Our main challenge right now is to create a reputation for the map library and ourselves as key sources of digital spatial data within our institutions. Emphasis must be placed on developing the knowledge and skills that are necessary to provide proper access to these products. The GIS literacy program is indeed an encouraging step towards this goal.

One other issue of concern is continued access to government information. Due to the trend of government agencies producing their map information in digital form, our role as providers of this information has to be redefined to ensure adequate public access. Committees like the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives Map Users Advisory Committee and the American counterpart, Cartographic Users Advisory Council, must move to the forefront and address this issue immediately. ❑

Disenfranchisement: Paranoia or Possibilities*

H ere we are on a quietly beautiful winterbound mountainside, facing the excitement of discovering intricacies of a whole new world. I stand in awe of all the possibilities of things we face, the difficulties and the opportunities. What we confront is not unique to map people; all librarians are challenged by it. I wonder what will be the librarian's role in all of this? Will there even be a role?

I see lack of access as the greatest problem we face. I am concerned that, in the rush to lower costs and to provide electronic access to resources, both our patrons and we ourselves will have to struggle through an envelope of non-access. I worry that, as print goes "out of fashion" in favor of electronic access from remote, public domain databases (such as "anonymous ftp sites"), an unacceptably large group of librarians, and therefore patrons, will become disenfranchised because they cannot get access to this ostensibly "public" information.

This lack of access will be generated by at least one of three things: first, an unwillingness of the library staff to provide service; second, an inability of the library to meet the costs attendant with hardware and software required to gain connection; third, and the greatest I think, the inability of the library to provide connection because no service is available in their area. This third one is the one I will explore more fully a little later.

We see the creation of the information disenfranchised even now. How many here do NOT have access to the Internet in their library? How many do NOT have access at their work desk or workstation? How many do NOT have access available for patrons? In any meeting, the number of raised hands increases with each question.

My supervisor is only 45 or 46 years old. She remembers when she was growing up that her aunt and uncle did not have electricity. In about

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INFORMATION
DISENFRANCHISED

1962, the National Electrification Act brought electricity to rural areas of the U.S., primarily western farms. How long had there been electricity to other areas of the nation? In fact, her aunt and uncle never did get electricity as long as they lived in that home, which was several more years. This shows well the sluggishness with which the intent demonstrated by passage and funding of such an act is brought to full reality.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1991, I attended the midyear meeting of the American Society for Information Science (ASIS). The final meeting was an open session/sounding board. One very frustrated librarian stood up and said that she had heard so much about the Internet, its resources, its potentials, its challenges. Yet every attempt she had made to find out how to connect to it was met with stone-walling. Who could she talk to, where should she go, what arrangements were needed for her to get access for her staff and patrons? The answer startled me. "It depends on where you are. Come up afterward and we can see if it is even available in your area." The presenters went on to explain that no definitive answer was possible because at that time there were still areas of the country for which no connection was available and no plans existed to provide any. Is that still the case? Very probably.

What are these people to do in the light of the Clinton/Gore Electronic Highway? Some suggest that "they" will be sure access occurs, yet it remains a mystery to whom "they" refers. Will there be a need for a great National Internetworkification Act of 2025? When "they" didn't provide electricity it a timely manner, why will "they" provide access to the Information Superhighway? This is my greatest concern.

The other great issues—education in and development of electronic information resources—are problems which feed the difficulties creating disenfranchisement.

The other great issues—education in and development of electronic information resources—are problems which feed the difficulties creating disenfranchisement. When I finished with my Master's degree in Library and Information Science six months ago, I felt like I was three years behind everybody else. During my studies, we dealt with phone-connected Dialog and direct-link access to the bibliographic database maintained by OCLC, Inc. The Internet was briefly mentioned as a possible resource for discussion lists.

My fellow students learned less about WordPerfect than I already knew; less about DOS than I already knew. Gopher was a rodent and Archie and Veronica were comic book characters. Phone calls to my faculty advisors were long-distance, so I did manage to convert them to using e-mail, but none of the students had accounts allowing access. How many library schools still aren't connected? If you read advertisements for entry level positions, many list Internet experience as one of the preferences. It won't be long, I suspect, before that moves to a requirement. Yet, where is the American Library Association in making sure that this education need is required and met in accredited programs?

What about education specifically designed to train and promote map librarianship? I got a message from Poh Chan of Simon Fraser University Library in Burnaby, B.C. regarding GIS training. I received permission to post it to Maps-L, a discussion list available on the Internet and I repeat it here: "We do not have such technology [GIS] in my map library now. If I were to go on study leave to upgrade myself and acquire this training, can you advise the type of courses one should take. Are there courses that teach this new map librarianship, and where? Or does one go specifically for GIS courses? Or is it more useful to go on practicum at a map library that has this new technology? Which are these libraries? Or should one go for a combination of a GIS course and practicum?"

I can't answer those questions. I am completely ignorant about GIS.

Last week, I decided to try to use the GIS server (which utilizes Arc-Info) that we have in our Government Documents collection. Please keep in mind that these are the impressions of a total GIS novice. I sat down, selected the single icon, and stared at a blank screen. Not a clue about what to do next. HELP–didn't.

One of the librarians came over and showed me some tools and a couple of the views, including one that took data down to a per-block region. Cool. Now what? By that point, I had spent half an hour and had to leave for another appointment.

At the Fall 1993 meeting of the Western Association of Map Libraries, I discussed with another librarian a GIS product I had seen demonstrated that day. I told him that, after about half an hour of instruction on that particular system, I could begin doing things on my own. "I don't have half an hour to sit down with each patron, though." He voiced a great challenge facing all of us. Our own education is of concern. But who will teach our patrons if we don't have the time? Another area of disenfranchisement threatens?

We face important questions. These new technologies are expensive. The education for them is expensive. How can a librarian, with the limits we face in budgets and salaries, get either the equipment or the education? There certainly exists a definite user need which WILL be met. But if librarians do not provide the access, others will–and for a fee. Will access ultimately be based on ability to pay? We know how ability to pay creates disenfranchisement.

ACCESS

I attended the George Washington University Windows of Opportunity Symposium for Female Students in Computing held in Washington, DC in May 1993. Two hundred undergraduate and graduate women students in Computer Engineering, Computer Science, and Information Science programs were selected to receive National Science Foundation funding to attend. Our profession needs to set a goal that at least 25% of the attendees of future sessions of such symposia come from Schools of Library and Information Science. We need to demonstrate, particularly to the National Science Foundation, that we are an important research group.

We need to attract research grants and be seen as a factor of importance and consideration in the realm of information science research and development. We must participate in preventing disenfranchisement. We need to get involved as creators of information science research, not just be recipients of it. There are some who do developmental research, but they are too few. As library schools close, how do we guarantee the continuation of research and the commitment to research which will benefit patrons and ease the task of librarians? How do we avoid punishing librarians who want to conduct extensive research?

As library schools close, how do we guarantee the continuation of research and the commitment to research which will benefit patrons and ease the task of librarians?

How do we help one another achieve research goals? How do we share information? In a word, Internet. Get on, get hooked. If you aren't on already, fight to get on.

As I suggested initially, our present situation is reminiscent of being on a mountainside, deep powder snow more hanging in the air than falling. And presented before us is that eerie, quiet beauty which precedes a deadly avalanche. We are only beginning to hear its roar. We cannot tell where it is–directly above us or slightly to one side. We only know we cannot stay where we are. We have to move. We innately understand one poignant fact: Stagnation is disenfranchisement. Stagnation is death. ❑