

**Unfinished Business: Race, Equity, and Diversity in Library and Information Science Education** edited by Maurice B. Wheeler. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005. 203 pp. ISBN 0-8108-5045-1

Discovery. Colonization. Slavery. Civil war. Reconstruction. Civil rights. And finally, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Was this a new beginning or a false start? Race has played a salient role in the history of the United States; racism, discrimination, and the degradation of African Americans and other minorities existed in this country for more than 200 years before the peak of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, 50 years before *Brown v. Board of Education*, W.E.B. Dubois proclaimed that “the problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color line” (1996, p. 11). Clearly, race continues to play an important role in America: almost 40 years after the historic Supreme Court decision, John Hope Franklin (1993), a prominent historian, echoed Dubois’ proclamation by stating that the problem of the twenty-first century will continue to be the color line.

Like Dubois and Hope, the contributing authors of *Unfinished Business: Race, Equity, and Diversity in Library and Information Science Education* draw a similar conclusion—that racial inequity remains in both intellectual and professional pursuits in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS). That is not to suggest that progress has not been made; it has, but the authors pose the question, “to what extent?” Contributors, which include graduate students, practicing librarians, and experienced LIS faculty, collectively argue that despite the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that occurred 50 years ago, the LIS field has never been fully integrated. Unlike most publications that argue for diversity merely because it is the right thing to do, *Unfinished Business* argues that diversity is necessary in order to challenge the historical patterns of institutional racism upon which many segments of American society are built.

*Unfinished Business* successfully shows that despite efforts to integrate LIS, much more work needs to be done. In the first chapter, Elizabeth Figa, a specialist in LIS history and culture, and Janet Macpherson, a doctoral student, provide a brief yet rich historical snapshot of American libraries and library schools before and after the *Brown* decision. As Figa and Macpherson show, segregation was standard practice among libraries before the *Brown* decision: in 1948, only four states offered integrated library services for blacks and whites. After *Brown*, the move towards integrating libraries was slow, and the American Library Association (ALA) made few efforts to facilitate integration. In 1961, for example, the ALA approved an amendment prohibiting refusal of library services based on race, but the amendment went largely ignored. LIS education has faced similar challenges in the realm of inclusion and integration. In 1966, 4 percent of

graduates from ALA accredited library schools were black. While the black population in the United States has grown considerably since then, the number of black graduates was only 4.43 percent in 2000, and the number of black librarians has increased only slightly (p. 106).

Mark Winston, a specialist in organizational behavior and an LIS faculty member at Rutgers University, is one of several contributors who discuss the challenges in making the *Brown* decision a reality in LIS. These challenges include recruiting and retaining faculty and students of color in LIS graduate programs; supporting minority students through all phases of higher education and their professional career; developing a “multicultural, gender-specific, and socially-aware curriculum while ensuring academic freedom for faculty” (p. 21); and facing the race issue that, the contributors argue, affects the recruitment and advancement of librarians within the profession.

In addition to discussing challenges, *Unfinished Business* also suggests possible solutions, including Project Athena, a self-sustaining Web model for recruiting LIS doctoral students of color. Other methods include mentoring students of color through publication and research processes, helping them to improve their technology skills, revamping accepted curricula, strengthening financial support, and implementing diversity instruction.

Regrettably, *Unfinished Business* is somewhat repetitive. For example, several essays provide redundant explanations of the same diversity-related problems—lack of finances, failure to attract and retain people of color, and an overall lack of effective mentoring programs. Though the information provided is useful as an overview, I had hoped for more detailed discussion of why various approaches failed and for, perhaps, more realistic, innovative recruitment strategies that could be useful to financially strapped LIS departments struggling to recruit students of color. Another shortcoming of the text is a failure to adequately illustrate the ways in which entrenched racism can also plague whites in LIS professions and educational programs. Racism has negative consequences for both underrepresented minorities and whites, but *Unfinished Business* focuses only on how racism affects people of color.

*Unfinished Business* is an excellent source for those wanting an overview of various diversity initiatives within the LIS field over the past 50 years, and for those seeking a brief explanation about previous recruitment strategies. It may also be a good source of information for those pondering new approaches or models for recruiting minorities. Most importantly, *Unfinished Business* provides the historical context that leads to the need for diversity programming, and reminds us that “segregation and conscious racial discrimination were not only the explicit law of the land in many places, but also standard American business, educational, political, and social practice” (p.10). Contributing authors cogently demonstrate that although the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision “called for

the desegregation of the schools in America, it did *nothing* to address the desegregation of society as a whole” (p. 18, emphasis mine). *Unfinished Business* is clear: until racism—whether institutional, unintentional, or blatant—is completely eradicated from all layers of society, it is imperative that both LIS professions and its educational programs effectively address issues of diversity.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Civil Rights Movement began much earlier than the 1950s. The writings of activists such as Maria Stewart (1832), Jarena Lee (1804), and David Walker (1829) clearly demonstrate that racial equality has long been a salient theme among African Americans.

### References

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1996). *The souls of black folk*. New York: Penguin Books.  
Franklin, J. H. (1993). *The color line: Legacy for the twenty-first century*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

### Reviewer

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