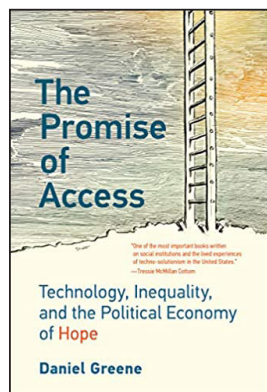


2. A.R. Fleming et al., "Treatment-seeking College Students with Disabilities: Presenting Concerns, Protective Factors, and Academic Distress," *Rehabilitation Psychology* 63, no. 1 (2018): 55.

Daniel Greene. *The Promise of Access: Technology, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Hope.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021. 260p. Paper, \$30.00 (ISBN 978-0-262-54233-3).



In *The Promise of Access: Technology, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Hope*, Daniel Greene sets out to examine “how the problem of poverty is transformed into a problem of technology” and the larger effect this has on public service-oriented institutions like schools and libraries. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2015 at three organizations—a tech start-up, a public library, and a charter school—he tells a story of public institutions adapting to dwindling state investment by embracing simplistic technological solutions to inequality, even when those who staff them seemingly know better. Why do we look to tech start-ups as models of success for public institutions when they operate under vastly different conditions? The allure of access and the promise of

technology makes an intractable problem like poverty into something that is actionable and legible to funders but sets these institutions on a path that may well end in their own undoing.

The book begins with a political history that undergirds the stories of the three organizations that follow. Recounting the policy discourse from the early 1990s, when the internet represented the promise of the Clinton administration’s New Economy, Greene examines the political use of ideas like the digital divide amid diminishing state spending and policies advancing the commercialization of the internet. The decline of the welfare state and the rise of skills training as a substitute for direct aid to the poor are key factors in how and why access to technology becomes the solution to poverty through *the access doctrine*: the understanding that those on the wrong side of the digital divide have been left out of the information economy; and, if given the right access to technology, they can be brought in and thereby lifted from poverty. This, then, brings the *hope* referenced in the title. With the right skills and training, individuals can overcome the structural problem of inequality and thrive in the global information economy. Conversely, those who cannot (or will not) be molded as competitors in the new economy are faced with an increasingly punitive and carceral state.

Using this theoretical framework, Greene takes us through three organizational settings: a local tech start-up, the MLK branch of the DC Public Library, and an entrepreneurial charter school. The backdrop for all three is Washington, DC, though the specific location is not a core concern. This is a broader story of a neoliberal urban development playbook that persists across locales: cities recruit largely white tech start-ups through tax incentives, real estate developers advancing gentrification create spaces that appeal to those workers, and—finally—public service institutions are recast in tech’s image, charged with remaking the city’s populace into entrepreneurs fit to compete in the information economy. It is this last piece of the puzzle that Greene investigates, and he largely succeeds in identifying the way that institutional transformations are enacted within individual organizations, often by the very “helping professionals” that staff them.

The book employs participant observation supplemented with interviews to form an institutional ethnography that is “less about the stories of individual people and more about the social relations within and between those different places.” Greene is a skilled storyteller, and, despite the work’s emphasis on institutions, we are introduced to a cast of characters

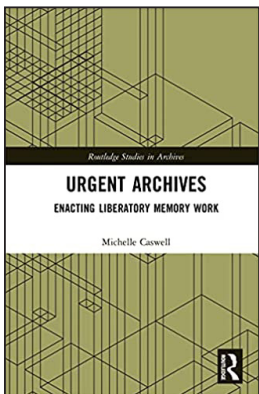
that are both immediately recognizable and refreshingly multidimensional. From the CEO of a start-up tech firm (“I don’t even know what government does. I just stay far from it.”), to the unhoused patrons in the library’s computer lab who’ve figured out how to game the reservation system, to the charter school teachers who model white-collar work for their students—these are the people navigating economies of scarcity on the ground, through which we learn the intricacies of how the access doctrine takes hold.

For Greene, the workplace philosophy of tech start-up firms coheres around the ability to thrive in an “environment of extreme uncertainty” through the proverbial *pivot*. Public institutions cannot pivot like tech firms do because they are bound to longstanding societal roles and lack the same control over choosing their clientele. That doesn’t stop schools and libraries from undertaking a process that Greene calls *bootstrapping*: when organizations remake their identities and operations to align with the access doctrine to secure funding, even if doing so calls the very purpose of the organization into question. When the tech-forward charter school is faced with a lower-than-expected graduation rate, teachers see the school’s core values compromised as they realign their work to meet the expectations of outside funders.

Librarians will of course be interested in the chapter on the MLK branch of the DCPL, and Greene offers a fair representation of professional debates as articulated by the library staff in his interviews and observations. It’s here that we see how libraries fit into a larger socioeconomic project; Greene’s analysis does not explain the entirety of libraries and their transformation in this crucial moment, nor should we expect it to. It does, however, help us better understand how the choices we make in determining whose support to garner and what new services to offer—and which values get left behind in the process—fit into this larger framework of placing the weight of structural problems on the shoulders of individuals.

The Promise of Access is an important contribution to our understanding of technosolutionism’s impact on public institutions and has much to offer library workers. Yet the most remarkable aspect of the work is how much it resonates with our current pandemic condition of extreme uncertainty, now that we have all been asked to “pivot” on a daily basis. As we move toward a postpandemic future, the lessons of Greene’s work should remain front and center while we reimagine, rethink, and reframe our institutional missions and professional priorities.—Roxanne Shirazi, *The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

Michelle Caswell. *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*. Milton Park, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2021. 142p. Hardcover, \$160.00 (ISBN 978-0367427276).



Michelle Caswell’s *Urgent Archives* is a powerfully persuasive book, challenging some of the most fundamental principles of Western archival tradition through a deep exploration of the theory and practice of community archives. Caswell is an archival studies scholar and a co-founder with Samip Mallick of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). These dual perspectives shape the book’s running themes as Caswell draws on her work with graduate students, her own evolving scholarly work, and her relationships with community archivists and archives users to develop her challenge to the Western archival tradition. The deep theoretical work of *Urgent Archives* is grounded throughout by descriptions of actual and potential ways that community archives constitute

profoundly important sites of liberation.