

LIBRARIES IN THE 'HOOD:
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE FLORENCE AND GRAHAM BRANCH LIBRARIES IN THE
COMMUNITY OF FLORENCE-FIRESTONE, 1912-2012

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ABSTRACT

LIBRARIES IN THE 'HOOD: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE FLORENCE AND GRAHAM BRANCH LIBRARIES IN THE COMMUNITY OF FLORENCE-FIRESTONE, 1912-2012

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This study explores the history of the Florence and Graham branch libraries in the unincorporated community of Florence-Firestone in South Central Los Angeles. Two of the oldest county library branches, Florence and Graham have no published histories. Similarly, no scholarly history has been written about Florence-Firestone. Only modest historical work has been published about the County of Los Angeles Public Library system. In addressing these gaps, this thesis serves as the first historical study of the Florence and Graham libraries and the Florence-Firestone community. As the study's literature review illustrates, this research contributes to the literature on Los Angeles urban history and the history of library services to poor, working-class, and disadvantaged populations. Written from the social history perspective, and drawing from numerous archival primary sources, this study examines how ordinary people influenced the development of library services in Florence-Firestone and the social forces that impacted the environment in which the libraries and community developed. The study contends that the libraries and community have shared histories and their mutually beneficial relationships created enduring benefits for residents. The study concludes that the history of the Florence and Graham libraries in Florence-Firestone serves as an instructive and inspiring narrative about the positive influence of library services in underserved communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Florence-Firestone community

“The Florence and Graham branches are located in County territory within the Los Angeles City School District. The surrounding area can be described generally as ‘deprived.’”¹

The community of Florence-Firestone is located six miles south of downtown Los Angeles. This unincorporated neighborhood is surrounded by the cities of Los Angeles, South Gate and Huntington Park, with Slauson Avenue on the north, Alameda Street on the east, the community of Watts to the south, and Central Avenue on the west forming its borders. Florence-Firestone is near the geographic heart of the area known—ominously by some—as South Central Los Angeles.² Florence-Firestone’s origins trace back to the late nineteenth century when the Florence and Graham districts were founded as outposts along the routes of the Southern Pacific and Pacific Electric railroads.³

Throughout its history, Florence-Firestone has remained a diverse, working-class

¹ *Renewal of Leases of Florence and Graham Libraries* (1965), Florence Library archives. Florence Library, County of Los Angeles Public Library. Los Angeles, CA.

² In 2003, the City of Los Angeles rebranded the area as “South Los Angeles.” This move was in response to the stigma associated with the term “South Central Los Angeles,” which developed after the 1965 and 1992 riots/insurrections and was exacerbated by increasingly alarming media portrayals of gang violence in the area through the 1980s and 1990s. However, the geography of South Central L.A. extends beyond Los Angeles city municipal boundaries, enveloping unincorporated areas like Florence-Firestone and nearby cities such as Compton. Outside of politically correct City of L.A. and local media circles, the term “South Central Los Angeles” remains alive in local the vernacular. Therefore, in this study, I retain and use the term “South Central Los Angeles” as both an historical artifact and a living geographic concept in the popular imagination.

³ Originally two distinct unincorporated neighborhoods, the area over time evolved into one community, which the County of Los Angeles eventually dubbed “Florence-Firestone.” Its name derives from the two major east-west arterials that bisect the community: Florence Avenue on the north and Firestone Boulevard on the south. Notably, the U.S. Census still refers to this census-designated place as “Florence-Graham.” Florence-Firestone’s railroad history is noted in: David L. Durham, *California’s Geographic Names: A Gazetteer of Historic and Modern Names of the State* (Clovis, CA: Word Dancer Press, 1998), p. 1272, p. 1277.

community. An historically Black population is concentrated in the southern portion, near Watts. The neighborhood also has functioned as an origination point for waves of newly arriving immigrants to the United States: European settlers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, émigrés from Mexico since the 1960s, and, more recently, Latinos from South America. The community's proximity to L.A.'s manufacturing core, just east of Alameda Street, coupled with historically inexpensive housing stock, have made this an ideal community for the working-class.

The Florence and Graham branch libraries

As an unincorporated community, Florence-Firestone lies outside of adjacent cities' municipal boundaries and therefore relies upon the County of Los Angeles for governance and municipal provisions, including library services. Notably, this tiny neighborhood of 3.6 square miles is home to two of the earliest developed and longest serving libraries of the County of Los Angeles Public Library (COLAPL) system. The aptly named Florence and Graham branch libraries opened in 1914 and 1915, respectively, shortly after the founding of the Los Angeles County Free Library.⁴

Throughout their histories, the Florence and Graham libraries have served as vital community institutions for the area's diverse, working-class, largely poor and disadvantaged population. In addition to providing basic library services, the branch libraries have

⁴ The Los Angeles County Free Library was established in 1912 and renamed the Los Angeles County Public Library in 1932. See: Helen L. Jones, *Public Libraries. Metropolitan Los Angeles: A Study of Integration*. (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1953): 9. After conducting market and historical research on the library's name origins, the county in 1990 rebranded it as the County of Los Angeles Public Library. This minor change in nomenclature reflected its official legal status as a "County Public Library." See: Haworth Editorial Submission, "News the May have Escaped Your Attention Until Now," *Public Library Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1990): 69-70.

functioned as community hubs, education and training centers for manufacturing laborers and returning World War II veterans, repositories of local Black and Hispanic history and culture, acculturation, assimilation and English language-learning centers for immigrants, and safe houses for children and young adults eschewing gang life, among other noble purposes. And despite the massive social, political, economic, and demographic upheavals Florence-Firestone has endured—for example, deindustrialization and widespread job loss, two devastating urban insurrections, post-insurrection Caucasian exodus, systematic disinvestment, domestic terrorism from gang violence—the Florence and Graham branch libraries have remained a constant and benevolent presence, interwoven into the fabric of the community. No doubt, much can be learned from exploring the nearly 100-year history of library services in Florence-Firestone.

Thesis and research questions

This study contends that the history of the Florence and Graham branch libraries in Florence-Firestone serves as an instructive and inspiring narrative about the positive impact of library services in poor, disadvantaged, and working-class communities. Moreover, this study argues that the Florence and Graham libraries and the Florence-Firestone community have shared histories: the development of library services in Florence-Firestone in many ways parallels the development of the community itself. Both the libraries and the community were borne out of and developed in response to societal forces happening around them. And as this study will show, the longstanding, deep-rooted, mutually beneficial relationships between Florence-Firestone and its branch libraries have engendered lasting benefits for the area's underserved populations.

In examining this library history, this study will answer the following research questions:

- Where, when, and why were the Florence and Graham branch libraries founded?
- What was their original mission and objectives and how have they evolved?
- Who were notable librarians, staff and library boosters and what were their major contributions to the library and community?
- Who were the libraries' clienteles and how has the patron base reflected demographic changes over time?
- How have library services reflected evolving community needs?
- How have the libraries evolved in and responded to societal changes happening around them?

Answering these questions sheds light on the importance of establishing strong and enduring community-library partnerships in poor, disadvantaged, and working-class communities. The history of library services in Florence-Firestone, as this study will illustrate, offers valuable lessons for communities within and beyond South Central Los Angeles.

Significance of the study and contribution to the field

Library history cannot be investigated fairly, thoroughly, and critically without reference to the larger sociopolitical environment in which libraries exist.⁵ Failing to account for micro- and macro-level social forces would render the resulting interpretation incomplete and undervalued as an instructive historical narrative.

To reconstruct a more inclusive library history, this study will closely examine three

⁵ As argued in Sidney H. Ditzion, *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture, a Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle States from 1850 to 1900*. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1947); and Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library; the Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

core subjects: the history of Florence-Firestone, the early history of the COLAPL system, and the history, evolution, and role of the Florence and Graham branch libraries in the community. Conspicuously, each of these subjects has received little scholarly historical analysis to date. While there is ample research on the history of the city's venerated Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL),⁶ and only modest scholarship on COLAPL,⁷ there is scant historical coverage of county branch libraries⁸ and, more noteworthy, absolutely no scholarly work ever written about the Florence and Graham libraries. Similarly, no scholarly history of the Florence-Firestone community has been written.⁹

This study endeavors to bridge these gaps in the research and, in the process, spotlight the positive impact of library services in poor, disadvantaged, and working-class communities. As the first scholarly investigation of library services in Florence-Firestone, this study will make significant contributions and provide new insights to the literature on urban library history and Los Angeles urban history.

⁶ See, for example, Debra G. Hansen, Karen F. Gracy and Sheri D. Irvin, "At the Pleasure of the Board: Women Librarians and the Los Angeles Public Library, 1880-1905," *Libraries & Culture* 34, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 311-346; Jerry Finley Cao, "The Los Angeles Public Library: Origins and Development, 1872-1910," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1977); Gertrude E. Gscheidle, "The Los Angeles Public Library," (M.A., University of Chicago, 1949).

⁷ See, for example, Ronald Floyd Sigler, "The Film Censorship Controversy at Los Angeles County Public Library – 1971: A Case Study" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1977); and Roger H. Woelfel, *Diamond Jubilee: Seventy-five Years of Public Service: The Story of the Los Angeles County Public Library*. Glendale, CA: A.H. Clark Company, 1987.

⁸ Early branch libraries are discussed in a brief article by Linda F. Crismond, "The Story of the Los Angeles County Public Library," *Public Library Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1989): 19-24.

⁹ The closest I have found to a comprehensive history of Florence-Firestone is a 9-page, uncredited article in the County of L.A.-produced *Florence-Firestone and Walnut Park Connection* (2007). But the article is basically a chronology of events without historical interpretation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“This material and information has been collected and compiled by Evelyn Vollnogle present librarian with the help of Graham Library’s many friends and the up town library... 50 years is a long time for people to remember facts and to keep pictures and it has been a little difficult to collect facts and be sure they are correct... She would like to suggest that for the next 50 years facts and pictures be collected as the years go by and not at the end of that time.”¹⁰

“We know much more, it seems, about ancient cities and dead civilizations—the chalices the elders drank from or the raiments warriors wore—than we do about day-to-day life in “South-Central Los Angeles,” beyond the term, beyond the trope.”¹¹

The history of public library services in poor, working-class, and disadvantaged communities is understudied in the historical literature. Arguably, this lack of scholarship can be attributed to topical myopia on the part of historians who have tended to focus on “big city” American public library histories and biographies of pioneering, heroic library luminaries. Inherent in these familiar narratives are subtle biases against poor and working-class library patrons.¹² Save for a few autobiographical tales,¹³ the history of library services to poor, working-class, and disadvantaged populations remains largely unwritten.

Similarly, the Florence-Firestone community in South Central Los Angeles has been undervalued as a subject of historical analysis. Attention from historians has been tepid at best, usually in the form of passing references made in the histories of adjacent

¹⁰ Evelyn C. Vollnogle, *History of Graham Library—1915-1965* (c. 1965). Graham Library archives. Graham Library, County of Los Angeles Public Library. Los Angeles, CA.

¹¹ Lynell George, “What It Is. (And What It Was.) Lynell George remembers South-Central Los Angeles,” *West* (October 8, 2006): 19.

¹² See: Michael H. Harris, *The Purpose of the American Public Library in Historical Perspective: A Revisionist Interpretation*. (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Library and Information Sciences, 1972); and Michael H. Harris. *The Role of the Public Library in American life: a Speculative Essay*. (Occasional papers, no. 117. Urbana, IL: Graduate School of Library and Information Science. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1975).

¹³ See, for example, Barbara H. Clark, “Ghetto Librarian,” *California Librarian* 34 (October 1973): 18-23. For a more light-hearted narrative see: Don Borchert, *Oddballs, Geeks, and Gangstas in the Public Library*. New York: Virgin Books, 2007.

communities. And while a few researchers have taken up Florence-Firestone as a topic, these studies examined issues of policy analysis and economic development, not history.¹⁴ Lamentably, the community today is best known for its social maladies.¹⁵ A scholarly history of the Florence-Firestone community remains unwritten and overdue.

This inaugural study of library services in Florence-Firestone will make a modest yet important first step in addressing these significant gaps in the research. Before proceeding, though, it is important to establish historiographical context for the study. Accordingly, this literature review critically examines the history of library services in poor, working-class, and disadvantaged communities as well as the history of such communities within the geography of South Central Los Angeles.

¹⁴ Florence-Firestone has been the subject of academic theses and professional reports. All but one focus on economic development. See: Clement Lau, "Alternative Ways, Locations, and Partners to Meet the Recreational Needs of Underserved Communities: The Case of Florence-Firestone" (DPDS diss., University of Southern California, 2011); Juan Oliveros, "The Community of Florence-Firestone: Revisiting Economic Opportunities in an Ethnic Neighborhood" (master's project, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003); Julia Fransica Orozco, "Florence Avenue: Exploring Economic Opportunities in an Ethnic Neighborhood" (master's project, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999); "Los Angeles County Model Neighborhood (Florence, Firestone & Willow brook) Economic Study." Los Angeles: Sanford R. Goodkin Research Corporation, 1970; Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, "Los Angeles Community Analysis Program: Socio-economic Diagnostic Findings for East Los Angeles and Firestone-Willowbrook (South Central Los Angeles); presented to Sanford R. Goodkin Research Corporation, Los Angeles, Calif., for Los Angeles County/CRA West, Inc." Los Angeles: CRA West Inc., 1969.

¹⁵ Florence-Firestone recently made national headlines after two teachers at Miramonte Elementary School were arrested in February 2012 for alleged sex crimes against school children. See: Scott Gold et. al, "Teacher Charged with Lewd Acts; Allegations Against a Veteran Miramonte Elementary Instructor Leave Many Parents Shocked and Angry," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2012: A-1; and Richard Winton et. al, "Second Teacher at School Jailed; Longtime Instructor at Miramonte Campus is Accused of Touching Two Girls Improperly," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 2012: AA-1. Crime, drug dealing, and bloody turf wars between Black and Mexican gangs have plagued Florence-Firestone for decades. The situation reached a nightmarish boiling point in the mid-2000's, garnering considerable media coverage. See: Sam Quinones, "Gang Rivalry Grows into Race War; Battle over the Drug Trade has Led to Escalating Violence in Florence-Firestone," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 2007: A-1.

Library services to poor, working-class, and disadvantaged populations

The field of library studies is not devoid of writing about library services to poor, working-class, and disadvantaged populations. However, most of this work has been written by practitioners reporting on programs and services.¹⁶ There is nothing “wrong,” of course, with librarians writing their own histories. Truthfully, they might be the only ones knowledgeable of important stories to tell. And, obviously, some kind of written history is better than no history. That said, there are limitations that must be admitted when we rely on self-reporting in history. The obvious is the reporter’s bias: in all likelihood, these histories will be celebratory, perhaps self-serving. Another problem is the general absence of critical inquiry in the works. As library scholar Rosemary R. Du Mont noted about librarians writing history, “Instead of analyzing and interpreting the past, they emphasized the facts... In short, theirs were promotional, optimistic accounts of progress achieved, problems solved, and challenges to be met.”¹⁷ Historians have contributed few studies of library services to underserved populations. The absence of the historian’s critical lens effectively diminishes the opportunity of connecting this important narrative to larger social, political, economic, cultural, and historical issues at play.

¹⁶ See, for example, Ewald B. Nyquist, “Poverty, Prejudice, and the Public Library,” *Library Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (January 1968): 78-89; Carol L. Kronus, “Inducing Attitudinal Change among Librarians,” *Journal of Education for Librarianship* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1971): 104-115; Otis D. Alexander, “Public Library Services to Underrepresented Groups: Poor & Unemployed Emphasizing Danville, Virginia,” *Public Library Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2008): 111-33; Lisa Gieskes, “Why Librarians Matter to Poor People,” *Public Library Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2009): 49-57; Wendell L. Wray, “Library Services for the Poor: Implications for Library education,” *Public Library Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2009): 40-48; and John Gehner, “Libraries, Low-income People, and Social Exclusion,” *Public Library Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (January 2010): 39-47. For books, see: Carol L. Kronus and Linda Crowe, eds., *Libraries and Neighborhood Information Centers* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1972); and Claire K. Lipsman, *The Disadvantaged and Library Effectiveness* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1972).

¹⁷ Rosemary R. Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 4.

While I found no bonafide historical studies of library services to poor, working-class, and disadvantaged populations, I located a few useful monographs written by librarians and library scholars. A close examination of these sources disclosed two diverging perspectives about library services to the underserved: the first can be described as a reluctance to perform such a social service-type function from the library; the second contends that servicing the poor is not only right but nothing new, as librarians have been reaching out to underserved populations since the profession's founding in modern times. These two outlooks are examined below.

In the introduction to the 1975 book *Library Services to the Disadvantaged*,¹⁸ William Martin examined the then-emerging trend of librarians engaging in more socially active work with poor and disadvantaged patrons. While acknowledging that librarians have evinced a longstanding commitment to social causes, Martin observed that recent sociopolitical upheavals changed librarians' outlook toward the disadvantaged. "[T]he response of the library profession to the social problems of the 1960s and 1970s has been such as to herald a qualitative change in professional attitudes and actions. Like all change this has not gone unchallenged, and many librarians have reacted strongly against what they perceive to be an unwarranted switch in professional direction."¹⁹ This so-called "switch" was toward a more social service-type function for librarians. Unfortunately, Martin neglects to identify the complainants. We do not know if the aggrieved were librarians in the UK (where Martin worked), American librarians, or both, for that matter.

¹⁸ William Martin, ed., "Introduction," *Library Services to the Disadvantaged* (Hamden, CT: Linnet Books, 1975), 7-31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Based on Martin's assessment the most we gather is that some rank-and-file librarians at that time felt discontent about their emerging social service role. Martin went on to point out that one challenge for servicing disadvantaged populations is that there are multiple definitions and degrees of "disadvantage." As there is no panacea, he recommended customizing library services for the disadvantaged like you would for other user groups. The remainder of this book offers the perspectives of several other contributors who held that "social concerns are appropriately those of librarians."²⁰

Finding accounts of librarians *objecting* to performing a social services-type function proved difficult. That, in itself, was a positive sign suggesting few practitioners held hostile attitudes toward the disadvantaged, as Martin claimed. However, evidence of some discontent was found in the secondary sources cited in *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life*, by Rosemary R. Du Mont.²¹ A revised version of Du Mont's doctoral dissertation, *Reform and Reaction* examined the American public library from 1890 to 1915, a formative era for the development of library services and a time when these services were initially reaching newly arriving immigrants and rural Americans. Du Mont argued that public libraries functioned to ensure social control for community reform. Her well-researched history drew from sources both within and outside the field of library science. Discussing this history's impact on modern-day urban public libraries, Du Mont referred to the work of Edward Banfield, the noted political science professor and social critic. Banfield had argued that the influx of populations into urban areas pushed out

²⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

²¹ Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, supra., note 17.

families with enough income to relocate. This generally unfolded as the exodus of Caucasians from urban areas in response to the influx of ethnically diverse populations; colloquially, this is known as “White-flight.” While suburbs developed, the central city declined. Wealth inequality in urban areas inevitably affected urban public libraries: as funding and programs diminished, the poor and disadvantaged, for a variety of reasons, availed themselves less and less of library services.

Du Mont pointed out that the American Library Association’s Social Responsibilities Round Table has been a longtime champion of enhancing poor peoples’ access to library services as well as battling societal ills. Some have disagreed with the latter agenda. For example, in 1965 J.E. Burchard argued against metropolitan libraries grappling with urban social problems.²² Librarians were implored to stick to books and reading services in D.W. Davies’ 1974 book *Public Libraries as Culture and Social Centers: The Origin of the Concept*.²³ And according to Du Mont, Edward Banfield thought that “the public library is not the proper agency to serve the lower classes living in urban centers, as their educational level is so low and their demoralization so great as to make library service ineffective.”²⁴ These words are Du Mont’s paraphrasing but the sentiment is that of Banfield, a right-winger and former advisor to three Republican presidents, including Ronald Reagan, arguably no friend to the poor and disadvantaged.²⁵ Banfield’s sentiment oozes with contempt for public libraries and the poor.

²² J.E. Burchard, cited in Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, p. 122.

²³ D.W. Davies, cited in Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, p. 122.

²⁴ Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, p. 133.

²⁵ Wikipedia. “Edward C. Banfield.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_C._Banfield

Others in the literature contend that customizing library services for poor, working-class, and disadvantaged patrons is not only right but also nothing new or innovative. This perspective is crystallized in Edwin Castagna's "A Troubled Mixture: Our Attitudes toward the Unserved as Librarians in a Professional Capacity"²⁶ and in John C. Colson's "The United States: An Historical Critique."²⁷ This viewpoint also appears throughout Du Mont's book. All three authors position library services to the underserved as a longstanding tradition dating back to the founding of modern librarianship.

Castagna examined librarians' mixed emotions about servicing the poor. He believed librarians essentially support the role of servicing poor patrons but the challenges they face doing so are overwhelming. According to Castagna, this leads to librarians feeling "a troubled mixture of compassion, eagerness to serve, doubt, fear, dismay, discouragement, determination, and hope."²⁸ Allowing discouragement to prevail, and for library services to the poor to falter, amounts to a missed opportunity to educate those most in need of assistance. Castagna said this would surely disappoint the heroic library luminaries who established a tradition of service to the poor. For example, in *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture*, Sidney H. Ditzion highlighted librarians' humanitarian "attempts at 'brightening the lives of the poor' and strengthening them against the temptations of the

²⁶ Edwin Castagna, "A Troubled Mixture: Our Attitudes Toward the Unserved as Librarians in a Professional Capacity," in *Library Service to the Unserved*, ed. Laurence L. Sherill (New York: Bowker, 1970), 15-24.

²⁷ John C. Colson, "The United States: An Historical Critique," in *Library Services to the Disadvantaged*, ed. William Martin (Hamden, CT: Linnet Books, 1975), 61-82.

²⁸ Castagna, "A Troubled Mixture," p. 15.

city”²⁹, an environment wrought with adverse socioeconomic conditions in late nineteenth century. Du Mont seconded the point about Ditzion’s compassion towards poor patrons:

In the development of new library services to meet readers’ needs, Ditzion saw a desire on the part of librarians and library supports to improve the quality of life for the urban masses... [T]o provide opportunities for economic mobility and to raise the standards of living of the immigrants and poor Americans, public libraries were themselves developed into agencies of general social uplift.³⁰

Castagna connected these early efforts with similar efforts by modern-day librarians aimed at improving the lives of the underserved. For example, he highlighted Enoch Pratt’s and Dr. Lewis Steiner’s shared conviction that the Baltimore Public Library must always be accessible to poor people. For good measure, both men put that belief in writing and delivered it in official capacities.³¹ Castagna also pointed to the early work of Selma Benjamin, a librarian at LAPL’s Venice branch. Benjamin came to Venice beach in the late 1960s, long before the area was a bastion of Westside L.A. quirk and cool. She saw a destitute, multiethnic community needing intervention. In response, Benjamin initiated educational and cultural programs for Venice’s disadvantaged population. According to Castagna, outreach efforts like these must continue and librarians must remain confident and determined rather than discouraged. “Such a response will be worthy of the great pioneering examples set for us by such librarians as Melvil Dewey, John Cotton Dana, Jennie

²⁹ Ditzion, cited in Castagna, “A Troubled Mixture,” p. 16.

³⁰ Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, p. 8.

³¹ Castagna, p. 16-17. Enoch Pratt’s opinion was conveyed in a letter to the mayor and city council of Baltimore in 1882. Dr. Steiner made his opinion known in a library dedication speech years later.

Flexner, and Joseph L. Wheeler.”³² To this list of socially conscious library pioneers Du Mont added library developer Andrew Carnegie, who saw himself as a “trustee for the poor.”³³

Similarly, John C. Colson connected modern-day library services for the poor with efforts of early library pioneers in the article “The United States: An Historical Critique.”³⁴ According to Colson, “The public librarian in the United States has long held a strong sense of his mission to serve the unserved. Indeed, Melvil Dewey or Frank Hutchins or Lutie Stearns would have said that any American without easy [access] to a public library is disadvantaged.”³⁵ Colson, a library professor and scholar, offered a thorough critique of library services to disadvantaged populations in the U.S. Agreeing the Castagna, Colson reminded us that librarians have been reaching out to underserved populations since 1876, the birth year of the ALA. As an example, Colson pointed to early accounts, such as E.E. Allen’s 1899 article on library services for the blind, A.L. Bailey’s 1907 article on library services for the “working man,” a 1911 article by F. C. H. Wendell about immigrants and libraries, and A. E. Bostwick’s 1911 article on library services for the urban poor.³⁶

Colson declared that World War I marked a turning point away from servicing the disadvantaged. Reader’s advisory services took on a more prominent role in public libraries until World War II. Postwar boom accelerated library development in newly expanding communities, particularly the suburbs. Throughout this history, African American patrons, many of whom remained in urban centers, were largely ignored. Librarians, concluded

³² Ibid., p. 24.

³³ Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, p. 56.

³⁴ John C. Colson, “The United States: An Historical Critique,” *supra.*, note 27.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 61-62.

Colson, simply did not understand their struggles. Such cultural ignorance pushed Eliza Gleason to call for an African American embargo on public libraries in favor of patronizing academic libraries on historically black colleges—a bold and drastic call to arms, though largely serving as hyperbole given that these colleges are concentrated in the American south.³⁷

Revolution in the 1960s reorganized library service priorities and put underserved populations back on the forefront. The infusion of federal monies through the Library Services and Construction Act of 1962 reintroduced the notion of outreach to the disadvantaged as a core service objective. According to Colson, in their efforts to lure the poor into libraries, librarians were empowered to take up official positions in the War on Poverty.³⁸ Commenting on this role, Du Mont remarked, “The librarian as social worker was given full play here...”.³⁹ But Colson also posited that librarians’ self-interest factored into their efforts to lure non-users, who comprised 25 to 40 percent of the population.⁴⁰ Doubts lingered over the public library’s ability to make lasting changes in the lives of the poor.

Colson concluded that the American public library remains essentially what it was over 200 years ago. Society changed, but the library stayed stagnant. In Colson’s estimation, the correct response is to focus library services less on individuals and more on communities, because the bonds, values, and responsibilities fomented within communities “ameliorate” negative social conditions.⁴¹ Furthermore, community development can be

³⁷ Ibid., p. 68-69.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, p. 124.

⁴⁰ Colson, “The United States: An Historical Critique,” p. 71-72.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 76.

doubly beneficial. As Colson said, “The disadvantaged...see the public library as irrelevant, not because they are indifferent to their needs for information, education and other benefits which can be obtained from libraries, but because they lack the communal connections by which they might begin to organize themselves to meet their needs.”⁴² In sum, community development would benefit underserved library patrons and the public library itself.

Poor, working-class, and disadvantaged communities in South Central Los Angeles

While Florence-Firestone has no published history, historians have written extensively about adjacent and nearby communities. Much can be gleaned from these “proximity histories.” This section assesses a few histories of South Central Los Angeles communities in order to shed light on the determinative roles played by socioeconomic forces, such as “ghettoization” of ethnic enclaves, poverty, environmental racism, demographic shifts, community disinvestment, and racially restrictive housing covenants. The story of South Central Los Angeles is, fundamentally, the story of Florence-Firestone.

Lawrence B. De Graaf’s groundbreaking 1970 article, “The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,”⁴³ was one of the earliest critical histories of South Central Los Angeles. Emboldened by a paucity of historical scholarship on L.A.’s black ghettos, De Graaf set out to write that history by answering these core questions: When did L.A.’s Black areas become ghettos? Were they ghettos like those in the South and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lawrence B. De Graaf, “The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 39, no. 3 (August 1970): 323-352.

Northeast U.S.?⁴⁴ The formation of L.A.'s Black areas is traced to the Black migration from the South and Midwest into Los Angeles between 1890-1930, though De Graaf noted that Black settlers inhabited the area as early as 1781. A distinct Black enclave took shape in downtown Los Angeles at 11th Street and Central Avenue around 1920. Blacks eventually migrated south along Central Avenue, displacing white families en route who felt an increasing encroachment. Racially restrictive housing covenants were used to exclude Blacks from "White-only" communities, such as South Gate and Huntington Park. As De Graff explained:

While whites built miles of residential tracts along the coast and into rural lands adjacent to the city, blacks were barred from such expansion and had to absorb the influx in their existing community or in older residential areas on its periphery. The result was increased ethnic concentration, a deterioration of property values, and a less optimistic view of their community on the part of some blacks.⁴⁵

De Graaf examined the development of two geographies intrinsically linked to South Central L.A. and Black L.A. history: the Central Avenue corridor and the community of Watts. Central Avenue is described here and elsewhere in the literature as "the heart of the black community."⁴⁶ For Blacks, Central Avenue was the main route of expansion outside of the central city as well as home to the first Black business and cultural institutions. Watts symbolized something else. Originally an agricultural outpost for Caucasian laborers and Black southern migrants, Watts developed into a bustling independent city in 1910. WWI brought more Black residents to the community. As Watts began looking less and less White, racial tensions ensued. Hysteria grew over the possibility of a Black power grab at

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 324.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 334.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 335.

city hall. De Graaf speculated that Watts voters' choice to be annexed by the City of Los Angeles in 1926 stemmed from the fear of a growing Black stronghold developing in Watts.⁴⁷ As Patricia Adler argued in her doctoral dissertation "Watts: From Suburb to Black Ghetto," annexation to Los Angeles subsumed Watts into a larger city council district, leading to lost identity and community neglect.⁴⁸

Racially restrictive housing covenants would confine Blacks to South Central Los Angeles well into the heady days of WWII. Throughout this sordid era, increasing neglect and community disinvestment led to crumbling infrastructure in South Central Los Angeles. Environmental racism in the form of rezoning turned the northern section of Central Avenue into a manufacturing district. General slum conditions became the norm around 1929.⁴⁹ They persist in much of South Central Los Angeles today.

Historian Josh Sides' 2003 book *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*⁵⁰ picks up where De Graaf left off. This impressively researched work examines the Black experience in Los Angeles between the years 1945-1964, which is to say, from the depression era to the flashpoint of the Watts Riot/Insurrection. To Sides, race "is a concept that has been integral to the way American cities have developed and the way urbanites of all backgrounds have made decisions."⁵¹ Nowhere else is this more evident than in South Central Los Angeles. Sides' book chronicles

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 347.

⁴⁸ Patricia R. Adler, "Watts: From Suburb to Black Ghetto," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1977).

⁴⁹ De Graaf, "The City of Black Angels," p. 349.

⁵⁰ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 8.

how “African Americans were not peripheral to the history of Los Angeles... but were, rather, important shapers of urban destiny in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated.”⁵² As De Graaf aptly noted in his book review, Sides’ monograph is comprised of three core sections: a history of Black manufacturing employment, a history of housing conditions in the Black community, and a history of Black protest against structural racism.⁵³ According to Sides, deindustrialization—epitomized in the closure of the Firestone, Goodyear, Ford, General Motors, and Bethlehem Steel plants in South Central Los Angeles, and resulting widespread unemployment—was a leading cause of entrenched poverty and continuing ghettoization of L.A.’s Black communities.

In a subsequent 2004 article, Sides investigated the devastating effects deindustrialization, racial politics, and political unrest had on the history, evolution and meaning of the City of Compton.⁵⁴ As Sides observed, “With more than a third of its population employed in manufacturing industries, Compton was probably affected [by deindustrialization] more than any other black area in Southern California.”⁵⁵ The aftermath of deindustrialization was nothing short of devastating. In a span of about twenty years, Compton went from a model, working-class suburb to an exemplar of urban crisis; by 1980, the word “Compton” signified crime, danger, and urban decay in the popular imagination.⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid., p. 9.

⁵³ Lawrence B. De Graaf, review of *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, by Josh Sides, *California History* 82, no. 3 (2004): 84-85.

⁵⁴ Josh Sides, “Straight into Compton: American Dreams, Urban Nightmares, and the Metamorphosis of a Black Suburb,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 2004): 583-605.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 593.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 598.

Such negative associations have been the fate of many South Central Los Angeles communities.

The politics of migration, deindustrialization, race, and housing are similarly explored in Becky M. Nicolaides' *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*.⁵⁷ This book, an adaptation of her 1993 doctoral dissertation, examines the transformation of the City of South Gate during the boom years between 1920-1965. South Gate is located seven miles south of downtown L.A. and situated on the eastern edge of the South Central Los Angeles region. The city is located just east of Florence-Firestone, across Alameda Street, the major north-south thoroughfare connecting the Port of Los Angeles and L.A.'s manufacturing core—a boundary which also serves as a physical and psychological divider separating historically Black enclaves like Watts and Florence-Firestone on the west from historically White suburbs to the east. Open, affordable land and the prospects of low-cost homeownership lured Caucasian migrants from the South and Midwest to South Gate in the early twentieth century. The area transformed from an agricultural backwater in 1920 to a prosperous, WASP suburb in the 1960s, largely due to the influx of working-class families employed in the local manufacturing industry. Indeed, South Gate is one of many South Central Los Angeles communities whose histories are closely tied to L.A.'s industrial core.⁵⁸

According to Nicolaides, the politics of race, economics, and culture between 1920-1965 stemmed from defensive homeownership patterns of South Gate's Caucasian working-

⁵⁷ Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

class. She wrote: “The home lay at the core of life, both literally and figuratively, as working people made their way through the challenges facing them in a maturing industrial economy. By the time the [Watts] riots broke out in 1965, South Gaters had been defining their homes and neighborhoods in racialized ways...”.⁵⁹ South Gate’s early physical and political development—that is, suburban and conservative—indicated a marked defensiveness against perceived outside threats. “[R]acial concerns moved to the core of their thinking. Seeking to protect their prosperous community from “threats” of integration from neighboring Watts in the 1960s, South Gate moved rightward.”⁶⁰ Nicolaides also connected South Gate’s transformation with national struggles for racial integration and political and socioeconomic equality. In this city, racism and classicism butted up against struggles for civil rights and economic equality. The history of South Gate, so intimately entwined with issues of blue-collar labor migration, deindustrialization, defensive housing policies, and the politics of race and class, is representative of the larger history of South Central Los Angeles.

Conclusion and significance

There is a dearth of historical scholarship on library services to poor, working-class and disadvantaged communities, and there is no written history of Florence-Firestone, itself a historically poor, disadvantaged, and working-class community. The former represents an abject disservice to these communities, whose stories of struggle for justice and equality through the provision of neighborhood library services should be celebrated, not undersold.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁰ Lisa McGirr, review of *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*, by Becky M. Nicolaides, *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (September 2003), 694.

The latter, meanwhile, is indicative of historians' general ignorance of and disinterest in L.A.'s unincorporated communities, especially those within the geography of South Central Los Angeles. The history of unincorporated South Central L.A. remains, in essence, depreciated and untold. For Florence-Firestone, a community without a published history, it is as if history only happens and matters around it. Florence-Firestone deserves better than that. Its people, families, and institutions, such as the venerable Florence and Graham branch libraries, deserve a fairer history told. This study of the history of library services in Florence-Firestone will address these historiographical gaps and, in doing so, make significant and original contributions to the literature on Los Angeles urban history and the history of urban library services, especially towards poor, working-class, and disadvantaged patrons.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Social history is this study's primary and guiding theoretical approach. From a social history perspective, this study will examine the experiences of ordinary people who shaped the development of library services in Florence-Firestone. Social history is an ideal methodological approach because it factors into the analysis the explanatory power of social, economic, political, cultural, and geographic forces impacting common peoples' lives, a major theme of this project. As my review of the literature illustrated, social forces like population flux, demographic shifts, racially prejudiced housing policies, and deindustrialization played determinative roles in the historical narrative of South Central Los Angeles. Furthermore, my assessment of the primary sources and secondary literature confirmed that the histories of the Florence and Graham libraries and the history of Florence-Firestone cannot be divorced from the larger social milieu in which they developed.

Aspects of this study will also draw from local history and microhistory approaches. Using local history methods, I will collect and analyze archival data from local sources (oral histories, branch library archives) and regional sources (county records departments). Microhistory methods will be used to analyze the happenings within the micro-geography of Florence-Firestone. To be sure, these methods will supplement the social history approach, the primary "lens" through which I will interpret this history.

4. PRIMARY SOURCES

Archives

This study heavily relies upon archival materials relating to the branch libraries and the community. Several Los Angeles-area archives will be consulted, including the COLAPL archives in Huntington Park, as well as the Florence Library archives, Graham Library archives, Florence Methodist Church archives, and Saint Aloysius Roman Catholic Church archives in Florence-Firestone. The main library and branch archives have primary source materials pertaining to library services and the community. Many of these documents have already been located and copied. I expect to find additional primary source materials relating to community history, and possibly some library-related primary sources, in the archives of the local churches.

Oral History Interviews

Oral history interviews with longtime residents will be carried out for this study. Tentatively, I have identified at least one interviewee who can offer valuable insights. Born in the Florence district in 1928, Mr. Joseph Titus is a lifelong resident of the community. He has witnessed the neighborhood dramatically transform. Mr. Titus serves on the Florence Firestone Chamber of Commerce, where his area knowledge is regularly consulted. The Chamber of Commerce put it best in their July 2008 Newsletter, which reads: “[I]f you’re interested in the history or any other information regarding the Florence Firestone area, then Joe Titus is the person to contact. Joe is our personal Historian and walking

Encyclopedia for the area, he's GREAT!"⁶¹ Once I have secured SJSU Institutional Review Board approval for working with human subjects, I will conduct oral history interviews with Mr. Titus to capture his personal recollections about the Florence and Graham branches and the changing landscape of the Florence-Firestone community. I anticipate conducting at least three interviews lasting one hour or longer at an agreeable location in or near Florence-Firestone.

Newspapers

Several local newspapers will be consulted for historical coverage of branch library activities and services. Regional newspapers will be consulted for historical coverage of the community's events, issues, newsmakers, and general evolution over time. Many of the local papers are out-of-print. These include the *California Eagle*, *Firestone Park News*, *Florence Messenger*, *Graham News*, and *South End Bee*. Most of these can be found online at "Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers," <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/> or at the Internet Archive, <http://archive.org/>. Regional newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *Southeast Wave-Star*, *Southside Journal*, *Southside Wave*, are accessible online via Proquest. Ethnically oriented newspapers like the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *La Opinion* also can be accessed through Proquest's "Ethnic NewsWatch" database.

Professional Publications

As this study is situated within the broader field of California library history, I will draw from various local and state library publications. COLAPL materials cover the history

⁶¹ Florence Firestone Chamber of Commerce. *Newsletter (subtitled: "What A Year!")*. Los Angeles: Florence Firestone Chamber of Commerce, June 2008.

of the county library system over its nearly 100-year existence. These sources yield insights about library operations, development, policies, statistics, and personnel. They include serials such as COLAPL's *Annual Report*, which spans the years 1926 to present, and *Books and Notes of the Los Angeles County Free Library, 1926-1955*; and special books such as *Twenty-five Years of Growth, 1912-1937*, *50th Anniversary, 1912-1962*, and the *60th Year Report, 1912/13-1972/73*. All are available at LAPL, COLAPL, USC, UCLA, and CSULA.

California State Library's *News Notes of California Libraries* is extremely valuable to this study because it contains decades' worth of noteworthy data—staff rosters, activities, and anecdotes, for example—about my subject branches collected by the state library between 1906-1979. *News Notes* volumes 1-74 is accessible online at the Internet Archive, archive.org. Print copies of various volumes are available at LAPL, USC, and UCLA.

I expect to find additional historical information about my subject branches and COLAPL in the California Library Association's publications *Bulletin of the California Library Association, 1939-1947*, *California Librarian, 1950-1978*, and *California Library Bulletin, 1947-1950*. These sources contain news, stories, and updates about library systems and local branches between the turbulent years spanning WWII to the Cold War era. Print copies are available at UCLA, CSULA, and LAPL.

Books

I located three primary source monographs that will be valuable to this study. Harriet G. Eddy's 1955 book *County Free Library Organizing in California, 1909-1918. Personal Recollections of Harriet G. Eddy, County Library Organizer, California State Library, 1909-1918*, chronicled her experiences as a library organizer traversing the state to establish

county free libraries in the early part of the twentieth century. Relevant to my study is the section discussing the founding of the Los Angeles County Free Library in 1912. CSULA library has a circulating copy of Eddy's book.

In the 1953 book *Public Libraries. Metropolitan Los Angeles: A Study of Integration*, Helen L. Jones wrote a substantive piece on COLAPL history, organization, and operations. Segments on management, library expansion, branch planning, tax-based funding, and services to other public entities provide valuable insights and background information. The piece also provides an informative snapshot of COLAPL service capabilities as a countywide library service provider in the 1950s, a time of rising demographic shifts in Los Angeles County, especially in Florence-Firestone. LAPL and CSULA have circulating copies.

Roger Woelfel's 1987 book *Diamond Jubilee: Seventy-five Years of Public Service: The Story of the Los Angeles County Public Library*, summarized the history of COLAPL just as the organization celebrated a major seventy-five year milestone. This brief 72-page book is arguably the only "complete history" of COLAPL written. Notably, it was authored over twenty years ago and never updated. LAPL and COLAPL have circulating copies.

Articles

Although the majority of journal articles relevant to this study are secondary sources, I found two primary source journal articles regarding COLAPL. The first is Linda F. Crismond's 1989 article in *Public Library Quarterly* entitled "The Story of the Los Angeles County Public Library." Crismond, an L.A. County librarian, sketched out the history of COLAPL. The article is valuable for context and chronology, though at five pages and lacking footnotes, it lacks scholarly depth. The second source is an uncredited 1990 news piece

entitled “News that May have Escaped Your Attention Until Now” in the volume 10, number 2 issue of *Public Library Quarterly*. This brief article explained the County of L.A.’s decision in 1990 to change the library’s name to “County of Los Angeles Public Library.” Both of these articles were acquired online through SJSU’s King Library website.

Databases

I anticipate using these databases to access primary sources: Ancestry.com, Automobile Club of Southern California collection, 1892-1963, and Title Insurance and Trust/C.C. Pierce Photography Collection, 1860-1960. Ancestry.com, a fee-based commercial database, provides access to U.S. Census data, family histories, and statistics that will be indispensable for this study. The Automobile Club of Southern California collection, 1892-1963, and the Title Insurance and Trust/C.C. Pierce Photography Collection, 1860-1960, maintain historical photographs of the Florence-Firestone community dating back to the early 1900s. Both archival photo collections are free and available through USC’s Digital Library.

Los Angeles County Assessor’s Building Descriptions

The evolution of my subject libraries’ actual facilities will be looked at in this study. Assessor’s building descriptions, the county tax assessor’s official records of structures on a parcel, will prove valuable for the study. Assessor’s building descriptions serve as primary source documents chronicling how a parcel has evolved structurally over time. Through my research I discovered that the Florence and Graham branches changed locations at least four times before finding their current homes. Tracing the history of the libraries’ facilities will be an important part of this investigation. I anticipate finding building diagrams,

records of alteration/damage, chronologies of use, ownership information, possibly even observations recorded about the libraries in the assessor records.⁶² Assessor building descriptions for properties in Florence-Firestone are kept at the L.A. County Assessor's South District Office in Signal Hill.

⁶² Building permits are another potential primary source. Like assessor's building descriptions, building permits contain information on structures and uses on a parcel. However, based on my prior knowledge and work experience, I know that building permit files seldom come with drawings or diagrams of the buildings for which permits were obtained. And because of spotty record keeping, these files are sometimes incomplete or missing. Therefore, the usefulness of building permits for this study has yet to be determined. The Los Angeles County Department of Building & Safety at 1320 W. Imperial Highway in Los Angeles keeps building permits for the Florence-Firestone community. Newer permits are in paper-form; older permits are stored on microfiche. Copies can be obtained by submitting a Records Search Request at the public counter along with a \$6.00 fee.

5. TENTATIVE CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction, Theoretical Approaches, Literature Review

The first chapter will introduce the community of Florence-Firestone in South Central Los Angeles, the Florence and Graham branch libraries, and COLAPL. I will establish the core research questions and thesis, then outline the significance of the research and this study's original contributions to the literature. I will also substantiate social history, local history, and microhistory as appropriate theoretical approaches for this research. Rounding out chapter one, a review of the literature on the history of library services in poor, working-class, and disadvantaged communities, and the history of these communities in South Central Los Angeles will provide context for the study.

Chapter 2: Origins and Development of Florence-Firestone, 1880s-1900s

A history of the Florence-Firestone community will be traced to the Don Antonio Lugo Spanish Land Grant of the late 1800s and subsequent subdivisions that helped develop the Florence and Graham districts and adjacent communities. The chapter will discuss farming and rural life in Florence and original Black homesteads in Graham. The chapter will also examine the influence of Remi Nadeau, the French-born pioneer who built the first manufacturing plant in Florence in the late nineteenth century. Finally, I will explore L.A. railroad expansion which spurred the establishment of the Florence and Graham districts.

Chapter 3: Origins of COLAPL, 1912-1930s

The origins of Los Angeles County's library system will be traced to the County Free Library Law of 1911 and the creation of the Los Angeles County Free Library in 1912. The chapter will reference the first-ever county library in Willowbrook, an unincorporated

community in South Central L.A. adjacent to Florence-Firestone. I will also examine the county library's evolution from rural-to-urban library services provider in response to increasing urbanization of Los Angeles County.

Chapter 4: Early Years of the Florence and Graham Branch Libraries, 1914-1930s

This chapter will examine the birth of the Florence and Graham branches as lending libraries established in local residences between 1914-1915. I will discuss the original buildings housing the libraries and the homeowners who acted as “custodians” of the books. I will also examine where, why, and how the libraries relocated within the community during these years. The chapter will discuss typical library programs and services of this era. Contributions of noteworthy library staff and library boosters will be assessed. The impact of railroad expansion, increasing urbanization, and in-migration of Europeans during this formative era will be analyzed.

Chapter 5: Florence and Graham Libraries in the War years, 1930s-1965

The WWII era brought about considerable changes for the libraries and community. In the buildup to the war, L.A.'s manufacturing industry greatly expanded. This chapter will explore how the libraries took on roles as education centers for manufacturing laborers, then as training centers for returning WWII veterans. I will analyze the impact of postwar demographic shifts—most notably, the increased African American populace—and the effects of such forces on the libraries. I will examine how COLAPL's switch to a regional services model during this era affected Florence and Graham. Library staff and new library locations during this era will be discussed. Finally, the chapter will consider the effects of the 1965 Watts Riot/Insurrection and resulting White-flight on the libraries and community.

Chapter 6: Florence and Graham Libraries in the Era of Deindustrialization, 1965-1970s

This chapter will assess the legacy of postwar deindustrialization on Florence-Firestone and its branch libraries. I will examine how the library and community responded to socioeconomic forces such as factory closures, widespread job loss and poverty, community disinvestment, “ghettoization” after the Watts Insurrection, and further demographic upheavals and population shifts, most notably, the increased influx of Mexican immigrants during this era. In particular, I will discuss Florence and Graham’s participation in the “Way Out Project,” a federally funded study of library services in disadvantaged populations conducted between 1968 and 1970. The “Way Out Project” seemed to portend the challenges and issues these libraries would face in the coming decades. This chapter will also spotlight the appointment of the first professionally trained librarians at Florence and Graham.

Chapter 7: The Decline and Rebirth of the Florence and Graham Libraries, 1980s-Present

This chapter, an analysis of the recent past and present, covers some of the toughest years the libraries faced. The 1980s and 1990s brought about radical demographic changes in the community. This era saw a marked increase in Mexican and South American immigrants and a marked decrease in the Black population. I will assess the impact of these demographic shifts on library services and programs. Furthermore, I will discuss the socioeconomic decline and rising crime/gang activity during this time, and the effects these social forces had on the libraries. The impact of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot/Insurrection will be considered. I will also look at how library staff, programs, and locations during this era differed from previous eras. The chapter will examine how branch library services declined,

evolved, and rebounded during this tumultuous period. Specifically, I will explore the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' recent initiatives that transformed the Florence and Graham libraries from fortified, foreboding edifices to colorful and inviting community centers. Ongoing service improvements for the area's diverse, working-class population will be discussed.

Chapter 8: Conclusion, Implications, Further Questions

The closing chapter will assess the lessons learned from this inaugural study of the history of the Florence and Graham libraries in Florence-Firestone. I will summarize the study's major findings and implications for urban public libraries and underserved communities. I will elucidate how the shared history between this community and its branch libraries produced strong and lasting benefits. Further questions arising from this study will be posed with the hope that other researchers continue the important work of examining the impact of library services in poor, working-class, and disadvantaged communities, and the history of unincorporated communities in South Central Los Angeles.

6. TIMELINE

Project research has been underway since January 2012 and will continue through this summer until I resume MLIS studies in the fall. Thereafter, during the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters, project research will continue as time permits, with increases in activity during semester breaks. Thus far, I have made two trips to the Graham Library archives and one visit to the Florence Library archives. Additional archival research at these branches is needed; I anticipate visiting both branch archives *at least* twice more. Extensive archival research will be conducted at the COLAPL archives in Huntington Park. Over the next year, additional primary and secondary source research will be conducted online and at LAPL, COLAPL, USC library, and UCLA library.

Data analysis and writing will commence in May 2013. Tentatively, there are eight chapters planned; each will take about four weeks to write. My thesis committee will be given a completed draft for review in January 2014. Editing, revisions and improvements will take six to eight weeks. SJSU Office of Graduate Studies & Research will receive the thesis for initial review in April 2014. The thesis will be submitted for publication in June 2014. This protracted schedule is feasible and preferred given my full-time job requirements, desired thesis objectives, and anticipated research costs, which are discussed in the following section.

7. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

This study will have three core resource requirements: travel, reprographics, and technology. Reasonable cost estimates and a tentative project budget are outlined below.

The study requires travel to several libraries/archives in the Los Angeles region, including the subject libraries' and local churches' archives in Florence-Firestone, the COLAPL archives in Huntington Park, LAPL Central Library in downtown L.A., USC Library in downtown L.A., and the UCLA Library in Westwood. Oral history interviews will require trips to Florence-Firestone. Presently, a potential interviewee is a longtime resident still residing in Florence-Firestone. Additional travel might be required to interview former residents who have moved elsewhere in Los Angeles. Although I do not anticipate traveling to the state library archives in Sacramento, I am available to do so if I find it advantageous for this study. At least one trip to the L.A. County Assessor's Office in Signal Hill is planned. A budget of \$700 will be established for travel costs relating to gas, car maintenance, parking, food and drink.

Reprographics services, such as printing and photocopying, constitute an essential resource requirement. This study relies heavily upon primary source materials housed at local archives. Photocopying these documents for later evaluation and analysis is required. Although extensive photocopying of archival documents was accomplished during the initial research phase, a considerable amount of primary source material remains in the archives. Based on my initial three visits to the branch library archives, I discovered that primary source documents varied in length from 1 to 60 pages. I spent about \$30 per day on photocopying (copies cost 25 cents) during these three visits. This equation serves as a

working estimate for copying costs at the other archives I will visit. Secondary source materials such as journal and newspaper articles were retrieved from online databases and printed at home. These items varied in length from 1 to 30 pages. Factoring in all printing done locally throughout the year, I expect to go through at least five black ink cartridges and two color ink cartridges during this study. On average, black cartridges are \$15, color ones are \$20. Therefore, a budget of \$500 will be established for reprographics costs.

Data collection for this study requires a few technological devices. First, recording equipment is needed to capture oral history interviews; this includes one digital audio recorder to serve as the primary recording device and one iPhone app audio recorder to function as a concurrent, secondary recording device in case the primary device fails. A digital audio recorder is about \$100 and the iPhone recording app is between \$1 to \$5. Second, transcription software will be needed to transcribe oral history interviews into text documents. This software costs approximately \$100. Third, a subscription to Ancestry.com will be purchased to access U.S. Census data, family history information, and statistics, all of which are indispensable to this study. A six-month unlimited access subscription costs about \$150. Given the study's projected two-year timeframe, the cost of an Ancestry.com subscription will be about \$600 for the duration of the study. A budget of \$850 will be established for technology resource costs.

The overall project budget is \$2500. This figure factors in the costs outlined above and an additional \$450 for incidental and/or unforeseen expenses incurred during this study. Every effort will be made to keep the project on-track and within budget.

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