be entering. I mean that when we try to orient ourselves—if we do try—we find that too many of our old expectations and images are, after all, tied down historically: that too many of our standard categories of

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thought and of feeling as often disorient us as help to explain what is happening around us.  

While the postwar moment was one of rapid and disorienting change, the real origin of these “earthquakes of change” might easily be pegged to the 1890s. (“There can be no great change without a terrible upheaval, a social earthquake,” Josiah Strong promised in 1891. It was in the 1890s that, in the wake of Reconstruction’s collapse, racial antipathy and racist legislation solidified into Jim Crow. It was in the 1890s that rapid urbanization and immigration raised specters of dangerous proximity to join the older American dream of wide-open spaces. It was in the 1890s that progressivism emerged to change how it was possible to think about state power and social welfare. It was in the 1890s that finance capitalism and consumer capitalism, together, upended the American economy and American culture. It was in the 1890s that the invasion of the Philippines changed the way Americans practiced empire and kicked off more than a century of overseas interventions and occupations. And it was in the 1890s that the traveling library movement began to send books out into the world.

The bookmobile was a tool for “struggling to grasp the outline of the new epoch,” for “orienting ourselves” to new realities. But despite the bookmobile’s youth its use involved—more than most wanted to admit, lest it sour Byrnes’s “thrilling new visions”—carrying the past into the future. The bookmobile was, of course, a twentieth-century technology designed to ferry about technologies that hadn’t been new for almost half a millennium. But more than that, I want to argue, when the bookmobile went out on the “rugged and smooth roads” of America, it carried with it what Mills might call a set of “expectations…tied down historically.” As it embodied the dream of “common consciousness,” in other words, the bookmobile also embodied a set of

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assumptions emerging from the great tragedies of America’s twentieth century: racial
segregation, imperial violence, and economic inequality. These assumptions—that communities
can form at a distance, that marginal spaces and people can be incorporated into a community
without requiring fundamental changes, that communities can be built by the movement of
objects through space—ultimately shaped what Doreen Massey calls the “power geometry” of
contemporary life, limiting the extent to which the bookmobile could actually orient a society on
the cusp of great change.⁵³

Though bookmobiles may best illustrate their confluence in American culture, these
assumptions were not unique to mobile librarianship. And so, in an effort to think through the
dream of common consciousness, this project focuses on the bookmobile without allowing that
focus to become myopic or mechanical. It begins with the bookmobile, in other words, but does
not always end up there, as mobile libraries offer a way to pry open the larger debates that
refracted and fragmented American life in the twentieth century. In order to investigate those
debates in a variety of contexts, what follows is organized into a series of chapters, each
constructed of linked case studies, based on archival research in thirteen states as well as on
close readings of correspondence, newspaper articles, film reels, editorial cartoons, Supreme
Court opinions, poetry, photographs, and more. These chapters are both thematically distinct and
roughly chronological: Over the course of the project—as over the course of the century—we
will watch the traveling library and bookmobile emerge, we will watch the dream of common
consciousness founder on the shoals of segregation, empire, and capitalism, and we will watch as
common consciousness is reimagined (sort of) in digital space. In each, we will see how the idea

⁵³ According to Massey, “power geometry” is that by which people in what is supposed to be a universally
mobilizing era are often “placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections.” Some move,
some don’t, and some can only move in certain circumstances for certain reasons. Doreen Massey, Space, Place &
Gender (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 149.
of common consciousness could not quite survive its practice, how its hopes were dashed by what those hopes failed to account for and transform.

Chapter One examines the early traveling library movement, focusing on the founding of the Kansas Traveling Library by suffragists. It illustrates and analyzes the movement’s emerging method: using books to bring people together to form communities on the scales of neighborhood, town, state, and nation. It argues that this method depended on assumptions that—while useful to middle-class, white clubwomen making claims on citizenship—would ultimately haunt the bookmobile in the century that followed. The chapter ends by following the traveling library model into the automotive age, exploring how new technologies and new infrastructures would change and intensify the dream of common consciousness wrought by the movement of books.

The next three chapters track the failures of this dream on fractured ground, when librarians and government officials used bookmobiles to offer visions of community limited by the key assumptions described above. Chapter Two addresses the consequences of assuming you could build community at a distance, especially when that assumption was taken up by people terrified by the prospect of cross-racial intimacy. In particular, the chapter explores the place of bookmobiles in the segregated South, where they embodied a version of common consciousness that aimed to share culture without contact. It argues that many bookmobiles ended up reinforcing segregation by bringing books to African Americans in order to keep them from white-controlled spaces. And then, by looking at desegregation scandals and a 1966 Supreme Court case, the chapter shows how the end of library segregation did not, ultimately, spell the end of control and separation as central parts of American life. Chapter Three examines what happened when the U.S. government tried to incorporate into the nation those spaces that had been marginal to (or marginalized by) American identity, without aiming to change the nation itself. The chapter looks
at two federal bookmobile programs—a New Deal project in New Mexico and a public diplomacy effort in Cold War West Germany—in order to argue that memories and fantasies of the nineteenth-century frontier shaped twentieth-century efforts to build and manage modern, democratic, and “American” communities at home and around the world. Chapter Four examines bookmobiles and supermarket-based library branches in postwar suburbia, arguing that the conviction that you could build communities by moving objects through space ended up replacing the values of public culture with those of consumer capitalism.

We continue to put incredible (and perhaps untenable) faith in the ability of shared information to build communities, even if much of that information travels not county highways but what used to be called the Information Superhighway. The final chapter of this dissertation explores the fate of common consciousness in this seemingly new context. Turning away from questions of intellectual property or jeremiads about decline and loss—both of which dominate discussions of physical books and digital technology—this chapter emphasizes instead continuity between the past and the present. Mobile text continues to bring the past into the future, in other words. Ultimately, by focusing on the way the Internet Archive digitizes books and then distributes them via bookmobiles, the chapter argues that (despite the claims of digital utopians) physical books, physical spaces, and physical bodies remain central to fantasies of belonging in the twenty-first century.

“Even when they do not panic, men often sense that older ways of feeling and thinking have collapsed,” Mills wrote, “and that newer beginnings are ambiguous to the point of moral stasis.”54 Always just on the horizon, about to arrive and change everything, the bookmobile’s promise was perpetually deferred and, in fact, inherently limited by the remains of the past. So

54 Mills, Sociological Imagination, 4.
when bookmobiles did arrive, they bore broken, troubled promises alongside books and magazines. Let’s see what happened when they did. Here comes the bookmobile!
Figures

Figure 1: Catawba County Map
From the North Carolina Digital Collections (http://digitalstatelibrarycontentdm.oclc.org/u?p249901coll36,88)
CHAPTER ONE

“We Need Union of Force...and Good Literature”: Building Infrastructures of Feeling in the Progressive Era and Beyond

“Looking forth on pavement and land, or outside of pavement and land, Belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits.”
–Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (1855) 55

“[O]ur weal is common weal; we thrive only in a commonwealth; our exaltation is the exaltation of our fellows; their elevation is our enlargement.”
–Richard T. Ely (1896) 56

“Libraries must be mobilized. Books must travel more.”
–Melvil Dewey (1901) 57

In May, 1898, Mary Keating was in Cimarron, Kansas, on a tour to promote the new Kansas Traveling Library in the sparsely populated, far western reaches of the state. Cimarron, a tiny town about 300 long, flat miles from the state capital (and library headquarters) in Topeka, was one of many small communities Keating hoped would benefit from the traveling library, which sent boxes of books across the state to areas that could not afford public libraries of their own. “These western counties need building up to a higher standard and I have a desire to be an instrument in my Father’s hand to help in such formation,” she wrote back to Topeka. “We need union of force to that end and good literature.” 58 This chapter is about the relationship between those two things—union and literature—and how their combination was used by people like Keating to build communities, transform the landscape, and make claims as public persons and civic beings decades before many of them were allowed to vote. Emerging out of a progressive

58 Mary Keating to Lucy Johnston, May 13, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Lucy (Browne) Johnston Papers, 1846-1937; Kansas Historical Society (Topeka, Kansas).
obsession with connection and common consciousness (union) and a faith in mobile print (literature) as a way of achieving it, traveling libraries like the one in Kansas sought to develop the physical and cultural systems necessary for the formation of social democracy’s “thick mesh.”

If that mesh was to take form, then the fantasies of cohesion and commonality that so characterized the turn-of-the-century moment would have to come together materially in the world, and progressive reformers sought to make it do so.59 Chief among those efforts were educational movements. From compulsory schooling laws to Americanization programs to the use of new technologies in classrooms to the rise and flowering of the public library movement, progressives tried to transform the spaces, materials, and mechanisms of learning in the United States.60 “[T]he great popular educational movement...is sweeping like a tidal wave over the country,” declared Ellen Herontin, the president of the General Federation of Woman’s Clubs in 1898.61 But while it captured the fury and scope of that enterprise, Herontin’s briny analogy undersold the structural nature of this attempt to use education to transform American life. With books and periodicals, with university extensions and professional societies, with Chautauquas and traveling libraries, progressive reformers and educators developed specific—and often

59 Recently, Glenn Gendzel, in an effort to determine what linked progressives into a movement, quotes reformers like Mary Parker Follett and Edward Alsworth Ross on what they called “collective will” or “social will” and Simon Patten on what he called“a state whose power will be superior to that of any combination of selfish individuals.” Michael McGerr argues that association and state power were twin motivators of the progressive project. And Richard Hofstadter influentially wrote in 1944 of progressivism that “its leading figures...share[d] a common consciousness of society as a collective whole rather than a congeries of individual atoms.” Glen Gendzel, “What the Progressives Had in Common,” _Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era_ 10 (2011): 335; Michael McGerr, _A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920_ (New York: Free Press, 2003), especially 66-68; Richard Hofstadter, _Social Darwinism in American Thought_ (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 [1944]), 168-169.


specifically *mobile*—methods for creating and disseminating new kinds of knowledge, with what they hoped would be new kinds of effects. But these were not just ways of transmitting knowledge. They were attempts to move people, physically and emotionally, into new and collective spaces—classrooms, churches, settlement houses, libraries—to learn and to find something in common.\(^{62}\) This seemingly paradoxical combination of place-bound community with new kinds of mobility was particularly progressive, as it necessitated an odd way of looking at the world that emerged most fully in the late nineteenth century. Library historian Christine Pawley has asserted that progressives “systematically channeled reading materials to particular groups of people.”\(^{63}\) But while Pawley is perceptive on the political contexts of those efforts (particularly as it relates to immigration and Americanization), she generally overlooks the infrastructures that made it newly possible to really *move* people, in all registers of that word—and, more importantly, the new ways of thinking about infrastructure those possibilities required.

Constructing new systems for producing and distributing information at the turn of the twentieth century—for channeling the tidal wave—represented a task as monumental, in its way, as the furious, early- and mid-nineteenth-century building of canals and railways. It, too, required new approaches: to the landscape, to mobility, to the state, to enterprise, to the relationship of urban and rural, to distance, and to newfound proximity. Just as the Erie Canal and the railroads had been responsible for the “annihilation of space and time,” in the words of Karl Marx and many of his contemporaries—or for “compress[ing] distance and time,” in historian Carol Sheriff’s—new educational infrastructures like traveling libraries worked to link

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\(^{62}\) That these spaces were primarily bourgeois, or aimed at achieving the middle-class progressive goal of ameliorating without actually transforming the economic system of the country, is one of the particular ironies and failures of this project.

\(^{63}\) Pawley, *Reading Places*, 67.
a nation together by connecting people across vast and alienating space.\textsuperscript{64} And in this case, the
distance overcome was as much psychic as geographic. In order for this new ideal of community
to take shape in the world, the system to make it happen could not be either physical or
sentimental. It would, in fact, have to be both, which is why this chapter offers a different way of
looking at infrastructure, as something both material and emotional, both concrete and cultural:
an \textit{infrastructure of feeling}.

Historian of technology Bruce Seely has described infrastructure as “an intricate—and as
we have been reminded, delicate—network of supporting elements.”\textsuperscript{65} And many in the
progressive movement, not least those who founded libraries, understood that for a shared
consciousness to happen, this sort of carefully-wrought, intricate, and delicate system would
need to be built across the landscape. This was, in many ways, especially true of those
progressives who worked in the sorts of rural areas where traveling libraries were most
prominent. Indeed, historian Daniel Rodgers has argued that North Atlantic “agricultural
progressives” in this period frequently turned to cooperation and combination—encouraged,
especially in Europe, by “thickly planted associational networks”—as a solution to a variety of
problems faced by isolated farmers confronting new economic, social, and geographic realities.
From dairy cooperatives to new educational efforts to planned communities, these efforts were
intended to inculcate “a deeper cooperative spirit.” In these movements, Rodgers asserts,
agricultural progressives demonstrated their belief that “the countryside was pliant and moldable,

\textsuperscript{64} Wolfgang Schivelbusch, \textit{The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century}

its terrific inner motion bendable into consciously chosen channels.”66 While traveling libraries tended to plug into existing agricultural progressive networks (rather than emerge directly from them), this commitment—to developing technological and cultural systems that could link people across a transformable landscape—deeply influenced the movement and the ways its members thought about infrastructure and belonging. This was a context in which cooperation was material as much as emotional, where combination could have immediate effects—where the “glimmering of the grand truths of social solidarity,” which Richard Ely said was just beginning to be seen in 1896, could take shape in paper, earth, and flesh.67

This chapter will examine how new ideas about infrastructure and belonging were enacted in the movement of books through space. It begins by examining progressivism’s rhetorical and material obsession with infrastructure, and by proposing “infrastructure of feeling” as a useful way of thinking about the relationship between landscape, matter, culture, and community. It then turns to the origins and intentions of the traveling library movement, which emerged out of that broader ideological investment in building infrastructures to form communities. Women’s clubs were particularly influential in building traveling libraries, and so that section will also examine the ways that doing so meant clubwomen could claim a powerful public role despite their disenfranchisement. The chapter will then zoom in on Kansas—that hotbed of radical, Populist, and progressive organizing—by treating the Kansas Traveling Library as a paradigmatic example of how these general ideas were practiced on the ground. Specifically, we will see how the program used mobile print to turn isolated people scattered across a lonely landscape—“many domestic women & lonely old ladies & all Mothers &

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Grandmothers,” in the words of one patron—into neighborhoods, which could then be tied together to build communities on even larger scales.68 Finally, in order to see how the fantasies of infrastructure and community developed in the traveling library movement transitioned to new contexts offered by automobility, the chapter closes by analyzing a series of visual and literary representations of bookmobiles. Watching these ideal vehicles cross ideal landscapes in maps and children’s books, we will see how not just moving books but putting them on the road both extended and transformed the library’s capacity for creating infrastructures that might, just might, have made common consciousness possible.

“The Thronged and Common Road”: Infrastructures of Feeling

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the first decades of the twentieth, progressive reformers confronted the consequences of what Rev. Josiah Strong called “the unprecedented and disproportionate development of material civilization” at the expense of the moral, ethical, and emotional.69 Against “individualism,” which it saw as the dominant political virtue of the Gilded Age and as inadequate amid new realities, progressivism (like Populism) turned instead to new visions of community and connection that would understand the relationship of the physical and spiritual as fraught but mutually constitutive.70 Historians of the Progressive Era have argued that progressivism was marked by a desire to “solve” the problem of class by transcending it, and that a commitment to “association” as a social and political strategy (and to a collective “the People” as an abstract idea), as well as a faith in state power as

68 Lena Fuller to Johnston, June 11, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.
an engine for positive change, were key parts of that project.\textsuperscript{71} Traveling libraries—which often grew out of associations, which were devoted to connecting people through print, which frequently sought to elide class differences and Americanize immigrants, and which typically ended up as departments of state governments—combined these impulses in an illustrative fashion.\textsuperscript{72} What is even more illuminating is the way in which traveling libraries embodied a particular way of combining them: in a commitment to material and cultural systems that would facilitate emotional connection, in a commitment to what I call infrastructures of feeling.

“Structures of feeling,” according to Raymond Williams, are “social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations, which have been \textit{precipitated} and are more evidently and more immediately available.” These common habits and ways of thinking, in other words, structure cultural contexts without necessarily being visible. Williams argues that these structures are “at the very edge of semantic availability,” unsolidified, but that does not, I insist, mean that they are necessarily immaterial or non-systemic.\textsuperscript{73} A chemical solution may appear homogenous, but it is in fact finely structured by physical linkages. In order to be shared, even in the inchoate manner Williams intends, the ideas and assumptions that make up social formations must \textit{circulate} materially in the world. And in order to circulate, there must exist a system that can support their transmission. An \textit{infra}structure of feeling, then, might be most easily understood as less a set of shared ideas themselves but rather that which makes them possible: the solution itself, the material framework and cultural grammar in which people are immersed and that allow them to share (or, at least, try to share) common understanding.

\textsuperscript{71} On association and state power, see McGerr, \textit{Fierce Discontent}, especially 66-68. On the progressive project of replacing class-conscious and class-riven society with “the people,” see Shelton Stromquist, \textit{Reinventing “The People”: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{72} On Americanization and traveling libraries, see Pawley, \textit{Reading Places}, 68-71.

\textsuperscript{73} Raymond Williams, \textit{Marxism and Literature} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133-134.
In their commitment to materializing their feelings—in schools, settlement houses, urban planning, public health policies, road beautification projects, and libraries—progressives worked hard to develop those infrastructures that link people together in body and spirit, understanding them to be key to the construction of social democracy. Such infrastructures would, ideally, not simply create shared spaces. Those spaces would, they insisted, bring to the surface of social life a common consciousness—sadly but only temporarily submerged in a sea of individualism—that would change the world. As we saw in the introduction, Washington Gladden and Charlotte Perkins Gilman turned to material metaphors—of trees, of watches, of batteries—to explicate their dream of common consciousness. They were not alone, and others took it even further. Jane Addams, for example, argued that the dawning of the new century demanded a “social morality”—and thus a new kind of democracy—in place of an individual one. Americans had become very good at “[c]ertain forms of personal righteousness,” according to Addams, wherein they knew, say, not to steal. This excessively individual approach, however, “makes virtue easy,” and fundamentally misunderstands “the exigencies of contemporaneous life.” This new kind of morality is not easy to develop, Addams warned the readers of her Democracy and Social Ethics (1902), and requires finding the kind of “common fund of memories and affections” that characterizes family relations. Developing that fund in a social context marked in new ways by massive scale, class stratification, and a cocooning individualism had its challenges. And for Addams, the solution was about physical mobility in the physical world: “We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by travelling a sequestered byway,” she insisted, “but by mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least

73 Addams, Democracy, 5, 6.
74 Addams, Democracy, 7.
see the size of one another’s burdens.” For Addams, the foundation of a truly *social* democracy is the physical infrastructure of shared space and thus of shared experience.

This infrastructure is simultaneously, inextricably physical and emotional. Entering the “thronged and common road” means not just existing alongside a mass of people but empathizing with them, understanding their burdens in ways that change one’s relationship to democracy and the commonweal. The physically shared space of the street is a condition of possibility for a common experience which is, then, the condition of community. “[G]oing forward as we must in the heat and jostle of the crowd” may be uncomfortable, Addams explains, but it turns out that discomfort, and its eventual and collective amelioration, is precisely the point. “It is as though we have thirsted to drink at the great wells of human experience,” she writes, “because we knew that a daintier or less potent draught would not carry us to the end of our journey.” For Gilman, the “tingling” of the “I”—in her description of common consciousness as “the tingling ‘I’ that reaches wider and wider”—captures the carefully harmonized vibrations of matter *and* spirit that characterized her utopian longing, vibrations that could be organized in service of a newly connected world. Addams and Gilman thus carried Gladden’s physical metaphors even further than his trees and chains, imagining *systems* for the creation, distribution, and management of belonging, of collective consciousness.

The gender politics of this move were complicated, to say the least. It could at times suggest a flattening that actually wasn’t very flat. Gladden, in particular, promoted disappearance into the family as a strategy somehow new and exciting, as if women had not been forced

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socially and legally to do just that for centuries." And, as Caroll Smith-Rosenberg reminds us, “rituals of cohesion” could be not “constitutive social dramas” but “potentially repressive of legitimate female protest and supportive of male hegemony.” But, at the same time, finding a “common consciousness” could, at least at some times and in some places, open women’s eyes to the power of what historian Gayle Gullett calls “politicized solidarity.” Indeed, in women’s hands, this way of thinking about infrastructure as both physical space and emotional circuitry could be a tool for social change and political power. The intersection of physical and emotional was, after all, a place women occupied quite thoroughly (if not always easily) in this period.

Gilman led the charge on this front, pushing women in particular to realize that the physical and emotional space of “the home is not isolated,” a fact of which “we are made painfully conscious through its material connections,—gas-pipes, water-pipes, sewer-pipes, and electric wires.” Even “[t]he mere physical comfort of the home,” she insists, “needs collective action, to say nothing of the psychic connection in which we all live.” Her plans for a feminist future often involved exploiting the ways that the home was always shot through by networks (collective kitchens and laundries, for example), and her utopian fiction frequently put women in charge of controlling and maintaining those various networks.

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80 Gladden, “Rights,” 3-4. Gretchen Ritter has argued that women’s civic membership was depended, or at least seemed to depend, on an autonomy that separated her from the family as the sole way of identifying herself and her value. Gladden’s turn to identifying all value by a relation to the family network could, then, cause some problems. Gretchen Ritter, The Constitution as Social Design: Gender and Civic Membership in the American Constitutional Order (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3. On the often complicated but always influential role of women in the Social Gospel movement, see Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, eds., Gender and the Social Gospel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).


83 Quoted in Lieberman, “Power Lines,” 182.

supposedly feminine knack for stewarding comfort to claim a right to transform communities and their physical landscapes. The General Federation of Women’s Clubs, for example, took a leading role in fighting billboards to preserve “the full enjoyment of outdoor beauty” in the first decades of the twentieth century, and women’s organizations had for years before that used the idea of “municipal housekeeping” to push for sanitation reform.\(^{85}\) Thinking about infrastructures as something that needed not just the shaping of matter but also the organization of feeling let women stake important claims in a nation newly obsessed with both engineering and belonging.\(^{86}\)

“Since the development of a society requires common service, and that common service requires for its wise direction a common consciousness,” Gilman insisted in 1904, “therefore every modification of human activity which develops common consciousness is advantageous.”\(^{87}\) By the time she wrote that, many such modifications were already in process. And one of them, the traveling library, was working hard to make the dream of a common consciousness not just real, but material.

“Through New Channels”: Building the Traveling Library Movement

Grand plans to use print to create community, and to develop a consistently “thick mesh,” were complicated across large swaths of the country by the fact that, as Christine Pawley writes,

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\(^{87}\) Gilman, *Human Work*, 277.
“[r]ural isolation from print was profound” in the late nineteenth century. Without specific physical infrastructures (home postal delivery, reliable roads, local libraries, etc.), print could play only a minor role in constructing communities outside of cities, which made it difficult to imagine ways of building a “common consciousness” across the wide and sometimes lonely spaces of the United States. The public library movement, and the publicly- and Carnegie-funded explosion of library buildings, Henry Legler pointed out in 1908, had “provide[d] city dwellers with an amplitude of reading material, but there was until a few years ago no provision for similarly meeting the greater needs of the isolated persons living...in thousands of little hamlets, in mining and lumber camps, in uncounted farmhouses.” Or, as one applicant for a traveling library in Kansas pointedly put it in 1898, she and her fellow rural residents “have all the hungry craving for something good to read that the more pretentious town people have,” but fewer books available. The traveling library emerged out of new ways of thinking about the systems of belonging, and as an elegant solution to the problem of building communities that were both material and affective across the vastness of national space. “Forcing good books through new channels into places where they had rarely been used,” in Wisconsin Free Library Commission secretary F.A. Hutchins’s words, made it possible to imagine community taking shape on larger scales and along new infrastructures.

These libraries, which were usually operated either by states themselves or by federations of women’s clubs, shipped books in boxes, some of which could double as bookshelves, by rail and wagon to outlying communities, usually from a central stock. The box and its books would

90 O.M. Record to Johnston, July 14, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.
remain in place at a particular location (like a store or living room made newly a library), and after a set amount of time, it would be sent back and replaced by another, different box. This was an answer to a problem as old as the codex (books are relatively expensive) and a newer one emerging out of the public library and public education movements of the nineteenth century (enabling wide access to an abundant and varied collection of books is difficult). The first large-scale traveling library program was founded by Melvil Dewey in New York in 1892 (others would follow in that decade in Michigan, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Minnesota, Kansas, and elsewhere). These libraries grew out of the same progressive ideas about infrastructure—that it should be material and emotional, that it should be a cause and a product of both association and state power—that influenced Gladden, Addams, and others. Traveling libraries like Dewey’s tried to literalize “common fund” and “common consciousness” by making claims for a common culture then developing the physical, bureaucratic, and emotional systems that would facilitate its being shared. Traveling libraries allowed those areas “remote from centers of population,” in Legler’s words, to share a collection of books—and thus, theoretically, a consciousness—with distant places by specifically exploiting those infrastructures which did exist, like rail lines, and carefully designing and deploying other systems to achieve the goal of using books to shape belonging.92

Indeed, books—and more specifically, libraries that might contain and transport them—were particularly potent tools for accomplishing that goal. They were objects, yes, but they were objects that were densely packed with meaning, which could be carried across space and time. They could embody and communicate something (as much as that something might be debated or disliked), something that could approach an intellectual and cultural commons, a shared

92Legler, Books, 3.
consciousness—some complex, perpetually unfinished amalgam of ideas, stories, fears, desires, prejudices, and values—made and remade in circulation. Moving books between people, and thereby fostering connections between them, made it seem like it might be possible, as in Walt Whitman’s earlier fantasy of social print, to “leap beyond yet nearer bring; / This printed and bound book—but the printer and the printing-office boy.”

Oddly, though, in the early period, and especially in the Kansas case to be discussed below, there was remarkably little debate about what those books should be. From the fragmentary evidence left of the actual books sent out by the Kansas Traveling Library, for example, it seems that much of the requests by patrons were for non-fiction (an occasional request would come in for Russian literature in translation or for Shakespeare), and that many of the books sent out were the same. All extant evidence suggests that the librarians encouraged, and the patrons enthusiastically undertook, a particularly non-fiction-focused version of what Amy Blair calls “reading up.”

Surprisingly then, the question of what really constituted “up,” what counted as “good literature,” tended to be bracketed off. It was likely marked by some basic shared assumptions—about the value of certain kinds of lives (white, elite, supposedly exemplary) and about certain kinds of reading practices and cultural objects—that were widely shared among the aspirational middle classes (the audience, for example, for Charles Eliot’s “five-foot shelf” of Harvard Classics) from which the libraries’ organizers were most often

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93 Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 112.
95 A paper presented by Lucy Johnston about the value of traveling libraries, suggests only specific titles when they would assist teaching in public schools on topics like slavery (Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin), the history of American Indians (James Fennimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales, Helen Hunt Jackson’s Ramona, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Hiawatha), and geography (Bayard Taylor’s Library of Travel). It also briefly mentions that Daniel Deronda, Swiss Family Robinson, The Virginian, and Helen’s Babies were acquired by the Wisconsin system. These give some sense of the assumptions with which traveling librarians worked, but the paper leaves largely unspecified the scope of what is meant by “good reading,” or “good literature.” Lucy Browne Johnston, “Traveling Libraries,” folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers.
drawn. These assumptions were, however, often left undiscussed and undebated, gestured at with a “good” or a “fine” but hardly central to how the librarians imagined their project. Indeed, organizers seemed much more interested in discussing and determining the shape of their readers’ social interactions than their specific engagements with specific texts. This suggests that to a significant degree it was not the content of the books but the very fact of their circulation among people that mattered most to the progressive dream of building a common consciousness. As we will see in the next three chapters, however, that general indifference to content would—as other assumptions unfolded—ultimately have devastating consequences.

For librarians like Dewey, being public or shared did not just happen. It was not an easy, inevitable byproduct of the book. Rather, it had to be constructed as and by a system that would make it possible. “[E]xperience has proved that unless knowledge is as free as air or water it is fearfully handicapped,” Dewey explained in an influential 1901 pamphlet that summarized his experiences over the previous decade, “and the state can not afford to allow even the smallest obstacle to remain between any citizens and the desire for either inspiration or information.”

Knowledge (and, more precisely, its material manifestation in the book) should, thanks to the development of a public system for its distribution, flow as freely as water. (Whether water itself should be free was a rather trickier question in this era of privatized utilities.) Only a few pages later Dewey declares that “a library is like a reservoir of drinking water,” which must be

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96 Dewey, “Traveling Libraries: Field and Future of Traveling Libraries,” 5. He was not alone in linking information and public utilities. “I believe in the people’s ownership of human necessities such as light, heat, water, power, telephone and telegraph,” insisted Wisconsin traveling library pioneer Lutie Stearns. Additionally, Lucy Browne Johnston, who organized the Kansas Traveling Library (to be discussed below), also used water to explain the value of traveling libraries: “Just as thirty-four little streams winding their way through Dunn county would do more good than one large river miles away, so these thirty four little libraries, circulating through so many families, will do more good than the one big library at the county-seat or State Capital.” Stearns quoted in Pawley, “Advocate for Access,” 436; Lucy Browne Johnston, “Traveling Libraries,” folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers.
replenished frequently or risk stagnation. This is his argument for the importance of a traveling library system that would allow communities to trade and recirculate collections, to avoid the problems that Hutchins identified as the cause of village libraries’ frequent failures: “Uninteresting books” and “Infrequent supplies of new books.” But it is also, in its resonance with Addams’s “great wells of human experience,” a claim for building a system that would allow for shared experience.

In ways that also echo Gilman’s description of the home shot through with connections, Dewey treated the library—as a system for the distribution of material books, as an infrastructure of feeling that would facilitate the literacy necessary for a common consciousness—as a foundation on which individual and social character is built:

By common consent the supreme thing in education is the building of character, but character grows out of habits, habits are based in actions, actions on motives, and motives on reflection. What makes most people reflect? It is usually reading that begets reflection, reflection begets motive, motive begets action, action repeated begets habits and habits beget that supreme thing character.

This carefully structured, accumulative approach to reading captures a specific example of the progressive impulse to judiciously organize and order life on all its scales and in all of its spaces—from cradle to grave, from gutters to governance. Using “traveling book[s]” as a foundation for this work, Dewey presented traveling libraries as a quintessential infrastructure of feeling.

Occurring again and again, throughout the literature of the traveling library movement, is an emphasis on the inextricability of the emotional and the material in library work, in general,
and its “itinerant principle,” in particular. The purpose of a traveling library, Hutchins wrote in 1900, was “developing the ‘library spirit’ in all parts of the state.” This spirit was not simply the books themselves as material objects, or just the knowledge they conveyed, but that collective *feeling*, prompted by access to them, that such knowledge deserved to be shared broadly. It was often inchoate and ineffable—an 1896 *Public Libraries* editorial insisted that “[t]he library spirit which descends at [American Library Association] meetings cannot be explained or described”—but it could have material, and even infrastructural, effects. The library spirit closed a circuit: Like “common road[s]” which beget common consciousness, shared books help create an emotional response which is the condition for the development of physical channels allowing the further circulation of books, which then creates a community which desires books.

Inviting people to interact with both books and one another in this way, libraries had effects far beyond the province of literacy. Indeed, the whole purpose of traveling libraries, its architects seem to argue, was not books but contact, a productive friction: “Enthusiasm for the work has seemed to kindle at the touch,” Hutchins wrote (presaging Gilman’s talk of a similar kindling), “and the pioneers have often been overwhelmed with calls for advice and information.” What is kindled by this touch is a way of thinking about books as central features of social democracy’s “thick mesh.” As a report by a library committee in New York explained it, the job of those who have decided to start a traveling library program is to “awaken a sense of the obligation which rests on every citizen to make his less fortunate neighbor, so far

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103 *Public Libraries, Volume 1* (Chicago: Library Bureau, 1896), 134.
104 “The main purpose was to show people how greatly a library may benefit a community,” Hutchins explained, “and to create a desire for a local library.” Hutchins, *Traveling Libraries*, 3.
as possible, a reader of good books.”

This tingling, kindled obligation was an almost entirely new product of progressivism, and it was also the point where the material and the emotional—where the physical and the cultural—rubbed together so thoroughly they became indistinguishable.

When it comes to shaping communities, the traveling library movement was complicated—but also, in a way, animated—by the fact that such systems were as likely in their early years to be run by the state as not. In New York, the traveling library was from the beginning a department of the state government, funded by tax dollars, and organized from Albany. But in Wisconsin, for example, J.H. Stout used a number of such libraries, funded privately, to facilitate the circulation of books in Menomonie, Wisconsin, and the whole of Dunn County. His system was imitated across the state (unified under the Wisconsin Free Library Commission by Stout, Hutchins, and Lutie Stearns) and eventually incorporated into a state department in 1903. In 1899, of the 2500 traveling libraries across the country, fewer than half were funded by state governments.

Who was responsible for these libraries, then? In many, if not most, cases, the answer was a set of institutions that were incredibly influential in the Progressive Era: women’s clubs. In particular, state federations of women’s clubs funded and operated traveling library systems, large and small, “being appealed to therefor by the representatives of clubs in the smaller communities in their state.” In 1899, for example, Hutchins recorded traveling libraries run by women’s clubs in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, California, Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois,

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107 Hutchins, Traveling Libraries, 5.
108 On the history of the Wisconsin program, which has been the subject of more scholarly attention than any other, see Pawley, Reading Places, 67-111; Pawley, “Advocate for Access;” Legler, Books, 8-10.
110 Public Libraries, Volume 1, 180.
Henry Legler gave, in 1908, just a taste of the range of traveling library activities undertaken by women:

Some women in New Jersey have used them to lighten the long winter days and evenings of the brave men who belong to the life-saving service...; other women, in Salt Lake City, send them regularly to remote valleys in Utah; a number of state federations of women’s clubs use them to furnish books for study to isolated clubs; Mrs. Eugene B. Heard of Middleton, Ga., is devoting herself to...[a] system which reaches a large number of small villages on the Seaboard Air Line in five southern states; ...to the ‘mountain whites’ libraries are sent by women’s clubs in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. In Idaho, California, Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, and many other states, women’s clubs are doing the same work for miners, lumbermen, farmers, and sailors.¹¹²

Small wonder, then, that so many libraries were not governmentally funded.

But this points to a fissure, of sorts, in the ideology of the traveling library. The “library spirit” was a fundamental feature of public librarianship, but with women’s clubs running the show, the definition of “public” was potentially paradoxical.¹¹³ Historian Amy Richter has argued that women in the late nineteenth century were able to make claims for participation in and influence on infrastructure (railroads, in her case) thanks to an ideology she calls “public domesticity.” This “transplant[ation of] private expectations to public spaces” allowed women to create and exploit a productive ambiguity in the distinction between public and private.¹¹⁴ Like Gilman rupturing the supposedly sealed home, women’s clubs made the whole world private as a way of acting in public—and libraries played a prominent role in this dynamic. (It is not, I think, a coincidence that Legler described the library, and especially the extended library, as “this house of the open door.”)¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Hutchins, for one, registers some confusion on this front. He suggests that a lack of public funding in some states “has not stayed the rapid progress of the movement. It has probably helped it,” but later argues that “State commissions...do more to communicate the ‘library spirit’.” Hutchins, *Traveling Libraries*, 4, 7.
¹¹⁵ Henry E. Legler, *Library Ideals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1918), 11.
“home-influence” on single young men.116 And traveling libraries, by their very mobility, promised to increase the scope of that influence—and, importantly, the scale of women’s power to act on the world.

Women’s clubs offered what the Historian of the General Federation of Woman’s Clubs called, in 1898, “the training of power” alongside and through “the working of a spirit of human solidarity, a comprehension of the continuity of life.”117 Traveling libraries offered women a potent tool—print, mobile print—to accomplish that training and that work. Especially in the West, as Suzanne Stauffer has pointed out, libraries offered women opportunities for mobility, “autonomy, responsibility, and power” not as easily available in other fields and other locations.118 Women, and especially women of the West, needed to “march forward in concentrated action,” Idaho Traveling Library founder Margaret Stephenson Roberts insisted, to “help turn this Great West into a paradise.”119 And moving print would help make that possible. Indeed, as we will see in the case of the Kansas Traveling Library Commission, using traveling libraries to organize print and an emotional consciousness across distances large and small created opportunities to both claim and potentially reimagine citizenship in new ways.

“Little Neighborhoods”: On the Kansas Traveling Library Commission

116 Van Slyck, _Free to All_, 135.
117 Croly, _A History_, n.p. This sort of “training of power,” which might allow women to negotiate, complicate, and challenge standard and often oppressive categories was not unique to the United States. Benjamin Cohen argues, for example, that women’s clubs in India “networked together individuals and associations into complex webs that challenge and span simple categories of ruler and ruled, and...revealed that the categories of colonizer and colonized were constantly shifting and thus being renegotiated.” Benjamin B. Cohen, “Networks of Sociability: Women’s Clubs in Colonial and Postcolonial India,” _Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies_ 30 (2009): 170.
118 Suzanne M. Stauffer, “‘She speaks as one having authority’: Mary E. Downey’s Use of Libraries as a Means to Public Power,” _Libraries & Culture_ 40 (2005): 40.
119 This, she declared, “can be done only through organizing, counseling and standing together.” Margaret Stephenson Roberts, “Arise and Possess Thyself,” Reel 2, Margaret Stephenson Roberts Papers, 1896-1956, Schlessinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
The Kansas Traveling Library officially began in 1898, having been imagined and planned by three leaders of the Kansas Social Science Federation of Clubs in 1897.\textsuperscript{120} Intended to “provide books for the bookless,” to move print to those “miles from books of any description,” the library within twenty years circulated over 1,500 libraries throughout the state.\textsuperscript{121} Particularly influential was Lucy Browne Johnston, KSSF Library Committee Chair, who recalled her own childhood of rural reading deprivation.\textsuperscript{122} “Fortunately, or unfortunately,” she remembered years later, “the first years of my life were spent on a farm near a very small village without library privileges.”\textsuperscript{123} Dedicating herself to preventing such an experience for other children in her adopted state, Johnston took the lead in developing the idea for and organization of the library.

With echoes yet again of Gilman’s vision of the (always public) home, Johnston reported that her early request for books from women in Topeka had an illuminating effect: “They began at once to fulfill their pledge and soon our home was so crowded with books that the good husband said either the books or the family would have to move out.”\textsuperscript{124} The books did eventually move out of her house, but they did not move out of Johnston’s life for many years; she “remain[ed] an effective and inspiring worker in [the library’s] cause and progress” for at least two decades after its founding.\textsuperscript{125} Indeed, that role continued after the library became an official department of the state, the Kansas Traveling Library Commission, in 1899—making Johnston an important state

\textsuperscript{120} For details on the founding and history of the commission, see James W. Drury, \textit{The Kansas Traveling Library Commission: An Administrative History} (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Governmental Research Center, 1965).
\textsuperscript{121} Quotations from James L. King, et al., \textit{Third Biennial Report of the Kansas Traveling Libraries Commission 1902-'04} (Topeka: Geo. A. Clark, 1905), 6. By fifty years after its founding, the library circulated over 100,000 books, with that number doubling by 1962. Drury, \textit{Kansas}, 8.
\textsuperscript{122} On Johnston, and women’s clubs more generally, in the founding of the Kansas Traveling Library, see Diana Weaver, “Letters to Lucy Johnston: Addressing the Need for Literature on the Kansas Prairies,” \textit{Information & Culture} 48 (2013): 50-67.
\textsuperscript{123} Johnston to Mrs. E. G. Wickwire [draft], Sept. 25, 1915, folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers.
\textsuperscript{124} “Report of the Traveling Library Commission to the Kansas Social Science Federation of Clubs,” draft typescript, ca. 1900, folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers.
\textsuperscript{125} King, et al., \textit{Third Biennial Report}, 11.
official in her own right. More on that transition, and the role of women in arguing for it despite being denied suffrage, later. For now, let it suffice to say that the Kansas Traveling Library program, and Johnston’s part in it, make an ideal case study for exploring the ideology and operation of early library extension.

Johnston conceived of and designed the program to accomplish the progressive goals of efficient governance and, most importantly, common consciousness.\(^\text{126}\) Johnston’s assistant, Mary Keating, complained bitterly in 1898, for example, about a “county that can muster but one soldiers [sic] boy; a county whose officers are elected by whiskey and money; a town where much more money is spent for whisky than for the support of the gospel.”\(^\text{127}\) According to progressive proponents of traveling libraries, the best way to solve the problem such fragmentation and selfishness presented—to get everyone on the same page—was to more efficiently use state resources like print to make local communities more cohesive and then to link them together into a large-scale polity. A 1900 newspaper report, parroting the language of the Traveling Library’s organizers, told the story like this: “For many years there has been stored in the State Library...a wealth of knowledge practically useless to the mass of people because of the laws which prevented its distribution. … Realizing the utter uselessness of the books in the State Library, with no power to put them in the hands of the people, a standing committee on traveling libraries was appointed and the result has proved its efficiency.”\(^\text{128}\)

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\(^\text{126}\) It is unclear whether Johnston herself would have called herself a progressive. She was an active suffragist and a dedicated Republican, and some sources describe her as conservative. Insofar as the progressive movement coalesced at all, though, it did so with shared assumptions and shared goals. Whether or not Johnston identified with the progressive movement, or a member of a progressive movement, the ideas and tools she used were progressive in nature. While I generally try to avoid calling her a progressive, I do (where warranted) call her actions progressive.

\(^\text{127}\) Keating to Johnston, May 26, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.

Unleashing and wielding that “wealth of knowledge” more usefully, by creating infrastructures for its distribution, was meant to develop what Keating called “union of force” and Gladden might have called a common consciousness. This was to take place on intensely local levels, building what Legler called “little neighborhoods” out of clusters of individuals, and also on much larger scales.\(^{129}\) Shelton Stromquist argues that a key goal of the progressive movement was “reinventing civic virtue, freed from slavish party loyalty,” which could “constitute a more potent political force—the people—whose citizenship transcended differences of class or neighborhood.”\(^{130}\) And this could easily describe the motivations and operations of the urban institutions of progressivism, like settlement houses and city sanitation movements. But off on the vast prairies of Kansas, like in so many places in the only recently urbanizing United States, it was not unusual for miles to pass between houses, and for towns to seem to barely hang together. In order to allow people to transcend mere neighborhood loyalty, an intermediate step was necessary. Nellie Armentrout, secretary of the traveling library program, explained in 1904 that “[w]e reach a class of people who do not have access to the city libraries.... We go into the homes of farmers and the people of the little hamlets and towns.”\(^{131}\) This was the first step: taking individual homes and—by providing the emotional and material systems to bring people together—making neighborhoods out of them. Indeed, Armentrout, like Johnston and Keating, saw books and reading communities forming neighborhoods in the first place and then (as we will see a bit later) connecting those newfound neighbors to an infrastructure that allowed them access to the political center of the state and the intellectual life of the nation.


\(^{130}\) Stromquist, *Reinventing*, 56.

\(^{131}\) “Books in Demand,” *Kansas City Journal*, December 31, 1904.
The Traveling Library was not just born out of an ideological context obsessed with the idea of association and connection; one of its primary goals was to nurture and promote what public sphere theorists call associational life. This life involved the sorts of clubs and organizations that had been such an important part of American political and social life since the nation’s founding—and which frequently involved combination, print, and mobility as central components or tools. In 1773, for example, the New York Sons of Liberty crafted an “association” which they “carried about the city…to unite with their fellow citizens,” gathering signatures to indicate an official and conjoined public. And Benjamin Franklin’s circulating library was born when he realized that members of his club could combine their books to “become a common benefit,” and then sought to “render the benefit from the books more common, by commencing a public subscription library.” By their very nature—and despite the excessive baggage of rationality often thrust upon associational life and civil society—these sorts of organizations mimic democratic politics more broadly by being simultaneously institutional and emotional, about both governance and common bonds. Women’s clubs, as a particular variation on this older form of association, were especially adept at exploiting this place where formal politics bleeds into the organization of emotion. And they were even more skilled at amplifying their influence by expanding the scope and the density of those associations. A newspaper in 1900 said outright of the Kansas Traveling Library that “the original intention was to provide means and to encourage the organization of Women’s clubs.” The report is correct, but it

133 Reprinted in Hezekiah Niles, Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America (Baltimore: William Ogden Niles, 1822), 188.
135 “State Library,” Kansas Traveling Library Commission Clippings.
vastly undersells the scope and importance of encouraging association on the prairie. To illustrate, I want to now turn to a story that emerges from the archives of the Kansas Traveling Library and captures this dynamic at work.

In late summer, 1898, May Pressly wrote in a tidy hand from her home in Protection, Kansas, to Johnston, just under three hundred long miles away: “I write for information, can I as an individual join the C.L. [circulating library] by remitting two dollars and guaranteeing safe return of the books? I live on a ranch in a thinly populated county with but very little access to reading matter.” Pressley had apparently discovered the Traveling Library’s existence the way most potential participants did in those early years: by word of mouth. She knew that the library required from potential recipients two dollars (to cover freight expenses) and a guarantee of the books’ safety. But she missed what was probably the most important of the requirements. Johnston, in response, likely sent the standard form letter that went to anyone requesting information about receiving the library. A rather straightforward, bureaucratic document, it explained that the Traveling Library insisted on the formation of a library club, which could both raise funds and protect the books, as a prerequisite for receipt of a box. This was a relatively common feature among traveling library programs nationwide. The New York traveling library system, for example, required an “application of twenty-five resident taxpayers or of the officers of a university extension center, a club, course, or circle.”

With this requirement, the Kansas Traveling Library plugged into and increased the efficacy of existing clubs, especially study clubs for women, like the Columbian Club of Ottawa.

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136 Mrs. W.W. Pressly to Johnston, Aug. 8, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.
137 As a 1902 report by the Commission explained, the traveling libraries had “never been systematically advertised to the people,” unlike other programs like those in Wisconsin. Nonetheless, there was “a ready response” to the libraries among the people. James L. King, et al., Second Biennial Report of the Kansas Traveling Libraries Commission 1901-1902 (Topeka: W.Y. Morgan, 1902), 5.
the Ladies’ Shakespeare Club of Galena, the Coterie Club of Pratt, and the Current Literature & History Club of Jamestown. A women’s club in Winfield, for example, planned to spend part of 1899 studying constitutional history, and so requested a series of books to help them. (That they were focused on studying political and legal history, two decades before any of them could vote in federal elections, suggests the sometimes subtly radical purposes to which the traveling libraries were put.) The club requirement also—and importantly—inspired the creation of new clubs where there had not been any before. And this is just what happened in Protection. It had seemed, from her talk of a thin population, that the task Johnston had put before Pressly might have been too much. But several weeks after her first postcard, Pressly wrote back with good news: “I received your letter some time ago and in the mean time made a circuit of our district and f[ound] three families besides our own who are willing to enter in a club and form an association, the school board included in the families, there are in all ten members over fifteen years of age and all reliable and I think will take good care of your books.” With this small and fragmentary record, it is difficult to know if Pressly’s desires and Johnston’s aims aligned fully, but a carefully reading makes clear that this card carried with its good news at least a trace of shared purpose. Indeed, in its single sentence, the card neatly encapsulates three specific ways in which the women of the traveling library (Johnston and Keating but also Pressly and her

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140 Mrs. C.A. Place to Johnston, July 10, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.

141 May G. Pressly to Johnston, Aug. 22, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers. After research was completed for this project, this correspondence was briefly quoted and discussed by a library historian examining letters to Johnston in the first years of the Kansas Traveling Library in service of a discussion about reading on the prairie. My analysis here aims to open up this correspondence in ways that connect it to larger dynamics in American life at the turn of the twentieth century. See Weaver, “Letters to Lucy Johnston,” 59.
fellow patrons) used print to organize association, and “common consciousness,” as a political tool.

First, and most fundamentally, Pressly writes that she “made a circuit of [her] district” to find fellows to join her. Here, we can begin to see a geography of reading and community take shape in rural Kansas under the tutelage of Johnston and her crew. Science writer Brian Hayes has remarked on the distinctiveness of agricultural geography in the United States. Whereas traditional practices in Europe and Asia involved central villages whose residents worked surrounding fields, American agriculture was long characterized by “widely scattered” farmhouses.\(^{142}\) The result is the “peculiarly American sight” of “house and barn huddled together in one corner of a giant cornfield,” meaning many rural residents “tend to live...at a considerable distance from their neighbors.”\(^{143}\) In the early 1960s, literary scholar and cultural critic John Kouwenhoven traced this distance back to the Land Ordinance of 1785, which divided the land west of the Appalachian Mountains into a grid system. Remarking on its psychic effects, Kouwenhoven argued that that system was “a blueprint for a future society in which men would live each in his own domain, free and equal, each man’s domain clearly divided from his neighbors.”\(^{144}\) Not exactly a recipe for social cohesion and shared consciousness. Indeed, where progressives frequently decried the “promiscuous crowd[s]” of urban poverty—of the masses of city-dwellers living “without knowledge of each other, without fellowship, without...public spirit”—out on the prairies they could be just as worried about the similar effects of distance on

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the future of democracy.⁴⁴ Women like Pressly were not only “isolated so far as city advantages are concerned (living in the country),” as a similar library applicant put it that same year, but they could be isolated from one another and from the frictional, tingling newness of the progressive enterprise and its libraries.⁴⁵ “Wherever the traveling library system is introduced,” declared a 1901 report by the Kansas Traveling Libraries Commission, “it makes friends with the people.”⁴⁶ But it also, as importantly, made friends among the people. Having Pressly move through the space around her, bridging gaps between the dispersed people of her county, was doubly important. It meant that the library would reach more people and be adequately supported, yes, but it also meant something more: moving from door to door, Pressly quite literally traced out a desire for print in the land around her, and in the process she marked a new shape for her community.

Second is that desire itself. What better encapsulates the ideals of democracy, and of common consciousness, than Pressly’s declaration that she and her fellows are “willing to enter” into an association? Willingness and the voluntary are key features of democracy, according to theorists of both civil society and liberal virtue.⁴⁷ Willingly entered into and devoted to the circulation and discussion of print and ideas—“organized for the mutual benefit of its members,” as an applicant for the traveling library put it—clubs like those encouraged by Johnston were meant to serve as microcosms, as embodiments of an idea of democracy both old and new.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1890), 7; Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 211.
⁴⁵ Kouwenhoven was a bit more sanguine, writing that the landscape of the agricultural Midwest “embodies a number of the forms and patterns which seem to me to be characteristic of a civilization based as ours is upon a distinctive blend of technology and a somewhat untidy but dynamic form of democracy.” Kouwenhoven, Beer Can, 17.
⁴⁶ Emma Troudner to Johnston, Nov. 27, 1898, folder 3, box 3, Johnston Papers.
⁴⁹ Maurine Axline Fay to Johnston, Aug. 15, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.
Educational historian Theodora Penny Martin argues that the women’s study club “functioned as a smaller, orderly society where traditional community values could be expressed and affirmed.”\textsuperscript{150} But this misses the ways that the clubs born out of the traveling library movement were not just conservative, not only looking back for stability in a new age. Their very form echoed those that came before them (like Franklin), but it also proposed something strange and radical, something that came out of what Michael McGerr calls the “essential audacity” of the progressive project.\textsuperscript{151} If nothing else characterized the progressivism, it was a faith that a collective will could be enough to transform the nation and the world. Or, as Herbert David Croly, a leader in the movement (and son of prominent clubwoman Jennie June Croly), put it in 1909, “an effective increase in national coherence looks in the direction of the democratic consummation—of the...expression of the Sovereign popular will.”\textsuperscript{152} Indeed, insofar as progressivism was a revision of American traditions in the face of what seemed to be ceaseless change at “the threshold of a new century,” then individualism, a longstanding celebration of the one over the many, was among the first in line.\textsuperscript{153} “The people are not Sovereign as individuals,” Croly insisted. “They become Sovereign only in so far as they succeed in reaching and expressing a collective purpose.”\textsuperscript{154}

But one dominant way of approaching American life, even during and after the Progressive Era was to celebrate space and openness. And nothing quite embodied that open

\textsuperscript{150} Theodora Penny Martin, \textit{The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women’s Study Clubs 1860-1910} (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 17.
\textsuperscript{151} McGerr, \textit{Fierce Discontent}, xv.
\textsuperscript{153} Strong, \textit{Twentieth Century City}, 11. Michael McGerr has noted “the progressives’ condemnation of individualism.” McGerr, \textit{Fierce Discontent}, 111.
space as well as the cowboy. By the 1870s, folklorist Marshall Fishwick suggests, barbed wire fencing and homesteading had largely ended the actual reign of the cowboy, but his iconic power was hardly diminished by the dawn of progressivism, fed by novels, traveling shows, and other media.\footnote{Marshall W. Fishwick, “The Cowboy: America’s Contribution to the World’s Mythology,” \textit{Western Folklore} 11 (1952): 77-92. While its heyday was probably the 1950s, that power would continue for decades afterward. In 1972, for example, historian William H. Hutchinson argued that the cowboy was so distinctive (and distinctively American) that European social theory was inapplicable to him and his surroundings, that “sea of space [which] provided the foetal fluid that nourished an optimism...that is not yet extinguished in the people that this space molded into Americans.” William H. Hutchinson, “The Cowboy and the Class Struggle (Or, Never Put Marx in the Saddle),” \textit{Arizona and the West} 14 (1972): 323.}

Frederick Jackson Turner, in his hugely influential 1893 address on the frontier in American life, argued that while the frontier had closed, the “expansive character of American life” continued apace. “Movement has been its dominant fact,” he declared, and “the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise.”\footnote{Frederick Jackson Turner, \textit{The Frontier in American History} (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920), 37.} The white, masculine settler colonialism of Manifest Destiny and the frontier fit itself to a newly transoceanic American empire at the turn of the twentieth century, of course.\footnote{For a supreme example, see Owen Wister, “The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher,” \textit{Harper’s}, September 1895, 602-617. Amy Kaplan argues that this essay “draws a continuous line between the knight and the cowboy, as well as between the West, now on the decline, and the dawning American interests in the Pacific.” Amy Kaplan, \textit{The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005 [2002]), 119.}

But in Kansas, under the influence of the traveling library, something was happening to (at least some of) the cowboys. In 1904, the \textit{Kansas City Star} reported about “a request which came in from some cowboys down on the border near the Texas Panhandle for a renewal of their little library which they designated as the ‘Cowpunchers’ Library’.” The story continued:

\footnote{“Report of the Committee on Traveling Libraries,” draft, ca. 1906, folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers.}

\footnote{Turner, \textit{Frontier}, 16.}
“According to the application blank, there were just eight of the cowboys, their library was ‘always open’, and the [cowboy] librarian’s remarks at the bottom of the slip were: ‘These libraries, I think, are the best things for us lonesome fellows.’\textsuperscript{160} That same year, Armentrout announced to another Kansas City newspaper that ranchers and cowboys were responsible for a rather significant circulation of books. “You wouldn’t think it, but cattlemen are great readers,” she explained. “I never knew it until I got into this work. ... It seems they read to drive away the lonesomeness.”\textsuperscript{161} This is not, to put it mildly, the Anglo-Saxon “out-of-door spirit, most at home when at large” that Owen Wister celebrated and eulogized in 1895.\textsuperscript{162} Instead, this is the purposeful choosing, the intellectual engagement, and the alleviation of loneliness through association that the infrastructures of progressivism were built to facilitate. Wister lamented the fact the cowboy had been forced to “further[ ] a design outside himself,” fleeing structure in favor of “self-government” but bringing “new creeds, polities, and nations...in his wake.”\textsuperscript{163} But here, the cowboy does not simply trail “rapid new square miles of brick;” he actively brings about for himself and his fellows both union and literature.\textsuperscript{164} Participating in a national culture constructed and circulated by women’s clubs, these cowboys build something Wister probably could not or would not imagine. At the “Cowpunchers’ Library,” always open, those icons of lawless individualism, of remote and forsaken geography, find comfort—and company—in books and in one another.

Third, and finally, not only does Pressly’s accounting—“ten members over fifteen years of age”—have the sound of making quorum, but her insistence that they are “all reliable

\textsuperscript{160} “The Traveling Public Library in Kansas: Free Books for all the State,” \textit{Kansas City Star} (11 September 1904).
\textsuperscript{161} “Books in Demand.”
\textsuperscript{162} Wister, “Evolution,” 606. Intriguingly, Wister’s \textit{The Virginian} (1902) was one of only a few books specifically mentioned by Johnston as sample traveling library acquisitions. Lucy Browne Johnston, “Traveling Libraries,” folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers.
\textsuperscript{163} Wister, “Evolution,” 604.
\textsuperscript{164} Wister, “Evolution,” 608.
and...will take good care of your books” says something specific about the kind of democratic spirit inculcated by the library. Some of this was relatively conservative, or at least points to the profound class privilege (and occasional class violence) in the progressive project. In an echo of a time before even universal white male suffrage in the United States, for example, the New York traveling library required “a responsible owner of real estate to act as trustee of the library.”¹⁶⁵ But it also suggests, at the same time, a revision of these older, class- and gender-bound definitions of citizenship. In a 1958 novel about the traveling library’s successor, a character insists that “the bookmobile helps teach the children to take care of things...proper care of books and prompt return of them furnish pretty good training for citizenship.”¹⁶⁶ This is, of course, a bit unsettling, but it is also the result of a (deeply imperfect and unfinished) progressive effort to make citizenship about actions rather than inheritances. When one clubwoman explained to Johnston in 1898 that “in the year and a half we have been running our library we have only lost one book and that was paid for in full,” she was not just explaining the status of the books but also offering a defense of her fitness for citizenship.¹⁶⁷ Given, for example, the gendered metaphors of women’s participation in public in the Progressive Era—as “social housekeeping,” Hannah Arendt later sniffed—evidence that one could maintain or even improve collective assets was key to asserting citizenship.¹⁶⁸ It was, indeed, what the organizers of the traveling library (and not just its patrons) claimed to do. This stewardship of resources explains why so many progressive women’s organizations were involved in improving the landscape by restricting billboards, building parks, or agitating for urban sanitation. But it was an even more

¹⁶⁵ “New York’s Traveling Libraries.”
¹⁶⁷ Fay to Johnston, Aug. 15, 1898, folder 1, box 3, Johnston Papers.
¹⁶⁸ On the “social” and “social housekeeping” in feminism (and Arendt’s rejection of them), see Linda Maria-Gelsomina Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2-9. See also, Denise Riley, Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of Women in History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 44-65.
powerful act when the bit of public property one claimed to care for and enhance was, like a book, not just a thing but a piece of a collective culture, a shared heritage made material. Pressly’s ability to gather together a group of people to both use and preserve the books—like the librarians’ ability to more efficiently distribute those books—positions her to claim citizenship in new ways. As people capable of building a reliable infrastructure for the circulation of a shared culture, Pressly and Johnston and Keating and Armentrout and all the others could act as democratic subjects years before they could legally vote.

And reliable that infrastructure was. In the spring of 1899, about six months after her first postcard, Pressly wrote again to Johnston in Topeka:

A few changes have taken place since I wrote. I have moved across the river and about three miles from where I did live, so as it would not be right to take the books so far from the readers that I left the books with Mrs. Campbell, one of the school board. I saw her a short time ago, she said the books have been well taken care of.\footnote{May Pressly to Johnston, March 20, 1899, folder 3, box 3, Johnston Papers.}

This was quite an abrupt change (and not, it must be said, precisely within the traveling library’s rules). Pressly, who had called this association and this library into being, had been forced by geography and circumstance—she was just completing a new home and expected to be “to \textit{sic} busy to think of reading for some time”—to leave it behind.\footnote{Pressly to Johnston, March 20, 1899, folder 3, box 3, Johnston Papers.} She wrote back several weeks later with a slight change of plans. “[W]e want another library,” she wrote, “although I think Mrs Campbell would like to be the librarian and it will be satisfactory to me for she is near the center of the readers and I live across the river and it is not as convenient for them to come to my home.”\footnote{May Pressly to Johnston, April 4, 1899, folder 5, box 3, Johnston Papers.} One lesson to draw from this is that geography could not, in the end, be entirely defeated by infrastructure; three miles and a river could not too easily be overcome. But, at the same time, the fate of the Protection library demonstrates that the infrastructures progressives
like Johnston (and, in effect if not necessarily ideology, Pressly) built could, in fact, last. According to a report filed by the commission in 1918, Protection still regularly received traveling library shipments. Two decades after May Pressly first opened up a channel between Topeka and Protection, and built up other channels amongst her neighbors, books still moved steadily along them.

These little neighborhoods—formed across space, and willingly entered into, for the more efficient use of public resources—were not the end of the traveling library’s project. Architectural theorist Dana Cuff argues that neighborhoods, and neighborliness, are necessary parts of forming a public sphere, insisting that “[s]ociality located beyond the household...forms a grain of sand around which participatory democracy or civil society can begin to take shape.” These small grains of public life formed in Protection, in the Cowpunchers’ Library, in Pratt and Galena, because of the ways the library personnel organized feelings—desire for print, loneliness, care, respect—into politics. But for this newly emergent civil society to truly take shape, it must be connected to formal politics and to larger scales of political life. As we will see in more detail later on, official libraries tended to use mobile print to construct communities precisely on the scale of administrative units running from the local to the national (or even the imperial). First, in the ideal operation of the traveling library, the neighborhood would organize itself, and its nearby fellows, into a local polity willing to fund a permanent library. In New York, for example, applicants for a traveling library were required to “agree that as soon as the public interest will warrant such action they will take steps to establish a free

173 Dana Cuff, “Enduring Proximity: The Figure of the Neighbor in Suburban America,” Postmodern Culture 15 (2005): para. 7.
library.” On a local level, mutual regard and association, built through print, was to become a collective political and economic obligation. The first fine strands of the thick mesh were taking shape.

And these small nodes would be connected into a print-saturated state. A commission report from 1900 boasts that library boxes “have traveled north to within ten miles of the Nebraska line, south and west to the Oklahoma and Indian Territory border, east to the edge of Missouri, and two are within three counties of Colorado.” Four years later, showing off the program to a newspaper reporter, Armentrout similarly boasted that “[t]hese traveling libraries go into every county in Kansas.” This time, she had a visual aid. Armentrout “held up a map of Kansas on which was stamped numerous red rings, each ring indicating the location of a library.” This map—which sounds similar to the maps included in many of the commission’s biennial reports—shows traveling libraries literally filling up the state, every county marked with at least one red ring, the whole big rectangle of Kansas bleeding (so to speak) with public print. This visual filling up of cartographic space recurs across the field of library extension in the twentieth century, on which more later, because it speaks directly and powerfully to the connective capacity of print, to the physical and emotional infrastructures offered by books on the move. Each of those rings, those dots, refers directly to a small collective drawn together by the desire for print and association—in Protection, or on the range, or elsewhere—and the map shows how they all combined to create Kansas itself.

That connection the traveling library promoted between recipients of library boxes and the state as a whole was not simply representational. During the campaign to have the state take over funding and help administer the program, the Kansas Social Science Federation of

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174 "New York’s Traveling Libraries."
175 "Report of the Traveling Library Commission to the Kansas Social Science Federation of Clubs."
Women’s Clubs sent out a letter to clubs across the state. The letter gave them a script to copy as they wrote their representatives to lobby on the library’s behalf:

Believing that all the people of Kansas who so desire should have the use of the miscellaneous part of the State Library; that it should be a State Library in fact as well as name. That hundreds of small libraries distributed over the State would do more for the intellectual and moral uplifting of our citizenship than the one great library at the State Capitol; and that a work for the State should be carried on by the State—

We, the undersigned members of the ................. Club, earnestly ask you to give your vote and influence for the Traveling-Library bill that will be brought to your attention by the Kansas Social Science Federation of Women’s Clubs.176

This did more than encourage legislators to put the library on an “effective…plane of usefulness,” as another similar petition put it.177 These campaigns built a political infrastructure through the emotional one the library had already established with print, linking both its administrators and its patrons to the halls of power at the political center of the state. Like antebellum abolitionist women—who, according to Susan Zaeske “seized the radical potential” of the petition to “assert substantial political authority”—Kansas’s clubwomen both reinforced and radically challenged the authority of the state to determine the shape, scale, and membership of communities.178 In place of older models of citizenship, and of more limited geographies of belonging, they offered an alternative system, built on an infrastructure of feeling, for imagining the space of Kansas. When the campaign succeeded in 1899, and the state largely took over the financial and administrative burden of the library, the systems built by the library (and the ways of thinking about systems they emerged from and influenced) came along. “A great sweep of library spirit

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176 Draft form letter to state representative or senator, n.d., folder 8, box 3, Johnston Papers. One clubwoman wrote from El Dorado, Kansas, to Johnston, noting that her club had “been requested to write to our Senator and Representative,” suggesting how the campaign enlisted women far afield. Mrs. Harry A. Miller to Johnston, Jan. 31, 1899, folder 4, box 3, Johnston Papers.

177 Attached to H.F. Mason to Johnston, Feb. 7, 1899, folder 4, box 3, Johnston Papers.

has been created in Kansas through the little traveling libraries,” the commissioner wrote—and it had, in fact, been swept into the very machinery of the state.179

And then the state could be incorporated into a reimagined nation. Johnston and others involved in the library were in frequent contact with other traveling library programs around the country, especially Hutchins, who offered advice during the “gallant struggle” that preceded the library’s inception and, once it was founded, celebrated that Kansas would “furnish a new center and an incentive to the states near you, which will be a very great help to the general cause.”180

This nation—constructed out of neighborhoods made into cities made into states made into regions—would be tied together not by any simple political geography but by a network of people desirous of, and willing to work to achieve, common consciousness. That those affiliated with the library corresponded with national suffragists like Frances Willard, or that Susan B. Anthony donated books to it, suggest how this new image might fit into other, contemporary attempts to remake the nation.

Acting on individual people like May Pressly as a way of shaping the state and the nation, moving from the local to the regional to the national, Johnston and her fellow organizers “jumped scales” as part of what geographer Neil Smith calls the “the concrete production and reproduction of geographic scale as a political strategy of resistance.”181 This simultaneity—the relation and enmeshment of local, city, state, region, nation, and even globe—was made possible by a carefully designed, multiscalar infrastructure that used print to bring people together into local communities and then organized those common bonds into larger social and political units.

180 F.A. Hutchins to Johnston, March 11, 1899, folder 3, box 3, Johnston papers. This language of newfound centers was used at the local scale, as well. A report to the KSSF around 1900 explained that when a traveling library “go[es] to strengthen an old library, its [sic] receives new inspiration and life, and that which was almost a lifeless thing becomes a centre of interest and activity.” “Report of the Traveling Library Commission to the Kansas Social Science Federation of Clubs.”
Scale jumping was not always a “strategy of resistance”—as we will see in Chapter Three, the federal government repeatedly jumped scales in order to create and maintain an empire—but for women often restricted to home or body, reaching out to influence far flung fellows could have transformative effects. It could, for example, potentially change the role of the library, of the librarian, and maybe even of women in American life. By 1926, an observer in Utah (another state with a strong traveling library tradition) could remark on the fact that public libraries had “grown more rapidly” since the dawn of the century than any other “branch of public service.” This was because librarianship itself had changed: “Formerly, there was too much of the idea that the library was merely a collection of books, and the librarian the keeper of the books.” Women like Johnston put paid to that notion, as we have seen, and “[t]o-day the idea is that the librarian is one who distributes books and makes the library the accepted center of a community’s intellectual life.”

This move from keep to distribute, and the centrality of libraries in their communities that seemed a consequence of it, was at the heart of the project of traveling libraries in Kansas and beyond. This sort of scale-jumping, which maintained the form and spirit of political geography while insisting on a role for women within it, was extraordinarily useful for middle-class white women working to assert their citizenship. But this investment in the state as the source of social power, and as the motor of mobile print, would have serious consequences for those less able, or willing, to claim a place in its halls of power.

First, though, the bookmobile had to arrive, birthed by the traveling library movement and shaped by the new infrastructures of a burgeoning car culture.

“Strange Secret Roads”: From Traveling Libraries to Bookmobiles

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It took Kansas until the 1950s to switch to bookmobiles, but other places turned much more quickly to internal combustion to power the production of common consciousness. This new technological form had some significant differences and possible advantages. For one, the shipped boxes of traveling libraries could really only move from point A to point B and had to return to A before they could move on to C. They also, because of this more bulky mobility, relied on people like Pressly to actually “m[a]ke a circuit,” especially on small scales.

Bookmobiles, being libraries with wheels rather than libraries that borrowed the wheels of trains and freight shippers, transformed and amplified the kinds of mobility available and allowed for the production of more complex networks. Bookmobiles applied and refined the lessons of the traveling library, pursuing similar goals but in the process making the infrastructure and belonging they shaped—their thick mesh—far more fine-grained. Putting books on the road, rather than the rails, promised to develop infrastructures both more flexible and more responsive. But this did not, of course, guarantee that bookmobiles would avoid the racial, economic, gendered, and political problems of imagining common consciousness in a stratified, unequal society. Subsequent chapters will examine these fantasies of automotive connection, their successes and their failures, on the ground in specific places at specific times. First though, it is useful to examine how the legacies of the traveling libraries, and their dream of common consciousness, lived on and were transformed in the ways people thought about bookmobiles. To that end, this section will examine often idealized representations—cartographic and literary—of bookmobiles and their infrastructures of feeling.

Physically and spatially, the finer grain made possible by the bookmobile is immediately evident in the maps of routes that appear again and again in published reports, fiction, and library

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archives. Like Armentrout’s map of Kansas, or those included in the biennial reports [FIGURE 2], these images offer space filled to bursting with mobile print. But they differ in very important ways. Where the map of the traveling library was about dots, the bookmobile’s is almost entirely about lines. The traveling library map showed libraries, and their attendant communities as spots on the page, and the system connecting those dots into a whole remained, in some ways, only implied or intended, not explicit or represented. In maps of bookmobiles, however, rather than dots we have lines, we have arteries—of flesh and paper and asphalt. In a 1910 map [FIGURE 3] from the very first bookmobile program in the nation, in Washington County, Maryland, we can see this quite literally take shape. There are dots representing library stations, as in the Kansas map, but those dots are connected by a web of lines showing “Library Wagon Routes” as they pass between the stations. Shown alongside (and occasionally atop) “Railroads,” “Trolley Lines,” and “Country Roads,” the routes achieve the status of infrastructure as they fill up the space of the county. And fill it up, they do. The map shows a networked county, made geographically real and cartographically present by the circulation of print. This is even more the case in the strikingly similar map, which we saw in the introduction, produced 48 years later in Catawba County, North Carolina. The profound and wide influence of this way of thinking about and representing mobile print in space can be seen in yet another map. In 1938, when a child at an elementary school in Williamsburg County, South Carolina, wanted to show the bookmobile that served the school, he or she pulled out tracing paper and an atlas. What that child drew [FIGURE 4] looks, in the end, like an only slightly stylized version of the Washington County or Catawba County maps. It is a map of a county filled up with lines. Even a child, in other words, knew this was the way of things.

184 Reprinted in Brown, Bookmobiles and Bookmobile Service.
In all of these maps, the lines—those arteries—stop at the border. Political and administrative units are, often, the bounded bodies of the ideal bookmobile. Like the traveling library, the bookmobile imagines compressing distance and filling up space, connecting people with a circulating mass of text. As we will see in later chapters, some actors—like Civil Rights activists and promoters of the Internet Archive—could use mobile print to challenge those boundaries by subverting or reimagining the bookmobile’s official role and asserting the value of communities formed across or against political borders. And, as Chapter Three will make clear, even the state could make concerted attempts to link together local, bounded units into federal and imperial structures. But in the local, ideal, and limited world represented by these maps—once the potentially radical domesticity of the traveling library had, in fact, been domesticated by the state—it was quite easy to mistake an electorate for a community and a tax base for a common consciousness. These maps mark out a shape for the kind of belonging delivered by the publicly-funded bookmobile. It is fine-grained, detailed, with more apparent and multiple connections between places. But it is, somehow, still restrained and restricted despite its new flexibility.

Two other maps, creating idealized (but less top-down, official) visions of how bookmobiles actually operated, offer good examples of another common way of imagining the bookmobile’s relationship to space. In 1952, Dirk Gringhuis published a children’s book called *Here Comes the Bookmobile*. The actual story will be discussed in more detail later, but for now I want to look at the endpapers [FIGURE 5], which provide a bird’s-eye view of the landscape through which a fictional bookmobile moves. In the image, we see the bookmobile loaded in the county seat, and we watch as it sets out on a day’s journey. It crosses the city limits

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and shortly thereafter moves from a paved road to rutted dirt. We see it stop at a school, then pass a farm, then stop at another school, then pause for a pheasant crossing. We see a child race back to get a book to a sick classmate, and we see the bookmobile stop at another school before heading back to the city and calling it a day. What makes this so fascinating is that we see all these things, all at once, in a single brightly colored image. The story is about one bookmobile, but there are twelve pictured in the map. Even more explicitly than the route maps discussed above, bookmobiles and their mobile books fill up and constitute the space around them. In this case, these bookmobiles—away from which no land or structures or people seem to exist—outline the shape of their community.

A similar dynamic is at work in maps created in the 1980s by drivers for the Utah State Library’s bookmobile program. These maps were designed to aid in completing their routes, and they are much more utilitarian documents than any of the other maps, but they nevertheless offer their own glimpse at an ideal and idealized world brought forth by the bookmobile. One map [FIGURE 6], of the Piute County route between Hoovers and Circleville, shows Highway 89 running through four different towns. Out of scale but relatively well detailed, the map shows the bookmobile stopped in six locations, with landmarks (a courthouse, a trailer park, a theater, a post office) nearby to mark the stops. Outside of the highway that allows passage between the stops, and the immediate area of the stops themselves, nothing else exists. This makes a practical sort of sense, of course: why take a lot of time and effort to draw other spaces in a map like this? But it also represents, strikingly, an influential way of thinking about bookmobiles in the landscape. As in the endpapers, there are multiple bookmobiles shown, and the community seems constituted by their movement across the land. Literary scholar Patricia Fumerton has

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186 Bookmobile Statistical Reports, 1940-, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.
examined drawings and charts by an early modern English sailor that are intriguingly similar to these. His drawings of ports and bays tend to primarily represent the places where ships, water, and land meet; little of the inland world exists. Fumerton argues that “his focus is primarily on the variable ways that sea meets land in an instance of siting or harboring.” Within his life of work and mobility, she insists, place “is imagined as a disturbed or disconnected process that never stays.”

Like traveling libraries, bookmobile programs were frequently the products of middle-class fantasies about class and community, so the relationship to status and place is a bit less precarious. But as in those charts, the interest is in “siting” and “harboring”—in the connections and the various, temporary homes that mobility can offer. Representing the moments of contact, the places and times when the bookmobile travels and when it stops and opens out its bookish bounty, the maps suggest those moments’ capacity for transformation (and, perhaps, their capacity for subversion). These maps show bookmobiles permanently altering the landscape by their circulation but somehow a permanent presence on the land, taking roads of asphalt, dirt, and gravel and transforming them into arteries for the transmission of bodies, paper, and ideas.

The ability to take direct advantage of the seemingly endless, and constantly expanding, roads of the twentieth-century American landscape allowed for deeper spatial penetration by bookmobile programs. And it also, at least conceivably, allowed deeper penetration into the emotional and psychic worlds of their communities. Landscape theorist J. B. Jackson noted that roads have inhabited an outsized role in human imagination because, among other things, of their “tendency...to introduce unwanted outsiders into the self-sufficient community or house.”

But the twentieth century presented a revision of this narrative, Jackson suggests, as those intrusions

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turned from invasion to an often welcome, or at least productive, interpenetration. Indeed, the rise of the bookmobile happened alongside a transformation that Jackson identifies in the history of roads. From structures “identified solely with movement from one place to another,” roads over the course of the twentieth century more and more became “the scene of work and leisure and social intercourse and excitement.” According to Jackson, “[r]oads no longer merely lead to places; they are places.” In this new context, then, not only could bookmobiles travel routes that visually and physically filled up the space of counties, they could also use roads to amplify a new kind of mobile sociability.

We can see this at work in a chapter book for children published at the height of the bookmobile’s iconic power, in the 1950s. Virginia Sorensen’s *Curious Missie* (1953) tells the story of a young girl growing up in rural Alabama. Constantly asking about her surroundings and the world—hence the titular nickname—Missie endears herself to a librarian, who teaches her that books can answer her many, many questions. The librarian then arranges for Missie to give a speech to a state commission, explaining that a bookmobile would help her answer her questions even better. The bookmobile is approved on a trial basis (the county will have to approve funding after a set period of time), and it visits Missie’s school to much delight. Shortly thereafter, Missie goes out on the route for the day. On the road, Missie makes a circuit of her district. In an echo of both the Kansas Traveling Library and the Washington and Catawba County maps, Missie uses the bookmobile to extend her immediate local bonds of neighborhood and family to include the people of her entire county. As they begin the drive, Miss Sudie, the

189 J. B. Jackson, *A Sense*, 190. Jackson, at the same time, emphasized that roads could also be intensely private, natural spaces. This tension, it seems, animated his conception of odology, the study of roads, and his arguments about its future. On Jackson’s contributions to that field, see Timothy Davis, “Looking Down the Road: J.B. Jackson and the American Highway Landscape,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, ed. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 62-80.
bookmobile librarian, tells her that “there are people living everywhere.” And it is true; the bookmobile’s arrival brings them pouring out of the woods. “Where did they all live?” Missie asks herself. “Their houses were secrets…along strange secret roads” (150). Missie helps this cascade of people get their books, chatting charmingly with them as she learns that “[a]t every single stop somebody was different in an interesting way” (158). Ultimately, these “different,” “secret” people come together around the figure of Missie, who accompanies Miss Sudie on more trips during the summer. “People along all the roads became friends,” the narrator informs us. “Missie knew their names. They knew her name” (172). Theorist Dana Cuff has argued that “neighborhoods embody a social relation linked to specific land use…[to] living in close proximity.” But as we see in Curious Missie, the automobile and its roads had “overthrown the regime of…’space’,” as Marshall McLuhan put it about electric technologies in 1967. Unlike in his vision of a world where “[t]he old civic…groupings have become unworkable,” a world where “[y]ou can’t go home again,” though, Sorensen imagines the bookmobile producing proximity, and neighborly bonds, over vast distances made accessible by new technologies. The bookmobile, in this imagining, combines automobility and transportation infrastructures with the infrastructures of feeling offered by mobile print. It thus links the “hidden houses along the twisting country roads” (186), ameliorating their isolated existence. The entire county becomes Missie’s neighborhood.

This presents a smaller, more friendly, and more manageable vision of a public, which is typically constituted as what Michael Warner calls a “relation among strangers projected from

190 Sorensen, Curious Missie, 149. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically.
191 Cuff, “Enduring Proximity,” para. 5.
193 McLuhan, Medium, 16. We will see in Chapter Four some of the ways in which this could mean participation in a process by which “strange secret roads” are made public in order to facilitate their being opened to capital.
private readings of circulating texts.” In *Curious Missie*, circulation is not just a precondition for the private, estranged construction of a public. Like many of those involved in traveling libraries and bookmobiles, Sorenson partially (though only partially) rejects Enlightenment rationality as the fundamental basis for political sociability. Instead, she insists that emotions and sensations—familiarity, pleasure, movement, belonging—are necessary parts of building a public as a *community*. Civil society, in this formulation less a “stranger relation” than a neighbor-relation, depends on proximity for its form if not always its ultimate function. As we will see below, the effect of bookmobiles always begins with the personal, direct, and emotional, but those effects can amplify and extend beyond—while retaining the shape of—that direct encounter. Roads, allowing for more encounters to be seeded throughout a community, made possible an even more “abundant harvest” than was possible in the traveling library.

This dynamic is also found, almost entirely intact, in Gringhuis’s *Here Comes the Bookmobile* (1952), in which Tommy goes out on a bookmobile’s route with his Aunt Kay, the librarian. Tommy, raised in a big city, is fascinated to learn about the ways of life out in the country: “I’ve never been in a one-room school, just in big schools like the one I go to in the city,” he tells Aunt Kay. When he first sees the schoolhouse, he decides it “looked strange,” with “the children…all sitting and working together at their desks in only one room” (25). But in only the next paragraph, he “decide[s]” that such a situation “might be fun” (25). Books themselves also help Tommy form emotional and often gendered bonds along the road. When they load the bookmobile at the top of the story, Tommy picks out four books he “think[s] some boys [his] age

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195 “Report of the Traveling Library Commission to the Kansas Social Science Federation of Clubs.”
197 Given that the replacement of one-room schoolhouses with larger, consolidated schools was a primary goal of the progressive movement’s educational efforts, and its success, this decades-later nostalgia for the schoolhouse may be part of a renewed longing for the small, the local, and the communal in the midst of the transformations discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.
might like” (15). At each stop, a boy chooses one of these books, signaling his affinity with Tommy and creating a link between them. Even at the last stop, where angry former city-boy Buzz at first sullenly refuses to check out a book, Tommy is able to use his pre-loaded book about trucks to entice the boy into reading. And after agreeing to take the book, Buzz makes a herculean effort to make sure a classmate will have a book he wants while he is sick at home (42-47). Tommy is able to use a combination of books and roads to build connections between himself and “his new friends” at each stop (47), and in so doing to amplify the effects of any one interaction to include even those with whom, like the sick student, he has no direct contact.

In *Curious Missie*, these bonds between fellows cannot be entirely or only emotional; the infrastructures of feeling that allow them must be made possible by strong links between citizens and their government, as well. McLuhan wrote that since the introduction of the television, a “new form of ‘politics’ is emerging, and in ways we haven’t noticed yet. The living room has become a voting booth.” But *Curious Missie* resists (perhaps futilely) this atomization and mediation of politics. Like the progressives, Sorensen sees state power and common consciousness as inextricably linked. Indeed, Missie teaches strangers that their new proximity is thanks to the wonders of government, embodied in the bookmobile, and thus that their government has everything to do with these newfound connections. On Missie’s first trip out, she and Miss Sudie encounter a woman who is intensely suspicious of the bookmobile, refusing to believe that the books are free. Missie eagerly informs her that, in fact, “[i]t’s the government

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199Reformed ignorance about the bookmobile was a trope of Sorensen’s. In an early draft of the book, she had opened the book noting that “to begin with, nobody in that neighborhood dreamed of such a thing. Nobody even knew there were such things. A rolling library? A Bookmobile? Even Missie never thought of that, as many curious thoughts as she had every day.” Virginia Eggersten, “First Draft of Curious Missie,” folder 1, box MF719, Virginia Eggersten Sorensen Papers, Children’s Literature Research Collections, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
that pays,” because “[t]he government wants all the people to have books to read” (160, emphasis original). The woman is shortly convinced, and checks a number of books out of the library for her family, declaring, “Thank the good Lord for such a government, to be so good to the people. … Ma’am—I hope we deserve it” (161, emphasis original). The woman has gained access to books and learned a lesson about her place in the government. Making an increasingly massive and bureaucratized government seem close, familiar, and friendly, the iconography of the bookmobile helped citizens negotiate their place in an expansive, frequently fragmented nation.

The friendly, helpful image of government has its limits, however; it must be managed by the people almost as much as they are managed by it. In many representations of the bookmobile, the government means well but remains partially ignorant of the good libraries do and must be educated about the value of the bookmobile. In *Curious Missie*, the bookmobile service is cut by the county commission, who reallocate the money to a rat-killing program. But (as in *Protection*) the proximity and involvement of average people remains, and Missie is able to use the neighborly networks she helped build to mobilize the entire county to lobby for the

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²⁰⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly given that they are run with limited public money, bookmobiles (like libraries in general) found themselves at the mercy of governmental structures with sometimes little interest in its services. Despite this group of stories’ casting of government as positive, tension between it and devotees of the library and bookmobile emerge repeatedly in the books. In *Librarian’s Night Before Christmas* (2007), in which a bookmobile-driving Santa Claus arrives to help a beleaguered librarian, begins with this lament: “We toiled overtime at our library here, / ‘Cause the powers that be cut our staffing this year. / They spent pork-barrel money like a tidal-wave sea, / But no funds trickled down far enough to reach me.” Interestingly, in this book, there is no appeal made to the government within the story (Santa helps out, teaches children about the wonders of the library, rushes off, etc.), but the story is clearly intended to mobilize its own readership in favor of library funding. Unlike other instances where funding emerges as a problem, *Librarian’s Night Before Christmas* instead uses its story to incite the collective political response the other stories also model within themselves. David Davis, *Librarian’s Night Before Christmas* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2007), 1-2. The question of funding also plays a significant role in the career romances about bookmobile librarians mentioned above, as well. *Books on Wheels* and *Books and Beaux* are both plotted around the question of legislative and tax support for bookmobile service (and *Nancy Runs the Bookmobile* and *With a High Heart* both make explicit mention of it). Mary Rebecca Lingenfelter, *Books on Wheels* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1938); Adele de Leeuw, *With a High Heart* (New York: Macmillan, 1945); Johnson, *Nancy Runs the Bookmobile*; Campbell, *Books and Beaux*. 
bookmobile. Upon hearing the imminent demise of bookmobile service, Missie insists that she must go back to the commission and make them keep the bookmobile. Her teacher tells her, though, that they “do not listen to little girls very much” (182). Uncowed, Missie realizes she knows a whole group of people to whom they just might listen: “My mother votes. My grandma votes. My father votes. Mother Willowby and her daughter Phyllis vote. All those people who came here for the voting—Remember how many there were? I saw them voting. There are Mr. and Mrs. White. There are the Cat-Lady and her sister” (184). These narratives of the bookmobile manage to critique government spending priorities without undermining faith in the government: the problem is not the state’s callousness but that they have not heard the voices they need to. But how to bring those voices together? Missie determines to spread the word using established and emergent networks, insisting that “Harry and Dick [her brothers] will help. Donna [her friend] will help. Mother Willowby will tell everybody who comes to the store. The minister will help too, I know it. You just wait! Everybody will help!” (185, emphasis original).

Like the Kansas Traveling Library plugging into the dense associational life of women’s clubs, Missie uses existing institutions and organizations to spread the news. She tells her aunt, who tells the Home Demonstration Club. She tells her grandmother, who tells the Missionary Society. She travels the bookmobile’s route in a horse-drawn wagon, letting people know what is going on. And she does not even know how far her words have spread:

There was no way of knowing how many helpers they really had. … She did not know how many people were walking back and forth on the red roads deep in the piney-woods. She did not know that fishermen told each other along the creek. But it was true. While people got their groceries, they talked of the bookmobile. Farmers stopped their wagons and called to each other over fences. Women along the highway spoke to each other over their telephones. (188)
Using the material itinerary established by the bookmobile, Missie is able to mobilize her newly expanded “neighborhood” to preserve the condition of its own construction.

Ultimately, “The County Goes to Town” (as the last chapter title has it) and appeals to the commissioners for the continuation of the bookmobile. A two-page spread, illustrated by Marilyn Miller, in the last chapter shows a large group of people gathered beneath trees on the front lawn of the courthouse [FIGURE 7]. Miller has a distinct style, illustrating faces as series of parallel and slanted lines and bodies in firm but sketched pen-strokes. The effect of the drawing is striking. It includes only twenty people, but image is cut off on the sides, not cleanly contained, suggesting a far vaster number present but not depicted. The use of a full two pages for this image also lends it a sense of immensity. But this immensity is, in Miller’s rendering, unified rather than chaotic; their aesthetic similarity seems, in the context of the chapter, to suggest their political union, as well. (Their nearly uniform whiteness is, too, not beside the point. We will explore the consequences of ignoring racism in celebrations of Southern bookmobile programs in the next chapter.) Immediately after the image, Missie takes charge of the crowd, leads “all her friends” (197) into the meeting room, and gives a speech, “talk[ing] for all the children in the whole county” (197). When she turns to point out the large number of people there, she “had not realized she knew so many of their names” (199) and actually “beg[i]n[s] to name them,” demonstrating the mutual recognition and familiarity produced by the bookmobile’s route (199). And her courage and determination encourages others to speak, including her father, who “as far back as Missie remembered, had never made any kind of public speech” (201) but whom the bookmobile has empowered to make himself public. Her grandmother, as well, stands up before the crowd and admits that she was illiterate until she learned to read “from books that came on the bookmobile” (206). Grandma Topping finishes her speech with a line that in many ways
summarizes the lessons of the bookmobile in *Curious Missie*: “This county is us… This county is not just roads and woods and creeks and such things. This county is us!” (204, emphasis original).

In Sorensen’s fictional rendering, the roads by themselves are insufficient, simply marking out potential connections. And the books they read, too, are not enough. In its combination of the two, however, the bookmobile has taught them more than simply how to read, the names of birds, the varieties of geraniums, or anything else found in its books. It has given them a model for social and political interaction embodied by the bookmobile itself. A *New York Times* reviewer, forgetting the book’s fiction, wrote that *Curious Missie* “leaves the reader of any age proud that in America even a little girl can talk to the Government and be heard.”201 The iconic, liberal fantasy offered by the bookmobile was so powerful it went unquestioned. As blacklisted screenwriters in Hollywood or African Americans unable to use segregated bookmobiles in the South knew, governments do not even always listen to adults, let alone to children. Bookmobile or not, the state was not inevitably benevolent and the power of the people was more than a little circumscribed. But because *Curious Missie* is part of the bookmobile’s beautiful fantasy, the people win, and the novel ends with an image of the brand new bookmobile (the original had been on loan) sitting on the courthouse lawn: “On the back it still said, though in letters twice as tall, ‘Good Reading for All’” (207, emphasis original).

*Missie* echoed *Why Not?*, a pamphlet published in 1929 by the American Library Association’s Committee on Library Extension as a “[d]ramatization of the arguments for and against a county library presented before an open meeting.”202 Meant to be actually performed during a meeting, with “every effort made to create the illusion of spontaneous discussion”—

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including having the actors “scattered among the audience”—the mini-play depicts democracy operating through reasoned discussion and debate. (Of course, as scripted by the ALA, the opponents never have a chance, suggesting the ways that this vision of democracy, like Sorensen’s, was rather more carefully managed than any “illusion of spontane[ity]” could overcome.) At the opening of the drama, the strongest proponent of the prospective county library’s effort to “get[ ] many books out near the people,” the character Graham Brooks makes his argument with an appeal quite similar to Grandma Topping’s: “We ask you to provide for everybody in the county the very same library privileges which city residents commonly enjoy. … This is what we ask for—for ourselves and for our children. … Just think what it would mean if…there would always be something different there for everyone to read.”203 We, ourselves, our, everybody, everyone: Brooks speaks on behalf of, and in the process seems to unify, the people of the county and their common needs and shared desires. Another proponent later makes this claim even more bald, arguing that—in contrast to small, women’s-club-run libraries where there are fewer books and “the responsibility falls on a few people” to run maintain them—in a county library, many books “would pass all around the county” and “the tax is on everyone.”204 The library’s chief opponent, on the other hand, makes his case in a cascade of “I”s and “me”s and “my”s and “those people”s.205 The first-person plural (and encompassing “everyone”s) of those in favor of the library, in contrast to the opponent’s singular (and

204 Long, Why Not?, 11. The script has him deride libraries run by women’s clubs—funded by “pink teas and socials”—as “picayunish,” rather erasing the contributions of women’s clubs to the very formation of the idea of library extension in the first place. Long, Why Not?, 10.
205 Long, Why Not?, 5-6. Intriguingly, the opponent’s argument—especially his claim that “George Washington never had no county library”—is later undermined by another character, who notes that the critic is “unwilling to live the way…George Washington did, seeing as he “did not come in a carriage or on mule back.” “Oh no,” the character continues (“witheringly,” according to the stage directions), “he came in a Cadillac!!!” Automobility thus not only facilitates modernity and circulation but precludes withdrawal from or refusal of it. Long, Why Not?, 6.
distancing “those”), linked common access to books to common existence to common consciousness.

The universalizing gesture of Sorenson’s “All” and Why Not?’s “everyone”—even in the midst of, and perhaps as a constitutive part of, the various exclusions and failures that Chapters Two and Four, in particular, will discuss—was vitally important to the image and ideology of the bookmobile and to its development of common consciousness. Just as the automobile and the highway aimed to make all the nation’s physical space accessible, the bookmobile aimed to incorporate all of its psychic geography, as well. Indeed, this use of the bookmobile to model civic participation and cohesion—to show and to build political, social, and emotional belonging—was echoed twenty-four years later in Laura Enerson’s Our Library Lives in a Bus (1977). In the book, the town bookmobile is wildly popular, except for the “few children who never came” (14). But one day, the librarian and her bookmobile find themselves drafted unexpectedly into a town parade celebrating the beginning of fishing season. In order to drive and play the bookmobile’s calliope at the same time, the librarian picks up a braided library skeptic. The girl is afraid at first, but “[t]ogether Miss Sarah and the little girl with her hair in long braids marched the bus, played the calliope very loud, and kept the books in their neat rows” (35). After the parade, the librarian parks the bus and children come pouring in, but not only the regulars: When the non-users saw the little girl smiling and happy, “they came into the library too, because now they knew the books were friendly” (42). Our Library Lives in a Bus thus models the literal incorporation of marginal people into civic life. The hesitant girl is drafted and becomes a vital part of the bookmobile’s movement through the heart of the town (and the heart of the town’s collective, civic experience), thereby involving other marginal children in the

206 Laura Enerson, Our Library Lives in a Bus (Grayland, WA: Cove Publishing, 1977), 8, 7. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically.
bookmobile. By passing through what Jane Addams might have noticed was a “thronged and common road,” filled with people joining together to celebrate their town, the bookmobile becomes far more than simply a conduit for books.

In stories like these, as in the official representations in maps, books are social objects that move along infrastructures of feeling. By virtue of being passed materially hand to hand—or hand to bookmobile to hand—books created the conditions for shared experience, and their movement along a communities’ arteries promised (at least in theory) to take those conditions and make them reality. In Curious Missie, for example, Missie finds it easier to bond with the people along the bookmobile route because “when all of them had read the same books, it was as if they all had extra friends to love and talk about” (172). The material mobility of books on the bookmobile mapped a geography of sociability—explicitly in the Here Comes the Bookmobile endpapers and more imaginatively in the charting of Alabama’s “strange secret roads” or the bookmobile’s incorporation of a shy girl into a central ritual of civic life. The combination of book, which “let[s] us travel with the magic of words,” and the bookmobile, which “might really take you far!,” let people construct and imagine a space shot through with roads and bound together in a common consciousness and a collective project.207 While, as we will see, later librarians frequently failed to follow it or to understand their limitations, these representations offered a “fine road map glued to the gear box” of American culture.208 And they offer us, as well, a useful guide to keep in mind as we follow the bookmobile on its travels through the twentieth century.

“Out There—On the Edge of Things”: Coda

208 Gringhuis, Here Comes, 8.
In 1914, Jessie Wright Whitcomb—Topeka author, lawyer, and reportedly the first woman to lecture at a law school for men—published a story in *The Craftsman*, an influential magazine of the Arts and Crafts Movement, about the traveling library’s place in the home and on the landscape. 209 “A Prairie Sod House and the Kansas Traveling Library” tells the brief story of a pair of men driving across Western Kansas, “on a section or road that barely scratched the prairie—the prairie that met the horizon on every side without let or hindrance.” 210 In “this horizon circle,” they see in the distance a sod house, which reminds one of them, Scotsman Alec MacDonald, of home. He does not expect, though, to find a house as intellectually rich as those of his native land, since “[h]ere it’s all culture of the soil—not of the mind.” 211 He is wrong. Welcomed into the house by a mother and her three blond children, MacDonald is agog; the house is filled with paintings and books. Baffled, he has the following conversation with the woman:

“This pictures and books are not ours, Mr. MacDonald,” began Mrs. Hold. “They belong to the State of Kansas.”

“To the State?”

“Kansas has a Traveling Library and a Traveling Art Gallery.”

“What is it you’re tellin’ me?”

“We can get the use of fifty books for several months for two dollars—where there are ten or more people to use them. I am the librarian because our place is the most central.”

“Central!”

“Yes, there are two houses in sight out there—on the edge of things—and three others. … When each new library comes we have the greatest jubilation! You have to live this way to *love* books!”

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“Woman, it’s grand!” cried Alec MacDonald enthusiastically.

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211 Whitcomb, “Prairie Sod House,” 452.
“Yes,” she laughed. “I think Kansas will prove before long that there is a way to raise artists along with wheat and corn and alfalfa. These libraries make life wonderfully rich for many a Kansas prairie home.”

This conversation, and MacDonald’s later response to it (“I’ve widened my horizon...widen it”), point us to the remarkable relationship of space and psyche at work in the story, and in the traveling library itself. Convinced that they could transform their landscape—that they could call forth from the soil not just grains but brains, that they could take a “circle of horizon” and make it a community—people like Johnston and Whitcomb held an amazing faith in the power of print on the move. As we have seen, that faith grew out of a larger conviction that common consciousness was a worthy goal, and that achieving it would require the development of infrastructures capable of moving both books and thoughts, both matter and emotions.

They were inspired by this dream of common consciousness, but these middle-class white progressives—and, importantly, their descendants—sometimes found it difficult, in the end, to find commonality with everyone. Their faith ultimately and ironically brought with it assumptions that would stymie efforts to follow the dream of common consciousness to its potentially radical end. In particular, in the decades to come, they would fail to realize the possibilities that mobile print offered for challenging and transforming a landscape riven by racial segregation, stretched thin by imperial expansion, and clotted by the detritus of consumption.

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213 Whitcomb, “Prairie Sod House,” 454.
Figures

Figure 2: Kansas Traveling Libraries Map (1904)

Figure 3: Washington County Map (1910)
Reprinted in Eleanor Frances Brown, Bookmobiles and Bookmobile Service (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1967)
Figure 4: Map of Williamsburg County, S.C. (1938)
From Bookmobile Map of Williamsburg County, South Carolina, 1938, folder, Carton 2, Lend a Hand Society Records, 1843-1982, Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, Massachusetts)
Figure 5: Endpapers from *Here Comes the Bookmobile*

In Dirk Gringhuis, *Here Comes the Bookmobile* (Chicago: Albert Whitman, 1952)
Figure 6: Piute County Map (ca. 1987)
From “#16 Maps” Envelope, Box 2, Series 21786; Utah State Archives (Salt Lake City, Utah)
Figure 7: Illustration by Marilyn Miller (1953)
CHAPTER TWO

“Spread by the Exchange of Books”: The Perils of Proximity in a Segregated Society

“I resist anything better than my own diversity;
I breathe the air, but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.”
–Walt Whitman (1855)

“I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity.”
–W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)

“The question in every case is whether the words are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about substantive evils. It is a question of proximity and degree.”
–Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1919)

The South “is American with a difference,” historian Ulrich B. Phillips wrote in 1928. What held Southerners in “considerable solidarity,” he insisted, was that they were “a people having common joys and common sorrows, and, above all, as to the white folk a people with a common resolve indomitably maintained—that it shall be and remain a white man’s country.”

This was, of course, not limited to the South. Indeed, two years before the founding of the Kansas Traveling Library, the United States Supreme Court had, with a 7-1 vote in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), formally sanctioned separation as an organizing principle of American life.

Nothing in the Constitution required “social, as distinguished from political equality” between different races, Henry Brown declared on behalf of the majority, and so there was nothing

unconstitutional about “[l]aws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought into contact with one another.” With those words, the Court authorized the expansion of Jim Crow, a legal and social system that saw proximity and contact as profoundly dangerous and that sought order at any cost.

Thus, even as Gladden and Gilman articulated common consciousness, and as people like Johnston worked to enact it with books, their dream of coherence and connection butted up against and was inflected by this other emerging system for ordering space and managing contact. Perhaps surprisingly, though, the dream of common consciousness was not necessarily at odds with the strictures of Jim Crow. In fact, it turned out that common consciousness, and its embodiment in the bookmobile, could be unsettlingly useful in the hands of segregationists. As we have seen, the founders of traveling libraries believed that circulating books would create a tingling, social friction that would cause feelings of neighborliness and connection “to kindle at the touch.” But, born in sparsely populated rural areas—and thus calibrated for a racially homogeneous, far-flung population—this conviction contained within it a paradoxical assumption: that community could be enacted at a distance, particularly by the management of intimacy and proximity. Far from undermining or openly challenging segregationist politics (as progressives largely failed to do more generally) this assumption helped fuel a belief that it was possible to share a culture, and even to share space, without necessarily coming into unwanted, uncontrolled contact with others.

\[\textit{Plessy v. Ferguson}, 163\text{ U.S.} 537 (1896)\], 544. With this ruling, the Court validated the fears of what dissenter John Harlan sarcastically called “the astute men of the dominant race, who affect to be disturbed at the possibility that the integrity of the white race may be corrupted, or that its supremacy will be imperilled, by contact on public highways with black people.” \textit{Plessy}, 562.

\[\textit{According to Shelton Stromquist, progressives “generally viewed the world as racially ordered, and their disposition on matters of race led them to accept the logic of segregation, the fear of Negro criminality, and the conviction that premature enfranchisement of blacks only fostered corruption.” Stromquist, \textit{Reinventing \textquotedblleft The People\textquotedblright}, 152. See also McGerr, \textit{Fierce Discontent}, 183. Unsurprisingly, African Americans who engaged with progressivism had different ends, and different means, in mind, as scholars like Glenda Gilmore have shown: \textquoteright Their progressive visions if realized would have ended white supremacy.	extquoteright Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, \textit{Gender & Jim}]

was a belief that abetted the ideologies and practices of American apartheid. Made a tool for both connection and separation, simultaneously, the bookmobile was tasked, uncertainly, with building the “thick mesh” of social democracy on fractured ground.

Michael Warner insists that “[s]pace and physical presence do not make much difference” in the constitution of publics. But presence—of physical bodies and physical texts—is, in fact, the actual and necessary foundation of publicity and of community. Forgetting that “circulating texts” must pass from hand to hand before they are ever read, theorists like Warner often fail to take account of how crucial issues of proximity, contact, and sharing are to the construction of communities and publics. The ideal of the public sphere may require the ability to abstract oneself out of the messy particularities of one’s body, as Warner himself has so usefully elaborated, but the actual experience of public life is found in often untidy encounters with paper, flesh, and dirt. 

Looking at bookmobiles and public libraries requires taking circulation literally, and in this chapter, we will see how they could shape these encounters, moving and channeling them in ways that facilitated the limited, limiting connections of Jim Crow.

Racialization and racism profoundly affect how people and things can move through space and build community, in ways that Dewey and Johnston—and later, Curious Missie—failed to notice, let alone challenge. The dream of a common consciousness that emerged with the traveling library and extended with the bookmobile depended on exploiting new forms of

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223 Warner has argued that entering the public sphere requires the assumption of a “public subjectivity” nonidentical with one’s own body, an “indifference to those particularities [of race, class, gender, and sexuality], to ourselves.” But that disembodied subjectivity is not universally available (if it is actually available at all): “the ability to abstract oneself in public discussion has always been an unequally available resource.” Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 160, 165. See also Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142.
mobility to create a new kind of communal, social space. But that dream ignored the blockages, diversions, and restrictions that mark shared space in racist societies. Sara Ahmed, reading Frantz Fanon, asserts that “racism ‘stops’ black bodies from inhabiting space by extending through objects and others.” By contrast, “white bodies” are able to “extend their reach” in this way, offering the ability to move, in all the registers of the word. White supremacy thus depends on determining and regulating a particular relationship between mobility and immobility, between whites’ ability to use objects (like bookmobiles, or books) to build new spaces and move into new lives, and others’ enforced inability to do the same. It is not coincidental that Plessy, like Dred Scott v. Sanford before it, limited access to freedom by limiting movement, or that later civil rights battles often took place at sites of movement (buses, hotels, train stations, cars). Within such a system, as we will see, bookmobiles could be tools for distributing books, yes, but also and in the process tools for dispensing unequal access to motion. Indeed, particularly in the South, bookmobiles often moved so that African Americans

224 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 111.
225 “If whiteness allows bodies to move with comfort through space…[s]uch physical motility becomes the ground for social mobility,” she explains, though she notes that “[s]uch physical motility should not be confused with freedom.” We will turn to the consequences of that confusion in Chapter Four. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 112, 136.
226 Homer Plessy, a man classified as black by Louisiana, had boarded a segregated, white-only railcar and had been arrested after being asked to move to a black-only car. Dred Scott had challenged his condition of slavery on the grounds that he had traveled and lived with his master in states and territories in which slavery was illegal. The Court declared that African Americans could not claim citizenship and thus had no grounds to sue. See *Plessy v. Sanford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857). Movement continued to shape the pursuit of civil rights. In the interwar period, for example, middle-class blacks claimed the “open road” in an attempt to open up public space, and the “Scottsboro boys” were accused of rape on a train. Several decades later, bus boycotts, station sit-ins, and Freedom Rides all challenged restrictions on movement at the heart of segregation. And “transportation racism” still shapes our world. On the historical cases, see Kathleen Franz, “‘The Open Road’: Automobility and Racial Uplift in the Interwar Years,” in *Technology and the African-American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study*, ed. Bruce Sinclair (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004); James A. Miller, *Remembering Scottsboro: The Legacy of an Infamous Trial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). On “transportation racism” see Robert D. Bullard, “The Anatomy of Transportation Racism,” in *Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism & Routes to Equity*, ed. Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004). 15-31; *Where We Need to Go: A Civil Rights Roadmap for Transportation Equity* (Washington, D.C.: The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2011).
would not, serving segregated slices of a jurisdiction in order to keep boundaries from being crossed and unexpected and threatening intimacies from taking shape. Deployed with the seemingly progressive goal of equalizing access to culture, but by those unable or unwilling to challenge the spatial restrictions of segregation, bookmobiles necessarily ended up reinforcing a Jim Crow common consciousness.

This spatial restriction produces “disorientation,” Ahmed writes, which “diminishes capacities for action.” But it did not erase them. This chapter is largely about the ways whites in power used bookmobiles and libraries to chop up space and limit movement within it. But it also takes seriously African Americans’ attempts to challenge that status quo, even if it finds those attempts often fell short of fully transforming the landscape and the place of books upon it. Offering both a critique of and alternative to dominant ways of using books to organize communities in space, a variety of African American activists—from a former Crisis agent and wartime nurse to a black historian working for the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to Congress on Racial Equality protesters—moved their own bodies along with books in ways that challenged and exceeded the limitations of Jim Crow common consciousness. But, troublingly, other efforts by African Americans (especially in cooperation with local governments) to provide access to a common culture moved books in ways that could actually keep blacks in place. Understanding these various efforts, and their complicated relationship to the ideas that initially spawned the traveling library and the bookmobile, offers fuller opportunities to understand how alternatives could both flower and whither in the face of segregation.

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This chapter takes up a relatively large amount of time (from the 1890s through the 1960s), in order to track the fate of common consciousness as Jim Crow expanded and then crumbled in the face of protest. Drawing on a large but often fragmented record of correspondence, administrative records, visual culture, unpublished and published memoirs, court decisions, and press coverage, the chapter touches down to explore specific case studies at moments central to that story: the solidification of segregation at the turn of the twentieth century, the proliferation of civil rights protest (and of “massive resistance” to it) in the 1950s, the emergence of an obsession with social and spatial order at the dusk of Jim Crow, and the intensification of that obsession amidst the tumult of the late 1960s. The first section sets the stage by examining one early attempt to use print to bring North and South together and to heal the wounds inflicted by slavery, sectionalism, and Civil War. In the process, it vividly illustrates how acting at a distance enabled Northerners to ignore the effects of racism and thus to reinforce separation as a guiding principle. The next section explores the consequences of the progressive investment in the “little neighborhood” in times and places when local control frequently meant intense segregation. Investigating library segregation, that section demonstrates that the bookmobile, that icon of mobile intimacy, could actually be used to enforce immobility and prevent interracial contact. It also examines the sometimes fevered resistance of Southern whites—prompted by fears of disease and disorder—to the emergence of such proximity in the civil rights movement. The following section identifies a shift in how such resistance was framed, as concerns about spatial order seemed to replace fears of racial contact, even as separation crucially continued to shape public culture. In order to find the broader resonances of that shift, the final section closely reads the only moment bookmobiles came before the United States Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Louisiana* (1966), which is also the only time the Court
considered the segregation of public libraries. This section finds obsessions with property, propriety, and presence in public space—and thus insists that racialized concerns with ordering space continued to restrict access to common consciousness even after the end of legal segregation.

“If evils will result from the commingling of the two races upon public highways established for the benefit of all,” John Harlan warned in his lone dissent in *Plessy*, “they will be infinitely less than those that will surely come from state legislation regulating the enjoyment of civil rights upon the basis of race.” As we will see, he was right. Restricting access to shared infrastructures like libraries—and to the books and feelings that would pass along them—meant exposing the ways in which the dream of a common consciousness was, for many, a terrible and seemingly inescapable nightmare.

**“Just Imagine”: Moving Books in the Long Shadow of Sectionalism**

Many progressives believed that if union of force was to take shape at the close of the nineteenth century, then the Union itself would have to be rebuilt, once and for all. Even several decades after the end of Reconstruction, sectionalism still cast a long shadow, and to imagine a nation unified by an infrastructure of feeling meant imagining ways to stitch North and South more thoroughly together (and to the new lands in the west, but more on that in the Chapter Three). One institution that took up this task, with mobile books as their primary tool, was the Lend a Hand Society’s Book Mission. In this section, we will see how that organization used the techniques that brought May Pressly into the intellectual life of Kansas to develop connections on a grander scale and against the fragmentation of sectionalism. But looking at the Book

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228 *Plessy*, 562.
Mission—and at very different projects developed by African American activists—will also illustrate how a focus on healing sectionalism could distract reformers from the lived realities of segregation, and thus from the separation at the heart of their project. Indeed, this turn-of-the-century attempt to bring North and South together with mobile print is, perhaps, one origin of the assumption at issue in this chapter. It depended on the idea that these two disparate, disconnected regions could be connected without Northerners needing to confront, face-on, in intimate proximity, the horrors of slavery and segregation.

The Lend a Hand Society was officially incorporated in 1892, inspired by the writings of Edward Everett Hale, a prominent Unitarian clergyman in Boston.\(^{229}\) In 1870, Hale had published a short story, “Ten Times One is Ten,” that laid out his philosophy and inspired a movement. Eighteen years later, surveying the proliferation of charitable “Wadsworth Clubs” (named after the story’s protagonist), Hale insisted that “‘Together’ is the central word of the gospel.”\(^{230}\) Clearly thinking along the same lines that Washington Gladden and Jane Addams would a short time later, Hale offered an almost mathematical formula for developing togetherness:

The phrase ‘Ten times one is ten’...means this,—that a certain Wadsworth Club, once imagined, found at the end of three years that, on the average, each of them had enlisted ten friends to the service of Faith, Hope, and Love. Each of these had the same eagerness as the first then had; and so, at the end of three years more, there were one thousand apostles of Faith, Hope and Love. In three years more there were ten thousand—and in three years more, a hundred thousand—by the same multiplication.\(^{231}\)

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\(^{229}\) Given the previous chapter’s focus on Kansas, it is worth noting that one of Hale’s first significant public roles was advocacy in favor of Kansas’s incorporation into the Union as a free state. See Edward Everett Hale, *Kansas [sic] and Nebraska: The History, Geographical and Physical Characteristics, and Political Position of These Territories* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1854).


\(^{231}\) Hale, *Ten Times One*, 7-8.
And given the explicit orientation of the Lend a Hand philosophy (its motto reads “Look up and not down; / Look forward and not back. / Look out and not in and / Lend a Hand”), this amplification was conceivably infinite.\(^\text{232}\) Inspired by Hale’s insistence that a club should “have for one, at least, of its objects, the uplifting of some person, neighborhood, or institution outside the club itself,” the officially incorporated Lend a Hand Society committed itself to a variety of projects designed to improve the lives of the Gilded Age poor.\(^\text{233}\) Many of the Society’s programs looked close to home: one made fresh produce available to working-class Bostonians; another built a floating hospital to treat the ill; another, called Noon-Day Rest, organized a lunchroom for working women in the city. Occasionally, other programs would look much farther afield, offering assistance to Boer prisoners of war being held in Bermuda, to Filipino boys, or to Belgians during World War I. But the Society’s longest-lasting and most successful program—the Book Mission—focused, intriguingly, somewhere in between.

Sometime in the late 1880s, the story went, white Bostonian Sarah Brigham took a trip to Florida. While she was staying at a hotel, an African American waiter asked to borrow a book, and Brigham’s eyes were opened, as a successor would later put it, to “the great lack of education and books among the mountain whites as well as the Negroes” of the South.\(^\text{234}\) Inspired by this moment, Brigham founded the Book Mission, which sent books to a surprising variety of institutions across the South. (The Mission was operated cooperatively with the Lend a Hand Society beginning in 1892, and it was subsumed into it in 1914.) Shipping boxes of books and periodicals to schools, libraries, and prisons across the region, the organization aimed to give a sort of literary breathing room to the “thousands of men, women and children crampned for

\(^{232}\) Hale, \textit{Ten Times One}, 7.

\(^{233}\) Hale, \textit{Ten Times One}, 9.

opportunities, who were anxious to ascend the educational ladder and to keep pace with the world’s progress.”

That rhetoric, along with the organization’s name, suggest its place in a long line of imperial enterprises, and the language Brigham and other Book Mission workers used to describe the South at least into the 1930s—of “unexplored regions,” of “isolated mountain section[s],” of “remote regions,” of people “awaiting the light we can and must bring to them”—also bears this out. A 1910 report noted how books provided by the Mission had “cheered the aching hearts of men in stripes behind prison bars and made them feel they have friends in the outside world who remember them.” And they appear to have seen their work for all Southerners in a similar light; in many ways, to these middle-class Bostonians, the South was another country. The wounds of sectionalism lived on in massively uneven industrial resources, in almost separate and vastly unequal economies, and in the disparate number and density of infrastructures between North and South. A “New South” would emerge in the first third of the century, out of groundwork laid in the last decades of the previous, but that economic renaissance—and the physical infrastructures it promised—would not immediately translate in any direct way into a common consciousness.

The Book Mission workers insisted, indeed, that it was not simply physical or economic differences that prompted the continued disconnect between the regions. At heart, the inability to

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238 A 1928 Book Mission report celebrated the “New South” for the millions “spent annually by all the States in road-building, the first step necessary before consolidated schools can be possible,” but it also lamented that many counties continued to list “from forty to seventy-five one and two-room schools for both white and negro children.” “Lend a Hand Book Mission Reports,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, November 27, 1928.
build a cohesive culture—and thus bridge the distance between North and South—was a result of a failure of imagination, and of emotion. Northerners, the Book Mission insisted, struggled to envision what it would be like to live in the South. “It is hard for us to imagine,” Mission director Mary Coburn wrote to a recipient in Tennessee in 1937, “what it would be to live beyond the reach of a public library, so it is especially challenging to be brought in touch with people who, like you, live almost in the desert as far as books are concerned.”\(^{239}\) And one request for donations from New England children asked them to “[j]ust imagine being five years old and never having learned a single Mother Goose rhyme, never hearing anything about Peter Rabbit and Mr. Macgregor.”\(^{240}\) Assuming everyone to have these shared experiences of a literate childhood, when their universality was not yet fact, meant not just ignoring but widening the gulf between North and South. Even into the 1940s the Southern teachers who received many of the books struggled to express their gratitude across that gulf. “I wish you could have been hidden in a corner where you could have watched their eager faces as I explained to them the contents of the box,” one wrote in 1943, and three years later another wrote that she knew “that if you could have seen the faces of the children as we unpacked treasure after treasure from your box that you would have felt amply rewarded for your efforts.”\(^{241}\) Separated by space and by an often

\(^{239}\) Mary Coburn to Ellen Click, June 11, 1937, “Book Mission Correspondence, June-Aug. 24, 1937” folder, carton 2, Lend a Hand Society Records. A Bostonian wrote into a newspaper in the late 1910s to praise the Book Mission and to castigate his fellow New Englanders: “The utter lack of reading matter among the great classes of people in the South is something of which few of us, throwing away our papers and magazines and books so carelessly, have any conception.” Edwin D. Mead, “Miss Brigham’s Book Mission,” “Book Mission, 20 March 1015-1 May 1920” Folder, carton 4, Lend a Hand Society Records.

\(^{240}\) “This is an appeal to boys and girls who have books of their own and can borrow many more from libraries to give other children of their own age a chance to read good books, too.”

profoundly different experience of the time since the Civil War, the North and South still struggled to know one another, and books were one tool used to build a common consciousness between them.

Ironically, the Book Mission’s argument depended on a refusal of the way their own efforts fit into a longer history of education and regional relations since the end of the Civil War. From Emancipation, freedpeople had demanded education, recognizing illiteracy as a major factor in their subjugation. And in response to those demands, as well as to the immediate postbellum transformation of abolitionism, white women from New England—from, in fact, the same social circles from which the Book Mission women came—traveled to the South to staff schools. This history is not once mentioned in any of the records preserved in the Book Mission’s archive, suggesting both a misplaced certainty that the will to learn would have to come from outside the South as well as an eagerness to forget Reconstruction in an effort to undertake a less racially-beneficent reconstruction.

The bridge between North and South would be built not just out of books, the Book Mission continued to argue, but out of bodies and intimate connections formed by books. Like Mary Keating, who traveled western Kansas trying to build up systems that would link those distant counties to Topeka, several Book Mission secretaries made trips through the South to survey their work and to try and expand it. In 1935, Mary Coburn took a long-awaited, seven-

carton 5, Lend a Hand Society Records; Elizabeth Watts to Whitman, March 27, 1951, “Book Mission – Southern Trip – Correspondence, Sept. 1951” folder, carton 2, Lend a Hand Society.

Carol Faulkner writes that “teaching in freedmen’s schools” was “the most common, traditional, and available option open to women in Reconstruction.” Carol Faulkner, Women’s Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen’s Aid Movement (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 39.

Trips took place several times before the complete incorporation of the Book Mission within Lend a Hand, and in 1915, 1917, 1921, 1924, 1928, 1935, 1941, and 1951.
week trip through what she called “the land of the Book Mission.”\textsuperscript{244} Driving through six southern states “in a Ford…[with] my mother as my companion,” Coburn followed a route laid out in a map earlier published in a request for funding [FIGURE 8].\textsuperscript{245} While the Book Mission was still shipping boxes of books at this point (not too long after, they would switch to sending money instead), this map is—like the bookmobile maps—about lines more than dots. Coburn herself moved through the space, both observing and embodying the connections the Mission sought to build. She discovered, for example, how the amplification of “Ten Times One is Ten” could be practiced, through print, in the mountains of North Carolina. “In one distant community,” Coburn explained, “only one man can read and [a librarian who struggles to find enough books] loans him a number of books at a time and he reads them to his neighbors who help him with his work, bring oil for the lamp, and come listen by the hour.”\textsuperscript{246} The dream, as articulated in this story, was that books gathered from a location in Boston could touch down in a rural hamlet and kindle local solidarities and a sense of mutual obligation. And then, ideally, those communities would be forever linked across fading sectional borders; indeed, in this case, even more explicitly than in the similar dreams of Lucy Browne Johnston and the Kansas Traveling Library, the coherence of the nation seemed at stake.

But as late as the last trip by a director, made by Helen Merritt in 1951, the struggle to truly understand the conditions of the South, and to assert connections against and across foreignness, continued. Before taking to the road, she wrote that though she had never before visited the South, “everyone I have written about my trip has been so cordial and co-operative I

\textsuperscript{244} Coburn, Draft letter to “Friends,” “Book Mission – Southern Trip – Notes, 1935” folder, carton 2, Lend a Hand Society Records.
\textsuperscript{245} Mary Coburn to Katherine Pettit, Aug. 5, 1935, “Book Mission Correspondence, 1933-1935” folder, carton 2, Lend a Hand Society Records.
\textsuperscript{246} Coburn, Draft letter to “Friends.”
am sure I shall not feel at all like a stranger.” But she nonetheless felt initially estranged, brought up short by a chasm between expectation and reality. “I can’t begin to tell you the conditions we found in most of these schools,” she wrote eleven days later from Kentucky. “They are typical of all the places we have ever heard of and from now on I’ll believe anything I hear of conditions in these isolated sections.” She had heard of the conditions, but she could not quite believe them until she had faced them, in person. This, of course, points to a fundamental problem in the Book Mission’s dream: can information alone truly overcome psychic, emotional, and economic difference and distance? The map of Coburn’s trip, and the plans for all of them, show significant hopes that community could be constructed on scales large and small. But, as we will see shortly, empowering local communities as a basis for larger ones could mean relinquishing direct and personal control over what shape the dream of a common consciousness could take.

Despite this interest in intimate contact, and in needing to see conditions in order to believe them, the directors seemed largely unwilling to truly confront the conditions that segregation had wrought. Indeed, one of the most significant fractures that threatened the Book Mission’s plans was race. The racial politics of the Mission were, from its founding on the inspiration of a black waiter, rather strange. The racially and economically unequal relationship of Brigham to that waiter was replicated over and over again, on a variety of scales, as the organization grew from that single interaction to thousands of them. That in the period after

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249 The Mission shipped 4,000 books in 1912, 12,205 to 10 states in 1923, and a seeming height of 16,601 in 1928. “Lend-A-Hand Reports Active Year” (1912); “Has Clubs in 24 States” (1923); and “Good Will and Good Works” (1929) in Scrapbook, clippings about Lend a Hand Society, 1892-1931, carton 4, Lend a Hand Society Records. Just one example of the strange class dynamics at play comes from a 1932 report by director Annie Brown, who wrote of
the 1890s, these Northerners saw the linking of North and South as a product of books moved *interracially* is striking. Historians have noted that that decade saw a kind of postbellum repair take place around whiteness (and especially white masculinity). In politics, empire, sports, and historiography, white men from various regions came together in ways that at least attempted to heal the wounds of war by actively furthering or passively ignoring continuing racial injustices.\(^{250}\) In contrast, the Book Mission sought books “for circulation among a scattered population of both races,” and did send books to institutions serving both whites and blacks.\(^{251}\) This was indeed radical, if only in a truly relative sense.

But it seems the organizers of the Book Mission understood racism and segregation as problems of *efficiency* rather than as fundamental injustices that challenged the dream of a common consciousness. A 1928 report complained that while white students were increasingly attending the sort of consolidated schools that allowed for the efficient and wide circulation of books, there remained “very few for negroes,” who continued to attend one-room schools.\(^{252}\) And in 1941, the director noted that often books “must be kept separate for white and colored schools,” meaning that white students had access to “[m]any more…good books” and African Americans were left with a “lack of variety.”\(^{253}\) (In one case, a draft of a 1935 annual report even suggested that sending books to black Southerners offered a bigger bang for the buck: “any

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\(^{253}\) “Book Mission – notes of trip South, 1941” folder, carton 2, Lend a Hand Society Records.
encouragement that can be given Negroes will be deeply appreciated and, in many cases, books so placed will be more carefully used and treasured than they would be in white communities.”) Segregation therefore often seemed to Book Mission staffers to stand in the way of building efficient infrastructures more than it was a fundamental social problem and a threat to their dream of common consciousness.

Unsurprisingly, African Americans often saw things in a rather different light. Kathryn Johnson, for example, understood immediately from childhood that she was excluded from the dream of a common consciousness embodied in print, at least as long as it failed to directly confront segregation and discrimination. Born in 1878, in Ohio, Johnson attended an integrated school—that glory of efficiency, according to the Book Mission—but wrote in an unpublished memoir that, in fact, “[i]t was only after I had started school that I became acutely conscious of the color line.” Books played a major role in this realization:

A little later an even worse blow came from one of the text books which we were given to study and accept as infallible. … It was called Eclectic Geography. It contained many large maps and took up most of the space on our desks. One section of the book was given over to a discussion of the races of mankind. There were pictures of each race. There was the white race, Caucasian; the red race; the brown race; the yellow race; and the black race. All had been given fairly intelligent faces except the black man. Underneath his picture it read, “This is an Ethiopian, he belongs to the most inferior race on the face of the globe.” I was amazed, stunned. My schoolmates turned to me and said, “That’s your folks!” I was crushed. I could not understand how a just God could make man in five races and make one inferior to all the others! I began to think long about it. I began to look in other books. But no book I could find which gave the African, or the American colored man, credit for any accomplishment.

Had Johnson’s school been in the south, it very well might have received Eclectic Geography from the Book Mission. The women of the Kansas Traveling Library, like those of the Book

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254 At the same time, the report warned that “[a] willingness to accept hand-me-downs persists from the days of slavery and state officials are quite right in asking us not to encourage this.” “Lend a Hand Book Mission, 1935,” “LHS draft annual reports, 1934-1936” folder, carton 5, Lend a Hand Society Records.
255 The Mission mostly did not send textbooks but occasionally did so.
Mission, could mostly put aside the question of what sorts of books they circulated, letting their assumptions hold sway without having to think very much about their effects. Johnson, on the other hand, understood intimately that—at least in many cases—the kinds of books circulated could influence precisely the kinds of social relations they created. Just as the book filled up the surface of her desk it also filled up the space between Johnson and her classmates, pushing them further and further apart. This was part, Johnson realized, of a “conspiracy designed to create a feeling of inferiority among all the peoples in whose veins ran the blood of Africa,” a conspiracy of disinformation and silence.256

Because of what Shelton Stromquist calls the “racial gulf that separated the worlds of white and black reform,” efforts to counter that conspiracy would have to take place apart from white-run institutions like the Lend a Hand Society, either by individuals or within the burgeoning institutions of the black freedom struggle.257 And they did take place, often by mobilizing books and always by presenting a criticism of—and, importantly, an alternative to—dominant ways of organizing communities. After returning from her work as a nurse in Europe during World War I, Johnson decided to confront the problem head on, creating her own sort of private, trans-regional bookmobile, “selling race pride” across the United States.258 Before the war, Johnson had worked as a field agent for The Crisis, the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons. In Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, Johnson sold copies of the magazine, which “laid the groundwork, and awakened the

256 Kathryn Johnson, unpublished memoir, folder 1, Kathryn M. Johnson Papers, Schlessinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
257 Stromquist, Reinventing, 152.
people” and prompted the founding of NAACP chapters. After the war, working on her own, she sold a different set of texts for an even broader purpose. Driving (much like the Book Mission directors) through the Northeast and down into the South, Johnson visited a rather different set of institutions: black churches, black colleges, and black homes, declaring she sought “to reach the rank and file” and “get the colored people reading.” Drawing on the model of Charles Eliot’s “five-foot shelf,” which aimed to make the classics of the (entirely white) Western canon available to a wider range of (mostly white) homes, Johnson developed what she called “The Two-Foot Shelf” of literature about African American experience, “to help the colored people learn something about themselves.” Selling over five thousand volumes in the two and a half years before 1925 (roughly at cost), she both explicitly tried to counter the effects of the conspiracy she had earlier experienced and implicitly critiqued the methods of programs like the Book Mission. Johnson borrowed the form of the five-foot shelf, much as the earlier traveling libraries had, but she turned a much more critical eye on its contents. As we saw in Chapter One, traveling librarians often let vague assumptions guide the choice of books, paying more attention to their circulation than to their contents. What Johnson’s rejoinder suggests is that passively ignoring the ideas embedded in circulating books would limit the ability to create the sort of common consciousness the progressives imagined. Largely ignoring

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259 Kathryn Johnson, unpublished memoir, folder 1, Kathryn M. Johnson Papers.
261 The precise contents of the shelf, other than Johnson’s own book about black soldiers in the war, are unclear. Kathryn Johnson, unpublished memoir, folder 3, Kathryn M. Johnson Papers.
262 Ovington, “Selling,” 114. Johnson once proposed the formation of a black-run “Bureau for the Distribution of Negro Literature,” which would distribute information about black history and life to whites so as to “increase the white man’s respect for a people whose ancestry has done so much towards laying the foundation for a world civilization.” Kathryn Johnson, “Educating Nordics,” The Messenger (May 1927): 144, 169.
physical segregation and endorsing, in effect, cultural separation had doomed their project from its inception.

Five years later, someone else’s attempt at “selling black pride” suggested something quite similar.263 In June, 1930, Lorenzo Greene and four other men drove south from Washington, D.C., aiming to sell books about African American history to black readers across the country.264 Those books, which were mildewing in the basement of Greene’s employer, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, were originally printed to spread the “the gospel of Negro history” by mail-order.265 But they sat there, unordered and unread, until Greene realized they could be bundled and sold like magazine subscriptions by agents on the road. Off and on for several years, Greene drove from city to town to city, selling steeply discounted sets of books to school, churches, and individuals.266 The goal of this work, he wrote partway through his journey, was to “induce the Negro public to subscribe to and read more widely the books of

264 For details on Greene’s career and his relationship to his mentor and boss, the prominent historian Carter G. Woodson, see Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
265 Greene, Selling, 54.
266 Like Johnson, Greene priced his books at a level that would feed and house him on the road, but which would not turn any significant profit. The ASNLH books were sold in bundles of eight for $9.98 ($127.12 in inflation-adjusted, 2009 dollars). According to an order slip published in Greene’s diary, the standard bundle included (all published by Associated Publishers in Washington, D.C.): Maurice Delafosse, The Negroes of Africa: History and Culture (1931); R. T. Kerlin, Negro Poets and Their Poems (1923); Kelly Miller, Everlasting Stain (1924); Willis Richardson, Plays and Pageants from the Life of the Negro (1930); Carter G. Woodson, African Myths (1928); Woodson, History of the Negro Church (1921); Woodson, Negro In Our History (1922); Woodson, Negro Makers of History (1928). Greene also offered “Special Combinations,” including “Books on Africa,” “Books for Ministers,” “Economics,” “Books for the Home,” and “Books for English Teachers.” Greene, Selling, 252. Selling black-oriented print more for politics than profit remains a common means by which social change is effected (or attempted) by African American activists. For example, Colin Beckles studied black bookstores as “PanAfrican ‘sites of resistance’.” He found that in Britain, the U.S., and Jamaica, bookstore owners and employees were not just capitalists or workers but “political activists who conceptualized the shop as a political ‘space’ in which the objective was to ‘liberate’ the minds of Black people by ‘de-constructing’ racist notions of Black identity and ‘re-producing’ the ‘truth’ about Black/African identity.” Colin Anthony Beckles, PanAfrican Sites of Resistance: Black Bookstores and the Struggle to Re-Present Black Identity (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1995), vii-viii.
the Associated Publishers, dealing with the history and achievements of the Negroes.”

Greene was far more invested in the “uplift” tradition—as well as its middle-class assumptions and prejudices—than Johnson, making his attempts seem often ham-handed and troubling. (He was also different, in this respect, from Langston Hughes, who in this period traveled through the South, selling to a wide cross-section of African Americans.) But despite their differences, all of these itinerants paid careful attention to what they were actually distributing as well as where and how they were distributing it. Connecting people through print as well as countering what Johnson had called a conspiracy of silence were twin goals of their projects. In the process of trying to achieve them, activists like Johnson and Greene expressed skepticism about the efficacy of building the “little neighborhoods” that were such an important part of the traveling library and its dream.

Like the Kansas Traveling Library, the Book Mission aimed to create building blocks for local libraries that could then be put under local control and connected to a national culture. (Remember, for example, the Kansas Traveling Library’s requirement that a library club be formed to steward the collection.) As it turns out, though, the stronger the local libraries served by the Book Mission became, the less interested they seemed in making those larger connections.

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268 He aimed, at least theoretically, to improve the lot of poor blacks, but at the same time he struggled to actually interact with them. When his group stopped in Greenville, North Carolina, and sought out rooms for the night, he recorded his response to a potential host: “When I saw her, I immediately knew that I could not stay at her home. She was ugly, black, untidy, ignorant, and her house lacked the atmosphere that I desired.” “I had gotten in with the wrong class of people,” he wrote, “and this despite the fact that I am very democratic.” Greene, Selling, 47. On the uplift tradition, see Kevin Gaines, Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
270 Methods and networks were very important to these efforts, as Johnson and Greene, especially, both depended on what the former called the “ready-made audiences” offered by black churches and schools. Kathryn Johnson, unpublished memoir, folder 3, Kathryn M. Johnson Papers.
Thanks to an influx of teachers who “were not progressive” during the war, “applications for books...fell off very much” in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{271} This was the beginning of the Book Mission’s decline. In the end, though, it was bookmobiles (and the efficient local governance that made them possible) that killed the Book Mission:

The building of “black roads” throughout the mountainous counties where only creek bed roads or mountain paths had been before, opened up the rural south for those who had been more or less confined to their back country. ... The bookmobiles began to make their rounds and many of the schools which formerly had no way of getting reading material were now able to have a few books which they could exchange each time the bookmobile made its trip. These, and other economic changes took place and the demand for our book service began to decrease.\textsuperscript{272}

By the late 1950s, the Book Mission began sending money rather than books to the South, abandoning not only the question of content but the physical books themselves as tools for building common consciousness. The little neighborhoods had taken over.\textsuperscript{273}

People like Johnson and Green, though, knew first-hand the isolation and exclusion this turn of events could promise; they understood that more efficient governance under the same old system could simply mean more efficient discrimination. Fostering institutions for local control without confronting, dismantling, and rebuilding the ways that control would be exercised, organizations like the Book Mission failed to grapple with the deepest scar left by slavery and the Civil War: the continued subjugation of millions of black Americans. In contrast, Johnson and Greene sought to build a trans-regional community based on racial solidarity, rather than nationalist abstraction, to build a “common fund,” as Dewey put it, from which African Americans could draw to find alternatives and demand recognition. Other individuals and


\textsuperscript{272} “Lend a Hand Society,” “LHS – draft annual reports, 1960-1961” folder, carton 5, Lend a Hand Society Records...


\textsuperscript{273} The Land a Hand Society, and the Book Mission, are still in operation, though much diminished.
organizations, like the black sorority Delta Sigma Theta, pursued this by using bookmobiles to assert a trans-regional and transformative racial community. But despite their best efforts, many black Southerners remained tied geographically to local spaces and, often, isolated culturally from anything so large. Eclectic Geography still held sway, and Southern infrastructures—physical and cultural—remained segregated. In the next section, we will start to see what role that ideas about proximity and community played in this, and how bookmobiles sometimes even helped perpetuate it.

“A Fear…I Can’t Explain”: Segregated Libraries and the Politics of Place and Space

In a series of lectures given in 1954 before interracial audiences at the University of Virginia, prominent historian C. Vann Woodward attempted to explain the strange and segregated world in which they found themselves—a world the Lend a Hand society failed to comprehend, let alone to challenge. Beginning with the compromises that ended Reconstruction but intensifying toward the close of the nineteenth century, Woodward explained, the North staged a “liberal retreat,” allowing an extreme approach to race relations to take hold. The

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274 In 1950, after years of planning, Delta Sigma Theta purchased and sent a bookmobile from New York City to Northeast Georgia. A gift to the state of Georgia for use by the West Georgia Regional Library (on the condition that it would serve black residents), the bookmobile circulated books, as well as serving as a site for educational classes and film screenings. Six years later, the DST executive director declared that “[w]e ourselves are enriched by the knowledge that we have opened a small part of the world of books to our brothers and sisters here” in the rural South. The Deltas thus asserted a cross-regional emotional bond, like that imagined by the Book Mission, but with a clear eye on the consequences of discrimination and a commitment to racial solidarity more than national cohesion. (The Delta-provided bookmobile was, one newspaper reported, “primarily intended for the use of Negroes in rural Georgia but its facilities would be available for the use of all of the rural people.”) The program earned broad recognition, including an award for “most unique library service of the year” from the American Library Association. “Bookmobile Project Declared Success By Delta Sigma Theta,” Daily Defender, September 5, 1956; “Deltas Launch Bookmobile With TV, Luncheon, Tea,” New York Amsterdam News, June 17, 1950; “Deltas Receive Award for Most Unique Library,” Philadelphia Tribune, July 17, 1951.

275 Woodward, Strange Career, 69. There were, Woodward explained, “forgotten alternatives” toward the beginning of this period, wherein formal segregation might not have occurred. (Which is not to suggest a lack of oppression—a position Woodward characterizes as “preposterous.”) He quotes, for example, a Northern reporter in 1880 puzzling over the “the proximity and confusion, so to speak, of white and negro houses,” and a visitor to the 1885 New
North, “eager to conciliate the South,” offered what Woodward called “permissions-to-hate,” allowing white animosity toward blacks to take the place of Southern antipathy toward the North.\(^{276}\) This was, in fact, the larger context of the Book Mission workers’ own set of concessions, in which they gave up a principle in order to build a national community, in which they complained about inefficiency but averted their eyes from its root causes and disastrous effects. Out of this mass of compromises and diverted gazes dawned an “era of stiff conformity and fanatical rigidity,” Woodward continued, in which a series of codes, called Jim Crow, “lent the sanction of law to…racial ostracism.”\(^{277}\) And this ostracism most vividly took form as a way of restricting access to public space and to public culture. Jim Crow was about determining who could go where, do what, interact with whom, and share a common consciousness.\(^{278}\) Lived experience of segregation varied on the ground, by time and by geography, and the rest of this chapter will catalogue some of those different concrete experiences. But it will be mainly interested in the cultural and physical system—the infrastructure of feeling—that enabled segregation and which had a strong grip across space and time. Within this system, as the little neighborhoods took shape, and took power, the politics of intimacy changed. If community was the result of intimate proximity, and the local powers resisted local, cross-racial intimacies, then the smaller communities conjoined into the nation—as opposed to those, like Johnson’s or Orleans marveling at the fact that “white and colored people mingled freely, talking and looking at what was of common interest,” both vivid examples of what such alternatives might have meant in the realm of community, culture, and education. Woodward, \textit{Strange Career}, 43, 31, 32, 42.\(^{276}\) Woodward, \textit{Strange Career}, 81.\(^{277}\) Woodward, \textit{Strange Career}, 44, 7.\(^{278}\) None of this is to suggest, of course, that the North was a racial utopia. But the oppression of African Americans often (though not always) took a different form from the “ostracism” Woodward describes. Kathryn Johnson, for example, remarked of the Book Mission’s hometown: “There were few other enterprises operated by colored people in Boston. Afraid of being segregated, they ate in restaurants run by white people, went to theatres where they couldn’t play, patronized stores where they could work only as menials; in short, Boston at that time was a place where you could get an education, but not employment where an education could be used.” Kathryn Johnson, unpublished memoir, folder 3, Kathryn M. Johnson Papers.
Greene’s, linked by black identities—would not incorporate (or be transformed by) African Americans.

Indeed, as early—or, from another angle, as late—as 1903, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that “there is little or no intellectual commerce” between blacks and whites; “they go to separate churches, they live in separate sections, they are strictly separated in all public gatherings, they travel separately, and they are beginning to read different papers and books.” This had a profound effect, the implications of which should invite us to again look askance at the Book Mission and its politics: “the very representatives of the two races, who for mutual benefit and the welfare of the land ought to be in complete understanding and sympathy, are so far strangers” that they do not, and cannot, know one another at all. The Book Mission (like many similar projects) invited contributors to “just imagine” what it must be like to live hundreds of miles away and thus to act at a safe distance. But it did not adequately consider that it could be just as difficult for a black or white Southerner to “just imagine” life a small distance down the road. Even at its height, the Book Mission reached only a handful of towns and hamlets in the South, and Johnson and Greene only ever briefly passed through and only ever obliquely affected places that were marked by quotidian and overwhelming divisions.

In fact, the vast majority of black Southerners had no consistent access to public libraries, with even fewer opportunities for interracial contact in library contexts. According to figures published in 1941 by African American library scientist Eliza Atkins Gleason, approximately 21% of black residents in thirteen southern states had access to public library service.281 Forty-

279 “To most libraries, lectures, concerts, and museums,” he continued, “Negroes are either not admitted at all, or on terms peculiarly galling to the pride of the very classes who might otherwise be attracted.” DuBois, Souls, 183-184.
280 DuBois, Souls, 184.
three percent of whites had such access. Additionally, 22% of the total black population in those states (roughly two million people) lived in jurisdictions that offered library service to white residents but denied it to black citizens. And even in places where libraries were not legally segregated, Gleason also noted, “these institutions do not publicize the fact that service is available to Negroes,” making even the numbers reported for those with access likely inadvertently inflated.

One prominent way that some tried to resolve this situation was to offer segregated service for African Americans. These institutions, which existed at least from the founding of a black library in Memphis in 1903 until full desegregation in the late 1960s, aimed to offer African Americans access to books on terms largely acceptable under Jim Crow. They were also (like traveling libraries in the earlier period) often begun out of private philanthropy and sometimes involved later administration by government. By 1918, likely more than sixteen segregated libraries serving black patrons had been founded across the Southern states, and others would follow in the decades to come. But there was often a cruel irony to these efforts: they supplied African Americans with books by undercutting one of the dreams that those books might have represented. As we saw in Chapter One, one of the fantasies of the traveling library was that moving books to people would move those people—emotionally and physically—into new spaces, in new combinations. But in contexts where spaces were racially-coded, and where

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282 As the Lend a Hand Society decried, this number is quite low compared to other parts of the country. Still, though, it is twice the proportion of African Americans without access.

movement in and through them was restricted, moving books could quite easily be used to keep people firmly in place. And “place” was a powerful idea under Jim Crow; it was, as Glenda Gilmore has described, “a stiff-sided box where southern whites expected African Americans to dwell.”

Bringing books into that box, and seeming to make it unnecessary to leave it, segregated bookmobile service—even undertaken with the finest of motives—could reinforce its walls. “With segregation a way of life, I realized that if we were to develop service for all, we must make plans to include all,” one white Georgia librarian remembered of building a black branch the late 1940s, “though necessarily a segregated framework, at that time.” These projects could promote the development of a common consciousness, and of powerful sorts of community, within those walls. But other than in some prospective future (when a newly educated, united black population would demand its rights), they struggled to challenge the terms of the box itself by insisting on intimacies and commonalities that violated the boundaries of Jim Crow.

The case of the Richard B. Harrison library, in Raleigh, North Carolina, illustrates the risks of this approach. The library was founded in Raleigh in 1935, after the North Carolina Library Commission and an “interracial committee and a group of interested negroes”

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284 Gilmore, Gender & Jim Crow, 3.
285 This sort of accommodationist library service could also tend to offer African Americans less contact with books than fully desegregated service did. As late as 1961, the United States Commission on Civil Rights found that in counties with segregated libraries, whites typically had access to more than six times the number of books available to African Americans. Gleason, Southern Negro, 93; Stephen Cresswell, “The Last Days of Jim Crow in Southern Libraries,” Libraries & Culture 31 (1996): 558.
286 Edith L. Foster, Yonder She Comes: A Once Told Li’bry Tale (Bremen, Ga.: Gateway Printing Co., 1985), 220.
287 Elizabeth Abel, for example, has uncovered a photograph taken in Mississippi by the Works Progress Administration in the late 1930s or early 1940s. In it, a young black child approaches the Greenwood Public Library for Negros, and is confronted by a hand-painted sign reading “You Are Late.” Abel argues that this sign “speaks in the vernacular rather than in impersonal bureaucratese,” turning the library into “the site of a complex instruction in literacy: not only the decoding of written texts, but also initiation into the voice of community.” In effect, she continues, the sign offers “a form of direct and honest speech that talks back to the texts at the library’s interior.” Elizabeth Abel, Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 74.
approached the mayor with the fact that the county, despite being home to “the largest negro population in the State,” had “no provision for public library service” to them.\textsuperscript{288} The mayor supported the development of a library, combining public funds (to pay for books and for a librarian) with those raised in the community (to pay for rent, furniture, and other equipment). Among the most difficult tasks, tellingly, was finding a location. “Various sites were considered,” a 1945 pamphlet explained, “but after taking all factors under consideration it was decided that a central, accessible location on the main Negro thoroughfare of the city was best.”\textsuperscript{289} With even streets racialized, placing a library designed especially to serve one part of the community was a task that required geographical precision. In that careful placement at its founding, the library sated the hunger of the “book-starved Negroes of Raleigh and Wake County,” as the pamphlet put it, but it did not explicitly question the root of that hunger or always encourage its constituents to venture out to find new satisfactions.\textsuperscript{290}

This was even more the case with the introduction of the Richard B. Harrison bookmobile, in the early 1940s, to serve what a Wake County Commissioner called “the rural colored people” outside of Raleigh.\textsuperscript{291} As Gleason had noted, rural African Americans had even more limited access to public libraries than their urban counterparts (5.5% vs. 56% in 1935), and


\textsuperscript{289} Richard B. Harrison 	extit{Public Library, Tenth Anniversary, 1935-1945} (Raleigh, North Carolina: 1945), 1. (Even as it describes the Location Committee’s ultimate success in finding a spot, the pamphlet announces the beginning of a campaign for funds to find a new, permanent home.) Available at http://web.co.wake.nc.us/lee/rbhlib/history/10ann/1945rbh10an.pdf.

\textsuperscript{290} Richard B. Harrison, 2. One 1949 report by a black newspaper described the library’s renowned “magnetic personality,” suggesting the way it could attract and excite even while tying its patrons to it, making it difficult to enter other orbits in other places. “Harrison Library Serves Many Patrons in Raleigh,” \textit{New Journal and Guide}, June 4, 1949).

\textsuperscript{291} Richard B. Harrison, 5.
bookmobiles like the Harrison Library’s aimed to solve that problem. The bookmobile regularly made stops at sixty different locations, “extend[ing] the library to citizens throughout Wake county,” in the words of one black newspaper. In Curious Missie’s vision of Southern bookmobiles in roughly this same period, moving books along “strange, secret roads” could bring people out of their houses and into common consciousness and shared citizenship. But in the age of “fanatical rigidity” that Woodward described, the bookmobile’s goals could find themselves turned upside down: the bookmobile moves and its black patrons do not.

A photograph taken in 1946 of a Harrison bookmobile stop makes this rather painfully clear [FIGURE 9]. The image shows a black man choosing books from the bookmobile with the help of two black female librarians. But he does so, oddly, from the very table at which he labors, processing cured tobacco. Just a quarter turn from his work, and with one hand still grasping a bunch of tobacco, the man points with his other out the window, where the bookmobile is parked. Taken from inside the tobacco house, the photograph shows a cramped single room, the man crowded from all sides by piles of tobacco that spill from the table and rise from the floor. Only a tiny sliver of open land shows in the corner of the window. Indeed, perhaps tellingly, the bookmobile itself blocks most of the horizon, limiting the visual space of the photograph and the physical space in which the man can act. As much as the proponents of the bookmobile imagined it opening up the lives of its patrons, the bookmobile here acts as one

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292 Gleason, Southern Negro, 95.
294 The photograph appears not to have been published or circulated (and, indeed, exists as a negative in the North Carolina State Archives). Though this is ostensibly an image of a triumph (bookmobile service for the isolated, poor, and black), its failure to circulate is consistent with what Elizabeth Abel has identified as a general tendency by which photographs of Jim Crow institutions were only rarely produced and even more rarely made publicly visible. Abel, Signs of the Times, 103-120.
side of the stiff-sided box of “place,” making it difficult to see beyond the immediate space of labor or to imagine different orientations within it.\footnote{Contrast, for example, the economic, social, and cultural power tobacco offered in a fundraising flier distributed by the Johnston County Library in Smithfield, North Carolina. The request features a bookmobile, with a white librarian in the cab, with two white women and a white man clustered around the outside. “Will you give a bundle or stick of tobacco,” it inquires, “for the Johnston County Library book fund?” folder 1, Johnston County Records, Public Library History Files, State Library of North Carolina (Raleigh, North Carolina). Available at http://digitalstatelibnc.contentdm.oclc.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/u/?p249901coll36,1378.}

The exact circumstances of this photograph—Was the farm his? Why did he not get up? What other interactions did the librarians have over the course of the day? Why was it staged like this?—are probably impossible to know. (It is unlikely, though, that he owned the farm, as only 28.4\% of nonwhite farmers in southern states in 1945 were owners or part owners of the land they worked.)\footnote{189,232 nonwhite farmers were in this category, compared to the 475,739 who worked as tenant farmers or sharecroppers. By contrast, 68.3\% of white farmers were owners or part owners. \textit{Black Farmers in America, 1865-2000: The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives} (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 2002), 23.} But it does vividly, if somewhat idiosyncratically, illustrate what was at stake in segregated bookmobile service. The bookmobile provided the man with books while making it unnecessary for him to enter shared, interracial public space—or even to leave his work for a moment. This was the paradox of the segregated bookmobile. At the June, 1952, celebration of the Stanford L. Warren Public Library’s bookmobile, in Durham, North Carolina, the program opened with James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” which includes several lines that put these painful ironies in sharp relief: “Keep us forever in the path we pray, /Lest our feet /Stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee.”\footnote{“Ten Years of Bookmobile Service, 1942-1952,” folder 1, Durham County Records, Public Library History Files, State Library of North Carolina. Available at http://worldcat.org/oclc/433594394/viewonline. On library segregation in Durham, including a brief discussion of bookmobiles, see Radway, “The Library as Place, Collection, or Service.”} This is a song both plaintive and powerfully hopeful, calling on its singers to “march on ‘til victory is won.” But its posture is one looking forward in time, to a glorious future at the end of a set path, rather than sideways through
space, to and beyond the horizons of the present. This was, indeed, the posture of segregated bookmobile programs more generally, which aimed to uplift the race through education in order to prepare it for what was to come but which also often failed to directly challenge or transform the present.

Why did some jurisdictions, either officially (a variation we will see in the next section) or by constraining the actions available to black activists, use bookmobiles to keep African Americans in place? Precisely because the alternative—the vision of kindling, frictional intimacy that inspired the traveling library—could seem to threaten the racial system Jim Crow was meant to enact. As Ernest Gellner argued, national community is born “if and only if” its members “recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.” Sharing books, sharing space, sharing consciousness: these portended a mutual recognition that would make the continuation of segregation untenable. With recognition would come obligation, and with obligation would come a need for justice to take shape on the land and in its people. As we are about to see, that threat inspired powerful, terrified, and frequently strange resistance by those who sought to make sure the South “remain[ed] a white man’s country.”

The South was not, certainly, homogenous in its approach to library segregation. By the 1950s, for example, Maryland had in place a law that would share funds with local communities for library service, provided that service was open to all people of any race. In 1952, more than half of the state’s 23 counties were using these funds to augment their library services. One

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298 The cover of the program includes a quotation from Sir William Temple that similarly highlights the ways that these programs often looked forward in time rather than horizontally in space: “Books, like proverbs, receive their chief value from the stamp and esteem of ages through which they have passed.”


300 See “Bookmobile,” Washington Post, April 28, 1952. Other Southern municipalities which had officially integrated library service by 1959 included: Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee; Little Rock, Arkansas (also home to an integrated bookmobile program); New Orleans, Louisiana; Richmond, Virginia; Louisville, Kentucky; Charlotte and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Miami and Tallahassee, Florida; Atlanta, Georgia. See “Atlanta
county that resisted, though, offers a glimpse at why the dream of common consciousness was so frightening to many white Southerners. In the spring of 1952, Calvert County was overtaken by what turned out to be a controversial question: should the county raise its taxes by 2 cents a person in order to share bookmobile service with neighboring Anne Arundel County? This was a proposal made by new resident “Mrs. Hilmer C. Nelson,” who objected to the lack of library service in Calvert County. While much of the county supported the plan, a portion of the population vociferously opposed it. One man delivering wood to Nelson’s home announced one day, for example, that “I won’t be back with any more wood, and if you get the bookmobile, we’ll burn it and all the books in it.” Nelson had butted up against what she referred to as “a fear…I can’t explain.” But we can explain it, or can begin to, by putting this incident in the context of the traveling library’s dreams and of segregation’s nightmares.

Much of the resistance to the library was couched in political and financial terms. One resident, for example, wrote into the Washington Post to defend himself and his neighbors, explaining that the decision hinged on “whether or not taxes should be raised,” not on race. But despite his protestations—that “a mutual respect” existed “between white and colored people” in the county—at the core of the resistance lay the fact that the bookmobile would serve all residents, no matter their race. (In fact, the ways that taxes literalize the mutual obligations of citizenship meant that the two arguments were inextricably intertwined.) The most prominent opponent of Nelson’s plan was William W. Duke, a trial magistrate in Prince Frederick, who


301 All extant coverage of this incident refers to her as “Mrs. Hilmer C. Nelson.” Her own given name is currently unknown, and I will henceforth refer to her as Nelson.


303 Morris, “Calvert Foes.”

declared that “A Negro will never set foot in that library as long as I have anything to do with it.” The main thrust of his argument, which appears to have been taken up in other quarters of the county, is striking and not a little bit odd: many “Negroes in this county,” Duke explained to a reporter, “have a venereal disease, which can be spread by the exchange of books.” The principal of the county high school, while refusing to take sides, also noted that it was a fear of disease, not the idea of African Americans reading, that disturbed opponents. In the end, this panic was not entirely successful, but neither was it a failure. The 1952 effort to get a library failed, and it was six more years before the county would take advantage of the Maryland library act and offer integrated library service.

Duke’s was a rather strange and feverish position, but it also makes a certain kind of sense within the context we have thus far explored. Traveling librarians had dreamed that community and mutual obligation would be “spread by the exchange of books,” but what is spread here is pestilence and social (or even physical) death. In ways that the progressives had not understood, despite their own complicity with it, the restriction of intimacy and of mobility were at the heart of white supremacist ideology and policy. It is not coincidental that African Americans seemed to threaten infection, and more specifically venereal disease, given the ways that fears of racialized sexual bodies and racist public health programs long shaped public life in

305 Morris, “Calvert Foes.”
306 The other main objection Duke had was that “the Negro is not above stealing a book from a library.” Morris, “Calvert Foes.”
307 The Washington Post reporter noted that “Many residents…seem to regard free circulation of reading matter as harmful as the ruinous ‘dry rot’ in so many tobacco fields.” Morris, “Calvert Foes.” This is a rather striking contrast to antebellum legal and social codes that limited slave literacy on the assumption that reading itself was a threatening source of power, and which made black reading itself an act of resistance. See Stephanie H.M. Camp, Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 93-116; Janet Duitsman Cornelius, “When I Can Read My Title Clear”: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1991). At the same time, separate and unequal funding of African American schools in the South suggests that there was not a whole lot of interest in making that reading possible, either.
the U.S. But as a Washington Post editorial and the high school principal both pointed out, many white Southerners depended on cross-racial intimacies in their everyday lives. “But colored people are employed hereabouts to clean homes, prepare meals, serve at table, make up beds, and launder clothes,” the latter said. “I can’t see how handling books would be more dangerous.” Indeed, a library might seem a strange place for these fears to materialize so powerfully. But public libraries invite their patrons to quite literally hold books in common, and to make passing them from hand to hand the foundation of community. (And integrated bookmobiles, which threatened to cross-racial boundaries both spatial and social, could highlight those possibilities even more.) White Southern society depended on intimacies between white and black, and Jim Crow and its racialized economic system were attempts to manage, control, and restrict those intimacies. Contact might happen, but it would ideally happen in situations where hierarchies were clear and spaces could be controlled. Where contact was not under contract, and where it could constitute a body politic, what Robin D.G. Kelley calls the “infrapolitics” of everyday resistance that marked other intimate encounters under Jim Crow might have seemed less manageable and more radically transformative. Outside carefully ordered commercial exchange, that threat of unpredictable encounter, and of frictional and tingling connections between black and white bodies, could thus inspire a sexualized panic of a

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309 Morris, “Calvert Foes.” The Post remarked that the fear of disease arose “in the minds of men who have been accustomed for years to having Negroes prepare their food and wait on their tables.” “Bookmobile,” Washington Post (April 28, 1952).

310 Kelley defines infrapolitics, drawing on William Sewell, as “the daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts” of the oppressed. He points, for example, to the practice of “pan-toting,” where black servants exploited their access to white kitchens to appropriate leftover food for themselves and their families. Robin D.G. Kelley, Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class (New York: Free Press, 1994), 8, 18-19.
sort usually more associated with the “the rape-lynching rationale” that enabled the murder of thousands of African Americans and the brutal policing of the color line. And the intimacies of public libraries, while certainly different in scope and scale, also offer a window into the ways that fears about contact and transmission would continue to structure encounters with the spaces of public life in America, even as Jim Crow began to fail. Indeed, as libraries were integrated (or, more precisely in many cases, de-segregated), the impulse to manage and control space—embodied so devastatingly by Jim Crow—was not abandoned. It would, in fact, accelerate and sharpen.

“VERTICAL NEGRO”: The Substitution of Space for Race and the Turn to Order

    In April, 1960, a group of black high school students walked into the Danville, Virginia, public library and were denied service. In many ways, Danville’s was a Jim Crow library like many others. But there was something special about this library: it was located in “the last Capitol of the Confederacy,” where Jefferson Davis had decamped after the fall of Richmond,

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311 While, as Cynthia Skove Nelson reminds us, fewer than a third of lynchings in the South involved accusations of sexual violence against white women, it was a powerful (and often powerfully effective) rhetorical posture that helped elide the larger political and economic purposes of lynching. Cynthia Skove Nelson, Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness through Racial Violence (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Consortium Press, 2007), 74.
313 They were sent to what one organizer later called the “very, very small” black library down the street. The youths were inspired by the sit-ins that February at Greensboro, North Carolina, lunch counters, the organizer explained. They debated challenging local segregation at a lunch counter, but rejected that idea, deciding that the “first attack” should be “against the public parks and the public library, because those were publicly funded.” Interviews with Robert Williams, “Danville, Virginia, 1945-1975,” Mapping Local Knowledge, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/bio_williams.html.
314 Two years later, in Albany, Georgia, another group of black teenagers protested a similar set-up (large white branch, white bookmobile, and small African American branch) and were arrested. “20 Youths Dragged from Library in Ga.,” Philadelphia Tribune, August 7, 1962.
and where the Confederacy had ultimately collapsed [FIGURE 10]. It was, as one protest organizer called it, “a seminal place” for a protest against segregation. And so, ninety-five years later, Danville was once again home to a last gasp of a failing, racist system. But just as the end of the Confederacy had not, ultimately, spelled total freedom for African Americans, neither did the formal end of segregation mean the abandonment of restriction, control, and separation as shaping principles of American life. After the students’ demonstration, and the NAACP lawsuit it inspired, a federal court ordered Danville to desegregate its public libraries. In response, first the city council and then 64% of voting residents chose to close the library rather than comply with the injunction. They also, importantly, ceased operations of the town’s bookmobile. After a plan to open a privately run, whites-only library failed, the public libraries eventually reopened four months later, in September, but only on what Time called “an odd basis”: all of the tables and chairs had been removed, and service was only available to patrons who stood.

The library had thus taken Harry Golden’s satirical call for “vertical integration” literally. In his best-selling Only in America (1958), Golden noted that “white and Negro stand at the

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317 In fact, one reported noted that Danville was one of only two towns in Virginia which maintained segregated libraries, and suggested that “Danville probably long ago would have admitted Negroes had it not been for the sentiment attached to the building,” which served as a “major Civil War shrine.” Elsie Carper, “Voters to Decide Future of Closed Town Library,” Washington Post, May 30, 1960.
319 The city also closed the parks that the protesters had sought to integrate. Carper, “Voters to Decide.” The Danville bookmobile program had begun in 1949 for what one newspaper called, intriguingly, “the convenience of the reading public which can not use the public library because of the limited space.” “Danville Residents Use Library’s New Bookmobile,” New Journal and Guide, October 1, 1949.
320 “Standing Room Only,” 42.
same grocery and supermarket counters…walk through the same dime and department stores, and stand at the same drugstore counters.”

Concluding, then, that “[i]t is only when the Negro ‘sets’ that the fur begins to fly,” he proposed what he termed the “GOLDEN VERTICAL NEGRO PLAN.” Under this plan, North Carolina would “provide only desks in all the public schools of our state—no seats.” With this modest proposal, Golden captured the strangely rigid caprice of segregation, as well the ways it inexorably structured the possibilities of shared space. In particular, he points us to important (if always somewhat fictional) distinctions—between commercial and public spaces, between private and public property, and between economic and emotional relationships—that affected who could share what and where. Relationships that were based on money and on one-to-one exchange of money for services or for objects in private or commercial spaces (like drugstore purchases or maid service) were acceptable. Relationships arising from more mutual, interdependent exchanges of books and ideas and emotional connection (like in schools or libraries) were threatening.

But somehow missing Golden’s caustically humorous take on these paradoxes, the Danville library appears to have taken it up, seriously, in the interests of discouraging the kinds

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322 Golden, Only, 122.

323 “In fact, this may be a blessing in disguise,” he assured his readers. “They are not learning to read sitting down, anyway; maybe standing up will help.” Golden, Only, 122. Emphasis original.

324 Golden also noted that black women accompanying white children were frequently allowed into supposedly white-only spaces, and so he also proposed a “WHITE BABY PLAN,” wherein African Americans could borrow white children, who would be “sort of pool[ed]…at a central point in each neighborhood.” “Eventually,” he continued, “the Negro community can set up a factory and manufacture white babies made of plastic” to take with them. Golden, Only, 122-123.

of mingling and interaction that sitting at tables might inspire.326 “Today the library is a place of wide open spaces,” a local newspaper editor noted just after the reopening.327 In December of 1960, the city returned limited furniture to the libraries, but promised that it would be “spread out,” and that people who wanted to sit would be assigned numbers corresponding to a specific “booth…where the applicant can study.”328 (Additionally, in an echo of poll taxes and literacy tests, applicants for library cards in Danville after desegregation were required to pay a $2.50 fee and fill out an application, including character and business references.)329 Clearly inspired by lingering racism and the still-strong grip of a dying Jim Crow, the library nonetheless ceased to use race to explicitly justify its actions.330

The Danville case is thus a spatially smaller-scaled variation on the bookmobile’s effort to control movement, and it is also a temporally smaller-scaled variation on the shifts the South underwent at mid-century. Over the course of less than a year, the Danville library started with an openly racist position (keeping black citizens out), moved to an extreme act of resistance to change (shutting the library), then seemed to transmute those openly racial concerns into more explicitly spatial ones (how people should be arranged and their movement organized). The

library rearranged the furniture in the face of a massive rearrangement of the society that had kept it segregated for decades. But this was more than just a randomly futile gesture, though it was likely that as well. It was—in an odd way, like the traveling library—an effort to manage new forms of community as they emerged, inviting some changes but forestalling revolution. Rearranging the furniture, after all, seemed designed to limit interracial contact (as in Magistrate Duke’s blustering), suggesting how racially charged these new concerns could remain. At the same time, though, it portended an important shift in the debate about segregation, libraries, and belonging: from the question of which specifically racialized bodies should go where to distinct if related concerns with the proper arrangement of all bodies in space. Lynn Staeheli and Don Mitchell assert that “the power to exclude entails an ability to reorder the public,” but in places like Danville, the reverse also held: the power to order public space reasserted an ability to exclude, even as the legal and social grounds for that exclusion partially changed. The safety and propriety of space came to stand in for, and often to reinforce, earlier ways of delimiting space; if proximity and contact were inevitable, they would have to be carefully controlled. Separation, if of a somewhat different kind, would remain the order of the day.

“Few sections of the segregation code have escaped attack,” Woodward declared in 1954, though the success of those attacks could be uneven and unexpected. Libraries were among the sites—like schools, most prominently—at which legal battles over access to public life took place. In the following section, we will look at the legacies of the shift embodied by Danville by examining how in one Supreme Court case, concerns about race in public libraries and on

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331 In an odd echo decades later, in the midst of another reorganization of public space, some downtown public libraries used furniture to restrict access to homeless citizens, banning belongings that would not fit easily under library chairs. See, for example, David Eggert, “Popular with homeless, Tacoma library sets limit on stuff you can bring in,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, May 15, 2002.
bookmobiles continued to be transformed into debates about public property, proximity, and propriety. The terms shifted, as did the legal landscape, but something remained of these older and stubbornly enduring ways of ordering communities and restricting access to them.

“Someone Else’s Property”: Property, Propriety, and Presence in *Brown v. Louisiana*

Calvert County and Danville were only two in a string of (relative) victories in efforts to desegregate public libraries during the civil rights movement. The first two years of the 1960s saw a series of library sit-ins—with mass arrests in Memphis and near-riots in Greenville, South Carolina—which frequently produced positive results. Other locations (like Savannah, Georgia, and Bessemer, Alabama) integrated without any major conflict at all.334 Federal courts in Alabama, South Carolina and Virginia all weighed in on the issue.335 But only one such case reached the United States Supreme Court: *Brown v. Louisiana* (1966), which dealt with convictions for “disturbing the peace” arising from a protest against a segregated library system.336 (It is also the only Supreme Court case to centrally involve bookmobiles.)337 In his survey of library desegregation, Stephen Cresswell declares that *Brown* “spoke to issues of public protest and not directly to questions of equal access to libraries.”338 But “issues of public protest” are issues of proper behavior in public space, of what kinds of presences are appropriate in what kinds of places. And so they are, in fact, issues that are absolutely central to questions of access to public culture and public space. In order to make that case, and to show one way that

334 For a more detailed accounting of these cases, see Cresswell, “The Last Days,” 557-563.
335 The decisions ranged from demands for integration to side-stepping the issue by allowing cities to close their libraries or institute fees and elaborate application procedures. See Cresswell, “The Last Days,” 564.
337 Bookmobiles have ended up before lower courts somewhat more often. In *Morrow v. Hardwell*, for example, the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals declared that weekly bookmobile service alone, with its limited supply of legal texts, did not offer inmates in a Waco, Texas, prison sufficient access to the courts. *Morrow v. Hardwell*, 768 F.2d 619 (1985).
the shift embodied in Danville wove its way into the fabric of American society, this section will closely read *Brown v. Louisiana* less as legal history than social theory. Ultimately, I want to argue that all of the opinions in *Brown* articulated a theory that predicated access to public space on the maintenance of order and thus on a refusal of revolutionary change.

The facts of the case were largely undisputed. At around 11:30am on March 7, 1964, a small group of African American men—including Henry Brown, L.C. Bibbins, Robert Smith, and Cleveland Kinzie—walked into the Audubon Regional Library in Clinton, Louisiana, and Brown requested a book. Echoing the demands of Johnson and Greene that books about black people be part of their community’s collective culture, Brown asked for *Story of the Negro* (1948) by Arna Bontemps, the Louisiana-born head librarian at Fisk University.339 (A children’s history text written in direct opposition to white-authored books, like *Eclectic Geography*, which tormented black children like Johnson, *Story* also won the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award in 1956 for promoting peace and equality in the spirit of its progressive namesake.) After the librarian had found that the book was not held by the library—a fact of which the men were likely aware in advance and which suggests the ways that black ideas as well as black bodies were unwelcome in the library—she informed Brown that it could be requested from the state library and either mailed to him or picked up at the library’s blue bookmobile. Brown and his fellows then remained in the library for around ten or fifteen minutes, at which time a sheriff arrived and ordered them to leave. Refusing, the five men were arrested for disturbing the peace, then convicted and sentenced by a judge who applied either a fine or jail time. Pretty much every participant agreed that this is what happened. Two years later, when the case reached Washington, though, the *meaning* of these facts inspired a passionate disagreement on the Court,

a disagreement that gets to the heart of the problems of intimacy and separation in midcentury public life.

The book would only be made available to Brown by mail or blue bookmobile because the Audubon Regional Library took the practices and ideologies discussed in the last section to a rather illustrative extreme: the library system was, quite literally, color-coded. There was the main library building in Clinton, two additional branch libraries, a red bookmobile, and a blue bookmobile. When white patrons registered, they were given red library cards; when African Americans registered, they were given blue cards stamped “NEGRO.” White patrons could use the library buildings or the red bookmobile [FIGURE 11a-b], and black patrons could use only the blue bookmobile [FIGURE 12]. Even more explicitly (and with seemingly more malice) than bookmobiles like that of the Richard B. Harrison Library, these mobile libraries were used to keep certain people in certain places.340

Brown and the other men did not just happen to want a book that Saturday morning in March. Explicitly rejecting the ways bookmobiles could limit access to common consciousness, and under the auspices of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), they purposefully violated the careful ordering of space represented by the library’s colorfully rigid organization. Whether that violation constituted a breach of the peace or not—and more fundamentally, what peace means in a public library—was the fundamental issue at stake in the case. Eventually, on February 23, 1966, the Court overturned the convictions in a 5-4 decision, but that issue remained largely unresolved. Abe Fortas (joined by Earl Warren and William Douglas) wrote the

340 This was of a piece with Louisiana librarianship more generally. The Louisiana Library Association, for example, clung to segregation until the 1960s. Even in the wake of Brown v. Board of Education, the LLA refused to enact widespread desegregation, and it and the American Library Association even parted ways for several years in the early 1960s. See Steven R. Harris, “Civil Rights and the Louisiana Library Association: Stumbling toward Integration,” Libraries & Culture 38 (2003): 332-350.
prevailing opinion, vacating the convictions on the ground that Louisiana’s disturbing the peace statute was unconstitutionally vague and unconstitutionally applied. William Brennan concurred with an opinion specifically arguing that the statute was unconstitutional even when applied to actions in public buildings, and Byron White concurred more narrowly. Hugo Black (joined by Tom Clark, John Harlan II, and Potter Stewart) vociferously rejected the prevailing opinion. In a 17-page dissent, which he read aloud to the court in what one report called “a 30-minute verbal assault,” Black insisted that nothing in the First Amendment grants the right to ignore authorized orders to leave a public building—and especially not a public library. In all of the opinions, to a perhaps surprising degree, the question of what was peculiar about public libraries was central. And so careful attention to how libraries figured in these seemingly conflicting opinions will reveal that this was more than just a run-of-the-mill First Amendment case. It was an opportunity to reconsider common consciousness in the wake of segregation, but it was an opportunity mostly lost. Robert Tsai argues that in Brown, “the Court refused to draw bright lines that would have extinguished First Amendment rights” outside more traditional venues of “vigorous expression.” And that is partly true: the majority did to some degree defend “widening circles of protest,” even as they reached public libraries. But it misses a key part of the story. The Court did not refuse outright to draw lines that would limit protest. And the lines it drew—


342 Robert L. Tsai, Eloquence and Reason: Creating a First Amendment Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 91.

343 Tsai, Eloquence and Reason, 91.
around property, propriety, and presence, in particular—continued the tradition of separation and a commitment to order at any cost.

Staeheli and Mitchell argue that “[t]he struggle over who can be on public property is a struggle over who is and is not to be included as part of ‘the people.’”344 As taxpayers and citizens, Brown and the other protesters entered and occupied public space in order to make claims on it, forcing the justices to confront a seemingly simple question: Who owns public space? Fortas, for his part, pegged his opinion on the library’s illegal segregation and the right of anyone to use public space. The “petitioners’ presence in the library was unquestionably lawful,” he intoned. “It was a public facility, open to the public.”345 He connected Brown to three previous cases in which the Court struck down convictions under Louisiana’s breach of peace statute for actions undertaken in civil rights protests.346 These protests took place in different locations (lunch counters, a bus depot waiting room, public streets), which applied different aspects of the law from the one at stake in Brown. The State of Louisiana argued, here, that Brown and the other protesters violated a specific part of the statute, which criminalized a failure to “disperse or move on” from public buildings when ordered so to do by any authorized person.”347 But Fortas generally refused the claim that a public building is materially different from a street (where the Court had previously protected speech rights), an argument made specifically by Brennan. Both justices argued, in effect, that public space belonged—at least to a certain degree, and with major caveats which will be discussed shortly—to all members of the public.

345 Brown, 139.
347 Quoted in Brown, 143.
Black explicitly and bitterly rejected that line of reasoning but, importantly, managed to do so without endorsing open racism. Reworking the move made in Danville, Black replaced Fortas’s questions of race with questions of space. Insisting flatly that “there was simply no racial discrimination practiced in this case,” Black instead turned instead to property rights.\(^{348}\) Where for Fortas, the case pivoted on discrimination and protest, for Black it was simply a matter of what he called “trespassers” on “someone else’s property.”\(^{349}\) Brown was asked to leave by those authorized by the state to oversee its property. He refused. He was thus guilty of breaching the peace. “It is high time to challenge the assumption in which too many people have long acquiesced.” Black declared, “that groups that think they have been mistreated or that have actually been mistreated have a constitutional right to use the public’s streets, buildings, and property to protest…without regard to whom such conduct may disturb.”\(^{350}\) Transforming the public into a possessive noun—“the public’s…buildings”—he cast protest as a use of its space by others and outsiders. (Later, Black made this even more explicit, referring to protest as an “[i]nvasion of another man’s property,” and to public buildings as “someone else’s property.”\(^{351}\)) Black thus functionally excluded protesters from membership in the public and from free and rightful use of public space. The public became a subject of ownership, and public space its object.

\(^{348}\) *Brown*, 160. It is worth noting that Black does not once mention bookmobiles in his dissent, a move that is necessary to deny that segregation was practiced by the library. This turn to property was, as an early biographer pointed out, of a piece with a longer-standing interest Black had in protecting property rights, emerging from his experience as a shopkeeper’s son and his conflicted thoughts about privacy. See Gerald T. Dunne, *Hugo Black and the Judicial Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), 394-395.

\(^{349}\) *Brown*, 162, 166.

\(^{350}\) *Brown*, 162.

\(^{351}\) Black argues that “[t]hough the First Amendment guarantees the right of assembly and the right of petition…it does not guarantee to any person the right to use someone else’s property, even that owned by the government and dedicated to other purposes, as a stage to express dissident ideas.” *Brown*, 162, 166.
Though Black refused race as an aspect of the case, though he generally rejected segregation, and though his arguments are pitched to apply broadly to any potential “mob,” the racial implications of this move are unavoidable. Though African Americans had been so long objects of property and were often still excluded (legally, socially, or economically) from ownership, Brown, like the Danville protesters, had sought to transform public space by making ownership of it truly collective and interdependent. A Danville organizer, for example, remembered reveling that if the protest failed to democratize access to the spaces they targeted, then at least it desegregated exclusion from them: “We felt on that day, very, very triumphant—that we had accomplished what we wanted—that was that if we could not use the park and the library, then they would be closed to all.” But Black turned asserting such self-consciously mutual rights to public space into crime, undermining one of the legal foundations for the actual realization of common consciousness. Turning important challenges around proximity, intimacy, and community into issues of property, Black (like the Court as a whole would ultimately do) sidestepped an opportunity to confront and transform restricted access to public culture, public space, and public libraries.

In fact, the question here—who owns public space?—became even more fraught when the justices argued about how it applied to public libraries. All of the justices seemed certain that there is something special about a library. In fact, the Court agreed to take the case despite its similarity to previous cases precisely, in Fortas’s words, “because the incident…occurred in a

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352 Brown, 168.
public library and might be thought to raise materially different questions.” And it did, though the justices did not always agree on what those questions were. “It is an unhappy circumstance that the locus of these events was a public library—a place dedicated to quiet, to knowledge, and to beauty,” Fortas wrote. “It is sad commentary that this hallowed place...bore the ugly stamp of racism.” Having vacated race, though, the fact that the protest took place in a library is what pushed Black over the edge. “I too lament this fact,” he responded, “and for this reason I am deeply troubled with the fear that powerful private groups...will read the Court’s action...as granting them license to invade the tranquility and beauty of our libraries whenever they have a quarrel with some state policy which may or may not exist.”

Indeed, it turns out the justices were not as far apart as the intensity of their rhetoric might suggest. As Nicholas Blomley argues, “[t]he enactment of property not only presumes a definitional certainty...but also invites us to imagine that property and settlement are synonymous.” And the justices all drew on a long history, legal and ideological, of judging protest on the basis of whether it disturbed that (always imaginary) settlement—whether it violated order and propriety. In 1905, for example, a district court judge declared that “[t]here

355 Brown, 135.
356 Brown, 142.
357 Brown, 167.
358 Nicholas Blomley, Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property (New York: Routeldge, 2004), xv.
359 There was also, tellingly, a tradition of using propriety to limit the actions of (especially female) librarians in the South. See James V. Carmichael, Jr., “Southern Librarianship and the Culture of Resentment,” Libraries & Culture 40 (2005): esp. 338-339.
is and can be no such thing as a peaceful picketing, any more than there can be chaste vulgarity, or peaceful mobbing, or lawful lynching.” And a public forum doctrine developed by the Court during the first Red Scare established “time, place, manner” restrictions that granted the state the ability to regulate speech on numerous fronts while preserving the right to orderly protest. And so manners and proper behavior, along with the mere potential for violence, came to mark the bounds of the right to speak in public. This continued into the postwar period, as it was applied by various courts to civil rights protests. Drawing on this tradition, for example, Louisiana’s lawyers in previous cases argued that the presence of angry white spectators, and thus the possibility violent reprisal, could negate the rights of African Americans to mount even peaceful protests. (Increasingly, explains Robert Tsai, “the Court armed citizen-speakers on both sides…with the Heckler’s Veto” to counteract this argument, though it still continued to frame much analysis of order and disorder.)

But in the library, it was the space itself—not just the people in it—that could be disturbed in ways that scared every single one of the justices in Brown, regardless of their vote. Fortas described, in almost gleeful terms, how the protest “challenged” the library’s “tidy plan” to enact segregation via bookmobiles. But that was the only bit of tidiness he was willing to see disturbed. The fact that the case took place in a public library, a place of quiet and beauty, made Fortas ultimately and severely qualify his claim that the public had an automatic right to public property. So in order to find in favor of the petitioners, Fortas went to great lengths to

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360 That last oxymoron, of course, was only supposedly contradictory in the South, at that moment, making the judge’s claims especially important in this context. From Aichison Topeka & Santa Fe Railway v. Gee (1905). Quoted in Mitchell, Right to the City, 55.
361 Mitchell, Right to the City, 48.
362 Tsai, Eloquence and Reason, 91.
363 Brown, 136. Undercutting an argument by Louisiana, Fortas commented that when the library sent Brown the book and told him he could either mail it back or deliver it to the blue bookmobile, “[t]he reference to the color of the vehicle was obviously not designed to facilitate identification of the vehicle” only, since “[t]he blue bookmobile is for Negroes and for Negroes only.” Brown, 137.
defend their behavior while in the library, in order to keep it within acceptable bounds. Their “deportment within the library was unexceptionable,” he insisted. “They were neither loud, boisterous, obstreperous, indecorous nor impolite.” The legal argument Fortas made was based essentially on the fundamental overbreadth and discriminatory application of the Louisiana statute, but he again and again framed it around assertions of the unobjectionable, appropriate behavior of the Brown and the other men. There was “no disorder” occasioned by their silent protest, he reminded his readers. After Brown sat down to wait, he and the other protesters “said nothing,” meaning “there was no noise or boisterous talking.” “There were no other patrons,” he also noted, and so no one was disturbed from their use of the library. Even the sheriff admitted this, Fortas pointed out, and the protesters were arrested solely for failing to leave when ordered to do so. It was, in fact, the protesters who engaged in “normal activity” that was “completely disrupted” by their arrest. Fortas’s investment in order as the foundation of rights is clear, and two years later, in a primer on the principles of dissent, he would make a similar claim in more vivid language, insisting that we do not in fact “live in a trackless jungle” because there is “a path that law and integrity mark out through the maze of tangled obligations and conflicted loyalties” that is speech in a free society. Conflating legal precision with regimented space with integrity, Fortas used propriety to mark the boundaries of sanctioned dissent.

364 Brown, 139.
365 Brown, 141.
366 Brown, 136.
367 Brown, 140.
368 Abe Fortas, Concerning Dissent and Civil Disobedience (New York: World Publishing Company, 1968), 15. This path, for Fortas, was marked out by “the rule of law,” wherein one can choose to disobey laws one finds unjust, but one must accept the punishment that goes with that violation. In the process, Fortas delineates sharply between moral and legal evaluations, seeming to mark that as the clear path through the thicket. Accepting legally supported penalties for violating an immoral statute is, Fortas insists, “action in the great tradition of social protest in a democratic society where all citizens, including protesters, are subject to the rule of law.” Fortas, Concerning Dissent, 48, 58.
The concurrences hold to the same pattern. White’s is the most conservative of them, holding that if there was “some explicit statute, ordinance, or library regulation of general application” banning hanging around in a library for a few minutes, then there would be no constitutional problem with the convictions. The First Amendment, he wrote, does not “forbid a municipal regulation limiting loafing in library reading rooms.”369 His argument for overturning the convictions was twofold, and somewhat internally contradictory: the imprecise statute was applied here only to maintain the library’s segregation, on the one hand, and that the protest was not in fact disruptive.370 If the former holds, then the latter should be largely irrelevant, but once again, White spent much of his opinion casting the protesters’ behavior as proper as a prerequisite for considering it legal. Like Fortas, he noted that “they were quiet and orderly, they interfered with no other library users and for all this record reveals they might have been considering among themselves what to do with the rest of their day” as they lingered in the reading room.371 They were not, of course; Brown and the others stayed in the library that morning in order to upset the library’s functioning as a segregated space. But White engaged in such hypotheticals repeatedly in order to transform that protest against explicitly racist policies into something less confrontational and more orderly. “In my view,” he wrote, “the behavior of these petitioners and their use of the library building, even though it was for the purposes of a demonstration, did not depart significantly from what normal library use would contemplate.”372 (Fortas argued, by slight contrast, that “[w]e need not assume the petitioner Brown and his

369 Brown, 150. Even Fortas would, several years later, say that the Court might well have ruled differently in Brown had the protesters “stayed in the library after the regular hours,” as that “would have been symbolic speech accompanied by a violation of a lawful and appropriate regulation.” Fortas, Concerning Dissent, 27.
370 He writes, in support of the first part, that “it is difficult to believe that if this group had been white its members would have been asked to leave on such short notice, much less asked to leave by the sheriff and arrested, rather than merely escorted from the building, when reluctance to leave was demonstrated.” Brown, 150-151.
371 Brown, 150.
372 Brown, 151.
friends were in search of a book for night reading” in order to find in favor of them, though he still returned again and again to the library-appropriateness of their conduct in the course of their demonstration.)\(^{373}\) And even Brennan, whose entire argument was that a public street and a public library are not different enough to warrant a different application of the statute, reassured readers that the protesters “were orderly and quiet” and “did not interfere with the functioning of the library.”\(^{374}\)

In their efforts to normalize the protesters’ actions, and to protect the library’s space itself, Fortas and Brennan did reduce the power of white response to undercut civil rights protest. The State of Louisiana argued that five men (black men, of course) simply sitting in the library and “staring vacantly” was “enough to unnerve a woman in the situation” the librarian was in.\(^{375}\) Fortas called this a “piquant version of the affair,” but says it is not sufficient for determining a breach of peace.\(^{376}\) He found nothing in the statute “which would elevate the giving of cause for Mrs. Reeves’ discomfort, however we may sympathize with her, to a crime against the State of Louisiana.”\(^{377}\) Brennan agreed, noting that the protest “might have embarrassed and unnerved the librarians, who had in the past faithfully observed the policy of segregation; but such ‘vague disquietudes’ do not take petitioners’ conduct outside the appropriate limits.”\(^{378}\) Both took pains to express their sympathy for the librarians’ discomfiture—though both, perhaps, also raised a skeptical eyebrow at its source—but they roundly rejected the idea that sheer discomfort, without a threat of imminent violence, was enough to justify restricting speech. In \textit{Cox}, the Court had

\(^{373}\) \textit{Brown}, 139. Black refutes Fortas here, noting caustically that the note Brown passed to the librarian misidentified the book he wanted and that, though he asked “what about the Constitution?” when told to leave, he “did not request that any copy of the Constitution be given to him.” \textit{Brown}, 160, 153.

\(^{374}\) \textit{Brown}, 148.

\(^{375}\) \textit{Brown}, 140.

\(^{376}\) \textit{Brown}, 141.

\(^{377}\) \textit{Brown}, 141.

decided that Louisiana’s statute could not be applied, in Fortas’s words, “despite the large scale of the demonstrations and the fact that petitioner's speech occasioned ‘grumbling’ on the part of white onlookers.”379 The small and “hallowed” library reduced the scale necessary to create a disturbance, certainly, but Fortas and Brennan both argued that it was the interior of the library itself, not the interiors of its librarians, that was at issue here. As long as the space itself remained ordered, and behavior within it orderly, then the speech that behavior expressed was constitutionally protected.380 Propriety granted a right to public property, and according to Fortas and Brennan, the petitioners in *Brown* had not behaved inappropriately.

Unsurprisingly, Black disagreed rather strongly, arguing that the space had, in fact, been disturbed. He argued that it “goes against common sense and common understanding” to claim (as the majority did) that people disturb the peace of a library only when they “stay there an unusually long time after being ordered to leave, make a big noise, use some bad language, engage in fighting, try to provoke a fight, or in some other way become boisterous.”381 Failing to follow orders and cluttering the space of the library, for Black, was enough to constitute a breach of peace. “Short of physical violence,” he wrote, “petitioners could not have more completely upset the normal, quiet functioning of the” library.382 To support this case, Black’s dissent made a move that calls back to Matthew Arnold, whose *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) had identified the violation of propriety with the violation of space. Dismissing an 1866 working-class demonstration in Hyde Park, Arnold wrote the rioters were “put[ting] in practice an Englishman’s right to do what he likes; his right to march where he likes, meet where he likes,

379 *Brown*, 134.
380 In some ways, this is of a piece with a liberal shift in public forum doctrine that Don Mitchell charts especially to *Hague v. CIO* (1939) and *Lamont v. Postmaster General* (1965), in which the Court sought “a means of regulating not speech itself but the space in which speech occurred.” Mitchell, *Right to the City*, 70.
381 *Brown*, 162.
382 *Brown*, 163.
enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes. All this, I say, tends to anarchy.” There was a place for everyone in the social system, but “the rioter has not yet quite found his groove and settled down to his work, and so he is just asserting his personal liberty a little, going where he likes, assembling where he likes, bawling as he likes, hustling as he likes.”

A century later, Black objected to those who claimed a supposed right “to protest whatever, wherever, whenever they want,” who insisted on “the constitutional right to go wherever they want, whenever they please.” The cast of characters changed (with working-class, white Britons replaced by African Americans), and the scene shifted (with a Louisiana public library standing in for a London park), but the script stayed remarkably static: desires that threatened the disposition of public space by the powerful were invalid on their face.

Wanting—or worse yet, demanding—in ways that clogged or cluttered space, that invited unpredictable proximities or uncontrollable intimacies, were necessarily and automatically disturbing, regardless of how orderly they might actually be.

Intriguingly, given the Danville incident, Black’s opinion regularly referred to furniture and the library’s layout to make this case. Fortas had opened his discussion of the facts of the case with a strangely detailed description of the library reading room.

And the particulars of the space were important to Black’s dissent, as well. But where Fortas and White described a

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384 *Brown*, 162, 166.

385 The script was even older than that. In 1829, one Virginia man had defended slavery and opposed abolitionism on the grounds that “[t]he property we seek to protect…is not mere brute matter” but rather “beings, that have passions to be inflamed…and who are capable of catching the flame of enthusiasm from the eloquent effusions of agitators.” Quoted in Phillips, “Central Theme,” 31. Also along strikingly similar lines, Fortas’s 1968 book on civil disobedience insisted that the individual “cannot substitute his own judgment or passion, however noble, for the rules of law.” Fortas, *Concerning Dissent*, 55.

386 The Hyde Park demonstration, for example, was declared illegal before it even took place.

387 “The front room of the building was used as a public library facility where patrons might obtain library services. It was a small room, containing two tables and one chair (apart from the branch assistant’s desk and chairs), a stove, a card catalogue, and open book shelves.” *Brown*, 135.
library empty of other patrons (and thus free of disturbance), Black narrated a space clotted with bodies that overwhelm it. After being told that he could pick up the book at the blue bookmobile, in Black’s telling, “Mr. Brown then sat down in the only chair in the library room other than the chair at Mrs. Reeves’ desk, and the four other petitioners stood around him,” and “when Mr. Brown continued to sit and the others continued to stand, she asked them to leave.” And there, framed by monopolized furniture and crowded rooms, emerges the true foundation of Black’s legal argument. The request to leave—which for Black represents a lawful and authorized exertion of control of over the space—came as a response to the presence of too many bodies in too small an area, to monopolized furniture and crowded rooms. This was sufficient for Black to sustain the convictions. There were not hundreds of angry whites in the library, Black conceded rather caustically, “but surely, in the prevailing opinion’s futile effort to rely on Cox, it is not meant that 300 or 100 grumbling onlookers must be crowded into a library before Louisiana can maintain an action under this statute.” A few bodies and the discomfort they inspire can be enough to render a space disordered and a peace disturbed.

As in Calvert County and Danville, it is impossible to understand Black’s narrative outside the context of the racialized fears of intimate proximity that plagued the dream of a common consciousness. In fact, all of the writing justices—even as every last one of them rejected open racism—failed to also reject demands for order in public space, demands that had and would continue to structure and limit black participation in public culture. According to the justices, the law’s job was to make access technically possible to everyone without inviting the sorts of revolutionary disruption that would change the terms on which the exclusion was originally based, and so they abetted attempts to reframe extreme racist anxieties as utterly

388 Brown, 153.
389 Brown, 163.
reasonable concerns about disordered space. They insisted with their words, as the librarians in Danville did with their actions, that proximity and intimacy must be managed and that order is often more important than justice.

By the late 1960s, this had diffused, broadly and culturally, in horrified responses to “race riots” in major cities and, by the mid-1970s, in a virulent rejection of busing and the specter of blacks on the move. After the end of legal segregation, spaces continued to be marked racially, often through identification or disidentification with violence, crime, and disorder. Legal scholar Richard Thompson Ford has tried to explain the persistence of racial segregation, finding that in many cases such “[s]patially and racially defined communities perform the ‘work’ of segregation silently.” (We will return to the consequences of this kind of residential community separation in Chapter Four.) And this conflation of black protest with spatial disorder could, in the end, foreclose full remediation of the injustices that prompted the protest in the first place, as an interest in order justified yet another averted gaze. “Riot produces fear,” Fortas wrote in 1968, “and fear has a tendency to still the response of conscience.” And in the face of this refusal to truly confront old oppressions in a supposedly “New Frontier,” black activists increasingly articulated what Peniel Joseph calls “a militant race consciousness” that

392 Fortas, Concerning Dissent, 65-66. “The Negroes in Detroit and Newark and Washington and Chicago who rioted, pillaged, and burned may have generations of provocation,” he also wrote. “They may have incontestable justification. They may have been pushed beyond endurance. ...But that provides no escape from the consequences of their conduct.” Fortas, Concerning Dissent, 53-54.

What was fundamentally at issue here, both in \textit{Brown} and in the larger cultural shifts it participated in, was \textit{presence}: was the sheer presence of bodies, and especially of black bodies in the “wrong places,” a sign of disruption? By the time \textit{Brown} reached the court, many formal barriers had fallen, and an affirmative response was harder to make. Earl Warren had, for example, declared in an earlier case that the “mere presence” of blacks could not itself qualify as a breach of peace.\footnote{Garner, 170.} But concerns about black presence remained powerfully influential legally (in the absence of consistent definitions) and culturally (in the absence of a consistent commitment to revolutionary racial justice). Legally, the question was often whether silent action, like mere presence, counted as speech under the protection of the First Amendment. “Symbolic conduct is an exceptionally vivid means of communication,” a 1968 \textit{Columbia Law Review} article declared, but the Court had yet to develop “a refined definition of symbolic speech.”\footnote{“Symbolic Conduct,” \textit{Columbia Law Review} 68 (1968): 1091-1092.} Unsurprisingly, especially without any such clear definition, the justices disagreed on some of the particulars of this issue. Fortas insisted that First Amendment rights “are not confined to verbal expression,” and Brennan claimed that Brown’s actions fell under the amendment’s “guarantees of speech, petition, and assembly.”\footnote{\textit{Brown}, 142, 146.} Black, on the other hand, systematically excluded conduct from First Amendment protection.\footnote{This was a relatively consistent position on Black’s part. See, for instance, his dissent in \textit{Griswold v. Connecticut}, 381 U.S. 479, 508 (1965).}

But again, the justices were not as far apart as it might first appear. Oddly, it seems that for Fortas, when nonverbal action was at issue, protection as “speech” required silence. The
rights of the First Amendment, he wrote in *Brown*, “embrace appropriate types of action which certainly include the right in a peaceable and orderly manner to protest by silent and reproachful presence, in a place where the protestant has every right to be, the unconstitutional segregation of public facilities.”

Though he argued for a broad application of the amendment, his defense overflowed with qualifications: “appropriate,” “peaceable,” “orderly,” “silent.” He recognized that their presence was disruptive of segregation—that the library’s “tidy plan” would be upended—but once again paradoxically required it to be orderly for it to qualify. Fortas fetishized silent passivity (and rejects a frictional, communicated fury) as a tactic of resistance.

A presence that expressed loudly cannot be protected.

Or a presence that lasted too long. Fortas, Brennan, and White all returned over and over to the briefness of Brown’s stay in the library. “There is no claim that, apart from the continuation—for ten or fifteen minutes—of their presence itself,” wrote Fortas, “their conduct provided a basis for the order to leave, or for a charge of breach of the peace.”

In the very next paragraph, he reiterates that that the men had “remained in the library room for a total of ten or fifteen minutes.” Shortly thereafter he noted that the statute applied in the convictions “contains not a word about occupying the reading room of a public library for more than 15 minutes.” And Brennan argued that “[t]heir presence, for a relatively short period of time, did not interfere with the functioning of the library.”

So, even as the majority granted Brown and his fellow protesters the right to be in the library, that presence had to be kept within certain bounds. They could be silent “monuments of protest,” in Fortas’s words, but they would be

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398 *Brown*, 142.
399 This appreciation for Gandhian nonviolent resistance, and distaste for most other methods of dissent, suffuses his *Concerning Dissent and Civil Disobedience*.
400 *Brown*, 139.
401 *Brown*, 139.
402 *Brown*, 141.
403 *Brown*, 148.
denied the permanence or the pride of place monuments are usually accorded.\textsuperscript{404} Despite the fact that they found in favor of the plaintiffs, the majority returned once again to Danville—and to the “\textit{VERTICAL NEGRO}”—in a desire to get people in and out in and out quickly, in a need to manage time and space to preserve order in the face of rapid change. Creating what amounts to a First Amendment version of a sundown town, the justices restricted presence temporally as a way of regulating space.\textsuperscript{405}

In late 1966, the Court heard another case in which hundreds were arrested for trespassing during a protest against a segregated jail. And once again, Black insisted on the government’s right to control its property. “The State,” he wrote in familiar terms, “no less than a private owner of property, has power to preserve the property under its control for the use to which it is lawfully dedicated.”\textsuperscript{406} But this time, something was different. Hugo Black was speaking for the majority. Only six months after \textit{Brown} was decided, the \textit{Chicago Tribune} noted of the new case, “[t]he Black dissent appears to be the doctrine of the court majority.”\textsuperscript{407} Seventy years earlier it had sanctioned segregation, and twelve years earlier it had revoked that sanction in \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}, but through it all, the Court retained overarching interest in carefully ordering space as a way of managing—and limiting the impact of—larger changes. By the end of 1966, that interest had been theoretically cleansed of race and became once again the law of the land. And more than that, it became part of the common sense that produced “free

\textsuperscript{404} \textit{Brown}, 139. For a striking examination of the ways an actual monument can shape the use and regulation of public space, see Staeheli and Mitchell, \textit{The People’s Property?}, 23-45.
\textsuperscript{406} \textit{Adderley v. Florida}, 385 U.S. 39 (1966), 47.
speech zones” and with which we continue to live today.408

“Few of Our Errors Go Unnoticed”: Coda

In 1961, the Wilson Library Bulletin, which had covered the Danville story extensively, published a letter from Rosemary Neiswender. As a librarian at the RAND Corporation—a major center for Sovietology at the height of the Cold War—Neiswender warned that “any attempt at segregation of public…facilities has extensive propaganda possibilities” for the Soviet Union.409 To make her case, Neiswender pointed to a 1960 news report in the Soviet library journal Bibliotekar’, which purported to be a reprint of a Wilson article. Neiswender offered a translation, which included some rather intriguing passages:

On May 20, 1960, the city council of Danville, Virginia, passed a resolution to close the city’s central public library, in defiance of a federal government decree on desegregation. By a majority vote, the council also voted to close the branch library and the bookmobile…. As grounds for the closing of these libraries, it was evidenced that twelve Negro students had entered the library for whites. This seemingly unremarkable fact provoked a storm of indignation and controversy. … The referendum proposed a series of such dubious (from the standpoint of common sense) propositions as furnishing the library with separate, individual cubicles where no one could see the color of readers….410

As Neiswender was quick to point out—even as she lamented the “distressing realities” of library segregation—that the Bibliotekar’ article contained what she termed “conscious

408 See, for example, Dahlia Lithwick and Raymond Vasvari, “You Can’t Occupy This,” Slate, 19 March 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2012/03/the_anti_protest_bill_signed_by_barack_obama_is_a_quiet_attack_on_free_speech_.html.
The decree was a court order, the referendum did not include the cubicle proposal. More striking, though, is the fact that whoever translated and condensed the Wilson article for a Soviet audience incorporated one fact that was hardly reported at all (and not mentioned in Wilson): when Danville shuttered its library, it also stopped running its bookmobile. 

“[T]he use made of this incident by the Soviet library press,” Neiswender fretted, “reveals that very few of our errors go unnoticed or unpublicized.”

Indeed, conflicts over bookmobiles, space, and the politics of common consciousness could resonate on a variety of scales running from the local to the global. Not only could the actions of a small library find their way, unconsciously, into a debate on the nation’s highest court, but they could also show up on the pages of a journal printed halfway around the world. Neiswender’s letter makes clear how threatening those reverberations could seem. But as we will see in the next chapter, the United States government frequently tried to harness those resonances—to manage them—pursuing the goal of managing communities across various scales in an effort to solidify the interlocking systems of federalism and empire. Using bookmobiles to incorporate indigenous communities in New Mexico and to bring West Germany into the U.S. sphere of influence, the state—in moving books, transforming the landscape, and changing its people—took up the project of ordering space and managing community on an almost inconceivably massive scale.

But even as it sought to order land at home and export that order abroad, the nation was haunted by the still-unresolved problem of separation that lay at the heart of American life. “We

412 The only mention of Danville’s bookmobile I have found is in a single Washington Post article. Carper, “Voters to Decide.”
413 “The image of American public library practices in regard to racial segregation (and worse, the underlying actuality) conveyed by this and doubtless other similar news releases from the Soviet Bloc and the uncommitted nations” she continued, “should surely be an increasing cause for our concern.” Neiswender, “Danville,” 218.
boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people above all other peoples,” John Harlan had lamented in his *Plessy* dissent. “But it is difficult to reconcile that boast with a state of the law which, practically, puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow-citizens, our equals before the law.” Decades later, that law had changed, but much had also stayed the same—and so common consciousness would continue to fail on a fractured landscape marked by division, discrimination, and distrust.

\[414\] *Plessy*, 562.
Figures

Figure 8: Book Mission Trip Map (1935)
From “Book Mission Appeal for Funds for Trip South” folder, carton 2, Lend a Hand Society Records
Figure 9: A tobacco house worker selects from the Richard B. Harrison Bookmobile (1946).
From the North Carolina State Archives
Figure 10: Danville Public Library—and “last Capitol of the Confederacy.”
Figure 11a: Children in the Audubon Regional Library in Clinton Louisiana (1962).
From the State Library of Louisiana Historic Photograph Collection
Figure 11b: Patrons visit the Audubon Regional Library’s red bookmobile in Norwood, Louisiana (1962).
From the State Library of Louisiana Historic Photograph Collection
Figure 12: Patrons aboard the blue bookmobile in Clinton, Louisiana (1961).
From the State Library of Louisiana Historic Photograph Collection
CHAPTER THREE

“A Powerful Spearhead for Almost Unlimited Progress”: Managing Time and Space on the Frontiers of Belonging

“The past and present wilt—I have fill’d them, emptied them. And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.”
—Walt Whitman (1855)\(^{415}\)

“[W]e stand today on the edge of a new frontier. … It would be easier to shrink from that new frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past…. But I believe that the times require imagination and courage and perseverance. I’m asking each of you to be pioneers toward that New Frontier.”
—John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jr. (1960)

Cowboy 1: Injuns! Run for cover, boys!
Roger Ramjet: Nonsense. There are no hostile Indians anymore.
Cowboy 2: Yeah. You know that, and I know that, but them Indians don’t know that.
—“The Cowboy,” Roger Ramjet (1965)\(^{416}\)

In late July, 1959, a bookmobile on loan from Delmar, New York, was carefully lowered by crane into the heart of Moscow’s Sokolniki Park, in order to serve as a display—organized by the American Book Publishers Council and the American Library Association—during the American National Exhibition.\(^{417}\) Chosen because it was “a dramatic method of illustrating the distribution of books,” and almost vetoed by Soviet authorities, the bookmobile was a massive hit.\(^{418}\) Each day, thousands of Russians toured the mobile library and, as a *New York Times* report noted a few weeks later, they “[o]bviously…found many—one might say most—of the

\(^{415}\) Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 123.

\(^{416}\) Roger Ramjet, episode 8, first broadcast 12 September, 1965, directed by Fred Crippen and written by Gene Moss and Jim Thurman.


books irresistibly attractive.” They must have, since they walked off with thousands of them. By August 17, three quarters of the bookmobile’s original stock of 4,000 books had disappeared. Shakespeare, Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck: all stolen. Even a volume of *New Yorker* cartoons that had been “nailed to a shelf with six-inch nails” was nearly carted off by an enthusiastic Russian visitor. Worried that the “almost denuded van” would give visitors the wrong idea about America’s information abundance, organizers closed the bookmobile. The *New York Times* editorial page, while it did not “condone this kind of book-borrowing,” cited “ameliorating circumstances” (communism, presumably) and called for a “Book Airlift to Moscow.” The call was heeded, and thousands of new books were flown in to restock the vehicle. The “beautiful red, white, and blue bookmobile” opened for the last weeks of the exhibition, once again offering Russians a view of this “new way in the pursuit of knowledge.”

In Moscow this chaos could be comforting, contrasted as it was with the rigidity of totalitarianism: the desire for American books overcame the “spiritual starvation” of communism, and the rules of capitalism (like, say, paying for goods or following rules) could be taught later. “Denied this privilege” of buying American books, one organizer explained, “they satisfied their hunger for books by taking them.” Elsewhere, though, in spaces that were meant to be already under U.S. control or influence, officials found this sort of disorder much more unsettling. What would it mean if West Germans stormed a bookmobile, for example, or if

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420 Caruthers, “U.S. Closes Bookmobile.”
424 “A Book Airlift.”
U.S. citizens in New Mexico failed to seem, well, American enough? In these places, prompting anti-communist (if larcenous) ecstasy would not be enough. As we will see in this chapter, bookmobiles were meant to carefully manage their patrons in order to create a smooth and legible state that could incorporate spaces at its margins without compromising or changing its basic character.

Three moments in the middle of the twentieth century, all part of the story of this chapter, fundamentally transformed the relationship between state power and association that the progressives had imagined to be central to the realization of common consciousness. The New Deal, World War II, and the advent of perpetual, existential conflict in the Cold War together birthed a federal government that was more powerful and more centralized than ever before. This significant shift in the balance of power in American public life led to a crisis in, then repurposing of, common consciousness. But this was not a break with the past so much as a reinterpretation of it. From its origins, there was a centralizing tendency present in the dream of common consciousness, as state agencies took on the task of identifying and then distributing a shared culture. In the middle of the twentieth century, that tendency would be enhanced and exploited. Under the watchful eye of the federal government, no longer would common consciousness be a coherence built from the small to the large, from the neighborhood to the nation. It would, instead, be a smooth connectivity imposed, by federal power, from above.

Writing specifically of the desert West but capturing something far larger, Patricia Price writes that, “for the nation-state, smoothness, ease, and internal homogeneity are but a recurring wish for intact fullness.”426 This wish—which we might understand as a geographic corollary to common consciousness—was a rather paradoxical thing. To accomplish this

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426 Patricia L. Price, *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 36.
smoothing, the American nation-state had to play with time and space.\textsuperscript{427} More precisely, it frequently gained authority by engaging with, and then orchestrating, tensions between old and new and between open and closed. Even though, as Eric Hobsbawm puts it, “the concept of \textit{nation} is historically very young,” nations have typically formed through appeal to an ancient, shared identity often (though not always) based in blood.\textsuperscript{428} Despite some attempts to the contrary, American nationalism has had a hard time supporting those sorts of claims.\textsuperscript{429} The state has been too young, and its constituents from places too far-flung, to really make them work. Instead, American national identity has been constructed through paradoxically twinned appeals to progress and to tradition: this country is new and exciting, and in order to remain so, we must keep to the same path.

Nations typically also emerge out a conviction that the nation and the state must line up, that the spirit of the nation and the space and power of the state should match.\textsuperscript{430} In the U.S.—a state with no prior nation and a fondness for geographic expansion—this meant not minor realignments of or conflicts over a few square miles but rather a more than century-long project of rather frantically, unevenly increasing the emotional shape of the nation to fill the sprawling, stretching space of the state. (At times, the reverse also held, and the state engaged in violence to allow its government to reach those who, like the erstwhile Texans of 1846, lay beyond its

\textsuperscript{427}I follow, in part, from Doreen Massey’s insistence—against the claims of critics like Ernesto Laclau, John Berger, and John Urry—that time and space are not dichotomously opposed, with the former dynamically social and the latter static. Space is, she argues, is not “an absolute dimension” but rather “a moment in the intersection of configured social relations” and therefore is fundamentally dynamic and inseparable from time. Doreen Massey, \textit{Space, Place, and Gender}, 265.

\textsuperscript{428}Eric J. Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1789: Programme, Myth, Reality} (Cambridge University, 1992), 18. Emphasis original.


\textsuperscript{430}See Gellner, \textit{Nations and Nationalism}. 
borders but claimed to be its nation.) This expansiveness, though, was both fuelled and tempered by a commitment to exclusion and limitation as large as the continent itself.\footnote{John Breuilly writes that “[t]he idea of the state is marked by internal tensions between universality and particularity and between boundlessness and limitation.” The geographic and demographic peculiarities of the U.S. only exacerbated this general principle. John Breuilly, “Nationalism and the State,” in Nations and Nationalism: A Reader, ed. Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2005), 61.} The nation could encompass anywhere—but not just anyone.

Bookmobiles were, perhaps unexpectedly, enormously useful tools for accomplishing this play with time and space. The bookmobile was, for much of the twentieth century, a shiny new technology a main task of which was to cart around another technology, books, which had not really been shiny or new since long before the United States even existed. It embodied, then, a fundamental tension between tradition and progress, a tension central to managing American national identity.\footnote{That a bookmobile called “The Pioneer” could be introduced in Queens, New York, in 1930, suggests how useful the iconic past could be to efforts to build a new future. “The Pioneer Introduces County Library Service to Queens Borough,” Bookmobiles (national) folder, Library for the Blind, Mobile Services, Bookmobile records, Seattle Public Library, Seattle, Washington.} At the same time, bookmobiles were prized for being both wide-ranging and geographically precise. Their mobility meant that they could go anywhere, but their routes were carefully planned and specifically plotted. (And as we saw in Chapter Two, that planning and plotting could be precisely designed to exclude while encompassing.) They thus captured the tension between theoretical boundlessness and practical limitation. And it is not, I think, an unmeaningful coincidence that each of the three transformative moments in federal power—New Deal, world war, early Cold War—brought with it a heavy federal investment in bookmobile programs.\footnote{The New Deal saw the first significant federal monies spent on mobile libraries (through the Works Progress Administration and other agencies), World War II turned bookmobiles into weapons of war (as will be discussed in a later section), and the 1950s saw a massive infusion of money from the federal government into local library extension programs with the Library Services Act of 1956.}
Beyond these crucial but general features, bookmobiles also carried with them a set of more specific assumptions and expectations about the relationship of time and space, assumptions and expectations formed on the crucible of the frontier. As we saw in Chapter One, the inclusion of the Cowpunchers’ Library, the overcoming of their loneliness out on the far corner of the prairie, was part of the work of the Kansas Traveling Library and thus part of the ideology that ultimately birthed the bookmobile. What the Cowpunchers did was to embed the national habit of incorporating frontiers in the project of the mobile library. And that habit was, at heart, a habit of geography and history: What was Manifest Destiny if not a mad and terrible theory for filling space (the stretch of the continent) with time (the always already)? “In its magnificent domain of space and time,” John O’Sullivan wrote in 1839, “the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles.” The future of the nation is the already-having-happened-but-yet-to-be-realized, the manifest and manifesting, extension of God’s will and the state’s power over the land. The present is, as it always is, the future’s past, but here that bit of folding takes on particular power. The frontier—in the joy and horror of open spaces and dark bodies, and in the melancholy triumph of their inevitable incorporation or destruction—is where the nation truly makes itself. One of my arguments here is that this image of the “frontier,” particularly as a place the bookmobile both revels in and overcomes, remained a useful, if sometimes troubling, way for people to deal with the temporal and spatial tensions required for creating and managing community in the twentieth century. As I will show, the bookmobile became what one administrator called “a powerful spearhead for

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435 As Price writes, “a rhetoric of emptiness has allowed an array of stark, transformational, and sometimes violent acts…to be committed upon the land and its inhabitants.” Price, *Dry Place*, 37.
almost unlimited progress” by, perhaps paradoxically, relying on the memory of the past to build and manage a glorious, democratic, modern future.

The memory of the frontier, that fantasy of national incorporation, fueled the “spearhead for almost unlimited progress” not only within the United States but around the world. This chapter will examine both a New Deal program in New Mexico, in the land that had been manifestly destined in O’Sullivan’s imagination, and a remarkably similar program (also run by the U.S. government) in Cold War West Germany. In doing so, this chapter makes its own interventions in time and space—historiographically, at least—by troubling distinctions between pre-1898 and post-1898 U.S. imperialism, on the one hand, and between “domestic” and “foreign,” on the other. Until the 1990s—with the “imperial turn” in American Studies—an attention to empire was often missing in histories of the United States. And when gazes did turn in that direction, they were often characterized by a frequent obsession with the wars and occupations of 1898 as part of a fundamental break with previous, non-imperial U.S. history. In this approach, the “closing” of the frontier in 1893 was the end of one story, and the Spanish-American War was the beginning of another. Scholars like Shelley Streeby and Laura Wexler have challenged that approach, arguing that 1898 and its aftermath cannot be understood outside the context created by both westward expansion and race slavery. As we saw in the last chapter, the spatial politics of slavery and segregation forged a shaky and riven ground on which

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436 For a foundational text that challenged this blindness, see Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in Cultures of American Imperialism, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 3-21.
437 Even William Appleman Williams’s brilliant 1955 critique of the effects of Turner’s Frontier Thesis on American historiography—which lamented that “[o]ne of the central themes of American historiography is that there is no American empire”—claimed that “[t]he United States has been a consciously and steadily expanding nation since 1890.” William Appleman Williams, “The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy,” in The William Appleman Williams Reader, ed. Henry W. Berger (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1992), 89.
to build common consciousness. In this chapter, we will see how an obsession with expansion and incorporation, developed long before and in place long after 1898, had similar but distinct effects that revealed the limits of common consciousness. More specifically, the passion for expanding into untamed territory brought with it another fixation—with overcoming, incorporating, and carefully managing that territory (and the people who lived on it)—that privileged political administration over emotional connection.

This chapter refuses easy distinctions between different kinds of spaces—between domestic and foreign, between inside and outside. In doing so, this chapter links three American Studies scholarships that often fail to intersect: on the practice of U.S. imperialism in places like Haiti and the Philippines, on the rich connections between the Black Freedom Movement and Cold War geopolitics, and on the practice and effects of U.S. cultural imperialism in postwar Europe. Examining an object (the bookmobile) and an idea (the frontier) that linked projects in the New Mexico and West Germany, this chapter questions the divisions that have kept these three scholarships separate and, perhaps, limited their application to seemingly “domestic” questions of American identity. Federal policies in the twentieth-century Southwest,

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439 I aim, here, to follow Amy Kaplan’s call to understand “how international struggles for domination abroad profoundly shape representations of American national identity at home, and how, in turn, cultural phenomena we think of as domestic or particularly national are forged in a crucible of foreign relations.” Amy Kaplan, Anarchy of Empire, 1.

U.S. interventions in the Philippines, and the American presence in postwar Western Europe were, of course, not identical. Racial ideologies, levels of violence, and political systems all distinguished them. But as the bookmobile illustrates, a constellation of elements—like uses of mobility, ways of managing democracy, ideas about improving rural space, and so on—linked American domestic and foreign policy and linked Europe to the U.S. not just through rock music or Coca-Cola but through older, more violent, and yet more excruciatingly controlled models of imperial expansion.

“All landscapes are haunted by ghosts,” Patricia Price writes. But sometimes, as we will see, it is a landscape itself that haunts. In this chapter, I argue that memories of imperial expansion, of the frontier, shaped the ways it was possible to imagine belonging long into the twentieth century. More specifically, I insist the federal government tried to use bookmobiles to incorporate two populations that were both marginal and crucial to the U.S. state’s power and coherence—Mexican-Americans and West Germans—into modern, democratic, “American” communities. The first three sections of the chapter deal with the Taos County Project, which ran in New Mexico in the early 1940s. The first uses the Project to illuminate how concerns about frontiers and American identity prompted a program of belated Americanization. The second addresses the way the Project sought to manage and control democracy in order to finally overcome the frontier. The third looks at the books and films circulated on the Project’s bookmobile, focusing particularly on how they facilitated play with time (by smoothing over the violence of the past) and space (by connecting Taos to the nation in the midst of a world war). The following section focuses on that war to see how the Taos idea worked elsewhere in the midst of a global conflagration. Turning then to the Cold War, the final two sections watch the

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441 Price, *Dry Place*, xxi.
U.S. Information Service use bookmobiles to build a modern, managed democracy on the West German countryside in the early 1950s. The first explores how images of the bookmobile as a “spearhead for…progress,” first established in Taos, became newly useful in West Germany. The next examines the imposition and limits of managed democracy there.

Just a few months after the American National Exhibition in Moscow, in the rugged southwest corner of North Dakota, a librarian “had a harrowing experience” when “a band of masked and armed horsemen held up the large Bookmobile unit” demanding “books.” This was covered lightheartedly in the local newspaper because, it turns out, the hold-up was part of an elaborate practical joke—a “bit of fun”—orchestrated by a local saddle club.442 This story, as bizarre as it is, reminds us how useful, and popular, the memory of a rough-and-tumble frontier could be for those encountering bookmobiles in the twentieth century. In what follows, we will see the geographic and emotional range of that memory, and the complicated intensity of its force in the world.

“The Area Abounds in Relics and Lore”: The Problem of the Twentieth-Century Frontier

On the afternoon of August 31, 1910, Theodore Roosevelt climbed atop a kitchen table in Osawatomie, Kansas, and called for a “new nationalism.”443 Arguing that a powerful central government should be “the steward of public welfare,” the ex-president outlined a series of specific policy proposals that would become his platform when he ran again for the presidency in 1912. But in the process, Roosevelt also articulated what was in essence a political theory of common consciousness:

We are all Americans. Our common interests are as broad as the continent. I speak to you here in Kansas exactly as I would speak in New York or Georgia, for the most vital problems are those which affect us all alike. The national government belongs to the whole American people, and where the whole American people are interested, that interest can be guarded effectively only by the national government.  

Roosevelt thus linked commonality to the shape and scale of a nation-state. The people’s “common interests” were not simply large, in Roosevelt’s telling. They spanned a continent claimed by imperial expansion and managed by a federal government. The occupation and control of that vast space would, under a “new nationalism,” produce not just political but emotional wholeness, what Mary Keating called “union of force.” The nation would become a community. Somewhere, not far from Roosevelt’s kitchen table and the crowds of people gathered to hear him speak, likely sat a box of books from the Kansas Traveling Library, which had been regularly sending libraries to Osawatomie since at least 1900. This was quite a meaningful coincidence.

The closure of frontiers, the incorporation of supposedly “untamed” space into the body and life of the nation, required the careful management of imperial and federal scales. As one might expect, given the contexts explored in Chapters One and Two, this meant drawing on a politics of community that was profoundly gendered and racialized, and which depended on linking and dividing people in space. With an alchemy of text and violence, residents old and new were made to feel in common (or to feel so excluded from that commonality that they could seem beside the point) by asserting links between the spaces they inhabited. The westward expansion of the U.S. involved the overlapping, nesting enclosures of reservation, territory, state,

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and nation—the assertion of boundaries and borders, political and cultural, that connected some people as they separated others.\textsuperscript{446} Creating nation that was both vast and smooth was about controlling the perception, experience, and exercise of scale.

And as we have seen in previous chapters, managing scale and producing nationhood is about controlling and structuring two interrelated dimensions: information and emotion. Historians of empire like Ann Laura Stoler and Tony Ballantyne have established the ways in which the management of intimacy and emotion, alongside the control and circulation of information, was central to the administration of empire.\textsuperscript{447} And ideas about race, space, and belonging were inextricably part of it. The “shuttling of paper” across oceans (in Ballantyne’s words) and “managing the domestic” relations between individuals (in Stoler’s) worked together to both establish who could fully belong and how the empire would operate.\textsuperscript{448} This dynamic was a key part of how traveling libraries, and then bookmobiles, operated in the United States. In Chapter One, we saw the Kansas Traveling Library move books through space in order to orchestrate intimate encounters between neighbors, and in Chapter Two how those intimacies at the same time depended on and were shaped by exclusion and refusal. Here, we will see how inclusion of the previously excluded drew heavily on both traditions.

In the nineteenth century, the conviction that the United State should expand, manifestly, to the Pacific emerged and helped add an obsession with time to the administration of space.

O’Sullivan’s grand declarations (of a “magnificent domain of time and space”) met the

\textsuperscript{446} As Kaplan has famously shown, the domestic space of the home and the domestic space of the nation were frequently mapped onto one another, helping to make the violent extension of national space seem both comfortable and natural. Kaplan, \textit{Anarchy of Empire}, 23-50.


establishment of the Department of the Interior, an interior now destined to be manifest. Messy engagements and violent struggles begot rectangular territories and agencies for administering them, a begetting suddenly natural and ever thus. Supposedly blank spaces were mapped “as surfaces…tightly partitioned by networks of straight lines and punctuated by place names.” A concert of iron and steel and wire, rail and rifle and telegraph, continued the work of tying East and West, both spatially and temporally. They facilitated extensive westward migration of native-born and immigrant Americans, the continued murder and enclosure of native people, and both closer and faster ties between territories and the nation’s capital. Indeed, by Frederick Jackson Turner’s announcement at 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, and the subsequent 1898 invasions and occupations of places like the Philippines and Puerto Rico, and Roosevelt’s 1910 speech, the continental frontier was meant to be closed. The past was to be past, and the frontier was to have become merely part of the nation.

But despite this more than century-long tradition of using information and emotion to fully incorporate and manage the continental stretch of U.S. territory, Roosevelt’s declaration was more wish than statement of fact. The incorporation and development of the ersatz frontier had proceeded unevenly in the new century. And it would continue to do so. By the 1930s, the federal government was asserting a power to encompass all of human activity—to produce, like the new nationalism the first President Roosevelt had imagined, a common consciousness across the continent. But it was stymied, in some areas, by the fact that in certain spaces the stubborn persistence of the past inhibited the growth of a federal future.

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449 On the origins of this rectangularity, see Bill Hubbard, Jr., American Boundaries: The Nation, the States, the Rectangular Survey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
450 Price, Dry Place, 47.
The Taos County Project was a New Deal collaboration between multiple federal agencies, the New Mexico state government, the University of New Mexico, and the Harwood Foundation. Its stated aim was to ameliorate the effects of rural poverty in the area by, for example, establishing health clinics and instituting modern irrigation practices. But, more generally, its goal was to induct a population stuck in the wrong space and the wrong time—a community seemingly foreign and seemingly antiquated—into the space and time of American modernity. It sought to make these people, and their land, both legible by and available to the bureaucratic machinery of the nation-state. Indeed, as narrated by its director several years after its end (in the retrospective *It Happened in Taos*, which will form the basis of the rest of this section) the project emerged most clearly out of the seemingly-stunned realization that the frontier remained a frontier.\textsuperscript{451} “[T]he area abounds in relics and lore of the early trappers and traders, the raiding Comanches and Apaches, Father Martinez the pioneer priest, the Indians’ war of rebellion,” Jesse Taylor Reid wrote of the county. “In the center of the plaza of Taos stands a flagpole from which Old Glory flies night and day—a concession granted by a special act of Congress in the days of siege by the daring Plains tribes.”\textsuperscript{452} But as much as that flag had claimed and continued to claim the territory as formally American, the social, political, and cultural structures—the systems for managing information and emotion—that would make those claims effective on the ground were missing. The “relics and lore” were not really past at all, and the frontier remained.

\textsuperscript{451} According to Suzanne Forrest, the Taos County Project was partly inspired by an influential 1940 study, by George L. Sanchez, of Hispanic poverty in Taos. The study was, intriguingly, called *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans*. Suzanne Forrest, *The Preservation of the Village: New Mexico’s Hispanics and the New Deal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998 [1989]), 249-250.

As Reid described them, the descendants of the original Spanish settlers in the region, and the isolated land they occupied, had largely escaped attention from any of the successive central powers that had laid ostensible claim to them. “For more than two centuries they were a ‘lost people,’” he wrote, “isolated in the hinterland of New Spain, forgotten by warring Mother Spain…neglected by Mexico with its newly won independence after 1821, and finally all but ignored by Uncle Sam for three quarters of a century after he had gobbled them up.” This was not simply a political failure. The states—cast two times out of three as family—“forgot[,]” “neglected,” and “ignored” the people they might have nurtured and with whom they might have bonded with love and consanguine obligation. Reid writes this, of course, as if the acquisition of the land had not required this erasure, this forgetting—as if it was not precisely, in Price’s words, “the perceived blankness of the Western landscape in the national geo-imagining…upon which white expansionism was predicated.” Forgetting the reasons for forgetting, Reid also notes that the people themselves lacked the mettle to cope with this inattention, especially as Uncle Sam’s other nieces and nephews moved Westward and into future. “Progress plodded its inevitable, stubborn way,” and the “militant, forceful, reckless race” of American pioneers arrived, but the Nuevo Mexicanos supposedly “lack[ed]…a driving response to the challenge of an expanding frontier.”

That “driving”—that ability to move which we saw so unequally distributed in the last chapter—was somehow distinctively American. And the residents of Taos lacked it, utterly. “Their roots are deep in the soil,” Reid explained. They were “bound to the land” and “truly

454 Price, *Dry Place*, 46.
indigenous.”457 But at least on the latter point, in fact, they were not, really. Reid himself narrated their descent from Spanish imperialists, and their forebears’ pitched battles against Indians in the region. And yet he seemed to have no language for describing their status. Suzanne Forrest has asserted that “colonial status” was frequently “impos[ed] upon both Hispanos and Indians,” which disadvantaged them economically while it “enabled some Anglo Americans to establish a special protective relationship over them—one that assuaged their guilt even as it enhanced their sense of themselves as socially and intellectually superior human beings.”458 (Indians are essentially absent from Reid’s narrative.) In the iconic, imaginative vocabulary of the West on which Reid often drew in this way, one was either mobile or rooted, powerful or under power, colonizer or colonized, American or indigene. The spread of this way of thinking and talking and being was itself an imagined memory of the frontier past and, simultaneously, part of the system that was laid over the land and that worked to incorporate it.

According to its technical demographic definition, the frontier was closed when the population was distributed across the landscape without significant gaps, but it was also to have meant the closure of the epistemic and ontological confusion the frontier occasioned. But a half-century later, the actual complexity of the frontier past seeming to weigh on him, Reid still flailed about for a precise way of talking about the Nuevo Mexicano residents of Taos. He thus arrived, twice, at the peculiar, paradoxical “native settler.”459 This inbetween-ness, this uncertainty, was one of the “relics” Reid saw scattered about the county, and which he (perhaps unconsciously) saw at the heart of its problems. In this place that was neither firmly now nor

457 Reid, It Happened, 10.
458 Forrest, Preservation of the Village, xix.
459 Reid, It Happened, 6, 7.
then, among these people who were not clearly us or them, what sort of Americanness and what sort of democracy could flourish?

And so Reid was confronted with the presence “in the Southwest [of] some two million of these Spanish-speaking citizens of the United States, who are proud of their allegiance to the Stars and Stripes,” but who were also, in some ways, still not American. Ignored by Uncle Sam, these proud citizens were not reaping the benefits of their nationhood and their nation was not successfully claiming all of its right in land and love. The aim of the Taos County Project would be to finish the work of westward expansion and—by filling the country with modern and democratic communities—make the West American.

Against the messy uncertainty of this surprisingly extant frontier, the Taos County Project embodied the hope (itself a relic of programs like the Kansas Traveling Library) that the solution was to organize belonging on a national scale. The Project emerged, Reid claimed, because Taos’s residents “live among their peaks with their handicaps….a challenge to every red-blooded fellow-citizen of this great democracy of ours.” In a true and large-scale democracy, Reid thus claimed, local problems cannot remain local. What the Project tried to do was to take the challenge that sharing presented, the affect-at-a-distance produced by nationalism, and channel it into the carefully nested bureaucracies of federal governance. But Reid rejected work that happened only at those largest scales, complaining, for example, that “[t]he tendency in recent decades toward centralized responsibility, authority, and control in state and federal government has minimized the importance of the county and its people as the functioning force in our social and economic life.”

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West, Reid suggested, would be met by an organizational impulse that ran on scales from face-to-face interaction to geopolitical conflict, by “a getting together of heads all along the line, from Washington down to the grass roots.”\textsuperscript{463} It was an impulse that rehearsed the process by which the United States had—through the organization of towns, counties, and territories out of seemingly independent settlers—initially incorporated the West in the nineteenth century.

Despite paeans to modernity and progress, and a hostility to relics, the Taos County Project depended on memories of the frontier to understand the present. As a consequence, the sort of democracy it built would be shaped and limited by that past.

\textbf{“Everybody’s Business Is Everybody’s Business”: Managing Democracy in Taos}

From the Project’s gestation, Reid wrote of Taos’s residents, “it was obviously necessary for them to \textit{organize} against their problems.”\textsuperscript{464} This organization would not take place solely on a local level, however, and certainly not by people acting separately. The people would need to come together “coöperatively and in harmonious effort with the many organized agencies available for their assistance.”\textsuperscript{465} And that cooperation would not be merely logistical or technical. “A very unusual thing has happened in Taos County, New Mexico,” Reid wrote. “It is so much of a departure from the ordinary that it is hard to believe. Yet it is true. \textit{Everybody got together on everybody’s business!} No longer is everybody’s business \textit{nobody’s business.”}\textsuperscript{466} This, Reid insisted, was the signal accomplishment of the Taos County Project: the opening up of individual lives to public scrutiny and collaborative problem-solving. (Indeed, the first chapter of \textit{It Happened in Taos} is titled “Everybody’s Business Is Everybody’s Business.”) And by

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{1} Reid, \textit{It Happened}, 103.
\bibitem{3} Reid, \textit{It Happened}, 2.
\bibitem{4} Reid, \textit{It Happened}, 1. Emphasis original.
\end{thebibliography}
bringing those individual lives together to form a more, well, perfect union, the Project was to make a nation. Indeed, it made the general statement of Roosevelt’s “new nationalism”—that common interests linked people in Kansas, New York, and Georgia—and Reid’s “challenge to every red-blooded fellow-citizen” literal. The isolation of deserts and mountains and revenant frontiers had kept people apart, and the Taos County Project would use “g[etting] together” to end once and for all the loneliness of the West.

The key mechanism for accomplishing this was that quintessentially American event: the community meeting. As we saw in Curious Missie and similar texts in Chapter One, town or county meetings were often used to illustrate the bookmobile’s connective capacity. In Taos County, however, that dynamic was reversed: it was the bookmobile that made successful meetings possible. The bookmobile, though it carried 800 books as well as a projection system, did more than simply “supply[] reading materials and educational moving pictures to the communities,” Reid wrote. The “little red wagon” had become, in fact, “the spark plug” of the entire project. (In 1946, the same year It Happened in Taos was published, the Los Angeles Times published a profile of two “Virginia Pioneers” with the University of Virginia Extension Division, hard at work in the foothills, doing “a frontier job…making democracy work in the back woods,” by holding meetings, showing educational films and planning a bookmobile. One resident, the reporter noted, called them “Democracy’s spark plugs.” This not only suggests the infiltration of mechanical metaphor into civic life but also the way that the sorts of Southeastern mountainous regions the Lend a Hand Society served may have also struggled to realize full

467 Almost two decades later, in North Dakota, a state bookmobile program staffer crashed a Farm Bureau meeting in order to argue that bookmobile service suited two main goals of the group—like “Promote good citizenship programs”—plugging into both the community meeting and the yeoman ideal of American life. Margaret Stav to Hazel Webster Byrnes, October 8, 1959, “Lib Comm Correspondence for 1959” Folder, Box 1, State Library Commission – Miscellaneous Files (Series 1064), North Dakota Historical Society, Fargo, North Dakota.
468 Reid, It Happened, 38.
469 Reid, It Happened, 38.
In Taos, the “spark” caused by the bookmobile’s “novelty and unique usefulness attracted people to gatherings as nothing else had done,” raising meeting attendance considerably. The Project thus joined a long history of using bookmobiles to amplify the efforts of a central agency. Residents were attracted to the bookmobile, and especially to its films, and that allowed “a wide distribution of information and education relating to the individual programs of the cooperating agencies on the one hand and the co-operative nature of the Project on the other.” As we’ve seen happen in other times and places, the bookmobile shared books, information, and cooperation, which itself facilitated the sharing of books and information.

What made the Project’s bookmobile distinct was that it was meant to be centralizing. The bonds that the bookmobile would enact would not only be organized by a central authority; the precise shape those bonds would take would be determined by that authority in advance and arranged along lines that suited bureaucratic needs over local desires. Most other library extension efforts were, of course, centralized, with routes and collections organized by a main library office. And, from the traveling libraries of the 1890s, those efforts attempted to consolidate scattered people into communities. The Taos County Project aimed to do that, but to do it in a very particular and more extreme way, by bringing people together for the purposes of administering their relationships to one another. This was an enactment, on the level of the interpersonal relationship, of a New Deal approach to governance more broadly: “Searching for a

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471 Reid, It Happened, 38.
472 The Project’s head librarian was first “sent on a round of the country” to examine other similar programs, so this similarity was no accident. Reid, It Happened, 39.
473 Reid, It Happened, 38.
way to direct the rapidly growing federal government,” Jason Scott Smith writes, “New Dealers
turned not to the task of amending the Constitution, but rather to the arena of administration and
management.”474 In Taos, the communities, and the democracy, that the bookmobile created
under this rubric were to be more managed than ever before.

Before the Project launched, the seventeen agencies initially involved (eventually thirty-
six would cooperate) held planning meetings, but “it was realized that these meetings could not
accomplish the purposes of the Project unless the people were represented in all of the
deliberations.”475 This question of representation was a crucial one in the conception of the
Project, but the system the organizers developed would insist on popular representation but
would resolutely not confirm and extend the messiness of democracy. It would, rather, be a
means by which the conclusions of any uncertain contest might be known, or at least adequately
predicted, in advance. It thus extended the small-but-important enticing role of the bookmobile
(come to a meeting, and there will be books and movies we have chosen for you, and we can
bring you into the system we have devised) into a larger model of political life: come to a
meeting to have your voice heard, provided we know the content and intent of that voice first.

During the summer and autumn of 1940, before holding the initial county-wide
organizing meeting, Project staff members visited the county’s thirty-one villages in order to
spread the word and have the residents choose representatives to the Project’s planning staff.
This worked in some ways quite similarly to the Book Mission directors’ journeys across the
South, or Mary Keating’s trips around the far reaches of Kansas, garnering support for the
Kansas Traveling Library. (It was on one of those trips, remember, that Keating wrote home to

474 Jason Scott Smith, Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956 (New
York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 190.
475 Reid, It Happened, 17.
Topeka of the need for “union of force…and good literature.”) But in Taos, far fewer chances were being taken when it came to determining what shape that “union” would take. When staff-members arrived in a particular community, Reid explained, “[t]he procedure was to…call on one of the leading citizens…who knew the people and their problems in an intimate way.”

That citizen would be convinced, then the staff would “propose to him that he call four or five of his close neighbors into his home that evening, at which time the field worker would explain the program to them and see what they thought about it.” This was advantageous, according to Reid, as “[t]he fact that the neighbors were invited to another neighbor’s home to talk over something would condition the meeting favorably in most cases.” And it usually worked, after which the field worker would “suggest[ ] that if the gentlemen thought well of the idea, they might invite a small number of their friends and neighbors to their homes on consecutively arranged nights” for discussion. After a number of such discussions on such nights, a meeting for the entire community would be held. “The field man knew by this time,” Reid explained, “what the community action would be.”

This process recapitulated but intensified key elements of the bookmobile in place by this time. As we saw in Chapter One, the traveling library (and thus the bookmobile) was borne out of a concerted effort to manage emotion on scales running from the local to the national. The Kansas Traveling Library, for example, required May Pressly to search out her neighbors as a prerequisite for receiving a library. The state and nation were rebuilt, on this model, from the foundation of neighborly bonds occasioned by the library but constructed by their participants. In

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Taos County, however, that neighborliness is not simply encouraged but *arranged*. In Kansas, strict requirements for participation had clearly influenced the development of neighborhoods that could be linked together on broader scales. But neighborhoods could conceivably, as well, have failed to take shape. In Taos, on the other hand, they would be manufactured to exact and predictable specifications. With this method, the Project made practically literal the plan of *Why Not?* (1929), the bizarre American Library Association pamphlet featuring a “[d]ramatization of the arguments for and against a county library presented before an open meeting,” meant to actually be performed at a meeting, perhaps fooling attendees into thinking they were witnessing a reasoned and passionate debate, the outcome of which—county libraries for all!—was always already determined. What was in 1929 a peculiar (and probably not terribly, or at least not literally, effective) effort by a professional organization had become a method actually undertaken by the federal government. The intimacy and knowledge that linked citizens to their neighbors would be identified, exploited, and organized into something useful. They would have democracy, whatever it took.

One of the effects of this method of managed democracy was to bureaucratize emotion, to make emotional connections seem like administrative ones and then to replace the former with the latter. The neighborhood gatherings in homes, followed by local meetings during which the communities would approve of the Project and elect their representatives to it, were merely preliminary steps. The true work of the Project began on November 8, 1940, with a meeting at which agency staff-members and community representatives were present. The minutes of the meeting, reproduced in *It Happened in Taos*, capture the Project’s strange democratic alchemy.

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481 Reid noted with pride that at the first staff meeting, through their representatives, “the communities reported their problems as they saw them, without any coaching from agency personnel.” But how much coaching would be required when the selection process was managed so closely? Reid, *It Happened*, 21.
At the meeting, Reid said that the staff was currently made up of agency representatives, but that community-members were present because they would be included in the staff, as well. “Then,” he explained, “we would have the people and the agencies represented together for the purpose of discussing common problems.”

Representation, in democratic systems, is meant to be what allows collective will to gain practical, effective force. And communities emerge, in part at least, out of a sense of shared experience. Both communities and their representations are, thus, meant to be products of the emergence of common consciousness. Saying that agencies and people can have “common problems” and be “represented together” asserts that people can, in essence, share common consciousness with institutions. The bonds of community become procedural—the product of meeting attendance and agenda-following—rather than emotional. This substitution of administrative bonds for emotional ones, and the new sorts of connection it made possible—primarily in the form of unprecedented interagency cooperation and “band[ing] together”—was one of the signal accomplishments of the Project, as touted in *It Happened in Taos*, as well as in journals like *Human Organization* and the *American Sociological Review*.

This could make the more manageable virtues of bureaucracy—predictability, measurability, orderliness—stand in for the virtues of democracy and community. And so, in organizing information and emotion, those former virtues were key to overcoming the messy uncertainty of the frontier and making Taos American. As we will see in the next section, the bookmobile supported this process not only by attracting people to the places where it happened, but by attracting them to particular kinds of information in the process.

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“Frontiers of the Future”: Reading Progress and the Past in Taos

The triumph of this managed, bureaucratic democracy was most evident in the operation and evaluation of the Project’s bookmobile. It was the “spark plug” of the entire operation because it attracted people to meetings, yes, but also, it seems, because that attraction could be quantified. The chapter about the bookmobile in *It Happened in Taos* is rife with numbers: the bookmobile boosted attendance from ten percent of family heads to over eighty; the introduction of the bookmobile and small community libraries raised circulation from 10,712 to 38,279 in the first year of the program; 832 people attended a film screening in one rural village, and 52,745 people attended screenings in a single year.\(^{485}\) That last number was followed swiftly by a note that in many places, “almost the entire population turned out for the shows, some of them walking with young children in the arms for as much as three miles.”\(^{486}\) The bookmobile offered the opportunity to link the sentimental (babes in arms) with the statistical (52,745 in attendance). This relation of emotion and order was meant to take place in the lives of the bookmobile’s users, as well in the assessment of its programs. “The regularity of its visits to the communities and the growing confidence inspired in the people by the friendly, sympathetic service of the bookmobile operator,” wrote Reid, “contribute a stabilizing influence in their lives, a dependability of service for which isolated rural residents and underprivileged people everywhere hunger.”\(^{487}\) Rather than the bookmobile’s flexibility, its mobility and unpredictable connections, Reid was himself and imagined his constituents to be attracted to its regularity, its fixed routes and set schedule.

Friendliness and sympathy—in other contexts cornerstones of democracy—here serve mainly as

\(^{485}\) Reid, *It Happened*, 38, 44, 45.
\(^{486}\) Reid, *It Happened*, 45.
handmaidens of routine, helping to establish a “stabilizing…dependability” that is the object of both the Project’s work and the people’s hunger. And this gets to the heart of the Project’s project: it was built on a conviction that feelings of community could be administered and thus measured and thus controlled. As we will see in that section, that administration depended on controlling a frontier past by linking it to the present and the future, with the bookmobile’s contents as the connecting threads.

The impulse to evaluate also manifested in the examination of individuals’ library records. Not content with circulation statistics, or librarians’ reports about books’ popularity, the Taos County Project adapted the social science methods of federal governance (sampling and demography) to the Project’s library. Reid reported the results of the sampling:

Children, as expected, were reading adventure fiction; teen-age young people confined themselves mostly to popular Western fiction; young adults seemed most interested in current fiction and some books on the war and international affairs; the older adults, those whose reading was confined mainly to Spanish materials, read what they could get on subjects of general adult interest, mostly those relating to the war and rural occupations.  

This passage contains numerous threads, three of which I want to examine here: language, genre, and war. Taking each of these in turn, and using them to contextualize the Taos County Project and its bookmobile, will reveal how the Project used the frontier to frame and manage literacy and democracy. It will also highlight the ways in which even this seemingly domestic program was enmeshed in a global system of expansion, violence, and cooperation.

First, the question of language influenced the bookmobile’s collections and the Project as a whole. Complicating Roosevelt’s earlier pronouncement of national similarity, Reid argued that the county’s education system was flawed precisely because it was the same as “one would find in Iowa, Vermont, or Oregon,” conducted entirely in English for children raised by Spanish-
It was “not practical, functional, or fitting,” misunderstanding the frustratingly in-between status of the region. But it did work in its way, and most Taos residents were literate, the older ones only in Spanish and the younger in English, as well. Almost all of the books carried by the Project bookmobile were in English, rather to Reid’s chagrin. “It was a disappointment that we could not secure from any source reading materials in Spanish that dealt with current American Problems in a satisfactory way for these readers,” Reid lamented, suggesting that the federal government undertake to produce some, “since it would serve not only the millions of our citizens of Spanish descent in the Southwest, but could be used to good advantage in exchange with our neighbors to the south.” Here reemerged Reid’s uncertainty about the status of Taos’s Nuevo Mexicano residents: they were “our citizens,” but reaching them was like reaching residents of other nations. This was, perhaps, in part due to the way the technology of the bookmobile, the dream of common consciousness, and the linguistic politics of the Western Hemisphere met in Taos. As Ricardo Salvatore argues, “U.S. visions of hemispheric integration were built upon notions of connectivity, circulation, and modernity that promoters and policymakers considered embedded in machines.” The bookmobile was one of those machines: the U.S. Information Service ran bookmobile programs in Mexico City in the early 1950s, for example, and in 1962 the Bureau for Inter-American Affairs proposed running bookmobiles in Peru and elsewhere. (It is also no surprise that among the film strips shown at

489 Reid, It Happened, 12.
490 Reid, It Happened, 12.
491 Reid, It Happened, 41-42.
493 The records of the Mexico City program are held by the National Archives and Records Administration (College Park), in Record Group 306. They were declassified after I submitted a Freedom of Information Act request, but they became available only after research for this project had been completed. The Inter-American Affairs proposal can be found in Marvin Weissman, Office of Institutional Development, to Arturo Morales-Carrion, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, Department of State, July 26, 1962; BOOKS—Bookmobile Proposal
bookmobile stops around the county was “Good Neighbors,” a record of a 1938 good-will tour of South America made by Franklin Roosevelt and Cordell Hull.) As we saw in the introduction, this intimation—that fellow-citizens could have less in common with one another than one might have with linguistic fellows miles and nations away—would later become ground for bookmobile-based resistance by Chicano nationalists. But in the context of Reid’s American-building enterprise, it was a curious suggestion, indeed, and one that illustrates the limits of 1940s liberalism and technocracy when it came to forming a multicultural and multilingual nation.

The second striking feature of Reid’s description is the manner in which teenagers “confined themselves mostly to popular Western fiction” (and, to a lesser extent, the way younger children “were reading adventure fiction”). Fictions of the West had played a significant role in the annexation of Texas, the promotion of the Mexican-American War, and the expansion of the U.S. state to include newly occupied territories afterward. Encounters between bodies, in texts that created imaginative encounters between east and west, stood in for and managed vast and violent encounters between nations. Almost a century later, in that mythologized land, the descendants of the occupied read the offspring of those earlier stories. As is so often the case, evidence of reception and its effects is illusory or nonexistent. (This may, indeed, be part of the point: where the fact of someone’s reading is measurable, their emotional response is rather more obscure, and so the Project’s attention was directed at the former.) But reading Reid’s list, one is forced to wonder about both the psychic and political work performed by Nuevo Mexicano youth.

Folder: Box 17; Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.  
Reid, It Happened, 45. “Good Neighbors,” Motion Picture Films, Record Group 178, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.  
Shelley Streeby has documented, for example, how romances written about the West and circulated among working-class readers in Eastern cities attempted to turn force into loving consent by mapping imperial expansion onto heterosexual romance and marriage. Streeby, American Sensations, 102-138.
reading those stories. Usually written from the perspective of white settlers—and usually depicting the violent and mercenary conquest of the land as both an inevitable triumph and an unqualified good—Western fiction helped create the imaginative conditions necessary for the extension of the state across the stretch of the continent. But read as part of a project to make it both full and permanent, these fictions perhaps turned that extension inward, incorporating not just political geography but the frontiers of the mind. These teenagers lived in a community where, Reid notes, funerals offered the most potent “occasion…for social get-together and interchange” and for “community-wide pause and celebration,” where contemplation of a fine-grained community history was the central cultural activity. By injecting “popular Western fiction” into the life of that community and the lives of its young members, the Taos County Project attempted to make these teenagers come of age as Americans. The history of their place would not be series of gatherings around death and remembrance but rather the shared, national myths of that place’s incorporation—and thus the seemingly true and final closure of frontiers, both internal and external.

And Reid’s public announcement of their reading habits also closes a sort of national-historical circuit, using “native settlers” in the present to sanction and smooth over the violence and injustice of the past. This was not an unprecedented strategy at that moment. In the 1920s and 1930s, for example, Glacier National Park in Montana was advertised using photographs of Native Americans, including one in which Pikuni Blackfoot chief Two Guns White Calf sits in traditional dress, on a rocky outcropping, reading a book by Zane Grey, master of the violent and morally ambiguous Western.496 The photo explicitly, like Reid’s description implicitly, invites

the viewer into a world where the experience of the West is framed by white culture and a white state—by the photographer, by authors, by the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs—for the passive consumption of people of color. In this imagined present, people of color cease to be subjects of their own lives, or authors of their own history, but are instead objects used to promote continued conquest while erasing painful pasts. This framing had staying power. Two decades later, in 1962, public health educator Anne M. Smith interviewed a bookmobile librarian serving Navajo pueblos in New Mexico. On hearing that the Navajo “like reading about themselves,” Smith suggested that “they have been in this cultural bind for so long, and books about themselves gives them a sort of status in their own eyes.” 497 White knowledge and white representation grants status to the native people, in this view, and sanction to the nation that slaughtered and sequestered them.

There is another way to understand these images—from the Two Guns White Calf photograph to Reid’s declaration to Smith’s interpretation—of people of color passively consuming and retroactively forgiving. Indeed, the librarian Smith interviewed complicated matters, agreeing to an extent with Smith but adding that “they have been suspicious of the white man and want to know what he is saying about them.” 498 Reading Western fiction, the Taos teenagers were gaining both the literacy skills they would need for—and, perhaps more importantly, awareness of the tropes and assumptions that would shape—their engagement with the larger, white-dominated America outside their villages. Even as these images helped solidify the appearance of a closed frontier (everyone reads Westerns because they depict a glorious but ended past), they also depict Latino and Native American subjects grappling with what that

497 “Interview #29: Bookmobile Services – State Library” (May 11, 1962), Folder 5, Box 1, Anne M. Smith Collection, Fray Angélico Chávez History Library, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

498 “Interview #29.”
closure might mean. They knew there was a set of systems—cultural, legal, geographic—
 extending and solidifying around them. From government boarding schools and the continued
 application of the Dawes Act to public health departments and land grant programs, the first half
 of the twentieth century in the West and Southwest saw the development of numerous
 bureaucracies designed to either assimilate or exclude both natives and “native settlers.”
 Figuring out how to use these systems, how to work them, could be one strategy for survival and
 success in the region. Thus the desire “to know what he has been saying about them” was part of
 a larger desire to understand and thrive within the world that “saying” had wrought. There were
 distinct risks to this sort of approach (as we saw in Chapter Two, with the stiff-sided box the
 Robert B. Harrison Library accidentally helped reinforce), but it was a potentially transformative
 one.

 The temporal folding at work in the teenagers’ reading habits (portraying the past in the
 present in order to imagine the future) played out, differently, in some of the bookmobile’s film
 screenings. The Project’s bookmobile-based screenings were part of a larger midcentury
 movement to create encounters with what Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson call “useful
 cinema.” Especially in Taos, these “useful” films were not merely educational in the sense that
 they taught about nutrition and farming techniques. They were pedagogical more broadly,
 offering training for becoming American and slotting into the right part of the national culture.

 This can most clearly be seen in *Frontiers of the Future*, one of the film strips Reid
 reported showing Taos residents. Produced in 1937 and funded by the National Industrial

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Council, this “screen editorial” was on the surface rather standard industrial propaganda: Technology! Engineering! Progress! Test tubes!501 But the language in which Frontiers of the Future cast its subject makes it particularly remarkable as a part of the Taos County Project. The film was narrated by Lowell Thomas, famous at the time as a broadcaster and author of With Lawrence of Arabia (1924), who in the film sits at a desk and narrates an immense change. “America for three hundred years has been the land of promise for the rest of the world, the land of new frontiers, new opportunities for all,” he intones. “Today, the job of building this nation geographically is completed; there are no new frontiers within our borders.” As he speaks, a political map of the United States appears on the screen and as a screen onto which are projected moving images of buildings, bridges, airplanes, and cars [FIGURE 13]. Technology and the infrastructures that make it run literally overtake the continental space of the nation. (Bits of Canada and Mexico are visible but, importantly, remain undifferentiated and un-illustrated.) “To what new horizons can we look now?” he asks, as a glowing question mark appears on the map, reaching from Minnesota to the Rio Grande, superimposed on an oil refinery, a factory, and finally a crowd of people busily walking down a sidewalk [FIGURE 14].502 There was no longer a West to look to, but Thomas’s next two questions illustrate an important shift in the rhetoric of the frontier: “Where are tomorrow’s opportunities? What’s ahead in America, for you, for your children?” The answer is, of course, “the frontiers of the future”—“not on any map,” they are “ahead of us.” The geographic and the temporal blend, such that the future becomes a space in which to expand. As the West had represented the future to nineteenth-century boosters and

502 That it was asked by Thomas, widely lauded as one of “the world’s foremost globe trotter[s]” and an inventor of the audio-visual travelogue, lent particular force to this question. “Lowell Thomas: His Brief Biography,” Milwaukee Journal, August 27, 1933.
thinkers ("we go west as into the future," wrote Henry David Thoreau, and O'Sullivan proclaimed that "[t]he expansive future is our arena" for expansion), in this film the future comes to represent the West.  

The context in which this film was screened in Taos amplified this effect. Bookmobiles in general still represented at this moment a mobile, technological, educational and "expansive future." (It’s no coincidence, for example, that Lowell Thomas was also featured in a 1961 U.S. Steel advertisement touting the bookmobile as "a good example of the fast-growing American appetite for learning and culture.") And this was only more true in Reid’s depiction of Taos as a land where the past had a stranglehold on the future. The “little red wagon” rode into Taos, in Reid’s telling, both carrying and representing the future. One of the Irving Rusinow photographs printed in It Happened in Taos shows the bookmobile stopped in front of a school in Llano de San Juan [FIGURE 15]. The front of the bookmobile sits in the right foreground of the image, gleaming against a rough-hewn adobe schoolhouse, its overhang held up by a cracked timber and its façade a windowless, dull, and ragged grey. Lined up between the bookmobile and the school—poised between mud and metal, between past and future—is what the caption calls a "flock" of community-members, arriving to watch a screening of educational films. "Many of them have never seen a movie before," the caption explains, and so we can imagine a screening of Frontiers of the Future in this “secluded mountain community” calling into being the world the film describes, where technology has, indeed, traversed and enfolded the sprawling continent and its myriad people. The bookmobile—jutting metallic and new into frame of the

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505 Reid, It Happened, Plate VIII.  
506 Reid, It Happened, Plate VIII.
photograph and the lives of Taos’s residents—could thus become, in all of the violent and spatial and temporal force of the phrase, what Reid called “a powerful spearhead for almost unlimited progress.” The phrase encapsulates and culminates the history-folding temporal play at work in the Project’s effort to erase the frontier and create an audience for the new and the wonderful. No longer a weapon used to resist white encroachment, the spearhead becomes instead a tool for the fashioning of a future. It becomes a bookmobile.

The third striking part of Reid’s description of the residents’ reading habits was the adults’ interest in reading about war. Not that the popularity of this material is surprising, given that the Project began as war raged in Europe and ended after the U.S. had entered the fray. But the way in which the Project’s library programs both facilitated and managed that popularity is striking. As we saw in Chapter One, the Kansas Traveling Library, having (supposedly, at least) linked isolated people together into neighborhood and nation, turned its attention to connecting them to the globe. The Taos County Project again and again borrowed components of the early traveling library programs and both intensified and managed them. This violent, global turn was no exception. Reid explained that the staff at the community libraries set up by the Project and serviced by the bookmobile “had regular times of day, usually in the evenings, for reading aloud to adults (who could not read English) the war news…; for pointing out the location of faraway places on the map which had been mentioned in the news or at which they had sons in military service.” The sequence here is striking: news of the outside world would be read to or by the residents, creating an occasion for them to be situated explicitly within it. Depicting the people

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507 Reid, *It Happened*, 48. The photograph would be uncannily echoed almost two decades later in a painting by Eric Sloane published in his *Return to Taos* (1960), which recorded an earlier westward journey. In the latter image, Sloane’s automobile sits in the right foreground, curvaceous and metallic in front of the flat adobe lines of Taos Pueblo, which the caption notes is possibly the oldest “lived-in place on the continent.” Eric Sloane, *Return to Taos: A Sketchbook of Roadside Americana* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1960), 89.

508 Reid, *It Happened*, 43-44.
of Taos, Reid repeatedly describes them as “bound to the land” and to their families. The geographic scope of the war and the intensity of the nationalist fervor it helped create allowed the Project to get the people thinking about their lives in connection to the nation and its undertakings—to spread them across the stretch of the continent and then, as part of the nation, the globe. However “faraway” a place, it could be located on a map in relation to Taos. Its residents were, these lessons illustrated, part of a nation asserting itself in the world. That nation was to be the shape their belonging took in the new and modern lives the Project offered. By putting hearing about a location on the news and having a child serving there in same clause, for example, Reid collapsed the bonds of blood and of nation. With the latter coming out on top, this became, once again, a way to continue the process of separating Taos County and its people from the past and incorporating them into the United States.

That process began in war almost a century earlier, and so the presence of this particular war in Taos (and of Taos in this particular war) inevitably highlighted the centrality of violence and conquest to this slow Americanization. Perhaps inadvertently illustrating this was another Rusinow photograph, this one not published in Reid’s book but preserved in Project records [FIGURE 16]. This image, like the one discussed above, is of the Project bookmobile in Llano de San Juan. In fact, it appears to be of the bookmobile in Llano de San Juan on the same day as the previous photo, only this time from the rear. But where the front acted as a figurative “spearhead” of modernity, the back carried its gun. Crowded with children, many holding books, the bookmobile sits with its rear door swung open. Two children stand in the doorway, looking

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510 “Taos County, New Mexico. Taos County project bookmobile visits Llano San Juan, circulates books, showed educational films in schoolhouse, sells defense stamps” (12/1941), Photographic Prints Documenting Programs and Activities of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Predecessor Agencies, Record Group 83, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.
out at the throng below. And next to them, on the inside of the rear door, glowingly lit by the sun, stands a white soldier. Well, an image of one anyway. “FOR DEFENSE,” the poster shouts, “BUY UNITED STATES SAVINGS BONDS AND STAMPS.” Next to the words is a reproduction of Daniel Chester French’s sculpture of a minuteman, which was cast from melted-down Civil War cannons and erected at the site of the battle of Concord on its centennial. Just as the statue itself closed a circuit—celebrating the violent creation of the union with the weapons that had almost a century later had violently reasserted union in the face of secession—its appearance in a New Mexico village closed another one. Bringing white military force once again to Taos, but this time in the guise of a noble farmer-soldier (carrying a rifle but with one hand resting on his plow) from the eighteenth-century founding of the nation, the bookmobile created a through-line from distant past to present that ostensibly smoothed over the violent and uncertain middle. The poster thus invited the now self-evidently American residents of Taos to emulate the minuteman and defend their land not from Americans but as Americans. But, at the same time, that smoothing was not complete and the poster ably illustrated the links between violence and landscape that powered the kind of Americanization the Taos County Project embodied so well.

It also illustrated an alchemy of information and emotion. The sculpture itself had embodied a sort of quiet, careful nationalism that was of particular use after the ruptures of the Civil War. In 1900, as The Kansas Traveling Library and the Lend a Hand Society each worked to build a nation, renowned sculptor Lorado Taft—whose daughter would co-sponsor the failed Library Services Demonstration Bill of 1950 in the House and whose son-in-law would co-sponsor the successful Library Services Act of 1956 in the Senate, both of which aimed to provide federal support for bookmobiles—praised the sculpture for being a “stern, tense
embodiment of patriotism” in contrast to the “usual exuberant productions.” Forty years later, that “stern, tense” emotionalism found a home in New Mexico, as part of a program dedicated to inciting feelings of nationalism in order to manage them. Looming over a seemingly chaotic throng, the poster (and the bookmobile to which it was attached) centralized and organized it. The poster’s address, like the bookmobile’s, turned the crowd into an audience, the mass into a nation. That address was occasioned by a war which, like the New Deal that preceded and influenced it, created opportunities to attempt to use bureaucracy to once again bring about a new and total nationalism. The war was a massive undertaking that depended on the willingness of citizens to struggle and die. From rationing to conscription to the shift to wartime production, that willingness—that patriotic and nationalist fervor—had to be first called forth and then managed. The movement of information, of books and images and newspapers and posters and politics and belonging, was one way that happened. And so the Taos County Project was both a site where that took place and a site that offered a model for its successful implementation. To see one way that worked, in the next section, we will look at how the Taos County Project’s bookmobile related to other wartime library efforts.

“Total War”: Learning Lessons in the Shadow of Guard Towers

Beyond bringing information about the war (or war bond posters) to Taos, bookmobiles supported the management of national feeling, as well as the U.S. war effort more generally. They supported “war work” in a variety of capacities, and like the Taos bookmobile they often

512 Jason Scott Smith has, for example, argued that the New Deal did not simply fade away with the advent of the war, as many previous interpretations have suggested. Focusing on public works and infrastructure, he argues that the war actually became “a powerful rationale for continuing to fund programs that were becoming unpopular.” Smith, Building New Deal Liberalism, 192.
collapsed the boundaries between the home front and the battlefield. Even before the United States entered the war, in the summer of 1941, bookmobiles “follow[ed] the men into the field” for an elaborate set of war games played out within U.S. borders. And once the nation did enter the fray, the rigid, bureaucratic control of entertainment and education, embodied so well in Taos and abetted by the bookmobile, continued apace. One 1942 report, for example, noted that the Special Services Division of the War Department emerged as a government-run alternative to organizations, like the YMCA and Knights of Columbus, which had “care[d] for the off-duty needs” of soldiers during the World War I. Under its auspices, that earlier piecemeal, charitable entertainment was to be replaced by a system in which every military unit “not only is accompanied by several Special Services officers who have been rigorously trained at devising ways and means of entertaining men, but is equipped with A and B kits which contain practically every type of available athletic equipment as well as a short-wave radio, a phonograph, records, radio transcriptions, books and games.” Mobility was key to this extension of central entertainment amidst “modern, global warfare,” and so bookmobiles and traveling libraries joined portable pianos, mobile post exchanges, and portable “motion-picture kit[s]” on a circuit through a worldwide network of wartime installations.

That network included “posts all over the world,” as the army’s Recruiting Journal put it—from Fort Benning in Georgia, where a bookmobile provided books to African American

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514 Lloyd Shearer, “Brightening the Corners Where They Are,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1942.
515 Shearer, “Brightening.” Organizations like the Red Cross did continue off-duty services to military personnel, including mobile libraries. See Christy Fox, “Book Depot Appeals for Army Literature,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1942.
servicemen, to Australia to Panama to Western Europe, where Special Services programs were deployed. Bookmobiles in the war thus frustrated simple distinctions between home front and front lines. Indeed, the bookmobile pushes us to reconsider what exactly a site of war might be. “Total war,” Emily Miller Danton wrote in a 1942 report in an American Library Association publication: “It’s being fought in Libya and in Houston, in Chekiang and in Pittsburgh, in your kitchen and in your neighbor’s garage.” And libraries were working hard to respond to this new context. In cities around the United States, as factories shifted to the production of war materiel, and as their workers’ lives were accordingly transformed, libraries developed new programs to serve them. One “war time innovation,” as the Chicago Tribune put it, was undertaken by the Henry E. Legler Branch of the Chicago Public Library (named after the traveling library pioneer who dreamed of “little neighborhoods”). Like other libraries around the nation, the Legler Branch ran a bookmobile to war plants in its area, bringing “complete library privileges to war workers whose increased hours allow no time for library visits.” Technical books were popular for leisure reading (total war, indeed), and vegetable gardening was another widely-requested topic, as patrons tended Victory Gardens—or, at least, worked to have enough to eat under rationing. But the way the bookmobile plugged into the war effort meant that books were more than just “weapons in the war of ideas,” as the wartime colophon and

519 “West Libraries Stress War Needs,” Chicago Daily Tribune, April 30, 1944. See also “Literature to Lettuce,” Irish Times Pictorial, January 29, 1944. Bookmobile programs did struggle under rubber and gasoline rationing, as described by Danton and dramatized in one wartime novel about a bookmobile librarian. Danton, “Victory,” 543; de Leeuw, With a High Heart.
520 Rationing was another way in which the foreign-domestic distinction was torn asunder by war, as the political and even military significance of seemingly homebound production and consumption decisions was made clear. See Amy Bentley, Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998).
propaganda programs had it. They had become part of the production and distribution of the weapons themselves. The dynamic of Taos was replicated but reversed. Where the Taos County Project bookmobile brought the residue of violence packed in alongside the books, here the residues of books were packed in with the instruments of violence. A book was read in Chicago and a bomb dropped in Berlin, and a bookmobile helped mark a line between those two seemingly distinct, seemingly distant events.

Other aspects of the home front were invisible in *It Happened in Taos*. Indeed, Reid was entirely silent about another federal effort being undertaken at the same time as the Taos County Project, an effort that was also about deciding who was not yet a true American, an effort that was also a proving ground for applied social science, for new breeds of bureaucracy, for managed democracy. As the Taos County Project wore on and its bookmobile traveled the county, less than three hundred miles away—the same distance as Cimarron was from Topeka when Keating wrote back calling for “union of force”—sat the Granada War Relocation Center, where from August 1942 thousands of Japanese Americans were detained following Executive Order 9066. Like the nine other euphemistically-named “relocation centers,” Granada was run by a new federal agency (the War Relocation Authority, created by Executive Order 9102), influenced by applied social science, and dedicated to Americanization through work and education.522

Grenada did not have a bookmobile, but, like all the other centers and like the Taos County Project, it did have both managed democracy and community libraries. As the first prisoners were transported to Granada that August, the War Relocation Authority was codifying a system of what they called “evacuee self-government.”\(^{523}\) This system involved the establishment “community government at the relocation centers” in “a form roughly comparable to municipal governments throughout the United States.”\(^{524}\) The system also, however, involved a series of checks and channels. Before the organization committee (“comparable to a constitutional convention”) could put a governance plan in place, it would have to be “approved by the Project Director and by a majority of the qualified voters.”\(^{525}\) Not only did this mimic the choreographed democracy of the neighborhood meetings the Taos County Project used to acquired the approval of its constituents, it also borrowed the Project’s technique of having “the people and the agencies represented together” as a means of managing the relationship of citizens to government. The problem was not simply that the WRA failed to enact even this anemic form of democracy (helping to prompt strikes in the camps), but that the idea of building democracy at the point of a gun—of trying, in historian Brian Masaru Hayashi’s words, “[t]o maintain control while having democracy”—was always already flawed.\(^{526}\) The cruel irony at the heart of this form of self-government was that cooperation was not the root of democracy but its destruction: “We the people of the Granada Relocation Center, in order to develop a democratic form of Community government, to further the common welfare, to provide for the internal


\(^{524}\) Second Quarterly Report, 23.


harmony, to co-operate with the War Relocation Authority, do establish this charter.”

This was democracy as submission, a slippage also evident in the camps’ educational programs, as well, from libraries stocked with cast-offs from the Victory Book Campaign to schools where—in the words of two observers in 1943—teachers tried “to teach the fundamental freedoms upon which our democracy is based in a classroom from whose windows guard towers are plainly visible.”

These ironies and hypocrisies and unhappy juxtapositions were less extreme in Taos, certainly, but they were very much present, as a happy shining bookmobile—that “little red wagon”—wandered its way through the villages, bringing books to one and all as federal agencies worked to erase centuries of tradition and enclose and enlist the county’s residents. Educational programs in camps like Granada were modeled on community schools established for Navajo people in the 1930s, and to veteran Indian Service staff, in one historian’s words, “the evacuated Japanese Americans were a familiar quantity: a dependent population under federal authority.”

Thus even at the height of war, of seemingly outward-focused energy, the organization and management of seemingly domestic people in seemingly domestic space remained paramount. Hence the emergence of a constellation of what Heather Fryer calls “security towns,” federally-constructed communities in the American West designed for “security, surveillance, and social control.” These towns drew on and transformed a longer history of occupation, separation, and control. In a pattern that should now feel familiar, the open

529 James, Exile Within, 37.
530 Heather Fryer, Perimeters of Democracy: Inverse Utopias and the Wartime Social Landscape in the American West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 4, 3. In Fryer’s telling, this constellation included relocation camps, Indian reservations, Los Alamos, and temporary war-worker settlements like Vanport outside Portland, Oregon.
spaces of the West went from feeling free to feeling threatening—especially with the seemingly
sudden realization that people of color, and “un-American” political minorities, were so
disturbingly present, and especially in moments of turmoil and conflict—and so called out for
arrangement, for management.

“The Project served the war,” Reid wrote, but it turns out he didn’t even know the half of it.531 Taos County was—like Granada—a site for learning lessons in the shadow of guard towers,
for figuring out how to fold unpredictable emotions into steady systems, for papering over
dissident ways of being or unruly alternatives, for designing and managing a bureaucracy of
belonging. These were lessons were put hard to work during the war, certainly. But it would
really be after it was all over, as an apparently new world (and a new and colder war) began, that
they would fully pay off.

“We Have Extended the Frontiers”: Reading Progress & the Past in West Germany

At the June 1952 dedication of the American Memorial Library in Berlin, Secretary of
State Dean Acheson declared that the building was a “symbol of our common cause,” of the
dedication to knowledge that both America and Germany shared. But the United States also
offered something new. “We are indebted to the Old World for the basis of our cultural heritage,”
he explained, “but we have extended the frontiers of knowledge to the common man.”532 With
that sentence, Acheson may or may not have succeeded in extending any frontiers of knowledge
to anyone, common or otherwise. But he did extend the frontiers of America, and specifically the
history of their occupation and incorporation, to the project of Cold War information

531 Reid, It Happened, 97.
“is the property of everyone who strives earnestly to attain it.” As we saw in Chapter Two, however, notions of
property are very tricky ground on which to make claims for access to information.
management. Nations establish authority in part from an ability to span seemingly disparate moments and seemingly distant spaces. As we have seen, the Taos County Project accomplished this by connecting 1940s New Mexico to the earlier occupation and incorporation of land acquired under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and by linking Taos to the geographic breadth of the nation-state. This section will show how Taos’s frontier, and its spearhead the bookmobile, became useful a decade later and halfway around the world. We will look at how programs, especially in West Germany, borrowed assumptions, techniques, and vocabularies that connected Cold War politics to those of the frontier. In the process, we will see how the bookmobile’s mobility, when combined with its technological constancy across the two times and spaces and its facility for building communities, made it an ideal tool for extending—and then incorporating—the frontiers of knowledge and of belonging.

As Acheson spoke, U.S. bookmobiles were crisscrossing the West German countryside (and West Berlin), amplifying U.S. information efforts there.\(^{533}\) (Focused on reaching local populations, these bookmobiles were distinct from the military versions that served soldiers stationed in Europe and around the world.)\(^{534}\) The bookmobiles—by 1957 there would be 24—were attached to existing U.S. Information Centers in West German cities and Berlin, known as America Houses, or *Amerika Hauser*. These centers offered lectures, showed films, distributed publicity about American programs, and, crucially, housed libraries, which were the “growing-

\(^{533}\) The bookmobiles joined other efforts to put American information on wheels in Germany and the rest of western Europe. In the first years of the 1950s, the Marshall Plan offices sent caravans—on trains and unfolding trucks—to places like Germany, Greece, Holland, and Italy to promote the Plan. See Masey and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, 8-35.

soil” and “backbone” for all other information activities. Stocked primarily with German-language translations of American books (from popular novels to medical reference texts), these libraries, like most Amerika Haus programming, had two main purposes. The first was to offer information that countered wartime propaganda, helping Germans, as one public relations officer put it in 1950, “realize that America was more than a nation of lady wrestlers, bloody strikes and boogie-woogie fiends such as Hitler portrayed.” The second was to prevent West Germans from falling victim to the siren song of communism amid postwar “chaos” and frequently “explosive” inequality. These proximate goals—endearing America to non-Americans and keeping them away from Soviet influence—were key not just to American programs in Germany but also to similar programs around the world. While these smaller aims were not those pursued in Taos, the ultimate goal of the programs, to use information to emotionally and politically incorporate those perceived as foreign into American systems, most certainly was. Bookmobiles, as we have seen, were particularly adept at this sort of incorporation. And so they were put to work for the Amerika Hauser, serving small towns in the Landkreise (districts) their headquarters occupied, and also by other federal agencies in places like Libya, Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines.

This section and the next will focus on Germany for two reasons. First, the records for U.S. bookmobile programs in Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines were classified at the time research for this project was completed. (They have since, after I submitted a Freedom of Information Act request, been declassified.) The program records from Germany and Libya, on

537 “Bookmobile Report 1952;” Box 2; Library Programs Division, Special Collections Branch, Oversize Scrapbooks, 1947-1958; Records of the United States Information Agency, Records Group 306; National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, Maryland), 3.
the other hand, were never classified and were therefore available for research. Second, thanks to a variety of factors (including their relationship to the High Commission for Occupied Germany, their proximity to the command’s many photographers, and luck, among others), the Amerika Haus bookmobile programs were rather lavishly documented, at least compared to most similar programs, including those back home in the U.S. (Except, of course and intriguingly, the Taos County Project.) Staff at the Amerika Haus in Giessen, for example, created a printed scrapbook full of photos of the bookmobile and its patrons. Staffers in Mannheim created an elaborate “diary” of their program’s first eight weeks, with photographs pasted in. Still more photographs and descriptions were published in in the High Command’s monthly magazine, the Information Bulletin. And U.S. Information Service staff undertook an internal evaluation of the program’s effectiveness, complete with statistics and quotations from patrons. The openness and richness of the records for West Germany is a quirk of archival categorization and preservation, but its consequences are anything but unhappy. In fact, West Germany is an ideal place to watch Americans “extend the frontiers” and U.S. bookmobiles repeat and reimagine the lessons of Taos. It is hard to picture, really, a site of U.S. Cold War programs less like rural New Mexico than West Germany. And yet they are linked, in ways that are unacknowledged and probably unintentional but also undeniably, again and again, there. Specifically, what we will see in West Germany is the deployment of bookmobiles as instruments of progress for a new age. But ironically, as in Taos, it is a progress—a bright and shining future—that depended on a long history of incorporating frontiers by managing space and community.

Indeed, bookmobiles in West Germany were to be, once again, “powerful spearhead[s] for almost unlimited progress,” as Reid had described the Taos vehicle. Surviving scrapbooks

538 Reid, It Happened, 48.
and other records reveal a visual and textual vocabulary shared by the *Amerika Hauser* and the Taos County Project. One photograph from a scrapbook documenting the Giessen *Amerika Haus* bookmobile [FIGURE 17] strikingly reprises multiple themes crucial to the mission and framing of the Taos program. The bookmobile fills the central foreground of the image as it fills the narrow dirt road on which it sits surrounded by *fachwerk* (half-timbered) buildings with stone foundations. As with Taos’s adobe, the smooth metal of the bookmobile, highlighted here by the shiny Americanness of the GMC logo, stands in sharp contrast to architecture that serves as visual code for the rough and unrefined past, for that which is quaint but which will be overcome. (It is also worth noting, too, that this photo also reprises the likely still-familiar image of large American vehicles entering and occupying German towns and cities, as in Taos the minuteman poster had echoed another history of invasion and occupation.)

The bookmobile also towers over the only human visible—an exceedingly small child, who looks intently up at the vehicle—and, quite importantly, over the iron frame of an old-fashioned plow. The *Amerika Hauser* did not aim directly to transform indigenous farming practices, unlike in Taos, but the changing lives of farmers factored significantly into the program. According to the introduction to the Giessen scrapbook, “the arduous but happy and historic isolation of the farmer” was at an end, replaced by a “hunger now for information…a desire for knowledge; and insistence [sic] on the facts, the trends, the imminencies.” The bookmobiles were meant to fulfill this emerging hunger with the right sort of information—and even more importantly in the right sort of way. “Now, through personal contact, through the printed word and through films projected from the Bookmobile,” the introduction intones in terms that should sound mostly familiar, “the country folk are being told about the dangers of
Communism, the values of cooperation, the blessings of democracy.” With a fear of communism encroaching from the East taking the place of the fear of aborted Americanism in the Southwest, the methods and lessons of Taos found a home on a new continent. Cooperation (if administered by a federal agency) and democracy (if controlled in advance) ride along on the bookmobile and incorporate new spaces and new people into a new future.

This image of “progress” was not without its skeptics, especially as progress and Amercaness came—as they had in Taos—to be conflated, and the process of Americanizing seemed to become as important as the result. On the Mannheim bookmobile’s fourth trip to the village of Ladenburg, a photographer came along. He wanted to use as a model the town crier, who had been employed by the bürgermeister to promote the bookmobile program. The crier was game, but as the Mannheim diary records, a city clerk “tried to discourage the town-crier from having his picture taken, saying that he would not pose for an American photographer for anything in the world, because it might give the Americans the idea that Germans are a backward people, who don’t even know modern means of communication.” The bürgermeister agreed that it was a troubling idea, and it was not until the bookmobile staff promised not to release the photo to newspapers that he relented. The skepticism was not entirely misplaced, judging by the photograph that resulted and was pasted into the diary [FIGURE 18]. In it, the crier stands—with a grizzled, bespectacled, slightly confused-looking face—bell in hand, astride a bicycle. Behind him hangs a row of posters, smooth and clean against the rough and dirty wall, advertising the bookmobile. From their sans serif fonts to their graphic two-toned images of a bookmobile and a book, the posters shout modernity and innovation. The crier, on the other hand, isn’t even caught

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539 Ex Libris: Giessen Box 2; Library Programs Division, Special Collections Branch, Oversize Scrapbooks, 1947-1958; Records of the United States Information Agency, Records Group 306; National Archives and Records Administration (College Park, Maryland).
mid-cry; on his outmoded vehicle, with his outmoded communications technology, he shouts nothing at all, frozen before harbingers of the new. 541 Another photo, in which the crier appears even more frozen in time as villagers look on, found its way into the Information Bulletin, rather violating the staff’s pledge to keep the photos private [FIGURE 19]. In both, the old man and his bell represent, in contrast to the shiny bookmobile, a personal and ultimately fallible distribution of information. 542

Other photos taken along West German bookmobile routes show that, as in Taos, this progress would require not just moving forward but doing so while looking back. For this bureaucracy, time was not an entirely straight line but instead was folded back in order to smooth out the past and facilitate unobstructed transit into a glorious future. The Americanization of Taos depended on the cheerful return and revision of white occupation and annexation of the land, in the form of a white soldier watching over the county’s boisterous children, or of young readers enjoying the rip-roaring fun of a Western novel. Surprisingly, something very similar is at work in West Germany. It is not the occupation of Germany that returns but rather, again and oddly, that of the American West. In the Giessen scrapbook, the first image of a German engaging with a specific book is of a young boy happily reading a book called Lederstrumpf, the cover of which is emblazoned with a painting of a Native American man, in three-quarter profile, wearing a feather headdress [FIGURE 20]. The book is one of James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales, published between 1827 and 1841, which depict the life of Natty Bumppo. The character was an archetypical frontiersman, steadily advancing west to stay just beyond the

541 The town of Edingen, which is on the bookmobile’s route, had a 70-loundspeaker P.A. system installed, a fact that is mentioned in the diary but not—unlike the crier—immortalized on film. “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 15.
542 It is not a coincidence that the Giessen scrapbook plays a similar contrast, between old and new kinds of mobility and communication, for laughs. “The word [of the bookmobile’s arrival] was passed along—sometimes slowly…” the caption reads under a photograph dominated by a cow and a wagon carrying yet another iron plow. Ex Libris: Giessen.
bleeding edge of federal control. He was, according to Cooper’s preface, “a veteran of the forest, who having commenced his career near the Atlantic, had been driven by the process of increasing and unparalleled advance of population, to seek a final refuge against society in the broad and tenantless plains of the west.”

The books are, in some ways then, a chronicle of the supposedly inexorable, inevitable extension of federal power in the West. So what is it doing on the Giessen bookmobile? The caption of the photo gives a clue: “Lederstrumpf…for Lederhans,” it proclaims, punning on the prevalence of lederhosen (leather breeches) among the boys who visit the bookmobile. But it is more than a pun; it links the German boy to Leatherstocking himself, creating a temporal and cultural overlap. This happens again on the next page, when another young boy intently reads Robert Louis Stevenson’s Buffalo Bill [FIGURE 21]. “Boof-a-loo Beel (‘Buffalo Bill’) still has his admirers,” the caption notes. Still, despite the fact that such cultural artifacts were far from unpopular in the 1950s. Still, which puts the boy in the audience of the Wild West Show, decades past, watching the creation and perpetuation of the idea of the wild frontier even as federal troops and federal agencies extended control over it. A photograph published in the Information Bulletin shows that Buffalo Bill was also popular outside Mannheim; children raise books in a forest of mostly unidentifiable titles punctuated by two copies of the frontier novel [FIGURE 22]. And in another Information Bulletin photo [FIGURE 23]—captioned “American Indian books are popular with German boys”—there is

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another boy, with another book, emblazoned with another Native American man in another headdress, this time carrying a tomahawk, an emblem of past violence.\textsuperscript{545}

At the same time, the more recent cataclysmic violence appears only rarely in the \textit{Amerika Haus} bookmobile records. The Americans comment about the devastation of World War II internally, but on those few moments when the war emerges in the relationship between Germans and the bookmobile, it emerges within a frame of oddly happy memories. The Giessen scrapbook, for example, shows Wilhelm Frischholz standing smilingly in front of the bookmobile, holding a book and a dachshund, and quotes him saying that “Amerika is a good place to visit—even as a prisoner of war” [FIGURE 24].\textsuperscript{546} Mostly, though, the world war is absent where the conquest of the West is excessively present. “Needless to say,” noted the Mannheim diary, “the boys all asked for books about ‘Cowboys’ and ‘Indians.’”\textsuperscript{547} Needless to say, but, nevertheless, they said it and showed it over and over again.\textsuperscript{548} Why? Connections between Germany and the frontier were, in some ways, striking equivalences to draw. Germany had recently and disastrously undertaken its own campaign of expansion and incorporation, and initial American presence in the western zones was meant to prevent the possibility of another attempt. But by the 1950s, the continued presence of institutions like the \textit{Amerika Hauser} had more to do with a new conflict than with the one most recently past. This new conflict—between capitalism and communism, between the United States and the Soviet Union—required a rapid revision of the recent past. Germany, at least the western section, was now an ally, as was Japan.

\textsuperscript{545} Another photograph in the Giessen scrapbook shows two young boy eagerly reading \textit{National Geographic}, suggesting the continued relevance of a different textual model of imperialism, as well.
\textsuperscript{546} \textit{Ex Libris: Giessen}.
\textsuperscript{547} “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 10.
\textsuperscript{548} There is some indication that the Mannheim bookmobile, at least, did not stock similar books for adults. “We explained again and again that detective and western-stories were not on our shelves,” the diary reads, shortly after explaining how popular similar children’s books were. “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 10.
(where U.S. bookmobiles also roamed in the early 1950s), and the recently, if always awkwardly, familial visage of Uncle Joe was now an unquestioned enemy.\textsuperscript{549}

A 1952 article in the *Information Bulletin* noted that “boys are mostly interested in books of adventure or the ever-popular stories about American Indians,” as if that popularity was a static fact and not a recurrence with political causes and political consequences.\textsuperscript{550} In order to enroll Germans in this new struggle and to bring them into an American future, the *Amerika Hauser* folded time. Like the *Mad Magazine* fold-ins that would become popular a decade later, the consumption of frontier literature made it so the present and the distant past met, obscuring the recent past and offering a brand new image in the process. Here, though, in contrast to Taos, the availability and popularity of these books folded not only time but space. The frontier West was overlaid onto Cold War West Germany, casting Germans as capitalist cowboys against the dangerous Indians of communism. The previous, disastrous German militancy is gone, and a noble tradition of overcoming frontiers became a more useful past.

This is what the *Amerika Haus* staff seemed to intend, but that isn’t, of course, the end of the story. Just as it is possible, even likely, that teenagers in Taos read “popular Western fiction” for reasons oblique to those Reid intended—to know what white Americans were saying about them, to gain a fluency in the tropes of the larger American culture, for what they experienced as sheer pleasure—it is pretty much inevitable that German children picked up Westerns for a range of reasons that eluded, or even evaded, *Amerika Haus* staffers. Stories of the American West had been popular in Germany for well over a half-century before the American occupation, thanks in large part to works by Karl May, a German who did not leave Europe until shortly before his


And after the war, Westerns remained extraordinarily popular in West Germany, far beyond the reach of the Amerika Haus bookmobiles (if not beyond the reach of American cultural imperialism more generally).\textsuperscript{552} Importantly, there is no indication that this fact had anything to do with the presence of these books on the Amerika Haus bookmobiles, which aimed to highlight “American accomplishments” in their collection, not to respond to local desires.\textsuperscript{553} But the books were received into a context the staffers seem not to have fully understood. Mays’s extraordinarily influential books, the books that established the Western tradition in Germany, explicitly invited identification with Native American protagonists and a rejection of modernity and industry, precisely the values the Amerika Hauser were meant to promote. Julian Crandall Hollick writes that, in Europe, the American West “has been…a mythical place to stage their own adventures,” and thus, we might add, not a place to do with America at all.\textsuperscript{554} (Just as, we might say, the Amerika Haus bookmobiles’ adventures in the German countryside often had less to do with outreach to Germans than they did with internal questions about what it meant to be American in the Cold War.) There was certainly mapping going on, and the folding of time, but it remains tantalizingly uncertain what shape that map, and that time, would take in the minds of German readers.

At times, this spatial folding, and its uncertain reception, could take place on a seemingly smaller, differently gendered scale. In Ketsch, near Mannheim, “[t]he books by L. Ingalls Wilder


\textsuperscript{552} According to Joe Hembus’s \textit{Western-Lexikon}, a German encyclopedia of the genre, there were 1,324 Westerns released on film or television in Germany between 1945 and 1985. Schneider, “Finding a New Heimat,” 50.

\textsuperscript{553} Management and Budget Division and Office of Public Affairs, \textit{The America Houses}, 131.

are favorites with the little girls," the diary explains. Only boys can be cowboys, it seems, but it is not only boys who tame frontiers. As Robert Moeller has described, postwar West Germany experienced a crisis around “the ‘woman question,’” with communism as one “powerful…negative point of reference.” And, in answer, the Amerika Hauser imported a contemporary interest in “containment” (on geopolitical and, as Elaine Tyler May argues, domestic levels), as well as a much older tradition of using the home as a microcosm of and testing ground for national expansion. Amy Kaplan has insisted that westward expansion in the nineteenth century depended on a slippage between the “domestic” (the home) and the “domestic” (the nation) that allowed the potential dangers of the American West to be worked out in concerns about white domesticity in the more familiar East. It is not, in this context, a coincidence that the first American bookmobile to reach German soil was part of an exhibition of American buildings and domestic technology in Hanover, or that it carried materials on architecture and home economics. (Or, for that matter, that the American National Exhibition in Moscow had both a bookmobile and a kitchen, which occasioned the infamous “Kitchen Debate,” on display.) The circulation of Wilder’s books mapped her “Little House”—like the frontier itself, sometimes precarious but always ultimately resolved into a vision of domestic cohesion—onto German homes still riven by demographic, sexual, and cultural crises.

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558 Amy Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 23-50


560 On these crises, see Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 75-175; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After*
linked postwar uncertainty back to a different, more successful project of incorporation, and forward to a righteous struggle against communism. Thus, on nesting scales (home, farm, village, Landkreis, nation) orchestrated by American bureaucrats, West Germany was to take its place in the future.

“Uncontrolled Sources”: Open Shelves and the Limits of Managed Democracy

As in Taos, this transformation was to take place thanks to a bit of democracy symbolized and made possible by the bookmobile. In West Germany, that democratic fragment was not the town meeting. It was the open shelf. As a public relations officer with the Allied High Commission explained, “[t]he traditional German library is a ‘fortress of culture’ which guards its books with jealous care,” with closed stacks and onerous requirements (including character references) for potential borrowers.\textsuperscript{561} In the U.S. Information Centers, by contrast, “the German visitor was not only invited, but urged by a friendly librarian to wander among the bookshelves and take his choice.”\textsuperscript{562} Open shelves were nothing particularly new in most American public libraries, but they surprised patrons at U.S. Information Service libraries around the world, as one U.S.I.S. official remembered years later.\textsuperscript{563} But it was not novelty alone, or simply the increased accessibility of books, that accounted for the open shelf’s influence. “This transfer of

\textsuperscript{561} Mahoney, “Windows,” 4.
U.S. library practices abroad not only spread American ideas,” the official explained, “it also provided a working example of how a democratic society educates itself.”

Acheson, for his part, used his speech to draw a bright line between freedom and tyranny, between the open shelf and the closed:

There are nations today who seem to be deathly afraid of this freedom. Free access to knowledge, open shelves, unchecked selection of books—all this is anathema to them. They have placed their books under lock and key, they ban the written word and spoken word when it originates with uncontrolled sources. They punish severely [sic] those who seek the truth wherever it may be found.

Nothing can point up in more telling fashion the nature of the conflict which divides our world today than this: where others retire behind barbed wire, we open wide the doors to knowledge so that the truth may guide us.

What Acheson and others did was to map time (tradition vs. progress) onto geopolitical and cultural space (open vs. closed, west vs. east, capitalist vs. communist) in important ways. The irony, though, was that the open shelves, those symbols of freedom, were stocked with books chosen very carefully to determine, in advance, what truth a reader might find there. A 1953 report, for example, explained that in book selection, “the aim is always toward showing American accomplishments” in various fields, and it proposed an accelerated “weeding program” designed in part to remove books “which have no relationship to the objectives of the America House program.”

There was nothing particularly unusual about this; virtually all libraries use selection criteria in building their collections. But the vast gulf between propagandistic internal plans and democratic external rhetoric, threw a key assumption into contrast. This was the assumption, which we saw at work in Taos, that the best kind of independence is independence.
arranged by someone else, that self-government is best when the self doesn’t get too involved in governance.\textsuperscript{568}

Not simply allowing patrons to come to books, but taking books to the people, the bookmobile essentially turned the library inside-out and thus intensified the open-shelf ethos. But this openness was supposed to be leavened by control—the library’s doors were to be open but doors nonetheless—and so the bookmobile could prove dangerous when it took American freedom on the road. On January 8, 1952, the Mannheim bookmobile went out on its first trip ever, to Ketch. The results were not entirely expected. “We arrived punctually,” the diary reads, and “were immediately beleaguered [\textit{sic}] by a swarm of noisy children, who greeted our arrival as they would that of a circus.” The children kept coming, and “[i]n their eagerness…trampled the grass and shrubs bordering the street.” The staff tried, at the mayor’s behest, to move to a “vacant place where the children could do no harm, but by this time the storming crowds jammed between the bookmobile and a house,” making it impossible to close the bookmobile’s door, let alone move the vehicle. The personnel were exhausted, wishing for a break “to build up strength for further service (and assault).” And no wonder, since they found themselves with unexpected duties. The two assigned to help children choose books also ended up “acting as policemen, in order to keep the interior…from being overcrowded,” a position the diary also refers to as “act[ing] like a gate.”\textsuperscript{569} And yet the children kept “trying to storm the bookmobile” long after they ran out of books for them.\textsuperscript{570} The next day, in Gross-Sachen, the “[c]hildren were

\textsuperscript{568} At one point, the Mannheim \textit{Amerika Haus} offered to provide “a basic collection of American books in English” to the \textit{Volksbücherei} (people’s libraries) in three large towns in the \textit{Landkreis}, “with the understanding that the open-shelf-system for these collections be used.” “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 18.

\textsuperscript{569} “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 10.

\textsuperscript{570} “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 11.
better controlled,” but the day after that, in Neulussheim? “Same thing! Crowds of children!”

From this point on, the staff decided, children would be issued numbered cards determining when they could access the bookmobile, and their hands would be examined before they were allowed entry: “dirty hands, no books.”

Rather a different vision, in other words, than Acheson’s unproblematic contrast of American “open shelves” with Soviet (and Nazi) “books under lock and key.” The bookmobile is “gate[d]” and guarded by makeshift police, its crisp punctuality contrasted to invading, animal swarms. At the same time, the opposite of the children’s “galvanized” and “extremely undisciplined” response was also rejected. The adult population in Ketch, where the children were among the worst-behaved, was described as “rather heavy and uninspired.” And an account of the bookmobile’s first trip to Hemsbach is accompanied by a note that the village’s residents “are known as being ‘stur’ (stubborn and narrow-minded).” And, indeed, the Hemsbach adults, far from storming the bookmobile, were suspicious: “What you are lending books free of charge? There is something funny about this.” Too much enthusiasm? Calls for “discipline” and order. Not enough eagerness? Then you are not, alas, a “good public.”

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571 “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 11-12. Intriguingly, it seems that U.S. military librarians could run into similar problems with American children in the Philippines. The library at Clark Air Base held “story hours” for the children of occupying troops in the late 1940s. They ran into trouble, though, when serving fruit juice afterwards caused an overwhelming crowd. The librarians discontinued juice service and instituted multiple story hours to ease the chaos. It is difficult not to see in this (very faint) echoes of the Lamarckian racial theories—which in the imperial context held that prolonged exposure to a tropical climate would turn white Americans savage—that had so worried the occupation government a century earlier. Ripley, “Global Army Library.” On theories of health in the occupied Philippines, see Anderson, Colonial Pathologies.

The difficult, limited position that the American bookmobile’s notion of freedom and openness offered German patrons can be seen in two pairs of photos pasted into the Mannheim diary. Each offers a rather Manichean view of bookmobile behavior, and together they converge on an exceedingly (perhaps even impossibly) narrow window of proper conduct. The first pair [FIGURE 25], from Neulussheim, contrasts the orderliness and guidance of proper library usage with the horror of the swarm. In the first image, the Mannheim U.S. Information Center director Naomi Huber stands in the bookmobile’s doorway, but decidedly not because she must act as a gate. There are, after all, only two children in the photo, both bright and blond, looking intently on as Huber “advises” them. They stand a respectful distance from the bookmobile, and the displays of American life on the side are clearly visible. In the second photo, a group of children “storm” the bookmobile, pressed tightly up against its side, facing every which way, jostling, laughing. The bookmobile’s displays are blocked and its door is closed. Just above the crowd in the frame sits a horse-drawn wagon; the left edge of the photo shows the bookmobile, the right an undisciplined mass and an archaic technology. The second pair [FIGURE 26] comes from Hemsbach and purports to show the shift there from “scepticism [sic]” to “enthusiasm.” The first photo depicts several worried- or confused-looking children, an old woman, and a hostile-seeming man—none hold books or, for that matter, seem eager to hold them in the future. Not an ideal audience for a bookmobile, certainly. In the photo meant to capture enthusiasm, a mass of children are, finally, eager for books, but they are so eager that they push and shove, surrounding an adult who is trying to distribute books. Ultimately, this eagerness is practically indistinguishable from the unacceptably unruly crowds the staff bemoans; the “bad” half of the first pair and the “good” half of the second are close, indeed. Storming, after all, can look a lot like enthusiasm.
The open shelf in Germany thus offered an odd microcosm of the frontier back in the U.S. Manly independence was prized as truly American but was always at the same time about to be dissolved into America; the chaotic frontier and the frontier’s orderly end together made the nation. And so, paradoxically, the open shelf offered Germans freedom in order to make them easier to control. Both too much liberty (read: anarchy) and too little eagerness (read: tyranny) threatened this delicate, impossible balance and thus the coherence of the project of Americanization. In the end, nothing captured the heart of the Amerika Haus bookmobile project, of the open shelf, quite like a photo printed in an Intelligence Report pictorial about the Berlin bookmobile [FIGURE 27]. In it, the director of the Amerika Haus installs “security straps” across the front of the bookmobile’s open shelves. These straps (which were, in Mannheim, “wood-slats”) were meant to “keep the books in the shelves while the bookmobile is in transit.”579 Offering insurance against mobility, the straps and slats were practical solutions to a practical problem—but also and at the same time perfect symbols of the constraints that animated the bookmobile’s freedom.

It turned out, though, that open shelves (filled with carefully-chosen books) were not quite enough to incorporate Germans into “American” communities. The U.S. Information Service, like the Taos County Project, was obsessed with measuring patrons and impact. The diary and scrapbook were attempts to offer qualitative reporting on the programs. But the Mannheim diary also included a statistical section, in keeping with the zest for numbers displayed in Taos, and rendered as a series of layered, overlapping graphs and charts [FIGURE 28]. Demographic data is sliced and diced to a point that—while colorful (pie charts showing patron careers are rendered in vibrant yellow, pink, and blue)—it is nearly incomprehensible.

One thing is clear, though, and it cannot have been very encouraging. At best (in Gross-Sachen), 12% of the local population used the bookmobile, and at worst (in cranky Hemsbach) the number was only 2%. The four towns where the bookmobile did not serve local schoolchildren had the lowest rates of use (from 2% to 5.2%), suggesting that residents who lacked a headmaster to herd them were unlikely to bother visiting the bookmobile.

This was a consistent problem. A comprehensive 1957 internal report on the Amerika Haus bookmobile programs—based on a survey of over 6,000 Germans as well as interviews—found that while 64% of residents in bookmobile service areas knew about the program, only 4% were current users (another 4% had used it in the past).580 Most of those who did not use the bookmobile (70%) did not do so because they had no time or interest. “My business takes all my time; I’m dead tired in the evening,” one respondent said.581 A small minority (2%) explicitly rejected the bookmobile’s American content. “I’m not interested in American books,” one said, rather mildly. “I’m not at all interested in American affairs,” said another, a bit more firmly. And another took it all the way: “The literature they offer there is un-German.”582 A healthy chunk of those who were unaware of the bookmobile said, after being informed, that they still would not use it. In addition to the usual reasons (no time), there were more anti-American ones. “I’m against our being swamped with American literary products. We have enough genius in Europe,” one said.583 Eight percent of non-users said the bookmobile’s purpose was to spread American propaganda (an intriguingly high 6% of users agreed), and four percent worried the goal was to

581 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 3.
582 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 4.
583 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 6. Additionally, at least two respondents rejected the very idea of a lending library “for hygienic reasons.” This, of course, echoes the racial fears of book-borne venereal disease that terrified the Calvert County magistrate five years earlier.
Americanize Germans.  

“Perhaps they mean to win sympathies for America,” one respondent speculated.  

“The idea is to impregnate the German people with American ideas,” said another.

There were small successes, but they were ultimately quite limited. Bookmobile users were slightly better informed regarding basic facts about the U.S., about the Mutual Inspection Plan, and about what the report termed the “atomic energy problem.” Users also were “clearly more in harmony with American policy toward West Germany than…the non-users.” Users were more likely to reject criticisms of Americans. Seventy-eight percent of users, compared to 63% of non-users, disagreed with the statement, “The Americans are presumptious [sic].” And similar proportions rejected the curious “Americans are a traditionless nation and culturally backward”—curious because Acheson’s speech, for example, suggested that a dearth of tradition helped America have a surplus of culture. (Intriguingly, though, only 48% of users rejected the statement, “Americans keep meddling in affairs of other countries.”) But there was a chicken-or-egg problem here, though it remained largely unremarked. Were users already more predisposed to American ideas, or did the bookmobile change their minds? The questions that the surveys posed could not say, and staffers made no effort to ask ones that could. So the USIS research staff was left in an awkward position, trumpeting encouraging data and muddling about, a bit confused, with the more discouraging results.

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584 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 24.
585 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 25.
588 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 27.
589 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 29.
590 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 29.
591 Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, 29.
592 There was also, it seems, a bit more intellectual diversity among the users that the report explicitly acknowledges. In the Mannheim diary, we are told that patrons in Edingen requested both books about the United States and Marx’s Das Kapital. “Bookmobile Report 1952,” 17.
In particular, they seemed stymied by what patrons were reading—or, perhaps more precisely, what they weren’t reading. “[T]he type of books read fall [sic] somewhat short of the ideal,” the report admits.\footnote{Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, iii.} The Americans opened shelves and channeled patrons past gates and guards, but they could not actually and entirely control what the West Germans read. And it seemed, too, that the users could not really be trusted. They did not steal books, like the Muscovites, but they still were not entirely honest: “an actual count of books borrowed shows that patrons take out fewer non-fiction books than they say they expect to take out.”\footnote{Amerika-Haus Bookmobile Program, iii.} People tend to respond to surveys in ways that make them look better, certainly, and this was a relatively small thing. But it was precisely such small things—such eruptions of local inconsistency in the face of a towering bureaucracy—that troubled a project designed to establish, and then carefully manage from above, democracy and community on scales running from the small to the large. This uncertainty, this unreliability, was just one more reminder that managing from afar is tough and unpredictable work, that margins cannot simply be gobbled up and assimilated without consequence, that humans (and their desires, in particular) are not, in the end, very easily controlled. So at the margins of U.S.-aligned Europe, at the edges of American military might—at the nation’s geopolitical frontier—the U.S. government found again the problems, not just the promise, of the American West.

\textbf{“How the West is Being Won Over”: Coda}\n
In the early 1970s, author Norbert Blei rode with a state bookmobile on a three-day run through northwestern New Mexico. He was there to watch, as the subtitle to the 1975 \textit{American}
Three decades after Jesse Taylor Reid wrote about the Taos County Project, the incorporation of the Southwest was still seen as unfinished and incomplete, and the adaptation of violent metaphor to describe the bookmobile’s role in that process still seemed to make perfect sense. Indeed, Blei’s essay captures, again and again, the stubborn persistence of the frontier—and thus the concerns that drove the programs in Taos and West Germany—in fantasies of universal connection. Blei accompanied two men on his trip, Jay Johnstone, an Anglo librarian, and Lee Platero, a Navajo driver and clerk. Platero comes to stand in, ultimately, for the haphazard incompleteness of Americanization. “He looks Contemporary Americana,” Blei writes. “He harbors, however, the authentic Indian mystery of silence.” Beneath and within the appearance of true and modern American identity hides something else entirely—not threatening, exactly, but unsettling and un-American. As much as Blei tries to organize his article around the movement of the bookmobile through geographic space (the trip from El Morro to Gallup to Thoreau, and so on), he ultimately follows a different, but still familiar trajectory: the opening up of indigenous mysteries to American knowledge. “I take a look at Platero again,” Blei writes. “I would like to get under that silence.”

In part, he does (though at times Platero frustrates this effort and “merges into the…landscape”). As Blei philosophizes about time and distance as “the two inner and outer imponderables in the New Mexican landscape,” for example, Lee tells him about “Navajo time—which is no time at all.” This is, Blei realizes, why the bookmobile loses many of its

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books: They are stolen, but less by the patrons than by what he later calls “an old Indian, cosmic landscape.” Out in the desert, it seems, the state does not effectively play with time and space—time and space toy with it, preventing the successful process of Americanization. Platero spent fifteen years “in the white man’s world” as a soldier and then a computer maintenance professional in New York—his friends on the reservation, he explained, call him “the guy who went east and forgot to turn around”—but even he is stuck in a past and on a landscape that has not yet been smoothed. “Old fears,” like the sound of an owl in the woods, Blei writes of Platero, “continue to haunt him.”

But as was the case in Taos, and outside Mannheim, the most haunting old fears were those of white officials and observers like Reid, Huber, and Blei. Out of a passion for expansion—a passion for “bring[ing] the word,” as Blei put it, and for “be[ing] in the space”—grew fears of untamed (untamable?) space, uncontrolled (uncontrollable?) bodies, and unsurmounted (insurmountable?) histories. Bookmobile programs, from New Mexico to West Germany, sought to complete the work of expansion and close the uncertainties of the frontier. Common consciousness would span the continent, and perhaps the globe, and the state would finally be a coherent, complete whole. As we have seen, these two dreams (of common consciousness and of political coherence) were, indeed, inextricably linked. But that link exposed the limits of the dream of a common consciousness that was planned in advance, or learned in the shadow of guard towers, or built on a deformed vision of the past, or managed beyond all spontaneity.

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“Hemingway Amidst Cheese and Crackers”: Public Culture and the Coincidences of Consumer Capitalism

“I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.”
–Walt Whitman (1855)604

“Can mass production of knowledge, now needed more urgently than motor cars or refrigerators, be stepped up?”
–Malvina Lindsay (1946)605

“I’m all lost in the supermarket. I can no longer shop happily.”
–The Clash (1979)

In “A Supermarket in California” (1955), Allen Ginsberg describes a peculiar encounter with the previous poet laureate of queer America. Perhaps surprisingly, they wander their way into an iconic institution of consumer capitalism:

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.
In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!
What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes—and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

…

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

…

Will we walk all night through the solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we’ll both be lonely.
Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?
Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood

605 Malvina Lindsay, “Race Against Ignorance,” Washington Post, July 11, 1946.
watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe.\footnote{Allen Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California,” in \textit{Howl and Other Poems} (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2006 [1956]), 29-30.} Ginsberg offers, here, a relationship between goods and literature that is both ironic and erotic; it is about possession, about inspiration, about memory, about sensuality, about spectacle. And it is also, like the traveling library, like \textit{Curious Missie}, about distance and closeness. But here, it seems, there is something possibly dangerous about nearness. The proximity of poets and produce, of artists and artichokes, is both embrace and repudiation. It suggests a landscape clotted with things but still “solitary,” still “lonely.” Objects and ideas, like bodies and brands, rub together until we struggle to remember the difference between them. We are immersed first in a sea of neon, then in the smoothing tide of suburbia, and then in the sorrowful amnesia of Lethe—and the distinction between them fades and fades. The republic of letters and the consumers’ republic collide in unexpected and unsettling ways.\footnote{On the “consumers’ republic,” see Lizabeth Cohen, \textit{A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America} (New York: Vintage, 2003), 127.}

In his characteristic combination of play and darkness, Ginsberg took up in “A Supermarket in California” a series of questions that had broad resonance as American capitalism reoriented itself around consumption, and communities reoriented themselves in new ways—physically, economically, emotionally—around the transportation and acquisition of things.\footnote{Rearranging political and physical geography around commerce was not entirely new in the postwar moment, of course—as the history of canals, railroads, irrigation, and industrialization makes clear. But the intense remapping and reorientation of local life had something of a new character, in a shift in infrastructure from raw materials to finished products, and from creation to consumption as the principal activity of society.}

As we saw in Chapter One, out of the foment of the 1890s emerged an intense and optimistic conviction that moving objects through space could create communities. By the 1950s, as this conviction remade the American landscape, fantasies of what could be possible if there were \textit{enough}—roads, motors, information—began to fracture.
In the decades after the war, American economic and consumer cultures saw a fierce contest between two groups with claims on common consciousness. First were the advocates of perpetual growth, of the glory and promise of new objects, of democracy by purchase, of equality at the checkout stand. A shared consumption of things, they believed, as Johnston and Dewey had, would link the country together. But the second group found that the dream of a common consciousness wrought by the circulation of things seemed newly a nightmare. What, this later group wondered, might be the cultural consequences of organizing life around the pursuit of objects? What happens when ideas (which often take material form) and merchandise (which often expresses ideas) come to seem not just imbricated with one another but entirely indistinguishable? What happens when what we hold in common is only that which is purchased—if the “thick mesh” of social democracy turns out to be only a thin tissue of goods?

This chapter tells the story of libraries ultimately and largely siding with the first group, and of the myriad consequences that decision wrought. Like Ginsberg and Whitman, this chapter wanders its way into the supermarket and out onto the boulevards of America’s car culture. In the process, and finding libraries there, the chapter traces the way postwar debates about consumption influenced ideas about space, community, and public culture.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a flood of popular sociology and criticism that, worried about the new consumer culture, tried to explain what Americans might actually have in common—“what’s,” as John Kouwenhoven put it in 1961, “‘American’ about America.” Among these were a number of works that worried that the answer was stuff. Kouwenhoven’s book was titled *The Beer Can by the Highway*, poet-critic Randall Jarrell wrote a jeremiad he called *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket*, and sociologist David Riesman asked the central question in a 1964 collection
of essays: *Abundance for What?* Artists like Ginsberg and Andy Warhol created works that played, to lighter and darker effect, with the fact that American culture seemed better suited to the mass production and supermarket consumption of what Warhol called “harsh, impersonal products” than with any older model of artistic genius or cultural value. And Dwight Macdonald seconded that emotion, with his theory of “mass culture”—called such because “it is solely and directly an article for mass consumption, like chewing gum.” Critics, artists, and social scientists pondering postwar American identity repeatedly turned to the supermarket, as a newly iconic institution and an epicenter of consumer culture, to understand the future of American public life. (Even these “anxieties were products of abundance,” Michael Harrington pointedly noted in 1962.)

By contrast, in the postwar years, librarians were confronting reports that “other agencies of mass communication reach far larger groups and reach more of them more frequently and regularly” than libraries. Film, radio, and television each seemed in turn to upend culture and displace books, and thus libraries, as the chief instruments of communication. But for many librarians, this bred not contempt but envy, as they grew more and more eager to use the tools of mass culture to promote public culture. As a result, they thought hard, and more optimistically, about the emergent consumer society and its sparkling supermarkets. Tasked with not just

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reflecting on culture but building infrastructures for distributing it, librarians’ thoughts
sometimes took a strange material form. In the mid-twentieth century, and with special energy
after World War II—building on decades of experience using bookmobiles to appropriate a
burgeoning, consumerist car culture—public libraries in cities across the country (like Freeport,
Illinois; Evansville, Indiana; Augusta, Georgia; St. Louis, Missouri; Nashville, Tennessee;
Wichita, Kansas; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Troy, Ohio) engaged in a collective experiment by
opening booketerias [FIGURE 29; FIGURE 30]. These new spaces were small, mostly self-
service branch libraries located in the supermarkets that increasingly dotted the urban and
suburban landscape. Putting libraries inside grocery stores, librarians materialized the fantasies
and anxieties of people like Ginsberg and Jarrell. Booketerias themselves were never a hugely
popular model for library extension (branch libraries and bookmobiles would hold that title
throughout the twentieth century). But the booketeria’s place alongside the bookmobile in what
librarian Wyman Jones called the “era of colorful locational innovation” in library service was a
particularly illustrative one, especially since they quite literally put Garcia Lorca down by those
watermelons.⁶¹⁴

Considering the bookmobile and the booketeria together, this chapter explores how
assumptions embedded in older definitions community were both laid bare and transformed by
the infiltration of market logic into everyday life. Melani McAlister has called on scholars to
“‘explain the coincidence’ that brings specific cultural products into conversation with specific

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⁶¹⁴ Jones argued in 1966 that that era had “more or less declined,” and that “[m]ost contemporary public library
administrations are dedicated to the notion that a branch should operate in a facility located and built for that
purpose,” rather than in leased or loaned space. This evaluation seems accurate, though Jones’s dismissal of
“locational innovation” failed to more fully understand the coincidences it gave rise to, and their reverberations far
beyond the specific administrative politics of branch location. Wyman H. Jones, “The Role of the Branch Library in
political discourses." And booketerias and bookmobiles embodied a broad coincidence of public culture and consumer capitalism, a coincidence that illuminated and exacerbated tendencies latent in the dream of common consciousness. Those tendencies—which often confused buying power with citizenship and commercial goods with the common good—ultimately mapped values of consumer capitalism onto spaces of public culture. As this chapter will show, this mapping had two primary consequences: first, a collapse of the library’s public role (as partial and problematic as it had been), and second, the decay of the cultural and physical infrastructures necessary for equal participation, especially by the urban poor, in public life.

There is, as Rachel Bowlby points out, a long and “peculiar history of the relations between book-selling and food-selling.” And Bowlby has insightfully tracked some of the ways in which reading and supermarkets collided in the twentieth century. But in missing the strange coincidence of the supermarket as what she calls “a public space” and the public library, she misses an opportunity to think through not simply consumer capitalism’s effects on the book but its effects on that quality of the book that the inventors of the traveling library held so dear: its theoretical ability to embody and call forth a common consciousness. Some scholars have argued persuasively that postwar print retained its ability to reflect and produce affective communities, particularly among white, middle-class Americans. But, at the same time, the rise of twentieth-century consumer culture transformed the ways it was possible to think about

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618 Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 188.
belonging to something larger than oneself, to think about being public. Stores, sociologist Sharon Zukin claims, “are social spaces where people enact community and build a public culture” based on “internalized rituals” and “modern values.” But because this particular way of being public is “not a civic culture based on mutual obligation,” its version of community offers a sharp and intriguing contrast to the thick mesh of social democracy. Indeed, libraries—public institutions moving public culture through public space—present a particularly fruitful opportunity to investigate how traditional conceptions of “public” and new forms of “culture” diverged in the postwar period, and the consequences of that divergence for the shape of belonging in the United States.

If in the postwar era, as Lizabeth Cohen has argued, “[f]aith in a mass consumption postwar economy…stood for an elaborate, integrated ideal of economic abundance and democratic political freedom,” then librarians worked hard to latch themselves to this “national civil religion” that dominated the culture even as it failed to distribute freedom as efficiently as it did material goods. Considering the booketeria alongside the bookmobile, this chapter argues that the coincidence of libraries and supermarkets—like the bookmobile’s combination of libraries and motors—emerged out of a seed left by the flowering and withering of progressivism. This seed, a deep optimism about what it might mean to treat knowledge as material and to design communities around infrastructures for the distribution of (textual) objects, sprouted into a set of compromises with some profound and unexpected effects. In the end, this is a story of the myriad consequences of latching libraries to consumer culture.

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“Salvation in a Supermarket”: Origins

Long before the booketeria, some bookmobiles and traveling libraries had occasionally put “library stations” in general stores in crossroads towns. But the booketeria surfaced in the postwar years—amidst a significant boom in car ownership—as an extreme crystallization, of sorts, of the ideologies of print mobility that birthed the traveling library and the bookmobile.623 The bookmobile had, after all, pioneered the strange reversal, the attempted use of a space or object supposedly opposed to culture to actually promote it, as a tool of librarianship. As we saw in Chapter One, the bookmobile emerged out of a movement obsessed with developing infrastructures of feeling, a movement with a powerful faith that a new form of mobility could change the landscape—and the people who called it home—for the better. “The bookmobile that carries library books out into the corners of the wide open spaces,” the Los Angeles Times crowed in 1931, “is disproving the yap that cars kill culture.”624 Developing infrastructures that let you fill those “wide open spaces” with books, the thinking went, would help people come together and form communities. As Chapter Three demonstrated, that assumption depended on the image of untamed frontiers incorporated into a national whole—an image that prevented, with its memories of violence and its passion for control, the actual realization of common consciousness. It also, as this chapter argues, encouraged librarians and others to think about

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623 Although St. Louis put a library branch in a downtown department store in the 1930s, the supermarket booketeria did not take off in earnest until the late 1940s, when Nashville and Lincoln each first proposed building their own. That period was also one of intensified car-ownership. Automobility had most thoroughly expanded in the interwar years, when as many as 55.7% of families in the United States owned cars. But after strict restrictions on production and use (especially rubber and gasoline rations) during World War II, another boom occurred in the 1950s. See, for example, James J. Flink, The Automobile Age (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990 [1988]), 132, 277-293. On the St. Louis project, see Andrew Linn Bostwick, “A Branch Library in a Department Store,” Library Journal 63 (1938): 420.

community as largely an effect of things on the move. And nothing in American society at midcentury moved objects with quite the same efficiency and spectacle as the supermarket.

From the late 1940s, a new city tried out a booketeria every few years, with the version in Troy, Ohio, getting the most attention—a wire story that was printed in numerous papers—and amply illustrating the hopes and the threats embodied in the booketeria. “Who would dream of placing Ernest Hemingway between crackers and limburger cheese?” asked Gaylord Binder in that wire story, oddly echoing Ginsberg’s poem. The answer: Stanley Beacock, “a librarian who has found his salvation in a supermarket.” Confronted with the need for more library space, but lacking the money for branches or bookmobiles, Beacock “turned to a second idea…[and f]ollowing an investigation, Fullmer’s Supermarket agreed to allow installation of a six-shelf, 8-foot high rack near the crackers and cheese department.” The experiment was a success, Binder joyfully announced. Six months in, circulation statistics were good (765 books circulating 5,279 times), and—causing Binder almost as much bemusement as the placement of Hemingway next to the cheese and crackers—patrons paid most of their fines, even though the self-service branch ran on an honor system. Beacock and the library’s board “committed their trust to the people of Troy,” Binder wrote, and it had worked out.

The article closes with the librarian’s mostly cheerful summary: “The Booketeria cannot take the place of a properly staffed branch if the population warrants it… However, it is the estimate of this library that it is a good outlet in the particular location. So far its good points far

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626 The honor system approach to booketeria service is striking in the postwar context, where credit undergirded so much of the “economic miracle” in the U.S. and Western Europe (though there were, of course, cultural differences in the way credit was perceived in different national contexts). See Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 123-124; Lendol Calder, *Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Jan Longemann, “Different Paths to Mass Consumption: Consumer Credit in the United States and West Germany during the 1950s and ‘60s,” *Journal of Social History* 41 (2008): 525-559.
outweigh any serious objections yet heard.” Indeed, this was a moment of odd hope among librarians treating information as a commodity—as an object of consumption—meant that libraries could gain (or retain, depending on who was doing the hoping) a central role in American life. And as we can see in Beacock’s optimistic but somehow still plaintive and defensive “so far,” it was a moment of hope that tethering the library to institutions of consumer capitalism would not have deleterious effects. As it turns out, finding the library’s “salvation in a supermarket”—and putting Hemingway in with the cheese and crackers—could cause problems. Specifically, putting the library in a grocery store, like putting it on the road, meant buying into (so to speak) a series of values seemingly at odds with the goal of building a common consciousness: atomization, an obsession with speed, the privileging of pleasure, and a cult of the new. And each of these values brought with it a fundamental confusion—of independence for freedom, of efficiency for value, of pleasurable for useful, of new for important—that warped earlier ideas about the goals of public culture and spelled trouble for the fate of common consciousness in a consumers’ republic.

“Brutality and Solipsism”: Atomization

In the postwar period, the white middle class took an American tradition—of confusing independence and freedom—and adapted and intensified it in new ways. As Frederick Jackson Turner had both described and reinforced in his 1893 Frontier Thesis, the United States had for more than a century constructed its understanding of political liberty in close relation to the “flux and freedom and novelty and vast spaces” of the frontier.627 Freedom had, in other words, been predicated on the movement of white people through geographic and psychic space, on

maintaining distance between people as a way of maintaining liberty.\textsuperscript{628} Progressives like Addams and Gladden had called for an alternative, for an interdependent crowdedness (a thick mesh, not a wide grid) as the basis for social democracy, but their voices had been drowned out by midcentury. And so, after World War II—with the acceleration of suburbanization through federally guaranteed mortgages, the G.I. Bill, and the sprouting of Levittowns and their imitators across the country, and with the spread of supermarkets and sprawl of the interstate—this confusion intensified and changed in two interrelated ways.\textsuperscript{629} First, the scale on which it happened seemed to shift, to get smaller even as the scope of participation expanded. This long-term tendency in American political and social life was now practiced in a rather local way: rather than moving thousands of miles west, many of those struck by a desire for geographic independence, for space to move around, traveled just a few miles away, to the suburbs. Secondly, and perhaps ironically, distance was produced through a proliferation of things. The more objects that clotted suburban space, the more distance there could be between people, and the freer those people would be.

These shifts had significant effects. Eric Avila argues that Disneyland “encapsulated the values built into the design of postwar suburban communities.”\textsuperscript{630} Its “meticulous organization of space,” he writes, “kept at bay that monstrous entity that dominated the landscape of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century metropolis: the crowd.”\textsuperscript{631} But the crowd—threatening as it could seem—could also be an encapsulation of democracy and belonging, of the public in all its beauty and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[628] As we saw in Chapter Two, opponents of library desegregation had argued that maintaining distance between black and white Americans was central, not antithetical, to freedom.
\item[631] Avila, \textit{Popular Culture}, 123.
\end{footnotes}
difficulty. As Jane Addams had declared at the beginning of the century, it was on the “thronged and common road” that a new social ethics would emerge. This conviction—like progressivism as a whole—had been attenuated in the ensuing decades. As we saw in Chapter Three, a certain faith in common consciousness had survived in parts of the New Deal. But programs like the Taos County Project tended to preserve the centralizing impulses of progressive community-building (in managed democracy, for example) at the expense of its more messy and unpredictable possibilities. And in the postwar period, this shift reached its logical conclusion in the transformation of public culture in the suburbs. As an attempt to spatially and culturally engineer respectability, the suburbs were characterized, as Avila puts it in the case of Disneyland, by “virtues…that emphasized a retreat from the public culture of New Deal liberalism.”632 This was privacy as privatization, and a carefully designed and managed distance from others came to supplant the hopes of Addams and the dreams of Curious Missie, hopes and dreams of less corporate or consumerist kinds of belonging.

As incredibly potent embodiments of the values of consumer capitalism, and as both motors and products of suburbanization, the car and the supermarket were key players in the process of making independence seem like freedom, in inviting the supplanting of grounded community by what William Leach calls “placelessness.”633 This section, like the ones that follow, tracks how contemporary observers imagined and responded to these shifts. Here, we will see how the automobile and the supermarket were understood to create atomized individuals by insulating their users with objects and by making individual consumer choices seem like political liberty.

632 Avila, Popular Culture, 107.
633 William Leach, Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life (New York: Vintage, 1999), 9. Leach puts many of the most destructive transformations in Americans’ relationship to place and community squarely on the shoulders of the kinds of mobility the automobile ushered in.
Cars, even more than the trains and subways that first allowed the growth of suburbs, facilitated the rapid decentralization of metropolitan areas. But as experienced at the time, this did not have merely geographic effects, David Riesman explained in 1959. “[T]he Mixmaster of the auto has scattered people in every direction,” he wrote, “with the result that there are no easily marked roads to friendship and relatedness.” As it turned out, gridding the nation with roads could, in the end, just lead to more isolation. Far from connection or belonging, Riesman insisted that drivers exhibited a striking “brutality and solipsism,” a result of the fact that (as in so many other suburban contexts) relations between people were replaced by relations between people and objects. “The driver of a car is completely surrounded by a nonsocial object,” he wrote, “isolated from physical contact with others and yet completely dependent on and related to them.” In this way, the automobile mimicked the broader social system of the atomized suburbs.

As Riesman had argued earlier in his seminal *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), middle-class suburbia was marked by a turn from older bourgeois models of selfhood he called “inner-directed” to the primacy of an “outer-directed” personality. The outer-directed person, Riesman argued, was deeply social, depending on approval or disapproval from others to determine

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635 Riesman, *Abundance for What?*, 289. Daniel Boorstin, later the Librarian of Congress, seconded Riesman’s analysis in 1961: “The automobile itself has been one of the chief insulating agencies. And the insulation has become more effective as we have improved body design from the old open touring car to the new moving ‘picture window’ through which we can look out from air-conditioned comfort while we hear our familiar radio programme.” Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Penguin, 1961), 118-119. Ironically, Boorstin’s retirement from the Library of Congress was covered on the same page in *American Libraries* as an article, discussed below, announcing the opening of a new booketeria in Wichita.
636 In the contemporary legal context, Don Mitchell has described something similar as a “right to be left alone” is codified as restrictions on protesting. This creates, Mitchell argues, “a model of citizenship that matches the cars we drive,” specifically the “high and sovereign” experiences of sport utility vehicle driving. This atomization promoted by this “false security” clearly has an even longer history, of which the bookmobile and booketeria are a part. Don Mitchell, “The S.U.V. Model of Citizenship: Floating Bubbles, Buffer Zones, and the Rise of the ‘Purely Atomic’ Individual,” *Political Geography* 24 (2005): 95.
behaviors: “their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual.”

But that person could also be, in a powerful way, deeply isolated by such constant contact. “While all people want and need to be liked by some of the people some of the time,” Riesman wrote, “it is only the modern other-directed types who make this their chief source of direction and chief area of sensitivity.” Drawing on Riesman a decade later, Dwight Macdonald expanded on this, explaining that members of the crowd “are not related to each other at all but only to some impersonal, abstract, crystallizing factor.” He contrasted these “solitary atom[s]” with true community, in which “a group of individuals is linked to each other by concrete interests.”

The postwar American was, in these critics’ estimation, surrounded and yet unmoored—and entirely unable to recognize it. In this “context of no context,” George W.S. Trow insisted as he surveyed the world around him in 1980 and pondered its origins, “mirages of pseudo-intimacy” convinced people there was no distance between them while, in fact, only increasing it.

The automobile, like the single-family home, embodied and materialized this odd sort of insulated sociability, where intense effort is expended on display—of income, of normality, of happiness—for others in order to reinforce a privacy that could ultimately inhibit mutual exchange and a vibrant, textured social life.

It also more concretely undermined the sorts of transportation infrastructures that allowed, or even required, people to come together in less predictable, managed ways. Both

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bookmobiles and booketerias tied library extension to an icon of America’s burgeoning consumer culture (automobiles and supermarkets, respectively) and also allied library use with the independence and autonomy associated with it. But such autonomy has often been a mirage. As John Urry points out, the rise of the automobile and the concomitant decline of public transportation have granted car-owners immense flexibility—but it is always “coerced flexibility.”641 The fantasy that we can go anywhere, at any time, has crushed many alternatives, and that has often meant the decay of urban centers and the infrastructures of the “walking city.” In the absence of alternatives to automobility, Urry insists, people are “force[d]…to orchestrate in complex and heterogeneous ways their mobilities and socialities across very significant distance” in ways that require a car.642 Ever more roads and highways replaced or preempted other possible transportation methods in many cities and suburbs, and those highways—often either destroying or circumventing urban communities—encouraged suburbanization and drastically reduced urban populations.643 (One study found, for example, that each additional freeway passing through an urban center reduced its population by an average of 18 percent.644)

This system of coerced flexibility reinforces racial, geographic, economic, and other inequities by allowing the expanded mobility of some at the expense of others’ immobility.645 This odd relationship of mobility to immobility—which characterized suburbia’s growth and reinforced white flight—helped fuel the central confusion at issue here. The irony of a rigidly

unequal transportation network, Celeste Langan argues, is that it “guarantees that mobility will be felt as freedom.”\footnote{Langan, “Mobility Disability,” Public Culture 13 (2001): 463. On the experience of a “parallel city” offered by riding the bus in Los Angeles, see Sikivu Hutchinson, “Waiting for the Bus,” Social Text 18 (2000): 107-120.} The ability to move seemingly unfettered through space, offered so explicitly and viscerally by the automobile, slowly but surely replaced the thronged road and other possible ways of thinking about freedom and belonging—and many of the physical, public infrastructures that would make those thoughts material.

The bookmobile was in some instances meant to address these inequities, by bringing books to those who could not travel themselves, but the booketeria was another story. The relationship between the two forms is revealing here. The emergence of supermarkets, which tend to assume automobility in their location and architecture, was closely related to the centrifugal force of suburbanization that was accelerated by the automobile. (Indeed, suggesting just how intimately the new retail environment was related to car culture, a 1958 guide to selecting store locations explained that “[n]inety-five per cent of all the retail stores built in the United States since the end of World War II have included some provision for off-street parking.”\footnote{Richard L. Nelson, The Selection of Retail Locations (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1958), 249.} Supermarkets provided a key outlet for the “abundance psychology” that Riesman identified with the outer-directed residents of suburbia, “capable of ‘wasteful’ luxury consumption of leisure and of the surplus product.”\footnote{Riesman, The Lonely Crowd, 18.} A 1962 article in Ladies’ Home Journal informed readers that “one of the biggest revolutions going is in the neighborhood grocery. Its shelves are bursting with excitement. You’ll discover delicacies once reserved for kings’ feasts.”\footnote{Quoted in Tracey Deutsch, Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 183.} This captures some of the effects of the supermarket on landscapes both physical and psychic in the new consumer capitalism: the emergence of new locations for shopping, the image.
of the home as a castle, the domestication of political “revolution” through consumption, and so on. Architectural historian Robert Fishman asserts that suburbs “embodied a new ideal of family life, an ideal so emotionally charged that it made the home more sacred to the bourgeoisie than any place of worship.” The supermarket played a key role in this new spiritual economy, providing extensive provisions for the family and, perhaps more importantly, acting as an altar for a new set of rituals that reinforced the individual and the family as the preeminent social units of the suburbs. “This place recharges us spiritually,” a character in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985) says of a supermarket, “it prepares us, it’s a gateway or pathway.” The supermarket thus offered itself as a site that would link objects, emotion, and mobility in transformative ways—in ways that threatened the project begun with the traveling library.

Indeed, the supermarket supported the atomization of the suburbs by, ironically, seeming to encourage social interaction. Urban planner Ann Satterwaite argues that a “casualty of this new scale and pace of shopping has been its sociability.” Planning and zoning, inspired by an emphasis on keeping residential and commercial spaces separate in the new suburbs, increased the prominence of shopping centers but also increased the shallowness of the social bonds they allowed. Nevertheless, there was a pervasive awareness, sometimes verging on concern, that supermarket shopping could come to stand in for shared experience and thus make individual consumer behavior seem like community-building. This was by no means entirely new—Gordon Selfridge declared in 1909 that his London department store “is not a shop, it’s a community centre”—but there did seem to be something about the conglomeration of the supermarket and

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the separation of the suburb that brought this to a new pitch.653 “The supermarket may be said to
give half the people of America the most regular, satisfying, ennobling and masterful experience
that they can confidently look forward to in a given week,” David Cort wrote in The Nation, in
1958.654

A year later, a New York Times report on the “Super Business of Supermarkets” brought
this home.655 Drawing on observation, on information from marketers, and on David Riesman
himself, the article offered a conflicted picture of what the larger effects of supermarkets might
be. Were they good for families or bad for them? Liberatory for women or not? But one thing
was rather certain: the supermarket had transformed the social landscape of the suburbs,
encouraging the “other-directed” society Riesman described and creating a world in which
“[m]ore people are exposed to supermarkets than to schools, churches, movies or any other
influence except newspapers and TV.” Indeed, the entire community structure could be changed.
A sidebar within the article described the opening of the Nashville booketeria and noted that
“[i]n many towns the supermarket has become a center of social life, sponsoring barbecues and
square dances...sponsor[ing] exhibitions by local artists, hanging the paintings right in with the
mounds of cold cuts and prepared patties.”656 Paintings in with the cold cuts, like Garcia Lorca
among the watermelons, seemed to offer an image of people coming together in the aisles around

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653 Selfridge quoted in Satterwaite, Going Shopping, 64.
654 “In great cities,” he continued, “many women regard the local supermarket as the only stable social force in the
656 Nine years earlier, another New York Times report used the sudden appearance “among the tomatoes, potatoes
and cabbages” of “a group of fifty oil paintings which [customers] were encouraged to buy” in Caldwell, New
Jersey, as an anchor for an analysis of supermarkets’ new merchandising techniques. And five years later, Wesley
Marx, in The Nation, raised a rhetorical eyebrow at “Artists and actors...being drafted to glorify food-buying.” He
noted, specifically, a Southern California arts festival in which “Housewives in search of ground chuck and pink
quail eggs dodged between 300 paintings displayed on the parking lot, while the Orange Street Players staged
Chekhov a stone’s throw from the fresh cabbage.” Rebecca Franklin, “From Soup to Nuts to Art....” New York
culture, not just commerce—but it was a vision which frequently fell short.

The cartoon [FIGURE 31] accompanying the article, by Carl Rose, made this amusingly, devastatingly clear. The tall, narrow image shows, from an angled birds-eye view, aisle after aisle of a grocery store, packed with people. Each customer has an overflowing cart, and the gridlock of all these people with all these vehicles with all these objects calls to mind the likely snarl of the parking lot outside and, further out, of the busy streets of the busy commercial district of a busy suburb. (With a library, childcare, education, an art gallery, psychiatry, cobbling, and dental care, the supermarket itself seems like a microcosmic, mutant suburb, offering a community’s worth of infrastructure under a single roof dedicated to commerce.) And the snarled customers with their laden carts seem, like Riesman’s driver in traffic, to be similarly insulated by the mobility and the fierce independence of their commercial behavior. Some few people talk to one another—several waiting in line, the librarian with a customer, and so on—but for the most part their interactions are wordless, and sometimes fraught. Most customers do not look at one another, absorbed by the riot of objects before them. Near the center of the image, in front of the “FROZEN FOOD FESTIVAL,” two carts filled with goods collide. Just above that, two nearly-identical women (their carts blocking the passage of yet another woman) bend over and, much to their apparent surprise, bump backsides, shocked and unsettled by the sudden contact.657 Most strikingly, at the very bottom of the image, a man with an empty cart looks over his shoulder with a look of almost palpable confusion and inadequacy at a man and a woman struggling to maneuver a cart filled with a tower of paper bags, each overflowing with a mass of newly-acquired things. This was not the “thronged and common road” of Addams’ imagination; this

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657 This might suggest a submerged potential for sensual, bodily, and near-sexual contact in the supermarket, which Adam Mack has identified in advertising for the markets. Adam Mack, “‘Speaking of Tomatoes’: Supermarkets, the Senses, and Sexual Fantasy in Modern America,” *Journal of Social History* 43 (2010): 815-842.
was something else entirely. It is not, in the end, surprising that the smaller illustration on the second page of the article [FIGURE 32] shows five shopper-less carts crowded together, rendered near-immobile in their collective, empty mobility. In the first image, to some degree, the carts might as well not have people at all. As with the suburban automobile, it is the object driving these encounters, cocooning their users from one another and propelling them through ostensibly shared space without requiring interaction, mutual regard, or the work of community-formation. “[S]teered...imperiously down the aisle,” as Cort put it, the shopping cart—like other new forms of mobility—encouraged the atomization of the lonely crowd by making consumption, and even movement, seem like ends in themselves.

This turn to abundance, and to private consumption as a primary social activity, had effects beyond supermarkets, and observers and critics continued to use their image to make arguments about this new situation. In describing the odd role of the suburb in both expanding and limiting choices, Riesman stated that “the suburbs have been one vast supermarket, abundantly and conveniently stocked with approved yet often variegated choices.”658 A vast frontier had given way to a vast supermarket, but the impulse to confuse large spaces for sites of freedom remained constant, or perhaps even accelerated. In popular thought and political fact, the independence—financial, geographic, social—necessary for making consumer choices increasingly replaced the kinds of freedom required to reimagine social life as something mutual, something not bought but shared. Cutting (in her characteristically acerbic way) to the heart of the matter, social critic Marya Mannes lamented in 1964 that “[t]he citizen has become the consumer, the individual the instrument, not of a super-state but of the super-market.”659 Mannes gets here to the strange way in which the supermarket—as a place but also as an idea—was tied

up in a troubling and convoluted relationship between consumption, individualism, and politics. The supermarket not only materially supported the suburbs—those “barren stencils,” as she put it, where these various strands most densely knotted—it also stood in the consumers’ republic as an epitome of individual freedoms: to browse, to choose, to buy.\footnote{Mannes, \textit{But Will It Sell?}, 16.}

Robert Fishman has traced the origins of suburbia to the eighteenth century, which is—importantly—the same period in which scholars like Roger Chartier have described an integral and productive relationship between print and privacy. In a classic example of the simultaneous and mutual production of exterior and interior spaces, land was increasingly carved out to allow sub-urban domestic privacy at the same time that reading found more and more of a place in private, domestic, and individual interiors.\footnote{Fishman, \textit{Bourgeois Utopias}, 18-38. Chartier argues that between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, “man’s altered relation to the written word helped to create a new private sphere into which the individual could retreat, seeking refuge from the community.” This did not, of course, mean that all public reading ceased, or that private reading meant a total rejection of the world. But it was the case, Chartier insists, that “silent, secret, private reading paved the way for previously unthinkable audacities.” Roger Chartier, “The Practical Impact of Writing,” in \textit{A History of Private Life, vol. III: Passions of the Renaissance}, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 111, 125. This process only solidified during the nineteenth century, according to James Smith Allen. In France, he argues, “individuals increasingly sought the meaning of more freely available texts in deeply personal, isolated acts” made possible by “the development of private interpretive practices” freed from older, more intense interference by church and state. James Smith Allen, \textit{In the Public Eye: A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800-1940} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 5.} Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that even the library—that most seemingly communal literary institution—would find itself incorporated into the atomized sociability of consumer culture. Nonetheless, both the bookmobile and the booketeria were, in their way, attempts to manage this turn to privacy, to make it work for the goals and needs of libraries. That attempt had decidedly mixed results.

Drawing on a long history of library extension as a tool for fostering democracy and community, both bookmobiles and branch libraries were frequently used to bring books to the people in order to increase library use. But in doing so, they took a risk that emerged from a
strange relationship of mobility to immobility in midcentury American culture: moving things could, at times, keep people in place. The dream represented by the traveling library, that moving books might move people to find one another, backfired. It could turn out that bringing the library to the people (and proliferating the number of libraries) could mean that the people no longer had to move or come together in a common place. Putting the library in “the Mixmaster” (in Riesman’s vivid phrase), scattering small libraries across the landscape, also meant fewer truly central public institutions where different people could come together to share a collective experience of culture. The very convenience and efficiency of bookmobiles and booketerias, to be discussed more below, meant fewer trips, at shorter distances. This could potentially reinforce neighborhood-feeling, of course, and it could invite more people into the library’s sphere of influence, but it also threatened to keep those neighborhoods, and those people, from linking together to form a larger community. In this way, bookmobiles and booketerias could in effect amplify the centrifugal tendencies of suburbanization and the proliferating consumer culture, abdicating a responsibility to tie people together. This did not have to be the case—certainly bookmobiles could be used to express and construct a clear vision of community space—but more bookmobiles, branches, booketerias, and other extension devices always threatened fragmentation as much as they promised cohesion.

And it certainly did not help that they also frequently tended to reinforce the equation of privacy with independence with freedom. Margolis, in that *New York Times* report, identified the “privacy of selection” as one of “the devices the supermarkets use to get us to go miles to buy groceries, [and] serve as our own shelf boys.” Relatively new to both merchandising and librarianship in the twentieth century, the open-shelf design discussed in Chapter Three encouraged, perhaps ironically, an isolated and insulated approach to grocery stores—and to
libraries as well, with booketerias and bookmobiles at the forefront. Not only open-shelved, most booketerias were entirely self-service, with patrons selecting books, filling out cards, noting due dates, and paying fines for late returns. In 1958, Herbert Goldhor, a librarian in Evansville, Indiana, reported an odd (and likely unexpected) reason for his booketeria’s success: “From the comments received, it’s clear that the shoppers like the service...in part because they are free to browse without anyone trying to help them.” Quite an endorsement of librarians, that. In part perhaps a healthy suspicion of librarians as ultimate and total arbiters of culture, this appreciation for booketerias’ privacy (like for the bookmobile’s similar practice of turning the library inside out) also points to a series of possibly troubling fissures. Those gaps—between librarians and patrons, between patrons and libraries as major civic institutions, and between patrons and patrons—increased physical, social, and cultural space around people, and could thus quite easily be mistaken for freedom: freedom from supervision, from authority, from enclosure, but also, potentially, from mutual regard and shared experience.

“Social Physics”: Efficiency

Reflecting in 1960 on the consequences of engineering and Taylorism in work life in the first half of the twentieth century, sociologist Daniel Bell wrote that one of the engineer’s most profound assumptions—with effects on work in the factory and on the American landscape writ large—was “that concentration is technologically efficient.” This was the logic that led to the dominance of the assembly line within factories and also, especially as the century wore on, to

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662 On the effects of open shelf, self-service shopping—including the “confirmation” of gender roles and the “forgetting” of class identity—see Kim Humphery, Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 66-68.
the “coerced flexibility” of the automobile. Concentrating industrial, commercial, and residential systems separately, Bell argues, this zest for conglomeration made more and more travel necessary to live out a full experience of human life. (He worried quite a lot about the separation of work from other aspects of everyday life, with the sacrifice of wholeness to the “cult of efficiency” an unhappy result.)

Business scholar Richard D. White, Jr., argues that after World War II, efficiency—which had become an “ultimate goal” of social, political, and intellectual life—fell “quickly from intellectual grace.” But the effects of that obsession with efficiency lingered on, and they moved even more thoroughly from one shop floor to another: from factory to store, from work to consumption. Automobiles, packaged foods, household appliances, and other objects made efficiency a watchword for home life, made the fast seem like the good. These new developments did not always actually make life easier, and women bore the brunt of the expansion of tasks made supposedly more “efficient.” But when the vice president of the United States and the Soviet premier met in Moscow to debate the relative efficiency of housework and the concomitant glories of consumption (or lack thereof) in their respective countries, it became almost absurdly clear that speed, everyday life, and consumer culture were powerfully intertwined.

The flowering of the public library movement—and especially the traveling library movement—at the turn of the twentieth century had grown out of what Marion Casey calls “the

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frenzy…to order society efficiently” that marked the Progressive Era.\(^{668}\) “Wasting time is worse than wasting money,” declared the author of *Some Principles of Business-Like Conduct in Libraries* in 1920.\(^{669}\) And none other than Melvil Dewey salivated at the idea of efficient library service, using the prominence of decimals in engineering to defend his new categorization system in the 1880s.\(^{670}\) While these extreme enthusiasms were questioned at the time by some librarians, and were tempered during the half-century between the 1890s and the 1940s, efficiency—like marketing and advertising—had fundamentally transformed librarianship, making speed and productivity key measures of value.\(^{671}\) And this was never more the case than in the bookmobile and (especially) the booketeria, which crystallized librarians’ embrace of efficiency and its application to education, consumption, and leisure.

Indeed, efficiency—both for libraries, which could increase their presence with only minimal outlay, and for patrons, who could combine errands—was the most widely cited reason for booketeria service. Lincoln, Nebraska, librarian Bernice Kauffman, writing in *American Speech* in 1947 to announce her library’s new and “unique service,” wrote that it had two main “advantages.” The first was that “library users wishing to borrow books…do not have to make a special trip to the library” and could now “select or return their books at the same time” as their grocery shopping, thereby “saving…time and transportation.” Second, she wrote, is its “economy of operation” for the library, which could run a branch without the “expense of heat,


\(^{670}\) Casey, “Efficiency,” 268.

\(^{671}\) The University of Chicago’s Graduate Library School, for example, pushed hard on quantitative and statistical analyses of efficiency and productivity in the late 1920s and early 1930s.
light, water and personnel." Martin Sloane, the syndicated “Supermarket Shopper” columnist, asked his readers in 1986 whether a booketeria would be appealing to them, and the response was overwhelmingly positive—and overwhelmingly focused on convenience. “What a timesaver it would be,” wrote F. Spedaliere of Virginia. From Cynthia Barrette of Humble, Texas: “[W]hen making my shopping plans I always have ‘Visit Library’ on my Saturday things-to-do list. But when I finally finish at the supermarket and other stores, I am usually too tired. Then on Sunday, I always feel bad about it.” Like traveling libraries and bookmobiles, booketerias thus tried to organize emotion—desire and regret, in this case—and doing so here had unexpected consequences. Just as engineers were certain that consolidating different aspects of production under one roof was efficient, librarians and patrons alike took to the idea of combining different acts of consumption together, for the sake of efficiency. “By a strategy of putting new branch libraries in shopping centers,” the Dallas Morning News had reported in 1960, “library officials hope to make a trip to the library as natural as a visit to the supermarket.” Putting books next to cheese made it easier for patrons (or customers, as they would eventually be known in some corners of librarianship) to take both home, but it could also threaten to make the former seem uncontroversially (“natural[ly]”) like the latter. Visiting the library and going to the grocery store became the same task, and a book and a box of cereal could seem newly equivalent.

Even before the end of the war, bookmobiles were marketed as a way of fitting books into the cracks in one’s day. A 1941 WPA poster, for example, declared the Chicago Public

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674 A similar set of preferences—for combining trips, for automobility, and so on—also influenced the popularization of drive-up book-drops in the postwar period. “[P]atrons are pleased with the new convenience,” Illinois Libraries reported, “and indicate a decrease in overdue books.” Focus on Indiana Libraries reported, similarly, that “[t]he drive-up returns enable patrons to bring back books at any time, combining a stop at the library with other errands.” [No title,] Illinois Libraries 35 (1951): 236; “Richmond Installs New Book Return,” Focus on Indiana Libraries 6 (1952): 3.
Library’s bookmobile service to be “Convenient,” “FREE,” and “Time-Saving” [FIGURE 33]. And in their 1971 ad campaign, major bookmobile manufacturer Gerstenslager took the efficiency of the bookmobile even further and—in what should be by now a familiar combination of food, mobility, and libraries—hinted at the somewhat disturbing ways that bookmobiles helped organize and order leisure, consumption, and education. “A Gerstenslager bookmobile will delight you in design,” one ad [FIGURE 34] published in American Libraries declares, and “complement your library’s efficiency in service and cost.” Their “name it. we’ll put it on wheels!” campaign aimed at humorously highlighting the “customobility” that a Gerstenslager vehicle could provide. But the image that accompanied this particular version of the ad showed the darker side of efficiency. Demonstrating their willingness to work with customers—and their assurances not to “fudge when it comes to finishing touches”—the image depicts what is essentially an ice cream sundae on wheels. A giant, open truck serves as a bowl, filled with ice cream and a large spoon, and the assembly of the sundaes is performed by children. In matching coats, hats, and earmuffs, the children take on different roles in the production of the sundaes: one drives, one wields a large caulking gun to apply chocolate or whipped cream, one cracks nuts, one operates a large crane carefully lowering cherries, one climbs a ladder to deliver more raw materials. All wear large smiles, pleased with the work of making pleasure.

This idealized vision of efficient production on the bookmobile is apparent in some actual experiences of it as well. In 1952, a seventh grader in Marathon County, Wisconsin, penned a poem describing the procedure followed during a bookmobile’s visit to her school:

We hardly can wait to get inside,
Until we get in, we frown
But then Mrs. Biwer comes in,
And smiles to let us know,

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When the lower grades find their books,
The higher grades may go.
We hand our books to the driver,
Who puts them on the shelf,
Wouldn’t you rather have him put them there,
Than to put them their [sic] yourself\(^6\)\(^\text{77}\)

This is not just library use made into work, as in the Gerstenslager ad; it is library use made into shift work. Landscape writer J.B. Jackson commented that the highway’s dominance of the landscape “has spawned a whole breed or roadlike spaces—railroad lines, pipelines, power lines, flight lines, assembly lines.”\(^6\)\(^\text{78}\) As particularly the last in his list suggests, these networks could be less a mesh to tie a community together than simply a way to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible. And bookmobiles, inspired by roads and built as automobiles, could repeat this problem. The particular kind of regimentation the middle-school poet describes, with shifts divided by age moving through the bookmobile separately in order to keep things running smoothly, recurs again and again in representations of bookmobiles and children. Not only did the bookmobile supposedly allow libraries to make more efficient use of their resources, it also invited a broader application of an economic logic—of scientific management and, more precisely, the scientific management of consumption—to libraries’ relationship to their patrons, and those patrons’ relationship to books and to one another.

And this “social physics” of efficiency, as Bell put it, had far-reaching consequences.\(^6\)\(^\text{79}\) Historian T.J. Jackson Lears has argued that in the twentieth century, “personal efficiency” became a new way of thinking about the worth of individuals and institutions, and that this

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\(^6\)\(^\text{77}\) “Bookmobile Poem by Kay Umland, 1952” (WI.400374.bib), Libraries and Schools in Marathon and Lincoln Counties, State of Wisconsin Collection, digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/SSRecIDS\text{earch}\?repl1=W\&repl2=W\text{L.400374.bib} (accessed December 8, 2009).

\(^6\)\(^\text{78}\) Jackson, \textit{A Sense of Place}, 190. It is worth noting that Jackson was, overall, quite optimistic about the new landscapes and situations offered by twentieth-century highway culture.

\(^6\)\(^\text{79}\) Bell, \textit{End of Ideology}, 233.
“preoccupation with an empty pursuit of efficiency…impoverishes personal as well as public life.”\textsuperscript{680} And libraries, buying into that logic, helped replace deliberation with speed as organizing principles of social and cultural life: “We don’t claim that this is ‘library service,’” wrote an Evansville, Indiana, librarian upon the introduction of a booketeria there, “but it is an economical and efficient way to distribute books.”\textsuperscript{681} Sacrificed at the altar of speed, “library service”—careful assistance, discerning selection, and dedicated common space—in this rendering became secondary to the economics of efficiency, which newly guided the library’s choices.

Poet and critic Randall Jarrell, in “Children Selecting Books in a Library” (1955), understood patron browsing alongside and through food-procurement—much like the librarians behind bookmobiles and booketerias—but with a key twist. Perhaps we could call it a return:

\begin{quote}
With beasts and gods, above, the wall is bright.
The child’s head, bent to the book-colored shelves,
Is slow and sidelong and food-gathering,
Moving in blind grace…\textsuperscript{682}
\end{quote}

This is not a present of neon and packages and advertising and rushed distribution. It is not a present of internal combustion and interstates and rush hour commutes.\textsuperscript{683} Here, while using a library is like getting food, it is like getting food in what to Jarrell felt like a too-distant past, a past of deliberateness and care and intellectual nourishment. This offers, then, a rendering of a key bargain that the booketeria, like the bookmobile, made. In exchange for “blind grace,” for

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{681} Goldhor, “Library-Booketeria,” 3074.
\end{flushright}
the “slow and sidelong” and full engagement with books, librarians helped usher in a moment in which books could be checked out alongside (and would move around like) boxes of cereal but, as Jarrell would put it less than a decade later, “[m]ost of our mental and moral food is quick-frozen, pre-digested, spoon-fed.” Booketerias and bookmobiles often imagined books to be objects—or, more precisely, only objects—like corn or soup or watermelons or limburger, that needed to get into consumers’ hands as quickly and smoothly as possible. (Or, as one patron put it in 1966: “Bookmobile is instant books.”)

In so doing, booketerias and bookmobiles treated libraries as answers to the problem of efficient distribution—a problem supermarkets, particularly with the help of automobiles, were particularly good at solving—rather than as a way of building infrastructures that are material and cultural to tie communities together. This new obsession with efficiency could have immediate effects on local communities. Caught up in an efficiency-at-all-costs logic, booketerias and bookmobiles could both be used to replace or prevent branch libraries. A 1948 article, for example, described a bookmobile as a “streamlined branch library” that made it possible to “supplant[ ] seven small branch libraries,” thus providing patrons with books without providing them with a permanent cultural and civic center. But, as we will see later on, mistaking efficient for good could have even broader cultural effects, as well. Michael Sorkin has described an obsession in urban planning with smooth and efficient “flow,” which grew

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684 Jarrell, Sad Heart, 28.
685 It is important to remember that the ideas that circulate through society take material form (in print, in disks, in chips, in bodily performance, and so on); my purpose here is not to deny that, but rather to suggest that to treat ideas as only material may be as insufficient as ignoring their materiality entirely.
687 On some of the cultural effects of distribution efficiency in chain stores and supermarkets, see, for example, De Grazia, Irresistible Empire, 130-183, 376-415.
688 “‘Bookmobile’ Replaces Seven Small Branches,” Los Angeles Times, September 28, 1948.
alongside and outlasted the sometimes coercive architectural modernism of Le Corbusier.\textsuperscript{689}

“Flow,” Sorkin explains, “seeks to increase speed (and save time) by prioritizing the faster means of movement” and avoiding “the potential for danger, confusion and slow-down resulting from the undisciplined mix.” But this acceleration and efficiency get in the way of what he calls “giving ground,” “a primal rite” and “concrete...exemplum of...deference to one’s neighbors.”\textsuperscript{690}

This dream of smooth, frictionless, efficiency—embodied in the highway and the supermarket, and visible in the bookmobile and booketeria—was a perversion of, and ultimately at odds with, the liberal fantasy of a frictional, tingling, and productive efficiency that had inspired the traveling library.

\textbf{“A Cult of Effortlessness”: Pleasure}

Related to efficiency was an identification of pleasure (and of easy pleasure, more precisely) as a fundamental measure of cultural value. William Leach has argued that beginning at the close of the nineteenth century, Americans began to mistake amusement for freedom. This moment was marked by the emergence of a “highly individual conception of democracy [which] emphasized pleasure and self-fulfillment over community or civic well-being.”\textsuperscript{691} Especially from the advent of radio in the 1920s, particularly thanks to a progressive commitment to hands-on and experiential education, librarians (like teachers) worked very hard to make claims for civic importance based on a connection to new and pleasurable modes of information-diffusion.

\textsuperscript{689} On attempts by Le Corbusier and his colleagues to design total and totalizing urban spaces, and their pitfalls, see James C. Scott, \textit{Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 103-146.


Indeed, rather than predictably lamenting radio’s negative effects, the forefront of the educational professions sought to coopt it to their own ends. In 1932, the president of the National Council of Teachers of English declared radio “a twentieth-century miracle” and “an agent of social progress,” and librarians were right behind her.692 “Let us be grateful, then,” a Rochester, New York, librarian announced in 1938, “for this new means of reaching children that is offered to us at a time when reading has more competitors than ever before.”693 It was a compromise librarians were very good at making, even as they did not seem to comprehend its risks as well as they did its rewards.

In addition to being an epitome of convenient, efficient, and private library service, booketerias and bookmobiles presented a model of librarianship often defined by entertained pleasure over intellectual effort. Booketerias from their invention and bookmobiles especially after the 1920s, tended to carry far more fiction than anything else. Using the Kansas state system of traveling libraries as a barometer, the Topeka State Journal declared in late 1923 that “Kansas, during the year now closing, preferred fiction to other reading.” (In 1904, the Traveling Library Commission had very few requests for fiction, and later librarians blamed a wartime desire for escape for this fundamental and permanent shift.694) Indeed, bookmobiles charted the rise and booketerias the triumph of a broader shift—away from print and toward other forms of

entertainment, with education and enlightenment as secondary or even tertiary goals—in twentieth-century libraries and librarianship.

In 1931, the Los Angeles Times had seemed optimistic that the bookmobile could “disprove[e] the yap that cars kill culture,” but in hindsight that prediction was perhaps premature. While “killing” may overstate and oversimplify, something was indeed happening at the coincidence of cars and culture. In 1965, teacher and education scholar Charles Spiegler published an instructive article, titled “If Only Dickens Had Written about Hot Rods.” In it, he sets out an agenda for “heal[ing] that breach” between students raised in “intellectual ghetto[s]” and their teachers who “left our Ivied Halls clutching that precious B.A.” but with no idea how to reach working-class students. These students—whom he intriguingly calls his “customers”—do not want Shakespeare or Eliot or Dickens, Spiegler insists, and so teachers should not require them. Confronted with a student who delivers the titular lament—why couldn’t Dickens write about hot rods?—Spiegler is stymied. But then “Miss Bookmobile,” the librarian who “comes to my school at regular intervals with a bagful of books meant to move the most immobile reluctant,” delivers a solution. She “weaves such a web of silent awe that books can say such wondrous things: of D-Day and Shark, for those whose tastes runs to blood; of Body Building and Weight Lifting, for those to whom the body in bloom is a thing of beauty...; of hot rods and drag races for those who...live for speed.” For the Dickens-phobic car enthusiast, A Tale of Two Cities is replaced by H. Gregor Felsen’s Hot Rod and Mexican Road Race, and suddenly the student is “searching the stacks all over the city for ‘anything by Mr. Felsen’.” Bookmobiles

696 Spiegler, “If Only,” 275.
697 Spiegler, “If Only,” 277.
698 Spiegler, “If Only,” 278.
699 Spiegler, “If Only,” 278.
lead to the library here—but the whole thing is built on a foundation of what seem to be some rather unstable equivalences and some rather significant assumptions about class and culture.

Two years later, in June 1967, a new library opened in a popular supermarket in Portland, Oregon. But the ability to “combine trips to the library with shopping trips” was not the only thing that made the library “unusual,” as the *Oregonian* put it.700 “Besides the books, pamphlets and magazines one expects to find in a library,” a reporter noted, “the Albina Branch provides Viewmasters, games, records, and films.” These unusual materials not only teach children (who are “also eager users of the library’s educational games,” the reporters are careful to point out), they change the very content and identity of the library space itself.701 Records “attract[ ] teenagers and adults who take the records home to enjoy or listen to them at the library,” with some “enjoy[ing] listening so much that they sing along, serenading the library staff.” Not only, then, is the library in a supermarket, the library is also a karaoke bar. And a movie theater: “Every Saturday afternoon at 2p.m., the library transforms its meeting rooms into a theater and free movies are shown.” As you might imagine in a society defined by what Riesman called a “cult of effortlessness,” this is a very popular development.702 “The steady crowd seems to have only one complaint,” the reporter notes: “the movies are only once a week!”

The problem is not, I am eager to emphasize, necessarily that “Miss Bookmobile” or the Albina Branch embraced the new spaces and materials of the consumer society. If we understand libraries not just in terms of the mechanics of print distribution, but rather as infrastructures that aim to produce civic connection, then a mild ambivalence to print as a privileged method of

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701 An emphasis on educational toys and games was a common one in postwar American society, when the baby boom, the Cold War, and new research on the psychology of creativity combined to make them more popular than ever. See Amy F. Ogata, “Creative Playthings: Educational Toys and Postwar American Culture,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 39 (2004): 129-156.
cultural transmission is not the end of the world. Shared experiences of films and music offer a powerful potential for inculcating civic identity and crafting belonging. But it is a chancy bargain, and one that often leads to a series of misunderstandings. The individualistic conception of democracy that Leach argues emerged at the turn of the twentieth century was characterized at a basic level by a confusion between access to things and access to citizenship and freedom. As Randall Jarrell argued in 1962, this misunderstanding—as well as the common practice of mistaking agreeable for good—had serious risks, risks he linked (illustratively, for our purposes) to changes in supermarket options:

> There has been not one revolution, an industrial and technical revolution, there have been two…. People have learned to process words too…. [W]e manufacture entertainment and consolation as efficiently as we manufacture anything else. One sees in stores ordinary old-fashioned oatmeal; and, side by side with it, another kind called Instant Cocoa, Instant Oats. Most of our literature…is Instant Literature: the words are short, easy, instantly recognizable words, the thoughts are easy, familiar, instantly recognizable thoughts, the attitudes are familiar, already-agreed-upon, instantly acceptable attitudes.

Jarrell thus argues that with a proliferation of options, and a proliferation of pleasure, it becomes too easy to use what he sees as the wrong metric—ease, and easy pleasure—for judging worth and making selections.

Back in Portland, these linked ambiguities took the form of an odd confusion. Amidst the report on the “unusual library materials,” which the librarians found “exciting and challenging” to work with, a shadow of possibilities unrealized takes shape: “The library’s small but useful collection of films on Negro history, health, consumer information, and job hunting is heavily

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703 Michael Billig, for example, has argued that nationalism takes form not only through the circulation of print (as Benedict Anderson has shown), but also in everyday banalities, from flags to sports to speech. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

704 Progressive reformer Herbert Cody, for example, declared that the “promise of American life” is a “promise of comfort and prosperity for an ever-increasing majority of good Americans.” Leach, *Land of Desire*, 6. Lizabeth Cohen argues that this mistake intensified after World War II, when the rise of the “Consumers’ Republic” encouraged people to view their consumption in civic terms. See Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 113.

705 Jarrell, *Sad Heart*, 25-26. For a reading of this passage in the context of the rise of instant food, see Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 175.
used by groups in the neighborhood.” Works that promote African American freedom are thus—because they take a material form associated with pleasure—equated with Viewmaster reels and pop music recordings. The turn embodied by the booketeria seemed to make it difficult not only to distinguish between books and things, as we saw earlier, but between different kinds of information used for different kinds of purposes—between political film and cartoons, between Dickens and Hot Rod. With pleasure as the governing principle, other kinds of distinction tended to fail.

This was a failure that horrified a number of midcentury cultural critics, like Dwight Macdonald, who complained that Americans increasingly failed to distinguish between the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, the valuable and the useless. Macdonald specifically identified a shift in “Masscult” (so-called because it hardly deserved to be called culture at all), which was “bad in a new way” in twentieth-century America. It offered “its customers neither an emotional catharsis nor an aesthetic experience,” he complained in 1960, “for these demand effort.” And it did not even really offer entertainment (which “implies life and hence effort”), providing instead a “distract[ing]…stimulating or narcotic” pleasure that is, above all, easy.

Drawing on Frankfurt School theorists who saw this obsession with ease as central to the rise of fascism and the failure of political culture, Macdonald described an atomized and distracted American public, cowed by its own culture and unable to exercise judgment upon it.

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706 For an elegant evaluation of MacDonald’s body of work and his influence, see Louis Menand, “Browbeaten: Dwight Macdonald’s War on Midcult,” The New Yorker, September 5, 2011, 72-78. (This is an expansion of his introduction to a 2011 edition of Macdonald’s criticism, cited above.) For a history of the sort of print Macdonald deplored, see Rubin, The Making of Middlebrow Culture.
707 Macdonald, Masscult and Midcult, 3-4.
708 Macdonald, Masscult and Midcult, 4-5.
709 He quotes Theodor Adorno specifically in “Masscult and Midcult”: “Distraction is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized process of labor to which…the masses are subject…. People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is only possible to those whose lives do not put such
We can, and should, resist the elitism and exclusion often at the heart of Macdonald’s fight (his claim, for instance, that “Masscult is a parody of High Culture” seems to miss the point). But at the same time it seems undeniable that something had shifted in the way Americans approached their own culture. It may be, as Louis Menand has argued in various permutations since the 1980s, that new art that emerged in the 1960s (and much criticism of it) ceased to be interested in the distinction between high culture and commercial culture.710 But the shift had begun much earlier, born out of two competing but often complementary impulses: to democratize culture and to monetize access to it. (The traveling library was birthed alongside the department store and the Sears-Roebuck catalog for a reason.) And contrary to the hopes of the traveling library’s founders, or the predictions of many critics who came after Macdonald—as more and more mechanisms (from the Book-of-the-Month Club to booketerias) emerged to make that culture more accessible—a broadly educated, sophisticated, discerning public largely failed to take shape. Instead, rather than continuing to chafe under cultural prescription from on high, ordinary Americans, in a fit of ecstatic, capitalized democracy, increasingly rejected the authority on which those prescriptions had been based. Ease and pleasure became central to the process of evaluating and consuming culture, and it became clearer and clearer that a much of the fragmented American public had little interest imagining a common consciousness, at least not when they sat down to be entertained.

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710 In 1982, Menand also charted the origins of this shift—whereby it was possible for Susan Sontag to “equat[e] a Rauschenberg painting with a Supremes song”—to the demystification of high culture and the romanticization of popular culture in the 1960s. In 2011, he argued that the 1960s saw the emergence of work that “ignored the distinction between art and commerce that had grounded the high-low system,” effectively leaving “Macdonald’s system of critical judgment…left stranded on the far shore.” Louis Menand, “Glad Hearts at the Supermarket,” The Nation, May 15 1982, 595; Menand, “Browbeaten,” 78.
“The Black Waters of Lethe”: Fashion

In 1934, English teacher Beulah Jo Wickard published a poem lamenting the absence of the past in her mechanical present. Her eulogy describes a playful, lively, and living literary heritage brought low by a forever forward-rushing, efficiently-timed, and carefully managed industrial society:

...By what blue-veiled streams
Is now proclaimed the depth of love’s desire
While mortal youth must kiss and spend his fire
To tune of steel that never knew a dream?
Great Pan is dead, nor shall we evermore
Hearken to his mad piping in the glen,
For men are lost, and Pan is lost to men.
The factory whistle shrills; the pistons shove
And robots all, we clasp a robot love.\textsuperscript{711}

With the past gone, and a future regimented by the factory whistle, people become machines themselves and find love only as robots. This is a poem about industrialization, but the past-less, scheduled future it imagines only became more real—if perhaps differently real—in the decades after, with the rise of a powerful postwar consumer culture, of the supermarket and the “supermarket.” There is a reason, after all, that Ira Levin ends his \textit{Stepford Wives} (1972) with the housewives’ robot replacements “shop[ping] languidly” through a supermarket, “[e]ven filling their \textit{carts} just so!”\textsuperscript{712} The “robot love” became the endless, insatiable clasping for the new, the exciting, the \textit{object} of desire.

Indeed, in addition to ease, time (or, more specifically, timeliness) became a key way of determining value. If distinctions based on quality or content or purpose become less and less useful, then an object’s relationship to the passage of time can serve as an easy surrogate. In some ways, all of postwar America—and not just Charon’s boat in Ginsberg’s poem—

\textsuperscript{711} Beulah Jo Wickard, “Robot Love,” \textit{English Journal} 23 (1934): 133.
“disappear[ed] on the black waters of Lethe,” as a sort of cultural amnesia took hold. Leach argues that “the cult of the new” was a “cardinal feature[ ]” of the new consumer culture, and this was only more true after World War II, when reconstruction, “reconversion,” and a cascade of new technologies began an even more intense obsession with the transformative potential of the new. Indeed, a taste for newness could be a way to try and wrest control of one’s life away from prescriptive tradition, to imagine a different tomorrow. But not everyone agreed that this was a good idea, and some worried that these new rhythms bode ill. Writing from “far off at the obsolescent rear of things” in A Sad Heart at the Supermarket, Randall Jarrell bemoaned this shift. “Our culture is essentially periodical,” he wrote, “we believe that all that is deserves to perish and have something else put in its place.” Living on a constantly advancing “frontier of necessity” (why, we certainly need a new car this year, don’t we?), Jarrell argued, we are left with “mere timeliness” as “the value to which all other values are reducible.” And while Jarrell was particularly cantankerous on this point, he was not alone. Specifically exploring the strange new world of the yearly model change in automotive marketing, David Riesman, too, worried about a cultural turn toward “periodicity,” with an attendant “bureaucratiz[ation] of whim,” which regiments, institutionalizes, and enforces “the cyclic variations of fashion.”

Librarians, perhaps even more than many others, were susceptible to this turn as they struggled to define and assert their role in a changing society. After efficiency, the chief argument for new methods of library service—like bookmobiles and booketerias—tended to be their newness itself. No press or professional report on booketerias mentions more than one predecessor,

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715 Jarrell, Sad Heart, 64.
716 Jarrell, Sad Heart, 72.
717 Jarrell, Sad Heart, 72.
718 Riesman, Abundance for What?, 278.
with most not mentioning earlier experiments in other cities at all.\textsuperscript{719} Indeed, “unique” is a popular adjective in booketeria reports, regardless of how pathbreaking a particular instance might be.\textsuperscript{720} Even \textit{American Libraries}, the magazine of the American Library Association, got in on the institutional-amnesia act. In a story headlined “First library-supermarket mix pleases grocery shoppers,” an unnamed writer attributes to Gary Hime, assistant director of the Wichita Public Library, the idea that “the Comotara [Branch, in a Kroger’s grocery store] is the first public library branch to be opened within such a store.”\textsuperscript{721} The branch was opened in 1986, and the story was published in 1987. That was, of course, a full forty years after a booketeria was opened in Lincoln, Nebraska, a mere 275 miles away. And it was closer to eighty years after St. Louis opened a branch library in a department store there, less than 450 miles away. This librarians’ obsession with being new was, ironically, far from new in the booketeria context. The first bookmobile, the first reading room, the first in-house movie showings, the first dedicated children’s section: librarians love to claim (and argue over) first-ness. Libraries thus promote themselves with reference to their adherence to the latest fashions, and to their supposedly unique offerings.

In an institution like a public library, this can be a troubling tendency. Libraries are constantly, and necessarily, grappling with the profound tension between two purposes: preservation and dissemination. To keep something safe and to provide as many people as possible with access to it are not, on the whole, very easily reconciled goals. The obsession with newness, however, threatens to sacrifice the former for the latter, and—importantly—to ignore a

\textsuperscript{719} The Troy article discussed above mentions a precursor in Evansville, which is among the only references to an earlier model found.

\textsuperscript{720} See, for example, Kauffman, “‘Booketerias’;” Wood, “Albina Library Unit;” and “‘Booketeria’ Opened in Sherwood Manor” (from the circular file in the Troy-Miami County Local History Library). “Unusual” was also a common adjective.

key place where they meet. The periodical culture, Jarrell insisted, “is, at bottom, the opposite of
the world of arts.”\(^{722}\) In that world, “the present is no more than the last ring on the trunk,
understandable and valuable only in terms of all the earlier rings.”\(^{723}\) One fundamental goal of
librarianship has been the transmission of culture and ideas across time as well as space, tying
generation to generation and building a culture in layers. When libraries abdicated that way of
reconciling the two goals of librarianship, in favor of newness and fashion and periodicity, they
risked sacrificing a claim to institutional purpose and civic value. The editors of *Library Journal*
complained in 1974 about how library promotions have “the same look, sound, and tone of all
the slick stuff that convinces us we can’t shave with one razor blade, or can’t succeed if the
knees of our pantyhose sag.” The proliferation of this “commercial pap,” and its application to
public libraries, they argued, “overlooks the basic justification for all public services—that
people need them.”\(^{724}\) Like the other misrecognitions at play when libraries meet supermarkets
and automobiles—mistaking independence for freedom, speed for value, ease for quality—this
confusion of desires for needs, of the new for the important, was a result of a series of
compromises public libraries made in the postwar years.

“An Offer Like That”: Consequences

Such compromises have consequences. The coincidence—the collision—of libraries and
supermarkets, of books and cars, of ideas and objects, of public culture and the values of
consumer capitalism, had two mutually constituting effects. The first was the subjugation of the
library’s public role to market principles. The second was the decay of the material and cultural

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\(^{722}\) Jarrell, *Sad Heart*, 73.
\(^{723}\) Jarrell, *Sad Heart*, 74.
infrastructures of public space that could facilitate shared access to resources, especially by the urban poor increasingly left out of the supermarket society.

To begin to illustrate that first point, I want to walk through a series of moments in the midcentury coincidence of libraries and consumer culture. In 1956, in Augusta, Georgia (where a booketeria had been installed) a librarian explained what a new library building would look like, if voters played along: “A library needs to be at ground level and built at sidewalk edge similar to a modern department store. Window shopping attracts buyers to a department store and readers to a library.”

A year earlier, a report about the Grand Rapids, Michigan, library went out on the Associated Press wire. Headlined “Supermarket Library” in the Seattle Times, the short blurb noted that the Grand Rapids library had “adopted shopping bags and shopping carts” to keep clutter to a minimum.

That same year, James Meeks, director of the Dallas Public Library, told the Dallas Morning News that, in the reporter’s words, a new library building “will be like a modern department store.” It would, for example, have departments—popular fiction, children’s, history, family, cooking, crafts—allowing patrons to efficiently find what they want. And such division would “get away from the deadening effect of long lines of tables and row after row of stacks.”

Five years later, a teen etiquette columnist offered readers a striking bargain: “Absolutely free—no limit. Offer good, day and evening hours, the year around…. Who’d make an offer like that? A drug store? Supermarket? Wrong—it’s your library.” With accelerating force, in short, libraries began to adopt the language and structure of consumer culture institutions like supermarkets and department stores. Indeed, by 1987, this had gone so far that

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725 Lloyd Parker, “$954,000 Library Bond Issue Slated for Vote Here Nov. 6,” Augusta Chronicle-Herald, August 26, 1956.
the Wichita, Kansas, booketeria was not even the library’s idea. The librarians there, American Libraries explained, “had hoped to open a new branch near northeast Wichita’s fastest growing subdivisions,” but supermarket chain Dillon’s—in the words of the library’s assistant director—“offered us a deal we couldn’t refuse.” The supermarket proposed 850 rent-free, utilities-paid square feet in the hopes of “open[ing] new horizons in the marketing concept of ‘one-stop shopping.’” By 1987, in other words, the marketing of the library could fold back on itself, turning the library into just one more gimmick used to advertise breakfast cereal and frozen corn.

Beginning in the 1970s and accelerating through the early 1990s, a new way of thinking about libraries emerged: the “information supermarket.” After decades spent putting books next to cheese and crackers, decades spent finding new ways to transport and promote information as an object of consumption, librarians were suddenly confronted with the stark reality of what it would mean to treat knowledge as a commodity. As Newsweek explained in a dour 1975 report on the future of libraries (titled “On Borrowed Time”), the new “information supermarket” version of the library would come “complete with membership fees, parking-meter rates for time in the reading room and softly ringing cash registers to tot up royalties for information producers.” The idea—deceptively simple—was that, if patrons wanted information, they should pay for it. After all, they pay for cereal when they want that, don’t they? In April 1973, for example, the chairman of the board of the Information Industry Association declared that “user-based charges must inevitably prevail,” and a month later, in the pages of Library Journal, librarian Louis Vagianos argued that a “fair market price” should be charged for library services, in order to correct a problem: “The information consumer has never really had to pay for his information and as a result has no conception of its cost, and therefore of its value to him as a

product or service.” In Vagianos’s vision, the only way for a library patron to understand worth is to become a library customer and understand it in terms of money. Joy, a new skill, knowledge, a beautiful phrase, a helpful idea, or an enchanting story: these are not, in the information supermarket, valuable in themselves. They are products that sit on shelves and have value only in exchange.

As this idea emerged, it was challenged by some who decried its mangling of the legacies of librarianship. Fay Blake, a scholar of library science, and Edith Perlmutter, an economist, wrote one of the most incisive critiques of the “information supermarket,” arguing that this focus on market value fails to understand the ways that libraries are not sites of private economic transactions. They are, instead, public institutions and spaces in which different—less private, less directional, less commercial—kinds of reciprocity and exchange can emerge. “The individual who makes use of the library’s product is not engaged in a private transaction which benefits and concerns only himself,” they insisted. Noting that patrons—while “free riders” in the sense that they do not pay directly for services—use the library in ways that have the potential to benefit the larger social whole: “Our carrying of the free rider is, in effect, our investment in human capital.” It is also a claim for a public role for libraries as institutions enmeshed in aspects of human social life that exceed or escape the logic of consumer capitalism. (That they spoke of “investment” and “capital” in making that claim suggests just how far gone

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732 William Leach argues that among the key features of consumer society is “money value as the predominant measure of all value in society.” Leach, Land of Desire, 3.
733 This is not dissimilar to the way publishers approached bookselling in the twentieth century, as described by Ted Strifhas. E-books, he argues, are only the most recent way in which publishers sought to limit the surplus value of books (which can, after all, be passed from hand to hand without the publisher receiving payment from each additional user). See Strifhas, The Late Age of Print, 19-46.
the rhetoric was in a context where Jarrell’s sad hearts had become, as Louis Menand put it in 1982, “Glad Hearts at the Supermarket.”

There is value, Blake and Perlmutter insisted, in “[f]ree and public libraries…which accept their responsibility for serving everyone with the full range of information they need.” Public and free: these are legacies of progressive librarianship that the “information supermarket” misrecognizes, distrusts, and rejects. “[A] library is not a supermarket,” the editors of *Library Journal* wrote in 1974. But it was, perhaps, too late. After decades of compromise, changing course would prove difficult. Today, while the “information supermarket” never fully took hold, we are left with few ways of thinking about libraries—and other public institutions—that are not deformed or impoverished by a cultural obsession with privatization, with the disentanglement of public and private, that took hold even as Blake, Perlmutter, and the *Library Journal* editors warned against it. As Tony Judt recently worried, “the pursuit of material self-interest…now constitutes whatever remains of our sense of collective purpose.” We struggle to articulate and enact a belief in something, anything, outside the self. And so we have trouble imagining what combination, collectivity, or common consciousness might mean. “We know what things cost,” Judt wrote, “but have no idea what they are worth.”

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736 Menand, “Glad Hearts.”
That obsession with privatization and self-interest had spatial effects as well as cultural ones, as the second large-scale consequence of these coincidences makes clear. One characteristic of the new consumer culture that emerged after World War II, noted by many of its contemporary observers, was its erasure of those unable to participate in it. Michael Harrington, in his influential *The Other America* (1962), described “a new kind of blindness about poverty” that caused the poor—residents of an “invisible land”—to “increasingly slip[ ] out of the very experience and consciousness of the nation.” Jarrell, unsurprisingly, noted a similar dynamic at work: “No matter how many millions of such exceptions to the general rule [of prosperity] there are, they do not really exist, but have a kind of anomalous, statistical subsistence.”

Those without buying power, Harrington and Riesman and Jarrell noticed, seemed to have no power at all in the new society. Intriguingly, both Riesman and Jarrell understood this elision in terms both spatial and institutional. Riesman describes mental hospitals as one of the locations where “we have hidden the people who belie the youthful, smiling, radiant, and glamorous faces in our advertisements that purport to show what an American ought to look like,” and Jarrell similarly writes that “our moral and imaginative view of the world is no more affected by [the poor] than by the occupants of some home for the mentally deficient a little farther along the road.”

This is not a happenstance; the transformations and reorientations wrought by the rise of the consumers’ republic were profoundly geographic. Suburbanization, the advent of highways, white flight, car culture and its endless parking lots in front of endless stores were all part of the consumer revolution and changed the landscape of the United States in ways that would make a

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741 Harrington, *The Other America*, 11.
common consciousness more and more difficult to imagine.\textsuperscript{744} And booketerias, like bookmobiles, were implicated in all of them.

As Chapter Two made clear, mobile print could at times abet racial segregation, thereby helping to make and keep division a core American value. This was the case here, as well, in the accelerating separation of those with the capital (social and economic) to participate in consumer culture and those without. Along with the “coerced flexibility” that accompanied automobility, and the broader cultural fetish for privacy discussed above, came a more general hollowing out of urban centers and of collective life. The flight not just of whites but of public and private investment in the transportation and civic infrastructures of inner cities meant fewer and fewer opportunities to hold experiences and spaces in common. Already, in 1962, Harrington described an “American city...transformed” by the automobile, the suburb, and the supermarket. “Occasionally,” he explained of the recent past, “almost everyone passed through the Negro ghetto or the blocks of tenements, if only to get downtown to work or to entertainment.”\textsuperscript{745} But, with the white and the (even moderately) wealthy increasingly off in the suburbs, “[t]he poor still inhabit the miserable housing in the central area, but they are increasingly isolated from contact with, or sight of, anybody else.”\textsuperscript{746} This infrastructurally and materially enforced blindness had, Harrington insisted, contributed to an inability to confront the inequities of the supposedly abundant consumer society by “remov[ing] poverty from the living, emotional experience of millions upon millions of middle-class Americans.”\textsuperscript{747} In the absence of shared space and


\textsuperscript{745} Harrington, \textit{The Other America}, 11.

\textsuperscript{746} Harrington, \textit{The Other America}, 12.

\textsuperscript{747} Harrington, \textit{The Other America}, 12.
common cause grew a welter of personal things and private places (at least on the side of the “affluent society”) that inhibited the development of a public philosophy.

One material consequence of this invisibility, abetted by the rise of automobiles and supermarkets, has been the food desert. With corporations putting profits first and with car-ownership assumed and then built into the environment of our cities, people who are not profitable, and who cannot easily travel, get left out. The car and the assumption of its ownership had a lot to do with this. As Brett Williams describes in the context of postwar Washington, D.C., white flight and the slapdash transportation networks Harrington decried as they happened produced cities that were “difficult to negotiate and skewered by commuter traffic,” making it difficult for urban residents to reach supermarkets and unprofitable for supermarket companies to serve them. “Thus,” Williams writes, “urban renewal and suburban development left behind food deserts for the poor.”

There are, unsurprisingly, also what we might call information deserts, areas where people with limited resources and circumscribed mobility cannot easily access information and communications resources. In the midst of these changes, John Marshall has described “the virtual abandonment of the American inner city, insofar as library development was concerned.” Under the impression that inner-city libraries “would be little used, while the readers (white, middle class) were moving out of the suburbs,” librarians let inner city libraries “decay” and planned suburban libraries on a principle of “access by motor car.”

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749 See, for example, Andrew Gillespie and Kevin Robins, “Geographical Inequalities: The Spatial Bias of the New Communications Technologies,” Journal of Communication 39 (1989): 7-18. This is, in a way, a de facto reprisal—on racialized socioeconomic terms—of earlier de jure racial restrictions on library access discussed in chapter 2.

more, too, downtown public libraries have been beset by conflicts between traditions of open access and the demands of gentrification and redevelopment, inspiring strict regulations to keep homeless people out that thereby extend the tradition of limiting contact by limiting access.\textsuperscript{751} There are, in other words, some places where some people can find neither crackers nor Hemingway, Garcia Lorca nor watermelons.

And beyond that basic (and devastating) inaccessibility of either good food or information, this dislocation and reorientation around objects has produced another important lack. “A major casualty of America’s drive-in culture,” writes Kenneth T. Jackson, “is the weakened ‘sense of community’ which prevails in most metropolitan areas.”\textsuperscript{752} And even more broadly, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tridib Banerjee have argued that the “centrifugal tendencies” of postwar American life “have resulted in alienation from public experience” and “the substitution of private spaces for public ones.”\textsuperscript{753} Commercial spaces replace community spaces—as demonstrated, almost cruelly, by the proliferation of shopping centers called “Commons”—substituting a “community” constituted through consumption for what Lynn Staeheli and Don Mitchell have called “a democratic, inclusive form of publicity.”\textsuperscript{754} In spite of the intimations of later scholars and critics, the turn to a mass culture had not, in fact, called any

\textsuperscript{751} See, for example, Joseph Sjostrom, “Library Adopts Homeless Policy: Arlington Heights facility bans ‘Prolonged or Chronic Sleeping,’” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, March 30, 1995; Eggert, “Popular with homeless.” On homelessness and restrictions on access to public space, see Mitchell, \textit{Right to the City}, esp. 161-226; Staeheli and Mitchell, \textit{The People’s Property}, 47-71; Smith, “Contours of a Spatialized Politics.”

\textsuperscript{752} Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier}, 272.


\textsuperscript{754} A cursory search shows such “Commons” in Federal Way, Washington; Raleigh, North Carolina; Fremont, California; Martinsburg, West Virginia; Cincinnati, Ohio; Wayne County, Michigan; Fenton, Missouri; and many, many more. “Town[e] Centers,” another popular commercial appellation, can be found in—as just a few examples among many—Leawood, Kansas; Clackamas, Oregon; El Dorado Hills, California; and Reston, Virginia. The substitution of private commercial space for truly public space (and thus the assertion of private property rights over these new commons) has, Staeheli and Mitchell argue, been “used to justify the regulation of space such that only certain members of the public under certain conditions are allowed into the new town square.” Staeheli and Mitchell, \textit{People’s Property?}, 92, 74. See also Margaret Kohn, \textit{Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space} (New York: Routledge, 2004).
coherent, organic, and collective mass into being. Despite being drawn at times from working-class communities, and sold quite aggressively back to them, mass culture had not—as Harrington pointed out so devastatingly—brought the poor or working class in a real and lasting way into public life. It had, instead, made a seemingly, a marketably, “public” life available but predicated on distance, speed, shallow pleasure, newness, exclusion, and separation. Libraries, which have typically asserted an ability to produce connections across both time and space, have been a key casualty here. As consumer capitalism has made it seem that that which connects us is only that which we buy—those goods that move through our atomized world efficiently, pleasurably, and fashionably—libraries have struggled to make a case for connection, and for public culture, in midst of the consumerist centrifuge.

“Virtual Supermarket”: Coda

Queer theorist Karen Tongson, in her attempt to “forge a reparative, queer relationship to the suburbs,” argues that those spaces are no longer the province only of the straight, white, and affluent. “[T]he predictable routes of transit meant to keep the white middle classes at a

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755 This has been the general position taken by those reacting against the interpretations of the Frankfurt school by deploying versions of Cultural Studies since the 1980s. These studies tend to fetishize and perhaps overestimate the power of “resistance” in the face of overwhelming hegemonic forces. John Fiske, for example, repeatedly finds resistance at work when television “act[s] as an agency for defamiliarization” (in the words of Fiske and John Hartley), in direct opposition to Theodor Adorno’s insistence two decades earlier that that medium (like the rest of the “culture industry”) aimed “at producing or at least reproducing the very smugness, intellectual passivity, and gullibility that seems to fit in with totalitarian creeds.” The truth may likely be somewhere in the messy middle between these positions, but as Raymond Williams reminds us, hegemony is incredibly adept at what he calls “incorporation,” the folding of “emergent” and potentially subversive class cultures into acceptable and mainstream forms of “‘popular’ journalism, advertising, and commercial entertainment.” John Fiske and John Hartley, Reading Television (New York: Routledge, 2003 [1978]), 6; Theodor Adorno, “How to Look at Television,” Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television 8 (1954): 222; Williams, Marxism and Literature, 124. For a sophisticated but still, perhaps, too optimistic reading of class, consumption, and resistance, see Nan Enstad, Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). For a more skeptical view, see Allan M. Brandt, “Engineering Consumer Confidence in the Twentieth Century,” in Smoke: A Global History of Smoking, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (London: Reaktion, 2004), 332-343.
reassuring remove from nonnormative subjects,” she writes, “have been dramatically rerouted.”

The carefully designed and painstakingly managed spaces of suburban America have found themselves overrun; they have, in Tongson’s words, been “marred by strange and wild things growing where they shouldn’t.”

It seems that perhaps the coincidences that suburbia occasioned are also ripe for rerouting, for a sprouting and profusion of “strange and wild things” that might reimagine the role of things in the landscape. The booketeria, like the bookmobile, was an attempt at using a reversal—using an object or institution that seemed opposed to public culture in order to, in fact, support it—as a tool of librarianship, but it was an attempt that often, as we have seen, faltered. Recently, some libraries have struggled to solve some of the problems such faltering presents, in a curious sort of reversal of that reversal. Beginning in March 2010, for example, the health department in Baltimore began a program they call the Virtual Supermarket Project:

[T]he VSP enables neighborhood residents to place grocery orders at their local library branch or school once a week and receive their groceries the following day at the same place for no delivery cost. The VSP increases their access to high quality affordable groceries in the very neighborhood that they live in, allowing them to bypass the difficulty and expense of catching multiple bus rides or taxi cabs in order to reach healthier food options.

Librarian Diama Norris, of the Tulsa Initiative, has similarly proposed “a potential fusion of the...green cart concept, the traveling taco stand, and the bookmobile” as a way to create “moveable oases” for her city’s food deserts. The Virtual Supermarket Project and proposals like it actually are more moments in a surprisingly long and textured history of the coincidence

this chapter has sought to explore. But unlike the “information supermarket,” they offer a canny reversal of the dynamics described above, using the expansive public-ness of the public library to try to alleviate the pain of living in the gaps and fissures of capitalist circulation and consumption. They are thus a reassertion of libraries’ role in supporting public landscapes in the face of capitalist indifference and what Raymond Williams called “mobile privatisation.”

They are also, in their ways, challenges to the possibility of total digitization in librarianship—that new challenge to the future of physical library infrastructures—and therefore are claims for the continued physical presence of public libraries in American communities.

But these new ideas come at a moment when that physical presence continues to be under siege. First, market logic and what one designer calls “retail feeling” continue to make funding and building public libraries, full of public culture, difficult. And even more powerfully, the last several decades have brought another seeming threat to the physical spaces and physical books of the library: digital technology. In the next chapter, we will see how those technologies facilitated a reemergence and reimagining of the dream of a common consciousness wrought by the movement of text. We will see, in other words, how—out of the separation, expansion, and consumerism that both characterized and unraveled the progressives’ fantasy—old ways of thinking about books on the move found new life on the Web and in the world.

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Figures

Figure 29: A Nashville, Tennessee, booketeria (ca. 1953)
From Nashville Public Library Photo Collection
Figure 30: A booketeria in Evansville, Indiana (1958)
Figure 31: Cartoon by Carl Rose (1959)
Figure 32: Cartoon by Carl Rose
From Margolis, “The Super Business of Supermarkets”

Figure 33: WPA Poster (1941)
From Library of Congress, “By the People, For the People: Posters from the WPA, 1936-1943”
name it.
we’ll put it on wheels!

We don’t fudge when it comes to finishing touches. Gerstenslager bookmobiles are crafted to the finest detail. From stairstep to ceiling, we use only the best materials and the finest workmanship. A Gerstenslager bookmobile will delight you in design, complement your library’s efficiency in service and cost. Write us or call us. The Gerstenslager Company, Wooster, Ohio 44691. (216) 261-2015. We give you a lot for your money.

CUSTOMOBILITY BY GERSTENSLAGER

Figure 34: Gerstenslager ad (1971)
From American Libraries 2 (1971)
CHAPTER FIVE

“Universal Access to All Knowledge”: Digital Books, Physical Spaces and the Reinvention of Common Consciousness

“Ever myself and my neighbors, refreshing, wicked, real,
Ever the old inexplicable query, ever that thorn’d thumb,
that breath of itches and thirsts”
–Walt Whitman (1855)761

“But their very physicality makes books inaccessible to the multi-terabyte databases of modern Alexandrian projects. Books take time to transport…. Even as the Internet has revived hope of a universal library…books have remained a dark region in the universe of information.”
–Gary Wolf (2003)762

“[T]he internet is not something you just dump something on. It’s not a truck. It’s a series of tubes.”

In July 2006, the government of Mountain View, California, revealed a shiny new bookmobile. The announcement didn’t happen at the main library building, or at the seat of the town’s government. Instead, the bookmobile was unveiled at the global headquarters of Google, Inc., which considers Mountain View its “hometown” and which had provided $200,000 to build the machine.764 If we bought the standard narratives of the digital age—narratives of disembodied information, universal access, of the triumph of the global over the local—this might seem more than a little bizarre. A local bookmobile, of all things, funded by one of the most influential digital-technology corporations in the world? Press coverage of the event did its best to paper (or perhaps more precisely unpaper) over the strangeness, working to emphasize

761 Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 111.
how Google-appropriate, and new, the vehicle was. This is “[n]ot your grandmother’s bookmobile,” the local newspaper headline insisted, and the article beneath it claimed that the bookmobile’s new features (a wireless internet hub, a self-checkout station, and two laptops) “even awed the high-tech gurus of Google.”765 And according to the article, the bookmobile’s most amazing attribute is its ability to act as an internet access point, “so the Web can be brought to places.”766 Casting a bookmobile’s ability to bring information “to places” as unprecedented required, of course, the curious elision of a century of bookmobile history and, for that matter, a half-millennium of print culture. The article fails to mention even once the bookmobile’s most prominent, voluminous feature (its books), and when a Google project manager did mention an older technology to try to explain the new contraption, it certainly wasn’t an earlier bookmobile: “It's like the ice cream man, but instead of ice cream it's the Internet.”767 The internet, in this view, has more in common with ice cream than it does with physical, paper books—and Google funded the bookmobile because of the Web, not all that silly paper. But Google’s funding of a bookmobile stocked with both wifi and books actually made sense, because the relationship between the two is by no means actually clear-cut or oppositional. As we will see in this chapter, books and bytes, like flesh and fiber optics, are far more imbricated, more mutually constitutive, more interwoven, than we tend to think.

By the 1970s, as we have seen in the previous chapters, the dream of common consciousness via the bookmobile had started to sour (for those it hadn’t excluded from the start, of course). In 1976, artist Nam June Paik rejected older transportation technologies and, for that matter, the very idea of information traveling the earth: “The effort to bring black and white

766 DeBolt, “Not your grandmother’s bookmobile.”
767 DeBolt, “Not your grandmother’s bookmobile.”
children together by means of school busing is going awry,” he wrote. “Desegregation strategies have become questionable. But television power can help achieve integration and understanding, and it has the added advantage that it happens over the air, unhampered by our polluted and complicated earth.”768 Buses failed. What we need is the transportation without the friction, the signal without the noise. Twenty years later, Paik’s peculiar vision would no longer seem unusual, as the turn of the twenty-first century, like the turn of the twentieth, saw the emergence of new technologies (personal computing, in this case) and new networks (here, the World Wide Web) that transformed the way people thought about information, community, and belonging. Once again, infrastructure became the frame on which a fantasy of universal belonging was built. This new fantasy was not entirely new; it was common consciousness reemerged and reimagined as both immediate and incorporeal. “This is like a groupmind!” Howard Rheingold declared of an early virtual community. And “[t]he sensation of personally participating in an ongoing process of group problem-solving…electrified” him as he realized that computers were allowing people “to rediscover the power of cooperation.”769 But despite the “re-“ in rediscovery, Rheingold saw a distinction between old forms of cooperation and community and the new, virtual ones:

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind. You can’t kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries.770

770 Rheingold, Virtual Community, xvii.
Rheingold may be a bit wistful about this difference—no kissing, alas—but he shared with his contemporaries a radical, almost violent optimism. This new virtual world, they believed, divorced from flesh and earth and steel, from the archaic politics of race and nation and gender, would offer an opportunity for truly common consciousness, for real universal connection and belonging.\footnote{In more recent years, this fantasy has lost some of its domestic luster, but its foreign policy dimensions—the assumption that the Web and, in particular, the social and participatory media of Web 2.0 are necessarily and directly democratizing—is flourishing, to rather depressing effect, as Evgeny Morozov has shown. See Evgeny Morozov, \textit{The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom} (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010).}

This new digital dream was a fantasy of a placeless, universal everywhere—and as such did not alleviate so much as exacerbate the blind spots and limits of common consciousness. Fred Turner has argued that this “digital utopianism” emerged out of the New Communalist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which generally “left questions of race unaddressed.”\footnote{Fred Turner, \textit{From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Steward Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 97} The new world the New Communalists would build, in Turner’s words, “would be masculine, entrepreneurial, well-educated, and white.”\footnote{Turner, \textit{From Counterculture}, 97.} It is not a coincidence that this also describes the world of the early Web, of Silicon Valley, of the ground for these supposedly inclusive, supposedly incorporeal new spaces and communities. Beth Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman have argued that the switch for race online is usually “‘off’ (i.e., race is an invisible concept because it’s simultaneously unmarked and undiscussed).”\footnote{Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman, “Race in Cyberspace: An Introduction,” in \textit{Race in Cyberspace}, ed. Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.} But not talking about race is not the same as not being shaped by it, and, indeed, silence is a key marker of privilege. Richard Dyer has influentially argued that “whiteness…is in but not of the body,” that it exercises power by remaining unmarked, unnoticed, universal.\footnote{Richard Dyer, \textit{White} (New York: Routledge, 1997), 14.} Sally Robinson agrees, asserting that “white
male power has benefited enormously from keeping whiteness and masculinity in the dark” because “[w]hat is invisible…evades the cultural marking that distances the subject from universalizing constructions of identity and narratives of experience.” The successful deployment of digital utopianism required, “leav[ing] our bodies behind,” separating the mind from the racially and sexually marked body, supposedly freeing it from the weight of such fleshly limitations to access the ethereal space of true belonging. But, as Michael Warner has asserted, such an “ability to abstract oneself…has always been an unequally available resource.” You cannot snap your fingers and wish the race and gender away, and so the dream of a common consciousness in a digital age assumes the freedom and weightlessness of white masculinity. And thus the disembodied virtuality so central to the new fantasy was less a solution for than a continuation of the assumptions (of universal whiteness, of shared middle-class identity) that hobbled common consciousness to begin with.

Alongside this constitutive (and deeply flawed) opposition of mind and flesh lies another influential binary: between bits and bytes on the one hand, and paper and ink on the other. So much commentary about books over the past several decades has been about this opposition, and about the seemingly undeniable, inevitable supremacy of the digital. Paper rots, ink fades, and you can’t even press Ctrl-F on a book and find what you want in an instant. Not to mention you have to actually carry a book—in a bookmobile, perhaps—to get it from one place to another. The horror. But we are, the story goes, moving swiftly and cleanly from this sad, papered-over world to a new, instantaneous, rot-free, touch-screen, shiny-smooth digital universe. But the real

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*Sally Robinson, Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1. Robinson also warns that the scholarly marking of white male bodies has more in common with the politics it seeks to refute than those scholars would likely want to admit. In post-1960s America, Robinson argues, white men have increasingly drawn on narratives of being made visible as white men (being torn out of the space of the universal) as ways of articulating opposition to feminism, affirmative action, and other progressive socio-political transformations. It is necessary, then, to not assume that marking whiteness or masculinity is enough to constitute a progressive act. 

*Warner, Publics and Counterpublics*, 160.
story, perhaps unsurprisingly, is so much messier than that. Transitions between information forms are never clean or easy or straightforward. Manuscripts, for example, coexisted with printed books for centuries after the invention of the printing press; the latter’s supposed triumph was slow, uneven, and always incomplete.\footnote{\textcite{mckitterick:print-manuscript-search-order-1450-1830}} This is certainly true today. As Siva Vaidhyanathan puts it, “[w]e are dazzled and distracted by the new methods of transmitting and using this knowledge, but most of the best expressions of deep human thinking still rest on paper, bound with glue, nestled and protected by cloth covers, on the shelves of libraries around the world.”\footnote{\textcite{vaidhyanathan:googlization-everything}} But I want to go a further than this claim that books continue to matter because not all information is digital. What I will suggest here is that books continue to matter even after the information they contain is “freed” from the page, just as flesh still matters in the ether.\footnote{\textcite{mak:page-matters}}

As this chapter will show, both of these digital utopian hopes—the belief that bodies don’t shape online communication and the conviction that paper no longer matters—depend, fundamentally, on misapprehensions of space and its politics. Physical bodies, physical books, and physical spaces remain central, I argue, to the construction of communities in the twenty-first century. To do so, this chapter focuses on the Internet Archive, which was founded in 1996 to preserve the Web and is now focused on digitizing and archiving, well, everything ever. The Internet Archive is an institution both confidently and awkwardly bestride the divisions at stake here: between ethereal environments and physical places, between physical bodies and incorporeal ideas, between printed pages and digital information. Unlike Google, which expands

\footnote{\textcite{mckitterick:print-manuscript-search-order-1450-1830} See David McKitterick, \textit{Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450-1830} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).}
\footnote{\textcite{vaidhyanathan:googlization-everything} Siva Vaidhyanathan, \textit{The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012 [2011]), 150.}
\footnote{\textcite{mak:page-matters} I draw here, in part, on Bonnie Mak’s claim that “[e]very digital page has a specific materiality and therefore matters in its own way. Suffused with individual circumstances of production, circulation, and transmission, each page is witness to and participates in its own social history, even in the digital present.” Bonnie Mak, \textit{How the Page Matters} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 71.}
information access in order to monetize it, the Internet Archive works in the long tradition this
dissertation has thus far explored. The digital-age heir (for better and for worse) to Melvil Dewey,
to Kathryn Johnston, to Henry Legler, the Internet Archive is an institution dedicated to
“Universal access to all knowledge.” It is a born-digital archive the logo of which borrows its
iconography from physical library spaces. And, most strikingly, the Internet Archive had a
bookmobile. After first examining the politics and problems of the digital utopians’ approach to
paper, the chapter will turn to the Internet Archive’s practices of production and distribution. We
will look at how central bodies and spaces are to the process of digitization, as well as how it
creates a legacy for the paper page in the digital archive. We will then examine the Internet
Archive’s bizarre but illustrative bookmobile, which turned digital files back into paper books.
The chapter will close by looking at what happened when an Internet Archive-affiliated
bookmobile stopped at Walden Pond, in order to argue that the regulation of space (not just of
ideas) matters for creating actual, functioning communities more than a century after the Kansas
Traveling Library began.

In 2007, Brewster Kahle, founder of the Internet Archive, assured an audience that
“books are within our grasp.” But despite his utopian confidence, what a “book” is—not to
mention what “grasp” means or who “our” refers to—was very much up in the air. What this
uncertainty meant, and how it affected the rethinking of common consciousness in the twenty-
first century, is the subject of this chapter.

“Some Better Way to Distribute Information”: Digital Utopianism and the Friction of Print

781 “Brewster Kahle builds a free digital library.” TED video, 20:02, December 2007,
In 1984, Stewart Brand organized a gathering of hackers north of San Francisco. In the course of conversations that weekend, which included Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, Brand spoke some of the most famous words ever uttered in the history of computing:

On the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it’s so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other.\textsuperscript{782}

But only one part of this statement really gets remembered: \textit{information wants to be free}. An adaptation of earlier statements of hacker ethics, the phrase played a significant role in the early years of digital communications. \textit{Wired} editor-in-chief Chris Anderson, focusing primarily on the economic dimensions, claimed that this selective remembering was a matter of rejecting the “paradoxical and tautological” tension at work in the longer passage.\textsuperscript{783} But more important, it seems, is that, when the phrase is unmoored from Brand’s longer argument, the semantic ambiguity of the word \textit{free} comes out to play. Particularly with the anthropomorphic twist Brand gave it, wherein information \textit{wants}, the object of that desire seems less likely to be the state of being unpriced than that of being unencumbered. It was not so much a question of economy as it was one of liberty (which is not to say that liberty has nothing to do with economics). That this distinction mattered, and that the second meaning was key to the phrase’s popularity, makes sense, because early ideas about digital information were largely fantasies of frictionlessness. The dream of digital distribution was, in other words, a fantasy of unfettered flow.

The founders of the traveling library had dreamed of moving books faster and further, of creating infrastructures that would take knowledge off of shelves and out of buildings. But the

\textsuperscript{782} For a genealogy of this passage, see Chris Anderson, \textit{Free: The Future of a Radical Price} (New York: Hyperion, 2009), 94-100.

\textsuperscript{783} Anderson, \textit{Free}, 97. Brand himself told Anderson that he was trying to highlight a paradox between expensive and free, one of the “[p]aradoxes [that] drive the things we care about.” Anderson \textit{Free}, 99.
purpose of the traveling library, like the bookmobile, was not merely to transport information, and those other purposes depended on friction. There was F.A. Hutchins, the secretary of the Wisconsin Free Library Commission, who wrote of “[e]nthusiasm...that seemed to kindle at the touch,” remember, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s image of common consciousness as that which “lifts and lights and enlarges the human soul of kindling majesty.” The physical transportation of books through space, and amongst people, was meant to bring people together as much as move data from one place to another. But if, as the digital utopians imagined, you could move that data without running into any obstacles and without rubbing up against any people along the way, how would common consciousness come into being? Indeed, while the larger culture of the early internet often centered on questions of community and (disembodied) interaction, we will see in this section that when they focused on print, their fantasies were more interested in efficiency and flow than they were in contact and belonging.

In 1972 the Advanced Research Projects Agency, the government office largely responsible for the birth of the internet, released a film about networks and flow. Computer Networks: Heralds of Resource Sharing (1972) aims to tell the then-recent history of networked computing, and all the big names are there. A young Bob Kahn—co-inventor, with Vinton Cerf, of the Transmission Control Protocol and the Internet Protocol—is on hand, standing in front of a blackboard, explaining the structure of a computer network linked by IMPs (Interface Message Processors). That structure is a result of technical limitations, but despite elisions and erasures in the film, it is clear that those limitations were shaped by and themselves shaped some very human senses of grace and efficiency. When you try to connect every computer in a

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784 Hutchins, Traveling Libraries, 6; Gilman, Human Work, 889.
network to every other computer, Kahn explains at his blackboard, “the extension of the network is just not a graceful thing.” Ultimately, it’s much more efficient, ironically, to take the long way around.

Picking up from Kahn, Lawrence Roberts—who used packet-switching to develop the ARPANET, the precursor to the internet—explains, in rather grand terms why such graceful, efficient networks matter:

The problem is much like small civilizations or small cities trying to develop separately and not having any way of sharing what they learn with other groups. And if that continues to happen, you don’t have a civilization, so that the necessity was to provide a mechanism so that what was learned one place could be transferred effectively and directly to other places without redoing it all and learning it all over again in each place.

The strange thing about this little speech is that it plays as the camera pans across an engraving [FIGURE 35] that depicts the making of William Penn’s treaty with the Delaware in the late seventeenth century. Strange but not entirely inexplicable. After all, one of the foundational myths of American life—the myth that gave us Thanksgiving—is that a nation born out of force and displacement really had its origins in the friendly exchange of information. In this deeply amnesiac telling, moving data (agricultural techniques, Christianity, treaty terms) back and forth first saved the colonists and then civilized the natives, ultimately creating the United States in the process. Refashioned for an age of digital technology, this story makes empire shorthand for connection but promises even more efficiently fruitful contact zones, ones made not of soil and flesh but ones and zeroes.

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786 It seems likely that the engraving was chosen to depict a generic encounter between European colonists and Native Americans and not for any reason having specifically to do with Penn.
Those zeroes and ones are a much better option, the film assures its viewers. “The computer technology has been moving in a way,” the film’s biggest name—J.C.R. Licklider, whose work influenced most aspects of digital computing in the late twentieth century—explains early on, “that nothing else that people have ever known has moved.” And we should be quite thankful, he suggests, as previous sorts of mobility fell a bit short:

It’s been hard to, well, share information for years. The printing press, of course, was the great step into sharing information, but the printing press didn’t essentially handle the problem of distributing it. It handled the problem of copying it. And we have been needing for a long time some better way to distribute information than to carry it about. The print on paper form is embarrassing, because in order to distribute information, you’ve got to move the paper around. And lots of paper gets to be bulky and heavy and expensive to move about.\footnote{Combining understatement (“for years,” meaning half a millennium) with hyperbole (“embarrassing”)—and mixing a dream for a glorious future with a shuddering disregard for the past—this is a perfect encapsulation of the techno-utopian approach to information and its histories. All that stuff that came before Babbage? Possibly important, we suppose, but also rather dirty and difficult and only interesting insofar as it led to the dawn of computing. “I tend to believe that things are going to be considerably better for a lot of people when and if we ever get changed over to an essentially electronic base,” Licklider continues. “It’s just fundamental that if one wants to deal with information, you ought to deal with the information and not with the paper it’s written on.” The weight of paper, the feel of it against skin, its passage through space, was irrelevant at best and a hindrance at worst.}

Licklider was certain, in the way of digital utopians (then and now), that information can and should be separated from the form it takes, that it can and should be encountered directly and

\footnote{One wonders if Licklider would look back at the pile of violated treaties between colonists or the U.S. government and native tribes—the violated treaties the video tries to ignore—and decide that the real problem was the paper they were printed on.}
without friction or interference, that it can and should be free. The point of networking
information, according to Licklider and his fellows, was to take it out of the hands of people, and
off the paths they traveled. Users could connect with information, and even with one another, on
demand, without any messy stuff getting in the way. With computer networking, Licklider
promised, information need not “be copied and sent all over the country,” as it “come[s] out of
the database and appear on everybody’s scope, and the correlation, the coordination, of the
activity is essentially right there in the computer network itself.” Of course, Licklider knew well
the technical and infrastructural requirements of that appearance (and the film itself goes on at
rather excruciating length about them). But Licklider sees speed defeat distance—a
“geographically distributed” team can be constantly “in touch” with one another and their data—
and his oracular voice does not allow such particulars to impede. Information simply appears,
and thank God for it.

This was a long way from the Kansas Traveling Library, which required May Pressley to
“make a circuit” of her neighbors before she even touched a printed book, or even from the
booketerias that, however they fetishized efficiency, encouraged undeniably embodied
encounters with physical books alongside encounters with cereal and canned soup. On a
computer network, according to Licklider, interactions with and around information are precisely
targeted and oh-so-smooth. Users identify what they want to see, or who they want to
communicate with, and it happens. This is a vision without couriers, without librarians, without
the accidental or frustrating or serendipitous or strange. It is a dream of a world without
friction.789 “And this is obviously going to make a tremendous difference,” Licklider assures the

789 More recently, but along strikingly similar lines, a tech writer wrote that we usually think about “digital
communities” by visualizing how “internet gatherings can bridge massive distances at miniscule cost while
viewer in his characteristically grand and dismissive way, “in how we plan, organize, and execute almost everything of any intellectual consequence.”

That included libraries, or at least the functions libraries served. In the 1972 film, over images of library stacks and bookshelves [FIGURE 36], Licklider had presciently fantasized about the way personal computing might kill paper and change the shape of book culture: “if everyone had a display console in his home and in his office, he could be reading from electronically-stored information instead of from a book, and the difference is he could have access to anything he wanted to read instead of just what was within reach.” Licklider’s fantasies of reading at a distance, and his concomitant faith in electronic impulses over pulped wood, had a long shelf-life. Twenty years later, for example, Robert Coover wrote in the New York Times that “out in the humming digitalized precincts” of hackers and computer networks, “the very proliferation of books and other print-based media, so prevalent in this forest-harvesting, paper-wasting age, is held to be a sign of its feverish moribundity, the last futile gasp of a once vital form before it finally passes away forever, dead as God.”790 (Licklider’s flair for the dramatic, as you can see, also continued apace.)

And a year after that, the inaugural issue of Wired magazine—periodical scripture for Web-era digital evangelism—including an article that updated Licklider’s dream. “The world’s great libraries share a great vision,” John Browning wrote in the 1993 article: “Books once hoarded in subterranean stacks will be scanned into computers and made available to anyone, anywhere, almost instantly.”791 This image of stacks unfolded out into the world was a familiar dispensing with all those sticky real-world inconveniences.” Bill Wasik, “Planet TEDx,” Wired, December 2012, 198.

one by 1993. Thanks to digital technology, according to the fantasies of instantaneous and total connection it occasioned, libraries could enact the open shelving so central to the Cold War bookmobiles we saw in Chapter Three on a total scale. From this straightforward, if a bit febrile, description of stacks opening up, Browning’s metaphors proliferate around images of digital flow and papery blockage. If libraries can scan, scan, scan, then they will “break[ ] down the walls that separate libraries from each other and their users” and become—as the article title puts it—“Libraries Without Walls for Books Without Pages.” Linking the falling of walls to the absence of pages, Browning presents paper as a sort of prison. It is not merely inconvenient or embarrassing but limiting and restricting. Information is trapped by paper which, in turn, trapped by walls. Proposing a jailbreak of sorts, Browning predicts that large-scale scanning will mean that “[i]nstead of fortresses of knowledge, there will be an ocean of information.” The progressives who dreamed up the traveling library and then the bookmobile were no fans of walls. As we saw in Chapter One, Melvil Dewey warned against “allow[ing] even the smallest obstacle to remain between any citizens and the desire for…information” and, like Browning, he turned to a bit of liquid imagery, called for knowledge to be “as free as…water.” But what Dewey seemed to have in mind was the frictional, disruptive flow of a river, with its unpredictable currents and changing scenery, and not the smooth and even placidity of a wide, wide ocean.

792 While utopian in many of the same ways as Licklider, Browning is a bit more grounded when it comes to considering the potential consequences of digitization and open access, predicting a showdown (or, more optimistically, a “compromise”) between libraries and publishers. He also acknowledges that technical limitations would frustrate the immediate realization of his proposal: “The electronic image of a book is still a few gigabytes worth of information, and a gigabyte is a helluva lot of data—several times more than what fits into most of today’s computers or flows conveniently through computer networks. Browning, “Libraries Without Walls.”
The dream of a library without walls was in no way new.794 (It had been part of the traveling library movement from the beginning.) But the image did have particular salience at this moment when the free flow of information was celebrated by both hackers and federal bureaucrats alike.795 Librarians themselves were excited, but also more than a bit nervous, about what they knew would be the very real consequences of a library without walls.

Less than six months before Browning’s article saw print, American Libraries (the house publication of the American Library Association) published a very different column with a rather similar name: “Libraries without walls; or, Librarians without a profession.” The column’s author, Bruce Park, acknowledged that his title is “perhaps a little melodramatic,” but he argued that the profession of librarianship is, indeed, disappearing “through a process called marginalization.” Park was specifically worried that library automation, which was taking over many of the “more tedious tasks” of librarianship, would leave so little work left that it could be done by volunteers, and the profession would be “pushed off to the side or to the margins.” Park offered a rather reasonable call to action for librarians to “change or redefine our relationship to this changing new environment.”

But the cartoon that accompanies the column, by Jim Flynn, illustrated more basic, deeper fears about the prospect of a library without walls, or books without pages. In the cartoon [FIGURE 37], a librarian clings desperately to the edge of

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795 Plans for a National Information Infrastructure (also known as the “information superhighway”), for example, was institutionalized and popularized after the passage of the High Performance Computing Act of 1991. According to Donald A.B. Lindberg, who directed the National Coordination Office for High Performance Computing and Communications, the NII was “envisioned as a seamless web of communications networks, computers, databases, and consumer electronics that will make unprecedented amounts of information available to U.S. citizens from all walks of life.” Donald A.B. Lindberg, “HPCC and the National Information Infrastructure: an overview,” Bulletin of the Medical Library Association 83 (1995): 29.


797 For analysis of an earlier project that similarly combined excitement about technology with concern about its implications for labor and the profession echoes earlier, see Downey, “The Librarian and the Univac,” 37-52.
a desk made of pages, which is balanced precariously at the edge of an open book as an Apple II-like computer, having sprouted arms and legs, uses the eraser end of a pencil to push the desk, and the librarian, over the edge. Several books have already fallen off of the desk and are tumbling through the blank space beyond the page. The librarian seems shortly to follow. A depiction, as if in a fever dream, of the challenges libraries and libraries faced in the last decade of the twentieth century, the cartoon captures the suspicion, and sense of palpable menace, with which librarians could sometimes view digital technologies.  

The funny thing is that Park’s worries about the encroachment of digital technology, and Flynn’s visualization of them, are structured by reference to the page. Marginalization is a page-borne image, and Flynn’s cartoon has computers and librarians battling it out for a territory that takes the form of page 86 of some unnamed book. Given Licklider’s antipathy toward paper, and Browning’s dismissal of it, you might think this a bit antiquated, even in 1992, and wonder what an en-limbed Apple II would even want with some silly, useless page. But it turns out, as we will see the next section, that pages (along with the messy inconvenience of human bodies) would be ironically central to actually achieving Licklider’s and Browning’s dream.

“Within Our Grasp”: Bodies, Pages, and the Space of Digitization

In December 2007, Brewster Kahle walked out onto the stage at a TED conference in Los Angeles, California, and began to talk about the inscription—“Free to All”—carved above the doors of the Boston Public Library. Kahle, a computer engineer and (after the 1990s sale of several companies to AOL and Amazon) a very wealthy man, had founded the Internet Archive.

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798 Which is not to say, at all, that the profession did not embrace computing and put it to innovative, if not always entirely successful, ends throughout the latter part of the century.
799 “Brewster Kahle builds a free digital library.”
in 1996 to maintain a record of the internet. But by the time Kahle walked onto that stage in 2007, the Internet Archive’s ambitions had expanded to include pretty much everything. Kahle wanted to take the Boston library’s motto and make it happen on a massive scale. “[U]niversal access to all knowledge is within our grasp,” he declared before talking about the Internet Archive’s goal of digitizing all of the published (and much of the unpublished) media in existence and making them available, for free, to all (or, at least, to anyone with internet access). Sixteen months earlier, Kahle had addressed the Society of American Archivists in Washington, D.C., rhapsodizing about “the dream of having it all.” He proposed, in that speech, ideas he said could put “the goal of universal access to all within our grasp.”

This was, and remains, a rather radical and impractical dream. Kahle’s signature phrase—“universal access to all knowledge”—contains not just one but two universalizing, totalizing gestures: access should not only be universal, but it should be to everything. And following on Licklider’s heels, it might be easy to think that the shift from paper to pixels is a matter of snapping one’s fingers, of a rapid and clean shift from dead trees to electrical impulses. Paper is over, in other words, so let’s get on with it. But transitions are never so smooth, perhaps especially when it comes to books. Another of Kahle’s favored images, that of the grasp, highlights the more physical and contingent dimensions of his utopian dream. A grasp is finite and bodily—it is a profoundly un-digital image. (It was, after all, the prospect of having access to only that information that was “within reach” that Licklider so disdained.) For Kahle, achieving this universal connection means we must reach, stretch, grasp; we must close our collective fingers around collective knowledge and squeeze. Indeed, while Kahle begins and ends his speeches with grand proclamations about the importance of universal access, and while

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he tends to gloss over obstacles with evangelical confidence, he nevertheless spends a lot of time on the nitty-gritty economic and physical necessities of his dream. The Library of Congress contains about 26 million books, he told the Society of American Archivists:

If a book is about a megabyte, 26 million books is 26 million megabytes…so it would take 26 terabytes to store all the words in the Library of Congress. In current terms, that’s a computer that’s about the size of this podium and costs about $60,000. So for $60,000 you could buy a computer system that could store all the words in all the books of the Library of Congress. Pretty Cool.\textsuperscript{801}

Pretty cool, indeed. And surprisingly specific.

Adrian Johns has argued that digitization is a self-consciously revolutionary act, part of efforts by the information revolution’s “protagonists to articulate, get to grips with, and redirect the historical trajectories in which they were living.”\textsuperscript{802} True, Kahle is constantly lining up those trajectories, reaching back to “the dream of the Library of Alexandria” and forward to a beautiful, digital future.\textsuperscript{803} But in Kahle’s case, this work of grappling with the past—this effort to “seize upon history in order to reshape it”—is not merely symbolic or rhetorical.\textsuperscript{804} While it is true that more and more books are “born digital,” dreams like Kahle’s rely on not just offering access to all knowledge created from now on; they must offer a way to make all knowledge retrospectively digital. They must, then, take hold of the past’s physical traces and quite literally reshape it for a digital future.\textsuperscript{805}

Indeed, if we think about not just the digital but the \textit{digitized}, then a whole process opens up before us, a process that depends, intimately, on physical bodies, physical pages, and physical

\textsuperscript{801} Kahle, “Universal Access,” 24.
\textsuperscript{804} Johns, “Gutenberg and the Samurai,” 861.
\textsuperscript{805} Importantly, of course, Kahle can only hope to provide “universal access” to knowledge that has attained physical form. Oral tradition that is never recorded in text, audio, or video, for example, is never going to be a part of “all knowledge” made available through the Internet Archive.
spaces. Speaking before the Society of American Archivists, Kahle explained that the Internet Archive had established sites to scan books inside libraries. (It was cheaper to ship books to India for scanning, he said, but libraries were wary of letting their materials go quite that far.) They had tried out some robotic scanners, but “they weren’t reliable.” So instead, they went back to “a simpler system—manual page-turning.” That supposedly “simpler” system? An assemblage of metal, glass, silicon, and flesh. In the system the Internet Archive settled on, a person sits before an apparatus that includes a cradle with a glass plate that lifts up and down to flatten the book for clarity, powerful lighting to create an even image, two high-resolution cameras (one for verso, one for recto), and a computer [FIGURE 38]. The scanner (who is a human worker, not the machine that usually takes that name) uses a pedal to raise and lower the glass plate, turning the pages as she photographs them and verifies their quality. The scanner’s body echoes a constellation of older forms of labor. She uses a pedal to power a machine, like generations of garment workers; she raises and lifts a plate, like a printer; she sits, carefully reproducing pages, like a monk in a scriptorium. (It is not a coincidence that the apparatus the Internet Archive designed is called the Scribe.)

This physicality could surprise those steeped in the dream of digital disembodiment. In 2008, Wired magazine warned its readers that “those picturing an efficient, automated process involving robotic arms and high-tech scanners” might be disappointed by the “primitive” set-up and by the “monastic diligence” required to “manually turn pages all day.” Perhaps to keep

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806 You can see one of the robots in action (sort of) here: http://archive.org/details/scanning_robot
808 This, of course, echoes the political and etymological life of the word “computer,” which as Jennifer Light describes used to refer to women who—by performing computations necessary for ballistics calculations—played a fundamental but now-forgotten role in the early history of computing. Jennifer S. Light, “When Computers Were Women,” Technology & Culture 40 (1999): 455-483.
Wired readers’ virtue intact, the article’s accompanying slide show largely trims out the lived reality of the scanning center at the University of California’s Northern Regional Library Facility. Two thirds of the photographs include no humans at all, reveling instead in gadgets like cameras, print-on-demand machines, and servers. Most of the images are close up, cutting out the environment in which these technologies and the human scanner both work. But the last photo—of Robert Miller, the Internet Archive’s Director of Books—breaks this pattern somewhat, showing a shelving unit with plastic boxes overflowing, and what appears to be a canister of cleaning wipes wedged, sideways, between the top shelf and the ceiling. The obligation to show a particular, important person, opened up Wired to depicting the actual, cluttered, and very human environment in which digital technology usually operates.

An undated tour of a Toronto scanning center, posted by the Internet Archive to show how its facilities work, is less shy about the messy, embodied humanity at the heart of this digital utopia. The needs of the body are present: one scanner’s water bottle sits beside her left foot, and the camera passes by chair after chair draped with scanners’ coats and sweatshirts while the cameraperson sidesteps a fan, likely necessary for humans working amidst bright lights and whirring servers [FIGURE 39]. The consequences of so many old books and so many human bodies—all that brittle cellulose and sloughing skin—are also visible, as the camera lingers on a disused book truck [FIGURE 40] holding a half-empty roll of paper towels and a Swiffer duster. For all the claims of those who, like medievalist Michael Camille, decry the distance between the sensual page and the surface-skimming screen, the body—sweating, thirsty, grasping, grimy—is in fact central to the production of digitized text.

811 “While a computer image can only convey the optical surface information from the original object,” Camille writes, “the manuscript itself is a locus of all five senses there depicted.” Michael Camille, “Sensations of the Page:
And far from simply freeing information from a paper prison, digitization in many ways actually highlights and extends the original, physical form of the book. Bonnie Mak has, following Roger Chartier, argued that while the digital page “may imitate the look and behaviour of counterparts in parchment and paper, it has its own distinct materiality.”812 This is undoubtedly true: marked up in XML and stored on mirrored servers, books preserved by the Internet Archive take new form that affects both meaning and use. But I want to suggest here that the *old* form remains crucial, if perhaps inadvertently so, to the life and meaning of the digitized text. Take, for example, *Emerging Communities: Integrating Networked Information into Library Services*. In early April, 1993, a group of librarians and technologists gathered at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. They were there to discuss the place of computer networks in libraries, especially the ways that they were increasingly “allowing librarians to develop new electronic communities with their colleagues and patrons.”813 Out of that meeting emerged a collection of essays (from which I’ve just quoted), edited by Ann Bishop and published by GSLIS. One copy of the resulting book sat on a University of Illinois Library shelf until sometime in early 2007, when it found its way to the second floor of the University Library’s off-site, high-density library storage building, where two Internet Archive Scribe stations sit in a small, high-ceilinged room. There, according to the metadata for the book’s entry in the Internet Archive catalog, it was scanned by someone named Tricia Leonard (or, rather, “scanner-tricia-leonard”).814 Flipping page after page,

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scanner-tricia-leonard took 324 pictures of the book, and the information the book contained is now available free of charge to anyone with internet access.

But what scanner-tricia-leonard recorded, and what is now available through the Internet Archive, is not the disembodied content of *Emerging Communities*, nor an unspecific, Platonic ideal of it. When you open it in PDF (which presents the book as a linear series of pages) or in “Read Online” format (which mimics the layout of a codex with what Kahle calls a “page-turny interface”[ ]), you see the images recorded by scanner-tricia-leonard’s cameras.815 And in those images, you see more than just ideas. You see, because the Internet Archive has made it visible and widely accessible, the particular history of a particular copy of *Emerging Communities*. I want to walk through just the first few pages of the file, to show how this works and its larger implications. The file’s second page—after the somewhat awkwardly-reproduced image of the gold-embossed cover—is a page that appears blank except for a stamp, unevenly inked and pressed a bit off center. The stamp, “UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN LIB. SCIENCE,” indicates that this copy of *Emerging Communities* initially found its home on the shelves of the Library and Information Science departmental library before likely being transferred to off-site storage and then to the Internet Archive scanning center.

The following image tells us even more about this physical book’s physical history. The Internet Archive’s habit of scanning every last page, as-is, has reproduced a bright yellow due-date slip [FIGURE 41]. The slip is a story of the book’s past. It reminds us again that the book lived, for a while at least, in the Library and Information Science library. A hand-written notation tells us when the book was processed—that a library worker took the slip, slid it along a glue-dispensing wheel, and pasted it into this copy of *Emerging Communities* on July 5, 1994. It also

815 “Brewster Kahle builds a free digital library.”
tells us that this copy of the book (the University Library currently holds three copies) was, while not hugely popular, checked out seven times in the 1990s, and then seven times between 2001 and 2007. We can see that on October 27, 1994, the due-date stamp failed, or that it was dialed to the wrong date, or that the library worker found a pen handier than the stamp. We can see very visible, very physical evidence that the slip’s careful, prescriptive design—in particular its vertical columns—made no difference at the hustle and bustle of the circulation desk. Only nine of the dates are anything approaching horizontal, and none of them fit neatly between the lines. The messiness of human bodies and human minds once again intercedes in the realm of digital information.

The next page, the verso of the front flyleaf, appears blank: no text, no stamps, no slips. But it is not, in fact, blank. The image is not an absence but rather a record of a certain sort of presence. It is, after all, not an empty file but a high-resolution photograph of a piece of paper, paper that had been pulped from trees, cut to size and bound into this particular copy of Emerging Communities. The image has the slightly yellowed tone of aging paper, and it sits in the file as presently, as fully, as the page it depicts sat in the original copy of the book. Moving past it requires physical work—the click of an arrow key or the swipe of a mouse, in place of a grip and a flip—and you cannot help but see it. Thus, on this page, the visual politics of digitization at work on all the pages becomes most clear. According to the figures Kahle presented to the Society for American Archivists in 2006, the cost of scanning a single page of a

816 Intriguingly, when something like the slip is put through optical character recognition, which allows for full-text searching and display, the results are delightfully, peculiarly uneven. The bits of printed legalese at the top of the slip, about replacement costs and the like, reproduce just fine. “NOTICE: return or renew all Library Materials! The Minimum Fee for each Lost Book is $50,000,” the beginning of the full-text version of this page reads. The italics don’t translate, but the text is clear. Immediately following that sentence, though, is the OCR rendering of a handwritten date: “*n C^ CJ.” Despite these glaring imperfections, though, it is still resolutely present, though its presence is rather more occult than in the formats that simply reproduce the visual page. “Full text of ‘Emerging communities: integrating networked information into library services,’ Internet Archive, http://archive.org/stream/emergingcommunit94clin/emergingcommunit94clin_djvu.txt.
book in an Internet Archive scanning center, using a Scribe machine and a human scanner, was ten cents.\textsuperscript{817} Not too much really, but if we take Kahle’s goal of digitizing the entire contents of the Library of Congress (about 26 million at the time of his speech) seriously, then the cost of reproducing the verso of the front flyleaves would be 260 million cents, or $2.6 million. Quite an investment if the goal was merely to make a book’s content available online. In books digitized in service of Brewster Kahle’s dream of universal access to all knowledge, what is reproduced and made widely accessible is not the knowledge itself but rather images of one way that knowledge was expressed physically in the world. If the purpose and effect were just the freeing of information from its paper confines, then this page, even more than the previous two, would be wildly beside the point.

But the logic of reproducing the cover and \textit{every single page}, including images of blank sheets of paper, becomes clearer when we take into account the full shape of Kahle’s peculiar dream. According to Kahle, one of the chief benefits of digitization is, surprisingly enough, “the ability to deliver paper remotely.”\textsuperscript{818} In his speech, he walked the archivists through the process he had in mind: “Take the archives’ and the libraries’ stuff, digitize it and put it on the Net, and then turn it back into paper.”\textsuperscript{819} He acknowledged to the archivists that the idea was, perhaps, “a little old-fashioned,” and he admitted in his TED talk that the idea might be “a little retro,” but he still believed in it.\textsuperscript{820} “I like the physical book,” he told the TED audience.\textsuperscript{821} “The idea of actually delivering books to people is, I think, a good thing,” he admitted to the archivists.\textsuperscript{822} And how would we do it? How would he go from paper to code to paper again, “delivering

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{817} Kahle, “Universal Access,” 25.
\textsuperscript{818} Kahle, “Universal Access,” 24.
\textsuperscript{819} Kahle, “Universal Access,” 24-25.
\textsuperscript{821} “Brewster Kahle builds a free digital library.”
\textsuperscript{822} Kahle, “Universal Access,” 25.
\end{footnotesize}
books to people” who were scattered and bookless? Well, like generations before him, Kahle
turned to the bookmobile. In doing so, he invested not only in the physical form of the book but
also in the communities he thought it could build in physical space.

“A Van on a Mission”: The Internet Archive Bookmobile

Early in 2002, Brewster Kahle traveled to Alexandria, Egypt, to present a copy of the
Internet Archive to the Egyptian Government. “Ms. Mubarak was grateful for the donation of
100 terabytes of web, 3,000 hours of Egyptian and U.S. government television, 1,000 movies,
and a book-scanning facility,” Kahle explained later that year. “Then she said, ‘But I love my
books.’” This encounter with a dictator’s wife led, he claimed in 2002 (by the time the TED talk
rolled around, Suzanne Mubarak had been scrubbed from the story), to a flash of insight about
freedom and access: “At that moment, I realized, if I wanted to build a digital library, the Web
would not be enough. We need to do books. You can’t build a library without books.”
By the end of September of that year, Kahle had turned this epiphany into a plan—and, more
importantly, into a van.

Specifically, into a 1992 Ford Aerostar minivan sprouting a satellite dish and stuffed with
a printer, paper cutter, and bookbinding machine and plastered with a decal that promised
“1,000,000 Books Inside (soon)” [FIGURE 42]. On September 30, 2002, the Internet Archive
Bookmobile (sometimes known as the Internet Bookmobile) set off on a cross-country trip,
stopping at schools, at libraries, at the International Inventors Museum, at the Great American
Bookmobile Conference, and at the U.S. Supreme Court (more on that later). This bookmobile
did not carry any books; it carried, instead, the potential for books. A “van on a mission,” as

823 Richard Koman, “Riding along with the Internet Bookmobile,” Salon, October 9, 2002,
passenger Richard Koman put it, the bookmobile was intended to promote both the public domain and print-on-demand technology. In doing so, the bookmobile would also make (or at least try to make) Kahle’s dream of remote paper a reality. “This technology,” Kahle crowed to the TED audience, “may end up actually putting books back in people’s hands again.” This was, of course, characteristically utopian and unrealistically ambitious.

But, to a surprising degree, it also wasn’t entirely wrong. Sure, a single Aerostar was not going to utterly transform American society. But on the ground—at the Belle Haven School in East Palo Alto, California, at the Newman School in Salt Lake City, at the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh—and in the moment, the bookmobile did change the reach and grasp of American book culture. Perhaps ironically, by digitizing books and putting them on the road, Kahle managed to make them even more physical. At each stop, the staff (Kahle and several friends for the first trip) helped attendees use the bookmobile’s technology to print, cut, and bind a public-domain, Internet Archive text into a book. In this context, then, books are not objects mysteriously made and transported from afar. They are the product of the reader’s bodily interaction with data, paper, and machines [FIGURE 43]. And, too, the books are products of interaction between “librarian” and user [FIGURE 44]. Indeed, like the Taos County Project’s bookmobile, a primary purpose of the Internet Archive Bookmobile was to occasion particular, pedagogical encounters. But where the Taos encounters were to be determined in advance by bureaucrats, the Internet Archive Bookmobile represented a very different sort of dream, one that combined the radical openness of hacker culture with the physicality and anti-corporate ethos of the DIY movement.

The idea was to teach people how to make books, using the public domain

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824 Koman, “Riding along.”
825 On another complex intersection of these two movements, see Katrien Jacobs, Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
and resources like the Internet Archive to free themselves from the tyranny of media
corporations and revel in their own power to create. The bookmobile embodied a vision of
“insta-book freedom.”

And it was not just books that would be transformed and transforming but also the spaces
they inhabit. When the bookmobile stopped in Salt Lake City, one teacher declared it “the
coolest thing ever,” continuing: “Where I taught in Chicago, the school library has hardly any
space, hardly any shelves, and what shelves they do have, have hardly any books. You walk in
the library and there’s no there there.” A print-on-demand setup, he explains, “could completely
change kids’ lives. … This would be such a great thing for them.”

The unstated and unstable irony here is that with such a set-up, the shelves would still be empty, perhaps emptier, and the
“there” might be even less visibly “there,” hidden away in hard drives and cables. One also
wonders where a school district without the funds to buy books for an existing library would find
the tens of thousands of dollars necessary to print them on demand. But it is important and
illustrative that the fantasy here is not entirely digital or entirely analog, but a meeting of the two.
The introduction of digital books to the school library—and, too, the technology to take those
bits and bytes and render them in paper and ink—connects local space to distant repositories,
one’s fingers to the ether. Indeed, it aims to create a fishing pier, of sorts, over what Browning
called the “ocean of information” that digitization would create, making it possible to reach into
that sea of data and pluck out a personal, physical encounter.

826 Koman, “Riding Along.”
827 Koman, “Riding Along.”
828 The Internet Archive tended to talk very optimistically about the capital investment necessary for a print-on-
demand system. A table on one bookmobile-related webpage lays out the cost of each component, concluding that it
cost them $14,000 to build the bookmobile (thanks to discounts from Hewlett-Packard totaling over $12,500). “As
long as we have the Internet and a printer,” a school principal told Koman, “we can create these books for students
and the library.” But, of course, internet access and hardware are not cheap and are not equally distributed. Koman,
“Riding Along.”
Kahle also explicitly imagined (though, it appears, did not entirely think through) his bookmobile causing a fundamental and troubling shift in the moral economy of books and libraries. In his speech to the archivists, he explained that a book printed on demand cost only a single dollar:

[F]or a buck a book you can afford to give away books. Which is kind of nice in the sense that you don’t have to give out the only copy that you have. I think of the librarian’s dilemma, wondering every time somebody walks out the door with a book, “Is it going to come back?” If we have the ability to print on demand, we can get around that particular problem.\(^\text{829}\)

But that “particular problem” is, in fact, at the heart of the model and the very idea of the public library. A public library holds not just a common cultural patrimony but a literally shared culture, in the form of books owned by an institution funded by taxes collected by an elected government and made available to anyone in its jurisdiction. The risk—“the librarian’s dilemma,” in Kahle’s words—that such availability occasions is, in many ways, precisely the point. The library card is a sort of social contract, and, while not always successful, this has for over a century been absolutely fundamental to the way that libraries work, practically and ideologically, for better and for worse. We saw in Chapter One, for example, May Pressly argue for her library club’s suitability by proclaiming what good care they would take of the books. And in Chapter Two, we saw a local magistrate’s horror at the idea of borrowing books alongside what he thought were diseased and unhygienic African Americans. In pursuit of “universal access,” Kahle proposes sharing on a very different set of terms. The traditional bookmobile had typically reworked, on a different and mechanical scale, the principle of circulation—taking books out of the library, out into a community, before eventually bringing them back—that characterized individual patrons’ engagement with library books. The Internet Archive Bookmobile, on the other hand, imagined

replacing the circle with the trajectory, sending books out without expecting, or even wanting, their return. Almost despite himself—despite all his, and Suzanne Mubarak’s, love of them—Kahle partly approaches paper books as absolutely delightful but decidedly secondary effects of endlessly transmittable, reproducible digital data. The Internet Archive Bookmobile, is “a print-on-demand-mobile,” Richard Koman wrote shortly after that first cross-country trip, and it “changes the notion that books are a limited resource.” (You can imagine environmentalists rather cringing at just about every aspect of the bookmobile.)

Given the way American fantasies about freedom tend to work, we might have anticipated that the project had global ambitions, as well. Indeed, where the Internet Archive Bookmobile was (at least in the 2002 telling) born in Africa, in an encounter with the first lady of Egypt, another African country would provide its ultimate test. As “sort of from the Silicon Valley sort of utopian,” Kahle told the TED audience, “we thought, ‘If we can make this technology work in rural Uganda, we might have something.’” And so Richard Koman, with Brad deGraf and funding from the World Bank, founded Anywhere Books and gave it a shot. Koman arrived with the zeal of generations of missionaries before him but with the form of the book, not its contents, as his gospel:

I embarked on this project with a generalized notion of doing some good in the world, of applying the public domain and the cool bookmobile idea, and making books for Uganda seemed as good a place as any to try it. Now, having made these personal connections, helping, listening, and talking to these Gulu kids who endure so much, living in the clutches of an insane evil, I am starting to understand the enormity of a book. You can see it in the smiles, in the jostling for control of the cutter. A book, her only book, made herself, with computers, a paper cutter, and these strange Mzungus [white people].

830 Koman, “Riding Along.”
831 “Brewster Kahle builds a free digital library.”
The problem was that, to a significant degree echoing the problems the *Amerika Hauser* faced in West Germany, the project was less a response to concrete local desires than a product of a very American (and unsuccessfully hegemonic) fantasy of global connection. Koman writes, for example, of “trying to put myself in the kids’ heads” as the bookmobile arrived at a school outside Kampala. “Did they see this as simply a wonderful and fun day? Or was this like a Bookmobile from Mars?” But, he declares, “[i]t didn’t really matter.” The kids were “thrilled to take part” in something so foreign “in a culture where passing annual exams is far more important than the joy of reading.” Promoting joy in place of rote utility (like open shelves in place of closed ones) initially masks and ultimately comes to stand in for any substantive, effective project of either local assistance or global connection.

Remembering the Uganda project five and a half years later, Koman seemed rather more sedate, suggesting that book-scanning and print-on-demand, while “swell,” are really “a very first-world approach to a third-world application.” More specifically, as he looked back, his “regret with the Uganda bookmobile is that we didn’t adequately hook up with a nonprofit on the ground who could identify and distribute really relevant books for a population, say subsistence farmers or refugees.” This was a curious reversal of the German case, where patrons who wanted fiction were instead largely sent dry, technical materials. But in both cases, it was ideological commitments that blinded American staffers to local needs. In Germany, it was the larger system of Cold War technical assistance and diplomacy. In Uganda, it was public domain evangelism. (Despite the likelihood that the real intellectual property problem faced by people in

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834 Koman, “Uganda Digital Bookmobile.”
rural Uganda was biotechnology and agribusiness patents, not copyright.) Consequently, while Koman and his fellows did approach the program at the juncture of digital and paper, they failed to effectively link the local and the global. They did not adequately consider space and scale. They plopped down in Uganda, with global-bureaucracy money and dreams of a new world, and expected everything to go smoothly. Of a piece with the larger commitment to lines over circles—to distribution over circulation—the Uganda project had failed to actually or effectively embed itself in the existing thick mesh of Ugandan life and politics. This could be the darker side of efforts, like the Internet Archive Bookmobile’s, to turn paper into data and back into paper: a consuming, total ambition on an unselfconscious and unworkable scale. As much as Kahle and Koman seemed to thumb their noses at the standard digital utopian disdain for paper—Licklider would likely have been rather baffled by the enterprise—the dream of “universal access to all knowledge” necessarily universalizes, requiring technocratic, one-size solutions to complex problems and diverse communities. Powered by new technologies, these bookmobiles tried to skip the “little neighborhoods” of traveling libraries past in favor of the impractical dream of a total, global neighborhood. But, as we will see in the next section, more decidedly local projects could run into their share of problems, as well.

“A Still Fresher Soil”: The Internet Archive Bookmobile Visits Walden Pond

The final destination on the Internet Archive Bookmobile’s initial cross-country trip, in the autumn of 2002, was the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court. Neither the timing nor the location were coincidental, as the trip’s last hurrah was to take place just outside the Court as the justices inside heard arguments in *Eldred v. Ashcroft*, a lawsuit with significant implications for Brewster Kahle’s public domain dreams [FIGURE 45]. Initiated by Eric Eldred and joined by other
publishers of public domain texts, the lawsuit challenged the constitutionality of the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act (1998), which had prevented many works (including Disney’s *Steamboat Willie*, most famously) from entering the public domain. There were important conflicts being played out in the court—between profits and patrimony, between property and public culture—and Kahle wanted to use the bookmobile to come firmly down on the side of the public domain. And he did, though ultimately the justices did not. In a 7-2 decision, the Court upheld the law, determining that “[t]ext, history, and precedent” confirmed the constitutionality of copyright extension.836

Before and even after *Eldred*, the story of the Internet Archive Bookmobile might appear to be a story, primarily, of intellectual property, of the public domain and the question of copyright. Much early coverage, including Koman’s, of the bookmobile focused on these topics. And when, in April 2004, Eric Eldred himself initiated an East Coast branch of the Internet Archive Bookmobile, he did so by printing copies of *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (2004), by Lawrence Lessig, an internet evangelist and law professor who had argued Eldred’s case before the Supreme Court.837 (“Larry was pleased,” Eldred wrote to a listserv the next day.838) But tellingly, the most attention-grabbing, influential event that took place around Eldred’s bookmobile had really nothing to do with intellectual property. The book Eldred printed and distributed was

836 *Eldred v. Ashcroft*, 537 U.S. 186 (2003), 199. “I don’t think we lost anything,” Eldred later told one sociologist. “In fact, I think we gained a lot, I think there was a lot of thinking going on that changed the minds of law professors … I think that it was very important that we did the process of standing up and showing people who wrong the Congress was.” Marc Garcelon, “An information commons?: Creative Commons and public access to cultural creations,” *New Media & Society* 11 (2009): 1312-1313
unquestionably in the public domain but, as we will see, where he chose to print it meant that a different regulatory regime—one of public space, not the public domain—reigned.

Unlike the original Internet Archive Bookmobile, which traveled across the country, or Anywhere Books, which traveled around the world, Eldred’s bookmobile (though sponsored by both organizations) was a much more local affair. It, like Eldred himself, was a creature of the Northeast, and particularly of New England. Eldred v. Ashcroft began when the Copyright Term Extension Act meant Eldred could not post selections of poems by that quintessential poet of New England, Robert Frost. And his bookmobile primarily stopped at colleges and universities from Philadelphia to New Hampshire. The bookmobile’s most famous, perhaps infamous stop, was at a very particular place, closely associated with New England and with, more precisely, a particular idea of local space and place: Walden Pond.

On July 8, 2004, the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, Eric Eldred took his bookmobile to a parking lot adjacent to the pond and a short hike from the site of Thoreau’s famous cabin. There, for an hour under a hand-lettered sign that read “Free Walden,” he helped visitors print and bind their own copies of Walden. But then, as he related the next day on the Internet Archive’s online forum, “I was asked by the Walden Pond Reservation police to pack up and leave and threatened with arrest. I left.” The police and a park administrator told Eldred he needed a permit to “pass out free literature,” a permit he would not be receiving. The problem was not with the text itself. (It had been decades since Walden had been subject to copyright protections.) And it was not even

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842 Eldred, “Free Walden.”
necessarily with the place in which Eldred chose to operate his bookmobile. (Had he been printing, say, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* on the shores of Walden Pond, he likely would have run into less trouble.) It was the concert of book and place—that combination on which the idea of common consciousness rests—that caused all the fuss. “If you’re going to give away books for free,” as a park administrator explained to the *Boston Globe* later, “it might take away business” from the Thoreau Society’s shop, which sells copies of *Walden* alongside coffee mugs and t-shirts.⁸⁴³

As you might imagine, Eldred was not amused. “Evidently members of the Thoreau Society, charged with his legacy, are now in the business of making money off him,” he wrote on the Internet Archive forum, “and are using their political power to suppress the free culture of which he would be proud.”⁸⁴⁴ He rages at the irony of “a state-enforced monopoly on ‘Walden’,” at the evident ideological distance between Thoreau and the Thoreau Society.⁸⁴⁵ Understandably obsessed with the ways in which political power is used against the many to promote the economic gain of the few—that was, after all, what *Eldred v. Ashcroft* was ultimately about—Eldred ends up missing the point. In his post, he refers to the park administration as “[t]he government trustees of the land,” but he fails to recognize how important that *land* is to what happened to him. There are, in particular, two lessons we can take from Eldred’s rather bumpy trip to Walden Pond, lessons about the fate of print and of common consciousness in a digital age. The first is that place still matters, and the second is that that fact has consequences which constrain the digital reinvention of common consciousness.

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⁸⁴³ Burge, “Fighting to be Free.”
⁸⁴⁴ Eldred, “Free Walden.”
⁸⁴⁵ Eldred, “Free Walden.”
Place matters. To celebrate its sesquicentennial, Eldred did not just post *Walden* to his website or email it to a listserv. That would have distributed the text, and probably even reached more people. In other words, since one of his goals, as he wrote on the forum, was to “promote[ ] the sharing ethos of the Internet,” why go offline at all? The simple answer is that there remained, and remains, a special power to a particular, printed book in a particular place. The more complicated answer, rich and strange, is that there remained something even more powerful about using a bookmobile to print this particular book in this particular place. Eldred believed that computers had the capacity to, as he told me, allow people “to communicate and share ideas more freely” based on “local rather than central control.” As Eldred seems to see it, his bookmobile sat (like the Internet Archive bookmobile before it) at the intersection of hacker culture and the DIY movement:

> It is true that purely digital books can have many advantages (or just differences, maybe) in effective communication over old-fashioned printed works. But the Internet Archive Bookmobile technology was similar to the personal computer in that it required learning new skills to do it yourself instead of relying on the IBM priesthood at the computer server. By starting from the bottom up, we could teach people to change practices without having to reply on a top-down change in the copyright law.

This set of emphases—on the local over the central, the bottom over the top, the self-made over the ready-made—was not new to Walden Pond in 2004. They had made a home there, in “an airy and unplastered cabin,” more than a century and a half before. Thoreau’s *Walden* is many things: a celebration of nature, a rejection of mid-nineteenth-century social mores, an economic experiment, a domestic tale. But more than anything else, really, it is a how-to manual of a peculiar and sideways sort; it is a philosophical, lyrical, and often baffling paean to the aesthetics

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846 Eldred, “Free Walden.”
847 Eric Eldred, e-mail message to author, June 17, 2012.
848 Eric Eldred, e-mail message to author, June 17, 2012.
and practices of, well, doing it yourself. Thoreau opens by explaining, for example, that the pages the reader is about to encounter were written while “I lived alone…in a house which I had built myself…and earned my living by the labor of my hands only.”850 Purposefully or not, Eldred was recapitulating, reimagining for a (sort of) digital age, Thoreau’s philosophy and, in particular, his peculiar relation to two objects: books and beans.851

In *Walden*, books appear out of nowhere and, ideally, take effort to read. Thoreau opens in his third chapter, for example, boasting that while his cabin was “beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate around the world.”852 But while he explains that he “kept Homer’s Iliad on my table through the summer,” he does not explain how it came to sit on that table. The book emerges from out of nowhere, fully formed, above the banks of Walden Pond. And while Thoreau admits that he did not often read Homer thanks to the demands of “[i]ncessant labor with my hands,” he later collapses the distinction between proper reading and proper labor.853 Indeed, the former must involve the latter, he argues. A true and meaningful encounter with books should be effortful, in contrast to the kinds of reading practiced by “a race of tit-men” constantly “sucking the pap” of easy books and family newspapers.854

While perhaps not reviving its troubled gender politics, Eldred’s bookmobile embodied, to a remarkable extent and not far from where Thoreau’s *Iliad* had sat, a twenty-first century version of Thoreau’s bookish philosophy. In a very concrete way (a way that did not require

851 Eldred seems to have been interested in the relationship between his project and Thoreau’s general principles. “I asked myself what Thoreau would have done,” he told the *Boston Globe* before deciding to fight the park administration. And the idea of the Thoreau Society colluding to “suppress the free culture of which he would be proud.” But he does not specifically connect his project with Thoreau’s antebellum DIY culture. Burge, “Fighting to Be Free.” Eldred, “Free Walden.”
852 Thoreau *Walden*, 130-131.
854 Thoreau, *Walden*, 141, 144.
Thoreau’s frequent elision), the books that Eldred distributed did not exist before that day on that shore. They did not come out of nowhere, of course—they came out of hard drives and printers, out of ink and paper and glue on the bookmobile—but before Eldred arrived at Walden Pond, the books that would be, and that would mean, did not exist. “This internet bookmobile was…not just a way to disseminate to [the] most distant home books that had already been printed centrally, as the old fashioned bookmobile was,” Eldred told me. “It is or was a way to reverse the process and start from the home to broadcast and share ideas…to others.”855 This ambition, to “start from the home to broadcast and share ideas,” is deeply Thoreauvian. Likely no one (at least since the medieval anchorites) has had more faith in the ability to change the world while staying close to home than Henry David Thoreau. Eldred’s digital dreams were, like Thoreau’s more analog ones, bound and indebted to place in ways we often fail to consider when we think about text in the twenty-first century.

Eldred’s bookmobile also required work—“readers actually learn how to make the books themselves,” Eldred reported with satisfaction—the sort of effortful engagement Thoreau so prized.856 The books were made, by hand, on the site where Thoreau built his cabin, his furniture, and his enduringly American philosophy. But despite the easy correlation between Thoreau’s books and Eldred’s bookmobile, it is the former’s bean-fields that offer, in fact, an even more vivid and meaningful connection. Thoreau fancies himself, throughout Walden, tied to the land in all its wildness—he “kept neither dog, cat, cow, pig, nor hens,” hearing rather “only squirrels on the roof and under the floor, a whip-poor-will on the ridge-pole, a blue jay screaming beneath the window.”857 But what really seems to tie him to the soil on which he lives, what makes him

855 Eric Eldred, e-mail message to author, June 17, 2012.
856 Eldred, “Free Walden.”
857 Thoreau, Walden, 168.
part of the place and which allows him to remake that place, is cultivation by his own hands, of a field of beans:

Meanwhile my beans, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted, were impatient to be hoed…. What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not. I came to love my rows, my beans…. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus. But why should I raise them? Only Heaven knows. This was my curious labor all summer—to make this portion of the earth's surface, which had yielded only cinquefoil, blackberries, johnswort, and the like, before, sweet wild fruits and pleasant flowers, produce instead this pulse. What shall I learn of beans or beans of me?\footnote{Thoreau, \textit{Walden}, 204.}

The relationship between person and produce (a relation we may recall from the preceding chapter) here is created and understood, as much as it can be—“Only Heaven knows,” after all—through laborious, creative, physical encounter with the earth in this place. This “curious labor” of making an old land produce something new, was recapitulated and reimagined by Eldred’s bookmobile. When Thoreau went to tend his beans, he opened before him an earth teeming with the past. “As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe,” he wrote, “I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day.”\footnote{Thoreau, \textit{Walden}, 209. Once again, as in \textit{Computer Networks}, a remembrance of Native Americans, now conveniently absent, offers a pivot between old and new.} Like Thoreau before him, Eldred drove a tool for cultivation into the soil around Walden Pond and came up with a deep history of place. Laptops and cables and hard drives and printers dig up into the air a hundred-and-fifty-year-old idea, “an instant and immeasurable crop” of useful past.\footnote{Thoreau, \textit{Walden}, 209.}

But such pasts, in such places, have consequences. It being so mobile, so digital, Eldred could have driven his bookmobile anywhere and printed copies of \textit{Walden}. He might have gone to Philadelphia or to Punxsutawney, to Boston or to Brooklyn, but he didn’t. To have the effect
he wanted, Eldred needed to be where Thoreau was, to draw on the past of the place and not just that of the text. As a consequence it was control over public space—over public property, not intellectual property—that constrained the way he could make books and make meaning. In Chapter Two, we saw how central questions of property and control have been to the history of libraries, and in Chapter Four, we watched as parking lots took on a strange power in the circulation and experience of public culture. Here, at Walden Pond, in 2004, those two strands met: “There is no place to park at Walden Pond except in the state parking lot,” Eldred reported on July 9, “for which I paid $5” and from which he was nevertheless ejected.\(^{861}\) The state maintained control of this space and, thus, of the possibilities for making new books and new communities within it. For all of Eldred’s arguments in favor of the public domain, for all his dedication to distributing a shared culture, his plan did not come to fruition. “The bookmobile was a concrete experiment that worked…it was only politics that defeated me at Walden Pond,” Eldred explained to me.\(^{862}\) But that isn’t quite right. It was not “politics”—as some vague realm impeding the perfect efficiency of the technical world—but a particular politics of physical space for which Eldred’s digital utopianism had not adequately prepared him.

“You Weary Giants of Flesh and Steel”: Coda


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\(^{861}\) Eldred, “Free Walden.”

\(^{862}\) Eric Eldred, e-mail message to author, June 17, 2012.
behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather. “

The old needed to make way for the new because this new realm was not made of “flesh and steel” but rather

of transactions, relationships, and thought itself. Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live. We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth. We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity. Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are all based on matter, and there is no matter here.

Beautiful, right? But, of course, also wrong. The internet is a matter of matter; it is a series of tubes, a physical infrastructure bound to physical space and limited by political geography. As this chapter has shown, even a repository as self-consciously digital as the Internet Archive is found in a series of rooms filled with metal and glass and flesh and paper, is found in server farms stacked with physical memory, is found—most strangely but fittingly of all—on the road, in a bookmobile. Far from making a radical break with the past, the Internet Archive reached back and brought forward the dream of a common consciousness—as well as its awkward universalizing gestures, its zest for both friction and distance, its imperial ambitions, its blind spots and missteps. It did not abandon paper or flesh, just as it could not in the end manage to abandon control and restriction. The question of who could share, and what shape that sharing might take, remained—and remains—an open one.

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864 Barlow, “A Declaration.”
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CONCLUSION

There Went the Bookmobile?

“Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.”
—Walt Whitman (1855) 866

This dissertation began with two stories. In one, librarians in Catawba County, North Carolina, made a map that captured how a bookmobile was meant to fill the space of the county, to connect its people with books. In the other, Chicano nationalists in El Paso, Texas, painted a bookmobile with symbols designed to connect Chicanos across the Southwest. Between those two small stories—between government maps and activist dreams, between political and racial geography, between lofty ideals and the weight of the earth—lay the heart of this project: the messy, unpredictable, wide-ranging, and surprisingly contentious role that bookmobiles have played in building “common consciousness” in America over the past century. In telling the larger story that lies between those two smaller ones, the story of the bookmobile and its America, this dissertation has made three primary interventions in how we can and should think about community, culture, and nationalism.

First, by emphasizing questions of circulation and space, this project has insisted that the ties that bind a nation together—the “thick mesh” of democracy—are never simply metaphorical. Communities are created and maintained, in large part, thanks to the movement of cultural artifacts, by means both technological and political. How those objects move, when they move, and most crucially, where they move (or don’t) maps the shape of belonging in communities. We

saw this at work in every chapter. When May Pressly “made a circuit of [her] district” to create a library club, she was turning the space and people around her into an institution that could receive and transmit culture from the capital. When the Audubon Regional Library sent out its color-coded bookmobiles, it was charting a shape for its community, one where culture was (sort of) shared but only across space that was rigidly and racially policed. When the U.S. government sent bookmobiles to West Germany, packed with books about American life, it was extending a hand—a hand to greet but also to squeeze and shape. When librarians put books on the road, or on supermarket shelves, they were creating new paths for library materials that helped change what libraries were and how they worked. And when Eric Eldred parked his print-on-demand bookmobile on the banks of Walden Pond, he was (perhaps without even knowing it) making an argument about how the relationship of particular books to particular places still matters in an era of digital technology. Understanding the bookmobile, then, has required understanding that circulation happens in physical space and that it happens thanks to particular technological, political, and social prerequisites. And this isn’t just true of bookmobiles. Scholars talk frequently about ideas “circulating” through societies, but they talk more rarely and more vaguely about the how and the where of that circulation. But as this dissertation has made clear, those are the crucial questions. It is not enough to say that ideas circulate, because the technologies and ideologies that enable that circulation have significant, inescapable effects on how and where those ideas can move—and on what influence they can have when they get there. Communities are formed by the circulation of culture, and the ground over which culture travels is always messy and often uneven.

Second, conflicts over “common consciousness” are, at heart, arguments about how it will be shaped and who gets to shape it. Insofar as it ever really exists, common consciousness is
a contingent, uncertain product of debates about what, exactly, it means to have something in common. Indeed, communities don’t just exist, don’t pop fully formed from some powerful brow. They are, rather, made—in the lofty realm of ideas, yes, but also in the oil-slicked, potholed street. We saw throughout this dissertation the uneasy but fantastically productive ways in which the imagined and the real clashed and combined, when the idea of common consciousness in some cases drove into roadblocks, many of its own making, and in other cases detoured off the map its originators had imagined. In particular, on the bookmobile, this progressive ideal took a longer, stranger path than a narrow history of progressivism would indicate. In the hands of librarians, out on the road, progressive principles like common consciousness were put into practice at times and in ways that both exposed their inborn problems and, at the same time, their possibilities for appropriation and reuse by marginalized people. The Kansas Traveling Library established strict rules, many of which were bent (or broken) out on the prairie. Jim Crow governments used bookmobiles to enforce segregation while African Americans used them to challenge it. The U.S. government sent bookmobiles to West Germany to Americanize its people, most of whom declined to participate at all. In other words, once it was sent out into the world, the bookmobile—like common consciousness more broadly—was not solely defined by the powerful. Over and over, administrators declared and users responded in unpredictable, uncontrollable ways. What bookmobiles meant, and even how they worked, wasn’t clear until plans met people out on the road. The history of the bookmobile this dissertation has told hasn’t, as a consequence, been one solely of ideas or exclusively from below. It’s been neither wholly a matter of oppression nor entirely a tale of resistance. What the bookmobile illuminates, and what is necessarily generalizable from the bookmobile’s specific case, is that the content and the
consequences of ideas are to be found in the doing, in messy battles about what ideas mean in practice.

Finally, this project has argued for the importance of considering “public culture” as a constitutive part of American life and history. Since at least the eighteenth century, the idea of the “public” has gestured at commonality—the community of rational human subjects, say—while it has in practice been bounded by, among other factors, race and gender.\textsuperscript{867} The bookmobile as an agency of public culture in the twentieth century reveals another, related tension between the “public” and the common: that between the state’s money and the people’s culture. This dissertation has made two moves in order to highlight and examine this tension. First, the emphasis on public culture has worked to correct an over-emphasis, in theoretical and historical scholarship, on capitalism as the motor of belonging in America. Indeed, a relentless focus on consumer culture in American Studies (and on “print capitalism” in book history) has obscured many of the non-commercial avenues by which culture has moved through American life.\textsuperscript{868} The public library movement, as a signal example, flourished in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, simultaneously with the consumer culture that has garnered so much more scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{869} Consideration of the long afterlife of progressivism, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere;” Warner, \textit{Publics and Counterpublics}.
\item In her incredibly influential study of the emergence of middlebrow culture in the U.S., for example, Joan Shelley Rubin examines an enormous breadth of genres and venues. But libraries are almost absent, treated where they are present alongside bookstores as yet another path between publishers and readers. Libraries are even more lacking in other books that transformed the study of twentieth-century America in the 1990s and 2000s. See Rubin, \textit{The}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
particularly to its interwoven commitments to state power and association, makes clear how necessary it is to take public culture seriously, as well as to explore and understand its interactions with the flashier realms of commercial exchange.\textsuperscript{870} The former task has been a primary goal of this project, and in every chapter we saw and interpreted the questions raised by the idea of sharing culture in both figurative and literal senses. The latter task was undertaken most directly in Chapter Four, where we saw libraries make themselves a home in—and be transformed by—the American supermarket.

This project’s emphasis on public culture has, secondly, illustrated that the emotions of nationalism are inextricable from the bureaucracy of state-building. To understand the bookmobile, as to understand the country as a whole, we must attend to the material prerequisites for national identity. Public culture—that which is held in common for general use and the consumption of which is part of the experience of nationalism—demands not just a spirit of togetherness but the nuts and bolts of governance to acquire, maintain, and distribute it. Taxes, which are used to purchase and preserve public culture, literalize the mutual obligations of citizenship, and infrastructure, which enables distribution, makes a community’s connections material. As we saw in Chapter Three, when the Taos County Project sent a bookmobile around the New Mexico countryside, it was working to encourage a sense of belonging to the nation \textit{and}, at the same time, to bring the machinery of the state into the lives of the people who lived there. The feeling of belonging to a nation, the political form of the town meeting, and the infrastructure of the irrigation ditch were inextricably part of the same project. These arguments that proceed from the study of public culture—that public culture matters, and that it links


\textsuperscript{870} On association and state power, see McGerr, \textit{Fierce Discontent}, especially 66-68.
nationalism and state-building—have potentially broad application to cultural and political history, allowing us to see connections and interactions where we might not have noticed them before.

This dissertation has brought these three insights—that circulation is necessary for cultural life (and its study), that community is a process, and that public culture is distinct and important—to bear, largely, on three aspects of twentieth-century American life: racial segregation, imperial expansion, and economic inequality. But race, empire, and class were not the only factors that influenced the answers that bookmobiles and libraries offered to the twentieth century’s enduring questions. Gender, for example, played a major—though by no means unitary—role in determining the shape of belonging. At the turn of the century, as we saw in Chapter One, domesticity was a tool for the exercise of political and cultural power by women, and for the expansion of library service across the country. But in the middle of the century, as Chapter Four illustrated, new icons of domestic modernity—supermarkets above all—served more to limit both women’s power and libraries’ growth. So, too, with order enforced by a centralized political power. In the Jim Crow South, as we saw in Chapter Two, governments rigidly organized the library landscape in order to limit access to common consciousness. In Chapter Three, though, we saw how a centralized government could operate with an opposite goal in mind, a goal of bringing people into the library’s orbit. And technology was a consistent, though unpredictable throughline in the history of the bookmobile: it scared some people, seemed a savior to others, but always both shaped and was shaped by the ways communities saw themselves. Other factors more narrowly influenced this history: religion was central to progressivism, sexuality fueled racist fears, climate affected where bookmobiles could travel, and more. As we have seen again and again, all of these factors, major or minor, interacted with
and influenced the three major dynamics this dissertation has tracked: racial segregation, imperial expansion, and economic inequality. The history of the bookmobile is, in a way both narrow and sweeping, a history of identity, culture, and belonging in the United States.

Indeed, this project has been a history of the bookmobile as a history of modern America, using a peculiar machine to illustrate and illuminate much bigger questions about what it meant to be an American in the twentieth century. But I want to close with a somewhat narrower question, a question I am asked almost every time I discuss this project: Where are bookmobiles headed, if anywhere? Most people I talk to assume that bookmobiles are dead or dying in the wake of the Web. But the story of the bookmobile’s future, like that of its history, is not so simple, after all.

“Here We Come Up in a Bookmobile”: The End?

In the early 1990s, the punk band Green Day joined the Lollapalooza tour in a rather unusual vehicle. “I think there’s something like thirty buses or something that’s gonna be on Lollapalooza,” vocalist/guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong told MTV at the time, and “here we come up in a bookmobile.”871 (“They’ll all be standing in line with their library cards,” Mike Dirnt added, laughing.) Found abandoned in Phoenix and refurbished into a tour bus by a band member’s father, the bookmobile retained the exterior marks of its former role (the MTV interview is cut repeatedly with dynamic shots of “BOOKMOBILE” painted on the side). But, really, everything had changed. Years later, Tre Cool recalled stopping the bookmobile in Oregon to “buy a bag of weed off some guy,” and a “woman pulls open the door, and goes,

‘Woah! This isn’t a bookmobile! Sure smells good in here, though.’ Or, as Armstrong put it in that MTV interview, “A lot of people come up to the bookmobile, and they’re like, ‘Do you have books for sale in there?’ And it’s like, [laugh] we don’t even read.”

According to the American Library Association, there were almost twice as many bookmobiles in service in the U.S. in the early 1990s than there had been in 1950. But something had shifted, captured with grinning confidence by the young men of Green Day. By the 1990s, after decades of expansion and contraction, filled with boundless faith and drained by unreasonable expectations, the bookmobile’s iconic status had finally and largely been emptied out, leaving the bookmobile hollow and ready to carry not books but a band. “Here we come up in a bookmobile.” But, of course, it wasn’t just irreverent punk rockers at work here. Almost a century on, the assumptions that had accompanied the bookmobile on its travels weighed heavily on a nation struggling with the consequences of the world—still marked by separation, expansion, and inequality—that those assumptions had built.

And still more weighed, and weighed more literally. Increasingly, the materiality of the bookmobile and of the culture it carries has seemed less a benefit, as it had for a century, and more a liability. Outside the eccentric precincts of the Internet Archive, the techno-utopian faith in exclusively digital networks is widespread. If libraries themselves are seen—ridiculously, but frequently—as unnecessary in the age of the internet, then bookmobiles, which use decades-old infrastructures to move centuries-old media, are even more baffling to internet partisans. (This, of course, is despite the fact that internet access remains unevenly distributed by race, geography,

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and income.) And, more so, amidst the decay in public funding we saw begin in Chapter Four, the very physicality of the bookmobile is difficult to maintain. Fuel, rubber, metal. Training, maintenance. All of these cost money, money that is no longer so easy to find or claim on behalf of public culture. That which powered the bookmobile now sees it grinding almost to a halt.

Almost, but not quite; the bookmobile isn’t dead yet. Cities like Worcester, Massachusetts, continue to launch new mobile programs, and large-scale programs in some states continue apace. And even more surprisingly, and hearteningly, the bookmobile still seems a useful form to some who, like Lorenzo Greene and Kathryn Johnson in the 1920s and 1930s, work to build communities that don’t quite match those imagined by state institutions. In 2010, for example, queer artists Irina Contreras and Kelly Besser launched the Miracle Bookmobile. Responding in part to threats to public funding for libraries, and explicitly inspired by Mary Titcomb (founder of the first bookmobile, in Washington County, Maryland), Contreras and Besser drove up and down the California coast, distributing “queer materials, science fiction, radical political publications, zines, pulp, smut, local West Coast history, memoirs, books en español and anything you love reading and wanna share” to people along the way. “Our hope for The Miracle,” they told an interviewer, “is to create new reading spaces altogether,” spaces built—like Johnson’s two-foot shelf or Greene’s black history texts—around “access to hidden histories which may otherwise be forgotten, rewritten, or destroyed.” And a year later, the People’s Library at Occupy Wall Street adapted the form of the bookmobile as a way to regroup

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874 See Dharma Dailey, et al., Broadband Adoption in Low-Income Communities (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010).
877 Vargas, “The Miracle.”
after the original library was destroyed in a police raid. Bookmobiles still play crucial supporting roles in efforts to fight out and work through what it means to be a public, what it might take to hold a culture in common.

It may be that—in a world where so much of politics seems to happen behind glowing screens, in smartphone apps and Facebook likes—there is something appealingly radical, once again, in driving up in a truck packed with books. Bookmobiles make literal in the present, as they make clear in historical retrospect, how central physical infrastructures and human bodies are to the sharing of culture. Eager to confront and transform the unsustainable injustices of contemporary life, activists and designers and radical librarians seem to be looking self-consciously to the past as they work to figure out how to, in the words of sci-fi author/design writer Bruce Sterling, “enjoy some futurity.” Unlike too many involved in bookmobiles over the years—who were so focused on “thrilling new visions,” as librarian Hazel Webster Byrnes put it, that they failed to see how weighted down by an unequal, unjust past the bookmobile actually was—these new participants seem both more cautious and more creative as they adapt to new contexts in a new century.

The bookmobile, in other words, might just come again.

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