

Thelma Horn Tate: Librarian of the World

Thelma Horn Tate rose from a childhood spent in rural, segregated Alabama to become an internationally acclaimed librarian. Her many accomplishments included advocating for and publishing about mobile library services worldwide and promoting library instruction, services for the disabled, and technological advancements in libraries.

Tate was born in Coatopa, Alabama,¹ and raised in rural Alabama.² She graduated with a bachelor's degree in education/history and library science from Alabama State University in 1957,³ then worked as a librarian at the Mississippi Vocational College in Itta Bena, Mississippi, from 1957 to 1959.⁴ She received her Master of Library Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1961.⁵ After graduating from library school, Tate took a position as a librarian for a "traveling branch library" (bookmobile) in the Chicago Public Library system.⁶ Then, from 1965 to 1966, she was a librarian at Alabama A & M Normal School.⁷

Tate's long-time association with Rutgers University Libraries began in 1970 as a reference librarian at the Mabel Smith Douglass Library on the Douglass College campus.⁸ "At various points, Tate served as the library's liaison to the American Studies, African Studies, Classics, Education, English, history, psychology, religion, Romance Languages, sociology and

¹ Obituary for Mrs. Tate H. Tate (Aged 71), *The Courier-News Bridgewater*, New Jersey, 22 May 2005, Sun • Page 23

² "Mrs. Thelma Tate", *Obituaries, Home News Tribune*, June 13, 2005, p. 17.

³ "Mrs. ThelmaTate" p. 220 in *The Directory of Ethnic Professionals in LIS (Library and Information Science)* / compiled by George C. Grant. Winter Park, Fla.:Four-G Publishers, 1991.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For further information on the "traveling branch system" see "CPL History" -- <https://www.chipublib.org/cpl-history/>

⁷ *The Directory of Ethnic Professionals in LIS.*

⁸ "People in the News". *College & Research Libraries News*. Vol 66, No 7, July/August 2005, p. 547

speech departments.”⁹ She also served as the Douglass library contact for Services for Persons with Disabilities¹⁰ and as coordinator of reference services at the Douglass Library for many years. Tate's colleagues recognized her as an exemplary instructor for college audiences on library resources and research methods, whether as individuals or in groups.¹¹ While working at Douglass, Tate served as chairperson of the Douglass College Equal Opportunity Board and as an active member of the Voorhees Assembly Board, the Douglass Advisory Services for Women committee, and the committee that developed the Douglass College "Shaping a Life" course.”¹² “Building on the early establishment of a User Education Program by Librarian Ada English in the Douglass College in the 1930s, Tate was responsible for reestablishing renaissance development of the Bibliographic Instruction at the college. The results of Tate's innovative work in this area have had a lasting and ongoing impact on the development of instruction programs at the University Libraries systemwide.”¹³

Appointed to the position of Global Outreach Services Coordinator at Rutgers University Libraries (New Brunswick, N.J.) in 1999, Tate developed and coordinated “the implementation of the Libraries' outreach services at the local, regional, national, and international levels.”¹⁴ In addition, she provided reference and instructional services and activities that benefitted the library system and the community.¹⁵ She worked in many other capacities, including ADA

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Office of the Associate University Librarian Research and Undergraduate Services, Public Services Administrative Memo #9: SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, May, 1994

¹¹ “Thelma Tate Horn Tate, Rutgers University Librarian, International Libraries Activist, 1934–2005” by Harry Glazer. P. 283. *IFLA JOURNAL, Official Journal of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions* Volume 31 (2005) No. 3, SAGE Publications.

¹² Mrs. Thelma Tate (From News Tribune (Francoise Puniello from Rutgers submitted this obituary).

¹³ Mrs. Thelma Tate Biography (Professor, Global Outreach Services Coordinator, New Brunswick Libraries, Rutgers University Libraries), 2003 Jean E. Coleman Lecture.

¹⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁵ *ibid*.

Coordinator of Services for Patrons with Disabilities for the system. She was a dedicated librarian who worked tirelessly assisting patrons with special needs of all kinds.¹⁶

Throughout her thirty-four years at Rutgers Libraries, Tate served on a number of university libraries committees, including the Rutgers University Libraries Instructional Committee, the Rutgers University Advisory Committee on Diversity, the Advisory Committee on Library Services for Persons with Disabilities, and the Rutgers University Libraries/School of Communication, Information and Library Studies Internship Committee (all three of which she chaired).¹⁷

Tate was very involved in state-wide, national, and international professional library associations, including as President of the Black Librarians Network of New Jersey from 1983 to 1988.¹⁸ She also was a long-time member of the New Jersey Library Association, including its College and University Section.¹⁹ “A distinguished leader, Tate has served as Vice President and President of the Round Table on Library Instruction (LIRT) of the American Library Association (ALA)²⁰ and chaired many of its standing committees. Other capacities in which Tate served within ALA include work on the Reference and Adult Services Division, the International Relations Committee Subcommittee on Africa, and the Black Caucus of ALA”.²¹

¹⁶ P. 25, “In Memoriam” in the New Brunswick Libraries Annual Report 2004-2005. Prepared By Francoise S. Puniello, Acting Director And the staff and librarians of the New Brunswick Libraries [Rutgers University]. https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/staff/nbl/directors_reports/nbl_annual_report_2004_2005.pdf

¹⁷ Thelma Tate, Letter to author, April 18, 2004.

¹⁸ *The Directory of Ethnic Professionals in LIS*.

¹⁹ NJLA/ACRL, The Newsletter of the NJLA College and University Section and the New Jersey ACAL Chapter Vol. 11 :2 Spring 1993, https://cus.njla.org/sites/cus.njla.org/files/newsletterimages/2018_spring_1993%20throwback.pdf

²⁰ “Library Instruction Round Table News”, vol. 21, no.3, March 1999,p.4.

²¹ Mrs. Thelma Tate Biography, 2003 Jean E. Coleman Lecture.

Tate frequently was an invited exhibitor at the ALA Diversity Fair. In 1998, at the first Diversity Fair, she, along with Sandra Troy and Marjorie Li, showed a PowerPoint presentation and presented a poster session about the Spring 1997 Symposium on Affirmative Action.²² At a later Diversity Fair, she showcased the Rutgers University Libraries/School of Communication, Information and Library Studies resident/internship position, which supported “members of underrepresented groups pursuing an MLS degree – a position she helped create and oversee.”²³

Tate was a member of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the American Association of University Professors.²⁴

In 1983, Tate joined the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).²⁵ Over the next twenty years, she served in “numerous capacities” in this organization, “including Secretary and Chair of the Round Table on Continuing Professional Education (Now Continuing Professional Education Section) and the Round Table on Mobile Libraries (now Mobile Libraries Section) where she served as its Chair from 1997-2001”.^{26 27} She also served as editor of the “Women and Librarianship” newsletter of the IFLA Women’s Issues Section.²⁸ The first IFLA Interest Study Group was established by Tate and the late Susan Swartzburg under the

²² RUL Advisory Committee on Diversity, 1997-1998 Annual Report. Prepared by Charlotte Toke, Sandra Troy, Mrs. Tate. p2.

https://libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/staff/groups/diversity_com/reports/1997-98_Final_Diversity_Annual_Report.pdf

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *The Directory of Ethnic Professionals in LIS.*

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mrs. Thelma Tate Biography, 2003 Jean E. Coleman Lecture.

²⁷ *IFLA JOURNAL*, Volume 31 (2005) No. 3

²⁸ WOMEN AND LIBRARIANSHIP Newsletter of the IFLA Women’s Issues Section (continues Round Table on Women’s Issues), Number 25 (November/December 2004), <https://archive.ifla.org/VII/s41/news/s41newsletter-dec04.pdf>

IFLA Headquarters in 1990. “The purpose of the study group was to introduce librarians, graduate students and the community-at-large to the work of IFLA and invite their involvement.”²⁹ Tate presented papers and helped organize international conferences for IFLA and other groups in Australia, Cuba, Spain, India, and other locations.³⁰ She also gave poster sessions at a number of ALA and IFLA conferences over the years. She was also a “frequent participant” in the SCECSAL (Standing Conference of Eastern, Central, and Southern African Library and Information Association} Conferences.³¹

Tate “was internationally recognized as the leading expert on the many uses of mobile libraries in developing countries. She “compiled and edited well-acclaimed bibliographies on mobile libraries across the globe and personally traveled to assess the effectiveness of camel–born mobile libraries in Kenya and donkey–driven library carts in Zimbabwe.”³²³³ ³⁴ “For the first time in our lives...we’re using camels to bring something new: Knowledge,” she recounted in a newspaper interview.³⁵ She also served as a member of a study team to assess mobile libraries in Laos and Thailand.³⁶ Through Tate’s efforts, Rutgers University librarians and libraries staff were given a chance to share perspectives with internationally prominent librarians from Botswana, Egypt, Germany, and Thailand.³⁷ She was also an active leader in the

²⁹ NJLA/ACRL, The Newsletter of the NJLA College and University Section and the New Jersey ACAL Chapter 3

³⁰ *IFLA JOURNAL*, Volume 31 (2005) No. 3

³¹ Ibid.

³² “People in the News”. *College & Research Libraries News*. Vol 66, No 7, July/August 2005, p. 547.

³³ For further information on Mrs. Tate’s work in Kenza and Zimbabwe see “Rutgers Librarian is Going Global” in *The Courier-News* (Bridgewater, N.J.), March 24, 2002, p.20.

³⁴ IFLA Mobile Section Newsletter Number 1 Autumn 2002, p.7

³⁵ “RU Librarian Leads Global Literacy Effort”. *The Central New Jersey Home News* (New Brunswick, N.J.). p.A2

³⁶ “Biographical Sketch” in Letter to author, dated April 10, 2002

³⁷ *The Agenda*, published from the Office of the University Librarian, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, vol. 26, no. 25, July 11, 2004,

Global Literacy Project. This New Jersey non-profit organization collects dated or unwanted books and ships them to communities in Africa, the Caribbean, and other developing countries.³⁸

Tate received many honors over the years. These included an H.W. Wilson Fellowship; the Edward J. Bloustein Incentive Award in Recognition of High Level of Performance and Contribution to the Accomplishment of the Goals and Objectives of Douglass College Library and Rutgers University.³⁹ In recognition of her long, varied, and distinguished service to Rutgers University and the international field of librarianship, Tate was awarded the Rutgers University Human Dignity Award in April 2002.⁴⁰

In 2003, ALA's Office of Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) selected Tate as the Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecturer. In the abstract for the lecture, she wrote:

Technological advances in the 21st century have refocused libraries at the center of knowledge and information literacy. As leaders and promoters of literacy development for productive citizenry through these libraries, librarians and information specialists are in key positions to play pivotal roles in the design, implementation and assessment of programs and services for underserved and unserved populations in our diverse communities. The possibilities, opportunities, and resources needed to reach out and serve members of our remote, rural and urban areas have never been greater.

³⁸ *IFLA JOURNAL*, Volume 31 (2005) No. 3.

³⁹ *The Directory of Ethnic Professionals in LIS*.

⁴⁰ *IFLA JOURNAL*, Volume 31 (2005) No. 3

However, due to the lack of adequate access to information, many citizens suffer from literacy anemia that can threaten the productive power of our communities. Consider the potentials for productivity among unserved and underserved members of our communities. The staggering statistics on the lack of service to new and non-readers, the geographically isolated, persons with disabilities, the rural and urban poor people, and all those who struggle against various types of discrimination.

To what extent are librarians maximizing options resulting from advances in information technology to build initiatives that serve underserved and unserved populations in our communities? In light of the philosophy of literacy empowerment for societal development presented in the life and work of Jean Ellen Coleman, this paper highlights research, creative ideas and models from around the world for designing, implementing, and assessing literacy programs that can effectively serve the needs of diverse populations.

By reflecting on the impact of programs and services that have resulted in more literate populations who have contributed to community-based library innovations and services, librarians and information specialists will be inspired to create new literacy initiatives that empower our diverse populations with good decision-making skills for productivity in our society.⁴¹

⁴¹ Mrs. Tate H. Tate, "Unserved and Underserved Populations: Empowering People for Productivity in the 21st Century". 2003 Jean E. Coleman Outreach Lecture Abstract, Office of Outreach Services, American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/olos/olosprograms/jeanecoleman/2003colemanlecture>

Over the years, Tate contributed articles to several publications. In addition, she co-authored several books and received much professional acclaim for her bibliographies on mobile libraries.

Tate also devoted considerable attention to local concerns. She served on the executive board of the Urban League of Greater New Brunswick, as a member of the community advisory board of the Black Resource Center of New Brunswick, and chaired several committees at the United Presbyterian Church in Plainfield, New Jersey.⁴²

“Mrs. Thelma Tate understood that her work as a librarian allowed her not only to advance the highest ideals of her profession but also to create new opportunities to increase human dignity and spread knowledge, both locally and internationally.”⁴³

Tate’s life work had several themes: literacy, community, and accessibility. She once said in a newspaper interview, “Libraries are the heart of communities...They are a foundation to growth and development in a society.”⁴⁴

In her ALA Councilor statement, Tate wrote about her concerns: “Advances in technology will continue to propel librarians into expanding leadership roles for literacy and electronic information development. Because we are specialists in collections, organization, preservation, and instruction in a digital age, we as librarians will enrich and maximize access as well as strategies for evaluating and using resources. While library users will become increasingly proficient as independent learners, the dynamic nature of advances in technology support the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Rutgers Librarian is Going Global” by Sarah Greenblatt. *The Courier-News* (Bridgewater, N.J.), March 24, 2002, p. 20.

ongoing need for continued human intervention and instruction. If elected to ALA Council, I will work with members to effect guidelines, standards, and policies for a digital age that support literacy development, professional development of librarians, research and the need for instruction librarians in all types of libraries in the nation and throughout the international community.”⁴⁵

In a biographical sketch, she once wrote, “Tate thoroughly appreciates the challenges and rewards of being a librarian, teacher and author. She has learned much from her extensive travel to libraries worldwide since 1980s. She thinks that literacy is the foundation for family enrichment, good citizenship, community development and productivity. Books, magazines and information are key components of development in these areas.”⁴⁶

In her role as a mentor, Tate stated in 1988 that “there has been a strong decrease in the number of black students going into the area of librarianship, which has caused great concern for many of us who know that libraries, librarianship and resources are the keys to enhancement of black people especially within our urban cities where we have so few resources available.”⁴⁷

Selected Bibliography

⁴⁵ “Library Instruction Round Table News.

⁴⁶ Letter to author, April 10, 2002.

⁴⁷ S. Lynn Sanders, “Black Librarians Encourage Youth to Join Profession,” *Asbury Park Press*, November 25, 1988, 35.

Tate, Thelma H. "African Americans in International Librarianship" in *Handbook of Black librarianship*, edited by DeLoach, Marva L., and E. J. Josey, 611-629. Lanham, Md. [u.a.]: Scarecrow Press, 2000.

Tate, Thelma H. 1991. "APPENDIX A: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION RESOURCES IN THE UNITED STATES" in IFLA Publications, 55. Woolls, Blanche, and Miriam H. Tees. 1991. *Continuing professional education: an IFLA guidebook: a publication of the Continuing Professional Education Round Table (CPERT) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions*. München: New York.

Tate, Thelma H. 2002. *Camel Library Services in Kenya, July 22-28, 2001: Report on the Assessment of Non-Motorized Mobile Libraries*. The Hague: IFLA Headquarters.

Tate, Thelma H. 2002. *The donkey drawn mobile library services in Zimbabwe, August 6-13, 2001: report on the assessment of non-motorized mobile libraries*. The Hague: IFLA Headquarters.

Tate, Thelma, and Jean E. (Jean Ellen) Coleman. 2003. *4th annual Jean E. Coleman library outreach lecture*. [Sun Valley, Calif.]: Produced and distributed by Teach'em.

Tate, Thelma H. "Global Outreach Services: Outreach" in *Academic Libraries* in *From Outreach to Equity: Innovative Models of Library Policy and Practice*, edited by Robin Osborne, 48-9. Chicago: American Library Association, 2004.

Tate, Thelma H. 1992. *Mobile libraries in the world community 1980-1992: an annotated bibliography*. The Hague: IFLA Headquarters.

Tate, Thelma H. 2001. *Report on the assessment of non-motorized mobile libraries: camel library services in Kenya, July 22-28, 2001*. [Place of publication not identified]: IFLA.

Tate, Thelma H. 2012. *Women in Agriculture*. Routledge.

<http://www.mylibrary.com?id=402159>.