Commentary

AALL and the Road to Diversity*

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Professor Mersky discusses the history and current and future role of the Association in helping to provide opportunities in law librarianship for members of minority groups, as well as the rationale behind AALL involvement in advancing diversity.

Why We Should Care

Why should we as law librarians be involved in discussing the importance of diversity within our organization? Primarily, we should be involved because we are members of the legal community, and we have a responsibility to see that people are treated equally. That is the reason the legal community exists. It does not matter for which branch of law we provide our service, whether criminal, civil, commercial, or any other: all lawyers and law librarians are concerned with equity. It is important that we acknowledge the fact that our professional responsibility goes beyond finding information and resources.

Unfortunately, some groups of people have not been afforded the same opportunities as others. Limiting one group's opportunities for education and advancement restricts that group's chances for success. In these situations, it is our responsibility to make the "catch-up" time as short as possible.

Ironically, it is often the case that publications addressing the problems faced by minorities are read primarily by members of minority groups. Until this changes, it is up to those of us assembled here to make others aware of the importance of promoting diversity within AALL.

Legal considerations aside, let us direct the attention of AALL members to the self-serving reasons for attracting and cultivating minority membership. There are more than 4,600 members of AALL, 205 of whom

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are members of an ethnic minority, so that minorities comprise less than 5% of AALL's membership. By restricting the number of people who participate in our organization to just one segment of society, we limit the depth and breadth of the intellectual contributions available to our group. By working to promote diversity in our membership, we (1) give ourselves the opportunity to help the historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, (2) work to uphold the values on which our country was founded, and (3) take advantage of multiple sources to enrich AALL.

If I accomplish little else, I hope that these remarks might increase awareness of—and sensitivity to—the importance of encouraging diversity in our membership. There are several reasons why I was selected to discuss the importance of integrating members of minorities into AALL at the 1992 annual meeting. For one thing, I have been alive longer than most people. More importantly, I am aware of the history of the association, and in fact, I am part of that history.

For most of my life, I have been active in the civil rights movement. I marched in Selma, Alabama. I would have participated in the nationwide boycotting of Woolworths, except that I lived in Olympia, Washington, at the time, and there were no Woolworths there to boycott.

I have not been "color-blind." I think that sometimes it is important to take a person's skin color or ethnic background into account when hiring or promoting. I have learned firsthand the value of tapping the diverse resources that follow from including people from different backgrounds. A work environment that includes minorities—and I here refer to differences in race, national origin, religion, age, physical abilities, cultural diversity, and sexual orientation—is far more stimulating and convivial than one that is homogeneous.

We are all aware of the law librarians who serve as outstanding role models for members of minority groups who want to enter the profession. I am privileged to know many of these people, some since they began their careers many years ago. Among my friends I include B.T. Davis, the late Robert Brooks, the late George Strait, Jessie Matthews, Ruth Hill, Cheryl Cheatham, Charlie Harvey Woods, Marvin Anderson, Bill James, Paul Fu, Frank Liu, Leinaala Seeger, Cindy Wang, Win-Shin Chiang, Judy Dimes-Smith, and up-and-comers such as Arturo Flores, Rhea Ballard, Grace Mills, and Bill Cogdell. Even though all of these individuals are outstanding and there are many more whom I have not mentioned, the fact remains that there are not enough minority role models to go around.

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1. As of 8/31/93.
Nurturing Diversity in AALL's Past

Before discussing what AALL should be doing now to nurture the development of these role models, I will give an overview of what AALL has done in the past to promote diversity in its membership. I am not aware of things done formally within the organization before 1983, when the minority scholarship was created. One such scholarship has been awarded every year since then. Two minority scholarships were awarded in 1990 because there was a one-time gift for that purpose. In March 1990, the minority stipend became a part of the scholarship program and was named in honor of George Strait. The minority scholarship continues to be funded from general AALL revenues. In 1991-92, the Scholarship Committee was asked to seek additional funds to increase the number of minority scholarships from a minimum of one to a minimum of two per year. I am proud to say that one of my former employees at Texas, Lisa Stafford, received the scholarship for 1992-93.

In 1985, the AALL Special Committee on Minorities was founded, with Dwight King of Notre Dame's Kresge Law Library as its chair. The charge of the Committee was to attract minority students to law librarianship and to encourage current minority law librarians to become more involved in AALL activities. To further these objectives, the committee developed a recruiting brochure and began an active recruitment program. Committee members made recruitment visits to several law schools. On these visits, they discussed law librarianship with forty-eight individuals--either library school students, law students, undergraduates, or librarians employed in other types of libraries.

Together with the Contemporary Social Problems SIS, the Committee cosponsored a program at the Atlanta Convention in 1988 entitled, "Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer--Minorities and Women Are Encouraged to Apply." The Committee began developing an internship program for minority library school graduates interested in law librarianship and produced the first minority law librarians' directory.

In 1988-89 the Special Committee on Minorities became a standing committee. As reported by Cecilia Kwan, the 1988-89 chair, the Committee sponsored the program "Legal Services to Minorities, Poor and Indigent" at the 1989 AALL annual meeting.

The mentorship program also was established in 1989. This program targeted minority non-law librarians and minority library school students interested in law librarianship. About twenty minority librarians were matched with mentors.

Lei Seeger, Chair of the Minorities Committee for 1990-91, reported that among the Committee's major objectives was implementation of the
Minority Internship Program, which was approved in principle by the Executive Board in June 1989. The program is aimed at recruiting new and non-law librarians to law librarianship through postgraduate internships, funded jointly by the host institute and from private or grant monies. Full implementation has not yet been achieved, but a committee has been appointed to seek external funding for the program.

The Minority Mentorship Program, initiated in 1989, was merged with the CONELL Mentor Project to form the AALL Mentor Project. The minority law librarians' directory has been incorporated into the *AALL Directory and Handbook* since the 1990-91 edition.

### Goals of the Committee on Recruitment

In 1990 a Special Committee on Recruitment was appointed. The Committee's charge was to study ideas and proposals for recruiting qualified individuals into the profession of law librarianship and into AALL. The Committee's report included goals and objectives that would serve to bring talented new people, including minorities, into law librarianship. It also included recommendations for ways to implement the Committee's special ideas.

My assignment was to survey the AALL chapters and SISs to learn about their recruitment programs. The survey results indicated that both groups were sensitive to the need for further outreach in recruitment, especially in recruitment of minority law librarians. Many had active recruitment and public relations committees. Many were involved in public relations and educational programs. Individual members were serving as mentors, teaching in library schools, networking with other library organizations, and participating in training programs. It was evident that these activities provided opportunities for members to heighten racial sensitivity and to advance diversity within the law library profession.

Ultimately, the Special Committee recommended that AALL establish a Standing Committee on Recruitment to achieve four goals: (1) a working relationship with accredited library schools, (2) a cooperative relationship with other library organizations, (3) a recruitment relationship with organizations employing prospective law librarians, and (4) helping each chapter and SIS carry out recruitment within its own jurisdiction. We also recommended a fifth goal: implementation should be approached using a
one-on-one personal relationship, such as mentoring. I am pleased that the AALL Executive Committee accepted these recommendations, and a Standing Committee on Recruitment was established.

In 1991-92, the AALL Strategic Planning Committee established a sixth goal: to foster diversity in the profession by increasing minority membership and participation, with the following objectives:

A. Increase the Association's minority membership as a percentage of total membership. The planning committee reported that in 1989 the minority directory contained 135 names and the 1990-91 AALL Directory contained 150 names. However, the Committee felt that the increase was due to better reporting and did not reflect a true increase in the number of minority members in the Association.

B. Support the professional development of minority law librarians.

C. Increase minority participation in AALL leadership. With the minority directory available and a revised committee volunteer form, it is easier for the Vice President/President-Elect to make minority appointments to AALL Committees. For 1990-91, eleven self-identified members of minority groups were serving on AALL Committees. In 1991-92, nine additional committee appointments went to self-identified minorities.

It is to our advantage, as an association, to commit ourselves to developing more professional role models for minorities. To accomplish this, it is necessary to support scholarships, internships, and trainee programs that provide financial assistance and encourage minorities to enter the profession of law librarianship. We must create mentor and networking programs for students and new librarians, and develop educational programs to reach high school and undergraduate students. Minorities must be targeted for programs designed to enhance existing skills and to teach the new ones necessary to keep up with technological advances.

In carrying out these programs, caution should be maintained against automatically thinking of minorities as being "naturals" for positions in foreign law and special collections. This is fair neither to the employee nor to the library. It is sad that many Asian and Hispanic librarians have been hired primarily for their language skills and, as a result, have not been encouraged to seek executive/management positions.
The Programs of Other Library Organizations

We must continue to look to other library organizations for support and inspiration. The American Library Association Special President's Committee on Cultural Diversity was charged in July 1991 with developing programs (1) to recruit culturally diverse students, (2) to foster the participation and advancement of culturally diverse people within the association and the profession, and (3) to promote the delivery of library services to culturally diverse populations. The Committee sponsored a hearing at the 1992 ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio.

The Committee's selected resource guide to cultural diversity activities in the library community, Bringing Us Together, provides a summary of training programs and minority staff recruitment efforts, and guides members to other resources for follow-up assistance and guidance. Two of AALL's conference programs, "The Law and Indigenous People" and "Copyright Protection of Cultural Property," are mentioned, as is the $3,500 George A. Strait Minority Scholarship.

Another activity included in the guide is the National Conference of African-American Librarians, sponsored by the ALA Black Caucus. The First National Conference of African-American Librarians, held in September 1992, was attended by more than 2,000 African-American professional librarians. The theme was "Culture Keepers: Enlightening and Empowering Our Communities." Preliminary information about the conference stated that it "is in no way a splintering of library and information professionals from their affiliations" with other national organizations.3

Nurturing Diversity and the Future of AALL

The June 1992 newsletter of the Special Libraries Association reviewed several affirmative action videos, including The Future Is Information: Careers in Library and Information Science, narrated by Raymond Burr and produced by the Denver Public Library; Librarians for the Information Age, narrated by Ossie Davis and produced by the University of Pittsburgh School of Library and Information Science; and Valuing Diversity, a video series produced by Copeland Griggs Productions.4 AALL and its local chapters need to consider producing our own recruitment videos to present law librarianship as a career opportunity and to establish the necessary liaisons to make sure law librarianship is promoted as a career opportunity.

Beyond this, we must lobby law schools and library schools to hire minority faculty members. Members of our staffs who are minorities should be encouraged to reach out into the community by teaching and participating in other public-service activities.

For the past several years, Tarlton's lawyer-librarians have participated in the law school placement office's "Alternative Careers" programs. From time to time, our law school dean, Mark Yudof, has asked our lawyer-librarians to represent the school on recruitment trips. In 1989 and 1990, Tarlton received the ABA's prestigious Law Day Public Service Award for two programs that the staff conducted in conjunction with Law Day. Both programs were presented to high school students and dealt with the meaning of the practice of law.

Recently, I have been working with Tricia Tingle, a member of the Choctaw tribe and President of the Native American Bar Association, to expand our collection of information related to Native Americans and to establish a Native American Bar Association chapter at our law school. Tricia's total immersion in Native American issues has heightened my commitment to promote cultural interaction and increased my resolve to attract this underrepresented group into the law and library professions.

On a more fundamental level, the field of law librarianship has to be made more attractive—not only to minorities, but to all prospective law librarians. Law librarianship must be seen as an intellectually challenging and rewarding profession.

We must join forces to raise salaries and to fight to ensure tenure for law library directors. Library support staffs must be encouraged to increase their skills and continue their education, and then must be promoted as they become qualified for professional positions.

AALL must be committed to promoting equality and diversity and to fostering a nurturing environment among its membership. AALL committees should continue to take advantage of the talent and experience that minority members bring to the Association. Only with the support and effort of the Association as a group will our goal be achieved. AALL has made progress in expanding opportunities for minorities, but we still have a long way to go. At the 1991 American Bar Association Annual Meeting in Atlanta, John J. Curtin, President of the ABA, concluded his remarks with "Freedom's Plow," a poem by Langston Hughes. I would like to share an excerpt with you now.

If the house is not yet finished,
Don't be discouraged, builder!
If the fight is not yet won,
Don't be weary, soldier!
The plan and the pattern is here,
Woven from the beginning
Into the warp and woof of America. 5

We shall eventually overcome.

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