

AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE LIBRARY PROFESSION: LITTLE KNOWN HISTORY

By Rebecca D. Hunt

Librarianship is one profession that is not widely acknowledged within the circles of career preparation. Those who work as librarians today find that their formal library education, with regard to the history of the profession as a whole, is missing some of the significant contributions African Americans have made and continue to make. It is important to take a closer look at librarianship as a profession and parallel the history of Black librarianship to examine the contributions African Americans have made and gain awareness of a career that is often overlooked.

The Beginnings of Librarianship

The history of librarianship is closely tied to the evolution of the education system and economic development in the United States. While libraries existed, there was no formal training for individuals who worked in the library prior to 1850. Early training was completed as an apprenticeship in which you learned a trade through practical experience under the guidance of an experienced individual or you learned on your own through trial and error. In 1876 the formation of the American Library Association (ALA) brought organization to the library profession. The mission of the ALA was “to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.”¹

The ALA published a journal, *American Library Journal* (renamed *Library Journal*) to provide information to librarians regarding the management of their libraries. The journal contained articles written by librarians and a section where questions submitted to the journal were answered. The emphasis of the journal was the dissemination of practical information for librarians to manage their libraries.

The latter half of the nineteenth century saw a rise in the desire of Americans to seek education. To accommodate this need, the building of schools and libraries increased. The successful building of libraries was partly due to the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie’s interest in libraries; he financed the construction of 3,000 libraries around the world, with the majority built in the United States.² It was during this time that many academic libraries were built for African Americans. Carnegie was responsible for the building of libraries at Tuskegee Institute in 1900 and Alabama A&M College, Atlanta University, Benedict College, Talladega College, and Wilberforce University in 1904. In 1905 he commissioned libraries at Cheyney State Teachers College, Johnson C. Smith University, Livingstone College, and Fisk University. In 1907, libraries were built at Howard University and Knoxville College.³ The aforementioned colleges and universities are considered to be Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These colleges and universities were built to educate African Americans and were their only alternative for higher education during the time when segregation was an institution in the United States.

Concurrently, a recognized need for formal training of librarians was taking shape. Melvil Dewey founded the first library school in 1884; it was called the School of Library Economy. Dewey proposed a systematic training of librarians under the tutelage of selected librarians and libraries. The training provided advice on library matters and suggested readings and areas of study. Other schools of librarianship around the country adopted this formalized format to educate apprentices. These schools of librarianship wanted ALA to recognize them as the appropriated place for library training. ALA created the ALA Committee on Library Training. By 1902, ALA was making reviews of the training programs but did not recognize the training programs as the only appropriate forum for training.

After Andrew Carnegie’s death, the Carnegie Corporation appointed Alvin Saunders Johnson to investigate the conditions of the libraries built with Carnegie

funds and to determine the adequacy of library schools. The results of Johnson's investigation led the Carnegie Corporation to appoint C. C. Williamson to investigate library education and library training schools in particular. The final report issued in 1923, called the Williamson Report, had a significant effect on library education. The report's impact affected how ALA viewed library schools and the future direction library training would take. During the time Williamson conducted his research, the Carnegie Corporation funded the first library school designated to train African Americans: in 1925 the Hampton Institute Library School opened. Prior to its opening, African Americans received what little training they could through training programs at libraries, although there were rare instances when African Americans attended all-White institutions for library training.⁴

The second half of the twentieth century saw increases in the opening of library schools. The academic programs of the schools continued to evolve with the issuance of new standards for library education by the Board of Education for Librarianship. This ended the debate surrounding educational requirements for librarians. There would no longer be different alternatives to library training. The ALA created the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA) in 1956 to review all library schools' education programs for training future librarians. Colleges and universities moved forward in opening schools of librarianship paralleling the federal government's support for the development of K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. The need for librarians peaked somewhere in the 1970s, when the number of library schools in operation was at its highest.

Economic and social conditions in the 1980s saw the beginning of several library schools closing. The recession caused universities to evaluate their programs and make cost reductions, which led to the closing of schools of library and information science (LIS), as they are now called. The LIS departments were not seen as significant departments that affected the reputation of the institution, attracted and maintained major donors, accumulated

large networks of alumni, or made connections to other academic departments. According to Rubin (2004), in 1999 there were 56 ALA-accredited library programs remaining in the United States and Canada.⁵

Social conditions in the twentieth century brought changes to library services for people of color. The ALA advocated for equality of library services for African Americans and other people of color. In 1961, an amendment to the ALA's Library Bill of Rights included the statement "A person's right to use the library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."⁶ This declaration did not move many communities to support this position: in fact, it was met with strong opposition. It was the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s that proved to be the pivotal point in American history. African Americans and Latinos demanded equal rights and opportunities that society had to offer. Legislation passed during this time included laws that affected libraries. In 1964, the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) was adopted. The LSCA mandated the provision of funding to libraries to develop their collections and services for all persons in the U.S.⁷ The ALA responded to the turmoil in the country by forming the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) to oversee concerns related to the human and economic rights of all people. Other committees were created to address concerns of equality and diversity, with several offering scholarships for people of color. In 1970, the Black Caucus of ALA (BCALA) was formed to work on behalf of African Americans and their communities. Its mission states:

The Black Caucus of the American Library Association serves as an advocate for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services and resources to the nation's African American community; and provides leadership for the recruitment and professional development of African American librarians.⁸

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Pioneers and Trailblazers

The history of libraries and librarianship as a

profession has transformed over the past century, as shown above. Along with the building of libraries and the development of the accepted academic training come significant African Americans who were part of the development. Casper L. Jordan and E. J. Josey in their article “A Chronology of Events in Black Librarianship” provide a comprehensive timeline of events in Black librarianship. Jordan and Josey trace the history from the first school and library for African Americans, organized in 1816 in Wilmington, Delaware. Richard T. Greener, the first African American to receive a degree from Harvard University, reorganized and served as a librarian at the University of South Carolina. In 1904, the Rosenberg Library of Galveston, Texas built public library quarters for the exclusive use of the Black population. Catherine Allen Latimer was the first Black professional librarian at the New York Public Library. Sadie Peterson Delaney was the first professionally educated Black librarian to graduate from the Carnegie Institute of Technology.

Arthur Alphonso Schomburg was a curator of the Black research collection at the New York Public Library. Eliza Atkins Gleason was the first African American to receive a PhD in librarianship from the University of Chicago. Virginia Lacy Jones was the second African American to receive a PhD from the University of Chicago. Clarence R. Graham was the first librarian to open the Louisville Free Public Library to African Americans. Clara S. Jones was the first African American elected as president of the ALA. E. J. Josey was the second African American elected to the position.⁹

The individuals named are only a sampling of African Americans who have contributed to the library profession. These men and women produced materials that described the struggles of Blacks in society and showed great personal achievements despite the obstacles. Their contributions to the library profession should not be forgotten. These librarians are worthy of the recognition we give to other African Americans who achieved greatness in their professions.

The Twenty-First Century

The field of librarianship has continued its evolution to meet the needs of its patrons and to embrace the technological changes during the past two decades. Libraries as they were a century ago with huge card catalog cabinets and manual typewriters no longer exist. Libraries today have embraced twenty-first-century technologies such as computers, online catalog databases, information being accessed virtually, communication via smartphones, and the Internet.

The educational requirements for librarians have also expanded to include the knowledge and use of technology. The changes are due to the expansion of information technologies that has changed the way information is being created, organized, accessed, and disseminated. As a result, current Library and Information Science programs have expanded their curricula to integrate new ways to access information, networking, communication, and Web-related skills. The inclusion of the technologies has mandated a change in the name of schools that were traditionally known as schools of library science. Currently, most are known as School of Information Science and Policy, School of Library and Information Studies, School of Library and Information Science, or School of Information Studies.¹⁰

The library profession continues to evolve based on the new technologies available, and the need for librarians is increasing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2009 there were 206,100 librarian jobs, with females holding 81.8 percent of the jobs. African Americans made up 5.3 percent, Asian Americans 3.0 percent, and Latinos 6.8 percent.¹¹ Job statistics for 2010 in the Occupational Outlook Handbook showed a drop in librarian positions to a total of 156,100 jobs, which is a 50,000 or 2.4 percent decline in positions. Projections for 2010-2020 see an increase in positions to 166,900 or a 7 percent increase.¹²

African Americans and Librarianship in the Future

African Americans continue to contribute to the field of librarianship. It is beyond the scope of this article to outline their many contributions over the past two decades. Suffice it to say we are making great strides to provide information and resources to the African American community. African American librarians are in leadership positions, and the profession continues to grow. Dissemination of information about the profession is critically important. In 1997 the ALA created the Spectrum Scholarship program to address the issue of under-representation of needed ethnic librarians within the library profession. It is the ALA's national diversity program to improve library service at the local level through the development of a representative workforce that represents the communities served by all libraries.¹³ African American librarians must provide leadership, information, and mentorship to those entering the profession. Joni Flowers eloquently states,

"We have a responsibility to inform and educate individuals of the career opportunities that are available in the library profession. My advice to those considering librarianship: focus on the technology, don't limit yourself to one aspect of the library, and make yourself as marketable as possible. More importantly, read the library literature. Current awareness is the key to a successful career in librarianship. The library environment is constantly changing, and we must have the knowledge and ability to adapt to change in order to move forward."¹⁴

Notes:

1. American Library Association, "Mission & History," <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/missionhistory>.
2. Richard E. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000), 357359.
3. Casper LeRoy Jordan and E. J. Josey, "A Chronology of Events in Black Librarianship," in *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, ed. E. J. Josey and Marva L. DeLoach (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 3-18.
4. Richard E. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000), 361-64.,
5. *Ibid.*, 452-54.
6. American Library Association, "Library Bill of Rights," <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/>.
7. John C. Frantz, "The Library Services and Construction Act," *ALA Bulletin*, 60, no. 2 (1966), Accessed November 14, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25697349>
8. Black Caucus of the American Library Association, "Mission Statement," <http://www.bcala.org/association/mission.htm>.
9. Jordan and Josey, "A Chronology of Events in Black Librarianshi.."
10. Rubin, *Foundations of Library and Information Science*..
11. U.S. Census Bureau, "Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 2011," <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0615.pdf>.
12. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Occupational Outlook Handbook: Librarians," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/librarians.htm>
13. American Library Association, "Spectrum Scholarship Program," <http://www.ala.org/offices/diversity/spectrum>.
14. Joni M. Flowers, "From Paraprofessional to Professional: The Changing Role of an African American Librarian," in *In Our Own Voices: The Changing Face of Librarianship*, ed. Teresa Y. Neely and Khafre K. Abif (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1996), 227.



Rebecca D. Hunt, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Technology, Research, and Assessment at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL. Post doctorate, as a 2008 ALA Spectrum Scholar, she received her master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Alabama. Her research interests focus on school library services for K-12 students; virtual schooling for K-12 learners, and literature for children and young adults. She has served as a member of the ALA Stonewall Book Award Committee and the American Association of School Libraries Research and Statistics Committee. **Email:** rhunt@niu.edu

LESSON PLAN

AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS IN THE LIBRARY PROFESSION: LITTLE KNOWN HISTORY

By Rebecca D. Hunt

CONNECTION TO HIGH SCHOOL: Middle and high school students seldom have the opportunity to explore American history and government from an African American viewpoint. The materials studied are often isolated instances and not fully represented in the textbooks used in schools. To provide a comprehensive understanding and solid foundation, students need to understand the often complex concepts of life for African Americans from the Civil War to the twenty-first century.

GOALS OF LESSON PLAN

Students will study *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965/1994, and the Higher Education Act of 1965/1992/1998 to analyze the affects these laws and judicial decisions had on the lives and educational opportunities for African Americans.

OBJECTIVES

- Describe the social, economic, and political conditions of African Americans from the nineteenth century into the twenty-first century.
- Evaluate primary sources and create a presentation reflective of the African American experience.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS) STANDARDS**HISTORY**

- Assist learners in utilizing chronological thinking so that they can distinguish between past, present, and future time; can place historical narratives in the proper chronological framework; can interpret data presented in time lines; and can compare alternative models for periodization;
- Enable learners to develop historical comprehension in order that they might reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage, identify the central question(s) addressed in historical narrative, draw upon data in historical maps, charts, and other graphic organizers; and draw upon visual, literary, or musical sources;
- Guide learners in practicing skills of historical analysis and interpretation, such as compare and contrast, differentiate between historical facts and interpretations, consider multiple perspectives, analyze cause and effect relationships, compare competing historical narratives, recognize the tentative nature of historical interpretations, and hypothesize the influence of the past;
- Assist learners in developing historical research capabilities that enable them to formulate historical questions, obtain historical data, question historical data, identify the gaps in available records, place records in context, and construct sound historical interpretations;
- Help learners to identify issues and problems in the past, recognize factors contributing to such problems, identify and analyze alternative courses of action, formulate a position or course of action, and evaluate the implementation of that decision;
- Assist learners in acquiring knowledge of historical content in United States history in order to ask large and searching questions that compare patterns of continuity and change in the history and values of the many peoples who have contributed to the development of the continent of North America.

INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS

- Help learners analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture in both historical and contemporary settings;
- Explain to learners the various forms institutions take, and explain how they develop and change over time;
- Assist learners in identifying and analyzing examples of tensions between expressions of individuality and efforts used to promote social conformity by groups and institutions;
- Enable learners to describe and examine belief systems basic to specific traditions and laws in contemporary and historical movements.

CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

- Encourage learners to compare and analyze societal patterns for preserving and transmitting culture while adapting to environmental or social change;
- Enable learners to give examples and describe the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups;
- Have learners interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding;
- Guide learners as they construct reasoned judgments about specific cultural responses to persistent human issues.

WARM-UP/ANTICIPATORY SET

1. Have students complete the “K” and “W” of the K-W-L chart, filling in what they know and want to learn about the social, political, and educational lives of African Americans from 1896 to the present. (The time period can be shortened depending on time constraints.)
2. Compile a list of information already learned and a list of information students want to learn.

ACTIVITY

1. Divide the students into groups based on the pieces of legislation or decisions:
 - *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)
 - *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)
 - Civil Rights Act of 1964
 - Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965/1994
 - Higher Education Act of 1965/1992/1998

2. Have students locate the original legislation. Students will conduct an analysis of each law or decision to extract the effects it had for African Americans.
3. Students will research the economic, political and social conditions surrounding the laws during that time period.
4. Student will prepare a presentation of the laws and their effects on the economic, political, and social conditions of African Americans. The presentations should include different types of media to describe this period in history.

ASSESSMENT

Students will write essays that reflect their learning based on the presentations. The essay should include a synopsis of the presentations; political, economic, and social conditions; and how the lives of African Americans changed from the past to the present.

Teacher Resources

- Information on using primary sources from the Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>
- Library of Congress Resource Guides: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/bibguide.html>
- History.com: <http://www.history.com/topics>
- University of Kentucky Libraries—Notable Kentucky African Americans Database: <http://www.uky.edu/Libraries/NKAA/>
- Library of Congress, American Memory Home: <http://rs6.loc.gov/amhome.html>
- The Jackson Davis Collection of African American Educational Photographs: <http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/small/collections/jdavis/>
- Library of Virginia—Listing of African American History Sites: <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/vhr/afam.htm>