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Review of *Platform Power and Libraries*. Edited by Christine F. Smith. Library Juice Press, 2025. 151 pp.

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Think back to your first music collection. Did you have a shelf of vinyl? Mixtapes shared by friends? CDs borrowed from your library?

At the end of each year, when Spotify Wrapped presents each user with an analysis of their listening behavior, I encounter a flurry of social media posts sharing the year's statistics. In 2025, Spotify informed us of our "listening age." Maybe it was fifty-nine ("You were into music from the early '80s. You're an old soul"), or maybe it was eighteen ("You were into music from the early 2020s. Your taste is trending"). Of course, I love sharing music with friends. But what lies beneath the glossy veneer of the Wrapped feature? Spotify dominates the streaming market, controls access to our entire music library, tracks the minutiae of our behaviors, and algorithmically recommends music, creating an echo chamber that further entrenches our "listening age"—all while charging us a monthly fee.[1]

Spotify's impact on music is an everyday example of *platformization*—that is, the phenomenon of the digital platform as "the dominant infrastructural and economic model" (Helmond 2015: 1). *Platform Power and Libraries*, edited by Christine F. Smith and published by Library Juice Press, explores the impact of platformization on one of our most cherished public institutions: libraries. Taken as a whole, the book describes a new landscape in which corporate-owned platforms act as intermediaries for traditional library functions. In the first chapter, Smith outlines how platformization threatens library values and practices. The book's contributors go on to discuss specific implications of platformization for ebook lending, the provision of film and video content, social media archiving, and academic publishing.

As Smith writes, "Platforms are neither innocuous nor neutral" (4). Whereas librarians previously made decisions about local collection development, cataloging, and access, many of these decisions are now controlled by platforms whose employees are not library specialists. Smith points out that neither librarians nor library practices are neutral. For example, classification standards are subject to historical bias, white supremacy, and

[1] These examples barely scratch the surface of Spotify's deeply troubling practices. Spotify also populates playlists with anonymous stock music, pays artists a fraction of a penny per stream (and even less in "Discovery Mode," which promotes artists' tracks in exchange for reduced royalty payout rates), allows AI artists to flood the platform, and the list goes on. Liz Pelly provides more detail in her excellent book, Mood Machine. See Pelly (2025).

patriarchy. However, when cataloging is outsourced to third-party platforms that don't share library goals and values, "biases . . . can be more easily glossed over, unquestioned, or concealed" (12).

This book is written for an audience of librarians and assumes existing knowledge about the library profession and its values. A key touchpoint for librarians in the United States is the American Library Association's "Core Values of Librarianship": access, equity, intellectual freedom and privacy, public good, and sustainability (ALA 2025).[2] The contributors to *Platform Power and Libraries* explore how these professional values are threatened when platforms mediate access to library resources.

Contributors Elena Rowan and Lisa Hooper each describe how platforms have affected library lending. Rowan focuses on ebook and audiobook lending. Hooper explores film and television streaming. Libraries were once governed by the first-sale doctrine (United States) and the doctrine of exhaustion (Canada), which give libraries full control over the analog materials in their possession. However, with ebooks, audiobooks, and video streaming, libraries must rely on leases and contracts with publishers and platforms. As Rowan writes, "This new property regime limits the library's capacity as owners, lenders, and preservers of digital resources" (36). Libraries are given little choice but to trust that platforms will act in good faith, but as the chapters in *Platform Power and Libraries* show, platforms often act in opposition to library values and priorities.

For example, platforms provide predetermined collections that may threaten libraries' missions to provide accurate information, meet local user needs, and prioritize intellectual freedom by offering access to books with varying viewpoints. Jordan S. Sly and Joseph A. Koivisto describe bundled academic journal packages that cannot be customized according to library priorities. Rowan notes that the platform Hoopla includes in its collection "Holocaust-denying titles[,] . . . books with medical misinformation, works containing extreme conspiracy theories, and guides on how to make weapons" (28). And platforms may remove controversial or challenged books from their collections without library consent (as in the 2009 case of Amazon removing George Orwell's books from Kindle libraries).

Platforms also put pressure on library budgets. A few companies (such as Elsevier, Springer-Nature, ProQuest/Clarivate, and OverDrive, the latter of which also owns the

[2] The contributors to Platform Power and Libraries are American, Canadian, and Australian. The Canadian Federation of Library Association's code of ethics contains similar ideas, including responsibility to individuals and society, privacy, transparency, and open access (CFLA-FCAB 2018). The Australian Library and Information Association's core values statement includes open access, authentic information, diversity and equity, privacy, and preservation of the human record (ALIA 2025).

video streaming platform Kanopy) dominate the library platform landscape, leading to ever-increasing subscription costs. Rowan describes how OverDrive's magazine automatic-borrowing feature substantially increases costs for libraries and cannot be disabled. Hooper notes the huge price differences between buying a film in the form of a DVD that could circulate for years (20–25) versus buying the same film on-demand from a streaming platform (100–150 per year).

Libraries have a long-standing practice of carefully protecting user data. Platforms collect data in violation of these privacy practices. Rowan gives an insidious example of data misuse: When a library planned to discontinue their Kanopy subscription, Kanopy mass-emailed users, encouraging them to petition their library not to cancel. Sly and Kovisto describe an overarching landscape of surveillance capitalism in which platforms emulate big tech companies by amassing user data with a focus on metrics, quantification, and profit. Data-driven practices also lead to algorithmic recommendations that limit the content encountered by users on library platforms. Hooper points out that video streaming services (including library platforms like Kanopy and Alexander Street Press) aim to promote binge-watching. Sly and Koivisto describe a platform-driven "prestige-power cycle." For example, the widely used database Web of Science encourages filtering by "highly-cited papers" and "hot papers," a feature that perpetuates a "self-repeating cycle that privileges certain researchers, academic disciplines, universities, journals, and publishers more than others" (121).

Platforms also affect libraries' ability to preserve cultural heritage. As historical events are increasingly documented and discussed from within the walled garden of social media platforms, libraries have an obligation to preserve this content. However, as Kieran Hegarty describes, social media platforms may block libraries' web-crawling software, leaving libraries with incomplete collections and struggling to find imperfect work-arounds. And while platform-provided APIs offer additional archiving functionality, libraries contend with ever-changing access costs and terms of service.[3] Libraries' missions and values are threatened as platforms "dictate terms of engagement that reflect their business models, rather than libraries' needs around collection, preservation, and access" (106).

Where do we go from here? *Platform Power and Libraries* paints a bleak picture of the impact of platformization on central library functions, including collection development, information access, and archival practice. But the book identifies some notes of optimism. Smith suggests that awareness of platform power can lead to more informed decision-making in libraries. Rowan describes the Internet Archive's ongoing court case to

[3] APIs, or application programming interfaces, "allow the extraction of structured data from the platform according to certain criteria" (92).

support "an open internet with safe, uncensored access to knowledge" (50) and mentions the advocacy organization Library Futures, which recently released a zine reflecting on music streaming platforms and suggesting that libraries can help "cultivate human curation anchored in our communities" (Gagnon-van Leeuwen 2025: 29). Rowan also highlights the Digital Public Library of America's Palace Project, a nonprofit platform that reclaims libraries' power and control over digital content. Hooper points to advocacy by ALA's Film and Media Roundtable and Video Trust. Hegarty proposes "counter-archiving"—that is, rejecting platforms' terms of service and archiving social media content according to libraries' own values; this could include web crawling or crowdsourced archiving strategies, such as direct data donations from users.

Platform power is not inevitable. It is possible for librarians, and for everyone who uses digital content, to reject an algorithmically driven, platform-powered information landscape and to move toward a community-driven, people-powered future.

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