

# Diversity and Professional Activism: “Both and,” Not “Either or”\*

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*Ms. Ayala explains why for her diversity in the context of professional associations is not a matter of “either or” but rather participation in “both and.”*

At the AALL annual meeting in Anaheim this summer, I mentioned to a librarian from Williamsburg, Virginia, that I had just attended the American Library Association’s Annual Conference in June. He turned to me and asked, “Why did you attend ALA?” There are actually several reasons as this article will outline.

The American Library Association “promotes the highest quality library and information services and protects public access to information. It is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries.”<sup>1</sup> I believe that membership in the organization is a method for promoting my profession and keeping abreast of national librarianship issues.

Involvement in ALA affords me the opportunity to network with others who share common interests. I have a great deal of respect for other cultures and am interested in how library services are delivered in the various ethnic communities throughout the country. I have attended meetings with individuals who are members of the Asian/Pacific Islander (APALA), Black Caucus (BCALA), and Chinese American (CALA) librarian associations. These groups meet and conduct business annually at the ALA conferences. Through my contacts and various listservs I receive information on librarians of color, collection development and recruitment issues. I have participated in national conferences focusing on ethnic communities and libraries. For instance, “American Indian Issues and Resources: Tribal Views and Federal Sources”<sup>2</sup> presented by the American Indian Library Association (AILA) provided me with much background and insight into American Indian populations and issues of ongoing concern to native people in our country and in New Zealand. Two years ago, I served on the Steering

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1. ALA HANDBOOK OF ORGANIZATION, 1997–98, at xiii.

2. The first AILA National Conference took place at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, Washington, D.C., June 26, 1998.

Committee of "Cultural Partnerships: Linking Missions and Visions"<sup>3</sup> sponsored by REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library Services to the Spanish Speaking. Dedicated to the memory of Cesar Chavez, the REFORMA National Conference celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization.

ALA is a forum through which I keep in contact with former professors, former employers, and colleagues who are not involved in law librarianship. I find it is important for me to exchange ideas and keep one another apprised of personal challenges as well as achievement and growth. Many of these individuals have mentored me and continue to be supportive of my work. The exchange is reciprocal because I am imparting information to them about law librarians, working in private law firms, and trends in legal publishing.

But my participation in ALA does not prevent me from being involved in AALL. I am active in my local chapter, the Southern California Association of Law Libraries, and I value the work of my fellow members. My coworkers are encouraged to participate and our firm supports our staff development efforts. I have attended the last two AALL annual meetings and found that my experience of "conference going" is a transferable skill. In Anaheim this year I attended the Diversity Symposium for the first time. It was a relevant program. I am enriched and impressed by programs that I attended both years. Membership in AALL is invaluable to me in my current position.

My involvement in two professional associations is designed to be both challenging and beneficial. I am constantly learning in both of them. My investment in volunteering has resulted in some key contacts, honed my leadership skills, and given me a good grasp of the issues. I advocate diversity to ALA as a law librarian and a librarian of color.<sup>4</sup> To AALL I bring a diverse perspective and experience. For me, diversity is not a matter of "either or" but a decision to participate in "both and."

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3. The first REFORMA National Conference took place at the Convention Center, Austin, Texas, August 22-25, 1996.

4. I am Chicana; my mother is Nicaraguense and my father is Mexican-American.