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# Georgia Librarians at ALA: Reports from the Field

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# Georgia Librarians at ALA: Reports from the Field

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## Georgia Librarians at ALA: Reports from the Field

By Christopher Andrews, Laurie Aycock, Catherine Bowers, Linda Most, Scott Pieper, Emily Rogers, and Karen Viars; compiled by Virginia Feher

From June 21–26, 2018, librarians descended on New Orleans for the American Library Association’s (ALA) Annual Conference & Exhibition. Featured speakers included Michelle Obama, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Sally Field, Viola Davis, and more. Numerous Georgia librarians attended and presented at the conference. Following are reports from a few of these Georgia librarians:

**Christopher Andrews**  
*Reference Services Librarian*  
*Assistant Professor*  
*University of North Georgia*

This was my first national conference and my first ALA conference. When I entered the convention center I was in awe of the sheer size of the center and the enormity of the conference. The environment was very inclusive. I saw young people with piercings and tattoos, folks in business suits, and even one person in a business suit with tattoos and piercings. It was inspiring to see so many people of different stripes who believe in the same goal: intellectual freedom and the right to read. I was and am very proud to be part of a profession that promotes free thinking and inclusivity.

I attended some great presentations. The one that stands out the most was a presentation on unintentional bias. The presenters acted out

four different skits that addressed this issue in a public library setting. For example, in one scenario, a controversial speaker was invited to speak at their library. They presented one library patron who opposed the speaker, another who was frustrated that the decision had been made without consulting the library board, and a third who had concerns about how the event was advertised. The presenters underscored the importance of letting people with opposing viewpoints be heard; how unconscious bias can lead to unintended consequences; why library policies matter; and how events within the library need to uphold the mission, values, and policies of the library.

Another professional opportunity the conference provided was the chance to meet various vendors and speak with a few of them about some of the products. Later in the summer I was going to do a formal presentation about Sage Business Cases for my colleagues. At the conference I met Sage representatives, and they described the ins and outs of that database. The additional content made my presentation much more robust! As a side note, I was also impressed with

all of the “swag” available to attendees. Anything Harry Potter items from Scholastic were “hot tickets,” but my favorite was a Springer t-shirt that says, “My secret power is librarianship. What’s yours?”



Michelle Obama, photo courtesy of Kimberly Boyd

The conference also was packed with truly famous people promoting their books. I saw Sally Field's interview. While she is a very entertaining and a dynamic speaker, at times she was a bit coy. I felt that she held back in some of her responses—perhaps because she didn't want to give away too much? Her book was released in September, so now I think I know why she was so cryptic.

The most exciting and dynamic speaker was Michelle Obama. I waited in line for hours to get a ticket to hear her. But it was well worth the wait! She is such a positive woman and a very captivating speaker. She stressed the importance of reading, how her parents encouraged reading, and what vital role reading books has played in her life. She also talked about the importance of self-worth and our worth as employees. Throughout the presentation, Mrs. Obama side-stepped politics and focused instead on the empowerment of reading.

On a more personal note, the Dean of the UNG Libraries sent nine librarians from four of our campuses to the conference. This was also a terrific opportunity to bond and get to know each other a little better. We attended sessions together and had dinners together. I also did the "hop on – hop off" bus tour of New Orleans with one of my colleagues. It was a great way to see different parts of New Orleans and hear about the history of the city. It was so encouraging to see how parts of New Orleans recovered from Hurricane Katrina.

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**Laurie Aycock**  
*Government Documents & Collection  
Development Librarian and Librarian Assistant  
Professor  
Kennesaw State University*

I've heard it said that what happens in Vegas may stay in Vegas, but what happens in New

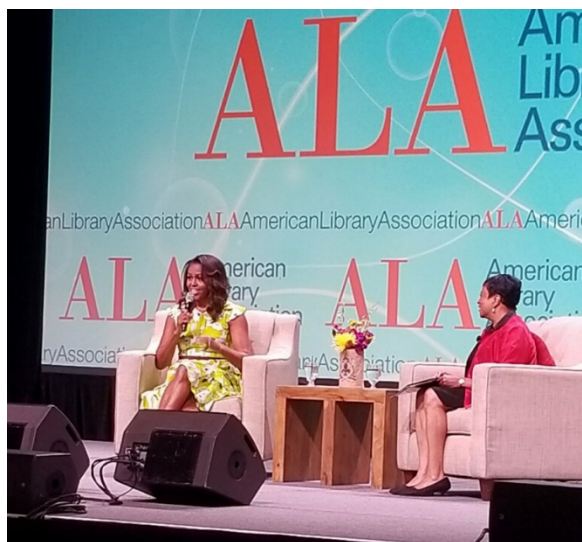
Orleans, goes home with you. I believe this is true after attending ALA Annual in New Orleans this year. The vibrancy of the city, the food, and the music combined with meeting librarians from around the country, author talks, a documentary about cats, fascinating speakers, and free books made for an experience that will stay with me.

The highlight of the conference for me were the two sessions I attended where Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress, spoke. During the opening session, she talked with Michelle Obama about her upcoming book, *Becoming*, and some of her experiences as wife, mother, and First Lady that are included in the book. She encouraged women to appreciate the value we bring to the workplace, to ask for what we need, because we can define the terms of our professional lives. She also encouraged us to learn each other's stories so that we don't dehumanize one another.

In another session, Dr. Hayden spoke with David Ferriero, Archivist of the United States. Their light-hearted banter about whose agency "does



it better” was enjoyable to watch. They said they have a friendly rivalry—with the common goal of creating a community of history and culture. I learned that 80% of Obama’s documents were born digital, and the National Archives & Records Administration has an agreement with the Obama Administration to create the first all-digital presidential library.



Michelle Obama and Dr. Carla Hayden, photo courtesy of Kimberly Boyd

My two other favorite sessions included a panel about science communication—how librarians can be a force for science by promoting science resources through displays, teaching science literacy, and using social media to discuss science—and a panel of Native American authors talking about their recent publications and encouraging us to making a commitment to expanding our awareness by reading stories from Native authors.

Rounding out my conference experience was attending the Stonewall Book Awards, the Odyssey Book Awards ceremony for children's and young adult audio books, and the Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) Reception and Awards Ceremony.

ALA Annual was a whirlwind of a conference, and there were many great sessions that I

couldn't attend. So many good things are going on in libraries around the world! Work is very busy, and it's easy to get caught up in the minutiae, so it was wonderful to have a few days to see the bigger picture. I love my profession and was definitely grateful for the opportunity to attend ALA this year.

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**Catherine Bowers**  
*Reference Librarian*  
*Assistant Professor*  
*Valdosta State University*

I attended the 2018 ALA Annual Conference on Saturday and Sunday. In addition to panels and the exhibitions, I attended a meeting of my library school's alumni association and met current students who had questions about making career-prep decisions. I also networked with attendees of the ABA Children's Institute and learned about some of their relevant issues.

**“Zine Cultures as Critical Resistance: A Hands-On Workshop to Build Community Engagement and Student Learning”**

This panel explored zines as counter-cultural voices and featured two zine creators, one of whom is a public librarian, and two academic librarians who have researched zines and zine-type literature, such as Soviet-era *samizdat* and similar underground publications. Zine creator Daniela Capistrano highlighted *Bulbancha Is Still a Place*, centering indigenous peoples' stories in New Orleans.

The session mixed scholarly presentations with a smaller focus on collection development and workshops. I asked how to communicate value and meaning to students who don't know what a zine is, and the answer that resonated most was passive programming, which could draw students and other attendees into an active experience.



“Studying and Spirituality: Prayer and Meditation Spaces in Academic Libraries”

The panelists covered the origins, usage policies, promotion signage, and assessment of the spaces in their libraries. One institution used swipe card door lock and had more than 10,500 entries in 18 months. Space usage varied between interfaith prayers and quiet meditation. The discussion also included possibilities of other spaces, such as nursing/lactation spaces. All efforts for these spaces evolved from student requests or observing students praying in the stacks, which reflected a strong community ethos.

“Be Your Own Mentor: Take Control of your Professional Development”

This was a solid, confident approach to a tricky topic. Mandy Havert, digital research and outreach librarian at the University of Notre Dame, led the audience through reconceptualizing mentorships, such as articulating what can be learned between all parties, an emphasis on mutuality, and who might be a good (or poor) fit. Havert outlined ways to frame these connections productively, including limited-term mentorship, and provided materials.

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**Linda R. Most, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor & Department Head  
Department of Library and Information Studies  
Valdosta State University*

I attend the annual ALA conference to represent the Valdosta State University (VSU) MLIS program, so primarily for networking, recruiting, and marketing purposes. As the department head for Library and Information Studies at VSU, I feel it is important for our MLIS program to be represented at ALA along with about 30 of the other accredited LIS degree programs. We are now attracting applicants from around the country, so we want to be

available for people who might be shopping for an MLIS program that meets their needs. We also want to have the chance to connect with our current students and alumni from around the country who are attending the conference.

Each year the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) books a booth in the ALA exhibits. This booth is shared by LIS programs that cannot afford to pay for and staff a full booth by themselves. In New Orleans, seven different MLIS programs shared the ALISE booth and another ten to fifteen programs had their own booths. All the MLIS program booths are grouped together in what ALA calls the Education Pavilion. This grouping helps conference attendees who are looking for information about different programs. It is also great for the representatives of the programs because we get to catch up with friends and colleagues we see once or twice a year at most.

The New Orleans conference was extra special for me because Dr. Carla Hayden, the Librarian of Congress, was in attendance and she was out and about walking around and talking with folks. She was happy to take pictures with whoever asked. Dr. Hayden came by the ALISE booth while I was there. It was an honor to meet her again and be in a photo with her. Also pictured are Denice Atkins from the University of Missouri and Mary Moen from the University of Washington.



The other activities I really enjoy when attending ALA include hearing the different authors talk about their work. This year seeing Michelle Obama be interviewed by Dr. Hayden was amazing. Attending ALA also gives me a chance to enjoy some big city amenities including dining at great restaurants and some years even seeing a Broadway show—I've seen Hamilton and Book of Mormon in Chicago—or attending a concert or baseball game.

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**Scott Pieper**

*Reference Librarian  
Perimeter College – Decatur  
Georgia State University*

**Karen Viars**

*Humanities & Science Fiction Librarian  
Georgia Institute of Technology*

What an experience at ALA this year in New Orleans! The city was hot and humid even for folks accustomed to Georgia. It was also an exciting and, ultimately, very successful conference for us. Scott was able to see Michelle Obama's talk with Dr. Carla Hayden. He also attended another session featuring Dr. Hayden and former ALA President Courtney Young where both discussed the future of



libraries. Karen attended the closing keynote with actress Viola Davis, who recounted her childhood experiences with her local public library.

However, the highlight for both of us was giving our presentation, “Motivating Library Learners: Three Theories to Enhance Teaching.” It was well attended (standing room only, in fact!): close to 100 people came. We had a wonderful dialogue with librarians working in many different kinds of libraries during and after our talk. Our presentation explored three motivational theories: Modern Expectancy-Value Theory, Keller’s ARCS Model, and Monroe’s Motivated Sequence. Through hands-on activities, we encouraged attendees to apply these models to teaching situations in their contexts. Can you believe part of our presentation was a Sham Wow infomercial? The enthusiasm and attendance was a great indication to us that librarians care deeply about teaching and are always curious about how to refine their practice. The New Orleans conference was the first presentation at an ALA Annual for both of us.

New Orleans was a fascinating city to explore. We toured an historic cemetery, dating back to 1820. Oh, the food! We had several meals together in the French Quarter with other colleagues and our spouses who came along for the adventure. Overall, it was a unique and valuable experience to visit and to present to colleagues from all over the country (although visiting New Orleans might be nicer in the winter).

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**Emily Rogers**

*Reference Librarian, Government Information  
Associate Professor  
Valdosta State University*

I attended the 2018 ALA Annual Conference on Saturday and Sunday to fulfill committee service obligations for the Government

Documents Round Table (GODORT) Awards Committee and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Literatures in English (LES) Program Committee. In addition to assisting at the GODORT Awards Reception in the beautiful Louisiana Supreme Court Building, I volunteered for the New Members Round Table Resume Review Session to help four library job-seekers improve their resumes and cover letters.

Among the sessions I attended:

“Zine Cultures as Critical Resistance: A Hands-On Workshop to Build Community Engagement and Student Learning”

This program, co-sponsored by LES along with the European Studies Section and the Zine Pavilion, covered zine collections in public libraries, people of color creating zines, alternative zine culture in Russia, zines as political resistance, and zine culture in an academic library. Audience members contributed to a compilation zine by creating their own zine pages during the session.

“ACRL President’s Program: Beyond Resilience: Crafting a Caring Organization”

This session opened with the ACRL awards and then moved on to the focus of the program: resilience and just workplaces. Eamon Tewell, author of a forthcoming work on reference and justice, moderated the program, which featured Chris Bourg from MIT, Derrick Jefferson from American University, Fobazi M. Ettarh from California State Dominguez Hills, and Karen Schneider from Sonoma State University. The panel recognized that the problem with the notion of “resilience” is that it places all responsibility for improvement on the individual worker rather than looking at potential problems within the organization. Libraries and other workplaces can too easily avoid confronting white privilege; as one panelist said, “Not knowing what to say doesn’t



mean silence is the answer. The silence of an organization is often the most toxic thing.” Panelists explored what it means to be a “caring organization”—where everyone feels seen and heard and respected.

“Endangered Government Information: Strategies to Protect Government Collections”

This session was cosponsored by GODORT, ALCTS, and the ALA International Relations Committee. It explored the growing problem of the disappearance of government publications, both online and in tangible formats. Looking at Canada’s government publication system as a model of what *not* to do, the panelists reviewed barriers and deficits in government stewardship of government information sources. More and more United States government publications are made available directly by agencies and in online-only format rather than distributed through the Federal Depository Library Program, and, as such, are in grave danger of inadequate preservation.