

The Shift from Apartheid to Democracy: Issues and Impacts on Public Libraries in Cape Town, South Africa

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Providing all citizens with free and equal access to information allows democracy to flourish. Integral to democratic governments, public libraries have both social and political responsibilities. South Africa's 1994 shift from apartheid to a democratic republic makes it an ideal nation through which to investigate the struggles and issues faced as a public library system adapts to a new political structure. South Africa's public libraries did not automatically receive the assumed benefits of the shift from apartheid's oppressive regime of segregation and inequality to a democratic government. Rather, it is a work in progress. South African libraries

face social, political, and economic issues such as: unfair allocation of resources, severe social conditions and problems with support from the government including problematic rhetoric within the New Constitution. LIASA (Library & Information Association of South Africa) has admirably begun to fulfill an important role in library development in South Africa. With appropriate funding and support from all levels of government and from local, national, and international library organizations, the public libraries in South Africa can become the beacons of democracy that they are intended to be.

Author note

This paper was inspired by a two-week long trip by the author to Cape Town, South Africa in January 2004. During this time, the author conducted interviews with librarians and visited public libraries. Research was completed in the United States and the paper was written as an Independent Study Research Project at the Pratt Institute Masters in Library and Information Science program in New York City.

Introduction

Ten years ago, South Africa held its first democratic political election, marking a shift of power from nearly fifty years of the minority National Party's system of white rule, known as apartheid, and a transfer of power to the majority black African National Congress (ANC). During apart-

heid, which lasted from 1948–1994, white South Africans enjoyed substantial public services, part of which included an extensive library system (Kagan 2003). However, in apartheid society, public services, including libraries, for blacks, were characteristically inadequate or nonexistent (Thompson 2001). Often, if services did exist, inferior separate structures were built for the races. For instance, while the main Cape Town public library building boasted integrated use, tables within the facility were physically separated and marked for black, white and colored users (Epstein 2002).

The release of the *Public Library Manifesto* by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) coincided with the South African shift to democracy. This timely document emphasized the principles of democracy and its relationship to public libraries. It begins:

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Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and of individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information. (UNESCO 1994)

The Cape Town City Council adopted the UNESCO manifesto in 1996 and used the principles it set forth to shape public library services and policies (Heymann 2003). This action marked the shift toward a truly democratic public library system for all citizens of South Africa, regardless of race. In the spirit of democracy, the Cape Town public libraries continue to use the UNESCO manifesto for direction in developing programs and services that meet community needs.

With the UNESCO statement as the guiding force of library services, librarians in the New South Africa have the opportunity to bring about long awaited social transformations. While a democratic South Africa holds the possibility for much needed genuine socioeconomic change, it is "at the same time full of dangers for the renewal of unrest and social disorder" (Dick 1999). In this era of political change, libraries, as symbols of democracy, have a considerable role to play in ensuring that the principles of democracy endure. This paper explores the sociopolitical past of South Africa and looks at contemporary issues surrounding the New Constitution, the new school curriculum, the role of social responsibility in South African librarianship, and the impact of several major social issues on libraries. These topics illustrate the political and social effects that the shift from apartheid to democracy has had on libraries in South Africa. The role of librarians in modern South African society is also explored.

Background on apartheid

In order to understand the present socio-political climate of South Africa and the role of the public library system, it is necessary to examine the past. Racism and segregation have shaped the political ethos of modern South African society. The success of the Dutch East India Company's colony, which began in the seventeenth century in what is now the Western Cape Province, was largely dependent upon slaves who were set to work un-

der Dutch supervision. African slaves created the basic infrastructure for the colony-making everything from roads and forts to orchards and arable fields (Thompson 2001). Such exploitation shaped the social fabric of modern South Africa. The colonial system destroyed indigenous pastoral societies such as the Khoikhoi of the Western Cape: the natives experienced political collapse, livestock reduction, or decreased wealth, and the onset of deadly diseases such as smallpox, which eradicated their population. With these devastating inequalities permeating all aspects of their society, the Khoikhoi were slowly reduced to "a subordinate caste in the colonial society, set apart by appearance and culture from both the whites and the slaves; technically free, but treated no better than the slaves" (Thompson, 2001). Although slavery was abolished in the Cape in 1833 and slaves were legally set free in 1838, exploitation continued and the colonial settlers had completely eradicated the indigenous culture of the Khoikhoi by 1870 (Thompson 2001).

The first colonial settlers set a precedent for social stratification, which only deepened after the British captured the Cape Colony from the Dutch in the late eighteenth century. Under British rule, social division continued with white colonists again depending upon indigenous slaves for labor (Thompson 2001). By the mid-1800's, complexities were growing within the social strata of the white settlers as well. The English colonists were not assimilating with the earlier Dutch settlers. The English distinguished themselves from their Dutch counterparts by referring to them as *Boers*, literally "farmers" in Dutch, and the term came to have a derogatory connotation (Thompson 2001). Over time, the Dutch settlers began to forge their own unique identity, referring to themselves as *Christians*, *Europeans* and, most often, *Afrikaners* (Thompson 2001).

During the nineteenth century, Afrikaners had further separated themselves from South Africa's other ethnic groups. In the mid-1800's, the colony's Dutch Reformed Church authorized the segregation of churches, setting up a "subordinate mission for Colored people" and banning Colored children from public schools, forcing them to seek education from the missions (Thompson 2001). During the same time period, many Afrikaners were engaged in The Great Trek (1836-1854), an effort to travel north, beyond the geographic

hold of the English settlers – an attempt to recreate the structure of their early eighteenth century colony, which did not include the British presence.

Afrikaners developed a collective identity as a chosen people with distinguishing characteristics that included being “endowed by God with the destiny to rule South Africa and civilize its heathen inhabitants” (Thompson 2001). A Dutch Reformed minister, S.J. du Toit, introduced this concept through publications. Most noted for his extensive ethnic mythology for Afrikaners, he also published a daily newspaper, *Die Afrikaanse patriot*, which appeared regularly from 1896 to 1904 (Thompson 2001). Because du Toit wrote in Afrikaans, the common language of the Dutch settlers, his convictions became accessible to the general public. The nature of his writings strongly contributed to the development of the Afrikaner nationalist ideology.

Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, professor of applied psychology at the university in Stellenbosch, was another influential nationalist Afrikaner. Verwoerd was a staunch supporter of the 1930's cause of the Poor Whites. He founded the journal *Die Transvaler*, which began publication in 1937. His publication catered to the Afrikaner population, and served as a recruitment tool to increase membership in the growing Afrikaner National Party. Verwoerd played a key role in developing the apartheid system by supporting and advocating for separate development of the races. Eventually, Verwoerd served as prime minister of South Africa (1958–1966) and during his leadership, “apartheid became the most notorious form of racial domination that the postwar world had known.” (Thompson 2001) The nationalist ideology, supported and promoted by the writings and actions of South African intellectuals, led to the fateful results of the election of 1948.

The official policy of apartheid began when the South African National Party gained the political strength that culminated the victory of 1948 general election. The powerful political regime that ensued was based on separateness – “apartheid” means “apartness” in Afrikaans. A system based on group, or race, membership was imposed and methods of policy and law were based on racial categories. The four basic racial classifications were White, Colored, Indian, and African. Even further subdivisions, based on ethnicity, applied

to the black African population (Henrard 2003). The government proceeded to enact numerous laws that instituted segregation and increased dominance of white over non-white peoples. Legislation with this intent began in the segregation era of the 1930's and continued throughout the apartheid era. Laws and acts included: The Representation of Natives Act (1936), The Native Trust and Land Act (1936), and the Native Laws Amendment Act (1937); The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), The Population Registration Act (1950), The Immorality Act (1950), The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, The Group Areas Act (1950), and the Bantu Education Act (1953). The government also attempted to contain the black African population in ten reservations, known as “homelands,” which separated the black population into “nations” based on ethnicity. Administered under white guardianship, the homelands were set up to develop along their own lines, separate from white society (Thompson 2001). By denying basic human rights to racial groups, apartheid legislation and homeland policies created a deeply entrenched system of racial discrimination and inequality in South Africa.

Apartheid rule has left a legacy of myths of European superiority; “the white-minority government looked to Europe for its cultural focus and tried to create a pseudo-European outpost for the privileged minority.” (Kagan 2003) And, black Africans became accustomed to a society with inadequate or nonexistent public services (Thompson 2001). Today, social services such as libraries are available for all South Africans. But, remnants of the apartheid system are still in place. A noticeable system of informal segregation keeps white and black sun-seekers on different sections of the beach, almost unconsciously (Dixon 2003). On a more formal level, the need for urban integration in Cape Town has been ignored to the point that the gap between rich and poor continues to increase – many black Africans still reside in townships or shantytowns alongside the highway while many whites reside in affluent suburbs (Turok, 2001). The political ethos that defined apartheid still encroaches upon every facet of South African society, creating a true challenge for librarians to overcome. It is the duty of the librarian to promote democracy by providing the resources and services that will render an informed society.

Libraries and the New Constitution

South Africa's political past has shaped the country's current political ethos. When examining libraries and their ability to successfully create an informed society, contemporary political issues must be considered. A clause in the New Constitution has become a contentious issue for librarians and politicians alike.

According to an article by Jo-Anne Smetherham in *Cape Times* on February 10, 2004, budgets for healthcare, museum, and library services are to be cut by half in the next three years. This proposed reduction is in response to financial strain placed on provincial authorities, which are struggling to fund a myriad of unrelated public services including: ambulance services, liquor licenses, veterinary services, and, most suitable to this discussion – libraries. The root of this problem is the wording of Schedule 5, Part A of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This schedule considers libraries, along with the services listed above, to be “Functional Areas of Exclusive Provincial Legislative Competence” (Constitutional Assembly 1996). Simply stated, public libraries are now the sole responsibility of the province in which they reside.

This marks a dramatic change from the pre-1996 funding structure, under which libraries were primarily funded by municipalities and received only a portion of monetary support from the provinces. One librarian, who works for the Cape Provincial Library Services, said “Municipalities ... do not have to fund this function anymore.” He further expounded upon the complexity of the situation by saying that, under the new constitution, municipalities can lawfully refuse to fund libraries. At the Local Government level, the Municipal Structures Amendment Act (Act 33 of 2000) and the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) do not provide for the execution of a public library function on a municipal level. Additionally, the Municipal Structures Act does not make provisions for the delivery of library services as a municipal function. Therefore, the provision of library services by municipalities is an unfunded mandate because municipalities can lawfully refuse to fulfill this obligation. Further, because the financial capacity of municipalities differs, the new funding structure promotes inequality: some municipalities would undoubtedly

be unable to carry out their functions according to general accepted library standards. At the same time, provincial governments also lack the financial capacity to staff and maintain libraries without financial assistance from the municipalities (Wehmeyer 2004).

In an e-mail interview, one South African librarian referred to the scenario laid out in the Jo-Anne Smetherham article mentioned above, saying,

Schedule 5 is stagnating our public libraries. We were told to cut back library services by 50% in the next 3 years and that libraries are an unfunded local government mandate. The Western Cape Provincial Libraries cannot take on more. It will also make a mockery of our Constitution that states that the government must be closer to the people. The City of Cape's budget for libraries is well over 120 million Rand while the Provincial budget is 42 million Rand – Can a sardine swallow a whale? (Jacobs 2004)

Ironically, the mandate set forth by Schedule 5, Part A does not support the founding provisions of South Africa's new constitution, which are “human dignity” and “achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms” (Constitutional Assembly 1996). Now, library development is unfortunately dependent upon both the richness of the province and the strength of political forces in the area (Kagan 2003). This structure is not in line with providing free and equal access to information to all members of society. Rather, the current situation impedes the growth of democracy and perpetuates the gulf between the rich and the poor.

Despite librarians' attempts to challenge the status quo and to amend the constitution, the schedule remains in place. In an interview, one librarian explained that when the provinces approached the National Government and asked them to change the schedule, their request was declined (Heymann 2004). Librarians must establish ways to maintain library services within the stifling current framework and pursue long-term solutions to the funding problem. Until this is achieved, it will be very difficult for meaningful library services to exist for all South African citizens.

Education & the New School Curriculum

Libraries play a key role in producing an informed citizenry. Democracies rely upon informed and well-educated citizens to participate in the pro-

cess of self-governance. Because libraries are educational institutions on some level, changes in education-related policies directly affect libraries. Recently, government education policy has caused an increase in library use by all levels of South African students, but has not provided libraries with increased funding.

Since the end of apartheid, public library use in South Africa has shifted and librarians have had to cope with playing a new societal role emphasizing education. Studies show that, since 1994, the role of the public library has changed from predominantly recreational to predominately educational (Armstrong 1999). A journey to the main public library in Cape Town verifies this: textbooks, which are rarely collected by libraries in the United States, are an integral part of the collections. Even more revealing is the Cape Town public library's longstanding policy (the policy began in 1986) to offer free membership to all students, whether or not they are residents of the city (Epstein 2002).

The impetus for the library's shift toward educational support was the introduction of the new school curriculum known as Outcomes Based Education (OBE). OBE has roots as far back as the medieval craft guilds and was introduced in South Africa by the government as the basis for Curriculum 2005 (Malan 2002). OBE focuses on the process and content of the educational process and expects students to demonstrate what they learn by completing projects, which require library use. It should also be mentioned that, due to poor living conditions, including lack of electricity and lack of space, the library often becomes the only space for economically disadvantaged South African students to do their schoolwork.

The South African government's *Revised National Curriculum Statement* includes a list of educational outcomes desirable for all school-aged citizens; the standards set forth by the list set out to create learners who can identify and solve problems, work in groups, and critically evaluate information (Revised 2002). Teaching such skills is what librarians do best. Although the ANC's views are clearly in-line with the educational use of libraries, the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* does not mention libraries, or any variation of the word, (including "librarian") once. Public libraries are being coerced into acting as edu-

cational libraries while the government is not providing financial support to guarantee their staff and facilities. Part of the problem is due to the current placement of libraries within the Department of Arts, Culture, and Science, which reflects the apartheid era view of libraries as recreational reading centers. Today, libraries would be better placed, and likely better funded, under the Department of Education, a move that would reflect the current library user population, which is mostly comprised of African students (Armstrong 1999). This modification to governmental structure would allow libraries to effectively work toward the educational aspects of their mission.

Librarians and social responsibility

In addition to the political motifs that surround public library work in South Africa, serious social issues pervade society. The following section outlines South African librarians' past and present roles in terms of social responsibility.

The mission statements of South Africa's early libraries did not embody socially responsible principles. Rather, they employed the British model of recreation and leisure to build their services (Armstrong 1999). The first semblances of South African public libraries appeared in the nineteenth century as private, subscription-based institutions – the popular model of the period. Decidedly, libraries denied access to those who could not pay, making libraries only available to those who could afford the subscription rates (Kalley 2000).

In 1928, the Carnegie Corporation awarded grants to establish public libraries in South Africa. The 1930's brought the creation of the South African Library Association (SALA) and marked the professionalization of South African librarianship. In fact, one of SALA's early objectives was to establish a free public library system (Kalley 2000). This was not immediately achieved. However, a 1936 study by R.B. Young, which found that library development in South Africa had "fallen behind the rest of the civilized world," spurred the move toward free public libraries (Kalley 2000). The inability to keep up with international trends was blamed on the persistence of the subscription system, which limited library services to mainly white South Africans. Recommendations were made to develop a free library system for all citizens. With significant help from the provinces,

public libraries began appearing in South Africa in the 1940s. Separate facilities were built for whites and blacks in the Cape, Transvaal, and the Orange Free State (Kalley 2000). Had the libraries begun with a mission driven by the principles of social responsibility, events may have taken a different shape.

In the United States, the 1969 creation of the American Library Association's (ALA) Social Responsibilities Round Table gave librarians a forum in which to discuss social issues and to propose actions toward improving social conditions. In a 1976 article on librarians and social responsibility, Patricia Glass Schuman stated "librarians have a vital role to play, a social responsibility to work toward an invention of the future which is free and just for all." She criticized librarians for being passive and elitist and challenged them to embrace the view that librarians have the capacity to create societal changes and to perpetuate democracy. She encouraged librarians to view themselves as agents of change working toward achieving a just, humane, and democratic society. To do this, she argued, librarians need to be willing to take positions on political issues, promote intellectual freedom, make the effort to collect materials that represent all sides of issues, and embrace their position as a political entity that wields power in a socially responsible way.

Though the principles of social responsibility appeared in the professional literature as early as the 1960s, it wasn't until 1998 that the issue reached the international level of the profession. This came with the 1998 inception of the Social Responsibilities Discussion Group by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) (Kagan 1999). This group focuses on promoting equal access to library materials and serves as a forum for discussing major issues concerning social responsibility and libraries. Typical issues include: rural library development, illiteracy, and the digital divide. This group, in which many South African librarians are active, encourages librarians to be politically active and to act in socially responsible ways, using their roles as information professionals to equalize access to information.

Archie Dick expanded upon the concept of social responsibility in an article about the responsibility of South African intellectuals, which includes librarians. He purported that South African intellectuals need to

remain critical and to speak the truth to power and to expose lies. In doing so, they need to clarify the changed terrain for intellectual work in South Africa, dig up buried histories, appraise global developments, comb alternative sources, and present in plain language in as many ways as possible, the truth that will help ordinary citizens. (Dick 1999).

These principles extend to the social responsibility of librarians to advocate and promote increased access to technology and communications systems in the knowledge-based society in which we live.

Today, South African librarians understand that the role of social responsibility is crucial to carrying out their mission. This is most evident in the Cape Town Library System's appropriate use of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto as the basis of its mission statement. Even more importantly, librarians who were interviewed and asked to summarize the public library's mission demonstrated that they share the values set forth by the UNESCO manifesto. The following items echo the manifesto and were mentioned by librarians as integral to the library's mission and vision: "empower communities with literacy training," "provide job resources," "promote democracy and human rights," "encourage freedom of expression and freedom to read," "reject censorship," "oppose racism," and "promote equality." Perhaps the most eloquent response received was from Johnny Jacobs, Manager of Library Services in the Tygerberg region of the Cape Town administration, who said the public library's mission was, "To be the torchbearers of information in our new democracy, to advance the African Renaissance, to compete as a world-city, to provide service to refugees, to eradicate illiteracy and HIV/AIDS, and to promote job creation – this should be our vision." This statement directly addresses specific issues that South African librarians must address in their efforts to provide community-based services.

Major social issues

A decade after the end of apartheid, South Africa is plagued with severe social, economic, and political issues. Sadly, the advent of democracy did not instantly relieve the economic and social forces that emerged under apartheid. The legacy of fragmentation and segregation still makes Cape

Town a mix of first and third world societies – where opulent gated communities juxtapose decrepit shantytowns (Turok 2001).

Coinciding with the tenth anniversary of South Africa's democracy, *The New York Times* published an article by Michael Wines and Sharon LaFraniere on April 26, 2004. The piece states that the real concern in South Africa today is “not the racial gap, but the gap between the haves, of any color, and the have-nots – what President Thabo Mbeki calls two economies ‘without a connecting staircase.’” Indeed, approximately half of South Africa's population is poor or on the edge of poverty and though the unemployment rate vacillates with each quarter, it is often between 30 and 40 percent. The most recent figures available show that a striking 37% of black Africans are unemployed whereas only 6% of whites are in the same predicament (Statistics 2004).

News stories about South Africa tend to focus on the country's severe health and crime related issues. A search in *ProQuest*, a periodical database that provides citations for both scholarly journals and newspapers, provides evidence of this practice. Search results follow: A search for “South Africa” AND “crime” yields 1017 articles; “South Africa” AND (health OR AIDS) yields 2068 articles; “South Africa” AND education yields 947 articles; and, “South Africa” AND “digital divide” yields a meager 7 articles. As shown by the database search, the most obvious social issues in South Africa are health and crime; however, the underlying problems of unequal education are not as often addressed in periodical literature.

Indeed, the incidence of HIV/AIDS has reached pandemic proportions in Sub-Saharan Africa and has received justifiable international attention. In 2001, the estimated rate of adults infected with HIV/AIDS was at 20.1 percent, putting South Africa seventh in the ranked list of countries with the highest HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rates in the world (CIA 2003). Crime in post-apartheid South Africa is another source of shocking statistics. For example, in 1998 South Africa had the highest number of reported rapes in the world and had one of the highest rates of other violent crimes; at this time, “the official South African murder rate was 58.5 per 100,000, nearly ten times the U.S. rate” (Thompson 2001). Though lack of adequate healthcare and prevalence of violent crime are serious social issues, they both directly

result from another epidemic – the lack of information and access to it.

It is the responsibility of librarians to identify and develop programs that address and meet the needs for increased access to information. Illiteracy, for instance, plagues South Africa and exacerbates nearly all of the nation's social problems. Citizens who cannot read cannot effectively find work, learn about healthcare and health-related issues, or even inform themselves of their individual rights in the democratic society in which they live. Illiteracy puts people at a serious disadvantage and can condemn people to a life of poverty and unemployment; often, for many who lack basic literacy, crime becomes the only source of income for food and other basic needs (Nicholson 2002).

Like illiteracy, the detriment of the digital divide, or the dichotomy of the haves and the have-nots of technological access and skills, perpetuates social problems. In South Africa, the digital divide persists: with a population of nearly 43 million, only a little over 3 million are Internet users (CIA 2003). This leaves over 90 percent of the population without modern technology and at a serious disadvantage in a society that depends upon constant access to information, more and more of which is distributed online.

The city of Cape Town commissioned a 2002 study focusing on the digital divide. Statistics revealed that over 80% of the population lacked computer access (*i.e.*, no access at home, work, school, or in community centers). Further, those who did have access to technology and were consequently able to actively participate in the emerging knowledge economy were “disproportionately young (62% between 18–34), English speaking (70%), white (82%), and well-educated (68%)” (Heymann 2002). These figures demonstrate that socio-cultural inequalities continue to pervade the city. After analysis, public officials, including librarians, made recommendations to build a strategic framework that could make Cape Town more globally competitive, efficient, and customer-focused.

Smart Cape Access Project

Librarians understand that bridging the digital divide means enabling a city to use information technology for promoting social and economic ad-

vancement on both individual and societal levels: individuals empowered with technological skills become desirable employees, while skilled workers benefit the nation's economy as a whole. It is with this understanding that the Smart Cape Access Project began. Funded by a Bill & Melinda Gates Access to Learning Award, the project focused on bridging the digital divide by building a "smart city," where "informed people could connect to the world and each other by the technology of the information age" (Valentine 2004).

The first phase began in 2002 when six pilot branches hosted Cape Town's first free Internet access. Administered by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and spearheaded by librarians, the Smart Cape Access Project has allowed librarians to take part in socially responsible action. One librarian who participated in the pilot phase of the project referred to it as a new vision for libraries, and went on to say, "It's a move away from the traditional role of handing out books over the counter and issuing overdue notices. Now we must play a social role. We are in a position to uplift the community'" (Valentine 2004). The project is scheduled to expand to Cape Town's remaining libraries in 2004 and will allow librarians to play an active role in combating poverty, unemployment, and inequality by empowering the members of their communities, including the most disadvantaged.

The future

In society, one problem begets another. Denying access to information contributes to poverty, violence, crime and general societal detriment. Librarians must be aware of this relationship between knowledge and society and must be prepared to lead their libraries toward becoming true symbols of democracy. Librarians need to recognize and enact their social, political, and professional responsibilities. Obstacles will make this difficult for South African librarians to achieve, but perseverance will make it possible.

As if the inadequate funding provisions set forth by the New Constitution and the distressing set of societal issues facing the country were not enough for South African libraries to cope with, there are growing concerns that a future generation of qualified librarians will not exist. Currently, in Cape Town's public libraries, vacant posts go

unfilled, staff morale is low, and libraries are reducing opening hours (Jacobs 2004). These factors have contributed to severely understaffed facilities and the subsequent closing of library buildings throughout the city. Further, consistency lacks in the area of library education: only a small number of librarians in South Africa are educated at the master's level and South Africa does not offer a degree comparable to the MLS in the United States. In fact, "eleven universities award at least 29 different LIS degrees (Kagan 2003). Due to the lack of cohesiveness in library education, South Africa's professional organization for librarians, LIASA (Library & Information Association of South Africa), will need to play a critical role in promoting the education of socially responsible librarians who are prepared to meet the needs of South Africa's diverse communities.

LIASA has admirably begun to fulfill this role. This year, South African Library Week was themed "1994-2004: Libraries in a Decade of Democracy" and focused on the role that libraries have played during the political transition. The event concentrated on issues such as the library's role in advancing literacy, ensuring freedom of access to information, developing an informed nation, and impressing tolerance and respect upon the minds of all South Africans (LIASA 2004). These themes show that the overall view of South African librarians, as set forth by their professional association, is geared toward creating an improved society for all citizens.

It is often difficult for libraries to identify and wield their social and political power. However, effectively serving communities, which are inherently laden with power, will allow libraries to impact society and to positively contribute to cultural beliefs and practices (Budd 2002). In South Africa, a young democracy still experiencing the shift from an oppressive regime based on inequality, it is crucial for librarians to understand the symbolic power inherent in their profession. Developing clear strategies for dealing with the government, both to secure funding and to ensure that their political importance is recognized will give South African librarians the power to enact real social and political changes. Over time, they will adapt to the new societal roles that came with the shift to democracy and South Africa will have libraries that serve to empower and develop individuals, communities, and society as a whole.

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