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AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLTEACHERS OF THE
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RACE, CLASS, GENDER AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION: AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLTEACHERS OF THE URBAN MIDWEST, 1865-1950

By

John B. Reid

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ABSTRACT

RACE, CLASS, GENDER AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION: AFRICAN AMERICAN SCHOOLTEACHERS OF THE URBAN MIDWEST, 1865-1945

By

John B. Reid

African American women teachers were prominent members of the African American communities of Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like ministers, teachers' image combined knowledge and respectability, traits particularly important to African Americans because of a tradition of exclusion from education and stereotypes of African American ignorance. African American women in the classroom faced additional obstacles, in particular the stereotypes of African American women's licentiousness and morally degeneracy. In the pre-Civil Rights movement context covered in this study (1865-1950), the very act of teaching mixed-race classes constituted an act of resistance to and a strike against these stereotypes. In addition, these teachers worked to equalize the treatment of African Americans in the classroom and to reform the school curriculum to better reflect the interests of African Americans. Outside the classroom, a large percentage of these teachers participated in the community relief and education work of Colored Women's Clubs, and a disproportionate number of teachers filled leadership positions in these clubs. Furthermore, several teachers wrote books or articles that sought to aid the African American community. These works include books on African American history, books for children, and beauty and etiquette handbooks. Because these teachers were nearly all women, and because the influence of teachers on their

communities declined in the last few decades, historians have mostly ignored their roles in African American communities.

In addition to restoring teachers to their place of prominence in early African American cities, this project addresses other problems: 1) the paucity of historical treatments of African American women's history, particularly African American women professionals; 2) the relationship between race and class in African American history; and 3) the current crisis in African American education. The body of data used for this study includes the following: collected papers of African American educators and their family; the records of public education systems; examination of newspapers, both mainstream and African American; U.S. Census records; the records of African American organizations, both local and national, such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs; and other relevant historical materials relating to Midwestern African American communities before 1950 which includes amateur histories, collections of newspaper clippings, and unpublished writings.

For Toni Wodrich, without whom this could not have been completed, and for Tanya, to whom I owe everything

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INTRODUCTION

Like the crisis currently being experienced by United States urban centers as a whole, urban schools in African American communities are weathering difficult times. The three most pressing problems facing these schools are the quality of education available to urban African American youngsters, the ability of these students to move into higher educational institutions, and the declining diversity of urban teaching forces. Increased diversity of the teaching force alone would help improve the quality of the educational experience for African American students; researchers have found that the diversity of the teaching force has a direct influence on the quality of education for African American students. Unfortunately, a trend in the opposite direction threatens the education of African American students even more. In 1963, twelve percent of the urban teaching force was African American. In 1989, that figure had gone down to eight percent and was falling. Researchers predict the percentage of African American teachers in the classroom will fall all the way to five percent by the year 2000 with no end to the decline in sight.[1]

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[1] Bernard Watson, "Problems and Potentials in Urban Education," *Journal of Negro Education* 58, 3 (1989): 309, 310, 313. Leonard C. Beckum, Arlene Zimny, and Amy Elizabeth Fox, "The Urban Landscape: Educating for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of Negro Education*, 58, 3 (1989): 433. Joseph Stewart, Jr., "In Quest of Role Models: Change in Black Teacher Representation in Urban School Districts 1968-86," *Journal of Negro Education*, 58, 2 (1989): 143. For a discussion of the role of African American teachers in the creation of African American

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In addition, the benefits of increasing the diversity of the teaching are limited due to the nature of public education itself. Public education systems in large cities are the product of nineteenth century cities whose staggering population growth led them to seek to use schools as new means of social control. The goal of controlling and indoctrinating students continues into the present, and this somewhat limits the change that African American teachers can effect. An expert in contemporary urban education has found that African American teachers in urban areas work within a "deep structure of schooling" that individuals or small groups are virtually powerless to change. Two factors limit this power: the control orientation of school policy and curriculum, and the reliance on test scores to measure success.[2] However this power is not total. African American teachers have and continue to work for positive change within classrooms.

This study seeks to place this situation in its historical context through an examination of the history of African American educators in the urban Upper Midwest, in particular the cities of Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit from the Civil War era until 1950. The Upper Midwest was chosen as the setting for this study because the history of African American education in these cities has not received the attention given to that subject in either the South or the Northeast. As the three largest cities in the Upper Midwest, Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit have served as leaders of the region in their initial desegregation of public education and in the subsequent

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education within the context of the African American self-help tradition and the social control function of education, see Chapters 1 and 2.

[2] Martha Montero-Sierburth, "Restructuring Teachers' Knowledge for Urban Settings," *Journal of Negro Education*, 58, 3 (1989): 337.

decline of those schools serving the majority of African American students in the region. In addition, during the ninety years covered by this study, African American teachers in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit were at the epicenter of urban and educational developments such as the desegregation of schools and faculties, the institution and hardening of rigid residential segregation in these cities, and the subsequent decline of their schools.

In addition to contributing to an understanding of contemporary problems in urban education, this study also contributes to the field of African American history as a whole, and in particular the history of African American women. As a region, the Midwest has been comparatively understudied by scholars of African American history. In addition, until recently nearly all works of African American history have contained an important lacuna: for the most part, they ignore African American women.[3] The emerging study of African American women's history demonstrates that

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[3] Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women in the Middle West: The Michigan Experience," 24. An important recent work that includes the experiences of Midwestern African American women is Richard Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992). Historians are just beginning to look at the lives and activities of African American women, and very little has been written about African American women in Michigan. Darlene Clark Hine, "Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women's History in Slavery and Freedom," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986). Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women in the Middle West: the Michigan Experience," lecture published by the Historical Society of Michigan, 1990. The first studies to emerge in this field were Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Women's Role in the Community of Slaves," *Black Scholar*, III (1971), 2-15. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn edited *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images* (New York, 1978), a pioneering work on African American women's history. However, scholarly historical works on African American women did not emerge in large numbers until the decade of the 1980s. Two of the most significant of these are Deborah Gray White's *Arn't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W.

African American history as a whole cannot be understood without an examination of the African American women.

This project also seeks to contribute to two subfields of African American history: African American educational and urban history.[4] Although considerable

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Norton & Co., 1985) and Jacqueline Jones' *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985). Both emphasize the unique slave and work experience of African American women in the South. In the 1990s, African American Women's history received a tremendous boost with the publication of the three major works: Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1990); Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1993); and Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, eds., *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1995).

[4] Work on the history of African American education began in the early twentieth century with Carter Woodson's pioneering studies. Woodson concentrated on documenting the history of African American education, and his work reveals a faith in the power of education to reform the social order. Horace Mann Bond's work in the 1930s focused on the perpetuation of inequality due to the failure of Southern states to provide equal education. An integrationist perspective dominated African American educational history in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Willard Range and Elizabeth Peck wrote books that discussed the historical successes and failures of integration of colleges in Georgia and Kentucky, while Louis B. Harlan's *Separate But Unequal* analyzed the limitations of separate schooling in the South as well as the education's inability to eliminate prejudice among whites. Stimulated by the work of Herbert Gutman and John Blassingame, the 1970s writing of African American educational history emphasized the role of education in the building of African American communities. Franklin and Anderson's *New Perspectives on Black Educational History* exemplifies a trend in the field to discuss the education of African American communities, leaders, and professionals. James D. Anderson's recent study of Southern African American education is an exception. Following the lead of the revisionists in American educational history, Anderson focuses on inequalities in the Southern system of education and its subsequent role in the maintenance of race and class barriers to first class citizenship. Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York: Arno Press, 1915). Willard Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951). Elizabeth Peck, *Berea: First Century, 1855-1955* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955). Louis B. Harlan, *Separate But Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958). James D. Anderson, *The Education of*

work has been done in these areas, significant work remains to be done. According to William H. Harris, the subfield of African American educational history needs more studies of the educators themselves and individual school districts rather than broad studies of African American education.[5] Historians, according to Harris, must also look beyond what happened in the schools and analyze its impact on the community.[6] As for urban history, much of what has been written about African American education and educators in the urban Midwest has been a small part of larger studies of studies of urban areas.[7]

Like Darlene Clark Hine's *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950*, this study of African American professional women will seek to inform us about the interrelationships of gender, class, and race as well as the role of African American professional women in the struggle for African American liberation.[8] The study of African American women

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Blacks in the South, 1860-1935 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[5] William H. Harris, "Trends and Needs in Afro-American Historiography." In Darlene Clark Hine, ed. *The State of Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986): 150.

[6] Ibid., 146.

[7] For example, see David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); and Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).

[8] Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

schoolteachers is particularly important because their education, high standing in the African American community, and roles as educators of youths allowed them to make major contributions to the struggles for equal education, social welfare, political rights, and liberation, in spite of their relatively small numbers. Studies of the activities and experiences of African American professional women on both national and local levels are needed to fill in this historiography. To date, historians have done very little on African American professional women in the Upper Midwest.[9] A few articles on African American women educators have appeared, but they deal with Southern teachers for the most part.[10] Therefore, a project on the African American women educators in the Upper Midwest would make a unique contribution to this historiography.

This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of all of the above by examining the lives and careers of African American teachers in these three cities as

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For another examples of this kind of study, see and Beverly W. Jones, "Race, Sex, and Class: Black Female Tobacco Workers in Durham, North Carolina, 1920-1940, and the Development of Female Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1984), 441-51. An interesting analysis of race, class, and gender can be found in Evelyn Brooks Higginbothom, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992), 251-74.

[9] Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women in the Middle West: The Michigan Experience," 24.

[10] To date, very little has been written on black teachers, and nearly all of that concerns teachers in the segregated schools of the South. Some examples are Sharon Harley, "Beyond the Classroom: The Organizational Lives of Black Female Educators in the District of Columbia, 1890-1930," *Journal of Negro Education*, 51 (1982), 254-65; Melinda Chateauvert, "The Third Step: Anna Julia Cooper and Black Education in the District of Columbia, 1910-1960," *Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women*, student supplement 1988, 7-13; Sandra N. Smith, "Charlotte Hawkins Brown," *Journal of Negro Education*, 51 (1982), 191-206.

individuals and as a group. It responds to the needs pointed out by Harris in that it is an examination of individual educators within specific school districts. It contributes to urban history as a work devoted entirely to the African American educators within major Midwestern cities.

A word or two about the available sources is required. When first approaching this topic, I expected to find an abundance of primary source material. After all, literacy was a prerequisite for a teaching position. In addition, I assumed that early African American teachers would be cognizant of their historical importance and would have preserved copious records. I entered the research believing the difficulty would come from too many records rather than too few. As a naive graduate student, I had not yet realized that no historian finds the amount of sources he or she would like.

However, I was quickly disabused of this notion. Reconstructing the history of African American schoolteachers in the Upper Midwest was an arduous task. As far as published sources go, teachers received only occasional mention, and these mentions were most often related to non-teaching activities. In other words, African American teachers as a group were rarely treated as an important group in the published literature; African American barbers almost always received considerably more treatment. As for the unpublished sources, very few collections of African American teachers' papers exist in public repositories at this time, although I believe a good deal of material must be held in private hands waiting to be discovered. Furthermore, the collections that do exist are very much lacking in substantive material. For example, I was not able to uncover one diary of an African American

teacher in the area and time period of this study, although I was able to find several diaries of European American teachers. Nor was I able to find any of these teachers' teaching materials, relegating the actual classroom practices of these teachers virtually unknown.

On the positive side, the community work undertaken by so many teachers was fairly well-documented. Records of community work figure prominently in many collected papers, and newspapers, both mainstream and African American, carried some coverage of these efforts allowing me to piece together some aspects of this work. For this reason, the dissertation has looked a great deal at the work of teachers outside of the classroom and looks little within the classroom itself. Future researchers will certainly uncover materials that open a window into classrooms, but this dissertation cannot.

The dissertation is organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the context within which these teachers worked, including an examination of the tension between the use of education for social control or for liberation in the histories of Midwestern public education and the histories of the African American communities in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. Chapter 2 then looks at the role of education in the African American tradition of self-help as well as the historiography of African American education. Chapter 3 looks at the first generation of African American public educators in Detroit, Michigan. These were not the first African American educators in the region by any means; African American men and women have worked to educate young people in their communities for as long as these communities have existed. They were, however, the first to enter

the mainstream public education systems as they desegregated in the years following the end of the Civil War. As such they were pioneers, teaching students of all races and ethnicities in classes where, in contrast to separated school systems, only a few of the students were themselves African American. After discussing the process of desegregation itself, Chapter 3 emphasizes the barriers these teachers broke and the way they viewed education as part of a larger role as aiding their community. They pursued the goal of aiding their community through their work in the classroom, but they also were active and accomplished outside the classroom as well.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 look at teachers in each of the three subject cities separately in order to examine these histories in more detail. Chapter 4 examines in detail at the life and career of one African American teacher, Azalia Smith Hackley. Hackley is significant to the story as a whole because she exemplifies one of the many teachers who used the public education system as a stepping stone to pursue other educational activities. Hackley was an exceptional educator who came to specialize in music education and took her teaching all over the United States. Chapter 5 examines Chicago's African American teachers, in particular the role of African American political influence in obtaining teaching positions in the highly politicized Chicago public school system. Chapter 6 focuses on Cleveland the careers of three African American teachers in the twentieth century and demonstrates the transition of the public education system and the experiences of the teaching corps due to the Great Migration of the World War I era.

On the whole, a look at the lives of these women demonstrates that in each of these cities, African American women schoolteachers had a dramatic impact on the

community, working inside and outside of the classroom to elevate the race and to fight negative perceptions of African American womanhood.[11] The teachers were able to take advantage of the community's respect for them and their connections to the community through their extensive involvement in women's clubs, farmers' clubs, organizations for boys and girls, and school improvement leagues. This range of connections made teachers one of the primary means of spreading information about Northern cities to southerners.[12] Yet in spite of the limitations imposed by urban educational systems and the stereotypes that continued to confine African American women, these teachers were active proponents of an ideology of racial advancement and empowerment. Responding to both the special circumstances of African American women's oppression and racial oppression as a whole, African American teachers used their special skills—namely public speaking and writing— to move forward the struggle for liberation.

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[11] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: the Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

[12] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 92-3. Chicago *Defender*, March 24, 1917 and January 31, 1920.

Chapter 1

To Liberate or Control?: Education, Urban Schools, and the Upper Midwest

A major component of American ideology is that education holds the key to success and happiness. But the pursuit of the good life through education is complicated by its often contradictory nature and purposes. Individualism, equality, social order, self-improvement, moral development—all have been goals of American educators and educational systems. The diverse goals and values have been partially the result of the diverse philosophies of its supporters.[1] Conservatives, progressives, intellectuals, and businesses have all looked to educational institutions as keys to the world they envision. The constructors of most of the United States' educational institutions, has been most interested in their social order function of education. On the other hand, ordinary working people have sought education based on their belief in its power to socially, politically, and economically advance both individuals and groups. Both groups have constantly negotiated the function of education, but it the social order advocates who have had an advantage in this struggle due to their superior access to capital and their grip on state and city governments.[1] Perhaps

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[1] Henry S. Perkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education 1865-1965* (New York: Random House, 1968), 219. Raymond Mohl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1985), 161. Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America*

because of the contradictions in both American ideology and American education, attitudes toward education have been ambivalent. The use of public funds for free education has been a struggle, probably because its functions have been so unclear. Regardless of these tensions, the American people as a whole have placed a great deal of faith in education to cure various ills.[2]

The history of American education from its beginnings in the colonial era has reflected these tensions. The goal of education in colonial Massachusetts was in keeping with the goals of the society as a whole to create a pious and harmonious community. The education provided for the citizens of colonial Massachusetts was designed to teach the literacy skills needed for religious study and the principles of good citizenship. The Massachusetts Law of 1642, America's first school law, called for the appointment of people "to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country." In addition, the colonial system was divided into two sections, grammar schools for children of the elite bound for college, and reading and writing schools that provided minimal education to the rest of the population. While the grammar schools offered a curriculum in the Classics that reflected a Renaissance vision of the properly educated person, reading and writing schools were concerned with instruction in minimal reading skills that would allow individuals to learn for themselves the work of God and proper religious behavior. This latter type of education is a direct descendent of the schools that emerged in sixteenth century

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1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1981), 147-8.

[2] Perkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea*, 219.

England as the Protestant Reformation placed more responsibility on the individual for the acquirement of religious education. The goals of pre-Revolutionary education were the preparation of persons for a pious life and to confer status.[3] Even at this early stage, education served mainly to maintain social differentiation rather than minimize it.

The post-Revolutionary education continued to emphasize order but for the first time came to be accepted as an institution whose purpose was the service of public policy. Many Americans began to believe that education was needed to build patriotic spirit, to shape good citizens, and to reform society. Order continued to be important because of the general concern that freedom be exercised virtuously in order to prevent the triumph of chaos. In addition, schools came to serve as selectors and nurturers of leadership talent, a role previously handled by an aristocracy. As government leaders saw education as a useful tool in the governing of society, the creation of an organized system of education began to make sense. On the whole, according to historian Rush Welter, the Founding Fathers' principles of education tended "to stress the conservative role of educational institutions in overcoming an excess of popular liberty."[4]

Early nineteenth century Americans increasingly looked to institutions to perfect the individual and to create a good society, and a system of common schooling

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[3] Joel Spring, *The American School 1642-1985: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education* (New York: Longman, 1986), 2-4.

[4] Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 27. Joel Spring, *The American School 1642-1985*, 2-4, 28, 31-2.

is in keeping with this system of beliefs. The foundations of common schooling lie in the urban charity schools of the 1790s and 1800s. In conjunction with juvenile reformatories, these schools sought to socialize children into the emerging industrial order and in so doing help eliminate the scourges of crime and poverty. The 1830s and 1840s witnessed the rapid expansion of Common schools movement, a movement distinguished by the establishment and standardization of state systems of education designed to achieve specific public policy goals. Before 1830, a number of cities had formal systems of schooling. Boston had a formal system of education by the 1790s. Ohio created a school fund in 1827. Some states such as New York and Pennsylvania supported charity schools, but a majority of children attended private schools. But none of these systems shared the principles of the Common School movement, namely that state controlled schools should teach a common body of knowledge to students from different social backgrounds. Placing students of different backgrounds in one room or building and teaching them a common body of knowledge combines post-revolutionary education's goal of promoting national unity and the charity school's goal of reducing social conflict, particularly violence and crime. Common schools also explicitly accepted the direct role between schooling and government policies. To carry out these policies, state legislatures created state agencies to run the schools. Again, state agencies had existed before — New York created the first superintendent of schools in 1821 — but by the 1830s the move to create educational bureaucracies became one of the major educational reforms of the era.[5]

The ideology of the Common School movement, most prominently delineated

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[5] Spring, *The American School*, 70-2.

by Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, established the framework for both popular and official discussions about the goals and purposes of public education in the United States. These arguments claimed that public schooling could solve society's major problems. In fact, they went so far as to claim that public schooling was necessary for the very survival of American society. Mann's perspective on the situation is instructive. A lawyer, Mann left the practice of law to pursue the creation and expansion of common schooling in Massachusetts with an almost religious fervor. Mann's belief in the need to reform society through the moral improvement of individuals was cemented by two incidents in 1848. In one, someone tried to start a fire in an adjoining hotel room. "A gang of incendiaries infest the city. What a state of morals it reveals," said Mann. Two weeks later, a riot broke out in Boston between Catholics and Protestants. His letters reveal that he believed proper education of popular opinion could prevented this type of riot in the future. Mann summed up his philosophy this way: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Most educational reformers of the time shared these beliefs with only minor variations. However, this ideology posed two problems: inevitable conflict over what would be the political and religious content of the common curriculum, and the fact that the power of education to transform society was not and remains unproven.[6]

Reformers like Mann viewed education as primarily a social control institution. The distinct temporal connection between the formation of an American working class and the creation of other state institutions of control such as poorhouses, hospitals for

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[6] Spring, *The American School*, 82-84.

the mentally ill, and prisons puts this effort is into relief.[7] However, reformers with goals of social control did not create common schools alone. Working people were also interested in common schools. This interest was expressed through workingmen's parties in the 1820s and 1830s whose political campaigns contained explicit advocacy of common schooling. But whereas reformers stressed the importance of common schooling to eliminate crime, poverty, and social friction, workingmen's parties argued for common schooling as a means to help workers protect themselves against political and economic exploitation. They also advocated education as a means for workers to gain political and economic power. This perspective is unique to the United States because of the distinctive form of Democratic politics that emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century, with universal white male suffrage and relatively high rates of voter turnout. In the United States, as opposed to Europe, the white-male working class tended to view the state as an ally and joined in a coalition supporting such schools because they viewed those schools as being in keeping with their interests. In addition, the United States committed itself in the nineteenth century to a civic culture based on democratic participation, excepting women and racial minorities. Both reformers and working people agreed that this culture required a means of transmitting democratic principles. With this coalition of reformers and working people, common schooling became the American norm. Massachusetts

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[7] Katz, *Reconstructing American Education*, 7-9. W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), 25.; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 11-13; Gerald N. Grob, *The State and the Mentally Ill: A History fo Worcester State Hospital in Massachusetts, 1830-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 62.

passed the first compulsory education law in 1851. But in this coalition lies the conflict that remains in public education: its dual role in liberating people through the distribution of knowledge and skills and in seeking to create, perpetuate, and control society through the training of young people.[8]

This dual function of education continued to be a problem in the latter half of the nineteenth century as schools expanded their social and economic functions to fill the vacuums of social control and social welfare in the new metropolises. The transformation of the United States from an agrarian nation to one where the majority of people lived in cities forced a reevaluation of ways of living in this new social context. The social problems brought about by this rapid urbanization are well-known: overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, an increase in poverty and crime, the breakdown of traditional family and community structures, and conflicts emerging from cities with a majority foreign-born population.

In urban areas, schools responded in two ways to the new challenges of urban living. First, public schools expanded their scope of activities to play a more central role in the lives of urban residents. The years of schooling were themselves increased with the quick adoption of Kindergartens after the first opened in St. Louis in 1873 explicitly to replace the habits and morals previously taught by families. By the 1890s, kindergartens had become one of the major school reforms of the era. Boston's first director of kindergartens wrote:

The mere fact that the children of the slums were kept off the streets, and that

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[8] Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 6-7, 51. Spring, *The American School*, 90-92. Welter, *Popular Education*, 51-52.

> they were made clean and happy by kind and motherly young women; that the child thus being cared for enabled the mother to go about her work in or outside the home—all this appealed to the heart of America, and America gave freely to make these kindergartens possible.[9]

Schools continued their expansion with the creation of summer schools, adult night courses, playgrounds, and Americanization programs. All were explicitly created to help control the new urban masses whose presence threatened the American social order. Nevertheless, native-born and immigrants alike flocked to urban schools, and without coercion. While social control may have been the intention of the designers of urban schools, they also clearly responded to the needs and desires of urban residents who strove to use education to empower themselves.[10]

A look at the historiography of education points to growing awareness of the complex relationship between education's social control and empowerment functions. The conservative school, following the lead of Ellwood P. Cubberly, continues to emphasize the positive aspects of education in America especially its role in promoting progress and its availability to all members of society.[11] In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s a group of revisionist scholars of education emerged, most notably

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[9] Quoted in Marvin Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870-1915* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 50.

[10] Spring, *The American School*, 159-69, 181.

[11] Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1919). An example of a more contemporary work that shares Cubberly's perspective is Harry S. Good and James D. Teller, *A History of American Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

Michael B. Katz, Joel Spring, and David B. Tyack.[12] These historians drew attention to the role of educational institutions in the distribution of social rewards and power. Katz particularly has pointed out the role of public education in the attempt to restore order to the burgeoning nineteenth century cities.[13] Really, to make their case they need to look no further than Cubberly himself who wrote in 1909:

> Our task is to break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as a part of our American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth.[14]

However, more recent scholarship has challenged this emphasis on the role of education as a means of controlling and shaping the masses. A number of historians, particularly those specializing in histories of the American working class, have criticized revisionist interpretations for their treatment of the worker, the immigrant, and the average citizen as nothing more than pawns in the hands of society's elite. Research has demonstrated that on the contrary, average citizens played an active role in the shaping of American educational institutions. David Hogan's article

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[12] Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) and *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Joel Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: the History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974). James D. Anderson is one historian who is part of this revisionist school who focuses on black education. James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[13] Katz, *Reconstructing American Education*, 23.

[14] Elwood P. Cubberley, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 15-16.

"Education and the Making of the Chicago Working Class, 1880-1930," provided the first blow to the revisionist school by demonstrating that immigrant children attended public schools in increasing numbers, going from approximately sixty percent attendance in 1910 to near ninety-five percent in 1930, without coercion. Instead, this increased school attendance was the result of increasing belief among immigrant families that education provided the means toward long-term economic stability. Julia Wrigley's *Class Politics and Public Schools: Chicago, 1900-1950* also challenged the revisionist perspective. Wrigley found that although Chicago's business elite did make efforts to create and maintain an educational system that would turn out docile but not "over-educated" workers, workers themselves, primarily through labor unions, worked to promote education that would empower workers economically.[15] The current state of the historiography, then, is an acknowledgement of a complex interrelationship between designs of social control from the creators and operators of educational systems as well as many of society's elite and the masses of average people who sought education that would empower them.

The histories of public education systems in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit reflect the tensions between order and liberation as well. Within the context of rapidly expanding cities with large populations unfamiliar with life in an urban environment, mechanisms of control began to emerge. In the cities of the Upper Midwest, public educational systems became epicenters of the struggles for liberation and control

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[15] David Hogan, "Education and the Making of the Chicago Working Class, 1880-1930," *History of Education Quarterly* (Fall 1978): 227-244. Julia Wrigley, *Class Politics and Public Schools: Chicago, 1900-50* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 13.

within which concepts of race, class, and gender were inextricably tangled.

The school systems of the three cities involved in this study — Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit — emerged generally in the pattern described above though somewhat later. In 1825 the legislature of the new state of Illinois passed a law requiring every county to make provisions for common schools. However, uproar over the taxes to support this forced this law to be repealed in 1827. From 1834 to 1854 Chicago was a frontier town, and its educational system reflected that fact. From a young Easterner teaching twelve children, eight of them native Americans, the schools progressed slowly in size and quality. Teachers, only a very few of them trained in East Coast training institutions, taught eighty to one hundred students in small, poorly ventilated wooden buildings. In 1854 the City Council of Chicago began the process of professionalizing its school system by hiring John Dore as Superintendent. The position of school superintendent was still new at this time; Boston had hired its first Superintendent only four years earlier. In 1857, the City Council created a fifteen-person Board of Education to oversee the schools. Dore's successor, William Harvey Wells, took office in 1856. Wells had come from Massachusetts where he had attended the first teacher training institution in the United States and had initiated the American Normal School Association in order to promote the training of teachers. Wells created a High School, a new concept with precedents in Philadelphia in 1838 and New York City in 1849, and created a two-year teacher training course within the High School in order to provide Chicago schools with trained teachers. His most noted accomplishment was dividing the Chicago school population into grades, each with its own curriculum. Wells published the detailed

instructions on material to be covered in each grade in *A Graded Course of Instruction with Instructions to Teachers*, first published in 1862 with two later editions. This book would be used as the basis for school curriculums all over the Midwest.[16]

As Chicago became an industrial city, its public education system followed. Vocational training was the first modification of the schools. Although resisted by Superintendent Howland who believed high schools should be a "poor man's college" and not a place for "practical education," vocational education was increasing in popularity. Europe led the way, and an exhibition of various European manual and technical training courses at the Paris Exhibition of 1867 helped popularize the concept in the United States. Business and industry leaders were at the forefront of the move to include vocational training as an educational option. In the 1880s, frustrated by the lack of progress in this area in Chicago schools, Chicago businessmen Marshall Field, Richard Crane, and John Crerar created a private vocational school supported by student tuition. In 1890, in response to this demand, Chicago opened the English and Manual Training High School. By 1896, twelve elementary schools had rooms equipped with manual training tools, many of them privately financed by businessman such as Richard Crane and businesses such as the Chicago Herald.[17]

The second major change in schools in the industrial era was the move to compulsory education. Arising out of two concerns, the rising delinquency of urban

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[16] Mary J. Herrick, *The Chicago Schools: a Social and Political History* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1971), 23, 33-34, 39, 41-43.

[17] Herrick, *The Chicago Schools*, 59.

youth and the rising use of children in dangerous industrial work, compulsory education became law in Illinois in 1883. This law required all children between eight and fourteen years of age to attend school at least twelve weeks a year unless they could present legitimate reasons for not being able to do so. This law was not enforced. In 1885 the school census in Chicago reported that only 79,276 of 169,384 school-aged persons were actually attending public schools. The Chicago Women's Club urged the Chicago Board of Education to enforce the 1883 law in language that explains the motives behind drives for compulsory education:

> Whereas the appalling increase of crime among youth, the large number of vagrant children, and the employment of child labor in the City of Chicago is fraught with danger to the commonwealth, Therefore, we, the Chicago Women's Club, respectfully ask your honorable body immediately to take necessary measures to ensure the enforcement of the Illinois Statute of 1883, providing for compulsory education.

In 1889 the law was strengthened, requiring twelve to sixteen weeks of schooling, eight of those weeks consecutive. More importantly, twelve truant officers were appointed, and circulars were printed in seven languages and distributed to the city's residents to inform them of the compulsory education law. In 1891 the Illinois state legislature passed the first child labor law, further encouraging the education of children. The effort gradually brought more children into the system, but many of those brought discipline problems into the classroom. By 1894, these problems were manifest in the report of the

Board Committee on Compulsory Education:

> Careful research into the history of pauperism and criminality seems to show that the child's bent is fixed before his seventh year. If childhood is neglected, the child will mature lawless and uncontrolled and the final end will be the jail or the poorhouse.

As a result of this report, the Board called for the establishment of kindergartens and refused to provide any assistance for children who would not behave in classrooms.[18]

The Chicago schools modernized slowly over the next fifty years, plagued by corrupt city government and inadequate financial support from the city. In 1895, the Board of Education acquired Cook County Normal School for the purpose of providing teacher training to elementary teachers. To that time, Chicago had been alone in being without a formal teacher training institution. The Board established Junior High Schools in 1924, but a lack of funds forced those schools to be closed in 1933. Part of this shortfall came from the corrupt nature of Chicago city politics and its elaborate patronage system. In 1934, $370,000 more was spent on the maintenance, heating, and cleaning of Chicago schools than on the instruction of children. The modernization of the schools took a turn for the better in 1947 when the Board gave up its powers over contracts and personnel and budget decisions and hired a General Superintendent of Schools, Herold C. Hunt, to take control of Chicago schools. Hunt replaced the patronage-filled non-teaching staff with certified civil service employees, created a Department of Instruction and Guidance, hired a business manager, instituted a formal examination system for the hiring of principals, opened this process to the public, and put the purchase of textbooks in the hands of committees of principals and teachers in order to prevent corruption in the choosing and purchasing of texts. Elementary curriculums were supplemented by home mechanics, an annual science fair, and developmental reading courses. High schools

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[18] Herrick, *The Chicago Schools*, 62-66.

received driver education courses and a required American civics course.[19]

Detroit, Michigan schools underwent a similar development. The territory of Michigan was created in 1805, and in 1809 the governor and judges of the territory enacted a law that established one school district and supplied funds for the building of school houses. In 1827 the Michigan legislature passed a law requiring that every township with fifty or more inhabitants employ a schoolmaster to instruct students in English and French, arithmetic, writing, and appropriate behavior. In 1829 another school law provided for a school tax to pay for schools. Although Detroit was exempt from this law, a special act made provision for schools in Detroit, and in 1833, two common schools opened in Detroit.[20]

Detroit's first free public school opened in 1842. Between that date and 1862 a struggle ensued between the supporters of schools and citizens unwilling to pay for them. This educational system had social control high on its list of priorities.[21] The Detroit system, like other urban educational systems of the era, largely attempted to control the new urban population.[22] The Detroit Board of Education's first report bears this out: Detroit's public schools were to be aimed at the "hundreds of youth

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[19] Herrick, *The Chicago Schools*, 74, 145, 209, 278-82.

[20] Arthur B. Moehlman, *Public Education in Detroit* (Bloomington, Illinois: Public School Publishing Company, 1925), 12-13.

[21] For a discussion of class and education, see Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: the Rise of Education Systems in England, France, and the U.S.A.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 36. For race and education, see Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America*, 147.

[22] Katz, *Reconstructing American Education*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapter One.

treading the pathway of vice and misery." The report addressed these youth again in the report: "The committee will not here dwell upon the evils of so large a mass of youth loose upon society in a city like ours—evils which are not only visited upon the authors of their being, upon themselves, but upon the morals, reputations, and the purse of the public."[23] The association between urban development and public education becomes stronger when looking at public education in rural Michigan; rural Michiganders did not have public schools until 1869.

Apparently, the system accomplished its goals. In 1843, the Detroit Gazette commented on the public schools:

> The primary schools were open for six months in the six several wards for the younger class of scholars, and the immediate consequences was the clearing of our avenues, streets and lanes of ragged, filthy children, engaged in every species of mischief, and growing up the pupils of depravity and crime. The second view presented the same children cleanly clad, inmates of school rooms, and the third exhibited them in connection with children of what is termed the better classes of society, contending for superiority, and finally the schools of the summer closed with universal satisfaction.[24]

And John J. Bagley, Michigan's governor and proponent of school integration stated a similar statement regarding the issue of control and education. According to Bagley, "idleness was the cause of more misery and crime than all else besides." A "practical" education, Bagley believed, would not only keep people from crime; it would "train children to be self-helping citizens." This statement sums up the educational experience of the Upper Midwest: an attempt to train youngsters to be

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[23] Detroit Board of Education, "Annual Report of the Board of Education of Detroit 1842."

[24] *Detroit Gazette*, December 1842.

"good citizens" and not challenge the existing hierarchy of society.[25]

Though Detroit's schools began with ungraded schools that taught only reading, writing, and arithmetic, by 1862 Detroit had won financial support from citizens of the city and had established nine-year union schools and a three-year high school. In 1863, Detroit hired the first school superintendent. The Act of 1883 made attendance compulsory for all children between eight and fourteen years of age for at least four months of the year, at least six weeks of which had to be consecutive. In 1883 By 1900 Detroit schools had a common elementary curriculum and had further divided instruction between eight-year elementary schools and a four-year high school. Between 1900 and 1950, the modern Detroit school system took shape with both the curriculum and teaching becoming scientific processes. Instead of one education for all students, the perceived individual capacity of students became an important consideration in the education they received, particularly with the creation of vocational institutions after 1900. The structure of schooling was changed, with the modern six-year elementary school, the interim junior high school, and four-year high school formed.[26]

Cleveland's development of public education is similar to that of Chicago and Detroit. Cleveland became a city in 1836, and its charter stated that "the city council be, and they are hereby authorized at the expense of said city, to provide for the support of common schools." In 1838, eight schools with eight teachers and 840 students (468 regularly attending) were operating in Cleveland. School managers

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[25] *Detroit Free Press*, September 13, 1881.

[26] Ibid., 14-15.

estimated that only about one-fourth of eligible students were attending school. Male and female students were apparently taught separately with teachers of the same sex until 1845-46, with female teachers receiving wages of twenty dollars a month as opposed to male teachers receiving forty dollars per month. The first high school was created in 1846. In 1853 the Cleveland city council passed an ordinance that created a board of education and the position of superintendent of Cleveland schools. In 1887 the first manual training school was opened and the first truant officer was hired to enforce Ohio's new compulsory education law. In 1892 the Ohio legislature passed the Federal Plan, a reorganization initiative that put all executive power in the hands of a school director elected directly by the people and a school council made of seven elected members. Together, the director and council formed the board of education. In the same year Superintendent Draper began to decentralize the school system and to encourage the system's teachers. In addition, Draper issued acts that prohibited corporal punishment. In 1896 free kindergartens opened in the public schools. In 1917 teachers were allowed to be married. At the conclusion of World War II, enrollments in Cleveland schools were at an all-time high.[27]

As public education systems grew and modernized, the cities of Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit transformed as well. At the center of this transformation was the founding and growth of African American communities in these cities. The story of these communities starts in the 1780s when the U.S. Congress arranged for and

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[27] Elroy McKendree Avery, *A History of Cleveland and Its Environs*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1918), 344, 353, 372. William Ganson Rose, *Cleveland: the Making of a City* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1950), 535, 757, 974.

organized this block of territory for incorporation into the new nation through a series of ordinances passed in 1784, 1785, and 1787. These acts set the precedent for the absorption of territories into the Union. In the most important of these ordinances, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the districts of the Northwest Territory were given the means to join the other states of the Union on an equal basis with the older states. It guaranteed settlers in the region freedom of religion and the right to a jury trial, prohibited cruel and unusual punishments, and made provisions for a system of public education. And as a harbinger of the future course of the Union, the Ordinance of 1787 forbad the introduction of new slaves into the Northwest territory, but did not free existing slaves in the region. In fact, since the 1760s when the French ceded the region to the British, several acts — the Articles of Capitulation of 1760, the Treaty of Paris of 1783, and Jay's Treaty of 1794 all protected slavery in the Northwest. In addition, the Ordinance of 1787 was largely unenforceable because the Native Americans of the region refused to accept American sovereignty over the region and did so only through force in 1795.[28]

Even after the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 that ended war between Midwestern Native Americans and the United States government, legal slavery in the Midwest continued to remain a possibility. Proslavery inhabitants of Indiana and Illinois in particular sought the legalization of slavery in their respective territories, sending five petitions to Congress over a six year period to repeal the Ordinance's

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[28] Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf, *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1990), 15-16. Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 7.

ban on slavery. When Congress did not respond to these petitions, the Indiana and Illinois territories adopted an indentured labor system which allowed slaveowners to bring slaves into the territory if the owners had those slaves legally classified as lifetime indentured servants. This status was nearly identical to Southern slavery, prohibiting these servants from traveling freely or gathering in groups. This provision, however, did not persuade slaveholders to come to the Old Northwest territories. The number of slaves in Indiana and Illinois territories grew from 405 in 1810 to 1,107 in 1820, whereas the slave populations of the new territories of Missouri and Arkansas gained 8,828 slaves in the same decade. At the same time, nonslaveholding persons continued to migrate to the region, shifting the tide against the proslavery Midwesterners and resulting in the banning of slavery in each of the state constitutions of the region. Only with the state constitutions in Ohio in 1802, Indiana in 1816, Illinois in 1818, Michigan in 1837, and Wisconsin in 1848 was slavery itself permanently and completely forbidden. Concern for the welfare of African Americans was not a major factor in the elimination of slavery from the region. In fact, desire to keep African Americans out of the territories and states was a powerful factor in the ban.[29]

The early history of the region, then, points to an essential contradiction: a strong concern for the rights and education of all citizens of European descent, and clear discrimination against African Americans. This hedging of the issue of slavery — essentially condemning it to eventual extinction without eliminating it outright —

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[29] Berwanger, *Frontier Against Slavery*, 9-11, 23. Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: the Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 64-65.

set up a complex and ambiguous relationship between the major cities in the region and its African American populations. The Ordinances guarantee of a public education system, carried into the state constitutions, made sure that the contradictions concerning race in the region would be carried into a new battleground — the region's schools.

The economic histories of Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit are important in order to understand the African American communities that developed within them. These three urban areas had similar economic foundations that shaped the early histories of these cities. All three were great lake ports, and their locations transformed them into major manufacturing centers in the nineteenth century. Both Detroit and Chicago were French forts in the eighteenth century, whereas Cleveland was founded by a Connecticut land company in 1796. All three, however, came into their own in the 1830s: Cleveland was granted a city charter in 1836, Chicago the year after. Detroit was incorporated earlier, in 1815, but its rapid growth began in the 1830s when the surge in Great Lakes commerce transformed the region into a major manufacturing and commercial region. The revolution in transportation that transformed the North between 1820 and 1860, particularly the boom in canals, placed Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit along an East-West trade axis that connected the major cities of the East Coast to the Midwest faster and less expensively than the flatboat trade to New Orleans. The opening of the Erie canal and the building of subsequent smaller canals such as the Ohio canal from Cleveland to Portsmouth, Ohio, placed Great Lakes cities in the ideal position to trade the products of the farm, the mine, and the factory with the large centers of population and commerce on the

East coast. This connection with the East also stimulated manufacturing in the Upper Midwest because of the relatively low cost of land and products for manufacturing. By 1860, Railroads superseded the canals, but the pattern had been set: American commerce would travel from West to East, and the port cities of Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit had become major centers of commerce and manufacturing. With these developments, the cities of the Upper Midwest became major economic centers leaving behind the South with its investment in slaves and plantation agriculture.

This economic boom attracted people from all over the world to fill the labor vacuum in the booming Midwestern cities. A large part of this population came from eastern states. Between 1800 and 1860, the population of the United States grew from 5.3 million to 31.4 million. Over five million of those were immigrants, the vast majority from northern Europe. Most of these immigrants settled in cities. In 1800 the United States contained only three cities with populations over 25,000; by 1860, nine, including Chicago, exceeded 100,000 in population, and thirty-five contained more than 25,000 people. Both Cleveland and Detroit contained over 35,000 people by 1860. Cleveland's population growth was indicative of the region, going from 1,100 in 1831 to 43,417 in 1860. More than 44 percent of those residents hailed from Germany, England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.[30]

The institution of slavery restricted the movement of the overwhelming majority of African Americans until 1860. In 1830, approximately eighty-seven percent of the African American population was in servitude. The early population of

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[30] William Ganson Rose, *Cleveland: The Making of a City* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1950), 296.

Midwestern cities contained a good number of escaped slaves, many of whom arrived in the North via the Underground Railroad. Although exact numbers are impossible due to the secret nature of the institution, it is possible that as many as 100,000 slaves escaped to lives in the North via the Railroad. Slave Codes and slave patrols successfully restricted the free movement of the vast majority of slaves. Most of the early migrants were free African Americans, a group that comprised thirteen percent of the African American population in 1830, and eleven percent by 1860. However, every Southern state restricted the free movement of free African Americans in the antebellum period. By 1830 there were 16,000 African Americans in the states of the Northwest Territory. Although their numbers were never as great as European immigration, African American populations in Northern cities grew steadily through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beginning in 1879, large numbers of African Americans left the South for the North or West, fleeing the poor agricultural economy and the unfair and often cruel treatment by landlords, merchants, or other racist Southerners. In addition, African Americans were attracted to the excitement of the new industrial life of the cities as were many Americans of all backgrounds who left rural areas for cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, several thousand African Americans left the South for Kansas in the 1880s. But the vast majority chose to stay in the rural South, lacking either the desire or the resources to make the trek. After World War I foreign immigration fell sharply, from one million in 1914 to slightly more than 300,000 the following year. The Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 kept that annual immigration to under 200,000. African American populations in the North and West increased by 330,000 during the

1920s. Another large-scale migration took place during the World War II era with 150,000 African Americans arriving in Detroit between 1940 and 1945. Again, this group was joined by 450,000 non-African Americans arriving in Detroit in the same time period.[31]

Given that Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit share similar geographical locations and economic foundations, it is not surprising that the compositions of their African American communities are similar as well. All three nineteenth century communities were quite small before 1860. In fact, none of these communities reached the five-figure mark in population until Chicago in 1890; Cleveland and Detroit would not surpass this figure until the 1920 census. Although the size of the Chicago's African American community was comparable to that of Cleveland and Detroit until 1870, the 1880 census showed that Chicago's African Americans outnumbered the other two cities by a ratio of three to one. By the 1900 hundred census, Chicago's African American community dwarfed the other two cities by a ratio of approximately six to one (See Table 1).[32]

These nineteenth century communities were comprised mainly of free African Americans who had migrated north to escape slavery, or free African Americans who migrated, principally from the border states. In Detroit in 1870, fifty-five percent of the African American community had been born in Michigan, while thirty-three

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[31] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1830. Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 103, 137, 172, 253, 403, 488. Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 184. Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 162-68. James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19-20.

[32] U.S. Census Bureau Reports, 1830-1900.

percent had been born in the Upper South. Less than twelve percent of Detroit's African American community hailed from the Deep South. In 1900, eighty percent of Chicago's African American population had been born in states other than Illinois. Forty-three percent came from the Upper South whereas only seventeen percent had come from the Deep South. In 1900, thirty-eight percent of Cleveland's African Americans were born in Ohio, thirty-six percent were born in the Upper South, and only six percent came from the Deep South.[33]

In the nineteenth century, all three cities restricted the locations in which African Americans could live, but a larger degree of racial integration was present compared to the ghettoes of the twentieth century. In Chicago, African Americans had clustered on the South Side by 1850. By that date, eighty-two percent of Chicago's African Americans resided in this neighborhood. Before 1900 African Americans resided in a few other enclaves in Chicago including one in the Near North Side and another in the Near West Side near Jane Addams' Hull House. Despite this concentration of African American residences, a comparatively high degree of racial integration characterized these cities. In 1898, just over twenty-five percent of Chicago's African Americans lived in neighborhoods in which they were the majority and thirty percent lived in neighborhoods that were ninety-five percent European American. In Cleveland, African Americans tended to reside in the Central Avenue district, but three other enclaves were identifiable. However, African American Clevelanders remained dispersed throughout the city. The 1910 census data reveals

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[33] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 11. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 40. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 63.

Table 1
Population of Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit 1850-1950

Year	Total Pop. Chicago	Total Pop. Cleveland	Total Pop. Detroit	African American Pop., Chicago	African American Pop., Cleveland	African American Pop., Detroit
1850	29,963	17,034	20,432	323	224	587
1860	109,260	43,417	45,619	955	799	1,402
1870	298,977	92,829	79,577	3,691	1,293	2,235
1880	503,185	160,416	116,340	6,480	2,062	2,821
1890	1,099,850	261,353	205,876	14,271	3,035	3,431
1900	1,698,595	381,768	285,704	30,150	5,988	4,111
1910	2,185,283	560,663	465,766	44,103	8,448	5,741
1920	2,701,705	796,841	993,678	109,458	34,451	40,838
1930	3,376,438	900,429	1,568,662	233,903	71,899	120,066
1940	3,396,808	878,336	1.623,452	277,731	87,145	149,119
1950	3,620,962	914,808	1,849,568	492,265	147,847	300,506

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau Reports, 1850-1930

that of one hundred and fifty-five census tracts, all but seventeen contained some African American residents. In Detroit between 1870 and 1900, eighty-four percent of African Americans lived in the Near East side. However, census records show that only one street in this district contained a majority of African American residences. Furthermore, all three had integrated schools by the 1870s.[34]

The occupational profile of the African American communities in these cities demonstrates a disproportionate number of African American workers at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder. As late as 1900 in Chicago, sixty-five percent of African American men and eighty percent of African American women were engaged in domestic or personal service occupations. At the same time, only eight percent of men and eleven percent of women were employed in manufacturing, and most of the women in this category were engaged in dressmaking. In addition, a large proportion of those in manufacturing jobs were unskilled laborers. In Cleveland in 1890, only three African Americans males worked in the city's steel industry, and none worked in a semiskilled factory job. In 1900 Detroit, forty-nine percent of African American males worked in domestic or personal service, as did eighty-two percent of African American females. By 1930, forty-nine percent of African Americans of both sexes worked in manufacturing and mechanical industries while thirty-three percent continued to work in domestic service.[35]

And all three cities were stratified with an elite at the top. The nineteenth

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[34] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 14-15. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 42. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 69.

[35] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 29-31. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 66. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 219, 221. Thomas, *Life for Us is what We Make it*, 42.

century African American elites were characterized by their interactions with the European American middle and upper classes. In Chicago, John Jones epitomized this group. Of mixed parentage, Jones achieved considerable economic success through a tailoring shop that catered to wealthy European Americans of Chicago. With the support of Chicago's European Americans, he was elected to the Cook County Board on Commissioners in the 1870s. In Detroit, Robert A. Pelham, Sr., a brick mason from Petersburg Virginia, brought his family to Detroit in 1862. He subsequently started a successful contracting business and became active in Detroit's Republican party, serving as a delegate to the state Republican convention in 1872 and obtained positions on the Republican *Detroit Post* for two of his sons. He was also one of the only African American members of Detroit's prestigious Michigan Club.[36]

The large-scale migrations of African Americans to these cities during the World War I and World War II eras transformed all three cities, doubling at least the numbers of African Americans in each city while Chicago continued to contain many more African American residents than either Cleveland or Detroit. During the World War I era, Chicago's African American population more than doubled from 44,103 to 109,458. The growth in Cleveland and Detroit was even more dramatic: Cleveland's African American population increased from 8,448 to 34,451 and Detroit's from 5,741 to 40,838. The numerical increase in each city was even greater during the 1940s. Chicago's African American population increased from 277,731 to 492,265 in that ten year period. Cleveland and Detroit also witnessed a near doubling of their African American populations with an increase in Cleveland from 87,145 to 147,847

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[36] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 55. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 186.

and in Detroit from 149,119 to 300,506.[37]

The Great Migration of the World War I era transformed the composition of the African American populations of each city. By 1920, more African American Chicagoans were born in the Deep South than in the Upper South or Illinois. A similar transformation occurred in Cleveland. In 1910, thirty-six percent of African American Clevelanders came from the Upper South compared to only four percent from the Deep South. By 1920, thirty-four percent originated in the Upper South compared to twenty-three percent from the Deep South. By 1930 Cleveland contained more migrants from Georgia and Alabama than from any other state excluding Ohio.[38]

These larger African American communities also became more residentially segregated in the early twentieth century. In Chicago, thirty percent of African Americans lived in predominately African American neighborhoods by 1910. By 1920, the majority of Chicago's African Americans lived in predominately African American neighborhoods. In Cleveland between 1910 and 1920, the number of census tracts showing no African Americans doubled, rising from seventeen to thirty-eight. In Detroit, residential segregation practices became entrenched during the World War I era.[39]

The occupational profile of twentieth century African American communities changed considerably as well with a higher percentage of African Americans working

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[37] U.S. Census Bureau Reports, 1910-1950.

[38] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 141-43. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 281-83, 161.

[39] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 17, 142. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 161. Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make It*, 136.

in manufacturing. In Chicago, fifty-one percent of the male workforce was engaged in domestic or personal service trades in 1910; in 1920, this figure plummeted to twenty-eight percent. For African American women in Chicago, the change was less dramatic but nonetheless present. In 1910 seventy-seven percent of African American women were engaged in domestic service occupations, and only ten percent were engaged in manufacturing. In addition, nearly all of these manufacturing jobs were dressmaking jobs. By 1920, sixty-four percent of women were working in domestic service, while manufacturing jobs had increased to twenty-two percent, and none of that increase was from dressmaking. In Cleveland between 1910 and 1920, the percentage of African American males working in domestic service declined from thirty percent to twelve percent due to increased opportunities in manufacturing. For African American females in Cleveland, their percentage in domestic service decreased from seventy-three percent to sixty-three percent while their percentage in unskilled labor occupations went from zero to four percent.[40]

With these expanded African American communities, the nature of the elites of these communities changed as well. The twentieth century elites, or "new elite" as they became known, were characterized by race pride, group solidarity, and self-dependence. In contrast to nineteenth century elites, they were more a product of emerging ghettoes in the twentieth century cities. They tended to be businessmen who relied on an African American clientele. In Chicago, Jesse Binga exemplified this "new elite." Binga established a business empire on the South Side, the cornerstone of which was the Binga Bank established in 1908. In Cleveland, S. Clayton Green

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[40] Spear, *Black Chicago*, 33, 154. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 74, 200.

established a real estate empire in the mostly African American Central Avenue district. In Detroit between 1915 and 1945, a number of African American entrepreneurs took advantage of the expanding African American market. H. S. Ferguson opened a chain of restaurants that was worth $222,000 by 1920.[41]

Many differences characterized the three cities, especially concerning their African American populations. Chicago's African American community was always significantly larger than that of Detroit or Cleveland, making African Americans a larger presence earlier, which in turn led to increased majority population hostility and increased residential segregation. Additional factors contributed to racial segregation and antipathy in Chicago. The 1871 fire allowed a restructuring of Chicago that may have included increased exclusion of African Americans in some neighborhoods. In addition, the African American enclave was coincidentally located close to hostile immigrant neighborhoods which amplified both racial antagonism and racial separation in the city. At any rate, the higher level of racial separation and anti-African American sentiment in Chicago distinguished it from Detroit and Cleveland in the presence of more separate institutions in Chicago.[42]

In the cities of the Upper Midwest, public educational systems became epicenters of the struggles for liberation and control within which concepts of race, class, and gender were inextricably tangled. This entanglement was not restricted

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[41] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 164-65. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 83. Spear, *Black Chicago.*, 75, 113. Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make It*, 201-02. Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 156-57.

[42] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 50, 55, 63, 153, 186-89. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 145. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 69, 209. William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 242.

solely to the realm of public education. In fact, the region's history, especially its nineteenth and twentieth century histories, reveal a region in which the issues of race and gender became especially prominent as the region was undergoing the throes of an industrial boom. This boom and its transformation of the society makes the Upper Midwest a unique laboratory for the study of race, class, gender and their complex interactions. This region's schools were at the center of these changes. With society's most impressionable citizens a captive audience, teachers and administrators put into practice their beliefs about the nature and composition of the ideal society. However, these beliefs and practices did not go uncontested. African American communities, in keeping with a long tradition of self-help through educational effort, worked to be included in the educational system. To be included meant not only inclusion in the student bodies of public schools, but also in the faculty and administration of these schools. The latter effort would prove to be even more difficult than the former.

Chapter 2

"Our Unquestionable Duty": African American Education and the Self-Help Tradition

In the United States, education has been a primary means through which African American people have sought to help themselves. African American communities throughout the antebellum period erected schools using a variety of means and structures and at substantial sacrifice and voluntary taxation. This tradition originated in Eastern cities but quickly emerged in the Middle West as African Americans founded communities in those cities. From the beginning, African American women joined African American men to form an equal partnership in these efforts.

Although non-African Americans have used education for advancement in the United States, some aspects of the African American educational tradition seem unique to people of African descent due to their unique circumstances. Vincent P. Franklin suggests that an abiding faith grows out of the slavery experience and the belief in its power to "liberate the mind" as a first step towards total freedom.[1] On a more pragmatic level, Leonard P. Curry argues that African Americans may have

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[1] Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1979), xi.

placed more hope in education because of a lack of other means of advancement: the aid of influential family members, access to large amounts of capital, an environment relatively free of constraints based on class or race, and community approval of their advancement efforts.[2] In addition, this uniqueness may have roots in Africa. Although much research remains to be done on the similarities between the nature of education in pre-colonial Africa and the United States, one scholar's work on African education suggests that some Africanisms may remain in African American education. Abdou Moumouni has written that pre-colonial African societies share certain characteristics in the education of their young. For one, these communities considered this education a sacred duty. For another, the entire community joined together to educate children and considered education a communal responsibility.[3] Although we can only speculate at this time, the communal efforts of African Americans in America to acquire education for their young, and the seriousness with which they treat it may have roots in the African past.

Whether or not these roots exist, it is clear that African American self-help in the area of education is an integral part of the African American self-help tradition. This self-help tradition can be described as follows: in response to their exclusion from marginalization within mainstream societal institutions, African American people

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[2] Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America*, 148.

[3] Abdou Moumoni, *Education in Africa* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1968), 15-18. For other works on African education, see A. Victor Murray, *The School in the Bush: A Critical Study of the theory and Practice of Native Education in Africa* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1967); and David G. Scanlon, ed. *Traditions of African Education* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964).

have created parallel institutions as a means of economic, social, and political advancement. In *Life for Us is What We Make it: the Building of Black Detroit*, Richard Thomas has convincingly argued that African American communities have a tradition of creating and sustaining their own public institutions to compensate for the their lack of access to mainstream institutions.[4] Thomas focuses mainly on social welfare and religious institutions, but clearly the model of the African American self-help tradition applies to African American self-educational activity. African American people in early eighteenth century Northeastern cities created parallel educational institutions because the stratified society in which they lived did not provide equal access to the dominant society's institutions. These African American-created and African American-run institutions have been crucial to the survival of African American communities especially in the realms of health care and the relief of problems associated with poverty and the elderly. The creation and maintenance of educational institutions is part of this tradition. In the antebellum period no city fully met the educational needs of their respective African American communities. In response, African Americans created numerous schools of their own.

A body of historical work has evolved around the subject of African American education. This historiography has developed in four phases. The first phase that emerged in 1915 and continued until the 1930s concerned the documentation of the African American educational experience, and it was dominated by the work of Carter G. Woodson. Published in 1915 Woodson's classic study of

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[4] Richard W. Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make It: Building a Community in Detroit* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

African American education, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, established the foundation for the study of African American education. Woodson's effort documents the antebellum education of African Americans as part of Woodson's larger effort to portray African Americans "as a participant rather than a lay figure in history."[5] The second phase of work in the history of African American education emerged in the 1930s as the study of African American history as a whole moved to examinations of the social conditions of African Americans within the context of an oppressive American system and society. Horace Mann Bond's *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* and *Negro Education in Alabama*, published in 1934 and 1939 respectively, focused on the role of schooling in the perpetuation of African American inequality. Bond suggested schools were not likely to be the sites of African American liberation. According to Bond, one could rely only on "the unsoundness of relying upon the school as a cure-all for our ills." And further, "Strictly speaking, the school has never built a new social order; it has been the product and interpreter of the existing system, sustaining and being sustained by the social complex."[6] The third phase encompassed the 1950s and 1960s. In keeping with the focus of the era on civil rights and the general integration of society, African American history focused on either the negative effects of segregation or the positive effects of integration and interracial cooperation. The study of African American

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[5] Quoted in Vincent P. Franklin and James D. Anderson, eds., *New Perspectives on Black Educational History* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Company, 1978), 3.

[6] Quoted in Ibid., 6.

education followed suit with several studies of integration and education.[7] Louis B. Harlan's *Separate and Unequal* was one of these works, analyzing the schools in five Southern states and pointing out the limitation of separate schooling. More important was Henry Bullock's *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present*. In this work, Bullock argues that the separate schooling system in the South "served as the main leverage" for the Civil Rights Movement through its role in educating the leaders of that movement.[8] The fourth and final phase dates from the 1970s and continues to the present. In keeping with the 1970s interest in the study of African American culture and communities, studies of African American education in this era have concentrated on the education of African American communities, leaders, and professionals. *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, a collection of essays published in 1978, does just that, with essays investigating the histories of African American efforts to build educational institutions in Philadelphia, Fisk University's training of African American leadership, and the training of African American physicians at Meharry Medical College.

The three most prominent historians of this movement are Vincent P. Franklin, James D. Anderson and Darlene Clark Hine. Franklin's *The Education of Black Philadelphia: the Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950* broadens the scope of the investigation of African American education by moving beyond the public education system to viewing a system of "community education"

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[7] Willard Range, *The Rise and Progress of Negro Colleges in Georgia, 1865-1949* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1951). Elizabeth Peck, *Berea's First Century, 1855-1955* (Lexington, Ky. University of Kentucky Press, 1955).

[8] Ibid., 12.

because "the public schools were only one of the more significant agencies providing education for black Philadelphians."[9] James D. Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* addresses the historiography of education and shows that while American public education has been driven by forces of liberation and control, African Americans have entered this realm with a "persistent struggle to fashion a system of formal education that prefigured their liberation from peasantry."[10] Darlene Clark Hine has investigated the education of African American professionals including African American physicians at Meharry Medical College and African American nurses in *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950.*[11] All three emphasized the African American initiative in creating and maintaining separate professional educational institutions.

This study seeks to follow in the footsteps of these historians in examining the history of African American educators of the urban Midwest in the context of education and the African American self-help tradition. These teachers worked within a tradition of long-standing. Well before emancipation, some European American masters and missionaries, as well as some people interested in helping the oppressed,

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[9] Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: the Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), xii.

[10] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 3.

[11] Darlene Clark Hine, "The Pursuit of Professional Equality: Meharry Medical College, 1921-1938, a Case Study," in Franklin and Anderson, eds., *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, 173-192 and *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1989).

participated in the education of some African Americans, slave and free. Before 1835, masters were not opposed to the education of slaves. In fact, many believed rudimentary education could make slaves more efficient producers. For example, the wife of his owner initiated Frederick Douglass's education. Although the owner abruptly ended this instruction, Douglass relentlessly pursued education on his own.[12] Missionaries from the Church of England and some Puritans sought to educate slaves so that they could be converted to Christianity. However, not until the Quakers began educating slaves and ex-slaves were the first American settlers to give African American people the same education as given to whites. After 1760 the natural rights philosophy of Quakers encouraged emancipation and manumission in a number of northern states, and benevolent and religious organizations undertook the task of educating these freedmen. Their purpose was to prepare the ex-slaves for citizenship. For example, in Philadelphia in 1770, a group of Quakers decided to create a school for Quaker slaves being prepared for freedom as well as for some free blacks.[13] At times, this was a thinly veiled expression of their desire to control the free African American population. In New York, these schools sought to stop "youth in their advance toward the slippery paths of vice" that slavery had started them on.[14] But as the eighteenth century ended, the enthusiasm for the natural rights theory began to

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[12] Waldo E. Martin, Jr., "Frederick Douglass: Humanist as Race Leader," in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 61-62.

[13] Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 29.

[14] John L. Rury, "Philanthropy, Self Help, and Social Control: The New York Manumission Society and Free Blacks, 1785-1810," *Phylon* XLVI (1985), 235.

wane and the fear of revolt increased. In the North, interest in African American education faded, and the South made educating African American people illegal.[15]

Beginning in the eighteenth century, early African American self-help organizations—the African American A.M.E. church, mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations— all created parallel educational institutions as part of their program for aiding the African American community. In addition, both organizations and individuals have taken it upon themselves to create educational institutions that educate young people and train the next generation of African American teachers and African American leaders who often carry on the self-help tradition.

Education has been an integral part of self-help efforts among African Americans in cities of the Northeastern United States since the early antebellum period. This is most readily apparent in the period before many of these cities created public schools for a small proportion of African American youngsters. This period (mostly before 1830) witnessed a great deal of activity in African American institutional development. Northeastern cities usually had no specific objections to minimal African American education. The lack of publicly funded educational institutions for African Americans forced the free African Americans in these cities like New York, Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia to create their own schools. Upon examining the earliest history of African American history in the Northern cities, it becomes clear that education has been central to African American self-help efforts. In fact, we must consider education to be one of the most important

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[15] Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 152.

elements of African American self-help.

The combination of the formation of communities of free people in Northeastern cities and lack of educational opportunities for these people led to the creation of schools for African Americans by African Americans. Some of these first schools were organized and built by African American communal self-help organizations while others were started with individual initiative. The result of both were schools that provided education for young African American people, jobs for educated African American adults, and leaders for the next generation of protest.

African Americans formed some of the earliest schools in collaboration with European American collaborators. One of the earliest examples of this phenomenon comes from New York City with the creation of the African Free Schools. Organized in 1785 with John Jay as president, the New York Manumission Society opened its first school for free African Americans in 1790. This school struggled until the dawn of the nineteenth century. At this time, the African American community of New York grew considerably, and the number of students seeking education in this school doubled. By 1820, a number of African Free Schools were in operation in New York City. Over five hundred students attended these schools, each student providing the funding of the school through the payment of tuition according to his or her means. These schools taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography as well as sewing and knitting. In addition, they were concerned with shaping the character of the students. An 1820 report of the comptrollers emphasized that no graduate of an African Free School had ever been convicted of a crime.[16]

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[16] Woodson, *Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, 97-99.

African Americans also worked alone to provide education for their community in the early years of the nation. An early example appeared in New York City in 1793. Kathy Ferguson, an ex-slave, opened a Sunday school to instruct the destitute children of New York City in religion. The next known African American self-help effort in education occurred in Brooklyn. In 1815 Peter Cruger, a African American whitewasher, established a school in his house to teach "the common branches of education."[17]

Soon more organized efforts on behalf of African American education emerged. In Albany a group of African Americans (a shoemaker, a grocer, a cartman, and an office sweeper) started a school on a lot donated by whites. In 1820, a school was created in the Albany African Church which was constructed with white financial help. However, this aid does not mean the creation of this Albany school was not an example of African American self-help. African American initiative was required to mobilize this money. And in a stratified society where African American people's access to capital has been restricted, white philanthropy is a legitimate way to acquire some of the capital needed to start African American schools. The school in the Albany African Church operated for three years with a African American teacher, but it closed due to lack of funds. It reopened in 1826 under the direction of a white benevolent society.[18]

Other organized efforts emerged in Brooklyn. Between 1817 and 1827,

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[17] Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 50-1.

[18] Mabee, *Black Education*, 51.

African Americans were educated in a Brooklyn public school, but in a separate room from whites. They paid tuition to cover most of the expenses of their education and were taught by William M. Read, a graduate of the African Free School run by the New York Manumission Society. When slavery was abolished in New York in 1827, the African American students were expelled from that schoolhouse. An African American writer later conveyed the surprise and mystery behind this move: "For some reasons unknown to us, [African Americans] were deprived of the use of that room and were driven to the necessity of building the present school house we now occupy."[19]

In response, Brooklyn's African American community banded together to supply education to African American youngsters. The African Woolman Benevolent Society constructed a school building for African American students. This new school did receive some public funds, but it was for the most part, in the words of a white Brooklynite, an "example of enterprise" among the African American people of that city.[20] Like other African American schools of the period, tuition was charged to keep the school going, but those who could afford to pay were not excluded. In the 1830s, one third of these Brooklyn students did not pay the tuition. School recitals were held to supplement the school's income.[21] This school was administered by African American trustees who came from all classes; they included a laborer, a shoe

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[19] Ibid., 52.

[20] Ibid., 53.

[21] Ibid.

polisher, a teacher, and a hog driver.[22] These trustees controlled the finances, building maintenance, and the selection of teachers—a surprising amount of power given the fact that the school was officially under city control.

Four of the five teachers of this particular school participated in the abolition movement or in the movement to secure equal suffrage in New York, playing activist roles in the community that would be followed by many other African American teachers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The African American convention movement is one example. African American teachers were a large presence in the New York conventions. At 1840 civil rights convention, three of six convention officers were or were soon to be teachers of African American schools—all men. As the profession became feminized in the second part of the twentieth century, African American women teachers continued to work as community activists largely through colored women's clubs where their work fell more properly into women's appropriate sphere of activity.

The Negro convention movement itself had the establishment of institutions for African American education at the center of its platform. Although a local convention had been held in Philadelphia in 1817 to discuss the plans to remove African Americans to Africa put forth by the American Colonization Society, the national convention movement started with the national convention held in Philadelphia in 1830. The second convention, held in Philadelphia in June, 1831, adopted a resolution to establish a college for manual training. The delegates chose New Haven, Connecticut as the appropriate location for this school, and one delegate purchased

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[22] Ibid.

several acres of land for the purpose of building a school. However, Connecticut officials, including the Governor and a U.S. Senator, adopted a resolution in September 1831 in which they pledged to resist the placement of the school in New Haven "by any lawful means." The Prudence Crandall incident in which Connecticut residents burned a school for African Americans started by Crandall pointed to the hostility of that state and region to African American education. In the face of this resistance, the Conventioneers abandoned the plan to build the college in New Haven.[23] The move to build such a school continued, however. At the 1853 convention in Rochester, New York, delegates approved a plan for an agricultural and mechanical college for African Americans, and they authorized Harriet Beecher Stowe to seek and gather donations for the building of such a school. In addition, this national movement spawned state Negro conventions that were less concerned with denouncing slavery and more concerned with coordinating self-help efforts. For example, the Ohio conventions in the antebellum period aimed at the collection of funds for the purchase of lots for schools and for the erection of school buildings.[24]

The African American residents of the city of Troy, New York also engaged in self-help to provide education for their communities. In 1830 two African American men combined resources to provide a school for that city's African American young people. A carpenter, Alexander Thuey, boarded an African

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[23] John W. Cromwell, *The Early Negro Convention Movement* (Washington, D.C.: American Negro Academy, 1904), 5-8. Susan Strane, *A Whole-Souled Woman: Prudence Crandall and the Education of Black Women* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 117-19.

[24] Cromwell, *The Early Negro Convention Movement*, 13.

American teacher for the school and William Rich, an African American barber, paid the teacher's salary that was not covered by the students' tuition. In 1833 the city bought a lot, moved a building to it, and put Thuey and Rich in charge of raising the money to make it both an African American church and an African American school. The African Americans who ran this school stated that "the colored people of Troy consider it a sacred duty to send their children to school, and pay for the schooling themselves. The moral effect of the school will in a great degree be lost if they depend upon the white people to do it."[25] This quote illustrates the sense of responsibility African Americans felt for providing schooling for the race in spite of European American hostility and intransigence.

In New York City the interplay of race and class oppression was laid bare in the attempt of African Americans to create a African American high school in that city. As John L. Rury has shown, the New York Manumission society ran Africa Free Schools for African Americans in the city, and these schools were a major source of education for African American New Yorkers.[26] But when the Phoenix Society, an African American charitable organization, attempted to establish an African American high school, it met with little success. The school was desperately short of funds. It had neither enough students to pay tuition nor the outside funding to survive, and it disappeared after surviving only a few years.[27]

The experiences of African American Philadelphians differed slightly. African

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[25] Mabee, *Black Education*, 55-6.

[26] Rury, "Philanthropy, Self-Help, and Social Control."

[27] Mabee, *Black Education*, 59-60.

American self-help efforts through education in Philadelphia received more support than those in Washington and Baltimore because African American Philadelphians did have the advantage of the basic support of the Quaker community combined with the presence of a strong abolitionist society. In the colonial period, teaching slave and free African Americans was legal in Pennsylvania, although teaching African American and white students together was not allowed. In 1758 the Bray Associates, an Anglican philanthropic group in Philadelphia launched a school for African Americans. Although opposed by most Philadelphians, the school enrolled thirty-six African American students, including Benjamin Franklin's house slave Othello. Both slave and free students were enrolled. By the 1760s, the Society of Friends was committed to providing education for the slaves and ex-slaves of Quakers. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, after having won manumission of Pennsylvania slaves in 1780, turned to aiding free African Americans in the state. Beginning in 1790, the Abolition Society began providing funds to African Americans for the opening of African American schools.[28]

Most Philadelphians of both races regarded these initial African American schools a failure. An inspecting committee found that Absalom Jones was too lenient with the children as was another African American teacher at another school. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society determined that "it is not practicable at present to have

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[28] Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 22-23. Support from Quakers and Anglicans was also present in colonial New England where both denominations set up schools for slave and free African Americans. Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1942), 238-41.

the black children properly taught by a black person." Quomony Clarkson, a teacher in a school in Philadelphia's Bethel A.M.E. church, faced this resistance first-hand as he continuously applied for teaching positions in the Philadelphia schools in this era without success. In 1800 the P.A.S. then consolidated three schools with African American teachers into one school with European American teachers.[29]

In response to this, African American Philadelphians established schools of their own. Three teachers — Absalom Jones, Amos White, and Ann Williams — decided to continue teaching "on their own account." In 1803 Cyrus Bustill, a free African American, opened a school in his home. Richard Allen in 1800 organized A Society of Free People of Color for Promoting the Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent to raise money to build a larger school, saying that many "free Africans" were "destitute of that education or information indispensable and necessary to their being useful members of society." In 1804 Jones received money from the Bray Associates and opened two new schools for African Americans.[30]

African American initiative was still required to obtain funds from the Abolition Society as well as to build and organize the actual school. One of the earliest African American teachers, Eleanor Harris, started her own school in Philadelphia in the 1790s with the financial assistance of the Abolition Society. Three free African American men—Absalom Jones, Cyrus Buskill, and Amos White—also

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[29] Ibid., 204. Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: the Foundations of Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865* (East Lansing, Mi.: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 75.

[30] Ibid., 204-05.

established and ran schools for African American Philadelphia in the 1790s and the first decades of the 1800s with the support of the Abolition Society. The Society's largest and last effort at providing education to African American Philadelphians was the Clarkson School, opened in 1813. It functioned successfully with white teachers until the 1820s when separate African American public schools began drawing away African American students.[31] The school apparently continued into the 1840s when African American Philadelphians again demonstrated initiative in obtaining appropriate education. In this decade, parents began to demand African American teachers. An extant letter from one of these teachers conveys the economic difficulties faced by these teachers as well as their commitment to African American children:

> I have wrote these few lines to Ascertain from the board of education If they would be wiling to alow me one dollar And fifty cents more added to my months saleray. Friends my reason for asking this favour of the is Where i now reside they have raised my rent One dollar higher on account of getting the hydrant water in.
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> As it respects the Schol friends i am not yet Tierd and feel a willingnes to do the best That lays in my power towards the children.[32]

The aid of white organizations in Philadelphia did not prevent African American Philadelphians from organizing their own schools with their own funds. In 1804 a African American society opened a school for African American children. They even continued to do so after the beginning of African American public education in Philadelphia in 1822. They did so partly because these schools were not

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[31] Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 29-31.

[32] Letter from Jane Stekley to the Board of Education. From Dorothy Sterling, ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 182-3. Sterling left all the mistakes to demonstrate that many of these early teachers were "barely literate."

numerous enough to educate all the African American children in the city. However, a quote from a member of the Pennsylvania Augustine Society for the Education of People of Colour in 1818 suggests other motivations:

> It is our unquestionable duty which we owe to ourselves, to our posterity, and our God, who has endowed us with intellectual powers, to use the best energies of our minds and our hearts in devising and adapting the most effectual means to procure for our children a more extensive and useful education than we have heretofore had the power to effect.[33]

This "more extensive and useful education" would be one that other schools—European American-run or public— were unwilling to provide for African American students.

The history of African American education in the cities of Washington D.C. and Baltimore shows similar efforts of African Americans to provide for their own education. Washington D.C. provides examples of the African American self-help tradition in action. In 1807 three former slaves built a school house for African American children and hired a white man to teach. It failed, and African American students went back to white-operated schools. In 1818, the Resolute Beneficial Society reopened the school, and again appointed a white man to instruct the students. In 1822 a African American shoemaker, John Adams, became the first African American person to teach in the District of Columbia. The school was funded with monies from the Society as well as tuition.[34] This school was always near financial ruin, as were all others that did not receive some financial support from the European American

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[33] Franklin, *Education of Black Philadelphia*, 31.

[34] Woodson, *Education of the Negro*, 131-2.

community. African American incomes were, for the most part, simply not high enough to pay the tuition necessary to support a school. But in keeping with the self-help tradition, the community banded together to provide this service to the community.

African American women were equally if not more active in African American efforts to educate themselves, and this was certainly the case in Washington D.C. From the beginning, the District of Columbia's African American women were active in African American education in numbers equal to men. Just after John Adams became the District's first African American teacher, Maria Becraft established a seminary for the education of young African American women which she left in the charge of her graduated students in 1831. Louisa Parke Costin, a member of a prominent African American family in Washington D. C., opened her own school for African American children in the 1820s, and her position was taken by her sister after Costin's death in 1831.[35]

The resilience of these Washington D.C. schools built and run by African Americans is demonstrated the experience of African Americans in the District of Columbia in the 1830s. In this decade, whites tried to stop the education of African Americans in the District of Columbia, but their efforts were unsuccessful. Because of an incident of racial violence, African American education fell into disfavor among many whites, and all white churches except the Catholic and Quaker began to deny African Americans access to their schools.[36] Even though one African American

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[35] Ibid., 133-4.

[36] Ibid., 134-5.

teacher was run out of town, the African American schools kept running. And in keeping with the tradition of African American self-help, this exclusion only stimulated the establishment of schools by African American people for African American people. This incident points out the importance of African American-controlled educational institutions. Whatever the vicissitudes of white attitudes, African American institutions can keep running—in secret if need be.

As in Washington D.C., African Americans in Baltimore, Maryland created their own parallel schools to educate their young people. The first known African American created and operated school was Daniel Coker's academy which drew students from as far away as Washington D.C. Coker had started the Academy around 1812. Those unable to attend Coker's school but still desiring education were forced to settle for attending white Sunday schools until 1829 when an African Free School opened. By the 1830s several schools had been opened by African Americans including one in the local African Methodist Church, one in the African Church, and yet another in the Methodist Bethel Church.

Baltimore's African American women assumed responsibility for a great deal of education work. During the decade of the 1830s, African American women opened five schools. These women were all graduates of the St. Francis Academy, a school for girls created by African American women immigrants from Santo Domingo. The expressed purpose of the St. Francis Academy was to train young women who would "become mothers or household servants, in such solid virtues and religious and moral principles as modesty, honesty, and integrity."[37] In order to achieve this goal, they

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[37] Ibid., 139.

trained teachers to staff the school, and in so doing created not only a place of education for some of Baltimore's young African American women, but also created a cadre of teachers who would take it upon themselves to teach the next generation of Baltimore's African American youth. In this way, African American self-educational efforts were able to produce a ripple effect as graduates often started their own schools or taught in existing schools.

These African American schools were often maintained through tuition (almost always required only from those who could pay) and through the financial contributions of organizations such as churches, clubs, or mutual aid societies. Many free African Americans facilitated educational self-help by leaving portions of their estates to educational institutions. One example comes from Baltimore. In 1835 Nelson Wells, a African American citizen of Baltimore, left the substantial sum of $10,000 for the education of free African American children. The Wells School, named after its benefactor, operated from 1835 to at least 1871.[38]

The above discussion has dealt mostly with African American education as it took place in formal schoolrooms between teachers and students. But this story would not be complete without looking at the contributions of African American literary societies to the education of African American communities. These societies formed in large numbers in the 1830s in response to the racial exclusion of white literary societies. Their function was mostly educational: providing libraries and reading rooms, encouraging literary efforts by providing audiences and mediums of publication, and training orators. In 1834 New York's Phoenix society attempted to

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[38] Ibid., 143.

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raise $10,000 for the building of a library, reading room, museum or exhibition room where African American children could hear lectures. Boston's Afric-American Female Intelligence Society (before 1832) collected dues to buy books and rent rooms. This particular group was "actuated by a national feeling for the welfare of our friends through it fit to associate for the diffusion of knowledge, the suppression of vice and immorality, and for cherishing such virtues as would render them happy and useful to society." These groups not only provided places and books necessary for learning; they also trained leaders for the community and were at times responsible for the development of actual schools.[39] They also point out that the use of education for self-help does not necessarily require the creation of a school—it may involve simply the encouragement of learning.

It was in this larger context that the Upper Midwest's first African American teachers entered the public education system. They entered the system when race relations were relatively good. They quickly began the work of aiding their communities both inside and outside the classroom.

[39] Dorothy B. Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846," *Journal of Negro Education* V (1936), 555-76.

Chapter 3

"A Career to Build, A People to Serve, a Purpose to Accomplish": Detroit's First African American Schoolteachers[1]

The integration of public schools in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit was not an easy or simple process. On the one hand, many African American educators worked for the desegregation of schools. During this struggle, desegregating teaching staffs was almost as large an issue as desegregating student bodies. However, many African American teachers did not support the movement to integrate public schools, preferring a separate system of education instead. This placed the debate around a difficult choice between the importance of providing African American role models in classrooms versus the very real threat to African American teacher's jobs that came with the integration of schools. However, the Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit public schools chose integration in the immediate postbellum period, and with this integration the Midwest's urban schools offered the first opportunity for African American teachers to enter mainstream public educational institutions. Having won entrance, this first generation of African American public schoolteachers began their

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[1] Portions of this chapter appeared in John B. Reid, "'A Career to Build, A People to Serve, a Purpose to Accomplish ': Race, Class, Gender and Detroit's First Black Women Teachers, 1865-1916 in Hine, ed., *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* (Brooklyn, N. Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 303-20.

work inside and outside of classrooms. These early teachers were indeed exceptional. A closer look at the lives of these women demonstrates that in the period before the Great Migration, and particularly before 1900, in each of these cities, African American women schoolteachers in Detroit had a dramatic impact on the community, working inside and outside of the classroom to integrate public schools, to elevate the race, and to fight negative perceptions of African American womanhood.[2] They achieved much during this period because the relatively new urban public education system and the relatively good race relations of this period provided a brief window of opportunity for African American women schoolteachers to work with some freedom. However, the stereotypes that continued to confine African American women did not disappear.

The Detroit case study displays what became a traditional pattern of movement from separate schooling to integration. As African Americans trickled into Detroit in the mid-nineteenth century, families found an educational system in Detroit that had provided a public school for African American children beginning in 1842. Before 1840, African American Detroiters had provided their own education as did most Northern free African American communities.[3] In 1836, Detroit's African Americans opened a private school in the Fort Street East building and appointed James Field, an African American, as teacher. Two European American men took over in 1838, but

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[2] Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: the Historical Assault of Afro-American Women* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991). Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 67-90.

[3] Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861.*

they were soon replaced by the Reverend William Monroe, a leading member of the African American community and emigrant from Indiana. When free public schools began in Detroit in 1842, the Detroit Board fired Monroe and replaced him with a European American person, demonstrating the Board's initial preference for white teachers. Monroe taught a private class for four more years in the Second Baptist Church.[4] In 1851, Monroe again became the teacher of the colored school, first in St. Matthews Episcopal Church and later in the Fourth Ward School Building, formerly a white school. Monroe retired in 1856, and white teachers took over the school, with a white male, John Whitbeck, becoming principal in 1860.[5] The resulting school system left children without African American teachers, and left educated African Americans, especially African American women, without an important career opportunity. This was not uncommon. Integration of the schools often resulted in the firing of African American teachers.

Even though Michigan was one of the first Midwestern states to provide for the teaching of African American students, it cannot be attributed completely to its relatively liberal attitudes.[6] The controlling mission of the schools was openly

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[4] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 23-4. Arthur B. Moehlman, *Public Education in Detroit*, 99-100.

[5] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 23-4. Moehlman, *Public Education*, 99-100; Moehlman incorrectly claims John Whitbeck ran the school between 1850 and 1870. He also does not discuss the many moves and personnel changes in the school. These inconsistencies suggest he relied on the incorrect history of the colored schools printed in the Detroit *Advertiser & Tribune* of April 19, 1867.

[6] The Northern tier of Midwestern states was considerably less racist than the Southern tier, perhaps due to their distance from large centers of African American population. Illinois and Indiana had not yet provided for the education of African American children in 1861. V. Jacques Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest*

expressed in the 1842 Report of the Detroit Board of Education, the first report of that board:

> The committee will not here dwell upon the evils of so large a mass of youth loose upon society in a city like ours—evils which are not only visited upon the authors of their being, upon themselves, but upon the morals, reputations, and the purse of the public.[7]

The system of education was set up counteract these "evils," to "eliminate vice and ignorance in the individual, so that the republican institutions might be protected and maintained."[8] According to the Detroit *Gazette* in 1843, these efforts were successful:

> The primary schools were open for six months in the six several wards for the younger class of scholars, and the immediate consequence was the clearing of our avenues, streets and lanes of ragged, filthy children, engaged in ever species of mischief, and growing up the pupils of depravity and crime. The second view presented the same children cleanly clad, inmates of school rooms, and the third exhibited them en connection with children of what is termed the better classes of society, contending for superiority, and finally the schools of summer closed with universal satisfaction.[9]

The fact that the Board created a school for African American youngsters, even though funds were already stretched thin, is not surprising. Here the consideration of a potential threat from the new urban residents crossed both racial, ethnic, and gender lines. However, race did mandate the creation of a separate school for African American children. The small size of the African American community in the 1840s and the proximity of their residences made one school sufficient to educate the city's

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and the Negro During the Civil War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 2, 170.

[7] Report of the Detroit Board of Education, 1842, p. 3.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Quoted in Moehlman, *Public Education in Detroit*, 86.

African American children—88 students were enrolled in 1840 in comparison to 895 non-African American students.[10]

The system's discrimination against women also limited change. From its beginnings in 1842, Detroit's public education system placed women on the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. The Detroit Board of Education's first report in 1842 described the school system in the following way:

> There should be at once established two grades of schools in each ward, and one or more high schools in the city. The first, primary schools, to be taught by females, and composed of the youngest class of children; the second, middle schools, to be taught by masters, and composed of the older and more advanced scholars. . . .[11]

Masters meant men; in November 1842 two middle schools opened, staffed exclusively by men.[12] No one on the board challenged the idea of women as appropriate only for primary teaching.[13]

The lower wages one could pay women workers motivated the Detroit school system to hire mostly women as teachers. From the beginning, the Detroit schools had limited funds. In 1842, the Board could afford to establish only one school in each ward to be operated six months of the year, resulting in crowded classes. In 1865 Detroit teachers averaged fifty-six students, while Chicago teachers averaged

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[10] Ibid., 68.

[11] Ibid., 82.

[12] Ibid., 86.

[13] These barriers were not absolute. In 1860 an eighteen year old woman with a reputation as a disciplinarian was given a middle school class that had driven away two male teachers. The majority of the Board opposed her, but she successfully tamed the class. She left teaching after that year for unknown reasons. Moehlman, *Public Education in Detroit,* 101.

fifty-three and Cleveland's averaged forty-seven.[14] When the Board sought to reduce costs in 1864, it decided to hire as few male teachers as possible. In the words of Mr. O'Rourke, president of the Detroit Board of Education, "women are good and cheaper."[15] Because schoolteachers could not be married before the 1930s, administrators rationalized lower salaries for women because these women presumably did not have to provide for dependents. Detroit's first colored school, established in 1842, paid men $30 a month to $18 a month for women. In 1865, the average male teacher earned $993, while the average woman earned $383. In 1912, the mostly female schoolteacher's average salary was $1,158—the average janitor earned $1,382.[16] Nationwide, the lower wages for which women would teach was one of the two major factors in the feminization of teaching (the other being the absorption of schoolteaching into the women's sphere of domestic dominance). On average, the nineteenth century woman was paid forty to fifty percent of the wage given male teachers.[17]

The openness of the Detroit system to African Americans was shared by school systems in Cleveland and Chicago. Even though the law would have allowed separate schools for African American children, Cleveland's schools were integrated from the beginning. From 1832-7, before the establishment of public schools, Black

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[14] Ibid., 108.

[15] Ibid., 115.

[16] Ibid., 193.

[17] Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 121-22.

Clevelanders ran their own schools in keeping with a practice among free African American communities throughout the United States. The 1840s saw Cleveland subsidize a separate African American school, but the 1850s saw a full integration of Cleveland schools. Integration met little resistance, even less than in Detroit. A petition to start a separate African American school was put forth in 1859, but was rejected by the Board of Education, perhaps because the president of the board was a leading abolitionist. After the Civil War, all resistance evaporated.[18] This relative harmony continued up until World War I. No racial violence in the schools was noted by the African American or mainstream press in those years, unlike Chicago where discrimination and interracial conflict were common in the schools after 1890.[19]

Despite Chicago's more troubled relationship with its African American citizens in the nineteenth century, the Chicago schools were also officially desegregated in the immediate post-Civil War era. The desegregation of the schools in these cities at about the same time was not an accident. The move to desegregate schools was a national movement after the Civil War. In Washington D.C., Radical Republicans were engaged in a battle to desegregate the nation's schools for eight years beginning in 1867. Although this effort failed, and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 did not put an end to school segregation, local efforts to desegregate schools met with success in the Upper Midwest. As in Cleveland and Detroit, African American citizens had to take the initiative and force the states and cities to desegregate. A nineteenth century African American Chicagoan remembered it this way:

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[18] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 16.

[19] Ibid., 61. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 44.

> The parents—most of them—objecting to segregation sent their children right on to the nearest schools as before. The teachers declined to assign them to classes or studies.
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> The Children, however, attended daily, taking their seats in an orderly fashion throughout the controversy that ensued. The school board then determined that any child with more than an eighth of Negro blood could attend the usual schools; but here again was trouble, for the wide range of complexions in the colored families soon demonstrated the impossibility in such a division. After a short time and a determined fight on the part of the colored citizens who invaded the offices of the Board of Education and the mayor, the inglorious career of the Black School was done away with and never resumed.[20]

It was in this context, then, that Detroit's first African American women teachers began teaching in public schools. As a group, they accomplished much despite these limitations. The career of Fannie Richards, the city's first African American teacher, may serve as one example. Richards' accomplishments are rather well-known, especially her involvement in the struggle to desegregate Detroit's public schools.[21] Fannie M. Richards (1841-1922) was born in Fredricksburg, Virginia to Maria Louise Moore, a free person of color born in Toronto to African American and white parents, and Adolphe Richards, a British-educated Hispanic with some African ancestry. Adolphe Richards' occupation as a carpenter in Fredricksburg provided

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[20] St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 44.

[21] Although two men—James Field and William Monroe—taught in schools under the direction of the city, Richards is considered the first Black teacher because she was the first to be hired on a permanent basis. See *Detroit Schools*, vol. 31, no. 2 (October 20, 1970), 1. This is a questionable distinction, but either way does not diminish Richards' career or importance. One can find short biographies of Fannie Richards in several sources, including Rayford Logan and Michael Winston, eds. *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York: Norton, 1982) and Jessie Carnie Smith, *Notable Black American Women* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991). Perhaps the best biographical source is W. B. Hartgrove, "The Story of Marie Louise Moore and Fannie M. Richards," *Journal of Negro History* 1 (1916), 25-26.

enough income and property for his widow to move the family after his death. His sons were able to continue the trade in Detroit until they completed their educations and went on to more lucrative pursuits. One son was Detroit's leading African American politician before 1900. Fannie Richards was educated first in the clandestine schools of antebellum Fredricksburg, and, after Moore moved her family to Detroit in 1851, in the segregated public schools of Detroit. Richards then moved to Toronto to attend high school and after graduation she taught in Detroit's Colored School 2 between 1865-71, and in Detroit's integrated Everett School between 1871-1915.

One aspect of the historical context must be kept in mind when examining this subject: the conceptions of the appropriate education for African American girls held by nineteenth century African American educators such as Anna Julia Cooper and Charlotte Hawkins Brown. Historically, the racial discrimination of European American society led to the neglect of the education of both African American men and women; neither were viewed as being capable or worthy of an education. Consequently, most of the education of African Americans has been done by African American teachers, and women have always been in the forefront of this effort. And unlike European American society, African American education was not sex-segregated. While both African American men and women were excluded from education, the struggle against this exclusion became a struggle based on race, not gender. While European American women were ridiculed for pursuing an education in the nineteenth century, the African American community supported the education of African American women, seeing it as part of a larger effort to uplift the race as a

whole.

However, the African American community was not without sexism, and the nineteenth century witnessed a debate regarding the appropriateness of higher education for African American women. In *A Voice from the South*, published in 1882, Anna Julia Cooper condemned the belief that higher education was not appropriate for young African American women. Cooper, an Oberlin College graduate herself, wrote "Let us insist then on special encouragement for the education of our women and special care in their training. Let our girls feel that we expect more of them than that they merely look pretty and appear well in society." This was important to Cooper because "We might as well expect to grow trees from leaves as hope to build up a civilization or a manhood without taking into consideration our women and the home life made by them, which must be the root and ground of the whole matter."[22] Others, including Fanny Jackson Coppin and Alexander Crummell similarly advocated the education of African American women. Together, their strong arguments in favor of the need for this education point to an underlying resistance to this education.[23]

The Richards and other African American migrants to Detroit arrived in a city where conditions were superior to those of the slave South but by no means friendly to African Americans. In fact, escaping the slave South was not a guarantee of continued freedom or even increased rights and privileges. Restrictions from the

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[22] Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York: Negro Universities Press), 24-25, 78.

[23] See Alexander Crummell, *The Black Woman of the South: Her Neglects and Needs* (Washington: B. S. Adams, 1883).

territorial days continued into the 1835 state constitution including the exclusion of African Americans from the vote, jury duty, and the militia, and a law prohibiting interracial marriages. Even more serious was the 1827 Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes and to Punish the Kidnapping of Such Persons. This statute, amended in 1828 to insure its enforcement, required all African American Michiganders to register with the clerk of the county court and to carry proof of freedom. Much more restrictive was the requirement that each African American resident of Michigan post a $500 bond as a guarantee of good behavior. This requirement reflected the prejudice against African Americans, and in particular the stereotype of them as possessing criminal tendencies. The justification for these restrictions was that the state would provide African American residents with additional protections against slave hunters and the illegal kidnapping of free African Americans. However, the real effect of this act was to exclude or limit African American migration and thus operated to force that migration underground. The timing of the act, corresponding to the completion of the Erie Canal and the influx of migrants that followed it to the Midwest, suggests a motivation to exclude rather than to protect.[24]

These supposed projections did not ease fears of kidnapping by renegade Southern slave-catchers. In 1833 a group of slave hunters from Kentucky arrived in Detroit, sparking Detroit's most serious early race riot. The hunters came to Detroit to capture and return two fugitive slaves, Thornton and Ruth Blackburn, to their masters in Kentucky. Detroit's African American community acted with alarm to this

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[24] *Laws of the Territory of Michigan* (Lansing, Michigan, 1874), II, 48-53, 137, III, 1217, 1242, 1247. *The Compiled Laws of the State of Michigan* (Detroit, 1857), II, 954. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 5-7.

development for two reasons: first, they were reacting with legitimate concern for two members of the tight-knit community, in particular a Thornton Blackburn who had acquired a good reputation within the community; and second, a general response against slave hunting in general due to the frequent abuses of slave hunters in their work. No African American Detroiter could rest when slave hunters were in town; too frequently legally free persons had been illegally kidnapped and put into slavery. Slave hunters were not known for their moral scruples, and anyone of the "wrong" skin color was a possible victim. Confronting these realities, the Detroit African American community united and took steps to resist the men from Kentucky. After the Blackburns were arrested and taken to court, a large number of African American Detroiters attended the hearing in order to insure the fair meting out of justice. The court decided in favor of the Kentuckians, however, and in response to this injustice the first signs of unrest appeared. On the day following the hearing, a group of African Americans from Detroit and surrounding areas, even some Canadians, appeared outside the jail to protest. The people appeared angry and unruly, armed with clubs and an apparent determination to rescue the Blackburns, but it broke up by nightfall. Amazingly, Ruth Blackburn was able to escape that evening by switching clothes with a visitor, walking out of the jail, and crossing immediately into Canada. The next morning the crowd gathered again in order to prevent the transfer of Thornton Blackburn to a steamship for delivery to Kentucky. Even though the group was armed with clubs, stones, and even pistols, the officials apparently did not take the threat seriously. This dismissal may have been due to racist assumptions about African American character as being childlike. For whatever reason, officials

dismissed these actions as an "impulse or braggadocio threat."[25] However, the threat was not empty. The group seized the horse and cart that was to take Blackburn to the steamship, beat the sheriff so badly that he died from his injuries within a year, and drove Blackburn away from the jail. The horse and cart were overtaken in the woods soon after, but in an ingenious maneuver, the cart was now just a decoy; Blackburn had already left for Canada to join his wife. The Blackburns were arrested in Canada, but later released. Blackburn later became a vice president of the Canadian Mill & Mercantile Company, and by 1867 was reported as being a wealthy citizen of Toronto.[26]

Although all worked out well for the Blackburns, the costs to Detroit's African American community were high. The committee of citizens that reported on the incident blamed it on Detroit's African American community, and they recommended, among other things, better enforcement of the 1827 Black Code and a nine o'clock curfew for African Americans. In addition, the mayor requested United States troops to enter the city to insure order and they stayed two weeks to protect against arson threats. Perhaps most importantly, the riot stirred hostile feelings between the races in Detroit. One Detroiter wrote in a letter that "I never did like Negroes and this has given me a more horrible idea of them — the children on going from school are as

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[25] *Detroit Courier*, June 19, 1833. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 10.

[26] Report on the Blackburn riot, *Detroit Courier*, July 24, 1833. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 9-11. Sidney Glazer, ed., "In Old Detroit, 1831-1836," *Michigan History Magazine* XXVI (Spring 1942), 206.

much afraid of them as we used to be of Indians."[27]

The Blackburn riot and its aftermath demonstrate two things about early Detroit and its African American population. First, the atmosphere in Detroit was not as friendly to African Americans as has sometimes been depicted. Early nineteenth century Detroit was not a haven for freedmen and escaped slaves because of the kindness of its non-African American population. Second, despite this hostile atmosphere, and in a testament to the horror of conditions for African Americans in the South, African Americans like the Richards family continued to come to Detroit though in fairly small numbers. The African American population of Detroit grew from 193 in 1840 to 587 in 1850; the Richards clan became part of this small group.[28]

Detroit's African American community had protested inequality since the 1840s because, according to the State Colored Convention in 1843, the Detroit educational system allowed African Americans only "a scanty and inadequate participation in the privileges of education."[29] But the changing conditions of the 1850s and 1860s exacerbated the problems with Detroit's separate and unequal system. The growth of Detroit's African American population made one school insufficient. Between 1840 and 1860, Detroit's African American population grew from 193 to 1402, effectively excluding large numbers of African American children

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[27] Letter from Eliza Mason to Catherine Mason, July 27, 1833 in the John Mason Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit Michigan. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 12.

[28] U.S. Census, 1840. U.S. Census, 1850.

[29] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 24-5.

from attending the one separate school.[30] An additional factor contributing to the tension may have been improper treatment of students in the separate school. At least one student was unable to attend the colored schools because of the cruelty of the teachers.[31] These factors coincided with the nationwide movement for African American rights that was encouraged by the rhetoric of the Civil War. Throughout the Midwest in 1864-5, African Americans petitioned legislatures to integrate schools.[32] A mixed school law was even debated in Congress between 1867 and 1875, but Southern legislators eventually defeated the bill.[33]

The Detroit Board of Education created a second public school for African American children and appointed Richards its first and only teacher in 1865. However, this did not resolve the problems inherent in separate schooling. Soon after Richards' appointment, the movement for desegregation in Michigan accelerated. The Michigan legislature outlawed school segregation in the state in 1869. When the Detroit Board of Education refused to comply, a group of prominent African American Detroiters including Fannie Richards and her brother, John D. Richards, helped initiate and financially support a lawsuit against the Board. The Michigan

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[30] These numbers are approximate due to the tendency of census takers of the period to undercount black residents. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 13, 62.

[31] The student was future prominent clubwoman Frances Preston. "Pioneer women of Afro-American Descent," 3. Unpublished manuscript, in Federation of Colored Women's Clubs Collection, State Archives of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan, 60-14-A, B1, F2.

[32] Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 165.

[33] Alfred H. Kelly, "The Congressional Controversy over School Segregation, 1867-1875" *American Historical Review* LXIV, no. 3 (April 1959), 537-63.

Supreme Court ruled against the Detroit Board that year, but the Board did not comply until 1871 after further pressure from the African American community, a clear demonstration of the Board's opposition to integrated schools.

The exact extent of Richards' involvement in this struggle remains unclear.[34] One article has been written about Richards' role in the desegregation struggle, but the author could only confirm that Richards was one of several financial supporters of the 1869 lawsuit. We know that her brother was Detroit's leading African American speaker and politician at the time. We also know that she knew John J. Bagley, a wealthy white industrialist, a financial supporter of the 1869 lawsuit, and Michigan's fifteenth governor, although we do not know the extent of this relationship. Richards' prominence as Detroit's first African American female teacher and her association with these two important figures in the movement suggest she had influence in the movement. At the time, she would have been the only African American Detroiter with intimate knowledge of the public school system, and could have served as an important advisor to those making public arguments. She certainly served the movement as a symbol of African American competence and of the injustice of the Detroit educational system.[35]

The more interesting question is why Richards became so closely associated with the desegregation struggle in Detroit. Part of the answer probably lies in a

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[34] Robin S. Peebles, "Fannie Richards and the Integration of the Detroit Public Schools," *Michigan History* 65 (1981), 30-1.

[35] The John J. Bagley papers make no mention of Richards, and although this does not mean that she did not serve in any kind of advisory capacity, it does suggest that her symbolic role may have been more important. John J. Bagley Papers, Bentley Historical Collection, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Detroit *Tribune* story of May 12, 1869. The paper portrayed that days events thusly:

> The young Negro teacher of Colored School No. 2 kept glancing toward the railroad tracks outside her classroom window. A week had passed since the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that Joseph Workman's son could not be legally segregated from other Detroit school children. As the afternoon train finally passed, Fannie Richards and her pupils cheered as they saw John Bagley's white handkerchief waving from the train window. This was a pre-arranged signal that meant that the court had abolished segregated public schools in Detroit.[36]

This apparently occurred, but the theatrics involved suggest some degree of staging. The *Tribune* was the Republican organ of Detroit (and continues as such as the *Detroit News*), and was clearly playing up what was a huge victory, both practical and symbolic. The desegregation of schools after the Civil War was an issue loaded with moral capital for Republicans. A blow to the Democratic party and its protection of segregation would have been relished by the Republicans as they celebrated a Republican political era. The victory was real—Detroit's African American children could now attend the mainstream schools to receive, in theory, an equal education. Access to education, then as now, provided real benefits: higher wages and more pleasant daily occupations. But the desegregation had symbolic importance as well. African American children in public schools were invited into the American educational ritual, where the social myths of equality and social mobility were mimicked, where citizens divided into age-grades were put through coming-of-age ritual activities to be graduated into the community as full-fledged members, the individuals symbolically absorbed into the whole.

The reasons that Richards was the center of this, then, may go beyond her

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[36] Detroit *Tribune*, May 12, 1869. Story quoted in Peebles, "Fannie Richards and the Integration of the Detroit Public Schools," 30.

political connections. In appearance and demeanor, Richards exemplified the virtuous teacher. It was especially important that her appearance was not threatening; being of mixed racial heritage, her features and skin color are barely identifiable as African American. Yet the stereotype that applied was still that of the Mammy, the loving, kind caretaker in Southern lore.[37] As we have already seen, Richards was said to have "the eyes of a devoted Mammy."[38] She provided the perfect symbol for a liberal integrationist movement: African American, yet non-threatening in appearance and demeanor.

One other factor may have played a role in the use of Richards' as a symbol in the desegregation struggle. The desegregation of the Upper Midwest's schools and other public institutions was not unanimously supported by their African American communities. In fact, a class rift developed over the subject with the highest classes of African American communities generally supporting integration and the more middling classes opposing it, each reflecting their best interests at the time. And, perhaps even more surprisingly, African American teachers did in some cases actively oppose this move.

The most dramatic instance of community opposition to school integration comes from Detroit itself. In November 1872 a group of middle-class African Americans actually petitioned the Detroit board of education to assign an African American teacher to teach their children. Their petition went beyond a simple request

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[37] Deborah Grey White, *Arn't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 46. Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images*.

[38] *Detroit Free Press*, June 20, 1915.

for an African American body to stand in front of the class. The wording of the petition points to both a desire for an education tailored to the needs of African American children and a distinctly different take on the reality of African American life in the Midwest in the nineteenth century. They asked that "their children may not be confined to an education from the text books alone, but that they may be trained . . . in such deportment and principles as may best fit them for usefulness in the natural positions that they may be called upon to fill in life."[39] The "deportment and principles" for their "natural positions" clearly point to the desire among these parents that their children receive practical education. For the vast majority of African American Detroiters, that situation was only minimally better than that of African American Southerners: relegation to the lower rungs of society with strict constraints on behavior. In this sense, only an African American teacher could understand and convey the proper "deportment and principles" for survival in a hostile environment.

A public debate in another Midwestern city demonstrates some of the issues surrounding the integration of African American schools and teaching staffs. Regarding teachers, a public debate broke out in Dayton, Ohio regarding the issue of teachers and the integration of public schools. The issue emerged in Ohio as the state was considering the issue of statewide school desegregation. Solomon Day, a Dayton teacher, wrote to a legislator of his belief that integration would have a negative effect "regarding the immediate and future interests of the colored race." Day did not oppose the principle of integration of schools, but feared that integration of the schools would lead to the dismissal of African American teachers. The hostility of

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[39] Detroit *Tribune*, November 12, 1872. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 167-8.

European American parents to African American teachers teaching mixed classes, Day suggested, was easily predictable, and no school board would employ African American teachers to lead these classes. Day argued that this loss of African American teachers would have a deleterious effect on African American communities as a whole, and his concerns were not without foundation. Obviously, outside the relatively liberal cities like Cleveland and Detroit, European American hostility to integration was high. Whereas residents of Cleveland, Detroit, and to some extent Chicago might accept African American teachers in classrooms with European American children, places like Dayton or Hillsboro, Ohio were not inclined to such toleration. At the time Ohio's separate schools contained 7,000 to 10,000 students, creating considerable opportunity of African American teachers in the state. By 1878, at least 225 African American teachers worked within Ohio. At an 1878 meeting to discuss issues surrounding African Americans and schools, it was estimated that teachers earned $320,000 per year in Ohio, a sum that African American communities could ill afford to lose.[40]

Teachers like Day were clearly in the minority, and the integrationist won the day with the passage of the school desegregation law in 1887. However, the school integrationists collaboration with Cleveland African American activists may have been problematic in their acceptance of the viewpoints of Cleveland activists whose experiences were those of an unusually tolerant area. One of these activists, Harry Smith, engaged in the debate and argued that the fears of African American teachers

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[40] Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, February 7, 9, 11, 14, 20, 21, 1878. David A. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line 1860-1915*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 200.

about the loss of their positions were largely unfounded. Smith suggested that political pressure could be exerted to keep African American teachers in the schools, and that a quota system could be implemented to mandate the employment of African American teachers. He did admit, however, that the employment of African American teachers was a "secondary consideration" within the larger integrationist efforts.[41]

Smith could place teachers in a secondary position because of the integrationist strategy and the larger political context in which it took place. Integrationists saw school integration as a means of improving European American attitudes and for preparing African Americans for equality. Obviously this was an extremely optimistic position whose foundation lay in the successes of elite African Americans in their integration into and acceptance by the European American majority. Those who opposed the integration of schools took a different approach. They saw separate schools as one of several separate institutions working toward an advancement that would eventually lead to equality and full acceptance in the mainstream.

In hindsight, the position of teachers opposing integration seems the more realistic one. One reason is that many African American teachers did lose their teaching positions when the schools were integrated. Most of these dismissed teachers went into other occupations while some went to neighboring states to teach. For the most part, they remained in professional or solidly middle-class occupations. For example, Ira Collins lost his job as principle of African American schools in Hamilton when they closed in the 1890s and went on to became a minister in Cleveland's

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[41] Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 205. Cleveland *Gazette*, Sept. 22, 1883, March 29, 1884, April 12, 1884, February 21, 1885, March 17, 1886.

A.M.E. Church. W. O. Bowles lost his position as principle of Dayton's African American schools and became a barber in Cleveland. Daniel Guy finished his tenure as principal of Newark, Ohio's African American school and entered the postal service. Between 1887 and 1916, only three integrated school districts in Ohio regularly employed African American teachers to teach in integrated classrooms: Cleveland, Youngstown, and Columbus. Cleveland employed the most by far: twelve in 1905, twenty in 1915. Elsewhere in Ohio the employment of African American teachers was sporadic and often openly resisted.[42]

Teachers like Day who openly opposed school integration were clearly in the minority, yet their numbers were significant and their arguments more than just self-serving. In fact, the issues they raised — the importance of African American teachers as role models for African American youngsters, the special problems of African American communities and the resulting special needs of African American children that require special instruction, the impossibility of an equal education in a majority European American school—are issues of concern to those involved in African American education in the 1990s.[43]

This desegregation struggle demonstrates the intersections of race and class in the African American Detroit of the 1860s. The African American middle-class, along with liberal whites, conceived and financed this struggle. Laboring African Americans simply did not have the money or connections to engage in this kind of organized

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[42] Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 265. See Cleveland *Gazette*, Feb. 28, 1914 for hostility.

[43] Joseph Stewart, Jr., "In Quest of Role Models," 143.

protest. Furthermore, the goals of poor and working class African Americans of this period tended to place more concrete economic issues ahead of civil rights and equal education issues.[44] The Richards family, with its education and financial stability, could guide the community's efforts in directions that benefitted the African American middle class. However Richards herself exercised her influence behind the scenes, sure to remain within the boundaries dictated by the proscriptions of women's separate sphere that cut across the boundaries of race and class.

Regardless of Richards' efforts in the desegregation struggle, her historical significance can't be limited to this one issue. The temptation to view Richards as a "great African American woman," mimics the "great white man" school of historical scholarship that excluded so many people from the nation's history.[45] Although Richards may be the most prominent of these women, in reality she was just one of a group of women whose work for advancement of the race, and particularly African American womanhood, has remained largely invisible. The first generation of African American teachers in Detroit were among the most dedicated and productive participants in African American community self-help efforts in Detroit in the era before the Great Migration. As the city's most prominent African American women, they embraced the Progressive spirit of their white, Protestant, middle-class counterparts and turned it toward their own communities, both inside and outside the

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[44] August Meier, *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 10-1.

[45] For a discussion of these issues, see Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1982).

classroom. Ironically, the Progressive spirit itself encouraged class division, and work for the ideological state apparati of the public schools both furthered this split and provided a forum for dissemination of these divisive ideas. The case of Detroit is in many ways emblematic of this process throughout the Midwest. Detroit's pre-Migration African American community comprised a more significant part of the city's population than their numbers imply. However, as several scholars have noted, nearly all of the limited power and prestige held by the African American communities was concentrated with a handful of professionals who were able to serve and sometimes socialize with privileged whites: usually doctors, lawyers, and ministers, and sometimes wealthy businessmen.[46] Most of the married women, like white women of the professional classes, worked inside the home. However, a good number of African American women from this class sought work outside the home of the kind deemed suitable for middle-class women of the era. While men had a few options in this regard, teaching provided a rare career opportunity for educated African American women.[47]

Detroit's African American teachers were small in numbers. The 1910 United States Census lists eight female and three male African American teachers in Detroit; another source refers to seventeen African American teachers in Detroit in 1915,

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[46] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 158-61. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 99-102. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 51-70.

[47] Nursing provided another option after 1873 when the opening of the first nursing schools began to professionalize nursing and turn it into a more "respectable" profession. Social Work and Library work provided two other options. Hine, *Black Women in White*, xviii.

although both of these sources probably include teachers of private schools.[48] I have identified ten of Detroit's African American women public schoolteachers after the integration of Detroit's public schools and before the Great Migration of the early twentieth century (in alphabetical order): Florence Cole, Mrs. J. Cook, Lola Gregory, Azalia Smith Hackley, Etta Edna Lee, Meta Pelham, Fannie M. Richards, Clara Shewcraft, Theresa Smith, and Sarah Webb.[49] One woman, Delia Pelham Barriers, worked with Richards in one of the segregated public schools, but apparently as an assistant and not formally as a teacher. We know more about some of these women than others, but what we know confirms that these women comprised an especially well-off and respected segment of Detroit's African American community.

The unusually high status of these women immediately separates them from other occupations of African American women. First and foremost, these women had remarkably similar backgrounds: nearly all of Detroit's early teachers came from

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[48] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915*, tables 17 and 18, 518, 521. Frances H. Warren, *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress* (Detroit, 1915), 270, 293-5, 310, 313.

[49] The methods I used to identify these women as teachers varied. Well-known sources such as David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto* identified Fannie Richards, Meta Pelham, Azalia Smith Hackley, Florence Cole, and Lola Gregory as teachers. Warren, *The Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress*, identified Sarah Webb and Mrs. J. Cook as teachers. I located Clara Shewcraft and Etta Edna Lee in the records of the Michigan Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, State Archives, State Library of Michigan, Lansing, Michigan. I stumbled upon Theresa Smith in an article in the Parson Scrapbooks in the Detroit Public Library. I then confirmed their employment as teachers by consulting the records of the Detroit School System and Detroit City Directories. All of the teachers in this article worked for public institutions because their employment as teachers can be established with some certainty. However, some black women and men probably worked as teachers in private schools, while others undoubtedly worked in the public schools before World War I but cannot be identified as black.For all these reasons, this paper does not include all of the black women teachers of the era. It attempts to discuss them as an important group.

relatively prosperous families. In fact, all but one were from families a Detroit paper called the "Cultured Colored Forty," families that boasted some education and/or material stability that separated them from laboring African American people.[50] Two of the four women mentioned in the news item were Detroit teachers—Fannie Richards and Lola Gregory. The Pelhams of Detroit, whose members included Delia Pelham Barriers and Meta Pelham, were arguably the most elite family in Detroit between the Civil War and the Great Migration of the World War I era. A Detroit newspaper referred to the Pelham women as "among our most cultured and highly respected ladies in [the African American] community."[51] Florence Cole's father, James H. Cole, was Detroit's richest African American until his death in 1907.[52] Teachers throughout the region had similar origins. In Cleveland, Central High School teacher Helen Chesnutt's[53] father was Charles W. Chesnutt, Cleveland's wealthiest African American citizen, "honored and esteemed" by prominent whites. Chesnutt later penned a biography of her father.[54]

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[50] A *Detroit News-Tribune* article about "Detroit's Most Exclusive Social Clique, the Cultured Colored '40'" named forty heads of families and eleven individuals. The Cole, Cook, Pelham, Shewcraft, Smith, and Webb families are listed. Fannie Richards and Lola (a.k.a. Lulu) Gregory are listed among the individuals. Only Etta Edna Lee cannot be connected to this group. *Detroit News-Tribune*, April 27, 1902, p. 7.

[51] *Detroit Advocate*, May 18, 1901.

[52] *Detroit News-Tribune*, April 27, 1902, 7.

[53] Helen Chesnutt, along with Cora Fields, held a rare position for a black teacher: a position in a High School. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 62.

[54] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 101. Helen M. Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952).

Beyond family background, the mixed racial heritage or at least a light complexion shared by most of these women points to their elite status. A light complexion aided one's entrance into the African American elite and into the public school system. The link between a light complexion and the upper echelons of Midwestern urban African American communities was common before 1900.[55] A 1915 survey of Detroit African Americans owning real estate or among the city's professionals and business people labeled only 239 of 1496 of these people "full-blooded Negroes."[56] Cleveland's *Advocate*, an early African American newspaper, consoled those "born with a color that rivals ebony," next to advertisements for skin-lightening powders.[57] Of Detroit teachers, Richards and Shewcraft definitely had white grandparents. Smith Hackley's appearance in photographs shows her light complexion. The fact that two separate authors made special mention of Theresa Smith's dark complexion suggests it was unusual for a woman of her standing.[58] A similar phenomenon was present in Cleveland and Chicago. Of early Cleveland

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[55] Spear, *Black Chicago*; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 91-112. For a discussion of color in African American history, see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: the Free Press, 1980), 121-22.

[56] Warren, *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress*, 36.

[57] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 107. Cleveland *Advocate*, September 18, 1915, October 17, 1915, November 13, 1915.

[58] Two separate authors noted her dark complexion, suggesting it was rare for women of this rank. Fuller and Williams describe her as being "of pure African blood." Fuller and Williams, biography of the Smith sisters in "Detroit Heritage." Her dark complexion was also noted in a newspaper article describing her conflict with a white parent. The article was not dated, nor was the newspaper named, but it most likely came from the *Detroit Journal* in August or September 1894. The Parson Scrapbooks, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

teachers, Helen Chesnutt exhibited a light complexion.[59] A light complexion most assuredly had its advantages in Cleveland; according to Jane Edna Hunter, a nursing student in early twentieth century Cleveland, "I was lighter in complexion than any of the other students, and this difference of pigmentation won favors and privileges for me." Unfortunately, these advantages cut both ways: "When at the end of a year, a student whose skin was a shade lighter than mine entered, I was displaced.[60]

Color was also a factor in the hiring and placement of Chicago teachers before 1920. To that time, the average African American teacher had lighter skin than the average African American resident of Chicago, and this became more pronounced as the teaching position became more prestigious. One teacher who began work in 1920 described her African American colleagues as "light brown." The first African American woman to teach at a Chicago high school, Ida Taylor, was notable for her fair complexion. After teaching at that school for a few years and doing well, the principal asked her to "get another nice, light-skinned colored girl" to join the faculty. This tendency to hire those with light complexions sometimes caused conflict when these teachers were accused of discrimination based on color. This issue came to a head in 1935 when Chicago *Defender* publisher Robert Abbott castigated Chicago teachers for this discrimination: "We can neither understand nor appreciate Race teachers who manifest no interest in, no sympathy and no consideration for those

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[59] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 62.

[60] Jane Edna Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer* (New York: Elli Kani Publishing Company, 1940), 55-56.

children of ours who show no signs of racial admixture.[61]

Clearly a connection existed between social status, color, and teaching jobs for African American women. Social status gave these women unusual access to education, financial support and family encouragement. Color was an actual causal factor in the hiring of African American teachers. Although light complexions were common in the elite and middle class sectors of late nineteenth century African American communities that supplied nearly all of these teachers, light complexions were also deemed more acceptable to school officials and parents in majority non-African American settings. African American teachers in all three cities — Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit — taught in racially mixed schools, often in schools with only a few African American students, so an acceptable appearance was important. However, there were exceptions: a dark-skinned woman, such as Theresa Smith, taught in Detroit's public schools.

The common roots of many of these families in the free African American communities of Virginia also suggests their elite status. Several of Detroit's teachers—Richards, the Pelhams, Lee, Cook—share roots in the free African American communities of Virginia. The Fredricksburg free African American community had a history of agitating for the right to educate their children well before the Civil War. However, in the 1830s, the Virginia legislature passed legislation severely restricting the activities of free African Americans. One of the most important provisions prohibited the education of African Americans, slave or

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[61] Chicago *Defender*, February 5, 1921, September 20, 1919, April 6, 1935. Michael W. Homel, *Down From Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920-41* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 110-11.

free. In 1838, the free African American residents of this city petitioned the state legislature to allow the education of their children out-of-state, but the state refused.[62] The Richards family, and several other prominent African American families who left Fredricksburg in the 1850s for Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit in response to these restrictions, believed the denial of education was one of the most important of these restrictions. The Pelham family migrated at about the same time from Petersburg, Virginia.[63] The resulting Midwestern communities contained African American communities with histories of 1) freedom and the higher status it brought in African American communities; 2) some capital which allowed for the purchase of property, the education of children, and/or the opening of a small business; and 3) exclusion from education and a willingness to agitate to obtain it. This may partially explain the commitment and success of these communities in desegregating the city's schools.

Fannie Richards is a case in point. Other examples include the several of Detroit's early teachers who came from Detroit's elite Pelham family. Meta Pelham (1864-1941) entered Detroit's teaching ranks after teaching fifteen years in Hannibal, Missouri. She returned to Detroit to write for the Detroit Plaindealer, Detroit's first African American newspaper, and eventually replaced Fannie Richards at Everett School in 1916. She taught there until 1923, and at Russell School until her retirement in 1935. Her sister, Delia Pelham Barriers, although apparently not a full-fledged

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[62] Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1942), 154. Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 148. Hartgrove, "The Story of Maria Louise Moore," 25-6.

[63] The Pelham Family Papers. Burton Historical Collection. Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan. Folder 1, Page 3.

teacher, assisted Richards in Colored School Number 2 in 1865. Benjamin Pelham's daughter Frances N. Pelham and Joseph H. Pelham's daughters Mabel Pelham and Gladys Pelham also taught in the public schools after 1916.

The Smiths, Coles, and Shewcrafts are yet three more prominent Detroit families whose daughters taught in the public schools. E. Azalia Smith Hackley (1867-1922) is perhaps the most well-known of Detroit's early teachers, but not for her teaching. The daughter of a teacher in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and the granddaughter of Wilson Beard, a prosperous Detroit laundry owner, Hackley became nationally known for her work in teaching African American folksongs to individuals and groups all over the United States. Hackley attended Detroit public schools, graduated from Washington Normal School in 1886, and taught in Detroit's Clinton School for eight years (1886-1894). Florence Frances Cole (d. 1907) is another member of a prosperous family who pursued a career in teaching. Cole's father, James Henry Cole, was one of the few Detroit African American elite born in the Deep South. He migrated to rural Michigan and worked on a farm as a stable boy until the Civil War, when he was able acquire a grain store and livery that supplied the army. He took these profits and bought into Detroit real estate, amassing over $200,000 of property before his death in 1907, making him Detroit's wealthiest African American. Cole taught in Detroit's schools until her marriage in 1897 to Dr. James W. Amers. She died in 1907. Clara Shewcraft (1876-1944) was the daughter of Richard Turner Shewcraft, the son of mixed parents from Guilford County, North Carolina, who became a prominent African American artist. Clara Shewcraft worked as a milliner after graduation from Detroit Central High in 1902. In 1905 she moved to Ypsilanti to attend the State

Normal School, and in 1907 she was hired to teach in Detroit, first at Bishop School and then at Parke and several others until 1937.

In addition to their similar backgrounds, this first generation of teachers broke critical barriers to the advancement of African Americans and particularly African American women. As a group, these women pioneered in many endeavors, paving the way for future African Americans in the Detroit educational system. Unfortunately, at first their barrier breaking provided opportunities for the few who, like themselves, could somehow manage to complete high school and, later, normal school. However, once these barriers were broken, they remained broken, and more and more African American women would gain access to this level of education and be able to obtain these positions as the twentieth century progressed.

Fannie Richards has received a certain amount of notoriety for being the first African American to teach in Detroit's mixed schools.[64] Yet at least two other early Detroit African American teachers broke educational barriers. Meta Pelham was the first African American woman to graduate from Detroit's mostly white Central High School, a remarkable achievement considering the school's failure rate in this era was

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[64] Richards was rather well-known in Detroit at the end of her career. Her retirement warranted an article in the *Detroit News-Tribune*, and her death was front page news in 1922. *Detroit News-Tribune*, June 20, 1915. *Detroit News*, February 16, 1922. A book of pioneering black women listed Richards as one of five successful black teachers in white schools that were "establishing the ability of Afro-American women," indicating that Richards' reputation extended beyond the borders of Detroit. M. A. Majors, *Noted Negro Women—Their Triumphs and Activities* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 171. Today she is still remembered for her pioneering role; her portrait hangs in the Detroit Public Library and a city school bears her name.

ninety percent.[65] Azalia Smith Hackley was also among Central High's first African American graduates, and later was the first African American graduate of Denver University School of Music in Denver, Colorado.[66] Again, this phenomenon was not unique to Detroit. Cleveland teachers broke the same kinds of barriers. Helen Chesnutt and Cora Field were the first African American teachers to teach at the High School level; Chesnutt was hired to teach Latin in 1910 at Cleveland's Central High School and Field was hired to teach music at the same school in 1915.[67]

Furthermore, these teachers broke an additional barrier every time one became the first African American to teach in a particular school or neighborhood. Before the Great Migration changed the racial configuration of Midwestern urban centers, Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit were predominately white cities, with nearly all African Americans living in one area (Chicago's South side, Detroit's near east side, and Cleveland's Central Avenue district) but never comprising more than sixty-five percent of residents in one particular area. Most often, African Americans formed less than fifty percent of the residents on a block, even in "African American" neighborhoods.[68] As a result, African American teachers usually entered schoolrooms in neighborhoods with mostly white residents, although after 1870 white students in

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[65] Federation of Colored Women's Clubs Records, 60-14-A, B1, F38. Pelham graduated in 1881. M. Pelham personnel record, Detroit Public Schools, Detroit, Michigan. Of the class that entered in 1881, only 16 of 160 students graduated. Moehlman, *Public Education in Detroit*, 145.

[66] M. Marguerite Davenport, *Azalia: The Life of Madame E. Azalia Hackley* (Boston: Chapman and Grimes, 1947), 41, 86.

[67] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 62.

[68] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 69.

these neighborhoods were increasingly non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, and few African American teachers taught in the white Anglo-Saxon areas.

Surprisingly, the interactions between African American teachers and white parents were mostly harmonious. In Detroit, there was one exception. A white parent removed her child from Lincoln School on Theresa Smith's first day because "colored people are all right in their place, but they never ought to be placed as teachers in our public schools."[69] However, the fact that it was singled out for attention by a mainstream newspaper suggests it was an exception and not a regular occurrence, although it may suggest just the opposite.

This does not mean that race did not play a factor in the placement of teachers. Evidence suggests the school administration attempted to keep racial conflict to a minimum. A study of the schools where African American teachers taught shows that all taught in the Near East Side where nearly all of Detroit's African Americans resided. Clara Shewcraft was the only exception, having taught in Hamtramck after 1918, but she spent her first eleven years in schools in the Near East neighborhood.[70] And although only eleven African American teachers can be found before 1871,

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[69] Newspaper clipping, from the *Detroit Journal*, undated but probably from 1892. Found in the Parson Scrapbook, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan. Theresa Smith (b. ca. 1876) began teaching in Detroit schools in 1894 (not related to Azalia Smith Hackley). Originally from Windsor, Canada, Smith and her sister Pauline came to Detroit for an education. Because Pauline Smith was unable to get stenographic work, she opened her own stenographic office, which became quite successful. Smith taught at Lincoln School in Detroit for one year (1894) before accepting a position as head of the Model Training Department of the State Normal and Industrial College in Tallahassee, Florida. She later went on to a similar position at Fisk university, and eventually became Professor of English and History at Lincoln Institute.

[70] Clara Shewcraft personnel file, Detroit Public Schools, Detroit, Michigan.

several taught at the same schools in Near East Detroit, although in only one case did they teach at the same time.[71] This suggests the Detroit school administrators considered race when hiring and placing Detroit's African American teachers. They most likely intended these hires to placate the African American community that had consistently challenged inequality in education.

After breaking these barriers, these teachers confronted less visible but no less difficult obstacles in the form of racial and sexual stereotypes. The nineteenth century witnessed the progressive growth of scientific racism which declared African Americans inherently and permanently inferior.[72] Theresa Smith's experience confirms that some whites considered teaching to be incompatible with African Americans' place in the racial hierarchy of the time. In this context, the act of teaching, especially the teaching of white students, contradicted assumptions about the intellectual ability of African American people. They challenged these barriers by serving as symbols of African American female competence at a time when the abilities of all African American Americans were being called into question.

However, African American women teachers had to overcome more than just negative images of African American competence. As Patricia Morton has demonstrated, African American women were represented in unique ways that

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[71] Meta Pelham taught at Everett School after Fannie Richards retired in 1915. Azalia Smith and Etta Edna Lee both taught at Clinton School, though not at the same time. Florence Cole and Lola Gregory did teach at Johnston School together.

[72] George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York: Harper Row, 1971).

demonstrate the convergence of gender and race.[73] Dominant culture discourse had divided African American womanhood into good and bad stereotypes: the Mammy stereotype exemplifying the good, the sexually promiscuous and mean Jezebel exemplifying the bad. These images correspond to the symbolic representations of women in Western culture which are defined by the binary opposition of Eve and Mary as symbols of womanhood.[74] Adding race changed the images. The image of Mary became the happily servile Mammy. The supposed hypersexuality of African blood transformed Eve into the oversexed and mean image of Jezebel.[75] In this context, Detroit's African American women teachers worked to dispute the bad stereotype. The role of the chaste teacher, the moral equivalent to the preacher, served this purpose well. Communities policed the moral behavior of nineteenth century teachers, insuring that students were exposed to an ethical image; the prohibition of marriage was designed to maintain that image.[76] Teachers, then, were highly visible symbols of purity in nineteenth century cities. The combination served the African American women teachers well, for it provided them with just the image

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[73] Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images*, xii.

[74] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 43.

[75] From the earliest contacts, Europeans associated Africans with the animal world and its corresponding unbridled sexual lust. Winthrop Jordan, *Black Over White: American Attitudes toward the Negro 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). For a discussion of the Mammy stereotype see White, *Arn't I a Woman?*, 46-61.

[76] Like ministers, teacher's lives were subject to scrutiny. As scrutiny of their private lives lessened, their academic freedom was correspondingly lessened. David Riesman, *Constraint and Variety in American Education* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), 125.

they needed to contradict the image of the evil and promiscuous African American woman. Ironically, these restrictions offered more to African American women teachers than to their white counterparts because negative stereotypes left African American women with so much more to gain.

But denial of the Jezebel image wasn't enough. The Mammy image could also constrict African American women teachers. This ultimate domestic servant—happy in her subservience, dedicated in her care for white children—was applied to at least one of Detroit's early African American teachers. For example, the *Detroit Free Press* described Fannie Richards as having the "eyes of a devoted Mammy."[77] This image of African American women as strong, loyal, and subservient may help explain the willingness of Detroit Board members to allow these women teach in the public schools at all. Teaching, then, despite its attempt to confront negative stereotypes of African American womanhood, could not always overcome these flexible stereotypes. However, the stereotypes interacted with other race, class, and gender factors with sometimes surprising results. The Mammy stereotype actually aided African American teachers in gaining access to the public education system, even in predominately white neighborhoods, by invoking the same racial symbolism that allowed African American slaves to care for white children in the Slave South.

All of the barriers broken by this first generation of public school teachers were, in themselves, worthy of recognition and analysis. But the work these teachers did outside the classroom, in their communities, supplemented that work and may have superseded it in importance. This work took place in the context of organized

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[77] *Detroit Free Press*, June 20, 1915.

African American efforts to aid the African American community, efforts that go back to the seventeenth century. This long history has led Richard Thomas to term this the "African American self-help tradition," a tradition of building institutions to serve the needs of the African American community where the dominant society refused to do so.[78]

Education has been one of the most important elements of African American self-help, and African American teachers were at the forefront of African American self-help initiatives. In fact, an examination of the careers of early Detroit teachers—even those who quit teaching in public schools—demonstrates that the urge to lift the race through teaching cannot be separated from the desire to advance the race generally. African American women teachers in the urban Midwest expressed their impulse to engage in self-help activities, like other African American women there and throughout the United States, first and foremost inside the classroom. These women most frequently cited this desire to advance the race as their predominant motivation for entering teaching.[79] In the late nineteenth century African American people, especially African American women, tended to believe that education of the African American community was the solution to the race's plight. Furthermore they believed women to be best suited for the instruction of young children in accordance with the Victorian ideal of womanhood.[80] But as African American women they

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[78] Richard Thomas, *Life For Us is What We Make It*, xiii.

[79] Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 263; Davenport, *Azalia*, 50.

[80] Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women and the Advancement of the Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 5-6. Jacqueline Anne Rose, *Lugenia Burns Hope: Black Southern Reformer* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia

necessarily came to the classroom with some sense of oppositional consciousness. Their activities constituted a special kind of self-help and protest. They worked with and promoted an African American woman's ideology of racial advancement and empowerment.

As for the daily activities in these classrooms, the available evidence suggests that African American teachers were probably more sensitive to issues of race and class than whites. After all, the act of becoming educated and seeking employment in the public schools required at least an internal denial of popular racist theories. In 1915, a local newspaper interviewed Fannie Richards and she said: "The mixture was interesting to watch in the classroom, for while the Jewish children led in arithmetic, and the German children were the best thinkers, the colored children were the best readers, almost orators, I might say."[81] At this time, few others in the Detroit educational system would have had so positive about the ability of African American students. In fact, intelligence testing had just begun systematically defining large percentages of African American students as retarded.[82] Azalia Smith Hackley also

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Press, 1989), 129-30.

[81] Peebles, "Fannie Richards," 31.

[82] Detroit was among the nation's leaders in using intelligence tests to separate students and thereby make the educational process more efficient. David Tyack, *The One Best System: a History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 208-9. Estimates vary from 17 percent to 53 percent as to how many black students were declared retarded by their performance on these tests. However, all agree that the percentage was much higher for black students, especially those born in the Southern states. Conot, *American Odyssey*, 141. Forrester B. Washington, "The Negro in Detroit: A Survey of the Conditions of a Negro Group in a Northern Industrial Center During the War Prosperity Period," unpublished, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

took special interest in the "culturally and materially" deprived students.[83] Her case suggests that the experience of race discrimination, combined with the gender roles assigned women, could translate into a concern for the disadvantaged of all races. However, the main point is that African American teachers brought an oppositional consciousness to the classroom, a different "angle of vision" that altered the outcomes of public education just by the presence of these teachers, without any conscience effort on their part, although conscious effort furthered the process. However, this different "angle of vision" contained a class dimension that would change public education in unforeseen ways. "Lifting the race" presumed that it required "lifting" and that African American professionals were the people most qualified and able to decide how that would be done.

It is outside of the classrooms, though, where African American women teachers exerted an even more powerful influence on the direction of African American urban communities. African American women teachers in Detroit engaged in a complex of racial advancement and empowerment activities geared towards African American people in general and African American women in particular outside the classroom. The teaching work discussed above was part of these resistance activities. But African American women teachers did not confine their efforts on behalf of African American people, and in particular African American women, to the classroom. Their participation and leadership in the African American women's clubs extended their efforts into the community. Undoubtedly the work done by the African American women of Detroit and other cities helped many people, especially poor

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[83] Davenport, *Azalia*, 44.

children and the elderly. Nonetheless, the work of these groups before 1915 actually increased class bifurcation in African American urban communities and served to harden those divisions. The explanation for this lies in the embedding of African American self-help in the nineteenth century Progressive movement.

African American women's clubs have a long history of providing education and aid to African American communities. The organization of African American women to serve their communities dates back to the earliest days of the African American presence in America, but African American women's clubs began forming in large numbers in the 1830s. Sparked by the increasingly large free communities in urban areas, the increasing amount of educated African American women with some free time, the urgent needs of the African American community's poor, and white challenges to the very concept of a free African American population, African American women began forming groups around specific educational, philanthropic, and welfare activities.[84] This movement accelerated in the 1890s when self-help activities began to take precedence over civil rights agitation in an increasingly hostile racial climate. In this decade these clubs began to organize on state and national levels. The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC) was organized in 1896, and the Michigan State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was organized 1898 at a meeting of the NACWC.[85]

These clubs developed alongside similar organizations in the white community

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[84] Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 436.

[85] Robin S. Peebles, "Detroit's Black Women's Clubs," *Michigan History*, 48.

that did not welcome African American participants. Like these white women's clubs, and in keeping with the Victorian belief that men and women should live their lives in separate spheres, African American women's club work usually involved nurturing activities expected of those in the women's sphere. Caring for social inferiors, children, and the aged required moral superiority and nurturing ability—the natural abilities of the ideal Victorian woman.[86] African American women's work in clubs differed from white women's in its commitment to more universal programs instead of individual relief and its commitment to protecting women from sexual exploitation.[87]

The importance of these clubs to the history of African American women teachers is that teachers comprised a disproportionate number of both members and leaders.[88] Their numbers allowed them to shape the direction of the clubs more than any other occupational group. In addition, their influence almost certainly went beyond their numbers because of their possession of culturally admired education and speaking experience. The Detroit Study Club provides an example of one of these clubs. Organized in 1898, this club included several of Detroit's early African American teachers: Fanny Richards, Lola Gregory, Clara Shewcraft, Meta Pelham,

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[86] Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990), 30.

[87] Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991), 559-90.

[88] Twelve of the seventy-five members of the Michigan Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were teachers at one time. MFCWC, 60-14-A, B1. In 1910, 0.003 percent of black Michigan women worked as teachers. This group was 0.009 percent of employed black women. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915*, 518, 521.

Theresa Smith, and former assistant Delia Pelham Barriers. This club heard members deliver lectures, invited dignitaries such as Booker T. Washington to speak to the community, and used its monies to help needy students attend school.[89] That W. E. B. DuBois wrote and asked for information about institutions maintained by African Americans is evidence of their importance to the African American community.[90] Like African American women's clubs throughout the country, Detroit African American women's clubs worked to care for the elderly as the need became crucial.[91] African American clubwomen built hundreds of homes for the aged all over the country between 1890 and 1913.[92] However, young children became the primary interest of African American clubwomen because they believed the best way to reform society was to instruct and care for the young.[93] Generally, providing child-care facilities and kindergartens were two of the primary functions of colored women's clubs throughout the country.[94] Of course the care of the elderly and the young were accepted public sphere activities for Victorian middle class women.

The Detroit home for elderly African American women and kindergartens in

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[89] See minutes of the meetings of the Detroit Study Club for December 11, 1886; March 2, 1887; and April 14, 1910. Records of the Detroit Study Club, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan. Box 4, Folder 2.

[90] Minutes for the May 7, 1909 meeting of the club. The actual DuBois letter is not in the collection. Records of the Detroit Study Club, Box 3, Folder 2, 5.

[91] Salem, *To Better Our World*, 68.

[92] Over 100 of these homes were created between 1890 and 1913. Meier, *Negro Thought*, 134.

[93] Salem, *To Better Our World*, 78.

[94] Meier, *Negro Thought*, 135.

Detroit public schools further demonstrate the significance of teacher's work in the clubs. Detroit teacher Fannie Richards initiated and served as first president of Detroit's Phillis Wheatley Home for Aged Colored Ladies in 1897, that era's most significant relief effort for the elderly of Detroit. As for aiding the young, Detroit's teachers acted on this belief through their choice of careers, and usually they brought their conviction and their knowledge to the clubs. But in at least one case, the club experience of a teacher may have provided the impetus for reform of the public schools. Fannie Richards convinced the Detroit school administration to experiment with kindergarten in 1872, making Detroit one of the first United States cities to provide kindergarten education.[95] This demonstrates not only Richards' influence with the Board, but also shows the interrelation of the work of Detroit's African American teachers in public education and their work in African American women's clubs.

This may partially explain their disproportionate representation among presidents of the Michigan federation of African American women's clubs: three of the first eleven presidents of the Michigan Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, organized in 1898, were Detroit teachers—Fanny Richards, Meta Pelham, and Lola Gregory.[96] Delia Pelham Barrier, Richards' assistant during her first teaching years, was also one of the first presidents of this organization. The power and authority of teachers in the clubs may have contributed to the division of the MFCWC into two factions—mothers and teachers. At the 1913 meeting, these two groups formally debated ways in which women's clubs could attract young members. Fanny Richards

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[95] Moehlman, *Public Education in Detroit*, 111.

[96] Peebles, "Detroit's Black Women's Clubs," 48.

and Lola Gregory argued the teacher's position, Delia Pelham Barrier and another women the mother's, with Meta Pelham moderating. Unfortunately, the club did not record the content and outcome of this debate.[97]

However, their work reflected the middle-class prejudices of the time, at least in the period before the Great Migration. They often imposed middle-class standards on the lower classes, and they tended to treat those they aided in a condescending manner.[98] In fact, these clubs often worked as methods of policing the behavior of the African American poor, seeking to modify their behavior so it did not threaten "race progress." Their work was a response to a "moral panic" in the cities as African Americans arrived in ever increasing numbers.[99] This response was clearly class-specific and gender-specific in that the focus for much of this activity was the reform of African American female prostitutes. Jane Edna Hunter is quoted at length about the desire to police these women. [100] Clearly these African American clubwomen adopted middle-class dress, demeanor, and attitudes.[101] And although African

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[97] Lucy Johnson, "History of the Detroit Study Club," unpublished manuscript in the Records of the Detroit Study Club.

[98] Salem, *To Better Our World*, 30. Lynda F. Dickson, "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990), 117. Sharon Harley, "Black Middle-Class Women," in Hine, ed., *Encyclopedia of Black Women*.

[99] Hazel V. Carby, "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," *Critical Inquiry* 18, (Summer 1992): 739.

[100] Ibid., 739.

[101] Mary Taylor Blauvelt, "The Race Problem as Discussed by Negro Women," *American Journal of Sociology* VI (1911), 662-672. Blauvelt attended a meeting of the MFCWC, and that is the basis for her article.

American women's clubs allowed working-class women to join, unlike their white counterparts, middle-class women still monopolized the leadership. In addition, by their middle-class values and behaviors they attempted to distinguish themselves from the poor masses.[102]

In addition to their work in African American women's clubs, nearly all of those who left teaching remained active in some form of self-help activity, demonstrating the extent of Detroit's African American women teachers commitment to advancement of the race. At least one teacher—Etta Edna Lee—married and was forced to leave teaching but continued active participation in clubs. Theresa Smith left primary school teaching for her university teaching positions, continuing her interest in educating young African Americans. In addition, she was listed as an honorary member of the Detroit Study Club during her absence.[103] Azalia Smith Hackley earned a degree in music, and started a club in Denver, Colorado committed to the "education and the promotion of our colored women and the promotion of their interests." She also became nationally known for her work to preserve and teach African American folk music all over the United States.[104] This shows the commitment of these women to self-help, warts and all, above and beyond their role as teachers. Self-help activity transcends teaching; teaching must be placed in the context of self-help, not the other way around.

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[102] Sharon Harley, "The Middle Class," in Hine, ed., *Black Women in America*, 787.

[103] Records of the Detroit Study Club, Box 3, Folder 1.

[104] Davenport, *Azalia*, 93, 148, 157. A building at Hampton University was named after Azalia Smith Hackley for her contributions to the race.

Nevertheless, the adoption of these middle-class standards and values did more than separate and self-aggrandize: middle-class values became part of a wider resistance and confrontation to the unique racial and sexual stereotypes imposed on African American women.[105] Sociologist Mary Taylor Blauvelt, after attending a meeting of the Michigan Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in the first decade of the twentieth century, confirmed this. She found that a desire to redeem African American womanhood separated these clubs from those of white women.[106] Here race mandated the creation of the clubs, and race mandated a modification of their functions and membership to serve the needs of the African American community and African American women particularly.

Without doubt, Detroit's African American women teachers were an astonishingly committed and accomplished group. In her biography of Azalia Smith Hackley, M. Marguerite Davenport writes that Hackley "had a career to build, a people to serve, a purpose to accomplish," and would never "betray her race" by abandoning her commitment to her work.[107] This quote could be applied to the rest of Detroit's early African American women teachers as well. Together, they advocated change both inside and outside the classroom. Working for racial advancement in a system with no such inclination, these teachers broke racial barriers and stood as examples of African American women's competence to the thousands of young people

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[105] Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women's History, White Women's History: the Juncture of Race and Class," in Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1994), 49.

[106] Blauvelt, "The Race Problem," 665.

[107] Davenport, *Azalia*, 50.

who passed through their classrooms. They did so despite the fact that a combination of racial and sexual discrimination placed them on the bottom of the school system's career ladder. They also led the African American women's clubs, where they continued their work to advance the race and to fight negative stereotypes of African American womanhood. Certainly, they were not immune from the operations of class, and these operations in public education and in society at large limited the extent to which they could create change. But they nonetheless created positive change for the African American community, and particularly African American women, that belied their small numbers.

Chapter 4

"For Her Little Brown Brothers and Sisters": E. Azalia Hackley, Music, and the Colored Girl Beautiful

While teachers like Fannie Richards and others spent their entire lives in the employ of the public schools, a good number of Midwestern public school teachers took different paths. As we have seen, many retired after a few years of service in order to raise a family. Others pursued higher degrees and went on to lecture at institutions of higher learning. Still others entered the business world for more income or more satisfaction or both. Despite their comparatively short stay within the profession, these women and men are a significant part of the teaching profession, and their lives can tell us as much about public education and educators as can the stories of the career educators. Their story is different, but it reveals another aspect of the teaching profession and those who worked within it.

One such teacher, and admittedly an exceptional one, is E. Azalia Hackley. Like so many other early African American teachers in the Upper Midwest, she was the daughter of free black migrants to the large Midwestern cities, a part of the African American elite who pursued a career in education. And like a great number of African American women of the time, part of her work as an educator revolved around the teaching of music. Hackley was exceptional in that she eventually acquired

a national reputation for her work as a teacher of music who published books on the subject. Moreover, she wrote a guide to beauty for African American girls. As a whole, Hackley's career exemplifies important aspects of the early African American woman teacher's history: her role as a barrier-breaker in education and elsewhere; her use of the teaching profession as a launching pad for another career; and the role of the African American woman as a promulgator of a unique African American woman's ideology of racial empowerment and uplift. However, Hackley's writings reveal a convergence of class and color, particularly in *The Colored Girl Beautiful* (1916), that demonstrates a disturbing anti-blackness as part of her version of racial uplift and empowerment.

Hackley's roots in Detroit are almost as old as Detroit's African American community itself. Wilson Beard, Hackley's grandfather, arrived in Detroit in 1840. Beard had been a slave in Kentucky who had been manumitted. After being fired from a domestic service job due to a desire of local employers to employ European servants as they became available, Beard took his limited capital and opened a laundry that employed eight people. This business was successful, and Beard and his family entered the ranks of Detroit's early African American middle class. He purchased a home on Monroe Avenue and sent both of his daughters to finishing school. In doing so, Beard had accomplished more than was typical of migrants from Kentucky. In general, former Kentuckians who migrated to Detroit were poor and unskilled, while Virginians and other Easterners were better educated and came to the city with more capital with which to establish themselves. In 1860, Virginians comprised fifty percent of skilled African American workers, while only four of forty-one

Kentuckians were so employed. The poorest area of African American residence in the city was known as the Kentucky area due to the high proportion of former Kentuckians living there. It was farther North than the Near East Side where the better-off African American population largely resided in the nineteenth century. The vice district was situated in the Kentucky area, populated with the usual bars, houses of prostitution, and seedy alleys. Beard was fortunate to avoid this fate, most likely due to his astute business sense and his ability to save money. While operating a laundry did not have the prestige of a professional occupation, ownership of the business placed him in the role of a local businessman, a respectable occupation not unlike the ownership and operation of barbershop. Beard and a few others, then, were able to turn a service occupation into a fairly good means of support.[1]

Beard had an interest in education and apparently passed this on to his daughter. As was common among African Americans in slavery, Beard desired and pursued an education even though it was illegal to do so in most slave states. He was able to acquire the ability to read and write by interacting with the children he walked to and from school each day. Beard never forgot the experience, and consequently he emphasized the importance of education to his children and grandchildren. He sent his daughter, Corilla, to finishing school and to music school. His granddaughter, Azalia Hackley, remembered his stories about his difficulty obtaining an education, and cited these as a source for her respect for education and her desire to become an educator.

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[1] M. Marguerite Davenport, *Azalia: the Life of Madame E. Azalia Hackley* (Boston: Chapman & Grimes, Inc., 1947), 23-4. David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 28, 31. Davenport's book is by far the best source of biographical data on Azalia Hackley as it is based on letters, papers, and diaries in the possession of her widowed husband in the 1930s. That material is no longer available.

Although the situations differed in that Beard was a ex-slave and the Richards clan had migrated with a free status, they nonetheless shared a similar pattern. In both cases, the lack of access to even the most rudimentary education heightened education's sense of importance within these families. This sense of education's importance helped to make teaching a logical career choice for several of the better-off African American families in Detroit and elsewhere.[2] When combined with the respectability of the teaching profession and that profession's willingness to include some African Americans, teaching can be understood as a desirable profession for the nineteenth century African American woman.

Hackley's parents moved to Murfreesboro, Tennessee after their Detroit marriage, and it was here on June 29, 1867 that Azalia Smith Hackley was born. Her mother, Corilla Smith, in the tradition of African Americans since the eighteenth century, opened her own school in order to educate the African American children of Murfreesboro. Mrs. Smith found an old church to use as a schoolroom, and she quickly had a number of students enrolled. Smith utilized her musical education in the classroom, as that was her primary training. She enjoyed the work greatly, but her job was made nearly impossible by the hostility of the majority population. This hostility was mainly manifested in verbal insults and threats. Men sitting in front of the general store would often verbally abuse Smith as she walked by and sometimes even threatened her life. They referred to her as the "Yankee school teacher with her high manners and her prissy dress." Periodically bricks flying through her classroom

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[2] Davenport, *Azalia*, 22-23. Hartgrove, "The Story of Maria Louise Moore and Fannie M. Richards," 26.

window interrupted her class. This was a common experience for Northern teachers who ventured to the South to teach after the Civil War, in particular African Americans. Another teacher who suffered similar effronteries was Ellen Garrison Jackson of Concord, Massachusetts. Jackson reported that "In the evening it is considered unsafe to go out, that is for colored people for they are stoned and driven about at the pleasure of the rowdies."[3] Jackson also reported a specific incident:

> I was walking with a friend on my way to a lecture to be delivered at Bethel Hall. We were walking very leisurely along when some one came up behind me and trod on my dress at the same time angrily exclaiming "I wish you not take up all of the sidewalk. Somebody else wants to walk as well as you." Accordingly I stepped aside and politely told him he could pass by if he wished. He then called me a nigger and told me he would not have any of my sass and told me he would slap me in the mouth. I told him in a very decided manner he would not do it. He then passed on. I have found out one thing about these people: if they attack you be careful to stand your ground and they will leave you but if you run they will follow.[4]

And although it was the feeling of Smith and most other Northern teachers teaching in the South that this hostility would soon end, the birth of two daughters—Azalia and sister Marietta in 1870—encouraged the Smiths to move back to Detroit. As hostile as Detroit could be to African Americans, it still offered more safety and more opportunity than did the Reconstruction South. And because education was of such importance to the Smith family, the fact that the Detroit schools were in the process of desegregating must have been a powerful incentive to leave Murfreesboro.[5]

Corilla Smith's experiences are noteworthy for a couple of reasons. For one,

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[3] Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), 273.

[4] Ibid., 273-74.

[5] Davenport, *Azalia*, 28.

her willingness and ability to start a school and attract students despite her lack of teacher training suggests the desperate need for African American teachers in segregated school districts. The need was so great that a woman with only a finishing school education and with some musical training could attract a large number of eager students. The extent of this need is revealed when one notes that a fairly large number of trained teachers were available. Oberlin College in particular was training African American women, several of whom went South to teach.[6] These women, however, could not come close to satisfying the demand for teachers in the Reconstruction South. Another notable issue is that her harassers were as upset by her Northern origins as they were by her race. This may have been because the sting of defeat at the hands of the North was still fresh and the use of the Yankee epithet would still connote an extraordinary amount of hostility. In addition, Smith may have been unwilling to report the use of racial epithets to her children. Her "prissiness" and reference to her supposedly haughty manner, however, were thinly veiled attacks on her "uppity" manners based solely on an African American woman dressing and carrying herself as an equal.

In 1870 the Smiths moved back to Detroit. Hackley's father opened a curio shop and the family settled into a fairly comfortable existence. They moved into an all European American neighborhood amongst many well-to-do Detroiters. As was typical of nineteenth century Midwestern cities, though, the Smiths' choice of neighborhood was restricted. As noted above, the vast majority of nineteenth century African American Detroiters lived on the Near East Side, a neighborhood bounded by

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[6] Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 261-305.

the Detroit River to the south, Gratiot Street to the north, Randolph Street to the west, and DeQuindre Street to the east. In 1870, eighty-five percent of Detroit's African American residents resided within these borders, and this percentage remained fairly constant into the twentieth century. In 1900, the figure remained eighty-five percent, and that figure still had not changed by 1910. But because the number of African Americans living in Detroit was comparatively small, they did not fill the Near East Side to the exclusion of others. In fact, the highest concentration of African Americans in Detroit in 1880 was seventeen African American residences out of twenty-six on a block; no other street contained more than twelve of twenty-six. The non-African American residents, though, were likely to be foreign born. For example, on the street with the highest concentration of African Americans, ninety percent of the non-African American residents were foreign born, suggesting that Detroit was already largely segregated although not on the strictly racial lines that defined segregation in twentieth century Midwestern cities. So even though the Smiths were the only African Americans in the immediate neighborhood, they nonetheless were living in that fairly small neighborhood where African Americans were not excluded. The Smiths' residence on Monroe Avenue placed them near the northwest border of this neighborhood not far from Beaubien Street where James H. Cole, Detroit's wealthiest African American, resided in a large, beautiful home. A sign of the Smiths' prosperity was the fact that they possessed not one but two pianos so that both Smith and the young Hackley could practice simultaneously. This was effective because at the age of three Hackley was already playing the piano and entertaining

any guest who would listen.[7]

During these years it became apparent that Hackley's mother had high hopes for her daughter. Corilla Smith had decided that Hackley's life would be devoted to serving her race as an educator, a musician, and as an example. Hackley at age six enrolled at Detroit's Miami public school, the first African American to enroll there. Upon starting public school, Hackley's mother gave her the following instructions: "Your are the first Negro to enter this school among the well-to-do white children; it is up to you to make good and uphold the Negro and pave the way for those who are to follow you." A heavy burden, perhaps, to place on the shoulders of a six-year-old girl, but Hackley would grow up to fulfill her mother's wishes.[8]

Hackley graduated from Miami and entered Detroit's Central High School despite several obstacles. For one, her parents' marriage ended about this time due to a general incompatibility but spurred by an "unfortunate incident."[9] This break up left Smith to support her two daughters on her own. In addition, Smith lost a considerable amount of money in an ill-advised investment. The combination of these two misfortunes dashed Smith's plans to give Hackley the best education money could buy as well as her plans to send her traveling through Europe. Hackley saved the family by working as a musician in dance bands while she attended school. Despite hardships, she broke her second educational barrier when she graduated from Central

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[7] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 59, 61, 69, 77. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population 1790-1915*, 28. Davenport, *Azalia*, 30-31.

[8] Davenport, *Azalia*, 31.

[9] Ibid., 39.

High with honors. This made her the first African American graduate of Central High School.[10]

Immediately after graduation from Central, Hackley was admitted into the Washington Normal School and broke yet another barrier: she became the first African American to be so admitted. She continued to support herself during her education by giving music lessons in the afternoons and occasionally performing at night. In 1886, three years after entering the Normal School, Hackley graduated and promptly applied to the Detroit Public School system. She was clearly qualified, and she was hired to teach second grade in the fall of 1886. She was successful in this position and soon won a promotion to a fourth grade position at the Old Clinton school. The Clinton School was located on South Clinton Street near Rivard Street, placing it squarely in the middle of the Near East Side neighborhood. As was typical, Hackley had been placed in school located within a neighborhood where whites "tolerated" African Americans. It is important not to overstate the nature of this employment. Hackley and other African American teachers in Detroit were essentially segregated within the school system. While it is true that they instructed classes that were filled with European American students, most of them comfortable financially, still a large proportion of these students were foreign-born. African American teachers like Hackley were not free to choose their place of employment. Detroit's West Side was simply off-limits to African American teachers (and students, for that matter). In addition, the fact that Hackley was joined at Clinton School by another African American teacher demonstrates that the Detroit school system was

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[10] Ibid., 41.

deliberately clustering African American teachers in schools within a particular neighborhood. With so few African American teachers and so many schools in the Detroit area (in 1896 there were 59 elementary schools in Detroit), the placement of two African American teachers at the same school was not a coincidence.[11]

Hackley taught in the Detroit school system for eight years (1886-1894). She was committed to teaching and, like her mother, used her musical skills to entertain and educate her students. However, her teaching received little mention in her letters. One letter spoke of the challenge of teaching: "School work has started in very heavy indeed. Ours is to begin 'binding' about now; but the children I have need knowledge and plenty of it, too. It really saddens me to see some of them trying so hard." Her most complete discussion of teaching itself came from a lecture to the Music Teachers' Association:

> Psychology teaches us how to guide the child into believing that he can do that which is required of him. So the teacher does not work out the exercises for him, nor does she do anything for the child which would prevent proper mental development. She gives him mental gymnastics to make him strong and free in thought and expression. The whole aim in teaching is to guide the child so that he will have faith in his own ability, so that he will do things for himself. The teacher who fails in this respect is a poor guardian indeed. The good teacher inspires the child with the thought that accomplishments come with trying. No teacher should be guilty of calling a child a dunce, lest he lose faith in himself.[12]

A good deal of Hackley's energy was devoted to work outside the classroom. She organized a flag-raising ceremony at the school that included a musical program

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[11] Burton, Clarence M, ed., *The City of Detroit, Michigan 1701-1922*, Volume I (Detroit: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), 745-51. *Detroit City Directory*, 1890.

[12] Davenport, *Azalia*, 145.

that so impressed the attendees that glowing articles appeared in two Detroit newspapers. This kind of event was repeated by other Detroit teachers as well, and it was remembered with significant pride. One Detroit teacher's diary contains extended commentary on her organization of a patriotic celebration in the city but contains no reference to the work of teaching. Perhaps teaching in the public schools was often tiring, uninteresting work. Thus it is tempting to surmise that the lack of male resistance to the feminization of the teaching force, and the fact that so many teachers left the teaching ranks after only a few years, was partly due to boredom and exhaustion.[13]

Soon Hackley's musical talents brought new opportunities, and consequently engendered some internal conflict. Hackley often commented that teaching was more than just a means to make a living. When offered a chance to join a touring musical group, the conflict between service and pure enjoyment surfaced. Hackley declined the offer, declaring "Sentimentality must not interfere; I must be strong." While she may not have loved teaching, it was something she felt obligated to due in order to serve her race. Her biographer eloquently describes the conflict between music and teaching:

> No offer was lucrative enough to induce her to play treason; she belonged to the Negro group and it to her; she would never renounce her fealty. The unclouded vision of the path before her was all too clear for that. Her mission was too firmly fixed in mind; she had a career to build a people

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[13] Letter of January 3, 1894 from Azalia Hackley to friend. Quoted in Davenport, *Azalia*, 44. Francis Farmer Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan. Palmer Scrapbooks, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

to serve, a purpose to accomplish.[14]

However, music continually pulled at Hackley. In 1889 she attended a concert by Sissieretta Jones, a classically trained soprano who toured the United States and the world with her own musical troupe.[15] Hackley was captivated by Jones and was filled with the desire to perform. She wrote to a friend regarding the Jones performance and its effect on her: "I couldn't sleep that night. Although I realized Mama's attitude and knew how very much she and Marietta needed me, there was something within much stronger than I. It was craving to manifest itself, so I lay awake into the night, thinking, wishing, planning, wondering."[16] Coincidentally, that same night she first met Edwin Hackley, her future husband. Hackley, reared in Grand Ledge, Michigan, was the son of a barber, and the Hackleys were the only African Americans to reside in that town. His mother had taught in a private school in Detroit before meeting her husband and had known the Beards. Hackley became a lawyer in Michigan before Tuberculosis forced him to move to a better climate. He

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[14] Davenport, *Azalia*, 50.

[15] Sissieretta Jones (1868-1933), also known as Black Patti, was one of the most well-known African American singers of the late nineteenth century. Disturbed by the treatment of African American performers by the Metropolitan Opera, she formed a group of forty African American performers and toured as the Black Patti Troubadours. She sang in Berlin, London, with Antonin Dvorak, for President Harrison, and may have been the first African American to perform in Carnegie Hall. 1889 was Jones' first year of performing after finishing her musical training and predated the formation of the Black Patti Troubadours by seven years. Willia E. Daughtry, "Sissieretta Joyner Jones," in Hine, ed., *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1993), 654-65.

[16] Hackley was needed by her mother and sister because both were ill. Marietta had suffered eye problems since birth and was completely blind by the time Hackley reached adulthood. Hackley's mother contracted cancer and suffered with that disease for twenty years. Davenport, *Azalia*, 51.

entered the bar in Denver, Colorado, the first African American to be so admitted in that state, and started a newspaper, *The Denver Statesman*. An editorial he wrote in 1888 demonstrates that he shared his wife's commitment to the importance of racial uplift:

> We must set higher standards and urge our boys and girls to reach them, If we do not do so, we may not expect our race to get very high in this competitive battle of life. The extravagant color which we are prone to give to ordinary conditions renders us unable to appreciate actual superiority and makes us the prey of our folly. . . . If we would cease the practice of extravagant flattery of ordinary things, the worship of pygmies as sages, the dubbing of struggling tradesmen, farmers, craftsmen, and professional men as captains of industry, of every barn-storming minstrel as a star comedian, and demand worth, measured by the highest standards, we would soon begin to gain a better knowledge of the straight and narrow way by which men and women progress and excel.[17]

The Hackleys moved to Denver after their marriage. Denver had a large and vibrant African American community at the dawn of the twentieth century. A booming railroad center, Denver had considerable construction and railroad work for African American men and plenty of domestic service work for African American women. Denver's African American population was drawn largely from Kansas, the state whose own African American population was fed by the Exodusters fleeing the post-Reconstruction South in the 1880s. By 1910 5,426 African Americans resided in Denver, a large number for a Western city, especially when compared with the 5,741 African Americans residing in Detroit in 1910. And since Denver's non-African American population was less than half that of Detroit, African Americans comprised

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[17] *Denver Statesman*, 1888. Quoted in Davenport, *Azalia*, 61.

a significantly higher proportion of the city's population than in Detroit.[18]

Table 2
African American Population in Denver and Detroit, 1910

City	African Americans	Non-African Americans	Percentage African American
Denver	5,426	207,955	2.5%
Detroit	5,741	460,025	1.2%

SOURCE: U. S. Census Bureau, 1910

Denver proved to be a positive environment for Azalia Hackley; there her musical career got underway. She attended the University of Denver School of Music for four years and graduated with a Bachelor of Music. In yet another first, she was the first African American to graduate from this institution. After graduation she taught in the Extension department of the School of Music and became assistant director of the city's largest choral group. Her work there was singled out by the local press: "The concert was under the direction of Mrs. E. Azalia Hackley, who has brought the club to its present high standard. Mrs. Hackley is not only a talented but a well-educated musician. Her choruses ring with vim and a vigor that is refreshing." But Hackley decided not to confine her efforts to assisting European American groups; she decided to direct African American groups with the purpose of educating and uplifting through music. In other words, she took the principle of service to the

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[18] Sue Armitage, Theresa Banfield, Sarah Jacobus, "Black Women and Their Communities in Colorado," in Hine, ed., *Black Women in United States History* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 54.U.S. Census, 1910. Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

race that initially led her into the teaching profession and took it into the field of musical performance. She expressed her wishes this way: "I want my concerts to be more than a mere evening of musical enjoyment; I want to plan them so that the youth may be inspired, stimulated, and trained at the same time." Hackley's work was successful immediately, as the *Denver Post* noted: "Mrs. Hackley is considered one of the best vocalists in the city. Under her direction Denver is doing more musical work among the Colored people than any other city in the West."[19]

Hackley worked toward racial uplift in Denver through participation in Colored Women's Clubs. For ten years she worked as the editor of the women's section of the *Denver Statesman*, and she had used this forum to communicate the work and ideas of the Colored Women's League in Washington, D.C., a forerunner of the National Association of Colored Women. Hackley and some other Denver women formed a chapter of the League in Denver and adopted the following resolution:

> We, the women of Denver associate ourselves together to collect all facts obtainable showing the moral, intellectual, industrial, and social growth of our people; to foster unity and purpose; to consider and determine methods which will promote the best interest of the Colored people in any direction that suggests itself.[20]

Of this program, Hackley wrote: "In mapping out this program we have borne in mind the great need for thought and talk on the practical as well as the cultural side of women's life. Our first work will be toward the education and improvement of our Colored women and the promotion of their interests." Their agenda included the

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[19] Davenport, *Azalia*, 86-88.

[20] Ibid., 92-93.

following topics: Hygiene, Current Events, Civil Government, Importance of African American History, Literature, and Sociology, Household Economics, the Influence of Music in the African American Home, Practical Talks to Mothers, and the "Physical Culture of Our Girls." This program resembled the Colored Woman's League in its middle-class interest in life at home and in racial uplift.[21] Hackley was also an active member in Denver's Imperial Order of Libyans, a political and beneficent organization.

It did not come easily or quickly, but Hackley eventually put together her interests in teaching, music, and service to her race. She told her husband, in words that express both the selflessness and condescension that are simultaneously present in Progressive Era racial uplift programs, that "I shall dedicate my life to those who justly deserve it — a progressive people, yet a people who need culture and self-appreciation." Her plan was to train and conduct choral groups in order to accomplish the following: to preserve African American spirituals; to draw attention to the work of African American composers; and to encourage African American children to pursue classical musical careers. Her plan was to acquire money and contacts by traveling throughout the country, training local singers and putting on shows. This plan of action would serve the dual purpose of spreading the word about African American music and talent while raising the enormous amount of money required to establish a permanent institution committed to these same goals that would outlive its

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[21] Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women and Organized Reform, 1890-1920* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1990). Davenport, *Azalia*, 92-94.

founder.[22]

The voice of the African American singer was one of Hackley's central concerns. African American singers at this time continued to be plagued by the stereotype that African American voices were a natural endowment that required no training. This alleged natural endowment was part of that collection of stereotypes revolving around the supposed savagery and exotic nature of the African American entertainer, a belief that drew from and perpetuated the myth of African American inferiority. Hackley wanted nothing to do with this set of beliefs: "It chafes me to hear people repeatedly say 'Cultivation spoils the Negro's voice' — and to find the Negro actually believing it. He who has a voice or an ear for music should not be misled by such fallacy."[23] And again, later on:

> There are few singers nowadays who can claim anything but local popularity with untrained voices. This is also true of instrumental music. Striking the keys of a piano to make chords and playing tunes on other instruments is not considered music by those capable to judge. We cannot hold our own with the other race if we allow ourselves to be satisfied with a little. Those who claim to be above mediocre — even those with natural talent — need technique, expression, a thorough knowledge of the elements and principles of music and of harmony. Nowadays the best artists play without notes before them and this means a cultivation of one's memory. All this requires much study.[24]

Hackley had similarly strong opinions on the importance of preserving and performing the music of African American composers. According to Hackley, knowledge of song was as important to the African American people as were the

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[22] Davenport, *Azalia*, 106-07.

[23] Ibid., 107-08.

[24] Ibid., 146-47.

teachings of Christianity. But this was not just any song: "to be really happy, to get the most out of their lives, they must be made to know, appreciate, and sing their own song." The song to which she refers is the tradition of African American music, a music "that has come from the soul of a toiling, hopeful people — an extract of their jubilations, their apprehensions, and their achievements — the only song that America can call her own."[25]

These songs were not just beautiful melodies to Hackley; they were, in her words, "songs of joy and sorrow, hope and despair" that could only have come out of the unique African American experience. Hackley's described the task awaiting her this way: "stimulating, leading, guiding, teaching, directing a people suffering more than any other group from petty jealousies and lack of foresight."[26]

Hackley started on this course in 1904, leaving Denver and heading for a series of fund-raising concerts in Indianapolis and other cities on the way to Philadelphia. The Indianapolis concert was a success, but the others did not pay enough to justify the effort, so Hackley abandoned her earlier plan and headed for Philadelphia. There Hackley assumed in charge of the choir at the Church of the Crucifixion. Again, her efforts were successful as she transformed a weak choir into one of the best in the city. Her success was based not only on the quality of the performance but in the public's affirmation of the classical (as opposed to folk) approach to the music. The rector of the church, Reverend Henry L. Phillips said, "Mrs. Hackley brought a new type of music to our church — classic music. Before

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[25] Ibid., 108.

[26] Ibid., 116.

her time, it wasn't there. Its appeal was immediate. If you asked anybody where he was going Friday evening, he would invariably answer 'the parish.' Crucifixion was understood."

During this time Hackley trained numerous singers, and one of those, Marian Anderson, went on to become a world-famous singer. Hackley came into contact with Anderson when Hackley organized "The People's Chorus," a choir composed of several hundred singers drawn from church choirs throughout the city of Philadelphia. Anderson, who was born and reared in Philadelphia, had attended church from an early age and had joined the children's choir of the Union Baptist Church at the age of six. By the age of twelve she was performing in "The People's Chorus" standing on a chair. Hackley said "I want her to feel elevated and, too, I want no one in the back of the hall to have the slightest difficulty in seeing her." She later became the first African American to sing with the Metropolitan Opera. She is perhaps best known for her Lincoln Memorial concert in 1939, a concert that was precipitated by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refusing to let her sing in Washington's Constitution Hall. Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR as a result of this action and initiated the Lincoln Memorial event to compensate for the Constitutional Hall debacle.[27]

After four years of this work, Hackley decided she needed to travel to Europe for more training and refinement. In spite of her respect for African American composers and performers, Hackley was still looking to Europe as the epitome of

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[27] Mildred Denby Green, "Marian Anderson," in Hine, ed., *Black Women in America*, 29-33. Davenport, *Azalia*, 115-16.

quality and taste in music. "In view of the task that awaits me — stimulating, leading, guiding, teaching, directing a people suffering more than any other group from petty jealousies and lack of foresight, it is essential that I should have all the training prestige and cultural experience needed to dignify — and most important of all, fortify — such a task."[28] That the trip was also intended to "fortify" her suggests that the work in Philadelphia, though rewarding, had been stressful, and the trip to Europe would involve some relaxation as well. Before leaving, Hackley staged one final concert with great success, even surpassing Sissieretta Jones whom she had so admired. One critic wrote of the event:

> Many of our older citizens can recall with infinite delight the first concert given at the Academy of Music by our group. It was sponsored by the late Adrian Lively. Then there were the Bergen concerts in which such talent as Sissieretta Jones, Flora Batson, and the Amphians were featured. All these were delectable offerings, but it remained for the concert on Thursday night to cap the climax in more ways than one.[29]

She also trained and put into place two replacements to carry on her work at the Church of the Crucifixion, and this church maintained its reputation for high quality musical performances into the 1940s.

Hackley took several long trips to Europe between 1905 and 1910, and in that time forged yet another plan to contribute to the uplift of African Americans through music:

> "The improvement of race musical conditions deserves more than a passing thought. Such development holds great possibilities for racial good: It means a better employed idle interest to growing and coming youth; it means better choirs; a better concert every time the church doors are opened; it means a

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[28] Davenport, *Azalia*, 116.

[29] Ibid., 118.

profitable occupation for those born with musical talent."[30]

It became her goal to sponsor African American students to study music in Europe. This was not simply an affirmation of European culture, although she clearly viewed exposure to that culture as a positive, as an aspect of cultural refinement. Her idea was much more far-sighted and practical than that. Hackley believed that African American artists could demonstrate their abilities to European teachers and audiences, and in so doing, pressure American teachers to take the talents of African Americans more seriously:

> These seven million or more Negroes need foresight. We can be advertised for good through our foreign students' success, for every musical journal and newspaper North or South will publish foreign musical matter, when American musical events of large proportions receive only local notice.

That this cost approximately five thousand dollars per student did not discourage Hackley:

> A mere pittance if it would score one point in favor of some many millions of people. One department store in any large city expends that much in a week for advertising. Why? Because the results of advertising are evident. How can we expect the world to believe we have musical talent if the fact is not continually advertised and evidence produced?[31]

The ever resourceful Hackley held public contests in order to raise the money for these scholarships, as well as soliciting donations. This fundraising was often a frustrating process: "It seems strange that while people will put up money for a pugilist or to bury paupers, they are slow to, and oftentimes will not, help a person to a career — something that is bound to benefit others in return." Nevertheless she was

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[30] Ibid., 149.

[31] Ibid., 126-27.

able to acquire enough funds to send one student per year to Europe. The program was apparently successful. The second winner chose to study in London where one of his teachers was the well-known composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.[32] Carl Rossini Diton, the second winner, chose Munich, Germany for his training and had positive remembrances of Hackley:

> I think Madame Hackley was one of the greatest social workers form a musical standpoint that the Colored group has ever known. She, more than anyone else, is responsible for the trend toward the cultivation of the Negro's natural voice and higher musical training. She was the first to lend her influence in a musically educational way in this country. I am sure that there has been nobody else in our group who has personally raised money for music scholarships.[33]

Hackley's only regret is that she could afford so little: "If only I had a million dollars, what I wouldn't do for these artists' sake — music for music's sake — race and race's sake."[34]

After 1910 and until her death in 1922, Hackley continued her work in a more direct fashion; she took her ideas and experiences directly to audiences through a series of lectures on a wide variety of topics. Topics of her lectures included Love, Beauty, Unity, and Teaching Music among many others. Some titles of her lectures are as follows: "Present Concert Conditions," "The Importance of Selecting for Your Child a Name that She Might Like to Emulate," "Different Kinds of Hunger," "Cemeteries I Have Seen," "Hospitals I Have Visited," "Colored Working Girls'

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[32] Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) was the son of a West African doctor and Englishwoman. He composed several cantatas and orchestral pieces, *Hiawatha* being the most famous of these.

[33] Davenport, *Azalia*, 130.

[34] Ibid., 131.

Homes," "Marrying for a Home," and "Hardships Students of Music Might Expect." Although the topics varied widely, the objects were largely the same: to enlighten and educate the audience, especially African American women, in order to uplift the race as a whole. An excerpt from a talk to a group of working-class African American women is a case in point:

> You, the Colored working women, have the bone and sinew of the race. You have helped to build the churches, the schools, and many of the Colored families of professional heads who enjoy the wealth that they do. A girl who is obliged to work in a kitchen should respect her work and dignify her position. You may be a somebody washing dishes or scrubbing floors if you do not depreciate your work; if you will give it status instead of half-doing it and complaining. A slip-shod, half-hearted working woman is a curse to the race, because she gives it a bad reputation. You should put the 'somebody' stamp on every portion of your daily task and do the work as if you expected to get a diploma for it each night. Put pride and joy in your work and let it reflect your inner self.[35]

Although Hackley worked very hard at both teaching and performing music, in hindsight one can not help but notice the condescension of telling domestic servants the importance of working toward a diploma as one scrubbed floors for a living lest they disgrace their race. In the following lecture passage on the topic of unity, Hackley argues for yet another use of music for the advancement of racial unity and solidarity:

> I have come here tonight to talk to you about Unity, which is the only way success can come to anyone. If I had been asked to talk to you of success and Unity among the musical people my talk would be a failure, because Colored musicians themselves are not united. They have done little or nothing to build up their profession. Most of them are too selfish to see ahead far enough to advance the group. It takes a vision nowadays to succeed. I have been all over this broad land and whenever I hear of the wonderful success of any particular Negro I find that this was attained only by the hardest kind of

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[35] Ibid., 142-43.

work — with ups and downs.[36]

Hackley seemingly did not approve of any activity by African Americans that did not also serve to uplift the race, either by teaching or by example.

The most compelling of Hackley's lectures were those that comprise the book *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. Published in 1916, *The Colored Girl Beautiful* contains advice for young women on the subject of beauty, love, and etiquette. The content, however, is a handbook on the need for the African American woman to control herself so that she may raise the level of the race. As such it is a commentary on the racism implicit in some programs for racial advancement and uplift. Hackley wrote *Colored Girl Beautiful* so that a reader might become "a beacon light to her home and to the race." *Colored Girl Beautiful* repeatedly speaks of the duty of African American women to devote their lives to their race rather than to themselves:

> Tell her that each colored girl may be an Esther, especially in all matters of cleanliness, manners, and self-sacrifice, to advance and change the prevalent opinion of the Negro. Each colored woman, not only bears her own burden, but she bears the burden of posterity and the burden of the race. Each one must fit herself for the triple burden. Not even a talent should be used wholly for personal gain nor solely for personal uses. Her education must be a process of development of powers not only to fit her for citizenship and life, but it must fit her for her race's burdens. Some one has said: 'To educate a boy is but the education of an individual — but when one educates a girl, the education of a family results.'[37]

In accordance with this, Hackley wrote, the schools should impress this in the minds of young African American women: "The colored girl beautiful will be taught her duty and relationship to the race, that she may be a living example of what right

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[36] Ibid., 143.

[37] Azalia Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful* (Kansas City, Mo: Burton Publishing Company, 1916), 31.

education and right training will do."

Regarding physical appearance, *Colored Girl Beautiful* is full of condemnation for the African American appearance and a guide to changing that appearance. "To a savage African, a baby with a black skin and flat nose is the ideal." And although the African American, according to Hackley, is blessed with the most beautiful eyes and teeth in the world, their mouths and noses are objectionable: "[African American children] should be taught their good points and their bad points, and should be encouraged to improve their personal appearance, as far as objectionable racial characteristics are concerned." Hackley discusses the objectionable traits in detail: "A large mouth is supposed to be the sign of generosity. No, but if it has thick lips and is a leaking mouth? If it hangs open too much? Only two classes of persons are excused from having open mouths, and these are children with adenoids and imbeciles. Every one else is supposed to keep his mouth shut most of the time." Hackley also found the African American nose objectionable:

> The noses are often flat and have no hump. Look at the hump of the Roman nose — it indicates 'fight.' Look at the hump of the Indian nose which also indicates warlike tendencies. Take the Jewish nose. The hump means fight — a continual warfare for gold. But the Negro has been a peaceful person, consequently he developed no nose hump. It is time he develop a hump — a Negroid hump.

Fortunately something could be done about these objectionable features: "Colored children should be taught that Thought will improve their good points and will eradicate any objectionable points."[38]

Self-control was, according to Hackley, the key to beauty for the African

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[38] Ibid., 11, 23, 26, 34, 35, 36, 135.

American girl and woman. Hackley insists that the Colored girl beautiful must sit still, must not visibly display anger or any other emotion, nor should she attempt athletic activity "unless she is sure that her physique will endure this."[39] Further:

> One not only enhances her beauty but one is really a Somebody or a Nobody according to the control she has over her mind and body. She must control her emotions as she does her appetite. Excessive emotion debilitates the system. Anger is poison to a woman's system. It causes chemical action which upsets the stomach. The bite of an angry person is sometimes poisonous, because of this chemical change. A fit of anger may upset the whole digestive system, and may even cause death because blood is taken from the digestive system and many bodily functions cease. . . . There is health as well as beauty in self control. Culture is self control.[40]

Part of the emphasis on self-control in *Colored Girl Beautiful* is clearly a reaction to the large number of Southern migrants that poured into the cities during the World War I era and whose habits served to embarrass the longtime African American residents of those cities. The above example of the open mouth could be considered part of this. In addition, Hackley condemns talkativeness and loud talking in public places: "It is exceedingly vulgar to air one's opinions in street cars, railroad cars, or in any public place. A person who really knows anything does not parade his knowledge and his opinions." Hackley also suggested that the schools should make sure some of these embarrassing behaviors were changed: "Colored schools are supposed to correct the tendencies of children who have lived under careless, untidy conditions, and to give them ideals of cleanliness and order." However, until she has improved herself, a "girl who lives in the back woods . . . should bide her time, stay to herself until she has fully improved herself, mind and body, and she will reap her

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[39] Ibid., 49, 50.

[40] Ibid., 48.

full reward."[41]

Hackley continued staging Folk Festivals across the country in order to raise money for some kind of permanent institution. In so doing she received accolades for her work. A hall at the Hampton Institute where she taught for a short time was even named after her. Finally, in 1912 Hackley opened the Normal Vocal Institute in Chicago. The school had a unique curriculum based on the beliefs of its founder. It emphasized both musical instruction and personality improvement: "They must learn to create an atmosphere through personality, for a flexible and forceful personality is one of the greatest assets any public performer can have; with it much can be accomplished." Part of this training included classes in poise, charm, and balance. Unfortunately the school was always struggling for money because Hackley insisted the tuition remain affordable. She continued staging concerts to raise funds until her death. She also managed other performers for one third of their earnings, and wrote *The Colored Girl Beautiful* and two music instruction books in order to raise money. Unfortunately, she was not able to raise enough to sustain the school after her death.[42]

To date, Hackley's membership in Detroit's African American elite has become her main historical legacy. Hackley did not make a secret of her class identification, and because of this Hackley became a symbol of the class-conscious Detroiter. She fit the pattern of the "Old Elite" with her light complexion and tendency to make remarks that bordered on condescension. In his study of nineteenth

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[41] Ibid., 47, 136, 51. For a discussion of the response to Southern migrants in a large Midwestern city, see James Grossman, *Land of Hope*.

[42] Davenport, *Azalia*, 57, 160, 161, 164.

century Detroit, David Katzman uses two Hackley quotes to portray the class consciousness of this "Old Elite." One quote is as follows: "New Year's night I attended the Odd Fellows Dance at Germania Hall. The Colored people have never had it before. Talk about a crowd! Everybody was there. I don't mean the tough element, but everyone else." The other quote is used as an example of the condescension of this "Old Elite" to newcomers to the city: "The race needs more quality in Emotion and less quantity." This labeling of Hackley was fair; one can find far more condescending remarks than those Katzman used. When asked about the her preferred obituary shortly before her death, Hackley asked that it say "Born, lived, and died for her little brown sisters and brothers, that they may be lifted from the slums of music."[43]

But we must not let this aspect of Hackley's personality ruin our appreciation of some of Hackley's genuine contribution to African American communities where she lived and to African American culture as a whole. Hackley broke numerous barriers in education, made significant contributions in the performance of African American music, and dedicated her life to the betterment of other's lives. However, a combination of class, color, and success seems to have separated her from the needs of the masses of African American women. In the end, the music could help in the liberation effort, but the altering of one's nose could not.

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[43] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 150, 153, 163. Davenport, *Azalia*, 57. Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*), 126.

Chapter 5

The Politics of Teaching: African American Teachers in the Chicago Schools, 1863-1935

The teachers in Chicago's schools faced racial discrimination and hostility in their pursuit of teaching jobs in the Chicago public schools. Nonetheless, through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African American teachers made inroads into the Chicago public education system. They did so through the use of several strategies. First and foremost, Chicago's African American teachers refused to accept the restrictions of the system and through perseverance broke them down. Second, Chicago's African American teachers took advantage of the increasing school segregation of the early twentieth century to secure more jobs in schools that became predominantly African American in student makeup. And third, African American teachers in Chicago took advantage of the relatively high political clout of that community to win positions in the system whose appointments were often political. As such, they present interesting aspects of the experience of African American teachers. They were often barrier breakers, and they were active in the pursuit of both satisfying careers and the advancement of the race.

Unfortunately, very little information exists regarding the identity of Chicago's African American teachers in the nineteenth century. It is clear, however, that Chicago's schools would not be particularly friendly to African American teachers

was clear from the start. In 1863, the Chicago Board of education overturned the policy of racially integrated schools and instituted a separate school for African American students. As was the norm for separate schools, this school had inadequate facilities for both students and staff. The school was staffed for the first year by two native-born European Americans, but by the end of that first year of operation a young African American woman, Mary Mann, had graduated from the teacher training program and was prepared to take a position in the Colored School. However, in an action that was to be emblematic of the city's attitude to African American educators, Mann was not allowed to share the stage at her graduation with her classmates. Mann taught at the Colored School until it was eliminated in 1865.[1]

Despite this rough start, the years 1880 to 1920 were relatively good ones for African American teachers in Chicago. Beginning in the early 1880s, the Chicago Board of Education hired African American teachers in small numbers to teach in the integrated schools. In 1901 there were thirteen African American teachers in the Chicago schools, and this number increased to sixteen in 1908 and forty-one in 1917. These teachers were not distributed randomly throughout the city. Their placement was largely restricted to those areas where African Americans were permitted to reside. However, this area included areas with schools that were predominately non-African American. In 1905, fifteen African American teachers were working in the Chicago public school system. Of those, eight worked in schools with few or no African American students. Four of the remaining teachers taught at schools with thirty percent African American enrollment, while the other three taught at one school

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[1] Chicago *Tribune*, July 11, 1863. Homel, *Down from Equality*, 3.

whose student population was ninety percent African American. The fact that three African American teachers were clustered at one school suggests that, as in Detroit at the same time, some amount of restriction was present in the placement of African American teachers, but it could not be called rigid separation. As late as 1917, seventeen of twenty-eight African American teachers taught in schools that were predominately European American.[2]

Up until the 1920s, the Chicago Board of Education refused to remove African American teachers because of complaints. In 1909, a group of elementary students threatened to walk out of the school if an African American teacher who had just been transferred to the class did not leave. The principal of that school refused to give in to the students. In 1917, another group of students objected to the hiring of an African American instructor at Phillips High School, but again the principal there refused to remove the teacher. It is especially surprising when one considers that just two years later, one of the worst race riots of the early twentieth century erupted in Chicago. The 1919 Chicago race riot lasted two weeks, took twenty-three African American lives (out of a total of thirty-eight deaths), and left one thousand African Americans homeless.[3] Given this state of racial tension and hostility, this support of African American teachers seems uncharacteristic. It may be partially explained by the unusually rigid structure of the Chicago public education system. Any teacher in the

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[2] Chicago Board of Education, *Annual Directory*, 1905-06, 1917-18. D. A. Bethea, *Colored People's Business Directory of Chicago, 1905*, 126. Homel, *Down from Equality*, 6.

[3] William Tuttle, *Race Riot : Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Athenaeum, 1970), 64.

system had to have high qualifications and political support. A principal would be unlikely to move a teacher without cause for fear of incurring the wrath of the politician supporting that teacher.[4] After 1920 some of that support seemed to evaporate, probably due to the tension caused by the race riot of the previous year. In that year an African American substitute was placed at Altgeld Elementary school, a school with no African American students. Again students revolted, but this time the Board removed the substitute even though the regular teacher had not returned. After this incident, race became an issue in the placement of substitutes. The superintendent announced that "It is not the intention of the officials to assign colored teachers to white schools where it is liable to create a disturbance." Clearly the political tide in Chicago had shifted.[5]

This political component to the hiring and placement of teachers and strict qualification requirements were two obstacles to the attainment of teaching positions for African American teachers. Between 1870 and to at least 1940, the Chicago Board of Education controlled entrance into and graduation from the Chicago Normal School. Only Chicago Normal graduates were allowed into elementary appointments, and only elementary teachers could apply for high school work. Essentially, the employment of teachers in Chicago was political: many unqualified teachers taught as temporary appointees. A high school graduate needed to find a political sponsor; only

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[4] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot in 1919* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 253. *Crisis*, 13 (1916), 35.

[5] Chicago Committee on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 522. Homel, *Down from Equality*, 31-32.

with a letter from a ward committeeman could a person obtain an appointment. As very few of these committeemen were African American, this made appointment to teaching positions considerably more difficult to achieve for African Americans. Before the 1930s, it was difficult to find politicians willing to sponsor an African American teacher. With the assumption of power by Mayor Edward J. Kelly (1933-47), African Americans found an administration that devoted a great deal of energy to courting the African American community. African Americans concentrated their efforts in the educational realm to improving the rate of entrance to Chicago Normal and increasing the number of teaching assignments for African American teachers which were largely patronage issues.[6]

Once a teaching appointment was obtained, African American teachers faced another obstacle in the discriminatory promotion policy of the Chicago schools. The promotion policy of the Chicago school system as it had developed by 1930 had a tendency toward "lock-step seniority". The normal route of promotion was for elementary teachers to move to junior high, then to high school, then to principalship of elementary schools, and then into administration. The problem is that this leads to an overly old cadre of principals. Preference is also given to those who are native Chicagoans and who attended Chicago schools. For example, in the 1930s, new entrants into the elementary schools were almost entirely graduates of Chicago Normal College. In the junior high school, forty-one percent of new hires were from outside the city, and in the senior high, fifty percent were from outside the city. This

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[6] Herrick, *The Chicago Schools*, 246. Homel, *Down from Equality*, 149. Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: the Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 280.

policy discriminates because elementary teaching, where most African American teachers necessarily start, is especially weighted toward insiders. In addition, preference for city residents excludes the large number of African American teachers that migrated from the South after 1915. Furthermore, by keeping African American teachers at the elementary school teaching positions, the policy necessarily kept African American teachers from the promotion process and thus from entering into the higher levels of the teaching force. Without access to jobs at the junior high level, African American teachers had little opportunity to become principals or administrators.[7]

This system kept the number of African American teachers relatively small. Only a few could qualify. The 1860 minimum requirement was two years of high school, boosted in 1880 to four years of high school, and in 1900 to two years of normal school.[8] These qualifications were tough to meet when so few African Americans attended high school. The number of African American high school students in Chicago was so small before the Great Migration that no attempts were made to separate the races in these schools as they were at the lower level schools. This hindered African American teachers from entering the normal school and hence the teaching corps.[9]

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[7] George D. Strayer, *Report of the Survey of the Schools of Chicago, Illinois* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932), 264, 256-57.

[8] Herrick, *The Chicago Schools*, 404. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 34, 156.

[9] Judy J. Mohraz, *The Separate Problem: Case Studies in Black Education in the North, 1900-1930* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 104-05.

This difficulty kept many qualified teachers, especially those from the South, out of the Chicago public education system. Even women who had taught in the South could not qualify and took jobs, sometimes as domestics. In a study of two hundred and seventy-four migrating families in the Great Migration era, a few former teachers were found. None were working as teachers; most were in factory or office work. An example of this is Triana Floyd Woods. A Mississippi native, Woods graduated from the Mississippi State Normal school and taught in Mississippi schools for fifteen years. She migrated to Chicago in 1917 and was unable to find teaching work. She subsequently entered factory work and was eventually made foreperson of the plant where she worked.[10] In 1900, fifty-eight teachers worked in Chicago. By 1910, that number had reached sixty-four. This made African American teachers less than one percent of the teaching force in that city, and not all of those worked in the public schools.[11]

Getting teaching work was so difficult that some African American Chicagoans advocated the institution of a segregated school system in order to create more public school employment for African American teachers. In 1910, a group of African American migrants from the South advocated such as move. The *Defender* vehemently opposed this plan as it would raise taxes and result in inferior facilities and education for those in the separate schools, a cost too high for the benefit of more teaching jobs for African Americans in Chicago schools. The issue continued to be raised over the

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[10] Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 168. *The Negro in Chicago, 1779 to 1929*, 122.

[11] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900 and 1910.

three decades. A letter favoring segregation to help African American teachers appeared in the *Defender* in 1938. It argued that separate schools would be beneficial because "Educated Negroes can get a chance to use their education for something beside running elevators and carrying luggage." A 1940 letter echoed that sentiment, arguing that in Chicago "well-trained Negro teachers must stay for years on the substitute list or get jobs in the South where separate schools provide openings for them." Indeed there existed considerable resentment among migrants who had taught in the South about the lack of opportunity in the Chicago schools. The effort became moot after 1920, however, as the schools and the teaching staffs became increasingly segregated.[12]

This increased segregation was due to the transformation of Chicago by the Great Migration of the World War I era. By 1890, Chicago had become a megalopolis of 1,099,850 inhabitants. Of those, seventy-eight percent where immigrants or children of immigrants. This tide of immigrants dwarfed Chicago's small African American population of 14,271 or one percent of the city's residents. The next forty years would see a dramatic increase in the city's African American population, though the percentage of African Americans among the city's population as a whole would remain relatively low.

Table 3 demonstrates the substantial increase in Chicago's African American population after 1890. Before the 1920 census Chicago's African American population was increasing dramatically, doubling between 1890 and 1900 and tripling between 1890 and 1910. This change is not reflected in the percentage of African Americans

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[12] Chicago *Defender*, November 12, 1910. Homel, *Down from Equality*, 31.

in Chicago because of the dramatic growth of the general Chicago population, which doubled in the twenty years between 1890 and 1910. The growth, then, of that African American population before the 1920 census has more relevance than the numbers suggest. For one thing, the tripling of the African American population between 1890 and 1910 would be significant within the African American community itself, greatly enlarging that community and requiring numerous new social and commercial institutions, or expanded older institutions, to support it. The pre-WWI migration's significance would also be greater than the numbers suggest because of the high visibility of African Americans in the city compared with the large numbers of European immigrants. Even though the African American population of Chicago was only two percent of the total population in 1910, up from one percent in 1890, this small percentage increase reflects a numerical increase of nearly 30,000 people.

Table 3
African American Population of Chicago, 1890-1930

Date	Total Population	African American Population	Percent African American
1890	1,099,850	14,271	1.3
1900	1,698,575	30,150	1.9
1910	2,185,283	44,103	2.0
1920	2,701,705	109,458	4.1
1930	3,376,438	233,903	6.9

SOURCE: U.S. Census Reports, 1890-1930

Nonetheless, the real transformation occurred between 1915 and 1930 as the

African American population of Chicago expanded to nearly seven percent of the total. Between 1910 and 1930 the African American population increased five-fold, while the overall pace of Chicago's growth remained fairly constant. Between 1920 and 1930, one in six newcomers to Chicago were African American. The numbers were not the only story in this migration. The place of origin of the majority of newcomers shifted to the poorest areas of the South—Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. In fact, the U.S. Census for 1930 shows that forty-two percent of Chicago's African American population at that time had migrated from the Deep South.[13]

This influx of African Americans to Chicago and the resulting increase in their presence in the city led to increased isolation within the city's South Side. Allan Spear has shown that the extent of this isolation was not total. Just as Kenneth Kusmer and David Katzman found in their studies of ghetto development in Cleveland and Detroit respectively, some interspersion of African Americans and European Americans took place in selected residential districts. Nowhere in any city could one find a block that was inhabited exclusively by African Americans. Nonetheless, Spear, Kusmer, and Katzman all found that concentrations of African Americans had formed quite early — the South Side in Chicago, the East Side in Cleveland, and the Near East Side in Detroit — where most of the city's African Americans were concentrated. Correspondingly, each city had several areas where African American residents were not welcome. And all three scholars of ghetto formation in these Upper Midwestern cities found that these residential boundaries became more firm over time, particularly

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[13] U.S. Census Bureau Report, 1930.

after the Great Migration.

The ultimate size of the African American communities in these cities should not be overestimated in regards to their importance to reform -minded citizens of the early twentieth century. Ultimately, the enormous problems thrust on major industrial cities like Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit were more than the Progressives could handle and the appalling state of the cities — the "shame" Jacob Riis and others documented so well — often took precedence over the troubles of the African American communities. This is not to say that African Americans received no attention from Progressives. In Chicago, for example, at least one settlement house was created for African Americans by Celia Parker Wooley.[14] In addition, in 1910 Ida B. Wells-Barnett had opened the Negro Fellowship League to provide lodging and services to African American male migrants in need, and Fannie Barrier Williams was active in several relief efforts including a training school for African American nurses in Provident Hospital, established in 1891, and the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association. Nevertheless, most Progressive education reform outside the South was aimed at European immigrants, not African Americans.[15]

The result of all this is that Chicago's schools employed very few African American teachers. By 1930, only slightly more than two percent of the Chicago teachers were African American, and only a few taught at levels higher than elementary school. Of three hundred and forty-five principals, only one was an

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[14] Mohraz, *The Separate Problem* 20. Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 95.

[15] Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., *Progressivism in America: a Study of the Era from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 82-84.

African American, and that was at one of the city's poorest schools.[16] However, this did not prevent some of these teachers from playing prominent roles in their communities. One indication of prominence in the community is leadership in the African American women's clubs, and at least one Chicago teacher, Ethel McCracken-Cleaves, was a president of Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.[17]

Nonetheless, the increasing size of the African American population in Chicago in the early twentieth century created more opportunity for African American teachers. Although this increase was partly due to the racist unwillingness of many European American teachers to teach in majority African American neighborhoods and schools, it was also due to efforts of African American teachers to obtain positions through perseverance and hard work, and through political connections if need be. The period immediately following the Great Migration into the 1930s was a period of significant gains for African American teachers in Chicago. We have insight into this particular period because of a series of interviews of Chicago's African American teachers conducted by Harold F. Gosnell for his book *Negro Politicians: the Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (1935). The interviews, conducted between 1931 and 1933, reveal two things in particular: the racism of many administrators, principals, and teachers in the Chicago public school system, and the successful use

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[16] Mary Jo Herrick, "Negro Employees of the Chicago Board of Education," (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1931), 9, 32. Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 137.

[17] Washington Intercollegiate Club of Chicago, *The Negro in Chicago, 1779 to 1929* (Chicago: Washington Intercollegiate Club of Chicago, 1929), 129-42.

of perseverance and political clout by African American teachers to break down these barriers.

The discriminatory acts of administrators, principals, and teachers in the Chicago system took many forms. One form involved the appointment and placement of African America teachers within the Chicago school system. The racial composition of the student population and the neighborhood in which the schools were located influenced the appointment of African American teachers. African American teachers were much more likely to be found in schools with large African American student populations. And as the percentage of African American students in a school increased, so too did the percentage of African American teachers in general, although it usually took several years for the transition to a predominately African American teaching force took place (see Table 4). This was the result of two factors. First, European American teachers tended to seek transfers from schools as their African American student population increased. This was not solely a result of racial prejudice, though that was certainly an important factor. In addition, most schools in majority African American neighborhoods were less desirable places to teach. As one African American teacher described them, "the school buildings in the Negro districts are, in general, old. The neighborhoods are poor."[18] A second factor was probably African American community pressure. African Americans in other cities have consistently pressured school boards to hire African American teachers to teach African American students. In Chicago, as noted earlier, this has included efforts to

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[18] Interview conducted with unnamed Chicago teacher, August 25, 1931. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 287.

Table 4
African American Teachers in Selected Chicago Schools, 1934

School	Percentage African American Childern, 1934	Total number of teachers, 1934	African American Teachers, 1934	Percentage African American Teachers
Burke	95	40	0	00
Carter	100	37	2	5
Drake	100	22	5	23
Felsenthal	100	34	1	3
McCosh	95	43	3	7
Smyth	90	26	3	12
Willard	100	69	34	49
Forrestville	100	58	32	55
Oakland	98	17	2	12
Tennyson	95	16	6	38
Emerson	98	13	8	62
Mosely	100	16	6	38
Colman	100	33	28	85
Doolittle	100	44	20	45
Douglas	100	43	28	65
Farren	100	38	6	16
Fuller	100	14	1	7
Hayes	100	16	12	75
Keith	100	14	10	71
Raymond	100	23	13	57

SOURCE: Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: the Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 288.

create separate schools.

A second factor in the placement of African American teachers involved the relative racial hostility of the particular area. Not all European American Chicago neighborhoods forbad the placement of African American teachers. In the early 1930s, West Side schools with less than fifteen percent African American student populations employed several African American teachers. In fact, Gosnell counted thirty-one African American teachers teaching in twenty West Side schools with few or no African American students. However, these neighborhoods tended to contain European immigrant communities. Six of the schools Gosnell polled were located in an Italian neighborhood along Polk Street, and each one employed one African American teacher. Four other examined schools were Italian and Polish neighborhoods where Gosnell found three African American teachers employed.[19] Nonetheless, the presence of African American teachers in these neighborhoods in remarkable in itself.

However, the situation was different in areas of Chicago where racial tension was most present. These areas tended to be neighborhoods in which fifteen to forty percent of the population was African American. Gosnell found no African American teachers in these neighborhoods. These neighborhoods included most of the areas of the greatest violence during the 1919 riot. Gosnell's survey found no African American in these riot-torn neighborhood schools even though African Americans constituted about forty percent of the neighborhood population. After interviewing principals in these neighborhoods, Gosnell reported that racial tension was the

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[19] Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 291.

primary factor in the minds of these principals: "The principals of the schools in this territory said that it would be folly for them to add unnecessarily to the race friction by putting colored teachers over white children."[20] One teacher's experiences reflect this racism:

> When it was my turn to be appointed, I was sent to a South Side school where there was a prejudiced principal. This principal was also full of nothing but theory. He used to teach over at the Normal College. About two o'clock of my first day's work, the assistant principal came to me and said that I had better waive my appointment, as my work was unsatisfactory.[21]

Teachers often protested this treatment. The above teacher refused to accept this judgement and protested to the principal. "I said that they hadn't had time to see my work. I was entitled to five days trial." However the principal insisted that this teacher leave. Again refusing to accept this judgement, the teacher went to the Board of Education to complain. The Board agreed with her complaint and agreed to appoint her to another school as soon as possible. Two weeks later, she was offered a second appointment. Although the Board of Education refused to acknowledge that race was a factor in this situation, the African American teacher didn't agree: "They say that they have now 'colored schools' and that they appoint in order from the list of

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[20] Ibid., 290.

[21] Interview conducted with unnamed Chicago teacher, August 27, 1931. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 290.

elementary-school teachers. On my own list that was not true."[22]

An African American high school teacher described a similar incident of racial discrimination:

> Principals of junior and senior high schools need not take teachers from the list in order. One of the most brilliant women in the entire system was refused at three high schools when the principals saw that she was a Negro.[23]

Eventually this teacher received an appointment at Wendell Phillips High School, the only Chicago high school with a large percentage of African American students. A similar incident occurred with a male African American teacher: "Although they spoke very highly of him, none of the principals of the three high schools with small Negro percentages and in which there were vacancies could use him." He too eventually secured a position at Phillips.[24]

Yet another teacher reported difficulty with the assignment clerks: "The assignment clerks just refused to send a Negro girl to an all-white neighborhood, or to any white principal, of whom there were many, who did not want a Negro teacher." Refusing to accept this situation, this teacher complained to the person in charge of appointments, who then called the person in charge of assignments for the entire district. This officer in charge of the district immediately asked a telling question:

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Interview with unnamed Chicago teacher, conducted August 25, 1931. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 294.

[24] Ibid.

"The clerk asked over the telephone whether I was white or Negro. So you see, color is a factor in getting an assignment."[25] This teacher eventually received an appointment, but when it occurred is not clear.

Another teacher reported a prejudiced principal: "I remember the first principal I worked under. She just didn't like Negroes. She would never praise me for anything I had done, but she always found fault with something. She didn't even speak to us in the halls."[26] This same teacher reported some similar prejudice among European American teachers in these schools: "Most of the old white teachers stay on the first floor and are very clannish, incidentally. They hardly speak to us, even now."[27] This prejudice among teachers could lead to the dismissal of an African American teacher. In one case, an African American teacher was asked to leave her position because of the prejudice of other teachers: "The reason they didn't want me at the other school was that I was on the first floor of the new building, and the white teachers wanted to keep Negroes off that floor, as they didn't want to use the same bathroom with them."[28]

However, some African American teachers reported little or no difficulty with race prejudice, and some even taught in majority European American schools without

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[25] Interview conducted with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 19, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 285.

[26] Interview with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 18, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 297.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Interview with unnamed Chicago teacher, August 27, 1931. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 290.

incident:

> My first year's teaching was spent at a school on the West Side. When I first went there, most of the children were white but the neighborhood changed very rapidly. I had no trouble at all with either the white children or their parents. . . . I had no difficulty at all about color, that is, no trouble worth mentioning.[29]

Another teacher reported the same lack of difficulty: "In none of my work have I run into any actual difficulties [regarding race]."[30] Yet another teacher had no apparent difficulty: "I have been at a near West Side school for all the ten years that I have been a regular teacher. I have never been particularly race conscious. I have never had any trouble with pupils or their parents."[31]

For this particular teacher, though, a relatively light complexion seems to have aided her in her their pursuit and maintenance of a teaching appointment.

> There was just one colored substitute during the time that I have been there. I remember her because she proved something that I have been thinking a long time, namely, that the children don't think of a teacher as colored unless she has a black skin. I remember one of my children came in late and when I asked him the reason he said that he had been showing the "nigger' teacher her room.[32]

In addition to direct protest, African American teachers in Chicago use political clout to break through racist barriers to employment. Some benefit came to African American teachers in Chicago through their use of political connections and

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[29] Interview with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 16, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 284.

[30] Interview with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 19, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 285.

[31] Interview with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 19, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 291.

[32] Ibid.

influence to obtain and keep teaching positions. As noted earlier, political influence was an important aspect of the teaching profession in Chicago because teachers were political appointees. In addition, African Americans in Chicago had more political power than in other cities of the Midwest, because of their relatively greater cohesiveness and numbers, and because white mayors and the white-dominated Chicago machine were willing to cooperate with African Americans.[33] Both teachers and the African American community used this power to obtain teaching positions. They saw these positions as important to the advancement of the race in terms of their employment of African American professionals as well as their providing role models and sympathetic instructors to African American children.

In interviews with Gosnell, several teachers reported the role of African American politicians in their appointments, although many of the teachers who benefitted from this political help found it to be of little or no consequence. One teacher, though, benefitted unambiguously from the help of a relative whose influence in the Chicago Republican party under Mayor William Hale Thompson was considerable. She was appointed as a substitute at a West Side school with no African American students. The principal there was aware that this teacher was African American, but did not resist the appointment. The teacher attributed this to the fact that "the district superintendent had been 'made' " by her relative. In other words, the political connections of her relative protected her from exclusion, unwarranted

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[33] Charles Russell Branham, "The Transformation of Black Political Leadership in Chicago, 1864-1942" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1981).

dismissal, and apparently from some mistreatment based on race.[34]

Another teacher, though a graduate of Howard University with experience teaching in New York City and Richmond, Virginia, sought the help of a Chicago African American politician after confronting difficulty receiving an appointment to teach in the Chicago public school system. At first, she did not realize that one's alderman could help with teaching appointments. After learning about this, she took action immediately: "I went to see my alderman and told him that my husband's business was slow and that I needed work. He told me to write him a letter to that effect. I did and he sent it to the superintendent." After this exchange, the superintendent put the teacher on the substitute list, and within two months of her first visit to her alderman she had received a teaching appointment. In exchange for his help, the alderman asked that the teacher's husband make some campaign speeches for him.[35]

However, in most cases the appointment of African American teachers seems to have taken place without the use of political maneuvering. And even in some cases where politics came into play, the teachers doubted the effectiveness of the political help. One teacher who sought the help of a political figure said that "if politics enters at all, it only serves to step up appointments that would be made anyway."[36] Another teacher disparaged the role of the politicians, claiming they were seeking only

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[34] Interview conducted with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 19, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 285.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Interview conducted with unnamed Chicago teacher, June 19, 1933. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 285.

political gain from the process:

> The politicians make me tired. One Negro politician, I recall, made a speech right after I had received an appointment and said that I have his "approval," whatever that meant. Another politician used to come up to me and say pompously, "Your superintendent and I have been talking about you and he thinks highly of you." This was always said around a crowd for the effect it would have on the politician's importance. I sincerely believe that all these gentlemen are only trying to take credit for something which would have happened anyway.[37]

The resentment of this overt politicking is understandable, and most likely some of the efforts of politicians were not of much use in securing teaching appointments. However, just as it is difficult to prove that teaching appointments expedited by political figures would not have occurred without this help, it is likewise difficult to argue that these appointments were inevitable. Considering the racial barriers faced by African American teachers, any efforts to secure appointments in the public school system should not be taken for granted.

On the whole, the efforts of Chicago's African American teachers to gain access to a discriminatory system are remarkable. Despite some ambiguity in the minds of some teachers about the precise role played by political influence, it seems clear that African American teachers and politicians worked together to increase the number of teaching positions for African American teachers. They combined their energies toward this good because of a realization that African American professionals and students with African American role models could make a significant difference in the lives of African Americans in Chicago. With the help of these politicians, African American teachers in Chicago were in a position to work for racial

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[37] Undated interview conducted with unnamed Chicago teacher. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians*, 286.

advancement and empowerment like their counterparts in Detroit and Cleveland.

Chapter 6

Doing "The Work of Uplifting": Race, Class, Gender and Teaching in Cleveland, 1900-50

Like Detroit and Chicago, the large-scale migration of Southern African Americans into the city during the World War I era transformed Cleveland. This was a crucial time of transformation for cities, schools, and teachers. The stories of three Cleveland teachers — Bertha Blue, Myrtle Johnson, and Dovie Sweet — span this period of transition. An examination of these three teachers places into relief the changes brought about by African American migration. These changes provided the opportunity for African American teachers to secure administrative positions, and to acquire a degree of power in school systems that were increasingly segregated. In addition, all three women worked through their writing for the empowerment of the African American community, in particular the empowerment of young African American women. Like the African American teachers of Detroit and Chicago, Cleveland's African American teachers broke barriers, struggled for professional advancement, and worked toward the advancement of the African American women's ideology of racial advancement and empowerment.

Like Detroit and Cleveland, a small number of African Americans taught in Cleveland's public schools in the nineteenth century. Although the first school for

African Americans was taught by Clarissa Wright, a young European American women from Tallmadge, Ohio, at least one African American women taught in Cleveland's public schools in the nineteenth century. There is a dispute, however, as to the identity of the first African American public schoolteacher in Cleveland. William Wells Brown, a noted African American historian and author, wrote that he had heard of an African American women teaching in the public schools on a visit to Cleveland in the 1850s, but no records have been found to confirm this. The first documented African American teacher in Cleveland public schools was Josephine Wilson who taught at the Mayflower School beginning in 1872. By 1889 Cleveland had six African American teachers working in the public schools. By 1910 this number had increased to ten, and by 1919 sixty-eight African Americans were listed as teachers in Cleveland's public schools. Helen Chesnutt, the daughter of author Charles W. Chesnutt taught at Central High School, while Louise Cannevile Evans taught at a Cleveland junior high school between 1917 and 1926.[1]

Bertha Blue (1877-1963) was one of the ten African American teachers in Cleveland schools before 1910. Blue was a member of a prominent Cleveland family, but that family's prominence did not come not from those things that characterized the "old elite" of cities like Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit. Yet the family's occupations and activities did not fit firmly into the category of the "new elite" that emerged in early twentieth century cities. Blue's first cousin was Welcome T. Blue, a prominent real estate dealer in early 20th century Cleveland. Welcome Blue is notable as a

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[1] Cleveland *Gazette*, December 28, 1901; September 22, 1906; July 11, 1914; November 22, 1919; August 22, 1925;. Akers, *Cleveland Schools in the Nineteenth Century*, 157. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 103, 180.

transitional figure between the "old elite" and the "new elite" in Cleveland. Another relative of Blue was Professor T. H. Reynolds, a pioneer in music in Kansas City and in Cleveland who earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Oberlin College and a Ph.D degree from Indiana University.[2]

The terms "old elite" and "new elite" require some clarification. Both terms are ideals; no one fit perfectly into either category, nor did either category contain all of the more advantaged African Americans at any one time. The terms are useful, however, as descriptive generalities. They accurately capture the changing nature of political and economic power in the cities as they were in the process of being transformed by in-migration in the early twentieth century. The "old elite" refers to the most successful African Americans who were merchants, businessmen, barbers who owned their own shops, and professionals such as doctors, teachers, and lawyers. The fluid class structure of African Americans, unlike their European American counterparts, occasionally allowed a well-known mail carrier, clerical worker, or Pullman car porter membership in this group. This usually depended on the quality of their family connections, their education, and their social standing. One of the most distinguishing features of this group was its general rapport with members of the majority European American population. Almost all of the "old elite" worked with or had clients among the native-born European American community. They usually attended integrated schools and sometimes even lived in mostly European American neighborhoods. The old African American elite tended to work to separate themselves

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[2] Bertha Blue Family Papers, mss 4630, box 1, folder 1, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

when possible from both the masses of both races. Membership in the right church and in the most prestigious or exclusive club were ways to distinguish and to distance oneself from recent arrivals. Travel and cultural enrichment placed high on their list of priorities, as they were among the native-born European American elite. Tensions sometimes surfaced between old elites and the emerging African American middle-class that developed as African American enclaves grew.[3]

The "new emerging elite," however, was more oriented toward African American neighborhoods and clientele. This group was comprised of the same kinds of people — businessmen, professionals, journalists, salesmen. The crucial distinction, however, was their reliance on an African American market for sale of their products or services. The growth of this new group was made possible by the increasing residential segregation of cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several factors contributed to this increased segregation. First, advances in transportation technology from the horse-drawn Omnibus to the electric streetcar and finally the automobile made possible a spatial separation between city residents. Growing incidents of racial discord also contributed to this gradual separation. As African Americans and native-born European Americans began living separately and miles apart due to these changes, it became less common for non-African Americans

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[3] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 98-102. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 164-66. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 71-84. E. Franklin Frazier and Drake and Cayton use the term "new middle class" to refer to this "new elite." E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class* (New York: Free Press, 1966); Cayton and Drake, *Black Metropolis*, 662. I have used the term "elite" rather than "middle-class" because I mean to refer a group of people whose income, level of education, occupations, diversions, and ideologies reflect leadership and power within a particular community. The term "middle-class" refers to people who are neither an elite class nor a working class.

to patronize African American business. In addition, native-born European American elites were being challenged by an emerging group of newly-wealthy entrepreneurs, resulting in heightened class-consciousness and attempts to separate oneself from others, a development that ultimately hurt African American businessmen and professionals as association with African Americans became a liability and less desirable. In other words, the ability to avoid African Americans became something of a status-builder. An important case-in-point is the decline of the African American barber. In Detroit, the percentage of African American barbers, who had long served a European American clientele, dropped from fifty-five percent in 1870 to seven percent in 1910. In Cleveland the numbers were almost identical: from forty-three percent in 1870 to less than ten percent in 1910. New York, Chicago, and Boston all witnessed a similar decline in African American barbershops. However, these developments opened the door for the opportunistic to capitalize on a large and growing market with little or no access to mainstream businesses or services.[4]

Welcome T. Blue was one of this newly emerging businessmen who profited from this change, capitalizing on the African American real estate market and eventually becoming one of Cleveland's wealthiest African American citizens. Blue got started in real estate around 1900 by establishing the Acme Real Estate Company. Acme specialized in finding homes for African American buyers, a difficult job as Cleveland's housing market became increasingly segregated as shown by the

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[4] Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 116-17. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 76. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 305. For similar developments in the catering trade, see W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schoken Books, 1967), 115-16.

population statistics. In 1900, only eighteen percent of Cleveland's African American population lived in neighborhoods that were less than one percent African American; in 1910 that number had fallen to only six percent. By 1910, one-third of all Cleveland's African American residents lived in one ward.[5] Blue later joined with S. Clayton Green, a successful African American businessman, to form Mowhawk Realty Company. This company constructed a number of office buildings, apartments, and shopping complexes in the heart of Cleveland's African American district. Mowhawk Realty also broke the color line by developing a suburban residential neighborhood specifically for an African American clientele. In addition, Blue and two others also started the Cleveland *Journal*, a newspaper that expressed the emerging elite's opposition to the more radical Cleveland *Gazette*. However, Blue was not easily pigeonholed; Blue maintained two offices in downtown Cleveland and not along the Central Avenue corridor that was the center of African American enterprise in Cleveland. He wanted to make sure he remained part of the American mainstream in the tradition of the old elite.[6]

As did her cousin, Bertha Blue seems to have straddled the line between the old and new elite in Cleveland. Like Fannie Richards and other teachers of the old elite, Blue had a light complexion and entered the teaching profession in a predominately European American neighborhood.[7] She taught at Cleveland's Murray

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[5] Davis, *Memorable Negroes in Cleveland's Past*, 43. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 42.

[6] Davis, *Memorable Negroes in Cleveland's Past*, 43. Gerber, *Black Ohio and the Color Line*, 314, 382.

[7] Photograph in Newspaper clipping, Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 1.

Hill school from 1903 to 1947. Murray Hill was located in Cleveland's little Italy, an Italian immigrant neighborhood on Cleveland's East Side. It was a particularly significant position because some prominent women of Cleveland taught alongside Blue at Murray Hill. For example, the sister of Mr. George McGwinn, president of the Cleveland Railway Company, taught with Blue and had high regard for her.[8] Although it was unusual for an African American to work, let alone teach, in this kind of neighborhood, a neighborhood known to resist African Americans seeking housing there, Blue was not only accepted but apparently well-received. She was renowned for teaching the writing and speaking of American English to both adults and children in the Murray Hill neighborhood. One former student wrote that "You were my first grade teacher at Murray Hill School in 1927 and please may I say my best through all my years of school. I am proud to say that too, I can't compare you with any of my teachers in school days." [9] Her respect in the community is evidenced by the offer on her retirement that she take a position on the Board of Trustees for the Alta House Settlement, a settlement house designed to help the poor and elderly residents of Cleveland's Little Italy.[10]

Similar to other members of the old elite, Blue focused her attentions for the

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[8] Letter from Harry E. Davis to Blue, June 19, 1947. Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 1.

[9] Note from Frances Azzolina (Mrs. Carmine Cimoroni) to Bertha Blue, 1944. Folder 1, Bertha Blue Family Papers.

[10] The Alta House was founded in 1895 by John D. Rockefeller and named for his daughter, Alta Rockefeller Prince. William Ganson Rose, *Cleveland: the Making of a City* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1950), 609.

most part on interracial cooperation. In fact, her decision to enter teaching and to continue teaching in schools not dominated by African Americans was a conscious effort to improve race relations. On Blue's retirement, a local newspaper commented that "many evidences of respect and regard were shown Miss Blue by this all white school and community and one of her fondest hopes is that a better interracial feeling has been created by her long service there."[11]

Blue also worked for African American advancement within the church. Blue was an active member of St. John's A.M.E. Church, as was prominent African American nurse Jane Edna Hunter and musician Noble Sissle. Blue served as editor of "The Reminder", the newsletter of St. John's. The newsletter printed the usual fare — service schedules, information about parishioners — but it also included occasional positive stories regarding the African American community. One example is the reprinting of a Cleveland *Plain Dealer* article describing the success of a Hoboken, New Jersey girl who at 14 years of age won first prize as best student in the Hoboken schools.[12] In this way, Blue used the forum of the newsletter to encourage the young people and their parents who worked toward an education in a mostly hostile environment.

Neither St. Johns A.M.E. Church nor Blue herself were apolitical in their work for the church. "The Reminder" generally advocated the ideas of Booker T. Washington. For instance, a majority of the church's members attended a speech by Booker T. Washington in 1910. The attendance was so high that Blue did not bother

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[11] Newspaper clipping, Bertha Blue Family Papers, Folder 1.

[12] Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 2.

to include a synopsis of the speech: "We feel it unnecessary to give a resume of the Booker T. Washington lecture as it seemed everyone was there." Apparently, the "general applause" indicated that "the majority concurred with his statements."[13] In general, Cleveland's new emerging elite stood behind or favored Washington's program of self-help and racial solidarity, while the old elite was largely opposed to Washington's program. On the occasion of Washington's visit to Cleveland, the Cleveland *Journal,* in keeping with its support of the new emerging elite, vociferously praised Washington while harshly criticizing the integrationism of Cleveland's old elite, in particular Harry C. Smith.[14]

However, Blue's "Reminder" also contained more traditional protest. The same issue that contained the pro-Washington piece also included a condemnation of the apparent ostracism of African American students at Oberlin College by European American undergraduates in contradiction to the historical attitudes of racial tolerance of that institution.

Blue's work on "The Reminder" also may have reflected adherence to certain aspects of feminism. In 1910 Ella Flagg Young visited Cleveland and reported on the Cleveland schools to the teachers of the area:

Mrs. Ella Flagg Young, superintendent of the schools in Chicago, recently

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[13] Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 2, issue of "The Reminder," 4-24-1910.

[14] Cleveland *Journal*, April 16, 23, 1910. Harry C. Smith (1863—1941) established the Cleveland *Gazette*, a paper with an uncompromising integrationist stance established in 1883. The old elite in Cleveland, as well as in Chicago and Boston, tended to oppose the Booker T. Washington accomodationist stance as their livelihood generally depended on an integrated society rather than a segregated society. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 130, 114.

> visited our Technical High School. Mrs. Young says this is how the Cleveland method appeared to her: "Here on one side of the buildings are the cooking and sewing rooms for girls," she said. "Over here are the vocational rooms for the boys. Well, the thing that strikes me about such an arrangement is this: When I want a cloth suit made I go to a man to have it done. And when I entertain at my house in the evening I go to a man caterer and he sends men to wait on my guests. So it seems to me boys could learn sewing and cooking to advantage."

In this passage, Young offers a biting condemnation of sex stratification or gender role division in Cleveland's vocational schools. Blue's printing of this excerpt of Young's lecture suggests agreement with its message, but she did not accompany the quote with any commentary.[15]

Blue also used "The Reminder" to advertise the importance of racial uplift and the African American woman's responsibility in it. The newsletter contained one particularly long piece on the subject that offered advice to young African American women. The piece attempts to instill in them the values and politics of race service and obligation as well as womanly self-improvement and respectability.

"The Reminder" article continually emphasizes the responsibilities of these young women and the role of hard work in creating the opportunities to fulfill these responsibilities:

> Life itself brings responsibilities and the young woman is no more exempt from sharing them than any one else. Her's are peculiar to her age, to her station in life and to the opportunities which she has grasped.
>
> Some girls fret and say that if only they had the chance that this or that girl has, they would really make something of their lives. They can not shift responsibility in this way, for every common day that comes to us, brings us all opportunities.
>
> The fact is, the opportunity that comes is usually one to work, to toil, to delve, to dig, to struggle and a proportion of young people whether boys or girls, are not looking for that kind of opportunity.

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[15] Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 2, "The Reminder", 5-15-1910.

> These are the opportunities that come to us. To neglect them is to miss our chance of making our life what it might be — what it ought to be.[16]

Blue then chastises those young women who reject the hard work of self-improvement and uplift for easier paths. In so doing, suggests Blue, they are acting out of selfishness and laziness, not lack of opportunity:

> It is not because these young people do not know this, but they simply give up in the struggle of doing what they knew they ought to do — a struggle which characterizes every one of us. From Paul, "who pressed toward the mark of the high calling" — to Shakespeare who said that he could easier teach twenty what were good to be done than be one of the twenty to follow his own teaching — to some young people of today who with willing parents and friends, with schools open day and night, with free public libraries and lecture courses, with earnest sermons, with health and strength still choose whatever comes to hand which requires the least effort mentally and physically. They are not the powers they might be in uplifting others. [17]

Blue then invokes the ideology of racial sacrifice as a means to uplift the race.

> But the Young women who have been able to grasp the opportunities which have come to them do not always realize that they have a responsibility in helping others — uplifting. They may be a little selfish. We must not wholly blame them either. Remember they have been daughters in homes where perhaps all the family have sacrificed, that they might finish music school or college. Their parents have placed all hopes in them, their friends are watching and praising them, and naturally their own thoughts would be upon themselves.
>
> But they must realize that the more they have received the more they owe to others.[18]

These sentiments are in keeping with African American women's movement with the African American protest tradition. Developing in the late 1890s, this vein of the protest tradition developed among African American women as it became clear that

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[16] "The Reminder," May 29, 1910. In the Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 2.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

the advancement of African American women as a whole was impossible without the elimination of negative sexual images and stereotypes of the African American woman. In an 1893 speech, Fannie Barrier Williams spoke to this problem: "This moral regeneration of a whole race of women is no idle sentiment — it is a serious business; and everywhere there is a witnessed a feverish anxiety to be free from the mean suspicions that have so long underestimated the character strength of our women."[19] With the writing of this piece, Blue joins this effort and uses the concepts of racial obligation and racial uplift that formed the organizational foundation for much of African American women's philanthropic work during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[20]

"The Reminder" article also comments on the need for young educated African American women to fulfill their obligations to the race within the Victorian ideology of women's separate sphere. According to Blue, these women should not use their education only in the world of work, but should bring it home and share "the culture and knowledge she has gleaned from her school course" with her mother while keeping her mother company. This obligation extends beyond the young woman's mother and into the African American community: "In fact the home needs her. The church, too, needs just such workers as she can be." If the young educated woman, in Blue's words, "fails to meet her responsibility to those who have not been as

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[19] Quoted in Hine, *Hine Sight*, 13.

[20] Ibid., 13.

fortunate as she," she will not "receive the blessing that comes from sharing."[21]

This last remark points to the role of religion in the African American women's ideology of racial advancement and empowerment. This ideology consisted of a complex of factors that included religion, education, and service. Blue's "Reminder" piece reiterates the importance of religion near the end of the piece:

> The Bible tells us that in the judgement there will be those condemned not because of wicked deeds committed, but because they failed to do the acts of love which they ought to have done. These shall hear some day: I was hungry and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger and ye took me not in; naked and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison and ye visited me not. They come to us every hour these chances to be kind, to be obliging, to be thoughtful, to render helpful service.[22]

Another important aspect of Blue's version of the African American women's ideology of racial advancement and empowerment is its emphasis on role modeling as an aspect of service: "The young woman's friends to whom she seems wonderful in her achievement — to whom she becomes almost an ideal — they need kind consideration and help." Here the concept of service is portrayed not only as the actual acts of helping others but also the importance of modeling the "ideal" for the less fortunate:

> However, every young woman wields an influence over a circle both of young men and women. Someone thinks what she does just right, and proper, and therefore they may do the same. Thus her influence may be, to urge a better life, or it may be degrading — the choice is left to her. Some one has said as soon as young men learn that girls will not associate with them if they smoke, drink or use bad language, just so soon will they stop doing those things and the world will be better because the standard of true manhood and

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[21] "The Reminder," May 29, 1910. In the Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 2.

[22] Ibid.

of true womanhood as well, has been raised.[23]

And in closing Blue encourages the young educated African American woman to take role modelling to the next level, that of a group leader: "If each young woman would constitute herself a group leader and make herself worthy of being one, wherever her lot was cast and by her influence stimulate a higher mode of living the work of uplifting whether of individuals or of a race would take on a hopeful aspect."[24]

This essay could be grouped with other writings by African American teachers such as Azalia Hackley's *The Colored Girl Beautiful* (1916) that seek to encourage young African American women to live their lives in particular ways under the guise of helpful advice to young people. These texts are really treatises on the politics of respectability, advocating a complex of behaviors and beliefs that seek to counteract the negative stereotypes of African American women. Another example would be the book that Blue considered to be her favorite: *The Correct Thing to Do, To Say, To Wear* (1940) by Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a noted African American teacher and advocate for civil rights.[25] *The Correct Thing to Do, to Say, to Wear* was a book of etiquette that distinguished itself as being by and for African Americans. However,

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Charlotte Hawkins Brown (1883-1961), born in North Carolina and reared in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the founder of a school for African American children in North Carolina, the Palmer Memorial Institute. As a civil rights advocate, she was an important figure in the South's interracial women's movement of the 1920s. She was also ejected from Pullman railroad cars for refusing to remain in the car designated for African Americans. In addition to *The Correct Thing to Do, to Say, and to Wear*, she wrote a number of short stories including "Mammy: An Appeal to the Heart of the South" (1919). Kathleen Thompson, "Charlotte Hawkins Brown," in Hine, ed., *Black Women in America*, 172-73.

Brown put it more subtly: "Then why should another book of etiquette be added to the scores of those already on the market? Out of the hearts of a humble people has come the desire for recognition of those vital qualities of soul which they feel and cultivate from time to time, but are thwarted in their attempt to express for lack of knowledge of the best means of expression."[26] Brown's work is also a treatise on the politics of respectability. For example, the house, according to Brown, should not be a place where the individual indulges himself; on the contrary, it should be "a school for developing and practicing the fine art of manners, speech and attitudes so willingly and lavishly bestowed upon outsiders." At the theater, one should "sit still in your seat" and "know when to laugh. DO NOT MISTAKE TRAGEDY FOR COMEDY." This is followed by the advice that "freshness and daintiness have as their foundation cleanliness. A good shower bath is at all times stimulating and refreshing and adds buoyancy of spirit." On grooming, Johnson makes the connection between this etiquette and the politics of respectability: "In civilized society, external advantages make us more respected."[27]

Clearly a relationship existed between a role as a educator and the writing of etiquette books. Teachers would be the logical people to fulfill this function because of their level of education and their experience in dealing with young people. However, the fact that this particular book was Blue's favorite suggests that there existed a relationship, in Blue's mind at least, between the functions of educating

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[26] Charlotte Hawkins Brown, *The Correct Thing to Say, to Do, and to Wear* (Sedalia, N.C.: Published by the author, 1940), vii.

[27] Brown, *The Correct Thing to Say, to Do, and to Wear*, 3, 30, 42.

young people and in working to empower those young people through the dispensation of survival skills. As Darlene Clark Hine has demonstrated, African American women have lived within a hostile that has invaded even the control of their sexual and reproductive selves. In that context, acts against the negative stereotypes that perpetuated that oppression were truly acts to insure the very survival of African American womanhood.[28]

However, some readers of Brown's book resented the rigid rules of behavior it advocated. While some praised Brown as "the First Lady of Social Graces" after the publication of her etiquette book, some referred to her as a "social dictator." This dual reception reflects a dynamic in operation in the work of African American women for racial uplift between forces of control and empowerment. To some extent these women were advocating measures of self-control, but those measures were reasonable responses to negative stereotypes that restricted African American women through portrayal of them as lacking the appropriate self-control. Furthermore, these controls were surface measures that actually provided African American women with the means to protect their inner lives from intrusive outsiders.[29]

While Bertha Blue broke ground inside and outside of the classrooms of Little Italy, Myrtle Bell (1907-1969) began teaching in the Cleveland Public Schools. Bell, thirty years younger than Blue, entered the teaching profession in a city that had changed considerably. The transformed cities of the early twentieth century brought issues of race/ethnicity and education to the forefront. Control, "Americanization,"

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[28] Hine, *Hine Sight*, 47.

[29] Ibid., 46. Thompson, "Charlotte Hawkins Brown," 173.

and separation became issues in the lives of virtually all the city's residents, and not just abstractions about equality and integration. African American teachers were caught in the middle of this turmoil. On the one hand, they served as important roles in the grassroots information network that stimulated African American migration to the Urban Midwest. In the classroom, their roles were more problematic. Faced with the increasing professionalization of the teaching profession, the increasing racial separation of neighborhoods and schools and its attendant hostility, African American teachers experienced a distinct decrease in prestige and power among European Americans as their roles as teachers of European American youngsters became less desirable. African American barbers experienced a similar shift. But the change came with some positives. They now had increased opportunities to work as teachers and thus increased their presence in African American communities. This allowed more teachers to serve as role models to their now largely segregated classes, to supply the "special instruction" to these students that their special situation required.[30]

Each of the central cities in this study — Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit — had become industrial powerhouses by the dawn of the twentieth century. Each was filled with immigrants and migrants from the rural U.S. seeking all that these new cities promised — work, safety, education. The African American migration to these cities had, of course, a long history, but the pace of this migration increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making African Americans slightly larger presences in these cities than earlier. However, these migrants were dwarfed in numbers by immigrants from Europe. Until 1915, these European immigrants were

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[30] Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 92.

the focus of most of the attention of the Upper Midwestern city inhabitants. The arrival of these immigrants spawned a series of reforms in urban education. But the impact of these reforms in education had a more negative impact on African Americans than it did on immigrants and children of immigrants, in particular the testing and placement of children in accordance with those tests. Because of difficulty educating students from schools in the South, Cleveland created two special schools especially for these newcomers to the city: Outhwaite in 1930 for boys and Longwood in 1929 for girls of junior high age. Both were in the Central area where the "retarded pupil problem was most acute." An estimate for the *Report on Negro Migration* found that 15.5% of pupils in classes for mental defectiveness were African American. These two schools focused on vocational training. The Cleveland Board of Education saw these schools as a benefit to regular schools because they removed these "retarded" students from classes where they might interrupt normal instruction.[31]

Cleveland underwent a remarkable transformation, as evidenced by the census data in Table 5. The effect of this population growth was an acceleration of racial segregation within Cleveland. Although the roots of residential segregation were in place before 1915, the World War I era witnessed an increasingly divided city. Between 1910 and 1930, the number of census tracts with more than fifty percent African American residents rose from zero to seventeen. At the same time, the number of census tracts with no African American residents rose from seventeen to forty-seven. The extent of this increasing racial segregation is put into relief when one

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[31] Cleveland *Board of Education Proceedings*, Cleveland, April 19, 1926, July 17, 1946. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 254.

considers that while African Americans were becoming more concentrated, European immigrant neighborhoods were losing much of their cohesion. While before 1915 many ethnic neighborhoods were segregated to roughly the same degree as Cleveland's African American neighborhoods, after 1920 those communities began to lose their cohesiveness and the city began to break down around racial lines.[32]

Table 5
Immigration and Migration: Cleveland 1850-1930

Year	Total Population	African American Pop.	Numerical Increase, Total Pop.	Numerical Increase, Af.Am. Pop.
1850	17,034	224	n/a	n/a
1860	43,417	799	26,383	575
1870	92,829	1,293	49,412	494
1880	160,416	2,062	67,587	769
1890	261,353	3,035	100,937	973
1900	381,768	5,988	120,415	2,953
1910	560,663	8,448	178,895	2,450
1920	796,841	34,451	236,178	26,003
1930	900,429	71,899	103,588	37,448

Source: U.S. Census reports 1870-1930

This increasing racial segregation was manifested directly in the Cleveland schools. Between 1921 and 1923, African American school enrollment increased by

[32] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, 161-65.

2,352 students. Ninety-eight percent of these students entered schools in which at least five percent of the students were African American. Simultaneously, the number of elementary schools with no African American students increased from seventeen to thirty in these two years. This was the beginning of a forty-year trend toward the segregation isolation of African Americans in Cleveland schools. Between 1931 and 1965, the percentage of African American students in schools with more than ninety-one percent African American enrollment increased from four percent to seventy-nine percent in those years.[33]

The negatives of this kind of situation are well-known: increased racial segregation in twentieth century cities has meant concentrations of poverty and the corresponding problems have been transferred to the schools (see Table 6). By 1965, due to the declining tax base of Cleveland's inner city, suburban Cleveland schools had two and a half times more money to spend per student.

This transformation may have come with some positives for African American teachers. For one, increased numbers and concentrations of African American students increased opportunity for African American teachers. As the African American population increased, the numbers of African American women attending normal school increased and graduates had little trouble securing teaching appointments. In 1889 there were six African American teachers, and in 1906 Cleveland public schools employed fourteen African American teachers. In the school year 1909-1910 a total of seventeen African American teachers were assigned to Cleveland schools, all on the east side with only two exceptions. After the Great

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[33] Ibid., 162.

Migration, the numbers jumped: in 1914 there were thirty-one African American teachers and 1919 there were sixty-eight. Even though these teachers were separated into predominately African American teaching districts, access to teaching work was superior to exclusion from it. The numbers of African American teachers continued to increase gradually in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1929 there were eighty-four African American teachers, seventy-eight in elementary schools, five in junior high and only one in senior high. When junior high schools were established, many African American teachers in upper elementary ranks were assigned there. Miss Blanche Johnson went on to Audubon Junior High and Miss Georgea Fields to Murray High in the junior high division. Miss Dorothy Chesnutt Slade, sister of Helen Chesnutt, was made a Wilson Junior High School teacher in 1919. The above were the only African American teachers in secondary schools until Russell Davis was assigned to Kennard Junior High in January 1928. He was the first male African American in the secondary system. Within a year, three African American women were assigned to Kennard, a school with almost entirely African American enrollment. By 1945 there were about 200 African American teachers in Cleveland schools, mostly in elementary schools. [34]

Myrtle Johnson Bell (1907-69) was one of the African American teachers who

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[34] Russell H. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland from George Peake to Carl B. Stokes 1796-1969* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1972), 180, 251-52. Cleveland *Gazette*, September 20, 1919. Alonzo Grace, *The Effect of Negro Migration on the Cleveland Public School System* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Western Reserve University, May 1932), 29.

Table 6
Racial Isolation of Students in Cleveland 1931-65

School Year	Percentage of African American students in school with 91-100 percent African American enrollment	Percentage of African Americans in majority African American schools	Percentage of European Americans in schools with 0-10 percent African American enrollment
1931-32	4.4	71.7	92.5
1933-34	22.3	69.9	92.7
1935-36	42.4	68.6	92.3
1937-38	41.2	74.6	92.8
1939-40	48.7	77.4	91.2
1941-42	56.1	77.2	90.9
1943-44	60.1	77.3	84.6
1945-46	56.8	79.0	82.5
1947-48	62.5	80.7	82.4
1949-50	57.2	79.3	82.3
1951-52	70.3	88.2	80.2
1952-53	50.1	81.7	77.6
1954-55	59.1	82.6	75.8
1956-57	56.3	87.6	76.8
1958-59	65.6	89.5	79.7
1960-61	75.8	91.5	80.0
1962-63	76.6	93.8	79.9
1964-65	78.6	94.5	78.6

SOURCE: Willard C. Richan, *Racial Isolation in the Cleveland Public Schools* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1967), 2

began her professional life in this transformed educational system. But her career would be shaped far more by race than had Bertha Blue's career. Her work would take her to the assistant principalship of a Cleveland high school in 1938, an accomplishment attained by an African American only once before her. She would sit on a commission on race relations with the Mayor of Cleveland. Along the way she faced discrimination in hiring by the public schools and had her employment options continually restricted due to her race. However, the newly acquired power of Cleveland's African American community was successful in assisting her at times.

Bell was the daughter of a railroad worker and a domestic service worker. Her parents traversed the terrain of so many nineteenth century migrants by moving to Ohio from Virginia seeking a better life for their children. Bell was born on a farm in Warrensville, Ohio, one of eight children. At the age of four she and her brother and sister were the only African American students enrolled in their school. Her parents moved to Cleveland when she was seven where she attended Kinsman School, Central High School, and entered Western Reserve University in 1923 at age 16. She left Western Reserve in 1925 in order to teach for two years at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute.[35]

After the two years she taught at Tuskegee, Bell returned to Cleveland to work

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[35] Newspaper clipping from the *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1962, in the Myrtle J. Bell Papers, box 1, folder 1, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. The Tuskegee Institute is a predominantly African American university located in Tuskegee, Alabama. Chartered and opened in 1881 by Booker T. Washington as Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, it was one of the first institutions of higher education devoted to the education of African Americans in the South. In keeping with Washington's political and educational philosophies, it stressed the practical application of knowledge. The name of the institution was changed to Tuskegee Institute in 1937.

as a substitute teacher for five years. Her intention was to find work in a Cleveland public high school, but she ran into to trouble because of her race. In Cleveland, as was the case in other Midwestern cities, African American teachers were almost exclusively relegated to the primary schools. Although it was not an official policy, the superintendent's office placed nearly all African American teachers in the elementary schools. In trying to gain placement in junior high schools or high schools, African American teachers were hindered by both race and gender. High school teaching jobs were the most prestigious in the school system, and because of this men were better represented in these schools. Men had increased access to these jobs because of their better access to higher education; most high school positions required training beyond a normal school education. Given these circumstances, women were at a disadvantage when seeking high school teaching jobs. When race was factored into this mix, it became even more difficult for African American women to acquire high school teaching jobs. For one thing, myths about African American intellectual inferiority could count against an African American seeking work in the most intellectually demanding teaching positions. Perhaps more significantly, high schools are necessarily larger and draw students from larger population bases, making it more difficult for them to draw students from only one racial group.[36] It would then be much more difficult for an African American teacher to be hired to teach in a school with a large number of European American students; early nineteenth century teachers seem to have been the exception to this rule.

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[36] Richan, "Racial Isolation in the Cleveland Public Schools," 3. As urban populations grow larger, and single-race neighborhoods grow as well, it becomes easier for a high school to draw students from a single race.

Bell returned from Tuskegee only to face this very problem: "The only Negro teacher in Cleveland senior high schools then was Helen Chesnutt, daughter of author Charles W. Chesnutt.[37] She was at Central High." Bell did not have the family connections to match those of Chesnutt and so was continually refused a full-time teaching position. After substituting for six years had failed to win her a full-time position, Bell finally gave up and headed South to take advantage of the better opportunities for African American teachers. She taught one year in Clarksburg, West Virginia but continued trying to break into the Cleveland system. Finally, her perseverance was rewarded, and she received an offer to teach in the Cleveland system. Unfortunately, it was not a high school position but rather an elementary position.[38]

The ugliness of Cleveland's racism confronted Bell on her first day of the new job. She reported for her position at Miles Standish Elementary School, as she had been instructed, but "when she arrived the principal informed her that she could not teach there." Apparently, the superintendent's office had not informed the Standish principal of Bell's race, though that office must have known because of her six years of substituting in Cleveland schools. Bell was quickly transferred and spent the next

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[37] Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932) was a prominent African American author of novels and short-stories. He specialized in chronicling the Reconstruction South. His best-known work is *The Conjure Woman* (1899), a series of short stories about slave life. His other writings include another collection of stories, *The Wife of His Youth* (1899), and the novels *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) and *The Colonel's Dream* (1905). Critics consider *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) to be his finest novel.

[38] Handwritten memoirs, undated and untitled, Myrtle J. Bell Papers, box 1, folder 1.

five years at the Moses Cleveland school where she was apparently more welcome. Bell had a rather resilient attitude about this racial discrimination. She wrote: "I found that wherever there was a white person against me because I was black, there'd be another white person who was just as strongly for me."[39] She adjusted according to the circumstances but refused to give up the struggle to secure a good teaching position and make a contribution to racial advancement.

Bell was promoted five years later, but she was promoted within that circle of schools that already had significant African American student populations. She then taught math and African American history at Kennard Junior High School where a large number of the students were newly arrived from the South. She was specifically promoted to Kennard due to this influx of African American students. One of her primary tasks was to institute a course in African American history of these newly arrived students. This course was instituted by Kennard's principal "in order to instill in them race pride."[40] Although the reason these students required more "race pride" is unknown, the principal was probably reacting to behaviors many European American and African American residents of northern cities associated negatively with newly arrived African American Southerners during the Great Migration era. These behaviors could include inappropriate dress, such as dirty overalls and cloth wrapped around the head, as well as the use of inappropriate language in loud tones. Apparently the principal thought that instruction in African American history would encourage a more "respectable" behavior and deportment among these junior high

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

students, although how exactly that would be accomplished is not clear.[41]

Bell's next promotion in 1938 brought her face to face with race and gender politics in public education. After excelling at Kennard, Bell won a promotion to the junior high department of Central High where she taught math. In keeping with her desire to empower African American students and parents, she formed a Parent Teacher Association. This would prove fortuitous given what was to occur. After two years at Central, she decided to get married. Bell married L. Frank Bell, a general office employee of the Republic Steel Corporation, but her marriage soon became a problem. When the Cleveland school board learned of her marriage, she was promptly suspended. The Parent Teacher Association and the local African American leadership, however, jumped to her defense and won her reinstatement and a promotion to assistant principle. This caused more controversy. Although she was reinstated and promoted, other married women were not being hired by the school system, and the Board struggled with this inconsistency. One administrator said, "it doesn't seem logical to promote a married woman" because of the failure to provide access to other married women. Board members discussed the policy of exclusion for eight consecutive meetings and apparently ended the policy of exclusion from teaching positions due to marriage.[42]

Bell's reinstatement and appointment to assistant principal demonstrate the extent to which the political power of the African American community in Cleveland

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[41] For a discussion of the behavior of African American Southerners and the reactions of city residents, see Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 144-54.

[42] Newspaper clipping, no date, Myrtle J. Bell Papers, box 1, folder 3.

had grown by the late 1930s. Bell was appointed to the assistant principalship on September 14, 1938. Although Bell was certainly qualified for this position, her appointment was part of a group of African American promotions in 1938 that came out of African American community protests about the lack of African Americans in leadership positions in the Cleveland schools. African American community leaders and the School Board of Cleveland held a series of conferences in 1938, and three promotions were the result. Her appointment followed shortly the appointment of two African American teachers to the principalships of elementary schools: Genevieve Storey and Wilbretta Pope. There was a precedent for this kind of protest. In 1926, a committee of African Americans petitioned the board to fill an open slot with a African American because they felt that a African American would best understand the plight of the African American student.[43]

However, more was at work here than simple response to African American community demands. The administration of the high school was having difficulty balancing the discipline of its African American students with the concerns of those students' parents. The solution to this problem was the promotion of an African American to a position where he or she would be in charge of discipline at the school. This would allow the school to discipline African American students without appearing discriminatory in the meting out of these punishments. Bell described it this way: "Mr. Wixom, principal of old Central High, was having difficulty in adjusting

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[43] The members of this committee were Herbert S. Chauncey, Norman S. McGhee, Harry E. Davis, Lethia Fleming, and Rev. Russell Brown. Nothing came of this effort. Cleveland *Gazette*, October 16, 1926.

to the influx of Negroes in Central High. He asked that I be transferred to Central to organize a Parent Teacher Association so that the Negro parents would be able to find out what Central was trying to do for their children." In this position, she was in charge of all discipline problems involving female students at Central High. At first, this did not sit well with some faculty members, and they resisted bringing students to Bell. "I told the principle I felt guilty just sitting, but he said, 'you can take it, you just sit there and they'll come around.'[44] She remained an assistant principal until her retirement in 1962. In 1956 she was named president of Cleveland's assistant principals.[45]

Gender, not just race, played a role in this promotion controversy. Bell was placed in a position of power at Central High that was not too threatening to those running the institution. As assistant principal in charge of discipline for female students she was in an administrative position, but it was a lower level administrative position. Her appointment, then, served as a means of appeasing both the students and parents of the Central High district, as well as the African American community as a whole without significantly changing the nature of the school's administration. Bell also experienced a "glass ceiling" as she spent twenty four years as an assistant principal, never making the leap to principalship, although race seems to have been the primary factor. Upon her retirement in 1962, she was the only African American serving as an assistant principle of a Cleveland senior high school. It was not until 1953 that more African Americans received administrative appointments. After 1953

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[44] *The Plain Dealer*, May 1, 1966. Myrtle J. Bell Papers, box 1, folder 1.

[45] *Call and Post*, May 26, 1956.

African Americans were regularly promoted to elementary school principalships in Cleveland, and the first man so promoted came in 1960. In 1954 Joseph D. Smith became Cleveland's first African American junior high principal. A few women were serving in this capacity, however.[46]

Like most other African American teachers of this period, Bell was active outside the classroom. Both Bell and Bertha Blue were members of the Minerva Reading club as were prominent African American Clevelanders Clara and Rosa Chesnutt. It also included Minerva Haywood, another black teacher at Kennard. A more direct effort to aid the African American community involved the initiation of a study group for students at Kennard dedicated to the study of race. Bell, along with Minerva Haywood, initiated the Question Mark club to study questions of race. The club put on weekly talks on such topics as Negro poets, Negro myths (delivered by Carter G. Woodson), the Negro in Medicine, Negro authors, the Negro in education, and Negro labor (delivered by Jane E. Hunter). Their 1930 slogan was "I am a question mark, are you?" This group demonstrates an evolution in the instruction of young people regarding race. Rather than telling students to control and sacrifice themselves to improve the condition of African Americans, the Question Mark club offered guidance to the students but allowed them to come to terms with the subject of race in their own lives.

In addition, Bell served the community in Cleveland city government. In 1945 she was appointed to a fourteen member Community Relations Board, one of two African Americans on that board. This board was later renamed the City Amity

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[46] Russell H. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 343.

Board, and its members included Mayor Thomas A. Burke.[47] The board urged action on the failure of police to apprehend an attacker of African American and Jewish Clevelanders, the unwillingness of a neighborhood to integrate, and poor scheduling of buses in and out of a predominately African American neighborhood.[48]

On her retirement, Bell made a plea for the integration of Cleveland's schools as she believed it was a key to reducing racial discrimination and improving race relations. "It will make for better understanding on the part of both white and colored children," said Bell. "Students and parents appreciate a good teacher, irrespective of color." Bell emphasized the progress being made in the integration of Cleveland's teaching force: "In the last two years the Cleveland School Board has provided more opportunities for upgrading Negro teachers. Negroes are in some supervisory positions at board headquarters. They are principals and supervisory assistants in elementary schools and principals and assistant principals in junior high schools. Many have won scholarships for further study and promotion."[49] Bell emphasized the progress, but she must have been discouraged by the lack of progress made by African Americans in supervisory positions.

At the time of her retirement, Bell reflected on the costs of leaving teaching to become an administrator. Although she related her experience in the most positive way possible, she clearly missed the rewards of teaching and was run down by the

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[47] Thomas A. Burke, Democrat, was elected mayor of Cleveland in 1945.

[48] *Cleveland Press*, April 13, 1945. *Call and Post*, May 19, 1945. Myrtle J. Bell Papers, box 1, folder 1.

[49] The *Cleveland Press*, June 14, 1962.

unrelenting and often unrewarding work of administration. Regarding her years as an assistant principal, Bell said "I have enjoyed it although it has taxed my ingenuity very much because the young adults of today prove to be thinkers. They think for themselves and are not easily led. Often I have found it necessary to make elaborate explanations for every rule that is inaugurated." Her most rewarding experiences are when she meets graduates "who have achieved success and come back to thank me for helping them along the way."[50] One student who did this was Carl Stokes, the first African American mayor of a major American city.[51] A great number of students joined Stokes in thanking Bell for her contributions, as did a number of African American teachers who thanked Bell for "opening doors for many of our women."[52]

One teacher who benefitted from Bell's pathbreaking was Dovie Sweet (1910 -). Sweet taught in Cleveland's primary schools and like Blue and Bell, worked inside and outside the classroom to improve the condition of the African American community. A native of Florida, Sweet came from a family of educators. The teacher of the one-room school she first attended was her cousin, Lillie George. She liked school so much that she told her mother that "I want to be a school teacher just like cousin Lillie." She tutored students at thirteen years of age and finished high school at the age of fifteen. She then attended Florida A & M, and after graduating from college she was picked for a summer job as an Assistant Home Demonstration Agent.

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[50] *East Tech Scarab*, June 7, 1966.

[51] Letter from Carl Stokes to Myrtle J. Bell, Oct. 3, 1966, Myrtle J. Bell Papers, scrapbook no. 2.

[52] Letter from Dovie Sweet to Myrtle Bell, Nov 17, 1966, Myrtle J. Bell Papers, scrapbook no. 2.

It was noted how well she related "to all levels of people." In Florida, Sweet was appointed to teach all colored schools, visiting schools and helping teachers. She received a grant from the Jeanes foundation, receiving $200 of her $800 annual salary from that foundation so that she could work as a teaching supervisor. In this role she traveled between Florida's African American schools advising teachers.[53]

While working as a teacher supervisor, Sweet became involved in a controversy concerning the NAACP. Having worked for that organization for some time, Sweet asked all of the teachers under her supervision to join it. Upon hearing of the this, a principal of one of the schools notified the superintendent and accused Sweet of agitating for equal pay for all teachers she supervised. The superintendent called Sweet into his office confronted her with the accusation. Sweet responded that this was not correct; rather, she was fighting for the salaries the teachers deserved based on their qualifications and certifications. The superintendent accepted this explanation and told the principal he should be doing the same. He then congratulated Sweet for her efforts. Here Sweet skillfully negotiated the issues of race and professionalization in education and came out on top.[54]

After nearly twenty years of service to the Florida schools, Sweet married and moved to Cleveland because her husband felt he should pursue defense work. Cleveland was a logical choice as it led the nation in increase of production due to the start of World War II with its business activity increasing one hundred and forty-

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[53] Dovie Sweet Papers, Mss 4204, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Jeanes Award form, box 1, folder 1.

[54] Ibid.

seven percent. Dovie Sweet's husband, Sherman Sweet, was the younger brother of the Dr. Henry O. Sweet of the famous Sweet riot and trial in 1920s Detroit. This incident ensued when Dr. Sweet had purchased a home in a white neighborhood, and a riot ensued that left one European American male dead. In 1926 the NAACP hired Clarence Darrow to defend Dr. Sweet on charges of murder. Dr. Sweet was acquitted in May, 1926.[55]

Before entering the workforce, however, Sweet pursued two graduate degrees. She graduated from Western Reserve Univ. with a M.A. in Secondary education and in 1956 with a Master's degree in Elementary education. She taught in Cleveland public schools between 1950 and 1976. She initially pursued these degrees because she had difficulty finding a teaching job in Cleveland due to the segregation of teachers and discrimination in hiring. Her papers contain a discussion of this segregation fight initiated by the Cleveland *Call and Post*. The paper confronted the Cleveland school system with evidence of its purposefully segregating African American teachers, concentrating them in the Central area and allowing none in the West. The director of school personnel denied this saying that the schools did not keep records of teachers by race. The school official, Anne McCarthy, could not explain why photos were required with applications.

While teaching in Cleveland, Sweet also taught "Beauty Culture." Sweet served as Dean of the Clark school of Dressmaking for several years, and also work

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[55] Dovie Sweet Papers, box 1, folders 2, 17. Rose, *Cleveland*, 1002. For a discussion of the Sweet riot and trial, see Thomas, *Life for Us is What We Make It*, 138-40. For a discussion of the NAACP desegregation of schools cases, see Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

with the Arthur John School of Modeling and received an award for her outstanding services to the school. She was also the Supervisor and registrar of the Mary Belle Academy of Beauty Culture in 1945, offering classes in hair styling, facials, and manicuring. Like Azalia Hackley and Bertha Blue, Sweet fought the stereotypes of African American women's degeneracy and hypersexuality through the teaching of beauty and manners.[56]

Sweet was a member of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's club, National Council of Negro Women, St. John's A.M.E. Church. She helped organize the Glenville area community council, Parkgate Avenue Street Club, East 111th Street Club, and the Retired Teachers Union. She was a staunch supporter of the NAACP, serving as vice-president of the Cleveland branch from 1963-70. She chaired the first Freedom Fund Dinner, coordinated the Cleveland branch's participation in the March on Washington, and surveyed the Cleveland area for cases of discrimination. Her volunteer work could have won her the title "volunteer of the year" according to Harold Williams, Executive Secretary of the NAACP. This work started early. At nine years of age she organized a girls group to make flowers of the sick people since there were no florists in her home town. As a young person she organized girls for personal grooming regimens. She also

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[56] Dovie Sweet Papers, box 1, folder 17, newspaper clipping from the *Call and Post*, February 10, 1945. *Call and Post*, September 4, 1948. Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, 294-95. Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 193. For a discussion of constructions of sexuality and African American women, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," in Hine, ed., *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible*, 11-13.

volunteered at the Phillis Wheatley Home.[57] Sweet organized the Myrtle J. Bell appreciation dinner for November 18, 1966 to note the retirement of that noted educator.[58] One of Sweet's greatest gifts to those she served was her optimism. Her motto was "The thing that goes the farthest toward making life worthwhile that costs the least and does the most is just a pleasant smile."[59]

Sweet was probably best known for a book she wrote after her retirement. Aimed at children, *Red light, Green Light* was a biography of Garrett Morgan a black Clevelander noted for inventions such as an early prototypes traffic lights and automobile turn signals. Sweet's *Red Light, Green Light* was written as an effort to make yet another contribution to the African American community. It was written, according to Sweet, "in order to give readers knowledge of the contribution a black man gave to America's culture," and because "It gives Black children pride in being black at an early stage."[60] With this work, Sweet continued her efforts to empower African Americans to fight for liberation. In this case, she used the exploits of a heroic figure from the past to inspire.

Jane Lee Darr, Blue's foster daughter, wrote the following poem about Blue:

GRANDMA BLUE

Grandma Blue led us
Out of the shadows of slavery —
over the troubled waters of Aftermath

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[57] Dovie Sweet Papers, box 1, folder 1.

[58] Ibid., box 2, folder 30.

[59] Ibid., box 2, folder 29.

[60] Ibid., box 1, folder 1.

Toward the Promised land of Peace ..
Not with raging tantrums
Not by Hatred bitter held within to fester
Not by loud cries of despair that weaken the spirit —
But with the tears of God Given Healing!

By using the language of love —
to open the doors of the heart of the enemy!
By serving the Feast of Forgiveness
In serenity of spirit
In spirit of rejoicing
In the beauty by which she was known!!![61]

This poem captures the pride with which African American teachers are remembered today. The teacher evoked by this poem, like that evoked by the portrait of Fannie Richards that hangs proudly in the Detroit Public Library, is a symbol of strength, learnedness, and piety. The Midwest's African American teachers demonstrated, as a group, enormous reserves of courage and strength, overcoming a general lack of faith in their ability to accomplish their tasks and disapproval of their attempts to accomplish them. As a group they were learned women and men who passed on knowledge, scholarly and otherwise, to thousands of young people without large paychecks or great notoriety. And as a group, they took verbal, written, and symbolic stands for moral behavior from both the majority population and the African American community itself. The legacy of these teachers is indeed a proud one.

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[61] Bertha Blue Family Papers, box 1, folder 5.

Conclusion

Teaching and the Politics of Empowerment: African American Women Teachers of the Upper Midwest, 1865-1950

Teachers were special. Combining knowledge and virtue into a coherent package that borrowed on and made use of Victorian concepts of respectability, teachers were leaders in the struggle for African American liberation and empowerment. In addition, African American teachers had special skills that they directed toward the cause of racial advancement and empowerment: public speaking and writing. But while pursuing these objectives, African American teachers operated within a tangled web of race, class, and gender ideologies that included: the emergence of urban public education systems with designs on social control; the professionalization and feminization of the teaching profession; the transformation of Midwestern cities through the interrelated processes of industrialization, foreign immigration, and African American migration; stereotypes of African American inferiority and moral degeneracy supported by pseudo-scientific doctrine; and a variant of this, negative stereotypes of African American women that focused on their supposed moral and sexual degeneracy. This last was particularly important because American society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had placed women at the center of the moral universe. The labeling of African American women as

degenerate and immoral justified the violation of African American women's bodies and lives as well as restricting their economic opportunities. These stereotypes challenged the very morality of the race as a whole, a stinging penalty given the cost of relegation to less-than-human status that a combination of inferiority and immorality can impart. The results of these ideas can be racist actions made legal: slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching are just three.

In this context emerged tensions between various seemingly contradictory tendencies: the tension between goals of social control and liberation in education itself; the tension between the limiting feminization and professionalization of teaching versus the empowering aspects of that same process; and the tension between the impulses for direct protest against oppression and self-help efforts to compensate for the effects of oppression. In the story of the Midwest's African American teachers lies an intriguing story of transcendence of these contradictions. The culture of resistance of African American teachers, most often manifested in an ideology of racial advancement and empowerment, worked within this context with consistency and flexibility. In constantly shifting territory, teachers consistently adjusted to changes and took advantage of changes to the advantage of African American women and African American communities as a whole.

However, some losses were incurred along the way. Individual teachers of all races lost power and authority within the classroom itself during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] The enormous bureaucracy of American public

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[1] Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: a Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 183-84.

education from its early years promoted a stable society that preserved the status quo, even if that included the oppression of African Americans. The process of bureaucratization and professionalization took some authority away from teachers in the classroom and, in the spirit of Progressivism, placed it into centralized bureaucracies populated by scientifically-trained experts. As a result, the teaching profession lost much of the respect of students and the community as a whole, and African American teachers were not immune to this. In addition, in a microcosm of the class bifurcation that divided urban African American communities in the twentieth century, decaying urban schools drove many talented African American women toward other pursuits as they became available.[2]

These developments hit African American women particularly hard due to the dual effects of racism and sexism. Whereas European American women suffered a loss of power, authority, and respect, their employment options were and still are greater than those available to African American women. In addition, European American women could continue to teach in comfortable suburban schools with little or no minority enrollment. Since the early twentieth century, racist restrictions have continually kept African American teachers in schools with majority or near majority African American populations. Most often these jobs have had the lowest level of prestige and comfort, starved with small resource allocations and often plagued by

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[2] For a discussion of this process, see William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: the Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 7.

overcrowding and, more recently, violence.[3] Furthermore, European American women have had much more success climbing the ladders of administration. In addition to facing a glass ceiling that has often worked to keep women out of the upper echelons of business and government, African American women were further restricted to the lower levels of educational systems. Not until the 1930s and 1940s did some African American teachers break into administration, and not until the 1980s did African American teachers rise to the superintendency of large urban school districts in the Midwest, a feat accomplished by the European American Ella Flagg Young in the nineteenth century Chicago.[4]

The professionalization of the education profession and the feminization of teaching itself could also have worked against the advancement of African American teachers. However, the oppressed peoples of the United States have not accepted the restrictions of public education, and have succeeded to a large degree in turning those educational institutions to the interests of the oppressed rather than against them. African Americans have done just this. African American teachers in particular exploited the tension between control and liberation, between centralized control and personal autonomy. Whatever the vicissitudes of organizational transformation, African American teachers responded by turning those changes to the benefit of African American communities. The feminization of teaching led to more

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[3] Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

[4] Ella Flagg Young began teaching in the Chicago schools in 1860, and by 1887 she had become the first female superintendent of Chicago Schools. John T. McManis, *Ella Flagg Young and a Half-Century of the Chicago Public Schools* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1916), 73.

opportunities for African American teachers. Increasing racial segregation of public schools in the twentieth century did the same. In addition, African American teachers turned the increased centralization of the educational authority to their advantage by penetrating these positions. By 1990, an African American woman had risen to the position of Superintendent of the Detroit public schools.

Clearly African American teachers in the public schools accomplished much despite these limitations. They did so by building on three traditions: the African American self-help tradition of which education had always been a central component; and the tradition of resistance in which a refusal to accept the restrictions of an oppressive society has always been central[5]; and third, the tradition of African American women to resist and respond to the unique combination of racism and sexism that they confronted.

The result of the combination of these traditions was the creation of an African American women's ideology of advancement and empowerment. Designed as part of the African American protest tradition, but taking specific aim at negative stereotypes of African American women that limited the advancement of both African American women and the race as a whole, this ideology bound African American teachers to a complex of obligation and service to the community. Teaching in public schools, it seems, was only part of this effort. These women were also expected to continue this uplift effort in the community. Teachers used the skills that come from advanced education, particularly writing and speaking, to take the message of racial service and

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[5] Vincent Harding, *There is a River: the Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

obligation to new venues. In addition, African American teachers occasionally took on the responsibility of educating young African American women for these roles through their publication of etiquette books, their writing of African American history for young people, and teaching at beauty schools.

Inside and outside the classroom, African American teachers used their special skills in service to the advancement and empowerment ideology. One example of these efforts was the role African American teachers played in breaking barriers in the public school systems of the Midwest between 1865 and 1950. The first barriers were broken as they entered integrated public schools to teach an integrated student body. Before 1900 in Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit, African American women taught in classrooms containing only a few African American students and at times children of prominent European American citizens of these cities. Fannie Richards of Detroit exemplifies this generation of teachers in her teaching of several prominent Detroiters and in her relationship with businessman and Governor of Michigan John J. Bagley. A second generation of African American women broke the barriers keeping African Americans from administrative posts in urban school systems. Myrtle Johnson Bell of Cleveland opened the way for African American women to become principals of schools. These efforts were crucial; once a precedent was set for African American access to positions it became nearly impossible to turn back the clock. As Cleveland's African American community demonstrated in its opposition to the firing of Bell, entry into higher levels of employment would be protected by political pressure.

Second, African American teachers worked for the ideology of advancement and empowerment to aid the African American community by acting as positive role

models for African American youth. Recent studies have demonstrated the value of African American teachers to the learning of African American students.[6] In Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit, African American teachers served as role models for African American students. Ironically, their ability to serve as role models increased as school systems became increasingly segregated in the first half of the twentieth century because this increased level of segregation provided more job opportunities of African American teachers. As this century wore on, African American teachers found themselves teaching classes with almost exclusively African American students. However, African American teachers served as role models in other ways as well. Their involvement in the fields of beauty and etiquette demonstrates the extent to which these teachers were admired and respected and looked to for guidance in matters such as appearance and behavior. Azalia Hackley's *The Colored Girl Beautiful* stands out as an example of this phenomenon.

Third, African American teachers operated for the ideology of racial advancement and empowerment by being at the forefront of the building of institutions within the African American community. These institutions varied from Colored Women's Clubs to social welfare organizations. In Detroit, African American teachers formed a disproportionate number of the leaders of these clubs. Fannie Richards was central in the building of Detroit's Phillis Wheatley Home for the relief of elderly African American Detroiters. Ethel McCracken-Cleaves of Chicago served as president of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. The strength of this

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[6] Joseph Stewart, Jr., "In Quest of Role Models: Change in Black Teacher Representation in Urban School Districts, 1968-86," *Journal of Negro Education* 58 (1989), 140.

commitment went beyond teachers' service in the public schools. Former teachers consistently continued their racial uplift and advancement work after leaving the public schools. For instance, Azalia Hackley continued her community relief work beyond her public school teaching days and continued to work for racial uplift and advancement in all her cities of residence.

The work of African American teachers, then, must be seen as part of the African American protest tradition. In Vincent Harding's *There is a River*, Harding demonstrates the African American protest tradition and uses the metaphor of a river to describe it. Varied, flexible, always changing yet always gradually carving out the river bed below, the river is one of nature's most powerful entities, capable of transforming the very landscape. The African American protest tradition has acted similarly. The efforts of African American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century form an undervalued prong of this protest tradition. In directing efforts against negative stereotypes of African American women, African American teachers did more than just provide opportunities for future generations of African American women. They also aided in the liberation of African Americans as a whole. The negative stereotypes directed against African American women and the real oppression that resulted from these stereotypes restricted the African American community as a whole. And, like a river, these efforts were characterized by their flexibility and ability to redirect or change advancement and empowerment efforts in keeping with the changed circumstances that surround it.

More importantly, African American women's racial advancement and empowerment efforts must force a reconceptualization of the nature of African

American protest and self-help activity during the period 1865 to 1950. The entire self-help tradition, in particular its large educational component, can be seen as being driven and perpetuated through the auspices of the African American women's racial advancement and empowerment ideology. In fact, the work of African American teachers in education suggests that education does not stand alone in its importance to the African American liberation and empowerment efforts. Rather, education seems to constitute just one part of a complex of racial advancement and empowerment efforts. The roles of these women in church activity, and the importance of the church in the development of African American educational institutions, points to a complex of ideas that center around the concept of service to the race. According to this ideology, that service could and should be exercised in many ways simultaneously. For teachers, then, teaching in the classroom was not enough; the obligation to service continued into community activities or through the publication of instructional writings.

African American women teachers of the Upper Midwest, through gradual, continual, and non-violent effort, made significant contributions to racial advancement and empowerment. In doing so, they acted within a unique African American women's culture of resistance that involved a redefinition of themselves through the nurturing of an oppositional consciousness and positive actions in opposition to oppression.[7] For teachers, these positive acts utilized their special skills of speaking and writing. These powerful tools, combined with the positive image of African

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[7] Darlene Clark Hine, "Theory and Black Women's History," unpublished paper presented at the University of Virginia, November 15, 1995.

American teachers themselves, made for a powerful combination that simultaneously resisted oppression and aided the race.

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