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NLS engineer Hugh Buitano shows Hannah Laurette Noël, a digitization projects intern, a lobby display that highlights NLS' evolving technology.

Mark Layman

## New Products and Services in the Works at NLS

The National Library Service is making it easier for its patrons to read where and when they want.

BY MARK LAYMAN

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped – NLS – has been circulating books and magazines in braille and audio for nearly 90 years. From the start, it has harnessed the latest technology to help people who are unable to use standard print materials experience the joys of reading.

That innovative spirit is driving more than a dozen projects underway at NLS that are exploring new products and services – including, for the first time, offering refreshable braille displays, also

known as eReaders, to patrons.

“Rapid advancements in technology are giving us new tools to connect with current and future patrons in whatever way is most convenient for them,” NLS director Karen Keninger said. “In some cases, that means providing the technology for people who don’t have it. But more and more, it means maximizing the compatibility of our service with the devices people already have.”

NLS has a long history of innovation, going back to its earliest days in the 1930s. At the time, standard commercial phonographs could

NLS, CONTINUED ON 6

## DONATED TIME

The following employees have satisfied eligibility requirements to receive donations from other staff members. Contact Gloria Dixon at 7-7724.

Maphon Ashmon  
Larry Appelbaum  
Craig Andrews  
Julie Biggs  
Charlotte Brown  
Lynette Brown  
Robert Cristarella  
SehHee Choi  
Melissiaa Drew  
Sandra Edwards

Ulinda Fenwick  
Ljiljana Ivezic  
Annette Harris  
Jurretta Heckscher  
Porsha Perry  
Hong Ta-Moore  
Roslyn Waddy  
Donna Williams  
Chante' Wilson-Flowers  
Arthur Wooden

## WELLNESS WORKSHOP KICKOFF

Whether you're continuing your journey or ready to get started, join us at the next Weight Watchers wellness workshop kickoff. Let's keep our workshop going strong! When you sign up at the kickoff, you'll receive a special discount. So mark your calendar, rally your colleagues and get started on your journey to wellness! The kickoff takes place on Feb. 12 from 1 to 1:30 p.m. in LM 209. Questions? Contact [mdwo@loc.gov](mailto:mdwo@loc.gov). Request ADA accommodations five days in advance at 7-6362 or [ada@loc.gov](mailto:ada@loc.gov).



The Office of Health Services offers this preventive program in accordance with LCR 9-1410 and 5 U.S.C. § 7901.

## NEW ACQUISITIONS DISPLAY

View more than 100 of the most interesting items in all formats that the Library obtained in fiscal 2018 – from the holograph manuscript sketches for Beethoven's monumental "Hammerklavier" Piano Sonata, Op. 106, to the 1941 Japanese Pearl Harbor damage-assessment map used to brief Emperor Hirohito to a letter to Rosa Parks from Betty Shabazz, the civil rights activist, educator and wife of Malcolm X. The display takes place on Feb. 12 from noon to 2:30 p.m. in the Montpelier Room. Questions? Contact Erika Spencer at [espencer@loc.gov](mailto:espencer@loc.gov) or 7-4371.

**FEBRUARY 1-22**  
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## CORRECTION

A story in the Jan. 31 Gazette incorrectly stated the name of the February federal holiday. The holiday is designated by federal law as "Washington's Birthday" in honor of the first U.S. president.

# GAZETTE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

[loc.gov/staff/gazette](http://loc.gov/staff/gazette)

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### MISSION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Library's central mission is to engage, inspire and inform Congress and the American people with a universal and enduring source of knowledge and creativity.

### ABOUT THE GAZETTE

An official publication of the Library of Congress, The Gazette encourages Library managers and staff to submit articles and photographs of general interest. Submissions will be edited to convey the most necessary information.

Back issues of The Gazette in print are available in the Communications Office, LM 143. Electronic archived issues and a color PDF file of the current issue are available online at [loc.gov/staff/gazette](http://loc.gov/staff/gazette).

### GAZETTE WELCOMES LETTERS FROM STAFF

Staff members are invited to use the Gazette for lively and thoughtful debate relevant to Library issues. Letters must be signed by the author, whose place of work and telephone extension should be included so we can verify authorship. If a letter calls for management response, an explanation of a policy or actions or clarification of fact, we will ask for management response.—Ed.

### Library of Congress Gazette

Washington, DC 20540-1620

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### GAZETTE DEADLINES

The deadline for editorial copy for the Feb. 22 Gazette is Wednesday, Feb. 13.

E-mail editorial copy and letters to the editor to [mhartsell@loc.gov](mailto:mhartsell@loc.gov).

To promote events through the Library's online calendar ([www.loc.gov/loc/events](http://www.loc.gov/loc/events)) and the Gazette Calendar, e-mail event and contact information to [calendar@loc.gov](mailto:calendar@loc.gov) by 9 a.m. Monday of the week of publication.

Boxed announcements should be submitted electronically (text files) by 9 a.m. Monday the week of publication to [mhartsell@loc.gov](mailto:mhartsell@loc.gov).

**Read the Gazette in color  
at [loc.gov/staff/gazette](http://loc.gov/staff/gazette)**



# Puerto Rico Center for the Book Opens

Tracy K. Smith, the U.S. poet laureate, joined in the festivities.

BY GUY LAMOLINARA

On Jan. 25, the Library of Congress came to Puerto Rico. Through its affiliate Centers for the Book, the Library reaches all 50 states, the District of Columbia and even the U.S. Virgin Islands, which acquired a center in 2009. One nearby U.S. territory was missing. That situation has now changed with the launch of the Puerto Rico Center for the Book – known locally as El Centro para el Libro.

The mission of the Center for the Book is to promote books, reading, literacy and libraries nationally. Through its network of affiliates, the center co-sponsors events and programs that bring the work and mission of the Library to places outside Washington.

At the University of Puerto Rico campus in San Juan on Jan. 25, Luisa Vigo-Cepeda, the center's new director, welcomed an enthusiastic audience of university officials, students and librarians to the installation ceremony for the center, to be housed at the university's Graduate School of Library and Information Science. She beamed as she introduced Margarita Benitez, director of the Puerto Rican Endowment for the Humanities, which will work closely with the new center on projects and initiatives.

The Puerto Rico Center for the Book will embody “the most wondrous places in the world – libraries – and the possibility of discovery” they offer, she said. “Part of the wonder is to be recognized by the Library of Congress. We are so honored.”

Those sentiments were echoed by José Sánchez-Lugo, director of the library school. He added that the center “acknowledges ... the right to access information and the



Guy Lamolinara

**Luisa Vigo-Cepeda (from left) with José Sánchez-Lugo and Tracy K. Smith at the installation ceremony for the Puerto Rico Center for the Book.**

quality that all of us aspire to.”

Vigo-Cepeda recounted receiving the official letter welcoming the new Puerto Rico center. “It filled us with joy and highly honored us,” she said. “We will foster knowledge of the center to libraries everywhere. We will support books. Excitement rules!” She noted that the center already has a YouTube channel and a Facebook page.

Adding to the festivities was the presence of U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith. She helped to draw a crowd that included not only lovers of poetry, but also writers of poetry, such as students from the Poetry Out Loud program, which is featured each year at the National Book Festival.

Smith has been bringing poetry to rural America with her project “American Conversations” (read. gov/americanconversations), whose website chronicles her first-term trips to New Mexico, Kentucky and South Carolina and second-term trips to Alaska, South Dakota, Maine and Louisiana.

“Poetry is a universal language,”

she said. “It is such a joy and honor to be here.” She read several poems in both Spanish and English, including selections from her recent collection “Wade in the Water.”

Smith told the audience that her poem “The Universe as Primal Scream” was inspired by her time living in Brooklyn downstairs from an apartment of screaming kids. After she finished reading it, she joked, “I now have three kids of my own. I realize these were really well-behaved kids!”

Later, someone in the audience asked her about the time she learned she would be poet laureate. “I remember Rob Casper, head of the Poetry and Literature Center, telling me, ‘Remember, this is not about you. It’s about poetry.’”

Indeed, Jan. 25 was not about any of the event’s participants: It was about reading, literacy and the empowering nature of books.

*Guy Lamolinara, communications officer for the Center for the Book, represented the Library at the installation ceremony. ■*

# OBITUARY

## Carl Iskow

Carl E. Iskow, a retired senior cataloging technician in the Southeast Europe Section of the Germanic and Slavic Division, part of the Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access (ABA) Directorate, died Jan. 5 at his home in Washington, D.C.. He was 72.

Iskow joined the Library on Sept. 30, 1968, and retired exactly 50 years later, on Sept. 30, 2018. In the 1970s and the 1980s, he worked as a preliminary cataloger in the Shared Cataloging Division, where he used his prodigious language skills to create initial bibliographic control records in a number of European languages, including Finnish, Estonian, Spanish and various Slavic languages. In 1990, Iskow was promoted to the position of a senior preliminary cataloger.

As a result of the 2005 Library Services realignment, Iskow was assigned to the European/Latin American Acquisitions Division,

where he worked as a senior acquisitions assistant. His duties did not change much, however, as he continued to create initial bibliographic control records for monographs in many languages.

After the 2008 ABA reorganization and until his retirement, Iskow worked as a senior library technician in the Southeast Europe Section of the Germanic and Slavic Division. He often volunteered for special assignments across sections designed to reduce backlogs in particular languages, such as Russian, Polish and Hungarian. Iskow got along well with his colleagues and was often commended for the accuracy and the quality of the records he created, and for his willingness to lend linguistic assistance to others.

Iskow graduated from Georgetown University in 1968, with a major in Spanish and a minor in Russian. He was a classmate and a college friend of President Bill Clinton. Iskow was invited by the president



to the White House for the 25th and the 30th reunions of Georgetown University's class of 1968, about which he often reminisced with great fondness.

Iskow did not have a chance to enjoy his retirement, as he became ill soon after he left the Library. His colleagues visited him often and shared the news about the Library with him. Iskow leaves no survivors; however, he is fondly remembered by the colleagues and friends he made during his long and dedicated service to the Library. ■

# NEWS

## Library Receives Grant to Help Preserve Nation's Books

The Library announced this week that it has received a \$540,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to evaluate the physical health of books in American research libraries and support development of a national book preservation plan. No objective formula yet exists to assess the condition of millions of books in the custody of the nation's libraries; this first-of-a-kind scientific study will help inform best practices and provide a baseline for libraries to analyze their print collections based on scientific guidelines.

Titled "Assessing the Physical Condition of the National Collection," the 40-month project will compare the physical, chemical and optical characteristics of a representative sample of bibliographically identical books across five large research libraries in different regions of the country to quantify

and objectively assess the condition of these volumes. The project will help to provide a method that libraries can use to decide which books and how many should be kept in the national collection.

"Contemporary scholarship crosses boundaries of format, institution and discipline," said Jacob Nadal, the Library's director for preservation. "This project unites the most current library science with our long history of cooperation to help libraries advance our core professional goals: providing access to research materials and preserving the published record in its original forms."

The collected data will build a knowledge base for how materials naturally age and decompose, provide a rich set of data about books as artifacts and lead to a stronger predictive model for the condition of books. One objective

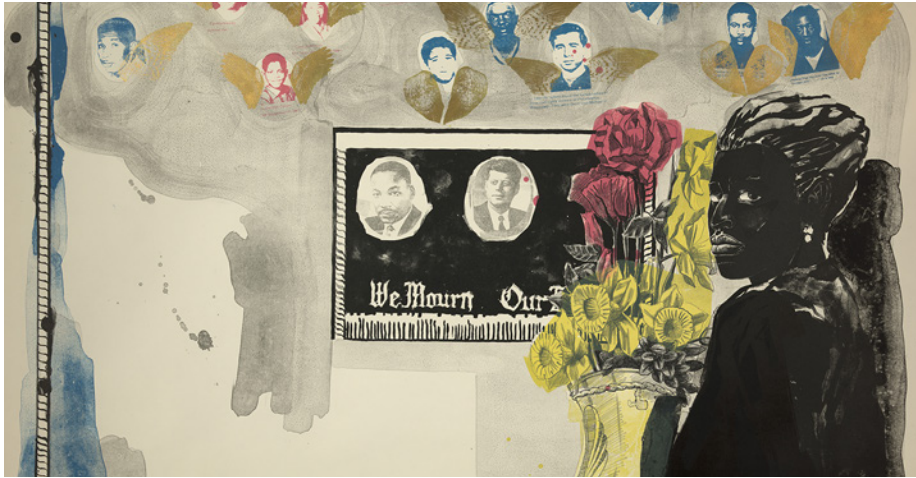
of the project is also to develop simpler testing tools to use on-site in library book stacks.

The research work will take place in the Library's Preservation Research and Testing Division (PRTD) and build on the Library's extensive research into noninvasive and microsampling analytical methods. These techniques make it possible to analyze library materials at a speed and scale that were not practical before.

PRTD will host two researchers for three years, each of whom will analyze 500 of the same volumes from the five selected American research libraries, totaling 2,500 volumes. The Library will convene an expert advisory body to review work in process and schedule conferences to report the project's progress. The study's findings will be shared nationally at a major event in 2020. ■



# New Exhibition Examines Socially Engaged Art



© Kerry James Marshall. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In “Memento, 1997,” Kerry James Marshall pays somber tribute to 1960s civil rights movement champions and martyrs.

Drawings by Herblock are displayed alongside issue-oriented works by other artists.

A new exhibition, “Art in Action: Herblock and Fellow Artists Respond to Their Times,” pairs original drawings by editorial cartoonist Herblock with historical and contemporary prints, drawings and posters that respond to major issues from the 17th century to the present. The exhibition opened on Jan. 31 in the Jefferson Building and will run through Aug. 17.

Herblock’s cartoons provide a call and response with other socially engaged artists who have wielded brush, pen, burin and pixel to engage with many of the same issues. These juxtapositions underscore how diverse artists across time and place can be kindred spirits in expressing concerns about the world they inhabit.

“Like poets, novelists, and other creative voices, visual artists have long had a special ability to reflect society and culture with powerful immediacy,” said Katherine Blood, curator of fine prints.

As a political cartoonist for the Washington Post and other newspapers, Herbert L. Block – who won three Pulitzer Prizes and became known simply as “Herblock” – devoted his 72-year career to creating social com-

mentary through his drawings. The Library houses most of Herblock’s lifework. Key topics that drew Herblock’s attention provide the organizing framework for the exhibition: civil rights, gender and women’s rights, health, the environment, the impact of war, refugees, education and the role of media.

“With sharp insight into his subjects and masterful technique, Herblock’s drawings show a remarkable ability to create visual metaphors. He commented on topics that he deemed most urgent and often proved prescient in identifying recurring issues of vital importance,” said Martha Kennedy, curator of popular and applied graphic art.

The exhibition features 39 items, including 12 Herblock drawings and works by 25 other artists, among them works in the grand, global tradition of political art by such artists as Jacques Callot, Leopoldo Méndez and Francisco de Goya, as well as modern and contemporary American artists such as Alexander Calder, Enrique Chagoya, Shepard Fairey, Kerry James Marshall, Juan Fuentes, Favianna Rodriguez and Helen Zughaib. The exhibition is one in a series fea-

turing Herblock’s work alongside examples by other visual artists.

The works selected for the exhibition draw on the Library’s extensive holdings of artists’ prints, drawings and posters.

Artists and works featured include Tony Auth’s depiction of Herblock taking on presidents of all stripes; Calder’s Cold War-era artwork supporting the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy; David Seymour’s photograph of Picasso with a glimpse of the painting “Guernica,” showing the terror of war in a famous example of protest art; Marshall’s somber tribute to civil rights champions Martin Luther King Jr. and President John F. Kennedy; Herblock’s “Reminder, 1942,” declaring his deep appreciation for those serving in the U.S. armed forces during World War II; Fuentes’ insight into the role of artist as social commentator; Ruth Lynne McIntosh’s portrait created for a project for veterans to pro-



© Herb Block Foundation.

In “Reminder, 1942,” Herblock declares deep appreciation for those serving in the U.S. armed forces during World War II.

duce art with paper made of old uniforms; and Zughaib’s memorialization of Syrian refugees.

The exhibition is part of a yearlong initiative in 2019 inviting visitors to explore America’s changemakers.

“Art in Action” is made possible through the generous support of The Herb Block Foundation. ■

## NLS, CONTINUED FROM 1

not play the 33 ½ rpm records – LPs – on which talking books were recorded. In partnership with the American Foundation for the Blind, NLS provided its patrons with custom-made machines.

Over the next three decades, NLS distributed many models of record playback machines to accommodate the changing specs for recorded books and magazines. Cassette tapes and several models of cassette playback machines – including one that also played records – followed beginning in the 1970s.

In 2009, NLS rolled out a digital talking-book machine that plays books and magazines on cartridges using standard flash technology, with one important difference: To protect copyright owners, the book and magazine files are encrypted. To date, 550,000 digital talking books have been produced.

Also in 2009, NLS launched its Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service, combining it with a web-based braille download service NLS had started 10 years earlier. For most of NLS' existence, patrons could receive materials only by postage-free mail, or they had to pick up materials at NLS-affiliated libraries. BARD mobile apps for smartphone devices came along a few years later. More than 105,000 books are now available on BARD. In fiscal 2018, NLS patrons downloaded more than 4 million braille and audio books and magazines.

"Just as cassettes replaced records, and flash cartridges replaced cassettes, digital distribution through BARD and BARD mobile is replacing physical media," Keninger said.

Projects now underway are preparing NLS for a future where service is centered around BARD.

NLS is exploring the use of a voice user interface, similar to commercially available virtual assistants, to navigate the collection and play books on a smartphone or smart speaker. "With a voice user inter-

face, patrons could use BARD even if they don't know how to use a PC, a mouse or a keyboard, or if they have a disability that prevents them from doing so," said Hugh Buitano, an NLS engineer working on the project.

Unlike methods used to date for online distribution of books, this project will stream audio to a patron's device. Streaming audio has several advantages over downloading, Buitano said. "With streaming, people can listen to a book as soon as they select it, without waiting for it to download," he explained. "The book doesn't have to be saved to a hard drive, so the playback device can be simpler. Best of all, streaming audio is mobile. Patrons can start listening to a book on their device at home and then, if they leave the house, pick up wherever they left off on their smartphone."

Another project is exploring solutions for NLS patrons who can't use BARD because they don't have

**"The goal is to use technology to ... improve [our patrons'] quality of life. That's what NLS is all about."**

– Karen Keninger

a computer or internet access. "We recognize that many patrons don't have high-speed data connections, so we've been testing an easy-to-use wireless device that will allow them to download books

from BARD via public cellular systems," Keninger said.

Yet another project that's close to becoming reality will provide braille eReaders to patrons who can't afford to buy their own. At the Library's request, Congress changed NLS' authorizing legislation in 2016 to allow it to distribute braille devices in addition to audio players. NLS partnered with the Perkins Library in Boston to test the effectiveness of distributing and reading braille files on eReaders. As a next step, NLS hopes to award a contract soon to purchase 4,000 devices specifically designed to read NLS braille materials.

While all this is going on, NLS continues to expand its collection by acquiring more commercial audiobooks – nearly 1,700 in fiscal 2018. Before 2013, NLS almost always used its own recording studio staff or outside studios to record books. "Our contracts with commercial publishers allow us to get best-sellers and new releases to our readers much faster – and at a lower cost," Keninger said. Many of those commercial titles are available only on BARD, another reason for NLS to make it easy for its patrons to go "digital first."

Without doubt, all these advances are exciting, but Keninger is quick to emphasize the deliberate pace of innovation behind the scenes at NLS. "We won't be adopting technology for its own sake. The goal is to use technology to enhance the reading experience for our patrons – to make it easier and more efficient, to improve their quality of life. That's what NLS is all about." ■

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## COPYRIGHT OFFICE OPEN HOUSE

Learn about the office's mission and day-to-day functions. Divisions within the office will display examples of their work and answer questions about copyright registration, interesting deposits in the Library's collections, law and policy initiatives and more. The open house takes place on Feb. 13 from noon to 2 p.m. in LM 408. Questions? Contact Alicia Morris at amro@loc.gov.

# Office Of Communications Survey



## 08 FRIDAY

**Open House:** Whittall Pavilion. 10 a.m. Contact: 7-8000.

**Aerobics Class:** Strength training and floor exercise. Noon, LC Wellness Center (LA B-36). Contact: 7-8637.

**Film:** "The Unsuspected" (Warner Bros, 1947). 7:30 p.m., Packard Campus Theater. Contact: 7-9994.

## 09 SATURDAY

**Tour:** "Touch history" tour of the Jefferson Building for visually impaired visitors. 9:30 a.m., ground floor information desk. Contact: 7-8000.

**Lecture:** Music Division specialist David Plylar discusses recent manuscripts acquired by the division. 11 a.m., Coolidge Auditorium. Contact: 7-8181.

**Film:** "Lincoln" (Touchstone, 2012). 7:30 p.m., Packard Campus Theater. Contact: 7-9994.

## 12 TUESDAY

**Aerobics Class:** Group walk. 6:30 a.m., meet outside of the Madison Building. Contact: 7-8637.

**Lecture:** Music Division specialist Janet McKinney discusses Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." 11 a.m., Gershwin Room. Contact: 7-0245.

**Exhibit:** Display of new Library acquisitions. Noon, Montpelier Room. Contact: 7-8203.

**Bloomsday Camerata:** Reading "Poet in New York," by Federico Garcia Lorca. Noon, LM 227. Contact: 7-6971.

**Aerobics Class:** Stretch and tone. Noon, LC Wellness Center (LA B-36). Contact: 7-8637.

**Meditation:** Open to all. 12:15 p.m., LA G-06 and LM 507. Contact: knyi@loc.gov, esim@loc.gov.

**Weight Watchers:** Wellness workshop kickoff. 1 p.m., LM 209. Contact: mdwo@loc.gov.

**Lecture:** "A Cross-Genre Look at Afrofuturism," a discussion featuring a playwright, a novelist and a poet. 4 p.m., Mumford Room. Contact: poetry@loc.gov.

**Film:** "Down in the Delta" (Amen Ra Films-Chris Rose Productions/Miramax, 1998). 7 p.m., Pickford Theater. Contact: 7-5603.

## 13 WEDNESDAY

**Aerobics Class:** Group walk. 6:30 a.m., meet outside of the Madison Building. Contact: 7-8637.

**Theatrical Reading:** "Black Pearl Sings," a Benjamin Botkin Lecture in recognition of African-American History Month. Noon, Pickford Theater. Contact: 7-1743.

**Open House:** Copyright Office. Noon, LM 408. Contact: amro@loc.gov.

**Rehearsal:** LC Chorale. Noon, LM 516-A. Contact: sgarske@loc.gov.

**Forum:** Bible study. Open to all. 12:05 p.m., LM 541. Contact: jber@loc.gov.

**Aerobics Class:** Low-impact aerobics. 12:30 p.m., LC Wellness Center (LA B-36). Contact: 7-8637.

**Yoga/Pilates:** Start at your own level. 1 p.m., LM SB-02. Contact: 7-3013.

## 14 THURSDAY

**Aerobics Class:** Group walk. 6:30 a.m., meet outside of the Madison Building. Contact: 7-8637.

**Yoga:** Noon, LM SB-02. Contact: 7-5984.

**Aerobics Class:** High-low. Noon, LC Wellness Center (LA B-36). Contact: 7-8637.

**Meditation:** Open to all. 12:15 p.m., LA G-06. Contact: knyi@loc.gov.

**Lecture:** Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor presents the Supreme Court fellows annual lecture. 3:30 p.m., Coolidge Auditorium. Contact: 7-8929.

**Film:** "Kings Row" (Warner Bros, 1942). 7 p.m., Pickford Theater. Contact: 7-5603.

**Film:** "Shakespeare in Love" (Miramax, 1998). 7:30 p.m., Packard

Campus Theater. Contact: 7-9994.

## 15 FRIDAY

**Aerobics Class:** Strength training and floor exercise. Noon, LC Wellness Center (LA B-36). Contact: 7-8637.

**Lecture:** Author Laura Demaria discusses her book "St. Louis Blues." 3 p.m., LJ 240. Contact: 7-2015.

**Concert:** Mnozil Brass present "Cirque," featuring music of different genres. 8 p.m., Coolidge Auditorium. Contact: 7-8000.

Request ADA accommodations for events five business days in advance at 7-6362 or ADA@loc.gov.

See [www.loc.gov/events](http://www.loc.gov/events)

## APPLICATIONS INVITED FOR THE KLUGE STAFF FELLOWSHIP

### What are the terms of the appointment?

The Kluge Staff fellowship will provide up to two Library employees six months to conduct independent research using the Library's collections. The staff fellow is detailed to the John W. Kluge Center for the duration of the fellowship.

### What can I research?

Research projects can concentrate on any topic in the area of humanities, arts, social sciences, librarianship, informational technology or law that is supported by the Library's collections.

### Who is eligible?

All Library employees of permanent or indefinite status who have five years of continuous service can apply, with the exception of indefinites who have not-to-exceed dates and Kluge Center staff. Staff can hold the fellowship only once in any seven-year period.

### Do I keep my salary and benefits?

Yes. The fellow is compensated at the level equivalent to his or her current salary. Appropriate benefits are maintained. The fellow is subject to normal leave regulations.

### Do I keep my current job?

Yes. The fellow maintains a lien on his or her present position.

Apply online by April 1 at [loc.gov/staff/kluge/](http://loc.gov/staff/kluge/). Questions? Contact Michael Stratmoen at [mist@loc.gov](mailto:mist@loc.gov).