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Title: Critical Perspectives on Diversity and Equality in U.S. LIS Practice: Four HBCU-affiliated Leaders Weigh in

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Abstract:

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have trained Black librarians and strengthened the library profession since 1927 when the first HBCU-based library school was founded at Hampton University. However, HBCU professors, library directors, and alumni are often overlooked in conversations on librarian professionalization. In this article, four distinguished HBCU-affiliated library leaders provide critical perspectives on LIS practice. Their collective insight illustrates the value of HBCUs in LIS and demonstrates opportunities for new directions.

Keywords: LIS professionalization, racial diversity, social justice, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), critical conversations

Paper type: Research

1 Introduction:

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are instrumental to racial representation and inclusion in U.S. higher education. Besides providing higher learning in the face of injustice, these campuses have also functioned as sites of resistance and social justice. For more than 100 years, HBCUs were virtually the only avenues for African Americans to attain advanced education. Today, they foster a third of African Americans or Blacks who earn Bachelor's degrees in the U.S. In terms of collective value, HBCUs are shown to strengthen economic opportunity, upward mobility, and cultural pride among African Americans (Bettez and Suggs 2012; Brown and Davis 2001) Bettez and Suggs 2012; Brown and Davis 2001. Nearly 300,000 students, approximately 80% of whom are African American and 70% from low-income families, are currently enrolled at HBCUs (United Negro College Fund 2014). These campuses also provide a solid basis for post-secondary academic achievement among Black S.T.E.M. professionals. Data from the National Science Foundation indicates that the conferring of the vast majority of African American medical professionals and PhDs in science and engineering between 2002 and 2011 was owed to eight HBCU institutions (United Negro College Fund 2014).

HBCUs are a significant part of the Black college experience as portrayed within the popular U.S. Black cultural imagery, including well-known media such as the hit 1990s sitcoms *A Different World* and *The Cosby Show*; Spike Lee's catalogue of films; documentaries like PBS's *Tell them we are rising: The story of historically Black colleges and universities*; musical works such as Beyonce's 2018 Coachella performance and a subsequent Netflix documentary; and the fictional works Chester Himes and other writers. Marybeth Gasman's research substantiates the benefits of HBCU institutional missions and epistemologies (Gasman 2013; Gasman et al. 2010; Gasman and Jennings 2006). Together with Arroyo, Gasman designed the HBCU-inspired framework for Black students that can potentially shift library and information science education (Arroyo and Gasman 2014). It should be noted that there have been five library science programs at HBCU institutions. North Carolina Central University School of Library and Information Science is the sole remaining HBCU-based ALA-accredited LIS program. The closing of the Clark Atlanta University (CAU) School of Library and Information Science significantly impacted the matriculation of African American students into the library profession. More than 15 years later, there are ongoing discussions (Ndumu and Rollins 2020) on the need to foster partnerships between LIS programs and HBCUs.

The struggle for racial equality continues, as evidenced in 2020 by the staggering U.S. coronavirus disparities coupled with a string of racist killings of African Americans that sparked mass public outcry. The time is ripe to explore taken-for-granted methods for achieving racial and ethnic empowerment and visibility in the LIS field. Rather than focusing predominantly on multiculturalism in service models or inviting people of color into the workforce, the field must also reflect on what can be gleaned from Black or African American experts. The purpose of this article is, thus, to capture the experiences of LIS leaders who attest to the positive role that HBCUs played in their professional trajectories. Indeed, LIS has been strengthened through the work of HBCU-affiliated alumni, librarians, and educators (Ndumu and Chancellor 2021). As countercultural and activist institutions, HBCUs, especially through pedagogical and social cultivation, can contribute toward dismantling hegemony in LIS. Despite a solid body of LIS

literature on the history of HBCU libraries and library schools (Allen and Brooks-Tatum 2014; Gravois 1995a; Gravois 1995b; Gunn 1989; Guthrie and McCoy 2012; Love 2016; Phoenix and Henderson 2016; Walker 2015), assessments of the benefits that HBCUs bring to the library and information science field are few. These institutions are rendered inconspicuous within wider LIS discourse and initiatives, a reality that underscores the field's inclination toward prioritizing mainstream universities while overlooking the innate equity work of HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) such as Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs); Tribal Colleges and Universities; Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian-serving institutions (ANNHI); and Asian American- and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI).

The goal of this paper is not to tokenize the individuals who shared their journeys; instead, it is to bring to the forefront knowledge of HBCU contributions. HBCU-affiliated leaders should be distinguished for more than simply their racial or ethnic identity, but also their professional capacities. As such, this article presents insight from four award-winning and well known library professionals, all HBCU affiliates, who demonstrate a range of library expertise and possess a combined 85 years of LIS experience. These influencers engaged in one-on-one critical conversations with the intent of encouraging new directions for the LIS field, writ large. They articulate various ways – for instance, non-dominant and anti-hegemonic leadership, pedagogy, fundraising, and research—in which Blacks, African Americans, and HBCUs enhance LIS.

2 Method:

This exploratory, qualitative study is guided by the question, “What can LIS learn from the professional experiences of HBCU-affiliated leaders?” To elicit insight, the project was structured as a critical conversation. Also known as critical transformative dialogue (Edwards Groves 2013), this methodology relies on collaborative and dialectic analysis. Exchanges between the interviewee and interviewer (or facilitator and participants when conducted in group settings) are strategic, introspective, and interrogative (Kristiansson 2007). Critical conversations can help renew professional practice (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2013; Kristiansson 2007). The technique is increasingly utilized in diversity-oriented and action based LIS research – as seen, for instance, with the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* special issue “Getting it on the record: Faculty of color in Library and Information Science”; Ceja Alcalá, Colon-Aguirre, Cooke, and Stewart's testimonies of being LIS faculty of color; and Honma's dialogue on women of color in LIS with noted scholar, Clara M. Chu (Ceja Alcalá et al. 2017; Honma 2018).

The researcher's critical conversations or critical transformative dialogues with four HBCU-affiliated leaders are important in light of the 2020 uprisings condemning racist murders across the U.S., and the subsequent calls for anti-racist and anti-oppressive social antidotes. Structured, reflective discussions can potentially further the type of transformed mental models that might actuate change within disciplines like LIS that traditionally lack racial inclusion and equality. New ideological paradigms that are necessary to stretch LIS and all of the institutions that the field touches: libraries, galleries, archives, museums, municipalities, and educational environments.

Four leaders were invited to participate in the study based on their widely-recognized experience within both the HBCU and LIS domains. Selection was therefore purposive or based on the researcher's judgment of expertise (Etikan, Abubakar Musa, and Sunusi Alkassim 2016).

Interviews took place in March 2019 and lasted between one-and-a-half to 2 h; two were conducted face-to-face in North Carolina and two via Skype. Participants were asked seven identical questions, as specified and emboldened in the discussion section. The interview questions were intended to explore professional journeys, reactions to diversity initiatives, and critical perspectives on new directions. The researcher transcribed, organized, and synthesized responses as vignettes. The vignette approach allows researchers to distill complex participant accounts (Barter and Renold 1999; Hughes 1998). Vignettes are suitable for thematic studies that encourage criticality (Heldbjerg and van Liempd 2018) and engage with social topics (Jackson et al. 2015). Participant narratives were streamlined for coherence. For example, the researcher standardized terminology. In this article, the term “Black” is in keeping with the current U.S. Census racial definition for people who identify with any Black racial group with historic origins in Africa. Where possible, distinctions are made between racial categories (e.g., Black, White, Native American, Asian, Middle Eastern) versus ethnic groups (e.g., African American, African, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin). “Pan-African” or “Black diasporic” describe Black ethnic groups as a collective. “People of color” is an aggregate term describing non-White racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.

Participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews and drafts of the manuscript to ensure reporting fidelity. The critical conversation method relies on respondents' subjective knowledge and worldviews. It is thus limited in that it cannot be said to represent the entire population of HBCU-affiliated librarians or library leaders.

It is also vital to clarify the researcher's position relative to this study. The project was guided by an interest in Black diasporic identity, libraries, demography, and social inclusion. This focus is influenced in part by many years of experience as an academic librarian at an HBCU institution. The researcher transitioned to academia and is affiliated with an MLIS program at a predominantly White institution (henceforth, PWI); their research agenda and scholarship are decidedly Afrocentric. The researcher believes that the LIS workforce can move toward reflecting the nation's ethnoracial plurality through other ways-of knowing, for example, through non-dominant research topics and tactics that counter monocultural empiricism. The aim of this study is to arrive at new occupational contexts by centering HBCU-affiliated leaders' identities and expertise. The recommendations may contribute toward philosophical and demographic change within the LIS field and might add to ideas on transforming libraries' standings within communities.

3 Discussion:

3.1 Participants' biographies

3.1.1 Wanda Kay Brown

2019–2020 American Library Association president Wanda Kay Brown is Director of Library Services at the C.G. O'Kelly Library at Winston-Salem State University, an HBCU in Winston Salem, North Carolina where she also received a bachelor's degree. Brown went on to

earn an M.L.I.S. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Brown has been a library leader for over 30 years, holding multiple positions within the Black Caucus of the ALA, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the Association for Libraries Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS), the Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA), and the North Carolina Library Association. Brown is the 2015 recipient of the DEMCO/ALA Black Caucus Award for Excellence, the 2013 BCALA Leadership Award, and the 2012 BCALA Distinguished Service Award. In 2009, she received the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Kovacs Award for Outstanding Alumni Achievement, and in 2013 UNCG awarded Brown with the School of Education Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award.

3.1.2 Dr. Ismail Abdullahi

An Emeritus Professor of Global Library and Information Science, Dr. Abdullahi retired in 2019 after three decades of educating librarians, 27 years of which were spent at Clark Atlanta University and North Carolina Central University. He published and presented extensively on improving regional and racial representation in worldwide library and information science education. Dr. Abdullahi held several leadership roles within the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the African Librarian and Information Associations (AfLIA) along with the American Library Association, and is the recipient of numerous awards, most recently the ALA International Relations Committee's 2018 John Ames Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award and the first ever AfLIA Lifetime Achievement for African Librarianship. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Library Science from the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen, Denmark, a M.L.S. from North Carolina Central University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. He happens to have taught two of the participants in this study: Tina Rollins and Kaetrena Davis Kendrick.

3.1.3 Kaetrena Davis Kendrick

Kendrick is the Dean of Ida Jane Dacus Library and Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections at Winthrop University. She earned an M.S.L.S. from the historic Clark Atlanta University School of Library and Information Studies, which until 2005 was the oldest HBCU-based LIS program in existence. Kendrick's research interests include professionalism, ethics, racial, and ethnic diversity in the LIS field along with the role of communities of practice in academic librarianship. She is co-editor of *The Small and Rural Academic Library: Leveraging Resources and Overcoming Limitations* (Kendrick and Tritt 2016) and author of two annotated bibliographies. In addition to her research and writing, Kendrick also leads professional development opportunities and organizational dialogues designed to energize employee morale and promote empathetic leadership in North American libraries. In her daily and long-term work, Kendrick has transformed library programs, services, and culture via creativity, compassion, leadership, and advocacy. In 2019, Kendrick was named the Association of College and Research Libraries' Academic/Research Librarian of the Year.

3.1.4 Tina Rollins

Tina D. Rollins is the Director of the William R. and Norma B. Harvey Library at Hampton University. She earned a bachelor's in Criminal Justice at Old Dominion University and an M.L.S. at the only remaining HBCU-based LIS program at North Carolina Central University, where she participated in the Diversity Scholars Program. Rollins specializes in racial inclusion and representation in information literacy, outreach services, and professional development. A successful fundraiser, Rollins has been a principal investigator on several federally-funded projects totaling more than \$500,000, including two IMLS grants for the Hampton University Forum on Minority Recruitment and Retention in the LIS Field and another two National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grants. Rollins holds several leadership positions within regional and national library associations, most notably, the HBCU Library Alliance Executive Board. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Higher Educational Leadership and is an Adjunct Professor at the Syracuse University iSchool.

3.2 Participants' responses:

3.2.1 How did you Become a Librarian?

Abdullahi: I started my library education in Denmark in the 1980s. I was recruited by the director of the library school, Dr. Preben Kirkegaard. He was essentially a chancellor since the Royal School of Library and Information Science is equivalent to a university in Denmark. It had more than 1,000 students and was the library institution for the entire country. Dr. Kirkegaard was also the president of IFLA at the time. I was working in the library as an assistant or paraprofessional, and happened to be the only Black person in the library. There were not many Black people in Denmark to begin with; I was an Ethiopian refugee. We chatted and he asked if I was interested in library science. I answered yes, and he asked if I could come to Copenhagen. At the time, I lived in the second largest city called Aarhus. I was admitted right away to the library school and graduated with a Library Science degree.

Brown: I was a student here [at Winston-Salem State University]. This is my alma mater. I was certified to teach English but I did not have the greatest student teaching experience. I also didn't not want to leave Winston-Salem. As I began to ponder what I was going to do, I thought, "Well, I have to have a job or my Mama and Daddy are going to make me come home." I went to the career services office and the representative wanted to know what I had done, or my work experiences. I said, "Well, while in undergraduate, I worked in the library for three years." And her response was "You know, there's a city-funded position for minorities [people of color] at Wake Forest University's library." It was 1977 and Wake Forest was trying to get more people of color to work on their campus. She added, "It requires a master's degree but it's not too late. They have only a week left to fill the position or they lose it." I applied and was invited to interview. During the interview, I happened to mention, "By the way, if this position isn't filled by such a date, you'll lose the money." Basically, I repeated what the career counselor told me. It worked. I got the job. My position was paid by a separate agency the first year. At the end of that year, they promoted me as a full-time employee. By the end of the second year, I knew I really liked working in an academic library and decided to go to library school. So I enrolled at UNCG [the

University of North Carolina at Greensboro] while working full-time. That's the door that led me here.

Kendrick: I didn't start right after my undergrad experience nor was I thinking "I'm going to be a librarian." That didn't come to me until much later, after I worked in other fields. I had been employed in libraries and people had been saying, "Kaetrena, you should become a librarian." But, actually, I was actively resisting that. It wasn't until after I worked in the non-profit sector for a few years that I decided I was tired of having a series of jobs. I wanted a career or something that I could work towards. There were two things that I thought about: "What do I like?" and "What areas or actions make me happy?" Those two things are, first, communicating clearly and helping others do the same through writing and studying language. The other factor was the environment that I like. I always felt very comfortable in libraries. For me, I had not had any negative experiences in those spaces. I had worked in a library as a paraprofessional for a number of years. I applied to two graduate degree programs in Atlanta. One was a communications program, and the other one was the Clark Atlanta School of Library Information Science. I said to myself, "Whomever contacts me first, I'll choose. I'd be equally happy with either of those outcomes." Clark Atlanta and the other school admitted me at the same time, but the other school wanted me to start later. I wanted to start as soon as possible. That's how I attended Clark Atlanta University and became a librarian. I graduated in 2004, which was the penultimate class.

Rollins: I had a number of jobs before becoming a librarian but I've always been connected with libraries in some way. Right before going to library school, I taught middle school English for about four years because my undergraduate minor was in English. I wanted to do something else and became a permanent substitute teacher. Neither was the right environment for me. All the while, I was still working part-time within libraries or bookstores. I eventually landed a job at Virginia State University in the serials department and really liked it a lot. Working in the serials department introduced me to quite a few people. One of those people was the department head, Tessa Perry, who said she knew of a program at North Carolina Central University. She conversed with me one day and said, "I noticed that you have always worked in libraries. Why don't you consider it as a career?" It was funny because my mom and my best friend had been telling me that for years. In defiance, I kept saying, "I won't be a librarian!" My grandmother used to tell me, "Tina, you read so much? I hope one day you find a job where they pay you to read." Of course, we know that librarians do anything but read on the job, but we give the gift of reading to people every day. What's really interesting is that in high school, I received a scholarship through our local Walter Cecil Rawls library system. It was a \$3,000 academic scholarship that I used for college. So, I've always felt a sort of serendipity with librarianship. It has been my purpose all along.

After I had that conversation with my boss, I applied to the program of North Carolina Central and was accepted. I loved it and felt at home. I even studied International Librarianship one summer in Copenhagen with Dr. Abdullahi. While at NCCU, I worked full-time in the cataloging department at UNC Chapel Hill. Later, I accepted a position as the assistant head of technical services at Hampton, where I am now the library director.

3.2.2 We're Witnessing an Exciting Moment in American Librarianship in Which There Have Been Four Consecutive ALA Presidents of Color: Loida Garcia Febo, Wanda Brown [Yourself], Julius Jefferson, and Patty Wong. The Two African American Library Leaders Happen to be HBCU Alumni. Additionally, the Robert Woodruff Library, an HBCU Consortium Library, was Recently Awarded the Association for College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Library of the Year and Two HBCU Affiliates, Loretta Parham and Kaetrena Davis Kendrick [You], Have Been Named ACRL Librarians of the Year. How Would You Describe the Historic and Current Link Between Black or African American Library Leaders and HBCUs?

Kendrick: I think [the HBCU link] provides a sense of community. When I tell people where I graduated from, I purposefully say that it is the historic Clark Atlanta University library school because it is my lineage in terms of education. I'm incredibly proud to be connected with people like Dr. Eliza Gleason, Dr. Virginia Lacy Jones, Dr. Robert Wedgeworth, A.P. Marshall, and, of course, Dr. Ismail Abdullahi who continues to be a guiding force in my daily work and scholarship. All of these people come out of the HBCU tradition. So the HBCU and LIS link, for me, is powerful.

Rollins: I think the connection lies in the family atmosphere, mentorship, and encouragement. At HBCUs, you're nurtured by the housekeeper, cafeteria workers, security guards, police officers, instructors, and administrators. I attended a PWI for undergrad. There were only two professors that I felt a connection with. At an HBCU, students have many mentors and the campus is a village. Everybody has a stake in your doing well. When it comes to HBCU library directors, even among those that didn't get their library science degrees at an HBCU like Clark Atlanta or NCCU, we still feel and believe in that sense of community and purpose. It is instilled in us, too, and it drives us. And we need that ourselves, especially with being in a field that is so homogenous. HBCU alumni and staff draw on the cultural lessons we've been taught in order to be successful. I know, personally, I am so happy and fortunate to have started my leadership career at an HBCU because I have been able to make mistakes and not feel inferior, fearful, or constantly on pins and needles. Here, people in high administrative levels have mentored me. I can speak to them about anything. They know what I'm trying to do; they see the vision. They're willing to support me in any way. So I've been so fortunate to start my career here because I don't feel pressure and can be authentic.

Abdullahi: HBCUs instill in their students confidence and self-understanding. I'm not saying that other schools [PWI]s don't do that, but they might distract the attention of the students – for example, as a result of discrimination, neglect, other social problems that students should not have to deal with while studying. There are distractors because the institutions have not prepared themselves to fully accommodate students of color. Sometimes they [other institutions] do not even provide faculty with the right kinds of accommodations. There are still holes in many ways, either with personnel or institutional norms or policy [at PWIs]. Those are distractors that sometimes prevent students from growing. For HBCU students, the experience is different, even if imperfect.

We also have a lot of Caucasian students here at NCCU. They also interact across the board without fear. Many have told me, “I learned so much about diversity here.” For Caucasian

students, it also eliminates the barriers that society places. So, HBCUs serve two purposes: we celebrate diversity at its fullest, in my opinion. Students who graduate from here, even those who are Caucasian, also become advocates because they understand the value of social justice and also gain friends. You understand? That is what HBCUs give to students. Yes – it gives them peace. They learn in an environment that is non-threatening.

Brown: Whether you work at an HBCU or a PWI, leadership just comes from people in general who take a strong stance in what they believe in and what they want to do. I tell people that the driving force for me early on was that I wanted to make sure that there was somebody who looked like me also sitting around the table making decisions. I wanted to make sure that what I brought to the table, I brought it in the best manner than I could. I was equally driven when I worked at Wake Forest as I am now [at Winston Salem State University]. Take E.J. Josey, for instance; I'm not sure whether he ever worked at an HBCU [note: Dr. E.J. Josey directed the Delaware State University library] but he was all about African American pride and leadership. And I think that that is what students get at an HBCU: pride in being all that you can be.

Let me take you to a different time. Black communities had their own stuff: their own barbershops; their own stores that they could hang out at; cleaners that were run by Blacks; and schools that were maintained by Blacks. There is pride in having your own, even though desegregation was the right and humane thing to do, and that's what HBCUs represent: your own. Let me see. I think I have a book. [searches through a bookshelf and points to a cover] This is a book of African Americans in Congress between 1870 and 1989 at a time where there were few of us in positions of authority. One thing you see when you look at these leaders is pride, pride in who they were and what they brought to the table. And I contend that that is what's missing in some young people today. A lot of times it is because they are not hearing it. They are not going to schools where they hear that our people are great. Pride.

3.2.3 Tell me About Your Journey to Becoming a Leader

Brown: It's relatively simple, actually. My first boss, the one who hired me at Wake Forest University, took me with her to a professional gathering of academic librarians through the North Carolina Library Association's College and University section. No one looked like me [as a woman of color]. Nobody. And I thought, “Wanda, you can change this.” And so I started out by volunteering. That was my first introduction to professional development here in North Carolina. I joined different committees and just served, but it was always at the back of my mind, “How could I get more people of color to become involved in service?”

I later met John Tyson while on a trip to the University of Virginia. He was very instrumental in the Black Caucus. He said, “I haven't seen you within the Black Caucus. I want you to come to a meeting.” So I went. It was there that I really, really just fell in love with giving back. I simply enjoy leadership and development. I ran for treasurer and was elected. I served two terms on the BCALA Board. The more I worked, the more I believed in the profession, the values that we share, and the joy that comes from serving others. So I gradually began taking on more responsibilities – the finance committee of this group, secretary of that group, and so on.

One day I was in an ALA session and they were looking for somebody to be chair of the Association for Libraries Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) and I said, "I think I can do it." The people in the room voted and I was elected. I thought, "That was incredibly easy." I started telling people that most of the time opportunities are there. It's important to step up and say yes, if you can. If you enjoy enacting change and being a visionary, then there are great opportunities for leadership in the library profession. And we need more leaders of color.

Kendrick: I became a leader by doing my work and trying to do it well while shutting down false notions of external competition. One of my colleagues always says, "I don't know what they're going to do, but I know what I am going to do." That's my mentality. I'm focused on the mission of the library, and I am very student-centered. I find great power in that. My career experience has taught me that the presence of a formal leader is not indicative that leadership is occurring, and that observation has spurred me to, as Roxane Gay shares, "find a way to lead by example." I have standards for myself personally and professionally. My goal is to always meet those standards. My other focus is scholarship and research, and I work diligently to find methodologies that speak to my goal of getting to the heart of under-observed issues in the field. If I am perceived as a research leader, it is due to my desire to ask our colleagues "Are we really who we say we are? Are we really doing what we say we want to do – for instance, help people? Are the spaces and systems in which we work really for everyone? Are we brave enough to fix where we fall short?" Most of my work stems from general and specific observations of colleagues where I've seen obvious and subtle gaps in values and practice.

Abdullahi: After library school, I started to work in Copenhagen. I was an advocate for people of color, particularly immigrants because the country welcomed a lot of migrants from Morocco, Turkey, the Middle East, and so on. I was active in IFLA when I graduated. I attended IFLA for the first time in 1979, and then attended a second time in 1980 when it was in Montreal, Canada. I participated in a panel. There were attendees from South Africa, England, Canada in the audience. At that time South Africa was under apartheid rule. I spoke very critically of their racist system. People were very unhappy with my presentation. However, there were four people in the audience who agreed with me. This is the picture [points to a photograph of himself, E.J. Josey, Robert Wedgeworth, and John Tyson on the wall]. Can you see them? One of the men stood up and said, "I am E.J. Josey. Well, I totally agree with what this gentleman from Denmark has said. We are facing the same problem in the United States. There is prejudice and discrimination and libraries have to stand up." And all of the audience fell quiet, even the panel. Afterward, the men came to me and asked if I could join them for dinner. I had heard of Dr. Josey but this was my first time meeting him. We exchanged information and, after IFLA, I invited him to Europe. He came to Denmark and gave a presentation since he knew Dr. Kirkegaard. Soon, Dr. Josey said "Maybe it would be good if you came to the U.S. to earn your Master's in Library and Information Science." He said, "Ismail, we need more activists like you and, besides, there aren't very many people like you in Copenhagen."

So I attended North Carolina Central University. I completed the program in one year. At that time, Dr. Josey became a professor at the University of Pittsburgh and needed a graduate assistant. He recruited me to the Ph.D. program. After I earned my Ph.D. in 1989, I went to the University of Southern Mississippi to teach. Then I took a position at Clark Atlanta in 1992. When that school closed in 2005, I came here [to North Carolina Central University]. I was the

only faculty member to continue teaching and transition to NCCU. All of my colleagues at Clark Atlanta University retired. All along, I have been active in IFLA, the Black Caucus, ALA, and so forth. I take students to Denmark on a study abroad trip every year. Dr. Josey is the reason I became a leader.

Rollins: I wanted to come back to Virginia, which is home to me. A position happened to open at Hampton for an assistant director of technical services, which fit my background in cataloging. Truthfully, I had always wanted to be a library director because I know that in order to make changes and bring about new ideas, I had to be in a decision-making capacity. I saw myself in a position of leadership one day. And I learned a lot of that when I was teaching, especially when I was frustrated but couldn't really can't make changes. The technical services assistant director position was a great segue for me to get into leadership. It just so happened that two years into the position, the director left. All along, she had been training me. Over time, I learned how to do her job. It was so subtle that I didn't even recognize it until she told me. It was succession planning. One day she just laid it all out and said, "Hey, I'm going to recommend you for my job. I'm leaving." I immediately thought, "They're not going to hire me. I've only been here for two years." I went through the entire interview process and simply said, "This is my vision." They ended up hiring me. My mentor molded me into a leader, it turned out.

3.2.4 Although Diversity Initiatives Have Been a Part of LIS for Decades, Some Would say there is now Energized and Substantive Work Around Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. What Excites you? What Worries you?

Kendrick: What excites me is that people are now looking at systems and not just people of color. We're doing anti racism and anti-oppression work and looking at the experiences, retention, recruitment and advancement of librarians of color whereas before there was a focus on numbers. Before, the question was "Why aren't librarians of color coming?" or "How can we get them to come?" Now, people are paying attention to privilege, whiteness, historiographies, and behaviors that harm racial and ethnic diversity. That's exciting to me. Also, library schools are working to figure out ways to bring undergraduates to the field. For example, many programs are now offering Bachelor's degrees in librarianship or information science.

The thing that I'm worried about is that the numbers are not moving. I wonder if the anti-racism and white privilege work that is being applied now to EDI is too late. I wonder whether we're going to be able to connect with groups that would diversify the field. I'm hoping that these things will connect to them. And maybe we can use this anti-marginalization work to market those programs. I think we can say "This is a field for you not only because we need representation, but also because we are working on taking down systems that keep you from being recruited and retained and advanced in the field."

Rollins: I get excited when people talk about strategy and action, which is what I aimed for with the IMLS-funded Hampton Minority Recruitment & Retention Conference. I'll give you another example: partnerships like the HBCU Library Alliance and Digital Library Federation that have allowed us to build capacity and secure joint funding. We've also been able to pave the way for undergraduate HBCU students to work in preservation departments at schools like Yale. I like collaboration and partnership. We've got to do better to partner and seek grants. I

appreciate that our PWI colleagues are inviting us into projects. There is a drive toward earnest conversation and action as opposed to the mentality of “we just need diversity.” Those conversations should always be authentic. I also like that we're having discussions on the concept of white supremacy. White privilege is being called out. We need to have those uncomfortable conversations so that we're all more aware. I'm glad that there has been drive towards that.

Abdullahi: Library science education is drastically different now. There is greater emphasis on technology, which will never entirely replace libraries nor librarians. I worry about this. Our priority must always be people. We have to remain true to the vision and mission of serving communities, especially Black communities. Innovation is exciting but there should always be a priority on libraries and cultural heritage institutions in LIS programs. This concerns me. For example, we do not need to lose our identity as we fortify online education. We must not lose the community aspect. That's my message. Library science is about community members coming together to discuss, understand each other, and establish networks. Understanding, community-building, discussions, these things will keep students strong and they will graduate with that strength. I wonder how online education changes the way students build community. Students must have lots of engagement with one another. [The library schools at] Clark Atlanta and North Carolina Central were built on relationships. Education is best when people gather to share and create experiences. Otherwise, students do not know one another and learning becomes just a correspondence program. The new generation of faculty must retain librarian identity in LIS programs, leadership, and advocacy.

Brown: What excites me is that people are slowly recognizing the value of having a diverse staff who look like the people who come in. To be honest, the thing that worries me is there seems to be a focus on numbers. Instead, there should also be a focus on the experience while in the LIS program. At ACRL last year, there was a workshop where a lady said, “LIS programs need to do a better job of steering people who are not right for the profession out of the profession.” That statement bothered me tremendously. Who gets to decide whether a person is the right fit for the profession? And who knows whether the problem lies in the student as opposed to the program? Also, diversity can mean many things. For example, at Winston Salem State, we have a growing number of Asian international students. Even though it is an HBCU, I am hoping to diversify our staff by hiring a librarian of Asian or Chinese descent. Essentially, we have to be specific when we talk about diversity.

3.2.5 Revitalizing HBCU-LIS Pathways is One Way of Strengthening Black Librarianship. Can You Think of Other Methods?

Rollins: First, it's important to mentor someone else behind you. We must passionately recruit people of color. We can't just wait for them. Many people are unaware of the breadth of the profession. We can talk to our co-workers who are paraprofessionals. We have to continue to connect with students. We have to tell them, “Hey, you might be interested in the field. Why don't you take a look at it?”, just like someone said to me.

Collaborating is also necessary. People sometimes think it has to be a big, grand gesture but you can start small. For example, we are collaborating with our Nursing and Health Sciences Program so that we can introduce students to Medical Librarianship. We have to figure out ways

that we can engage students on HBCU campuses. We need to research partners and build relationships with schools or programs. As you do the groundwork, make sure that whatever pipeline programs are being created, they are actually attainable for students.

Kendrick: I'm going to tell you a story to answer your question. With my first low morale study, I sent out a call for participation. I said, "I'm doing a study. This is the parameter of the study. If you feel like this is something you want to talk about, let me know." I completed other studies and shared the same message of "Hey, I'm doing the study. Come one, come all. If you feel like this is something that's interesting or important to you, share your feedback." In all of those instances, I have always asked, "What is your racial or ethnic identity?" I hardly ever received participation from African Americans or Blacks. The only times when the majority of responses for research were from people of color is when I asked them specifically and said, "This study involves people of color." This trend is very problematic. If I say "librarian," I mean all librarians. So that's one part – it appears to me that librarians of color don't tell their stories unless they are specifically invited. We separate ourselves from the larger conversations that are happening. So, then, researchers have to circle back and just talk to African Americans. For me, that's totally fine; I'm glad to be doing this work. But it is also problematic in that what it seems to tell me is that people of color have to start telling our stories when asked. When a librarian is asked about their accounts – not as a Black or Brown librarian, per se – that's an opportunity to tell their truth. We often isolate ourselves from spheres of scholarship. So people don't tell our stories because they don't know what they are. Why do we have to wait for the minority-specific research to come out when our perspectives could have been included at the beginning? There's a self-separation and Black practitioners need to start joining scholarly conversations about practice, experiences, issues, concerns, and innovations.

We need data earlier so we can be at the table when the original interventions are being created. If you are working as a Digital Humanities Librarian and you're a person of color and someone says, "I'm doing a study about digital humanities," then do the survey. That way, your voice is included. Let's strengthen our own voices in dialogues about our practice by engaging earlier in scholarship. Systems and policies won't change until our experiences are collected, turned into evidence, ethnography, and phenomenology. People of color make up 13% of the profession. What if people of color made up 13 percent of every survey? It won't be equal but it will be equitable.

Abdullahi: Students need to be more socially involved in communities of library science, such as when it comes to arguing, struggling, speaking and writing for African Americans and people of color. They must be involved. I've been active in ALA since 1985. Since I migrated to this country, I have served in many roles at ALA, including the ALA Council. In fact, I served five terms on the Council. Originally, librarians of color were very few on the Council; maybe five or six of us were there, at most. There was always talk about ALA needing more Councilors of color. Well, some of us said, "If it's going to happen, we have to do it." We established the ALA Diversity Council Caucus. Now, after maybe 12 or 13 years, the number has risen to 40 or so Councilors of color, which is almost a quarter of the ALA Council. Why? Because we worked for it and we said we have to do it. We did it as a team.

Brown: I think we can address social issues so people will see that librarians are on the frontlines. One of the missions for my ALA presidency is tackling the school-to prison-pipeline.

We'll be asking all types of libraries to come together for these mostly African American and Hispanic boys and see what is happening in our schools. Many of these young men are at risk. I don't think some libraries even think about the difference that we can make in communities on this particular issue. This is a problem that school, public, law, community college, research and HBCU libraries can all address. Black librarians can inspire strategic change.

4 Concluding Thoughts:

The purpose of this conversation was to invite HBCU-affiliated library leaders to describe why HBCUs matter to LIS. Though there is cause to celebrate these institutions and reflect on past achievements, this paper goes beyond nostalgia by discussing areas where Black or African American librarians' experiences and LIS education can be improved. Together, Wanda Brown, Dr. Ismail Abdullahi, Kendrick Davis, and Tina Rollins reified, first, the sense of community and connectivity that HBCUs bring to LIS and, secondly, precisely why Black librarians are needed in key aspects of the field. Besides injecting racial or ethnic diversity to a largely White field, librarians of color add functional and ideological richness (Ndumu and Rollins 2020) to the profession.

There were common themes among the four interviewees. All of them followed unexpected opportunities and were eventually recruited to the profession, groomed for leadership, and affirmed through their experiences on HBCU campuses. Interestingly, Abdullahi and Brown spoke of being inspired by African American library activists such as John Tyson, E.J. Josey, and Robert Wedge worth, and this influence was residual in that Abdullahi and Brown later directly and indirectly supported Kendrick and Rollins. The researcher was not aware of these generative relationships prior to the study. This dynamic underscores the importance of same-race mentors, instructors, and organizational leaders who often serve as trusted messengers. Put plainly, librarians of color should also see people like themselves represented in positions of influence. Otherwise, the LIS governance will continue to reinforce a skewed workforce stratification.

Participants' accounts also point to a global or Pan African cultural pride that might be leveraged to strengthen Black librarianship beyond the U.S. The involvement of Black librarians in IFLA was such that cross-cultural exchanges were forged, as described by Abdullahi's powerful initial meeting with Josey, Wedge worth, and Tyson. This introduction would net important gains; Abdullahi's transnational library leadership supported former students like Rollins who spoke of enrolling in his courses and taking part in a study abroad trip. Global collaborations among Black library associations are only now being realized, for example through the 2019 partnership between the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) and the African Library and Information Association and Institutions (AfLIA). Coalition building is vital for fostering the next generation of Black diasporic library leaders.

The critical dialogue method was found to encourage evaluation. Critical dialogues can inject context and uncover tacit knowledge. Through it, librarians and library educators can advance the LIS profession's outlook and culture. Brown and Davis both spoke of not necessarily waiting to be invited to participate but instead seizing opportunities for engagement. Participants articulated why creating access or pathways is important for underrepresented groups. Rollins and Abdullahi reminds us that relationships and community are germane to not only the HBCU

experience but Black librarianship. Moreover, each of the participants called for active rather than passive measures for improving the experiences of librarians of color; this proactive stance is seen in their work in establishing ambitious fundraising programs, spearheading unconventional research, penetrating spaces that lack inclusion such as the ALA Council, and cultivating radical or emancipatory initiatives such as that of the school-to prison-pipeline campaign.

This critical dialogue exercise also presented moments of counter-storytelling. Despite their great appreciation and pride in being HBCU alumni, participants challenged the romanticized idea that emerging Black library professionals must attend HBCUs to become leaders. This distinction was raised by both Davis and Brown who argued that there are many African American library leaders who did not attend HBCUs and are instead alumni or affiliates of predominantly White institutions. The salient factor, they contended, was fostering the type of alliance and support that is characteristic of HBCU campuses and broader Black diasporic or Pan African cultural traditions. Such alliances should be inter institutional. Based on participant responses, there is great value in borrowing from or collaborating with HBCUs. Rollins spoke to this type of collective action when describing the HBCU Library Alliance and Digital Library Federation's Authenticity Project.

The critical conversations with Kendrick, Abdullahi, Brown, and Rollins took place in March 2019, approximately a year before U.S. society faced the coronavirus outbreak and widespread protest in response to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. These injustices sparked renewed, fervent attention to the constancy and damage of racist social structures. In response, many called for deliberate measures to systematize anti-racism and empowerment.

Well before the seismic 2020 year that provoked public consciousness, the participants in this study shed light on the need to better understand the concepts of white supremacy and white privilege in order to undo deeply entrenched marginalization. They described root causes and solutions to racial inequities in LIS and society at large. Kendrick weighed in on philosophical shifts toward anti oppression and anti-racism along with the reality that many librarians experience low morale. Abdullahi spoke of the redemptive potential of non-threatening LIS spaces or healthy, nurturing environments. Rollins discussed the need for greater resource distribution as well as institutional and organizational allies. The work of social inclusion must be shared, she argued. Brown connected LIS to one of the most pressing social problems facing the country: the mass incarceration and policing of African American males. All of the participants stressed the importance of rethinking diversity beyond public relations and multiculturalism but as a fundamental increase in hope, respect, and opportunities for people of color. In the wake of a tumultuous period in the nation's history, communities are calling for healing and reflection through meaningful dialogue. LIS can offer wisdom in this moment—first, from the position of libraries being community anchors and, secondly, as a result of lessons learned throughout our field's own decades-long struggle to realize racial equality. The ideas shared in this article might encourage frameworks for facilitating the types of critical conversations that can inspire substantive, sustained transformation.

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