

The
New York
Society
Library

Annual Report 2021





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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR (2021)

Ellen M. Iseman

Having assumed the role of Chair only four months ago, I begin this report by thanking the Library officers, trustees, and staff members who have helped with the transition. While there are too many names to cite, I wish to express my gratitude for sage counsel to Carol Collins Malone, Library Chair from 2016 to 2021, who led the institution with dedication and on whose watch the initiatives of calendar year 2021 took place. Also, George Frelinghuysen, Susan Robbins and Timothy Wallach have been most valuable resources, along with Head Librarian Carolyn Waters.

My tenure began just as the Omicron variant arrived in New York City, and I called a special Executive Committee meeting to review Library protocols. We were fortunate to navigate through that period with the Library staying open and adhering to ever-changing public guidelines. The health and well being of Library members, staff, and visitors were, and of course still are, paramount.

Due to the pandemic, membership levels decreased in 2020 but then increased in 2021. As there still remains a decline since the beginning of the pandemic, the Library staff is vigorously trying to attract new members and to re-enroll lapsed members.

Event programming was able to proceed robustly via online platforms or in hybrid mode. Many exciting talks took place, with appreciative feedback received. Our *Black Literature Matters* exhibit continued to be a major attraction, with more than 500 nonmember visitors.

COVID forced the cancellation of Project Cicero's usual bustling distribution event, but thanks to the generosity of New Yorkers and volunteers, approximately 45,000 books were distributed to the City's

neediest students in the five boroughs. Board member Susan Robbins has done an extraordinary job overseeing this program for more than two decades.

A celebration of books also took place, in a different way, at the New York City Book Awards on June 9. Prizes were given following the hard work by the Jury for both 2019 and 2020, led respectively by Warren Wechsler and Bianca Calabresi. It was the 25th anniversary of the Book Awards and proved a lively gathering although participants were not together. The Children's Library's Young Writers Awards ceremony was also held virtually, on May 25. The Awards yielded 187 poetry and prose entries from students representing Library member families and approximately 25 schools. Attendees honored longtime Young Writers Awards juror Robert Quackenbush, who died in May 2021.

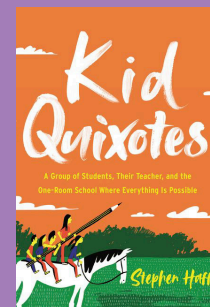
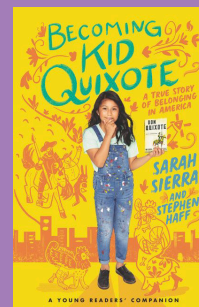
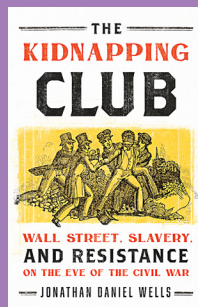
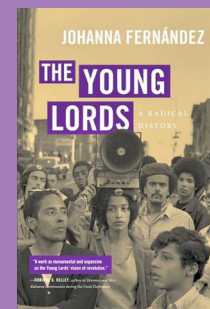
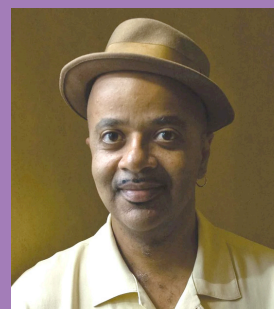
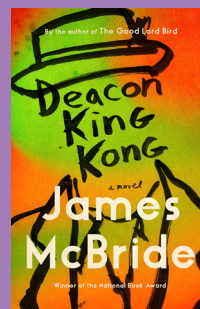
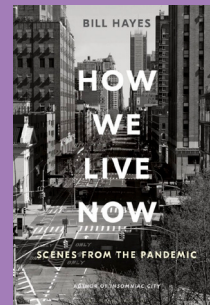
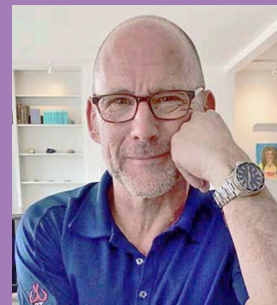
Juneteenth, June 19, was added as a Library holiday. Juneteenth marks, of course, the emancipation of enslaved African Americans and celebrates African American culture.

The Board of Trustees met regularly on Zoom, and we were happily joined by a new trustee, attorney Elliot Orol. As previously mentioned in a Library newsletter, the Building and Renovation Committee has been working on plans for a Library renovation project that would enhance facilities for Library staff and users. As Ms. Malone as Chair explained at a special Board meeting held in person on November 17, the concept and implementation of the building improvements are complex, and the fundraising campaign has many different steps to it. Work is underway to sharpen a plan and prepare a full presentation on this effort to the membership in 2022.

We are profoundly grateful to the Library membership for its support and commitment during a tough period in the Library's history, and to our staff for rolling up their sleeves to address so many pandemic challenges.

Finally, a thank-you again to our Board members for their ongoing work to help maintain the excellence of the Library and to imagine new ways that we can serve our membership and the broader community. In an uncertain world with unforeseen health concerns and a surprising, disturbing turn of events in world affairs, the Library remains an oasis for readers and writers and an enduring cultural icon in our City.

Respectfully submitted April 26, 2022
Ellen M. Iseman, *Chair, Board of Trustees*



The winners of the 2020-2021 New York City Book Awards.
The New York City Book Awards were generously underwritten by Ellen M. Iseman.
The Hornblower Award was generously underwritten by Jenny Lawrence.

REPORT FROM THE HEAD LIBRARIAN (2021) Carolyn Waters

2021 was the year we were supposed to get back to normal, putting the pandemic behind us, moving forward with the momentum we began in early 2020. Despite the lingering pandemic—with us still as I write this—we nevertheless made great strides forward. Memberships increased; while they still stand 12% below our pre-pandemic high, we were pleased to see so many lapsed members rejoining. And we welcomed a near-record 475 new members, who continue to discover us by word of mouth or just walking by.

In addition to those new Library members, we welcomed two new senior staff in 2021: in January, James Addona joined us as our new Head of Development, very quickly finding his place here and immediately working to replace our antiquated membership and development software. This is a huge improvement and provides us, and our members, with tremendous processing efficiencies, more accurate and more easily obtained member records, data security, and cost savings. And in June, Meg Donabedian became our new Assistant Head Librarian, with primary responsibility for managing Circulation activities and, more immediately, for ensuring enforcement with our evolving COVID-19 policies and protocols.

Great thanks are due to Building Superintendent Chris Henry, Cleaning Contractor Harry Abarca, Development Assistant Diane Srebnick, and the entire Circulation Department, who worked onsite throughout the pandemic, keeping our building open and welcoming to all. Just after Labor Day, we were joined by the rest of the staff, most of whom had been working entirely remotely since the lockdown in 2020. The surprising success of the remote work experience encouraged us to create a flexible work arrangement for staff in certain roles to continue to work from outside the Library one day a week. Having all staff back in the building meant

that long-dormant projects could resume, like the inventory of Closed Stack, on which Peri Pignetti and her Cataloging staff made significant progress, completing 33% by the end of the year. In addition, they undertook another important effort to proactively remove bias in our cataloging records, by replacing prejudicial terms like “illegal aliens” with “undocumented immigrants,” among other changes.

Conservation work got back underway as well, with Book Conservator Christina Amato restoring two beautiful 19th-century volumes of the *Flora Boreali-Americana* by André Michaux. The work was made possible by a grant from the Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Family Foundation, with the conservation process documented in a blog post on our website.

We began our Black Literature Matters project in the fall of 2020 with the first in a four-part series celebrating the works of Black authors over the centuries. Following up on the 1700s program, in 2021, we presented the remaining three events: the 1800s, 1900-1959, and 1960 to present. That effort - a collaboration among trustee Adrienne Ingram, former trustees Jenny Lawrence and Linn Cary Mehta, Library member Barbara Ascher, and staff members Sara Holliday and Marialuisa Monda—was a tour de force that required deep research into historical, biographical, literary, and Library themes. The result was a unique and exciting series of programs that incorporated lectures, conversation, dramatic readings, audio, and video, and now lives on online. The 1800s program alone attracted a live online audience of 95, with over 700 video views to date.

In 2021, we said goodbye to the *Book Beautiful* exhibition, which had been extended due to the pandemic, and on April 28 opened *Black Literature Matters*. Harriet Shapiro, Head of Exhibitions, and Dr. Farah Jasmine



Griffin, guest curator, were able to collaborate—remarkably, remotely—and delve into the Library’s stacks and history to deliver this deeply affecting show and catalog. By the end of 2021, more than 750 visitors had viewed the exhibition and exhibition trailer.

When the exhibition opened, with vaccines just being rolled out to most Americans, we were still not ready to hold in-person events or gatherings, and held off on our usual exhibition opening reception. When we resumed in-person events (with vaccine and masking requirements and capacity restrictions in place), we were delighted that the very first event was a celebration of exhibition curator Farah Jasmine Griffin’s new book *Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature*.

At our first in-person event in over eighteen long months, we debuted a brand-new lectern and audiovisual equipment, providing us with the capability to present hybrid events—events presented live in the Members’ Room and at the same time livestreamed to an online audience. For this, we are extremely grateful for Alex Sanger’s generosity and for Sara Holliday’s tenacity in scoping out the knotty technical requirements.

Thanks are due to the Lecture & Exhibition Committee and the Events Department for another year of educational, informative, and entertaining events, including Ian K. Toll on *Twilight of the Gods*; Edward Hirsch on *100 Poems to Break Your Heart*, with dramatic readers; Cynthia Saltzman and Xavier F. Salomon in conversation on Saltzman’s *Napoleon’s Theft of Veronese’s Feast*; and Barbara Ascher and Peter Duchin in conversation about their respective memoirs.

Katie Fricas deserves a round of applause for yet another year of shepherding the New York City Book Awards jury through their rigorous process

remotely. In June, she was the host for a festive online event celebrating the winners of the past two years of the awards. The online party featured remarks and appearances by Library trustee and awards sponsor Ellen M. Iseman, Jury Chairs Warren Wechsler (2019) and Bianca Calabresi (2020-2021), jurors and winners from both award years, and an impressive video presentation of the past 25 years of the New York City Book Awards.

While the Children’s Library remained in “browse and borrow” mode for most of the year, they nevertheless continued providing services like book bundles, reader’s advisory, book displays, reading lists, and virtual programming, and reopened for limited seating in November.

Throughout this past year, the key to our rebuilding efforts was a group of staff members—dubbed the Planning Task Force or PTF for short—who I’ve come to rely on tremendously for critical discourse—and as an all-important sounding board on everything from COVID-19 protocols and membership strategies to choosing fabric swatches for new Whitridge Room furniture. Thank you to Meg Donabedian, Sara Holliday, Steve McGuirl, and Diane Srebnick for your thoughtful and sound advice. And thanks also to Madjalía Seynou, whose attention to detail and determination ensure our financial records are accurate and the audit process seamless.

Final thanks to our wonderful membership who sustain us through thick and thin. And to the entire Board of Trustees for their generous assistance and encouragement during a second difficult year, with tremendous gratitude to the Executive Committee in particular for their wise counsel and support throughout.

Respectfully submitted on April 26, 2022
Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

REPORT FROM THE TREASURER (2021)

George L.K. Frelinghuysen

For the year ending December 31, 2021, the New York Society Library recorded an operating surplus of \$428,959 prior to non-cash charges. Excluding the forgiveness of the Library's Paycheck Protection Program loan early in the year, the Library's adjusted surplus was \$7,084. The Library's overall financial performance remained strong, aided by the generosity of our members and robust performance results from our endowment, as well as continued focus on expenses, which came in under budget.

On the revenue side, several brief comments are in order. Subscription revenue declined 14.75% year-over-year due in large part to new accounting standards, which require that revenue should be recognized ratably over the applicable membership period. The effect of this ruling was to inflate artificially the number for 2020 by recording a portion of 2019 renewals in that number. Without this adjustment subscription revenue would have declined much less, as the number of members grew 8.8%, to 2,624, at the end of 2021, against 2,412 the year before. Encouragingly, after the Library experienced a decline in subscribers following its pandemic-related closure, new memberships last year rose 45%, to 475, from 328 in 2020. The Library continues actively to explore ways to rebuild our base of subscribers, and results to date offer encouragement.

Regarding the annual appeal, the Library raised \$726,062 in 2021, which marked a slight decline from the 2020 level of contributions. A total of 601 donors gave unrestricted gifts in 2021, down from the figure of 658 for 2020. While slight decline in the number of donors is consistent with the drop in subscribers, the average contribution increased year-over-year, attesting to the loyalty of our members. The top three categories represented 66% of all unrestricted funds raised, compared to 68% in the previous year. In 2021,

the Library also received \$600,341 in restricted funds, of which \$493,185 were for the renovation project. In addition, the Edward Nissim Foundation made an unrestricted gift of \$250,000 in June of last year, which the Board of Trustees subsequently designated for the building fund. The Board would like to express our appreciation to all the membership for your continued generous support of the Library.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention that miscellaneous income in 2021 benefited from \$28,000 in book royalties from the Estate of Shirley Hazzard.

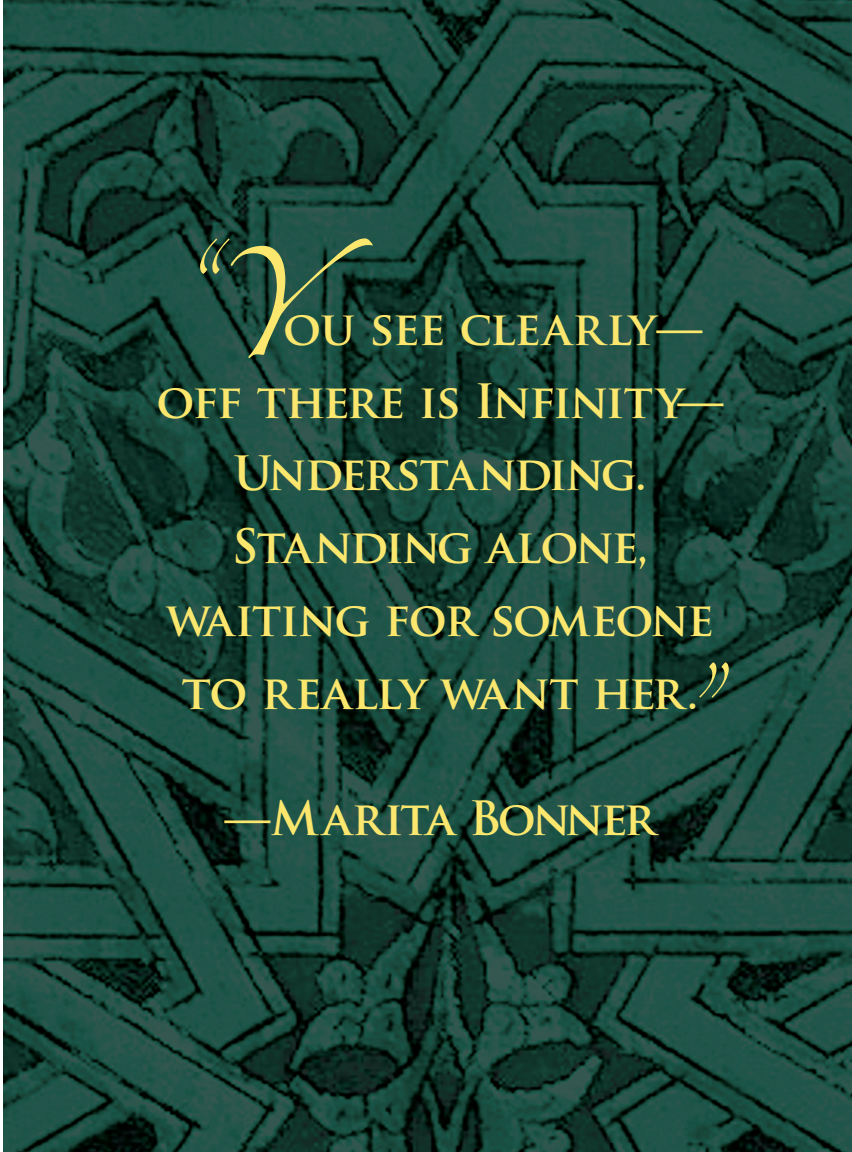
Actual operating expenses before depreciation increased 4.6% in 2021 compared to 2020 due to several factors. The Library made the decision in 2021 to outsource its computer systems department and signed a contract with Domain Computer Services to ensure the safety and reliability of our technology offerings. This led to an increase in outlays for Library services only partially offset by a reduction in staff expenses. In addition, the hiring of a full-time Director of Development in 2021 was largely responsible for the increase in the line item for fundraising and membership development, and we are already beginning to see the benefits of his leadership in this area. In the area of Library programs, total expense was 18% higher in 2021 than in 2020 due to the fact that in 2020 the summer issue of the Library's *Books & People* newsletter was not published. Building services remained approximately comparable with 2020. Also noteworthy, 34% of printed book expenditures were covered by restricted book funds. The Library will continue to pay close attention to expense control in 2022.

Endowment income provides the largest source of support for the Library's operations and covers about 55% of our operating expenses. On December

31 the market value of the endowment was \$52.5 million, up 14% from the \$46.2 million reported at the close of 2020. Last year's strong performance confirms our belief that the different styles of the investment managers will continue to yield superior results. For example, Beck, Mack & Oliver, one of our investment advisers whose performance lagged the averages for several years, turned in a stellar year, rising 40% as their value-based approach outperformed strategies focused on growth. I would like to end this discussion by noting that our spending policy for the endowment is 4.50% of the fair-market value averaged over 12 quarters. Looked at another way, if we divide the allocation for 2020 by the endowment's market value at the end of last year, our draw was 3.3%. By not heavily taxing our endowment, as these number show, the Library is guaranteeing its long-term future.

In closing, I would like to thank Carolyn Waters and her very able staff for the great work that they do over the course of each year to ensure that the services provided to our members are of the highest order.

Respectfully submitted on April 26, 2022
George L.K. Frelinghuysen, *Treasurer*



“YOU SEE CLEARLY—
OFF THERE IS INFINITY—
UNDERSTANDING.
STANDING ALONE,
WAITING FOR SOMEONE
TO REALLY WANT HER.”

—MARITA BONNER



STATEMENT OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES, UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS

December 31, 2021, with Comparative Totals For 2020

| Revenue | 2021 | 2020 | Expenses | 2021 | 2020 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Membership subscriptions | \$582,663 | \$683,472 | Staff expenses | \$1,948,732 | \$2,009,191 |
| Donations | 726,062 | 763,595 | Library materials | 146,166 | 143,025 |
| Loan forgiveness <i>(Paycheck Protection Program)</i> | 421,875 | | Library services | 211,019 | 148,582 |
| Lectures and events | 18,795 | 20,679 | Library programs | 30,574 | 25,820 |
| Book sales | 1,651 | 1,976 | Fundraising & membership development | 305,203 | 151,289 |
| Library Fees & Fines | 8,455 | 3,546 | Building <i>(excluding depreciation)</i> | 346,600 | 343,708 |
| Miscellaneous income | 33,788 | 49,480 | Professional fees | 58,494 | 82,805 |
| Total Revenue | \$1,793,289 | \$1,522,748 | Miscellaneous | 29,278 | 36,785 |
| | | | Total Expenses | \$3,076,066 | \$2,941,205 |

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Decrease in net assets before allocation of four and one half percent (4½%) from endowment | (1,282,777) | (1,418,457) |
| Allocation of four and one half percent (4½%) from endowment | 1,711,736 | 1,629,538 |
| Increase In Net Assets | \$428,959 | \$211,081 |

Notes: This statement includes unrestricted revenue and expenses only.
All other funds are accounted for separately. Full audited financial statements are available at the Library.
Effective for 2020 the Library reduced its endowment allocation from 4¼% to 4½%.
The approximate market value of investments on December 31, 2021 was \$52,513,000.

THE GOODHUE SOCIETY



Sarah Parker Goodhue (1828-1917) gave the bequest that permitted the Library to move into its present building. This charcoal drawing of her by Samuel Worcester Rowse hangs in the circulation hall.

The Goodhue Society is a group of living donors who, during their lifetimes, have included the New York Society Library in their estate plans by stating an intention to leave a bequest to the Library. The following represents The Goodhue Society's members as of December 31, 2021.

Anonymous (14)
 Robin Lee Allen and
 Kimberlynn Elizabeth Allen
 Mark Barron and Joel Rubin
 Byron Bell
 Lucienne and Claude Bloch
 David William Bloom
 Mr. and Mrs. Peter O'B. Brown
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 Michael Nimetz
 Paula Offricht
 Roger F. Pasquier
 Ada Peluso
 Romano I. Peluso
 Lynne B. Potter
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2021 CONTRIBUTORS

The New York Society Library is extraordinarily grateful for the generous annual support from the following individuals and foundations.

In 2021, gifts were received in memory of Herbert A. Lewis, Donald Paneth, Matthew Phillips, Robert Mead Quackenbush, Susan Harney Rooney, Dr. George Satran, Vice Admiral R.H. Scarborough Jr., and Thomas Thacher, and in honor of Alex Budoff, Elizabeth Goldfarb, James Goldstein, Claire Holt, Carol Malone, and Elizabeth Winthrop.

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\$20,000 and Above

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FROM THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTION: BLACK WRITERS SPEAK

Inspired by our contemporary moment, *Black Literature Matters* presents a diverse selection of titles by writers of African descent from the Library's collection. Included here are works in English that span a vast range of time and space. Published over five centuries by writers from two continents, these works range in genre from novels, poems, and plays to essays and works of scholarship. This rich and powerful body of literature contains a chorus of voices that speak to the Transatlantic Slave Trade,

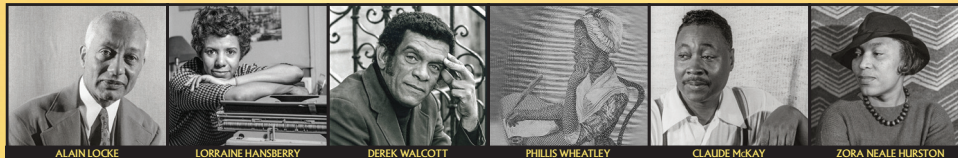
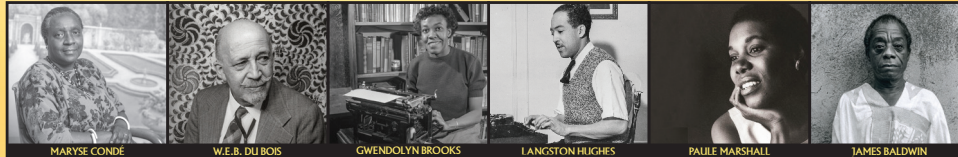
Colonialism, and Racial Segregation, voices that motivate the movements that have challenged and helped to dismantle these unjust systems. In addition to large political concerns, the books are great aesthetic achievements as well. Their authors are concerned with creating innovative works of art.

A myth of African intellectual inferiority helped to undergird the projects of racial slavery and colonialism. However, Europeans who first traveled throughout Africa

encountered a diverse array of complex societies with deep cultural, political, and intellectual traditions. Our exhibition gestures toward that rich history, with an image of a 12th-century Arab manuscript recovered from Timbuktu. The manuscript informs the major design element of the exhibit. Timbuktu is but one of many historic African centers of learning, but its libraries have come to represent the intellectual heritage of the continent. For our purposes, this image celebrates the history and lineage

of libraries as places that help to preserve and disseminate thought and serves as a reminder that the writers we recognize here claim both an African cultural heritage and a Western one. We hope the books displayed here will pique your interest, introduce you to new writers, encourage you to return to familiar ones, and most especially invite you to explore others that sit awaiting you in the stacks.

Professor Farah Griffin
Guest Curator



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William and Weslie Janeway
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PIONEER LIBRARIANS JEAN BLACKWELL HUTSON AND DOROTHY PORTER WESLEY CHANGED THE WORLD OF BLACK LITERATURE



The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University (Washington, DC) and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York, NY) are the world's leading repositories of materials on the history and culture of people of African descent. Two librarians, Jean Blackwell Hutson (1914-1998) and Dorothy Porter Wesley (1905-1995), were the major architects of these two groundbreaking collections. Together, they were part of a generation of librarians that historian Janet Sims-Wood says "helped foster a new understanding of the Black experience in Africa, the Americas, and other parts of the new world."

During her time at Moorland-Spingarn, Dorothy Porter Wesley built the collection, published a number of groundbreaking bibliographies, and created a new classification system that revealed the racial logics of Dewey Decimal classification while working within that schema to expand and transform the organization of knowledge about Black peoples.



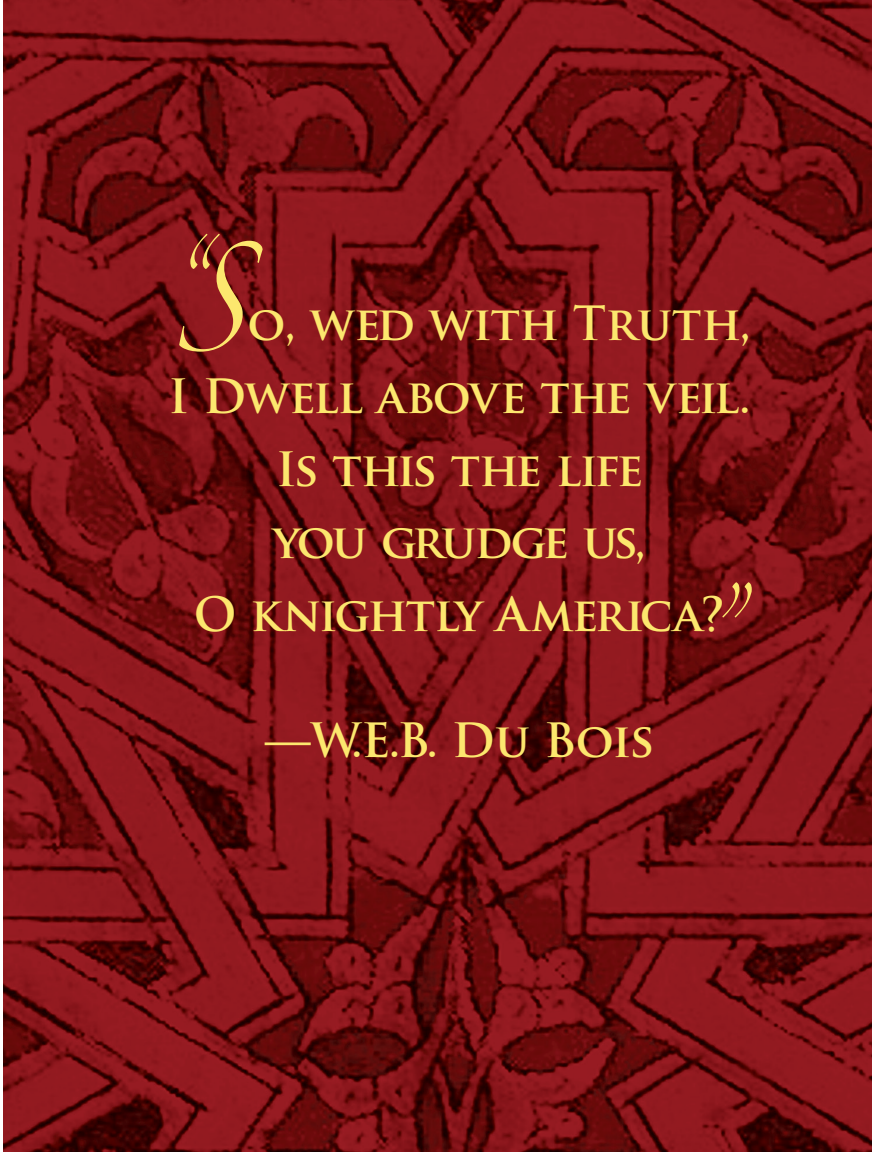
Porter recalled, "They had one number—326—that meant slavery, and they had one other number—325, as I recall it—that meant colonization.... every book, [even] a book of poems...went under 325." Porter moved books about Black literature and history "wherever [they] fell in the regular Dewey Decimal classification," while completely discarding some sections and rewriting the meaning of others.

Jean Blackwell Hutson served as Curator and Chief of the Schomburg Center for over thirty years. Under her direction the library's collection grew from 15,000 volumes to well over 75,000. In addition she acquired the papers of Langston Hughes and other luminaries. In 1964, at the invitation of President Kwame Nkrumah of the newly independent Ghana, Hutson moved to West Africa to build the Africana collection at the University of Ghana. Upon her return to New York, she began the ambitious project of fundraising for the construction of a new Schomburg Center. The state-of-the-art library, museum, and cultural center opened in 1980.

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“SO, WED WITH TRUTH,
I DWELL ABOVE THE VEIL.
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O KNIGHTLY AMERICA?”

—W.E.B. DU BOIS



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