

CHAPTER VII

INDEPENDENT NEGRO LIBRARIES

THOUGH the independent Negro library has not been particularly popular as a governmental form in the establishment of public library services for Negroes, this form of organization is of sufficient interest and significance to warrant a discussion, in some detail, of the activities of even a small group of institutions.

GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

The governmental organization of an independent Negro library at the present time¹ offers no peculiar problems because of the racial element. This type of institution is organized as would be any other public library system, and its boards of control are empowered with the same privileges and limited by the same restrictions that regulate the activities of the boards of control of white institutions. Only eleven examples of the type appear to be in existence. Probably because of the scarcity in the numbers, there is not found, however, so wide a range in the variations of governmental structure as Joeckel found in his general study of public library governmental forms. For example, no independent Negro library is an integral unit of either the city or the county governments by which it is maintained; all institutions in this group are governed by boards of trustees, though, as would be expected, there are

¹ During the latter period of the existence of the independent Negro library in Charlotte, North Carolina, the board of Trustees of the Negro institution was elected by the board of trustees of the white institution (see p. 81).

definite variations in the methods by which the boards are created. For all practical purposes, therefore, the governmental structure of the independent Negro library may be said to follow the general patterns of the American public library.

Table 4² shows the names, location, and types of these independent libraries and brings out clearly the scarcity in their numbers. Even with this small number there are examples of numerous types of organization. The publicly owned and operated municipal library leads in number, there being seven in this group. There are also two county libraries and one library which serves its own city and part of its county; and finally, there is one privately owned and operated city library. This is an unusual type, and therefore the establishment of this institution will be described in more detail than that of the other ten.

The name of the institution in question is the Hannibal Square Library, and it is located at Winter Park, Florida, the home of Rollins College. Through the efforts of the Students' Interracial Club of this college and other friends a sufficient amount of money was raised to build and equip a fireproof, modern structure. It was erected adjacent to the grade school for Negro children on ground given by the city. The purchase of the first 100 books was started with what has been called "flower money." The wife of one of the college professors had always been interested in aiding the Negro group, and at the time of her death the money which would have been spent on funeral flowers was donated for books for Negro use. Thus were provided the funds which purchased the first books for Hannibal Square Library.

² See pp. 76-77.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Methods of support.—The financial support of independent Negro libraries is derived from the usual sources by which public libraries are maintained.³ These sources—the special library tax and the library appropriation—have already been discussed in chapter v in connection with the support of Negro branch libraries, and all views expressed there would also be applicable in the case of the independent Negro library.

Methods of allocation of funds.—The independent Negro library is no exception among public institutions in the allocation of funds for its support. The amount of money received is determined to an extent by the impression the library boards make on governmental authorities whose power it is to dispense public funds. Here, of course, as with all other institutions where the Negro receives separate service, the question always arises as to whether the service is equal to that being provided for the white group. No one of the publicly supported libraries reported that its funds for maintenance were allocated on any objective basis. We may conclude, therefore, that there is probably no more logical basis for the allocation of funds than for the Negro branch. In this instance, however, the independent Negro library does have one decided advantage—it has its own board, which may present its individual case to the city or county authorities. It is entirely conceivable that a librarian with imagination, enthusiasm, and concern could present the library's case to his board in such a manner that the board in turn might also be willing and anxious to present a convincing argument to the proper authorities for adequate library support.

Expenditures in independent Negro libraries.—Though, as

³ Privately supported libraries not included in this category.

has been shown,⁴ the independent Negro library as a form came early in the development of public library service for the Negro, over half of the existing examples have been organized within the last ten years and several of these within the last five years. Consequently, it has been impossible to secure data for a comparatively long period. Figures 11, 12, and 13, however, will present sufficient information to acquaint the reader with the recent status of these institutions.

Figure 11 shows the total and per capita operating expenditures for the year 1937 in eight independent Negro libraries. Raleigh, North Carolina, leads in total expenditures with a high of \$3,700.00, and Waycross, Georgia, is at the bottom with a total expenditure of \$290.00. The median for this distribution is \$1,575.00. As with Negro branch expenditures, the highest per capita expenditures are not always associated with the highest total expenditures. Guthrie, Oklahoma, leads the distribution with a per capita expenditure of \$0.81, and Jackson, Mississippi, is the lowest with an expenditure of \$0.01. The median for this distribution is \$0.10.

Only a rough comparison may be made of these total expenditures with those of certain Negro branch libraries for the same year,⁵ as the latter group is much larger and also includes library units in decidedly larger population groups. A few points, however, are of interest. The total expenditures in the independent Negro group do not go so high or so low as do those for the Negro branch libraries, though the median for independent libraries is higher than is that for the Negro branch libraries. When per capita expenditures are considered, however, almost the reverse

⁴ See p. 19.

⁵ See Fig. 2, p. 122.

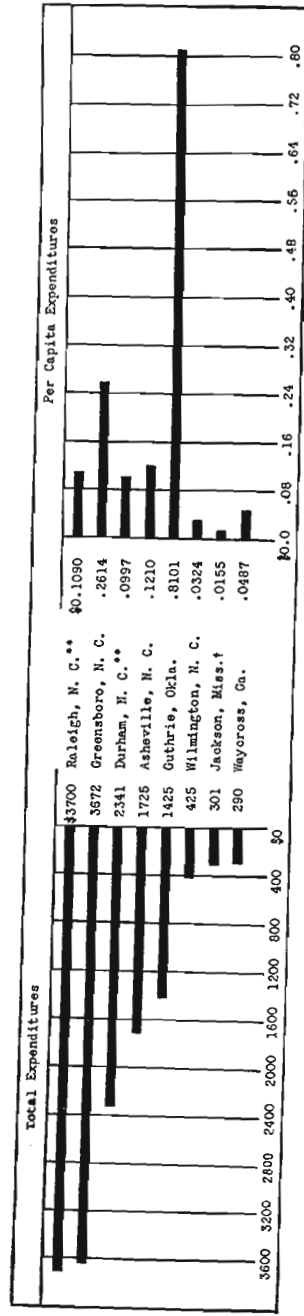


FIG. 11.—Total and per capita operating expenditures for the year 1937 in eight independent Negro libraries*

* Per capita figures are based upon the Negro population within the incorporated area of the city except when otherwise specified; all population figures are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*.

** Per capita figures based upon county population.

† The figures for Jackson are for the year 1938, as the library was not established until February, 1937.

is true. The per capita expenditures for the Negro branch libraries do not go so high or so low as do those for the independent Negro libraries. The median for the group of independent libraries, however, remains higher. The per capita expenditure for Guthrie, Oklahoma, is the highest per capita figure encountered in the whole study; and, in

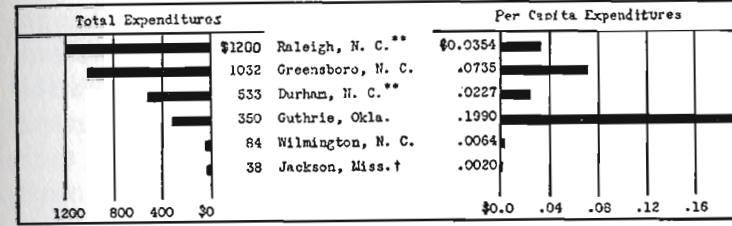


FIG. 12.—Total and per capita expenditures for books, binding, and periodicals for the year 1937 in six independent Negro libraries.*

* Per capita figures are based upon the Negro population within the incorporated area of the city except when otherwise specified; all population figures are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*.

** Per capita figures based upon county population.

† The figures for Jackson are for the year 1938, as the library was not established until February, 1937.

comparison with other cities of its size, its total expenditure cannot be ranked as low.

Figure 12 shows the total and per capita expenditures for books, binding, and periodicals for the year 1937 in six independent Negro libraries. Raleigh, North Carolina, continues to rank first in total expenditures and Guthrie, Oklahoma, in per capita expenditures. The same handicap is apparent as that mentioned above in attempting to compare this figure with Figure 4,⁶ which shows similar information for Negro branch libraries. In a comparison of these few examples for which records were available, it could not be said that the book budget for independent

⁶ See p. 129.

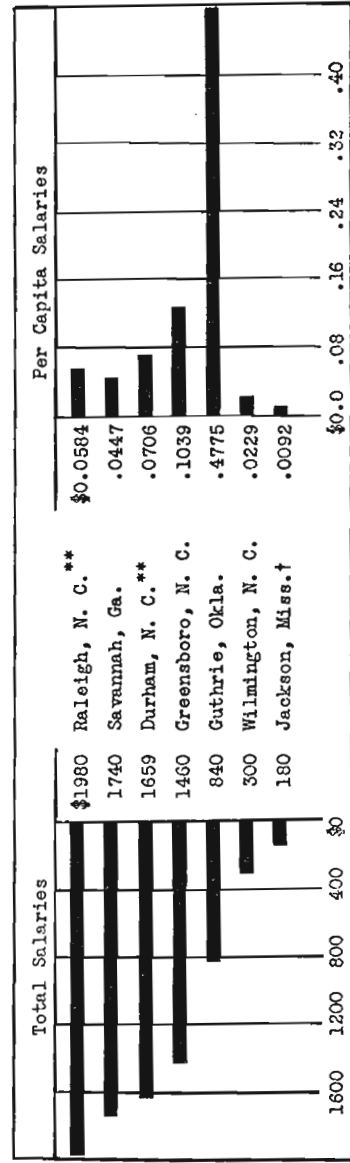


FIG. 13.—Total and per capita expenditures for salaries for the year 1937 in seven independent Negro libraries*
 * Per capita figures are based upon the Negro population within the incorporated area of the city except when otherwise specified; all population figures are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*.
 ** Per capita figures based upon county population.
 † The figures for Jackson are for the year 1938 as the library was not established until February, 1937.

libraries is considerably below that for branch libraries, as has usually been assumed.

Figure 13 presents information on total and per capita expenditures for salaries. In a comparison of this group of salaries with the total salaries for the group of Negro branch libraries for which information was available,⁷ it may be seen that the branch libraries generally have higher expenditures for salaries. It must be pointed out, however, that the largest expenditures are in cities which have considerably larger populations than any of the cities in the independent library group. When the expenditures for the cities in the same population groups are compared, the independent libraries measure up comparatively well.

INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The internal organization and administration is no less important in the independent library than in the Negro branch library. In a review of the organization, however, there is perhaps less to be said concerning the independent institutions. Their staffs are usually limited to one or two individuals, and the head librarian with the library board is always responsible for the policies of the library.

Library quarters.—All independent Negro libraries, with one exception, are housed in quarters which have been specially provided for the purpose. Some quarters are rented, while in others buildings have been erected especially to house the Negro library; but no library, with the one exception noted above, is housed in an institution which is primarily maintained for another purpose. The one exception is a very recently organized library which is housed in a community center, and this location could hardly be criticized since it is the regular meeting place for adults and children.

⁷ See Fig. 5, p. 131.

It is almost impossible to mention the quarters for independent Negro libraries without emphasizing the attractiveness of two of these institutions. Both are housed in rented stores, but the ingenuity of the librarians has transformed the original bare and uninviting locations into places of real charm. These examples are mentioned only to call attention to the point that it is possible to do many things of value with small funds, when these funds are managed by people with imagination and ability. Similar results could not be obtained by every person, but there is greater possibility of attracting librarians of real ability if they are allowed to feel that the administration of the institution is largely their responsibility and that they will be permitted to carry out many of their own ideas. Though both responsibility and freedom may be felt by the personnel of the Negro branch, the organization of the independent library necessarily compels a reasonable share of both responsibility and freedom, at least for the librarian.

Library hours.—Consistency is lacking in the number of hours the independent Negro library is open just as it is in the Negro branch library.

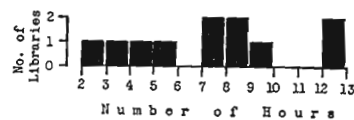


FIG. 14.—Distribution of library hours of eleven independent Negro libraries. The median is 7.7.

No library is open less than one hour per day, and seven of the eleven are open more than seven hours a day. The median for the distribution is 7.7, approximately eight hours per day. This average is considerably higher than that for Negro branch libraries, which is approximately six hours per day.⁸ Obviously, a comparison on the basis of these two figures alone can-

⁸ See Fig. 7, p. 138.

not be entirely accurate, yet it will indicate that the independent Negro libraries, as a group, are open more hours per day than are the Negro branches.

Personnel.—Efficiency in the personnel of the independent Negro library is as important as is efficiency in the Negro branch. In fact, the personnel of an independent Negro library should be chosen with even more special care since this staff does not have the guidance which is

TABLE 24

ACADEMIC TRAINING OF THE PERSONNEL OF INDEPENDENT NEGRO LIBRARIES

	High School but No Certificate or Less	High School Graduate	College but No Degree	College Degree
Librarians	1	3	7	5
Per cent	6	19	44	31

always theoretically present in the operation of the Negro branch. The following description will give some idea as to the present situation.

Table 24 shows the academic training of the personnel in the eleven existing independent Negro libraries. In comparing the academic status of the personnel of the independent libraries with that of the Negro branch libraries,⁹ it may be clearly seen that there is comparatively little difference in their ratings, as the percentages in each class are approximately the same for both groups. It is even probable that the status of the independent group might be slightly higher. It will be recalled that in reference to the class listed as "College but No Degree," for the

⁹ See Table 20, p. 139.

workers in the Negro branches, the point was made that numerous persons included in this category had had only a few college credits. In the case of the independent units no person who is listed in this classification seems to have had less than two full years of college work. Another point of interest is that the academic status of the personnel of the independent libraries is determined entirely by the training of people whose jobs are solely public library work. No independent library is located in a school, and thus the training of the school librarian who is also the public librarian is not responsible for raising the general level. This, as previously mentioned, was the situation in regard to the personnel of Negro branches.

The professional training of the personnel of the independent Negro libraries is shown in Table 25. Here again

TABLE 25
PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF THE PERSONNEL OF
INDEPENDENT NEGRO LIBRARIES

	None	Twelve Weeks or Less	Thirteen Weeks but Less than a Year	One Year or More
Librarians	8	6	0	3
Per cent	50	38	0	19

the independent group makes a representative showing,¹⁰ and the same point may be made as above regarding the absence of school librarians whose training in many instances raises the general professional level of the Negro branch librarians.

¹⁰ See Table 21, p. 140, for professional training of personnel of Negro branches.

Figure 15 gives information about the salaries of the librarians of eight independent Negro libraries during the year 1937. The range is from \$144.00 to \$1,080.00, with a median of \$799.50. In comparing this distribution with that for Negro branches¹¹ it may be seen that the average is approximately the same, though there is a difference in the extremes.

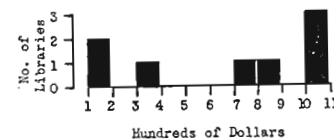


FIG. 15.—Salary distribution of eight independent Negro librarians for the year 1937. The median is \$799.50. The range is \$144-\$1,080.

COUNTY EXTENSION

Only three of the eleven independent libraries provide county service of any kind. Two give service to the whole county,¹² and the other¹³ serves a part of the county. One library uses a bookmobile which goes out into the field every day, and the other two libraries use deposit stations, with a car for direct service.

SPECIAL LIBRARY SERVICES

Special services for children.—A survey of special library services for children provided by independent Negro libraries yields practically the same results as the survey of these same activities in the Negro branches. None of the eleven libraries has a special children's librarian, though three have special children's rooms. The most popular activities are the vacation reading clubs and the story hour. One library reported a game night each week for the older boys and girls. This program is the first example

¹¹ See Fig. 8, p. 141.

¹² Richard B. Harrison Public Library, Raleigh, North Carolina, and the Hertford County Colored Public Library, Winton, North Carolina.

¹³ Durham Colored Public Library.

encountered in which something definite was being attempted to provide activities for the "in-between age." In recent years in certain professional circles, it has been more and more realized that the library should provide special services for the young people when they pass the age for the children's room and are not yet full-fledged adults. It would perhaps not be practical for each library to have a game night for this group, but it is encouraging to note even a slight awareness of this need.

Special services for adults.—As with Negro branch libraries, special services for adults means here "adult education activities." Again the survey yields almost negative results. There is, however, one institution¹⁴ which is keenly aware of the contribution which the public library may make in this direction; and, since it is fortunate enough to have on its staff two full-time professionally trained workers, it has been possible to begin the organization of an adult education program. So far there are reading guidance programs—the same kind of service a readers' adviser would give—a library-sponsored art club, a library-sponsored reading club, and two library-sponsored discussion groups. There is also a special collection for the use of adult education teachers. Though this program is not so extensive as the need warrants, it goes considerably beyond a small beginning; and, since this library is one of the youngest of the independent units—having been organized only a short time ago—expansion of these activities may be expected.

Special services to schools.—Close co-operation between the independent Negro library unit and the Negro public school is as much needed as is co-operation between the Negro branch and the public school. This point of view

¹⁴ Richard B. Harrison Public Library.

has been discussed in some detail in a preceding chapter,¹⁵ and it is only referred to again to stress the importance of the subject. Generally meager educational facilities for the Negro require a unity of action among those institutions whose privilege and obligation it is to provide some means of education for the group.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has considered the administration of a small group of eleven Negro libraries of which the essential characteristic is that they are separate governmental units, controlled by their own boards and independent of the libraries maintained for the white population. Throughout this whole chapter an attempt has been made to point out the facts which indicate that independent Negro libraries have fared no worse than the Negro branches in regard to expenditures, quarters, hours, and training and salaries of personnel. An opinion to the contrary has usually been assumed.

It was also pointed out that the independent organization had certain administrative advantages over the branch organization, such as the opportunity of having its own trustees plead its own special cause before the city or county authorities. Further, it was suggested that the degree of freedom and responsibility found in the independent organization would be far more likely to attract enthusiastic, efficient personnel than the present administrative limitations and restrictions found in most branch libraries. These two advantages are important factors and must be considered fundamental in the establishment of new units for Negro service.

¹⁵ See pp. 146-47.