



Cheryl Knott. *Not Free, Not for All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015. x, 312p., ill. ISBN 9781625341785. US \$28.95.

Cheryl Knott's *Not Free, Not For All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* is a long overdue study that examines twentieth-century African-American information history and counters the fictive image of American public libraries as community spaces accessible to all. Knott argues convincingly that restricted library access for African Americans was a willful act, codified in state legislative policies that were subsequently enforced by Southern librarians. The text presents early twentieth-century public library culture as highly racialized and gendered, emphasizing intersections with education and civil rights. Readers are introduced to white clubwomen who – although integral to public library development – did little to challenge the status quo, producing progressive-era public libraries as exclusive spaces for white women and children. In contrast, African-American clubwomen, educators, and librarians leveraged Negro libraries to supplement meager educational opportunities and create safe spaces for Black cultural advancement.

The narrative traverses three broad divisions spanning the origins of Negro public libraries, the library in the lives of Black users, and desegregation, weaving together these stories into a coherent whole. The text presents a diverse array of Black voices, from prominent individuals such as Eliza Atkins Gleason, Thomas Fountain Blue, W. E. B. DuBois, and Zora Neale Hurston to little-known librarians who created welcoming spaces for Black readers. The result is a holistic analysis of African-American information access and use during the period. The book comprises nine chapters and relies on diverse primary library sourced documents and secondary data. Chapter 1 presents a foundation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century print culture in the United States. Chapters 2 and 3 look at the establishment of Carnegie and municipal Negro libraries. Chapter 4 examines library services to African Americans during the Great Depression. Chapter 5 focuses on libraries administered exclusively by African Americans. Chapter 6 uncovers the rarely discussed architecture of Negro branches, including the role of Black architects and masons. Chapter 7 presents the beginnings of a black bibliography, or reader's advisory, emphasizing culturally competent reading materials prepared by trailblazing African-American librarians. Chapter 8 examines Negro libraries as civic spaces. Chapter 9 concludes the book with a discussion of public library desegregation. Knott's work builds on Robert Darnton's communications circuit, which maps the ways books



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are produced and subsequently disseminated throughout society. Although she seeks to expand or reposition the role of libraries within the circuit, she does not interrogate the model's appropriateness for this historical place and time. Is Darnton's model - which assumes an egalitarian reality nonexistent in the Jim Crow South - adequate for her purposes?

*Not Free, Not For All* is certainly a valuable text for print culture scholars, but it might also interest students of Southern history, African-American Studies, and Women's Studies seeking to broaden their analysis of American civic life, culture, and protest in the first six decades of the twentieth century.

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