


mandate of librarians to keep certain segments of external memory alive is essentially a political task, calling for knowledge that is ethical and situation-specific rather than technical and general in the style of L&IS research." This claim, if true, complicates both our view of the profession and our notion of the kind of education that is most appropriate for librarians. Librarians, according to this view, would be ethicists, involved in making important value judgments in the administration of institutional resources. Critical to their success would be a deep understanding of the functions and limitations of the particular institutions they serve, hence the importance of the "situation-specific" nature of their knowledge. Some of the important issues in current librarianship seem to illustrate this view. Right to know, access versus ownership, and resistance to censorship are major concerns involving questions of social ethics insofar as library services are valued as moderately scarce resources to which people can make moral, political and legal claims.

It is disappointing that White does not develop his idea of librarian as ethicist. He does say that "aside from their bibliographic expertise, the 'science' of working librarians is policy . . ." Here then reemerges a tension and ambiguity between the librarian as technician; i.e., information specialist, and librarian as humanist; i.e., as ethicist and public policy advocate. An exploration of this tension might have some bearing on the phenomenon of library school closings in recent years—since the closings are due, many librarians argue, to fundamental misconceptions about the nature and value of the profession. *For Information Specialists* may be of use and interest for library school students, but for librarians its points of interest are few.—*Stephen P. Foster, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.*

Rosenberg, Jane Aikin. *The Nation's Great Library: Herbert Putnam and the Library of Congress, 1899-1939*. Champaign, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Pr., 1993. 235p. \$39.95 (ISBN 0-252-02110-4).

Jane Rosenberg has written a fine book on Herbert Putnam's forty-year tenure at the Library of Congress (LC). It is a solid and readable history of several complex issues: LC's role in American library development; the vicissitudes of Congressional support; the library community's reactions to Putnam's management of LC services to libraries; and the role of LC in the development of librarianship as a profession. In relatively few text pages (165), relatively many pages of notes (51), nineteen period pictures, and a graceful "Essay on Sources," the author bestows equal measures of scholarship, but somewhat uneven insight on each of her four stated themes.


The book is a rewritten version of the author's 1988 dissertation, "The Library of Congress and the Professionalization of American Librarianship, 1896-1939." Rosenberg's discussion of this theme is definitive. Similarly, her treatment of the intertwined topics of LC's role in American library development and Putnam's vision of LC as the national library may be confidently labeled "required reading"



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for future students and scholars. The "ebb and flow of congressional support for LC activities" is documented and put in historical context—World War I, the Depression, etc.—but the conclusion that Putnam "was remarkably successful at building and sustaining LC services over a forty-year period . . ." is debatable. The account of librarians' reactions to the limits imposed by Putnam on services to the library community provides ample evidence of both overlong patience and ineffective impatience by ALA and library leaders with LC, particularly during Putnam's later years. The story behind Putnam's leadership of the Library War Service reveals much about his administrative style and the prevailing paternalistic attitudes about women and wartime library censorship. The effect on LC (if any) of Putnam's two-year hiatus as director of the War Service is not clear. From heady, patrician start to gritty, bureaucratic-authoritarian finish, Putnam sharply distinguished among four LC clienteles: Congress, federal libraries, scholars, and other libraries. Rosenberg shows clearly how Putnam cut the pattern and set the pace for the future of each. But she focuses primarily on LC's assistance to other libraries.

Several of the book's eight chapters deal at length with the evolution and operation of LC cataloging and card services. The work's overall conclusion rests convincingly on these "technical services" issues:

While librarians everywhere could describe the physical attributes and contents of books and devise classifications that placed like items together, they had no means of linking their col-

lections until the Library of Congress promoted a common denominator of catalog description and disseminated standardized cards. Through depository catalogs and the Union Catalog, the Library enabled American researchers to locate materials held by many libraries The scholarly world gained a map of American resources and keys to their organization.

General readers may be overwhelmed by more than they care to know about the early history of the LC card service and American cataloging practices. Technical service historians may grumble at the lack of this or that comparative detail. Too bad! The book deserves wide distribution and close reading. For "there be dragons here," and Rosenberg has chronicled their seedtime. For then and there—during the forging of "standard" nonstandard processing practices in American libraries; during the growth of a plantation mentality by and toward library workers; during the debate on the proper training for librarians; during the calcification of the LC-ALA-ARL minuet—is the story of how our profession got to be the way we were, and are.

Asserting that "few scholars, . . . have addressed the development of librarianship through the organization and development of libraries," Rosenberg has written a book "to offer a national outlook on the effort to organize and record materials and demonstrate why and how . . . [LC] became the center of a virtual network of American libraries and librarians." Mission accomplished.—*Larry X. Besant, Morehead State University, Morehead, Kentucky.*