

Doris Hargrett Clack, 1928–1995: Educator, Gentle Activist, and Mentor

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The future is longer than the past!" she used to tell us in class. It was Doris Clack's first year as a full-time professor, twenty-two years ago, at the Florida State University School of Library Science. Back then the required beginning course, LIS 521—Cataloging & Classification, was a six-credit-hour course, and FSU was still under the quarter system. There were more than a few of us in that class who had never planned to be catalogers. But Clack's enthusiasm was infectious. She made us understand how the library catalog was a product of lasting substance created solely by librarians; the other services provided by librarians, while certainly of great value, were by nature more intangible and fleeting in significance. If catalogers are conscientious and do their work well, they not only leave a permanent record of their efforts, but they also perform a service that is essential to support the reference staff's fulfillment of our library patrons' needs. There was a lot of theory discussed in her lectures, not just the practitioner's rules. We might not have believed it then, but in later years we discovered that the theoretical foundation that had been drummed into us would come back to aid us at times when we had to face challenging questions related to cataloging or classification.

When Doris Clack died of cancer, on November 22, 1995, some people were shocked to learn that she was sixty-seven

years old. She had always been so elegant, tall and fashionably dressed, with a milk-chocolate complexion, a beautiful smile, and regal posture. It was not the first time that I'd heard expressions of surprise upon the discovery of our beloved professor's real age. Back in 1974, Clack's graduate assistant, Michele Newberry Dalehite, was working at library school one day when one of our fellow students passed by and reported excitedly to Michele that he had seen Clack's dissertation from the University of Pittsburgh, and that, according to information in it, she was forty-five years old! The word spread around the place, and everyone was stunned. We swore she didn't look a day over thirty, and she certainly didn't act like some old, middle-aged person. Well, she was serious about cataloging and firm, even strict, in teaching us the discipline. But she also seemed very caring, and she followed the fashion trends, and—dare I say it?—somebody saw her at ALA once when she had her hair in an Afro! Groovy!

The graduate assistant, Michele, took all of the courses that Clack offered, and later, with a fresh M.L.S. degree, was hired by a fledgling organization in Atlanta called SOLINET. Over the next several years Michele became known all over the Southeast as she trained catalogers in the MARC format and this new online cataloging network, OCLC. Michele has done other work since then, has continually been involved in

professional associations, and just last year assumed the presidency of the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA)! Doris Clack was so proud of Michele, as she was of all her former students who went on to make their own contributions to the profession. It pleased her to think, and she was not mistaken in this, that she may have had a part in inspiring the achiever to reach for success.

No one would deny that Clack approached her calling as an educator with a sense of dedication that seemed almost boundless. In addition to presenting her best effort to degree-seeking students, Clack took on responsibility for continuing education of catalogers all over North Florida and surrounding regions. She was good. And when they asked her to speak, to help train them, she could never say no. There were workshops on *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR)* revised chapter 6 and, later, on *AACR2*, on the *Dewey Decimal Classification* 19 and 20, on filing rules, on MARC formats, and on cataloging for nonbook materials, micro-computer software, or archives and manuscripts. Practitioners assembled in Tallahassee, Gainesville, Panama City, Miami, Tampa, Orlando, Daytona, or St. Augustine (in Florida), and in Birmingham, Alabama, or Jackson, Mississippi, to learn from Doris Clack the latest rules and practices they needed to be effective in their jobs. People still talk about the March 1979 International Conference on *AACR2* that was held in Tallahassee and organized by Clack. This was what we now call "cutting edge" stuff, with *AACR2* just hot off the presses and speakers like Michael Gorman, Ben Tucker, Ronald Hagler, et al. Participants were 228 librarians from all over the United States, and from Canada, Great Britain, and Puerto Rico. Seven years later, Clack recognized the significance of another new development when she invited the Library of Congress' Mary K. D. Pietris to Tallahassee to introduce catalogers to the *Subject Cataloging Manual: Subject Headings*. It was 1986, and that event, called the "Workshop on Subject Access in Libraries," also featured a young scholar whom Clack had characterized as

a "rising star" in the profession, Karen Markey (now Karen M. Drabenstott).

When the university changed to the semester system, in the early 1980s, the required cataloging course became a four-hour, one-semester class. This meant fewer total class contact hours to cover basic theory and practice, while at the same time, new issues and trends had to be addressed, such as MARC, the bibliographic utilities, retrospective conversion, and new catalog formats (COM and online). It was difficult making the necessary adjustments to scope and extent in the course content. Clack began to develop a reputation as a demanding professor, and the course was feared by some students who didn't want to be challenged in a class that they had already decided they would not like. Nevertheless, after some news about Doris Clack's death was posted on the Internet, more than a dozen unsolicited responses were received from appreciative and admiring former students as far away as Indiana and California.

"Doris Clack was such an enthusiastic teacher and such an encourager," said one message. Another person admitted that "Clack really had to work with me to help my poor brain understand cataloging . . . she was a wonderful lady and she will live in my memories, with a smile." In a similar vein: "Although I didn't excel at cataloging, she made it an interesting course, and I have always admired her accomplishments and character." And "I was far from her most distinguished student, but there was no way I could not like, respect, and admire her. She was a great woman and a great lady." One final tribute, from a colleague in South Florida: "I had known she was ill for quite some time, but it still hurts to know that one of the greats at FSU is no longer with us. . . . I can honestly say that she inspired me to become a competent cataloger. . . . I no longer catalog since I am now a manager. But her lessons about quality and caring about what is truly important will always remain with me." She made scholarly contributions to our field, as well, which have influenced teachers, students, and practitioners who never had the fortune of meeting her. Among the books authored or edited by Clack, at least

two have been published by the American Library Association: *Authority Control: Principles, Applications and Instructions* (1990) and *The Making of a Code: The Issues Underlying AACR2* (1980). Another book, *Black Literature Resources: Analysis and Organization* (1975), published by M. Dekker, became an essential aid to collection analysis in the area of black studies, as well as a tool for evaluating possible prejudice or biases in the subject heading and classification treatments of racial minorities. Many of her articles (at least ten) on these and related subjects were published in professional journals, particularly *Library Resources & Technical Services* and *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*.

Her record of service in professional organizations was staggering. A member of many executive boards and committees, at various times she also served as chair of the Cataloging and Classification Section of the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services (ALCTS), its Subject Analysis Committee (SAC), its Council of Regional Groups, and the Association for College & Research Libraries Afro-American Studies Librarians Section. This ALA-related activism prompted several of her colleagues from other universities to share the following sentiments. "I was shocked to hear of Doris Clack's passing. . . . My, this is quite a loss." "She was a most conscientious professional and a congenial person." "I got to know her mostly when she was chair of SAC, and I developed a lot of respect for her—a real professional but always considerate and kindly."

This manner of hers, the ability to couple a businesslike intellect with human compassion, did not go unnoticed at Florida State University. Not only was she elected twice as the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) representative to the Faculty Senate, she was also called upon to serve on some of the most difficult university committees, including search committees for new deans of the SLIS, of the College of Education, and of Graduate Studies.

Amazingly, this remarkable professor also found time to be active in her com-

munity and in her church. In the 1970s she was vice president of the Parent-Teacher Association at her children's school, and she was the den mother for Boy Scout Pack 87 for four years! Shortly after I had completed my M.L.S., I heard her mention the Boy Scouts, and I asked her how on earth she could find time for that. She said that she'd decided to make the time for it, because it was important that she be involved and spend time with her two sons. This was when I learned that the two boys had been fairly young when she'd gone to Pittsburgh to work toward her Ph.D. They had remained with their father, Doris's devoted husband, Harold Clack, in Tallahassee. After seven years as a high-school teacher, followed by fourteen years as Head of Cataloging and then Head of Technical Services at Florida A & M University Library, and the birth of two sons, here was this woman at the brink of middle age, going up north to work on another academic degree. "I had to do it," she told me, and she mentioned that sometimes it's necessary to make sacrifices to accomplish your true goals in life, when you finally realize what your vocation should be. The women's liberation movement, around this time, was paying a lot of lip service to the notions that women could do anything men could do and that women have the right to be strong and to determine their own destinies. Clack did not talk about it. She did it. And that was the most enduring lesson, perhaps, that she taught to me and many other students, of both sexes.

Doris was an African-American. Her ethnic heritage was an important part of her identity. This may not have been obvious to her students, because in class she was always focused on the purpose and realities of Cataloging and classification. But she had many commitments and involvements, with the university's Black Student Union, the campus Equal Opportunity committees, and M. L. King Distinguished Service awards, as well as a long and extensive service record in the Black Caucus of ALA. During the last decade of her life, Clack found a way to combine her talent and skill as a teacher with her interest in her ancestors' homelands. She spent

a year in Nigeria teaching in the Department of Library Science, University of Maiduguri. During that year, she visited, did consultant work, and gave lectures about information organization and about technology in libraries in cities and towns all over Nigeria. Six years later, in 1994, she was able to return to Africa, this time to Ghana, where she made speeches at the University of Ghana and also before the Council of Catalogers in Academic Libraries. And only six months before her death, she went to Uganda to lecture at a workshop on authority control. At her funeral service last November, we were told that everyone in West Africa who came to know her loved her, and this I do believe. One friend in Morso, Ghana, even named her daughter after her, Doris Clack Donker.

Clack was ordained as a deaconess in the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Tallahassee in 1995. Eventually she found time for all things important, didn't she? I will never forget how she used to tell us in class, "The future is longer than the past!" Oh, I know . . . the context always had something to do with Cataloging. It could have been a decision to change the library's whole collection over to the LC Classification. It might have been a revision to rules for forms of names, one

which would make access to materials more "user-friendly." Or, it may have been the effort we later had to make to learn and implement that complicated MARC format, while we were still filing cards and that "online" catalog seemed like somebody's pipe dream. "The future is longer than the past!" It was an expression so positive, forward looking, and full of hope that I have been able to use it to help guide me, not only in my professional career, but also in my personal life, when I have had to make a commitment to change. I know that I am not alone when I say, Dr. Clack, you were a wonderful educator, a gentle but effective activist, and, above all, a strong role model, or mentor—in short, an inspiration to us all!

Memorial contributions are being accepted to establish a cataloging scholarship; donors should write "Clack Memorial" on the memo line of checks made payable to the FSU Foundation and mail these to Dean Jane B. Robbins, School of Library and Information Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2048. Another memorial fund supports the Bethel Christian Academy, for which donations may be mailed to: Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, 224 N. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Tallahassee, FL 32301.

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