

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
STUDIES IN LIBRARY SCIENCE

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THE SOUTHERN NEGRO  
*and*  
THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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## FOREWORD

**D**URING the past decade social and economic conditions in the South have been extensively and objectively studied, and the results of many of the investigations have been published. The Institute for Research in Social Science of the University of North Carolina has been responsible for much of the investigation, the results of which have been given permanent form through the University of North Carolina Press. Odum's *Southern Regions of the United States*, published in 1936 by the University of North Carolina Press, brought together in one major volume many of the findings of studies carried on by the Institute under his immediate direction and of other social scientists and social science organizations in the southern region.

The general library facilities of the South have likewise been extensively studied. Their distribution, nature, and support have been carefully investigated, and the results of the investigations have been published. However, a number of studies dealing with libraries have not originated in the South nor have they been published by southern presses. Among the titles through which southern libraries have been described the following have been especially noteworthy: *The Equal Chance*, by the American Library Association; *Library Service*, by Joeckel; *The Geography of Reading*, by Wilson; *Libraries of the South*, by Barker; *Resources of Southern Libraries*, by Downs; *Contributions to Library Science*, by the Library School of George Peabody College; *County Library Service in the South*, by Wil-

son and Wight; and the *Surveys* of the libraries of the Universities of Georgia, Florida, and Mississippi, by Wilson, Branscomb, Lyle, Dunbar, and Kuhlman. The *Proceedings* of the Southeastern and Southwestern Library Associations, the *Proceedings* of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, and the *Reports* of the planning committees of the various state library associations, and state educational and library departments in the region have likewise added to the published material.

The publications and mimeographed reports which deal with the library program of the Tennessee Valley Authority and with the state-wide library programs of the Works Progress Administration in the South add to this total description. They not only add to it, but, by virtue of the fact that these organizations have been engaged in operations that have involved hundreds of employees and entire states or parts of several states, the reports make clear how new patterns of library service have been developed where old and too crystallized patterns would have failed to meet present requirements. Taken altogether, this documentation of libraries in the South is more complete than that of the libraries of any other region in the nation.

This extensive documentation, both of the total economic and social status of the region and, more particularly, of its library resources, throws little light, however, upon the exact status of library service to Negroes in the South. Where extensive statistics of library facilities are given, they usually are presented in totals that are not broken down by race, and to that extent they fail to provide a basis for an adequate understanding of the exact nature of library service in those states in which the segregation of services to Negroes is mandatory under state law. Unlike *Special Problems of Negro Education*, by Wilkerson

("Advisory Committee on Education Monographs," No. 12 [1939]), which indicates upon a percentage or per capita basis the differentials in various educational services to whites and Negroes, they fail to show, in many instances, just how much library service, or what kind of library service, is provided in a given state or city for the two elements of the population. It is one thing, for example, to say that the residents of New Orleans (population, 458,762, 1930 Census) had access to 273,683 volumes in its public library in 1939. It is quite another thing to know, however, that 129,632 Negroes in New Orleans had only 14,697 volumes for their exclusive use. These volumes were housed in one branch library, and they constituted the only collection of books directly available to Negroes in the city. Again, it is one thing to report that 774 southern communities provided library service for their residents in 1939, when only 99 of them (13 per cent) provided service to Negroes. The other 675 made no provision whatever for service to Negroes. The 99 which provided such service for Negroes represented a gain of 24 libraries during the four-year period 1935-39, but the increase in the number of libraries serving whites for the same period was 283.

The present study, *The Southern Negro and the Public Library*, by Mrs. Gleason was made to determine just what public library service was available in 1939 to the 8,805,635 Negroes in thirteen southern states in which segregation of service is prevalent. It deals specifically with the legal basis of free public library service to the Negro, the governmental and internal organization and administration of such service, the Negro population served, and the free service which Negro private high school, college, and university libraries render to the public. It presents detailed statistics concerning the ninety-nine communities

in the South which provide public library service to Negroes. In these respects, it breaks new ground. It becomes the first extensive study to appear in print which shows where public library service is provided in the South for Negroes, what it costs, and under what conditions it is administered. It does not deal specifically with the size and nature of the book collections made available to Negroes, nor does it describe the library service provided Negroes through the state library programs carried on by the Works Progress Administration. It constitutes, however, the first major step in the description of the actual service rendered Negroes through regularly established public libraries in the region.

Fortunately, this study is to be followed by others which will deal with the library facilities of Negro college and university libraries in the South and with other forms of education which demand the presence of library facilities for their support. One of these which deals with the libraries of Negro colleges and universities is being carried out by the United States Office of Education and is now well under way. When they are completed and published they should furnish, as many of the previous studies and publications have not, the basic, detailed information which is essential for remedial planning and action.

The study was made by Mrs. Gleason, librarian of Talladega College and now under appointment as director of the Library School of Atlanta University, while she was a student at the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago and a Fellow of the American Library Association.

LOUIS R. WILSON

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
June 1941

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## INTRODUCTION

THOUGH much improvement has been apparent in recent years in the development of college libraries for Negroes, progress in the public library field has been less marked. Not only has this retardation been evident in the limited spread of public library facilities but also in the dearth of important investigations dealing with this vital phase of Negro library activity. As a field of specialization it has been almost entirely neglected.

Perhaps the first attempt to establish the status of the Negro in the American public library scene was made by William F. Yust,<sup>1</sup> at that time librarian of the Rochester Public Library, though formerly (1905-12) librarian of the Louisville Free Public Library. The information gathered by Mr. Yust was presented in a paper read before the American Library Association at its Annual Conference in 1913. This paper dealt primarily with service offered by public libraries, though some consideration was given to school and college facilities.

It is very interesting to note that in this early discussion the writer reviewed some of the same problems which today confront those concerned with public library provisions for the Negro: methods of management, reading interests, and, of course, the not underestimated "southern attitude." No effort was made by Mr. Yust to analyze thoroughly any one of the questions; in fact, it is doubtful whether at that time sufficient evidence was available to

<sup>1</sup> "What of the Black and Yellow Races?" *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, VII (July, 1913), 159-67.



support an objective investigation. Some of the conclusions he reached are also of current concern and are stated here because of their pertinence to certain discussions which are to follow. Mr. Yust maintained:

That books and reading are of the utmost value in the education, development, and progress of the race.

That in many places institutional libraries are supplying the book wants of the few negroes who really have need of libraries.

That where a genuine demand has manifested itself and up-to-date facilities have been provided negroes have been quick to use them and have made commendable progress.

That the best solution of the problem is the separate branch in charge of colored assistants under the supervision and control of the white authorities.

That public library provision for negroes is only a part of the larger question of negro education.

The second attempt to secure information on public library service to Negroes seems to have arisen out of preparation for the first annual meeting in 1922 of the "Work with Negroes Round Table," held for several years at the Annual Conference of the American Library Association.<sup>2</sup> Questionnaires were sent to one hundred and twenty-two libraries by the One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street Branch of the New York Public Library, which is located in the Negro district of New York City known as Harlem. It was hoped that through these forms sufficient data might be collected to obtain an overview of all types of public library service available to Negroes. Consequently, questionnaires were also sent to libraries outside the southern area. The questions asked were limited to five; only those inquiries were made which seemed essential as a starting-point for discussion and investigation.

At the second annual meeting of the "Work with Ne-

<sup>2</sup> Ernestine Rose, "Report of 'Work with Negroes Round Table,'" *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, XVI (July, 1922), 361-66.

groes Round Table" at the American Library Association Conference in 1923, held in Hot Springs, Arkansas, a third review of the status of public library service for Negroes was made available. This survey was included in a report made by Miss Julia Ideson of the Houston Public Library on "Progress South" and contained brief information on conditions in thirty-five distinctly southern libraries. The data for this report were obtained from questionnaires sent to about eighty libraries in the principal cities of the South which had large Negro populations. Thirty-five libraries replied, and the information given in the report was based on the responses of these libraries.

In 1926 two efforts were made to secure information regarding public library facilities for the Negro group. George T. Settle, librarian of the Louisville Free Public Library, prepared a paper, which he read before the Southeastern Library Association at its Fourth Biennial Conference, on the "Status of Work with Negroes in the Territory Embraced in the Southeastern Library Association."<sup>3</sup> Mr. Settle secured information for his report from questionnaires sent to forty-seven public libraries in the southeastern district whose collections totaled 10,000 volumes or more. This questionnaire attempted to secure information on where service was given and also to find out the general points concerning its administration. Further, an attempt was made to ascertain the opinion of southern librarians on the need for a Negro library school, and at the end of the questionnaire a section was provided for remarks so that any additional phases of the problem might be commented upon.

The other study completed in 1926 was that made by the Committee on Library Extension of the American Li-

<sup>3</sup> Southeastern Library Association, *Papers and Proceedings* (1926), pp. 46-51.

brary Association to be included in the volume, *Library Extension*, published by the Association.<sup>4</sup> This study consisted of a brief review of existing conditions, covering population served, by states; forms of public library service, by state and city; use of public libraries; state service; and libraries in educational institutions. This study included more factual information than any of the other investigations dealing with this problem.

The next systematic attempt to collect data on this subject was that made in 1930 by Louis Shores, librarian of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee. Mr. Shores was interested in determining opportunities available to Negroes in the library profession and also in establishing the status of the Negro in the American public library scene. As in former investigations, questionnaires were used to gather the data. They were sent to eighty cities selected on the basis of the size of the Negro population, and the questions which were included asked only for information of a rather general type.<sup>5</sup> In 1931 Mr. Shores followed this article by a second, which was published in the *Wilson Bulletin*.<sup>6</sup> No new figures as to library coverage were given, but noteworthy historical facts were presented regarding the post-war development in Negro library service and Negro professional library activity.

Three comparatively recent studies<sup>7</sup> which consider

<sup>4</sup> American Library Association, Committee on Library Extension, *Library Extension* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1926), pp. 73-78; Appendix, pp. 154-55.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Shores, "Public Library Service to Negroes," *Library Journal*, LV (February, 1930), 150-54.

<sup>6</sup> V (January, 1931), 311-15.

<sup>7</sup> T. D. Barker, *Libraries of the South* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1936); L. R. Wilson and E. A. Wight, *County Library Service in the South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935); L. R. Wilson, *The Geography of Reading* (Chicago: American Library Association and the University of Chicago Press, 1938).

southern library conditions have presented interesting facts about the Negro and the public library, but no one of them has attempted a thorough analysis of any phase of the problem. Since it is felt that an investigation of this kind is significant, it is the purpose of this study to investigate and evaluate certain aspects of public library service for Negroes in the South, which in this study will mean the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Stated somewhat more formally, the aims of the investigation are (1) to define the legal basis of free public library service for Negroes in the South; (2) to identify all institutions offering permanent public library service to Negroes, thereby establishing the extent of library coverage for the group—a simple fact, yet never clearly stated; (3) to revise figures of total library coverage in the South; (4) to identify the governmental type of the public libraries offering service to Negroes and to determine to what extent one type may offer wider opportunities for service than another; (5) to review the administration and services of the library units maintained for Negro library service; and (6) to determine to what extent the library facilities of private secondary schools and institutions of higher learning for Negroes supplement the regularly organized and publicly supported public library facilities provided for the groups.

The material has been treated in the order in which it naturally seemed to fall. Historical information introduces the subject, and this is followed by the discussion of the legal basis of free public library service for the Negro.

Chapter iii presents data on the governmental organization of the library units which serve Negroes. In this section information will be given on branch and station affilia-

tions, and also on the organization of independent Negro library units.

Chapter iv is concerned with two important facts connected with the extent of Negro library service: the number and distribution of Negro citizens who are served by public libraries and the number of Negroes residing in areas where public library service is maintained for the white population but none for Negroes. This figure will constitute a correction of the commonly accepted figure for library coverage in the thirteen southern states.

Chapter v treats of financial support and administration and takes into consideration maintenance from public funds, budgeting and accounting, and the allocation of funds for Negro library service.

Internal administration is the subject of chapter vi, and here is found a review of the inner activity of the library organization which includes such factors as quarters and hours, personnel, salaries, book selection, interlibrary loans, county extension, and special library services.

The full content of chapter vii is a discussion of those Negro public libraries which operate as independent institutions. This is followed by an examination of the supplementary public library services offered by formally organized educational institutions.

Factual information for this study has been obtained through several sources: published material, correspondence with state library agencies, records of the American Library Association, and through questionnaires and direct observation. Personal visits were made to all known places where separate library agencies were maintained for Negro library service. No attempt was made to visit all library systems which serve Negroes at the main library, though this was done in a few instances. The question-

naires were sent to all public libraries in the southern area known or thought to offer service to Negroes, and to all private secondary schools and Negro colleges and universities in the area listed in the 1937-38 edition of the *Negro Year Book*. The mailing list for the questionnaires sent to public libraries was made up from information secured from all sources available and was then checked with data from the state library agencies. When discrepancies were found between the original list and information submitted by the state agencies, questionnaires were sent to all libraries on the original list as well as those suggested by the state authorities. This was necessary as it was found that occasionally small libraries did not report to state agencies and these sources, therefore, could not always supply complete information.