

lation of the essential elements in the *pattern* of library service to the Negro in the South and (2) the statement of certain *recommendations* for the future which to the writer seem of much importance in the future development of libraries for the Negro.

THE PATTERN OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE  
TO NEGROES IN THE SOUTH

The enumeration which follows seeks merely to point out some of the essential characteristics of present public library services available to Negroes. Types and general quantities are emphasized; for the detailed statistics the reader is referred to the appropriate chapters in the study.

1. Of basic importance is the fact that the service in the South has followed the familiar pattern of the dual system of institutions for the two races. With few exceptions, library units for the Negro population are separate in housing and service, although not necessarily in administrative control. This dual system, in a region which is much below par in economic ability, has resulted in special difficulties in establishing facilities for the Negro in the first place and in providing anything approaching adequate or equal service in the second place.

2. Governmentally and administratively, library service to Negroes has been developed as part of unified library systems. That is to say, the units which serve Negroes are usually branches or stations in a single public library controlled by one board of trustees. There is a considerable and apparently growing number of exceptions to this general rule in the form of independent Negro libraries controlled by their own boards and entirely separate as governmental agencies from libraries for the white population. The results of this type of organization, now repre-

sented by eleven examples, are such as to warrant a just and intelligent scrutiny.

3. Judged merely by the extent of service rendered, the Negro population of the South is much less well provided with public libraries than the white population. Of a total of 774 public library units in the South, only 99 provide service for Negroes. Under these conditions service is denied, therefore, to approximately 2,000,000 Negroes who live in areas where public libraries are open to the white population but not to Negroes. Forty-four per cent of the white population of the thirteen states considered receive service in contrast to 21 per cent of the Negro population living in the same area. When service to urban and rural populations is considered, the rural Negro is considerably less well off than the urban Negro.

4. Negro library service is most likely to be found in places with large total and Negro populations and with comparatively high total and per capita wealth. Intangible factors are just as significant as causes for the establishment of public libraries for Negroes as are factors that can be stated in terms of statistical measures. It is thus relatively simple to account for the reason why certain fairly large cities with rather dense Negro populations do not provide service of any sort and why certain small cities with small Negro populations do provide service.

5. Appropriations for Negro library service are low. Little attempt has been made to develop useful measures of need, and less of an attempt has been made to develop objective standards by which to measure equality of service in comparison with the service provided for the white population. The result is that gross inequalities exist between the service provided for the white group and that provided for the Negro group. These inequalities thus

nullify the Negro's full civil rights which the Fourteenth Amendment attempted to guarantee to him.

6. State extension service to Negroes is relatively slight and adds little to local provision. Even the state libraries themselves, whose collections are frequently special in nature, in some instances make no provision for Negro readers. This fact is lamentable when considered in relation to the almost complete absence of special collections available to Negroes through the general public library facilities accessible to them.

7. Following the general pattern of the American public library, there have developed numerous small, inadequately financed public library units which attempt to provide service to the Negro population. In many instances they are entirely too small to operate as effective public library agencies.

8. The advantages springing from thoughtful and forceful internal administration have not been utilized to any great extent as a means of counteracting many of the difficulties which surround Negro public library service. Quite generally the Negro library is considered less from the point of view of how great difficulties may be surmounted in rendering a larger and more helpful library service to the Negro population than from the point of view of being able to say that *something* is being done for the Negro. With such an attitude prevailing in the controlling library authority, the Negro personnel is often selected merely as a means of keeping the Negro library open rather than as competent librarians with qualities of leadership which would make for growth and improved service.

9. Negro secondary schools and Negro colleges and universities have contributed relatively little to public

library service. Secondary schools and public libraries have developed one type of co-operation through their jointly housed and administered library units. However, it may be questioned whether in most of these instances the public library receives many benefits. Colleges and universities and public libraries, in contrast, have developed no characteristic co-operative techniques.

10. The statistics concerning library service to Negroes are unsatisfactory. National statistics are almost wholly lacking, state statistics are meager, and even in local units accurate data as to costs and other items are often not available. A situation of this kind makes it impossible, without much delay and effort, to view objectively the problems incident to Negro library service.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The present status of public library service for the Negro in the thirteen southern states under consideration leaves much to be desired. While progress has been noted here and there, it is clear that public library facilities in the South are inadequate for all races—and much more inadequate for the Negro.

This inadequacy seems to arise from conditions—historical, legal, and economic—no one of which is likely to be radically changed overnight. However, since it is believed that the public library may contribute significantly to the life of any community group, the important question remains for more specific consideration: what can help the situation? The fact that the present picture is discouraging is no ground for assuming that it is hopeless.

Certain suggestions bearing on this point have been made throughout the previous chapters; for emphasis some of these will be repeated here. In addition, several new

suggestions will be presented. The statements which follow in this connection are considered as much an attempt to call attention to the various aspects of the problem as to suggest proposals for its partial solution.

1. The fact that two states—Missouri and West Virginia, though not included in the thirteen states under consideration in this study—which have constitutional provisions requiring separate schools for Negroes have developed a different type of free public library service for the Negro shows that the pattern of complete separation of the races is not an inexorable formula forever closing the case. This is emphasized by the additional fact that certain cities—El Paso, Texas, Covington, Kentucky, and others—have also found that their citizens are willing to permit Negroes to use the free public libraries provided for all citizens.

It is therefore suggested at the outset that it may be unnecessary to assume that traditional patterns must be followed in every case in providing more adequate public library service for the Negro. There may be many communities in the South which could be persuaded to see the advantages of providing *one* good public library for all races. These communities may be willing to recognize the ill effects for both races which are bound to come from the strife incident to the Negro's ever more insistent demand, in the courts and otherwise, that public library service for him be made equal in fact to the public library service for the white population. These communities may realize the economic impossibility of building two first-rate public library systems—one for the Negro and one for the white group.

Where communities insist upon complete separation, of course, a different approach must be followed. Between

the extreme of complete separation and the ideal of one good public library in a community for all races, many varying approaches may be possible. The time, place, attitudes, and circumstances of each community must be weighed carefully in deciding upon the proper approach.

2. Some agency should be responsible for accurate and regular reporting of information concerning public library service for the Negro. In this connection three possible sources for the collection and dissemination of this information may be suggested: the Library Service Division of the United States Office of Education, the American Library Association, and the Negro library school. Little constructive planning can be done unless accurate information as to present conditions is readily available.

3. A proposal of a somewhat similar sort is that the "Work with Negroes Round Table" of the American Library Association be revived or that a comparable organization be established. It will be recalled that in the survey of the literature dealing exclusively with public library service for the Negro it was found that the "Work with Negroes Round Table" was responsible for much of the available data.<sup>1</sup> In addition, it is possible that the subjects and problems discussed in an organization of this kind would be in themselves of sufficient value to necessitate no further justification.

4. A library school for Negroes should be established in which fees are not prohibitive to the majority of Negroes who desire to secure professional library training. No service can be better than the personnel which operates it, and at the present time no library school is maintained in the South in which Negroes may matriculate.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> In September, 1941, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Ga., opened a library school for Negroes on the graduate level.

5. Intensive field work of a general advisory nature should be carried on among the public library agencies for Negroes in the South. This type of activity has proved successful in the field of secondary education for Negroes in at least one southern state, and it is unquestionably needed in the public library field. Trained Negro workers might be attached to the state library extension agencies in a manner similar to the association of the inspector of Negro high schools in North Carolina with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. With most public libraries for Negroes still in an embryonic state of development, a service of this nature is greatly needed.

6. Special consideration should be given to the choice of the library unit which is to provide public library service for the Negro.

(a) When for a variety of reasons it is apparent that effective service cannot be provided by means of a branch library unit, it is recommended that an independent Negro library be established. This form of organization has been eminently successful in the field of state-provided higher education for the Negro; indeed, it is open to serious question whether the same degree of success could have been obtained by these state Negro colleges if the institutions had been branches of the state universities to which Negroes are not admitted.

(b) The regional library offers numerous opportunities for improved service, especially in any region where the financial limitations make it impossible to provide satisfactory administrative officers for numerous small units.

7. Improved co-operative arrangements between all social and educational agencies interested in the education of the Negro in its wider aspects are essential. This implies a state of active concern on the part of all such agencies.

Important results may be anticipated from greater development in this direction.

8. Many of the problems which now handicap the extension and enlargement of public library service for the Negro are incident to economic inadequacies. The greatest hope in this connection lies in the more active entry of state and federal governments into the field of public library service by means of grants-in-aid. If this dream were to come true, a very serious question would immediately arise in regard to Negro service: What service might be considered as equal to that provided for the white group? This question leads to the final recommendation.

9. Negro librarians should interest themselves in aiding and participating in research designed to set up objective standards for the measurement of public library collections and services. These standards would serve as a starting point for the determination of equal facilities and would thus provide a sound basis for further study of equalization of library service by those concerned with this difficult and perplexing problem.