Preserving A Historic Legacy: THe HBCU Library Alliance

Loretta O'Brien Parham  
*Hampton University, Loretta.Parham@hamptonu.edu*

Janice R. Franklin Ph. D.  
*Alabama State University, jfranklin@asunet.alasu.edu*

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Preserving A Historic Legacy: The HBCU Library Alliance

by Loretta O'Brien Parham (Director of University Libraries, Hampton University) <Loretta.Parham@hamptonu.edu> and Janice R. Franklin, Ph. D. (Director of University Libraries, Alabama State University) <jfrankin@asuclt.east.lsu.edu>

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) evolved from a segregated south with a mission to educate newly freed slaves that had been emancipated after the Civil War with the promise of equal opportunity under the law as Americans. In spite of struggles to survive, historically black colleges and universities have flourished, educating thousands of professionals that have made outstanding contributions to the growth and prosperity of their country. HBCUs, and the libraries that serve their community of scholars, are today considered American treasures. The Higher Education Act of 1965 defined HBCU, and by Executive Order in 1980, the White House Initiative on HBCUs bestowed special national recognition to these 105 institutions for their value in American society. The libraries of HBCUs have supported the mission and preserved the legacy of black achievement through wealth of priceless collections that now reside within their walls. Realizing this rich heritage and the need to work together to strengthen and integrate libraries into teaching and learning activities on the campuses of their historic institutions, 96 librarians representing 101 HBCUs met in Atlanta, October 28 and 29, 2002 to answer a call for cooperation at a historic HBCU Library Initiative conference. The intent of the conference was to explore opportunities for collaboration and to strategize about ways in which more advocacy can be generated for HBCU libraries.

The Cry for Unity
The idea for the initiative grew out of a meeting in 2001 of the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET) Board of Directors. SOLINET is a membership network of 2,575+ libraries and other information organizations, working in collaboration with many partners, local to international, to provide leadership for cooperative action, improve access to information, and enable its members to effectively anticipate and address the region's needs for education, economic development, and improved quality of life. The region includes ten U.S. States, and the Caribbean.

Serving on the nine member Board were directors of two HBCU libraries, Loretta O'Brien Parham of Hampton University and Janice R. Franklin of Alabama State University. Parham and Franklin were able to observe the work of SOLINET member libraries belonging to the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL), and spoke about the need to develop a

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If Rumors Were Horses

Lyman and Ewy Newlin's son Fred Matheny Newlin, II, was elected decisively to the position of Supervisor, Town of Lewiston, New York, as of January 1, 2004. Fred has wanted to be in politics since he was a little tike. Lyman says he used to take Fred around on his trips to publishers' offices so some of us may remember him. Anyway, Lyman is obviously the power behind the throne here (or else he thinks he is). Congratulations to Fred and the whole Newlin family!

Lyman also sends word that Oliver Sita (018 SW Alice Street, Portland, Oregon 97219; 503-245-6069) has pretty much retired as a bookseller. Pull out your old Against the Grain's — this is a great history of our industry for sixteen years! There is so much that I have forgotten. Anyway, Oliver Sita was a rare bookseller in Portland Oregon, who ran Oliver's Books. Oliver used to work at Pickwick Book Store in Hollywood and for twenty years was the chief book selector for the academic approval plans of Richard Abel and his successor, B.H. Blackwell. ATG, v. 2, #2 (April, 1990, p.15) and many subsequent issues, sport an ad from Oliver's Books.

And more news from people from the past. Dick Rowe of Faxon, Rowecom and Divine fame has vacated the position of Director of Internet and Information Services for the Dean for America Campaign. (Rowe had joined the campaign for a salary of $1 a year.) According to the Boston Globe (“Tech 'negativity bubble' begins to deflate” by Scott Kirsner, 1/12/2004, Rowe “is trying to devise a way to distribute the software tools used by the Dean campaign for fund-raising and organizing to other Democratic campaigns.”

choose to make. Please enter the survey here:
http://www.informedestrategies.com/projectmuse

A fascinating read. From Frontline (volume 21, issue 02, January 17-30, 2004 —
"We have to be able to recover our costs," interview with Prof. Martin Blume, Editor-
in-Chief, American Physical Society. Blume discusses the movement toward open access
publishing, page charges for authors versus the subscription model, the Ginspurg e-print
archive, the Budapest Open Access Initiative among other models.
http://www.frontem.com/fit2102/stories/200
40130001308200.htm

Was reading through HR 2613 on the Lib-
rary of Congress Thomas Website. The bill
is called: Public Access to Science Act (In-
troduced in House) and proposes to amend
title 17, United States Code, to exclude from
copyright protection works resulting from
scientific research substantially funded by
the Federal Government.
http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query

Was talking to Paul Bazin <pbazin@providence.edu> the other day about a grisly
subscription problem and was reminded of his
and Janice Schuster's great presentation in
Charleston on "Periodicals Collection Man-
agement: Organizing, Creating, and Imple-
menting a System."

Did you see the GREAT review that the 2001
Charleston Conference proceedings got in
College and Research Libraries, January 2004,
vol65:1, p.81-82. The review is by Shelley Arlen
(University of Florida). Only problem is that my
name is listed as the editor of the book. I am
the general editor, but ROSANN BAZIRJAN
(Penn State) and VICKY SPECK (ABC-
CLIO) are the REAL editors and deserve
ALL the credit for the excellent review. Thank you, Vicky
and Rosann, for your untiring work to make the proceedings happen. Vicky and
Rosann are now working on the 2003 pro-
cesd in as we speak. And I haven't seen
the 2002 proceedings, but I believe that they are
out. Will check and get back to you all. In
the meantime, we will post information on the
Charleston Conference Website about the
proceedings.
http://www.katrina.info/conference

Ran into the sensational Michael Cooper
<info@buscainc.com> of BUSCA fame
(BUSCA means "search" in Italian, Spanish,
and Portuguese; Anyway, Busca, Inc. is located
in the heart of the Finger Lakes region. Al-
though Busca's headquarters is in Ithaca, NY,
their primary facility located in Hector, NY
serves a spectacular view of Seneca Lake and
the countryside. Did you see Jack
Montgomery's interview with Michael in the
November 2003 ATG (v.1595, p.54, 58, Well,
Garrison Kellor, host of A Prairie Home
Companion, read one of Michael's authors'
Victor W. Pearn's poems on the Writer's Al-
manac program of November 11, 2003,
Veteran's Day. The featured poem "Receiving"
was from Devil Dogs & Jarheads by Victor W.
Pearn (0-9666196-3-3, $14.95), Devil Dogs
and Jarheads is based on Pearn's training in
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Preserving A History Legacy:
from page 1

similar model to address issues perti-
nent to HBCU li-
braries. Further
exploration re-
vealed that the
HBCU library
directors and
dean had never
met as a body,
had never con-
vected to share
ideas, talk,
and network or
laugh to-
gether, and were
without a plat-
form for
advocacy. No exis-
ting organization or committee
offered an agenda or venue on
behalf of the libraries of the
designated White House HBCU
Initiative; not in the American
Library Association (ALA), not in the
Black Caucus of the
ALA (BCALA), not in the Na-
tional Association for
Equal Opportunity in Higher
Education (NAFEO), and not in the
United Negro College Fund (UNCF).
(The one ex-
ception is the "Association of 1890 Library
Deans and Directors," representing 18 land-
grant HBCU institutions.)

Upon closer examination, it was noted that
better than 70% of the HBCUs are within
the geographic region served by SOLINET. This
reality was discussed during a retreat of the
SOLINET Board. The SOLINET Board and
Kate Nevin, executive director, embraced the
idea with enthusiasm. What started out as an
airing of mutual concerns took on a different
focus that became a strategic goal of the
SOLINET Board to foster cooperation among
libraries with diverse populations in HBCUs and
the Caribbean. SOLINET provided services,
assigned staff to work on the project, and
is hosting the HBCU Library Director elec-
tronic discussion forum (edf). This dialogue,
which began November of 2001, served to engage
the library directors and the executive director of the
Council on Libraries and Information
Resources (CLIR), who along with SOLINET,
provided financial support. With funding and
the development of a strategic framework,
planning began for the first meeting of HBCU
Library directors. Eleven months later, the
HBCU Library Initiative was formally born
on Monday morning, October 28, 2002.
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Answering the Call

The goal to develop an action plan for collaboration led to the establishment of a steering committee that included HBCU librarians, and SOLINET staff under the visionary leadership of the executive director, Kate Nevin. In addition to Nevin, Parham and Franklin, other steering members included, Elsie Weatherington of Virginia State University, Emma Perry of Southern University A&M, Tommy Holton of Dillard College, and Jennifer Bliss, HBCU Project Director at SOLINET. They also included Sandra Phoenix, SOLINET Grant Writer and Executive Assistant respectively, provided invaluable support. The decision was made to convene a meeting of directors from HBCUs in order to determine common opportunities and challenges that could be addressed jointly. The committee enlisted the aid of Merryl Penson, Executive Director for Library Services, Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, to facilitate the meeting activities. SOLINET staff assisted in arrangements and logistics with additional assistance solicited from Dean Gunn of the Clark Atlanta Library School, Brenda Banks of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, and Althea Jenkins, Librarian Director, Florida State University. Letters of announcement were sent to college and university presidents informing them of the meeting opportunity.

A position paper that would set the stage for conference discussions and outcomes was developed. The final paper submitted by Janice Franklin, A Call for Cooperation Among HBCU Libraries: Opportunities for Consideration (http://www.hbculibraries.org/Cooperation.htm) provided the foundation for gathering input and consensus at the meeting after approximately eighteen months of dialogue amongst the HBCU librarians over the electronic list and during SOLINET Annual Membership Meetings. Four potential areas for cooperation were identified: 1) preservation and digitization of cultural materials, 2) information and advocacy, 3) human resources for shared expertise, recruitment and staff development, and 4) strategies for better access to collections and facilities.

Appropriately, Atlanta was selected for the meeting location. The efforts of the steering committee and the individual passion for the project resulted in 105 libraries receiving invitations to attend. A resounding outcry for collaboration was heard with the overwhelming attendance of directors representing 103 White House designated HBCU libraries answering the call.

Meeting Outcome

The meeting began with a statement of vision and change presented by the Chair of the Steering Committee, Loretta Parham, who told the audience, "...I hope that we can work toward a vision for an entity that can represent and present the HBCU library with reliable authority. A community that can promote our interests, position us for collaborative development of virtual and print collections, and place the HBCU Library in a position to reinvent for the most strategic disbursements and benefits...."

A stirring and emotional roll call followed as each library institution verbally responded in order of founding dates as early as 1837, to the rhythmic and pulsating evidence of the Atlanta based group, Giyaya Mata African Dance and Drum Ensemble. African drums and dance thus signaled the start of the meeting. For one and a half days, break out sessions and discussions about the HBCU libraries were conducted. Participants were vocal and eager to share, mentor on the spot and offer ideas about a possible future.

The Executive Director of the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), Deanna B. Mareum, and Susan Perry, Senior Advisor for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, provided luncheon remarks. An arousing and thought-provoking dinner keynote address was delivered by Dianne Boardley Suber, the President of Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh NC. Dr. Suber's comments challenged the attendees to think and act "outside of the box" in planning for the future of libraries for African-American students.

By the closing day of the meeting, a spirit of cooperation and a strong sense of commitment were felt by all as they united to determine ways of strengthening library programs and services at HBCUs. Participants sensed a new and historic undertaking of extreme importance at a time of scarce resources and heightened expectations.

From Here

The steering committee is now continuing its work at the request of the conference attendees who empowered this group to plan for the new consortium. The initiative has a name, the HBCU Library Alliance, the organizational bylaws are in place, the Website is active and hosted by Howard University (www.hbculibraries.org), committees are working, and the planning grant funded by the Mellon Foundation is underway. It has been no small feat to garner the unanimous commitment of the HBCU libraries. However, the decision was made on October 29, 2002, to move forward and do the work that is needed for the success of an organization whose purpose is to collaborate for greater strength and productivity of its membership and their constituency. The October meeting identified specific areas for cooperation that are now in motion, including a statistics committee that is providing original documentation to lay the foundation for future library initiatives. Other grant opportunities and partnerships will be identified to promote and educate on behalf of the HBCU libraries and the organizational initiatives that will emerge. The population of libraries that comprises the membership is not homogeneous. The membership includes institutions that are racially diverse and either public, private, church affiliated, small, large, federal and state assisted, two year, four year, and university level doctoral degree granting educational centers. For this reason, the need for a more accurate picture of the membership has prompted efforts to build portals of information and compile data that has never before been made available. Such information has value not only to HBCUs but also to major foundations and agencies that may be unaware of the impact of HBCUs and their library collections. The possibilities appear limitless as the work of the initiative now takes shape.

In year 2000, the same year that Franklin and Parham began their tenure on the SOLINET Board, President Clinton proclaimed September 17 through September 23, 2000 as National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week. In a press release issued by the White House Office of the Press Secretary on September 14, 2000, President Clinton made the following statement:

"Rooted in the segregated South of more than a century ago, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) for decades were the sole source of higher education for African Americans. Generations of African American educators, physicians, lawyers, scientists, and other professionals found at HBCUs the knowledge, experience, and encouragement they needed to reach their full potential. . . . The faculty and staff of HBCUs have created a nurturing environment for their students, set high academic standards and expectations, and served as inspiring role models for the young people around them. In addition to educating many of our Nation's most distinguished African American professionals, HBCUs reach out to improve the quality of life in surrounding communities. . . . For well over a century, HBCUs have made our mark as vital institutions of higher learning. They have educated millions of young people, and today they maintain their lead role in preparing African Americans and students of all races for the challenge and opportunities of this new century."

These words ring hollow without the work of the many African-American librarians that have worked tirelessly to insure high quality resources and services in the libraries of these great institutions, for it is a personal privilege and a significant responsibility to work at an HBCU on behalf of its constituency. The libraries of HBCU institutions have become symbols of democracy in providing access to information for the descendants of slaves who believed that education would lift them up from slavery into a promised land of equality. As culture keepers for this great people, librarians of HBCUs continue their quest to serve well their institutions with the conviction and faith that they must preserve this glorious legacy. It is with this purpose in mind that the call for cooperation was answered among libraries of historically black colleges and universities by uniting to form a consortium that will represent the diverse, multitype, HBCU libraries, libraries with a common history and a common purpose that is rich in contribution to the American story and the African-American experience.