

# THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND YOU

a discussion with Jessamyn West  
@jessamyn

Mississippi Library Conference  
October 14, 2014  
[librarian.net/talks/mla14](http://librarian.net/talks/mla14)

Monday, November 3, 2014

Hi my name is Jessamyn West and we're going to spend the next two hours talking about the digital divide and the role of libraries. [librarian.net/talks/mla14](http://librarian.net/talks/mla14) has notes and references for some of the sources I quote.



Monday, November 3, 2014

First a little background.



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The longer I've been a librarian, the more I've become a hobby-horser for digital divide topics. It's not so much that the topic is more important to me, but that it seems, over time, to have become less important to everyone else. I think it's human nature to look around you and figure that what you see is the status quo everywhere.

As more people get connected, they think everyone is getting connected. This is normal even if it's not accurate.



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I live in rural Vermont and, like many people there, have a variety of jobs. I teach basic computer classes at the local high school (and sometimes at the library) really simple stuff like "where are my files?" I also do a regular "drop-in time" where people who just have a question or two can come by and ask. My students are mostly, but not all, seniors.

I started this after library school back in the mid-nineties. My feeling was that I'd do that for a few years, then everyone would have learned the stuff and then we could move on to more sophisticated topics like copyright awareness, online privacy, that sort of thing.



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But we're still doing it. The last town to get hooked up with electricity in my state was Victory Vermont in 1963 ... we're still dragging a little in terms of internet access too. I live in a small town, Randolph, of about 4500 people and we're digitally divided enough that when a new street gets wired, it makes the paper. That, and the people running cables through the woods with horse teams. Not kidding

We also have a bit of a culture of "offline and proud of it" which is sometimes even more of a challenge.



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SUBJECTS

AUTHORS

ADD A BOOK

LISTS

RECENTLY

HELP



# OPEN LIBRARY

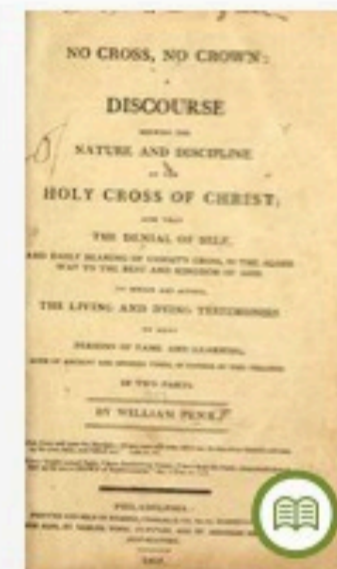
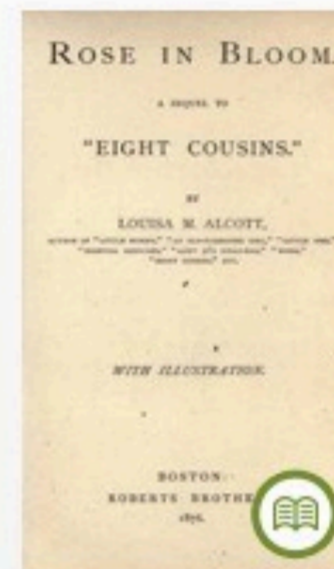
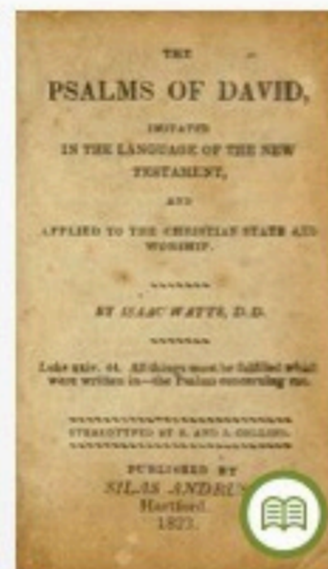
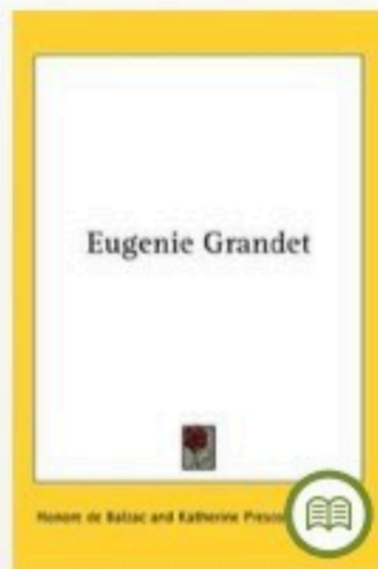
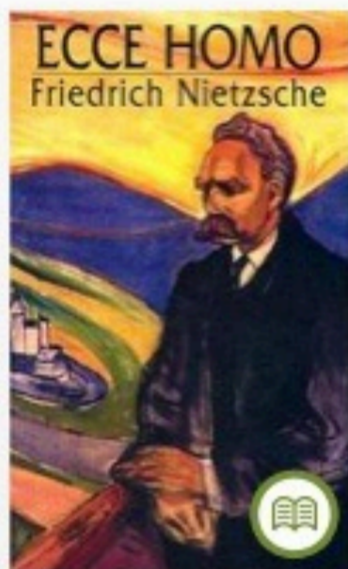
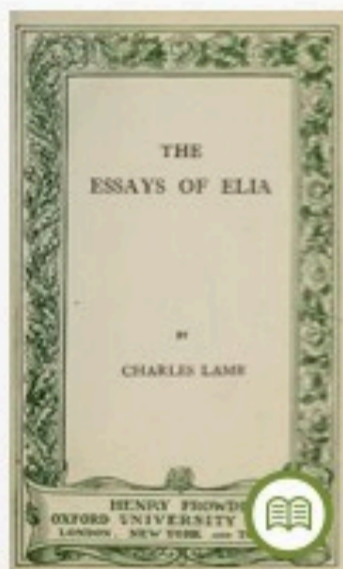
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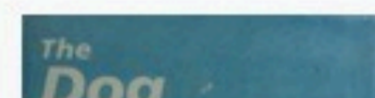
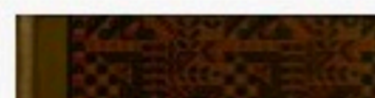
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to borrow, read & correct.

**Books to Read** The World's classic literature at your fingertips. Over 1,000,000 free ebook titles available.



**Books to Borrow** Here's a sample of recently returned books from the eBook lending library.



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I just picked up a job working at Open Library which is a project of the Internet Archive. We do ebook lending worldwide. You want to see technologically confused people? Try explaining how a DRMed ebook download works to someone in Tanzania.

I love the work, I mostly help people read free ebooks, but a downside to this job is that the powers that be at the Internet Archive firmly believe that their online library should be self-serve and bristle at paying for "support". Why can't people just figure it out? They'll ask. You've heard it before. This is my divide.



63,000 people

Monday, November 3, 2014

Ninety percent of Vermonters use the Internet (that ten percent is about 63,000 people). 30% of offline Vermonters cite "broadband not available" as their reason for not having broadband at home. 19K can't get it at all (which often means "haven't used it" especially for older folks). 33,000 don't have any internet at home. Sometimes this means "at work" and often this means "at the library"

This is more or less the same as Mississippi which had about 12% offline population as of the middle of last year. This touches on a point for our discussion. Are we counting the right things to make the points we need to make?





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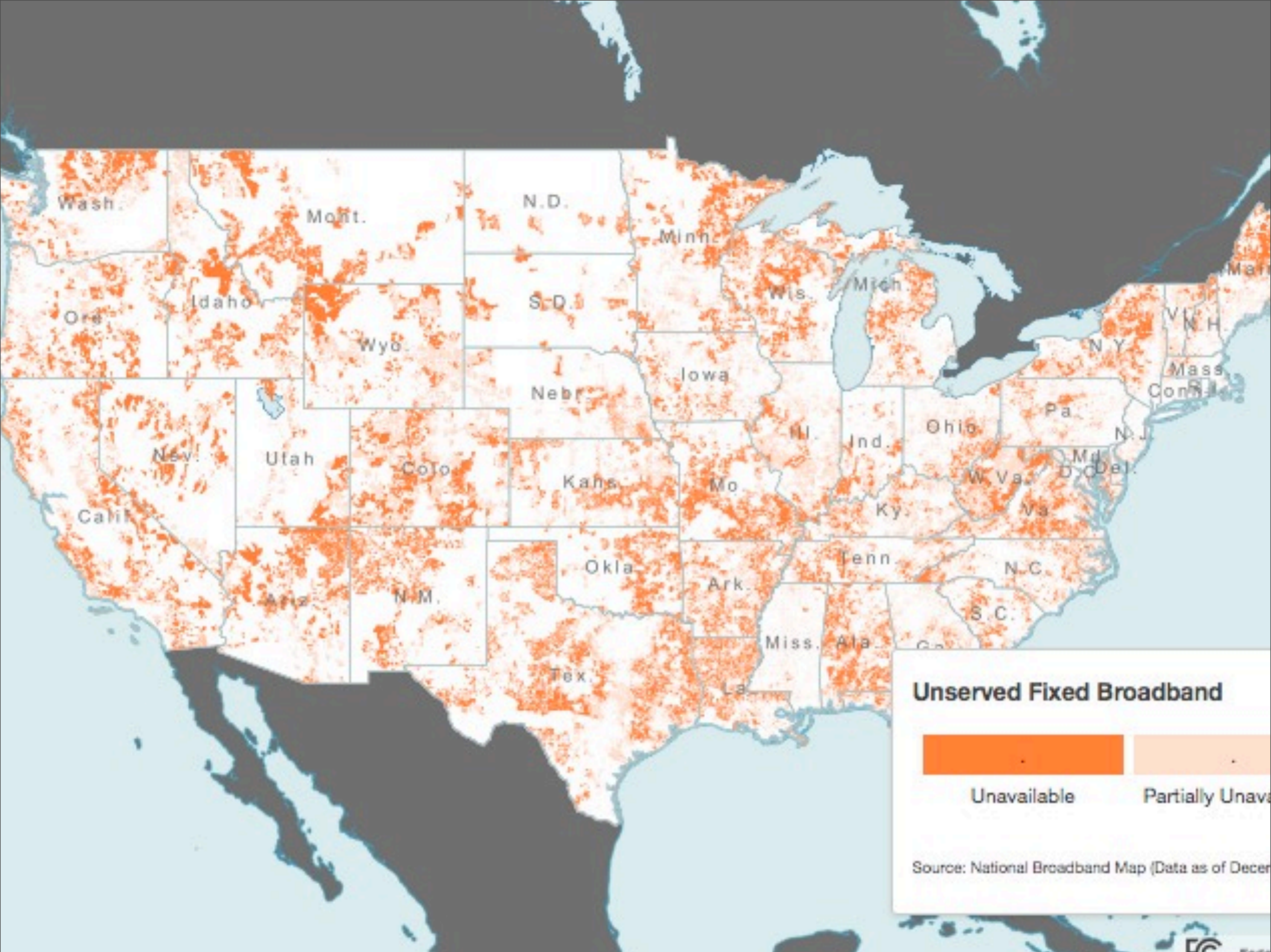
# YAY LIBRARIES

- 91% offer free wifi
- 74% report increased wifi use
- 60% report increased computer use
- 62% are the only source of free access to computers/internet in their communities

Monday, November 3, 2014

The library has always been the institution for everyone, and we seem to have gotten the role of social safety net for the digital divide. I'm not complaining, exactly, but it would have been nice if that job had come with some money.

Libraries have increased access, doubling the number of pcs in the past 10 years. 91% of public libraries provide free Wi-Fi, and 74% of libraries report use of Wi-Fi increased in 2011. 62% of public libraries report that they are the only source of free public access to computers and the internet in their communities. 60% report increased use of public internet computers. Yay libraries.



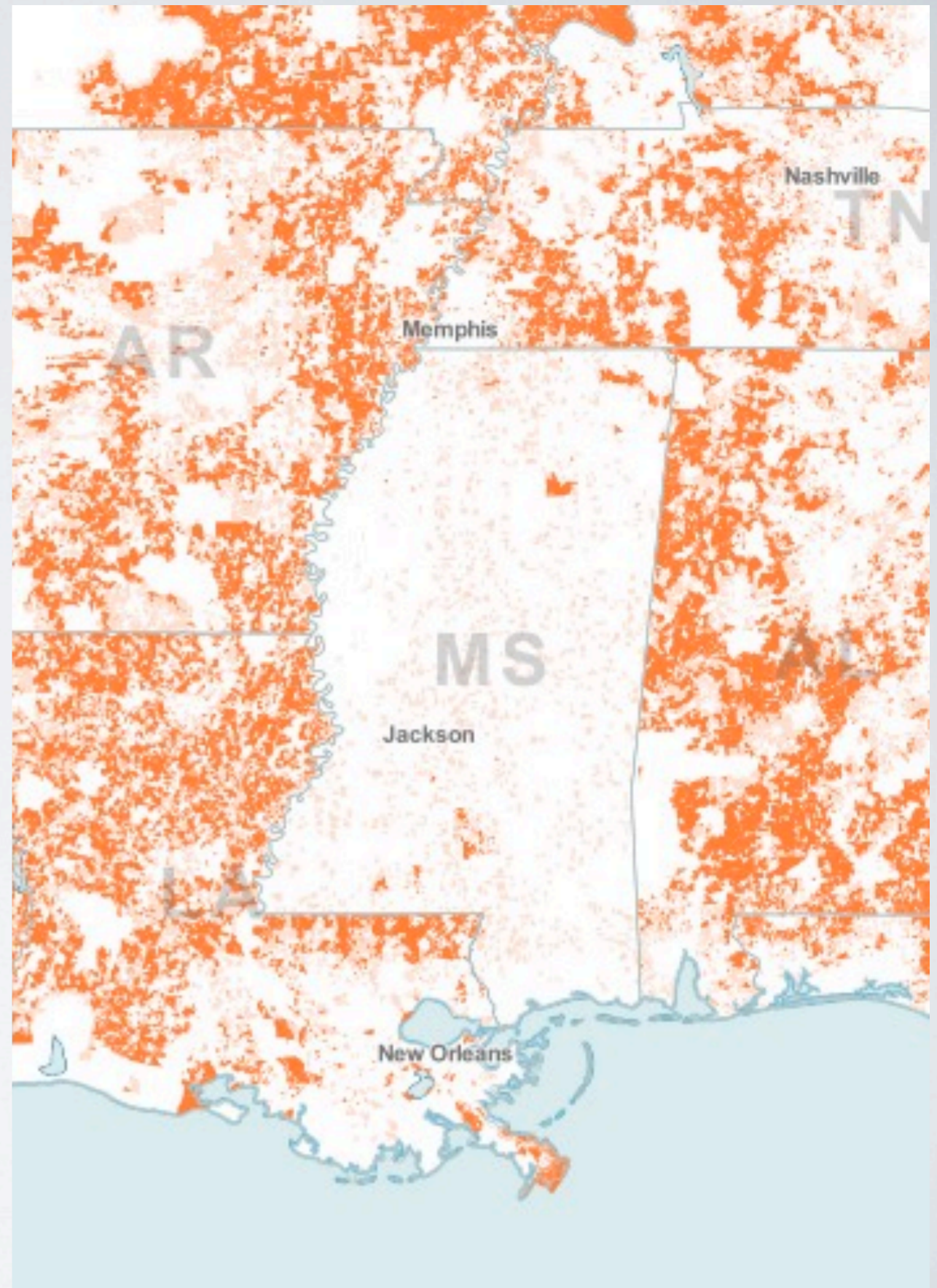
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Back to the US at large. 15% of adults don't use the internet at all. 47 million people.

This was a big freakout when we found out that 40 million people didn't have healthcare and what did we do? We built a mandatory broken website for them to use to solve this problem. How much do you think this 40 million overlapped with \*that\* 47 million? A bunch, right? And as much as a broken website won't really fix this problem, a lot of money would sure help...

# MISSISSIPPI

has some unique issues



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And one of the things you might notice about this map is that it's a little... weird. There were some anomalies in how MS's data was prepared and presented. I'm sure you guys can confirm that this is not so accurate.

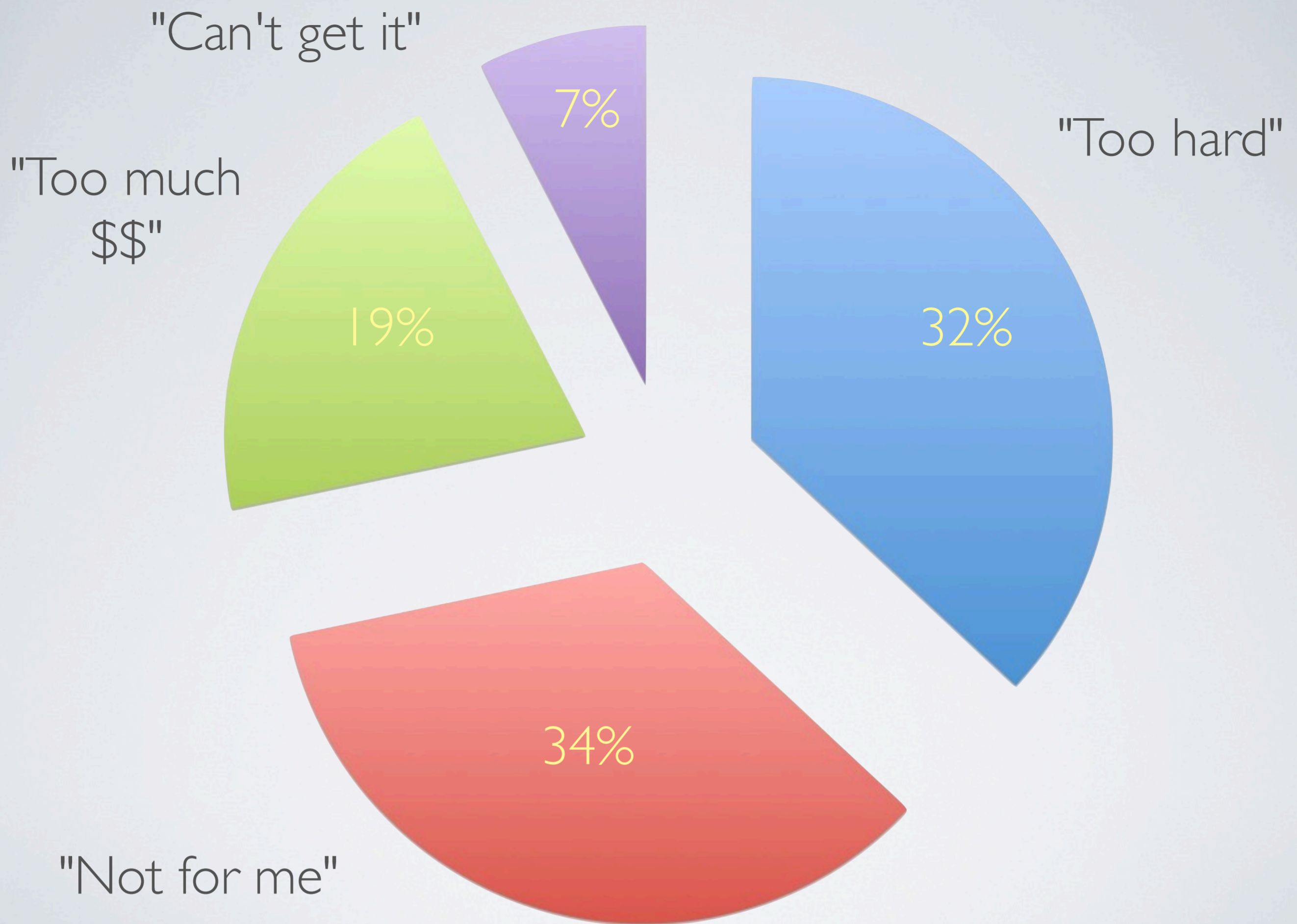
# OFFLINE PEOPLE

- 25% share a home with an online person
- 14% used to use the internet but stopped
- 63% say they would need help getting online
- 92% are not interested in getting online

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So what do we know about offline people?

1. ...Remember that since this is likely mobile, this isn't just someone whose computer you can borrow.
2. ...in my drop-in time I see people who had a partner who died or left who used to "run the computer" in the household
3. ...just like we've found with other information needs, people only do the thing they don't want to do when they have a real reason to do so. It's nice if this is a neat thing like "buy that book you found on NPR" (how I met my current landlady) or "See the grandchildren" and not "Fight with your health insurance company" or "File for unemployment benefits"
4. ...and this means "outside of their current support network" one of the things we know about problems like poverty is that they become generationally institutionalized. If you're offline there's a good chance that your immediate friends and family are also offline



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IRS was one of the original organizations (along with the FCC) to study offline America (sidebar: why) and they found that people were pretty evenly split. Two (at least) divides with subdivides originally can't get/don't want. These categories have held up over time somewhat but the "can't get it" crowd is being replaced with the "would need help" crowd

- 34% "Internet is not for me" (fear, stubborn, who knows)
- 32% "Internet is not easy to use" (need help, have challenges)
- 19% "Too expensive" (need access or need computer)
- 7% "Can't get it" (regulation is helping with this, but slowly)

The can't get access category is rapidly shrinking and is replaced by the "Don't get it" "Can't use it" category. This is progress?

# DIVIDES CONTAIN MULTITUDES

- Economic
- Usability
- Empowerment

Monday, November 3, 2014

Looking at this from a slightly different angle, there used to be just an economic divide (can't afford internet, can't afford computer), now we have

usability divide – low literacy "40% of the population has lower literacy skills", seniors – HUGE group, issues with vision, physical impairments, vocabulary (brains less plastic which is fine but need more assistance with terminology – Godzilla)

I teach a class on getting started with facebook but I have an entire handout which is just "Can you find the tiny triangle that is hiding your settings?"

empowerment divide – esp with the social web– 90% of users don't contribute, 9% contribute sporadically, and a tiny minority of 1% accounts for most contributions (wikipedia) people don't know how to search (am I right librarians??) and SEO is like the national pastime trying to mess with relevance/recall, the less you pay the more you are the product being sold (cheap laptops, free webmail, free apps)

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# TRICKY ISSUES

- Device-based broadband downsides
- Bad design in government sites
- Myth of digital "natives" vs "tourists"
- No infrastructure support
- PEBCAK \*

\* problem exists between keyboard and chair

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And the worst part: There's very little money in studying the digital divide.

# WHAT'S NORMAL?



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I spoke earlier of the empowerment divide and I think one of the unique problems that rural libraries have is exactly what I spoke about earlier. People tend to think what's true and real is what they see around them. This is a normal response.

However, we sometimes get stuck in little eddies in our rural locations (good ones and bad ones – my library had to rethink its privacy policies because the usual "an email address is for one person only" thing doesn't hold true where I am. Good on them for thinking about it and not telling people they were using email wrong) where lack of tech understanding leads to continued tech apprehension and a normalizing of the offline life that may be counterproductive for people.

What we want to do is help our communities frame "what is normal" in a way that empowers them to get involved to the level of their ability. So let's talk a little bit about your communities.



Monday, November 3, 2014

Second, I'd like to know where folks are from. It's too big a group to do long intros but just name and library (and type) or location and we'll put it on the map.

3

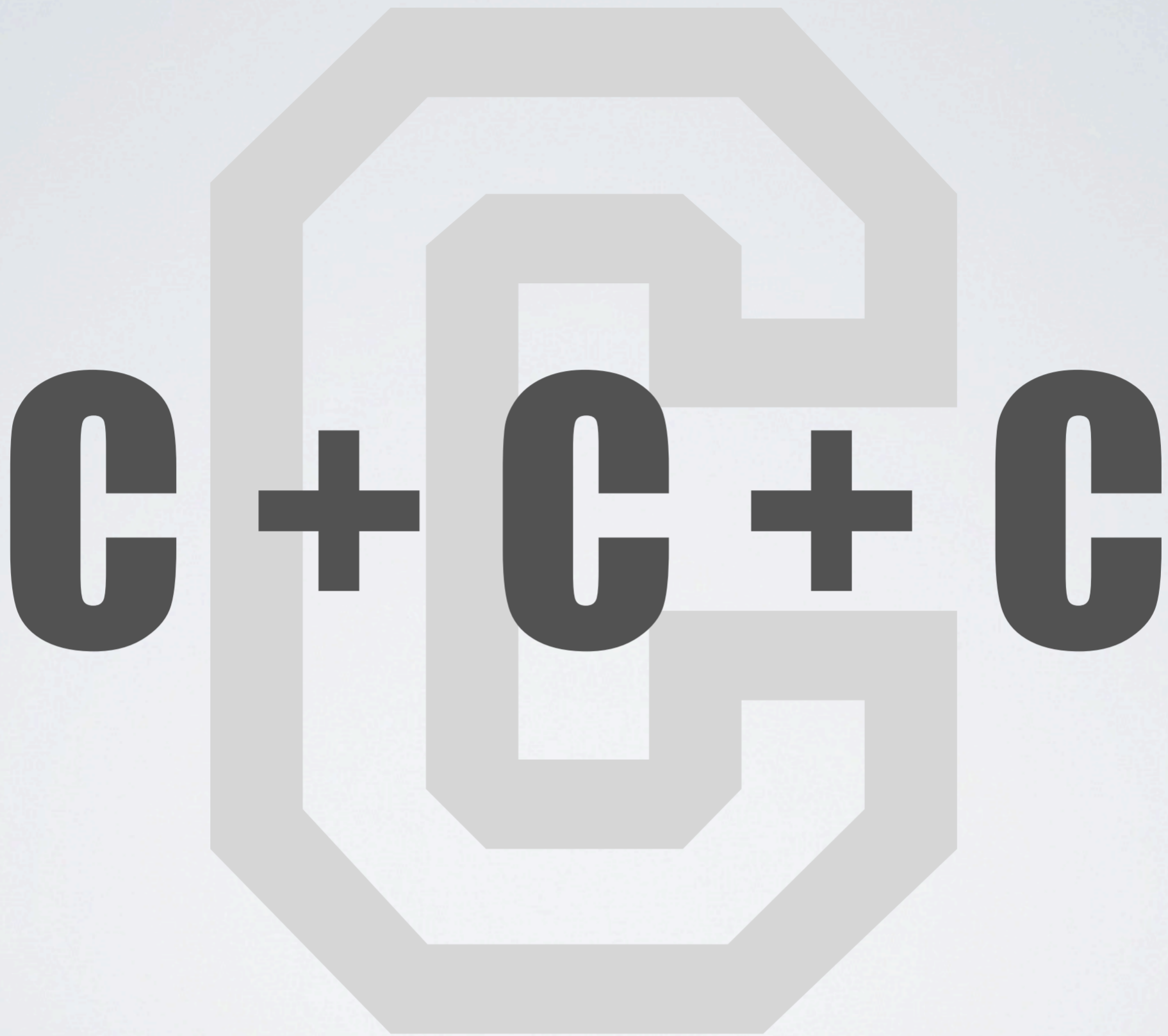
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Now we're going to do some break into groups stuff. I can have a tendency to talk forever but this is for you guys to discuss what you have going on.



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C is for computers. C is for challenges. C is also for Complaining. Which is honestly my favorite thing to do sometimes with computers (and librarians) but not what we're going to do today. Too simple, not constructive.



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**Mnemonic**

Count + Collect/Create + Cheer

Change

**C**ount

**C**ollect

**C**heer

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Mnemonic

Count + Collect/Create + Cheer

Change

# COMPLAIN.

- Not enough computers/not enough time/hours
- broadband speed is slow
- \$\$\$ needed to fix the above
- confidentiality w/r/t things people need help with
- ADA compliance
- “just go to the library” for all this
- assumed expertise
- communications problems
- lack of understandings different libraries
- viruses/scams
- babysitter’s club



# COUNT?

- increase in wifi access after doing a class
- circ/bodies/traffic
- length of sessions? “f this noise”
- timed door count (after classes)

# COLLECT?

- dedicated person for IT not library employee. one on one help
- equipment that isn't more limited computer (Chromebooks/notebooks)
- keyboard/typing issues - touchscreen/dragon?
- incentivize: scanning, family history, resume, yearbook

# COMMUNICATE?

- in-library promos: banners
- facebook - people tagging other people in the library
- getting the ear of a professor, football games
- 3D printer - print out logo toys, spread around to schools
- newspaper/high school announcements

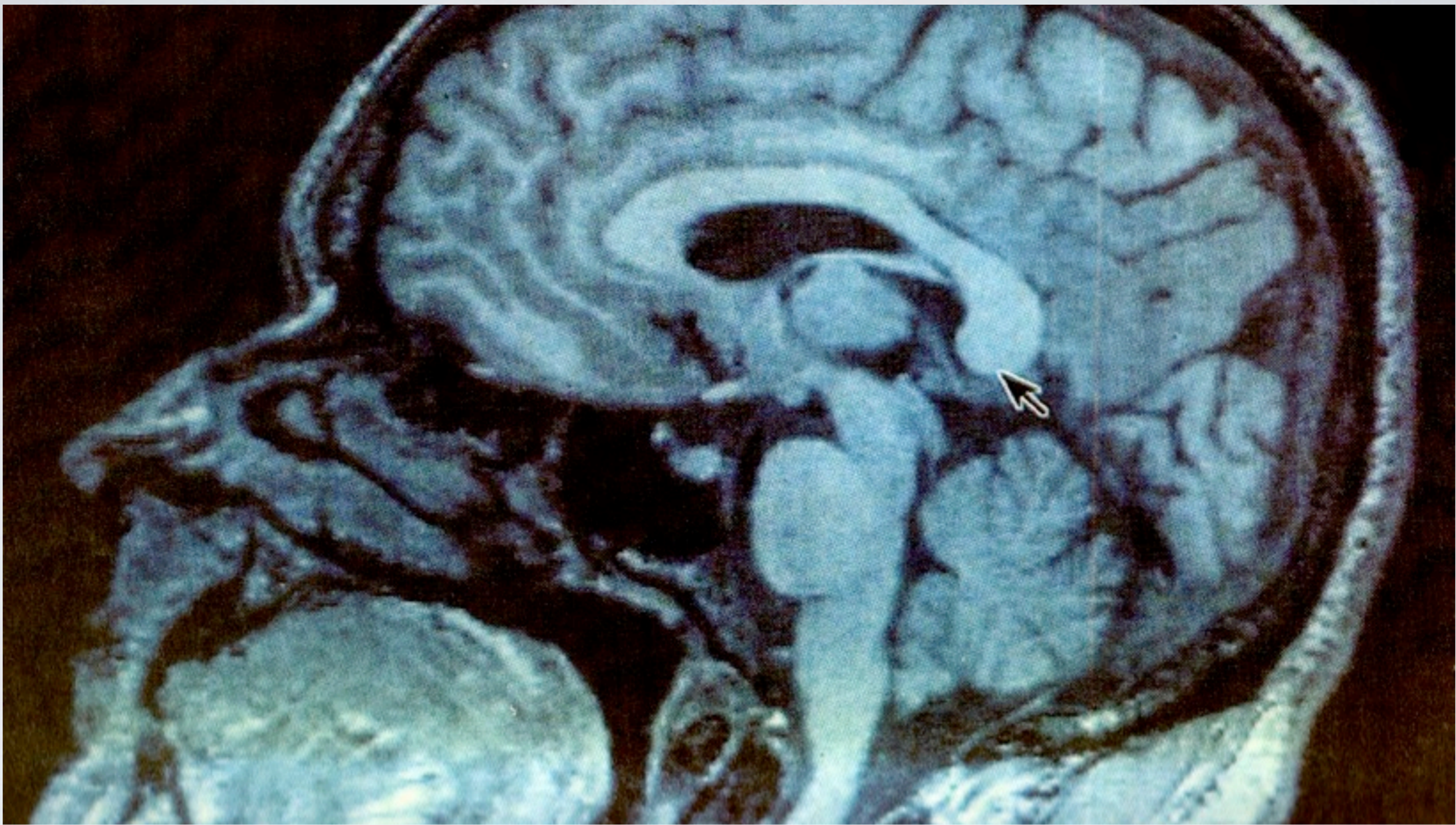
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**cheer**

4

# THE PROBLEM

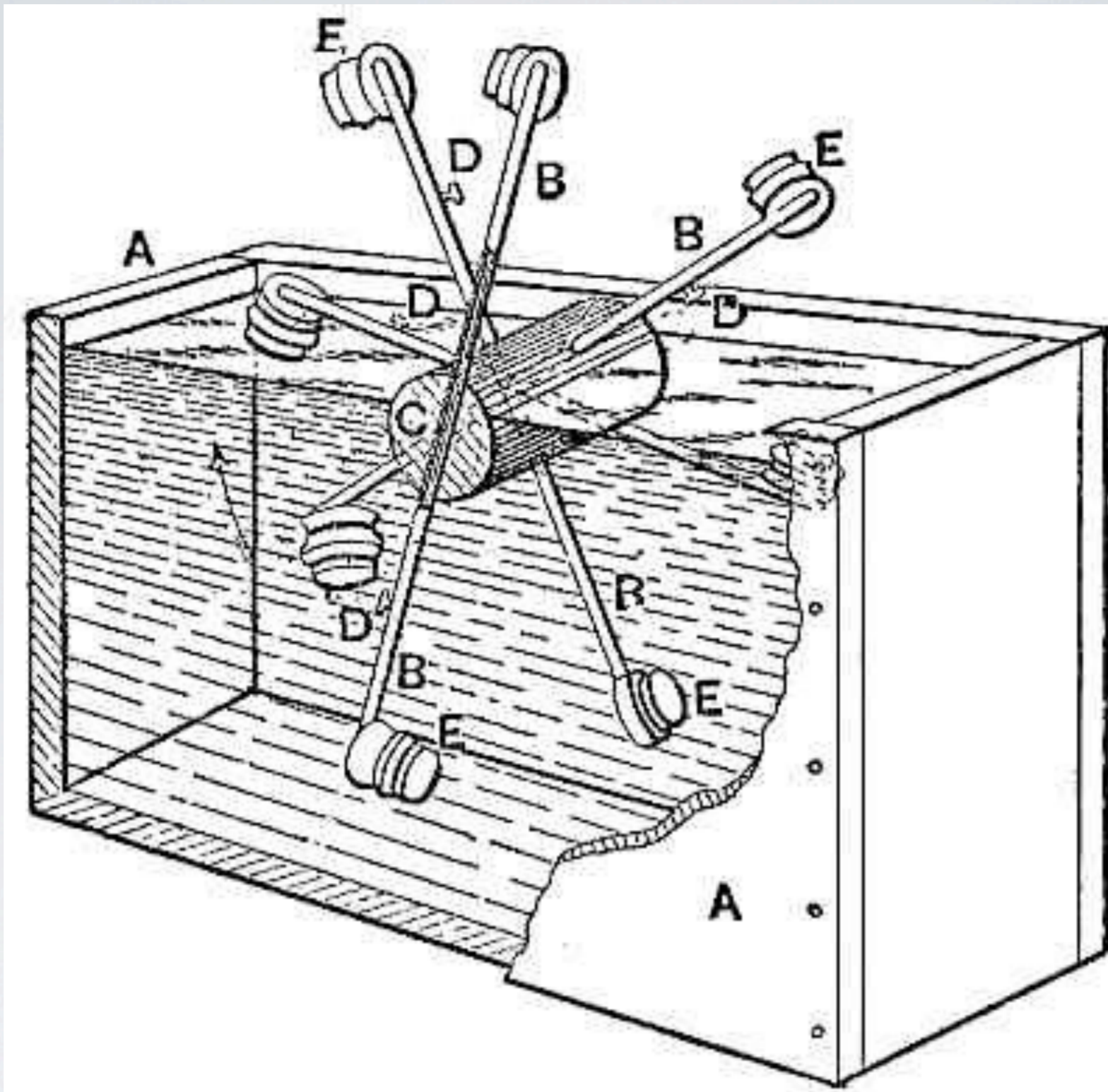
- Head full of good ideas +
- Weird sleep away from home +
- Colleague overload +
- Snack onslaught



# RETROGRADE AMNESIA



HOW DO WE REMEMBER?



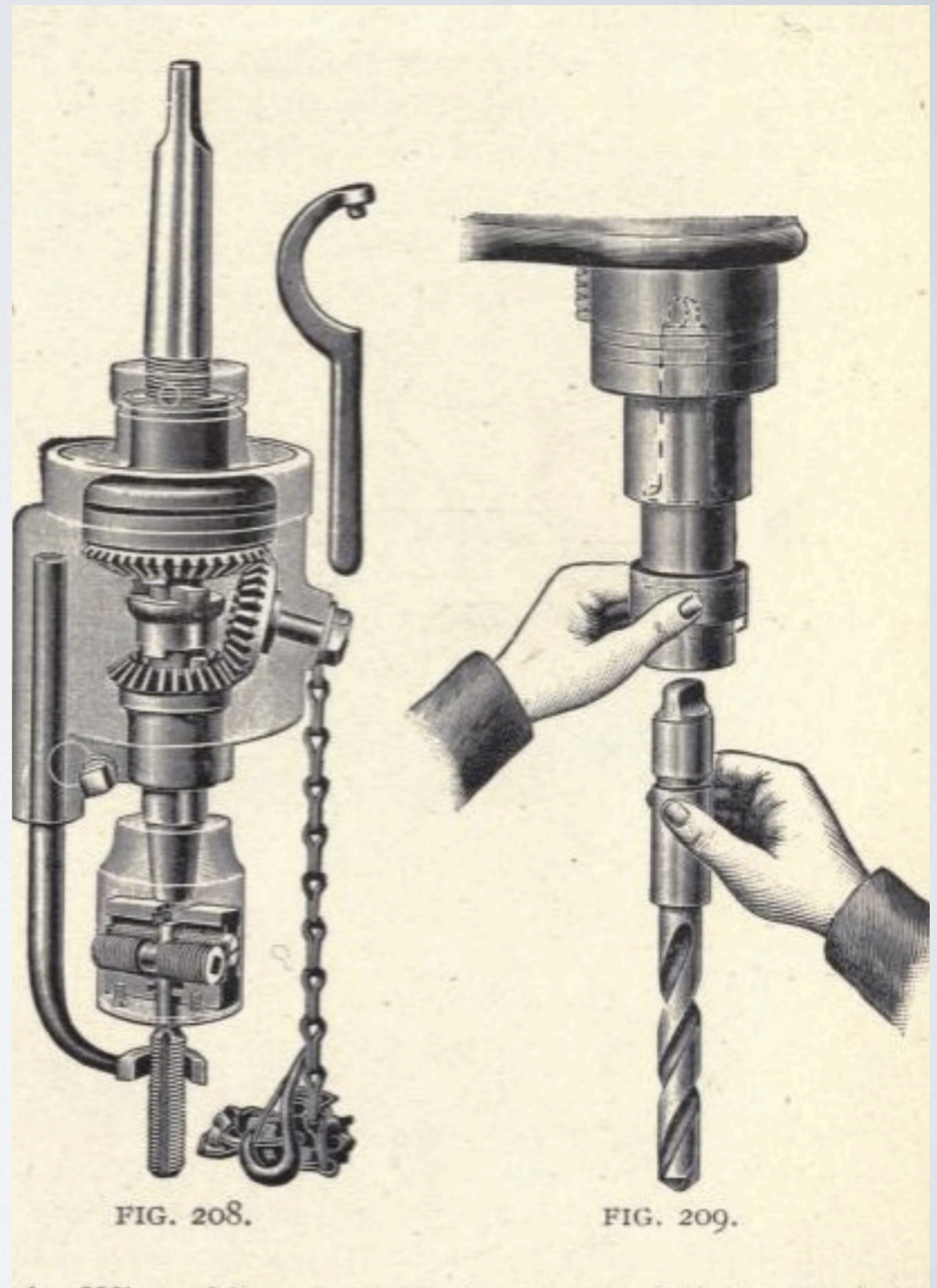
STAY MOVING FORWARD?



# 3 TECHNIQUES

“Put the idea into your own words.”

Reminder System  
Buddy System



# I. YOUR WORDS

One library thing  
One non-library thing



## II. REMINDER

Sign my email list  
I will email you  
You will tell me how you're  
doing

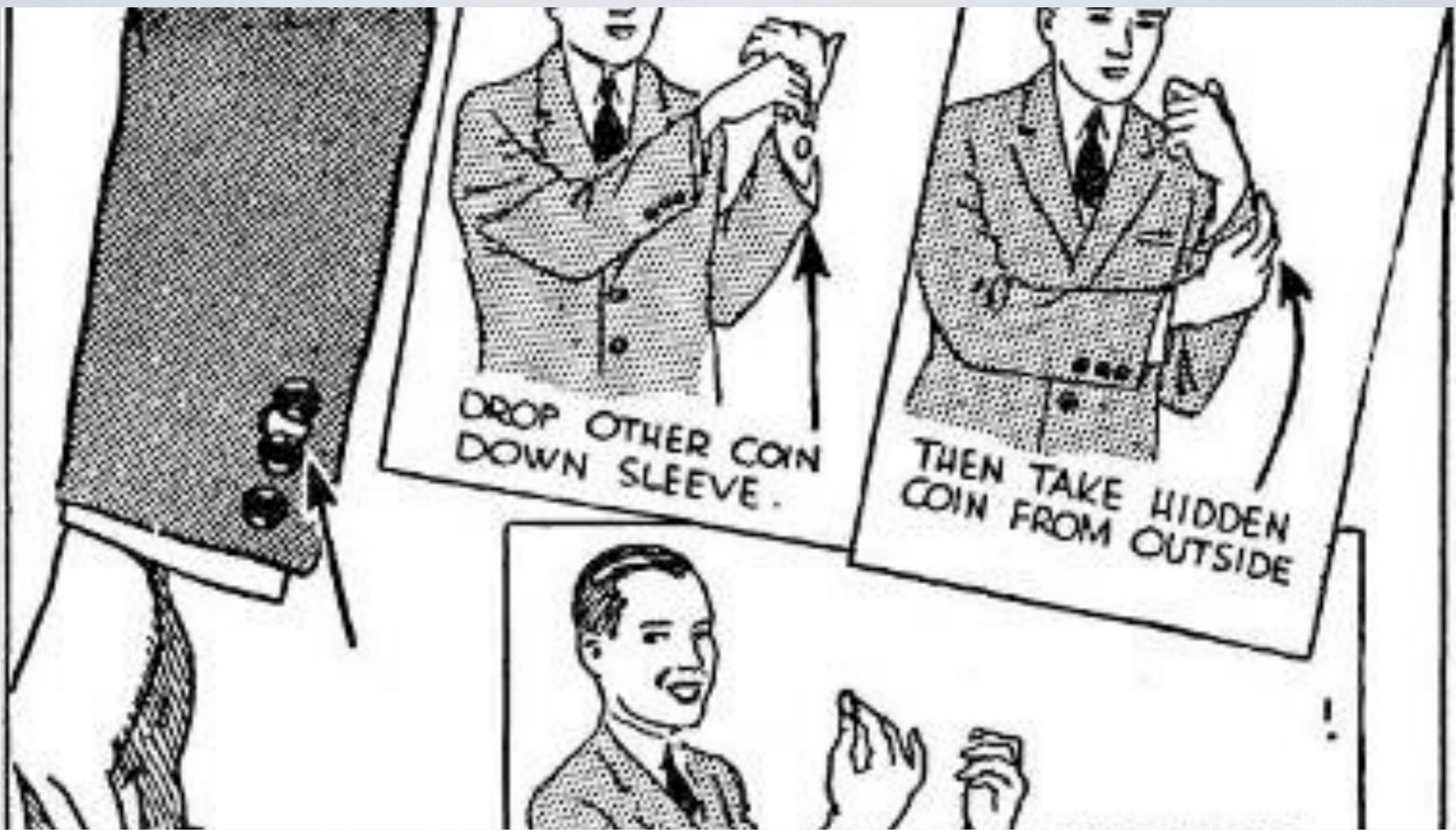


### III. BUDDY SYSTEM

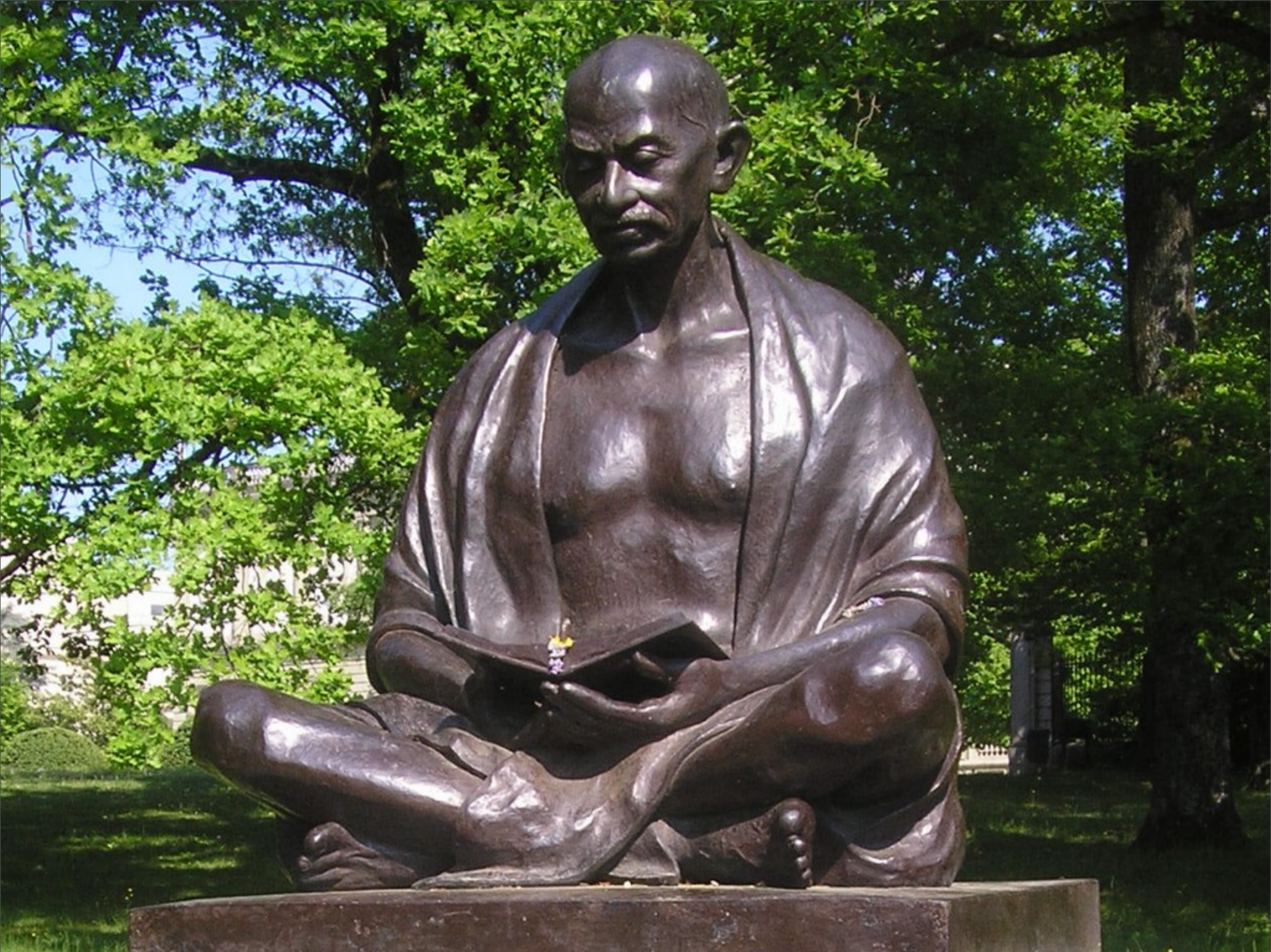
Find someone you don't know  
Exchange emails

“In two weeks, ask me if I've  
done \_\_\_\_\_ yet.”





SURPRISINGLY NOT MAGIC



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Gandhi is quoted a lot as saying "Be the change you want to see in the world", but it's a bit of a paraphrase of his longer statement.

"We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.... We need not wait to see what others do."