

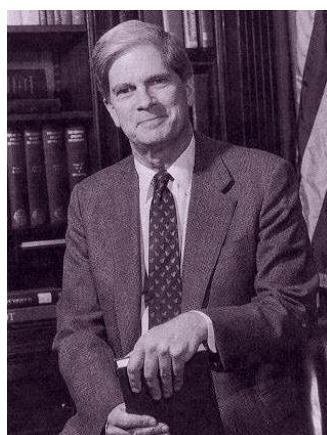


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Address to the National Press Club on the Library of Congress

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[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Thank you very much for those kind and generous words.

Libraries today face an unprecedented challenge of preserving memory, activating intellect, and serving the public agenda in an age that is in many ways present-minded, spectator-oriented, and self-indulgent; and in a culture which has tended, oftentimes one might add, to in a sense take libraries for granted as part of the landscape rather than to let their realities and their possibilities feed the imagination for what they might do.

Now, the Library of Congress is not just the largest -- as has been already said of the Library - - it's the most diverse and the most accessible repository of human knowledge in the history of the world. And it's an important but still partially undiscovered national asset for dealing with some of these problems that are bearing in on us -- bearing in on us, I think, from three concentric circles.



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It's a place of opportunity, therefore, for responding to the key problems pressing in on us today from these three universes that are moving in on us -- the world, the nation, and this city of government itself.

Having a universal library on Capitol Hill at the dawn of the Information Age is rather like having the world's largest gold reserve sitting under the treasury as you go on the gold standard: You have to mine it; and America must mine more of the gold, for as we enter the time when we must increasingly live by our wits rather than just our power, it is a resource that is not just desirable but indispensable.¹

It's a reservoir of knowledge that is quite simply a unique instrument for both competing with and understanding better the rest of the world. It's 86 million items now and -- I regret to tell you -- with 31,000 arriving a day, you can see how it builds up fairly rapidly, in all languages and all media. We're currently collecting in more than 450 languages. It houses larger Hispanic American and Arab collections, for instance, than exist in either Latin America or the Arab world. It possesses the largest Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Polish -- you name it -- collections anywhere outside those countries (outside those countries where those languages are spoken). And it provides, as well, the world's largest collection of maps, documentary photographs, sheet music, movies, and much else.

Now, to appreciate the global reach, not just the richness of contents, of this unique and not very fully understood institution, just consider with me for a minute some of its activities with respect to just one country that the introducer has mentioned, the Soviet Union, within just one recent period of about a half year.

At the Washington Summit in December 1987, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev asked to see a work on the USSR done by the Library's Congressional Research Service while his arms negotiator was independently meeting with the author of another such work from the CRS.



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In late January 1988, the Library of Congress officials participated in a unique international scholarly conference in Leningrad that opened the Russian churches celebration of its millennium last year, and at the same time laid the groundwork for the Library of Congress' own exhibit -- exhibition and conference on the same subject in the spring here in Washington.

In February, the largest library disaster of modern times destroyed or damaged four million volumes of Russia's original vehicle for intellectual westernization, the priceless Academy of Sciences Library in Leningrad. [The] Library of Congress immediately sent two delegations, saved many books by persuading the Soviets to use vacuum freeze drying for 210,000 volumes and to use phased conservation techniques for saving 180,000 foreign language volumes. We have since signed a protocol so that the Library of Congress is now formally the principal coordinator of an international replacement and recovery effort.

Meanwhile in Washington, the Library was showing Soviet movies all spring to prominent American leaders going to the Soviet Union and providing opportunities to talk with a number of the directors and actors in these movies -- which are, in many ways, the forward arm of *glasnost*² -- in the Library's Mary Pickford Theater.

President Reagan, speaking at Moscow University -- Gorbachev's *alma mater* -- during the Moscow Summit in June presented to its library the first major primary materials for studying American history ever made available to undergraduates there -- microfilms from the Library of Congress of the complete papers of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.

Shortly thereafter, Soviet journalists and publishers visiting the Library of Congress agreed for the first time to publish American children's books in the Soviet Union in cooperation with the Library's plans, which the Congress and President have since endorsed formally to make this year, 1989, the Year of the Young Reader.



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Shortly after that, the Library hosted the first bi-national conference ever held between Soviet and American library and information specialists, agreeing then on a bi-national conference next year in Moscow between the Library of Congress and the Lenin Library on the role of libraries in the development of both countries.

Many Soviet officials now see open access to knowledge as a key prerequisite that they had not thought about earlier for any serious democratization in that country; and some have even discussed the possibility of linking their national library to a legislature on the model of the Library of Congress in order to get it out from under a ministry which is always more inherently subject to direct police controls.

Now, every one of the seven Library of Congress involvements with the USSR in a seven-month period that I have just itemized -- every one came from a different part of the Library: the Congressional Research Service, which is the world's largest public policy think tank; the Office of the Librarian; the Conservation Office; the Manuscript Division, which houses the papers of almost all American Presidents up to Coolidge; the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division; the small center for the Book and Children's Literature; and the large departments of processing and research Services.

America's continuing decline in international and foreign language studies has occurred precisely during a time when we have become as a nation increasingly interdependent with other countries economically, ecologically, and in all kinds of other ways. At a major conference on knowledge and power -- the -- the transcript of which is available for any of you who would like to see it -- last summer, convened by the Library of Congress' Council of Scholars, Secretary of State George Shultz identified the persistence of religious and ethnic *particularism* as one of the most perplexing and recurrent problems that he encountered during his term of office.



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The Library of Congress in its current restoration of its glorious [Thomas] Jefferson Building hopes to include reading rooms for all major cultures of the world in that building -- transforming it into a living, universal museum of the written word of all peoples; the closest thing anywhere to the world's memory; the place to find out what is unique about other people, their achievements, their anguish, their aspirations.

The Library's [John] Adams Building, by contrast next to it, is the place for using new modes of data and scientific analysis so that common things can be measured and compared. Our special reading rooms for the social and natural sciences there will, we hope, increasingly aid our international competitiveness. We hope to interest the productive private sector in making fuller use of our little known collection of nearly four million technical and scientific reports, as well as our unmatched ability to render foreign technical literature into English with a staff of more than 100 fluent in Chinese, and the same number --a little more -- in Japanese, and well over 200 fluent in Russian.

The Library's own unparalleled foreign languages collections have just been augmented, I am pleased to announce for the first time anywhere today, by the acquisition of the National Translation Center from the University of Chicago. The Center's holdings date from the 1920s and include more than 350,000 complete translations of scientific and technical articles and research papers and bibliographical information on another 600,000 translations. We are excited about the prospect of being able to make this asset available to the nation's research and development community, perhaps in the context of a broader service of rendering the foreign works of importance into English.

But how is this national Library to serve the nation beyond helping -- as I have already mentioned -- that first circle of the world, relating to international understanding and competitiveness? The attempt to answer this question in a nation that has some 115,000 other libraries, and many other private and public institutions dealing with knowledge and information, has been a driving force behind our unprecedented, just completed year-long



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internal examination of what this Library's mission and strategy should be for its third century, which will begin in the year 2000.

For guidelines towards the library of the future, I turn first and foremost to an internal management and planning committee of 27 mid-level members of the Library of Congress staff; but also to members of Congress, to external management consultants, to a national advisory committee of 29 distinguished librarians, publishers, and business people; and to 11 national forums held in different locations all over the country with about 10,000 librarians and interested citizens participate. Now, on the basis of all this and nearly 1,000 written staff suggestions plus oral suggestions from a thousand staff members who attended the 12 open forums I conducted all last year, we slowly agreed on a set of institutional values that define a mission and suggest a new organizational concept towards which we are now actively moving, along with the outlines of some new ways for serving the nation -- that second of those circles around -- around us.

This Library has a contribution to make both as leader and partner to the educational process in this country, broadly understood, helping combat not just the illiteracy that is growing alarmingly in this country but also the growing aliteracy of which my predecessor, Dan Bornstein, used to speak -- aliteracy being those who can read but rarely do; and finally, also, the tendency, even among educated people, towards a passive spectatorism, a self-indulgent cynicism which undermines the active intellect and the hopeful spirit which are the two indispensable items to a healthy and improving democracy.

The Library's main service to the nation since the beginning of this century has traditionally been providing inexpensive cataloguing for other libraries. But the time has now come to begin also sharing the contents of this Library with the broader community. New technologies make it possible to reproduce key elements of our massive special collections of sights and sounds, as well as instructive and inspirational facsimiles of the unique primary record we have of the American experience at inventing a self-governing constitutional system and making democracy work in a large, modern society.



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We are, accordingly, initiating a new project for sharing old things through the new technologies in a series we are calling American Memory. American Memory will use optical disc and other advanced technologies to offer access in local libraries to such collections as: the first editions of Steven Foster's music, the Library's vast holdings of unpublished dramas - - who knows what "Mute Inglorious Miltons"³ here may rest in the files of our Copyright Department; American folksongs recorded in the '30s and '40s before these were wide -- widely available; turn of the century motion pictures that are not in any other collections; out of print and obscure works of local history and genealogy of which we are the unique repositories in many cases.

The series will establish American Memory corners, providing local libraries both with exciting new technology that will interest young people not otherwise attracted sometimes to libraries in an audiovisual age, but at the same time will provide solid content that will increase the inventory in local libraries and will raise questions that will lead viewers and readers to the books in the library all around them for further answers, and for further satisfaction of a curiosity that has to be engaged before it can be satisfied.

American Memory will quietly increase a present-minded generation's knowledge of and pride in its own past, and local libraries and schools will be able to build their own teaching materials around what will be permanent enrichments to their library's collections.

We believe that this collection will also interest foreigners who are more fascinated than ever with our ongoing experience, as well as the American people, and that it will help them understand us better just as our reinforcement of foreign area studies here in Washington will help us understand them better.

Now, the Library is also preserving our National Memory by serving as the world's pioneer in new methods of preservation technology. Library specialists -- specialists have patented, developed, and tested a mass gas deacidification process⁴ that will extend books by -- the life of books by as much as 500 years, books that are often decomposing because of the high acid content used in most papers since the middle of the 19th century.



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The Library also, of course, serves this nation as its reference checker of last resort -- in person, by telephone, or by correspondence. The Library of Congress last year answered nearly three million inquiries -- more than a million from the general public through our various research divisions; nearly a half million from Congress through the Congressional Research Service; another half million to the Copyright Office; and more than 700,000 to the Law Library, which of course includes the world's largest international law library.

Well, the task ahead lies in continuing our historically free services to Congress, scholars, and the general public while exploring the possibilities of fee-based services or in-kind contributions from groups in the productive sector whose inventiveness and competitiveness would be greatly advanced by using resources here that they have yet to discover. Getting the champagne into the wine cellar, if you like -- our wine cellar -- then out of the bottle into everybody's six-pack, sharing it through online facts or disc technologies as they come on stream.

This Library deals, of course, in movable information and it's thus in an excellent position to help overcome a danger that concerns me, I think, with the general cultural explosion in Washington -- what I would call the "creeping Versailles syndrome." There is a tendency to bring things into Washington to enjoy them here rather than get them out into the nation to benefit the ordinary citizenry; and this is, to some extent, inevitable when you're dealing with artifacts that [are] difficult to move. But we who deal in movable information in the electronic age have special opportunities and, I think, moral obligations to the public to use the new technologies, to share the materials here with those who cannot come here.

The last of the three concentric circles that pose special service opportunities for the information systems of the future is this remarkable city of Washington itself. Its rise as a major intellectual center has gone largely unnoticed, unlike the earlier emergence of Washington as a center of artistic and theatrical activity. The growth of public policy think tanks, of humanistic research centers, of scientific research in a city that includes this Library, the National Archives, and other government information centers has made Washington in



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many ways the information capital of the world as it enters this Information Age. Whole fields of thought flourish almost uniquely in Washington: the aesthetics of power rather than academic political science; political economy rather than university or business econometrics; strategic studies rather than academic international relations; and so forth.

But Washington is a city still in which it is easier for genius to visit than to stay; it is easier to write than think. It's a city that is present-minded, adversarially organized, advocacy driven. There is, therefore, a particular need for the objectivity that the Library of Congress and its Congressional Research Service provides, as well as for the independent academic standards of excellence that flourish in this Library and are exemplified by its national academic all-star group, the Council of Scholars, and by such visiting scholars as our most recent one for them, Sir Isaiah Berlin.

We would hope to celebrate the life of the mind here the way this city now celebrates the performing and visual arts, and the way the Library already does for poetry and chamber music, for instance. Perhaps we need special honors for those fields in which America excels but the Nobel Committee does not give awards: the humanities and the social sciences. And, indeed it is progress in these that is essential to the very survival, and not merely the enjoyment, of our civilization.

This city needs peaks of independent intellectual quality and it needs to honor the intellect. The world and the nation needs [sic] new ideas that will be not produced -- that will not be be produced simply by new money or programs. The soil is needed -- and the soil for new ideas must be fertilized by the kind of freedom and access to the full human record which the Library of Congress uniquely offers.

But there's also a need for some inner moral impulse to serve, which I believe our staff has both exemplified and strengthened during the year-long review process we've just completed at the Library of Congress.



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Our planning process began with a three-month discussion of values -- Some people thought that was just an idle exercise or platitudinous one -- but they came up with values which we now recognize as institutional commitments, above all...service and quality, fairness and participation.

These produced a service mission that recognizes and builds on the dedication and skill of the public servants who work so hard in our and in other libraries. And it's produced a radically different concept of the way of doing business, away from the traditional paramilitary structure -- which is -- of organization -- which is rigid, hierarchical, and focused on protecting turf inside the organization -- towards a new flexible, participatory, team-oriented system that is focused on expanding service to our constituents outside. It recognizes the breadth and depth of knowledge of the staff and seeks to get them off the 19th century assembly line into the 21st century information network; to see this Library as pivotal players in a continuum of scholarly communication that provides access to the old in order to foster creation of the new.

This Library is determined, then, to be both catalyst and participant in the scholarly process, that which transforms information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom as it seeks to serve the Congress and the nation that has so generously and imaginatively sustained it. [The] Library is organizing exhibitions and programs this year in honor of the 200th anniversary of the United States Congress which created this remarkable intellectual conglomerate shortly after moving the new Capitol to Washington.

The Founding Fathers sensed early what others, including many of the Russian visitors we talked to, are just discovering now -- that both a body of knowledge and access to it must aspire towards universality if you are to aspire towards true democracy. The first meeting of the Continental Congress in '74 in Philadelphia occurred in a library building and building the Library of...they debated...borrowing privileges even before they got around to -- to deriving out of all those books just how it was that a free people was going to devise an equitable way of governing themselves.



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Building the Library of Congress in Washington on Jefferson's example and around his own book collection, the Congress through the years has linked an institution that makes laws for our people with a treasury of learning for all people. And this is surely one of the great and least sung historic accomplishments.

The fear of all of us who are its custodians is that it could somehow, someday be lost, eroded -- all manner of ways it could go out -- like the Great Library at Alexandria which was the culminating, really, accomplishment of the ancient world. The great hope is that it may recreate the -- the creativity that prevailed in Alexandria before that terrible fire -- of an Eratosthenes who first measured the earth's circumference; of a Callimachus, the first bibliographer who worked there; and an Erasistratus who discovered the pumping action of the heart.

America may have the opportunity -- if it has the heart and the vision and will -- to produce a civilization like that of the Greeks, but perhaps even better because it could be continental, multi-ethnic, and without slavery. But if this is to happen in the Information Age, we will have to bring more of Athens into this particular realm, the frontiers of truth into this center of power. And we will need new private sector Carnegies to reinforce continuing federal support if we are to help share with America and the world a richness that should surely not be confined just to this city.

We here in Washington have a unique opportunity to participate in the unending human effort to winnow information into knowledge, to distill that knowledge into wisdom, and to bring it all to bear on the enduring American Dream that whatever our problems are today, tomorrow can still be better than yesterday.

Thank you very much.

¹ Notable analogy



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² lit. "openness"; late 20th century Russian era privileging freedom of thought and expression, particularly with respect to Western ideals of individual liberty, democracy and government transparency

³ Reference to unacknowledged creativity. The phrase is found in Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. The phrase is also found in the title of a poem written by Ambrose Bierce. The relevant stanza from Gray's elegy reads:

*Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.*