

DuMont, 35 Years Later: HBCUs, LIS Education, and Institutional Discrimination

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This article revisits Rosemary DuMont's 1986 articles on Black librarianship and racial attitudes in LIS. The first part addresses missing or limited coverage on the library schools at five historically Black colleges and universities: Alabama A&M University, Clark Atlanta University, University of the District of Columbia, Hampton University, and North Carolina Central University. The second part provides examples of biases in accreditation as it relates to HBCU-based LIS programs. The article closes with a discussion on the erasure of HBCUs in LIS education, despite their important contributions to racial and ethnic representation and inclusion in the library professions.

Keywords: Black librarianship, HBCUs, LIS education, racial inclusion, racial justice

In 1986, Rosemary DuMont published two articles: "The Educating of Black Librarians: An Historical Perspective," in *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*

(DuMont, 1986a) and "Race in American Librarianship: Attitudes of the Library Profession," in *Journal of Library History* (DuMont, 1986b). Not since Louis Shores's (1932) article on "Library Service and the Negro" had a White researcher explored Black librarianship. In the first, DuMont examined the pioneering library schools at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The article afforded a synopsis of each program and explored the contributions of African American librarians. The second paper investigated librarians' and library instructors' attitudes toward race. Here, DuMont described how racism and segregation impacted library services. Essentially, DuMont began with what was perceived to be the lack of coverage (up to that point) on HBCUs in LIS and subsequently addressed racist positions that impeded equitable library education and services. She did not, however, associate the two dynamics. We do so in this article.

KEY POINTS:

- DuMont wrote separate articles on the history of HBCU-based library education and racial segregation in libraries. These discussions should have been combined. The juxtaposed influences of HBCU institutions and structural racism continue to impact the LIS field.
- ALA Office for Accreditation records reveal biased treatment toward HBCU-based MLS or MLIS programs. LIS educators and ALA leaders should reflect on the consequences of institutional racism within both higher education and the library and information science field.
- The library education programs at HBCUs could have thrived had there been adequate support for these institutions. LIS educators must ponder ways of responsibly and earnestly partnering with HBCUs.

Purpose

Some 35 years after DuMont's works were published, there have been significant changes not only within Black librarianship but also within LIS education *and* HBCUs en masse. DuMont (1986a) felt that "any overall appraisal of the Black experience with library science education is impossible at this stage because large scale participation is so recent" (p. 246). Yet there were by that time several comprehensive publications on the significance of Black librarianship, including a 1930 national study of African American library workers (Van Jackson, 1940). There was also research published by Eliza Atkins Gleason, Virginia Lacy Jones, and E. J. Josey (Gleason, 1945; Jones, 1970; Josey, 1970, 1977; Josey & Shockley, 1977). DuMont neither cited nor acknowledged this scholarship, which dually negates the presumed mission of furthering racial equality in LIS and underscores how Blacks were overlooked in LIS education. Works on the experiences of Black librarians must recognize the role of early African American pioneers. Furthermore, any accounts of breakthroughs must be coupled with evidence of barriers. Peterson (1996) aptly notes that "concentration on the few who 'made' it distorts the picture by not illuminating the stories of those who attempted but were denied" (p. 167).

The aim of this historical study is to add to the body of knowledge on Black librarianship and racial bias in LIS by revisiting and expanding upon DuMont's 1986 works. Our guiding questions are as follows: (1) What context was missing from DuMont's works on Black librarianship? (2) In terms of racial inclusion and equality in librarianship, what can we learn from the histories of library schools or LIS programs at HBCUs? The first part of the article contextualizes and historicizes library schools at HBCUs. We elaborate on the programs at Alabama A&M University and the University of the District of Columbia, both of which received little to no attention in DuMont's works. We also describe significant changes, such as the 2005 closing of the LIS program at Clark Atlanta University, and provide an update on the only remaining HBCU-based School of Library and Information Science at North Carolina Central University. The second part interrogates consistent discrimination toward HBCU-based LIS programs as well as their continued erasure in conversations on US LIS education.

Our research is based on records housed at the American Library Association (ALA) Archives at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; the Clark Atlanta University Archives at the AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library; the University of the District of Columbia Archives; and the North Carolina Central University Archives (see Appendix B). This article has developed out of recent observations of how these HBCU-based LIS programs, libraries, and students are rarely discussed in ongoing conversations on racial equity, diversity, and inclusion in LIS. Embedded within decisions of how, where, and when HBCUs are acknowledged is the reality that these institutions are on the fringes of LIS consciousness. It is plausible to assume, judging from the proportionately scant coverage, that minority-serving institutions¹ such as HBCUs remain undervalued in the US-based library landscape.

LIS programs at HBCUs

In the first piece, DuMont (1986a) recounts the beginnings of Black librarian education, with nearly a third of the article concentrating on the development of the first formal or degree-granting library school at Hampton University and the subsequent

transition of this library school to North Carolina Central University. Early apprenticeship programs are discussed to a lesser extent. Very little attention is paid to the library school at Alabama A&M University. Neither is there mention of the short-lived library school at the University of the District of Columbia. This section adds context to accounts of the development of these programs and describes some of the circumstances, according to publicly available data, that led to the closing of all but that of North Carolina Central University. The artifacts in Appendix A provide a glimpse into these historic programs.

It is vital to begin by describing the importance of the anti-hegemonic, anti-racist mission that continues to motivate HBCUs. These institutions provided educational pathways for African Americans even before the emancipation of slaves in 1863. Formally recognized as historically Black colleges in University in 1965, they were, by and large, the only options for African Americans to pursue higher education in the first part of the twentieth century. The ongoing need for racial equality is precisely why HBCUs remain relevant today. Collectively, HBCUs promote civil rights, social progress, and community engagement. These campuses educate a third of all Black collegians, although they comprise just 103 of the nation's more than 5,300 accredited institutions of higher learning. Studies on HBCU contributions to LIS point to an underestimation of the countercultural and transformative nature of these campuses (Arroyo & Gasman, 2015; Ndumu & Rollins, 2020). Black librarianship would be all the more meager had it not been for the professionalization provided at HBCUs and the synergized recruitment on the part of a dedicated group of HBCU-affiliated leaders. Indeed, many past and current African American LIS leaders (e.g., Eliza Atkins Gleason, E. J. Josey, Julius Jefferson, Wanda Brown, Carla Hayden, Lorretta Parham, Virginia Lacy Jones, Irene Owens, and Ismail Abdullahi) have been educators, products, or advocates of HBCUs.

The decade between 1969 and 1979 was especially prosperous, as there were five HBCU library schools in operation. The Black Caucus of the American Library Association was founded in 1970. That same year, the first edition of *The Black Librarian in America* was published (Josey, 1970). In 1971, Atlanta University reached 1,000 library school graduates and NCCU graduated its largest class of 109 graduates (Ndumu, this issue). Robert Wedgeworth became the first African American executive director of ALA in 1972. He is credited with revitalizing ALA during a period of fiscal and organizational crisis (Landgraf, 2018). The year 1975 marked fifty years since the first HBCU-based library school was founded at Hampton University. The following year, Clara Stanton Jones became the first African American president of ALA. Clark Atlanta University's library school dean, Virginia Lacy Jones, became the first African American to receive the ALA Melville Dewey Award in 1973, and, in 1977, she was granted the Joseph Lippincott Award. Jones had previously been the first African American president of the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) in 1967. As Dawson (2000) writes, such "achievements are an inspiration worthy of continued emulation and cause for celebration." However, this period of exciting growth was short-lived for a number of reasons, some of which DuMont (1986a) points out and many of which she overlooks. We elaborate on the five historic HBCU library school programs in the remainder of this section.

Alabama A&M University (1969–1982)

DuMont (1986a) describes Alabama A&M University's program in three sentences and characterizes it as a "single purpose' school, emphasizing school library media programs" (p. 50). On the contrary, the Alabama A&M University School of Library Media in Huntsville, Alabama, focused from its inception on the intersection of libraries, media, and technology, very much like many LIS programs and iSchools today. The program spanned the period from 1969 to 1982 and was one of 12 graduate schools at Alabama A&M University, a public land grant institution founded in 1875. The university is supported through state and federal funds appropriated to assist in carrying out work stipulated by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which mandated that public property should be earmarked primarily for agricultural, scientific, and military research and training. It has consistently been one of the largest of 14 HBCUs in the state.

According to ALA Committee on Accreditation archival records (Closed Programs, Box 31, Folder 1), the library school program was the result of a cross-institutional collaboration between Alabama A&M University's administration, then under the leadership of President Richard D. Morrison; the head librarian, Mr. Binford H. Conley; and educational media faculty at Auburn University and Purdue University. It was made possible through a \$203,050 grant from the Kellogg Foundation and, later, three grants under the Higher Education Act, Title II-B. It was the first library media program to be certified by the Alabama Department of Education.

Courses began in the spring semester of 1969, with three part-time instructors and 25 students. By 1971, there were five full-time faculty members and three part-time faculty members. That same year, the program transitioned from the Department of Library Media to the School of Library Media. Administrators began to scale up development but maintained curricular focus in both library media and school librarianship. The Alabama A&M University library school curriculum consisted of five core competencies in management and supervision, instructional systems development, media design and production, curriculum and instruction, librarianship, and educational media. The latter satisfied the requirements for the Southeastern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Standards for School Media Programs. Core courses included Foundations and Problems of Education, Educational Research, School Administration and Supervision, and Educational Statistics, which were to be supplemented with library media minor concentration through courses in Library and Media Centers, Advanced Reference Materials and Bibliography, and Introduction to Information Science. During the 1972–73 academic year, library school faculty, along with the staff of the J.F. Drake Memorial Library, began planning for a state-of-the-art Learning Resources Center that would allow for hands-on multimedia training for library school students.

The uniqueness of the Alabama A&M University program lay in its social justice orientation. For example, in 1971, the program began to host community-based programs geared toward drug-use prevention. The Institute for Training in Librarianship for Drug Education, made possible through a US Department of Education Title II-B grant, provided tools to equip academic librarians and school library media specialists to address the rising heroin and LSD problem that disproportionately affected communities of color. Alabama A&M University applied for and received accreditation in 1975. Commencement records list 21 to 25 library school graduates annually until the program ended in 1982.

University of the District of Columbia

The University of the District of Columbia (UDC) is the result of a 1975 merger of three universities (Federal City College, Washington Technical Institute, and D.C. Teacher's College) and is currently the only public institution and one of two HBCU institutions in the nation's capital. The UDC Department of Media, Information and Learning Systems was established in the midst of this transition and as the university grew exponentially, based on ALA COA archival records (Unaccredited Programs, UDC, Box 32, Folder 4). Plans for the Master's in Media Services program began in 1969. Classes were offered beginning in 1971 and were taught by ten faculty. Records indicate that the library science program was established as an alternative to what the administration perceived to be the high tuition and rigid admissions policies at other library science programs, one being Catholic University, which is also located in the District of Columbia. Archival documents show that administrators believed it "virtually impossible for many minority members to enroll" at Catholic University (Unaccredited Programs, UDC Self-Study, 1973, Box 32, Folder 2). "For many qualified, talented people in the District of Columbia, our program is the only feasible source of graduate education," they continued. They also cited as part of the program's purpose the need to provide library training that would have a positive impact on communities and develop "personnel that would be aware of, comfortable, and responsive to urban surroundings." They also noted "the need for Black people—especially Black men—in the media science professions" (ALA COA Archives, Unaccredited Programs, UDC Self-Study, Box 32, Folder 2).

The UDC program conceptualized library science broadly, with emphasis on the organization and dissemination of print and non-print information resources: books, periodicals, audiovisual media, computer hardware and software, and instructional technology. Library "collections" were approached as "media." The core curriculum included 10 courses in Media Bibliographic Organization and Description; Building Media Collections; Multimedia Technology Techniques; Research and Evaluative Techniques, among others. Electives included six courses in Theory of Media Cataloging and Classification, Systems Analysis, Seminar on the The Computer & Media Resources Centers, Data Processing & the Media Center; Media for Children; MultiMedia Technology Techniques. Students were able to concentrate in Media Technology and Learning Systems, Library Media Specialty, and School Media.

The UDC library school sought accreditation by formally submitting a Self-Study in March 1977. Progress toward accreditation stalled when the Director of the Library School became ill. The program was disbanded after it did not meet American Library Association (ALA) standards for comprehensive review. UDC conferred the last Master's in Media Services degrees in the summer of 1979.

Atlanta University/Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Studies

As DuMont (1986a) mentions, the Atlanta University School of Library Science was founded in 1941 a few years after Hampton University's library school closed. The program had at its advantage a pipeline of African American undergraduates from four adjacent HBCUs in the large, majority-Black Atlanta metropolis. Records show that it also received

students from another six HBCUs in Georgia and 14 in Florida and South Carolina. It is important to note that in 1988, just two years after DuMont's publication on HBCUs in LIS education, Atlanta University merged with neighboring Clark University to form Clark Atlanta University. While both universities belonged to a consortium of five HBCUs in Atlanta, Atlanta University had up to that point exclusively provided graduate education, with one of its programs being the School of Library Science.

The Clark Atlanta University program was also energized by the Civil Rights movement that inspired tremendous activism and mobilization between Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia. A 1987 program description captures Atlanta's University *raison d'être*:

A great predominantly Black university cannot be just an ivory tower institution. It must involve itself in the concerns and problems of its community. At local, regional and national community levels, Atlanta University's history is a record of such involvement. To be a Black university is not be a racially or class-exclusive institution. Chartered in 1867 without regard to race, creed, or color, Atlanta University has always been an oasis of racial and class tolerance and harmony in a society bound by racial separation and conflict and class exploitation. (ALA COA Archives, Clark-Atlanta University, 1987 Comprehensive Review).

The closing of the Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Studies in 2005 had a significant impact on U.S. librarianship—specifically, Black librarianship. While there are still many questions surrounding the closure, the primary reason was attributed to the university's financial difficulties. There were two key factors that many felt played an integral role in the closing of the school. First, in 1988 the university hired Dr. Walter Broadnax as the second president, replacing Thomas W. Cole, the former president of Clark College who led the oversight and planning of the consolidation of Clark College and Atlanta University. Shortly after Broadnax's arrival, he announced that the university was experiencing financial difficulties and would need to eliminate some academic programs. The university hired a consulting group to assess the university's financial situation and to develop a strategy for financial recovery (Mulligan, 2006). As part of the cost-reduction plan for financial recovery, the administration created an implementation committee composed of university faculty, without representation from the School of Library and Information Science. The committee recommended closing five academic programs, including SLIS. Although the recommendation to close SLIS and the other programs was voted down at the Academic Council meeting in 2003, the Board of Trustees accepted the proposal by Broadnax, and it was announced that the school would close at the end of the 2004–2005 academic year (Chepesiuk, 2004).

Simultaneously, the CAU SLIS was granted conditional accreditation in 2002, the first time in its 62-year history. The External Review Panel (ERP) recommended to the ALA Committee on Accreditation (COA) that SLIS receive conditional accreditation because it needed significant improvement on four of the standards: Goals and Objectives, Curriculum, Faculty, and Administration and Finances. Conditional accreditation would require the ERP to visit the school in three years to determine if SLIS was compliant in the four areas (Mulligan, 2006).

President Broadnax was initially supportive of helping SLIS reach full accreditation. In a progress report to the chair of ALA's Committee on Accreditation (COA), he stated, "I am

fully supportive of the Action Plan” and cited efforts to recruit faculty, increase faculty publications, and expand enrollment (Oder, 2003, p. 16). However, when the president made the announcement that SLIS would close, he heavily cited the concerns that were outlined in the ALA COA report. Broadnax then argued that getting the school up to accreditation standards would be a significant expense that would add to the existing \$7.5-million deficit. Some believed that the administration used the conditional status as a significant justification for the school’s closing. This aligns with Marion Paris’s (1991) contention that “although financial exigency does not directly cause the closing of library schools, it provides a rationale” (p. 263).

LIS programs spoke out against the closure. Specifically, deans of southern library schools held a Day of Solidarity for Clark-Atlanta University School of Library and Information Science. Leaders—including Elizabeth Aversa (University of Alabama), Robert Ballard (North Carolina Central University), Dan Barron (University of South Carolina), Vicki Gregory (University of South Florida), Wallace Koehler (Valdosta State University), Beth Paskoff (Louisiana State University), Jane Robbins (Florida State University), Douglas Raber (University of Tennessee), and Lee Shiflett (University of North Carolina at Greensboro)—were all in attendance to show support for CAU to remain open (Mulligan, 2006). Despite a concerted, national protest of the closure of Clark Atlanta University’s SLIS by many groups including students, alumni, faculty, deans and former deans, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), the ALA itself, library science programs across the country, and even the chair of the ALA COA—the program closed, leaving North Carolina Central University as the sole HBCU library science program.

In 2017, a reception was held at the National Conference for African American Librarians to commemorate the historic Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Science. The event included former deans Lorene Brown and Anita O’Neal and featured testimonies from Clark Atlanta University SLIS faculty and alumni, along with proclamations from national leaders such as Georgia’s US Congressional Representative John Lewis.

North Carolina Central University (1941–present)

North Carolina Central University (NCCU) remains a vibrant program. In 1984, just before DuMont’s articles were published, the school’s name was changed to the School of Library and Information Sciences. Between 1986 and 1996, the program reached many milestones. There were 951 graduates of the program, or an average of 90 students annually. The school also began to enroll students from newly formed African and Caribbean nations such as Nigeria, Jamaica, Ghana, Zambia, and the Bahamas. Dr. Benjamin Speller retired as dean in 2003 after 20 years of leading the program. In 2005, he was replaced by Dr. Irene Owens, the first African American to receive a PhD in LIS from the University of Texas, Austin.

Beginning with the 1990–91 academic year, the school offered an interdisciplinary program in information sciences leading to the Master’s in Information Science (MIS). The NCCU joint MLIS/JD program began in 2004. In 2016, SLIS received approval to offer three certificate programs in Health Informatics, Information Policy and Management, and Digital Libraries (a postgraduate degree certificate). These certificates all lead to advanced graduate degrees. SLIS also offers five joint degree programs, in law and library science,

law and information science, business administration and information science, public administration and information science, and educational technology and instructional design and information science. Students can also complete North Carolina Department of Public Instruction School Media Coordinator certification and licensure. Courses are offered evenings, Saturdays, summers, and online (through the NCCU Extended Studies division). Except for the Archives MLS concentration, students can complete the MLS and MIS degrees completely online.

In addition to establishing a curriculum in Digital Librarianship, the NCCU SLIS also houses key collections in African American librarianship, including the E. J. Josey Papers and the BCALA Archives. Furthermore, the program received substantial grant funding for community-based programs such as the National Library of Medicine–funded Eagles eHealth project, a two-year initiative to provide health literacy to North Carolinian communities where health disparities exist. NCCU SLIS also received a \$1.5-million IMLS grant to recruit librarians of color.

The program has been consistently accredited since 1975, with the latest reaccreditation occurring in 2017. In 2018, the NCCU School of Library and Information Science celebrated 75 years of providing library education predominantly to African Americans. That same year, long-time dean Irene Owens retired, with Dr. Jon Gant entering as dean shortly thereafter. In 2019, renowned scholar Dr. Ismail Abdullahi retired after 30 years of LIS education, mainly at Clark Atlanta University and North Carolina Central University.

Hampton University (1925–1939)

With the assistance of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, the first ever library school intended for Blacks was established in 1925 at Hampton University (Walker, 2017). Accredited by the Board of Education for Librarianship, the Hampton Library School prepared students to receive undergraduate education in library science. Two years following the opening of the school, the first Negro Library Conference was held in the Museum of Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in 1927. It was organized by a graduate of the Institute and head of the Louisville Free Libraries Colored Branches, Thomas Fountain Blue. The conference brought together approximately 40 librarians from the South (Martin & Shiflett, 1996; Smith, 1940).

It has been nearly 90 years since the founding of the Hampton University Library School. Yet Hampton University still contributes to increasing racial representation and inclusion in the library professions. Since 2018, the Harvey Library at Hampton University has received numerous IMLS and NEH grants to host forums and design projects on minority recruitment and retention in the LIS field through the “Leading the Charge” initiative.

Discrimination toward HBCU-based library schools

DuMont’s subsequent article, “Race in American Librarianship: Attitudes of the Profession,” primarily discussed views about the desegregation of library facilities, associations and conferences (DuMont, 1986b). By DuMont’s definition, racial equality was narrowly perceived as presence or attendance in library spaces as opposed to quality of experience along with the recognition of culture, aptitude, and contributions. Hollow views of racial progress

fail to advance the type of critical awareness that might combat slights based on misestimations of HBCUs and African Americans. This undervaluation explains why prominent White LIS educators held problematic views of Black librarians. For instance, Hampton University Library School director Florence Rising Curtis—whom DuMont lauds for her “foresight” (1986b, p. 492)—suggested that library training for Blacks needed to be “quite different.” That is, Curtis believed that library training for Blacks should be minimized to focus mainly on children’s librarianship and “elementary reference work and organization.” There was “‘very little demand’ for Black public librarians in the 1920s,” Curtis observed (as cited in DuMont, 1986b, p. 492). These views discounted the intellectual capacities of African Americans.’

We encountered this same thread of essentialist thinking in the writings of other renowned library educators. Louis Shores, recognized by *American Libraries* magazine as one of the 100 most influential library leaders in the twentieth century, similarly expressed a library imperative based on social hierarchy:

Library workers have even sought out the special classes; the sick and the criminal, the blind and the lame, the foreign born and the foreign bred, the Jew, the Pole, the Italian, the Yellow man, and, in short, any group distinguished by a common characteristic of race, creed, color, language, nationality, or a physical, mental, or social abnormality. And the Negro, as a special group, was in a fair way to receive his share of library service when the present economic crisis [The Great Depression] interfered. (Shores, 1932, p. 374)

Rather ironically, Shores’s early career was spent at Fisk University, a celebrated HBCU institution. Peterson (1996) points out in her writings on paternalism, imperialism, and racism in US library history that Shores “was aware of and affected by racial conflict and made attempts at conciliation. . . . Yet, at the same time, he never questioned his good fortune to lead and direct a major college library when many educated and experienced Blacks could have and should have done this job” (p. 166). Louis Shores was hired as a library director of this “Negro college” directly from library school at age 24, despite the existence of more than 210 Black library workers around 1930. At the time, only five of the more than 50 Black college libraries were headed by Blacks (Peterson, 1996).

Very little is said of direct mechanisms for resisting the entry of Blacks into the field. It can be argued that in the library sector, the racial status quo manifested as custodianship on the one hand and exclusion on the other. Often, barriers existed through draconian policies and procedures. Historical records paint a compelling picture of the exclusion of Blacks in program admissions and matriculation at mainstream library schools. Cooke (2017) writes of the mistreatment of Black students in the Carnegie Scholars program at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Peterson (1996) chronicles practiced discrimination throughout various programs. One instance involves ALA’s 1943 assessment of the relationship between accredited schools and prospective Black library school students. Responses to ALA’s query were uniformly acerbic. A letter from the University of Pittsburgh² states, “on the admission of Negro students to Carnegie Library School, I will have to ask you to not list this school as one that admits Negroes. There has been a longstanding trustee policy against it . . .” while a response from Syracuse University reads, “The attitude toward

the admission of negroes [sic] at Syracuse has not changed. It is based entirely on living conditions. Colored men are accepted freely as far as I know . . . but colored girls are not encouraged to enter because it is almost impossible to find suitable living places for them” (Peterson, 1996, p. 168). DuMont herself surprisingly wrote, “There are also problems of retention [of Black students] in some [library school] institutions because of the lack of preparation, weak study skills, communication inadequacies, and writing deficiencies of some students” (1986a, p. 245).

Understandably, then, when it came to HBCU-based library schools, seeking ALA accreditation was not without its challenges. Put plainly, achieving accreditation in an exacting and staunchly White profession was a magnanimous feat. A review of the Office of Accreditation archival records demonstrates prejudiced internal dialogue regarding library programs at HBCUs. Though the stated goals of the American Library Association Office for Accreditation espoused a “spirit of accrediting that should be that of constructive evaluation of a library school,” there was evidence to the contrary. For example, prior to submitting their program Self-Study, the University of DC administrators hired a consultant to assist with preparation, as is customary in the higher education accreditation process. The consultant subsequently forwarded disparaging notes about UDC’s program to the ALA Office for Accreditation (ALA COA Archives, Unaccredited Programs, UDC Self-Study, Box 32, Folder 2):

Dear Elinor:

I feel mean in sending the enclosed letter to you, but I am so appalled at the sloppy mess that is Federal City College’s [University of the District of Columbia’s] Department of Media that I feel COA should be alerted.

When I visited them I could not get such standard things as a course schedule, a list of committees, a budget for their program, or the breakdown of graduate technical assistant students or information on the percentage of faculty time devoted to the two different programs.

The students were mature and seemed well-motivated, but I fear the administrator and some of the faculty are neither mature nor well-motivated. If they apply for accreditation, assuming they can get themselves together to complete a Self-Study, and the Self-Study is accepted by COA, you will need a sophisticated and suspicious visiting team.

Sincerely,

Dick

Dr. Richard L. Darling, Dean
School of Library Service
Dean, Columbia University

Accreditation Officer Elinor Yungmeyer replied:

Dear Dick:

You really have had your problems with Federal City College, haven’t you? And I certainly agree with your stance as regards to their rather unique procedure for reimbursement.

All of this is to say thank you for forwarding the copy of your letter to Dr. Boone. While it isn't pleasant to know this about any program, forewarned is forearmed.

Thanks again.

Sincerely yours,
Elinor Yungmeyer

From there, the notes were channeled to the accrediting committee. The impact was damning, it appears. One COA member commented, "The people running the program obviously were frustrated and I attempted, again, to defuse any feeling that they were being singled out for special treatment."

Some critiques of the report—logical and mechanical errors, for example—were justified. There appeared also to be misgivings about the parent institution, specifically, UDC's open admission policy. The program Self-Study emphasized the uniqueness of UDC in meeting the needs of underserved students, such as "1. First-generation in formal higher education; 2. A life experience which is urban and is largely centered in the Washington, D.C. area; 3. An average age which is 25; 4. Sixty-six percent are either married or area heads of households; 4. Eighty percent are employed full or part-time; 5. Achievement levels show a wide range." However, reviewers' comments reflect continued belittlement. One wrote, "I read and read until I came to the conclusion that this was not an organized Self-Study, but merely an inchoate mass of material. . . . One thinks media people being strong in imaginative methods of communication, but certainly these people fail miserably. Please excuse me not reading to the end of the report but by half way through I had decided that this school does not meet our standards." Another COA member expressed the following: "If you really need detailed comments—I'm sure by now you have them a-plenty from other shell-shocked COA members—I will supply, but even getting through the report was agony without having to write about it, too." Yet, another wrote, "I don't think there's going to be much question on this one, but I do resent all the time I've had to put into just reading it. It's just not worth it."

Against this backdrop, HBCU-based programs attempted to increase Black student enrollment in library schools. After chairing the 1967 ALA Ad Hoc Committee on Opportunities for Negro Students in the Library Profession, Atlanta University's dean, Virginia Lacy Jones, wrote,

Of the 9,204 graduates of 25 accredited library schools from 1962 through 1966, it was estimated that there were 372 or four per cent Negroes. When Atlanta University . . . is eliminated, there is a total of 9,002 library school graduates, with an estimated 190 or two per cent being Negroes. (Virginia Lacy Jones Papers, Box 4, Folder 3)

And yet some ad hoc committee members expressed concerns regarding Black students' abilities to thrive in library schools, citing that these pupils lacked "sufficient scope and depth in the liberal arts and in many cases failed to develop adequate facility in oral and written expression." Unsurprisingly, the suggestion was to make "provisions for the necessary remedial work required to raise the scholarship level of Negro students with deficiencies" (Virginia Lacy Jones Papers, Box 4, Folder 3).

The slights were consistent, as demonstrated in the records of (Clark) Atlanta University's 1987 program reaccreditation. For example, COA committee member Dr. Doralyn Hickey raised concerns in the letter below (ALA COA Archives, Clark-Atlanta University, 1987 Comprehensive Review):

Dear Agnes,

Just a note to let you know that I reviewed the Lee/Summers comments on the Atlanta University situation. My only caveat would be that it seems a bit terse. I am assuming that a more "friendly" communication will accompany the summary in the form of your cover letter.

Apropos of this, I wonder whether the format used for the COA evaluation (comment paralleled with the related "standard") is designed more for internal use than for distribution to the institution. I am wondering if the Lee statement, in this case, should be recast into a letter, retaining the original statement to use if further justification of the "concerns" is needed.

Well, it was a thought, anyhow . . .

Sincerely,

Doralyn

Dean, University of North Texas
School of Library Service

Nonetheless, other COA reviewers found the harsh comments to be adequate, as evidenced by Andrew H. Horn's note on the review:

Dear Bill,

I'm sorry I didn't get around to a "prompt response" to your August 20 memo with the enclosure about Atlanta University. However, it doesn't seem to matter because the statement sounds clear, fair, and full. How could it be improved?

Hastily,

Andrew H. Horn

Dean, UCLA

School of Library Service

Alabama A&M University hardly fared better (ALA COA Archives, AAMU, Box 31). This program also rebutted punitive remarks from COA members. In a copiously organized letter, Dr. Carl H. Marbury took umbrage to what he felt was condescension toward AAMU's library school program, students and especially faculty. COA remarks included the following:

Missing in this faculty is intellectual incisiveness, identification and articulation of problems, the planning and studies to problem solution, and effective change. There seems to be an unawareness of issues in librarianship broadly conceived to include relevant concepts of information science, as well as issues in instructional technology. It is therefore recommended that a vigorous effort be made through recruitment to replace faculty members not meeting standard for teaching and research.

The program's dean, who happened to be a Harvard alum, replied, "To label an entire group of professional faculty members in such intolerant terms as indicated above seems highly

unwarranted as a result of a three-day encounter. . . . If such attitudes are held by select visiting team members, then their perceptions could have been expressed in less inflammatory and deleterious terms.”

In discussing racial attitudes in the library profession, DuMont’s (1986b) historical review was limited with respect to the extent to which prejudice manifested as discrimination in library policy, procedures, and practice. Based on our review of various archival records, library schools at HBCU institutions demonstrated the potential for a collectively rich presence in library education, particularly during the 1970s.³ Yet these programs faced discrimination as they pursued ALA accreditation. The opinion of many was that “Blacks could and should go to Black library schools and work in Black libraries with Black patrons” (Peterson, 1996, p. 169). As problematic as this segregationist ideal was, supporting HBCUs would have furthered the very goal of keeping the library field separate along racial lines. Instead, evidence suggests that Black students and HBCU institutions faced obstruction when it came to seeking inclusion in library education.

Conclusion

A lot has changed since DuMont’s publications on HBCUs and racial attitudes in LIS education. Indeed, HBCUs, LIS education, and US society have all progressed. There is greater awareness of structural inequality and institutional bias toward HBCUs. The library and information science field continues to confront power, privilege, and equality as extensions of the information industry and higher education. We now have better frameworks and data to understand the structures that contribute to the subjugation of racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States, in particular. And there have been critical works on the development and current state of LIS education—specifically, Hansson (2019), Cox (2010), and Swigger (2010), though there is little mention of racial and ethnic representation and inclusion in the LIS professions in these works, nor is there any mention of programs at HBCUs. While critical race theory and curricular diversity are amplified in Percell, Sarin, Jaeger, and Bertot’s (2018) anthology, the important, broader racial equity and pedagogical work of HBCUs in LIS remains unstated within the LIS research milieu. To truly arrive at an anti-racist, plural, and socially responsible profession, LIS educators and leaders should coalesce these parts—that is, frameworks, critical theory, comprehensive studies—into actionable efforts—specifically, partnerships, pathways, and curricula—that are rooted in racial realism. The field must also scrutinize social norms that culminate in injustices—notably, the weaponization of accreditation.

It is also important to note that LIS programs have been susceptible to closures and downgrades among both schools and departments over the years. In fact, between 1978 and 1994, 16 LIS schools closed (Johnson, 2019). There were several reasons offered for the closures, ranging from student enrollment to financial exigency and the perception of the value of LIS as a discipline, but there are still many unanswered questions (Johnson, 2019). As a result, LIS faculty have been vocal about the lack of transparency among university administrators. Paris (1991) has chided the profession for being silent on school closures and contended that there needs to be action from the field to hold school authorities accountable for decisions on closures.

The School of Library and Information Science at Columbia University announced its intent to close in 1990 when Provost Jonathan R. Cole said that keeping the school “can

come only at the cost of sacrificing greater priorities” (Saxon, 1990, p. 2). Stating that the school is “valuable but not vital,” the university urged the consolidation of their renowned rare book and book conservation programs with another library science program. Other schools, like the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Library and Information Science, were in danger of closing in the early 1990s; in the UCLA case, an agreement was made between SLIS and the School of Education to become the Graduate School Education and Information Studies. While there may be underlying issues for an administrator’s decision to close or downgrade a school, we argue here that privately funded HBCUs, where funding is primarily reliant on endowments, would have experienced even greater disadvantages during this season of closures.

Moreover, while there is no direct evidence of systemic discrimination against HBCUs regarding funding of public institutions, these schools have struggled with unequal and inadequate public funding since their establishment during Jim Crow. Since publicly funded schools receive the majority of their revenue from state and federal funding, and as states tighten their budgets on higher-education spending, we can infer that HBCUs would receive marginal funding compared to other institutions. A study from the University of Notre Dame points to racial discrimination as the reason that HBCUs pay higher tax-exempt bonds than PWIs (Harris, 2018).

DuMont’s 1986 articles set out to provide a historical overview of Blacks in librarianship and LIS education. However, there were several missing links. A close examination of DuMont’s 1986 articles led to our discovery of oppressive accreditation practices that eliminated HBCUs from mainstream LIS education. Often, efforts at higher education “legitimacy” are merely epistemic violence grounded in racial categorization. It can thus be said that the LIS field has used accreditation as an apparatus to distinguish professional qualifications and disqualifications along racial lines. Continued notions of PWI (predominantly White institution) exceptionality and HBCU inferiority persist, as some LIS instructors remain misinformed about HBCUs. This was made apparent by an incident in which one of the authors was warned by an LIS colleague that a neighboring HBCU was low-grade. The colleague was demonstrably wrong, as the HBCU in question is a research-intensive institution that places among the largest producers of Black medical professionals in the United States and boasts among its alumni numerous African American political leaders, actors, athletes, and scientists. This incident was especially unfortunate given that the LIS program recruited from this particular HBCU and several others.

Despite these types of prejudices, there have been some strides. In 2019, Loretta Parham, CEO of the Robert Woodruff Center Library (an HBCU consortium library), became the first African American to serve as the chair of the ALA Committee on Accreditation. That same year, Chicago State University achieved initial accreditation from ALA, making it one of two current ALA-accredited programs in the country to serve a primarily African American student body.⁴ In 2019, ALISE members voted to extend institutional membership to non-ALA-accredited LIS programs, making it easier for non-traditional programs to receive adequate peer support to flourish during the developing stages, especially.

We must also emphasize that our intent is not to aggrandize HBCUs; like higher education institutions writ large, HBCUs vary in size, scope, and effectiveness. It is well

documented that some HBCUs faced fiscal and academic challenges, particularly in the early 2000s (Coupet & Barnum, 2010; Freeman & Cohen, 2001). As we described, Clark Atlanta University experienced these struggles. HBCUs also encountered questions of relevance as PWIs began to deeply invest in students of color (Gasman & Collins, 2014). Nonetheless, there appears to be a resurgence of HBCU support and enrollment. Factors that have recently served to fortify HBCUs include the substantial increase in federal funding under the Obama administration (Gasman & Collins, 2014) and the reliably racially polarizing rhetoric that defined the Trump administration (Estreet, Jones, & Freeman, 2017).

We hope this article has shed light on how African American librarians, along with HBCU library schools, historically faced unfair scrutiny from both the LIS professoriate and/or ALA bureaucrats. There are some pressing questions that we cannot answer here but that warrant deep study: Why aren't LIS programs being developed across HBCUs or predominantly Black institutions (PBIs)? Or might there be an opportunity to revitalize HBCU-based LIS programs such as those of Hampton University and Clark Atlanta University? Should the profession examine ALA accreditation standards? How can we embrace and support the programs at NCCU and Chicago State University? To what extent is library and information science viable and visible as a career option to students at minority-serving institutions more generally?

Increasing racial diversity in all aspects of the library professions will require greater understanding of, and partnerships with, not just HBCUs and PBIs but Hispanic-serving institutions, Asian American, and Native Pacific Islander-serving institutions, as well as Tribal Colleges. Through earnest and culturally responsive partnerships as opposed to mere recruitment, US LIS programs can make great progress in addressing the critical shortage of librarians of color.

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Notes

1. Minority-serving institutions are postsecondary educational institutions that serve primarily ethnic and racial minority groups. These federally recognized colleges and universities are unique in both their missions and operations.
2. Through Dr. E. J. Josey's leadership, the University of Pittsburgh later became a leader in recruiting and educating Black library school students.
3. Indeed, HBCUs continue to advance racial inclusion in LIS, as is the case with North Carolina Central University. HBCUs also educate a significant proportion of the nation's Black undergraduate students who transition to PWI graduate programs.
4. Since Chicago State University began to serve African American students beginning in 1965, it has been classified under Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as a predominantly Black institution (PBI) as opposed to a historically Black college or university.

Appendix A: Images



Figure 1: *AUSLIS Students and Faculty in class*, circa 1955 Virginia Lacy Jones Collection, Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library

Identifier: auc.115.0026



Figure 2: Alabama A&M University library school, 1971

Seated left to right: Effie Lee Morris, Robert Wedgeworth, Virginia Lacy Jones, Clara Stanton Jones, Mary Spradling
Newspaper article
Courtesy of American Library Association Archives

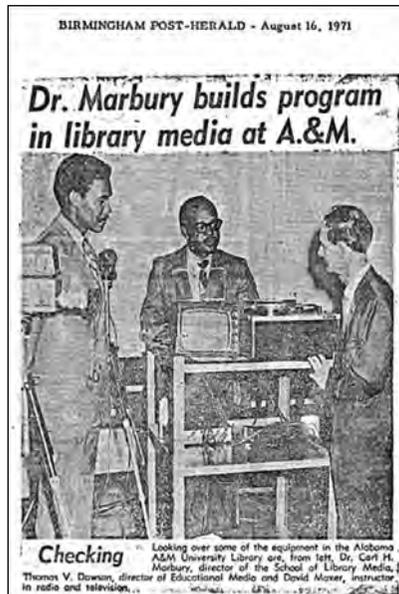


Figure 3: Virginia Lacy Jones and others, 1973, Virginia Lacy Jones Collection, Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library

Identifier: auc.115.0032

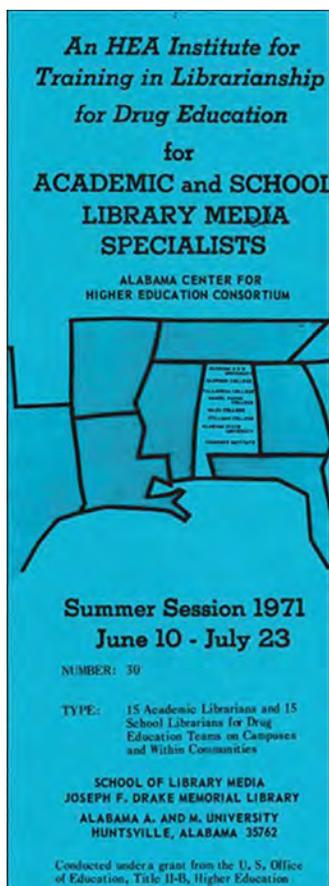


Figure 4: Alabama A&M University library school, 1971 Brochure
Courtesy of American Library Association Archive

Appendix B: Archival sources

1. American Library Association Archives (all housed at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

Alabama A&M University School of Library Media Accreditation, 1967-1980: Reports, reviews and correspondences. Closed Programs, Alabama-Oregon, 1967-80. (Box 31).

Unaccredited Programs: District of Columbia, University of, 1972-80. (Box 32).

Unaccredited Programs: District of Columbia, University of, Self-Study, 1973. (Box 32).

North Carolina Central University: Reports, reviews and correspondences. (Box 31).

Committee on Accreditation. Atlanta University, 1980-87 (Box 77).

Committee on Accreditation. Clark-Atlanta University–Comprehensive Review, 1987 (Box 77).

Committee on Accreditation. North Carolina Central University Library School Report, 1976-1985. (Box 73).

2. Virginia Lacy Jones Papers. (1967). Committee Report Ad Hoc Committee on Opportunities for Negro Library Students. Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Archives.