

African American Librarians: A Survey Conducted between 2019 and 2020 in the United States

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ABSTRACT

The library profession in the United States faces many challenges in keeping up with diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts. African Americans who are entering the library profession contribute to these efforts. This article presents the analysis of a survey of African American librarians in the United States conducted on October 23, 2019, and closed on February 1, 2020. It looks at the journey of African American librarians to the library profession. Survey takers were asked to describe their achievements in librarianship, how they entered the profession, future goals, and challenges. Analysis of survey responses is presented along with a brief literature review, followed by some suggestions for further research. We hope to increase the conversation on this topic and to contribute to diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts.

The library profession in the United States faces many challenges in keeping up with diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts. African Americans who are entering the library profession contribute to these efforts. We began working together on this topic in April 2019. We realized that most of what exists in the library literature on African Americans needs further research to discover today's African American librarians' challenges and contributions to the profession. Therefore, we surveyed African American librarians in the United States to address this issue and to contribute to the library literature on this subject.

This article presents the analysis of a survey of African American librarians in the United States conducted on October 23, 2019, and closed on February 1, 2020. It looks at the journey of African American librarians to the library profession. Survey takers were asked to describe their achievements in librarianship, how they entered the profession, future goals, and challenges. Analysis of survey responses is presented along with a brief literature review, followed by some suggestions for further research. We hope to increase the conversation on this topic and to contribute to librarianship diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts.

Methods

We surveyed African American librarians from all types of libraries, information centers, and museums in the United States. Working as a professional librarian when the survey was circulated was the stated eligibility for survey takers mentioned in the survey distribution note and the consent page before participants proceeded to the survey. We used the Survey Monkey program to create the survey, which was launched after approval and passing institutional review board requirements. In total, 359 people completed the survey. It was distributed to 12 discussion lists chosen from the American Library Association (ALA) electronic discussion lists and library Facebook groups. After the survey closed, we exported the results from the survey program and carefully analyzed them. The survey had 18 questions, some of which included optional text boxes for open-ended responses.

Keyword patterns from these open-ended responses were analyzed by examining the frequency of keyword repetitions in the open-ended responses to the questions. The rationale for using single keywords to analyze qualitative responses was simple: we manually counted the number of keyword repetitions for the top repeated specific words and phrases using a keyboard command. We wanted to create a way to present the number of specific keywords that repeated the most in the open-ended text box responses.

Literature Review

Today's librarians stand better because of African American librarians in history and their significant contributions to literature. A growing body of work in the library literature on African American librarians started in the 1930s or earlier. Within the past decade, however, contributions to the literature on this topic were sparse, leading to suggestions for more research about today's African American librarians and their challenges. Selected resources from the library literature inspired this research to broaden the knowledge base in the research area when contextualizing the survey's findings. Most resources selected to be reviewed in this section were written within the past 5 years. The resources cited in this section are mainly narrative histories of African American librarians. The section is divided into three subcategories: narrative histories of pioneers, brief library education reviews from the literature, and current narratives.

Narrative Histories of Pioneers

Earlier works offer context for the topic when displaying narratives from pioneering African Americans. A seminal piece is Alma Dawson's (2000) "Celebrating African-American Librarians and Librarianship." In her article, Dawson portrays pioneer African American librarians' achievements in librarianship. Ethelene Whitmire's (2017) book about Regina Anderson is another example mentioning an important pioneer. Anderson played an essential role in the Harlem Renaissance when she fought for promotion and equal pay against entrenched sexism and racism.

Renate Chancellor's (2020) book on Elonnie J. Josey is a critical contribution to the literature. Josey was the first African American president of the ALA, from 1984 to 1985, and the first African American librarian in the Georgia Library Association. Josey was also the founder of the Black Caucus of the ALA (BCALA).

The article from Alex H. Poole (2018), titled "'Could My Dark Hands Break through the Dark Shadow?': Gender, Jim Crow, and Librarianship during the Long Freedom Struggle, 1935–1955," is a valuable addition to the library literature, with a historical review of southern African American female librarians during the long civil rights movement (1930s–1960s). This article lets researchers follow through on the actions in history and compare them with today's challenges.

"African American Female Librarians: A Study of Job Satisfaction," by Joyce K. Thornton (2001), is also a valuable contribution to the literature. Thornton says that "libraries must move from being philosophically committed to increasing, retaining and advancing the number of minorities, especially African Americans, into the profession" (143). Thornton hopes to provide insight toward that goal by examining the job satisfaction of African American women in the library profession. In addition, an article from Greg Landgraf (2018), titled "Blazing Trails: Pioneering African-American Librarians Share Their Stories," highlights pioneering African American librarians who dedicated their lives to the profession of librarianship.

Rebecca D. Hunt's (2013) article, titled "African American Leaders in the Library Profession: Little Known History," briefly mentions the historical background of the librarianship profession and when the first African American library school opened in the United States in 1925. The article also indicates that African Americans and Latinos demanded equal rights and opportunities that society had to offer during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The Library Services and Construction Act of 1964 (P.L. 88–269) mandated funding for libraries to develop collections for all people in the United States. The article cites the mission of the BCALA, which was established in 1970 for African American librarians. It was founded as a support mechanism for the African American community and for recruitment and professional development of African American librarians.

Library Education Review

A discussion of the important role of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in educating Black librarians is necessary to build a consensus as part of the literature review. Rosemary Ruhig DuMont's (1986a) article, "The Educating of Black Librarians: An Historical Perspective," is an essential resource on this topic. It is divided into three main sections: the chronological historical development of library science education for Black students, the discussion of the contemporary situation when the article was written in the 1980s, and the recommendations for future developments in library education for Black librarians (234). DuMont's (1986b) second article, "Race in American Librarianship: Attitudes of the Library Profession," reviews the historical developments of southern public library service access for Black librarians.

Thirty-five years later, Ana Ndumu and Renate Chancellor (2021) published an article that revisits DuMont's two articles from 1986 on Black librarianship and racial attitudes in library education. The second part of the article mentions the discrimination issues in accreditation related to the closure of HBCU-based LIS programs. They indicate that structural racism still affects the LIS field. They raise many questions at the end of their article that demand urgent responses. Ndumu (2021) published another article, "Shifts: How Changes in the US Black Population Impact Racial Inclusion and Representation in LIS Education," in which she points out the importance of HBCU-based education and how it played a prominent role in educating African American leaders, such as "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Thurgood Marshall" (146). Ndumu provides recommendations for LIS leaders to improve recruitment and inclusion efforts for Black librarians and contributes to the conversation about HBCU-based LIS programs.

Partnership education models in librarianship were also discussed among scholars as one of the solutions to strengthen LIS education. Ndumu and Tina Rollins's (2020) article, "Envisioning Reciprocal and Sustainable HBCU-LIS Pipeline Partnerships," highlight how the inclusion of HBCU educational practices can strengthen LIS and recommends a model of HBCU-LIS degree program partnerships. Elaina Norlin and Patricia Morris (2001) suggest a similar partnership model when they highlight the critical role of HBCUs in providing education for the African American population. Kimberly Black (2018) discusses the necessity of delving into diversifying librarianship and how library and information science education programs at predominantly Black institutions such as the Chicago State University can play a critical role in this effort.

A valuable recent resource is Aisha M. Johnson-Jones's (2019) research explaining the historic library practices that discriminated against Blacks. In her book, *The African American Struggle for Library Equality*, Johnson-Jones explains how the Julius Rosenwald Library Fund program was one of the important initiatives that supported the education of Black librarians as a remedy to cure injustice in librarianship education.

Maurice B. Wheeler and Daniella Smith's (2018) article, "Race and Leadership in Library and Information Science Education: A Study of African American Administrators," highlights today's library education and lists African American leaders in library education, including a brief historical survey and statistics. This article is an excellent contribution to the literature that highlights education in librarianship from a leadership perspective while pointing out today's achievements. Wheeler and Smith cited Carla Hayden's speech when she became the fourteenth Librarian of Congress, as the first woman and African American, in 2016. Hayden stated in her remarks, "As a descendant of people who were denied the right to read, to now have the opportunity to serve and lead the institution that is the national symbol of knowledge, is a historic moment" (quoted in Wheeler and Smith 2018, 2). Wheeler and Smith also mention Edward Christopher Williams, the first African American to earn a degree in library science in the United States, who graduated from the New York State Library School in 1900.

Current African American Librarian Narratives

In addition to reviewing some resources about the education of African American librarians, it is worth citing the current narratives from African American librarians on this topic. The *21st-Century Black Librarian in America*, edited by Andrew P. Jackson, Julius C. Jefferson, Jr., and Akilah S. Nosakhere (2012), is a valuable resource. This book is a collection of essays written by library educators, library graduate students, retired librarians, public library trustees, veteran librarians, and new librarians that cover many challenges and contributions to the profession. The book starts with Elonnie J. Josey providing a selected bibliography of works, which is a roadmap for the young generation of librarians. Some of the essays include, "Challenges of the Black School Librarian in the 21st Century: Why I Choose to Stay," "National and International Challenges of Black Librarianship in the 21st Century," and "What Does Black Librarianship Look Like in the Proverbial Information Age?" Two previous editions of this book were edited by Josey (1970, 1994). It is necessary to contextualize and compare the 2012 edition with these earlier editions. The latest edition, edited by Shauntee Burns-Simpson and colleagues (2021) and titled *The Black Librarian in America: Reflections, Resistance, and Reawakening*, was published in commemoration of the BCALA's fiftieth anniversary.

Jean Darnell's (2021) article, "Unpacking Black School Librarianship," tells of her experience as a young, Black school librarian. She explains how she created inclusive programs that address the setbacks to "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) caused by predominantly white institutions (PWIs)" (33). Erika Long's (2021) article, "Making a Mark on White Space: My Experience as a Black School Librarian," is a recent article that tells the success story of a school librarian. She indicates that she advocates the recruitment of more school librarians of color by displaying her authenticity within professional associations and being vocal about her accomplishments. Maegen Rose's (2021) article, "Black School Librarianship: Navigating Race and Creating Change," adds a narrative about how Rose shifted her career from social work to librarianship.

In "Strange Career: Reconciling Race and Profession in American Librarianship," Steven R. Harris (2019) indicates some current reconciliation efforts. He mentions the ALA Council's task, "Resolution to Honor African Americans Who Fought Library Segregation," adopted in June 2018 (106). According to Harris, this effort was not sufficient. Indicating that "this charge needs to be an ongoing commitment, not a single resolution," he suggests creating a commission for reconciliation to forge "a path toward healing" to make a more whole and inclusive profession (106).

Renee F. Hill's (2019) narrative is highlighted in her article, "The Danger of an Untold Story: Excerpts from My Life as a Black Academic." Her narrative is from an academic librarian's perspective. She mentions microaggressions, double marginalization, and many other challenges. Despite this, she encourages librarians of color to continue working in higher education to add diverse perspectives and to help pave the way for future librarians. Like Hill's perspective, Amy

Table 1. At What Type of Library Are You Currently Working?

Answer Choice	Response	%
HBCU academic library	56	15.82
Academic library (non-HBCU)	161	45.48
Public library	99	27.97
Special library ^a	21	5.93
School library	17	4.80
Total respondents	354	

Note.—HBCU = historically Black colleges and universities.

^a Examples of special libraries are those in government, museums, and law firms.

VanScoy and Kawanna Bright (2019) tell the story of librarians of color experiencing uniqueness and difference in a predominantly white profession.

Survey Results

The first nine questions were background questions, which included educational, age, sex, and statistical career-oriented questions. The remainder of the questions included comment sections that were designed to measure survey takers' input about their experiences. The first question asked about the types of libraries where African American librarians currently work. As shown in table 1, "academic" was the top response, although all kinds of libraries received answers. Special libraries and school libraries received the lowest results. Further research may be needed by narrowing this category down to a particular library type and focusing on the types of libraries that received the lowest results.

The second question asked how long the respondents had been in the library profession working as a librarian. The majority of survey takers had been in the profession between 10 and 20 years or more. Being in the library profession was defined as "employed as a professional librarian." Only 65 of 355 respondents were in their first 5 years, as entry-level librarians (table 2). The data from this group indicate that further research could assess the reasons for this low percentage of entry-level participants.

Table 2. How Long Have You Been in the Library Profession?

Answer Choice	Response	%
1–5 years	65	18.31
5–10 years	76	21.41
10–20 years	108	30.42
≥20 years	106	29.86
Total respondents	355	

Table 3. What Is Your Salary Range?

Answer Choice	Response	%
\$35,000–\$55,000	109	31.05
\$55,000–\$75,000	118	33.62
\$75,000–\$125,000	110	31.34
\$125,000 or higher	14	3.99
Total respondents	351	

The third question inquired about salary range. The lowest value on the pay scale was \$35,000, an approximate number based on statistics from the ALA and Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA 2014) and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). Most respondents indicated that their annual salaries were between \$55,000 and \$75,000. The ranges \$35,000–\$55,000 and \$75,000–\$125,000 also received high responses. A tiny percentage of respondents indicated salaries of \$125,000 or higher. Table 3 displays the inequity of salaries between positions and salary ranges. Each librarian's position differs by its geographic location and responsibilities depending on the size of the library. Perhaps more research is needed for future studies to do more detailed analysis of salary inequity according to size, type, and location.

The fourth question determined how many survey takers participated in library organizations or associations. Most responded "yes" to this question. Participation in library organizations does not necessarily mean being a member. Therefore, the question also asked survey takers to comment optionally by naming the organizations they were a member of. The participation percentage on this question is shown in table 4. In the comment section, the survey takers gave names of the affiliated organizations, with most common organizations being BCALA, Indiana Black Librarians Network, ALA, Indiana Library Federation, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, Association of College and Research Libraries, Medical Library Association, North Carolina Library Association, and Society of American Archivists. In contrast, 52 respondents answered this question "no." Although this number is a small percentage of this survey, it is worth looking at the possible reasons why these survey

Table 4. Do You participate in Library Organizations?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Yes	97	27.32
No	52	14.65
If yes, please indicate the ones that you are a member of	206	58.03
Total respondents	355	

Table 5. What Is Your Gender?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Female	307	86.24
Male	46	12.92
Nonbinary/third gender	3	.84
Total respondents	356	

takers do not participate in library organizations or associations. Various reasons might include the cost of the conferences or lack of support at the institutional level. More research is warranted to look at ways to encourage involvement in professional library organizations.

The fifth question asked about gender (table 5). Most survey respondents were female, suggesting the need for more diversity on gender. However, the data collected from this survey cannot be generalized to the entire population of African American librarians. It is also possible that not many gender-diverse or African American male librarians responded to the survey.

The sixth question asked the survey takers' age range. The majority of survey takers were between the ages of 30–50 years. The age range of 20–30 years had the fewest participants. Survey takers aged 50 and older composed more than a quarter of the responses. Table 6 shows that African American librarians come from diverse age groups. There could be a correlation between the results of the second question, regarding entry-level librarians, and the low percentage of the youngest age group. More research should be done in this area.

The seventh question of the survey addressed the types of degrees that the survey takers held. The majority of respondents indicated having a professional library degree (table 7). In addition, 31.55% of respondents indicated that they had a second master's degree, and 9.30% reported having a doctorate. The education field is changing as disciplines become more interdisciplinary to accommodate library professionals. Further research might be useful regarding the types of second degrees that the respondents had to determine the shift of direction in the profession.

Table 6. What Is Your Age Range?

Answer Choice	Response	%
20–30 years	29	8.15
30–40 years	89	25.00
40–50 years	99	27.81
50–60 years	75	21.07
60 or older	64	17.98
Total respondents	356	

Table 7. What Professional Degrees Do You Have?
(Select All That Apply)

Answer Choice	Response	% ^a
Bachelor's degree	231	65.07
Master's degree in library field	322	90.70
Second master's degree	112	31.55
Third master's degree	6	1.69
Doctorate degree	33	9.30
Total respondents	355	

^a Participants could select more than one answer to this question. Percentages are calculated based on 355 (100%) respondents.

The eighth question asked survey takers if they received a degree from an HBCU. Of 356 survey takers who responded, 263 (73.88%) said they did not have a degree from an HBCU (table 8). The percentage of those who did have a degree from an HBCU (26.12%) is low, given the overall number of respondents. For the 93 people who answered "yes" to this question, it is also unknown if their degree is a library degree from an HBCU. Accordingly, this is another area for researchers to investigate, regarding HBCUs that are historically known to give library degrees and changes over time.

The ninth question surveyed participants' job roles. Only 43 of 356 survey respondents said that they were serving as library directors in their libraries, and 7 were serving as library deans (table 9). In addition, 31 of 83 survey takers mentioned in the comments section that they held management positions with leadership capacity. Based on the low leadership percentage for this question, research could examine whether a gap exists in the area of leadership education for African Americans in terms of library directors and library deans. Further investigation and research should look at the reasons why this percentage is low and consider underlying factors.

Question 10 asked survey takers about the underlying motivation that led them to choose librarianship as a profession. The top two responses were "mentorship influence" (103 respondents) and "service to the community" (101 respondents). "Passion in research" and "undergraduate education faculty influence" were other reasons for choosing librarianship as a profession

Table 8. Do You Have a Degree from an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Yes	93	26.12
No	263	73.88
Total respondents	356	

Table 9. Which One of the Following Roles Do You Hold?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Library director	43	12.08
Library dean	7	1.97
Librarian	223	62.64
Other (please specify)	83	23.31
Total respondents	356	

(table 10). In addition to the quantitative responses, respondents provided 138 additional comments to question 10. These comments show that family, community service, mentorship, and paraprofessional positions, such as student assistant and volunteer jobs, are motivating factors when choosing librarianship as a profession. Following are some responses from the survey takers regarding their journeys or stories about entering the profession:

- "Community service has always been a part of my family, church, and sorority life."
- "Worked at the library as a work-study student but really had no intention of staying in the field. I had some really good mentors who not only talked me into it but helped move me along in different positions in the library."
- "My desire to help others with their research and reading needs drove me to become a librarian."

Some keywords were repeated within these 138 text-box responses from individual survey takers; therefore, some keyword patterns were captured. "Research" (13 responses), "mentor" (10), "community" (12), "service" (6), and "family" (6) were the most repeated keywords within the comment responses (numbers in parentheses indicate how often these words were repeated in the overall text-box responses). In addition to the noted keywords, "second career," "archives," "supervisor influence," and "entry-level paraprofessional jobs" were indicated as other reasons for entering the profession.

Table 10. What/Who Influenced You to Become a Librarian?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Mentorship influence	103	29.43
Service to community	101	28.86
Passion in research	68	19.43
Undergraduate education faculty influence	33	9.43
Total respondents	350	

Table 11. Of the Following, Which Would You Choose as the Most Important Trend/Theme for the Future of Librarianship?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Intellectual freedom	41	11.58
Technological advances	101	28.53
Library programming	61	17.23
Open access	89	25.14
Data analytics	23	6.50
Other (please explain further)	39	11.02
Total respondents	354	

Question 11 sought survey takers' input about significant trends and themes for the future of librarianship. "Technological advances" (101 responses) and "open access" (89 responses) were the top answers (table 11). There were 39 additional comments to this question, some of them shown below:

- "I think Open Access and data analytics may be important in the future. However, I believe that storage issues, new resource sharing management systems, and working with vendors and publishers to reduce the cost of serials (Big Deals) are a future trend that more and more libraries are discussing and reviewing."
- "Digital inclusion: I think as more content is born-digital (including job applications), the difference between those who 'know how to navigate the digital environment and those who don't' become[s] even more drastic."
- "Real efforts at diversifying librarianship and addressing micro and macro aggressions, bias (Conscious and unconscious) and racism."

Survey respondents' comments show that some terminology was repeated in addition to the question's original options. "Equity and inclusion," "community," "open access," and "diversifying librarianship" were the most repeated keywords from these respondents, in addition to "data analytics," "information literacy," and "technology." The responses to question 11 show that the profession's future is changing. Members of the young generation entering the profession should improve their skills in these highlighted areas and be aware of the challenges mentioned, such as insufficient support and budget.

Question 12 asked about the challenges that African Americans face at their libraries. The top two answers were "budget issues" (105 responses) and "staffing issues" (82). However, "insufficient support" and "salary equity" also received their fair share of responses (table 12). There were 81 additional comments to this question, including the following comments:

Table 12. What Do You See as the Most Important Challenge You Face at Your Library?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Budget	105	29.43
Staffing	82	23.16
Salary equity	39	11.02
Insufficient support from stakeholders	61	17.23
Professional development	18	5.08
Keeping up with changing technical requirements	31	8.76
Keeping up with policy changes	11	3.11
Total respondents	354	

- “I left an ARL [Association of Research Libraries] library due to extreme bullying and mobbing that focused on racist themes and stereotypes.”
- “Our predominantly white and female profession can be a place of extreme discomfort and agony for BIPOC librarians. This is horrible for the profession.”
- “I think insufficient support from stakeholders covers a lot of the other issues libraries face such as budget, staffing, professional development (often libraries can’t afford to send staff) and changing technical requirements.”
- “Staffing and salary equity go hand in hand.”

“Budget” (23 responses), “staffing” (12), and “stakeholder” (11) were the most repeated terms among the 81 comments for question 12. In addition to these mostly repeated keywords, repeatedly commented areas created a pattern: library programming, lack of leadership, maintenance of electronic resources, education of stakeholders, and microaggressions. There are also correlations and relationships between terms—for example, “staffing” and “salary equity” are often used in the same comment, as is “relevancy” with “technology,” “cultural competency” with “collection development,” “community engagement” with “programming,” and “diversity” with “inclusiveness.”

Question 13 asked if survey takers contribute to the collection management area. The majority of participants (169 responses) said “yes,” as “contributing to the collection.” However, 102 participants said they do not contribute to this task in their libraries (table 13). Overall, 125 survey takers commented on this question (approximately five pages of comments). Below are some text-box responses:

- “Our community is predominantly African American, so we make sure to purchase those items we believe our patrons want and need [for] entertainment and educational purposes.”

Table 13. Do You Contribute to the Collection Management in Your Library and Improve African American Literature?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Yes	169	47.74
No	102	28.81
Sometimes	82	23.16
Total respondents	354	

- "I often look at what I've seen at exhibits and book fairs/shows to see what we may need to order for research. I always play a part in curating local authors who want to add their self-published titles to the main collection, and many of them are A.A. [African American]."
- "Each librarian is assigned a section for collection development. However, the selections we make for the collection are scrutinized by the singular collection development librarian, who has the final decision on whether or not our book selections are ultimately ordered. Essentially, we make suggestions, but we have no true power to purchase and select books at my institution."

Text-box responses to this question also show that some terms are repeated and that there are some connections between them. Acquiring items through nontraditional means such as self-published authors, donations, additional research, and liaison duties involving collection management were mentioned the most. Some terminological correlations used in the same comment included "diverse" and "authors/books," as well as "African American literature" and "history," "studies," "materials," "authors," and "African American experience."

Question 14 was about the challenges that respondents have experienced during their professional careers. "Professional disrespect" (123 responses) had the most responses, followed by "low pay" (109). "Bad working conditions" (47) and "racial discrimination" (44) received their fair share of responses, followed by comments (table 14). Although question 14 had the top five

Table 14. Which Challenges Have You Experienced the Most in Your Professional Career?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Professional disrespect	123	35.65
Low pay	109	31.59
Bad working conditions	47	13.62
Racial discrimination	44	12.75
Total respondents	345	

challenges listed, the comments from the survey takers show that additional related or correlated challenges exist. The comments to question 14, from 136 respondents, filled approximately 7.5 pages—one of the longest comment sections among the questions. Below are some text-box responses from the survey takers:

- “Microaggression and lack of respect for my expertise.”
- “I have experienced professional disrespect that was fueled by racial discrimination.”
- “People are surprised that I am intelligent, that I hold a full-fledged librarian position, that I can write a scholarly article or present a scholarly presentation. Having views disregarded unless championed by a white person.”
- “I’d say being a young Black woman, I’ve had to prove my competency often. It’s gotten better as I’ve made my mark in the field and got a job at another institution. I get it more from faculty and students who don’t expect me to be the librarian or defer to a white male or older colleague. People on campus don’t believe I’m faculty when I go to exercise privileges associated with being faculty.”
- “I had a hard time picking between ‘Professional disrespect’ and ‘Low pay’ primarily because the two feed into each other. There’s a general disrespect for the department (Acquisitions and Collection Management) I work in, which is partly why the pay is lower than other library faculty/staff of the same rank.”

“Discrimination” (20 responses), “microaggressions” (6), “gender” (8), and “race” (10) were the most repeated keywords from 136 survey takers who commented on this question. There are also correlations between terms that are used in the same comment repeatedly—for example, “gender” and “gender orientation,” “gender gap,” and “gender bias” with “disrespect” and “bad working conditions” and “low pay.” The repetitiveness of these terms indicates obvious patterns of challenges that the survey takers have been facing.

In question 15, the authors asked survey takers to rate the library profession in general diversity and inclusion activities. The majority of responses said it is fair and poor (table 15). Below are some selected comments from 105 respondents (six pages of comments):

- “It’s a wildly undiverse field with no real strategy to address it.”
- “From the statistics, it does look like it is getting better. Being the only POC [person of color] on staff and trying to represent your community is pressure enough, but I felt like more was always expected of me than from my white coworkers. And they always wanted me to come up with recommendations for A.A. materials and minority programming. I just wanted to see them take the time out to do their own research.”
- “Black people are over-represented in lower classifications such as pages, custodial staff and security and under-represented in management positions.”

Table 15. How Do You Rate Diversity and Inclusion in the Library Profession in General?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Excellent	2	.56
Very good	18	5.07
Good	45	12.68
Fair	147	41.41
Poor	143	40.28
Total respondents	355	

- "I think it depends upon what part of the country you are in. For example, if I was still working as a librarian in the Midwest, my answer would be poor. But if you are [in a] more racially/ethnically/etc. diverse part of the country, then it is probably fair to good."
- "The same issues that were present when I first started in 1992 are the same, only the vernacular has changed. The same old statistics rolled out that show the profession is still very white. A lot of talks, but not a lot of really hearing what we say."
- "I see the diversity and inclusion, and I suspect it is better than what I see because not all diversity is visible; however, I do not think we represent the populations we serve in proportionate numbers."

"Diversity" (40 responses), "inclusion" (28), and "people of color" (10) were the most repeated keywords in this question's comment section. There are also correlations between terms that are used in the same sentence structure: "diversity" and "inclusion," "fair" and "poor," "profession" and "white," and "ethnically" and "racially."

In question 16, the authors asked the respondents whether they engage in diversity and inclusion activities in their libraries. Although 95 respondents said "no" to this question, most said "yes" or "sometimes" (table 16). From the comments sections, it is clear that some people who responded "no" might not have been responsible in their job to create such activities "directly" or might not have had the opportunity to do so. Here are some comments from the survey takers:

Table 16. Do You Engage with Library Users in Creating Diversity and Inclusion Activities?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Yes	155	43.79
No	95	26.84
Sometimes	103	29.10
Total respondents	354	

- “African American Read-Ins and diverse voices book displays”
- “Collaboration with other campus departments re: events and programming; collection development; student outreach; committee work; incorporating ethnic diversity in visual and written course content”
- “Teaching classes on equity and inclusion.”
- “Global reading initiatives, Monthly cultural identity reading lists, Class unit on a social justice action.”

Overall, 114 survey takers commented on this question (approximately five pages of comments). Text-box responses show that some terms repeated: “program” (50 responses), “diversity” (30), “community” (12), and “activity” (25). The correlations between terms that were used in the same sentence also show the type of diversity and inclusion activities. Some of the keywords used together by the commenters were “diversity” and “programs,” “book discussions/displays,” “reading (initiatives),” “inviting guest speakers,” and “collection management.”

Question 17 asked what primary advice the survey takers would give to African American librarians who are entering the profession. The first two options—“Gain experience prior to and during library school” and “Seek mentorship”—had the majority of responses, and the options “Join professional associations” and “Improve research and writing skills” followed (table 17). Following are some survey takers’ comments:

- “A mentor will help to provide guidance, support, and a safe space for open discussion of issues and considerations unique to being a Black librarian in an overwhelmingly white field.”
- “You need a mentor (several over the course of a career). I don’t think I can stress this enough. Also, pick something and become the best at it. Expertise is a great way to distinguish yourself. Also, make professional development a habit. This will help you develop

Table 17. What Would Be Your Primary Advice for African American Librarians Who Are Just Entering the Profession?

Answer Choice	Response	%
Gain experience prior to and during library school	117	33.05
Seek mentorship	123	34.75
Join professional associations	46	12.99
Improve technical skills	26	7.34
Improve research and writing skills	35	9.89
Total respondents	354	

wide-ranging competence. When it is your time to lead, you will be more confident and a better boss.”

- “It’s really all of the above. I didn’t intend to work as an academic librarian, so I never really considered research skills. Even if a person works as a public librarian, the research and writing skills, especially in terms of scholarly research and grant writing, are essential for marketability.”

Ninety-one survey takers commented on this question (approximately five pages of comments). Text-box responses show that some terms repeated: “skills” (18 responses), “mentor” (55), “career” (11), and “networking” (4).

Question 18 asked, “What is your most important accomplishment(s) in your career?” The responses to this question exhibit the accomplishments of recent African American librarians of our time. Comments ran to approximately 11.5 pages. In total, 310 of 354 survey takers who responded to this question made comments. Below are some selected responses to this question:

- “Becoming a Director at an HBCU where I can mentor librarians and encourage students to pursue life endeavors.”
- “Becoming a dean.”
- “After over 40 years in this profession, I have accomplished quite a bit (e.g., implementing new systems, starting new services, etc.). However, I am the proudest when I think of the new employees (librarians and non-librarians) I have mentored and who continue with successful careers.”
- “Being able to improve and provide better access for the African American community.”
- “Mentoring other young librarians and library assistants of color and showing them that they have a lot to offer the profession and the world.”

The most commented activities and accomplishments from survey takers were doing professional development activities, creating a culture that is more diverse and inclusive in their libraries, recruiting, completing high-level education, serving in a leadership position, mentoring other librarians, implementing a support system for library users, getting a promotion, getting tenure, building a diverse collection (collection management), and entering and remaining in the profession.

Conclusion

With their achievements, African American librarians play a pivotal role in the library profession. This survey reveals African American librarians’ remarkable achievements despite their many challenges, their journeys on entering the profession, and their future goals, along with

valuable suggestions for the next generations of librarians. The goal of this article is to contribute to the conversation on this topic and to advocate for a more diverse profession. The survey results and the review of recent publications from scholars in the literature show a need for further research in this area. The education section of the literature review reveals a need to improve efforts to recruit more African American librarians.

Although this survey covers a limited range of topics, suggestions for further research address areas that this analysis could not cover much in detail:

- Each type of library (academic, public, special, etc.) could be researched within its parameters and become a candidate for future study to reveal more detailed statistics.
- Research should continue to solve problematic areas that are pointed out in survey question results. An in-depth look at the causes of salary inequities, racial discrimination, professional disrespect, and poor working conditions is crucial to improving the library profession.
- Most important, continuing research is needed on the education and recruitment of African American librarians toward the goal of creating a more inclusive and diverse profession.

The data collected from this survey strongly indicate that it is time to improve the library profession's diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts. This change starts by creating a more empowering environment for African American librarians and many other diverse groups. Library and information science is one of the core fields that can improve social justice efforts and make a better, humane society. The more this field improves, the better and more healing society will become.

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