

## Book Reviews

**Herring, Mark Y.** *Fools Gold: Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library.* Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007. 191p. alk. paper, \$45 (ISBN 0786430826). LC 2007-13548.

This book is based on Mark Herring's article "10 Reasons Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library" that originally appeared in the April 2001 issue of *American Libraries*. Written to counter any ideas that "nonlibrarian bean counters" might entertain about replacing libraries with Internet services, Herring's article was well received and was reprinted in various languages. Based on this acclaim, Herring was asked to expand his ideas into a monograph, and the result is this volume.

Presented in a conversational, informal tone that displays Herring's vast vocabulary, the narrative makes the case that the Internet is "a fine accessory to libraries" but not an ersatz library in and of itself. Yet it's not just the relationship between online options and brick and mortar libraries that propelled Herring to write: a larger cultural context underlies his concerns about the "perilous times libraries are in today." He takes this broader context very seriously: in his original 2001 article he even claimed that he was trying to "save our culture," no less. In this vein he laments the poor state of public education in America while worrying that America is becoming a country that no longer values reading books, stating that the act of reading is "at the core of the culture of libraries." While he doesn't see the Internet as the cause of these woes, he does fear that many see the 'Net as a potential cure, "a magic pill to cure all of our diseases."

Over the course of nine chapters, Herring examines such topics as the overwhelming amount of misinformation and disinformation on the Web, some of the problems with fraud and abuse in

Web-based commerce, difficulties with search engine reliability and accuracy, and the nature and threat of "link rot" and its implications for bibliographic accuracy in online subscription journals.

He also offers observations on why electronic books aren't the same as print books, provides a general overview and debunking of the myth of the "paperless society," and devotes an entire chapter to the various problems associated with Google books and other massive book digitization projects, and in the clever fashion that permeates this book, titles the chapter "Google *Über Alles*." Many of the topics he covers won't be news to many librarians, but rehash familiar territory.

Herring is particularly upset with how easy it is to access pornography on the Web, making the interesting claim that "no one who has used the Web for more than ten minutes can doubt that Web porn is readily available." He does not provide any documentation for this assertion—he just states it as fact, assuming, it seems, that surfing the Web for at least ten minutes will lead to an encounter with online pornography. He attacks what he calls the American Library Association's "defense of pornography," referring to the ALA "First Amendment absolutists." He strongly advocates Internet filtering, calling on the ALA to "express its contempt, if it has any, for smutographers by calling for the filtering in *every* library, not just public ones, and not just in children's areas. Such an act would go a long way to exhibit its concern for the enormity that is pornography, whatever the kind."

The effectiveness of Herring's arguments are weakened by a number of sweeping, unsubstantiated assertions. In a discussion about electronic books and printing, he claims that "no one reads more than three or four pages on the Web



at a time anyway" without providing any documentation to support his claim. *No one* reads more than three or four pages? An informal survey of the undergraduates in my library quickly put this notion to rest. In a discussion on online commerce, he states as inevitable "the sad conclusion is that if one chooses to use the Web as his or her preferred means of doing business, he or she *will* eventually become a victim of Internet fraud of some kind," as if this were some law of economics.

Herring's conservative viewpoint dominates these pages, and he often states his opinions as fact. "Democratic capitalism has proven to everyone (save a few political science professors working at American universities) to be the best form of economic government," he asserts with certainty. He uses the term "First Amendment absolutists" with nothing less than disdain, and pretty much equates anyone who is against Internet filtering as being pro-pornography. By his own admission, Herring is a cultural warrior, and at times this book feels far more like an extended, clever rant intended to rally the faithful and alienate the opposition. As such, it reads like more like a guest editorial on *Fox News* or an op-ed piece in *The Washington Times* than a solid work of scholarship. —Gene Hyde, Radford University.

**Woodward, Jeannette A.** *What Every Librarian Should Know about Electronic Privacy*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2007. 222p. alk. paper, \$40 (ISBN 1591584892). LC 2007-13566.

After reading this book, some users will likely throw away their computers, regress to communicating through smoke signals, and toss their underwear out the window. Why? The reason is because "Big Brother" is watching you. Most Americans know that the possibility of their electronic communications being read by a third party is very likely in today's tech-savvy world, but what does underwear have to do with "Big Brother"? At least one underwear manufacturer was caught imbedding traceable RFID (radio

frequency identification) tags in their underwear. While this company and others, including libraries, only use these tags in their products to trace shipments and for inventory, there is the possibility of using RFIDs for tracking people.

Yet, what happens when some unscrupulous person gets hold of the means to use RFID tags to trace someone? An RFID tag in a library book could be used to trace a library user anywhere. Imagine what happens when this same patron is using a public library computer that happens to have key logging software on it? Everything they type is conveyed to another party who is stealing this patron's information. Then there are also legal ways of data mining in which third-party vendors sell information retrieved from online searches. Each of these intrusions into an individual's right to privacy is appalling, but imagine combining all of them together.

Examples such as these are Jeannette Woodward's reason for reminding librarians that their task is not only to provide public access to information but also to protect patrons from those who manipulate them in the world of electronic information. Woodward, herself a former public library director, academic library assistant director, and author of several books, has most likely dealt with electronic privacy issues herself and as a director, has been a decision maker on privacy policy. Understanding that there is no guaranteed method of protecting electronic information, she contends that librarians need to be proactive in informing their users how to protect themselves. Current privacy legislation is outdated by more than twenty-five years; and, until legislation catches up with changes in communication technology, data brokers will continue to mine data from online searches and sell it to interested parties, and hackers will continue to steal information. There are tactics available to library users to guard their information and to protect it from online predators. Libraries should collect and store only