Alternative Libraries and Infoshops
Progressive Actions in Contemporary Cultures

There is a human need to share collective information. One manifestation of this is the creation of libraries as collections of knowledge both as a support of dominant culture and as an alternative to it. Using discourse theory as it relates to interactions between dominant and marginalized groups within culture, this course will explore the tension between "mainstream" and "dissident" ideas, focusing on Enlightenment-era United States beginning in the 19th century through the present. Using examples of alternative libraries and "infoshops" such as 19th century Black literary society libraries, prison libraries, civil rights freedom libraries, LGBTQ libraries, and protest libraries like the George Floyd Square bus stop library and the Occupy libraries, we will examine the socio-historical contexts in which those libraries developed through articles from mainstream and alternative press sources, primary sources, zines and other graphic works, documentaries, podcasts, and guest visits. What were the problems these libraries tried to address? How successful were they? What were the end results? We will also discuss the problems with creating a library at all, often privileging print and media culture over other forms of knowledge creation and dissemination such as oral traditions and embodied knowledge. Final projects will allow students to identify a community need to address and envision their own alternative library or knowledge structure.

Instructor Ginny Moran
Module 5 MTWHF 8-9:15 am
Remote