

## 1971: A Commentary with Renewed Relevance

In 1971, as CLR celebrated its 15th anniversary, higher education was in a precarious state, experiencing declines in federal support and, in many cases, state support, while simultaneously facing the demands of higher enrollments and increased aid disbursements. That year, a study prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and the Ford Foundation was published, titled *The New Depression in Higher Education, a Study of Financial Conditions at 41 Colleges and Universities*. The study found that most of the nation's public and private two-year and four-year institutions of higher education were in financial difficulty, and it reported on their range of responses.

CLR President Fred Cole's introduction to that year's annual report has an eerie relevance today, so has been chosen for this week's feature. Noting the impact of the financial squeeze on libraries, he writes:

"Through every available means we must work to produce a greater understanding of the significance of libraries in our society, particularly in every aspect of our educational systems. For today more than ever libraries are the bedrock of education, of cultural and scientific advancement. The library community knows this, of course. But do users? Do those upon whom libraries depend for support?"

That year CLR awarded \$1.4 million to support 32 new projects on behalf of research, academic, and public libraries.

The description on the following pages is reproduced from the 15th annual report of the Council on Library Resources, Inc., for the period ending June 30, 1971, pp. 9–10.

## INTRODUCTION The Year 1970-1971

In January 1971 a study prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and the Ford Foundation was published,\* documenting a trend already apparent to careful observers: the majority of American institutions of higher learning, after a decade of the most rapid growth and development in history, were entering upon a period of economic stress requiring the most prudent financial management. The decline in federal support for higher education, reduced funding by some state governments in reaction to public resistance to higher taxes and to student unrest, rising enrollments and allocations for student aid and minority programs, the decreasing purchasing power of the dollar, increasing salaries—all these, according to the study, were contributing to "the new depression."

No type of academic institution or any part of it is immune to the effects of this financial squeeze—including the library. A comparable situation is being encountered by public libraries, especially those in urban areas.

It is a situation which might just possibly be manageable if all that was required was maintenance of the *status quo ante*. But the demands upon libraries for services are becoming not only more varied but more sophisticated. One has, for instance, only to think of the growth in use of audiovisual materials, or the call for access to publications from once remote foreign countries, or the need for service to members of previously unserved groups. The increasing rate of publication—of serials as well as monographs—brings with it another set of problems . . . problems of additional purchase funds, increased pressures on cataloging, greater storage requirements. One wonders at times if there is any general realization of how well libraries have done in meeting the pressures put upon them, of how well—in spite of multiplying difficulties—they have succeeded in their primary function of placing in a reader's hands the book or serial he desires.

One wonders also how long the large libraries, using primarily traditional methods of operation, can continue to offer services of

---

\* Earl F. Cheit. *The New Depression in Higher Education, a Study of Financial Conditions at 41 Colleges and Universities*. New York, McGraw Hill Book Company, (1971).

quite remarkable quality in the face of limited resources and increased costs. Some cutbacks in hours of service and in funds for acquisitions and new personnel have already taken place. A period during which it was commonly said that there was a shortage of professional personnel has come rather abruptly to an end, and now we hear talk of an oversupply. Actually, there is not an oversupply of trained librarians; there is just an undersupply of funds with which to employ them.

Automation has been seen as an answer to many of the problems of libraries. It is *beginning* to be an answer, and librarians, like others, will have to take it into consideration as they plan for the future—always bearing in mind that automation is valuable only as it contributes to the library's chief function: service. We have much to learn about its application, and we have much progress to make. Judging from the pattern of development in other fields of technological activity, changes can be expected to come with relative rapidity. We have passed the very first stages and are now seeing the early steps in the development of better equipment and systems and perhaps also a decline in cost.

It is undoubtedly true that library operations can be made more efficient through the judicious use of automation and other technological improvements, through better management, better procedures and systems, and personnel trained in their uses. But we need more than efficiency and economy if libraries and their requirements are not to be disregarded in these difficult times. What seems to be lacking is a constituency of users with a vocal and active appreciation of the role that libraries play in their lives.

Through every available means we must work to produce a greater understanding of the significance of libraries in our society, particularly in every aspect of our educational systems. For today more than ever libraries are the bedrock of education, of cultural and scientific advancement. The library community knows this, of course. But do users? Do those upon whom libraries depend for support?

In the belief that libraries are an irreplaceable asset, the Council on Library Resources during the fiscal year covered by this report allocated \$1,401,982 for the support of 32 new projects and continued or completed work on a number of others. In some cases assistance which cannot be measured in dollars and cents was provided by Council staff.

As in previous years, our dealings with librarians have reinforced our conviction that, in good times or bad, they are a joy to work with. We are much indebted for their helpfulness and their friendship.

FRED C. COLE  
*President*