"Will the Day Ever Come When We Will Be Judged on Our Merit and not on Our Blackness?" The Black Caucus of the American Library Association and the Long Freedom Struggle in the United States, 1970–1975

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Abstract. This paper centers on the early years (1970–1975) of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. The Caucus sought to combat structural, professional, and personal racism, to achieve equity in library employment, services, and materials, and to imbue Black librarians and Black library users at all types of libraries and in all geographic locations with a sense of dignity, pride, agency, and self-determination.

We engage with five literatures in this paper; each engagement shows the interpenetration of information and library science with larger currents of political, social, and cultural history. First, historian Stephen Tuck posits a "long freedom struggle" starting with Emancipation in 1863, not merely a narrow civil rights period embracing the late 1950s and first half of the 1960s. The Black Caucus's work comprised a crucial part of this broader, longer, multifaceted Black protest agenda. Second, like Tuck we embrace an ecumenical definition of Black activism: both building and resisting proved essential. We explore Black Caucus activism in four cases of resistance and four of building. Third, following historian Darlene Clark Hine, we argue that Black middle-class professionals, in this case librarians, played a vital role in the freedom struggle. Fourth, we complicate the conventional periodization narrative in library and information science history that ends with the desegregation of state associations and public libraries by the end of 1966. The struggle for racial equality and equity in librarianship remained far from complete. Fifth, scholars have paid considerable attention to the desegregation of public libraries but have neglected other aspects of the freedom struggle in LIS. This paper contributes robustly to the 2023 iConference theme of inclusivity.

Keywords: Diversity · Equity · And inclusion (DEI) · Social justice · Historical research

1 Introduction

On a frigid January day in Chicago, Illinois, the Council of the American Library Association (ALA) convened for its 1970 midwinter meeting. Amidst Council's prosaic business, eleven Black librarians—Thomas Alford, Willis Bolton, Emily Copeland, Audrey

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N. Jackson, Virginia Lacy Jones, E.J. Josey, Effie Lee Morris, Carrie Robinson, Edith Prunty Spencer, Binnie Tate, and James Welbourne, Jr.—took a momentous stand.

Introduced by Virginia Lacy Jones, Dean of Atlanta University's School of Library Service, Effie Lee Morris of the San Francisco Public Library read a "Statement of Concern." The statement underscored Black librarians' exigent concerns about institutional racism, poverty, and lack of educational, employment, and promotional opportunities [1].

Despite national political attention to these issues, Morris upbraided the library profession for its glacial response. Challenging ALA's passivity, a new Black Librarians' Caucus was formulating an agenda for action. The group, Morris stated, pledged not only to continue to meet at ALA conferences, but to monitor and ultimately to evaluate ALA's progress in "fulfilling its social and professional responsibilities to minority groups" [1].

This statement heralded the birth of the Black Caucus. According to its founder, E.J. Josey, the formation of the caucus represented a survival tactic: only through such a vehicle could Black librarians shatter their longstanding invisibility, demand respect from a white-dominated profession, increase their professional involvement, promote self-determination and empowerment, and grapple with ALA's onerous bureaucracy in service of social change [2–4]. Josey summed up, "if [B]lack people are to have justice and an effective response from American society, they must organize into enclaves of [B]lack strength" [5, p. 4].

This paper centers on the early years (1970–1975) of the Black Caucus. Established a year before the U.S. Congressional Black Caucus, the Black Caucus sought to combat structural, professional, and personal racism, to achieve equity in employment, service, and materials, and to imbue Black librarians and library users at all types of libraries, from public to academic to special, and in all geographic locations, with a sense of dignity, pride, and self-determination. As Fisk University's Ann Allen Shockley insisted, "The weapons of black librarians for instituting change are those of books and related services. These should be wielded with honor as goals are sought and changes are made. The time is now. The moment is here" [6, p. 1].

We contribute to five historiographical conversations in this paper, each of which imbricates political, social, and cultural history. First, historian Stephen Tuck posits a "long freedom struggle" starting with Emancipation in 1863, instead of a narrow civil rights period (i.e. the direct action phase) embracing the late 1950s and first half of the 1960s [7, p. 8]. The Black Caucus's work comprised an essential part of this broader, longer, and multifaceted Black protest agenda locally, nationally, and internationally.

In fact, the Caucus debuted at a peculiar moment in the long freedom struggle. On the one hand, President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society legislation, most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, indicated great progress on civil rights, as did the appointment of the first Black person to the Supreme Court, the first appointment of a Black person to a presidential cabinet, and sundry affirmative action programs [8]. On the other hand, as historian Thomas Holt contends, the movement's tenuous consensus of the early 1960s frayed pursuant to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 [7, 9]. The second half of the 1960s saw profound unrest in Northern urban communities, the ascent of Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and postcolonialism, tensions between integration and separatism, and the questioning of nonviolence tactics [7, 9–11]. Moreover, the 1968 election of Richard Nixon brought together under the

GOP banner suburban whites, white southerners, and working class whites even as it furthered ongoing fragmentation among Black activists [9]. The Black Caucus therefore coalesced at a far from auspicious moment.

Second, like Tuck we embrace an ecumenical definition of Black activism: both building and resisting proved essential [7]. We explore Black Caucus activism in four cases of resistance and four of building. Third, following historian Darlene Clark Hine, we argue that Black middle-class professionals, in this case librarians *qua* grassroots information professionals, played a vital role in the long freedom struggle [11]. Fourth, we complicate the conventional narrative in library and information science history that culminates with the desegregation of state associations and public libraries by the end of 1966. The struggle for racial equity and equality in librarianship, however, remained far from complete [12]. Fifth, although scholars pay considerable attention to the desegregation of public libraries they neglect other aspects of the long freedom struggle in librarianship [13–20].

After setting forth our methodological approach, we first explore the gestation of the Black Caucus. Next, we discuss the broader political, social, and cultural contexts that presaged the Caucus's founding. Third, we broach the Caucus's goals and its membership. We then unpack key examples of Caucus activism between 1970 and 1975, highlighting both resistance and building. Finally, we discuss the Caucus's early achievements and its agenda for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in information and library science and in larger political, social, and cultural contexts.

2 Historical Method

As Zachary Schrag notes, "history is not about the past but rather about people: *history is the study of people and the choices they made*" [21, p. 9]. Historical writing therefore constitutes a constant interaction between facts and interpretation. It depends upon collecting, evaluating, prioritizing, and interpreting sources, and then upon transparently communicating that interpretation [22].

First, we identified and located sources. Relying upon multiple sources of documentary evidence in service of trustworthiness, we located documents through berrypicking: flexible, iterative searches involving, e.g., footnote chasing, citation searching, journal browsing, database searching and browsing (by subject, keyword, and author) [23, 24].[1] We vetted a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, published and unpublished, created by institutions and by extra-institutional actors. These sources ranged from journal articles to periodicals, books to reports, book chapters to archival manuscripts.

[1] Exemplary search terms included "Black Caucus," "Negro librar*," "Black librar*," "Afro-American librar*," "African-American librar*," and "African American librar*." Useful databases included Library Literature & Information Science Full-Text, Library Literature & Information Science Retrospective: 1905–1983, Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts (LISTA), LISA: Library & Information Sciences Abstracts, JSTOR, Project Muse, ProQuest Central, ArchiveGrid, Historical Newspapers-Black Newspapers, HistoryMakers Digital Archive, New York Times 1851–3 years ago: ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Washington Post—ProQuest Historical Newspapers 1877–2001, and Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature.

Second, to assess our sources' nature and value we employed the critical method. We engaged both in external criticism, namely by establishing the authenticity and provenance of our sources, and in internal criticism, namely by interpreting the content of our sources. We asked questions such as: when was a given source produced? By whom? For what purpose(s)? Third, we interpreted our evidence, seeking to understand when, where, how, and why certain events occurred and to determine their consequences. Fourth, we sought to communicate that interpretation transparently [22].

U.S. library scholar Jesse Shera contends that historical writing should provide "a synthesis, a series of generalizations, that not only will give the past a living reality but will make of it a medium for the better understanding of the present" [25, p. 241]. This paper pursues Shera's noble goal.

3 Roots

The establishment of the Black Caucus was decades in the making. ALA historically remained aloof from or neglected racial equity issues [8, 12, 26]. An ALA "Work with Negroes" round table convened in 1922 and again in 1923, but friction among its members triggered its disbandment [27, 28].

Yet the 1936 annual meeting in Richmond, Virginia, proved a tipping point. A furor erupted because of segregated meeting facilities; this led to an ALA resolution mandating integration at such meetings [29]. The pallid 1936 resolution constituted the ALA's last word on the subject for more than a decade and a half, however [30]. The ALA's Bill of Rights (1939) and Code of Ethics (1939) ignored equal, much less equitable, collective treatment of Black librarians, dealing only with strictures on individual members at ALA conferences.

A 1952 constitutional change mandated only one ALA chapter per state instead of putatively separate but equal chapters, as had prevailed in North Carolina and a handful of other southern states [20]. White librarians grudgingly accepted integration, especially after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) [30]. Yet substantive change remained wanting; Black librarians could not but doubt the association's commitment to equality [31].

In response to ALA's longstanding recalcitrance, as early as the 1930s a handful of Black librarians convened at ALA meetings to share concerns at lunches or dinners. These gatherings gave way to similar meetings in hotel suites in the 1950s, and then to dinners sponsored by Atlanta University's School of Library Service where Black librarians "fellowshipped" [3, 8]. But the driver for the Caucus's creation was E.J. Josey, "the conscience of the American Library Association" [32, p. 13, 33].

Born in 1924, Josey grew up impoverished in segregated Portsmouth, Virginia. Not until his World War II service (1943–1945) was Josey permitted to use an integrated library. His wartime experiences in the U.S.'s Jim Crow army made him "an implacable foe of segregation and second class citizenship" [26, p. 300]. Josey fought for the "Double V": victory abroad over fascism, and victory at home over racism. To these commitments Josey added another—to overthrow colonialism worldwide.

In 1950, Josey began an illustrious six decades in librarianship when he matriculated as a graduate student at Columbia University. Joining the American Library Association two years later and attending his first ALA annual meeting in 1957, he found much to

lament in the organization's stance on racial equality, which was at best one of benign neglect and at worst one of complicity [26].

An indefatigable civil rights activist both locally and nationally, Josey played a key role in the 1960 Savannah, Georgia, lunch counter sit-ins and subsequent local business boycotts. As Librarian and Assistant Professor at Savannah State College (1959–1966), he collaborated with the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter and served as student advisor to the protesting collegians. Josey also served on the Savannah NAACP's Executive Board, which in 1962 successfully persuaded the mayor not only to desegregate the main public library, but also to appoint two Blacks to the Library Board, including Josey [8, 26].

Like the 1952 constitutional change, ALA's 1962 "Statement on Individual Members, Chapter Status, and Institutional Membership" seemed propitious. It enjoined local associations to provide equal rights for individuals or risk losing their chapter status. Though the statement lacked enforcement measures, much to Josey's consternation, in a histrionic display of bigotry the state library associations of Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi withdrew from ALA membership anyway [34].

In 1964, Josey vigorously protested the Association of College and Research Libraries bestowing a National Library Week award to the Mississippi Library Association. What was more, a 1964 meeting of the similarly secessionist Georgia Library Association featured an ALA staff member as a speaker. Josey successfully motioned that ALA proscribe its officers and staff from attending or speaking at state library association meetings that were not ALA chapters. A year later, Josey sponsored still another resolution; this one barred from ALA any institution that discriminated against library users based on race, religion, or personal belief. But ALA Council voted the resolution down. Despite these travails, segregation in librarianship soon faltered. In 1965 Josey became the first Black member of the Georgia Library Association. Moreover, in a remarkable turn of events all state library associations were integrated by the end of 1966 [26].

Overall, as historian Dennis Thomison suggests, rival constituencies cleaved ALA in the 1960s. Acting too slowly for activists and too quickly for traditionalists, the Association predictably pleased neither [34]. Many ALA members and leaders greeted the period's social ferment with indifference if not hostility; the shibboleth that social problems were beyond the purview of professional associations died hard [34]. For his part, Josey found professional discrimination practiced unabashedly and widely [35]. Black librarians remained effectively shut out of leadership positions and professional publication venues, and the profession refused to view Black librarians as legitimate [5, 36].

By 1970, however, some professional leadership gains were evident, as suggested by the elections of Joseph Reason (second vice president, ALA), A. P. Marshall (president, Missouri Library Association), Alma Jacobs (president, Montana Library Association), John E. Scott (president, West Virginia Library Association), and Milton Byam (vice president, New York Library Association) [4]. Further, a handful of Black librarians occupied upper-level positions in predominantly white institutions and Blacks such as Reason stood for ALA offices [37].

Reflecting on the 1960s, Fisk University's Ann Allen Shockley called the decade "the movement years—the years of change, years of confusion, and years of identity searching—all sparked by a new black assertiveness" [38, p. 182]. Even so, at the time of the Caucus's founding, only two Blacks had served as ALA division presidents (Charlemae Rollins and Augusta Baker). Los Angeles Public Library's James E. Crayton wondered poignantly, "Will the day ever come when we will be judged on our merit and not on our blackness?" [39, p. 204].

Josey ramped up his protest activities still further. Serving on the 1969–1970 ALA Nominating Committee, Josey, by this point Chief of New York State's Bureau of Academic and Research Libraries, determined to advance a Black candidate for president. To garner broad support, he asked fellow Black librarians to attend ALA's midwinter meeting in Chicago. The group decided to nominate A.P. Marshall of Eastern Michigan University for president (by petition) and to support other Blacks for Council. This channeled into the formal creation of the caucus, whose members unanimously elected Josey chair [3].

4 Overall Caucus Goals

After its foundational meeting in Chicago, the Caucus consolidated organizationally. Its 1970 constitution reiterated the group's raison d'être, stressing the egregious lag in librarianship opportunities for Blacks, the dearth of publications concentrating on social and economic issues disproportionately affecting Blacks, and ALA's and the profession's complacency [37]. Louise Giles of Macomb Community College trumpeted, "the winds of revolution (racial, social, and moral), which have been buffeting society for the last few years, have finally begun to be felt in the library profession" [40, p. 258]. The Caucus had these winds, however tenuous and however capricious, at their back.

The Caucus brought together diverse Black librarians. In some cases, tensions surfaced between those favoring integrationism and those favoring Black Power-based separatism, but all Black librarians could unite under an anti-racism banner. As inaugural Black Caucus *Newsletter* editor Jeanne English, librarian of Evanston Township (Illinois) High School, wrote, "members range from university librarians to children's librarians, from information science librarians to leaders of large urban public libraries, from far-out librarians to conservative[s]" [41, p. 2]. The Caucus's inaugural directory (1973) boasted 315 Black librarians who worked in eight types of venue [42].

In a flurry of activity, the Caucus pressed ALA to respond to Black members' needs in recruitment, training, employment conditions, representation, and promotion, to vet candidates for ALA offices, to scrutinize ALA planning and policy, to assess library materials and services, and to serve as an information clearinghouse [37, 43]. The Caucus thus represented a fruitful pressure group that sensitized other librarians to the needs of the Black community [44]. Despite rampant professional and social prejudice, Black librarians knew their worth. As Mohammed Aman of St. John's University put it, "Black librarians have encouraged the young to dream, to pursue excellence and to contribute to the history of the [B]lack man, and have worked diligently and consistently for the universal recognition of the identity, rights and talents of all men" [45, p. 155]. The Black Caucus built on this time-honored commitment.

5 Key Initiatives, 1970–1975

The Black Caucus's activities in the early 1970s included ALA annual meeting programs, a Distinguished Service Award (begun in 1970), a newsletter (begun in 1972), and a membership directory (first published in 1973). More broadly, it plunged into activism. On the one hand, the Caucus resisted. Its members worked to prevent public libraries from supplying segregated southern schools, to forestall the abolition of an innovative community-based librarianship program at the University of Maryland, and to combat employee discrimination both at the Library of Congress and in the Los Angeles County Public Library system. On the other hand, the Caucus built, notably in increasing Black representation in ALA and in encouraging members to run for ALA office, in building coalitions, in cultivating local chapters, and in establishing an African exchange program.

5.1 Resisting

Public School Desegregation and Public Library Service (1970–1971). At the Caucus's 1970 founding, Virginia Lacy Jones introduced a resolution. It targeted southern schools' stratagems to evade desegregation as ordered by the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Brown II* (1955) by establishing "segregation academies" [46]. The resolution proposed censure of such evaders of the law [47]. Although considerable procedural wrangling ensued, the Resolution on Library Service to Educational Institutions Established to Circumvent Desegregation Laws ultimately passed, earning the Caucus its first victory [48].

The NAACP summarily endorsed the Caucus's resolution. In tandem with NAACP officers from 42 chapters in 12 southern and three border states, Josey searched for evidence of "coddling segregation" [49]. Although southerners denied the charge, Josey and his NAACP allies documented segregationists transferring materials from public libraries and public schools to segregation academies [50].

Southerners responded with vitriol. Charged with receiving books from McGehee Public Library, the school board president of Arkansas's Bayou Park Academy wrote, "We were shocked to learn that such a person would be so small and petty as to file a complaint of this order, knowing it was untrue" [51]. Apropos of the resolution, an Atlanta school librarian rescinded her ALA membership. She dismissed the resolution as "a statement of the principle of a small misguided group" [52].

The ALA never censured a southern school, but by their vigorous action, the Caucus established a base for further resistance.

The University of Maryland's Urban Information Specialist program (1970–1971). Not only did the Caucus attack racism in school librarianship; it also confronted racism in graduate library education. In 1970, supported by U.S. Office of Education funding, the University of Maryland's School of Library and Information Services launched an Urban Information Specialist (UISP) program with Caucus founding member James Welbourne, Jr., as its director. Given the information crisis of the inner cities, librarianship demanded novel approaches [53]. UISP's approach, Welbourne reflected, "was both critical of the traditional role of libraries in urban communities and optimistic relative to the possibility of a more activist role for librarians as urban information

specialists in economically depressed neighborhoods" [54, pp. 124–5]. These specialists would offer "critical life needs" services, including information on affordable housing, on health and welfare, on cultural awareness and racism, and on job and unemployment assistance [54, p. 125].

By promoting grassroots cultural self-determination and empowerment, UISP foregrounded social justice. It piloted a new work role for the librarian of the future: that of information interpreter, a community-information source liaison [55]. To develop these liaisons, the program recruited nontraditional students, many of whom lacked an undergraduate degree, from local communities who were familiar with those communities' social problems. Instead of a book-centric orientation, moreover, the program premised broader information skills given rapid socio-technological change, and experiential learning [55].

But the Office of Education elected not to fund the program for a second year, and Maryland's faculty and administrators refused to support it. Addressing the Caucus in 1970, Welbourne castigated such "manifest discriminatory behavior" [56, p. 8]. Outraged Caucus members wrote letters of support to the Office of Education. Jeanne English, for instance, pointed to the "great courage, insight, and particular education and experience [necessary] to translate information in its many forms into active aid for the impoverished, the intellectually and spiritually starved" [56, p. 75]. But their pleas were to no avail. Racism lived still as "an active, vital and institutionalized social force" [56, p. 1].

The death of UISP, Welbourne lamented, truncated librarians' efforts to engage urban communities economically and politically. Also sacrificed was the activist goal of preparing a new generation of socially responsible public librarians [54]. In this case, Caucus resistance fell short even though their emphasis on community-centered librarianship lived on.

Discrimination at the Library of Congress (1970–1974). Complementing its educational activism, the Caucus trained its sights on discrimination at the United States's citadel of librarianship, the Library of Congress (LC). In the spring of 1970, the Library of Congress compelled copyright examiner and leader of the Black Employees of the Library of Congress (BELC) Joselyn Williams to resign after he and other employees filed a lawsuit under Title VIII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The suit claimed LC failed to recruit qualified Blacks, relegated Black employees to "dead-end" positions, maintained policies that tamped down on Blacks' career advancement, and enlisted only whites as supervisors [57].

Workers conducted sit-ins in the spring of 1971 to protest these conditions and Williams appealed to the Caucus for support [37]. Spurred by the Caucus, ALA Council passed a resolution upbraiding LC for racially discriminatory employment practices. An ALA committee gathered evidence of rampant racial discrimination, namely in promotion and recruitment. The committee called upon LC to initiate an affirmative action program, human relations training for supervisors, and federally-funded job training to promote employees' upward mobility [58].

The Caucus honored Williams's efforts with a 1973 resolution. It characterized him as "a fearless leader of the Black Employees of the Library of Congress, who had the temerity and the courage to bring charges of racism and blatant discrimination in

employment and promotion against [B]lacks to the attention of the American Library Association" [59, p. 7].

ALA subsequently reviewed LC's progress. It found reported grievances addressed begrudgingly if at all. Moreover, an atmosphere of "apathy, fear and mistrust," even the occasional specter of violence, curbed the potential of affirmative action policies [60, p. 199].

Despite its troubling findings, ALA suggested no immediate solution. Rejecting censure, it fell back on platitudes, urging LC staff and administrators to develop better mutual understanding. Yet undoubtably due to Caucus actions, subsequent years saw an increase in the employment of Blacks at higher levels [3].

In line with its advocacy for Williams and Black LC workers, the Caucus promulgated a resolution in support of Barbara Ringer's complaint that LC had denied her a register of copyrights position because of her gender and her support for Black LC workers [37, 61]. The hearing officer of the Equal Opportunity Employment Committee ruled in Ringer's favor. Faced with a legal battle, LC awarded her the job, one for which she showed exemplary credentials [62, p. 590]. The Caucus thus notched another victory, however modest, in the struggle for racial equity in librarianship.

Los Angeles County Public Library (LACPL) discrimination (1971–1974). In a final example of resistance, the Black Caucus leapt to the barricades on behalf of Los Angeles County Public Library (LACPL) librarians of color. In the spring of 1971, these workers charged LACPL with discriminating against minorities in its hiring, placement, and promotion practices and sought redress from the California Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) [39].

The status of librarians of color was dire. Of more than 60 supervisory positions in the LACPL system, librarians of color filled not one, and of more than 230 professional librarians, only 16 were Black or Latinx. LACPL neither actively recruited workers of color nor gave them equitable promotional opportunities [63]. The FEPC substantiated these charges.

The FEPC ruling was soon put to the test. In August of 1972, the LACPL made two affirmative action appointments. But the seven librarians who scored higher than the appointees on the County Civil Service Test appealed to the Los Angeles Civil Service Commission, arguing reverse discrimination. The Commission found, however, that the two appointees' experience and professional abilities, if not their test scores, outweighed those of the petitioners.

Castigating administrators' "gross neglect, insensitivity, and conscious racism" [63, p. 386], James E. Crayton thundered, "We will protect our rights through the ballot, through organized State and Local caucuses, through strategy and tactics, through unity of action, and by all other necessary means," he promised [39, p. 206]. This activism funneled into the 1972 founding of the California Librarians Black Caucus (CLBC), discussed below.

Whether resisting segregation academies, institutional racism at LIS programs, or professional discrimination between 1970 and 1975, the Caucus mobilized passionately and effectively. In other cases, however, they built.

5.2 Building

Black representation in the American Library Association (1970–1975). From its 1876 founding, ALA leaders and members relegated Black librarians to nominal participation, much less leadership [8, 64]. In the 1960s, for example, ALA's eleven standing committees included 374 members, but Black librarians received only five of these appointments and served on only three of the committees. Over the same period, of the 542 nominees for ALA Council, only 18 were Black; membership elected nine.

Bolstered by Caucus efforts, Black representation increased over time [37]. In 1974 alone, five Blacks served on ALA standing committees. Moreover, the number of Black Council candidates between 1970 and 1974 doubled from 1960 to 1970—though merely a dozen succeeded. By 1974, Blacks consistently served on the Nominating Committee, the Appointments Committee, and the Committee on Professional Ethics. Most significant, the Caucus's efforts led to the 1975 election of Clara Stanton Jones, Director of the Detroit Public Library (the first woman and the first Black to hold this position), as ALA president.

Coalition-Building (1970–1975). The Caucus remained independent, but elected not to sever ties with ALA. Robert Wedgeworth, later to serve as ALA Executive Director and as the Dean of Columbia University's School of Library Service, underlined the need for a strategic balance between separatism and integration. He lobbied for fusing the Caucus's separate power base and its influence in various ALA decision-making units, a most delicate balance [64]. Neither integration and separatism nor local and global engagement were mutually exclusive.

The Caucus's efforts complemented the work of other social justice-oriented groups such as the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) (established in 1969), the Task Force on the Status of Women (TFSW) (1970), the Task Force on Gay Liberation (1971), and the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA) (1971) [65–67].

Some coalition-building occurred. For instance, Josey coauthored a resolution to establish the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship, the TFSW's precursor. He also consistently enjoined the ALA Executive Board to support the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Further, several Black librarians, Josey included, participated in the founding of SRRT [3]. The Caucus moreover endorsed the SRRT Task Force's 1971 resolution on the recruitment of minorities, "Action Now to Achieve Racial and Sexual Parity in Library Staffing." Also in league with SRRT, the Caucus proposed an alternative slate of candidates for ALA offices in 1975; this resulted in the election of Clara Stanton Jones [31]. Wedgeworth observed that on the one hand, alliance with SRRT potentially expanded the Black Caucus's power base to encourage social change. On the other hand, alliance likely meant compromising on priorities and commitments [64]. Testifying to this tension, Josey staunchly resisted suggestions for the Caucus to become part of SRRT; he wrote, "my reaction to the suggestion is that it is absurd!" [68, p. 347]. In many cases, then, alliances remained provisional and elusive.

Local Chapters (1970–1975). Encouraging further activism and coalition-building at the community level, the Black Caucus midwifed the birth of local chapters in Chicago,

New York, and California. The Chicago chapter came to life as the ad hoc Chicago Planning Committee at ALA's 1970 midwinter meeting. Its members then formed an ad hoc committee to plan a Black Caucus program and activities for ALA's 1972 annual meeting [69]. Two events galvanized the chapter. First, in late 1972 library school graduate student Voree Gordon applied to the Illinois Manpower Advisory Committee for a scholarship. Encountering peculiar obstacles, Gordon appealed to the Chicago chapter, whose protest to Advisory Committee proved successful. Second, in 1973 a vacant higher administrative position at the Chicago Public Library (CPL) was filled without sufficient advertising; the nascent Caucus successfully protested this oversight, and the search was reopened [70].

These dual crises aside, Chicago's Black librarians wanted systematically to address the local Black community's educational and intellectual needs [69]. As the Black Caucus of Librarians-Chicago Chapter, the group convened in October 1973.

The CBLC organized to aid the Black community educationally, politically, and professionally. It stimulated the Black community's interest in library services and programs, offered educational opportunities, recruited Blacks into the field, and augmented the community role of the Black librarian [69].

Another local caucus effloresced in New York. In Queens, communities of color received inequitable public library service. Meager collections, employment inequities, and lack of career development opportunities for Black librarians predominated [71, 72]. In the summer of 1970, Ernestine Washington, the first Black branch supervisor in Queens, and children's librarian Cynthia Jenkins established the Black Librarians Caucus of Queens.

The new Caucus's Statement of Concerns zeroed in on the system's lack of proportional representation: Blacks comprised 22% of Queens's population, but far fewer than 22% of the borough's public librarians [71]. Moreover, not one borough branch employed a Black person as principal librarian. The Caucus also supported the efforts of Black librarians to evaluate Black literature and to develop relevant spaces, programs, and collections. These material and personnel deficits unjustly hindered the educational development of Black children.

Still another local chapter, the California Librarians Black Caucus (CLBC), gelled in 1972. Two events animated its founding [73, 74]. First, James E. Crayton's activism in fair employment practices in 1970 and 1971 put him in frequent communication with the officers of the Black Caucus, including Effie Lee Morris. Second, in 1971 several California Library Association (CLA) Council members began conversations about discrimination against and proportionate representation of librarians of color. The next spring, Black librarians from both southern and northern California convened to form a statewide Black caucus.

The CLBC's goals mirrored those of other chapters and of the national Black Caucus [73]. Grounded in outreach and activism, CLBC strove to eradicate professional inequities by monitoring legislative activities, by supporting Black librarians for leadership positions, by participating on local and national committees, by giving scholarships to aspiring Black librarians, and by professional recruitment, mentoring, support, and recognition. Not to be overlooked, it sought to promote and evaluate Black literature and services to the Black community, to preserve Black culture, and to fight for community information equity.

The African Exchange (1972–1974). Invigorated by global postcolonial currents, the Caucus embarked upon international collaboration in the early 1970s. As Mohammed Aman exhorted, "The feeling of brotherhood among [B]lacks should be extended to mutual actions between [B]lacks in the United States and their brothers and sisters in Africa" [45, p. 159].

UNESCO proclaimed 1972 International Book Year (IBY), but ALA seemed blithely to ignore Africa in its programming [3]. Hence the Caucus passed a midwinter resolution in support of IBY that established an exchange program [75].

The exchange program promised information sharing and cultural understanding. Not only would American Black librarians offer training to African librarians, but the former would "learn from their African brothers and sisters the ways and means to involve the library and the cultural center in combating illiteracy and spreading reading and knowledge" [45, p. 160].

In the inaugural exchange, Thomas Battle of Howard University spent the 1972–1973 academic year in Sierra Leone while Harry Kamara of the Sierra Leone's National Library Board served on the Howard staff. In 1974, Wallace Van Jackson, Virginia State College librarian emeritus, served on the library faculty of the University of Botswana. Battle later reflected appreciatively, "This exchange initiated great possibilities for cooperation with our African colleagues" [76, p. 13].

In the first half of the 1970s, the Black Caucus joined the freedom struggle with gusto. Whether it was building or resisting, establishing an exchange program with African librarians or protesting public library service to segregation academies, the Caucus persistently and innovatively furthered the freedom struggle. In doing so, they established a beachhead for subsequent advances.

6 Conclusion

In their history of southern United States public library desegregation, Wayne and Shirley Wiegand emphasize librarians' tendency to invest in longstanding professional myths of opposing censorship, defending intellectual freedom, and providing unbiased service to all [13]. Just as their work explodes these myths, so too does the story of the Black Caucus; it underscores the gulf between librarianship's professional ideals and its practices in a previously unexplored way. The Black Caucus fought racism locally, nationally, and internationally, on political, social, and cultural fronts, at micro and macro levels, and in both de jure and de facto segregated spaces.

As the aforementioned examples of resistance and building indicate, this paper contributes to library and information science history by concentrating on previously overlooked actors, communities, and institutions. This focus expands our understanding beyond southern public libraries, which have drawn most scholarly attention. Using the Black Caucus as a lens, we also flesh out the larger social and cultural history of the Black freedom struggle in the United States. Though often overshadowed in recent historiography, Black middle class professionals such as librarians played a fundamental role in all phases of the freedom struggle.

The story of the Black Caucus also challenges conventional periodization. The fight for racial justice in libraries and librarianship as well as in American society continued

even after the death of de jure desegregation. Moreover, the freedom struggle did not sink into declension after the mid-1960s; rather, members of the Black Caucus borrowed from numerous protest traditions, pursuing not only those of integration and separatism, but also local, national, and global engagement. The 1970s, argues historian Stephen Tuck, constituted a period in which Blacks tried to expand their rights, not merely to fight rearguard actions—and attained success in some areas despite formidable resistance [7]. The history of the Black Caucus supports these hypotheses.

This paper's scope remains necessarily selective given spatial constraints. The group would go on in the second half of the 1970s and for decades thereafter to entrench itself even more firmly as a vital force for social justice in both the ALA and the broader profession. Celebrating the Black Caucus's silver anniversary, ALA Executive Director Tracie D. Hall, herself a BCALA member, lauded its "unflagging commitment to equity." "I cannot help but think of how prescient its founding was," she celebrated [77, p. 34]. All the same, the imperative to promote social justice and decimate structural racism remains just as urgent in 2023 as in 1970, as does the need for recruiting, mentoring, and leadership development of Black librarians, providing relevant and current information services and resources, and engaging communities [77]. So long as racism exists, as Lisa Biblo prophetically argued, so too will there be a need for the Black Caucus [31]. The group remains a stalwart force fighting for diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

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