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**A Review of Reading Places, Literacy, Democracy,
and the Public Library in Cold War America - By
Christine Pawley**

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/alan_delozier/14/

Reading Places, Literacy, Democracy, and the Public Library in Cold War America

CHRISTINE PAWLEY, 2010

Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press
vii + 272 pp., appendices, \$28.95

From a broad perspective, this volume explores the American library system and how it evolved from the early days of nation building through the post-Cold War era. Looking beyond the title and related introductory themes alone, what sets this work apart from being a straight facts and figures narrative is an intensive social history approach that focuses specifically on the development of literacy patterns and how librarianship adapted to a variety of societal factors over time. Author Christine Pawley tells this story through spotlighting “ordinary individual readers” in particular, and how their habits evolved from various key perspectives. She effectively breaks down her research findings and their impact on gender, ethnicity, race, age, class, occupation, religious orientation, and related factors that reflect the diverse nature of the American populace. However, the most prevalent theme chosen by Pawley is geographically based, as Wisconsin communities especially rural precincts and counties combined with statewide context are used to tell this story.

It appears that Pawley has placed this work in a socioeconomic context with balanced political insight when looking at the exercise of research freedoms from start to finish. Pawley has divided her chapters into a logical pattern which starts with a milestone event, the Door-Kewaunee County Library demonstration of 1952, and local response to questionable reading material content and debates regarding the existence of information centers altogether. Subsequent sections cover the lead-in to this event and aftermath including a careful study of free schools, assimilation initiatives, outreach to children, intellectual freedom, and the role of women as librarians as part of a major look at gender comparisons in the field and society overall. Pawley also highlights the infrastructure of libraries and their connections to governing boards, and also expertly compares and contrasts such factors as literacy rates, library support, financials, and related factors of note.

Various individuals and organizations who contributed to this story are featured within the text with detailed background notes. This includes such prominent entities as the Wisconsin Free Library Commission (WFLC), for example, which is noted throughout this work as a prominent entity that called for information accessibility plans that endured for decades. The WFLC outlined a number of points including the “fundamental remedies of Knowledge, Education, Organization, and Spiritual Forces . . .,” (p. 105) to foster a plan to help define the objectives and need for public libraries while helping people to broaden their intellectual and social horizons in the process. An important thread discussed in detail by Pawley is the story of traveling bookmobiles and their purpose in filling the void where library centers were not readily accessible. This plan was emblematic of the questions raised about democracy, literacy in

action, and how to enable these concepts on a wider scale, or in other words, "...public libraries served to disseminate knowledge that elites recognized as valuable in increasing opportunities for self-education and social mobility among the less privileged and thus likely to contribute to the success of the republican experiment" (p. 125). Pawley goes on to examine the root causes of library utilization be it stationary or mobile along with levels of opposition or support depending on circumstances encountered within a particular community over time.

The chronology of reform measures employed by Pawley includes the initial period of acknowledging non-English ethnic groups living throughout Wisconsin which numbered many immigrant Germans, Belgians, Norwegians, and others with their children who were subject to progressive measures of such legislators as Governor (later Senator) Robert La Follette from the early 1900s through the mid-1920s which helped to promote inclusion and government reform statewide. As a means of focused support, during the twentieth century, a major landmark came to light via the "Wisconsin Idea" which in short, was a progressive approach to library development that included consultation with university experts, multi-language book collecting, and collaboration whereby, "...schools, libraries, women's clubs, and extension agencies cooperated to foster literacy and encourage community participation, especially among immigrant and native-born members of the working class" (p. 67). These efforts were ambitious and carried on through World War II and afterwards as the time of "red scare" across the nation especially in Wisconsin, the home of Senator Joseph McCarthy and growing concern over reading patterns on the whole became a major issue.

Pawley reports that historically libraries were encouraged to provide access only to "morally acceptable" books was a common trend to prove against subversion during the postwar era in particular. Popular novels often stood as proper, but many argued about public or school libraries ultimately shelving certain titles depending upon their content. In addition to the role of librarian as adviser, the bookmobile and libraries were purposely organized in certain ways in order to focus books towards those of age and grade level appropriateness with an eye also towards ultimate intellectual development. As the 1950s moved forward, rural residents were becoming more widely exposed to a world of possibilities beyond reading alone which helped to promote the appeal of education, economic opportunity, and even comfort of mind and place. "Consumerism became an exercise in citizenship through a linkage between the pursuit of individual material goals and the national economic interest" (p. 215). An even deeper look at a more refined future is provided by Pawley in her final pages and epilogue as she explained how libraries emerged more free and enterprising, a result of changing attitudes and acceptance of a wider world view due to technological advance and future promise.

This is a work that employs an interdisciplinary approach that makes its content and message very effective for serious study. The research methodology

used by Pawley draws on a number of primary sources including traditional letters and reports, oral history interviews, and even library circulation records which provide a personalized window into usership patterns. Based on the uniqueness of data and importance of the topic, this is a highly recommended volume for those who are looking to glean more about an often-overlooked area of social history that transcends regionalism and speaks to the core of library access on the whole.

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Confronting America: The Cold War Between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy

ALESSANDRO BROGI, 2011

Chapel Hill: The North Carolina University Press

xii + 533 pp. \$58

In the first chapter of *Confronting America*, Alessandro Brogi states that “America’s confrontation with Western European Communism was as meaningful as its clash with Soviet Communism” (p. 13). Demonstrating this throughout his voluminous book, the author offers an impressive analysis of the postwar conflict between the U.S. government and the Communist parties in France and Italy. Interestingly, his approach differs from traditional Cold War studies for two reasons: it focuses on two peripheral, Western European nations; it broadens the usual political perspective by exploring “the interconnectedness of diplomacy and cultural constructs” (p. 9). Brogi’s extensive research, based on archival sources and on intellectual commentaries, resulted in a reliable survey of the historical period taken into account, supported by many examples and quotations.

The “confrontation” in the title does not only refer to the anti-American stance taken by the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) and by the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), but also to the American government itself, which was forced to rethink its own reputation at both sides of the Atlantic. The political threat of these national parties was indeed a continuous one, from the end of World War II to the Eurocommunist episode in the 1970s and 1980s. The author pays particular attention to the differences between the various U.S. administrations and to the alternative strategies of the Communist party leaders.

The triangular perspective chosen by Brogi is justified by the large number of analogies between the French and Italian postwar political situation and

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