
Introduction

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF LIBRARY SERVICE to minority populations of the United States first requires an understanding of the long struggle to include people of color among the ranks of those providing library service. This issue of *Library Trends* presents an overview of the efforts of African-Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander-Americans, Chinese Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans to develop services, identify important issues, foster leadership, and establish inclusive definitions of identity. Without these narratives, there would be insufficient philosophical, intellectual, or emotional bases on which to develop future programs and collections.¹

In 1988, the American Library Association (ALA), Office for Library Personnel Resources (OLPR) under the leadership of its director, Margaret Myers, issued *Librarians for the New Millennium* (Moen & Heim, 1988). In that volume, the need for emphasis on the recruitment of minorities to the library and information science professions was a central theme. Efforts to secure ALA funding for the recruitment of minorities, including OLPR hearings held in 1987, are summarized and a 1988 invitational preconference on recruitment described. As background for the preconference, OLPR supported an analysis of students enrolled in U.S. programs of library and information science: the Library and Information Science Student Attitudes, Demographics and Aspirations Survey (LISSADA Survey) (Moen & Heim, 1988). The *LISSADA Survey* reported that enrolled students in 1988 were 90 percent white. Thus began a decade of studies, initiatives, and a profession-wide commitment to emphasize recruitment among people of color (Josey, 1999; McCook & Lippincott,

1997a; McCook & Lippincott, 1997b; McCook & Geist, 1993; McCook & Gonsalves, 1993). A decade later, the 1998 annual statistical report of the Association for Library and Information Science Education found 83 percent of enrolled students are white (Saye, 1999).

This improvement in minority enrollment provides hope that general recruitment of minorities in librarianship is demonstrating some success. However, it is important to realize that even this modest success is the result of a concerted effort on the part of the profession in the last decade of the millennium and that the increase in minority enrollment is not proportionate by ethnicity.

Over the years, professional associations have provided minority scholarship funds, but these have not been concentrated in a way to make a strong impact in overall patterns of recruitment and occupational entry. The establishment of the ALA SPECTRUM scholarships, first awarded in 1998 to fifty library and information science students of color, marked a sea change in the profession's commitment to recruitment of a diverse workforce. The years of meetings, reports, and studies initiated by OLPR have finally borne fruit. The SPECTRUM program provides national publicity, a recruitment network, leadership seminars, and mentoring support for the SPECTRUM scholarship recipients. The national campaign to recruit students for the SPECTRUM scholarship program has provided publicity that has generally enhanced recognition of library and information science as a viable career option for people of color.

This step forward by ALA to recruit a diverse cohort of minority librarians must be seen in the context of the ongoing movements to recognize and value differences among the people of the United States. Without the establishment of strong ethnic caucuses in the American Library Association and the subsequent creation of a grassroots leadership, ALA would not have had the foundation to support the development of this creative program.

Today the American Library Association has included "Diversity" as one of five key action areas to fulfill its mission of providing the highest quality library and information services to all people. By "diversity," ALA means race and ethnicity as well as physical disabilities, sexual orientation, age, language, and social class (*Diversity*, 2000). An ongoing new initiative by the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services is the "Diversity Fair" held at ALA's annual conferences and providing an opportunity for librarians to demonstrate possibilities for other librarians in search of "diversity in action" ideas.

New energy fueled by the SPECTRUM initiative, the delineation of "diversity" as a key action area by the ALA, and the recognition that the United States is becoming a nation characterized by growing cultural acceptance and inclusion has been infused into the thinking about the kind of profession librarianship needs to become. This issue of *Library Trends*

captures the rich traditions of the major ethnic groups that have struggled to achieve a position in the development and delivery of library services.

To capture the intellectual foundations and informed activism that characterize the profession's commitment to diversity, authors have been selected who have a history of scholarship and advocacy. These librarians and scholars all began their careers before or at the time that the civil rights movement provided a legislative mandate for equality. They know from personal experience and personal journeys of the long road to full participation in U.S. society. They have devoted their professional careers to providing excellent service informed by social consciousness and commitment to equality.

Alice Robbin is a political scientist whose research focuses on the classification of racial and ethnic data. She presents statistical data on selected economic and social indicators derived from the U.S. Census that provide this issue with robust demographic information with which to assess the achievements and challenges that confront us in the decades to come.

Alma Dawson, who has chaired the Association of College and Research Libraries Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity and the Association of Education for Library and Information Science Recruitment Committee writes of the achievements of African-American librarians and the Black Caucus of the ALA from the perspectives of a professor of library and information science with experience as an administrator and student at historically black as well as at majority universities.

Kenneth A. Yamashita, former president of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), has been active in many areas of the American Library Association including Council and member of the Committee on Minority Concerns and Social Diversity. His article traces the history of APALA with special attention to the work of Janet M. Suzuki in APALA's precursor, the Asian American Librarians Caucus.

As former President of the Chinese American Librarians Association, Mengxiong Liu has studied library services for ethnolinguistic students. She provides a history of Chinese American librarians in the United States with a special focus on the building of East Asian libraries. Her article places the experience of Chinese American librarians in a cultural context with attention to contributions and accomplishments.

Edward Erazo has been president of REFORMA and the Border Regional Library Association; Salvador Güereña has also been president of REFORMA and was honored by the association as 1992 "Librarian of the Year." From their broad experience in serving Spanish-speaking users, Erazo and Güereña provide a complex portrait of efforts to establish services to Latinos taking into account the many different cultures joined by a linguistic heritage.

Lotsee Patterson is professor at the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Oklahoma. She is of Comanche and

Chickasaw heritage. Her work to affect government policy change for library service to Native Americans has been recognized by the NCLIS with the Silver Star Award and by the ALA Equality Award. As Patterson points out, the tribal governments of Native Americans define a mutual interdependence with the U.S. government unique among the nation's ethnic minorities. Thus, describing the history of service development is rich in complication. Separate legislation regarding Native Americans creates a shifting basis for describing and assessing service.

The issue concludes with Sandra Ríos Balderrama's essay on diversity. As the first diversity officer appointed by the American Library Association, Balderrama asks why we want someone distinct from us to work with us, not for us; to create with us, not duplicate us; to reciprocate with us, not assimilate to us; to mentor us, not intimidate us; to be an equal, not a box in the organizational hierarchy. Her essay is a poetic discourse that invites readers to contribute equally their ideas, expertise, potential, and distinctiveness. Balderrama's synthesis elicits the dream of individualized hope for a coexisting sense of care.

These ideas reach back to touch the spirit of former OLPR Director Margaret Myers whose work on personnel concerns within the American Library Association during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s laid much of the foundation on which we build today. Upon her return from the Peace Corps where she provided community library service in Botswana, Myers expressed a calm thanksgiving that ALA has dedicated resources to expand its commitment to diversity (M. Myers, personal communication, January 18, 2000).

Acceptance of diversity as a value of librarianship is crucial to the goal of librarians seeking to build communities. The decision to identify diversity as a key action area by the ALA is a decision by librarians to work to build communities that will be resilient and enduring.

NOTE

- ¹ This issue focuses on the development of services to a diverse population and the efforts to recruit a diverse workforce as reflected by the efforts of members of the American Library Association. Researchers should be aware that other library-related associations have also endeavored to increase the participation of minorities in the profession, including the American Association of Law Librarians (Committee on Diversity, Scholarships); the Association of Research Libraries (Diversity Program; Conferences on Career Development and Leadership); the Medical Library Association (scholarships); as well as initiatives in state library associations.

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