
Hardy R. Franklin

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STATEMENT OF
HARDY R. FRANKLIN
PRESIDENT
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
AND
DIRECTOR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC LIBRARY
BEFORE THE
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES
ON LIBRARIES AND THEIR ROLE
IN THE INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE
APRIL 19, 1994
SENATOR SIMON AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE, I AM HERE TODAY IN TWO CAPACITIES, FIRST, AS PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (ALA), WHICH IS THE OLDEST AND LARGEST LIBRARY ASSOCIATION IN THE WORLD, WITH A MEMBERSHIP OF OVER 57,000 LIBRARIANS, LIBRARY TRUSTEES, AND FRIENDS OF LIBRARIES AT PUBLIC, ACADEMIC, SCHOOL AND SPECIAL LIBRARIES. AND SECOND, AS DIRECTOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC LIBRARY, MY STAFF AND I STAND READY TO PROVIDE YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES WITH LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE IN THE EVENT THAT YOU CAN'T FIND WHAT YOU NEED AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

AS WE ALL KNOW, THIS COUNTRY IS UNDERGOING AN ENORMOUS TRANSFORMATION. ALMOST EVERYTHING WE DO IN OUR CIVIC LIVES, WORK LIVES, AND PRIVATE LIVES IS CHANGING BECAUSE TELECOMMUNICATIONS, COMPUTING, AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ARE ALTERING THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE, GAIN INFORMATION, CONNECT TO OTHERS, AND EVEN THE WAY WE THINK. SOME SAY THIS CHANGE IS AS SIGNIFICANT AS THE PERIOD FOLLOWING THE INTRODUCTION OF MOVABLE TYPE BY GUTENBERG, WHICH MADE IT POSSIBLE TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION RELATIVELY INEXPENSIVELY AND WIDELY.

AS YOUR COMMITTEE AND OTHER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS CONSIDER HOW
TO BUILD BOTH A STRONG AND FLEXIBLE NATIONAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE (NII), I WANT TO DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO THE ROLES THAT LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARIES CAN PLAY TO SUPPORT THE NII.

THE NATIONAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE PRESENTS AN EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY FOR LIBRARIES BECAUSE INFORMATION, IN ADDITION TO BEING OUR BUSINESS, IS OUR MIDDLE NAME. MOST OF OUR MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAMS ARE IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE AND THE RESOURCES WE PROVIDE TO OUR PUBLIC ARE A MIX OF TRADITIONAL LIBRARY MATERIALS, SUCH AS BOOKS, MAGAZINES AND FILMS, AUDIO AND VIDEO TAPES, AND NEW INFORMATION RESOURCES, SUCH AS CD-ROMS, AND ONLINE DATABASES, WHICH CAN PROVIDE US WITH ABSTRACTS, OR FULL TEXT UNTIL WE ARE ON INFORMATION OVERLOAD.

AS I LOOK INTO THE 21ST CENTURY, I CAN SEE CLEARLY THAT AS THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY EXPANDS, THIS COUNTRY WILL NEED LIBRARIANS MORE THAN EVER TO MANAGE THE EVER-GROWING MOUNTAIN OF INFORMATION AND TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER WITH THAT INFORMATION. INDEED, NO OTHER INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS KNOW BOTH THE RICHLY DIVERSE PUBLIC AND THE RICHLY DIVERSE INFORMATION RESOURCES SO WELL.
BETWEEN US AND THIS MOUNTAIN OF INFORMATION ARE THOUSANDS OF LIBRARIANS, WHO ARE STRATEGICALLY POSITIONED. THANKS TO THEM WE CAN FIND THE INFORMATION WE NEED BECAUSE WE SELECT, ACQUIRE, ORGANIZE, AUTOMATE AND DISSEMINATE INFORMATION. THOUSANDS OF LIBRARIES HAVE AUTOMATED THEIR CARD CATALOGS, AND OPENED THEIR DOORS ELECTRONICALLY SO THAT A GROWING, BUT STILL SMALL NUMBER OF INFORMATION-LITERATE USERS CAN SEARCH THE COLLECTION FROM THEIR HOMES AND OFFICES AS WELL AS IN THE LIBRARY AND OVER THE INTERNET.

TO INCREASE THE PUBLIC'S COMFORT WITH HIGH TECHNOLOGY, LIBRARIANS PROVIDE PERSONALIZED SERVICE BY COACHING AND TRAINING, LIBRARIANS OFFER HELP TO THOSE WHO WANT TO TAKE THE MOST APPROPRIATE ROUTE ON THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY WITHOUT GETTING LOST OR TAKING A LONG, FRUSTRATING, AND LIKELY EXPENSIVE DETOUR. NOW, FOR THOSE OF US WHO NEED MORE HANDS-ON GUIDANCE, LIBRARIANS ALSO SERVE AS THE HUMAN FACE OF INFORMATION BECAUSE THEY PROVIDE ANSWERS TO MILLIONS OF QUESTIONS EVERY YEAR OVER THE TELEPHONE, FACE-TO-FACE, AND INCREASINGLY VIA E-MAIL AND ELECTRONIC BULLETIN BOARDS.

AND FINALLY, OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIANS SERVE AS CHANGE AGENTS, INTRODUCING THE PUBLIC TO THE MARVELS THAT NEW TECHNOLOGY CAN
Provide but without losing sight of the library's original mission - providing access to information in all formats -- not just electronic -- to all people in this country.

I also see that libraries, as an institution, will be needed to undergird the emerging national information infrastructure, to the growing, but still small number of Americans, who are wired and plugged in, their local library will be accessible online to browse, to locate materials, and to retrieve information and materials. But for many of us, the library will still provide a clean, well-lighted, warm, welcoming and supportive climate where information can be found and trained staff can offer help.

If we are to remain a vibrant democracy, we must ensure that all people living in this country have equal information opportunity, that libraries must serve as the public access point, or the public "on ramp" to the information highway. Over and over again, I hear true stories of how peoples lives have been changed by getting the right information at the right time. Their stories add up to what we all know to be true: That information is power.

ALA has been gathering some of these stories about how libraries
CHANGE LIVES. MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO WRITE, TELL US THAT THEIR FIRST INTRODUCTION TO A COMPUTER WAS AT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY. I HAVE ATTACHED TO MY STATEMENT A FEW EXAMPLES OF THESE STORIES.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE INTERNET ENABLED ALA'S WASHINGTON OFFICE TO ASK FOR INPUT TO THIS HEARING FROM LIBRARIES AROUND THE COUNTRY. I WOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT FOR THE RECORD A COMPILATION OF RESPONSES RECEIVED IN JUST ONE WEEK FROM THIS ONLINE INQUIRY.

WHILE AMERICAN LIBRARIES CANNOT SOLVE ALL THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS WE ARE FACING AS A SOCIETY, I BELIEVE THAT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY MUST REACH OUT TO SERVE ALL SEGMENTS OF OUR SOCIETY IN AN EFFORT TO CLOSE THE EVER-WIDENING GAP BETWEEN THE INFORMATION HAVES AND THE INFORMATION HAVE-NOTS. LIBRARIES ARE DEEPLY COMMITTED TO LITERACY AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING AND TO PARTNERING AND COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NON-PROFIT SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS TO SERVE THE UNDERSERVED AND THE UNSERVED.

IN CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THAT IF LIBRARIANS ARE TO PLAY THE VITAL ROLES OF INFORMATION MANAGERS, INFORMATION NAVIGATORS, INFORMATION PROVIDERS, TEACHERS AND CHANGE AGENTS, WE WILL NEED SUPPORT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. SOME OF OUR LIBRARIES NEED
TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT THEM TO THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY. SOME OF OUR LIBRARIES NEED FUNDS TO MAKE THEIR UNIQUE RESOURCES ELECTRONICALLY AVAILABLE. SOME OF OUR LIBRARIANS NEED EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO BRING THEM UP TO SPEED SO THEY, IN TURN, CAN TRAIN THE PUBLIC. SENATOR SIMON AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE, SINCE THEIR IS NO BLUE PRINT FOR WHAT A LIBRARY WILL LOOK LIKE IN THE 21ST CENTURY, WE, AS A PROFESSION, NEED SEED MONEY TO SUPPORT EXPERIMENTATION, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION.

I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION AND CONSIDERATION AND LEAVE YOU ON A HIGH NOTE FROM FIVE OF MY STAFF AT THE D.C. PUBLIC LIBRARY: