

“When I Enter”: Black Women and Disruption of the White, Heteronormative Narrative of Librarianship

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Only the Black Woman can say "when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me."

-Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*

Introduction

As we began the research for this chapter, it soon became clear that Black women have always been integral to first literacy movements of the 1800s and later librarianship. It also became clear that literacy, social justice activism, and literary cultural production have always intersected for middle class, educated Black women. As Michelle Garfield points out, “The Philadelphia women who organized the Female Literary Association...hoped to engage in activities that would expand their own mental capabilities. Yet they also used these skills to engage actively in political discussions regarding slavery and the rights of blacks.”¹ Most important was the drive to satisfy both the collective needs of their people and their own individual needs as gifted, educated women. Garfield puts it most succinctly, “These women

¹ Michelle Garfield, “Literary Societies: The Work of Self-Improvement and Racial Uplift,” in *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*, ed. Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2007), 125.

were not one-dimensional individuals.”² These early literacy movements were also the beginning of the ideology of racial uplift and the obligation of the educated elite of Black America-- particularly women--to improving the lot of their less fortunate sisters and brothers.³ Even in the 19th and early 20th century, Black women negotiated race, gender, and class. The resulting societies that brought basic educational skills to the enslaved and poor people of African descent, also served as the birthing place for Black women writers. According to Garfield, “...the literary society is unique in that it brought women together with the express purpose of writing and reading their own work.”⁴ This history demonstrates that Black women have always operated out of a sense of communal duty and, in modern parlance, self-care. Activism, writing, and literacy have been interconnected in the history of Black women. We are attempting to place this intersectionality in the context of Black female librarianship. It should not come as a surprise that the five Black women librarians we focus on in this chapter were also writers of plays, poems, essays, children’s literature, or novels.

At the same time, we would be remiss if we did not problematize and interrogate the master narrative that librarianship is a performance of white, middle-class values. That narrative comes through in now-cringe-worthy fashion in Elise Johnson McDougald’s essay “The Task of Negro Womanhood,” originally published in Alain Locke, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (1925). McDougald, who was a groundbreaking educator in New York City and an activist,⁵ divides Black women into different “classes” which mimic white socio-economic

² Ibid., 119.

³ These movements have been overshadowed by W.E.B. Du Bois’s formulation of the “talented tenth.” Clearly the Black women’s literacy movements were the precursors to that.

⁴ Garfield, 117.

⁵ Elise Johnson McDougald (1885-1971) was the first African American woman principal in New York City public schools. She was also on the supervisory committee of the North Harlem Community Forum which took place during the 1920s. She served with Regina Anderson Andrews, one of librarians we examine in this chapter.

classes. These consist of the “leisure class” (wives and daughters of men in business, professions, etc.) who suffer from the same difficulties finding “good help” as their white counterparts. The second is women of “business and the professions”; third, “trades and industry;” and fourth, “a group weighty in numbers struggling on in domestic service.”⁶ McDougald reserves special praise for the second class of women, as one would expect. She describes the women in business and the professions as “a most active and progressive group.”⁷ She takes note of the feminization of the field of librarianship--it has not quite evolved into “library science,” but endorses this new profession as ideally suited to the African American middle class woman. “There is an ever-present hope that, once trained, the Negro woman librarian will scatter such opportunities across the country.... [Black women librarians] are thus rendering exceptional service, and additionally creating an impetus for the enlargement of this field for Negro women.”⁸

These Black women were often librarians in white structures of power. They often had to struggle within those power structures that racialized and gendered them. For some of these women, they sought to contextualize their librarianship and libraries, some on a local level and some on a professional and national level. Regardless of the scope, these women had similar goals, to change, expand, and challenge libraries and librarianship. In the work of these women, we can observe the precedent and application of S.R. Ranganathan’s five laws of library science, originally published in 1931. The five laws of library science are: books are for use; every reader his/her book; every book its reader; save the time of the reader; the library is a growing

⁶ Elise Johnson McDougald, “The Task of Negro Womanhood,” in *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. by Alain Locke, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. Originally published in 1925), 370.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ McDougald, 376.

organism.⁹ For some of these women, their work offered critiques of libraries that did not adhere to the ethos delineated by the laws. In their quotidian work in service to a community or the Library field, the five women examined here made significant contributions to American librarianship, Black literature, and feminism.

It is important that the librarians we will examine are placed within their own historical and ideological contexts. While it would be a mistake to apply more recent advances in Black feminist thought and critical race feminist theory without this acknowledgement, our analysis has benefited greatly from the main tenets of these approaches, in particular social construction and intersectionality theory. For this reason we have decided to divide the five into two groups which mirror the waves of the feminist movement in the United States. Equally important, the groupings also mirror two major waves in Black cultural and literary production, the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement. In the first wave (1910-1930), we examine Nella Larsen, Pura Belpré, and Regina Anderson Andrews; in the second wave will be Ann Allen Shockley and Audre Lorde. This is just a snapshot of Black female librarianship. There were and are many more Black female librarians whose narratives are just as insightful and fascinating as the women described in this chapter. However, for many reasons, most rooted in racialized sexism, such as their absences from archives and library histories, these women do not have biographies written about them or their stories otherwise memorialized. We hope this chapter is one step in recognizing the contributions of Black women to librarianship.

⁹ S.R. Ranganathan, *The Five Laws of Library Science*, Ed. 2 reprinted, (Bangalore: Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science, 1988).

The First Wave: Nella Larsen, Regina Anderson Andrews, Pura Belpré

Nella Larsen was born in Chicago in 1891 to a father of African descent¹⁰ and a Danish mother. She took the name Larsen from her mother's second husband who was also Danish. Larsen felt that her social location as a biracial person (as opposed to mixed race as were so many of the Black bourgeoisie, especially in Harlem) whose mother was a European immigrant made her unique among the middle class social milieu she was associated with in New York. According to her biographer, Thadious Davis, "While race and gender were the social constructions negatively affecting her youth, they recombined in New York to inspire an internal drive toward agency, visibility and voice that went beyond mere survival."¹¹ While Larsen attained middle class status through her careers as a nurse, then librarian, then writer, she did not come from the middle class like so many of her friends and acquaintances in New York. She married into McDougald's leisure class of professional wives when, in 1919 she wed Elmer S. Imes, a physicist and only the second African American to earn a Ph.D. in Physics in the United States.

While still engaged in her nursing career, in June and July 1920, Larsen had published pieces in the *Brownies' Book*, a magazine for African American children. After leaving her position as a nurse with the New York City Department of Health in 1921, Larsen found herself at a professional crossroads. As Davis explains, "Nursing, though respectable and increasingly professional, was not as highly regarded as a white-collar job in a library." After working as a volunteer, in 1922, Larsen was hired as an entry-level library assistant at the 135th Street branch

¹⁰ The race and ethnicity of Larsen's father is a Gordian knot. According to the certificate of live birth registered by the pharmacist who assisted at the birth, no race or ethnicity is listed for her father. Yet she is listed as "Colored." The author's statement for Alfred A. Knopf publishers (1926) notes, "Nella Larsen is a mulatto, the daughter of a Danish lady and a Negro from Virgin Islands, formerly the Danish West Indies."

¹¹ Thadious M. Davis, *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 4-5.

of the New York Public Library (NYPL). Her supervisor was Ernestine Rose, a white librarian who worked diligently to recruit more African American women into the branch.¹² Because of Larsen's pieces in the *Brownies' Book*, Rose arranged for Larsen to be an assistant to the librarians in the children's section. She made an impression upon the young patrons at the branch with her well-coiffed hair and warmth.¹³ In turn, Larsen seemed to thrive in this environment and Ernestine Rose was so impressed with her aptitude and talent that she encouraged her to apply for admission to NYPL's Library School. The Library School did not have a good track record with retaining African American candidates, but Larsen succeeded and earned her certificate in 1923. She returned, certificate in hand, to a higher-grade position and more money at the 135th Street branch. Larsen saw her position as a librarian as a step up in her individual professional status, but it was also significant in a much larger way. As Davis points out, "Whether she was conscious of it or not, Larsen was in the process of falling 'out of the marriage plot that demands not only that a woman marry but that marriage and its progeny be her life's absolute and only center.'" ¹⁴ Some scholars view Larsen's career as a librarian and a writer as a pathway to fit in with the educated, light-skinned social circle to which she was introduced by her marriage to Imes. Other scholars tend to reject the "gentility" argument and analyze Larsen's development as a librarian as an intellectual tool to broaden her critique of class and intellectual ideologies. Karin Roffman suggests, "Larsen's complicated reaction to the ideologies she was asked to absorb in library school helped her to sharpen her explorations of those critical attitudes in her fiction."¹⁵ Roffman focuses on Helga Crane, the main character of Larsen's novel, *Quicksand*, to center her

¹² Ernestine Rose worked closely with another member of our first wave, Regina Anderson Andrews to increase cultural programming at the 135th Street branch.

¹³ Davis, 144.

¹⁴ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York, 1988), 51. Quoted in Davis, *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance, A Woman's Life Unveiled* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1994), 144.

¹⁵ Karin Roffman, "Nella Larsen, Librarian at 135th Street," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 53, no. 5 (2007): 753.

argument that the novel is a critique of the library training Larsen received at the Library School of the New York Public Library.

Quicksand tells the story of Helga Crane, a young biracial-race woman, working as a teacher at a university in the American South. *Quicksand* follows Helga's unsuccessful search for fulfillment in both her employment and romances as she travels from the South to Chicago, then Harlem and Copenhagen. In each city, Helga finds herself confined by her race, her gender, and her penury combined with her materialism. Helga leaves higher education where she gives "willingly and unsparingly of herself with no apparent return."¹⁶ She finds herself constrained by the expectation of "respectable" and middle-class behavior at the university, which Helga describes as "the strenuous rigidity of conduct required in this huge educational community of which she was an insignificant part."¹⁷ After abandoning her teaching career, Helga contemplates a career as a librarian because of her love for books. Preparing to visit the library, a structure Helga describes as an "ugly gray building where was housed much knowledge and a little wisdom, on interminable shelves,"¹⁸ she dresses in her plainest clothing, "a suit of fine blue twill faultlessly tailored, from whose left pocket peeped a gay kerchief, an unadorned, heavy silk blouse, a small, smart, fawn-colored hat, and slim brown oxfords, and chose a brown umbrella."¹⁹ Helga dresses in her most unassuming and respectable clothing to visit the library, her costume's plainness reflected in her muted description of the library. At the library, in a scene that hints towards the discrimination of African American students experienced by Larsen at the New York Public Library School, Helga encounters several gatekeepers to becoming a

¹⁶ Nella Larsen, *Quicksand and Passing*, ed. Deborah E. McDowell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

librarian and is dissuaded from pursuing librarianship. Helga enters a room in the library and “in less than a quarter of an hour she came out, in surprised disappointment. ‘Library training’ — ‘civil service’ — ‘library school’ — ‘classification’ — ‘cataloguing’ — ‘probation period’ — flitted through her mind. ‘How erudite they must be!’ she remarked sarcastically to herself...”²⁰ Helga finds herself bereft of another career path and stymied by the numerous obstacles placed in front of librarianship.

The role of Larsen’s librarianship in shaping her fiction writing still resonates today. In her article, “Librarian as Poet/Poet as Librarian,” Erin Dorney interviews several poet-librarians while reflecting on her own experience as a poet and librarian. Just as Larsen’s librarianship contributed to her writing, Dorney remarks, “... my librarian training has impacted my life as a poet.”²¹ Even as a writer, Larsen was unable to completely leave librarianship. In her writing, Larsen was still addressing the flaws of the field. In *Quicksand*, she castigates libraries for not being welcoming to intersectional and marginalized identities. Her critique arguably had a greater goal than reforming librarianship. Claudia Tate contends that *Quicksand* went even further and represents an attempt to explore the intersection of race and gender in a subversive and even revolutionary way.²²

Larsen demonstrates the danger of fragmenting a complex intersectional identity into competing schools of interpretation, especially for Black women. In the early twentieth century, Black women activists tended to combine the politics of respectability²³ and revolution. Because

²⁰ Ibid, 31-32.

²¹ Erin Dorney, “Librarian as Poet / Poet as Librarian,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (February 12, 2014).

²² Claudia Tate, “Desire and Death in *Quicksand*, by Nella Larsen,” *American Literary History* 7 (1995): 234-60.

²³ The concept of respectability politics for Black women in part comes from the idea of the “cult of true womanhood” and chivalry. In order to be treated with dignity, Black women were expected to adhere to white and European-centric ideals of beauty, decorum, and feminine activities. Often attainment of these ideals proved difficult for Black women due to systemic racialized sexism. To learn more about respectability politics, see Barbara Welter,

we as Black women view ourselves as racialized, gendered beings, we cannot draw a boundary between the personal and the political. Both operated in the life of Nella Larsen; the common thread between them is Larsen's position as a librarian. Larsen resigned from her position at the 135th Street branch to devote herself to her writing full time. She would never return to Harlem. When she gave up writing, she returned not to librarianship, but to nursing, her first career. This may have occurred because of increased credentialing standards for librarians or because of Larsen's desire to disassociate from the memories of Harlem. Nevertheless, she died a librarian's death: in 1964, she succumbed to congestive heart failure while reading in bed.

Regina Anderson Andrews is the epitome of the social class to which Larsen wanted to belong. Born in Chicago in 1901, Andrews was the daughter of William Grant Anderson and his wife Margaret Simons Anderson. William G. Anderson grew to prominence as a defense lawyer and "race man" who was associated with Ida B. Wells and her activism against lynching. Wells became a firm family friend and in 1940 her granddaughter, Lucille Duster, was a boarder in the Anderson homestead.²⁴ Andrews's mother Margaret also set an example of being involved with social justice activism and racial uplift as a Black clubwoman. Every indication, then, is that Andrews was her parents' daughter. Her artistic accomplishments as a playwright and erstwhile actress undoubtedly flowed from the influence of her mother, who was a celebrated artisan of china painting. We can say with the same certainty that Andrews learned the value of fighting injustice at her father's knee and through her acquaintance with Ida B. Wells. We cannot overstate Wells's influence: *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, one of Andrews's most celebrated plays,

Dimity Convictions (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), Roger D. Abrahams, "Negotiating Respect: Patterns among Black Women," *The Journal of American Folklore*, 88, no. 347 (1975); 58-80, and E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2001.)

²⁴ Ethelene Whitmire, *Regina Anderson Andrews: Harlem Renaissance Librarian*, (Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 101.

was about lynching. Indeed Andrews herself said, “Before coming to New York, I had been very much influenced by Ida B. Wells Barnett. ...When I was a child in Chicago and first heard of lynchings, they were incomprehensible. It’s understandable that in my twenties I would have to write a play about lynching.”²⁵ For Andrews, her literary accomplishments deeply intersected with her library-activism, thus carrying on the tradition of the Black women literacy activists of the nineteenth century.

Unlike Larsen, who viewed a career in librarianship as a step up and out of the working class into the middle class, Andrews was solidly positioned in the Black bourgeoisie. Andrews’s biographer, Ethelene Whitmire, claims that Andrews never gave a reason for entering librarianship²⁶ but Andrews did acknowledge a “patient understanding librarian in the grammar school in Normal, Ill” as an early influence on her intellectual development.²⁷ In addition, Andrews undoubtedly was attracted by the opportunities for groundbreaking advancements for Black people, and Black women in particular, in a field that was becoming feminized as well as racially and ethnically diverse.

Andrews’s career as a librarian began most likely as a student volunteer, in the library of her high school, Hyde Park High School; she then worked as an assistant librarian when she was a student at Wilberforce University. After she returned to Chicago, she applied for a position at the Chicago Public Library. In August 1921, she secured a position as a “Grade 2, Junior Library Assistant”²⁸ without having to be concerned too much about racial discrimination, since the

²⁵ Lofton Mitchell, *Voices of Black Theatre*, 78. Quoted in Whitmire, *Regina Anderson Andrews: Harlem Renaissance Librarian*, 71.

²⁶ Whitmire, 3

²⁷ Consuelo C. Young, “Preface,” *Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1938, 13. Quoted in Ethelene Whitmire, *Regina Anderson Andrews: Harlem Renaissance Librarian*, 23.

²⁸ Whitmire, 29.

Chicago Public Library hired personnel through the city's Civil Service Commission.²⁹ Andrews asked for and received a leave of absence from her position at Chicago Public Library in June 1922 and eventually resigned formally in September 1922. Andrews's hiring experience with Chicago Public Library would stand in stark relief to her experience at New York Public Library where, as an applicant, she was told, "Because of your color...we'll have to send you to Harlem to work."³⁰ This came as a surprise to Andrews, who prided herself on her mixed race ancestry and her upbringing in integrated environments. She first identified herself as "American" and was then corrected by the interviewer as being "colored." The interviewer inadvertently revealed a well-known secret that "American" was code for "white" and that people of color had no claim to the protection offered by US citizenship. In one moment, Andrews's self-identification was cast aside and forced into a social category subscribed to by early twentieth century America. Isabel Gonzalez-Smith, Juleah Swanson, and Azusa Tanaka state that the "freedom to claim one's identity, particularly racially and ethnically, can be empowering for people of color."³¹ In the early twentieth century, for a woman of color to claim the identity of "American" in the face of a white person of some authority must have come with a healthy dose of self-confidence and assurance. In light of this racist interaction with her job interviewer, Andrews could have run from the label of "colored" but instead she chose to embrace it.

In 1923, Andrews accepted a position at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, which, by then had become the "Black" branch of the NYPL. However, she would chafe

²⁹ Whitmire, 28-29.; The Civil Service Commission administered an exam and candidates were ranked for a position based on their grades. It was an effort to hire on merit rather than nepotism and corruption.

³⁰ Whitmire, 32.

³¹ Isabel Gonzalez-Smith, Juleah Swanson, and Azusa Tanaka, "Unpacking Identity: Racial, Ethnic, and Professional Identity and Academic Librarians of Color," in *The Librarian Stereotype: Deconstructing Perceptions & Presentations of Information Work*, ed. Nicole Pagowsky and Miriam Rigby, (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2014), 165.

at the notion that this was the only branch where she could work, “because of her color.” Nevertheless, there was a silver lining to this cloud of racism. Andrews, through her employment at 135th Street, was positioned to become one of the birth mothers of the Harlem Renaissance and engaged in her activism to improve and highlight the intellectual lives of African Americans.

While she disdained the gendered restrictions imposed on middle class Black co-eds at Wilberforce and rebelled against the class and gender expectations of the Black bourgeoisie in general, her middle-class, mixed-race family background afforded her a privileged position in the growing intelligentsia and literati of Harlem. She embodied the intersection of the "New Negro" and "New Woman" movements. Her position as an assistant librarian at the 135th Street branch made it possible to influence the cultural programming of her supervisor Ernestine Rose.

Andrews was a driving force behind fora at 135th Street. The fora included talks by Margaret Sanger and literary discussions, and covered topics such as social conditions in Latin America and India, race relations in the United States, and anti-war talks. Andrews used her connections and natural proclivity as a social butterfly to find guest speakers.³² According to David Levering Lewis, “...considering the qualifications of her assistant, Regina Anderson [Andrews]... Miss Rose could have failed only if she had been resolutely dim.”³³

Whitmire describes how Andrews found physical space for artists to work in the library, and users of the space included Eric Walrond and Claude McKay as well as Langston Hughes.³⁴ Moreover, Andrews not only used the public space of the library to further the careers of the leading talents of the Harlem Renaissance, but also the private space of the apartment she shared with Ethel Ray Nance and Louella Tucker at 580 St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem. Lewis

³² Whitmire, 36.

³³ David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, (New York: Penguin Books), 105.

³⁴ Whitmire, 37.

describes 580 as “a sort of Renaissance USO, offering a couch, a meal, sympathy and proper introduction” for up-and-coming artists who made their way to Harlem.³⁵ Scholars of the Harlem Renaissance trace the inception of the movement to a Civic Club *Opportunity* dinner in 1924 under the auspices of Charles Johnson and planned extensively by Andrews and Nance. The guest of honor was Jessie Fauset and attendees, in addition to Andrews and Nance, included the leading talents of the Harlem Renaissance: Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Jean Toomer. Andrews was able to further the careers of these and other writers because of her position at the 135th Street Branch. In this way, Andrews defined her activism as a librarian. Her mission was to transform the library from a space for the consumption of cultural production³⁶ into a space for creating cultural production. Andrews’s work with Harlem Renaissance artists demonstrates her role in the expansion of the library from a place merely to check out books to a place that supports the arts and science for the betterment of the public.

This would continue with her own artistic production, both as a playwright and actor. Her plays were often political and addressed the injustices of racism and segregation. Whenever possible, any plays she was associated with would be performed in a library branch. The basement of the 135th Street Branch traditionally held theatrical performances, initiated by W.E.B. Du Bois and encouraged by Ernestine Rose. Andrews was part of Du Bois’s original theater group that performed at 135th Street. After the group disbanded, Andrews created the Harlem Experimental Theatre (HET) with other actors, which continued performing in the basement until moving to a church.³⁷ The HET would not be the last theater company to work out of the 135th Street Branch. In the 1940s, the American Negro Theatre (ANT) was founded

³⁵ Lewis, 127.

³⁶ We are using “cultural production” here to describe the literary and other creative works that comprise the body of artistic endeavors attributed to a group of people.

³⁷ Whitmire, 61-63.

and also performed out of the basement, featuring actors like Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis. The space inhabited by ANT is still preserved at the Schomburg today as a performance and exhibition space.³⁸

Andrews's work with plays in the Harlem libraries was a reimagining of what a library could be to the public. It reconsiders what can be deemed knowledge; rather than knowledge represented as books, Andrews's work with Harlem theatre groups recasts knowledge as drama, public performances, and a return to an oral tradition. Her combined efforts of fora, working with Harlem Renaissance writers, and her playwriting represents the library as adaptable to its community's needs. Andrews and the other librarians at the 135th Street branch grew the library to meet the needs of their community while also reconceptualizing the type of knowledge held in a library. However, this reconceptualization would never have been possible without the explicit support and permission of Ernestine Rose, the white supervisor of Andrews and other librarians.

For all of her dedication to the encouragement of Black artistic endeavors, and thereby Black racial uplift, Andrews hated being pigeon-holed as a "colored" librarian who, because of the racial politics of the New York Public Library, could only serve at the "colored" branch. Using strategies she may have learned from her lawyer father, she enlisted the aid of Du Bois in her fight to get promoted at the 135th Street Branch. In 1930, she received a promotion (still an assistant librarian but Grade 3, instead of Grade 2) and a transfer to the Rivington Street Branch.³⁹ The Rivington Branch, no longer open, was located downtown in the Lower East Side (LES) near Little Italy and Chinatown. By 1930, the library served mostly Jewish people from Eastern Europe. Although not a "colored" branch, this branch served mainly non-Protestant

³⁸ New York Public Library, "The 75th Anniversary of the American Negro Theatre," *NYPL.org*, accessed September 9, 2017, <https://www.nypl.org/events/exhibitions/75th-anniversary-american-negro-theatre>.

³⁹ Whitmire, 65.

ethnic white people and did not have the prestige of other branches such as the 42nd Street Branch.

Eight years later, Andrews became the first African American to head a branch of the NYPL, when she became Acting Branch Librarian of the 115th Street Branch. In her speech she summed up her approach to library activism: “We must be more than Librarians, bibliophiles, curators and catalogers in order to develop the kind of social philosophy necessary for the modern community library.”⁴⁰ Andrews would become a Supervising Librarian at the 115th Street Branch and in 1948 at the Washington Heights Branch. However, before those promotions could occur, she had to write a thesis. According to Whitmire, Andrews began the process for the thesis in 1938 when she had to submit topics to the local examining board. One topic she entertained was a “study [of] library conditions and opportunities among Negroes in the rural regions of the South and also in certain Islands of the West Indies, particularly Spanish speaking ones.”⁴¹ In the end, Andrews wrote her thesis on a topic more in line with her theory about library activism and with her own multiracial background and integrated upbringing. In 1945, she submitted her thesis, “A Public Library Assists in Improving Race Relations.” She set her thesis statement as, “Can we as librarians extend the use to which books and working with books can create another road to racial understanding?”⁴² For her, “the use of books [represented] our strongest means of promoting intercultural understanding.”⁴³ The tools and materials of librarianship that could be used to maintain racism and marginalization, were reimagined and repurposed to be useful and enriching to the lives of Black Americans. Andrews believed

⁴⁰ “Opening of Little Theatre and Auditorium,” (Regina Andrews Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, November 3, 1938), as quoted in Whitmire, 92.

⁴¹ Whitmire, 93.

⁴² Regina M. Andrews, “A Public Library Assists in Improving Race Relations,” (Thesis, New York Public Library—Circulation Department, 1945), 1, as quoted in Whitmire, 97.

⁴³ Andrews, 14, as quoted in Whitmire, 97.

fervently that seeing a Black woman in a position of authority in all branches of any public library made it and the community it served all the stronger. Andrews practiced what she preached both by refusing to be limited by the idea she could only serve as a librarian in Harlem and by her choices in other civic engagements, like her membership and eventually her appointment as an officer in the National Council of Women of the United States (NCWUS).

Regina Anderson Andrews was unquestionably a trailblazer on many fronts. Yet her pioneering efforts were accomplished firmly in the context of the politics of respectability. Unlike Zora Neale Hurston or A'Leia Walker,⁴⁴ no rumors of lesbianism or bisexuality swirled around Andrews and her female circle of friends. Although some scholars, most notably Deborah McDowell,⁴⁵ have argued for a homoerotic sensibility in Larsen's *Passing*, there has not been any suggestion that Larsen questioned her own sexuality. While the women of 580 St. Nicholas Avenue seemed to accept the gay members of their circle, including Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, they do come across as judgmental of Hurston and Walker.⁴⁶ Class, color, and sexuality intersect with both Hurston and Walker, and it is important to remember that Andrews and her circle reacted to the intersection and not one element of it. Whitmire makes a valiant attempt to render Andrews's heteronormativity as radical in the context of white female librarianship, stating on the very first page of her introduction, "[Andrews] had several paramours and at least one was possibly a secret—and unlike many of her contemporary white female librarians who were often single and childless, Regina married...."⁴⁷ Nevertheless we must acknowledge that Andrews married a man from a similar background to her own.

⁴⁴ A'lelia Walker (1885-1931), the daughter of Madam C.J. Walker, also held literary salons in her Harlem home.

⁴⁵ Deborah McDowell, "Introduction" in McDowell, ed., *Quicksand and Passing*, xxiii-xxx. An excerpt of the full introduction is anthologized as "Black Female Sexuality in *Passing*" in Carla Kaplan, ed., *Passing*, 363-379.

⁴⁶ Whitmire, 42 (Hurston); 44-45 (Walker).

⁴⁷ Whitmire, 1.

Starting their library careers at the 135th Street Branch as entry-level assistant librarians unites Larsen and Andrews. However, there were women of color librarians at the Branch when Larsen arrived in 1922 and Andrews in 1923. Pura Teresa Belpré was hired at the 135th Street Branch in 1921 as the “Hispanic assistant” and so became the first Puerto Rican librarian on staff at the NYPL.⁴⁸ Ernestine Rose,⁴⁹ had observed the growing Puerto Rican community in Harlem and actively searched for a Puerto Rican hire. Based on a recommendation from her friends, Rose recruited Belpré’s older sister for a position at the branch.⁵⁰ However, Elisa Belpré Maduro’s husband would not allow her to work outside the home so she passed the offer onto her younger, unmarried sister, Pura Belpré. Belpré was first enamored of librarianship after her initial visit to the 135th Street Branch when she observed Catherine Allen Latimer,⁵¹ an African American librarian, at work with students in the library: “As we entered the reading room, I noticed the librarian, Miss Allen, later Mrs. Latimer, moving slowly among the crowded room helping teenagers. . . . I thought, ‘If I could do what this lady is doing for the rest of my life, I would be the happiest person on earth.’”⁵² Belpré found her vocation when she discovered that there were no Puerto Rican folktales in the children’s room at 135th Street. According to Hernández-Delgado, “... Pura Belpré made a personal commitment to preserve the rich Puerto Rican folklore for the children of the United States. ...To acquaint children with the cultural

⁴⁸ Julio L. Hernández-Delgado, "Pura Teresa Belpré, Storyteller and Pioneer Puerto Rican Librarian," *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 62, no. 4 (1992): 428.

⁴⁹ Rose was also the supervisor of Andrews and Larsen. She makes her third appearance during Belpré’s employment at the 135th Street Branch.

⁵⁰ Hernández-Delgado, 427.

⁵¹ Catherine Allen Latimer (1896-1948) deserves her own in-depth study. She was, in fact, the first African-American librarian hired by the New York Public Library. She rose through the ranks to become the head of the 135th Street Branch’s Negro Literature and History division. When the NYPL acquired the private collection of Arturo Schomburg in 1926, Schomburg was appointed head of the division and Latimer was demoted to his assistant.

⁵² Lillian Lopez and Pura Belpré, “Reminiscences of Two Turned-On Librarians,” in *Puerto Rican Perspectives*, ed. Edward Mapp, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 88, quoted in Hernández-Delgado, 428.

heritage of Puerto Rico became Belpré's primary mission throughout her professional career; it eventually served as the impetus for her later publications."⁵³ By including Spanish language materials in the library's collection, Belpré was making the library more accessible for the community and believed that books are for all. By serving her patrons, Belpré was essentially decolonizing the once English-only library collection.

Belpré entered the New York Public Library School in 1925, three years after Nella Larsen and the year before it merged with the Columbia University School of Library Service.⁵⁴ It was during a course on storytelling that Belpré revealed her talent for oral performance of folktales from Puerto Rican culture. Like Larsen, Belpré used childhood memories and stories told to her by her grandmother as the foundation for her success as a children's librarian and storyteller. Belpré had found her niche as a librarian-activist. Because of her efforts, "the folklore of the Puerto Rican child made its beginning in English and Spanish, throughout the library system...."⁵⁵ With the expanding Puerto Rican population in Harlem, Belpré filled an important role in the NYPL's outreach efforts in the communities its branches served. In 1929, Belpré moved to the 115th Street Branch, a community which had become predominantly Puerto Rican. Regina Anderson Andrews would become her Branch Librarian in 1938. At the 115th Street Branch, Belpré continued her activism by instituting bilingual story hours and a juvenile puppet theatre, the precedent for Belpré's future career as a puppeteer. Primarily because of Belpré's efforts, the 115th Street Branch became the cultural center for New York's Hispanophone

⁵³ Hernández-Delgado, 428.

⁵⁴ 1926 was also the year Regina Anderson Andrews enrolled in the Columbia University School of Library Service.

⁵⁵ Pura Belpré, "The Folklore of the Puerto Rican Child in My Library Experience," (Pura Belpré Papers, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College Evelina Lopez Antonetty Puerto Rican Research Collection, n.d.), 2, quoted in Hernández-Delgado, 429.

population. Belpré began publishing books of Puerto Rican folktales, beginning in 1932 with *Pérez and Martina: A Portorican Folk Tale*.

Belpré's activism was closely aligned with her community's cultural production. In this regard she differs from Andrews. While Andrews also saw cultural production as a means of racial uplift, her primary mission was to lead the charge for integration by example and representing the ability of Black women librarians by heading branches outside of the Black community. Belpré, on the other hand, moved with the Puerto Rican community as it moved into other neighborhoods of New York (Upper Manhattan, East Harlem and the South Bronx).⁵⁶ She transferred to the Aguilar Branch on 110th Street in 1939, where she continued the same library-activism as she had accomplished at the 115th Street Branch.

In 1940, Belpré attended the American Library Association meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she presented a paper on her work as a librarian in the Puerto Rican communities of New York. Her sojourn in Cincinnati cemented her status as an inspiring librarian-activist and had a transformative impact on her personal life. She met Clarence Cameron White, a highly acclaimed composer and concert violinist who happened also to be African American. White was in Cincinnati to conduct a music festival. They would marry in 1943 and remained married until White's death in 1960. Belpré loved and was devoted to her work as a librarian, but the pull of her creative work was just as strong. In a move similar to her forebear, Larsen, Belpré took a leave of absence from her position at the Aguilar Branch in 1944 to write. She resigned formally a year later to concentrate completely on her writing. Belpré viewed her literary production as an extension of her library activism. Hernández-Delgado quotes a letter written by Belpré to her supervisor at the Aguilar Branch, "One does not uproot the foundations solidly laid by a mere

⁵⁶ Hernández-Delgado, 431.

stroke of a pen. ...That is why there cannot be a resignation from children's work for me. I will still be carrying on, in efforts to contribute, through my future writings something which the children will enjoy."⁵⁷ In her publications in subsequent years, Belpré did just that. In addition to creating popular entertainment for children, Belpré "was fulfilling her mission of acquainting Puerto Rican children in particular, and the American public in general, with the existence and beauty of Puerto Rican folklore."⁵⁸

After the death of her husband in 1960, Belpré found a ray of hope in her sadness, as she considered returning to librarianship. After making inquiries about returning to the library, she was hired to fill a new position: Spanish Children's Specialist, through the Office of Children's Services. This meant that Belpré could travel throughout New York City and thus have a wider impact than being assigned to a single branch. She also managed to keep publishing, including a Spanish version of her first publication, *Pérez and Martina*. Belpré retired in 1968, only when she reached the mandatory retirement age of 65. By then she had cemented her legacy, was instrumental in launching the groundbreaking South Bronx Library Project, and created a mobile puppet theater for it. To ensure the success of the project, she agreed to work with the Project on a per diem basis.⁵⁹ Because of her dedication to the South Bronx Library Project, "Puerto Rican residents became cognizant of library services and learned the value and importance of Puerto Rican folklore."⁶⁰ Belpré continued publishing until 1978, and in 1982 she was celebrated and honored by the New York Public Library. The day after this celebration, Pura Teresa Belpré passed away.

⁵⁷ Hernández-Delgado, 432.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hernández-Delgado, 434.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 435.

These librarians, while seemingly operating within framework of whiteness, disrupted the established concepts of librarianship. Consequently, the “anti-gentility” school views the first wave of Black women librarians (as well as Ernestine Rose) not as practitioners of a respectable profession but rather agents in a movement who were attempting to “[create] a new attitude toward the library as a political tool in twentieth century American culture.”⁶¹ Roffman notes that the Black women librarians at the 135th Street branch, “were women who shared an attitude about the library’s potential to shape ideas and policies on a national scale...[and] attempted to revolutionize both the library itself and a conception of cultural institutions and knowledge production that would give them a much more significant role in the shaping of both.”⁶² In so doing, these activist-librarians pushed back against the racism embedded in the library training systems, collection development, and the Dewey Decimal System, the main classification system. Larsen, Andrews, and Belpré were not the only three to do so. Dorothy Porter Wesley, a researcher and librarian at the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center at Howard University, would later condemn the implicit bias and imperialism of the Dewey system that sought to further colonize African people by placing their works in either the category for “slavery,” or most telling, “colonization.”⁶³ Long before the practice became more accepted, Black women were critiquing and modifying the tools of library science, which were reinforcing the marginalization of Black Americans.

The Second Wave: Ann Allen Shockley and Audre Lorde

Ann Allen Shockley was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1927, just as Andrews and Belpré were becoming trailblazers in the field of librarianship by smashing the field’s color and

⁶¹ Roffman, 753.

⁶² Ibid., 754.

⁶³ Karin Roffman, *From the Modernist Annex: American Women Writers in Museums and Libraries*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 71.

language barriers. Shockley represents the shift away from the realm of public librarianship to that of academic librarianship as well as a geographical shift away from the East Coast and more specifically the New York Public Library. Nevertheless, Shockley continues the tradition of our first wave librarians by being a multifaceted professional. Shockley was a journalist, a novelist, and a librarian. She has won awards both for her academic works on librarianship as well as her fiction.⁶⁴ She also shares other traits with her foremothers: she, as a daughter of social workers Henry and Bessie Lucas Allen, was part of the Black middle class; she married and later divorced William Shockley and had two children.

Shockley's career as a librarian coincides with the standardization of librarianship credentialing. She received her BA from Fisk University in 1948 and her Masters of Library Science from Case Western Reserve University in 1959. Shockley held positions as Assistant Librarian at Delaware State College from 1959-1960, as Assistant Librarian at University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, 1960-1966, and Associate Librarian there 1966-1969. She returned to her alma mater Fisk University in 1969 as an Associate Librarian and head of Special Collections and Archivist, where she remained until her retirement in 1988.

Shockley compiled a solid body of work dealing with critical librarianship while she was at Fisk and this work comes directly from her experience as a curator of Black literary production throughout her career. Titles such as *A Handbook for the Administration of Special Negro Collections* (1970), *History of Public Library Services to Negroes in the South, 1900-1955*, *Living Black American Authors: A Biographical Directory* (1973), and *Afro-American Women Writers, 1746-1933* encapsulate Shockley's brand of library activism. She wanted to

⁶⁴ Hatshepsut Award for Literature, New York, 1981; Martin Luther King Junior Black Author Award, Nashville, 1982; A Crossroad to Freedom Award in Recognition of Outstanding and Professional Librarianship, Western Branch Louisville Kentucky Library, 2005; Alice B. Readers Appreciation Award, 2006.

document the erasure of Black contributions not only to literature but also to librarianship. Furthermore, she wrote guides on collecting and preserving library and archival materials about and by African Americans. In *Special Negro Collections*, Shockley provides advice, exercises, and examples from her own work at Fisk University Library, including a guide on developing budgets, a list of required personnel, and examples of curricula to be incorporated within an African American library collection. However, *Special Negro Collections* goes further than being just a guide. In the introduction to the handbook, Shockley manages to provide background information of African American collections in libraries while criticizing “predominately [*sic*] white colleges and universities” for two actions: one, having minimal information on African Americans and two, “hastily attempting” to develop African American special collections.⁶⁵ As the field of Black studies was developing in the late 1960s and early 1970s in predominantly white institutions (PWI), collections and research libraries on the African Diaspora were also developed to support the work of scholars. It was during this time that the Schomburg *Collection* became the Schomburg *Center* for Research in Black Culture; and in 1972 formally became one of the research libraries of the New York Public Library. In *Special Negro Collections*, Shockley chastises libraries at PWIs for devaluing African American material and only then putting together African American special collections when as she states, Black Americans have had a “revolutionary role in American society.”⁶⁶ As for her motive for writing this guide, she criticizes library science programs for not including the administration of African American special collections into their curriculum and for neglecting and ignoring the growing field of Black Studies. Shockley’s scathing criticism even reaches the white scholars of Black studies.

⁶⁵Ann Allen Shockley, *A Handbook for the Administration of Special Negro Collections*, (Nashville, TN: Fisk University, 1970), i.

⁶⁶ Shockley, *Special Negro Collections*, i.

She explains that African American research collections are “established to coincide with black studies programs, to cool militant black students who are angrily aware that their⁶⁷ black writers, leaders, and scholars should too have an equally honorable place on library shelves, and to aid young white researchers who have found the black role in society a lucrative field for quick scholarly recognition.” In one sentence, Shockley validates the anger of the Black Power movement on college campuses but also condemns white researchers who are researching the African Diaspora, not out of genuine academic interest but instead to mine the field for promotion and tenure. Her language places Black students in the role of revolutionaries and white scholars as colonizers of the field. Her works, while providing documentation and guidance, do not forgive readers for their complicity in the need for Shockley’s handbooks and bibliographies — in the 1970s and still today.

Arguably Shockley’s most important work in this regard is her volume, *Handbook of Black Librarianship* (1977), co-authored with her African-American male colleague at Fisk, E. J. Josey. Virginia Lacy Jones stated in her review of this work, “Librarians interested in establishing or evaluating collections of Afro-American materials will find the *Black Librarianship* to be a valuable aid in that it contains a list of reference books which reflect the black experience, a list of African and Afro-American periodicals, a list of black authors whose books have become best sellers, and a list of black authors whose works are included in the ALA Notable Book List.”⁶⁸ Earlier in the same review, Jones praises the *Black Librarianship* for restoring the “contributions of pioneer black librarians to American library history.”⁶⁹ It is deeply

⁶⁷ Emphasis is Shockley’s, not the authors.

⁶⁸ Virginia Lacy Jones, “Review of *Handbook of Black Librarianship* by E.J. Josey and Ann Allen Shockley,” *The Library Quarterly* 49, no. 1, (Jan. 1979): 104.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

ironic that librarians today do not recognize the contributions of Shockley to the field; Josey is seen as the driving force behind the *Black Librarianship* and is given the most credit for it.

The movement of black librarians in the 70s and 80s has been distilled to just the work of E.J. Josey and has erased the work of black female librarians who were also in the struggle, not unlike the essentializing of the late nineteenth century Black political thought movement to Du Bois. Du Bois did not do this work alone. Similarly, Josey was not the only African American advancing the roles of Black librarianship. While the library field is often characterized as "feminized," that does not mean that it is immune to misogyny and sexism.

Shockley, like her foremothers Larsen, Belpré, and Andrews, was also a literary artist, and most biographical references list her many and various occupations: librarian, journalist, teacher, bibliographer, essayist, and fiction writer. Occasionally, she is only listed as a writer but never as just a librarian. Unlike Larsen and Belpré, Shockley never resigned from her position as a librarian but did her writing whenever she had free time. In the introduction to her short story "A Birthday Remembered, 1980," Shockley remarked on her struggle to balance her careers as a librarian and a fiction writer, a struggle that will resonate with many women working in academia, "Working as an academic librarian, I write on weekends, holidays, and summer months, with my dogs, Tiffany and Bianca, watching the birthing pains. I wish it could be different."⁷⁰

Outside of the world of academic librarianship, Shockley is best remembered for her groundbreaking novels which, for the first time, offered Black lesbian characters as protagonists and heroes. As Alycee Jane quotes Jewelle Gomez in the foreword to the 1997 edition of Shockley's novel, *Loving Her*, reading Shockley's first novel, *Loving Her* (1974), "For Black

⁷⁰ Susan Koppelman, *Between Mothers and Daughters: Stories Across a Generation*, (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1987), 285.

Lesbians was like reading *The Well of Loneliness* for the first time as teenagers and realizing there were ‘others’ out there.”⁷¹ Shockley garnered praise from many Black Lesbian feminists for both her bravery and her achievement. In “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism,” Barbara Smith poignantly remarks, “Yet there are a handful of Black women who have risked everything for truth. Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, and Ann Allen Shockley have at least broken ground in the vast wilderness of works that do not exist.”⁷² In her essay, “The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview,” Shockley brings together her intersectional analysis and her expertise as a librarian and writer. As she states, “It is my belief that those Black female writers who could have written well and perceptively enough to warrant publication chose instead to write about Black women from a heterosexual perspective. The preference was motivated by the fear of being labeled a Lesbian whether they were one or not.”⁷³ This is a fear that Shockley challenged when she incorporated themes of women-loving-women, transgender and non-conforming gender identities, and homophobia in her novels and essays.⁷⁴ However it has also led to some ambiguity about Shockley’s own identification. Biographies of Shockley either omit any mention of sexual orientation identity or present problematic descriptions. For example, the website NNDB.com, a biographical dictionary, is one of the few which has a category for “sexual orientation.” For Shockley, the compilers list her sexual orientation as “straight,” with the following note,

⁷¹ Alycee J. Lane, foreword to *Loving Her* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), v. *The Well of Loneliness*, a “lesbian novel”, was published in 1928 by the British novelist Radclyffe Hall. For many Lesbians at the time and later, *The Well* was the first time Lesbians saw themselves explicitly represented in a literary work.

⁷² Barbara Smith, “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism,” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 7 (1978): 26.

⁷³ Ann Allen Shockley, “The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview,” in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith, (New York: Kitchen Table Press 1983), 84.

⁷⁴ Contemporary queer, gender and racial politics are important themes in Shockley’s most recent novel, *Celebrating Hotchclaw* (2005).

Is not known to have engaged in any lesbian relationships. See Yolanda Williams Page, *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers* (2007), page 522, “Although a majority of Shockley’s fictional characters are lesbian, she identifies as a feminist with lesbian sympathies.”

Rita B. Dandridge, an important compiler of Shockley’s work, gives a list of Shockley’s personal intersecting and sometimes conflicting identities, including “straight woman and lesbian sympathizer.”⁷⁵ The ambiguity around Shockley’s sexuality has allowed the official historical record to “straightwash” Shockley. However, in a personal conversation with Margo Okazawa-Rey, a founding member of the Combahee River Collective who knows Shockley, Shelley Haley asked directly about Shockley’s sexual orientation. Okazawa-Rey’s answer was unequivocal: “Ann is in the life. She is one of our Black Lesbian heroes.”⁷⁶

With *Ann Allen Shockley: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1987), Dandridge has compiled an invaluable aid for assessing Shockley’s impact on library science, queer literature, especially Black lesbian literature, racial, gender and queer politics, and journalism. Dandridge explains in her preface how she came to do this work, “The more of Shockley’s writings I discovered, the more intrigued I became by the quantity and quality of her works and the relevance of these to black studies, women’s literature, American history, and library resources.”⁷⁷ Dandridge acknowledges that Shockley has received “some recognition”⁷⁸ for her work but this tends to come from scholars and is highly compartmentalized in a way that belies the intersectionality of Shockley’s work. In the introduction to the compilation, Dandridge discusses the lack of national attention Shockley has received, “Shockley’s talent is also

⁷⁵ Rita B. Dandridge, *Ann Allen Shockley: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.), xiv.

⁷⁶ Shelley P. Haley (co-author of this chapter), Personal Conversation with Margo Okazawa-Rey at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY, May 1, 2017.

⁷⁷ Dandridge, vi.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

relatively unknown on the national level because of the thoughtless reviews some critics have given her works.”⁷⁹

Shockley, like her Black foremothers in librarianship, accomplished a number of firsts and established herself as a librarian-activist, embodying the spirit of the Ghanaian word and symbol, *sankofa*,⁸⁰ which now is translated as “one must reach back to reclaim that which is lost in order to move forward.” *Sankofa* has guided Shockley throughout her career as a librarian and as a novelist and essayist. She strove always to make her work accessible, even if it made her unpopular with academic critics. Shockley always considered herself a full-time librarian and a part-time writer. In “A Soul Cry for Reading,” Shockley reveals herself “as an underpaid, overworked librarian or ‘general factotum’.”⁸¹ Although she may have, at times, resented librarianship, she never left. This cannot be said of our final librarian, Audre Lorde.

Lorde is often cited along with Shockley as the bravest of the brave: Black Lesbian writers who wrote openly Black Lesbian literature. While Shockley’s lesbianism is debated, Lorde’s self-description as a “Black, Lesbian, feminist, mother, poet warrior” leaves no doubt about her orientation. Librarianship was a vocation Shockley and Lorde shared, but like Larsen, Lorde left the field to devote herself fully to her writing and vision that “poetry is not a luxury.” Lorde believed in the power of words, the power of poetry to effect lasting change. As she states, “For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change,

⁷⁹ Ibid., xii.

⁸⁰ Many Black/Africana Studies programs also embrace *sankofa* as a guiding principle of their research and teaching practices.

⁸¹ Dandridge, 61.

first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.”⁸² Lorde’s first steps in birthing this vision began with libraries.

Lorde was born in 1934 in New York City, the youngest of three daughters to Linda and Byron Lorde, who were recent immigrants to the United States from the Caribbean. Lorde’s parents instilled in all their daughters a strong work ethic and the value of education, particularly a Catholic education, and a sense that the United States was not their home. Displaying a bias against and superiority to African Americans common to many African and Caribbean immigrants, Linda Lorde would not allow Lorde to play or socialize with any African American children in Harlem where they lived. Linda Lorde who was light enough to pass as “Spanish” also had a deep-seated prejudice against dark-skinned people of African descent. She often remarked “you didn’t trust anybody whose face is black because their heart is black.”⁸³ This, in turn, had a serious impact on Lorde’s developing self-esteem, since she was the darkest of the Lorde daughters, causing her to act out. In fact, it can be argued that Linda Lorde’s colorism forged and fueled Lorde’s poetic and bookish sensibilities. The parenting style of the Lordes was steeped in the politics of respectability and their belief that they were ethnically superior. Lorde’s sisters, Phyllis and Helen, took piano lessons; Lorde herself preferred to memorize poetry, even as she was furtively writing her own poems.⁸⁴ Books, language, and poetry became Lorde’s shelter from her strict, emotionally detached parents and the disinterest of her sisters. She first became aware of this haven in the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library.

Lorde was five-years old when she first met Augusta Baker, the Children’s Librarian at the 135th Street Branch. Baker was one of the first wave of Black female librarians who also was

⁸² Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA.: The Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

⁸³ Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 18.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

a trailblazer. According to her obituary in the *New York Times*, Augusta Baker was “a spellbinding storyteller, editor and former custodian of the children’s section at the New York Public Library.”⁸⁵ When Augusta Baker was hired as the Children’s Librarian at the 135th Street Branch (now Countee Cullen Regional Branch) in 1937, she found her calling as a librarian-activist. Beginning in 1939, the same year Lorde first met her, Baker spearheaded a campaign at the Branch to find and collect children’s literature that were positive and empowering representations of people of African descent. Throughout her 37 years at the New York Public Library, she held various positions, including becoming the first Black librarian in an administrative position when she became Coordinator of Children’s Services in 1961. In this position, she fostered the vision of the South Bronx Library Project by inviting Pura Belpré to participate. In 1946, she compiled *Books about Negro Life for Children*, a reference work of titles related to the Black experience. This was retitled in 1971 as *The Black Experience in Children’s Books* and, according to Baker’s entry in *Pioneers and Leaders in Library Services to Youth: A Biographical Dictionary*, this work was instrumental in raising awareness about the negative stereotypes in Helen Bannerman’s “The Story of Little Black Sambo.”

This, then, is the remarkable woman who, in Lorde’s own words, inspired her to read and in turn gave her hope. It is important to quote at length what Lorde remembers about her first meeting with Augusta Baker. She tells the story in *Zami: A Biomythography*:

I learned how to read from Mrs. Augusta Baker, the children’s librarian at the old 135th Street branch library... If that was the only good deed that lady ever did in her life, may she rest in peace. Because that deed saved my life, if not sooner, then later, when sometimes the only thing I had to hold on to was knowing I could read, and that that could get me through.

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Saxon, “Augusta B. Baker, 86, Storyteller, Editor and Children’s Librarian,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1998.

Lorde goes on to describe how her mother tried to keep her quiet by pinching her ears, which, of course, only made Lorde scream louder. She goes on,

Suddenly, I looked up, and there was a library lady standing over me. My mother's hands had dropped to her sides. From the floor where I was lying, Mrs. Baker seemed like yet another mile-high woman about to do me in. She had immense, light, hooded eyes and a very quiet voice that said, not damnation for my noise, but "Would you like to hear a story, little girl?"

Part of my fury was because I had not been allowed to go to that secret feast called story hour since I was too young, and now here was this strange lady offering me my own story.

...Still bewildered by this sudden change of events, I climbed up upon the stool which Mrs. Baker pulled over for me, and gave her my full attention. This was a new experience for me and I was insatiably curious.

Baker reads a variety of stories to Lorde and she reacts by saying,

By the time she had finished that last one, I was sold on reading for the rest of my life. ... I said, quite loudly, for whoever was listening to hear, "I want to read."⁸⁶

Lorde's education came in the heady times of the Civil Rights Movement. Lorde graduated from Hunter College in 1959 and entered Columbia University's School of Library Science, where she earned a Master's degree in Library Science in 1961. De Veaux describes this period of Lorde's life, "Bordered by Harlem, Columbia became yet another stage upon which she juggled carefully inhabited, intersecting worlds. She worked during the daytime, took classes at night, and was still involved with the 'gay-girls' scene in the East and West Village."⁸⁷

Lorde would go on to become first the young adult librarian at the Mount Vernon Public Library, perhaps still honoring the influence of Augusta Baker, and later in 1966, the Head Librarian at The Town School in Manhattan. In the intervening years, she married Edward Rollins, a white, gay man and had two children, Elizabeth and Jonathan. She also became politically active and attended the March On Washington in 1963.

⁸⁶ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A Biomythography* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1994), 22-23.

⁸⁷ De Veaux, 62-63.

In 1968, she made the life-changing decision to resign from her position at The Town School and to accept a Poet-in-Residence position at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. Her activism pivoted from curation of the written word to production of it. She would never return to librarianship. In an interview with Adrienne Rich, her friend, collaborator, fellow Lesbian, and fellow poet, she explains the transformative effect Tougaloo had on her:

Audre: I knew by the time I left Tougaloo that teaching was the work I needed to be doing, that library work—by this time I was head librarian at the Town School—was not enough. It had been very satisfying to me. And I had a kind of stature I hadn't had before in terms of working. But from the time I went to Tougaloo and did that workshop, I knew: not only, yes, I am a poet but also, this is the kind of work I'm going to do.⁸⁸

This does not mean, however, that librarianship was no longer part of her self-identity. In the same interview with Rich, Lorde explains the influence of librarianship on her development as an intellectual. While discussing Rich's need for documentation and Lorde's resistance to it:

Audre: Don't forget that I'm a librarian. I became a librarian because I really believed I would gain tools for ordering and analyzing information. I couldn't know everything in the world, but I would gain tools for learning it.⁸⁹

Still it is striking that despite Lorde's admonition, "Don't forget that I'm a librarian," most, if not all, her biographers and compilers have forgotten it. De Veaux mentions Lorde's librarianship mainly as facts of her career path. Passing mention of librarianship is made in the introduction and timeline of *I am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*.⁹⁰ There is no mention of Lorde's librarianship in the most recent anthology by Gloria I.

⁸⁸ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 92.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁰ *I am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, eds. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. Introduction by Byrd mentions librarianship, 3; Chronology cites librarianship, 267.

Joseph.⁹¹ In librarianship, Lorde's departure from the field of librarianship is often held up as an example of the isolation of people color, especially women of color, a result of the field's ignorance of how the processes, tools, and practices that we engage with as librarians reflect and uphold whiteness.⁹² This is complicated by Lorde's continued self-identification as librarian. It is a missed opportunity by many researchers to not connect how Lorde's experience as a librarian affected her work on black feminist thought and theory.⁹³ Lorde is making use of her training in cataloging and classification systems to discuss how knowledge and understanding are separate from one another. It is interesting that Lorde chooses to use the word "tools" in the Rich interview, and we cannot help but be reminded of another essay in *Sister Outsider*, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."⁹⁴ In the context of her quote from her conversation with Rich, one can argue that librarianship influences "The Master's Tools." When library science is applied to that essay, we can see how classification tools continue to colonize people of color, unless critiqued and dismantled. So while Lorde may have left the profession of librarianship, the identity of librarian never left Lorde, and as seen with the women of this chapter, it influenced her writings.

Conclusion

These five women, while just a sample of how Black women contributed to librarianship, provide us with an understanding of the role of Black women in the history of American librarianship. Nevertheless, Audre Lorde's statement "the master's tools will never dismantle the

⁹¹ Gloria I. Joseph, *The Wind is Spirit: The Life, Love and Legacy of Audre Lorde*. The omission of this important aspect of Lorde's career belies the cover blurb from bell hooks, "This anthology is awesome because unlike other biographical reminiscences, it offers a candid and holistic portrait of Audre Lorde." (emphasis ours).

⁹² Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005): 19-20.

⁹³ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 105.

⁹⁴ "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is considered one of the foundational texts of Black feminism.

master's house" remains a question for Black librarians. Certainly each of these Black women made significant changes, reimaginings, and disruption of the whiteness of libraries over the course of their careers. It also cannot be ignored that the women of the first wave of librarianship all benefited from an adherence to white, middle-class values. Furthermore, all of these women, by the chance of a genetic lottery, were on the lighter end of the color scale.

In 1924, Regina Anderson Andrews, Ethel Ray Nance, and Louella Tucker hosted a soiree for Langston Hughes at their apartment on St. Nicholas Avenue. Photographs were taken to commemorate the event. As we study this photograph and others from the Harlem Renaissance, an uncomfortable and often neglected truth emerges: the intersection between class and skin color, now commonly referred to as colorism. We believe it is fair to say that the librarians we have discussed as part of the first wave, along with other members of the Harlem Renaissance internalized and benefited from colorism. Of course not all artists were comfortable with the tacit acceptance of colorism. For example, Zora Neale Hurston wrote a play in 1926, which she titled *Color Struck*, and although it was never produced, it is a biting testimonial to the existence of and awareness of colorism among the social circle of our first wave librarians. The very title is the phrase used colloquially to describe people of African descent who have internalized white supremacy and its concomitant concept that light skin color equals intellectual capability, sexual desirability, and an omen of economic success. Hurston's play tells the story of Emmaline (Emma) Beazely and John Turner, a couple who are always arguing because of John's blatant disrespect of Emma demonstrated through his wandering "eye" which is always directed at "yellow" or "half-white girls." Zora leaves no doubt about the theme of the play.

Appropriately, given the title, Hurston explicitly states the skin color of the main characters:

John Turner, a light brown-skinned man; Emmaline Beazely, *a black woman* [emphasis ours];

Effie, a mulatto girl; Lou Lillian, Emma's daughter, *a very white girl*. Emma becomes overwhelmed with jealousy and mistrust, and her relationship with John disintegrates. Hurston is careful to demonstrate that the effects of colorism go beyond the dissolution of a dysfunctional relationship as these lines from Scene 2 show,

Emma: (*Calmly bitter*) He went and left me. If we is spating we done had our last one. (*She stands and clenches her fists.*) Ah, mah God! He's in there with her—Oh them half whites, they gets everything, they gets everything everybody else wants! The men, the jobs—everything! The whole world got a sign on it. Wanted: Light colored. Us blacks was made for cobble stones. (*She muffles a cry and sinks limp upon the seat.*) (Hurston, 43-44).

As a young girl learning double dutch jump rope, Haley encountered this chant that the more experienced jumpers used to keep time as they twirled the rope. It also was the source of a blues song by Big Bill Broonzy:

If you're white, you're alright
If you're brown, stick around, but
If you're black, get back, get back.

In recent times there has been much scholarly attention paid to colorism and the fissures and polarization it has always caused in communities of color.⁹⁵ Colorism was and is a tool of white supremacist patriarchy used to ensure the fracture and disunity of communities of color. While we can infer that class and colorism played a role in which Black women were placed in

⁹⁵ A cursory literature review on the topic of colorism in general and colorism during the Harlem Renaissance reveals a plethora of articles and books. Ones which we find enlightening include: Taunya Lovell Banks, "Colorism: A Darker Shade of Pale," *UCLA Law Review* 47, no. 6 (August 2000): 1705-1746; Jacob S. Dorman, "Skin Bleach and Civilization: The Racial Formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4.4 (2011): 47-80; Margaret L. Hunter, "'If You're Light You're Alright': Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 2 (2002): 175-193; Sharon L. Jones, *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance: Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West*, 2002; Treva B. Lindsey, "Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011): 97-116; Mahshidossadat Mirmasoumi and Farshid Nowrouzi Roshnavand, "Blackness, Colorism, and Epidermalization of Inferiority in Zora Neale Hurston's *Color Struck*: A Fanonian Reading of the Play," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 17, no. 4 (2014): 55-65; Leland Ware, "'Color Struck': Intragroup and Cross-Racial Color Discrimination," *Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal* 13, no.1 (Fall 2013): 75-110.

librarian positions, there has been no explicit scholarship on the topic. Nevertheless recent scholarship reinforces our inference. Treva Lindsey writes in her conclusion, “The bodies and representations of the bodies of African American women in Washington and other urban centers were a terrain in which the socio-cultural dynamics and competing notions of a New negro ethos was magnified. ... African American women both implicitly and explicitly accepted white constructions of feminine beauty...and situated themselves at the center of a public discourse of political, economic, social, and cultural significance.”⁹⁶ There are grounds to speculate that all the first wave librarians were complicit in perpetuating colorism (even if unwittingly) and gained social and class advantages because of their light skin, “good hair,” and European facial features.

In addition, the general ethos of Du Bois’s “talented tenth” and Locke’s “New Negro”⁹⁷ reified the implicit superiority of light skin and its connection to the educated Black middle class. In fact Du Bois’s prejudice against dark-skinned folks exacerbated his political and intellectual feud with Marcus Garvey. In the February 1923 issue of *Century Magazine*, Du Bois, light-skinned, Harvard- and Berlin-educated, described Garvey as “a little fat black man, ugly, but with intelligent eyes and a big head.”⁹⁸ Garvey countered by calling Du Bois an “unfortunate mulatto.” Jacob Dorman, highlighting the connection between class and color here, states, “...Du Bois has interwoven class and color into the discourse of civilization to associate blackness and ugliness with a lack of civilization.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Treva B. Lindsey, “Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011), 111.

⁹⁷ The “talented tenth” and the “New Negro” sought to combat dangerous stereotypes of African Americans and replaced them with images of erudite, cosmopolitan, and sophisticated Black intellectual leaders of society.

⁹⁸ W.E.B. DuBois, “Back to Africa,” *Century Magazine* 150.4 (1923), 539. Quoted in Jacob S. Dorman, “Skin Bleach and Civilization: the racial formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4.4 (2011), 62.

⁹⁹ Dorman, 62.

Further support for the connection between colorism, class, and librarianship can be found in how Ethelene Whitmire introduces us to Regina Anderson Andrews. Andrews is seeking employment at the New York Public Library. At this point (this is the first page of the first chapter) we know nothing about Andrews except she is a librarian from Chicago who applies for a position with the NYPL and receives an interview. Here one might expect Whitmire to tell us about Andrews' credentials but instead she gives a vivid and detailed description of her hair as she arrived for her interview: "No doubt she was impeccably clad, as usual, and her waist-length hair was most likely pinned up since Andrews 'combed it very high on her head in a Spanish fashion.'"¹⁰⁰ From there we get a physical description of Andrews ("Regina had been described as a 'beautiful, beautiful girl' and "a pert olive-skinned girl.""), and we learn that she was featured on the cover of *Messenger: World's Greatest Negro Monthly*, a periodical whose editorial direction included "[showing] in pictures as well as writing, Negro women who are unique, accomplished, beautiful, intelligent, industrious, talented and successful."

It should also be noted that all our first wave librarians selected marriage partners who were light-skinned members of the talented tenth. Larsen perceived both her occupation as a librarian and her marriage to noted physicist Elmer S. Imes as her ticket to the middle class. Thadious Davis discusses Imes's choice of Larsen as a wife. She states, "This invidious emphasis on color as a measure of value perhaps contributed to Elmer Imes's initial attraction to the 'mulatto' Nella Larsen, who had straight, or 'good,' hair and features that were more Caucasian than Negroid."¹⁰¹ Regina Anderson Andrews, whose own parents were part of the talented tenth, eventually married the son of another prominent member of that group, William

¹⁰⁰ Whitmire, 1. For the description of Andrews' hairstyle, Whitmire cites (FN 2, 121) an interview with Ethel Ray Nance, Andrews' roommate at 580 conducted by Ann Allen Shockley, one of our second-wave librarians.

¹⁰¹ Davis, 130.

Andrews, even though the love of her life may have been Arthur St. George Richardson. However, Andrews's parents disapproved of Richardson and ended their engagement. Whitmire shares the speculations of Andrews's niece that her parents rejected Richardson because of his dark skin and Whitmire herself adds the speculation that Andrews's parents may also have disapproved of Richardson's Caribbean background—his father was born in Bermuda.¹⁰² Finally, Belpré married the noted composer and violinist Clarence Cameron White, whose photograph reveals a light-skinned African American man with European features. Through colorism, they achieved positions that allowed them to disrupt the “master's house.”

While our first-wave librarians pushed boundaries, it is important to recognize the white power structures that they were still working in and upholding. Particularly for Andrews and Belpré they were groundbreaking because they were allowed to be groundbreaking. Most of their work, the fora, plays, and Spanish-language library services, were sanctioned and approved by their white library supervisor, Ernestine Rose. During the era of Carnegie libraries, from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, libraries were created to uphold white middle class Protestant values and provide reading materials to occupy blue-collar workers during off-hours.¹⁰³ In addition to the library services, the very architecture, the physical embodiment of the library, was thought to have a “civilizing” effect.¹⁰⁴ Historian Wayne Wiegand argues that libraries, especially in New York, the entry point for many European immigrants, became a place of assimilation to American values.¹⁰⁵ However, European immigrants were not the only new

¹⁰² Whitmire, 49.

¹⁰³ Wayne A. Wiegand, *“An Active Instrument for Propaganda”: The American Public Library During World War I*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 5; Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: a People's History of the American Public Library* (New York: Oxford Press, 2015), 83.

¹⁰⁴ Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives*, 95.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 96-97.

arrivals to large northern cities, like New York. African American refugees¹⁰⁶ and migrants from the American South were arriving in waves to northern cities as part of the Great Migration. Just as libraries were a place for European immigrants to assimilate, so the library was a place for people of the Great Migration to be assimilated into the culture of the Harlem Renaissance. For example, Andrews's fora and plays sought to educate their audience to be cosmopolitan, erudite, and socially aware. All these were also the values that Harlemites wanted to project of the "Black Mecca."

On the other hand, the librarians of the second-wave pushed against the white power structures rather than just existing and working within them. Lorde used information science in her essays on Black feminism to disrupt white hegemonic notions of knowledge and information. We see Shockley advocating for libraries at HBCUs to lead the way for African American special collections and incorporating the contributions of marginalized groups, including Black lesbians, into scholarly works and bibliographies. In the second wave, which aligns with the Black Arts and Black Power movements, these two librarians subverted white-centric ideals and forged spaces for Black and queer people, without the expectation of respectability.

But still, questions remain for us: to what extent does the disruption of the librarian narrative exist merely because these are Black women? Is the expectation that, as Black women, we are all automatically disruptive? Is the exceptionalism of Black women (often phrased as the "strong, Black woman" stereotype) an unhealthy model to live up to? How much emotional labor do we expend to do this disruption? To further investigate these questions, more work needs to be done by librarians interrogating the field's racial biases and how the structure of the library

¹⁰⁶ Many scholars have reframed The Great Migration as a refugee movement in reaction to lynchings and Jim Crow instead of economic flight as previously thought. See: Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, "Racial Violence and Black Migration in the American South, 1910 to 1930," *American Sociological Review* 57, no. 1 (Feb., 1992), 103-116 and Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Random House, 2010).

upholds whiteness and sexism. Because even after all the work of our Black female forebearers, Black librarianship today is still in peril. Andrew Jackson, in the preface to *The 21st-Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges*, bluntly states, “All is not well in librarianship. Despite all that has been accomplished and all that black librarians have overcome, there is still work to be done, glass ceilings to be shattered, closed doors to be opened.”¹⁰⁷

Librarianship in the United States is still overwhelmingly white. Chris Bourg in a blog post cleverly sums up the field’s racial diversity problem as the “the unbearable whiteness of librarianship.” In that same blog post, she lays out the racial makeup of librarianship as of 2010 from data collected by the ALA Diversity Office. Librarianship is over 87% white and African-American librarians make up just over five percent of the field.¹⁰⁸ One reason for the racial disparity is the continued structural whiteness and implicit racism in librarianship and libraries.

April Hathcock discusses how one of the consequences of the whiteness of the librarianship leads to failed diversity initiatives. “The normativity of whiteness,” Hathcock states, “works insidiously, invisibly to create binary categorizations of people as either acceptable to whiteness and therefore normal or different and therefore other.”¹⁰⁹ The experience of Regina Anderson Andrews being told that she was “colored” and not “American” is still an experience being felt by Black librarians today. Black women in librarianship are still racialized and gendered, and their physical bodies are still political. Black librarians are still expected to “uplift the race” and the field of librarianship. Taneya Gethers, in her chapter in *The 21st-Century Black Librarian in America*, advocates that the “professional duty of black librarians is

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Jackson, “Preface”, xix.

¹⁰⁸ Chris Bourg, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Librarianship,” *The Feral Librarian* (blog), March 3, 2014, <https://chrisbourg.wordpress.com/2014/03/03/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-librarianship>.

¹⁰⁹ April Hathcock, “White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, October 7, 2015, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/>.

not separate from our cultural responsibility as people of African descent. An essential part of the mission is to help empower black people throughout the African Diaspora, and this undertaking is critical to our mission today.”¹¹⁰ Jackson echoes this sentiment, stating that “Today’s call for action is for young and new black librarians to stand tall and firm on the shoulders of our ancestors... It is your time to keep pushing, to make a difference and address the challenges in the 21st century.”¹¹¹ At five percent of librarianship, the heavy load of labor and activism for Black librarians is daunting. Making racial equity the responsibility of Black librarians allows white librarians to remain complicit in their whiteness and racism. White librarians should be just as responsible for addressing the lack of diversity in the field and just as expected to make changes for the better. Tracie D. Hall recommends that “... it is time that we more intentionally mine and theorize the histories of race and resistance in libraries and the promise of black librarianship in the fight for racial equity and social justice.”¹¹²

Libraries have long been considered the symbol of civilization. Meanwhile Black feminists have long advocated that a free civilization is not truly free if Black women are not liberated. Anna Julia Cooper argued “Only if the black woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.’ ”¹¹³ Reflecting Cooper nearly one hundred years later, and demonstrating the required need for each generation of Black feminists to repeat themselves, the Combahee River Collective stated that “If Black women were

¹¹⁰ Taneya Gethers, “The 21st-Century Black Librarian: Renewing Our Commitment to Liberation and Cultural Activism,” in *The 21st-Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges*, eds. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius C. Jefferson Jr., and Akilah S. Nosakhere, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 224.

¹¹¹ Jackson, xix.

¹¹² Tracie D. Hall, “The Black Body at the Reference Desk: Critical Race Theory and Black Librarianship,” in *The 21st-Century Black Librarian in America: Issues and Challenges*, eds. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius C. Jefferson Jr., and Akilah S. Nosakhere (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 202.

¹¹³ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, (Xenia, OH: Aldine Printing House, 1892), *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, [tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/5BXEW0](https://tinyurl.com/tinyurl/5BXEW0), 31.

free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression.”¹¹⁴ Concerns and anxieties about the presence and absence of Black women’s physical bodies in libraries confirms the observation that “African American women and their bodies [are] central to discussions of civilization and its meanings.”¹¹⁵ When the experiences, contributions, and voices of Black women are ignored and deflected in discussions of diversity and equity in libraries, the fruit of those discussions will never develop and advance. We believe this chapter is progress in this mission to better understand how libraries, race, and gender have become inextricably intertwined into the fabric of American society.

¹¹⁴ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982), 18.

¹¹⁵ Dorman, 55.

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