

DOLLY B. DAVIS HOOVER: PIONEER BLACK LIBRARIAN

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On November 26, 2000, friends and colleagues gathered at Saint Stephens Episcopal Church to honor the memory of Dolly B. Davis Hoover, the first African American faculty member at Indiana State University. The newspaper accounts of this occasion make note of her contribution to diversification and her role as a librarian at the university. As Charles Chillington eulogized “she opened ways that were not opened to most of us here.”¹ These accounts, however, only offer a mere palimpsest of her remarkable career, a career which should be acknowledged in annals of Black Librarianship. The accomplishments of Dolly B. Davis Hoover are remarkable given the context of the time when she embarked upon the career of professional librarian in 1945.

In a commencement address delivered at Atlanta University² in 1949, Librarian of Congress Luther H. Evans posed the following question, “What will be the applications of your education?”³ Expressing the conviction that it was the duty of the “educated members of society” to seek employment in areas in which they would have the potential to excel, Evans strongly encouraged the graduating class to consider a career in librarianship.⁴ The advice offered by the Librarian of Congress was quite logical, as Black librarianship in the 1940s was making tremendous strides, given the considerable obstacles that impacted its existence.

Many trace origins of professional librarianship in America to the American Public Library Movement (1876-1917).⁵ However, in the midst of a library movement whose aims were to democratize the access to knowledge, African Americans were faced with a cultural repression, born out of the aftermath of slavery and reconstruction, which provided impediments to this so-called democratization.⁶ Yet, it was in this inhospitable environment that African American institutions of higher education, and their libraries, developed and flourished. Initially, years of forced illiteracy had to be overcome, and the aims of these early institutions were to simply teach their students how to read and write.

Given this state of affairs, the libraries at these institutions were small and the materials housed

therein were of the most basic type. As James A. Hulbert was to observe, there was not a “great need for numerous books...Simple readers and elementary textbooks were the order of the day.”⁷ The methods employed by the so-called “librarians” in these early collections were at best rudimentary, hence requiring only the most basic understanding of library methodology. Because of limited funds, most collections were housed in less-than-ideal situations. Collections were developed from cast-off materials and, more often than not, were composed of any printed matter regardless of content. Cataloging was unnecessary since most of the early collections were so small a card catalog was unnecessary. Librarianship was governed by “expediency” borne out of “bare necessity” and, consequently, the librarian, in most of these situations, was usually a teacher at the institution who had a “special interest in books” and little or no formal training in librarianship.⁸

Until the mid-1920s, the number of professionally trained African American librarians was quite small. Contributing to this statistic, beyond the “backwardness and stagnation characterizing most Negro college libraries”⁹ of the time, was the fact that Blacks seeking to be professionally trained in librarianship had to apply to white institutions. Black students in these white institutions encountered a myriad of difficulties, ranging from a dearth of “suitable lodging places within easy access to the campus,” to a “lack of knowledge of positions and success in placement.”¹⁰

By 1925, however, great change was afoot. Through the efforts of a few dedicated African American community leaders, libraries within Black institutions were improved and expanded; many Black educators were aroused from what has been characterized as apathy toward libraries; and Black students became convinced that libraries were one means to break free of the limitations imposed by their environs. In particular, it was the work of the Hampton Institute Library School in Virginia, and its director Miss Florence R. Curtis, which was responsible for the greatest change. With the establishment of the Hampton Library School in 1925, increasing numbers of African Americans became educated in librarianship.¹¹ The success of the Hampton Library School, however, was to be short-lived as

financial support waned during the late-1930s and the school closed. After the untimely demise of the Hampton Library School in 1939, the Atlanta University School of Library Service “assumed responsibility for educating the majority of Black American Librarians.”¹²

Despite all of these advances, one thing remained constant for the Black librarian – libraries serving predominantly white communities seldom employed them. A review of the literature dedicated to Black librarianship over the first half of the twentieth century clearly demonstrates that librarianship was a segregated profession. Employment was only to be gained in academic and public libraries serving African Americans.¹³ Given the predominant library culture of the period, the life and accomplishments of Dolly B. Davis Hoover are both emblematic and remarkable.

Dolly B. Davis Hoover was born to Ernest J. Davis, Sr. and Dolly Walker Davis in Washington D.C. on December 13, 1923. Her father was an attorney and her mother was a nurse and they encouraged Dolly and her siblings to excel academically.¹⁴ She attended Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., which was established in 1870 as preparatory school for Blacks.¹⁵ After she received her high school diploma in 1940, Dolly entered a course of study in education at Miner Teachers College in Washington, D.C. A young white woman named Myrtilla Miner originally founded Miner Teachers College as a Normal School for “colored girls” in 1851.¹⁶ In 1944, Dolly was awarded the Baccalaureate degree. During her time at Miner Teacher’s College, she developed an interest in librarianship, and she worked in the card division of the Library of Congress from 1944 to 1945.

Her interest in librarianship was logical. As we have seen earlier, most of the early Black librarians were teachers who had a “special interest in books.” Unlike so many of these Black librarians, Dolly saw the need to attain an expertise in librarianship. It could be said that this need to achieve in her chosen field was engendered by her parents. After her graduation, and concurrent with her work at the Library of Congress, she attended Catholic University of America, where she was awarded the Bachelor of Science degree in Library Science in 1945. It should be noted that Catholic University was a predominantly white institution, so Dolly encountered many of the challenges that confronted Blacks seeking to be educated at non-Black institutions.

Upon her graduation, she followed the path of many young African American librarians; she sought employment in Black institutions of higher education. In 1945, Dolly was engaged as an Assistant Cataloger at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.¹⁷ She remained in that position from 1945-1949. Given the historical significance of the Institute, her first job was quite an achievement for a beginning Black librarian and truly

demonstrated her abilities in her profession. Founded in 1880, and opened by Dr. Booker T. Washington in 1881, the mission of the Tuskegee Institute was to direct newly emancipated Blacks toward progress through “industry and education.”¹⁸ Dolly worked under the administration of the third president, Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, whose accomplishments included the founding of the United Negro College fund. It must have been a truly exhilarating period of time for this young woman.

In 1949, St. Philip’s College, a Black institution in San Antonio Texas, welcomed Dolly to its library family.¹⁹ She worked in the library’s technical services division until 1955, and during her tenure she attained the rank of Librarian. Ever striving to improve her abilities, Dolly entered into an advanced course of study in librarianship at the University of Chicago during her final years at St. Philip’s. Her course of study culminated in a Masters Thesis titled, “Library-circulated books, their public and their use: A study of the books circulated from four branches of the Chicago Public Library.” In 1954, she was awarded the degree of Master of Arts in Library Science. Although Dolly had accomplished so much throughout her career as an academic librarian, it should be remembered that it was still a period in our history when African Americans constantly and continually had to prove their worth to a disbelieving world. The year when Dolly was awarded her Master’s degree was the same year that bore witness to the landmark Supreme Court decision on *Brown versus the Board of Education*. In its decision, the Court ruled that separate educational facilities were unequal and violated the 14th Amendment. One year later, in 1955, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and this act gave birth to Civil Rights Movement.

By 1958, Dolly had already been engaged as the first Black librarian at Indiana State Teachers’ College in Terre Haute, Indiana.²⁰ She was hired under the administration of the sixth President of the institution, Raleigh Warren Holmstedt. President Holmstedt, over the course of his tenure at Indiana State was responsible for campus expansion, extensive improvements to the institution’s curriculum, and its recognition as a “comprehensive” university.²¹ He also was forward thinking regarding the status of librarians and their work. According to Dorothy Shinoske, the Head of Circulation at Indiana State during the 1950s, Holmstedt was the first administrator to recognize librarians as professionals.²² Despite all this, it was still remarkable that a predominantly white college would hire a Black librarian, especially given the racial climate of the period.

Perhaps the one person who could be credited as being the progressive in this situation was Director of Libraries Fred Hanes. Hanes had started out at Indiana

State as a member of the teaching faculty in the School of Library Science. In 1953, the Indiana Legislature appropriated \$400,000 for the expansion of the existing library building and the construction of a new wing commenced in 1955. By the fall of 1958, Hanes had assumed the directorship of the “new” library, and the expansion involved was not restricted to its physical structure. He expanded services to evening and weekend hours, increased the size of the collections, and made the library a repository for government documents. He also hired Dolly.

Dolly’s position in 1958 was that of halftime Senior Librarian. Perhaps one of the factors that influenced her hire at Indiana State was that she was an accomplished technical services librarian. Another might have been the fact that her position would afford her very little contact with the public and student workers. In an appraisal report from 1961, Mr. Hanes emphasized that her “[o]nly contact with students [was] in limited supervision of student employees in the Catalog Department.”²³ According to several people employed at Indiana State at that time, segregation was to be found in many areas of the school. Dolly herself remembered that during this period of time she would have to eat in a segregated area of the campus cafeteria.

On July 1, 1959, because of her abilities, Dolly’s status was changed to that of full time employee. At the same time she was appointed as the Assistant Head of the Cataloging Department. In 1960, after having won the respect of her colleagues, Dolly was elected President of the Library Staff Association. It was evident that she was a “good fit” for both the Library and the College. In 1962, after only three “full-time” years of service to the College, Dolly was recommended for tenure. Interim Director, Thelma Bird, in her evaluation wrote, “Mrs. Hoover exhibits a high level of professional competence. She works harmoniously with the library staff, and is a willing, cooperative worker. She is receptive to new ideas, and flexible in her attitudes.”²⁴ On May 4, 1961, R. W. Holmstedt wrote Dolly a letter, informing her that she had been granted tenure at the college.²⁵ In the conclusion to his letter, the President wrote, “I wish to express my personal appreciation for your service to Indiana State College.”²⁶ Granting tenure to an African American woman was quite significant in 1961. In February of that year, four African American college students sat at the “whites-only” lunch counter in the Woolworth Store in Greensboro, North Carolina, and demanded service – an event which many credit as being the opening gambit in the war against segregation.

Her time at the Cataloging Department during the 1960s was extremely productive. This period was a time of tremendous gains in information services – a period that witnessed what is now called the “information explosion.” To meet the increasing needs of the institution’s library users, more print materials had to be acquired, and new methods for organizing and accessing these materials had to be adopted. To con-

front the challenges of this new world of information access, Dolly took a sabbatical leave of absence for the academic year 1967-68 and returned to the University of Chicago to pursue an advanced course of study in Library Science. Through her work, she demonstrated her consummate abilities, both as a technical services librarian and as an educator. In 1971, Indiana State recognized librarians as having faculty status, and in 1972, the University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana, invited Dolly to teach a course in advanced cataloging at their distinguished School of Library Science.

While Dolly was imparting her knowledge of cataloging at Illinois, construction was completed on Indiana State’s new main library, the Cunningham Memorial Library. Named for the first “appointed” librarian of the Indiana Normal School, Arthur Cunningham, the six million dollar building provided ample space for the library’s growing collections. In January of 1973, the library officially opened its doors and in 1974, Dolly became the Head of the Cataloging Department, administering the work of six librarians and six paraprofessionals.

During the 1970s, Dolly was instrumental in the creation, and adoption, of the Library Constitution. She also served on numerous university committees, including a term as Chair of the Library Faculty Assembly in 1973. Former Librarian Gene Norman has observed that, “Dolly had a good mind and could always be counted upon to help come up with an effective solution when knotty political problem[s] arose.”²⁷ The same held true when it came to her dealing with the “knotty problems” brought about by the myriad changes confronted by catalogers during the 1970s and 80s. She supervised the library’s database searching service in 1980 and, during the same year, managed the conversion of cataloging practices to AACR2. From 1981 to 1982, she directed the reclassification of the collection from the Dewey Decimal System to the Library of Congress Classification System and from 1984 to 1985 she participated in the implementation of the new online public access catalog using NOTIS software.

Head of Cataloging was not the only title that Dolly would assume during her years of service to the library at Indiana State. Another hat, which she wore during her tenure at the Library, was that of Subject Specialist. As Dr. François Muyumba noted, Dolly took great initiative “to diversify library materials. She was responsible and persistent for ordering more books on African, African-American, and Caribbean cultures... She has enriched our lives.”²⁸ In the early 1980s it was determined that the library needed to address issues surrounding their well-used collection and on April 1, 1983, Dolly was named Head of the Preservation and Conservation Department. One of the reasons for this appointment rested in her aptitude as a librarian and researcher. Many of the practices and policies instituted during her four-year tenure are still being used at the Cunningham Memorial Library at the present time.

After thirty years of service, Dolly retired from Indiana State University's Cunningham Memorial Library on June 30, 1987. Retirement for Dolly did not signal an end to her service to Indiana State University, the Terre Haute community, and the State of Indiana. She sponsored the Zeta Nu Chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, a Black sorority founded on January 13, 1913 by collegiate women at Howard University who wanted to use their "collective strength to promote academic excellence and to provide assistance to persons in need."²⁹ Throughout her life in the Wabash Valley, she was an active and beloved member of the St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Terre Haute. During the final decade of her life, Governor Evan Bayh appointed her to the Indiana State Pharmaceutical Board and to the Indiana Realty and Appraisal Board. She was also the recipient of two Sagamore of the Wabash awards. This award is the highest honor which the Governor of Indiana bestows. It is a personal tribute given to those who have rendered distinguished service to the state or to the governor.

Dolly B. Davis Hoover was truly a pioneer in Black Librarianship. With great reserve, strength, and intelligence, she made tremendous headway into a world where few African Americans had gone before. She became the first Black Librarian to work at Indiana State University and was one of its first Black faculty members. Most remarkable was the fact that she accomplished all of this at a time when there was a great resistance to integration. After thoroughly appraising Dolly's life, Charles Chillington's eulogy certainly rings true, "she opened ways that were not opened to most."³⁰

The authors would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in providing information on the life and times of Dolly B. Davis Hoover:

Mrs. Ethel Davis Bell

Ms. Allayne Bell

Mr. Gene Norman

Ms. Susan Davis

(Endnotes)

1 Kenya Woodard, "ISU's 1st African American faculty member memorialized at service," *Indiana Statesman* (Nov. 6, 2000).

2 Founded in 1865 by the American Missionary Association, Atlanta University was the nation's oldest graduate institution serving a predominantly African American student body. On July 1, 1988, Atlanta University and Clark College consolidated to form Clark Atlanta University.

3 Luther H. Evans, "The Magnificent Purpose," *Phylon* (1946-1956) 10/4 (4th Quarter, 1949), 314. It should be noted that Evans (1902-1981) was Librarian of Congress

from 1945 to 1953. He resigned from the position in 1953 upon his election as the third director-general of UNESCO.

4 Evans, "The Magnificent Purpose," 316.

5 Casper LeRoy Jordan, "African American Forerunners in Librarianship," in the *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, 2nd ed., ed. E.J. Josey and Marva L. DeLoach (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000), 19.

6 James A. Hulbert, "The Negro College Library," *Journal of Negro Education* 12/4 (Autumn, 1943), 623.

7 Ibid.

8 Hulbert, "The Negro College Library," 623-24. According to Hulbert, out of "seventy-nine Black institutions of higher education...only fifteen had libraries with 10,000 or more volumes, and seven colleges either had no library at all or had collections too wretched to be known as libraries.

9 Ibid., 624.

10 Florence Rising Curtis, "Librarianship as a Field for Negroes," *Journal of Negro Education* 4/1 (Jan., 1935), 95-96. The conditions endured by Black library students during this early period, make even more remarkable their accomplishments. In particular, one must admire the achievements of Edward Christopher Williams (1871-1929), who was the first Black to have been awarded a Masters degree in Library Science (New York State Library School, 1900), and who went on to become Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Library Training Class, and Librarian of Howard University in 1916.

11 S.L. Smith, "The Passing of the Hampton Library School," *Journal of Negro Education* 9/1 (Jan., 1940), 51-58. In 1935, Florence Curtis was to note that during the period from 1900 to 1934, approximately seventy students had enrolled in library schools other than the Hampton School. Of these students forty-three "had completed the curriculum of the first year of professional course." In comparison, from 1925 to 1934, one hundred students enrolled at the Hampton School of which, ninety-six completed the one year's curriculum and found employment in a variety of libraries. See, Curtis, "Librarianship as a Field for Negroes," 95-96.

12 Jordan, "African American Forerunners in Librarianship," 19. Established in 1941, the Atlanta University School of Library Service was, according to Luther H. Evans, one of only 34 schools conferring library degrees in the United States at that time. See, Evans, "The Magnificent Purpose," 317. The first dean of the Library School was Dr. Eliza Atkins Gleason, who holds the distinction of being the "first" African American to earn a Ph.D. in Library Science (University of Chicago, 1940). See Casper LeRoy Jordan and E.J. Josey, "A Chronology of Events in Black Librarianship," in the *Handbook of Black Librarianship*, 2nd ed., ed.

E.J. Josey and Marva L. DeLoach (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000), 7.

13 An example of this is illustrated in Florence Rising Curtis's "Librarianship as a Field for Negroes" (1935). In this article, Miss Curtis, makes an argument for Black librarianship only within the context that these librarians would do well to serve Black institutions.

14 Her brother, Colonel Ernest J. Davis, Jr., had an illustrious military career. He was a 1939 graduate of Dunbar High School. In 1945, he graduated from the U.S. Military Academy. During World War II, he received flight training at the Tuskegee Institute. He was known as a Tuskegee Airman. After the War he attended Howard University. Further, he received a master's degree in aeronautical engineering from Ohio State University in the 1960s. During the 1970s, he was a researcher at the Pentagon and during the 1980s he worked for the National Transportation Safety Board until his retirement. Her sister, Mrs. Ethel Davis Bell, was also a graduate of Dunbar High School. Like Dolly, she attended Miner Teacher's College and received her Baccalaureate degree in 1945. Following in the footsteps of her mother, she became a nurse, after having been awarded a degree in Nursing from Yale University in 1948. She became the first nurse in Terre Haute to hold two master's degrees, her second being in Media Technology. Mrs. Bell was a member of the faculty at Indiana State University, where she retired as Associate Professor of Nursing in 1992.

15 The school began in the basement of a Presbyterian Church and was later renamed "Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School."

16 In 1873, the school attained the title "Teacher's College." By the time that Dolly was pursuing her bachelor's degree, the College was coeducational. Miner eventually merged with Wilson Teacher's college in 1955 and became the University of District of Columbia Teacher's College. Finally, in 1976, the college merged with Washington Technical Institute and Federal City College to form the present University of District of Columbia.

17 It should be noted that her brother Ernest was attending Tuskegee at that time. Given the obstacles encountered by young Black librarians during that period, mainly the "lack of knowledge of positions and success in placement," it is quite possible that Ernest encouraged Dolly to apply for the position.

18 Washington was the institute's first President and served in that position until his death in 1915.

19 St. Philip's College, was founded in 1898 by James Steptoe Johnston, bishop of the Western Texas Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church. It was initially known as St. Philip's Normal and Industrial School. At first the school was a weekend sewing class for six Black girls. From 1900 to 1902 the school was directed by Perry G. Walker. In September 1902 Artemisia Bowden joined the school as administrator and teacher.

Under her supervision the school grew from an industrial school for girls into a high school and later a junior college. During this period the institution was known as Bowden's School. In September 1927, St. Philip's became a junior college for the Black community of San Antonio and vicinity. It remained a private Episcopal school until 1942, when it became a municipal junior college affiliated with San Antonio College under the auspices of the San Antonio Independent School District.

20 Indiana State Teacher's College eventually became Indiana State College in 1960 and Indiana State University in 1965.

21 Holmstedt was President from 1953-1965. It was during this period that the first doctoral degrees were awarded.

22 Shinoske had observed that Holmstedt's predecessor, President Ralph N. Tirey, "thought of librarians as clerks." Email, Gene Norman, 11 November 2002.

23 Fred W. Hanes, Indiana State College Appraisal of New Faculty Members, February 20, 1961, Typescript, Indiana State University Archives, Terre Haute, Indiana.

24 Thelma C. Bird, Indiana State College Appraisal of New Faculty Members, March 22, 1962, Typescript, Indiana State University Archives, Terre Haute, Indiana.

25 R. W. Homlstedt, Terre Haute, to Dolly Hoover, Terre Haute, May 4 1962, Typescript, Indiana State University Archives, Terre Haute, Indiana.

26 Ibid.

27 Email, Gene Norman, 11 November 2002.

28 Woodard, "ISU's 1st African American faculty member."

29 Delta Sigma Theta, "History." Website. Address: <http://www.deltasigmatheta.org>. Accessed November 12, 2002. The sorority included among its members Dr. **Alexa Canady**, the first Black neurosurgeon in the United States; **Shirley Chisholm**, the first Black woman member of the U.S. Congress; and **Barbara Jordan**, the first African-American to serve in the U.S. congress from the South since reconstruction.

30 Kenya Woodard, "ISU's 1st African American faculty member memorialized at service," *Indiana Statesman* (Nov. 6, 2000).

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