

## Demographic Trends and Social Structure

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AT THE OUTSET, before dealing specifically with trends and structures, it will be helpful to look critically at some of the prevailing assumptions concerning the relations between libraries and society. Librarians like to say that their agency reflects the social milieu. The common claim is that of response to economic, technological, cultural and educational trends. It is even asserted on occasion that libraries not only follow but create social developments.<sup>1</sup>

To a degree all this is true. There is no doubt that libraries are conditioned by the larger society. Economic productivity provides public wealth that libraries may (or may not) share. Increasing specialization leads to greater dependence on information, which libraries may (or may not) supply. Governmental concern for persons of limited educational background may (or may not) prompt modifications of service programs. Dominant cultural values may (or may not) enhance or depress both library use and the general image of the institution. The larger context sets parameters — limits and opportunities — outside of which the library as a derivative agency cannot function.

But within these limits libraries do not necessarily follow dominant interests or reflect shifting social tendencies. The analytical observer cannot but note the limited change in libraries — that is, basic change in concept, function and emphasis — over a century that has witnessed fundamental alteration in technological applications, social organization and group values. The library is hardly a mirror image of its milieu. On

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the contrary, some of its distinctive characteristics stand in contrast to prevailing social drives and goals.

A few examples will illustrate the point. If any one drive has dominated contemporary times, it is economic expansion as public policy and monetary accumulation as the prevalent private goal. While libraries have contributed to industrial growth and occupational skills, for most this has not been a conscious aim, nor does it figure largely in formal statements of institutional purpose. Popular culture is marked in these years by preoccupation with sex and violence, but this is not the typical content of library collections. In a time of technological emphasis, libraries continue in significant part to be enclaves of humanistic and social thought. Racism and group prejudice underlie many personal relationships, but the library can properly claim at least a degree of intellectual freedom. Examples of disjunction between the agency and current trends could be multiplied.

Not only have libraries not followed every flow and eddy, but the very way in which they have stood against the currents serves in part to characterize them as social agencies. Some of the library's distinctiveness derives precisely from *not* being "typical" or "responsive." Perhaps this is the source of what strength it has.

Contrasting evaluations can be given to the library's characteristic role. One is that it reflects the "better" impulses in society. Granting dominance of the economic motive, one can turn to libraries for the full range of human aspiration and for a balanced education. Granting the prevalence of a popular culture at times tawdry and even destructive, the library contains humankind's noble pronouncements. Granting a body of approved values and viewpoints, the collection holds the voices of dissenters. From this view, the library may be the bastion of that enlightenment which in the long run will keep society on course.

There is, however, a contrasting interpretation. Libraries overall serve only a minority of the population. Specialized and research collections naturally are used by specialists and researchers — no doubt key groups, but not large groups in the bulk of the populace. Public library collections are seldom used by more than 20 percent of adults, only part of whom use them as a knowledge source; a sizable portion of the 20 percent turn to it as a free source of diversion. This has occasioned a revisionist view of public library history, characterizing the agency as elitist in practice while it officially claims communitywide roots,<sup>2</sup> a position that has been answered with perspective by a social historian of libraries.<sup>3</sup>

Pejorative terms aside, it can hardly be claimed that the majority of Americans have found libraries to be of regular value to them, or that

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the library clientele constitutes a cross section of the population. As to collections, it can hardly be claimed that they reflect proportionately the recurring interests of the majority. (For such an index of popular taste, one would turn to the content of television or of mass-circulation magazines.)

A related common assumption is that it is inherently desirable for libraries to reflect social change and contribute to prevailing social tendencies; and, conversely, that it is undesirable, indeed undemocratic, not to do so. Taken literally, this is the position of an agency that has no role of its own, but waits for social winds to blow in order to decide which way to turn. Following the sometimes tortured efforts in the professional literature to establish direct social connections, one has the feeling of an agency uncertain of its function, seeking to establish its identity by noting social change and making at least verbal gestures toward response.

In actual practice libraries of the several types do have a role which they play. Librarians have a core of professional standards which they follow. The role and the standards do not shift with each turn in popular values and tastes. Yet, librarians often seem more interested in stressing how they do change than in proclaiming the continuing function which distinguishes them in the social order. The winds blow but the library stands, and this may be because it has hold on a rock of purpose, whether articulated or not. Librarians will want to identify and clarify that function in preparation for a time when they will be called on to justify their existence.

What is really meant by the interrelationship of libraries and society is that the larger context sets limits which the agency cannot escape, but within these limits the library takes on a character of its own, responding to some parts of the milieu but not to others. Its role is defined as much by its nonrepresentative attributes as by its direct responses. Understanding of the agency depends on identifying this distinctiveness, and it is one of the tasks of research to lead the search.

Against this background, the content in this article can more readily be approached without preconceptions. Effort will be made to trace the major demographic trends and group structures of recent years, and to note library response or nonresponse to them — without any automatic assumption that response is good and nonresponse is bad. Then the effort will be made to look ahead a bit at the clouded future and at emerging library opportunities, from the view of what the essential strength of libraries can contribute and not in a search for some new and ephemeral

mission. These considerations will provide a vantage point from which to suggest some needed and promising research.

Unless otherwise documented, census-type statistics in this article were derived from two sources. For data through the last decennial census, the 1972 report of the U.S. Commission on Population and the American Future was used.<sup>4</sup> This is a significant document worth examination — or reexamination — by every librarian, because it not only marshals the figures but goes on to interpret them and to propose a future population policy. For recent census material since the last national count, the primary source was a 1978 issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.<sup>5</sup> The several major articles assemble statistics through 1976 and organize them under such headings as population, family, consumption, work patterns and social mobility.

In relating census data and population predictions to libraries, the earlier comments about the relationship between libraries and social trends should be kept in mind. Straight-line connections can be simplistic and should be used with caution. Allowance must be made not only for demographic change, but also for the disjunction between the agency and its milieu. What happens to libraries will depend as much on what librarians do or don't do as on changes in society.

#### POPULATION GROWTH

The preceding caution applies even in the basic dimension of sheer size of population. Short-term fluctuations can overshadow long-range trends, and by the same token, long-range trends can obscure current fluctuations. For example, one reads regularly in the newspaper that the median age in the nation is steadily increasing, which is certainly true; the statistics show that the population of persons sixty-five and older increased 17.6 percent between 1970 and 1977, whereas the total population increased only 6.1 percent. When the statistics are examined more closely, however, it turns out that the most rapidly growing group in these same recent years was the ages twenty-five to thirty-four category, which increased by 31.8 percent (a consequence of the baby boom after World War II). Still using the increasing median age as an example, a straight-line projection would logically lead to an ever-rising age level in the future, to the point where the United States would be a country of old people; in reality, the post-sixty-five age group will probably level off at about 16 percent of the total population, and do so not long after the year 2000.

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The past 100 years has been a period of growing population, from 38 million in 1870 to 203 million in 1970; the current estimate is 220 million. This has also been a century of parallel library growth in research, academic, school, public and special collections and services. Assuming for the moment a continuation of total population growth for the next 50 or 100 years, will this lead again to parallel, steady library development — will 400 million people support libraries at double the amount of 200 million? Not necessarily, and for a number of reasons. Some social scientists argue that continued rapid population growth from this point on may lead not to economic well-being but to economic scarcity, as natural resources are depleted, as the problems and costs of population concentration mount, and as competition from the production of other countries increases.<sup>6</sup> This prospect presages restricted rather than expanding funds for libraries. In fact, this prospect may already be at hand, for libraries of many types currently find it increasingly difficult to get additional appropriations, even in a time of ostensible economic prosperity. The population curve, the productivity curve, and the library curve are not inextricably joined.

A scant twenty years ago, demographers were virtually agreed that the United States would reach 300 million residents early in the next century, and 400 million well before the end of the century. The accelerated birthrate in the late 1940s and 1950s obscured the steady decline in the ratio of new births that had appeared long before. When the boom ended, the birthrate fell back not just to the preboom level but actually to a lower point. The birthrate figures are 18 per 1000 in 1935, 27 per 1000 in 1947, and 17 per 1000 today; using fertility rate (the average number of births a woman can expect to have during her childbearing years) as a measure, the figure is now under the 2.1 level required to maintain the population over the long term. The boom was an aberration while profound modifications in lifestyles continued, not the least of which was the widening acceptance and use of contraceptives. In very recent years sterilization has pushed the decline further — whatever the effectiveness of the pill, the impact of sterilization is even greater and is practically irreversible.

Today, the predictions of population growth by demographers, both in the U.S. Census Bureau and outside, are much more conservative, and usually hemmed in with a medley of conditions and contingencies. The U.S. Census Bureau works with three alternative sets of assumptions concerning fertility rates, with the predicted year 2000 population ranging from 250 million to 350 million, depending on which set of assumptions

is applied. Most demographers, noting the growing divorce and sterilization rates and the larger percentage of working and career women, incline toward the lower figure. A generation ago there was concern about the looming problems of overpopulation; now concern emerges about the problems of a no-growth population.

The Commission on Population and the American Future made a strong case for the opportunities that will be opened by a more stable or even no-growth population. It challenged the traditional view that "more is better." However, the report of the commission went on to make the point that the opportunities presented by a stable population will not be achieved automatically. Conscious goals must be set in the light of the new conditions, and measures applied to attain them — a prescription which, as will shortly be indicated, applies equally to libraries.

Neither as government nor as society does the United States have a population policy for these next years that will be so different from that of the past. Demographic forces are followed, not anticipated. As the prospect looms closer, public discussion of the issue will move to the fore; within a matter of years there will be consideration of subsidies for having children.

Actually, the population of the United States will grow for a period, policy or no policy, because the women who were born during the baby boom of twenty-five to thirty years ago are now of childbearing age. School enrollments have gone down, but will turn up moderately again before reaching a stable level. The effect of a zero-growth population base will be delayed, but in time the lower birthrate, changing roles of women, and new concepts of the family will prevail — in fact, will prevail well before the end of the professional life of many librarians now in practice.

What does all this mean for libraries? At the least it means new ground rules for library planning, and at the most new opportunities now only dimly perceived.

Library policy-makers, like those responsible for other agencies, have long assumed steady population growth and concomitant growth in the economy. Without questioning, it was taken for granted that there would be more people to serve, greater economic productivity, and expanding social wealth for which libraries could compete. These at least were verities on which one could depend, with reasonable expectation of some degree of success in the competition. The library problem was seen as one of keeping up with expansion and relocation of population.

With the new predictions, the economic base will change. The effect of a stable population on the economy is uncertain. One scenario fore-

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sees periodic recessions and an overall slowing of productivity, to the point where the standard of living will be threatened. If this is the alternative, public agencies of all kinds will find it increasingly difficult to get funds as people fight to hold on to what they have gained. This, of course, can be another of the easy, one-dimensional predictions. A more positive scenario foresees a stable economy along with a stable population, with an opportunity to improve quality rather than exhausting resources and energy on quantity. If this is the alternative, increasing specialization can be forecast — in technology, in services, in human activities in general — and it is, as has been noted, the specialized elements of a society which make greater use of libraries. And if quality of life is stressed as a public aim, the case for libraries can be made on cultural as well as utilitarian grounds.

Separate from available dollars, population prospects will directly affect school and college enrollments. The elementary school population is in the process of decreasing by about 7 million pupils (and perhaps one-quarter million teachers) in the period 1975-82, and the wave of decline has now reached the secondary schools. Enrollment will turn up again by at least the same amount in the following decade, after which it will level off slightly above the present level. There are 32 million youngsters in elementary school today; by the year 2000 the figure will probably be 36 million. At the secondary school level the growth will be equally small, from 16 million today to 17-18 million 20 years hence.<sup>7</sup>

Predictions for college enrollment must necessarily be more flexible, for attendance is voluntary rather than mandatory. The official predictions range all the way from 10 million to 15 million by the year 2000 (the present figure is about 9 million).<sup>8</sup> Enrollment by younger adults is off slightly at present, a trend that may continue as some young people take a skeptical view of the automatic middle-class syndrome of college attendance, and as others note the increasing inability of the economy to absorb all college graduates at the full level of their training. On the other hand, the adult market for higher education, which has almost counterbalanced the decline at younger levels, may expand further as people decide to prepare for living as well as for working.

The gross decline in the number of children in a stable and older population will not be overlooked either by public officials or by taxpayers. Already one-half of bond issues for schools are defeated. The public library will be affected, for work with children has been an aspect of community service that traditionally engendered support for community libraries. With possible improvements in school libraries (which could come to pass

as discussed below), the foundation of public libraries in children's service is sure to be shaken in some way in the next years.

However, before slower population growth leads to expectations of lesser library support, the question of quality versus quantity enters the picture. Smaller enrollments, and slower population growth in general, relieve the pressure for space and more space. Money that went into buildings could go into services. One example of this might be a state that continues to support the steady growth of school media centers. Even if such growth were not rapid, in time it would equal the need (in contrast with the past, when improvement in any aspect of the educational program was overshadowed by the constant need to handle more children and build more facilities).

Even as decreased population growth does not necessarily mean less use of or less "need" for libraries, so factors other than demographic may counteract any possible negative influence from this source. Assuming the growth curve for population will level off, is the same likely to be true for numbers of publications? On the contrary, if a stable population leads to a more specialized society, the issuance of data in all forms may increase even more than it has in the past few decades. Moreover, if lessening of pressure to expand will enable libraries to improve and diversify their service programs, the small proportion of the population that now uses libraries could be substantially increased, and this would carry weight at the time of budget requests.

This kind of optimistic outlook depends upon library response and assumes a capacity to improve quality. What exactly is the new "quality" that libraries might have a chance of realizing? This is not the place for a detailed recital, but directions can be discerned: a genuine information network across the nation; full research resources readily accessible to scholars; school and college libraries that function as teaching agencies, not just as elaborate stockrooms; public libraries that serve as educational and cultural centers, and not just as free bookstores.

The prospect of decelerated population growth will provide a different setting for library planning in the next period. No longer will the automatic aim be more shelving space, more seats, more staff. The emphasis will shift from extension to improvement, and the two are not the same.

For these many years library directors, of necessity, have been expansionists. The driving force has been keeping up numerically with increasing demand, and the high point in many an administrative career has been the planning of a new and larger building. Currently, the agency



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finds itself in a kind of hiatus, between constant growth in the past and the possibility of a no-growth population base in the future. For the present, caught in the swing, library managers are preoccupied with "holding on," struggling to maintain the advances already made. This will not be enough for the next years. Instead of sharing in a rather considerable social surplus of funds, libraries will have to compete for lean pickings. Instead of aiming each year for "more," library directors and practitioners alike will have to turn in upon their agency, setting hard priorities. But more than consolidation will be called for. With a relatively stable rather than a rapidly growing population, and one hopes with concentrated attention to quality of life for all segments, library policy-makers will be called on once again to be innovative, as were library leaders a century ago who set the basic service pattern that has prevailed during the long period of expansion.

#### AN OLDER POPULATION

One of every ten Americans will be sixty-five years of age or older by 1980. The percentage will increase steadily to 16 percent shortly after the year 2000, approximately 40 million people at that time, and then will level off as a stabilized population is approached. In that older persons are not distributed evenly over the country, but tend to gravitate to warmer regions, some states will have one-quarter or more of their residents in the senior group, and some localities much more. These are not estimates or predictions but simple projections, for the people involved are living today.

About 75 percent of all Americans now reach the age of sixty-five, as against only 40 percent at the turn of the century. But once there, they only live four years longer on the average. Longevity as a whole results more from the control of contagious diseases of youth than from control of the chronic diseases of old age.

Professionals and others of at least moderate means usually making adequate pension provisions for themselves, tend to think of retirement years as a time of relative comfort and an opportunity to engage in long-cherished activities (reading among them) — all of which may well occur. However, this is not representative of older citizens as a whole. The average current income of the household head sixty-five or over is \$6300 per year, just above the official poverty level of \$6200. The oldsters of today, who obtained their formal education a half-century or more ago when even high-school attendance was exceptional, are distinctly below the average level of the population in education; just about one-half did not

complete one year of high school. This factor, along with the debilities of old age (limited mobility, failing eyesight, outright illness) account for the relatively low proportion of senior citizens using libraries.<sup>9</sup>

But the picture is changing. To begin with, the arbitrary retirement mark of sixty-five years of age is blurring. More people are retiring earlier and, on the other side, with the legal challenge to the customary sixty-five-year mark, some will retire later. Arrangements for partial retirement, shifting to part-time employment in some modification of previous occupation, will increase. From this time on, the educational level of those moving into the advanced years will be higher, as will, to some extent, their economic level.

The senior contingent will not remain a poor, voiceless and politically ineffective minority. Their influence is already felt, if at no other time than when they vote down increases in school budgets. Once united and active, this group will be a growing force, for common concerns of health, housing and taxes bring them together and feed their emotional reaction.<sup>10</sup>

Whether attitudes toward the aged will change is another matter. If any truth is beyond challenge, it is that man is mortal, but until the shadow is at the door he does not live as if this were the case. Young people are startled when told that the only way to avoid old age is to die early. To many people, the advanced in age are an uncomfortable reminder of the human condition. It is hoped that they will remain quiet and relatively invisible, but in the coming years these hopes will not be realized.

How does this situation relate to libraries? An underlying consideration is that more retired people reduce the size of the work force, so that a smaller proportion of the total population carries the load of production. Actually, this will not occur for some time, in part because the growing number of oldsters is being offset by the smaller number of youngsters, and in part because the number of married women entering employment continues to increase. In time an adjustment will occur, as the proportion of "nonproductive" older citizens grows, and if other pressures have already weakened the economy this could tip the balance. Other things being equal, longevity does not make for support of formal education and libraries — unless senior citizens can be mobilized as advocates.

While it is true that retired people as a group do not bulk large in library patronage, use surveys show that older individuals of any given educational level turn to libraries more than their counterparts at the same educational levels in the middle years. Further, where library use

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occurs at all in the period of advanced years, it tends to be more frequent and intensive than for the typical younger adult, with reading playing a more prominent role. As the educational level of oldsters increases, they will in time occupy a definite place in the library's public. This applies not only to the public library. The fastest-growing programs of colleges and universities are summer and off-season noncredit courses, with many students in the older age brackets. The provision of reading lists for further study is one of the features stressed in brochures for these offerings; these sometimes amount to bibliographies to guide self-study rather than being random grocery lists. One can even dream of a Library College for Senior Citizens, with some central source of high quality guidance in media use, with materials provided by local public, school and academic libraries. The potential is there, in the many older people sitting in their armchairs who are reluctant to turn on the television again.

The political element could also provide an opportunity. Libraries, like other agencies, will have to scramble for their dollars in the next years, which in part means mobilizing a constituency. Older people have time, many have energy, and some are consciously looking for a cause to which they can give their efforts. If the library can be made useful to them throughout the year, they can be useful to the library at budget time.

The one distinctive group service that public libraries have developed is service to children, with separate programs and special training of staff. A parallel program is conceivable for older and retired adults. Even as juvenile librarians should be knowledgeable about child development, so staff for senior citizens should have background in geriatrics, and from this, fresh service programs could be devised. This serves as an example of what is lacking in the undifferentiated mass of adult service in the public library: programs expressly aimed at identifiable groups and built on psychological principles.

Here, as elsewhere, demographic trends can be predicted within limits. What cannot be predicted with any reliability is their effect on libraries, for this depends more on what libraries do, i.e., more on response than on stimulus.

### WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

The very joining of women with family in a discussion such as this violates part of the aim of the women's movement — to find a role outside the family. But the two are linked, and can be treated in association without doing injury to either the rights or the aspirations of women.

The most clear-cut demographic indicator of the changing status of women is the increase in proportion of those in the labor force. Some seek employment for career purposes, others simply for the money, and some for both reasons. Whatever the motivation, nearly 50 percent of women are now employed, and the proportion is higher for those between twenty-five and forty-five years of age. As today's married woman leaves employment to have children, she is likely to return early to the work force. At the other end of the working life, a growing percentage of women work to age sixty to sixty-four, while a shrinking percentage of men continue in their regular jobs until age sixty-five.<sup>11</sup> Women are fitting family, children, work and career into a composite.

The net effect of these various changes is that women now share with men the load of economic productivity, although by no means do they yet share equally in monetary reward for comparable work. Of 14 million new jobs created in the past decade, 10 million have been filled by women.

Several of the demographic indicators for women are related to marriage and the family. The percentage who enter marriage at all has declined somewhat, from 65.6 to 63.5 percent since 1970. In the younger years the difference is more pronounced: in 1960, 28 percent of women aged twenty-two to twenty-four were single — by 1976 the number had risen to 46 percent. Once married, women tend to have children at a later age; the decline in the fertility rate is less for women in their thirties than for those in their twenties. The proportion of women going to college has inched upward to 58 percent, while the proportion for men has dropped from 70 percent in 1970 to 64 percent currently. The number of women in professional schools has jumped perceptibly. In one way or another, women as individuals are fashioning their own lives either inside or outside of marriage.

No continuous and analytical records of library use are kept that would yield a documented answer to the question of what the women's movement means for libraries. In the past, at least for the public library, a kind of stereotype was noted in use studies: women predominated in the user group, at least for all but the largest and more specialized facilities; and a large contingent within this female majority was made up of "housewives" who read "light fiction." However accurate that observation may have been, any such stereotype should be viewed with skepticism in the future. As men and women pursue careers, participate in the business and industrial worlds, and share in maintenance of home and family, sex differences in reading and library use will be minimized. As husband

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and wife enter the library, the latter may go to the section on personnel management, and the former to the section on cooking.

And what of the family? Its demise is proclaimed on every magazine stand and regularly in the Sunday supplement to the newspaper. Changes are occurring, the most basic being the smaller number of children. Divorce rates move inexorably upward. The number of single-parent families is increasing, and will soon be 20 percent of the total. What all this really tells about the texture and quality of family life is hard to say. It is conceivable, given that old-fashioned ingredient of love, that the child develops better even if both parents work and share, than a child would in the traditional structure if the precious ingredient is missing.

One tangible result of the women's movement is the proliferation of formal preschool facilities for younger children. Some amount to no more than baby-sitting on a group basis, but others provide a constructive learning and social experience. Schools can be expected to mount more programs for the early years, kindergarten and prekindergarten. Genuine media centers in schools could be an integral part of the development, but public library children's divisions, with their greater orientation to print, may be slower to capitalize on the opportunity.

However one evaluates the women's movement and the changing family, the fact remains that both depend less on tradition and more on fresh and conscious understandings than in the past. This could prompt the single woman, the mother, and the father alike to turn more frequently to the record of knowledge. Again the analysis leads to the same question: will libraries anticipate needs growing out of social trends and, while holding to their essential role, organize and focus special programs for identified groups? Libraries should long have had separate and vital home and family sections — treating a fundamental institution in the society as a unit — and the need, if anything, is now greater.

By and large, the potential library public is augmented by demographic changes in progress. Younger children can be served in the school and in the community before as well as during the school years. The customary male audience for career, occupational and technological materials will be joined by women, as will the customary female audience for homemaking and child-rearing materials be joined by men. Change makes for stimulus, stimulus makes for search, and the search may well lead to collections of information and wisdom. Libraries are as much or more for people reaching out as for people staying within tradition. Whatever is being liberated — women or family or both — library use is likely to go up rather than down.

## GEOGRAPHIC REDISTRIBUTION

Two shifts in location of people in the United States have changed and continue to change the face of the country: (1) the migration from the northeast and north central states to the south and west, and (2) the exodus from central cities to outlying metropolitan areas (known formerly as suburbs, the term no longer accurately describes the exurban landscape). Both may peak or at least decelerate in the next decades, as new metropolitan and regional balances are reached.

The migration from north to south and west has recently received intensified attention under the headings of "sun belt" and "snow belt," but the shift started well before the terms were invented. In percentage figures, Florida and California are actually past their 1940-70 heyday, with growth rates today very little above the national average. The more populous "sun belt" states are now experiencing the pressures of population concentration which have endangered the older centers of the northeast.

Overall the trend continues. With a national increase in population from 1960 to 1970 of 13.3 percent, the northeast and north central states had a 9.6 percent gain, and the southern and western states showed an 18.1 percent gain. The shift has accelerated since the last national census; from 1975 to 1977, it is estimated that the former regions became almost static in population, while the latter grew 2 percent per year.<sup>12</sup> If this trend were to continue, there would be some 150 million people in the south and west by the year 2000, and some 100 million left in the northeast and north central regions, altering the eastern preponderance that has prevailed since the founding of the nation.

But again the broad figures must be examined more closely. Some sections of the south never did experience notable increase: the central southeast group (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi) has one of the lowest growth rates in the country. On the other hand, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont — the quintessence of the snow belt — are growing more rapidly than the national average. Population increase has slowed down in Arizona, in part because of a prospective shortage of water and less favorable job opportunities, and the same conditions apply in parts of California. If the present situation may be described as fluid, the levels in the several containers can be expected to reach a fresh balance — but not without an impact on libraries as on other agencies.

Forty years ago Louis R. Wilson in *The Geography of Reading*<sup>13</sup> documented the disparity in library resources as one between the northeast and north central states on one side, and the southern and western states

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on the other. Of course, library development has gone forward in all regions since then, most notably in the growth leaders, California and Florida. In some respects the sun belt continues to catch up; it is interesting to note that several southern and southwestern cities are going forward with plans for new central public library buildings, although buildings in various of the older northeastern cities are those most in need of replacement.

A "geography of reading" for the 1970s is lacking, but it is apparent that part of the disparity continues to exist. The extraordinary resources of the Washington/New York/Boston triad are unmatched in the country. But this need not mean a duplication of such resources in the growing sun belt. These regions have not only grown in the strength of individual libraries, but also in regional cooperative programs, so that they are far from helpless in meeting many of their own requirements. What is needed is steady progress toward a national network, so that the holdings of libraries where population is stabilizing are also available to areas where population continues to increase. To this time the design of library delivery systems has assumed people coming to libraries; in the future the basic construct will be libraries coming to people in home, office and laboratory, crossing state and regional lines in the process. The technological means exist; the test is whether the requisite social, political and professional attitudes and structures can be developed.

#### URBAN CONCENTRATION AND DISPERSION

One of the most evident and influential demographic trends of the past century has been the migration of people first to the urban center, and then the shift out from the center over the metropolitan area. Overall, 70 percent of the American people live in metropolitan areas; the figure is expected to be 85 percent by the year 2000. The proportion currently is 80 percent in the northeast and 93 percent in California, the highest among the states. The midsized areas, those with 1 to 2 million people, have recently been growing faster than the larger and the smaller metropolitan concentrations.<sup>14</sup> Within metropolitan areas, over one-half of the urbanites live outside the central city, and the proportion is growing.

It is not too much to say that urbanization provided the soil and the climate in which the modern library emerged and grew. The city provided that combination of population concentration, unified government, functional specialization, economic productivity and cultural variety that called for the record of knowledge, and also provided the financial means to build the record. The early public library was an urban product, from Boston onward. School libraries first took root in cities. Many universities

appeared within the urban concentration, and the greatest combinations of research library resources are in one-half dozen centers. The special library — for business, government, the professions — flowered in this same environment. Cities and libraries — for a century the two have been interconnected, symbiotic.

If urban concentration provided the vortex for library as well as other information-knowledge agencies, the half-century of metropolitan dispersion that followed has been a mixed blessing. In the early decades of suburbanization, the total library picture appeared to be enriched. Suburbs made up of families of above-average income fostered some of the more satisfying smaller public libraries, and were able to do so for two reasons: (1) an ample and expanding tax base in the locality that did not have to support the complexity which characterized the central city, and (2) circumscribed library service provision that left the more expensive facilities to be provided by the central city. The same forces made for some of the more commendable media centers in suburban schools. The comfortable suburb and its libraries thrived on wealth produced in the city and at the same time depended for specialized library service on the city from which the wealth had been taken.

The neat pattern of suburban satellites did not continue, however. The exodus from the central city accelerated and urban sprawl appeared. The flood spread across a patchwork of governmental units that had emerged long before urban decentralization was envisioned. The result is that while some of the "better" public libraries can be found in the suburbs, so can some of the worst, and similarly, some model school media centers as well as many school libraries tucked away in corners of overcrowded buildings.

In recent years a new balance has appeared in the metropolitan areas. In the earlier stages the dispersion was primarily residential, people moving to homes and communities of their liking, while still working and shopping in the center. Then the dispersion drew out retail trade, and major — sometimes monumental — shopping centers were built. More recently industry and industrial research followed on the periphery. Now some corporate headquarters shift to the outer edges. The typical suburbanite today is not a dweller on a tree-lined street, commuting to the central city for livelihood, and dependent on the center for supplies and services. Instead, families live, work, shop and play all in the outer fringes, usually with all the trees long since bulldozed. The point is that not just people, but significant segments of the economy and culture have made the shift. Rather than a central city and modest satellites around the vital



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center, there are now congeries of focal points loosely attached to a declining core.

Not all agencies have adjusted to this new pattern. Some continue in the structure that grew up during urbanization and early suburban dispersion. The library is one of these, with the specialized foundation for a complex technological and industrial society in the center city, and neighborhood libraries in the many decentralized governmental units. Out on the periphery are the new knowledge-oriented industries, many members of the business community, a growing proportion of professionals — while the collections with the capacity to serve them are back in the city they have left. The library is a facility that has not developed a new metropolitan structure. There are exceptions. In a few metropolitan areas, countywide libraries show greater strength than a welter of small suburban installations; in a few others, federated systems coordinate resources and services. Interestingly enough, these structures — county libraries and federated systems — were not originally intended to deal with the metropolitan complex, but with small-town and rural service, and for lack of any other available alternative they have been adapted to the urban situation. They were designed to improve residential service to children, students and adults in their general interests, and not to build specialized resources. Moreover, most metropolitan areas lack even this partial structure of coordination.

Meanwhile, back in the center, the crisis continues, and it by no means leaves libraries unaffected. The litany of problems is familiar: fewer jobs, declining population, shrinking tax base, physical deterioration, mounting costs of maintaining law and order. Seventeen of the largest cities have lost population since 1970. Many of the poor are also here. The financial result is the specter of municipal bankruptcy.

Under these conditions, with few exceptions, the central city libraries that were at the forefront of service innovation a generation or more ago — developing subject departmentation, reference service, adult education, children's activities — are now struggling to retain past gains. Some are discernibly slipping.

If this were the end of the story, if metropolitan dispersion on the one hand and central deterioration on the other were the sum and substance of demographic change in urban areas in the next decades, the prospect would be grim indeed. The road would be downhill for all those libraries that have been nurtured by urbanization, and that means the bulk of past strength. But an urban balance may be emerging, and in fact some reversal of dispersion can be discerned.

To begin with, the outward flow of vital forces may not continue to draw out the whole nexus. Corporate decision-making is still primarily a city-located enterprise. Some corporations are moving their headquarters out, but others — displaying social concern in business commitments — are constructing new buildings in the central city. The financial fuel that keeps the economy going is supplied from the center, as are the bellows of advertising that keep the flame bright. Highly specialized services in medicine and law are still located there. “High” culture remains in or near the nucleus — and there also is the knowledge reservoir, the central city library and many of the special libraries.

As to population dispersion, it would be inaccurate to claim that the exurban exodus has stopped or will soon stop. The strongest outward pull now is not — as it was formerly — the dream of a piece of one’s own land and a stable community (neither is easy to find). Rather, the drawing force is the simple fact of continuing industrial development. People go out as much to get jobs as to escape social disorganization. But, harking back to the prospect of a no-growth population, part of the impetus for new industry will lessen and decentralized industrial growth may slow down. There may be fewer new jobs at the fringes ten or twenty years from now.

This is conjecture. What is definite is that the sprawling metropolitan area is there without adequate library resources at the frontier of growth. Here is where applied research and experimentation is urgently needed — not in how to build great new libraries over the metropolitan expanse, but in how to open access for decentralized endeavor to the resources already in the central city (a technological problem within reach) and how to finance that central reservoir from other than the strained resources of the beleaguered city (a social-governmental problem which is more elusive).

The conceptual framework for this research should not be the metropolitan area of the present. Rather, it should be the *urban region*, made up of connected metropolitan areas — the string of centers from Boston to Washington and beyond; Milwaukee and Gary combined with Chicago; Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse together, not separate; and on a smaller scale, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The social-psychological barriers to joint planning are high in such instances, but electronic communication can penetrate the barriers in microseconds.

In the city itself population change, other than continuing exodus and persisting poverty, is occurring. Some people are staying or coming back, particularly a new or at least increasing breed of “cosmopolites.”

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The cosmopolite is well educated, rather young, comfortable financially, and in business, the professions or communications. He or she may or may not be married, may or may not live alone, but in any case typically has no children. Such individuals have long characterized the upper East Side and parts of Greenwich Village in New York City, the Gold Coast in Chicago, Georgetown in Washington, and pockets in other cities. Now their number is increasing and their territory expanding to parts of the upper West Side in New York, north of the Gold Coast in Chicago, the Spring Garden area in Philadelphia, and to several sections of San Francisco. Those people who swell the ranks of this group have deep-seated values: new attitudes toward the family, women with careers, changed sexual mores, and a conscious search for identity.

Are these newer city dwellers, these cosmopolitan individuals, library users? Certainly, they are information-dependent, making their living as they do from specialized endeavor. But for this purpose they need instant, current information sources. Is this the forte of existing city libraries? These people are clearly culture-conscious, following ideas, literature and the arts, particularly the more sophisticated among them. Is this the strength of the city library as it has been known? Even as metropolitan dispersion called for a new type of outlying library that did not appear, so the newer central-city revival calls for an agency that does not follow traditional lines.

Rather than the "monolithic" library, with a continual range of subject resources without distinguishable height, depth or emphasis, the emerging central city library needs a constellation of sharply differing units — one for the business-corporate-financial community, one for the communications complex, one for the high-culture cosmopolite — and (it is to be devoutly hoped) one focused on and dedicated to the poor and the minorities caught in the backwash of the city while currents flow elsewhere.

The central city library is in reality a metropolitan resource. No matter where the central building is located, no matter what blight can be seen from the front steps, people from all over the region — as much as thirty or forty miles out — seek out the agency and use it. Why? Because they have specialized needs and nowhere else to satisfy them. Every urban library director should know how many of the patrons of the central unit live outside the city, if for no other reason than as a bargaining chip for broader financial support. Turning to the future, this "metropolitan" library (central unit of the city library) is a promising candidate to serve as the node connecting subregions to interstate and national resources.

Part of the problem in taking on any such role is physical space. The buildings constructed a half-century or more ago are outdated and overcrowded. Should a major new investment, which in the largest places could approach \$100 million, be made to build another structure in the center far away from the dispersing populace? In one form or another this question confronts many municipal authorities, and often becomes ensnared in controversy and indecision.

The further one goes the more the questions mount. Who will finance any grand new structure? Should the city somehow find money to construct a facility that will be used in significant measure by individuals, organizations and firms not on the city tax rolls? Should costs be shared by the whole metropolitan area, and if so through a metropolitan library authority? Can a case be made for federal investment on the grounds that new central city libraries will be resources for multistate urban regions? The issue will not be soon resolved, while the old structure stands and waits.

#### MINORITIES AND THE POOR

The various population changes swirling around the city have left behind definite pockets of poverty, and in older cities the poor are not confined to pockets, but spread through the total pattern. One in every nine Americans, 25 million people, live at or below the official poverty level.<sup>15</sup> Here is the clear and hard class line in society, separating those who can afford the necessities of life from those who cannot. The more than ten years of the "war on poverty" have had a result similar to that of the Vietnam war: the elusive foe has prevailed.

A disproportionately large segment of the poor is black, Spanish-speaking or members of other minorities. The median income for white families in 1975 was \$13,073; for black families, \$8540. The gap between the income of black women and white women has narrowed significantly, as the former have left domestic service for factory and clerical positions, but the differential for the two groups of men has been reduced only partially. Further, what the statistics tend to hide is that the increase for blacks is not shared evenly, but is really a technical average affected by a certain number of blacks who have moved into the middle-income ranks, while most remain just about where they were.

The usual figures also fail to identify the white poor, particularly the rural white poor. This does not refer to the small-scale farmer but to the untrained individual, unemployed or working part-time, eking out existence on a small rural plot, living in a tarpapered, tin-roofed shack,

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driving to town in a rusted automobile. If poverty is cultural as well as economic, these dwellers on the back roads of hilly country from Canada to the deep south are at the bottom of the scale. While no figures exist to indicate upward mobility of this group, it is possible that breaking out of poverty is no more likely for the rural poor white than for the city black.

Outreach efforts by libraries to serve undereducated minorities reflect the approach, and for the most part the lack of success, of the wider war on poverty. Genuine concern is expressed for the problem. Some effort is extended to meet it and some dedicated individuals give their fullest. Here and there visible progress occurs in vital library service in the city slums, although hardly ever in the rural slums. Even the urban efforts touch only a fragment of the poor, however. Few programs have been evaluated to find out exactly what was achieved. After a period of time some of the experiments fade away—some because they have clearly not been effective, and others because funds could not or were not spared from established activities.

The school library in minority neighborhoods stands at that strategic point where many a slum child first encounters the world of print. At its best the school media center has a range of the communication forms with which the youngster is familiar. Here, with fresh young minds a greater opportunity exists than with set, older minds. Too often, unfortunately, contrary forces prevail: school and community are not in accord, child and institution have differing aims, librarian and instructors do not constitute a teaching team, and the youngster simply does not know how to read. Once again measures of effectiveness are lacking, i.e., not necessarily broad percentages, but documented evidence of some individuals reached and some doors opened by exposure to the school library.

At a different level, seeking to clear the way for culturally deprived individuals, some academic institutions have adopted open admissions policies. The benefactors are by no means only blacks and other minorities, but all who complete high school. This brings in individuals weak in communication skills and leads not only to remedial work but also to modifications in regular courses. It is charged by some that a lowering of standards occurs not just for admissions but also for graduation. One critic has observed that "the blacks and Puerto Ricans and Asians arriving at City College come from working-class families in which television and radio are the exclusive sources of information and in which there was no tradition of learning, no special association with books, no clear commitment to the purposes or possibilities of higher education."<sup>16</sup>

Some academic libraries have provided remedial instruction in library

skills. In this and similar endeavors the aim is to prepare the individual to use standard sources of learning, particularly in print form. Such iconoclastic questions as why learning must necessarily be conducted through books, and whether libraries should adjust to the individuals by providing extensive nonprint resources (rather than expecting the student to adjust to the library's traditional stock) have seldom been raised. There is an institution-individual confrontation involved in open admissions, both in the college as a whole and in the library in particular, and it is probable that the established institutional practices will hold firm.

With few exceptions outreach programs have been planned by professionals who are not members of the group being served. The approach has been to adapt methods built up over the past fifty years for middle-class and upwardly mobile groups. It will be interesting to observe whether a fresh and unique approach can be developed by the American Indians in their current preparation for the White House Conference on Libraries. Here is a minority on which the United States long practiced outright geographical segregation in the form of reservations. In fact, Indians have been kept so separate that the White House conference will have a special panel for them, the only minority so treated. Planning now underway by Indians in preparation for the conference will provide one demonstration of a truly indigenous approach to serving minorities.

### CLASS AND LIBRARIES

If it is true that libraries serve individuals rather than groups as such, and that the individuals may or may not be representative of their statistical category, then it follows that changes more subtle than those in the census tables may affect library use and library support. One of these more subtle influences is class or group characteristics.

Social agencies can be differentiated by the breadth or limits of their patronage. Some serve all or most segments of the society, while others relate predominantly to one or another group or level. The symbiosis between agency and clientele contributes significantly to attitudes toward the agency on the part of the public, on the part of its users, and even on the part of its staff.

Schools by law serve all "classes," and they have been directly influenced by their surrounding communities. A narrower portion of the spectrum goes on to attend institutions of higher education, and their policies have been determined more by interplay with particular strata than with society as a whole.

Some agencies by their nature relate more to one or another level.

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Parks are used more by persons of lower than of upper income. On the other hand, theater and musical organizations (which to a degree are public agencies in the sense of partial government subsidization and voluntary community support) usually reach a cultural elite. Where does the library stand in relation to perception and use by the various classes?

To attempt any answer, some concept of "class" must be formulated. This proves to be most difficult when applied to American society, where lines blur and conceptions differ depending on the background of the observer. Yet most people are conscious of groups they consider to be above them or below them in the social order. Sociological studies have long found class distinctions in American communities, marked by differing attitudes, values and prejudices.<sup>17</sup> The barriers of course are not rigid between groups and people shift from one level to another, but the very phrase "upward mobility" implies a recognized hierarchy of lower and higher associations.

An overwhelming number of Americans identify themselves with the "middle class," which they see as superior to some lower groups and different from and somehow more virtuous than certain upper groups. But the bounds of the middle class are most flexible; people of very modest and also of very substantial incomes put themselves into this broad strand. If one seeks to be more precise and objective — adopting as a minimum a living standard that enables a family of four to meet medical, educational (including college education), recreational and cultural costs, which now is estimated in the \$15,000-\$18,000 range — less than one-half of American families would qualify; in fact, according to this standard, professional librarians would not enter the "middle class" until some years after entering practice, and some would never make it.

For purposes of an education-research agency such as the library, society can be pictured as made up on the one side of a minority of persons of limited education and often of limited income, and on the other side of a minority of well-paid and usually highly educated specialists (e.g., professionals, managers, scientists). A broad middle range falls between the two with gradations of class feelings. Overall, the picture is of a relatively classless society, but with some distinctions most readily identified with amount of education and specialization.

In this relatively classless society, libraries have generally been agencies for special and privileged groups, and not a resource actually utilized by all or many levels. Studies early and late have consistently shown public libraries to be disproportionately used by persons of above-average income and above-average education. Advocates have proclaimed the potential

value of the community library for working-class and poor neighborhoods, and occasional experiments have realized part of the potential, but the statistics inexorably return to a preponderance of upper-income, better-educated users.

All this is to be expected of an agency essentially oriented to print and to a considerable extent oriented to more specialized content in print. The library is a tool of education, so naturally it is used by those who have or are gaining considerable education. If it were more an agency of multi-media communication, its clientele would be more of a cross-section, as occurs in some school libraries that have become media centers. As another alternative, if the library were more of an informational agency, dispensing utilitarian data rather than reading material as such, its usefulness to nonspecialized individuals would be increased.

Recorded, packaged knowledge, often in some depth, has nevertheless been the stock-in-trade of the library, and continues to be so at present. Even newer automated data sources, not in print form, usually aim at a specialized, highly-educated minority. Will this change in the future? Indeed, does it need to change? A specialized society requires advanced knowledge sources. Inevitably, those with more training, and therefore usually those getting more financial reward, will turn to them. Why try to serve persons who are not disposed to use libraries or whose work does not require a periodic input of new knowledge?

There are both social and tactical reasons for reaching a wider segment of the people while retaining present strength and clientele. Information is not an ordained privilege of those who have "made it." Reasonable concern for the many others, who are "information poor," would prompt efforts to open this source to them, and if necessary to redesign collecting and distribution policies in order to share the knowledge wealth. This is not a matter of information welfare, a handout to a small subclass, but a matter of import to a broad part of the spectrum, who may economically be in the middle as well as the lower levels, but who lack access to information they need as citizens, parents, consumers, and workers.

It is the fact that libraries are used by a distinct minority that accounts for the prevailing image of the agency. By and large, it is seen as valuable to persons with research and specialized responsibilities and to a small group in the general population who read more than the newspaper and the popular magazine. Few of those who direct policy and control the purse-strings would decry these activities, but as natural resources become limited in the nation and economic productivity slows, they will — when the chips are down — put their priorities elsewhere.



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Is this likely to change? Will libraries of the various types modify and extend programs to gain a wider social base? To this observer, the prognosis is not favorable. Over the years libraries essentially have changed very little, and where they have, it has often been to concentrate and intensify rather than to broaden and diversify. This is characteristic of institutions as they mature and settle. Today, the newer efforts are directed inward — better bibliographical control, centralized data records, regional and national networks — all designed to serve better not even the whole of the present clientele, but the subgroup of specialists within it. The forces that seem destined to change the library are more technological than social, with modifications in structure and mechanics more likely than in social purpose and wider clientele.

#### RESEARCH

In the same vein, research in the library field has been oriented more toward internal problems rather than outward to users or to the society as a whole. Such matters as resource-building, technical methods and institutional management have predominated. Having fairly well exhausted such topics as they apply to individual libraries, attention now turns to the same questions among groups of libraries. In the process research gets further and further away from the elemental interface between resources and users and the underlying relationships between libraries and the community at large. Yet there have been significant pieces of social investigation, probing the relation between the agency and people. Interestingly enough, these less-frequent endeavors are likely to come to mind and endure as landmarks when one thinks of “library research”; the operational investigations prove to be more circumscribed and time-bound in their impact and effect.

The problem with social research in the library field is that it has been sporadic and fragmentary. A study of insight opens fresh avenues, but few additional investigators explore the same road further. Perhaps the better analogy is to say that solid building blocks are molded by individual studies, but scattered blocks do not constitute a structure of knowledge. Librarians stand far short of understanding the impact of social change on their agency or its effect on people.

As a secondary interest, attention to social implications can be traced far back in the professional literature. The 1852 *Report of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library*, in a resounding phrase, foresaw their institution as enabling people to “understand questions going down to the very foundation of the social order.”<sup>18</sup> The 1876 national survey identified

libraries as an emerging reservoir of recorded knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Over the years reflective individuals groped toward an understanding of the agency in relation to community.<sup>20</sup>

The social theme took on a conscious research bent in the 1930s at the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago, with the work of Douglas Waples on reading,<sup>21</sup> Carleton Joeckel on governance of libraries,<sup>22</sup> and others. Yet even their work remained unfinished; the blocks of research were sometimes fitted into part of a wall, but not into a completed structure of theory which librarians could apply. Practicing professionals watched the efforts at Chicago with reactions ranging from sympathy to condemnation, but in either case watched rather than participated.

Social histories that went below the surface appeared from time to time, i.e., the works of Ditzion (1947), Shera (1949), Rothstein (1954), and Lee (1966).<sup>23</sup> A recent study of the New York Public Library continues the tradition.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that more is known about the relations between some early libraries and their communities than is known about these same agencies today. The occasional studies tend to stand alone rather than constituting a rounded social history of the library up to the present.

From time to time pressing problems prompted some objective social investigation. With professional concern about access to libraries in the early 1960s, the actualities of the situation were examined.<sup>25</sup> As issues of intellectual freedom and censorship came to the fore, the performance of librarians themselves was analyzed.<sup>26</sup> Also, on occasion, social scientists rather than librarians were brought in. The most notable example is the Public Library Inquiry of the late 1940s,<sup>27</sup> at least one volume of which raised questions that have not been settled thirty years later.<sup>28</sup> Social investigators were also brought in to evaluate a few of the outreach efforts of the 1960s, both in New York City and in upstate New York.<sup>29</sup> The few investigations by social scientists of library use — Hajda in Baltimore City, Warner et al. in Baltimore County, Monat in several Pennsylvania centers<sup>30</sup> — went beyond gross group response to bring out motivations for library use.

Much of this research was viewed by library policy-makers as “background,” a polite term for peripheral or irrelevant. The next budget had to be prepared, the next building planned, the next branch opened. Administrators seeking to keep up with expansion felt little need for social research, and for a logical reason. They were not setting goals or deciding priorities; these had been set for them decades before, and within the

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established framework they concentrated on the practical task of "keeping up." The situation will be different in the future, however, with demographic change, economic problems flowing from this change, continued redistribution of population, and altered social values and lifestyles. What was background will become foreground, and hard-headed managers will perforce find themselves considering the social effects of the declining birthrate, longevity, urban rehabilitation and the changing family.

User studies have increased in number in the last decade or so, following a comprehensive report for the Baltimore area.<sup>31</sup> Almost invariably such surveys deal with large groups and census-type data. Tracing of relations with individuals has been rare (the work started by Ennis is an exception<sup>32</sup>), so that librarians know relatively little of the "why," "how" and "to what effect" of their clientele. There exists at least the beginnings of a social history and of a sociology of librarianship, but only a glimmer of the social psychology of the field. This is the reason why many practicing librarians are unimpressed with the social surveys, for they know that their professional judgment on the job is applied to separate and sometimes atypical individuals and not to groups. Library social research, so far as it exists, is where sociology was a century ago, when general social surveys were the mode of investigation.

Directions of promising research are implied in the foregoing analysis. At the more elementary level, a new "geography" of library resources is needed for regions and for the country as a whole, so that the association and dissociation between facilities and shifting populations can be traced. More user studies are needed, not going over the same broad census-type ground but focusing on subgroups. Beyond groups, the library experience of individuals needs examination. Just who of the society do libraries serve? Are the users typical or not typical of their groups? What are the motivations of those who respond, as compared to their fellow creatures? For these individuals, where does the library stand among the other sources of knowledge and culture that they utilize? Is there change in response, are libraries reaching a broader or narrower range of the population as the median educational level increases? Such questions would appear to be basic to an understanding of any public agency. Only with the answers to such questions can assessments of the role of an institution be based on more than hunch and hope.

Continuing or periodic data are needed for program planning and evaluation. At several points in this article on relations between libraries and society, there was no choice except to say simply that documentary evidence does not exist. On a sampling basis it would be both technically

possible and financially feasible to keep a running record of just what is happening to library patronage, perhaps state by state. With this information, planning for new services (e.g., for older people or for members of the "working class" or for cosmopolites) would be on firmer ground. After programs are launched, a continuing record would permit evaluations of objectives achievement. At present, librarians are unsure just where new effort should be expended, and if they do strike out, are unsure later what difference it makes.

Such applied research can lead to deeper probing of the library role. Nontypical users (those not following patterns that would be assumed from their backgrounds) should be pursued. Equal attention should be given to instances where the library as an agency deviates or even stands against prevailing fashions. Often it is the fresh view which research provides from the "other" side, rather than the confirming evidence from the familiar side, that provides the greatest insight. Researchers should hypothesize social divergence as well as social adherence.

Research by definition analyzes what has been and what is, not what will be, but models of the predictable future already exist and can be isolated for examination. Population groupings typical of what will prevail a generation hence can be found today and their utilization of library and information sources studied. A few examples of metropolitan library authorities exist which merit research attention because they seek to deal with the political and financial problems of serving a functionally unified user population living and working in a patchwork of fragmented governmental units. More difficult to isolate and study is the emerging model of electronic communication from collections to users, as against the long-prevailing system of users physically going to the centralized collection. To examine this prospect, experimental research will be necessary; it is in some respects the most complex and expensive kind of investigation and might be considered by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science as it seeks to discern the road into the future.

It is a matter of concern — both to present understanding of the agency and to the designing of future library policy — that relatively little social research of these several types goes forward currently. The library is an agency half-understood by librarians and the public alike. Until now the desire for greater understanding has been more an intellectual and academic interest. The institution itself has gone forward in modes set long ago in a young, growing, economically expanding country, and would have done so just about as it has with or without research. One does not need analysis of the terrain or a detailed map when going

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straight ahead through familiar territory. The road ahead turns, however; it is not likely to be smooth. Social research in the library field is no longer solely an exercise of doctoral students and the preoccupation of a handful of researchers. For an agency that may or may not survive through the next century, investigation is an imperative, just as it is for the many other enterprises that now turn to the library to find out what research tells them about their relation to the society.

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