

**African Theses and Dissertations in Academic Libraries in the United States:  
Background and Current Practices**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper begins with some background to the growth of interest in African studies/African studies library collections in the U.S. in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It discusses the emphasis from the start on African-produced materials as integral. Historical highlights include the central role of Northwestern University (evolution of program library, 1930s/40s), establishment of formal Program (1948) and Library (1954), national conference on Africana libraries (1954), establishment of African Studies Association (1957) and librarians committee, establishment of CAMP (1963). The paper reviews the developments of African scholars arriving at Northwestern (1950s-); early outreach to African librarian colleagues, Nairobi conference (1967); early inter-institutional cooperation, and national and international collaboration.

In particular, the paper focuses on the period from very late 1960s to near present, in which evolving models of acquiring materials of all types were developed. This includes the emergence of vendors in Africa and non-African vendors working in Africa to supply the North American/European library market with African materials. The paper describes the U.S. interest in publications, theses and dissertations from African universities and the manner in which the emerging vendor scene did or did not offer these materials (ethical and otherwise); strategies in North American institutions to acquire university publications, theses and dissertations (especially Northwestern's); developing/changing inter-institutional cooperation with African universities; role of ALC, CAMP and ASA; and ongoing confirmation on part of North American Africanist librarians/scholars of the importance of access to research coming from African universities and programs to share American research especially theses (ASA field research program; research standards and guidelines).

Finally, the paper shows how during the present time North American institutions acquire African theses and dissertations, how they are used in Africanist scholarship today, and how their availability influences Africanist scholarship and graduate studies. It discusses how inter-institutional cooperative contacts encourage this, and demonstrates some examples such as the Northwestern model, Ford funded Northwestern-University of Ghana-CODESRIA linkage and the Title VI dissertation project. Finally, the paper explores the role of digital technology and the Web in the acquisition of this type of literature.

**African Theses and Dissertations in Academic Libraries in the United States:  
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I would like to begin by expressing my thanks for the opportunity to participate in this DATAD workshop with such distinguished colleagues. My goal today is to discuss African studies library collections in the United States. My focus will be on our longstanding interest in access to the scholarly production of African institutions of higher education, in particular theses and dissertations, and in making them available to researchers. I also hope to provide background information with regard to how our African studies library collections are organized and how librarians charged with building these collections and making them accessible work cooperatively. My focus will include both the historical background and the current situation. I hope to clearly demonstrate that American librarians responsible for building African studies collections have always considered knowledge produced in Africa integral to our collections and essential to support research and curricular programs in African studies at our universities.

By way of personal introduction, I would like you to know that since 1975 I have worked in four university research libraries in the United States with a focus on African studies. I presently head the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, North America's largest African studies library. Many argue that the Herskovits Library's collection constitutes the largest single collection of African studies materials in the world. The collection includes about 275,000 volumes, 2,800 current serial titles, 250 current newspapers, archival and manuscript collections, extensive collections of ephemera, maps, posters, videos and photographs. The collection also includes an expanding array of electronic resources for the study of Africa.

Established as a separate library in 1954, its roots go back to the late 1920's and are closely connected to the appointment of Melville Herskovits to the Northwestern University faculty in 1927. His interest in Africa and his recognition that there were no systematic library collections of African research materials in the United States brought forth an early focus in library collection development in African studies at Northwestern

University. In 1948, he established at Northwestern the first interdisciplinary research center in African studies at a major North American research university. A separate library was integral to his vision, which led to the establishment of the library I now head. After his death, the library was named in his honor.

Before there was any formal organization of librarians in the United States interested in African studies, Melville Herskovits provided two opportunities for formal discussion of the topic in a national setting. First, in 1940, he chaired a conference at Howard University sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies. Called "The Conference on Negro Studies," he insisted the discussion have a library and archival component. His approach to "Negro studies" went well beyond the United States to include an African and diaspora point of view. Second, in March 1955, he called together a meeting of about 15 librarians and scholars from around the United States in the African studies library at Northwestern University to plan an agenda for strengthening research libraries in African studies. In the course of this two day meeting, it was further determined that work must be undertaken to establish a professional association dedicated to African studies. The major themes of this meeting's focus on library issues were interdependence and cooperation.

The African Studies Association, which I will call ASA, was formed in New York City in March 1957 almost exactly two years later. Melville Herskovits is considered its founder, and he served as its first president. The first annual meeting of the ASA was held on the Northwestern University campus in October of that year. At its formation, those planning for the work of the organization recognized the importance of library and archival issues and a library committee was appointed as one of the ASA's first of only three standing committees. The first formal meeting of this committee was held at the Library of Congress in June 1958. At this meeting, an agenda of goals, which the membership saw as critical, was agreed upon. Wide-ranging in scope, these goals included dissemination of information about the holdings of Africana collections, preparation of guides to Africa-related archival holdings, support for national bibliographies in African countries, greater acquisition of publications from Africa in

North American libraries and preparation of Africa-related reference works and bibliographies, just to mention a few. Regarding Africa's scholarly output, from this early date focus on acquisition of and access to the scholarly publication of newly established African universities, colleges and presses was considered a priority. Another primary focus of interest was bibliographic control of theses and dissertations related to Africa. At that time in the United States, bibliographic control of theses and dissertations was nowhere near as comprehensive as it is now even though *Dissertation Abstracts* began publication in 1938. Access to what was cited was often a challenge. The relatively free access we have today in the United States evolved over time.

I would like to now tell you something about the Africana Librarians Council of the African Studies Association and the Cooperative Africana Microform Project of the Centre for Research Libraries. The Africana Librarians Council has evolved over time and is the same organization established in 1958 as the ASA's Library Committee. The Africana Librarians Council, which I will call ALC, and Cooperative Africana Microform Project, which I will call CAMP, have served as the professional focal points for Africa-related library and archival activities and developments in the US since their inception. For 45 years, the ALC has carried on with an agenda focused on coordinating and improving Africana library collections and services that would benefit the African Studies Association and its membership as well as the wider community of Africanists and research libraries worldwide. A number of publications from the early days of the ALC document the tremendous enthusiasm of librarians in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s to build collections truly reflective of information both about and, most significantly, from Africa, Asia and Latin America, areas woefully lacking representation at that time in research libraries in the United States. These are cited in note 2 to the text of my paper.<sup>2</sup> I cite them despite their age because they stand as evidence of the long-standing interest of a relatively small number of librarians in making African materials widely available in North America libraries.

One of the most important priorities set very early on was to establish an effective means of communication among the ALC's membership and the wider community of

interested persons between the twice a year meeting schedule that has persisted throughout its history. There is always a meeting of the ALC in the context of the annual conference of the African Studies Association in the fall. And then, the ALC and CAMP meet again on their own in the spring. From 1962-64, the ALC published *Africana Newsletter*. First published on its own, it was later incorporated into the *African Studies Bulletin*. This was followed by a period of time during which ALC news and minutes of meetings were published in the *African Studies Newsletter*. By the mid 1970s, the ALC felt the need for its own separate newsletter was so great that *Africana Libraries Newsletter* began to be published. It continues to this day as the primary means of printed communication for all interested in Africa-related library concerns in the United States. It is widely and freely distributed beyond the membership of ALC, especially to African colleagues. For the last few years *Africana Libraries Newsletter* has also been on the World Wide Web. Information about obtaining *Africana Libraries Newsletter* is found in note 3 to the text of this paper.<sup>3</sup>

CAMP was formed about five years after the ALC, in 1963, when 12 institutions came together for the specific purpose of purchasing in a cooperative manner rarely held Africana and commercially available expensive microform sets as well as initiating projects aimed at preservation microfilming of a wide range of archival and print materials in North America, Europe and Africa. The Center for Research Libraries in Chicago was the natural home for an initiative like CAMP. Dedicated to acquiring, storing and making accessible relatively little used research materials, The Center for Research Libraries, which I will call CRL, was established in 1953. The 12 charter member libraries of CAMP were all early members of CRL and their university library leadership had already experienced the benefit of cooperative endeavors in collections and access. Among the types of materials at CRL that were given special attention for collecting were theses and dissertations from institutions outside the United States. CAMP and ALC membership consisted basically of the same group, the same people working together to achieve the complimentary sets of goals. CAMP however, has institutional members, while the ALC has personal members. Through CAMP, ALC members were able to move forward with the agenda of acquiring and making accessible

theses and dissertations related to Africa. This was a challenging area to work in because of the difficulty involved in acquiring copies of theses and dissertations. Nevertheless, by the late 1970s a bibliography listed 373 Africa-related dissertations held at CRL.<sup>4</sup>

Through the years, institutional membership of CAMP has primarily been North American, but its ranks do presently include a few European and African institutions. With the availability of very reduced membership fees for African institutions and the expanding ease of communication thanks to the World Wide Web and e-mail, it is hoped that international cooperation and linkages within CAMP can shape in greater ways its collection building efforts. It is also hoped that e-mail and the availability of online catalogue access to much of CAMP's collection through the World Wide Web will make it more possible to learn about the wealth of Africa-related resources available on microfilm. Today, CAMP continues to grow following the same initial priorities and includes many thousands of titles in its collection.<sup>5</sup>

ALC and CAMP have worked together carefully to insure that research resources supporting the study of Africa are available to support basic undergraduate curriculum and advanced postgraduate and faculty research. In pursuing this goal, ALC and CAMP members have always been concerned about links with African colleagues. Cooperative contacts between ALC, CAMP and African librarians have expanded over the years and changed greatly, but it is important to note that these links were identified as an essential component of our work right from the very start. One very important aspect of these linkages was the visits of African librarians to ALC and CAMP meetings. While the numbers are small, the fact that efforts were made from the earliest days to work cooperatively with librarians in Africa is important to remember. Also, American librarians in very small numbers began to visit Africa. These personal links over the years have been an important feature of the ALC and CAMP meetings. We have benefited greatly from the opportunity to share ideas and discuss initiatives. A contemporary example of how this has worked relates to DATAD. Mary Materu-Behitsa has regularly attended recent ALC and CAMP meetings keeping us informed of developments.

These early links set about a process of dialogue that has continued to this day. In recent years, there has been an increase in our communication. From my North American perspective, this increase is because of the growing recognition among a broader constituency both of librarians and readers that the greater number of publications from Africa in our libraries, the better informed are researchers. It is absolutely essential that our libraries in North America be more inclusive of African imprints. In our efforts to acquire more of Africa's expanding publishing output, we have established linkages with librarians, publishers and suppliers. Another reason is the sincere interest in North America in assisting African librarians build collections that include relevant publications of North American publishers through various book and journal exchange and donation programs. Finally, as e-mail and World Wide Web communication increasingly becomes more widespread and reliable, the sheer number of contacts increases and the ability to interact with each other in a regular manner assists greatly in the maintenance of mutually important links. As our information links expand both in variety of scope and in the sheer number of people involved, the ability of librarians in the United States and Africa to fulfill their collections and service goals increase.

As I have already noted, one of the earliest priorities for the ALC was bibliographic control of theses and dissertations related to Africa. Two of the earliest ALC members compiled the first list of American dissertations. First published with just under 600 citations as an article in the *African Studies Bulletin* in 1961, the compilers, Marion Dinstel of Boston University, and Conrad Reining of the Library of Congress, prepared a revised edition that was published by the Library of Congress in 1962 and included 700 citations.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth noting, I think, that at the same time in Britain, a similar organization to the ALC, the Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa, better known by its acronym, SCOLMA, was established in 1962. SCOLMA's initial priorities also included bibliographic control of dissertations and theses. One of SCOLMA's earliest publications in 1964 was a list of 1142 dissertations.<sup>7</sup>

These two examples of bibliographies of dissertations and theses relating to Africa are supplemented by many others produced over the years listing theses and dissertations completed at African universities. There are some very early lists such as *Nigerian Theses*, published in Ibadan in 1965, and some very current ones such as “The Union List of Theses and Dissertations Held by Universities and Research Institutions in Kenya.” This CD ROM, according to the November 2003 issue of *INASP Newsletter*, contains about 3,000 citations.<sup>8</sup>

In order to pursue the goal of making available in the United States the scholarly production of African universities, formal exchange links were established with African institutions of higher education. These were institution to institution links established by individual ALC member librarians in which a mutually beneficial relationship was established that focused on the exchange of the scholarly output of the cooperating institutions. For example, at my own institution in the 1960s, Northwestern, an early and intensive exchange arrangement with the University of Ibadan was established. Another example of the same time period, is Syracuse University, which established a comprehensive publication exchange agreement with the East African Institute of Social Research at Makerere. Regrettably, these exchange programs ultimately were abandoned.

The emphasis on cooperative contacts reached a high point in 1967 at the Nairobi conference on African bibliography.<sup>9</sup> During this conference, African, European and American participants discussed a broad range of issues including some of the same issues in access to information we continue to deal with today. Both the ALC and SCOLMA have sponsored various anniversary conferences, the most recent were in honor of 40 years: ALC in 1997 and SCOLMA in 2002.<sup>10</sup>

As American libraries expanded their efforts to collect materials published in Africa, several patterns of acquisition emerged. The first was the shortest lived. The acquisitions trip. Through the 1960s and into the early 1970s, many American African studies librarians visited Africa specifically to acquire research materials. These trips were common, often following similar itineraries. Personal connections were established

with government printers, publishers and universities that often proved long lasting. Exchange programs were set up with university libraries and departments. Individual negotiations brought about a broad range of acquisition of publications from universities. Many of these exchanges lasted long after the funding for African acquisitions trips had disappeared. The only library that continues with any regularity this model is the Library of Congress.

These visits also allowed for the establishment of personal contact with bookshops and individual entrepreneurs who served as a suppliers of materials published in Africa to American libraries. It was not unusual for these bookshops to supply to American libraries stock beyond what they sold locally. Individuals became very broadly based in attempting to acquire a broad range of materials for American libraries.

Over time, patterns emerged in which several expatriate-based suppliers dominated in the supply of research materials published in Africa to American libraries. These included such businesses as African Imprint Library Services (U.S. based), Leishmann and Taussig (U.K. based) and Hogarth Representation (U.K. based). While still in business, African Imprint Library Services is no longer a major vendor of current materials. Leishmann and Taussig was incorporated into Hogarth Representation. Most recently, David Hogarth, founder of Hogarth Representation, has retired. His business now has two components, one based in Canada and one in Nigeria. In addition, the Library of Congress office in Nairobi established a participants program and began collecting for all participant libraries the same materials it collected for the Library of Congress. Participation in the program is not limited to American libraries. The National Library of South Africa, for example, is a participant. In the early 1990s, the emergence of the African Books Collective made it possible for greater distribution of African materials in American libraries. Based in the U.K., the African Books Collective now has over 80 trade and scholarly press members. Selected titles are marketed from offices in the U.K. and distributed in North America by Michigan State University Press.<sup>11</sup>

While the Library of Congress Office Nairobi program and the African Books Collective limit their offerings to printed materials, both African Imprint Library Services and Hogarth Representation have on occasion acquired copies of select unpublished theses and dissertations from African institutions and made them available to their customers. This has not happened very often, but when it has happened we have questioned the offers. In fact, some of us have not purchased the materials without the assurance of the vendor that it had received the permission of the appropriate parties to make the dissertation available. It has not only been these organizations that have from time to time made theses and dissertations available to North American libraries. Occasionally individual entrepreneurs in Africa already supplying libraries with published materials have attempted to expand their scope of offerings to include a wide range of information coming from universities. In some cases, these individuals have attempted to arrange for permission to copy and sell to North American libraries copies of dissertations. These efforts have been occasional and successful only briefly.<sup>12</sup>

As interested as American African Studies Librarians are in acquiring for research purposes in our libraries copies of African theses and dissertations, we are also committed to acquiring only those legitimately available. We furthermore have always been clear with our post-graduate students and faculty researchers the importance of the African Studies Association's ethical guidelines for research the full text of which is found on the ASA's website.<sup>13</sup> The relatively small number of theses and dissertations in our libraries that have been successfully acquired have for the most part been acquired through the very labor intensive processes of letter writing and personal contact. Because of the visits of African scholars to our libraries, we have often been successful in receiving complimentary copies from the authors.

African Studies librarians have also designed various cooperative projects that include theses and dissertations or are focused specifically on theses and dissertations. Several recent projects have been undertaken by those American universities with African studies centers and libraries designated by the United States Department of Education as National Resource Centers for African Studies. Attempts have been made to

pair with an individual African university with the hope that dissertations could be exchanged. The American library would receive copies of theses and dissertations from an African university and in return the American partner library would provide American theses and dissertations selected by the African institution. Linkages in this project are the most recent efforts and have been developed over the past several years. In preparation for this workshop, I have contacted several of the individuals managing these projects. Although some success is reported, expectations have not been met. They have not been met because the projects established depend a great deal on individual initiatives and commitment, both in Africa and the United States, and are not carried out in a uniform manner. The absence of a framework to exchange titles agreed upon by all concerned is a hindrance to success and sustainability.

Questions I should now address include how are these dissertations and theses acquired from African universities made available in our libraries, who uses them, who asks for them. Dissertations and theses acquired at my library are treated as any other monographic acquisition. They are immediately upon receipt added to the online catalog with a provisional record. At that point, they become part of the cataloging backlog. However, one of the priority areas in original cataloging at Northwestern is dissertations and theses. Therefore, the materials are part of the Catalog Department's workflow. Once cataloged, the thesis or dissertation catalog record is loaded into WORLDCAT and a revised catalog record is in NUcat, our online catalog. Once in WORLDCAT, it is very publicly available. We integrate theses and dissertations on our bookshelves or in microform cabinets along with other materials. We also circulate them providing access as we do to other materials.

In my own experience whereas in the past librarians have been mostly concerned with the issue of availability, in recent years growing numbers of postgraduate students and faculty members have shown increased interest in actually accessing dissertations and theses from African universities and increased knowledge about precisely what they want. From my perspective, this is the result of two factors. First, expanding email and web based discussion of research. In particular I am thinking of the H-Africa network and

the worldwide participation in its discussion.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, frequent research visits of African scholars to American universities increases awareness of current research at African universities. For example, at my own institution, Northwestern, we have just concluded a very successful multi-year cooperative program with the University of Ghana and CODESRIA in which research scholars associated with all three institutions work cooperatively in a broadly based research network that emphasizes transnational scholarly communication and knowledge production. In fact, the short title for this Ford Foundation sponsored program is “Transcending Boundaries.” At each institution, components of the program existed locally in addition to the major thrust among the three institutions. This means that an even larger number of West African and American scholars were engaged with one another and one another’s research.

This one example is replicated in many other cases where an American and an African university establish a partnership in which the sharing of research is integral. In the course of such programs, it becomes important to have accessible theses and dissertations, for in the sharing of research data complimentary research agendas are strengthened and promoted.

As we in the ALC and CAMP have followed the development of the DATAD project we have come to believe that its success will benefit all institutions with an interest in access to theses and dissertations produced at African universities including our own. We in the ALC and CAMP look forward to the development of DATAD and the opportunity through DATAD to make accessible to our researchers theses and dissertations produced at African institutions through a framework which will be established by cooperating African institutions working first and foremost to benefit African institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Easterbrook is the George and Mary LeCron Foster curator of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University. He wishes to thank Matthew Teti for assistance in the preparation of this manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Current Trends in Newly Developing Countries’, *Library Trends* 8.2, 125-341, October 1959; Philip J. McNiff, ‘Foreign Area Studies and their Effect on Library Development’, *College and Research Libraries* 24.4, 291-96, July 1963; Paul L. Berry, ‘Development of Library Resources’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 356, 126-32, November 1964; *Area Studies and the Library*,

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edited by Tsuen-Hsui Tsien and Howard Winger, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966; Hans E. Panofsky, "Acquisition of Library Materials from Africa," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 7:1, 38-46, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> *Africana Libraries Newsletter* can be obtained by writing to Dr. Marion Frank-Wilson, Editor, *Africana Libraries Newsletter*, Indiana University Main Library E660, 1320 E. 10<sup>th</sup> St., Bloomington, Indiana, 47405-3907. *Africana Libraries Newsletter* is also on the web at [www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/african/aln](http://www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/african/aln).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Britz, *Foreign Doctoral Dissertations on Africa Purchased on Demand by the Center for Research Libraries*, The Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about the history of the Africana Librarians Council and Cooperative Africana Microform Project see David L. Easterbrook, 'The Archives-Libraries Committee and the Co-operative Africana Microform Project: A Brief History', *Africana Resources and Collections*, edited by Julian W. Witherall, 18-38, Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, 1989. For current information see the following websites: ALC, [www.loc.gov/rr/amed/afs/alc](http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/afs/alc); CAMP, [www.crl.edu/areastudies/camp/index.htm](http://www.crl.edu/areastudies/camp/index.htm); CRL, [www.crl.edu](http://www.crl.edu).

<sup>6</sup> Marion Dinstel and Conrad Reining, 'American Doctoral Dissertations Concerned with Africa,' *African Studies Bulletin* 4:1, 1-49, 1961. Library of Congress. African Section. *A List of American Doctoral Dissertations on Africa*, General Reference and Bibliography Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1962.

<sup>7</sup> Standing Conference on Library Materials on Africa. *Theses on Africa Accepted by Universities in the United Kingdom and Ireland*, W. Heffer, Cambridge, 1964. For current information about SCOLMA see its website: [www.lse.ac.uk/library/scolma](http://www.lse.ac.uk/library/scolma).

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Amosu, *Nigerian Theses; A List of Theses on Nigerian Subjects and of Theses by Nigerians*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1965. "The Union List of Theses and Dissertations Held by Research Libraries in Kenya, No, 1" cited in *INASP Newsletter* 24:3, 2003, [www.inasp.info/newslet/nov03.html](http://www.inasp.info/newslet/nov03.html).

<sup>9</sup> J. D. Pearson, *African Bibliography: A Report on the International Conference Organized by the International African Institute and Held at University College, Nairobi, 4-8 December 1967*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968.

<sup>10</sup> Both 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference proceedings have been published: ALC, Nancy J. Schmidt, editor, *Africana Librarianship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Treasuring the Past and Building the Future: Proceedings of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of the Africana Librarians Council*, African Studies Program, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 1998, and SCOLMA, "African Research and Documentation in the New Millennium: Papers Presented at the SCOLMA 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference, Oxford, June 2002," *African Research and Documentation* 90, 1-107, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> More information about these services can be found at the following websites: African Imprint Library Services, [www.africanbooks.com/ails1.htm](http://www.africanbooks.com/ails1.htm); Hogarth Representation, [www.meabooks.com](http://www.meabooks.com); Library of Congress Office Nairobi, [www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi](http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/nairobi); African Books Collective, [www.africanbookscollective.com](http://www.africanbookscollective.com).

<sup>12</sup> An important article expanding on this brief summary is Phyllis B. Bischoff, "Publishing and the Book Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa: Trends and Issues and their Implications for American Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16:6, 340-347, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> [www.africanstudies.org/asa\\_guidelines.htm](http://www.africanstudies.org/asa_guidelines.htm). These guidelines and related issues are discussed in Johannes J. Britz and Peter J. Lor, "A Moral Reflection on the Information Flow From South to North; An African Perspective," *Libri* 53:3, 160-173, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> [www.h-net.org/~africa](http://www.h-net.org/~africa).