

## Twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary communities

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The Great Books Foundation, The Big Read, Oprah, and online literary communities, such as those found on LibraryThing.com, are a few contemporary formations of literary communities – or sites of shared reading – that are the descendants of those identified by Barbara Hochman in chapter 36 in this collection. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers were and are still influenced by “cultural insiders (authors and literary commentators; educators and newly professionalized librarians),”<sup>a</sup> but social advances along with technological advances, such as radio, television, and the internet have had an impact on the practices and perceptions of shared reading, as well as the book choices readers make.

As Hochman argues, fiction-reading maintained its position as a contested social practice well into the twentieth century. She illustrates well fiction’s contested terrain within late nineteenth-century social groups; this chapter picks up the story to identify some of the contemporary debates around reading literature, and in particular, what constitutes “good” literature. To do this, I focus on groups of readers, which are, of course, comprised of individual readers. Literary communities position reading not only as an individual activity but also as a social one, and they provide the analyst with opportunities to evaluate how literary taste and taste hierarchies are influenced by social structures.<sup>b</sup> By attending to the ideological and political basis of groups of readers, we may set the text aside as an object of analysis and instead emphasize the social structures that revolve around readers and their reading choices. In their interactions with contemporary formations such as the mass media, educational institutions, and government agencies,

a Barbara Hochman, “Readers and reading groups,” chapter 36, 000–00.

b Nancy Glazener’s “The novel in postbellum print culture” (chapter 20 in this volume) illustrates how publishers worked to create different reading publics as distinct commercial entities in the postbellum era.

readers in groups demonstrate agency while also reflecting – and sometimes contesting – the hierarchical positions assigned to particular books and their readers.<sup>1</sup> The focus of this chapter, then, is on the complex social influences on book choice by groups.<sup>2</sup> First, I illustrate how mass media, and more recently, new media, along with other social changes such as those in formal education, have created an environment in which literary categories are expanded and become fodder for wide debate. The emergence of the “middlebrow” has become a symbol of the conflict between elite tastemakers and an expanding group of increasingly better-educated and independent-minded readers. While these forces have been brewing for a while, my discussion introduces the government as a relatively new significant influence in both individual and group reading choices. By promoting reading in general, the government perforce finds itself in a position where it is also recommending *what* people ought to be reading. The result, fueled by librarians who are happy to have the financial support no matter what strings may be attached, is that for the first time the national government has become a player in the canon-making enterprise. The final section of the chapter brings into view the rapidly evolving new media constellation that helps shape the relationship between an assertive middle-class readership and the intervention of the government, at a time of unprecedented complexity in the longstanding dialogue between elite and mass reading culture.<sup>c</sup>

The twentieth- and twenty-first centuries have seen major changes that have had great influence on the American reading public. The USA enjoys high literacy rates though women have higher prose and document literacy than men.<sup>3</sup> Technological changes have facilitated the increase in the production, distribution, consumption of, and responses to, novels. This increase in access to different kinds of literature, in part, has shifted elite cultural anxiety from the danger of novel-reading to concerns about particular novels as being dangerous at worst and trashy at best.<sup>d</sup> Throughout the past century, cultural commentators and scholars have debated the terms, value, and components of literary hierarchy. In short, the types of novels one owns or reads or admits to reading still act as cultural indicators.

Debates about the value of novels play out in educational settings, in libraries and other governmental agencies, and in various forms of media.

c In “A history of the future of narrative” (chapter 71 in this volume), Robert Coover considers the ways in which new media are reshaping narrative forms. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to suggest how government intervention might be doing the same, but this possibility may warrant the attention of literary critics.

d On the dangers of novel-reading in the nineteenth century, see Hochman, chapter 36.

Whatever the institution, broad social forces and power relations influence group reading choices and practices, most obviously through prescribed lists but also through the interpretive practices of those running the groups, published reviews, and broadcast book discussions. The new media culture of the past three decades – including radio, television, books, and the internet – not only facilitates the emergence of and access to nouveau literati such as Oprah Winfrey and other self-appointed literary tastemakers, but also provides vehicles for reader congregation and resistance.

Literary communities can be broadly categorized as formal (or institutional), semi-formal, and informal, according to their ideals, structures, and practices. Formal literary societies have been historically attached to educational, governmental, or religious institutions. Examples include the groups of pre-World War II African American belletristic literary societies identified by Elizabeth McHenry in her important reconfiguration of the idea of a homogeneous black community. McHenry brings to light the role of African American literary societies in the antebellum North and in post-Civil War literary culture, and argues that the groups provided some members of the black upper and middle classes with the education and self-confidence necessary for social action.<sup>4</sup> The literary circles of Chautauqua that began in 1874 and continue today are another example of formal literary communities. The ideological foundations of Chautauqua rest in liberal education for adults of all backgrounds, and were informed by an evangelical Protestant Christian philosophy of moral enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> (Even a group such as the Jewish Book Club that meets in the Temple Judea Mizpah at Northeastern Illinois University, shares this influence.<sup>6</sup>) These groups, however, illustrate well the messiness of an attempted taxonomy of literary societies using rigid descriptions. Contemporary groups might have their foundations in institutions, religious organizations, or ideologies, but members often break away to create their own rules, regulations, and practices. Elizabeth Long provides an example of this separation in her analysis of women's reading clubs in Houston, Texas.<sup>7</sup> One of the groups she studied had members who began their shared reading experiences in The Great Books program (described below), and brought their ideas of "good" literature and discussion practices to their new group.

Little evidence exists of literary societies that began in the nineteenth century and continued through to the late 1940s or even to the 1920s, presumably because most of the world was at war during much of that time. After World War II, formal adult education emerged to educate those sent to war and those who missed schooling to serve or work in the war effort. In 1947,

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Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer Adler of the University of Chicago created The Great Books Foundation, which conceived of an ongoing liberal education as a way of bettering society. Spurred by the idea of war studies (later called general honors), a reading seminar designed by John Erskine for soldiers fighting in the trenches of the First World War,<sup>8</sup> the independent, non-profit educational organization's mission was – and is – to “provide people of all ages with the opportunity to read, discuss, and learn from outstanding works of literature . . . [as] part of a grassroots movement to promote continuing education for the general public.”<sup>9</sup> The Great Books Foundation claims it has “helped thousands of people through the United States begin their own discussion groups in libraries, schools, and community centers.”<sup>10</sup>

The ideological beginnings of the Great Books Foundation were firmly ensconced in the educational philosophies of Hutchins and Adler, whose commitment to the Great Books lay in the belief that they were the foundation of progressive education. According to Daniel Born, Adler and Hutchins advocated a seminar-type book discussion of culturally sanctioned classics featuring close reading and dialogue between the discussion leader and the readers.<sup>11</sup>

Debate over what kinds of reading are appropriate continued into the twentieth century in both public venues and in private circles.<sup>12</sup> Born entertainingly retells the story of Adler and Hutchins meeting Gertrude Stein at a dinner party at which the question of which texts were “Great Books” came up in conversation, and an argument ensued over the value of teaching books in translation. The night ended with Stein slapping Adler across the head and leaving for a tour of Chicago with hired city police guides.<sup>13</sup> Adler later reminisced that while he was honored to be “bitch-slapped by the queen bee of American modernism,” he had little respect for her argument. He writes: “The way I felt about her at that moment, I wished they had . . . taken her for a ride Chicago-style.”<sup>14</sup>

Used in elementary, high school, and university classrooms, the Great Books' trademarked method of discussion is called shared inquiry, in which the teacher or conversation leader poses questions about the text. Readers are encouraged to read closely, and to support their responses with specific references to selections from the text. Discussions focus on the selections, and readers are asked to fully explore the ideas within the selections before moving to ideas outside of them. Readers respond to one another instead of discussing the text with only the teacher or group leader.

The Great Books reading lists are not limited to traditional American classics. Rather, they range from Chekhov to Milton, and from Cather to

Hesse, with the Bible also appearing on the list. The chosen texts represent the enduring debates over what is appropriate reading material. Maintaining the liberal ideology of the program's co-founders, who believed in the direct link between literature and democracy and between democracy and freedom, Great Books staff and supporters assume that the classics allow readers to "meet and talk about enduring issues and ideas."<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, the ideological goal of co-authors Charles Van Doren and Adler was to make a university-sanctioned canon accessible to the general public, a mission they laid out in *How to Read a Book: A Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (1940). While they did not presume to offer "correct" readings, they recommended a list of 137 writers and books that would be "worth your while" to read. (Many of these books were [and remain] on the lists published by the Great Books program.) The authors also not so subtly imply that high-literary taste status, or cultural capital, can be gained by anyone who "learns to read" in the way that they teach, and by reading the books they recommend. Once a reader is "competent to judge" literary fiction, according to Adler and Van Doren, he or she "will probably find a large company of men and women of similar taste to share your critical judgments."<sup>16</sup>

Informal book clubs began appearing in the 1960s and the 1970s, coinciding with the rise of feminist consciousness-raising groups that were forming around North America at the time. A brief introduction to these groups may help to conceptualize the gender composition of – and hence reactions to – contemporary book clubs.

In reminiscing about feminism in the 1960s, Judith Harlan writes that the consciousness-raising gatherings were the backbone of an informal, unorganized network that promoted women-only meetings at which members "talked freely about the frustrations and restrictions they faced in their daily lives; they discussed society's underpinnings of sexism; and they experienced a 'click' as they suddenly understood the connection between society's sexism and the frustrations of their own individual lives."<sup>17</sup> In some contemporary American women's book clubs, membership and book discussion might not be as revolutionary as it was in these earlier groups, but many women still want their groups to be women-only spaces and will often work out social or personal conundrums through shared interpretations of the novel under discussion.<sup>18</sup> Later in the chapter I will discuss how these gendered spaces and practices influence literary debates.

First, however, it is important to contextualize contemporary communication systems. While present-day book clubs resemble the "grassroots" historical forms of literary communities in many ways, they are influenced by

rapidly changing mediated forms of popular culture. Contemporary readers engage in social practices that are unique to the digitized spaces of twenty-first century life. Online book groups, interactive fan-fiction sites where fans write their own fiction about favorite characters (such as Harry Potter) and share it with one another,<sup>19</sup> online retailers' and their customers' use of book reviews (as at Amazon.com), and book swapping and review websites mandate that we consider the changing authority of the reviewer. Literary blogs or LitBlogs, as they are often termed by their writers and readers, reconfigure traditional notions of cultural authority to allow almost anyone to become a writer, and anyone with interest and a computer connection can be a reviewer.<sup>20</sup> As Robert Coover illustrates in chapter 71 of this collection, the World Wide Web now provides a different means for production and distribution of texts.<sup>e</sup> The internet also provides reader access to other readers regardless of location, and thus provides access to yet another way to choose books. Online book clubs in their various iterations and formats are new forms of literary communities that work together with other forms of media, such as film and television, to create a cultural space in America that includes novels.

According to Cecilia Konchar Farr<sup>21</sup> and readers in more than thirty interviews and focus groups conducted in the United States,<sup>22</sup> "the general reader" or "real readers" (as opposed to professional readers who interpret literature for a living), are generally white, well educated, and mostly women.<sup>23</sup> Their selection process is not without conflict, especially in book clubs. On the one hand, readers want to demonstrate their cultural capital by choosing books that are viewed by cultural authorities as "worthy." On the other hand, readers need to actively consider the particular histories of pleasure reading and discussion, and also the taste hierarchies, within their book club.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes, the two hands cannot be joined together.

This author's research on the One Book, One Community phenomenon yielded a fine example of a semi-formal book club that serves specific readers' needs: the Huntsville (Alabama) Public Library African American Authors Book Club. Librarian Cleareaser Bone started and runs the club. Bone and other librarians responded to the lack of library-sponsored book clubs that choose African American novels or have African American storylines. The book club, called "Sister to Sister, Brother to Brother, African American Authors Book Club" has been reading together since March 2006. Although meetings are organized by librarians and held in the library,

e Coover, chapter 71, 000–00.

members bring reading suggestions to the meetings and vote on which novel or nonfiction books to read together. According to Bone,

We try to cover different genres of literature, whether it was fiction, non-fiction. Whether it was anything from Tyler Perry's *Don't Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings* (2007), or something, to non-fiction being, oh, what's the book . . . *Don't Play in The Sun* (2005). That was two non-fiction books, but two totally different, coming from two different points of view . . .<sup>25</sup>

This group's reading choices raise important points about processes of text selection. Non-professional readers look for books that they will enjoy reading, and also find intellectually stimulating and personally affecting. The diversity of US readers – with their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, gender and sexual relations, social positions, religious affiliations – demands that novels reflect their own experiences, while teaching them how to operate in the world.<sup>26</sup> Similar to the women authors identified in this volume by Elizabeth Nolan, who work within and stretch the models and marketplace available to them to tell their stories, contemporary book club readers often look for an author whose experience will speak to their own.<sup>f</sup>

Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray demonstrate earlier in this volume that – despite popular claims to the contrary – antebellum men purchased and read novels at least as frequently as women, and that both sexes often read them aloud in mixed-gender groups.<sup>g</sup> But their analysis demonstrates how little the cultural status of women's reading practices has changed over the past 300 years. Even today, mixed gender or all-male literary communities are usually associated with “serious” literature and not often called book clubs but rather, “salons” or “reading groups.” Contemporary women's book clubs, including the televised and online version of Oprah's Book Club, are associated with less serious fiction.<sup>27</sup> Cultural conflicts continue to revolve around “high” cultural and “low” or “popular” culture, with issues of gender thrown into the mix.

When the author Jonathan Franzen refused to appear on the popular television book club segment of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to discuss his novel *The Corrections* (2002), he not so discreetly implied that viewers of the program could not also be readers of “serious” or “high” literature. To National Public Radio he said, “I feel like I'm solidly in the high-art literary tradition, but I like to read entertaining books and this maybe helps bridge that gap, but it also

<sup>f</sup> Elizabeth Nolan, “The woman's novel beyond sentimentalism,” chapter 34.

<sup>g</sup> Ronald Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “The novel in the antebellum book market,” chapter 4, 000–00.

heightens these feelings of being misunderstood.” Franzen accused Oprah’s Book Club of being a “promotional vehicle for schmaltzy, one-dimensional novels.”<sup>28</sup> Because Oprah’s audience is predominantly female and the mass audience is often characterized as feminine, some critics believed that Franzen became the poster boy for the American white, male author under threat. His reactions, and Winfrey’s subsequent decisions to un-invite him and then discontinue her hugely successful club, re-ignited debates about high and low literary and cultural classifications, with the arguments taking place in both popular and scholarly publications. Unlike the overtly gendered debates of previous eras, these contemporary conflicts also reflect anxiety about the state of the novel in an electronic era. Still, as Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues, the current debates stem from gendered anxiety in a society that associates mass culture with women “while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men.”<sup>29</sup>

The first run of Oprah’s Book Club lasted from 1996 to 2002. Most of the books picked were considered “middlebrow.” While it was easy for some to classify all of the book choices made in that iteration of the club as “trash,” some scholars and cultural workers were careful to differentiate among the texts. Shirley Kossick, for example, identified three distinct themes in Oprah’s picks: (1) “triumph of the individual over apparently insurmountable odds”; (2) the challenges of women, and minorities, in general; and, (3) “the affirmation of the quality of life.”<sup>30</sup> After a one-year hiatus, Winfrey reinvented the Book Club in 2003 to include four university-sanctioned “classics.” And, in the fall of 2005, she opened her list to include memoirs and nonfiction. None of her current picks would be considered “middlebrow” fiction.

Celia Conchar Farr argues that cultural conflicts over the hierarchy of literary works arose in the early twentieth century as certain novels made their way into university English classes. Using textual analysis based in studying classical texts, poetry, and scripture, scholars critiqued the novels with the same vigor. American novels had to stand up to the same scrutiny. Some rose to the top of the lists and others were condemned to the proverbial trash pile. According to Farr, in the early 1900s, analytical standards were “increasingly hostile to the social aspects of novels. So novels became low-brow or highbrow, bad or good by way of traditional standards of aesthetic merit that . . . were aristocratic in origin and assumed the mediation of a discriminating few.”<sup>31</sup>

The creation of “middlebrow” as a marketing category, according to Nicola Humble, was a gendered response to women writers and readers.<sup>32</sup> During the period from 1920 to 1950, according to Humble, critics who used the term “middlebrow” were reacting to the assumed audience of the book.



This claim is useful for contextualizing critical reactions to contemporary formations of literary communities. According to Humble, once a novel becomes popular – whether by bestseller status, Book-of-the-Month Club choice, or more recently, Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club selection – it is excluded from serious attention. “A novel [is] therefore middlebrow not because of any intrinsic content, but because it [is] widely read by the middle-class public – and particularly the lower middle classes.”<sup>33</sup> Issues of gender aside, the idea suggests that if many people are reading a book, it must possess limited cultural value. A bestseller cannot be literary. The more popular and economically successful a cultural artifact – such as a novel or book program like Oprah’s Book Club – is, the more literary merit becomes suspect.<sup>34</sup>

Janice Radway argues that reviewers criticized members of the Book-of-the-Month club and its lists because of their power – both economic and cultural – to define good literature.<sup>35</sup> These reviewers’ assumption was that good novels should stand out on their own; they should not be sanctioned by institutions. According to Radway, the perceived problem was not necessarily that so many people were participating in the Book-of-the-Month Club, but rather that the wrong cultural authorities were influencing people in their book selections.

Is this what bothers contemporary cultural critics about local, grassroots book clubs? Are the novels themselves under scrutiny, or are readers’ responses and institutional programs suspect? Perhaps the concepts should not be considered separately. Book choice and discussion are intertwined in book club practices, and these functions can also create discontent among members of book clubs.<sup>36</sup> The friction arises from the interplay among literary analysis training, cultural distinction, group dynamics, and institutional agendas. Whether the reading lists are prescribed, created by the group themselves, or some combination, reading communities simultaneously work to inform readers’ literary tastes, distinguish themselves from other readers (and citizens), and fulfill readers’ self-perceived educational and social needs.

Enter the United States government. On December 20, 2005, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) released a press statement announcing its new nationwide reading program. The Big Read, as the program is called, is the NEA’s response to a national study that found that reading in the USA was on a drastic decline. Chairman Dana Gioia says in the release that:

If cities nationally unite to adopt The Big Read, our community-wide reading program, together we can restore reading to its essential place in American

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culture. Call me naïve, but I can actually envision an America in which average people talk about *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Great Gatsby* with the same enthusiasm as they bring to *Lost* or *Desperate Housewives*.<sup>37</sup>

According to that same release, literary reading in the USA is not only on the decline but reading for “pleasure and enlightenment” is *in crisis* (emphasis added). Modeled on successful “One Book, One City” programs in which citizens of a city or region are encouraged to all read the same book, The Big Read’s aim is “to restore reading to the center of American culture,” and, more implicitly, to educate and civilize American citizens through shared reading of “classic” books.

The Big Read is the NEA’s response to their own research. The study, called *Reading at Risk (RaR)*, is drawn from data collected from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), which was conducted by the Census Bureau in 2002. Only four of the questions were related to reading. Of the 17,000 American adults surveyed, 56.6 percent reported reading any book in the past twelve months, and 46.7 percent reported reading literature,<sup>38</sup> a category restricted to novels, short stories, plays, and poetry.

At the turn of the last century, cultural authorities lamented the *rise* of novel reading. The NEA has turned this around 180 degrees, while ignoring nonfiction reading in its description of the dire situation of the American reading public. The *Reading at Risk* study does not report participation by nonfiction readers or those who might read online. Instead, the main message of The Big Read is that reading a certain type of literary fiction will encourage civic engagement. Even if we consider the correlation between reading fiction and civic engagement, we must ask whether literature – much less a hierarchically determined literature – alone will create the informed citizenry that the NEA idealizes. To assign this duty to literature may ask too much. And, as Catherine Ross *et al.* have argued, to give such a task to reading can take away from the individual pleasures of books – in whatever form they might take and however they may be discussed.<sup>39</sup>

The Big Read program and its partners (ranging from the American Library Association to corporations like Boeing and Ford) fund more than 200 One Book, One Community-type programs across the USA. The participants in these programs are often provided with one of twenty-two books, many of which could be considered part of the traditional American canon, but some of which have also caused public conflict. For example, titles such as *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) have as late as the 1980s been banned. Big Read participants also have access to a centrally produced reading guide

and to book programs that sometimes, but not always, provide opportunities for alternate readings of the text.

There are currently three librarians who stage the Huntsville (Alabama) Big Read. For four years, the program was called Get into Reading, and was managed by the same small committee who chose the books, planned the program, wrote and distributed the promotional material and reader's guides, and facilitated the events, which included film screenings, art competitions, book group discussions, and historical re-enactments. Mary, one of the Huntsville Public Library's Branch Librarians who produces The Big Read, in addition to her regular responsibilities, reacted emotionally to news that they had received funding from the NEA program: "I cried a little bit and – it was like amazing because, you know, to go from a zero budget to \$25,000 was pretty extraordinary." The NEA funding provided financial oomph that allowed Mary and her small group to continue with the programming that she herself calls "a unique way that people from different walks of life, different parts of the community, could connect."<sup>40</sup>

Such dedication speaks to the ideological, material, and emotional effort wrapped up in shared reading programming. Not unlike other event producers in the USA, Canada, and the UK, the Huntsville producers articulate ideals of community through shared reading and discussion. Those ideals, however, are not necessarily those promoted by the NEA. The national organization promises the public, funders, potential supporters, and politicians that a certain type of book acts as a conduit for discussion, for public engagement. Huntsville's Big Read 2007 book choice, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), seems particularly promising at a time when the American South struggled to make sense of the Jena 6, a case in which six black youths were arrested for the beating of a white youth. However, an analysis of the readers who attended and of the book discussion at the events suggests that neither were members of the African American community present nor were the readers willing to engage with the book's contemporary connection.

This onus on a novel and the discussions around it might be unfair. To create engaged citizens is important for a critically engaged, knowledgeable society, but to prioritize the cultural value of literary fiction assumes a form of elitism that endures from past centuries. The uniqueness of twentieth- and twenty-first-century print culture, however, lies in the social changes that have resulted largely because of increased literacy rates, levels of education, and changes in the way that mass media and the internet have created an environment in which literary categories are created, discussed, and contested by groups of assertive middle-class readers. Individual readers will bring to

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their literary communities – whether formal, semi-formal, or informal – their individual and collective histories and experiences informed by religion, education, media, and more recently, new media. Readers demonstrate agency within these confines by choosing their own, and perhaps multiple, groups – online, on television or radio, or face to face. And while the classification of “middlebrow” remains a symbol of the conflict between elite cultural authorities and this expanding group of increasingly independent-minded readers, the government is now an active player – through selective financial support – in the canon-making game.

## Notes

1. See Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).
2. Contemporary American examples of comparative analysis of reading groups in and outside the academy include Jane Missner Barstow, “Reading in Groups: Women’s Clubs and College Literature Classes,” *Publishing Research Quarterly* 18 (2003): 3–17; and Temma Berg, “‘What do you know?’; Or, The Question of Reading in Groups and Academic Authority,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 19.2 (2008): 123–154.
3. Mark Kutner, Elizabeth Greenberg, Ying Jin, Bridget Boyle, Yung-chen Hsu, Eric Dunleavy, and Sheida White, “Literacy in Everyday Life: Results From the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy” (National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education: Washington, DC, 2007). Accessed at [http://nces.ed.gov/Pubs2007/2007480\\_1.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/Pubs2007/2007480_1.pdf) on October 4, 2008.
4. Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 14. See also McHenry, “‘Dreaded Eloquence’: the Origins and Rise of African American Literary Societies and Libraries,” *Harvard Library Review* 6.2 (1998): 32–56.
5. Barry D. Cytron, “The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in Iowa, 1880–1900,” *Palimpsest* 59.6 (1978): 168–175; Andrew Chamberlin Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* (Irrington, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003); John C. Scott, “The Chautauqua Vision of Liberal Education,” *History Of Education* 34.1 (January 2005): 41–59.
6. [www.neiu.edu/~ncaftori/jbook.htm](http://www.neiu.edu/~ncaftori/jbook.htm) (Accessed September 6, 2008).
7. Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
8. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 135, cited in Daniel Born, “Utopian Civic-Mindedness: Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mortimer Adler, and the Great Books Enterprise,” in *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace*, ed. DeNel Rehberg Sedo (in progress).

9. [www.greatbooks.org/](http://www.greatbooks.org/) (Accessed March 28, 2008).
10. [www.greatbooks.org/about](http://www.greatbooks.org/about) (Accessed March 28, 2008).
11. Dan Born, "Utopian Civic-Mindedness."
12. Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (New York: Scribner, 2000).
13. Born, "Utopian Civic-Mindedness."
14. Mortimer J. Adler, *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 139–140, cited *ibid.*
15. [www.greatbooks.org/programs-for-all-ages/gb.html](http://www.greatbooks.org/programs-for-all-ages/gb.html) (Accessed March 28, 2008).
16. Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, *How to Read a Book: A Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940; updated edition, 1972). Cited quotations are on pp. 350 and 214.
17. Judith Harlan, *Feminism: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO 1998). "Click" was coined by Jane O'Reilly in the 1970s; it means "clicking-things-into-place-angry." See [www.nymag.com/news/features/46167/](http://www.nymag.com/news/features/46167/) (accessed June 27, 2008).
18. Long, *Book Clubs*; DeNel Rehberg Sedo, "Badges of Wisdom, Spaces for Being: A Study of Contemporary Women's Book Clubs" (PhD Diss, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 2004).
19. See, for example, Karen Hellenkson and Kristina Busse, eds., *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006).
20. See Sven Birkets's response to LitBlogs at: [www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2007/07/29/lost\\_in\\_the\\_blogsphere/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2007/07/29/lost_in_the_blogsphere/?page=full) (assessed July 31, 2007).
21. Cecilia Konchar Farr, *Reading Oprah: How Oprah's Book Club Changed the Way America Reads* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).
22. The primary data described in this chapter is a result of a three-year, international project called "Beyond the Book: Mass Reading Event and Contemporary Cultures of Reading in the UK, USA and Canada" ([www.beyondthebookproject.org](http://www.beyondthebookproject.org)). Qualitative and quantitative data was collected in Chicago, Huntsville (Alabama), and Seattle, in addition to six other sites in the UK and Canada.
23. The 2008 National Endowment for the Arts Survey ([www.arts.gov/research/ReadingonRise.pdf](http://www.arts.gov/research/ReadingonRise.pdf)) states that 31.9 percent of literary readers are Hispanic, 55.7 percent are white, 42.6 percent are African American, and 43.9 percent of other ethnicities report as readers. Of the men interviewed, 41.9 percent reported themselves as readers, while 58 percent of the women did. Sixty-one percent of the readers reported having a Bachelor's Degree or higher, and 55–64 was the highest age group to report having read a book not for work or school in the past year, with 58.4 percent. According to the 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts on which this publication is based, nearly half (47.0 percent) of all adults read a novel or short story in 2008.
24. Rehberg Sedo, "Badges of Wisdom."
25. Personal communication with Cleareaser Bone, Huntsville, May 9, 2007.
26. Farr, *Reading Oprah*, 66.

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27. Kathleen Rooney, *Reading with Oprah: The Book Club that Changed America* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005).
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