

Libraries under fire as they shift from print to digital

By Michael S. Rosenwald, Washington Post

The hallmark of public libraries – the printed book, bound by covers and centuries of page-turning – is being shoved aside by digital doppelgangers.

Around the country, libraries are slashing their print collections in favor of e-books, prompting battles between library systems and print purists, including not only the pre-pixel generation but digital natives who represent a sizable portion of the 1.5 billion library visits a year and prefer print for serious reading.

Some of the clashes have been heated. In New York, protesters outside the city's main branch have shouted: "Save the stacks! Save the stacks!" In Northern Virginia, the Fairfax County library system chief recently mused that the Friends of the Library were no longer friends – a feud fueled by outrage over a print collection that has shrunk by more than 300,000 books since 2009. The drop in the District is even more dramatic: Nearly 1 million books have vanished since 2009.

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