Lisa Fagin Davis, CENSUS abstract

The corpus of manuscripts in the United States has grown enormously since the 1700s, currently numbering tens of thousands of manuscripts in hundreds of collections in nearly every state. The growth of collections in North America was and is significantly different than the development of European collections. The most fundamental difference is that every European manuscript in North America has had a value placed on it, either by sale or by gift or by theft or by legacy, and every one has travelled from its point of origin. This single feature accounts for several general characteristics of the corpus: 1) we have more than our fair share of illuminated or decorated manuscripts, as those were the most prized by dealers and collectors; 2) conversely, we have relatively few Caroline or pre-Caroline codices, since they aren't illuminated and weren't as desirable to early American collectors; 3) our collections were formed on an *ad hoc* basis, built up manuscript by manuscript, and so we have very few, if any, coherent collections that came to us from a single point of origin; 4) the practice of early twentieth-century biblioclasm, the dismantling of codices to be sold leaf by leaf – as opposed to collecting recycled binding fragments or albums of cuttings – had an enormous impact on the national corpus, leaving us with tens of thousands of single leaves scattered across North America.

Of the 510 current repositories, somewhat less than half already have some kind of cataloguing metadata, that is, the cataloguing in the *Census* or *Supplement.* For many of those collections, it is indeed the *Census* or *Supplement* data that makes its way into a MARC, Luna, or other record. Collections that were not included in the previous works are much less likely to have been catalogued in any detail. Unlike some of the other countries presenting at this colloquium, the United States has no national initiative for

cataloguing or digitizing manuscripts. There are several reasons for this – the lack of funding at the federal level; the difficulty of justifying such projects in a country where medieval manuscripts can feel exotic and irrelevant; and, while the number of manuscripts is not itself overwhelming, the sheer number of collections – more than 500 scattered across the entire nation – makes such comprehensive projects difficult, if not impossible. Instead, we are seeing a series of *ad hoc*, institutional projects, such as the ongoing digitization and cataloguing at institutions such as the Beinecke Library at Yale or the Houghton Library at Harvard. At the state level, we find projects such as the Online Archive of California, or the Digital Commonwealth in Massachusetts. A wider regional project is underway in eastern Pennsylvania called Bibliotheca Philadelphiensis, or Bibliophilly. The largest digital repository of early manuscripts in North America is Digital Scriptorium, with 8,131 manuscripts from thirty-three collections. In the largest repositories alone, 93 collections (20% of the total) and 13,500 manuscripts (30% of the entire corpus) have already been catalogued and digitized, at least in part. URLs for these repositories are recorded in this GoogleDoc: https://goo.gl/4qUWdx