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FIRST DRAFT  
REMARKS TO OPEN NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK  
APRIL 21, 1968  
IRL/irl

Good evening. It is a great pleasure for me as Rhode Island Chairman of National Library Week to open this observance. For in today's changing world, one of the only constants is the increased need for knowledge, and the true fountains of knowledge are certainly our libraries. Knowledge about vocations, human relations, national and international events is essential to the quest for self-fulfillment and national well-being for our citizens. And scientific, and technical knowledge is required for our economic well-being. The public library is in a unique position to furnish such of this knowledge, and indeed as an integral part of our huge educational network, has a unique responsibility to be a primary source of information for millions of American citizens of all ages.

I think that National Library Week is an appropriate occasion to look back briefly over some of the history of libraries in our country. From its origins to the present, the library has been considered central to the process of education. In America, the establishment of the first educational institution and the first library were almost

simultaneous. In 1636 the legislature of the Massachusetts Bay Colony appropriated 400 pounds to establish a college. Two years later the Reverend John Harvard gave an additional sum and more than 300 volumes from his library to this new institution which in gratitude was named Harvard College.

Although the public library is considered a peculiarly American institution, it did not really come into its own until late in the last century. Since only the rich could afford collections of books, the middle class turned to group buying, a device pioneered by Benjamin Franklin and a group of friends who in 1731 founded the Library Company of Philadelphia. Between 1750 and 1850 subscription libraries were formed in hundreds of towns, and the motivation for the public library came from these groups. The first important public library opened in Boston in 1874. From the beginning the pioneers in the public library movement emphasized the need for the library to educate. In 1876 Melvil Dewey, one of the founders of the American Library Association wrote "The school teaches the people to read; the library must supply them with reading which will serve to educate."

Late in the 19th century, the groundwork for our modern library system was laid by philanthropic men of vision such as John Jacob Astor, J.P. Morgan, Samuel Tilden, and of course,

Andrew Carnegie. The latter gave more than 42 million dollars to build more than 2800 public libraries in communities which evidenced enough interest to agree to maintain them.

Until recently our public library system was largely nurtured by the philanthropies of the very rich and by sporadic governmental assistance. In 1956, however, we reached a new era with the passage of the Library Services Act. Since it is clear that an informed citizenry is one of the prerequisites of a democratic system, it is similarly clear that a proper function of democratic government must be to help provide that information. Libraries were the obvious conduits. In 1956 Congress felt that our rural sections were most in need of assistance and it was to those areas the legislation was directed. That first bill provided federal funds to extend and improve library services in areas with a population of less than 10,000. By 1964, Congress recognized that the needs of all libraries were growing and acted to provide grants to urban as well as rural areas, through the Library Services and Construction Act. As a co-sponsor of that legislation, I agreed wholeheartedly with President Johnson who said upon signing it "The library is the best training ground for enlightenment that rational man has ever conceived."

Between 1957 and 1968 Rhode Island has received \$2,173,027 in Federal funds for use in salaries, purchase of books, materials and expansion of facilities. In fiscal '67 \$246,000 in federal funds helped in library construction alone right here in our State. The 1966 amendments to the LCSEA provided 571 million dollars through 1971 to raise physical standards and help provide new library space, to support inter library cooperation and to assist handicapped and institutions to partake of library services. This will mean an additional \$606,000 to Rhode Island.

Thanks to these federal efforts Rhode Islanders are receiving better and better library services. But, of course, more is needed than the single pronged approach of Federal assistance. To insure our citizens the best possible facilities and materials, a broad, cooperative effort is necessary. And we in Rhode Island are fortunate in that this effort is in fact underway. After the passage of the Federal Library Services and Construction Act of 1964, our State Legislature established the Department of Library Services. Under the able leadership of Elizabeth Myer, this department is providing a fine level of cooperative endeavors. Our State has a highly developed network involving our public and university libraries which is being expanded to include our secondary school libraries. This system encourages the maximum use of

our existing resources so that all of our people may be assured of maximum benefit from our present facilities.

The library has always been recognized as the heart of higher education. It is just as important to arts and humanities as the laboratory is to science and technology. And just as our colleges need modern, efficient laboratories, so do they need efficient, well developed libraries. Those of us with teenage youngsters have all pored over Lovejoy's College Guide and similar volumes listing all the colleges and universities of this country. Have you noticed that no matter how brief the description of the individual college, the one fact that is always included is the number of volumes in the library. The conclusion is obvious---We need high quality libraries in colleges to provide high quality education. As Carlyle said "The true university is a collection of books."

In this sense, to be truly educated, one must remain an undergraduate all ones life. Too often, our young people look upon graduation as an end, when in fact it should be viewed as a beginning, a commencement to learning. Formal schooling provides a foundation for education, not a completed building. And even this foundation will crumble unless learning continues. The building materials clearly are books, both before and after graduation. Education and books must be part of the entire life of an educated person if life is to

have depth and meaning. The explosion in leisure time that we are witnessing, together with the explosion in population and information is bringing a concomitant explosion in the demand for library services. And we must continue to meet this demand with support both on the private level and the public level. We must not only continue in our traditional services, but we must also initiate imaginative new programs.

These programs are of two dimensions, internal and external. To meet the internal problems of the information explosion, our libraries are turning more and more to automation and computerization. Many of you whose careers are in library services, know far better than I the impact of microfilm, and other devices of automation. However, I would like to comment briefly on the external aspect of innovation.... the growing need to involve the library more intimately in the life of the community. Expert commentators on today's American scene agree that our number one domestic problem is to improve the quality of life for all of our citizens. What this in fact means is that our number one enemy is ignorance and poverty in our core cities---a euphemism for our slums. And here is where I feel our public libraries can help us come to grips with this great challenge.

Poverty and ignorance are linked in an unholy alliance.

It has been demonstrated that the ability to learn and read goes hand in hand with the ability to earn and succeed. Dynamic, well-staffed libraries can help develop reading skills and learning interests that will in turn develop earning abilities. Libraries can help provide the incentives that will change illiterates to literates. Libraries have a special mission to this "out group", those youngsters, and those oldsters, who don't have "the system" going for them-- the reading drop outs, so to speak.

I know that much is being done to assist the disadvantaged right here in Rhode Island. The bookmobile which the State Library circulates does much in bringing books into many project homes which would otherwise go without them. I know the fine work the Providence Public Library is doing with Project Books in South Providence, and of the Demonstration Library Project which has been a success at the Oakland Beach Elementary School in Warwick. All these projects are eminently worthwhile. But even more can be done.

Those who need aid must be sought out. In other words the libraries must play the active role of solicitor, not the passive role of supplier. What I have in mind is what has been done at the University of Maryland through the largesse of a \$176,000 Federal grant. Here a library has



been set up in a Negro section to attract children by such services as story telling sessions, plays, movies, and musical events. The neighborhood is toured on a regular basis for storytelling. The object is to make the library a community center, where those who drop in will probably never become drop outs.

The Boston Public Library has set up tutorial services for junior and senior high school students in underprivileged areas. "Operation Second Chance" is a project of the Brooklyn Public Library to help improve the reading abilities of functional illiterates. And in New Haven a neighborhood center is being developed in a slum section to provide an educational program to attract non-readers. These are the directions we must take.

By latest count the number of libraries in America---specialized and general, public, school and college----has risen to the impressive total of 70,502. In the last fiscal year the total federal contributions to these libraries was nearly 500 million dollars. Assistance on this scale reflects revived interest in libraries as a primary instrument of education in America. As generalists, we in government can help with the provision of care and tuning of that instrument. But it is you the specialists, you in the library field who must be the improvisers, who must devise the proper tunes to be played.

Thoreau once said "Books are the treasured wealth of the world, the fit inheritance of generations and nations."

It is our job to preserve and promote that inheritance.