

11-27-2013

Libraries, Information, and the Right of the City 2013 LACUNY Institute Introduction

Jonathan Cope

Follow this and additional works at: <http://academicworks.cuny.edu/ulj>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cope, J. (2013). Libraries, Information, and the Right of the City 2013 LACUNY Institute Introduction. *Urban Library Journal*, 19 (1). Retrieved from <http://academicworks.cuny.edu/ulj/vol19/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Urban Library Journal by an authorized editor of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.

Libraries, Information, and the Right to the City

Introduction to the Proceedings of the 2013 LACUNY Institute

Jonathan Cope

Jonathan Cope is an assistant professor at the College of Staten Island of the City University of New York (CUNY) and chair of the 2013 Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY) Institute. He holds an M.A. in liberal studies from the Graduate Center, CUNY, a MLIS from Queens College, CUNY and a B.A. from Antioch College.

In a much cited 1999 article in *Library Quarterly*, Wayne Wiegand identifies what he calls the “tunnel vision and blind spots” of a great deal of Library and Information Science (LIS) literature. The gaps that Wiegand identifies primarily consist of what he sees as the failure of LIS to engage in the critical theories and concepts that roiled North American academic discourse throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Although LIS literature has begun to incorporate many of these debates into its research agenda, it is still—like many other academic disciplines—struggling to understand and analyze the implications of the dramatic technological, social, economic, and political developments that have occurred in the fourteen years since Wiegand penned his influential article.

The geographer David Harvey’s—admittedly controversial—concept of the “right to the city” was selected as the theme for the 2013 Library Association of the City University of New York (LACUNY) Institute because it forces librarians, educators, and advocates of an information policy in a broadly defined public interest to confront a set of complicated issues, concerns, and concepts that do not lead to a set of easy, or clear-cut, solutions. To quote Harvey, “[t]he right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city” (2008). As the health of public institutions of all kinds is challenged by a broad political agenda that economists describe as one of austerity—that has only intensified since the onset of the economic crisis of 2008—the relationship between libraries, information, and the concept of a generative right to the city has become more vital than ever.

At our best, librarians and information professionals have been steadfast advocates of maintaining the public’s right to access ideas, knowledge and information. Documents such as the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights reaffirm a conception of rights that is primarily about the right to access resources and the right to be free from censorship (American Library Association, 1980). Although these are important issues, the LACUNY 2013 Institute opens a broader dialogue in the discipline and in the profession. We are talking now about how library and

information professionals can—or should—move beyond being guarantors of access and how they might become actively engaged in the production of knowledge by communities. We are looking at how libraries and information professionals might deepen and expand more participatory forms of democracy.

To begin this conversation, Christine Pawley delivered a keynote address that examined the history of American libraries in the public sphere. Other presenters covered a range of topics, including how libraries engage in the urban public sphere (or polis), how issues related to the economics of publishing and cataloging inform professional practice, and how critical information literacy relates to the right to city. Additionally, speakers explored the concept of the right to the city and its implications for libraries and democracy, assessed how information professionals should react to hate speech online, considered the corporatization of higher education, and explored library outreach to the Occupy Movement. The day concluded with a Jessa Lingel's closing keynote about the role of the library at Occupy Wall Street in 2011 and 2012.

I believe that, at least in small measure, the 2013 LACUNY Institute filled several of the blind spots that Wiegand identified fourteen years ago. But more importantly, the Institute created a dialog between, and among, academics and practitioners about how Library and Information Science can address these vital concerns. It is my sincerest hope that this conversation and research agenda be continued.

References

American Library Association (1980). *Library bill of rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>

Harvey, D. (2008). Right to the city. *New Left Review*, 53, 23-42.

Wiegand, W. A. (1999). Tunnel vision and blind spots: What the past tells us about the present: Reflections on the twentieth-century history of American librarianship. *The Library Quarterly*, 69(1), 1-32.