



**Pour la défense des femmes : étude d'écrits  
d'Africaines-Américaines, de 1860 jusqu'au début des  
années 1920"**

Elise Vallier

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**Université de Paris-Est Marne-La-Vallée**

**Ecole Doctorale « Cultures et Sociétés »**

**Thèse de Doctorat**

**Spécialité : anglais, civilisation américaine**

**Elise VALLIER-MATHIEU**

**“In Defense of American Womanhood:**

**A Study of African American Women’s Writings (1860s-1920s)”**

**Thèse dirigée par les Professeurs William DOW et Nina SILBER**

**Soutenue le 9 décembre 2017**

**Membres du Jury : Madame la Professeure Hélène LE DANTEC-LOWRY**

**Madame la Professeure Anne STEFANI**

**Monsieur le Professeur Jean-Paul ROCCHI**

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# Introduction

This dissertation examines how some African American women educators, clubwomen and intellectuals of the middle and upper-classes reflected upon being a woman and asserted their womanhood between the 1860s and the early 1920s, through the study of their life writings, articles, essays and speeches. This study analyzes how these women addressed the way they were portrayed in American society, and examines the attitudes and strategies they adopted to defend the image of women of color at a time when their morality was constantly questioned. I chose to work on this topic in the period 1860s-1920s because the very womanhood of African American women was highly disputed at the time. I wanted to discover how these women defined and kept redefining what it meant to be a woman of color in the rapidly changing society of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries.

It is first necessary to define the term “Womanhood”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it has three definitions. First, womanhood is the state or condition of being a woman. It corresponds to the state of being a woman – not a girl anymore – of having attributes which make women who they are in the workplace, at home, in society. Entering this stage of life implies coming of age and having reproductive capacities. Secondly, womanhood corresponds to “the qualities considered to be natural to or characteristic of a woman”. In that sense, it refers to the cultural understanding of what women should be and do in a given society. In this study, the nineteenth century “cult of true womanhood” – also named the ideal of “separate spheres” – and the model of the “new woman” at the beginning of the twentieth century play important roles in the evolution of this definition in America. What were the qualities considered to be “natural or characteristic” of a woman in the 1860s? What were they in 1920? Thirdly, womanhood also means “women considered collectively”. In this study, I analyze how these women thought about being a woman – how they experienced being a girl, coming of age and how they reflected on women’s proper role in society –. I thus focus on the first two definitions of the term. The concept of “womanhood” is a floating, evolving concept. It keeps being redefined. In *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper*, Karen Baker-Fletcher argues that “womanhood [...] involv[es] continuous growth”<sup>2</sup>. In a monograph in which she chronicled the “creation and transformation of womanhood in America”, Mary Ryan has written that “womanhood has always had a geography of its own”<sup>3</sup> and that:

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper*. (New York: Crossroads, 1994). See chapter 4 devoted to womanhood, 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*. (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975 and 1979), ix.

The history and concept of womanhood should also be flexible enough to account for its multiplicity as well, especially is variation by class, race, ethnic group, and geographical region. No rigid typology of womanhood, moreover, can adequately depict actual female experience, the millions of unique lives that participate in the creation, the maintenance, and the transformation of any gender system.<sup>4</sup>

This suggests that the definition of womanhood is impacted by race and class but also by region. This dissertation examines these different influences.

African American women were indeed not recognized for their humanity or their womanhood for a long period in American History. As the historian Eric Foner has underscored in *Give me Liberty: An American History*, “the nineteenth century’s ‘Cult of Domesticity’, which defined the home as a woman’s proper sphere, did not apply to slave women, who regularly worked in the fields”<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, from 1820 until the beginning of the Civil War, American women were expected to abide by certain rules – such as remaining in the domestic sphere – were expected to possess certain “feminine” qualities, according to the dictates of the cult of true womanhood which Barbara Welter has described in “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” (1966)<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, regional aspects must be considered since Victorianism was construed somewhat differently in the North and in the South. Some scholars such as Anne Firor Scott consider that there was a more extreme form of Victorianism in the South precisely because of the nature of race relations there<sup>7</sup>. After the abolition of slavery in 1865, many black women were still denied their status as women. As Hazel Carby and several other scholars have claimed, black women were for a very long time “relegated to a place outside the ideological construction of ‘womanhood’. That term included only white women”<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, since the nineteenth century, women of color suffered from a negative and often sexualized image whose roots are to be found in slavery. As Deborah Gray White has

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, xvii- xviii.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Foner, *Give me Liberty! An American History*, Single Volume, (New York, Norton, 2012), 417. On the question of the cult of domesticity, see Sheila Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place: A History of the Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*, in which she discusses the cult of domesticity, Republican motherhood and the ‘cult of true womanhood’. For a definition of the cult of true womanhood, see Barbara Welter’s article “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” *American Quarterly* 18/2. (1966): 151-174. Many scholars carried out research on the cult of true womanhood. See Mabel Donnelly’s “American Victorian Woman: The Myth and the Reality”. Ph.D diss., Greenwood Press, 1986 and Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” *American Quarterly* 18/2. (1966): 151-174. She has argued that the four pillars of true womanhood were: piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics: 1830-1930*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970). See chapter 1 in particular.

<sup>8</sup>, Hazel Carby, “On the threshold of Woman’s Era: Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory”, in ‘Race’, *Writing, and Difference*, ed., Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1986), 301-316. See 308-309. See also Carby’s most renowned contribution: *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. (New York: Oxford University, 1987). Carby is a British scholar and the daughter of Jamaican and Welsh parents.

shown in her dissertation devoted to slave women, the image of black women has often been linked to sex<sup>9</sup>. Patricia Hill Collins has also reaffirmed the belief previously expressed by Cheryl Gilkes: “As punishment [for their assertiveness and their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality], Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images”<sup>10</sup>. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the myths of the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the tragic mulatta emerged in popular culture<sup>11</sup>. The question of sex and sexuality are addressed in this dissertation in order to understand how African American women activists fought against such images.

Studying women in America between the 1860s and the early 1920s, a period of profound social transformations, should reveal how the concept of womanhood in America changed between 1865 and 1920 and if black women’s understanding of what constituted “proper” womanhood was always similar to that of white women. In addition, this study should reveal whether women of color in the United States developed a different definition of womanhood. If they did, this study should unveil how and why they developed this distinctive definition. For instance, did they feel compelled by white society to conform to a certain definition of womanhood? Moreover, this work should show the extent to which class and region are important factors in these definitions – in particular because social class or regional affiliations impacted black women’s agency in that period.

I chose to work on a long historical period because this approach enables me to determine whether women’s understanding of womanhood changed over time, at a period where being a woman in America underwent dramatic transformations – from the early

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<sup>9</sup> See her dissertation entitled *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, published as a book in 1985. Deborah Gray White, “Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Antebellum South”, Ph.D diss., (University of Illinois at Chicago, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Cheryl Gilkes, as cited in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 69. First published 1990. See in particular Chapter 4 entitled “Mammies, Matriarchs and Other Controlling Images”. Patricia Hill Collins argues that during the twentieth century black women were often also portrayed as “welfare recipients [and] hot mammas”. See also Patricia Morton’s *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women*, (Wesport, Conn.: Praeger, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> The figures of faithful “mammies” emerged in popular culture and in advertisements in the 1890s. Scarlett O’Hara’s servant embodies this image. The figures of the Jezebel and the tragic mulatta were present in art and literature. The tragic mulatta is a literary figure which is exemplified in the female characters of the novels written by Nella Larsen: *Quicksand* – the characters of Helga Crane — and *Passing* – the character of Clare Kendry. See 2005 Hélène Charlery’s dissertation for a study of these three images: « Les Africaines-Américaines : Entre deux identités. Sexualisation et Déssexualisation des représentations journalistiques, puis cinématographiques des Africaines-Américaines de 1869 à 1966 ». Université de Paris Est Créteil Val de Marne, Bibliothèque du Centre. As Waters has claimed, at that period, the image of black women was “tied to the troublesome portrayal of black women as mammies that writers such as Collins, Adrienne Rich, and many others warn against”. Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway, *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*, (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont Press, 2007), 375-376. To this day, the attacks have continued with the image of “welfare mothers”, or cocaine-addicts living in the ghettos.

1860s, when many of these women were born – to the end of the Progressive era in 1920. Consequently, I opted for a diachronic approach.

The time period can be divided into two main periods: the first period (1860s-1890s)<sup>12</sup> composed of the Reconstruction era starting with African Americans' emancipation in 1865 and its promise of full political rights for black people, the period called "Redemption", the northern troops' withdrawal from the South after the election of 1876 up to the 1890s, which was a time of political upheaval; and the second period (1890s-1920s), the Progressive era, a period of major social and political transformations for women in America.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the political situation was tense for the black community, as white southern Democrats "redeemed" their governments from Republicans and reasserted the doctrine of white supremacy<sup>13</sup>. The 1880s and 1890s brought fewer social and political advances for the African American community. Even if they correspond to decades of profound changes for American people of color, African Americans found themselves compelled to live in a society with legally enforced white supremacy. In the wake of the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and with the withdrawal of military troops from former Confederate States, the South managed to enforce discriminatory laws against black Americans. Ostracized and considered as second-class citizens, people of African descent struggled to find their place in the larger (i.e. white) American society.

One also needs to consider the question of women in this period. In the 1870s and 1880s, at a time when Victorianism was gradually yielding ground to more modern notions, did African American women wish to conform to Victorian ideals? As black men were being disenfranchised in the South in the 1890s and 1900s, black women carved out their own political spaces, as Glenda Gilmore explains it in *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*<sup>14</sup>. By publishing newspaper articles, organizing meetings and founding associations and clubs, black women fought against all forms of discrimination throughout the country<sup>15</sup>. In the 1880s and 1890s, women of color had somewhat more latitude in defending themselves: the black press relayed their claims, and their free status enabled them to work for their communities.

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<sup>12</sup> Reconstruction corresponds to the period 1865-1877. I started my research in the 1860s because several women in this study were born in the early 1860s.

<sup>13</sup> This period was called the "Redemption".

<sup>14</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> This form of resistance was not a new phenomenon, as Deborah White has shown in the 1979 in her dissertation *Aren't I a Woman?* Many forms of resistance to oppression had emerged under slavery.

In the 1890s, women's reasserted agency took on an important meaning because it developed or consolidated at a time when men of color were being disenfranchised and where racial discrimination was legally reasserted and made legal in the country. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation was lawful as long as Americans were guaranteed equality<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, as of the 1890s, approximately thirty years after the Civil War, the country was in the process of national reunification. This affected politics and relationships between Americans of the different regions. Several virulent race riots agitated the country in these years, as for example in 1898 in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1906 in Atlanta, Georgia, and in 1919 in Chicago, Illinois. The enforcement of Jim Crow laws in the 1890s signaled a new era in American race relations. Rayford Logan has termed this time the "nadir" for African Americans in the United States<sup>17</sup>. In the 1900s, African Americans aimed at changing the image of the race and the nature of their activism. While the educated black elite had tended to emphasize the necessity of racial uplift and self-help from 1865 to the late 1890s, a shift operated at the turn of the century: the movement started from the bottom up: blacks increasingly displayed a spirit of "protest and group assertiveness" and the "New Negro" emerged.

The turn of the century was also a period of major changes for women in the United States: the image of the "New Woman" emerged. In the manner of the Gibson Girl, portrayed by Charles Dana Gibson in the 1890s, the new woman was a modern woman, wearing short hair, dressing elegantly but displaying shorter skirts, rejecting corsets, freely riding bikes, attending college, willing to embrace a career and at times refusing – or postponing – marriage and having children. This era, identified as the Progressive era, was also a period when many social workers and activists, notably women, undertook to reform and modernize society. At the same time, many women also kept fighting to obtain the right to vote. Suffragists finally earned victory in 1920, through the Nineteenth Amendment. This modern model of womanhood influenced white women and black women, but again, race played an important part in these definitions: How different were white "New Women" from the emerging "New Negro Women"? While white American women were redefining what it meant to be a woman, how did elite black women define ideal womanhood? How did black women respond to the "New Woman" ideal? Did black women define a new ideal of

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<sup>16</sup> Under Chief Justice Fuller, the Supreme Court established the "separate but equal" rule. It would take about a century for the Supreme Court to overturn this decision, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954.

<sup>17</sup> The Historian Rayford Logan coined the term in his 1954 book entitled *The Negro in American Life and Thoughts: The Nadir, 1877-1901*. See also: Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, "'Somewhere' in the Nadir of African American History, 1890-1920." Freedom's Story, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/nadir.htm>.



womanhood in these years, combining both the womanly attributes of the cult of separate spheres and the ideal of the new woman? Region also affects these questions. According to Anne Scott, the “Southern Lady” did not die with the New South – at the turn of the century: it kept living and “outward forms of ladylike behavior were carefully maintained” even after the 1920s<sup>18</sup>.

In this period of transition from the Victorian woman to the new woman, black women’s reputation was regularly attacked. In 1895, John W. Jacks, the President of the Missouri Press Association, wrote a slanderous letter in which he not only attacked all blacks but also called all black women, “prostitutes and [...] thieves and liars”<sup>19</sup>. Some educated black women of the elite such as Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, aiming at defending the image of the black women, founded the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Ruffin also founded a woman’s newspaper, the *Woman’s Era*, in which several women regularly wrote columns. Many female activists frequently published articles in black newspapers – such as in the *Chicago Defender*, the *Voice of the Negro*, *The Colored American Magazine*, *The New York Age* or *The New York Freeman* for instance<sup>20</sup>. Being able to publish in black newspapers was not only an assertion of freedom for African Americans, but it was also a form of liberation for women, as they could finally express themselves in either the local, regional or national press<sup>21</sup>. The study of these articles should enable me to see how they spoke about being a woman of color.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to determine how African American women – who lived at a time of transition – from one ideal, true womanhood, to another, that of the modern, “new woman” – construed womanhood during that period of profound social and political changes. How important was the class component in the definition of womanhood? Did elite women advocating Victorian womanhood relate to lower class women? Was there a sense of solidarity between classes? For instance, Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell adopted very different attitudes towards black women of the lower-class. How wide was the gap, then, between working-class and upper and middle-class women of color?

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<sup>18</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics: 1830-1930*, 225. “The image [of the southern Lady] had not entirely disappeared. It lived on, not as a complete prescription for woman’s life but as a style which as often as not was a façade to ward off criticism of unladylike independence or to please men. It gave an illusory uniformity to the southern female personality”.

<sup>19</sup> Jacks mainly targeted Ida B. Wells for the statements she had recently made about lynchings.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Talbert, Gertrude Mossell, Victoria Earle Matthews or Frances Harper Watkins wrote numerous articles.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2006). See also Noliwe Rooks’ *Ladies’ Pages: African American Women and the Culture that Made Them*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

Class appears to have played an important part in the process, but how important was the part played by their regional identity? Did tensions exist between clubwomen living in different regions? Region must also be considered when exploring the history of womanhood in America: as the scholar Anne Firor Scott has underscored, the South had an extreme version of the Victorian lady and the cult of domesticity, prompting both black and white women of the South to develop alternative – more conservative — versions of womanhood<sup>22</sup>. Black women certainly defined womanhood differently in the 1870s South and in the 1920s North. Definitions of womanhood must be understood both historically and geographically.

The part played by color must be taken into consideration as well. Some of the women under study were of mixed ancestry while others were dark-skinned. Mary Church Terrell and Fanny Barrier Williams could easily be mistaken for white. Other women of mixed ancestry such as Anna Julia Cooper, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Margaret Murray Washington were also light-skinned, while others such as Ida B. Wells or Mary McLeod Bethune were dark-skinned. Did color impact the way these women organized club work?

The question of black womanhood has been tackled by historians only recently. Studies about African American women took off in the 1970s and 1980s. The first studies about African Americans – carried out by white scholars and several black intellectuals associated with Carter Woodson in the 1930s – indeed dealt almost exclusively with men of color. The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of what became known as “black urban studies”<sup>23</sup>. With the Civil Rights movement, efforts to create university departments specifically designed for African and African American studies encouraged the emergence of scholarship by and about black people in America. What is more, in the mid-1970s, social history opened new perspectives<sup>24</sup>. When historians started exploring black women’s life stories in the 1970s, they initially focused on their living conditions under slavery<sup>25</sup>. One of

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<sup>22</sup> See Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics: 1830-1930*. See chapter 1 in particular.

<sup>23</sup> These studies dealt with black migration, the effects of urbanization and the formations of what came to be known as black ghettos. Robert Austin Warner, *New Haven Negroes: A Social History*, 1940, 1969; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1967), Arnold H. Taylor, *Travail and Triumph: Black Life and Culture in the South since the Civil War*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 1976), Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978). More recently, Marcy S. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City before World War I*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Among other works, Herbert Gutman wrote *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* in 1976, in which he debunked the myths of the matriarch and female-headed families that had been conveyed by *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, known as “The Moynihan report” published a few years before, in 1965.

<sup>25</sup> For example, scholars studied Mary Prince’s *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* published in 1831, Sojourner Truth’s *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828* which was published by Olive Gilbert, a white female friend of Sojourner Truth’s in 1850, Harriet Wilson’s fictional autobiography – or autobiographical novel – *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* published in 1859, or on Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, published in 1861 and edited by Louisa Maria Childs, in which she denounced the sexual violence she



the first studies published on slave women was Deborah Gray White's *Aren't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, in which she emphasized the resistance of African American women to slavery<sup>26</sup>. In many other subsequent studies, women of color were finally no longer depicted as passive beings but as actors of History.

Numerous studies were published about slave women<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly enough, it seems that women's slave narratives have been studied more than women's later life narratives. Black women's life narratives published during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow eras have received somewhat less attention, although both periods are invaluable to document the intellectual history of women in freedom. Nevertheless, several scholars have studied the experiences of African American women after emancipation. For example, in *Mistresses and Slaves, Plantation Women in South Carolina: 1830-1880* (1997), Marli Weiner has demonstrated how the relationships between women of both colors shifted from a relation of trust and esteem to a harsher relationship from the antebellum era to the post-Civil War era<sup>28</sup>. In her analysis of the lives of white and African American women in *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (2000), Laura Edwards has documented African American women's agency in post-war North Carolina<sup>29</sup>.

Numerous academics have tackled the question of womanhood yet when the subject of womanhood was first studied in America in the 1970s, most of the research was initially carried out on white women<sup>30</sup>. Since the 1970s, the historiography on womanhood has given

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suffered from under slavery, emphasizing the importance of sex in black women's experience of slavery. Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Mineola and New York: Dover Publication, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Aren't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. White published it in book form in 1985.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women in the Old South*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*. (Cambridge: University Cambridge Press, 2003), Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*, first published 1985 (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2010), Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Marli Weiner devoted two chapters in her book to the notions of domesticity and womanhood in the lives of black and white women in South Carolina. See Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina: 1830-1880*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 174. "Facing danger and humiliation as a result of the war about slavery, [... white women] rapidly lost the remnants of their benevolence and the sense of shared femaleness that they had felt for black women". For her, "this harsher racism was a direct result of the new work patterns that had arisen" after the war, when white women had to perform new domestic chores which they were not accustomed to and when African American women could sometimes choose to work for white employers or not. See Weiner, 231.

<sup>29</sup> Laura Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000). See chapter 3: "Talking for her Rights", 125-148.

<sup>30</sup> Mary P. Ryan's 1975 study *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present* shows it well: none of the seven chapters address the question of black womanhood. The book written by Sheila Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place* discusses the cult of domesticity, Republican motherhood and the Cult of True Womanhood for white women. Sheila Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*. (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

consideration to the study of black women. In 1972, Gerda Lerner, an Austrian scholar, was among the first scholars to analyze the question relating to womanhood. In her collection of essays entitled *Black Women in White America, A Documentary History*, one chapter is devoted to black womanhood<sup>31</sup>. Research on African American women has been prolific since then.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a rise in scholarship by African American women historians on and about African American women in freedom. Existing scholarship has sought to address how black women negotiated the period of the Reconstruction and Jim Crow Eras. In *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (1990), Sarah Evans has devoted two chapters to the experiences of women of color in America between 1865 and 1920<sup>32</sup>. Other works using an innovative methodology were published in the 1990s. In *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920* (1991), Beverly Guy-Sheftall has analyzed how black women were perceived in white America between 1880s and 1920s and has examined how black women viewed themselves, using Spelman College's alumni records. In *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (1996), Anne Meis Knupfer has convincingly argued that like white women, black clubwomen used the cult of true womanhood in order to make their struggle for women's rights more acceptable at that time and thus, to obtain more political rights<sup>33</sup>. In 1998, Marli Weiner pointed out that on the plantations, definitions of womanhood by black women had been shaped by the experience of slavery and under the constraints of white supervision<sup>34</sup>, and that after the war, the ideology of domesticity was transformed, "privatized" to mean simply "devotion to family"<sup>35</sup>. According to her, what was important was that the Civil War and Reconstruction "allowed women of both races to consider, perhaps for the first time, the possibility of questioning the ideology of domesticity"<sup>36</sup>. In *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (1999), Deborah Gray White has studied womanhood using black clubwomen's personal

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<sup>31</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*. (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1992). First published 1972. Chapter 10: "Black Women Speak of Womanhood", 561 – 614.

<sup>32</sup> Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*. (New York: The Free Press, 1990). She has discussed the activism of black women and the influence of Mary Terrell, Ida B. Wells, Josephine Ruffin and Charlotte Hawkins Brown, among others, in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>33</sup> Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 130. "African-American women's efforts to define the meaning of womanhood for themselves took place in the context of white interference, which ranged from insistence on women's labor to separating slave families to rape. Nevertheless, black women were able to define a consistent pattern of behavior that minimized white influence over their lives".

<sup>35</sup> Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 233.

<sup>36</sup> Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves*, 233.

writings to demonstrate their agency as well as the difficulties and successes they met in defending their name<sup>37</sup>. In 1996, Glenda Gilmore also made a major contribution in the field with *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*<sup>38</sup>. Examining the agency of several African American women in North Carolina in detail, she has convincingly argued that black women of the “better-class” questioned the Victorian ideology as early as in the 1880s and 1890s and were in fact ahead of their white counterparts when it came to challenging etiquette and conservative gender roles, therefore astutely showing that as early as 1877, numerous black women in North Carolina proved to be “new women” much earlier than white women<sup>39</sup>. She has devoted several chapters to the analysis of black manhood and black womanhood in North Carolina from the 1890s to 1920<sup>40</sup> and has not only demonstrated that much of the question related to race, region and gender had to do with sex<sup>41</sup>. She has also pointed out that African American women’s struggle for the vote was part of a strategy to defend the interests of women of color.

Inspired by Beverly Guy-Sheftall’s and Glenda Gilmore’s scholarly works, I hope to make a contribution by exploring the way African American women construed – and spoke about – black womanhood on a regional and a national scale<sup>42</sup>.

A significant part of the research carried out on black women in the post-Civil War era has dealt with prominent clubwomen, educators and social reformers<sup>43</sup>. The way these women understood what being a woman meant from the 1860s and up to 1920 has received little scholarly attention. Yet, understanding this ideology of womanhood is paramount for understanding – both male and female – black agency from 1865 onwards, the nineteenth

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<sup>37</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 37-38. Gilmore has worked on Sarah Dudley Pettey for example. “African-American women had been “new women” since 1877, when the reluctant state legislature, wary of black voting strength and white legislators years of forced integration, had established a state supported normal school inside feel for African-Americans, the first such school in the country”.

<sup>40</sup> See “Race and Womanhood” (chapter 2), “Race and Manhood” (chapter 3).

<sup>41</sup> See in particular chapter 4: “Sex and Violence in Procrustes’ Bed”.

<sup>42</sup> During my studies, I was also inspired by the works of French scholars such as Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, Claire Parfait, Hélène Quanquin, and Claire Bourhis-Mariotti, who work in the fields of African American history, Women’s history or Intellectual history. For example, the project entitled “History from the Margins” (“Écrire l’histoire depuis les marges”), organized by prominent French scholars such as Claire Parfait, Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, Claire Bourhis-Mariotti and Matthieu Renault has stimulated my interest. See *Writing History from the Margins: African Americans and the Quest for Freedom*. Eds. By Claire Parfait, Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry and Claire Bourhis-Mariotti (Paris: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> See for instance Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, Wanda A. Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Clubwomen in Illinois*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), and Floris Loretta Barnett Cash, “Womanhood and Protest : The Club Movement among Black Women, 1892-1922”, Ph.D diss., (State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1986). See also Dorothy C. Salem, “To Better our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920”, Ph.D diss., (Kent State University, 1986).

century struggle for civil rights by African Americans and the struggle for women's rights before 1920.

Additionally, some of the work devoted to the study of African American womanhood has been carried out within the fields of literature. A significant part of the research done on African American womanhood examines literary works such as novels or short stories, not historical sources such as letters, journals and newspaper articles<sup>44</sup>.

Furthermore, women of color in America have for a long time not received the scholarly attention they deserve. Black male intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington<sup>45</sup>, Kelly Miller or Alexander Crummell have comparatively received more attention than black women intellectuals such as Ida B. Wells or Anna Julia Cooper, despite the important roles the latter played in this era of great social and political changes for African Americans. Besides, the contributions of these female intellectuals were largely underestimated by black male leaders. For example, although he obviously valued the intellectual philosophy Anna Cooper had crafted, W.E.B. Du Bois used her famous phrase "When and Where I Enter..." without giving her credit for it in his piece<sup>46</sup>.

Nevertheless, the prolific and fruitful scholarship devoted to women of color – which took off in the 1970s – has shed light on black women's lives and achievements has permitted some of these activists to reach national fame. Several women are now illustrious: Ida B. Wells for her struggle against lynching, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper are quite renowned and their writings appear in curricula nowadays. Some black women such as Fanny Jackson Coppin Nannie, Nannie Helen Burroughs and Mary McLeod Bethune are also famous thanks to their work in the field of education; in the case of Bethune, she gained recognition through her role in the Black Cabinet during Roosevelt's presidency in the 1930s.

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<sup>44</sup> See for instance, Ajuan Maria Mance, *Inventing Black Women: African American Women Poets and Self-Representation, 1877- 2000*. 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007); Leonore Hoffmann and Margo Culley, *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Elizabeth Ann. Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999); Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. (London: New York: Routledge, 1994); Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, *Composing Selves: Southern Women and Autobiography*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> See W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publication, 1994), first published in 1903, which is considered as his masterpiece. See also Booker T. Washington's famous autobiography *Up from Slavery* (New York: Dover Publication, 1995). First published in 1901.

<sup>46</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Damnation of Women", in *Darkwater*. Chapter VII, published in 1920. When discussing the question of the so-called black woman's immorality, he targeted white southern men. The sociologist quoted Cooper but failed to name her : "As one of our women writes: 'Only the black woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me'". He nevertheless cited other black women of distinction: Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Shadd.

Yet, the lives and works of other women remain largely unexplored. Autobiographies written by Fannie Barrier Williams, Maritcha Remond Lyons or Jane Edna Hunter – to name only a few – count as very important works by African American women yet are proportionately less widely known<sup>47</sup>. The work and life of Fannie Barrier Williams is still quite unknown to many and the first biography about her was published only quite recently<sup>48</sup>.

During this period (1860s-1920s), black women intellectuals developed an alternative version of womanhood, a combination of Victorian and more modern mores in order to assert their humanity and their womanliness. At the turn of the century, as the country was increasingly reunified, as many efforts were made to undermine the regional tensions that had led to the fratricidal war of 1861-1865, while African American men were gradually losing their civil rights and the New South was being revived, these same women redefined womanhood, advocated a code of conduct which was not devoid of Victorianism but also embraced the trends of the emerging “new woman”. It appears that these intellectuals crafted a definition of the “New Woman” – the “New Negro Woman” – which had slightly different undertones from white women’s definition in order to serve their own progressive agenda. Gender, color, region and class oriented these women’s philosophies.

To verify these hypotheses, I analyzed not only the life narratives – such as diaries, journals, autobiographies and memoirs – of numerous women but also their correspondence, newspaper articles, essays and diverse contributions in various black newspapers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is interesting to study autobiographical writings because they enabled African American women – even more so than for white American women – to express their political voices and to express their humanity and their womanhood and, as Kimberly Harrison has suggested, were also places of “rhetorical rehearsals”<sup>49</sup>. Studying the diaries, letters and autobiographies left by these women enabled me to get a better sense of what shaped their views about manhood and womanhood.

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<sup>47</sup> In “The Sacred Right of the Weak: Pain, Sympathy and The Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America”, in *Journal of American History* 82 (September 1995): 463-49, Elizabeth Clark explains that the abolitionists’ emphasis on bodily integrity can account for the decreased interest in the life stories of women of African descent after emancipation.

<sup>48</sup> Wanda A. Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*. (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, University of Illinois Press, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*. Harrison refers to diaries here: “The personal spaces of women’s diaries provided room for rhetorical rehearsals and allowed women to persuade themselves that they could and should take on the new roles thrust upon them.” Kimberly Harrison, “Rhetorical Rehearsals: The Construction of Ethos in Confederate Women’s Civil War Diaries,” *Rhetoric Review* 22 / 3 (2003): 243-263. Although Harrison’s study dealt with white southern women during the Civil War, what she asserted about the practice of diary-keeping was true for black women who lived during and after the Civil War as well, as one may see in Charlotte Forten and Ida B. Wells’s diaries.



Moreover, studying a handful of women enables scholars to learn about the individual. History appears as more personal and perhaps as more universal when it is studied through autobiographies, letters, diaries or memoirs. As several scholars working on the autobiography have explained, these documents “bring to light private and intimate details that put forth the human value of testimonials”<sup>50</sup>. This approach enables researchers to explore the construction of social, racial and regional and national identities. Reading the life writings of these women reveals the way these women built themselves as girls, as women and how their views might have changed in time. As Kevin Gaines has argued:

It is therefore extremely useful for students to grasp that [...] social identities are not fixed, or predetermined, but mutable. How have social identities changed over time? How, and in what contexts, do people construct their identities, and how much choice do they have in doing so? To what degree are people able to question the dominant assumptions of their age? Dwelling in the foreign country of the American past may make it easier to pose these challenging questions about themselves in our time.<sup>51</sup>

The nature of the sources I was interested in posed the problem of literacy. While conducting my research, I was indeed faced with the dearth of sources, since few black women were literate in the 1860s and 1870s. In the 1860s, many literate black women belonged to the upper and middle-classes and were born into pre-war free families of color, who often lived in the North or in the urban centers of the – often-Upper – South<sup>52</sup>. Therefore, many women in this sample were born in the Northern States but some of them were southern-born. After the 1870s, with the efforts made to educate black people after the war, more women were literate at the turn of the century. I could therefore focus on literate women of the middle and upper-classes who lived in two main regions: the North – including the North-East, New England, States such as Pennsylvania and New York along with States

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<sup>50</sup> This formula was used in the call for papers by the organizers of the conference entitled “Auto/biographies historiques dans les arts” which were held on 25, 26 and 27 March 2015 in Le Mans and Angers. The organizing committee was composed of Delphine Letort and Benaouda Lebdaï (Le Mans), Tanya Ann Kennedy and Daniel Gunn (Farmington), and Erich Fisbach and Christophe Dumas (Angers). “The auto/biographies of famous historical characters articulate a personalized approach to events: not only do they underline the agency of charismatic individuals at key moments of the past, but they also bring to light private and intimate details that put forth the human value of testimonials”.

<sup>51</sup> Kevin K. Gaines, “Racial Uplift Ideology in the Era of ‘the Negro Problem.’” Freedom’s Story, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center.  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/racialuplift.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> This group of women was very small since, at the end of the Civil War, northern black people represented only 10% of the African American population and since, within this group, even fewer belonged to well-off families who had been free for several generations. Most free families of color lived in large cities such as Charleston, South Carolina, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Washington D.C.. Northern black people generally represented an average of 1.6% to 2% of the total northern American population and tended to live in urban areas as well, while southern free blacks represented about 6.8% of the total American population in 1860. In 1860, four million African American slaves lived in the South and 500,000 blacks were free. 90% of black people lived in the South, in rural areas for the most part and often had never had the chance to learn to read or write because of slavery. This includes the percentages of the Upper and Lower South, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest states. See chart: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, “Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970” [Computer file] (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1997).

situated in the Midwest such as Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota – and the South – including Washington D.C., the Upper-South<sup>53</sup> and the Deep South<sup>54</sup>, with the limit of Missouri in the west and Texas in the Southwest.

Finding elements on the private lives of black women represents a challenge because few of them have entrusted repositories with their personal papers. Many scholars have mentioned the difficulty of studying women and indicate that this is even more true for African American women. As Deborah Gray White has underscored in one of her articles, because they were accused of being immoral, women of color were generally not inclined to reveal any information about their private lives<sup>55</sup>:

Few left records that revealed their private selves; most of the collections left are filled with public memorabilia rather than personal materials. Even though it makes the historian's job of piecing together their private lives almost impossible, for women who wanted their public identity to stand in for the private, this was a good strategy. Nevertheless, some private records have survived, and they point to a heavy and complex burden of being black, female, and a committed leader<sup>56</sup>.

I chose not to work on non-literate women because I did not wish to rely upon reported speech or whites' writings about African Americans: I wanted to be able to analyze the intellectual thought of these activists. I also chose to work on written sources exclusively, and thus not to write oral history because I wanted to analyze how these intellectuals crafted these definitions<sup>57</sup>. Authors of *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* provide fascinating information on the quotidian lives of humble African American women during the Jim Crow era, using interviews – collected in the 1990s – of black women who had experienced life in the 1890s up to the 1950s<sup>58</sup>. Yet, this book does not provide information on how they reflected upon their lives at the time or the way activists and intellectuals fought against negative stereotypes about women of color.

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<sup>53</sup> The Upper-South includes Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Missouri. Five States did not secede from the Union in 1860-1861: Missouri, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and West Virginia.

<sup>54</sup> The Deep South is composed of States such as South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

<sup>55</sup> Deborah Gray White has discussed this problem in "Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women's History", *Journal of American History* 74 (June 1987): 237-242. See 237-238, as cited in Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West", *Signs*. Vol. 14, No. 4, 912-920, 916. "Black women have also been reluctant to donate their papers to manuscript repositories [because of their] perennial concern with image, a justifiable concern born of centuries of vilification [and also because the] adversarial nature of the relationship that countless black women have had with many public institutions, and the resultant suspicion of anyone seeking private information".

<sup>56</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Although the approach offers undeniable advantages, I chose not to use oral history. As Françoise Thébaud has contended, "oral history initially sometimes self-proclaimed as 'another history', a more popular, more democratic, more feminist history". Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*. (Lyon : ENS Édition, 2007), 76. This method enables many women who cannot write their life stories, to testify and become historical beings. In this sense, it is more democratic.

<sup>58</sup> Anne Valk and Leslie Brown. *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

My purpose was not to work on African American women literary authors but on African American women educators, activists, clubwomen, and intellectuals since I am interested in understanding the discourses which black women crafted about being a woman of African descent and the measures they took to “uplift” the community<sup>59</sup>. I chose to focus on women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie B. Williams, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell because contrary to story writers – who might have wished to pen their life stories in a particular way, so as to give the writing a literary flavor—, these activists, clubwomen, and intellectuals generally wrote speeches and essays during the woman’s era in order to fight for African American women’s political rights and spoke about being a woman in a very straightforward manner in their autobiographies and memoirs<sup>60</sup>. These activists, clubwomen, and intellectuals developed innovative, sophisticated thought patterns on womanhood at a key time of transition in women’s history and believed that their voices were paramount for thousands of African American women who lived in this period. Anna Julia Cooper particularly exemplifies this model of black women intellectuals: she articulated thought-provoking concepts about womanhood in America as early as in 1886. The intellectual contributions of women such as Wells-Barnett, Anna Julia Cooper or Fannie Barrier Williams are treasures for the study of black thought and culture in America.

I chose to adopt a biographical approach. As Eleni Varikas has pointed out, this approach “offers a privileged means to liberate women from the stranglehold of *the woman*, a compilation of mere demographic or biological data, which is more a symbol than history itself – to whom one refuses to grant the dignity generally granted to an individual”<sup>61</sup>. The biographical approach also enables readers to understand the stakes of the period better. In “Racial Uplift in the Era of the ‘Negro Problem’”, Kevin Gaines emphasizes: “A biographical approach focusing on several representative African American figures offers [people] insight into the lived experience of educated blacks confronting the nation’s retreat from the nation’s

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<sup>59</sup> This is partly why I chose not to work on literary authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, who penned *Dust Tracks on a Road* in 1942. First, Hurston was not an activist or club member at the turn of the century. Secondly, she took much liberty with dates and the content of her book is generally unverifiable. As Maya Angelou emphasizes in the introduction to the book, “Certainly the language is true and the dialogue authentic, but the author stands between the content and the reader”, Maya Angelou, Introduction to *Dust Tracks on a Road*, xii.

<sup>60</sup> Contrary to literary authors such as Hurston, women activists such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Terrell did not fictionalize their life narratives. These writers – who had worked as journalists or were regular contributors in the black press – thoroughly documented their memoirs, relying on letters, newspaper clippings in order to support their claims and often justified their stances in their life writings.

<sup>61</sup> Eleni Varikas, « L’approche biographique dans l’histoire des femmes ». *Les cahiers du GRIF*, Le genre de l’histoire. Volume 37, N.1, 1988 : 41-56. See 55.

[http://www.persee.fr/doc/grif\\_0770-6081\\_1988\\_num\\_37\\_1\\_1754](http://www.persee.fr/doc/grif_0770-6081_1988_num_37_1_1754).



commitment during Reconstruction to upholding the rights of African Americans. How *did* it feel to be considered a problem?”<sup>62</sup>.

While conducting my research in American university libraries, at the Library of Congress and in repositories, I could unveil documents which reveal the thoughts and ideas of several women of color in America<sup>63</sup>. These writings were available in the form of newspaper articles, essays, books, diaries, autobiographies, and correspondence.

Some of the women in this study – such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell – left numerous documents, while others left very few documents – such as one or two article(s) or letter(s) or short memoir(s) or autobiography(ies)<sup>64</sup>. I necessarily had to negotiate this natural imbalance in my work.

In this dissertation, I give particular attention to the writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells. I chose to work specifically on these four women for several reasons. These prolific activists largely contributed to the intellectual History about African American womanhood in the Progressive era. They belonged to a community of black female leaders which was particularly active at the turn of the century, which organized club work and defended the image of women of color. Did these women share a common vision of womanhood?

Ida B. Wells-Barnett is certainly one of the most famous African American women of this period. She earned recognition for her struggle against lynching, her journalistic work, her outspokenness, perseverance and courage. I decided to work on her life and legacy because although she mainly dedicated her energy to the struggle against lynching and disenfranchisement, she was an active clubwoman who supported woman's rights and woman suffrage. What is more, her early writings – newspaper articles and diaries – reveal that she

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<sup>62</sup> Kevin K. Gaines, “Racial Uplift Ideology in the Era of ‘the Negro Problem.’” Freedom’s Story, TeacherServe©. National Humanities Center. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/racialuplift.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> I could gather primary sources in several universities and institutions in the United States : at the Library of Congress, at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, at the Woodruff Library Archives and Special Collections at Clark Atlanta University, at the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina, at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscripts at Duke University, and at the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Center for Advanced Study, Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I could also obtain copies of unpublished documents online through Alexander Street Press. I could consult the “Black Thought”, “North American Women’s Letters and Diaries” and “Women and Social Movements” collections. I could also obtain copies of manuscripts preserved at the Schomburg Center for Research and Culture at the New York Public Library, New York and at Fisk University.

<sup>64</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, for example, left a very short autobiography in which she revealed very little about her personal life. As her biographer Wanda Hendricks has indicated, “The brief autobiographical sketch of her life that she wrote for the *Independent* in 1904 remains to date her only personal narrative. But the essay was broad and vague, omitting names and specific dates and providing few clues about how significant she was to the social, political and economic transformation of the country”. Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, ix-x.

was concerned with the image of African American womanhood, in the South in particular. Her experience as a Southerner in the mid-1880s shaped her understanding on gender, black manhood and womanhood and region and nation. Although she was less involved in the NACW after 1899 and worked more within the Afro American Council<sup>65</sup>, the NAACP or the National Urban League, it seemed relevant to include her in the study. Mary Church Terrell is a widely known figure of African American History and one of the most famous black women in the United States for her work within the NACW, her fight against segregation in Washington D.C. and her well-known memoir published in 1940, *A Colored Woman in a White World*. It appeared as logical to study her life and work because this prolific writer and energetic lecturer and clubwoman ceaselessly worked in favor woman's rights and suffrage. Anna Julia Cooper is considered as one of the first black feminists – in the same way Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart were in the nineteenth century. This well-read intellectual is famous for *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman from the South* (1892) yet is generally lesser known by the public, although her work is well-known by specialists of American History and Women Studies. Although she left few autobiographical writings, her numerous essays and her sophisticated thought about womanhood made her a logical choice for this study as well. I also decided to study the life and writings of Fannie Barrier Williams because although she is surprisingly less known today, she was a major intellectual at the turn of the century. She actively worked for the defense of the image of African Americans at the turn of the century<sup>66</sup>. As her biographer, Wanda Hendricks, has emphasized, she has been the victim of historical neglect – probably because of her gender<sup>67</sup>. Contrary to Booker T. Washington – with whom she collaborated extensively, Williams had indeed fallen into oblivion for a long time<sup>68</sup>.

Furthermore, my choice was partially guided by the availability of the resources. Since I had opted for a biographical approach, I focused on women who left quite a number of documents – autobiographical writings, articles, essays or books. Ida Wells and Mary Church left numerous writings such as articles, books, diaries and memoirs, while Fannie Barrier

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<sup>65</sup> As of 1898.

<sup>66</sup> Her short autobiography and numerous articles sparked my interest when I was doing research under the supervision of Professor Silber at Boston University in the Fall of 2012. I first read her autobiography when reading the contributions of the women from different sections in the *Independent* in 1904. I then perused *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*, ed. Mary Jo Deegan, (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> The first biography about her was published by Wanda Hendricks in 2014, while I was studying for my Doctorate.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Jo Deegan and Wanda Hendricks have partially redressed this oversight with *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*, in 2002 and Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, published in 2014.

Williams and Anna Julia Cooper left few – or even very few – autobiographical documents, yet their writings – speeches, essays and articles – were so profuse that they constituted rich materials to conduct this research.

At first sight, these women seem to have much in common. All belonged to the upper or middle-class, were educated – although Ida Wells did not go to college as long as she wanted –, worked as teachers at some point in their lives and knew the North and the South quite well. These four women came from various places in the country – three of them were born in the South<sup>69</sup>, one was born in New York State – and lived in different cities as adults. Two of them – Wells-Barnett and Williams – settled in Chicago, Illinois, while Mary Terrell and Anna Cooper resided in Washington D.C.. Additionally, all four women married professional men. Three women in this study – Fannie, Ida and Mary – were married to successful, prominent African American lawyers. Only Anna Cooper wedded an instructor of Greek from the West Indies before being widowed at a young age.

These clubwomen knew each other – and it is very likely that they knew each other's works and writings. Yet, despite their common paths, their geographic proximity, and their common interests in black women's welfare, the women in this study did not maintain close ties. Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell – who both lived in Tennessee at some point – met when they were approximately twenty years old. Feeling that they shared common points, Ida Wells deeply admired “Molly” Church for her ambition, personality and courage to stand against her father's objections to become a teacher<sup>70</sup>. In the 1890s, Fannie Williams and Mary Terrell regularly met and collaborated in the early years of the NACW and were both contributors to the *Woman's Era*. Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams travelled together to attend the Pan-African Congress in London in 1900. Yet, besides these occasional collaborations, these women defended women of color each in their own way, using distinct methods and being involved within different clubs and associations.

I am conscious that working on Ida B. Wells, Fannie Barrier Williams and Mary Church Terrell may seem curious as it is well-known that these women had sharp disagreements throughout their lives about the best way to organize club work. Among other

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<sup>69</sup> Mary Church was born in Memphis, Tennessee, while Ida B. Wells was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi and Anna Julia Cooper was a native of North Carolina.

<sup>70</sup> She wrote in her diary: “Her ambitions seem so in consonance with mine [... S]he is the first woman of my age I've met who is similarly inspired with the same desires hopes & ambitions”. Yet, as De-Costa Willis has pointed out, “the two Memphians, however, never became friends, although they had similar interests and were both involved in the women's club movement”. Ida B. Wells, *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman*. ed., Miriam DeCosta-Willis, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), Introduction, 6. De Costa-Willis explains: “She admire[d] Mollie, perhaps, because she, too, is an independent, accomplished, and ambitious young woman, who chooses a teaching career over the stringent objections of her patrician and patriarchal father”.

matters, they did not see eye to eye on the role women's clubs or the National Association of Colored Women had to play. For example, Mary Church Terrell did not always agree with Margaret Murray Washington – who had very conservative views of what the NACW should do. Chicago women also did not get along: Fannie Barrier Williams did not see eye to eye with Ida B. Wells-Barnett on how to run the Frederick Douglass Center<sup>71</sup>. At the turn of the century, while some – such as Fannie Williams and Mary Church Terrell – tended to support Booker T. Washington's accommodationist approach, others – such as Ida B. Wells and Cooper, generally – advocated a more militant approach. It is precisely because they did not share the same views that I chose to work on these women<sup>72</sup>. For example, through the study of their early lives, I aim at discovering what factor(s), in their lives, may have influenced their philosophies.

In terms of social class, regional identity, family patterns, and access to education, the women included in this sample cannot be considered to be representative of all black women living in the United States at that time<sup>73</sup>. Yet, they represent the essence of the energy, agency and resources of the African American community<sup>74</sup>. This study therefore reveals the thoughts of a category of middle and upper-class black women who were representatives of their class and who were defending and fighting for the recognition of African American womanhood<sup>75</sup>. In “Biographie et histoire dans la jeune République” (2002), Naomi Wulf, a French scholar, has convincingly shown that the question of representativeness is not a problem when one uses a biographical approach because “the biography offers a concrete look upon and a sense of the development of history that are often wanting in Cultural History”<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 142-143. Hendricks speaks of the “animosity” that had existed between Wells-Barnett and Fannie Barrier Williams. Wells had been relegated to the position as Vice President of the Frederick Douglass Woman's Club, which was organized in 1905. Wells charged Celia Parker Wooley of having preferred a white woman for the post, 143.

<sup>72</sup> Scholars who studied Fannie Williams such as Mary Jo Deegan have argued that Williams and Cooper must be studied together because their visions and methods differed: “Cooper and Williams expressed two distinct voices and visions. They are not dichotomous but they are distinct. Hazel Carby (1986) fruitfully compared the work of Wells-Barnett and Cooper. The voices of both Cooper and Williams, and more, are needed to help understand the lives of African Americans, men and women, Americans, and the eras they experienced.”, *The New Woman of Color*, ed., Mary Jo Deegan, xli.

<sup>73</sup> Yet, as I show in this work, some elite black women claimed to be representatives of African American womanhood.

<sup>74</sup> Most of them may be considered to be the first black feminists and the foremothers of the Civil Rights of the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>75</sup> Besides, at times, I also analyze the writings left by women of humbler backgrounds.

<sup>76</sup> Naomi Wulf, « Biographie et histoire dans la jeune République », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 1 | 2002, mis en ligne le 30 juin 2006. URL : <http://transatlantica.revues.org/392>, 3-4.

Despite the extremely dynamic research carried out about these women<sup>77</sup>, it appears that no study dealing with black womanhood has relied on the public and private writings of several women, despite the advantages of this methodology. I aim at redressing this oversight by partly relying on both private and public writings, using primary sources such as letters, diaries, autobiographies and memoirs and newspaper articles, essays, and books. My work also distinguishes itself from previous studies because I analyze diaries which have been little studied so far. For instance, Mary Church Terrell's diary in German has received scant attention in the scholarship<sup>78</sup>.

Additionally, the writings of these prominent African American women have been analyzed<sup>79</sup> but various personal writings of women who came from humble, middle-class or elite backgrounds and diaries written during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow eras have never been examined together. In order to redress this oversight, I rely on documents written by both prominent, well-known African American women and lesser-known women, in an effort to offer a wide perspective of nineteenth century African American womanhood. For example, I examine letters and articles left by alumni from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, such as Spelman College or Howard University<sup>80</sup>, and also by students from colleges which historically accepted black students such as Oberlin College or Radcliffe College. Scholars have pointed out that there has not been any comprehensive research on HBCU alumni's writings so far<sup>81</sup>. These documents have often been neglected in historical studies. In "Swept under the Rug?" (2007), Marybeth Gasman has pointed out that research on black women who attended black co-educational colleges and universities was lacking: "In

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<sup>77</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, published in 1972, Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York and London: Norton Company, 1984), *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings*. ed., James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976).

<sup>78</sup> While I was working on my dissertation, Joan Quigley published *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation's Capital*. She has worked on Mary Church Terrell's German and French diaries. Yet such analyses are still rare: to my knowledge, few scholars have widely used Terrell's French and German diaries. Moreover, she uses them in order to examine Terrell's fight against segregation in Washington D.C..

<sup>79</sup> Since the 1980s, diaries like those of Charlotte Forten and Ida B. Wells have been widely studied and many of them are available in published form.

<sup>80</sup> I use writings left by Spelman College alumnae, along with students' letters to University journals at Spelman College and Howard or Fisk Universities for instance. My method is similar to that of Beverly Guy-Sheftall who relied on alumni's writings in *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920*. Guy-Sheftall's dissertation drew on the personal testimonies of Spelman College black female students, along with the diaries of the two white female founders of Spelman. They did not however constitute her main primary sources. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1920*. (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Pub., 1990).

<sup>81</sup> Stephanie Shaw has extensively drawn on sources held at the major HBCU in her book though. Each HBCU such as Hampton, Howard and Spelman Colleges for example, hold their own respective alumni files. My aim is to document the lives of former students because a larger study has not been undertaken.



articles and books related to the history of black women, black colleges are rarely discussed with any depth". Instead, black women who met difficulties getting access to white institutions have been studied<sup>82</sup>.

Until recently, black and white men have written much of the literature on black colleges. Perhaps as a result, black women have been placed at the margins, their lives rarely explored. In effect, race becomes masculine. The fact that, for black women, differences of race and gender are equally important has been ignored<sup>83</sup>.

Moreover, Gasman argues that "when black women were studied, they have been in "all-female colleges, Bennett and Spelman"<sup>84</sup>. My work does not exclusively focus on all-female Colleges: I use writings left by women who attended Spelman and Radcliffe Colleges and I also rely on writings left by Howard University and Fisk University alumnae.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, when the question of womanhood was tackled, it was often limited to the study of clubwomen's writings. My approach is different in the sense that I use writings by clubwomen and by other women who did not belong to any clubs. Some of these women were housewives – married to ministers –, or teachers. Such writings dealing with womanhood have never been analyzed together. Besides, when comparative studies were carried out, they often dealt with no more than two women<sup>85</sup>. When scholars wrote biographies about two women who had lived in the same era, they generally focused on the educational philosophy of these activists<sup>86</sup>. Scholars wrote biographies about these four extraordinary women<sup>87</sup>. Yet, overall, no collective interpretive biography focusing on these

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<sup>82</sup> On that point, see Elizabeth Higginbotham, *Too Much To Ask: Black Women in the Era of Integration*. (London and Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>83</sup> Mary Beth Gasman, "Swept under the Rug?: A Historiography of Gender and Black Colleges". Graduate School of Education. GSE Publications. University of Pennsylvania, 2007. *The American Educational Research Journal*, Volume 44, Issue 4, December 2007: 760-805. <SAGE >Publications, Inc. or Society/Proprietor, 2008> by SAGE Publications, Inc. at <http://aer.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/44/4/760>. [http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1194&context=gse\\_pubs](http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1194&context=gse_pubs).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> See for instance the book dealing with Anna Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs: Karen Johnson's *Uplifting the Women and the Race: The Lives, Educational Philosophies and Social Activism of Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs*, published in 2000. Yet, this book also focused its attention on their educational activism, not on their views about being women in the United States.

<sup>86</sup> For instance, a Ph.D dissertation dealt with Fanny Coppin and Hallie Quinn Brown. Faye Emily Spencer Maor, "Lifting Word by Word: Ideologies of Literacy, Education and Feminism in the Rhetoric of Two Nineteenth Century African American Women". Ph.D Diss. (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004). This work dealt with their views on education, and did not address their views about womanhood. Moreover, the lives of two other women were studied together.

<sup>87</sup> The only biography of Mary Church Terrell is entitled *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell* was written by Beverly Washington Jones in 1990. Beverly Washington Jones, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954* (Brooklyn: New York, 1990). Several biographies were devoted to Ida B. Wells. Linda O. McMurtry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009). Several studies have been published about Anna Julia Cooper: Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond: The Life and Writings of Anna J. Cooper*, (Northampton, Massachusetts: Smith College Studies History, 1982); Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012) and Christiane

women's views on womanhood has ever been written. Their philosophies have often been analyzed separately – or those of two women were studied jointly – but they have never been explored together and I plan to correct this oversight.

Additionally, scholars such as Kathryn T. Giles argue that the biographical aspect often overrides the analysis on the philosophies of these women: “As Lewis Gordon has noted in *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (2000), too often we find a close examination of the ideas and theories of Black intellectuals absent because interpretations of their biographies and experiences have been preferred focal points.”<sup>88</sup> This dissertation is different in the sense that, because it lies at the intersection of social history and intellectual history, it is both a study of the life experiences of several African American women and an analysis of the philosophies and intellectual legacy of these women.

Finally, my approach differs from previous works because I give special attention to region and nation. I compare black women's life experiences from different regions, thus offering a contrasting image of nineteenth century African American womanhood.

This dissertation – which presents a gallery of interwoven portraits – should permit me to show that some African American women – influenced by their regional affiliation, their social class or background – understood womanhood in very modern ways and broke free from the stranglehold of the cult of true womanhood, yet at the same time kept embracing Victorian ideals and defended a very strict definition of “proper” womanhood. This work should also enable me to determine the extent to which race, gender, region and class played a part in the definition these women had of being a woman and how this evolved in time. This study should also allow me to examine the strategies upper and middle-class black women adopted to defend their reputation as a group along with the impact of class, region and color in the crafting of these strategies.

This work is an interpretive collective biography. In the first part (1860s-1880s), I first provide the theoretical, conceptual and methodological frameworks of this work and expound how I use intersectionality as a methodological tool to understand women in History. In this first chapter, I also focus on the use of the biographical method in social and intellectual history, I tackle the question of representativeness and I also provide a survey of the specificities of the primary sources I used to complete this work. In the second chapter, I

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Warren, *Anna Julia Cooper, Feminist and Scholar: A Textual Analysis*. The first autobiography about Fannie Barrier Williams was written by Wanda A. Hendricks: *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*.

<sup>88</sup> Kathryn T. Gines, "Anna Julia Cooper", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anna-julia-cooper/>.

study these women's girlhood and examine how they reflected upon education, marriage, coming of age and upon society in general in America. I also analyze how their parental role models may have played a role in the way they envisaged work and gender roles. I also examine their early adult years, their life experience on American – and at times, on foreign – campuses, their career choices, their views on courtship, reflections on friendships, men, marriage and sexuality. For this part, I rely on their public and private writings, their journals and autobiographies or memoirs but also on their early newspaper articles and essays or speeches. When I could, I compared their “writings of the instant” to their “a posteriori writings”, as in the case of Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells.

In the second part (1890s-1920s), I provide a brief overview of American womanhood from the Colonial period to the early twentieth century in order to understand the changes operating in the “woman's era” (1890-1920) and account for the advent of the “new woman”. Then, I study how these elite activists presented themselves as representative role models and ambassadors of African American womanhood who had “a special role” to play in the community and in the country during the Progressive era. I examine how, in their writings – articles, speeches or etiquette books – and club work, they emphasized traditional – Victorian – values and insisted on piety, purity, morality and respectability. For these last three parts, I rely upon these women's newspaper articles, speeches and addresses delivered at women's conventions, alongside their private correspondence, diaries, and autobiographies or memoirs.

The third part (1890s-1920s) is about the strategies clubwomen and activists used to organize racial uplift, emphasizing the importance of education for women, women's paramount role as mothers in society and on their responsibility in building “better homes”. I also examine how some working-class and bourgeois women personally experienced motherhood and juggled motherhood and professional engagements. Lastly, I analyze how and why they insisted on the necessity for women to obtain the right to vote and consider how this question largely impacted the community at large.

The fourth and last part (1890s-1920s) of this dissertation analyzes how women intellectuals and activists envisaged activism through the prism of region and nation. I first study the way they expressed their regional identity – their Northernness or Southernness – and understood the images created by the New South as political manipulations. I also examine how they denounced the fact that lynching was linked to constructions of gender and sex in the South. Then, I analyze the strategies clubwomen resorted to within their clubs and the NACW and determine to what extent their regional identities and political sensitivities impacted their activism. To do so, I use clubwomen's speeches and professional



correspondence – such as the NACW presidents’ correspondence. Finally, I note that, at a period when Pan-Africanist thoughts were gaining ground, they prized their Americanness and developed international consciousness with people of color.

Nota Bene: I use the terms “African American women”, “black women”, “women of color” or “women of African descent” to refer to these women in order to limit unnecessary repetitions.

Part ONE: Becoming A Woman in White America:  
Building a Unique Womanhood (1860s-1880s)

This part focuses on the period 1860s-1880s, which was a period of important political, social, and economic changes in the United States – for all Americans, and for African Americans in particular –, since it encompasses a brief period prior to the war, the Civil War, the period of the Reconstruction and the Redemption<sup>89</sup>. The first chapter provides the theoretical, conceptual and methodological frameworks of this study and reveals how this work – which presents a gallery of interwoven portraits – uses intersectionality and relies on a set of specific primary sources.

In the three following chapters, the analysis of sources left by African American intellectuals, educators and activists reveals what it was like to be an African American girl in the United States in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. I first focus on the way these women built their gender, racial and regional identity as they grew up; then I expound how they thought about their professional lives; finally, I study their various experiences as young women – their views about courtship, love, men and marriage.

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<sup>89</sup> The 1870s and 1880s were decades when white southern Democrats “redeemed” their governments from Republicans and reasserted the doctrine of white supremacy.

# Chapter 1: Theoretical, Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks

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## 1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

### Working on “women”, not “*the woman*”

This dissertation examines how a sample of African American women understood womanhood between 1865 and 1920, through an analysis of their private and public writings – their autobiographical writings such as their diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and correspondence, alongside their newspaper articles, speeches and essays.

It is necessary to clarify some points when working on women. Even if, as I will soon see, the intellectuals of this study often spoke about “*the black woman*” – thus using the singular form – to speak about African American women in their writings, it is important to emphasize that one may not speak of the history of *a* or *the black woman*<sup>90</sup>. In fact, as Ginette Castro has emphasized, the History of women in America is plural and diverse: “there is not *the* History of American women but there are *women in American History*”. This French scholar has also emphasized the crucial role played by American women in the history of their country: “Women have contributed to the History of the United States. Recording this contribution means reintroducing them in the national experience which they share with men. It means compensating historians’ silence about them”<sup>91</sup>. There is a need to study the wide variety of women’s life experiences. As Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall have shown, there is a need to reveal “the range of diversity and difference *within*” the category ‘women’<sup>92</sup>. The project of Alison M. Parker and Carol Faulkner in *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History*, was to “blur the artificial boundaries between the scholarship on race, gender, and American politics and between the fields of African American history, women’s history, and mainstream American history”<sup>93</sup> and I aim to do the same in this dissertation, since women’s History constitutes History, African American History and African American women’s History is United States History.

In addition, the historical period under study – the post-war era and Progressive Era – also accentuates the necessity to assess the importance of gender. Studying women between

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<sup>90</sup> Ginette Castro, *Les femmes dans l’histoire américaine*. (Nancy : Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), First published 1988. Ginette Castro has argued: “The black woman is a construction, a simplification”.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> See “Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory”, in *Signs*, ed. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. Volume 38., No4. Summer 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/669610>.

<sup>93</sup> Carol Faulkner and Alison M. Parker. *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History*. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 3.

1865 and 1920 – which is a period of especially important changes for women in America – is particularly interesting since the Civil War impacted the way Americans thought about the roles of men and women in America. Nina Silber has emphasized in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* that there is a need to continue exploring questions of gender in the current historiography because like all other wars, the Civil War challenged established gender roles among both white and black people<sup>94</sup>.

Women's historical role has long been neglected by historians yet studying women is indispensable to examine the history of a country and to understand the past more fully. Additionally, studying gender offers the opportunity to finally recognize women as « agents of history », as independent, active historical actors. As Françoise Thébaud, an eminent French scholar, explains, gender studies enables the historian to “seize, beyond few individual rebellions, women as agents of History, in their diffuse resistance, their gestures, or their positive actions ; unveiling a woman's identity and an ability for women to be autonomous in both men's or women's domains but even more in domains which are typically their own”<sup>95</sup>.

Gender studies developed widely in the United States from the 1960s onwards and historical studies on women and gender have gradually developed later in France – in the 1970s and 1980s. Many scholars first devoted their research to powerful women and then to ordinary women, specifically in the field of Social History<sup>96</sup>. Françoise Thébaud gives a remarkably detailed survey of the development of the studies about women in France, Germany, Europe and the United States since the 1960s and 1970s in the monograph *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*. She highlights the “long deafness of the historical method”<sup>97</sup>, pointing to women's “invisibility”<sup>98</sup>.

Even more, too little is known today about the roles of black women in Intellectual History. Black women intellectuals indeed still suffer from a certain invisibility in historical studies. As the authors of *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions* have pointed out: “women's

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<sup>94</sup> Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber eds., *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Years before, Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber had already insisted on the need to focus on gender when studying the civil war and the post-war era. See Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). “In the end, the entire Civil War experience – from its causes to its legacy – can best be understood if historians analyze how gender shaped the actions and the attitudes of the participants in this central historical event”, 339.

<sup>95</sup> Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lyon : ENS Éditions, 2007), 86.

<sup>96</sup> Historians generally widely studied the lives of powerful women before studying ordinary women.

<sup>97</sup> Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*, 30.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 33.

knowledge is excluded by silencing women's speech and erasing the historical accomplishments and ideas of women"<sup>99</sup>.

To chronicle the lives of these African American women – some of whom were intellectuals – and to fight against this invisibility, I used intersectionality because it is an efficient tool to carry out research on women and minorities<sup>100</sup>.

## Intersectionality: Definitions

In *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History*, Alison M. Parker and Carol Faulkner have emphasized that “intersectionality is a vital tool for exploring the historical experiences of multiple groups”<sup>101</sup>.

In 1891- 1892, Anna Cooper was the first black feminist to analyze social and racial relations in the United States thinking in terms of a person's “race, color, sex, condition” – therefore using intersectionality<sup>102</sup>. With the development of feminist thoughts and the scholarship about African American women from the 1970s onwards, several scholars started to use intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw theorized the concept in 1989<sup>103</sup>, showing how

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<sup>99</sup> Kristin Waters and Carol B. Conaway, eds., *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*, (Burlington, Vermont: University of Vermont Press, Published by University Press of New England), 387. “Maria W. Stewart was one of the first feminists to note the systematic erasure of women as a way of controlling knowledge”.

<sup>100</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299. Each of the facets of a person – gender, race, social class – is imbricated and form their unique identity. In the case of African American women, their identities as women, as blacks, as heterosexual or homosexual and as working-class, middle-class or upper-class Americans shape their identities. Moreover, the concept of intersectionality is not an abstract notion but a description of the way multiple oppressions are exerted. It enables scholars to study the different relations of power and domination. On this question, see Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal article: “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex : A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139-167. This concept is widely used by scholars today, since it is an efficient tool to show how discrimination has diverse (and sometimes simultaneous) causes. Numerous scholars such as Michelle Wallace, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins –to name only a few – use intersectionality. Like Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins has used the “concept of intersectionality to analyze how ‘oppressions [such as ‘race and gender’ or ‘sexuality and nation’] work together in producing injustice’” Yet, Collins adds the concept “matrix of dominations” to this formulation: “In contrast, the matrix of dominations refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression.”, as cited in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 2001), 11–12.

<sup>101</sup> Alison Parker and Carol Faulkner. *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History*. (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper, including A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers and Letters*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 108. She thought that these were “accidents, not the substance of life”.

<sup>103</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299 and “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139-67.

some exclusive categories such as race, sex and class could be reified<sup>104</sup>. Combining useful tools and categories – class, gender, region – to study social phenomena is paramount and it is the interconnectedness of these categories that enable the sociologist or historian to study effectively the effects of social domination and discrimination. According to this analytical method, the different aspects of a personality are imbricated, intertwined and cannot be studied separately.

This method has been internationally used. Raymonde Séchet believed that the imbrication of all sections were to be considered when studying women: “Feminist thought has endeavored to show that domination does not only emerge in social relations through class [...] The concept of intersectionality has permitted to offer a feminist thought combining the dominations of sex, race, class”<sup>105</sup>. In 1991, Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American jurist and writer, presented the assets of this method in her seminal article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”. She contended that race, gender, sexuality and class are the most important categories by which individuals are socially characterized.

Yet, for Elsa Dorlin, a French scholar, a problem still lay in the fact that “the life experiences of black women remained perceived as experiences which were different from patriarchal domination, which articulated different power relations, exactly the same way femininity had been for a long time perceived as a variation, a differentiation from the norm of masculinity”<sup>106</sup>. In “De l’usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de ‘sexe’, et de ‘race’ dans les études sur le genre”, Dorlin has shown that this epistemological approach was problematic because it tended to “reify” groups of people and create “a myriad of sub-categories” such as black women, migrant women or veiled women<sup>107</sup>. In the case of African American women, it is highly important to use intersectionality since, as Dorlin explains, they fall into different categories, possessing a “hybrid identity”. She explained that the experience

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<sup>104</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, as cited in Raymonde Séchet, « *Sexe, race, classe, pour une épistémologie de la domination. Morceaux choisis* ». ESO Rennes, Espaces et Sociétés - UMR 6590 CNRS – Université Rennes II. Numéro 33, juin 2012 : 77-83, 80.

<sup>105</sup> Raymonde Séchet, « *Sexe, race, classe, pour une épistémologie de la domination. Morceaux choisis* », 77.

<sup>106</sup> Elsa Dorlin, « De l’usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de ‘sexe’ et de ‘race’ dans les études sur le genre », *Cahiers du Genre*, 2/2005 (n° 39) : 83-105. URL : <http://www.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-du-genre-2005-2-page-83.htm>. DOI : 10.3917/cdge.039.0083. See page 89.

<sup>107</sup> Elsa Dorlin, “De l’usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de ‘sexe’ et de ‘race’ dans les études sur le genre », 96. Moreover, Dorlin refers to Franz Fanon’s work on racialization. Fanon argued that the oppressed are often given the same analytic tools to fight against their domination as those used by the oppressive powers.

of African American women shows well how the sexist and racist ideologies excluded them from the categories “black” or “woman” and negated their hybrid identity<sup>108</sup>.

### **Definitions of Concepts : “Race”, “Class”, “Gender”, “Sex” and “Region”**

Despite the fact that race, class and gender are social constructs, they are essential instruments to study social groups in History and Social Sciences. As Professor Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry has shown in her study of African American families, “almost all experts today agree that race/class/gender must be taken into account” in research<sup>109</sup>. Like Céline Bessière, Le Dantec-Lowry believed that “when one attempts to examine the dominations linked to class and gender, one tends to ‘subsume one to the other’ and she suggests thinking about inequalities linked to gender, race and class as historical and concrete configurations of relations of power”<sup>110</sup>. As Bessière has emphasized, the concepts of gender, class and race are not “fixed, natural entities but above all social and historic, arbitrary and unstable constructs, tools to polarize domination and power in society”. Consequently, it is necessary to conduct analyses in terms of relationships and configurations between race, class and gender<sup>111</sup>.

These concepts must indeed be studied together – gender and race are often intertwined. For example, some scholars have shown that many women leaders such as Anna Julia Cooper have at an early stage of their lives and activism, “inextricably linked [their] racial identity” to their womanhood, therefore showing the “inseparable unity of race and gender in their thought”<sup>112</sup>. On this question, Raymonde Séchet has underscored: “race and gender are socially constructed and imbricated relations which are inextricably linked. Their relationship makes them categories which are defined according to one another and which are experienced in differentiated ways”<sup>113</sup>.

The term “race” is widely used in scholarship in English-speaking countries but very little in French-speaking countries, where the term “color” is often preferred. I used the term “race” for concepts in this dissertation because I carried out my research in English and

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<sup>108</sup> Elsa Dorlin, « De l’usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de ‘sexe’ et de ‘race’ », 99.

<sup>109</sup> Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, *De l’esclave au président : Discours sur les familles noires aux États-Unis*, (Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2010), 221.

<sup>110</sup> Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, *De l’esclave au président*, 225.

<sup>111</sup> Céline Bessière, « Race/classe/genre. Parcours dans l’historiographie américaine des femmes du Sud autour de la guerre de Sécession », *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés* [En ligne], 17 | 2003, mis en ligne le 27 novembre 2006. URL : <http://clio.revues.org/591> ; DOI : 10.4000/clio.591, 3 and 8, as cited in Le Dantec-Lowry, Hélène, *De l’esclave au président*, 225.

<sup>112</sup> Evelyn Higgingbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race”, *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter, 1992): 251-274, 273. Cooper “inextricably linked her racial identity” to her gender identity.

<sup>113</sup> Raymonde Séchet, « Sexe, race, classe, pour une épistémologie de la domination. Morceaux choisis », 77-83, 78.



because I study American women using intersectionality within the field of American Studies<sup>114</sup>.

Using an intersectional approach enables scholars to analyze social groups who share common racial origins and/or culture. In the Oxford English Dictionary, race is defined as “racial origin or the qualities associated with this: *rights based on race*”. “Ethnicity” on the contrary is derived from “ethnic”, defined as “relating to a group of people who have a common national or cultural tradition” or “referring to origin by birth rather than by present nationality: *ethnic Albanians*”. According to Evelyn Higginbotham – who has widely worked on the notion of race – in the late nineteenth century, race signified for African Americans “a cultural identity that defined and connected them as a people, even as a nation”, “For blacks, race signified cultural identity and heritage, not biological inferiority”<sup>115</sup>. African Americans perceived themselves as belonging to a group, as forming “a nation within a nation”<sup>116</sup>, “Through a range of shifting, even contradictory meanings and accentuations expressed at the level of individual and group consciousness, blacks fashioned race into a cultural identity that resisted white hegemonic discourses”<sup>117</sup>.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, gender is “the state of being male or female (with reference to social or cultural differences rather than biological ones)”. In December 1985, in “Gender : A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, Joan Scott suggested using the concept of gender – “a constitutive element of social relations founded on perceived differences between sexes, and gender – [as] a first manner to signify

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<sup>114</sup> Some American scholars criticize the use of the term “race” because it emphasizes racial differences. For example, in “*Race*”, *Writing and Difference*, race is defined “as ‘the ultimate trope of difference’ and is said to have ‘artificially and arbitrarily contributed to produce and maintain relations of power and subordination’”. See “African American Women’s History and The metalanguage of Race” in “*Race*”, *Writing and Difference*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, art 1, p 1-20; 21-37; 370-80. See also Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, *De l’esclave au président: Discours sur les familles noires aux États-Unis*, 21. As Professor Le Dantec-Lowry underscores in her book, “the term ‘race’ and its derivatives are less commonly used in France than in the United States. Moreover, the ‘notion of ‘race’ is linked to a social, political and cultural construction and has of course no biological legitimacy” yet it “is pertinent to speak about black Americans because it is commonly used in this country and because this group has long been defined in opposition to a white ‘race’”. Evelyn Higginbotham believes that race “is a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves”. Evelyn Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and The metalanguage of Race”, *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, (Winter 1992): 251-274, 253.

<sup>115</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and The metalanguage of Race”, *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, (Winter 1992): 251-274, 268.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Robinson Delany coined the term « a nation within a nation » in his “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States”, 209. The term “race work” conveyed the idea of praise: “it expressed both allegiance and commitment to the concerns of black people”, Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and The metalanguage of Race”, 267.

<sup>117</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham. “The Metalanguage of Race”, 267. Higginbotham believed that blacks, throughout the nineteenth century, “constructed and valorized a self-representation essentially antithetical to that of whites”, 269. Was there a sense of “spiritual, psychical” uniqueness? among black people, as Du Bois argued?, 269.

power relations”<sup>118</sup>. The concept of gender is useful because it enables the historian or scholar to “hunt down all form of explicit or implicit ‘gendered’ politics or discourse – in French one would more easily say “sexué”— gendered-related — to understand how gender constructs social relations”<sup>119</sup>. According to Gisela Bock, gender enables historians to think in terms of “relations and articulation”: “The interest lies in the possibility to invite historians to think in terms of relation and articulation of socio-cultural relations”<sup>120</sup>.

It is important to take sex and gender into account when one analyzes History and to consider that there are differences between sex and gender. First, as Françoise Thébaud explains, “sex” has to do with what nature assigns humans to be and do<sup>121</sup>. “Sex” is therefore perceived as an “invariant whereas ‘gender’ may vary in time and space. Masculinity or femininity – being a man or a woman or being treated as such – does not have the same meaning at all time periods and in all cultures”<sup>122</sup>. On the contrary, gender also has to do with the specific role one is ready to embrace in a given society. I aim at examining women’s definitions and resistances to the roles they were given by the society they were living in. For Judith Butler, identity is composed of several “stabilizing concepts such as sex, gender and sexuality”<sup>123</sup> and gender is purely a product of what society wants people to be<sup>124</sup>. She also argues that “If Simone de Beauvoir was right to say that one was not born a woman, but that one becomes one, one realizes then that the term ‘woman’ refers to a process”<sup>125</sup>. In my dissertation, I precisely aim at studying how this process took place, how these women built their identities as women, and how they defined and redefined womanhood<sup>126</sup>.

When studying black women in America, connecting race, gender and sexuality is relevant because race and sex are closely linked. The image of black women’s sexuality in the larger nation impacted the way women of color represented themselves in their writings, precisely because they were aware of the negative images circulating about them. Women of

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<sup>118</sup> Françoise Thébaud, 125.

<sup>119</sup> Françoise Thébaud, 125.

<sup>120</sup> Gisela Boch, *Beyond Equality and Difference*, 1989, as cited in Thébaud, 127-128.

<sup>121</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines sex as first: either of the two main categories – male and female – into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions, and secondly as the fact of being male or female.

<sup>122</sup> Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l’histoire des femmes et du genre*, 121.

<sup>123</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Politics of Subversion*. First edition 1990, 84.

<sup>124</sup> Judith Butler, *Trouble dans le genre, le féminisme et la subversion de l’identité*, (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2005), 109-111. Butler even speaks of “founding illusions of identity” when referring to the mechanisms of gender.

<sup>125</sup> Judith Butler, 109, italics hers. See also page 71 : Butler explains that Beauvoir asserts that “one ‘becomes’ a woman because one is compelled by culture to become one”, 71.

<sup>126</sup> In Anglo-Saxon countries, the concept of gender is widely used yet French scholars tend not to use the term ‘gender’, even though they have adopted the method. In 2007, Françoise Thébaud has shown that French scholars do not often use the term “gender” yet have widely adopted the concept. French scholars generally use terms such as “masculine and feminine” or “men and women”. Thébaud, 123.

African descent reacted in various, different ways to the attacks against African American men and women: some displayed more conservative attitudes than women of other racial groups, while others remained silent about questions related to sex. Black clubwomen's adherence to Victorian ideology, as well as their self-representation as "super moral", was, according to Darlene Clark Hine, perceived as crucial not only to the protection and upward mobility of black women but also to the attainment of respect, justice, and opportunity for all black Americans"<sup>127</sup>. According to Hine, "in response to assaults upon black sexuality, there arose among black women a politics of silence, a 'culture of dissemblance'"<sup>128</sup>. In order to protect "the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives", black women, especially those of the middle class, reconstructed and represented their sexuality through its absence – through silence, secrecy, and invisibility. In so doing, they sought to combat the pervasive negative images and stereotypes. Gender and sex therefore appear as critically linked to community and race.

Like race or class, gender is a power-related category. For Danièle Kergoat, a French scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw's most famous 1994 article entitled "Mapping the Margins : Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color"<sup>129</sup> summarizes well the problem linked to Black Feminism and intersectionality : "speaking about cartography is equivalent to making categories solid, natural"<sup>130</sup>. Our study precisely aims at reaching the opposite goal since these categories are unfixed, mutable. Like Elsa Dorlin and many scholars, I believe that it is necessary to stop thinking in terms of fixed categories:

We cannot admit the stability or unicity of the categories 'race', 'class', 'religion', etc. on the pretext of historicizing the category of 'sex'. In other words, one cannot historicize the gender-based domination, work on its multiple historical applications, while merely subdividing the gender-based domination into different differentiating factors (class, 'race', sex, nation, culture, religion [...]). Black women do not constitute a social category which designates a well-defined identity of "black women". Similarly, what does the expression "Western women" mean? In these conditions, one cannot accept to racialize the subject of feminism, because one claims to denaturalize or desessentialize it"<sup>131</sup>.

From the Latin "classis", class is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary first as a set of category of things having a common characteristic, and secondly as a system that divides

<sup>127</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West : Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance", *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912-920, 915, a cited in Higginbotham, Evelyn. "The Metalanguage of Race », *Signs*, Winter 1992, 266.

<sup>128</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, « Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West : Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance », *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912-920, 915, a cited in Higginbotham, Evelyn. "African American Women's History and The metalanguage of Race", *Signs*, Winter 1992, 266.

<sup>129</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, « Cartographies des marges : intersectionnalité, politique de l'identité et violences contre les femmes de couleur », *Cahiers du Genre*, 2005/2 (n° 39) : 51-82. DOI : 10.3917/cdge.039.0051. URL : <http://www.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-du-genre-2005-2-page-51.htm>.

<sup>130</sup> Séchet cites Kergoat here. Raymonde Séchet, « Sexe, race, classe, pour une épistémologie de la domination. Morceaux choisis ». ESO Rennes, Espaces et Sociétés - UMR 6590 CNRS – Université Rennes II. Numéro 33, juin 2012 : 77-83, 81.

<sup>131</sup> Elsa Dorlin, « De l'usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de 'sexe' et de 'race' », 100.

members of a society into sets based on social or economic status. 3) a set in a society based on social or economic status.

As Elsa Dorlin has shown, contrary to race and gender, class – despite its importance – has tended to be insufficiently taken into account in the scholarship: “geometrical concepts promoted by post colonial studies and Black Feminism have mostly focused on the intersection between race and gender and have left little room for social class”<sup>132</sup>. According to Elsa Dorlin, contrary to social class, “sex and race are old ideological categories – supposedly natural –, categories of critical analysis and political categories. Using “race” as a category for analysis enables the scholar to designate racializing relations<sup>133</sup> yet social class is one of the most important factors to consider when one studies women in History because with gender, race, and sex, class determines the identity of a person, their economic and educational opportunities. As Raymonde Séchet points out, “studying the social interactions at stake is indispensable”<sup>134</sup>. In this dissertation, I will address questions such as: How are gender and class related? How did women construe their affiliation to a certain social class? How did their sense of belonging to a certain social class impact their definitions of gender roles and their sense of being a woman?

To consider these questions, the work accomplished by William Dow on social class is enlightening. Professor Dow insists that class is an ever-evolving concept which must always be historicized. In the introduction to *Class Matters: Representing Class in American Culture, Literature, and Film*, “like race and gender, [class] is always being recast in changing historical circumstances, and needs to be seen constantly in formation”<sup>135</sup>. Moreover, class should no longer only be understood as “a ‘structure’ in its own terms, constituted as either a historical subject – ‘the’ engine of history – or a theoretical objective of ‘objective’ empirical dynamics”. Instead, it must be understood as “a dynamic discursive product of history”<sup>136</sup>.

Class is an extremely determinant factor in the study of the lives and actions of black women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries since class impacted their access to literacy and education, the way they lived and thought about gender, race, region and nation. It shaped the way they positioned themselves as a group vis-à-vis other groups of different

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<sup>132</sup> Raymonde Séchet, « Sexe, race, classe, pour une épistémologie de la domination. Morceaux choisis ». ESO Rennes, Espaces et Sociétés - UMR 6590 CNRS – Université Rennes II. Numéro 33, juin 2012 : 77-83, 81.

<sup>133</sup> Séchet cites Elsa Dorlin. See Elsa Dorlin, 15. Ibid., 77.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>135</sup> William Dow, Introduction: “The Continuum of Class.” *Class Matters: Representing Class in American Culture, Literature, and Film*, eds, William Dow, John Chandler and Yann Roblou. (Valenciennes: University of Valenciennes Press, 2010): 8-16, 8.

<sup>136</sup> William Dow, *Class Matters: Representing Class in American Culture, Literature, and Film*, 14. Professor Dow cites E.P. Thompson’s work in *The Making of the English Working Class*.

social classes. For instance, as Evelyn Higginbotham has argued in “African American Women’s History and The metalanguage of Race” (1992), the “racial uplift” activists of the late nineteenth century “remained locked within hegemonic articulations of gender, class, and sexuality”. Indeed, “race work” or “racial uplift” equated normality with conformity to white middle-class models of gender roles and sexuality” and “many black women linked mainstream domestic duties, codes of dress, sexual conduct, and public etiquette with both individual success and group progress”<sup>137</sup>. Black leaders – such as the women under study here – “argued that ‘proper’ and ‘respectable’ behavior proved blacks worthy of equal civil and political rights. Conversely, nonconformity was equated with deviance and pathology and was often cited as a cause of racial inequality and injustice”<sup>138</sup>. For instance, in 1904 the elite, college-educated Sarah Willie Layten spoke about members of the working-class in these terms: “Unfortunately the minority or bad Negroes have given the race a questionable reputation; these degenerates are responsible for every discrimination we suffer”<sup>139</sup>. Similar remarks made by Mary Terrell and other leaders can be found in their articles or life writings. As Jessie Carney Smith has shown when writing the biography of S. Willie Layten, “The politics of ‘respectability’ disavowed, in often repressive ways, much of the expressive culture of the ‘folk’, for example, sexual behavior, dress style, leisure activity, music, speech patterns, and religious worship patterns”<sup>140</sup>. In this dissertation, I analyze the “class and sexual tensions between the discourse of the intelligentsia – the ‘New Negro’ – and that of the ‘people’”.

Some scholars demonstrated that defiance of nineteenth century middle-class Victorian codes was also found in literary practices among African American women. Two female writers combined two genres, fiction and autobiography, to write stories that suggest that this harmonious combination of qualities in a woman was possible. In her study of Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig*, Beth Maclay Doriani has said:

Harriet Jacobs and Harriet Wilson both create identities that defied the nineteenth century stereotypes and exploit autobiographical forms to teach their readers about the black female self. They define a sort of womanhood that is different from the definitions advanced by the white world, and then demonstrate

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<sup>137</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and The metalanguage of Race”, *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, (Winter 1992): 251-274.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>139</sup> S. Willie Layten, in *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, ed. Jessie Carney Smith, 404. According to the *Journal of the Fifth Annual Assembly of the Woman’s Convention* held in 1904, Layten urged women to react. Layten was raised in a family of affluence and was college-educated, contrary to other women such as Nannie Burroughs or Maggie Lena Walker. She was able to pursue studies at LeMoyne College in Memphis and attend courses at the University of Philadelphia as a young woman. After living a few years in California from 1882 to 1894, she finally settled down for good in Philadelphia.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*



that autobiography can have as its aim is to record messages as well as the creation of identity. Like the white heroine of women's fiction, they show their sense of communal identity, portraying themselves as bound to their children and extended families. Resourceful and intelligent, they take responsibility for the welfare of their children, and like the white, male, Emersonian hero, they show themselves to be self-reliant -- shapers of their own destinies and responsible for their own survival<sup>141</sup>.

I will now detail the methodology used in this dissertation.

## 2. Methodological Framework

I chose to study womanhood through the filter of women's life writings for a variety of reasons. Françoise Thébaud contends that new studies on men and masculinities and women and femininities constitute "a 'history of genders' which highlight, for both men and women, the search for and the consultation of sources on the self -- correspondence, diaries and autobiographies -- and [...] invite to give historical actors their place back and to question the meaning individuals give to their own practice as the modes of expression of the experiences"<sup>142</sup>.

### Using Specific Sources to Study Women: Women's Public and Private Writings

Because the best way to understand History is through the words and voices of historical protagonists, when studying women -- and therefore when making women visible in History --, it is important to rely on their own words and documents. Françoise Thébaud has written that making women visible consists in "*breaking the distorting mirror of the myths which surround femininity*, going and searching for real women, women in action and replacing these women in their historical contexts, *unearthing their statuses, their works, their joys and sorrows, and their fights*. It means making women full historical subjects -- and this is no easy task. It is to give oneself a past, it means *recovering our memory*"<sup>143</sup>.

Like Carroll Smith-Rosenberg who believed that "letters and diaries provide us with a unique opportunity to hear women's own words directly, not filtered through a male record"<sup>144</sup>, I think that it is through the study of women's private and public writings that the

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<sup>141</sup> Beth McClay Doriani, "Black Womanhood in Nineteenth Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies", *American Quarterly*. Vol 43, No 2, June. 1991 : 199- 222, 218-219.

<sup>142</sup> Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*, 202.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 69, italics mine. This expression is reminiscent of the formula used by the scholar Anne Firor Scott on white southern women : *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*, published in 1984.

<sup>144</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Hearing Women's Words: A Feminist Reconstruction of History", *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 29.



History of American women – and black American women in this precise case – may be written. In order to give African American women their voices back, it is fundamental to look for and listen to what these women said, wrote and left our contemporaries to peruse. Women's accounts are the best narrative forms for this study because they offer a unique insight into their thoughts and ideas and a "wide window [...] upon the larger culture"<sup>145</sup>. As a result, to carry out this research, I used private and public writings which reveal specific, individual trajectories. I drew upon private writings – "writings of the self" such as correspondence, diaries or journals meant to be kept secret – or not – and unpublished autobiographies and memoirs – alongside public writings – articles, pamphlets, essays, published autobiographies and memoirs – written by African American women themselves or their descendants.

As for life narratives or "writings of the self", I relied on two types of primary sources: first, a category which Margo Culley terms "*writings of the instant*"<sup>146</sup> – diaries and letters – and "*a posteriori writings*"<sup>147</sup> – autobiographies, memoirs and reminiscences. These sources constitute the basis of what a social historian should use in order to understand the way people lived during a specific period. As Thébaud has said, numerous sources "lie at the back of attics. These documents are precious if they can be consulted to know the way women have lived, worked, loved or thought. They constitute the main part of the family archives which historians have neglected for a long time but which can shed light on the private and social life of the groups which have preserved them in an unprecedented way"<sup>148</sup>.

The analysis of such personal histories enabled me to unveil a collective history of several African American women in the post-Civil War era. Analyzing black women's rhetoric in their speeches and published articles alongside their diaries, correspondence and autobiographical writings – when available – helps determine the contours of the concept of "womanhood".

Life writings have long been deemed as unacceptable sources in History yet historians started using them at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Similarly, biographies were not considered as proper or reliable contributions to the

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<sup>145</sup> Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, *Composing Selves : Southern Women and Autobiography*, 294. "What has proved most interesting to me in this study of southern women's autobiographies is the wide window these texts open upon the larger culture. The writers may not be representative selves; but taken together their narratives vividly convey the daily and local felt life of women across the South in a great variety of life circumstances, women of different classes, races, places, ages, careers, political views, and familial roles".

<sup>146</sup> Margo Culley, *A Day at A time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1794 to the Present*, (New York, Feminist Press, 1985).

<sup>147</sup> Jean-Philippe Miraux, *L'autobiographie: Écriture de soi et sincérité*. First published 1996. (Paris : Armand Colin, 2009).

<sup>148</sup> Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes et du genre*, 73.

historic field. It took up to the beginning of the twentieth century for these sources and this method to be regarded as acceptable. In the 1920s and 1930s, life writings began to be more widely used thanks to the emergence of the “Chicago School”<sup>149</sup>. Biographical sources present undeniable qualities: they enable scholars to renew research and historiography<sup>150</sup>.

Investigating how black women construed and viewed womanhood between 1865 and 1920 presents challenges because primary sources left by nineteenth century women are somewhat scarce – this is even more true for African American women. As a result, one important difficulty for both European and American scholars is to locate primary sources. As the French scholar Françoise Thébaud has emphasized, “Writing the History of women indeed first poses the problem of sources”<sup>151</sup>. Similarly, the American researcher Deborah Gray White has emphasized the difficulty of finding elements of private life of black women<sup>152</sup>.

Working on the papers of African American women has been challenging for a variety of reasons. First, it is difficult to consult women’s documents because most sources are often catalogued under male names. As Françoise Thébaud indicates, “the preservation of archives is not neutral. Because they were often not properly preserved, the documents dealing with women have not always been properly preserved or cataloged as such, they have been buried in files which were classified in a conventional way”<sup>153</sup>. Thébaud adds: “Women did not leave traces because they were ‘excluded from the public sphere’”<sup>154</sup>. “They are almost completely absent from the traditional material used by historians, documents left by

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<sup>149</sup> In 1908, two sociologists named William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki used life writings for their study of Polish immigrants in America and Polish peasants in Poland. Clifford Shaw also penned another major contribution to the field: *The Jack-Roller*. A second wave saw the emergence of the influence of Howard Becker’s work on deviance. On this, see Vincent Broqua and Guillaume Marche, *L’épuisement du biographique ?*, (Cambridge : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 3 and Alain Coulon, *L’école de Chicago*. 5<sup>e</sup> édition, (Paris : Que sais-je ?, 2012), 75, 76 and 79. “Qualitative sociology” relies on “autobiographies, private correspondence, newspaper and narratives made by the individuals under study themselves”, 75-76. Thomas used in habitual documents in habituals such as “letters, newspaper articles, court documents, ministers’ sermons, political parties’ leaflets, notes”, 83. Then, in the 1940s and 1950s, the method supplanted Robert K. Merton et Talcott Parsons’ functionalism – where the individual was above all « envisaged for its functions in a given system » and born in the 1920s-1940s. See Broqua and Marche, *L’épuisement du biographique ?*, 3. The method was less and less popular in the 1960s before its revival in the 1980s.

<sup>150</sup> Broqua and Marche, *L’épuisement du biographique ?*, 7.

<sup>151</sup> Françoise Thébaud, *Écrire l’histoire des femmes et du genre*, 71.

<sup>152</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves. 1894-1994*, 88. “Few left records that revealed their private selves; most of the collections left are filled with public memorabilia rather than personal materials. Even though it makes the historian’s job of piecing together their private lives almost impossible, for women who wanted their public identity to stand in for the private, this was a good strategy. Nevertheless, some private records have survived, and they point to a heavy and complex burden of being black, female, and a committed leader”. Paula Giddings has emphasized that “because there is so little evidence of the *thoughts and ideas* of Black women, their own words, whenever possible, were used to record that experience”. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter : The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 6. Italics hers.

<sup>153</sup> Thébaud, *Écrire l’histoire des femmes et du genre*, 71.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

men who possessed knowledge and power : diplomatic and administrative archives, the press or diplomatic documents”<sup>155</sup>. This was also true for all American women – including African American women.

Secondly, working on African American women’s documents is doubly difficult because primary sources by ordinary black and white women were generally catalogued differently. For example, some women such as Fannie Williams believed as early as 1893 that white women’s lives could be more easily documented – because sources left by white women were often catalogued separately from men’s, — whereas black women’s writings were often hidden in black men’s sources<sup>156</sup>. She argued:

Separate facts and figures relative to colored women are not easily obtainable. Among the white women of the country, independence, progressive intelligence, and definite interests have done so much that nearly every fact and item illustrative of their progress and status is classified and easily accessible. Our women, on the contrary, have had no advantage of interests peculiar and distinct and separable from those of men that have yet excited public attention and kindly recognition<sup>157</sup>.

The situation is different for famous black women or leaders – their Papers being preserved in repositories.

Sources are often difficult to find because to this day, many African American families have still not entrusted a repository with their documents<sup>158</sup>. As a result, research has sometimes been conducted by family members of women diarists or authors of life narratives. For instance, Elizabeth Petry, the daughter of the writer Ann Petry recently found the James family papers in her mother’s house. Her book *Can Anything Beat White? A Black Family’s Letters* published in 2005 tells the story of the James family members from the 1860s to the 1900s. Nevertheless, several unique collections have become public after being retrieved from family attics, basements or repositories by historians. This is the case of Virginia Gould with the Papers of the Johnson Family – a free family of color in the Old South – who published

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<sup>155</sup> Thébaud, 71.

<sup>156</sup> Contrary to black women, the documents left by white women could be catalogued separately from their husbands’, Fannie Barrier Williams believed.

<sup>157</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation”, 1893, in *The World’s Congress of Representative Women*, ed. May Wright Sewall, Chicago: Rand, Mc Nally, 1894. 2: 696-711, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 18.

<sup>158</sup> Deborah Gray White has discussed this problem in “Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women’s History”, *Journal of American History* 74 (June 1987): 237-242. See pages 237-238, as cited in Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West”, *Signs*. Vol. 14, No. 4: 912-920, 916. “Black women have also been reluctant to donate their papers to manuscript repositories [because of their] perennial concern with image, a justifiable concern born of centuries of vilification [and also because the] adversarial nature of the relationship that countless black women have had with many public institutions, and the resultant suspicion of anyone seeking private information”.

*Chained to the Rock of Adversity: To Be Free, Black and Female in the Old South*<sup>159</sup>. Farah Jasmine Griffin also unearthed and edited the letters which testify of the love and friendly relationship between domestic servant Addie Brown and middle-class teacher Rebecca Primus between 1854 and the late 1860s in Hartford, Connecticut, in *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends*<sup>160</sup>. Undoubtedly, many other diaries and letters are yet to be found in the attics of African American families and in the archives of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other repositories in the United States. I am happy to be able to use some of these resources in my work<sup>161</sup>.

The dearth of women's sources contrasts with the profusion of documents about women written by men. Thébaud explains that many of the writings dealing with womanhood were generally written by men and not by women: "the excess of males' discourses on 'the' woman : lawyers, moralists, instructors, doctors say what she is and what she must be and do" contrasts with the rarity of "traces left by women"<sup>162</sup>. This can be seen in the profusion of both white and African American men's articles about women or "*the* woman", or articles discussing what women "should" or "ought to" be and do<sup>163</sup>.

For this study, I looked for both published and unpublished diaries, autobiographies, correspondence and newspaper articles written by African American women<sup>164</sup>. Contrary to

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<sup>159</sup> Virginia Mecheam Gould, ed., *Chained to the Rock of Adversity: To Be Free, Black and Female in the Old South*. Southern Voices from the Past: Women's Letters, Diaries, and Writings Series, (Athens, Georgia and London: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Likewise, letters between an ex-mistress and her former slave were very recently disclosed in the book entitled *Cecelia and Fanny: A Remarkable Friendship Between an Escaped Slave and her Former Mistress* (2011).

<sup>160</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, ed., *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends : Letters from Rebecca Primus of Royal Oak, Maryland and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut, 1854-1868*. (New York: Knopf, 1999).

<sup>161</sup> I rely on sources found for example at Howard University, Spelman College, Fisk University. I also rely on primary sources preserved at the Library of Congress, as in the case of Mary Church Terrell or the NACW, and in other repositories, such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at NYPL, or Radcliffe College. Sources left by some women were generally uneasy to consult since very few documents are digitized. Some, like Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells left numerous sources, which were available in published form. Unfortunately, in some cases, some documents left by these women were lost. For instance, in *Crusade for Justice*, Alfreda Duster indicates that many of Ida B. Wells's papers were lost to a fire. See Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. ed., Alfreda Duster. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). As for Fannie Barrier Williams, there seems to be no Family Papers available about her or her husband, S. Laing Williams. The documents left by Williams are a short autobiography published in the *Independent* in 1904 and numerous newspaper articles which are now in published form in: Mary Jo Deegan, ed., *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*, (DeKalb: Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002). See Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

<sup>162</sup> Françoise Thébaud, 71.

<sup>163</sup> This formula is reminiscent of the title of Stéphanie Shaw's book *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do : Black Professional Workers During the Jim Crow Era* published in 1996.

<sup>164</sup> While locating published documents was easy, locating unpublished sources was a much more complex task. African American women's diaries in particular were not easy to find. I started by consulting the four journals Dorothy Sterling had presented in *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. See Part IV:

Fannie Barrier Williams, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell who left autobiographical writings (autobiographies, either short or long), Anna Cooper did not leave any diaries and left a very short autobiographical extract<sup>165</sup>. Since there is always an autobiographical aspect in one's writings – and Cooper left numerous writings – and since Cooper is not an exception, I decided to include Anna Julia Cooper in the corpus. Cooper's essays, articles and pamphlets – which are always political pieces – were often autobiographical. In *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman from the South* published in 1892, when she was aged 34, her design was to expose her political and intellectual philosophy. Being among the firsts to publish such a long collection of essays, she became one of the first and most talented intellectuals and feminists of her times<sup>166</sup>.

Nevertheless, when using diaries, letters and autobiographies as primary sources, some precautions must be taken. For instance, historians have to take into account the reasons for writing, the moment of publication and above all the subjectivity of the account. As much as possible, they must verify the information present in these narratives – which are often replete with errors or approximations due to memory impairment. Once such precautions are taken, the wealth of information available in these types of writings is immensely valuable. Life writings such as diaries, journals, letters – “*writing of the instant*” – and autobiographies – “*a posteriori writing*” – enable readers to grasp the writer's state of mind at specific moments in

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“Epilogue: Four Women”. Sterling published parts of the diaries of Frances Anne Rollin (1868), Mary Virginia Montgomery (1872), Laura Hamilton Murray (1885-1886) and Ida B. Wells (1886-1887, the “Memphis Diary”). Frances Anne Rollin, originally from Charleston, South Carolina, published the biography of Major Martin Delany, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, in 1868. Rollin soon married and later lived in Columbia, South Carolina. Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York and London: Norton & Company, 1984). Carole Ione, one of Frances Rollin's descendants, published *Pride of Family, Four Generations of American Women of Color*, in 1991. See *Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color*. (New York: Harlem Moon Classics, 2004). Mary Virginia Washington lived on the Davis Bend plantation during the 1870s. In her 1885-1886 diary, a middle-class housewife named Laura Hamilton expressed her concerns with motherhood and housekeeping. I learned about additional diaries and letters when contacting archivists of HBCUs such as Fisk, Howard Universities and Spelman College, and I also had good results at the NYPL Schomburg Library. At Fisk University, I learnt about America Robinson's letters to her fiancé James Burrus, and the diary of Ella Sheppard. I could also easily obtain copies of Maritcha Lyons Williamson and Pauline Lyons Williamson's Papers at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library.

<sup>165</sup> She did leave a very short autobiographical extract named “Autobiographical Fragment” in a draft which is available at the Howard Spingarn Research Center, probably written in the 1930s and reprinted in Charles Lemert's monograph *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 331. Cooper wrote a few additional autobiographical pieces: “The Early Years in Washington: Reminiscences of Life with the Grimkés” (1951), *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 310 to 319 and in 1945-1950, Cooper described her experience of the preparation of the Doctorate and her defense at the Université de la Sorbonne in the piece entitled “The Third Step”, to leave a mark in History about her remarkable experience. See “The Third Step: Cooper's Memoir of the Sorbonne Doctorate” (1945-1950?), in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 320 to 330.

<sup>166</sup> She wrote on various subjects such as education, politics, history, philosophy, making her one of the most talented woman intellectuals of the nineteenth century.



History and since the way historical actors evaluate and perceive events constitutes and makes History, these sources are immensely valuable.

## **“Writings of the Self”: Definitions**

### **“Writings of the Instant”: Diaries and Correspondence**

Even if diaries and letters have for a long time not been used by historians, with the emergence of the Chicago School and changing practices, these sources have become precious, habitual and legitimate sources of information about women’s private worlds for historians nowadays.

Diaries – when unintended for readership – possess an additional, unique quality to document intellectual history: such sources enable readers to enter the mind of men and women at a given historical period. First, a diary is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “a book in which one keeps a daily records of events and experiences” – offering twenty-first century readers a window in nineteenth century women’s intimate thoughts and personal reflections. The “Latin root of diary means ‘daily allowance’; and the very repetitiveness and frequent interruptions of a day’s work for most women make diaries a logical mode for women writers to choose to pen their life stories”<sup>167</sup>. The term “diary, or journal”, implies a quotidian activity – “jour” meaning “day” in French – but it is rarely the case<sup>168</sup>. Contrary to French where there is often an added notion that the diary may be “secret” or “intimate” – one says “journal intime”<sup>169</sup>, in English the term diary does not evoke such a notion.

In the sixteenth century, keeping a diary was a common activity – which developed as paper was more and more widely available. Even if diary keeping is often widely deemed today as a primarily feminine activity, it has not always been so. In fact, diary keeping in America was originally a masculine activity. For example, Puritans confided their faith in God and narrated their experience in the New World in religious journals. This practice grew increasingly popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Margo Culley has shown in *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1794 to the present* “American men kept journals in numbers far exceeding those kept by women until well past

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<sup>167</sup> Cynthia A. Huff and Suzanne L. Bunkers, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts, 1996), 5.

<sup>168</sup> In French, the neologism “diarisme” was invented by Michèle Leleu, a scholar who published *Les Journaux intimes*. Leleu invented the neologism “diarist”. The term “diarism” comes from the English “diary”.

<sup>169</sup> In French, the second term “intime”, “intimate” evokes the notion of personal, private and of course intimacy. The French dictionary Le Robert gives this definition – translated here : it is “something completely private and generally withheld from others’ attention (opposed to public)”.



the middle of the nineteenth century". Many men – who were often tradesmen, artisans or landowners, kept diaries which were often closer in form to the logbook than to the diary as one understands it today. They often listed the tasks to accomplish, the accounts of the property or the store. For instance, plantation owners kept logbooks to keep track of the number of slaves they possessed – indicating their names, sex, age, and worth – to manage the plantation and keep records of crop sales, and family expenses. etc. Additionally, diary-writing was a common form of expression for soldiers in wartime and numerous men left "war journals"<sup>170</sup>. It is only during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the practice became feminized and came to be viewed as a purely feminine activity. Margo Culley argues that "diary writing becomes increasingly a woman's activity, as the diary becomes associated more and more with the writer's secret life"<sup>171</sup>. Diary-keeping came to be viewed more and more as a leisure habit or as a desirable activity for a woman – it became part of a lady's accomplishments. Class therefore became an important factor in the development of this activity. What is more, scholars such as Culley, Elizabeth Hampsten, Rebecca Hogan and Minrose Gwin believe that diaries are "a form particularly conducive to women writing". What form did women's diaries take initially in the United States?

American women kept diaries for various reasons: before the mid-1850s, most diarists wrote factual notes in their diaries. They used their diaries as a sort of log-books: as a space to draw lists – of objects they needed, of tasks they had to accomplish, of recipes or of their household's expenses. They also used this space to note down the visits they received or paid, or even the list of the illnesses or deaths which had occurred in the community over the year. One therefore often kept a diary for practical reasons. Many women's diaries are closer in form to logbooks, agendas or pre-dated "pocket-books" than to diaries containing very personal information and which one could term as "intimate".

Two types of diaries exist: "situational diaries" and "life diaries". "Situational" diaries are diaries which authors begin writing at a precise, key moment in their lives – after their marriage, courtship, after the death of a member of their family, during a trip or an expedition, during a war or because of a migration. Such diaries end when the author of the diary, for one reason or another, stops writing – perhaps because they did not feel the necessity to continue

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<sup>170</sup> Because black men were forbidden to learn how to read and write, most diaries were kept by educated white men. Many men kept diaries during the Civil War. The most famous war diary is that of New Yorker Elisha Hunt Rhodes. Nevertheless, several black men managed to keep diaries during the Civil War: Thomas Wentworth Higginson published his war journal under the title *Army Life in a Black Regiment* in 1870.

<sup>171</sup> Margo Culley, *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1794 to the Present*, 3-4. Introduction.

writing anymore, or because of an external factor – lack of time or of paper – common in wartime.<sup>172</sup>

In this study, most diarists kept situational diaries to organize their thoughts or express their emotions at key moments or turning-points in their lives – often during the transitional passage from childhood to adulthood. For instance, Charlotte Forten kept her diary during a traumatic experience – the Civil War, when she was teaching freedmen, alone and away from home. This is also the case of Laura Hamilton Murray who kept a diary at a key moment of her life: when experiencing marriage and motherhood. She indeed started writing after her wedding and kept doing so during her pregnancy, confiding her doubts and fears about her changing body, motherhood and family life<sup>173</sup>. Similarly, Frances Anne Rollin kept a diary during her passage to adulthood, while living far from her native South Carolina, completing her first manuscript under a penname and being courted by the man who would become her husband<sup>174</sup>. Ida B. Wells kept a diary at different moments in her life: in 1885- 1887, 1893 and 1930<sup>175</sup>. In the late 1880s (1885-1887), Ida Wells wrote at a time of transition from girlhood to adulthood in Memphis, Tennessee, depicting her coming of age and passage from girlhood to adulthood and her first professional experiences as a teacher and a journalist. The 1893 diary is different in nature, since it is a short travel diary which she kept when travelling to the United Kingdom on her own, when making her first steps as a crusader against lynching<sup>176</sup>. In her 1930 diary – kept one year before her death –, the mature Wells-Barnett discussed her daily life in Chicago, her family activities, her son Hermann, alongside her activism<sup>177</sup>. Mary Church Terrell's 1880s diary may be deemed as both a youthful and a travel diary. In it, she kept a record of her trip in Europe in 1888-1890. The young Mary Church

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<sup>172</sup> Such journals differ from “life diaries” which the diarist keeps throughout their entire life.

<sup>173</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 472- 479 and Murray Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C.

<sup>174</sup> Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 453- 461. The diary starts on 1 January 1868 and ends on 28 July 1868. See also the following diary entries printed on pages 366- 369. She started writing again on 2 August 1868 and stopped on 19 October 1868. Frances Anne Rollin (1847-1901) from Columbia, South Carolina, married William J. Whipper, a norther-born lawyer and legislator on 17 September 1868. The marriage was not a happy one. Frances Rollin had three children: Winifred Whipper – who became a teacher –, Ionia Whipper – a doctor – and Leigh Whipper – a “distinguished actor”, 461.

<sup>175</sup> Her “Memphis Diary” deals with the period 1885-1887. She also kept a very short diary when she was in England in April 1893 and later, in 1930 in which she discussed family and political matters. Miriam DeCosta Willis has emphasized the similarity of her style between her youth diary and the 1930 diary. See Ida B. Wells, *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman*, ed., Miriam DeCosta-Willis, 165.

<sup>176</sup> In it, she explained being sea sick. See *Memphis Diary*, 161-163.

<sup>177</sup> See *Memphis Diary*, 165-175.

envisaged diary-keeping rigorously<sup>178</sup> and seemed to be disappointed with herself when she failed to write<sup>179</sup>. Her diary appears as a companion during her exile on the European continent, a friend whom she could speak to in the language she was studying, as if this practice was a way of improving her skills in the desired language. She indeed envisaged her diary as a place where she could make progress in French first (1888-1889) and in German then (from 20 September 1889 to 1890)<sup>180</sup>. She resumed this activity in 1905 and 1908, when she had achieved fame and was active as a clubwoman and lecturer<sup>181</sup>. The format and tone of these diaries were very different from that of the late 1880s. In 1905 and 1908, she wrote short entries during the entire year, adapting to the format of the little books issued by “the Standard Daily Reminder” for 1905 and the “Date Book for 1908”. In the short diary entries, she mostly discusses her busy schedule, motherly duties, trips and other conference engagements.

This form of writing is specific because it often projects the thoughts of the diarist soon after the event recounted – therefore offering an almost immediate impression of the facts. Margo Culley terms this “*writing of the instant*”<sup>182</sup>. The lapse of time may indeed be very short – a few minutes – or longer – a few months – or years in certain cases. In the case of the diary, the temporal distance between the moment of the events and the moment of writing is often much shorter than for the memoir or the autobiography. The lapse of time does not generally need to be taken into account – unless the diarist has edited their work years later<sup>183</sup>.

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<sup>178</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*. She strove to write as regularly as she could. On 25 October 1888, from Lausanne, she indicated being sleepy but could not go to sleep before writing a few lines. See page 50. On 3 February 1889, after a two-month stop, she called her diary “my friend”, 62. On 30 November 1888, again, she made a point of honor in writing in her journal, although it was already eleven o’clock at night, 58. Mary Church Terrell Papers. My translation. I translated the diary into English, as a result, each of the diary entries cited in English in this work is my translation.

<sup>179</sup> On 18 November 1888, she regretted having neglected writing in « her poor journal » for two weeks, and lacking time to accomplish things. Diary entry dated 18 November 1888, 57.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. She began writing her diary in French on 26 August 1888 and stopped on 11 February 1889. On 26 August 1888, she envisaged her diary as a space for linguistic practice. She decided to write a few lines in French every evening in order to make progress. She explained that she came to Paris to learn the language – and “to learn German and music, if it was possible” – and wanted people to stop speaking English to her. See pages 1-2. She also kept a diary in Italian for a short period of time, and mostly depicted her visits of Italy in it.

<sup>181</sup> Terrell kept a diary during the entire year in 1905 and 1908 years. There are no traces of Terrell keeping a diary between 1890 – when she ceased keeping her diary in German and Italian – and 1905. Mary Church Terrell Papers. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Microfilm Collections. At the age of 42, her handwriting was obviously more mature in 1905 than in 1890, and so were the notes she made. Three years later, in 1908, at the age of 45, she resumed this activity for one year.

<sup>182</sup> Margo Culley, *A Day at A time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1794 to the Present*.

<sup>183</sup> In that case, diaries must be approached completely differently. When a diarist decided to make a manuscript public, they may be tempted to rewrite or rearrange the manuscript years after the facts, therefore changing the perspective for good. Some precautions when dealing with such diaries should be taken when studying History. In America, some diaries such as Mary Chestnut’s were indeed modified years after being written. See for

The writing generally reveals “raw” information, which is not generally re-read or corrected by the diarist themselves, as it is the case for memoirs or autobiographies. Yet Pierre-Jean Dufief warns readers that “diaries – written in secrecy toward a possible or distant publication, can be the object of many manipulations ; writers work on them for posterity, modifying and rewriting essential passages like incipits”<sup>184</sup>. Nevertheless, using diaries in historical studies is informative of the way the diarist *perceived* events. This immediacy gives the diary a particular quality: it reveals the thoughts and ideas of diarists *almost* on the spot. Yet as Béatrice Didier has argued, one cannot really speak of immediacy but rather of quasi-immediacy, since the diarist has to remember the event – which took place some time ago — before telling their diary what happened a few hours, days or months before<sup>185</sup>.

When one writes an autobiography or an article, the purpose is often political, since the writer has an addressee in mind while penning their story. This is somewhat different when a diarist leaves a journal and it is sometimes difficult to imagine the diarist’s purpose. One has to wonder when perusing a diary: Did the diarist wish or plan to be read one day, or were these confidences supposed to remain secret?

Diary-keeping is often – although it is not always the case – a private, secret activity which enable the diarist to pen intimate thoughts in a free space<sup>186</sup>. In this study, it seems that the diarists often kept their diaries to themselves since they did not intend to publish their journal. For instance, Charlotte Forten mostly kept her diary to herself and did not seem to exert any sort of self-censorship since she did not intend to publish it<sup>187</sup>. Likewise, Ida Wells’s “Memphis Diary” was also not meant to be read by others and was kept locked in a drawer. As the biographer Linda O. McCurry wrote in 1998 in her biography of Ida B. Wells-Barnett *To Keep the Waters Troubled*: “Wells may have done some self-censoring, but she clearly

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instance C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chestnut’s Civil War*, (New Haven and London, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>184</sup> Pierre-Jean Dufief, *Les Écritures de l’intime. La correspondance et le journal*. Actes du colloque de Brest, 23-24-25 octobre 1997. (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2000), 9.

<sup>185</sup> Béatrice Didier, *Le journal intime*, (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 9.

<sup>186</sup> I am referring to diaries left untouched after being written, not diaries such as Mary Chestnut’s that were rewritten years later. The existence of the diary could be kept secret but it could also be disclosed to family members. For instance, the white diarist Kate Stone read her Civil War journal to her offspring in the late nineteenth century and Gertrude Thomas wrote in 1859 that she wished her grand-children to remember her. She wrote: “For my girl or girls should I have others, these pages are penned”. Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye, The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 167.

<sup>187</sup> Yet, parts of her diary were disclosed during the war because the “abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier, a friend and supporter of Charlotte’s, published excerpts of her journal she had sent him that chronicled ‘Life on the Sea Islands’ in the May and June 1864 issues of *Atlantic Monthly*.” Karen M. Davis, “Charlotte Lottie Forten Grimké (1837-1914),” *African-American Authors, 1745-1945: A Bio-Biographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson, (Westport, Greenwood Press, 2000), 200.

intended her diary to be a private place to express freely things she never would have discussed with others. She kept it locked in her writing desk and hid the key”<sup>188</sup>. It seems that the situation was similar for Mary Terrell. When she was in Paris, this curious, cultured unmarried woman – who was then in her mid-twenties did not intend her diary to be read.

In addition, Béatrice Didier, a French scholar, argued that the notion of secrecy is not scientifically exact since the diarist always writes for an imaginary reader. “Isn’t the reader always here, after all?”, she asks<sup>189</sup>. Another French scholar, Marc-Antoine Kaeser, has also contended: “Putting one’s thoughts on paper implies the unconscious desire for a reader, even a virtual one”<sup>190</sup>. Diarists indeed often write to themselves or to an imaginary friend. For example, Mary Church used to call her diary “my friend” or “my poor diary” when she failed to write<sup>191</sup>. In that sense, the diary appears as close in nature to correspondence; the only difference being that the diary often implies an imaginary reader while the personal letter targets a real reader. What is more, in some cases the activity of keeping a diary is not secret: some diarists sometimes read their journal to family members or descendants as a source of inspiration<sup>192</sup>.

Diaries often serve as a place of transformation, where it is possible to craft one’s self-narrative. In *Inscribing the Daily*, Cynthia A. Huff and Suzanne L. Bunkers have examined the function of a diary and argued that diarists used the journal as a means to “transform themselves and their culture”<sup>193</sup>. In the diary, language is constructed: the diary evokes “a question of historical and textual self-construction through language”. They also showed that “the “diary [a woman] keeps is often a testing ground for construction of identity and narrativity. It is a subversive tool and an aid to cultural reinforcement.”<sup>194</sup>. The reader of her

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<sup>188</sup> Mc Curry, Linda O., 69. See the footnote 65 in which she cites the 4 July 1886: “I took my writing desk to town to have it filed open & when I returned found my keys where I had hidden them over a week before”, 349-350.

<sup>189</sup> Béatrice Didier, *Le journal intime*, 8.

<sup>190</sup> Marc-Antoine Kaeser, « La science vécue. Les potentialités de la biographie en histoire des sciences », *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 1/2003 (n° 8) : 139-160. URL: <http://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-des-sciences-humaines-2003-1-page-139.htm> DOI: 10.3917/rhsh.008.0139, 150.

<sup>191</sup> She called her diary “my friend” – “mon amie”, and “mon pauvre journal” – my “poor journal”. She seemed to view it as a real person, apologizing to it when she failed to write in it.

<sup>192</sup> This is not the case in this study yet the existence of the diary could be kept secret but it could also be disclosed to family members. For instance, the white diarist Kate Stone read her Civil War journal to her offspring in the late nineteenth century. See Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*. John Anderson ed., (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1972). Gertrude Thomas wrote in 1859 that she wished her grand-children to remember her: “For my girl or girls should I have others, these pages are penned”. See Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, 167.

<sup>193</sup> Cynthia Huff and Suzanne Bunkers, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*. (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 8-9.

<sup>194</sup> Cynthia Huff and Suzanne Bunkers, *Inscribing the Daily*, 17.



youthful diary can sense the change operating within the young Mary Church. From the unsure woman of 24, she grew into a more mature woman at the end of her trip in Germany in 1890<sup>195</sup>.

Diaries can also be places where diarists can express their personal and political voices. The scholar Kimberly Harrison has pointed out that “[t]he personal spaces of women’s diaries provided room for rhetorical rehearsals and allowed women to persuade themselves that they could and should take on the new roles thrust upon them.”<sup>196</sup> For instance, in the 1860s Charlotte Forten, and Mary Church or Ida Wells used their diaries as places of rhetorical rehearsal in the 1880s. It is important to peruse the diaries of women who were politically engaged in national struggles for African Americans between 1865 and 1920 because it is there that they developed their political voices and crafted their emerging activism and feminism. Joanne Braxton has also demonstrated that the diary can serve multiple purposes: in the case of Charlotte Forten, the diary was in turn “a private (and therefore defensible) ‘territory’ of the mind and a retreat from the racism and sexism of the dominant culture”<sup>197</sup>, or “a testing ground for the development of a poetic identity [...] she continues her use of the diary as a tool of personal restoration and self-healing”<sup>198</sup>.

I also used – although less widely – both personal and professional correspondence in this study. Correspondence is a letter or series of letters written for a real addressee or recipient. Contrary to diaries, letters imply the existence of a real reader. With this form of personal writings, the text is no longer self-oriented, as it is in the case of the diary, but it is addressed to an intended reader. As a result, correspondence appears as more authentic than diaries<sup>199</sup>.

Depending on the degree of intimacy between the two correspondents, the reader of personal letters is often able to peruse intimate details of the writer’s life and thoughts. Depending on the addressee – it can be a spouse or friend, daughter or sister, in-laws, relatives

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<sup>195</sup> When she wrote in German, her handwriting changed as well, as if the language in which she expressed herself changed her personality. From an agreeable, loose and well-spaced handwriting, she wrote in a smaller, denser manner in German.

<sup>196</sup> “[T]he personal spaces of women’s diaries provided room for rhetorical rehearsals and allowed women to persuade themselves that they could and should take on the new roles thrust upon them.” Kimberly Harrison, “Rhetorical Rehearsals: The Construction of Ethos in Confederate Women’s Civil War Diaries,” *Rhetoric Review* 22 / 3 (2003): 243-263.

<sup>197</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within A Tradition*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 87.

<sup>198</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography* 92.

<sup>199</sup> Pierre-Jean Dufief, « Le colloque a donc souligné l’authenticité, la sincérité de la correspondance par rapport au journal, car cette dernière est constamment confrontée à l’épreuve de la réalité avec la présence du destinataire », 9 and 11. « Le journal et la correspondance se rejoignent souvent dans leur pratique du discours et de la communication », 10.



or colleagues –, the authors of letters often allude to personal and private matters. In this study, I used for instance the letters of two friends – Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus – to document their relationship and the way they envisaged men and marriage in the mid-1860s. In these letters, there was no censorship because as the editor of the letters explains, both women were “not concerned with publication or with a white audience. As such, their letters provide a rare glimpse into the day-to-day activities of two ordinary black women.”<sup>200</sup>. Both diaries and letters – when they are not censored – offer insights into women’s intimate lives. Professional letters offer other types of information: they may reveal the way strategies were adopted within an association or the divergences of opinion over certain matters – as in the case of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in this present study.

Correspondence may belong both to the *writing of the instant* (if the letter is written immediately after the facts described or not long after them, as in the case of the diary), but it may also belong to *a posteriori* writings if the message is written months or years or even decades after the facts, for instance when the writer shares memories of facts which occurred decades before with his addressee. Yet generally the lapse of time between events and the moment of writing is often short. A person indeed generally writes to a friend, relative or acquaintance, in order to provide news or share one’s thoughts over recent developments.

Letters and diaries present similarities. As Pierre-Jean Dufief indicates, “a network of resemblances and continuities [...] is forged between letters and diaries” since some diaries can take the form of a letter written to oneself<sup>201</sup>. As seen before, diaries may be less authentic because the diarist can decide to edit their document, erase words or more or less long passages of their diary a long time after writing it. On the contrary, the author of a letter generally cannot make changes to the letter or destroy it – except perhaps when they have access to the addressee’s place – in the case of a sibling or a spouse. In this work, I also occasionally relied on the extracts of interviews of the descendants of some women in this study, as in the case of Dorothy Sterling’s interview of Alfreda Barnett Duster made in 1976<sup>202</sup>.

While diaries and letters offer unique insights into the thoughts of women almost on the moment, other forms of “*a posteriori writings*” such as memoirs, autobiographies and

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<sup>200</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, ed., *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends*, 4. Griffin adds: “The Brown-Primus correspondence provides material needed for moving beyond both the silence in the historical record and black women’s self-imposed silence about their inner lives”.

<sup>201</sup> Pierre-Jean Dufief, *Les Écritures de l’intime. La correspondance et le journal*. Actes du colloque de Brest, 23-24-25 octobre 1997. (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2000), 9.

<sup>202</sup> See the “Afterword” in *Memphis Diary*, 193-199.

reminiscences, which are often carefully crafted narratives – offer alternative information on women’s lives.

### **“*A Posteriori* Writing”: Memoirs, Autobiographies and Reminiscences: Definitions and Differences**

I also relied on memoirs, reminiscences and autobiographies – which sometimes partly belonged to the genre of the slave narrative, as in the case of Kate Drumgoold. These constitute what the French literary scholar Jean-Philippe Miraux has termed “l’écriture *a posteriori*” – *a posteriori* writing.<sup>203</sup>

It is necessary to explain – albeit briefly – the differences between autobiographies, memoirs and reminiscences. According to Philippe Lejeune, a French specialist of the genre, an autobiography is, “a retrospective in prose which a real person makes of his or her own existence, when he or she places the emphasis on his or her individual life, in particular on the history of his or her personality.”<sup>204</sup> This literary genre is widely studied in both literary studies and History<sup>205</sup>.

The term memoir comes from the French word “*mémoire*” (“*memory*”) and according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first definition is: “a historical account or biography written from personal knowledge”. The second definition is: “An account written by a public figure of their life and experiences”. While memoirs place the emphasis on historical events, external to the person, autobiographies and reminiscences reveal elements of the writer’s private life and are centered on the self. As Jennifer Wallach asserts, memoirs are historically valuable because they lay “at the crossroads of memory and history”. Moreover, Wallach explains that writing one’s memoir has to do with what “is a lifeless representation of what is no longer [...] a memoir does not remain in the domain of memory for long. After it is written down, it becomes fixed, a set interpretation, somewhat akin to historiography. When memoirists write their life story, they are, in a sense, transforming living memories into *a fixed history*”. Memoir writings, like history, like memory itself, is partially “reconstruction of lived movements, but is invariably a construction too”<sup>206</sup>.

Two of the main sources – Ida B. Wells’s *Crusade for Justice* and Mary Church Terrell’s *A Colored Woman in a White World* – are both memoirs. Although the title *Crusade*

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<sup>203</sup> Jean-Philippe Miraux, *L’Autobiographie: écriture de soi et sincérité*, (Paris, Armand Colin, 2009).

<sup>204</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, (Paris : Seuil, 1975), 14. Women’s autobiography is a complex text as well because it can, according to Estelle Jelinek, often be “characterized by irregularity, discontinuity, and fragmentation rather than a coherent shaping of life events”, Huff and Bunkers, *Inscribing the Daily*, 7.

<sup>205</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/autobiography>.

<sup>206</sup> Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *‘Closer to the Truth than any Fact’: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow*, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 32.

*for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* – chosen by her daughter Alfreda Duster in 1970 – suggests that this is an autobiography, the scholar Joanne Braxton argues that *Crusade for Justice* is in fact a memoir which constitutes “part of the ‘lost ground’ of Afro-American literary tradition”<sup>207</sup> and which does much to “establish continuity within black female autobiographical tradition”<sup>208</sup>. This memoir also borrows “from the confessional mode of autobiography to allow Wells the latitude to discuss her experience of marriage and family as it influenced her work and public life”. Braxton indeed thought that “the confessional aspect is more fully developed in *Crusade* than in most historical memoirs” and Braxton concluded that

Wells’s autobiographical consciousness alternates between the confession and the historical memoir, allowing the autobiographer the necessary latitude to discuss both her public and her private duty. This Wells required in order to demonstrate her development, not only as a political activist, but as a wife and mother. [...] In this way, *Crusade for Justice*, Wells’s historical memoir, looks forward to the modern political autobiographies of Ann Moody, Shirley Chisholm, and Angela Davis”<sup>209</sup>.

It is also built as a scientific work, since Wells used correspondence, newspaper clippings and figures to support her claims or illustrate her statements. Joanne Braxton has shown that in *Crusade for Justice* Wells adopted a “documentary mode”, in the form of a “linear narrative, which is heavily influenced by journalism and reportage, and authenticated by quotes from newspapers, letters, and other verifiable, external records”, as if she wanted to make sure her reader could verify the verity or authenticity of her account. Wells was also careful about the chronology of events – this was not the case for all women in this study –, Braxton called it her “brooding historical consciousness”<sup>210</sup>. Similarly, Mary Church Terrell’s life writing is more a memoir than an autobiography. Terrell relied on her diaries, newspaper articles, speeches, personal documents and memory to pen her life story. By using this method, Terrell depicted events with numerous details. Braxton believed that Terrell’s *A Colored Woman in a White World* was “a formidable historical and personal memoir closely related to the Ida B. Wells type” which nevertheless differed from Ida Wells’s memoir because the author “demonstrate[ed] a broader cultural sensibility and a wider range of knowledge”<sup>211</sup>.

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<sup>207</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 103.

<sup>208</sup> i.e. the slave narrative, Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 104.

<sup>209</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 138.

<sup>210</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 110. Terrell used the same techniques as well in her writings, sometimes publishing letters she received or sent on a particular question, sometimes to justify her acts. See for instance *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, (Alexandria, Virginia: Alexander Street Press, 2004).

<sup>211</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 140. Terrell published *A Colored Woman in a White World* in 1940 at the age of 77 and lived fourteen years after penning her autobiography. The title of her autobiography suggests an emphasis on her sense of isolation in the country and world she lived in, and the sense of uniqueness she felt as a woman of the educated African American elite. What “world” did she mean? She obviously not only had her nation in mind but also the Western world. Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*

A reminiscence is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a “story told about a past event remembered by the narrator. It is also a collection in literary form of incidents that someone remembers.” The word comes the late Latin *reminiscentia*, from Latin *reminisci* “remember”<sup>212</sup>. Many authors of the writings used in this study thought that their works were reminiscences or autobiographies rather than memoirs, perhaps because they humbly believed that they were the sum of their memories of a given period and in this way did not constitute real historical memoirs. Several women – Elizabeth Johnson Harris, Frances Jackson Coppin or Susie King Taylor – entitled their life writings “reminiscence” or simply “life story” yet these were in fact memoirs. For instance, Frances Coppin entitled her piece *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints of Teaching*, but it is a hybrid form. In the first part, she focused on her personal life experience, and in a second part, she dwelt on teaching methods. Susie Taylor also entitled her autobiographical piece *Reminiscences of my Life in Camp with the 33<sup>rd</sup> United States Colored Troops Late 1<sup>st</sup> S.C. Volunteers*, which is in fact a memoir<sup>213</sup>. Elizabeth Johnson Harris evoked her childhood with her family, her courtship, marriage and her role as a mother as well as her children’s achievements and evoked few historical events in *Life Story*<sup>214</sup>.

Furthermore, “a posteriori writings” provide a distinct look upon History and historical events because personal thoughts are evoked differently than if they had been written on the moment. Compared to the diary, in the case of autobiographical writings, a longer period of time usually goes by between the events and their recounting. This difference is important because it influences the content and the style of the writing – notes written *a posteriori* being informed by the passage of time<sup>215</sup>. As a result, since authors may have experienced social and political transformations, their style may be altered: they can be more or less nostalgic, angry, happy or disappointed since the act of remembering events may rekindle happy or

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in a *White World*. (London: G.K. & Co, 1996). First published 1940. Moreover, as her biographer indicates, the book was originally entitled *A Mighty Rocky Road*. See Beverly Washington Jones, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954*. (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), 62.

<sup>212</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/reminiscence?q=reminiscences#reminiscence> 8.

<sup>213</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp With the 33d United States Colored Troops Late 1st S. C. Volunteers*. (Boston: The author, 1902). See: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/taylorsu/menu.html>. See also Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp: An African American Woman’s Civil the War Memoir*, first published 1906 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth Johnson Harris, *Life Story, 1867-1923*. Special Collections Library at Duke University. Elizabeth Johnson Harris wrote her life story in 1923, at the age of 56. See <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/harris/>.

<sup>215</sup> The writer may have changed over time and these changes may alter his or her style: he or she can experience a wide array of feelings: she may feel more or less nostalgic, angry, happy or disappointed.

traumatic experience.<sup>216</sup> As a result, the time gap between the events described and the moment when these women penned their life story is important to consider since this obviously plays a part in the way they wrote their stories.

What is more, autobiographical writings are not reliable sources to chronicle historical facts since they are not devoid of mistakes or oversights. An autobiographer may have a faulty memory, time may have altered the way they envisaged the difficulties met or may in some cases deliberately choose to present erroneous facts. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson Harris apologized in her introduction to *Life Story*, saying that she wrote this piece from memory and may have forgotten some elements or may have committed some mistakes in her account<sup>217</sup>. Some writers adopted strategies to fight against memory impairment. For example, Mary Church Terrell wrote her autobiography from “one of her diaries” to write a reliable account, using documents – her diaries and newspaper clippings – to remember moments she may otherwise have forgotten to mention<sup>218</sup>. Ida Wells proceeded similarly, using articles and newspaper clippings to justify her statements. Despite these flaws and the fact that they may offer an incomplete picture of the author’s life, autobiographical writings are interesting for historians because they present the author’s views of events. In fact, these sources provide information on how the writer views events that occurred years or decades earlier<sup>219</sup>.

The nature of these women’s autobiographical writings may also be very different depending on the context of publication and the time which elapsed between the facts and the time of publication. For instance, Fannie Barrier Williams wrote an autobiography of a different nature from those of Church Terrell or Wells-Barnett: Williams wrote a six page-long life story whereas Wells and Terrell wrote memoirs of more than 300 pages.

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<sup>216</sup> This is the case for instance of Susie King Taylor who recounted her son’s demise in Louisiana and the difficulties she met to secure a berth to bring her son’s body back home with her. See *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp*. In the case of the WPA interviews conducted during the Great Depression among former slaves, the context of the interviews surely influenced their contents. Some former slaves evoked slavery with nostalgia because they remembered having enough to eat when living on their former masters’ plantation, precisely because they were now experiencing hunger and poverty due to the major economic crisis of the 1930s. Not all of them did, though, and it is likely that they would not have given such interviews in the late 1860s or in the 1890s.

<sup>217</sup> She indicated that one day, she may decide to re-write her story in order to rectify these errors or follow a proper order: “Please forgive the errors that may be found in these work from an unfinished scholar. Many of the contents in part second should have been included in part first. But as all could not be remembered in one or the same time, I would write as such, came in my mind or memory. A few articles in print included are clippings from papers and magazines. Those in the signature E.J.H. are all my own work. I may rewrite this in more proper form at some convenient time.”. <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/harris/section-01/harris01.html>.

<sup>218</sup> See the introduction written by Nellie Y. McKay, Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, xv.

<sup>219</sup> This can be contrasted with the diarist or autobiographer’s articles written during the period.



The context for writing was very different for Williams, Wells and Terrell. Contrary to Williams – who wrote her autobiography in the *Independent* in 1904 in her late forties (at the age of 49) when she was an active clubwoman during the woman's era, Ida Wells and Mary Terrell wrote their memoirs in old age, at the twilight of their lives – one might say – having had the opportunity to reflect on the events depicted and society in general and being surely influenced by the recent developments in society as they penned their stories<sup>220</sup>. Wells-Barnett was 66 years old when she began writing her autobiography in 1928-1929, Mary Terrell was in her seventies in the late 1930s. Consequently, using writings of the instant and a posteriori writings demands careful treatment.

There are major differences between diaries and autobiographical writings even if they are written by the same historical actor because the stance of the writer is obviously different, influenced by the passage of time. It is important to indicate that in this study Mary Terrell and Ida Wells are the only two women in this study who left both diaries and autobiographies. Ida B. Wells wrote her diary in 1886-1887 at the age of 24 and 25 and penned her autobiography in 1928 at the age of 66; her stance is therefore completely different in each document. The same is true for Mary Terrell who was aged 25 during her European trip and was in her sixties when she penned *A Colored Woman in a White World*<sup>221</sup>. This change in time must always be taken into account when studying such sources. The study of their writings shows that the purpose of these two women was obviously very different when they put their thoughts on paper in a diary, building a space for themselves and their rhetoric, from when they penned life narratives – telling readers about their life experiences and narrating historical events from their viewpoints and building their self-image for posterity.

Moreover, the difference in nature between an autobiography and a diary induces a difference of treatment by the historian. The fact that the autobiography is written for an audience and intends to be a public document influences the writing. This is visible in the writings of women who left both diaries and autobiographies – Wells and Terrell. Terrell's 1889-1890, 1905 and 1908 diaries were not written in the same manner as was her autobiography – the tone differs quite dramatically. This is particularly true when Terrell discusses political subjects such as racial or gender discrimination. It may be said that there is

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<sup>220</sup> For example, Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement in the South and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

<sup>221</sup> As her biographer, Beverly Washington Jones, has explained, Mary Terrell was 64 when she began writing her manuscript. She “wrote and rewrote for almost ten years, finally completing the book in 1938”. Beverly Washington Jones, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954*, 62. She was able to complete her manuscript and have it published in 1940, at the age of 77, living to see the passage of the Supreme Court case Civil Rights Act of July 1954 and died in the summer of 1954 at the age of 91, at the dawn of the Civil Rights movement.



more emotional depth and perhaps more authenticity in diaries. As some critics have underscored: “While Terrell intended the book to be a forthright account of the prejudice she had experienced, the autobiography described events in polite terms and was less critical of American society than she perhaps intended. In contrast, her diaries reveal a more emotional response to the treatment she had endured.”<sup>222</sup>

Lastly, these “a posteriori writings” also show twentieth century readers how the author would like to be remembered. Jennifer Wallach, a historian and specialist of memoirs has said that the main richness of autobiographical writings rests upon the fact that it enables the historian to learn “a great deal about the way an individual perceived him or herself and his or her times – if the witness’s misrepresentation is honest – or about how the individual would like to be remembered”<sup>223</sup>.

Why did these women – who often were teachers, clubwomen and activists – become writers? What pushed them to pen their life stories? These women often had both personal and political reasons to pen their life writings. In many cases, it resulted from a wish to leave a trace of and explain their actions as clubwomen, activists and American women who had experienced racial and gendered discrimination.

Numerous scholars have proven that American women of African descent felt the need to either pen or speak about their stories, sometimes in search of a self-definition. For instance, in *Inventing Black Women: African American Women Poets and Self-representation: 1877-2000*, Ajuan Maria Mance underscored women writers or poets’ need for self-definition. Likewise, in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Collins, a sociologist and feminist, also emphasized the need for oppressed minority women to pen their stories in order to define their self-identities<sup>224</sup>. The act of defining themselves on paper was political in itself. This self-definition illuminates the crusades women of African descent have fought since the birth of America. Writing diaries or letters or autobiographies helped these women explore their inner selves and shape their personal and collective image<sup>225</sup>. As Collins argues, “black women have also stressed the importance of self-definition as part of the journey from victimization to a free mind in their blues”<sup>226</sup>. Collins claims that crafting self-definition was a vital, “essential part of [women’s]

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<sup>222</sup> "Mary Church Terrell." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. *Encyclopedia.com*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404708316.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Jennifer Wallach, *Closer to the Truth*, 31.

<sup>224</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Perspectives on Gender*, Volume 2, (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

<sup>225</sup> There was a double purpose.

<sup>226</sup> Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 104.

survival”<sup>227</sup>. For her, this self-definition was empowering: finding a voice was important to fight racism and protect the image of black womanhood.

Autobiographical writings are places of self-liberation and free speech. It is not “just [...] a literary form but [...] something of a literary ‘venue’, a site of negotiation among the principal agents – memory, unfolding identity, and the demands of inscribed narrative, that is, sequence, causality, and coherence. As such sites, writers persevere, struggling to compose texts that mirror their own lives”<sup>228</sup>.

Then, it is also a place which enables the author to express the multiplicity of their identities, all the aspects which compose their identities – gender, race, region or class. “Autobiography is the genre most at war with itself” because “it may be the genre most expressive of the multiplicity of selves that complicate human identity”<sup>229</sup>. It is interesting to study such texts in the case of African American women because they often spoke about the different facets of their identity.

Moreover, in the nineteenth century, women of color in America had to – and probably still have to today – deal with their dual racial identity. In the twentieth century, Patricia Collins highlighted the fact that women of color possessed a dual culture and thus, a dual self-identity. Collins believes that being ““watched” by society – as a minority – generates a dual consciousness in women of African descent, one in which they became familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, sometimes adopting them for some illusion or protection, while hiding a self-defined standpoint from the prying eyes of dominant groups [...] We’ve always had to live two lives – one for them and one for ourselves”<sup>230</sup>. This dichotomized vision of the self was already present in African American women’s life writings between 1865 and 1920, a period of significant change for African Americans. This suggests that black women leaders’ self-definition was influenced by an intended readership – which I must consider throughout my research. A black woman may present her message in diverse ways, depending on whether she spoke to a black or white, working-class or middle-class audience.

In other cases, the authors did not participate in the publication process themselves: their stories were published thanks to the help of family members. For example, Alfreda Duster and Karen Fields helped family members publish life writings: Mamie Garvin Fields’

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> *Composing Selves*, 294.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 91. This is reminiscent of W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of “two-ness of being both American and Negro”, as Du Bois terms it in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

*Lemon Swamp* and Ida B. Wells's *Crusade for Justice*. These women wished to publish their kin's narratives to preserve the memory and history of African Americans. Mamie Fields passed on her passion for history to her descendants, and this is probably the reason why her granddaughter completed and published her story years later. "An appreciation of history that is at one a large uncomplicated and complex runs through my grandmother's doings, as well as through the way she recounts events"<sup>231</sup>. Karen Fields explains that Mamie Fields and she had different ways of apprehending memory and history.

The difference between my abstract South and my grandmother's South as lived often triggered passionate discussion. It also exposed different uses of remembering. Looking back with my grandmother, I was trying to relegate childhood shocks about Dixie to their proper place. Looking back with me, my grandmother was determined to pass on a heritage. I focused on the past, therefore; she upon the future. But she focused upon the future in a special way that comes naturally to a Charlestonian, the native of a city which weathers its daughters and sons in an atmosphere of continual remembering<sup>232</sup>.

In the case of Wells's *Crusade for Justice*, the publication process was an uneasy one. After penning her account in the late 1920s, Ida B. Wells unfortunately did not have time to complete her manuscript – her last sentence remains incomplete<sup>233</sup>. After the death of her mother, Alfreda Duster rapidly started looking for a publisher but soon met difficulties. As Braxton explains, the "cycle of rejection started shortly after her mother's death and went on for about thirty-five years"<sup>234</sup>. It indeed took many years for Alfreda Barnett Duster to finally be able to publish her mother's account. Duster did everything in her power to publish it in order for her mother to gain national and international recognition. About the publication process, Duster wrote: "My role was a determination to see that this book was published. I knew it was a valuable story – one that should be published by a press which had nation-wide and even international distribution facilities, and I would not settle for less. So I just kept seeking and sending, and when the manuscript was returned, I just kept looking for another publisher"<sup>235</sup>. As a result, Ida B. Wells's *Crusade for justice* is "a family and community document as well as a celebration of an individual triumph"<sup>236</sup>.

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<sup>231</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields and Karen Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir*, (New York and London: The Free Press, 1983), xxii.

<sup>232</sup> Mamie Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, xx.

<sup>233</sup> She became ill very soon after penning the last sentences and died shortly after in 1931. As a result, a long period of time elapsed between the time the document was written and its publication. The family had the documents in its possession.

<sup>234</sup> Joanne Braxton, 106. See also *Crusade*, xxxi. Introduction by Alfreda M. Duster. "The few papers and diaries and the autobiography on which [Ida B. Wells-Barnett] had been working have remained in the possession of her family since her death".

<sup>235</sup> Alfreda M. Duster, letter to Joanne M. Braxton, 30 January 1983. As cited in Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 106. Duster added "I knew it had significance".

<sup>236</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 106.

Alfreda Duster not only managed to find a publisher: she also edited the autobiography, accomplishing an extremely demanding job of fact-checking, reading and editing with John Hope Franklin. Franklin said about Duster: “Duster... has accurately perceived her role as an understating and sympathetic editor, scrupulously avoiding the pitfalls of filial subjectivity”<sup>237</sup>. The autobiography was finally published in 1970, thirty-nine years after the death of Ida B. Wells and 108 years after her birth. Since Ida Wells had not had time to give a title to her pages, the choice of the title *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* was made by her daughter Alfreda Duster. She chose a title which chronicled her mother’s fights and evoked a holy struggle. As Braxton has showed: “*Crusade for Justice* signals the central concerns of the text; it also suggests a holy war, a figure of thought that runs throughout Wells’ narrative. The subtitle, *The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, indicates the intention to minimize the autobiographer’s personal life in order to portray her participation in a vast historical drama; *Crusade for Justice* is clearly presented as the story not only of Ida B. Wells but also of her times”<sup>238</sup>.

Other women wrote their autobiography to keep up with a family tradition of “keeping a family record”. This was the case of Maritcha Remond Lyons, who penned *Memories of Yesterday: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was* and entrusted her “literary nephew” with continuing her life story. Her purpose was to honor her predecessors, to make “a permanent tribute to the noble men and women of our contingent who bore unflinchingly, toil, discomfort [...] never swerving from the path of duty”<sup>239</sup>.

The publication of these women’s life stories was very often a political gesture. They used the space of these publications to express their activism on a variety of questions – racial and gender-related questions.

Famous feminists generally used their life writings to express and diffuse their thoughts about womanhood while lesser-known women published autobiographical pieces in university newspapers to testify about their lives and actions and communicate their ideas about womanhood<sup>240</sup>. Leaders such as Anna Cooper or Mary Terrell wished to speak for the oppressed and the voiceless, especially women; this is evident in Cooper’s *A Voice from The South*. In “Our raison d’être”, written in 1892, Cooper explained that she published *A Voice*

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid. “For three years after the book was accepted, she worked under the supervision of the historian John Hope Franklin” and did “scrupulous editing”, 106.

<sup>238</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 107.

<sup>239</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was, An Autobiography*, Introduction, Williamson Papers, Schomburg Center, NYPL, New York City.

<sup>240</sup> In the *Howard University Journal* or the *Spelman Messenger* for instance.

from the South to put an end to the silence surrounding black women, and finally give them a voice. For Cooper, the “sadly expectant Black Woman” was indeed “mute and voiceless”:

The colored man’s inheritance and apportionment is still the somber crux, the perplexing *cul de sac* of the nation, – the dumb skeleton in the closet provoking ceaseless harangues, indeed, but little understood and seldom consulted. [...] One important witness has not yet been heard from. The summing up of the evidence deposed, and the charge to the jury has been made – but no word from the Black Woman<sup>241</sup>. “The ‘other side’ has not been represented by one who ‘lives there’. And not many can more sensibly realize and more accurately tell the weight and the fret of the ‘long dull pain’ in the open-eyed but hitherto voiceless Black Woman of America<sup>242</sup>.

In 1892, when she decided to break that silence, Cooper was a pioneer indeed, being among the first women to voice the cause of black women. Fannie Barrier Williams had gotten married five years earlier — in 1887 – and had settled in Chicago and was starting her fight for black women’s rights. Ida Wells had not yet left the South and was about to begin her crusade against lynching – the lynching of Thomas Moss occurred the same year<sup>243</sup> —, Mary Church Terrell, back from Europe, had recently wedded Robert Terrell – in 1891 – and was living in Washington D.C.. Cooper not only believed that as women, they “assume[d] to be leaders of thought and guardians of society. Our country’s manners and morals are under our tutoring”<sup>244</sup>, but she also maintained that black men could not speak for black women. Black women themselves had to raise their voices because they were unique and no group could explain their situation better than themselves.

Their voice is in consequence not always temperate and calm, and at the same time radically corrective and sanitary. At any rate, as our Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot *quite* put themselves in the dark man’s place, neither should the dark man be wholly expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact Voice of the Black Woman<sup>245</sup>.

Cooper wrote to solve the American racial problem. On 17 September 1892, she hoped: “If these broken utterances can in any way help to a clearer vision and a truer pulse-beat in studying our Nation’s Problem, this Voice by a Black Woman of the South will not have been raised in vain”<sup>246</sup>,

Many women wished to have space to speak one’s mind freely, to demonstrate their agency and assert their power through words. This was the case for most women of this study. For example, Fannie Williams – who published during the heart of race riots and the woman’s era in 1904<sup>247</sup>, aimed at drawing the attention of the editor and readers of the *Independent* to

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<sup>241</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, ed. Charles Lemert, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 51.

<sup>242</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Our Raison d’Être”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 51-52, written on 17 September 1892 at Tawawa Chimney Corner, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 51.

<sup>243</sup> Wells published her first study upon lynching in 1892. *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. See <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>.

<sup>244</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 90.

<sup>245</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Our Raison d’Être”, 1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 52.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> 1904 was a year of popular unrest: a riot occurred in Springfield, Ohio, that year.



the existence of educated black women in the northern States<sup>248</sup>. Her short autobiography – written in the form of an article – indeed came as a response to a previous publication which had presented the voices of black and white women from the North and the South<sup>249</sup>. Up to that point, the only testimony about northern womanhood in the newspaper had come from a white woman of the North<sup>250</sup>. Williams also aimed at arousing interest and sympathy for the black woman and encouraging women of African descent to act for the community, as she was doing herself – by helping young women migrants recently arrived in Illinois with the Frederick Douglass Center.

Moreover, many women wished to raise their voices against racial injustice in the United States. Many wrote autobiographies to leave a testimony of a period. For instance, in 1904 Fannie Williams wished to draw white Americans' attention to racial injustice and to change whites' perceptions about African Americans. Like Anna Cooper years before, Williams hoped African Americans would soon be granted their rights. In 1912, one nurse wrote to denounce racism and the dire economic situations blacks suffered from in the post-war United States<sup>251</sup>. This was also the case for Kate Drumgoold – who published her autobiography in 1898, at the heart of the Jim Crow era when black men were being disenfranchised and Susie King Taylor – who published her reminiscences in 1906 at the height of racial strife – 1906 was the year of the Atlanta race riot – and deplored the lack of patriotism and the inertia of younger African Americans. Mary Terrell and Ida Wells, who both published their autobiographies at the twilight of their lives, used their memoirs to denounce the continuation of lynching, segregation and racism in the country.

Black women writers also often intended to leave a legacy of activism. For example, being a famous figure of the anti-lynching struggle in the late 1920s, Ida Wells-Barnett wished to inspire other members of the community and to pass on her knowledge to younger

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<sup>248</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography", the *Independent*, July 1904.

<sup>249</sup> Four articles were published to present the difficult existing race relations and the difficulties met by Americans of color in the early 1900s. The editor of the *Independent* indicated that this article "discusse[d] a phase of the Negro problem not touched upon by the three anonymous women, and often generally overlooked by the American people. This article therefore supplement[ed] the others, and the four taken together picture the negro problem from the feminine standpoint in the most genuine and realistic manner shown in any articles we ha[d] seen in print". See page 91. As the editor of the newspaper indicated, the voice of the woman of color of the North had been silenced thus far. Williams's testimony broke that silence.

<sup>250</sup> See "Observations on the Southern Race Feeling by a Northern Woman", the *Independent*, 56. 17 March 1904: 594-599. As for the South, two – black and white – southern women had published articles. These articles were written shortly after the race riots going on in Ohio in March 1904. The names of the authors were kept secret because of the late events. "The Race Problem: An Autobiography by a Southern Colored Woman", the *Independent*, 56. 17 March 1904: 586- 589. "Experiences of the Race Problem by a Southern white woman", the *Independent*: 590- 594.

<sup>251</sup> A Negro Nurse, "More Slavery At the South", New York: the *Independent*. 25 January 1912. From the *Independent*. New York: published for the proprietors, 1848-1921. v. 72, Jan. 25, 1912: 196-200. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/negnurse/negnurse.html>.



ones: “It is therefore for the young who have so little of our history recorded that I am for the first time in my life writing about myself”, she wrote. She also felt compelled, “constrained” to do so to offset the lack of “authentic race history of Reconstruction times written by a Negro himself”<sup>252</sup>. Her goal was two-fold: she wished to leave a legacy for African Americans and to voice her life story to enhance her image in the United States. As Braxton argues, Wells was writing to “set the record straight” about her, because she had been widely attacked in the white press<sup>253</sup>. Writing her autobiography was obviously political in the late 1920s, a period of profound instability in the United States. Ida B. Wells penned her life story to fight first against racism, and then against sexism. Braxton has argued that “race, not sex, served Wells’s point of departure, for she knew that black women were oppressed primarily because they were black and not because they were women”<sup>254</sup>. “Racial oppression, not sexism, was the primary issue” for Wells<sup>255</sup>. Joanne Braxton contended that Wells positioned herself, not as a “wise and paternal elder, some ‘articulate hero’ but as a “protector of black manhood and a nurturer and defender of black womanhood” in her memoir<sup>256</sup>. On the contrary, Terrell wrote her life story having race but also gender-related questions in mind when she wrote *A Colored Woman in a White World* in 1938 -1939 – this is visible in the choice of the title. The title indeed places less emphasis on activism and struggle for racial justice and more emphasis on gender than Wells-Barnett’s memoir. What is more, as Peebles-Wilkins and Aracelis Francis have said about Terrell’s account, compared to Wells-Barnett’s work, Terrell used a feminine style to narrate her life: “Her personal presentation was more characteristic of the ‘feminine’ style”<sup>257</sup>. Nevertheless, Mary Church Terrell had a political goal in mind when writing her life story. She was one of the most famous black woman activists of the United States – and remains so today – probably thanks to her role as the first President of the NACW from 1896 to 1900 but also to her numerous publications and unwavering activism in favor of desegregation in Washington D.C. in the 1950s<sup>258</sup>.

Region also informs such documents quite strongly. Southern women often had two sets of goals when writing: denouncing racial oppression and women’s oppression by men. In *Composing Selves : Southern Women and Autobiography*, Prenshaw writes that in their

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<sup>252</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 3-4, as cited in Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 109.

<sup>253</sup> Joanne Braxton, 111. “Wells attempts to compensate for a public image frequently maligned in the white press. Like the fugitive slaves, Wells feels compelled to tell her story from her own point of view”, 110.

<sup>254</sup> Joanne Braxton, 120.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>257</sup> Wilma Peebles-Wilkins and E. Aracelis Francis, “Two Outstanding Black Women in Social Welfare History: Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett”, *Affilia*. Vol 5, No. 4, Winter 1990: 87-100, 98.

<sup>258</sup> See the 1953 Supreme Court Case *District of Columbia v. John Thompson*. Terrell played a major role in the desegregation of Washington D.C..

writings, southern women – regardless of color – were “motivated by a moral purpose – and thereby justified by a higher calling than self-revelation – writers like Anna Julia Cooper, Belle Kearney, and, later, Katharine DuPre Lumpkin and Lillian Smith draw upon life experience to bear witness to the white South’s oppression of African Americans and, especially in Kearney’s narrative, to oppose the patriarchal subjection of women”<sup>259</sup>.

Because they were famous or had achieved relative fame as lecturers, several women used the opportunity of writing an autobiography to tell *their* truth about their themselves, their ideas, deeds, lives, black womanhood and the community. For example, Mary Terrell starts her autobiography in her introduction by stating: “In relating the story of my life I shall simply tell the truth and nothing but the truth – but not the whole truth, for that would be impossible.”, as if she was swearing on the Bible before a judicial hearing.<sup>260</sup> Like all other diarists or memoirists or autobiographers, Terrell was telling her truth about America of the 1860s to the late 1930s and these truths constitute a fragment of a larger historical, multifaceted truth – which constitute History<sup>261</sup>. Terrell claimed in her introduction that she had pledged to represent facts fairly: “I have been obliged to refer to incidents which have wounded my feelings, crushed my pride and saddened my heart. I have touched upon this phase of my life as lightly as I could without misrepresenting the facts.” Above all, she did not want her readers to think that she was complaining in her life-writing<sup>262</sup>. By writing about their personal lives, these women defended the reputation of all black women in America, at a time when black womanhood was heavily attacked.

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<sup>259</sup> Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, *Composing Selves*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2011), 292. Prenshaw identifies a typical slave narrative: “African American writers such as Harriet Jacobs focus more directly upon the protagonist-self, her struggles and emotions, for she is the embodied victim of racial oppression, as well as the emancipated victor who outwits and escapes slavery”, 292.

<sup>260</sup> Mary Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, Introduction.

<sup>261</sup> Aware that telling facts about racial relations in 1940 – the time of publication – could lead some readers to view her as a “bitter” woman, she wished to make it plain that her account was in fact factual: “And even if I tried to tell the whole truth few people would believe me. I am well aware that truth will be interpreted by some to mean bitterness. But I am not bitter.”.

<sup>262</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, Introduction, “I do not want to be accused of “whining”, she says. Mary Church Terrell did not wish to declare war on white Americans with this publication in 1940: “I do not want to wage a holy war or any other kind of war upon a group which is strong and powerful enough to circumscribe my activities and prevent me from entering fields in which I should like to work. I wish to insist upon this with all the emphasis which I can command. No colored woman clothed in her right mind who has had as many genuine friends in the dominant race as I have had and who has been given by them as many opportunities to render the service which I have tried to give could be bitter toward the whole group”. She decidedly posed herself as a bridge between black and white Americans in 1940, simply giving a factual description of her life. Terrell did not want her descriptions to be considered as controversial or as an attack against whites.

To conclude, these women penned their life writings of various nature for diverse reasons. In their diaries, they at times sought a comforting imaginary friend to whom they could confide their secrets or intimate thoughts, or used their journals as places of rehearsals of their free speech. They envisaged their memoirs or autobiographies as places where they could set the record straight about themselves but above all about all black women. Studied together, such sources reveal the thoughts and ideas of women at different moments of their lives and are informative of the way their personalities were built.

According to Jennifer Wallach, it is simply impossible to write, to understand, or to experience from an “objective” standpoint. Rather, history is experienced, recorded, and understood subjectively”<sup>263</sup>. History is inherently subjective: “Objectivity is something historians strive to attain, all the time knowing that it is impossible to attain”<sup>264</sup>. The author of the introduction to Mamie Garvin Fields’s autobiography *Lemon Swamp* accounts for the subjectivity of an account: *Lemon Swamp* is a “subjective, personal account of life and work in SC from 1888 to now”. It “does not claim to be objective. It has the viewpoint of a woman who set out her first one-room school in 1908, who joined a national women’s organization in 1916, who became active in Charleston’s affairs in the 1920s, and who still counts herself a responsible member of her community”<sup>265</sup>.

In addition, all historians are products of their times and of their social background and environment<sup>266</sup>. All memoirs, autobiographies, biographies or personal accounts for that matter – because they are written by people who have their own history, origin, set of customs, frame of mind, etc, — are subjective. Yet this subjectivity is not problematic so long as historians and readers are aware of it and account for it. In fact, the subjectivity of a person facing some events informs the historian about a period. The way an autobiography is written and the manner with which events are told – either orally or not – is informative about History. These women’s subjectivity is useful to understand the period 1860s-1920s in the United States. As Broqua and Marche have argued: “The biographical method in Sociology does not aim at espousing the point of views of the actors without any distance, but it aims at grasping the perspective which the consideration of their subjectivity offers on how their experience is made”<sup>267</sup>. Understanding how these women reflected upon their life

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<sup>263</sup> Jennifer Wallach, *Closer to the Truth*, 23.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>265</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, xiii.

<sup>266</sup> Jennifer Wallach, 17 and 22. Historians are confined to their point of view.

<sup>267</sup> Broqua and Marche, 10.

experiences, how their subjectivity influenced their struggles and their ideas is at the heart of this study.

## Writing A Historical Biography

I chose to write a historical biography because it offers a wide array of advantages. There is a scientific debate over the use of historical biographies. Why is biography relevant for historians, in History and Sociology? What does the historical biography have to offer?

In 1988, Philippe Levillain, a French scholar, claimed that this method was interesting because it shows the bonds between the past and the present and between the individuals and society: “the now redeemed historical biography is the best way to show the links between the past and the present, memory and project, the individual and the society and to experiment time as a proof of life”<sup>268</sup>. In « La science vécue. Les potentialités de la biographie en histoire des sciences » (2003), Marc-Antoine Kaeser contends that “the biographical method is justified [...] because it authorizes a particular viewpoint on the past and provides historians with rich perspectives and renewed historical questions”<sup>269</sup>. The biographical approach is the best approach for this kind of study because it highlights a historical period in often unprecedented ways. It also informs readers about women’s long-lasting and ever-important impact on History and suggests new, pertinent questions about History<sup>270</sup>.

One of the most interesting ways to study History is through Social History. The study of life writings offers access to the process, the construction of a person’s identity and as Anne Levallois has shown, biographers know today how important a person’ childhood history is in one’s construction as an individual<sup>271</sup>. Understanding how identity is formed during childhood is informative about a person’s later life choices and life trajectory. This is

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<sup>268</sup> Philippe Levillain, « Les protagonistes : la biographie », in *Pour une histoire politique*, ed., René Rémond, (Paris : Seuil, 1988) : 121-159, 158-159, as cited in Anne Levallois, « Le retour de la biographie historique : L’histoire et la psychanalyse s’y rejoindraient-elles ? », *L’homme et la société*, 2002/4 n°146 : 127-140. DOI : 10.3917/lhs.146.0127, 137.

<sup>269</sup> Marc-Antoine Kaeser, « La science vécue. Les potentialités de la biographie en histoire des sciences », *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, 1/2003 (n° 8) : 139-160. URL: <http://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-des-sciences-humaines-2003-1-page-139.htm> DOI : 10.3917/rhsh.008.0139, 140.

<sup>270</sup> Eleni Varikas, « L’approche biographique dans l’histoire des femmes », *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, Année 1988, Vol. 37, No. 1 : 41-56, 54. [http://www.persee.fr/doc/grif\\_0770-6081\\_1988\\_num\\_37\\_1\\_1754](http://www.persee.fr/doc/grif_0770-6081_1988_num_37_1_1754).

<sup>271</sup> Anne Levallois, « Le retour de la biographie historique. L’histoire et la psychanalyse s’y rejoindraient-elles ? », *L’Homme et la société*, 4/2002 (n° 146) : 127-140. URL : <http://www.cairn.info/revue-l-homme-et-la-societe-2002-4-page-127.htm> DOI : 10.3917/lhs.146.0127, 138.

why I wished to study these women's personal history and life experiences<sup>272</sup>. As a result, like many other biographers, I deem it important to study these women's childhood and coming of age as African American women in white America. As Marche and Broqua have noted, the biographical method enables scholars not only to "write the life of a subject a posteriori, but also to understand how a trajectory is built throughout a life"<sup>273</sup>. Understanding how these women, from their childhood, built their identities and became the women they did become was central in this work. In that regard, the biographical approach was the best alternative because it informs the reader of the biography of the historical context in which the person has lived: as Georges Duby has said in 1984 in his book dealing with *Guillaume le Maréchal ou le meilleur chevalier du monde*: "throughout the ever-fascinating narrative of an individual's adventures, these exemplary witnesses enable [historians and readers] to know the era of these people"<sup>274</sup>. The biographical approach enables readers to explore the period these women lived. Praising the works of several scholars such as [Anne] Stefani, Ivöl, Serme and [Claire] Delahaye, Guillaume Marche emphasized that the "stance or the ideology present in these writings must be historicized and constitute a precious tool of the research used in Social Sciences"<sup>275</sup>. Moreover, as Levi-Strauss has argued, "Biographical and anecdotal history is the least explanatory; but it is the richest in point of information, for it considers individuals in their particularity and details for each of them the shades of character, the twists and turns of their motives, the phases of their deliberation"<sup>276</sup>.

### **The Biographical Approach: Definitions, Advantages and Pitfalls**

The biographical method was slowly accepted as an acceptable method in History. In the introduction to *L'épuisement du biographique?*, François Dosse explains: "From its origins, the biography has been conceived as being distinct from History". In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has little been used<sup>277</sup>, even if it became more and more commonly used at the turn of the century. Biographical studies became fashionable in the late nineteenth century: several important African American scholars or publishers published numerous biographical anthologies or encyclopedias. Probably to redress oversights, some publishers particularly wished to present the lives and work of black women. The first attempts to write

<sup>272</sup> What one calls in French "le vécu".

<sup>273</sup> Broqua and Marche, *L'épuisement du biographique ?*, 9.

<sup>274</sup> Georges Duby, as cited by Anne Levallois, 134.

<sup>275</sup> Broqua and Marche, 9.

<sup>276</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, 6 as cited in Aileen S. Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 6.

<sup>277</sup> François Dosse, *L'épuisement du biographique?*, xiv. See pages xi- xvi.

about black women were made in the 1890s, when Major Monroe wrote *Noted Negro Women* in 1892 and Gertrude Mossell published *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* in 1894. Having women's names mentioned in the famous *Who's Who in Colored America* was a slow process though. In the early twentieth century, only a handful of women appeared in it.

In the scholarship, the biographical method was nevertheless often decried, being deemed improper or lacking interest. The 1986 article published by Pierre Bourdieu, an eminent French scholar, threw opprobrium on this method<sup>278</sup>. In it, he spoke about the "illusion" of the biographical mode. His article fostered what Broqua and Marche called the "exhaustion" of the biographical mode at the beginning of the 1990s and from the mid-1980s to the 2000, the biographical approach was regarded with mistrust, before undergoing a revival in the 2000s. Several scholars such as Eleni Varikas, Nathalie Heinich, Guillaume Marche and Vincent Broqua have tried to prove its worth and to explain the reasons for its revival.

Eleni Varikas considers that the biographical approach is critically useful to understand the impact of gender on constructions of social relations of power. Indeed studying women's everyday life and experiences is crucial for historians to understand gender-related issues<sup>279</sup>. According to Varikas, the major goal of the biographical approach is no longer to submit women's social experience to ready-made analysis but on the contrary to elaborate analysis from women's social experiences. Because "women" as a group has been reified and objectified, the present challenge for feminists is now to consider women 'as scientific objects'<sup>280</sup>.

In 2010, Nathalie Heinich tackled the question to prove once and for all that Bourdieu had in fact wronged himself on the question of the biographical approach<sup>281</sup>. For Heinich, Bourdieu has "enmeshed himself into the illusion of an illusion" by saying that a life narrative was 'only' socially constructed and therefore artificial, misleading and illusory<sup>282</sup>. In her mind, the biographical method enables readers to "understand the way a journey is experienced by a traveller"<sup>283</sup>. For her, the biography, the "biographical tool" enables the reader to understand the underlying *reasons* for the experiences of the subject<sup>284</sup>. She thinks

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<sup>278</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, « L'illusion biographique ». In: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. Vol. 62-63, juin 1986. « L'illusion biographique » : 69-72. doi : 10.3406/arss.1986.2317.  
[http://www.persee.fr/doc/arss\\_0335-5322\\_1986\\_num\\_62\\_1\\_2317](http://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1986_num_62_1_2317)

<sup>279</sup> Eleni Varikas, 47. According to her, this is why the biographical historical approach has been often selected to study women.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Nathalie Heinich, « Pour en finir avec l' 'illusion biographique' », *L'Homme*, 2010/3. N° 195-196 : 421-430.  
<http://www.cairn.info/revue-l-homme-2010-3-page-421.htm>.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 424-425.

<sup>283</sup> Heinich, 424-425.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 426, italics hers.



that as long as historians strive to listen to such life narratives, the biographical approach offers particularly rich narratives<sup>285</sup>. Like Heinich, I believe that the primordial question that biographers should ask themselves is not only: “to what extent is this narrative truthful or accurate, manipulated or artificial or purely rhetorical? The question should also be : “In which contexts were these writings produced, published, under which form ? Was it written by a third party, did the autobiographer write it spontaneously, or were they asked to do so? Was it the result of an interview?”<sup>286</sup> Like Heinich, François Dosse, Vincent Broqua and Guillaume Marche have also aimed at debunking the attacks on the biographical approach. In the introduction to *L'épuisement du biographique?*, Dosse explains that the biographical genre was criticized because of its “hybrid character” and was deemed for a long time as a “sub-genre”, suffering from “opprobrium because it was thought to lack reflection”. This despised genre has nevertheless met public success, proving that it responds to a desire which transcends the fashions of the time<sup>287</sup>. For example, since the 1980s, specialists of African American History in the United States adopted the biographical method and devoted their energy to crafting encyclopedias on black women to correct women’s invisibility in the scholarship. For instance, Darlene Clark Hine has widely worked on African American women and has edited several collections and books<sup>288</sup>. Dosse, Broqua and Marche have pinpointed the recent revival of the biographical mode in Social Sciences. François Dosse indicates that the biographical mode has become more and more widely utilized in History<sup>289</sup>. Dosse demonstrates that this “quest for identity” has not disappeared but has been fragmented into a myriad of ‘biographems’ which no longer need to be linked together”. On the contrary, he points out that the plurality of identities has now become necessary<sup>290</sup>. The biographical mode has become plural and this plurality can be found in the method chosen by biographers themselves, who are now prone to write “choral” biographies<sup>291</sup>.

This dissertation aims to offer a gallery of portraits – a “choral biography”. This interpretive collective biography present the thoughts, attitudes and the lives of a number of women – who had dissimilar occupations – from distinct social and regional backgrounds. I chose to pen a collective biography because it is an innovative and a very efficient manner to

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>287</sup> François Dosse, xii.

<sup>288</sup> See Darlene Clark Hine ed., *Black Women in America*. Second Edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), see also *Notable Black American Women*, Vol. I and II, eds. By Shirelle Phelps and Jessie Carney Smith, Detroit: Gale Research Inc. Staff, 1992 and 1996). See also *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed., Beverly Guy-Sheftall, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

<sup>289</sup> François Dosse, *L'épuisement du biographique*, xiv.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., xv.

write History. I decided to do so after being inspired by Professor Silber and by the theory articulated by the French scholar Naomi Wulf in her article about the use of historical biographies in the study of Colonial America<sup>292</sup>.

First, I was inspired by the valuable advice dispensed by Professor Nina Silber during the Fall of 2012 when following a seminar entitled “United States History 1830-1900: Race, Region, Reunion and Disunion in US Historiography” at Boston University. Professor Silber had her students read John Stauffer’s *The Black Hearts of Men*, a collective biography which successfully illustrates the atmosphere and thoughts of a group of men (Gerrit Smith, James McCune Smith, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown) who had received little attention “as historical actors”. The biographical approach was especially interesting because a biography of four to five people living in a given historical period enables readers to learn about people’s contrasting and/or similar viewpoints and attitudes. For instance, Stauffer has pointed out:

These lines of influence and interconnectedness are revealed in form as well as in content in the story line that unfolds in the following pages, which weaves together the four men’s lives by highlighting one at a time. The overall effect is a kind of collective biography, a braiding together of four lives. Only by changing perspectives, listening to multiple voices from different social groups and vantage points, is it possible to understand how racial identities get defined, blurred, and remade<sup>293</sup>.

Professor Silber convinced me that this method could effectively help me present and confront the attitudes and ideas of people in a given period. Because it presents the thoughts of different historical actors, a collective biography can make readers realize the problems of a period and give the human experience a unique, central place.

Secondly, the work of the French researcher Naomi Wulf furnished additional arguments in favor of this method. In her seminal article, Wulf explained that writing a collective biography enables the historian to “photograph a transition period”<sup>294</sup>. Wulf explained that in the early 2000s, when one witnessed the “revival of the historical biography, [which was] not exclusively about the history of famous men, the question [was then] to look at famous or non-famous actors as witnesses of history, reflections, revelators of their time

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<sup>292</sup> Naomi Wulf, « Biographie et Histoire dans la Jeune République », *Transatlantica* [en ligne], 1. 2002.

<sup>293</sup> John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3-4. “The story of this interracial alliance offers a number of new insights and perspectives on antebellum reform and the Civil War era. It shows how Americans from different social groups interacted and shaped each other’s worldviews – something no other study of antebellum reform has done in depth. Additionally, the links between personal faith and behavior on the one hand and broader historical, political, and literary developments on the other hand have been inadequately addressed, especially among people from different social groups [...] Together these men also highlight the dynamic interactions between race, religion, class and gender among moral and social reformers”.

<sup>294</sup> Naomi Wulf, « Biographie et Histoire dans la Jeune République », *Transatlantica* [en ligne], 1. 2002.

[...] Biography is not about one single individual: it is about history as it is viewed through the eyes of the individual – or a group of individuals, who is no longer represented as a hero but as a sort of repository who happens to be at a crossroads of events, of trends and moves which his or her life narrative make more tangible”<sup>295</sup>. This method enables historians to present the stories of one person or several persons through a collective history. Wulf explained that biography liberates from the false opposition between the individual and society: the individual does not exist on its own, it exists only within a network of diversified social relations<sup>296</sup>. It is also a way of blending the personal and the collective, making sense of the personal history of individuals to narrate History<sup>297</sup>. This dissertation aims at doing precisely this. By analyzing the life writings of several women, I aim at exploring the trajectory of a group of middle and upper-class, educated women.

Naomie Wulf thought that this was an excellent means to efficiently narrate history: for her, collective biography offered a possible solution to the methodological problems of representativeness because it enables the historian to study a group of individuals who represent a social class, have the same job and share similar interests, as long as the historian precisely defines the place these representative men and women occupy in the social structure<sup>298</sup>. Wulf insisted that the biographical approach represents “a supplemental tool to New History”, as French scholar Le Goff claimed it in his study on Saint Louis<sup>299</sup>. According to Wulf:

The individual is at the same time a more or less critical actor and he is a product of its time. Telling his life experience brings light to the time period in two ways. The first one explicitly illuminates this period thanks to the observer who voluntarily chooses to propose a critical analysis of his or her contemporary society. The other way illustrates the tensions, conflicts and contradictions of its time, which are all essential to understand the time period; then the individual sort of embodies these tensions”<sup>300</sup>.

The biographical approach is the best way to analyze women’s lives, in particular in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. As mentioned before, autobiographical writings were ways for African American women – even more so than for white American women – to express their political voices and also to express their humanity and their womanhood. Studying their autobiographical writings is therefore crucial. The biographical

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<sup>295</sup> Naomi Wulf, 2.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>297</sup> Vincent Broqua and Guillaume Marche, *L'épuisement du biographique ?*, 13. Introduction. Vincent Broqua and Guillaume Marche have written “the biographical approach sheds light on History and society because individual and collective trajectories meet there”.

<sup>298</sup> Naomi Wulf, 4.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 6.

approach offers a privileged means to take women – who are denied the dignity due to an individual – out of the stranglehold of the category “*the woman*” – which is a mere symbolic – and not historical--, demographic or biological data<sup>301</sup>. Breaking through this abstract and heterogeneous category does not only mean acknowledging the right for women to exist as autonomous beings. It is also a sine qua non condition to think about women as a group susceptible to fight for their own liberation<sup>302</sup>. This is what these women did when they wrote about what being a black woman meant, or when they organized and ran women’s clubs and associations at the turn of the century. They were deeply aware of the need to organize as women and defend their very humanity and womanhood in order for them and their community to live freer lives.

Were the life stories of Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Fannie Barrier Williams representative of black women at the time?<sup>303</sup> The answer appears to be in the negative: most of these women had unique and unusual life trajectories. I will examine to what extent their lives were exceptional and see that these women were representative members of their social class.

The biographical method provides solutions to the problem of representativeness and offers an interesting way to study this group of women because as Naomi Wulf has convincingly shown, the biography offers a concrete look on History and gives a sense of the development of History that are often wanting in Cultural History”<sup>304</sup>. This methodology also enables researchers to draw a gallery of portraits of women at different eras. Broqua and Marche explain that because she used several autobiographies published at various ages and at different periods for her research, Anne Stéfani has efficiently managed to draw a fascinating panorama of white southern women activists during the 1950s and 1960s<sup>305</sup>. The biographical approach is also rich because its very nature allows readers to enter directly a historical period. François Dosse considers that the biographical method can offer privileged access to the dreams and anxieties of an era<sup>306</sup>. He provides the examples of the historian Walter

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<sup>301</sup> Eleni Varikas, « L’approche biographique dans l’histoire des femmes », *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, Le genre de l’histoire. Vol. 37, No. 1, 1988 : 41-56, 55. [http://www.persee.fr/doc/grif\\_0770-6081\\_1988\\_num\\_37\\_1\\_1754](http://www.persee.fr/doc/grif_0770-6081_1988_num_37_1_1754).

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>303</sup> Broqua and Marche, *L’épuisement du biographique*, 11.

<sup>304</sup> Naomi Wulf, 3-4. In this article, Wulf even answered the question about the difference in approaches between French and American researchers: “Recent French theories indeed meet certain American historiographical preoccupations on two main axes : that of mutations within intellectual history itself and that of the emergence of cultural history”.

<sup>305</sup> Marche and Broqua, *L’Epuisement du biographique ?*, 12.

<sup>306</sup> Dosse, *L’Epuisement du biographique ?*, xii.

Benjamin, who believed that the role of historians was to deconstruct the continuity of an era and show how the entire life of an individual reveals the reality of an entire era<sup>307</sup>.

Writing about women's lives enables historians to do microhistory. Microhistory – the study of people's or small groups' lives and experiences – presents numerous advantages. Like Marc-Antoine Kaeser who has worked on the biographical method, I believe that by plunging into the experience of actors of the past, by understanding how they perceived the world and the people around them, by considering how they understood the world in which they lived, one may have a better sense of the acts and motivations of these historical actors<sup>308</sup>. In "Microhistory, Biography, Fiction, The Politics of Narrating the Lives of People Under Slavery"<sup>309</sup>, Sue Peabody has contended that the great strength of microhistory is that

It joins the elemental power of a good story-telling – characters, plot, description – with a postmodern commitment to revealing the architecture of historical research and exposition. The microhistory works on at least three levels: 1) it recovers the lost stories of individuals' struggles; 2) it situates them in the wider macrohistorical context of their times; and 3) it illuminates the relations of power and conventions of representation to show why subalterns' stories are so very hard to reconstruct in the first place<sup>310</sup>.

Furthermore, contrary to biography – which tends to "take as its structure or 'plot' the life of an individual from birth to death and is often celebratory –, microhistory has major assets: it is more democratic: "It unveils the lives of the masses, often still largely unexplored. Until the mid-twentieth century, the subjects of biographies were typically members of the elite or exceptional people, exemplary people whose lives were cast in the heroic mode"<sup>311</sup>. According to Peabody, it also enables scholars to study historical actors whose lives are often largely unexplored: "Microhistory, which emerged first in Italy and was later adopted by French Annalists and their emulators in the United States, was a self-consciously political attempt to move beyond the limitations of previous social history trends, like cliometric history, to recover the lived experience of the underclass — the 'people without history'." Microhistory enables scholars to examine the lives of many different members of a given group<sup>312</sup>. I relied on the writings of both well-known and lesser-known women to conduct this

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<sup>307</sup> Dosse, xii-xiii. Moreover, for François Dosse, a biography gives the reader the illusion to have direct access to the past. Dosse, xii.

<sup>308</sup> Kaeser Marc-Antoine, « La science vécue. Les potentialités de la biographie en histoire des sciences », *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines* 1/2003 (n° 8) : 139-160.  
URL : [www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-des-sciences-humaines-2003-1-page-139.htm](http://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-des-sciences-humaines-2003-1-page-139.htm).  
DOI : 10.3917/rhsh.008.0139, 123. See also page 144.

<sup>309</sup> Sue Peabody, « Microhistory, Biography, Fiction », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 2 | 2012, mis en ligne le 25 mai 2013. URL : <http://transatlantica.revues.org/6184>.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 7. While cliometric historians, who typically analyzed vast arrays of serial data (e.g. fertility, morbidity and migration), shared the microhistorians' goal of writing a "total" history of the popular classes, they

study. According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, this methodology must be used alongside others yet is of interest because it considers historical actors in their particularity:

Biographical and anecdotal history [...] is low-powered history, which is not intelligible in itself and only becomes so when it is transferred *en bloc* to a form of history of a higher power than itself; and the latter stands in the same relation to a class above it. It would, however, be a mistake to think that we progressively reconstitute a total history by dint of these dove-tailings. For any gain on one side is offset by a loss on the other. Biographical and anecdotal history is the last explanatory; but it is the richest in point of information, for it considers individuals in their particularity and details for each of them the shades of their deliberations<sup>313</sup>.

The biographical method presents pitfalls though. According to Marc-Antoine Kaeser, in the 1970s, prosopography was an “ideal means to have access to the concrete reality of the context”<sup>314</sup> but it could be problematic because the subject served as a pretext to present the general historical background or because the context was given only to highlight the subject<sup>315</sup>. Another pitfall for the historian is the permanent tension between the subject’s personal history and to the more general context<sup>316</sup>.

Moreover, the biographer can sometimes have the illusion of giving the person their life back<sup>317</sup>. Biographers should be careful when writing since they will inevitably be forced to fill in the blanks of the narrative in a person’s life. As Sue Peabody has said, in that regard, the biographer becomes a writer and a narrator despite themselves.

The challenges posed to narrating, as opposed to merely researching, Furcy’s life, however, have also been numerous. As with any microhistory, most of the documentation is produced by people and institutions that are less interested in the perspectives of the slave than of the institutions they represent. It is the intersection of Furcy’s life with institutions like the church and the judiciary (and later, the press) that produces evidence about his life. Between this documentation, there are wide gaps of silence, which the historian must seek to fill carefully with informed speculation<sup>318</sup>.

Historians must also carefully question biographical sources and, as Kaeser suggests, must rely on other types of primary sources. Using other sources prevents the biographer’s voice from being stifled and “breaks the spell of identification.”<sup>319</sup> In this study, I combined autobiographical writings with writings of a different nature – for instance, newspaper articles, essays, speeches and professional correspondence, in which authors discussed the

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nevertheless tended to portray the downtrodden as the subjects of external forces: economics, disease, politics or religion. By casting peasants as the *subjects* of powerful narratives, the purveyors of microhistory deliberately cast these people as heroic resisters to official power”.

<sup>313</sup> “The historian loses in information what he gains in comprehension or vice versa [...] The historians’ relative choice, with respect to each domain of history he gives up, is always confined to the choice between history which teaches us more and explains less, and history which explains more and teaches less”, in *The Savage Mind*, published in 1966, 261-262, as cited in Aileen Kraditor, *Up From The Pedestal*, 6.

<sup>314</sup> Prosopography is according to the Merriam-Webster “a study which identifies and relates a group of persons or characters within a particular historical or literary context”. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prosopography>. Kaeser, 142.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>316</sup> Eleni Varikas, « L’approche biographique dans l’histoire des femmes », 48.

<sup>317</sup> Dosse, xiii.

<sup>318</sup> Sue Peabody, « Microhistory, Biography, Fiction », 6.

<sup>319</sup> Kaeser, 151.



role of women in society or the rights of the African American community – because these varied sources inform readers about these women’s goals and aspirations.

The ultimate limit for biographers, according to Peabody, is the ability to tell “the truth” about the past. Is there only one truth after all or are there many truths?, one may ask. There appear to be several “truths” about the past, and these stories or analyses constitute “truths” about the past. What is more, the multitude of viewpoints form the wealth of the past. Analyzing the viewpoints of different historical actors is the best way to understand a historical period and History more generally<sup>320</sup>. In any case, biographers – historians or mere writers – must be truthful. As François Dosse has shown, “The biographical genre implies the existence of an implicit pact of veracity, similar to Philippe Lejeune’s autobiographical pact”<sup>321</sup>.

Biographers almost unavoidably relate to one’s subject when they write a biography. Kaeser explains that biographers often confront their own personality to that of their subject. Each historian is confronted to this in their work, whether this work is based on autobiographical writings or not – this is reinforced and perhaps more obvious when a scholar uses the biographical approach. When research is carried out on autobiographical documents, the feeling of intimacy – because it can transform into a form of identification – constitutes a risk<sup>322</sup>. On this topic, Varikas has demonstrated that identification is no longer an inevitable aspect in the work process but a state which the biographer must reach while constantly subjecting her own subjectivity to that of the subject<sup>323</sup>. Interestingly, Varikas was convinced that biographies were to a greater or lesser extent autobiographical<sup>324</sup>. According to Varikas, women biographers writing the biography of a woman were often looking to write a new self-definition – no longer founded on patriarchal norms but on women’s experiences<sup>325</sup>. For some feminists and scholars, the nature of the relation between the biographer and the subject of the biography is a complex one. Scholars believed that they sometimes found themselves directly involved in these unequal social relations of power<sup>326</sup>. As mentioned earlier, there is always a personal aspect to consider when one studies biographical sources. Speaking about the link

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<sup>320</sup> Sue Peabody, « Microhistory, Biography, Fiction », 10. Yet as Sue Peabody has pointed out, historians must acknowledge the limits to their research: “Historians today share the objectivists’ aim of telling the truth about the past, yet following the postmodern turn, we also doubt the capacity of *any* historical narrative to be fully objective, if only because, through the selection of topic and argument, our stories are necessarily limited. Therefore, from the very outset, our histories are embedded in relations of power by virtue of the topics that we select to research, not only the ways that we tell those stories.”

<sup>321</sup> François Dosse, *L’épuisement du biographique ?*, xv.

<sup>322</sup> Kaeser, 150.

<sup>323</sup> Eleni Varikas, 49.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>325</sup> Varikas, 51-52.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 48.

existing between biography and psychoanalysis, Anne Levallois believed in 2002 that biographers somehow speak about themselves in the biography they pen. Biographers are those “who – through their reading and analysis – give life to the text and to the archival documents at their disposal, and as rigorous or meticulous their method might be, their sensitivity is not only palpable in their work but it also brings the individual under study to life”<sup>327</sup>. For this reason, some scholars wondered whether the biographer of women must be a woman herself<sup>328</sup>. I do not believe that one has to be a woman in order to write the biography of a woman yet I think that biographers are often drawn to their subject in a personal way – because of their personal history or because they share the same gender, race or social class<sup>329</sup>. According to Varikas, empathy is often largely created because both the biographer and the subject belong to the same social class<sup>330</sup>. While social class may represent a starting factor, gender or race may be others. In the Preface to *L'épuisement du biographique*, François Dosse argued that biographers necessarily maintain a personal relationship to their subjects and evolve in a context where the boundaries between their world and the world of the subject are sometimes in some respects blurred<sup>331</sup>. To fight against potential subjectivity, Dosse evokes the possibility for the biographer of « losing one's identity » and insists on the importance of « maintaining a certain distance »<sup>332</sup>.

Having detailed the methodology used in this study, I will now examine the childhood experiences of these women, analyze how they built their gender, racial and regional identities in order to understand their respective personal history and to get a better understanding of their future fights – be they for the African American community or for women in general.

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<sup>327</sup> Anne Levallois, « Le retour de la biographie historique, L'histoire et la psychanalyse s'y rejoindraient-elles ? », *L'Harmattan, L'homme et la société*. 2002/4, n° 146 : 127-140. DOI : 10.3917/lhs.146.0127. <http://www.cairn.info/revue-l-homme-et-la-societe-2002-4-page-127.htm>. Last consulted 17 November 2015. 139-140.

<sup>328</sup> Eleni Varikas, 46.

<sup>329</sup> I did sympathize with the fate of the women under study and reacted to certain situations I read about with indignation probably partly because I am a woman. As Michelle Duster – Ida B. Wells's great-granddaughter – has said, I believe that “there is a common experience between women of African descent in particular, and all women in general”. Michelle Duster, *Ida From Abroad: The Timeless Writings of Ida B. Wells from England in 1894*, (Chicago: Benjamin Williams Publishing, 2010), 134.

<sup>330</sup> Varikas, 48.

<sup>331</sup> Dosse, xiii.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

## Chapter 2. Building Their Gender, Racial and Regional Identity

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Exploring the early lives of these women is fundamental to understand their life trajectories and their future fights. Getting a sense of the way these women's gender, racial and regional identities were built during their childhood helps twenty-first century readers get a better understanding of their struggles. In their life writings, most women of this study naturally evoked their early years, their family life and their origins. The amount of information available differs from one woman to another: some women such as Mary Terrell or Ida B. Wells devoted several pages to their childhood while others only penned a few lines, as in the case of Fannie Williams or Anna Cooper. In their life writings, these women gave information about their ethnic origins, spoke about their parents and relatives, evoked the importance of religion growing up and alluded to their relationships with representatives of the opposite sex. To speak about their early lives, these writers adopted different strategies: they mostly relied on their own memories and some women additionally relied on family stories and oral accounts made by family members. For instance, the 77 year-old Mary Church Terrell depicted the young girl she was in the 1860s and 1870s thanks to stories her parents or relatives told her. Relying on her own memory and her family's stories, she portrayed a chatty, curious and energetic young girl. She remembered that she was sometimes scolded by the teacher at school because "it was utterly impossible for [her] to keep still"<sup>333</sup>. These stories – which are subjective and potentially flawed by her faulty memory – nevertheless enabled her to present herself in a specific manner and to share with her forebears the picture of the young person she was.

### 1. Parentage and Influences

Frances Barrier Williams was born free in 1855 in Brockport, New York in a free family of color<sup>334</sup>. Fannie was very light-skinned and had "beautiful, wavy brown" hair

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<sup>333</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 13. "As a child, I talked a great deal and was never quiet of my own free will and accord, if I could find anything to do, which I generally did, or could discover anybody to talk to".

<sup>334</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography", the *Independent* (July 14, 1904). "My mother was born in New York State and my father in Pennsylvania." and "my parents and grandparents were free people".

“which any woman might be proud [of]”<sup>335</sup> and could easily have been mistaken for white. She belonged to the educated middle-class of the North, both her parents had attended school and were educated<sup>336</sup>. Her father Anthony Barrier, originally from Pennsylvania, “moved to this Western New York village when he was quite a boy” [in 1839] and became a respected businessman in the town, owning a barber shop while Harriet Barrier kept house and taught the local Sunday school<sup>337</sup>. Anthony J. Barrier and Harriet Barrier were married on 8 April 1849<sup>338</sup>. The pair had three children: George A., born in 1850, Ellen Barrier – nicknamed Ella —, born in 1852 and Frances – nicknamed Fannie –, born in 1855. As of 1872, George worked with his father and took over the barbering business of his father in 1874<sup>339</sup>. Fannie’s father was a respected and influential man in the community and an active Republican<sup>340</sup>. The Barriers were well-accepted by the white community of Brockport. Fannie testified that the Barriers were the “only colored family in the church, in fact, the only one in the town for many years, and certainly there could not have been a relationship more cordial, respectful and intimate than that of our family and the white people of this community”<sup>341</sup>.

A few years later, on 10 August 1858, and thousands of miles away, a light-skinned girl, Annie Julia Haywood, was born a slave in North Carolina<sup>342</sup>. Her father, probably George Washington Haywood or Fabius Haywood, belonged to a famous family of slave

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<sup>335</sup> *The Brockport Republic*. 6 December 1894. The article was surely written by a white Brockport resident. See <http://brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/people/misc/Barrier%20-%20Williams%20family%20newspaper%20chronology%2004-04-16%20FINAL.pdf>. This document was prepared and published by the Brockport Community Museum and edited by Williams G. Andrews.

<sup>336</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 5. “They both attended the common schools and were fairly educated”.

<sup>337</sup> His obituary in the local newspaper read : Mr. Barrier “was an honest, conscientious and straightforward man, well meriting the widespread respect which he commanded”, *Brockport Republic*, 28 August 1890.

<sup>338</sup> Anthony J. Barrier was born in Philadelphia in 1824. He died in 1890. Harriet Barrier was born in Sherburne, Chenango County in the State of New York in 1835. Fannie Barrier Williams said: “My father [...] was married to my mother in this town and three children were born to them; he created for himself a good business [...] was able to take good care of his family.”

<sup>339</sup> In 1874, Fannie’s father started another business in the coal trade. Barrier became an associate of a certain “Page” and bought lots to store the coal. The business thrived until 1876, when “the coal firm of Barrier & Page has sold out its business and dissolved partnership”. See the *Brockport Republic*. <http://brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/people/misc/Barrier%20-%20Williams%20family%20newspaper%20chronology%2004-04-16%20FINAL.pdf>. Robert married Miss Delia Pelham of Detroit on 27 May 1874.

<sup>340</sup> For instance, he was friends with Frederick Douglass, who lived quite close – in Rochester, New York. In January 1874, the Barriers received his visit at home. Douglass befriended the Barriers and the Whites – Harriet Barrier’s sister and brother-in-law – when he lived in Rochester.

<sup>341</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 5-6.

<sup>342</sup> In one of the forms she filled in in 1930 at the age of 72, she wrote that she was born on August 10, 1860 though. Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1. Nevertheless, Cooper is commonly believed to have been born in 1858.

owners in North Carolina and was probably Annie's mother's slaveowner<sup>343</sup>. The circumstances of her birth – probably in sexual abuse – influenced her vision of white Southerners in her later writings. What is surprising though is that Anna Julia Haywood bore the name of her genitor, as if he had acknowledged paternity of the children he had had with Hannah Stanley. Her mother, Hannah Stanley Haywood, born in 1820, had received very little education<sup>344</sup>, worked as a domestic and raised her children alone<sup>345</sup>. Anna Haywood had two brothers, Rufus, born around 1836 and Andrew, born in 1848<sup>346</sup>.

Ida Bell Wells-Barnett was born four years later during the Civil War, on July 16, 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi to parents who were successful, literate, skilled former slaves<sup>347</sup>. Her father, James Wells – nicknamed Jim—, had been “taught the carpenter’s trade and [her] mother was a famous cook”<sup>348</sup>. Her father “was the son of his master, who owned a plantation in Tippah County Mississippi, and one of the slavewomen, Peggy”. He never knew the “cruelties of slavery”, as he “was never whipped or put on the auction block”, Wells explains. Jim Wells was most probably a Master Mason<sup>349</sup>. Ida’s mother, Elizabeth Warrington of Virginia, was a “cook to old man Bolling, the contractor and builder to whom my father was apprenticed. She was born in Virginia and was 1 of 10 children. She and two sisters were sold to slave traders when young, and were taken to Mississippi and sold again”. Like many other former slaves, Wells’s mother made efforts to locate her relatives back in Virginia after the Civil War: “She often wrote back to somewhere in Virginia trying to get track of her people, but she was never successful. We were too young to realize the

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<sup>343</sup> It is believed that either George or Fabius Haywood was her biological father. George Washington Haywood (1805-1890) was a State attorney in Wake County in North Carolina. Fabius Haywood (1803-1880) was a physician.

<sup>344</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C. Box 23-1. “Tho[ugh] untutored she could read her Bible and write a little. It is one of my happiest childhood memories explaining for her the subtle differences between q’s and g’s or between b’s and l’s”.

<sup>345</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond : The Life and Writings of Anna J. Cooper*. Vol. XLIX. (Smith College Studies in History, 1982), 8. Hannah Stanley Haywood was fifty years old at the time of the 1870 census. See also Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction*, First edition 2007, (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 14.

<sup>346</sup> Leona Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne*, 8. In 1870, Andrew lived with his mother and his wife Jane. Andrew and Cooper’s mother were illiterate, except the young Annie, who was then 12 years old. Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1. Form. Rufus Haywood was a North Carolina Band leader – of the Orchestra Stanleys Band – he died in 1892. Andrew Haywood was also a musician and organizer of state militia who also served during the Spanish American War. He died in 1918. See also Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction*, 14.

<sup>347</sup> Ida’s parents were free in the antebellum era.

<sup>348</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 7.

<sup>349</sup> James Wells’s friends assisted Ida and her siblings in 1878 after the yellow fever epidemic. Many middle and upper-class African American men belonged to the Masons. Mary Church Terrell also made a reference to it in her autobiography. Fannie Barrier Williams also made allusions to Masons or secret societies in her article dealing with religion.

importance of her efforts, and have never remembered the name of the county or people to whom they “belonged”<sup>350</sup>. Along with white ancestry, Wells was told that she had Native American origins. Her mother often used to say that “her father was half Indian, his father being of full blood”<sup>351</sup>.

Mary Eliza Church Terrell was also born free in the South – in Tennessee – in 1863 to free parents who had both been slaves<sup>352</sup>. Her mother Louisa Ayers Church was a successful hairdresser and entrepreneur while her father was a businessman who had made a fortune in real estate<sup>353</sup>. Mary Terrell had diverse racial origins. She used the information passed down to her when she was young to document her ethnic origins, explaining for instance that her grandmother on her mother’s side was dark-skinned and that she had Malay blood on her father’s side – her great-grandmother Emmeline being supposedly “a Malay princess”. To complete her account on her parentage, Mary Church Terrell relied on a letter she had received years earlier from a white man from Arkansas who presented himself as the son of Rosalie, the white woman with whom Terrell’s paternal grandmother Emmeline had been brought up with. Mary Terrell explained that her great-grandmother, the mother of her grandmother Emmeline had been sold in America as a slave at the age of 14<sup>354</sup>. Her daughter Emmeline was brought up with her owner’s daughter Rosalie, a white woman – “more as two sisters than as mistress and maid”<sup>355</sup>. Emmeline successively lived in Virginia, Holly Springs, Mississippi, and Arkansas but also in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she learned French. Her mother Louisa Ayers Church was light-skinned: her mother’s “complexion [was] the shade of a beautiful, yellow peach”<sup>356</sup>.

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<sup>350</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice*, 8. Wells probably did not have time to obtain this information from her mother because of her sudden, unexpected death.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>352</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 1. Terrell expressed her gratefulness for having been born free: “The fates were kind to me in one particular at least. I was born at a time when I did not have to go through life as a slave. My parents were not so fortunate, for they were both slaves. I am thankful that I was saved from a similar fate”.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Robert Church is often called the first black millionaire of the South. He became wealthy after the 1878 Memphis yellow fever epidemic. Mary Terrell was immensely more privileged than other women in this study.

<sup>354</sup> The facts which she described had only been brought to her attention recently. Terrell did not say much on this man – did not even provide his name —, did not even indicate his name or the date at which she received this letter yet she copied it in her chapter. The letter read: “You know we Southerners take much pleasure in watching the advancement and prosperity of even the younger generation of those whose parents were connected with our household and children’s growth. I hope this little memo of history will be interesting to you”.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>356</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Being a Colored Woman in the United States”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 26.



Terrell was born into a biracial family on her father's side. Her father, Robert Church was the son of Captain Charles B. Church<sup>357</sup>, a white steamboat captain born in Virginia. Robert Church was so light-skinned that he could easily be mistaken for white: "My father was so fair that no one would have supposed that he had a drop of African blood in his veins. As a matter of fact, he had very little"<sup>358</sup>. Her father never tried to conceal his racial identity and his bonds with his white family: "I learned about my father's antecedents in a very matter of fact, natural sort of way". Like Cooper, Mary Church was related to a white slaveholding family of the South. Yet while Cooper's father was a white slaveholder who had maintained no relationships with his illegitimate children, "Captain" Church, the patriarch of the family, maintained cordial relationships with his illegitimate son – who had married a woman of color and with his children. Mary considered Charles Church as her grandfather and he regarded her as a granddaughter. Her father indeed regularly took the young Mary on visits to the "Captain"<sup>359</sup>. Robert Church apparently treated Robert almost like a son: "My father explained the relationship existing between Captain Church and himself, and told me how kind Captain Church had always been to him. "He raised me from a baby," said he."<sup>360</sup>. From the very start, it is clear in Terrell's account that contrary to Cooper, she positioned herself as an African American woman with strong affectionate ties with the white members of her family. Ties between the black and white members of the family were tight indeed. According to Terrell, her father considered James Wilson, a man who was "as fair as a lily", who had "eyes as blue as the sky", and who was the "perfect specimen of the Caucasian as could be found anywhere in the world" as his brother<sup>361</sup>.

Mary Terrell belonged to a family of Southerners who had been torn apart during the Civil War: while "Captain" Charles B. Church, a slaveholder in Memphis, Tennessee, had apparently sided with the Union during the Civil War, his own son – James Wilson, whom Terrell affectionately called "Uncle Jim" – sided with the Confederacy<sup>362</sup>. Terrell thus

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<sup>357</sup> His name was Charles B. Church (1812-1879). He was married to "Emmeline", Mary Church Terrell's grandmother (ca.1815-1851). Dennis Brindell Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin. *Fight On! Mary Church Terrell's Battle for Integration*. (Clarion Books: New York, 2003), vii. See Mary Church Terrell's family tree.

<sup>358</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 2.

<sup>359</sup> The 77-year-old Mary Church Terrell recalled visiting her grandfather in his beautiful home: "It was [my father's] custom to take me in his buggy to see Captain C. B. Church Sunday mornings when I was four or five years old. Captain Church always welcomed me cordially to his beautiful home". She "simply adored him", she recalled. In her life-writing, she emphasized her father's physical resemblance to "Captain" Charles Church. She remembered telling her father.

<sup>360</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 1-2.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 12. She claimed that she affectionately called him "Uncle Jim".

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 2 and 11-12, italics mine. Terrell wrote that "Jim was forced to fight in the Confederate Army very much against his will", though she unfortunately did not explain why he was forced to join the forces of the South, above all when his own father sided with the Union. "I have heard my father say that Captain Church's sympathy was on the side of the Union, even though he was a slaveholder, and that he suffered financially

belonged to a family who had had two diverging views about the South, slavery and the sectional conflict<sup>363</sup>.

Two children Mary (1863-1954) and Thomas (1867-1937) were born of the union between Robert Church and Louisa Ayers, his second wife<sup>364</sup>. When Mary Church was young, the couple decided to separate and this deeply affected her. She openly discussed it in her autobiography, indicating that her parents' divorce was a source of pain and shame: "My mother and father separated when I was quite young. This pained and embarrassed me very much. In those days divorces were not so common as they are now". Divorce was indeed deemed as improper in the 1870s and the young Mary seems to have felt the disgrace of her mother then: "no matter what caused the separation of a couple, the woman was usually blamed" in those days<sup>365</sup>. She and her brother Thomas were placed under the custody of their mother who then owned a successful shop in the city but they also regularly spent time with their father<sup>366</sup>. Robert Church later married his third wife, Anna Wright Church (1856-1928)<sup>367</sup> on 1 January 1885, when Mary was 22 years old<sup>368</sup>.

These women grew up in very different circumstances, evolved in distinct family structures, had various social and economic backgrounds and came from diverse areas of the

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because he took this stand", 2. "Although he was usually cool and calm, nothing riled him so quickly as a reference to what he considered that painful and disgraceful episode in his life", 11.

<sup>363</sup> Moreover, like Wells, Mary Church grew up in a family where Freemasonry was important. "Captain Church" was probably a Free Mason since she said in passing that pictures of Captain Church dressed as a Knight Templar were visible in her home. See Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 2.

<sup>364</sup> Her father Robert Reed Church married three times. He first married a slave Margaret Pico during slavery days in 1857, with whom he had one daughter, Laura Church Napier (1858- ??), Mary's half-sister. Fradin, *Fight On!*, 102. Mary Church Terrell did not acknowledge this marriage in her autobiography, she seemed to consider that her father had married twice, not three times. See page 12: "Until my father married a second time [i.e. in 1885], for many years our entire family consisted of my mother, father, brother and myself."

<sup>365</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 10.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., After the court granted her the custody of both Thomas and Mary, Louisa Ayers Church "sold her store in Memphis and moved to New York City, where she established another on Sixth Avenue which she managed with brilliant success".

<sup>367</sup> She was "a black school principal in Memphis and a well-known pianist who had given piano lessons to Mary", Fradin, *Fight On!*, 37. They had two children together: Robert Reed Church Jr. (1885-1952) and Annette Church (1887-1975).

<sup>368</sup> When the patriarch, Robert Church, died after a short illness on 29 August 1912 at the age of 73, he left a fortune to his wife and children. Thomas and Mary both equally inherited "forty houses and twenty-three plots of land" he had owned. Fradin, *Fight On!*, 102. Yet, some family difficulties erupted. The daughter of his first wife Margaret Pico — Laura Church Napier — claimed part of her father's inheritance. Even if she "did not try to get any of the inheritance of Mary Church Terrell and her brother Thomas", Napier sued Anna Wright Church, Church's third wife, "who had received the mansion at 84 South Lauderdale Street and other valuable properties", *Fight On!*, 102-103. The case went up to the Tennessee Supreme Court. Napier lost her case. Nevertheless, Anna Wright Church spent part of her fortune in this legal procedure and, in 1917, sued her own children, Robert Jr. and Annette, deeming that she had spent most of her money trying to defend an inheritance that they would someday obtain. See page 105. Mary Terrell was not affected by these claims and maintained amicable relationships with the Church family during this period. Fradin, *Fight On!*, 102-105.

country. These women also often grew up in families who taught them about their origins and encouraged them to cherish their family history.

### **The Importance of the Heritage of Slavery Growing Up**

All of these women were aware of the American history of bondage while growing up and were often told family stories from slavery time. For example, in one of her autobiographical writings, Anna Cooper linked her own birth to American slavery and to the memory of the Civil War, saying that she came to the world during the Civil War serving “many an anxious slave’s superstition to wake the baby up and ask directly ‘which side is goin’ to win the war?’ Will the Yankee bet the Rebs and will Linkum free de Niggers?”<sup>369</sup>.

Similarly, Ida B. Wells also grew up hearing stories about slavery days. Her mother “used to tell us how she had been beaten by slave owners and the hard times she had as a slave”. Ida’s father resented the violence committed on his own mother by her “mistress”. This memory was so painful that “He didn’t refer to slave days very often”<sup>370</sup>. About Ida’s grandmother Peggy and her former mistress Miss Polly, James Wells said: “I never want to see that old woman as long as I live. I’ll never forget how she had you stripped and whipped the day after the old man died, and I am never going to see her. I guess it all right for you to take care of her and forgive her for what she did to you, but she could have starved to death if I’d had my say so. She certainly would have, if it hadn’t been for you”<sup>371</sup>.

Mary Church Terrell experienced the heritage of slavery quite differently from Wells, probably because of her light skin color but also because she grew up in a tolerant area in Ohio after the age of 6. It was there that she first realized that her skin was of a different color than those of other young girls and it came as a shock:

While we were reciting our history lesson one day, it suddenly occurred to me that I, myself, was descended from the very slaves whom the Emancipation Proclamation set free. I was stunned. I felt humiliated and disgraced. When I had read or heard about the Union army and the Rebel forces, I had never thought about my connection with slavery at all. But now I knew I belonged to a group of people who had been brutalized, degraded, and sold like animals. This was a rude and terrible shock indeed.<sup>372</sup>

As an adult, in an article entitled “Being A Colored Woman in the United States”, Mary Terrell spoke about the shock she experienced:

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<sup>369</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1.

<sup>370</sup> “The only thing I remember about my father’s reference to slave days was when his mother came to town on one of her annual visits [after slavery]. She and her husband owned and tilled many acres of land and every fall brought their cotton and corn to market. She also brought us many souvenirs from hog-killing time”, *Crusade*, 9.

<sup>371</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 10.

<sup>372</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 20-21.

I remember distinctly the first time it dawned upon me with irresistible, crushing force that there was something radically, painfully wrong with the color of my face. After that incident it was borne in upon my mind more and more that this difference in complexion between me and the strong, white group which owned the world, the flesh and other things too numerous to mention would cause me a great deal of trouble if I didn't watch out.<sup>373</sup>

Terrell explained having first felt “confusion and shame” at the thought of “measuring arms with these white children whose ancestors have always been free”, yet she insists that the shock was short-lived, for Terrell “recovered [her] composure” and asserted her identity as the daughter of pre-war free African Americans. She “resolved that so far as this descendant of slaves was concerned, she would show those white girls and boys whose forefathers had always been free that she was their equal in every respect. At that time I was the only colored girl in the class, and I felt I must hold high the banner of my race<sup>374</sup>. Some time later, Terrell recovered from the shock when she learned that slavery was a long story in the history of the world.

When I grew older, however, the stigma of being descended from slaves had lost its power to sting. For then I discovered that with a single, solitary exception, and that a very small one, no race has lived upon the face of this earth which has not at some time in its history been the subject of a stronger. [...] Holding human beings in slavery seems to have been part of the divine plan to bring out the best there is in them. In being descended from slaves, therefore, I learned that my group and I are no exception to a general rule. This fact not only comforted and consoled me, but it greatly increased my self-respect. I felt I had the right to look the world in the eye like any other free woman and to hold my head as high as anybody else<sup>375</sup>.

As Jean Marie Robbins has explained,

The idea that blacks were simply the latest in a long line of victims of slavery was a powerful coping narrative for Terrell, it allowed her emotional distance from the shame and stigma of slavery and became a source of strength and determination. This realization was a pivotal moment in the development of Terrell's identity, as it is for many black children<sup>376</sup>.

Because they reminded these women of their heritage of slavery, mothers and grandmothers were often role models as well. Terrell's grandmother was a very important feminine figure for Mary because she embodied resistance to slavery<sup>377</sup>. She kept in tender

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<sup>373</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Being A Colored Woman in the United States”, in *Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*. Black Thought and Culture, Alexander Street Press, Alexandria, Virginia, 2004. Last accessed October 2012, 26.

<sup>374</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 20-21. Fannie Jackson Coppin lived a similar experience at school. Like Terrell, she felt that she represented the whole race when she studied at Oberlin and therefore, had to be flawless: “I never rose to recite in my classes at Oberlin but I felt that I had the honor of the whole African race upon my shoulders. I felt that, should I fail, it would be ascribed to the fact that I was colored, *Reminiscences of School life, and Hints on Teaching*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jacksonc/jackson.html>, 15.

<sup>375</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 21.

<sup>376</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women's Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens in the Progressive Era, 1890-1910”. Loyola University Chicago, 2011. Ph.D. Diss. [http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/99](http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/99).

<sup>377</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 10. “In complexion she was very dark brown, almost black, with a straight, shapely nose and a small mouth. In her manner she was quiet, refined, and reserved”.

regard her grandmother, whom she affectionately called “Aunt Liza”. The figure of Terrell’s courageous, dignified grand-mother appears to have had the greatest influence on her. Her grandmother Liza could seldom tell the end of her stories about slavery days because the young, impressionable Mary often started crying<sup>378</sup>. Of all the stories her grandmother told her about her life in bondage, the one in which she had threatened her master to death when he was about to whip her made the biggest impression on Terrell<sup>379</sup>.

Likewise, Susie King Taylor enjoyed listening to her grandmother’s stories. As Catherine Clinton indicates in the introduction of Susie King Taylor’s book, Taylor “was descended from a long line of proud females who passed on their stories to their daughters and instilled in them a sense of pride in heritage that was not dimmed by generations of bondage”<sup>380</sup>. Women of African descent passed on stories of resistance from mothers to daughters. The figures of uncompromising women deeply inspired their daughters and instilled them with racial pride.

I will now analyze how these writers spoke about their parental figures in their narratives. The paternal and maternal figures undoubtedly shaped these women’s opinions of men and women and their understanding of gendered-based attitudes. Many women of this study greatly admired their father, whom they often portrayed as bold and courageous, – in brief possessing the characteristics of manhood – whereas they tended to depict their mother figures as frail, religious, gentle and nurturing beings – in short, as purely feminine beings, possessing the necessary qualities to be regarded as “true women” according to Victorian standards.

## **The Importance of Paternal Figures**

Most of them praised both of their parents but for possessing different qualities<sup>381</sup>. For example, like many women of this study, Maritcha Remond Lyons attributed traditionally

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., “‘Never mind, honey,’ she used to say to comfort me, ‘Gramma ain’t a slave no more.’”, 11. Terrell could not explain why the pain that discovering that her grandmother had once been a slave was greater than for her parents: “It nearly killed me to think that my dear grandmother, whom I loved so devotedly, had once been a slave”.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 11. She threatened him to “knock your brains out with this here chair”. Terrell wrote that her grandmother said that the master “never c[a]me a step nearer”. See also page 41.

<sup>380</sup> Susie King Taylor, xxi. Introduction by Catherine Clinton.

<sup>381</sup> Fannie Williams did not say much about her family in her writings but it is possible to assert that she maintained close relationships with members of her family and frequently visited her parents in Brockport. Williams often used the opportunity to deliver lectures in the area. For example, she delivered a lecture in 1898 at the First Baptist Church entitled “What can she do?”. *New York Sun*. 14 July 1898. Reprinted in <http://brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/people/misc/Barrier%20-%20Williams%20family%20newspaper%20chronology%2004-16%20FINAL.pdf>. She was present when her father Anthony Barrier suffered from a stroke in 1890. Fannie and her husband had just entered Anthony Barrier’s store in Brockport when her father was taken very ill. He collapsed in his barber shop and died eight



feminine qualities to women and traditionally masculine qualities to men. Maritcha Remond wrote: “My faithful father, my wonderful mother! Never can I adequately express my obligations to them. They practically ‘made over’ a sickly, peevish, unproposing girl into a woman with a new lease of life”<sup>382</sup>.

Many women indeed held their fathers in high esteem in their narratives. For instance, the father figure in the Remond family naturally possessed masculine qualities, he was “ambitious and enterprising” which enabled him to run a successful business in Salem, Massachusetts, and Newport, Rhode Island<sup>383</sup>. Maritcha Remond Lyons expressed her gratitude to her father Harry Albro in the very first pages of her autobiography published in 1928, saying that he had shaped the type of woman she had become: “This simple essay is also an expression of the very tender regard in which I hold my father. He, at the cost of personal sacrifice, enabled me to attain what was regarded in my youth as a liberal education for a woman”<sup>384</sup>. According to her, writing this autobiography was for Lyons the possibility to write the book her father had never been able to pen.

Ida B. Wells stressed her father’s courage in her memoir. She strongly admired her father, whom she depicted as a courageous man who stood up to his former master, Mr. Bolling. Very early, the family story that was passed on to Wells was that of courage. After being intimidated during the elections of 1867, Jim Wells “said nothing to anyone...and went across the street and rented another house. When Mr. Bolling returned he found he had lost a workman and a tenant, for already Wells had moved his family off the Bolling place”<sup>385</sup>. In

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days later. *The Brockport Republic*. 21 August 1890. Harriet Barrier died in her home on Erié Street at the age of 79. *The Brockport Republic*, 22 April 1915. It is unclear if Williams was present in Brockport when her mother died on 16 April 1915. I was unfortunately unable to find any letter or document received or sent to or by her parents. As Wanda Hendricks has emphasized, “in spite of of her public celebrity, Barrier Williams left few personal papers”, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, ix.

<sup>382</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, 5. She described a family full of love: when speaking about her parents in their old age (both lived up to their eighties) “Each was happy in the consciousness of loving and being loved. The home spirit they inculcated has descended a precious legacy unto the third generation”.

<sup>383</sup> He raised his children in order to make them employable people: “the girls were educated fully up to the standards of the time and had trades”, while the sons “received all the training then available”. This family displayed typical “Yankee thrift and ingenuity and simplicity”, 58.

<sup>384</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays: All of Which I Saw and Part of Which I Was, An Autobiography*, Introduction, Williamson Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NYPL. The autobiography contains 8 chapters and is 81 page-long. Maritcha Lyons was born on 31 May 1848. Their family lived in Brooklyn. Her sister, Pauline Lyons Williamson, worked as a nurse and lived in California at some point. Their parents were Mary Joseph Marshall and Harry Albro. The pair got married on 14 May 1840. They were friends of the white Remonds. Maritcha was named after the woman who was a personal friend of her mother’s. Pauline Lyons Williamson married Mr. William Edward Williamson, “a cabinet maker of Plainfield”, Maritcha Lyons, *Memories*, 29. She had a son, Henry Albro, who later worked at the New York Post Office. This son became an “enthusiastic Prince Hall Mason”. Pauline “was married a second time to a Mr. Marshall Kingsland of Morristown, New Jersey. They had one son, James Lyons, who also worked at the New York Post Office. Chapter 5, 29.

<sup>385</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 8-9.



her autobiography, Ida Wells constructed the image of her father as a politically committed man “interested in politics” who did not hesitate to brave the Ku Klux Klan to defend his political views: “I heard the words of the Ku Klux Klan long before I knew what they meant. I dimly knew that it meant something fearful, by the way my mother walked the floor at night when my father was at a political meeting”<sup>386</sup>. Wells’s admiration for her father’s bravery undoubtedly played a part in the young girl’s character building.

Contrary to Ida Wells of Holly Springs, Mary Church grew up in an affluent black family of Memphis and was raised with a sense of belonging to an influential white family of the South as well. Her father Robert Reed Church was the son of a white entrepreneur of Memphis who worked his way up from being a dishwasher to being a steward. She built the image of a man who despite his handicaps – his illiteracy –, possessed the necessary qualities and intelligence to get out of potentially dangerous or uncomfortable situations. He “had a certain innate culture which men deprived of educational opportunities, as he was, rarely possess.” He was also a talented businessman who possessed “ability of high order”<sup>387</sup>.

On the subject of her father, Terrell’s narration may give the impression that she had let herself be carried away. Her sentences flow and seem to follow her stream of consciousness. Since Mary Church Terrell seemed to be aware that her account may appear as biased to her readers, she acknowledged the “temptation” of picturing her father only in a favorable light. Several times in her life writing, Mary Church defended herself from painting him with partiality: “I am not trying to paint him as a saint, for he was far from being one. He had the vices and defects common to men born at that time under similar circumstances, reared as a slave, and environed as he was for so many years, from necessity rather than choice, after he was freed”<sup>388</sup>. Like Wells, she painted her father as a courageous and even bold man: “He was one of the most courageous men I have ever known.”<sup>389</sup> she says, providing two examples of his “fearlessness”. Both times, it appears that Robert Church was the victim of racial attacks. Depicted as either bold or unaware of danger, he challenged peril: first, in 1866, during what was termed the “Irish riot”, he was: “shot in the back of his head at his place of business and left there for dead. He had been warned by friends that he was one

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>387</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 5-6. “He taught himself to write his name legibly – even beautifully -- but he never wrote a letter in his life to my knowledge. I do not know whether he would not or could not do this, but he always had an employee or a member of his family write his letters for him”. Mary Terrell also remembered him as a loving father who enjoyed spending time with his children and cooking nice meals for her.

<sup>388</sup> “It is a great temptation to say much about my father, for he was a remarkable man in many respects”.

<sup>389</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 6.

of the colored men to be shot.” yet ignoring his wife’s advice, he went to work<sup>390</sup>. The second time, “one winter” when it was extremely cold – Terrell does not provide the exact date –, Robert Church was stoned when he was in his sleigh and decided to use his revolver to defend himself<sup>391</sup>. As Robbins has argued, “Terrell paints her father as fearless and daring as he continued to build his financial empire in the midst of this hostile atmosphere”<sup>392</sup>. As Terrell suggested, it is a wonder that no harm was done to him. Perhaps his extraordinary status as the wealthiest black man in Memphis prevented his assassination or his lynching<sup>393</sup>. Terrell sang her father’s praises, portraying him at times as a loving and protective father who regularly took her on trips, at times as a shrewd and experienced businessman, and also as a very strict man whose reactions she dreaded as an adult woman. She nevertheless pointed out his bad qualities in her autobiography. This “reserved” man could also be bad-tempered and could easily get angry. “My father had the most violent temper of any human being with whom I have come in contact. In a fit of anger he seemed completely to lose control of himself, and he might have done anything desperate in a rage.”<sup>394</sup>. Despite his faults, Mary Terrell’s father figure remained important throughout her life, until his death in 1912.

Women whose fathers were white Southerners tended to remember their fathers in a less flattering light because of the domination they had exerted onto their mothers under slavery. For example, Anna Cooper did not hold her father in high esteem or maintain a tie with him, considering him as little more than her biological father or genitor. She once wrote: “I owe nothing to my white father beyond the initial act of procreation.”<sup>395</sup>. In fact, she always referred to him in harsh terms in her articles<sup>396</sup>. As an adult, in one of the forms she filled in in 1930, Anna Cooper made it very clear from the start that she had always fought her battles alone, without her father’s help: “Presumably my father was her master, if so I owe him not a *sou*”<sup>397</sup>.

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 7. “They and my mother begged him not to leave his home that day. But he went to work as usual in spite of the peril he knew he faced. He would undoubtedly have been shot to death if the rioters had not believed they had finished him when he fell to the ground.”

<sup>391</sup> This was a dangerous thing to do for an African American man at the time, for he risked retaliation.

<sup>392</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 83.

<sup>393</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 7-8.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>395</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1. Form for Negro College Graduates, seemingly filled in in 1930.

<sup>396</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 8. “The fact that her mother was her father’s slave was “resented by the slave mother and obviously by the daughter”.

<sup>397</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. She used the French term “sou”, which in French means a very small amount of money and is equivalent to a cent or a penny. Italics mine.

Grandfathers or parents' male friends also played key roles in the childhood of these women. For many memoirists, the figure of the grandfather was that of a slave or a free man who had courageously achieved freedom or ceaselessly worked for the country and for its values. Grandfathers also sometimes played the role of surrogate fathers. For instance, because she was raised by her grandfather, Elizabeth Johnson Harris speaks extensively of her beloved "dear old grandpa" who raised her like his own child<sup>398</sup>.

## The Importance of Feminine Figures

While they attributed qualities of courage and boldness to their fathers, many women of this study often placed their mothers on a pedestal and described them as models in their life writings. For example, while she described her father as her genitor, Anna Cooper emphasized her mother's position of weakness when she implied that the latter had probably been forced to have sexual intercourse with her master. Cooper used positive terms to depict her mother in her writings: "My mother's self sacrificing toil to give me advantages she had never enjoyed is worthy of the highest praise and undying gratitude"<sup>399</sup>. Her mother apparently rarely spoke about Anna's father, being "always too modest and shamefaced ever to mention him"<sup>400</sup>, thus giving the impression that Cooper grew up under the exclusive care of her mother, in a very feminine atmosphere. As Leona Gabel has indicated in her biography of Cooper, "her silence on the subject [of her father] and the note of bitterness in her allusion to her white father [is] in sharp contrast to her praise of her slave mother"<sup>401</sup>. In one autobiographical writing, she indicated that her mother "was a slave and the finest woman [she] ha[d] ever known"<sup>402</sup>. Similarly, Mary Church Terrell praised her mother in her account and dedicated the first words of her life writing to her. Likewise, Fannie Barrier Williams explains that Harriet Barrier was a model for her and her sister, Ellen Barrier. As an active woman, she sent her children to school, instilled religious values in them, was active in the local Church and served in the Woman's Baptist Foreign Mission Society in the 1890s.<sup>403</sup> Mrs Barrier was also a teacher of the Bible class in the Sabbath school in Brockport for

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<sup>398</sup> Elizabeth Johnson Harris, *Life Story*, see Chapter 3 : Life with her Grandparents, Daily Chores.

<sup>399</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Form for Negro College Graduates, seemingly filled in in 1930. To the question: "birthplace of father": she answered "I do not know". Her mother was born in Raleigh, North Carolina.

<sup>400</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>401</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 8.

<sup>402</sup> Anna Julia Cooper. Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>403</sup> *Brockport Republic*. 6 February 1890. Harriet was elected solicitor. In April 1890, she was elected as Vice President of the Women's Foreign Missionary society of the First Baptist Church. April, 10, 1890. <http://brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/people/misc/Barrier%20-%20Williams%20family%20newspaper%20chronology%2004-04-16%20FINAL.pdf>.

approximately twenty years<sup>404</sup>. She also defended the cause of Temperance: in 1895, she was elected as the officers of the WCTU of Brockport and was active until 1906<sup>405</sup>.

Several women used apparently contradictory terms to speak about their mothers in their life writings, often initially portraying them as frail, sociable and nurturing beings and yet strong at the same time. At the beginning of her account, the figure of Mary Terrell's mother is that of a fragile yet deeply loving and maternal being. Indicating that she could never have been born, Terrell highlighted the despair in which her mother found herself at the time. Her mother apparently attempted to commit suicide before her birth, or so she was told:

TO TELL THE TRUTH, I came very near not being on this mundane sphere at all. In a fit of despondency my dear mother tried to end her life a few months before I was born. By a miracle she was saved, and I finally arrived on scheduled time none the worse for the prenatal experience which might have proved decidedly disagreeable, if not fatal, to my future<sup>406</sup>.

Like Cooper and Wells, Mary Church Terrell very often expressed deep affection for her mother in her life writings and never ceased to praise her, saying that she was an example of modesty, good will, generosity and cheerfulness<sup>407</sup>. She “irradiated good will and cheer upon all with whom she came into contact. She was a ray of sunshine all the time, and nobody, no matter how depressed he might be, could withstand the infection of her hearty, musical laugh”<sup>408</sup>. For Remond Lyons, the mother figure was also that of a physically weak woman. Mary Joseph Lyons was a “slightly formed, slender woman”, a “frail little” being “whose body deemed almost too fragile for the lofty soul it enshrined” who nevertheless brought “love, attention and harmony” and “ruled by love rather than by fear, still remaining loyal to the essentials of her puritanical inheritance”. She was depicted as being the family and community “advisor, comforter and friend”<sup>409</sup>. Maritcha Remond Lyons also emphasized certain feminine qualities in her mother. Drawing a portrait of her mother as a sociable and entertaining host for her many and “frequent” guests, she highlighted for instance that she mastered the art of small talk and was always pleasant. She was a “social woman whose

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<sup>404</sup> *Brockport Republic*. 31 October 1895. She was already a teacher in 1895. In 1899, 25 “ladies who have been, or who are now, connected to her Bible class” came to her home one evening to offer her presents to thank her for getting involved for the class. *Brockport Republic*. December, 7, 1899. The article informed citizens about the departure of Mrs Barrier to her daughter's residence in Chicago, for a prolonged stay. It is unclear how long she had served as teacher though. Another article published in *The Brockport Republic* refers to a repast given to honor Harriet Barrier for her 20 years of service. “Class Reunion”, The date is unclear, yet it probably occurred in 1915.

<sup>405</sup> *Brockport Republic*. 19 September 1895. Her sister Mrs White was also elected. In 1906, at the age of 71, Harriet was “chosen to represent the Union [WCTU] at the State Convention” which was to be held in Norwich in October 1906.

<sup>406</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 1.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. On her grand-mother, see page 11. She had been so affected by slavery that when Mollie asked her to speak about it, she seldom could finish her story, being too emotional.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>409</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, 58.

company was as agreeable as when she was a maiden, with her it was possible to have a good time without ‘furs and feathers’. One could expect to “pass many delightful hours with her in the home where courtesy, sociability and friendliness reigned supreme”<sup>410</sup>. In addition, Several women presented their mothers as disciplined, religious and loving women. Ida B. Wells described her mother, Elizabeth Wells, who worked as a domestic worker, very positively and as a “deeply religious woman” who “won the prize for regular attendance at Sunday church, taking the whole brood of 6 to 9 o’clock Sunday school the year before she died.”. This disciplined woman taught her children how to accomplish domestic duties but she also encouraged them to study hard at school.

She taught us how to do the work of the home -- each had a regular task besides schoolwork, and I often compare her work in training her children to that of other women who had not her handicaps. She was not 40 when she died, but she had born eight children and brought us up with a strict discipline that many mothers who have had educational advantages have not exceeded”<sup>411</sup>.

It seems that while these women used Victorian terms to present their mothers and speak about their qualities, they showed that these role models were in fact active, independent and enterprising women who did not embody the passive, fragile Victorian woman. They often emphasized their mothers’ courage and keen sense of initiative. For instance, Maritcha Remond Lyons praised the courage of her mother when they had to flee New York City after the terrible riots of the summer of 1863: “Mother’s fortitude never relaxed nor did her courage fail”<sup>412</sup>. Similarly, Drumgoold’s female family figures highly prized their independence and adopted strategies to defend it. Kate Drumgoold’s mother did not relent before adversity. After being sold in Georgia and being separated from her children, she came back to get them at the end of the war, defying her former master who refused to free her offspring. A Bureau agent named Major Bailey, helped her reach Brooklyn with her family<sup>413</sup>. At the end of her account, Drumgoold rendered a vibrant tribute to her mother<sup>414</sup>.

Likewise, according to Terrell, her mother possessed the necessary qualities to be a successful career woman. Mary Church’s mother was a respected and energetic

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<sup>410</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, 45.

<sup>411</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 9-10.

<sup>412</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories*. Chapter 2, 10. Her mother had been closely “associated” with the Remonds, serving as clerk “in their confectionery store in the summer, and instructor of the daughters in the various branches of hair work during the winter”. Lyons, 10 and 59. The bonds were very strong: Maritcha Remond was mother’s bridesmaid and I am named for her”. Maritcha’s mother had also been a pupil of “Martel, a noted New York French hairdresser”.

<sup>413</sup> See Kate Drumgoold, *Women’s Slave Narratives: Annie L. Burton and Others*. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006).

<sup>414</sup> Kate Drumgoold, *Ibid.*, 133. “And there is another dear one that God will help me to remember with all the love and gratitude, and it makes me feel sad as I have to speak of her once more [...] She was the one that brought me on to this lovely city, and that is my mother, who has gone to that land of song where there is no more of sickness or sorrow and where God will dry every tear”.



businesswoman who undoubtedly played a central role in the shaping of Mary's personality. Her mother's ability to combine the roles of mother and businesswoman definitely influenced Mary's conception of gender roles. Her mother was indeed a very progressive woman. Economically independent, she was the first of the pair to succeed financially thanks to her business – Robert Church building his fortune some time later: “To her husband Mother was a helpmeet indeed, for it was she who bought the first home and the first carriage we had”. As Robbins has shown, after separating from her husband, she lived on her own and ran her own business in a fashionable district of Memphis – which was quite popular<sup>415</sup>. “Her mother's ability to provide the family's first house, her decision to divorce, and continued success as an independent woman shaped Terrell's sense of what women could accomplish even in a male-dominated society”<sup>416</sup>. This very talented and fashionable hairdresser showed Mary that women were capable of many achievements both as women, mothers and as professionals.

Moreover, many women of this study grew up in families where it was perfectly acceptable for a woman to be active socially and politically. Many of these women's mothers were involved in their local communities. For example, Ida Wells's and Fannie Barrier's mothers ran the Sunday schools and were appreciated members of their communities. The mothers of these writers were often politically active and committed to high ideals of liberty. These women's upbringing often awakened in them a strong sense of race consciousness. Some were born in families with a heritage of activism. For example, Charlotte Forten or Maritcha Remond Lyons were born in families where there was a strong tradition of political activism. Lyons's mother was described as a patient, discreet yet hard-working and committed partner to Maritcha's father in the Underground Railroad<sup>417</sup>. She was a lover of freedom who “transmitted to her children the priceless heritage of a keen aspiration toward a higher plane of living”, as her daughter put it<sup>418</sup>. Being in contact with abolitionists during her childhood, growing up listening to stories of the family's engagement in the anti-slavery struggle sensitized Maritcha to the cause of those of her race who were kept in bondage in the

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<sup>415</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 9.

<sup>416</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women's Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 93.

<sup>417</sup> Maritcha Lyons, *Memories*, 46. Maritcha Remond Lyons (1848-1929). Maritcha's parents were Mary Joseph Lyons and Albro Lyons Sr.. The pair married in 1840 and the Lyons became involved in the abolitionist movement in the 1850s. They belonged to the Underground Railroad network – their house was a stop on the way to freedom. As a result, as a young girl, Maritcha was used to meeting runaways at home and listening to abolitionist speeches. Moreover, her mother was an important member of this network: “At anti-slavery meetings and conferences, mother was almost invariably present; not to agitate but to learn her duty in the premises”, 46. Both parents believed that helping refugees was a “duty lying next”.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. “In her soul burned an ardent thirst for lawful liberty, a devotion [to] the cult of individual freedom, unrestricted by race, sex or religion”.



South<sup>419</sup>. Similarly, Susie King Taylor's actions were part of a family tradition in liberation. Her forefathers had waged war during the American Revolution. It was also the case of one of Charlotte Forten's forefathers, James Forten Senior, who had also fought during the Revolutionary War<sup>420</sup>. Family traditions of resistance and struggle for black freedom were often passed on to these women. Consequently, these women's family influence helped develop their race consciousness since their early childhood.

The image of financially independent, active, politically committed and enterprising mothers undoubtedly shaped and influenced the views of these future feminists about the roles men and women could and should play in society.

These women generally developed close ties with their mothers throughout their lives. For example, Anna Cooper maintained a loving relationship with her mother as an adult and regularly wrote to her "dear Mother". For instance, in 1898, Cooper wrote a letter to her mother from Hampton Institute, telling her "Enjoy yourself and have a good time" with Mrs Gible, a friend she was staying with for some time. Another letter dated 1891 from Toronto reveals how affectionate – and perhaps even overprotective – Cooper was towards her mother: "Now be good and take care of yourself. [...] Let me know when you need anything more. I enclose a dollar for your picnic with Miss Hill"<sup>421</sup>. Cooper's admiration and love for her mother were so strong that Cooper later decided to honor her mother by naming one of the schools of Frelinhuysen University after her<sup>422</sup>.

Likewise, Fannie and Ella Barrier seemed to have been close to their mother. In the local press, it appears that Harriet Barrier visited her daughter Fannie in Chicago for long periods of time. In October 1895, Barrier temporarily stopped giving her Sunday classes

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 62. The Remonds were active abolitionists and free-soilers. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, the "zeal of this family grew in intensity" and they "never used products of slave labor" – such as sugar or cotton, molasses or rice. When they could, they used "substitutes or went without. They replaced cotton goods with silk, linen or woolen materials".

<sup>420</sup> He was a powder-boy.

<sup>421</sup> Letter dated 1898 and July 1981, Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C., Box 23-1.

<sup>422</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 7-8. It was named the "Hannah Stanley Opportunity School in memory of her mother", as Leona Gabel explains. See also the remarks made on Frelinhuysen University in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers and Letters*. eds., Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, 249. See also Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C.

because she was to visit her daughter in Illinois<sup>423</sup>. Harriet ended up staying a year at her daughter's place in Chicago<sup>424</sup>.

Despite her parents' divorce in the late 1860s, and despite the distance that separated her from her mother – Mary was in Ohio while her mother was in New York City —, Mary Church Terrell remained close to her. When she was young, Mary found a faithful confidant in her mother, often confiding her thoughts, pain and worries in her. For example, when she was in Europe in the late 1880s, she anxiously and impatiently waited for her mother's letters. Since Mary sought to maintain a symbiotic relationship, she had difficulties coping with the geographical distance. For example, on 14 September 1888, she notes having received a letter from her anxious mother after Mary had informed her that she was feeling sad and homesick<sup>425</sup>. She also expressed her deep affection for her mother, a person she knew would never be replaced in her life:

Her good letter was so kindly, so full of the heart of an affectionate mother worrying about her daughter's happiness, [when] being so far away from her. May God save her, spare her until I see her again. What would I become if my mother died? [...] I cannot even bear the thought of it. She said that if I was sad, and if I desired to go back to her place, I could [...] My own good mother! How much pain and suffering of all sorts she has had [in her life]. Yes, I know, my mother committed mistakes, she was not always right, but committing mistakes is quite natural. She was compelled to act as she did<sup>426</sup>.

Her diary entry, obviously written in times of difficulty – she was experiencing homesickness – reveals her consideration and value of her mother's experience but also her dependence on her. Another time in her diary, she expressed her affection for her mother: "As usual, I cried when I read the letter from my Mother – whom I love more and more"<sup>427</sup>. On 25 September 1888, Church missed her mother and desired to be able to be with her<sup>428</sup> but she also expressed her deep attachment and gratitude to both her parents: "How I love my mother. I also love my father who has done so much for me. I am very grateful to him because he has given me so much"<sup>429</sup>. She seems to wish to give as much proof of filial love to her father as

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<sup>423</sup> *The Brockport Republic*. 31 October 1895. She also used this opportunity to visit her son George in Detroit.

<sup>424</sup> Harriet Barrier came back from Chicago in November 1896. *The Brockport Republic*. 26 November 1896. After "receiv[ing] a hearty welcome from many friends", she probably resumed her work at the Sunday school. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to find the reason why Harriet stayed at her daughter's place for so long. It was common to stay several months at some relatives' but the length – an entire year – seems curious. 1895-1896 corresponds to a very busy period in the life of Fannie Williams. Perhaps Harriet Barrier dropped her engagements to join her daughter, who may have been experiencing personal difficulties – or not, it is difficult to say. Perhaps Fannie felt overwhelmed by her lecture engagements or by the recent controversy over her membership at the Chicago Woman's Club. She may also have been experiencing difficulties as a wife or as a woman.

<sup>425</sup> Mary Church. Diary in French, 19. "This morning, I received a letter from my mother, who was very worried after receiving my mail. I wrote it while I was feeling deeply sad, sorrowful and homesick. ».

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., Diary entry 25 September 1888, 40. "I wrote to my Mother today. I wish I could see her".

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

to her mother, as if she wished to re-establish the balance between her parents – who were separated. Her emotional dependence on feminine figures was so marked that when she was abroad for a long period of time, the 24 year-old Mary Church sought a reassuring feminine presence and attention. Her landlord, Mrs Schmitt, seems to have served as a surrogate mother for Mary in Paris. She liked her much: “She is so kindly. [...] I like her because she is like a mother to me”<sup>430</sup>. Years later, her attachment to her mother grew even stronger. Perhaps because Mary and her mother had suffered from their separation when Mary Church studied in Ohio while her mother was in New York City, both women seemed to have tried to make it for lost time during the rest of their lives<sup>431</sup>. For fifteen years, between 1896 and 1911, when her mother Louisa Ayers Church lived with the Terrells in Washington D.C., Louisa Ayers played the role of confidant and offered psychological support to her daughter. While Mary Terrell paid tribute to her patience and attentive listening, she expressed regrets for having burdened her mother’s mind so much during these years<sup>432</sup>.

Aunts, mothers’ friends or other protective figures also sometimes inspired these women. For example, one of Maritcha Remond Lyons’s main inspiring figures was her ‘aunt Susan’ who had a “mellow and sweet” heart. She admired her for her devotion to the community, saying that she displayed a “spirit of self-sacrifice, first for her family, next for her people by race extraction”<sup>433</sup>. This progressive woman definitely played an important role in the building of Maritcha’s self-image. Susan had “natural dignity that courted friendliness but rebuffed familiarity”. A deeply devout woman – “she believed in God all the more zealously” —, she always carried the “Bible, a few volumes of the less orthodox sermons,

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>431</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 115. Louisa Ayers Church lived with her daughter and son-in-law in Washington for fifteen years in her old age, before her death in 1911. Mary recounted: “In reviewing the period she spent with me, after she had passed away, it seemed to me that each of us had tried to make up for lost time by concentrating into those fifteen years all the devotion we could have shown each other during the time we had been separated. She was a great comfort, and in spite of physical affliction she was an unalloyed joy to us all.”

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 8. “If I was gloomy or worried about anything and went to Mother's room to talk matters over with her, [...] She had a way of really convincing me (and I am not so easily "convinced") that the matter was not so bad as I thought it was, that the prospects didn't begin to be as gloomy as I had painted them, and that everything would turn out all right in the end. As I look back upon my habit of confiding my troubles to my mother, I reproach myself severely for placing upon her mind and heart any burdens which she, herself, was not obliged to bear. It seems to me it was a weak and inconsiderate thing for a daughter to do. The only reason I can forgive myself for imposing my woes upon my mother was that she never seemed to let anything worry her at all”.

<sup>433</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories*, 59-60. Susan Remond (1814 - ?) was a successful businesswoman. She established a bakery at home in Salem, Massachusetts, and expanded her “mother’s enterprise as a pastry cook and confectioner”. Maritcha recounted that Susan’s kitchen was “a Mecca where gathered radicals, free thinkers, abolitionists, female suffragists, fugitives all sorts and conditions [...] found rest and refreshment for mind and body”. This “exceptional woman” ended her life living as a nun. See Juliet E.K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*. Second Edition. Volume 1, To 1865. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 175.

with files of *the Liberator* and *Anti-Slavery Standards*”<sup>434</sup>. Aunt Susan was not the only feminine figure who influenced Maritcha: her aunts Sarah and Caroline Remonds also inspired her deeply as able and enterprising women<sup>435</sup>. These women successfully started a business together before one of them left for Europe to live in a free country. Maritcha particularly admired Sarah Remond, who was, according to her, a “good woman, a refined woman” who started a “crusade” against slavery because she was “dedicated to freedom”<sup>436</sup>. Likewise, young Fannie and Ella Barrier were deeply inspired by their aunt Mrs Troy A. White, who was a figure of Temperance and a respected member of her community<sup>437</sup>. Along with their mother, this feminine role model undoubtedly played a role in the construction of their self-identity.

The study of black female intellectuals’ life writings suggest that they used a Victorian language to speak about their mothers and showed that their role models possessed the attributes of dual womanhood which Carlson has developed<sup>438</sup>. These women’s influential figures possessed numerous qualities: they were not only pious, feminine and gentle but they were also courageous, enterprising and hard-working. Undoubtedly, these images had an effect on these women’s self construction. As Jean-Marie Robbins has explained for Mary Church Terrell, “The stories Terrell heard about her mother and grandmother’s bravery, independence and competence in a male-dominated world contradicted the Victorian values that were widely seen as the Progressive Era middle-class woman’s ideal”<sup>439</sup>.

## Growing Up an Orphan

Ida B. Wells’s self-construction was quite different from that of other women of this study because she was orphaned from the age of sixteen. The Wells family lived happily in Memphis, Tennessee, before a dramatic event – the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 – crushed

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>435</sup> Maritcha had three aunts: Susan, Caroline and Sarah Remond.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 61. Maritcha was particularly inspired by Sarah Parker Remond (1826-1894), who was a famous abolitionist, lecturer, and a women’s rights advocate. Caroline Remond Putnam (1826-1908) was the daughter of Nancy Lenox, a cake maker and decorator, and John Remond, a merchant and caterer of Salem, Massachusetts. Susan, Caroline and Sarah’s brother was Charles Lenox Remond, who travelled with William Lloyd Garrison.

<sup>437</sup> *Brockport Republic*. March 22, 1900. “This woman will be missed because of her good works and her great influence upon those who met her”. Pamela R. White (1836- 1900) was Harriet Barrier’s only sister feminine role model. Born in 1836 in Sherburne, New York (like her sister), she married Troy A. White in 1868, got active in the WCTU in 1885 and remained an active defender of Temperance ever since. She also got engaged in charity work, first belonging to the First Baptist Church of the city and then becoming a Methodist – she was a member of the Free Methodist Church of the city. She died in Brockport in 1900, at the age of 64, and was survived by her husband Mr. Troy A. White, her sister Harriet Barrier, and her two nieces. Her eulogy shows how respected and beloved she was in the community.

<sup>438</sup> They were pious, gentle, pure while being active, working women involved in social work.

<sup>439</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 94.

this stability. In 1878, she was visiting her relatives in a nearby town when the news of her parents' death came. Ida Wells came back home despite the warnings and found that her parents and some of her siblings had died<sup>440</sup>. This event was a turning point that shaped the rest of her life. With the death of her parents, Ida Wells suddenly had to grow up and leave childhood behind. In her life narrative, Ida Wells depicted this traumatic episode as a moment when "life became a reality to [her]" and presented herself as a voluntary and courageous teenager willing to achieve the impossible for her siblings<sup>441</sup>. At the death of her parents, Ida Wells settled things up with the family Doctor and resolved to take care of her siblings<sup>442</sup>. Yet "the Masonic brothers", being their "natural protectors", offered to take care of James Wells' children<sup>443</sup>. As Joanne Braxton has explained, this episode raised the awareness of the young Ida of "her sexual identity as well as her social powerlessness". Since a young woman was not expected to act as head of her family, it was decided that the siblings should be dispatched in various families, while Ida, being considered "old enough", had to "fend for herself".

Yet, Ida Wells refused the Masons' solution and offered to take care of her siblings, therefore violating acceptable gender norms<sup>444</sup>. As Joanne Braxton has emphasized, "By demanding to be allowed to stand as the head of her family, Wells had unintentionally violated the racial and sexual etiquette of her community"<sup>445</sup>. Wells consequently appears in her narrative as an independent, energetic and modern woman early in her life, since her notions of duty to family "conflict[ed] with the conventional notions of ideal womanhood espoused by her community". Braxton commented on this episode by saying that Wells "accentuates her adolescent performance" and diminished "the importance of the actions of

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<sup>440</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 12. In the end, both her parents had died, some of her siblings as well. Only her sisters Annie and Lily, two brothers and herself survived. Wells explained that she almost died on that occasion: sick with fever for four days, she "drank hot lemonade" to heal.

<sup>441</sup> Wells recounted in her memoir: "That's exactly why I'm going home. I'm the oldest of seven living children. There's nobody but me to look after them now. Don't you think I should do my duty, too? [...] He said nothing more but made me goodbye as though he never expected to see me again", *Crusade*, 12.

<sup>442</sup> When she came to settle financial issues with the family Doctor, Dr. Grey – who happened to be white —, Ida Wells was suspected of maintaining improper relationships with him. In reality, her father – who had left some money in a safe at a bank – had asked the Doctor to get the money for his family. See *Crusade*, 13-14. Wells-Barnett remembered this traumatic episode decades later with dismay: "I am quite sure that never in all my life have I suffered such a shock as I did when I heard this misconception that had been placed upon my determination to keep my brothers and sisters together", 17.

<sup>443</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 16.

<sup>444</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 16. "When all this had been arranged to their satisfaction, I, who said nothing before and had not even been consulted, calmly announced that they were not going to put any of the children anywhere; I said the deal would make my father and mother turn over in their graves to know their children had been scattered like that and that we owned the house and if the masons would help me find work, I would take care of them [...] Of course they scoffed at the idea of a butterfly 14-year-old schoolgirl who had never had to care for herself trying to do what it had taken the combined effort of father and mother to do".

<sup>445</sup> Joanne Braxton, 113. This is a reference to the rumors which circulated about her at the death of her parents regarding the payment of the white Doctor.



her siblings in this crisis”<sup>446</sup>. In her autobiography, as Wells stressed her inexperience as a young woman, she automatically emphasized her courage to offer to keep her family together<sup>447</sup>.

Because it was one of the few acceptable solutions for women of the black middle-class, “Two of the [Masonic members], Bob Miller and James Hall” who “had been appointed by the Masons as our guardians” advised her to look for a position as a teacher at a “country school”. Wells then took the examination and obtained a position in a country school six miles from home. Even if she did not have any natural inclination for this occupation, Ida Wells submitted to these men’s decision. The period which followed was a difficult one for Ida Wells. At age 16, she was away from Monday to Friday evening and took care of her siblings on weekends<sup>448</sup>. She was assisted by relatives and by a friend of her mother’s later on<sup>449</sup>. Moreover, the Wells were confronted with financial difficulties but could fortunately count on their father’s savings<sup>450</sup>. Ida Wells endured the situation for one term yet it was so difficult that Ida’s aunt suggested that Ida seek a position closer to home. Ida secured a position at a school in Memphis, which proved less strenuous. Her mother’s friend took one of her siblings under her care and her brothers started working, and in 1882, Ida was able to continue teaching in Memphis and take care of her two sisters<sup>451</sup>. Years later, in 1886, the twenty-four year old Ida secured a stable teaching job in Memphis and was beginning to contribute to local newspapers.

Familial relationships grew increasingly complex in 1886-1887 when her aunt Fanny – who “had taken [her] two sisters with her as well as her own three children” – asked her to come to Visalia, California. Ida Wells did not wish to leave Memphis but – feeling indebted to her aunt for what she had done and receiving no appointments from schools in Tennessee<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 112.

<sup>447</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 17. “Of course as a young, inexperienced girl who had never had a beau, too young to have been out in company except at children’s parties, I knew nothing whatever of the world’s ways of looking at things and never dreamed that the community would not understand why I didn’t want our children separated”.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 18. “I came home every Friday afternoon [...] I spent Saturday and Sunday washing and ironing and cooking for the children and went back to my country school on Sunday afternoon”.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 17-18. Her paternal grand-mother Peggy, aged 70, came to Holly Springs to take care of Ida’s siblings yet became so ill that Ida’s aunt had to come along to fetch her. Later, Ida was able to secure the help of a former friend of her mother’s.

<sup>450</sup> She said ironically: “I was to be paid the munificent sum of \$25 a month [...] We lived on the money that my father had left”, 16-17.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 18. “After one term, I went to Memphis on the indication of the aunt who lived there. She had been widowed by the same yellow fever epidemic which took my parents, and she had three small children of her own to care for. [...] My mother’s sister, said she would take care of Eugenia. My two brothers were put to work on the farm and I took the 2 girls with me to Memphis”.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 24-25. “I had made a very pleasant place for myself in the life of Memphis by this time and *I didn’t want to leave*”. Her aunt “had given me help in the home with her when I badly needed it and had cared for my



– she accepted to come. After attending a meeting organized by the National Education Association in Topeka, Kansas, Ida arrived in Visalia, California, and started working in a small school there in September 1886. Moreover, Wells had misgivings about teaching there because she did not wish to work in an area where African Americans were segregated. She thought: “I was helping to perpetuate this odious state of things by staying and teaching at this school. I spent an unhappy day as these thoughts kept occurring to me. But again I determined to make the best of the situation I could not help”<sup>453</sup>.

Her diary reveals the sense of boredom she experienced in California. Wells missed the bustling and dynamic social and intellectual life of Memphis: “Dreary days” passed, even if she tried to “make the best” of a situation she “could do nothing about”<sup>454</sup>. On August 9, 1886, she confided: “I’ve no books, no companionship”<sup>455</sup>. After one month, feeling that she had her whole life in front of her – she was then aged 24 – and that she was too young to live in such a secluded place, she desired to go back to Memphis<sup>456</sup>. Her aunt agreed to let her go on condition that she took her two sisters with her. Indecisive, Wells hesitated many times before going to Kansas City for good<sup>457</sup>. She had misgivings because she felt indebted to her aunt, whom she refused to leave in California on her own. Ambivalent about this situation, she went through several crises and experienced anguish<sup>458</sup>. After many hesitations, Wells set off for the South<sup>459</sup>. Consequently, at the age of 24, Ida Wells left California and became the legal guardian of her sister Lily. During her twenties, Ida Wells felt isolated, melancholy and went through periods of depression. On March 20, 1887, she wrote in her diary “I am not

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two young sisters while I was teaching. I felt that I owed her a depth of gratitude and that I ought to go” [Italics mine]. See pages 24-25. Moreover, her aunt was isolated: “Not a dozen colored families lived there, and although there was plenty of work, it was very dull and lonely for my aunt and the five youngsters in the family. There was good work and good wages for her, and better health than back in Memphis, but no companionship; so I decided to stay with her”.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 25-26. She explained: “This school was a makeshift one-room building. The separation of the two races in school had been asked for by the colored people themselves, as I learned afterward, and they had been given the second-rate facilities that are usual in such cases”.

<sup>454</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 26.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 25. “When I told my aunt that it was even worse for me, a young woman, to have nothing to look forward to, as I was just beginning to live and had all my life before me, she said that if I returned I must take my two sisters with me. She knew very well that I had no money with which to do so”.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 103-104. See her diary entry dated September 12, 1886. She planned to leave for Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 106. She confided crying “half the night & all the morning”, asking God for guidance in her decisions: “Help me and bring success to my efforts I pray”.

<sup>459</sup> Ida asked Robert Church – Mary Church’s father – the necessary sum to pay for her train ticket. As mentioned earlier, Mary and Ida had met in July 1887. On July 13, 1887, Ida Wells reported meeting “Mollie” in Memphis, Tennessee, saying that she was “the most pleasant companion” she had met. See *Memphis Diary*, 149. Ida felt close to this young woman because their aspirations were similar: “She’s the first woman of my age I’ve met who is similarly inspired with the same desires hopes and ambitions”. Ida Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 150. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, they were not friends.

happy and nothing seems to make me so”<sup>460</sup>. On July 16, 1887: she assessed her 25 years of life and confides being dissatisfied: “within the last 10 years I have suffered more, learned more, lost more than I ever expect to”<sup>461</sup>.

## The importance of Religion Growing Up

Perhaps these women’s common point is that religion had paramount importance in their families. Most of them were Christians who were taught to revere God. Their writings reveal that faith and religion played an important – if not central – role in their lives. They set as an example qualities encouraged by the Christian religion such as piety, obedience, patience, universal love and religious deportment. Quite naturally, morality and purity are often at the heart of their narratives and discourse – on womanhood and on many other subjects.

Fannie Barrier Williams was raised in a Baptist family but in adulthood, she became a Unitarian, like her best friend Celia Parker Wooley<sup>462</sup>. In her autobiography, she explained that she was raised in a strictly religious family: her father served as Treasurer and Deacon of the Baptist Church of the city and taught a Bible class<sup>463</sup>. His wife Harriet was also active in the Church and taught Sunday School. In June 1890, Harriet Barrier was elected solicitor of the Woman’s Baptist Foreign Mission Society<sup>464</sup>.

Ida B. Wells was raised a Methodist. Ida Wells regularly asked for God’s guidance in her 1886-1887 diary. For example, on March 28, 1887 she wrote: “Father help me to have some influence over [Sunday school children at Avery] and use that influence for good! I want to be of use to them, show me the way, I beseech thee”<sup>465</sup>. Even if she sometimes admitted in her youthful diary that she had issues observing all Christian precepts, she strove to become a better Christian. On 16 July 1887, she regretted not being an exemplary

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>461</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 150. She defined the first years of her life as: “the first 10 or so far away, in the distance as to make those at the beginning in distinct: the next five are remembered as a kind of butterfly existence at school, and household duties at home”. She was conscious that she was only starting to live her life: “I’ve only begin to live – to know life as a whole with its joys and sorrows” and seemed to be impatient to live it.

<sup>462</sup> Fannie and S. Laing Williams both joined the interracial All Souls Church (Unitarian) in 1888. See “Fifty Years of Emancipation”, Meadville Lombard Theological School, Wiggins Library, Jenkin Lloyd Jones Collection. <http://www.meadville.edu/uploads/files/163.pdf>. See also Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders*, 68.

<sup>463</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 5. “My parents were strictly religious people and were members of one of the largest white churches in the village. My father, during his membership in discharge, held successively almost every important office open to a layman, having been clerk, trustee, treasurer and Deacon... He was four years teacher of an adult Bible class composed of some of the best men and women of the village, and my mother is still a teacher large Bible class of women in his veins Sunday school”.

<sup>464</sup> *Brockport Republic*, 5 January 1888 and February 6 1890, <http://brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/people/misc/Barrier%20-%20Williams%20family%20newspaper%20chronology%2004-04-16%20FINAL.pdf>. Last accessed July 2017.

<sup>465</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 138.

Christian. She used her diary as a place where she could reassert her resolutions to observe good conduct, indicating that she had decided to stop devoting her attention to superficialities such as fashion. In the Spring of 1887, she wished to focus her attention on Easter celebrations and not on dresses: “I thought of the beautiful Easter time coming, and my thoughts had strayed away from the true significance of the time to less important matters of dress”. She resolved not to “spend [... her] holy day in fun and pleasure for [her]self” and instead, “fast for my many sins of dereliction and remain home to work, watch and pray, and praise for the wonderful goodness of my Father to an unworthy servant”<sup>466</sup>.

She was also active in her local church. At some point, she opened a Sunday school for young men: “I went to Avery Chapel Sunday school & organized a class of young men or rather youths, just merging into manhood”<sup>467</sup>.

Likewise, Mary Church was a very religious young woman in the 1880s. In her diary written in French, she indicated that she enjoyed the sermons given at the American Church in Paris<sup>468</sup>. Nevertheless, Mary Church seems to have been more in tune with the teachings of the Reformed Church of Switzerland. On 28 October 1888 in Lausanne, she wrote:

I just came back from Church, where I listened to a good sermon, which I understood well from beginning to end. The Minister said that we should listen to one's conscience, that we should be the ones to decide what to do and what not to do. [...] One should not listen to other people's ideas and smother one's conscience. I like his ideas about liberty. He mentioned the Reformers, saying that they suffered in order for the Church to be free<sup>469</sup>.

In her European diaries, she regularly thanked God for his blessings. For instance, when her father allowed her to remain in Europe for another two years, she was grateful to him and the Lord<sup>470</sup>. Another time, she praised God for making her so fortunate and happy: “I am so happy, I feel blessed. For me, it is a real heaven on earth. God has guided me. I am sure of it”<sup>471</sup>.

Anna Cooper was perhaps the most devout Christian of this study. She married George Cooper, who had been trained as a Priest in the Episcopal Church<sup>472</sup> and remained an Episcopalian later in her life. She was a member of “St. Luke P. E.” – probably St Luke's

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 138-139. She attended Ashbury Methodist Church and praised the new Minister, Mr. Nightingale, saying that he was “certainly a splendid judge of human nature”.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 129 and 144 and 150.

<sup>468</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 23. She attended service at the American Church rue de Berri and enjoyed the sermon of Mr. Newell: “The sermon was good and I needed it”.

<sup>469</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*. Diary entry dated 28 October 1888, 52.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., diary entry dated 11 February 1889, 70.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>472</sup> George Cooper was ordained Reverend by Bishop Lyman on 4 June 1876. The pair married one year later in 1877. Cooper died on 27 September 1879 in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is buried in the City Cemetery in Raleigh, with Anna Julia Cooper. See <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=39777718>.

Episcopal Church – and declared actively contributing to the Church despite not holding service in Church<sup>473</sup>.

## **2. Girls Raised As Exemplars of Virtue and Morality**

Raised in strict observance of the Christian religion, these girls of the black middle and upper-classes were expected from a very early age to conform to the strict Victorian ideals of the time – that is, they were also expected to respect certain values such as piety, thrift, modesty, morality, etc. – and to possess certain qualities, deemed ‘feminine’ or ‘womanly’. They were were taught to behave in a strictly “proper” manner and were taught to abide by a strict etiquette from a very young age.

### **The Importance of Propriety and of Victorian Ideals Growing Up**

According to Stephanie Shaw, the qualities that black girls had to fulfill and that would ensure their social success were those of “cleanliness, politeness, respectability and thriftiness”. They also had to learn how to “shop economically, eat sensibly, dress tastefully, keep their good reputation clean, show good character, control oneself, display self-reliance and maturity”<sup>474</sup>. In one word, they had to display “moderation in all”. The qualities sought in a woman differed among black and white women. Glenda Gilmore has pointed out that “the prevailing image of middle and upper-class white southern womanhood in the post-bellum period devalued scholarship and outspokenness among young women” whereas “African Americans of both sexes entered Reconstruction valuing strength, initiative, and practicality among black women.”<sup>475</sup>. Subjected to these dual imperatives, girls had to find or be provided with guidelines. Parental presence was central but educational institutions also played a role in this process. Parents or teachers of African American girls deployed a lot of energy in trying to model girls’ character because they thought that the collective image of black womanhood was at stake.

Moreover, from a very early age, these women were expected to possess certain Victorian attributes in order to be considered as “feminine” or womanly. Like white women,

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<sup>473</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, Box 23-1. Form. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, situated on 1514 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Washington D.C., opened in 1879. Alexander Crummel served as Rector until his retirement in 1894.

<sup>474</sup> Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). See chapter 1, in particular pages 18-19. Shaw has studied three generations of black professional women who would later be race leaders, librarians, professors, teachers, or nurses. The first generation was composed of those born between 1858 and 1883, the second generation included those born between 1884 and 1909 and the third generation was composed of those born between 1910 and 1935.

<sup>475</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 36.

many women of color were expected to conform to strict Victorian attitudes, the only ones deemed appropriate and legitimate. Yet, contrary to white women, African American women had to navigate between the realities of their time – the difficult economic situations of their families found their root in slavery and racial discrimination – and the social injunctions made to women at the time – linked to their gender and class. Navigating through these injunctions was often an uneasy thing to do.

Perhaps because these women belonged to a small part – the educated, middle and upper-class – of the African American community, they felt that representing the community added a certain pressure on their shoulders growing up. As Shaw has explained, “the manners [of these girls] reflected not only their own character but that of the entire family”<sup>476</sup>. Parents and educators indeed believed that African American girls of “the better class” represented their families and by extension, literally embodied “the race”. In brief, their manners represented those of the black community. For instance, in her *Reminiscences* published in 1913, Fanny Jackson Coppin explains that she was aware that her exceptional circumstances – being a northern educated black woman in America – implied that she represented the whole community at Oberlin College, where she attended the Gentlemen’s Course in the 1860s<sup>477</sup>. Mary Church Terrell explained in her autobiography having felt the same impression while studying in Ohio as a child<sup>478</sup>.

Girls of the middle and upper-classes were often raised with Victorian ideals in mind. Parents – and mothers in particular — tried to instill Victorian qualities in their daughters and often exerted pressure and control upon them<sup>479</sup>. Young women subsequently did place the emphasis on the respect of Victorian ideals as well. For example, in her diary, it becomes very clear that Ida B. Wells was influenced by Victorian ideals of femininity. As DeCosta-Willis, the editor of her diary explains, “[h]er characterization of [her teacher] Miss Atkinson owes much to the ideology of puritanical Victorianism, propagated by white missionary teachers at

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<sup>476</sup> Stephanie Shaw, 17.

<sup>477</sup> Fannie Jackson Coppin, *Reminiscences*, 15. “I never rose to recite in my classes at Oberlin but I felt that I had the honor of the whole African race upon my shoulders”.

<sup>478</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, Chapter 3: “I am Sent North to School”.

<sup>479</sup> Shaw, 17. In her monograph, Shaw has provided the example of Charlotte Forten’s niece Angelina who was raised as a promising race leader. In the 1890s, her father, Archibald Grimké, provided her with numerous recommendations in his letters when he worked as an American consul abroad. He “reminded Angelina to respond to people who had written letters to her, to thank people for favors that they had provided, and to keep in touch with old family friends”. He wanted her to prove “a comfort” to the Grimkés and hoped that “she, like other “nice girls, *white and colored*, would always behave respectably”.

Rust University”<sup>480</sup>. In young adulthood, Wells did not totally break free from Victorian codes. As DeCosta-Willis has emphasized, her early style in her diary and in her early articles show how imbued with Victorian etiquette she was:

Like other nineteenth century, middle-class women of color, such as Maria W. Stewart, Charlotte Forten, and Frances Watkins Harper, Wells practiced Victorian social customs and conformed to a strict code of ethics. The code mandated that, like their white counterparts, black women be noble and refined; they had to ‘uplift’ the race (notably men) by eradicating vice: drinking, gambling, and fornication<sup>481</sup>.

Ida Wells praised her teacher for possessing certain qualities – deemed feminine, such as patience, docility. Miss Atkinson seemed to possess all of these qualities and Wells deeply admired her for this. In her mind, Mrs Atkinson, her music instructor represented a paragon of femininity.

So fair and pure, so divinely good, whose motions were grace & poetry personified [...] She seems so thoroughly pleasant, so bubbling over with an effervescence of youth, health, high spirits, cheerfulness and withal such an exuberance of vitality in every look or motion that every one is charmed without knowing why<sup>482</sup>.

Like Mamie Garvin Fields later, Wells believed that some teachers gave kinder attention to light-skinned pupils than to dark-skinned pupils<sup>483</sup>. At Rust University, her schoolfellow Annie was the Professor’s favorite because she possessed all the desirable qualities expected of a young woman at that time by white Northerners: she had an obedient and “docile disposition”<sup>484</sup>. This pupil of mixed ancestry was the favorite of Mr Hooper at Rust University because of her “obedient disposition”. “Her extreme tractableness and therefore easily controlled and her evident ladylike refinement” pleased the professors, whereas Wells was known to be “tempestuous and rebellious”. Wells often lamented the fact that she failed to live up to the standards imposed on her. She regretted lacking certain qualities: she explained that she showed “hard headed willfulness”, and regretted “the trouble [she] gave, [as well as her] disposition to question authority”<sup>485</sup>. These qualities – or lack

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<sup>480</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 76. Rust College was a HBCU founded in 1866 by the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is related to the United Methodist Church. Rust College was indeed administered by whites when Ida B. Wells attended it.

<sup>481</sup> DeCosta-Willis, *Memphis Diary*, 121.

<sup>482</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 78.

<sup>483</sup> See Fields, Mamie Garvin. *Lemon Swamp*, 47. Fields had the impression that only light-skinned pupils had the favors of the teachers: “One reason why I didn’t go to our private high school for Negroes in Charleston was that, back then, honors were always given to mulatto children, light-skinned half-sisters and brothers, grands and great-grands of white people. It didn’t matter what you did if you were dark”.

<sup>484</sup> She was the favorite, not because of her color – because others were fairer – and not because of her high intellectual powers. Wells wrote in her diary: “So I’ve come to the conclusion that it was her obedient disposition, her extreme tractableness, and therefore easily controlled and her evident ladylike refinement” that made Professor Hooper prefer her, *Memphis Diary*, 78.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



thereof – in nineteenth century America became useful to Wells over the years<sup>486</sup>. Yet as a young woman, she seems to have suffered from her temper and keenly felt the pressure to conform to Victorian expectations girls of the middle and upper-class felt at school or at home<sup>487</sup>. As Stephanie Shaw has shown, this type of social pressure was exerted upon middle-class African American girls and women<sup>488</sup>.

From a very young age, girls of color were constantly reminded of the importance of propriety whenever they were around boys and men. Their family members, mothers in particular, saw to it that they behaved in an acceptable manner. African American women very often did everything that was in their power to raise their daughters in a strict fashion, in order to instill in them a sense of responsibility, respectability, purity and morality.

Between 1865 and 1900, middle and upper-class black women were often urged to comply with the Victorian code of conduct and girls were reared to become future race leaders. They were raised with the sense that their mission was to promote racial uplift<sup>489</sup>. In *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*, Stephanie Shaw has explained that many middle-class black families were very strict about their daughters' attitudes and adopted rigorous child-rearing strategies. The individualistic impulse was reinforced by "a sense of mutual obligation among the women, their families, and the larger black community and had important collective consequences as well"<sup>490</sup>. Young black women were therefore taught to be particularly careful because their own individual acts would impact the entire community. Black families of the middle-class were particular about their daughters' upbringing because they wanted to instill them with a sense of self-worth and respectability. Importantly, they did not view Victorian ideals as incompatible with race work or public sphere work. On the contrary, they understood them as complementary.

As premarital sex or sexual relations out of wedlock were looked down upon by both men and women, African American parents of the middle-class were very careful that their

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<sup>486</sup> DeCosta-Willis, *Memphis Diary*, 73. "Wells is misrepresented and misunderstood. Although she often complains about such misrepresentation, she also accepts responsibility for her 'tempestuous, rebellious, hard headed willfulness' and her 'disposition to question authority'. Ironically it is the very qualities that problematize her personal relationships – her tenacity, rebelliousness, and disputatiousness – that will impel her to undertake, six years later, a courageous crusade against lynching". *Memphis Diary*, 73.

<sup>487</sup> Shirley Carlson, "Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era". *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Spring, 1992): 61-73, 68. Interestingly, Wells would later be considered as the perfect embodiment of this dual noble black womanhood which Shirley Carlson describes. Wells-Barnett was later "commended both for traditional 'feminine' qualities and for her intellect and service to the black community".

<sup>488</sup> Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. "These daughters "were prepared not just for work but for professional positions, activism, and leadership roles".

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

daughters retained unsullied reputations. In the early 1880s, when the 13 year-old Elizabeth Johnson was courted by a man from the local area, her grand-parents were very much concerned about respecting propriety and protecting their grand-daughter's respectability. Her grand-parents kept a watchful eye on her. She described this attentive supervision:

I happened to be well trained so as to keep myself in place, and never rushing out of my place, therefore though as a child, I continued to love - and with the right control of mind I kept my love - sign hidden and myself in the proper place for a child. But to my great surprise in two years later he called to see me. But I had to be excused as I was not yet receiving young men company, and I was compelled and willing to abide by the rules of my dear Grandparents regardless of the love on either side<sup>491</sup>.

Considering that she was too young to get seriously involved with a suitor, they advised the young man to wait patiently for her to be older:

Finally he made the second call - this time to the old folks, asking the privilege to visit the house, the old lady dear Grandmother seemed a bit willing, but Grandfather talked with him very nicely still he had him wait a while longer, as I was young and only a school-girl. So he went on and waited whether patient or impatient I do not know. But just the same he had to wait until consent was given by the old folks. After which we corresponded by his many calls and lots of letters for one year and eleven months before we were married<sup>492</sup>.

In her life narrative, Johnson explained that whenever her suitor visited her, the pair was never left alone. For example, her grandfather would tell "slave and ghost stories", the family would sing while she would play the "little organ grandpa had given [her]". At any rate, the pair were never let alone and adult supervision was mandatory<sup>493</sup>. Moreover, when "the gentleman was away in another city for eight months or more", Elizabeth and he corresponded regularly but her grandparents insisted upon reading all letters exchanged: "But in the way that I had to read his and my letters to the dear old folks, it seemed that he was corresponding with them also - ha ha". To readers who might consider such supervision drastic, she explained:

One may think that our Courtship days were very unpleasant and embarrassing in regards to the old folks and their peculiar rules, but not so, we fully understood these from the beginning and we were mostly always contented to abide by the same, as we just had it to do, Oh those were the days. And we knew that the future would bring around a change. So we very willingly and patiently abiding by their rules until by marriage vows, the glorious changes were made and all were well and satisfied<sup>494</sup>.

She willingly obeyed her parents when the man in question asked her if he could write her letters. She was 10 years old at that moment:

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<sup>491</sup> Elizabeth Johnson Harris, *Life Story, 1867- 1923*. Duke University. Online version. <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/harris/harris-indx.html>, chapter on Courting, 25-31.

<sup>492</sup> <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/harris/section-08/harris08.html>, 16.

<sup>493</sup> Elizabeth Johnson Harris, 16. Italics mine. Moreover, Harris seemed to deplore the change in the new generation who did not appreciate music in the 1920s: "I would play the little organ that GrandPa had given me, and we would sing Church or Sunday-School Songs. *In those days Sacred music was always in place and enjoyed in the homes as well as Church or elsewhere*. Then very often GrandPa would amuse us by telling us of Slave and Ghost-Stories, a few of which you will find in print ~~on the opposite page~~ elsewhere in these pages. These we would enjoy very much".

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 17.

I was reluctant to do this without the consent of my parents or grandparents. And I could not afford to play the part in slipping notes or letters. So I had to wait until a free opportunity came, where there would be no blind-folding. For this he [her suitor] thanked and complimented me, by saying ‘*You are a good little girl to obey and I hope that you will make a good wife for a good man some day*’ Bye-Bye. Well I yet loved this man, but was determined not to break the rules of the old folks or the peace in my simple but happy home. And the compliment that he paid me made me feel proud, and the more determined to obey the home rules<sup>495</sup>.

It seems that Harris attributed this strictness to the generational gap that existed between her and her grand-parents. As her testimony shows, she willingly abided by the strict rules imposed by her grand-parents and understood that this close surveillance was aimed at protecting her reputation and respectability.

These young women of color were raised with precious feminine and masculine role models in their family. These girls were taught – and consequently developed – very precise and conservative views about being a girl of color in the United States. They were often taught strict Victorian gendered conceptions typical of the late nineteenth century and were expected to behave according to their gender and propriety rules of the time. In the 1860s and up to the early 1890s, not only did parents and legal representatives often keep a watchful eye on their daughters but they also encouraged them to develop and cultivate certain traits of character supposed to be feminine. Girls were taught to cultivate a feminine and genteel manner, and in brief, were encouraged to possess all the attributes possessed by the Victorian lady. In the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s, African American girls women often grew up being aware of the difficulty their gender and color might cause them. Black women intellectuals rarely spoke about sex in their writings. As Mia Bay has shown,

Cooper, Terrell, and other middle-class black women of their day often avoided speaking freely about the racial and sexual slights for fear of drawing attention to themselves at a time when ‘derogatory images and negative stereotypes of black women’ s sexuality made black womanhood a fragile ideal. Instead, they adopted what historian Darlene Clark Hine has called a ‘culture of dissemblance’ designed to shield the ‘truth of their inner life and selves from their oppressors’<sup>496</sup>.

### **3. Building An African American and Regional Identity**

These women were raised in the 1860s and 1870s, at a period when racial segregation was not as strongly implemented in the country as in the late 1890s or early twentieth century<sup>497</sup>.

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 15. Italics hers.

<sup>496</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance”, *Signs* 14 (Summer 1989): 912-920, 917, as cited in Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*. (New York: Hill and Wang, A Division of Farrar, Strauss and Grouse, 2009), 120. Darlene Hine has contended that black women developed a “culture of dissemblance” and often remained silent on questions related to sex: “Black women, as a rule, developed and adhered to a cult of secrecy, a culture of dissemblance, to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives”, 915.

<sup>497</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 48-50. Fields, who was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1888, experienced racism very differently. She remembered that she was seven years old when the 1895 Constitution

Nevertheless, public transports in some cities in the United States – northern or western cities such as Philadelphia or San Francisco – were segregated in the 1860s. For example, Charlotte Forten evoked racial discrimination in streetcars in her 1860s diary, ironically commenting on Philadelphia’s nickname – the “city of brotherly love”<sup>498</sup> – and racial discrimination would only stop in San Francisco, California, after Mary Ellen Pleasant won a legal battle in 1866.

Racial identity was central to the formation of their identity. With gender, their racial identity constituted one of the most important elements of their identity. All of these women considered themselves as women of color.

### **Growing Up in A Region Where Racial Discrimination Was Less Fierce**

Several women became aware of their color identity quite late in their lives because they grew up in communities in the North relatively free from racial discrimination<sup>499</sup>. This was the case of several northern black women such as Fannie Barrier Williams or Fannie J. Coppin. Fannie Barrier Williams grew up in Brockport, New York, which she presented as a place where she enjoyed racial equality. She testified having been the victim of no race prejudice there, to the point that she did not seem to be aware of her skin color as a young girl: “We suffered from no discriminations on account of color or ‘previous condition’, and lived in blissful ignorance of the fact that we were practicing the unpardonable sin of “social equality”<sup>500</sup>. Fannie Barrier Williams had lived a perfectly carefree childhood and made many white friends at school growing up: “During all schooldays our associates, schoolmates and companions were all white boys and girls. These relationships were natural, spontaneous and free from all restraint.”<sup>501</sup>. In fact, she seemed to realize her racial identity when she was

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suddenly changed the racial climate of the State. A new State Constitution replaced the previous Constitution which dated from 1868 – and which had given African Americans the right to vote. It disenfranchised many African Americans by instituting the poll tax and literacy tests – it was revoked in 1968. Fields remembered that it had a rapid impact on racial relations in the State: “The Jim Crow law made friends into enemies overnight” in a city where families who had recently immigrated had lived peacefully with African Americans. She and her siblings who had been friends with German American children living across the street were no longer friends: “the day after [Jim Crow], we got to be enemies, and we began to fight each other”. The German boys, Kramer and her brother, who used to play marbles together, started using these as weapons to break the neighbor’s window pane. She remembered: “If you met Kramer in the street, he would call you ‘nigger’. Then we would shout ‘cracker’ back. That quick the children who had been friends changed”. In her mind, children weren’t responsible for this, “the law made the children do this”, the responsibility fell on “old people [who] made the law”.

<sup>498</sup> Charlotte Forten Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*. Ed. Brenda Stevenson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). 1854 diary, 363. “I was suffering the many deep deprivations which all of our unhappy race must suffer in the so-called ‘city of brotherly love’. What a mockery that name is! But over these wearing months it is better to draw the veil and forget”.

<sup>499</sup> As I will soon explain, they were nevertheless aware that African Americans were discriminated against in some areas of the North.

<sup>500</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 6.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

confronted to Southerners: “Until I became a young woman and went South to teach I had never been reminded that I belonged to an ‘inferior race’”<sup>502</sup>.

## First Encounters With Racism

In a predominantly white country, whether they lived in the North or in the South, African American women were at some point in their lives reminded of their skin color. All women of this study fell victims to racial discrimination in their lives, received lower wages because of their color, were segregated against in public transportation and public places. Even northern women underwent racial segregation in northern cities such as Philadelphia in the 1860s<sup>503</sup>.

Northern black women were lucid about northern realities and were well-aware that race discrimination existed in some parts of the North. For instance, when Fannie Jackson Coppin travelled to Philadelphia, she “was sharply reminded of [color]”. It was a rude awakening because having “been so long in Oberlin”, she “had forgotten about [her] color”. In the segregated Philadelphia of the mid-1860s, when the street car conductor “forbade [her] entering a car that did not have on it “for colored people,” she had to wait. “This was my first unpleasant experience in Philadelphia”<sup>504</sup>. Fannie Barrier Williams voiced the same experience in her autobiography. She testified having suffered from racial discrimination in the North as a young woman. When she followed an art class in Boston in “the very cradle of liberty” as a young woman in the 1870s, she was asked to leave the course because her presence caused inconvenience to white southern students. The instructor – averse to racial discrimination – was sorry to ask Fannie to leave yet complied because of economic reasons: “Even here [...] white Southerners were there before me, [...] I was told by the principal of the school, a man who was descended from a long line of abolition ancestors, that it would imperil the interests of the school if I remained, as all of these southern pupils would leave”. In the end, she had to “submit to the tyranny of a dark complexion” and interrupt her art studies in Boston<sup>505</sup>. Her testimony shows how from the 1870s onwards, the South – its values and culture and its inhabitants – influenced politics nationally<sup>506</sup>. In 1904, Fannie Barrier

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Other cities such as San Francisco in the West enforced racial segregation. See the example of Mrs Derry of Philadelphia or Charlotte Brown of San Francisco who sued railroad companies in 1863-1867.

<sup>504</sup> Fannie Jackson Coppin, *Reminiscences*, 14. In 1865, she worked as a teacher of Latin, Greek and Mathematics at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and became Principal of the Ladies Department the following year. In 1869, she became Principal of the Institute.

<sup>505</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 7. This was not Williams’ last encounter with racism since she was confronted to racial discrimination a few years later in the South.

<sup>506</sup> There was also a general tendency in this period to implement discriminatory laws in many places in the country. Northern politicians supported this effort.



explained that in turn-of-the century Chicago, African Americans still suffered from racial discrimination and underwent humiliations. In her autobiography, she described one incident about a southern white man who could not tolerate the presence of an African American clerk employed at a company<sup>507</sup>.

Black southern women also grew up being aware of the existing racial discrimination in their native region. In the 1860s and 1870s, the young Ida Wells was aware of racial violence at a very early age. She could feel the anguish her mother felt when her husband attended political meetings. Elizabeth Wells feared the presence of Ku Klux Klan members. Ida Wells remembered:

I heard the words Ku Klux Klan long before I knew what they meant. I knew dimly that it meant something fearful, by the anxious way my mother walked the floor at night when my father was out to a political meeting. Yet so far as I can remember there were no riots in Holly Springs, although there were plenty in other parts of the state<sup>508</sup>.

The South Carolinian born in 1888 Mamie Garvin remembered the racial slurs she heard as a child in the 1890s. Once, as she was admiring the College of Charleston with her sister Ruth, she heard a boy say: “Scat! Nigger, what you doin’ down ya?”<sup>509</sup>. Years later, she was still astounded and trying to understand why a “small white boy of Charleston” used an expression used to frighten cats to tell them to go away. Because they were repeatedly taught a children not to fight, Mamie and her sister did not respond and left.

When they went south, northern women were faced with southern racism. Upon graduation from Brockport State Normal School in the 1870s, even if Fannie Barrier “could easily have obtained a position” as a teacher near Brockport, New York, she “wanted to go out into the world and do something large or out of the ordinary”. Inspired by the models of the northern missionaries, the “school-marms” of the North<sup>510</sup>, this energetic young woman

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<sup>507</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 9. Williams explained that one day – Williams did not provide the precise date this event took place – it occurred before she penned her autobiography in 1904 –, this clerk met a southern-born customer who seemed disturbed by her appearance. He told her: “I come from a section of the country where we make your people know their places. Don’t you think you are out of yours?” She merely looked up and said, “I think I know my place”. He added: “I am a southern man, I am, and I would like to know what kind of a man is this that employs a ‘nigger’ to sit at a desk and write”. Even if the man left after his interview with the boss, never to return again, Williams felt the need to mention it in her short autobiography, in order to show that race prejudice was a national phenomenon. In Williams’s testimony, the influence of the South nationwide is obvious. When she studied in Boston and was forced to leave a class because Southerners demanded that she leave, when she assisted African American women to obtain positions as clerks in Chicago in the 1890s and 1900s, Williams realized the relentless influence of southern prejudices in the entire country. She would fight against this influence throughout her life.

<sup>508</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 9. This took place in the 1860s and 1870s, before Elizabeth Wells’s death in 1878.

<sup>509</sup> Mamie Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 51.

<sup>510</sup> She praised the “sacrificing devotion of the pioneer New England teacher as the colored girl.” Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl” *Voice of the Negro* 2, no. 6 (1905): 400-403, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 63-66, 64.



applied for a teaching position in the South and “soon obtained a situation in one of the ex-slave states”<sup>511</sup>.

It was then and there that Fannie Barrier Williams discovered a new life and racial discrimination: “Indeed, until I became a young woman and went South to teach I had never been reminded that I belonged to an ‘inferior race.’”<sup>512</sup>. For Williams, the shock was so powerful that years later, she wrote about this period as a pivotal, life-changing moment in her autobiography: “It was here and for the first time that I *began life* as a colored person. In all that the term implies”<sup>513</sup>. She tried “to adapt [herself] to these hateful conditions” yet with difficulties<sup>514</sup>. She said:

No one but a colored woman, reared and educated as I was, can ever know what it means to be brought face to face with conditions that fairly overwhelm you with the ugly reminder that a certain penalty must be suffered by those who, not being able to select their own parentage, must be born of a dark complexion.

In her twenties, her “cherished [American] ideals had been “shattered”<sup>515</sup>. Her color implied the limitations of her aspirations:

All truth seemed here only half-truths. I found that, instead of there being a unity of life common to all the intelligent, respectable and ambitious people, down south life was divided into white and black lines, that in every direction my ambitions and aspirations were to have no beginnings and no chance for development<sup>516</sup>.

The 49-year-old Williams recounted that at the age of 20, she had to learn a whole new way of life, very different from what she had been accustomed to:

Everything that I learned and experienced in my innocent social relationships in New York State had to be unlearned and readjusted to these lowered standards and changed conditions. The Bible that had been taught, the preaching I had heard, the philosophy and ethics and the rules of conduct that I had been so sure of, were all to be discounted.

Before that moment, she had the feeling that she had experienced life as a white American girl. And now, not only did she come of age at that period, but she also started her

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<sup>511</sup> Williams was inspired by northern “school-marms”. Carlson explains that in northern States such as Illinois for example, the black Victorian schoolteacher was presented as a role model to girls and young women, and that “the black Victorian school teachers exemplify the interplay of the two cultures -- European American and African American – within the Illinois black community”, Carlson, 65. Her sister Ella also became a teacher. In September 1875, Ella got a position as Assistant Principal of a Grammar School in Washington D.C. and Fannie obtained a post as a teacher in a school at Hannibal, Missouri and later worked in the Washington D.C. area. Fannie taught in the South for eleven years, from 1875 to 1886. Probably in 1885 or 1886, she met her future husband, S. Laing Williams, who was then a Law student in Washington D.C.. See William G. Andrews and Richard W. Black, *A Century in the Life of an African-American Family: The Barriers of Brockport*, an online exhibit (Brockport Community Museum 2016). <http://brockportcommunitymuseum.org/pdfs/people/misc/Barrier%20-%20Williams%20family%20newspaper%20chronology%2004-16%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>512</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, the *Independent* 57, 14 July 1904: 91-96, 91. the *Independent*. 1904, and *The New Woman of Color*, 6.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 6. Italics mine.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid. She exclaimed: “What a shattering of ideals!”.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

life as a black woman. Her narrative reveals that Williams was under the impression that she had in fact lived two distinct lives: one – from her infancy to the age of 20 – as a white American woman and the second – from the age of 20 to her death – as a woman of color.

The time spent in the South in the 1870s also made Fannie Barrier Williams realize that for Americans, race was more important than social class or merit: “Whether I live in the North or in the South, I cannot be counted for my full value”, the merit of persons of color being systematically sacrificed in the name of racial identification<sup>517</sup>. Williams’s race consciousness was born when she experienced discrimination in the South. The shock of living in a region where, because of her color, she was denied the opportunities she felt entitled to because of her education and class was so great that Fannie Barrier decided to devote her energy to helping women who were less fortunate than she was.

Coming of age learning the limitations a black woman was faced with because of her color was a painful experience for Williams: “It is scarcely possible to enumerate the many ways in which an ambitious colored young woman is prevented from being all that she might be in the higher directions of life in this country”<sup>518</sup>, especially because she learnt it at a later age than most of her counterparts, having grown up in an area relatively free from racial discrimination: “Plainly I would have been far happier as a woman in my life up to the age of 18 years old had I not been so free, spontaneous and unhampered by race prejudice”<sup>519</sup>. Fannie B. Williams said in her life writing : “I have never quite recovered from the shock and pain of my first bitter realization that to be a colored woman is to be discredited, mistrusted and often meanly hated”<sup>520</sup>.

All of these women without exception fell victims to the discriminations persons of color suffered from and all of them agreed on the fact that racial discrimination, the “color line” constituted, as Fannie Williams termed it “an insurmountable obstacle” in American society<sup>521</sup>. In 1904, when discussing American racial prejudice, Fannie Williams seemed to lose faith in the future. When she penned her autobiography, she confessed: “I dare not cease

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid, 12, and as cited in the *Independent*, 96. She nuanced this view later on, believing that white American women still refused to see black women obtain positions as clerks, even if they declared themselves “liberal” when it came to racial relations. “Here in the northern states I find that a colored woman of character and intelligence will be recognized and respected, the white women who would recognize and associate with her in the same club or church would probably not tolerate her as a fellow clerk in an office or [shop]”.

<sup>518</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 7. Williams was referring here to the period 1855-1874. “My faith in the verities of religion, in justice, in love, and in many sacredly taught sentiments has greatly decreased since I have learned how little even these stand for when you are a colored woman”.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., as cited in the *Independent*, 92.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 95.

to hope and aspire and believe in human love and justice, but progress is painful and my faith is often strained to the breaking point”<sup>522</sup>.

These young African American women were also painfully confronted with racial discrimination in public transportation. In their writings, these women accounted for the harsh treatment reserved to African Americans in transports. These experiences revealed the double standard existing between black and white women in public places –where black women were denied courtesy – “chivalry” – and respect, and were even brutally treated.

Some women such as Fannie Williams experienced racism when they went south. She deplored in 1904 that racial discrimination did exist in the Northern states, even if it “did not manifest itself so openly and brutally” as in the South:

I cannot say that I have experienced the same kind of humiliations as recited in the pathetic story of the southern colored women in the *Independent* of March 17, 1904, but I can't but believe that the prejudice that blights and hinders is quite as decided in the North as it is in the South, but does not manifest itself so openly and brutally<sup>523</sup>.

By writing this, Williams showed how she positioned herself as a northern woman indeed, rather protected from the humiliations faced by women of color in the South, yet she also uses this passage to show her sense of sisterhood with black women of the South:

Prejudice is here and everywhere, but it may not manifest itself so brutally as in the South. The chief interest in the North seems to be centered in business, and it is in business where race prejudice shows itself the strongest. The chief interest in the South is social supremacy; therefore prejudice manifests itself most strongly against even an imaginary approach to social contact<sup>524</sup>.

Because she dreaded being ill-treated when travelling, Fannie Williams apparently later tried to avoid as much as possible going south and being exposed to the segregationist system enforced there: “Fortunately, since my marriage [in 1887] I have had but little experience South of Mason and Dixon’s line.”<sup>525</sup>.

Likewise, Susie King Taylor attempted to avoid the southern transportation system. Several years after the Civil War, in 1874, this native of the South settled in Boston and married a certain Russell L. Taylor in 1879. In 1898, when her son – who lived in Louisiana – fell sick, she came to visit him. On her way there, Taylor fell victim to racial segregation in the South. Accustomed to equal treatment in Boston for years, she was astonished to experience strict racial segregation when visiting her son<sup>526</sup>. Upon reaching Shreveport, she

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 13.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>526</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences*, Chapter XIV, 69. She had to take smoking cars to reach Shreveport, Louisiana, to the bedside of [her] son, who was very ill”. She explained: “I went to this [smoking] car, and on

tried to secure a berth on a sleeper for her son home and she was denied the right to do so. Taylor emphasized in her account that despite black Americans' loyal devotion to the nation, they or their children were denied the right to travel in decent conditions because of color:

He was not strong enough to travel otherwise. If I could only have gotten him to Cincinnati, I might have brought him home, but as I could not I was forced to let him remain where he was. It seemed very hard, when his father fought to protect the Union and our flag, and yet his boy was denied, under this same flag, a berth to carry him home to die, because he was a negro<sup>527</sup>.

On the way back to Boston, she feared for her life: "At Clarksdale, I saw a man hanged. It was a terrible sight, and I felt alarmed for my own safety down there". The situation bettered as she approached Memphis: "I found conditions of travel much better" there, she wrote<sup>528</sup>.

In the 1890s, Anna Cooper was also personally confronted with racial discrimination. Aware that black women of the South had to do considerable traveling often "unattended", she expressed concern for African American womanhood – she spoke about a "slighted womanhood" – very early in her career. Cooper denounced the lack of "manners" and decency shown to black women in America, describing the evictions of women from tramways or trains. For example, she explained that one man once called out to her saying "Here gurl" – although she was "past thirty"<sup>529</sup> – and spoken to rudely.

Ida B. Wells also fell victim to discriminatory practices during her young adulthood. In 1883, at the age of 21, as she was on her way back from her school in Memphis, Tennessee, Ida Wells was asked to leave the ladies' car because of her color. Even if there "were no Jim Crow laws cars then", Wells explained that "there had been efforts all over the South to draw the color line on the railroads"<sup>530</sup>. Faced with her refusal, the conductor violently forced her out of her seat. Wells was bewildered by both the passivity of some white passengers and the encouragement of some whites on the car. She defended herself energetically, in a way which could be thought unseemly for a middle-class woman<sup>531</sup>.

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entering it all my courage failed me. I have ridden in many coaches, but I was never in such as these. I wanted to return home again, but when I thought of my sick boy".

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 71-73. As a result, her son died in Louisiana and she went back home to Boston alone.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>529</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, 93. Cooper "mention[s] instances of personal violence to colored women traveling in less civilized sections of our country, where women have been forcibly ejected from cars, thrown out of seats, their garments rudely torn, their person wantonly injured. America is large and must for some time yet enter its out-of-the-way jungles of barbarism as Africa its uncultivated tracks of marsh and malaria". Cooper ironically commented on the lack of manners of white Southerners. "When a great burly six feet of masculinity with sloping shoulders and unkempt beard swaggers in, and, throwing a roll of tobacco into one corner of his jaw, growls out at me over the paper I am reading, "Here gurl," (I am past thirty) "you better git out 'n dis kyar 'f yer don't, I'll put yer out,"--my mental annotation is *Here's an American citizen who has been badly trained. He is sadly lacking in both 'sweetness' and 'light'*", "Woman vs. the Indian", *A Voice from the South*, 95. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

<sup>530</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 18.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 18-19. He "tried to drag me out of the seat, but the moment he caught hold of my arm I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand [...] I had braced my feet against the seat in front and was holding the back, and as

After this incident, Wells decided to start a legal procedure<sup>532</sup>. The case was taken to the Circuit Court and Wells won the case \$500 for damages<sup>533</sup> but the decision was reversed at the State Supreme Court and Wells lost the case one year later<sup>534</sup>. When Wells learnt that she had lost her lawsuit after years of judicial battle, she confided feeling “so disappointed, because I had hoped such great things for my suit for my people generally”. She had completely lost faith in the American judicial system: “I have firmly believed all along that the law was on our side and would, when we appealed to it, give us justice”. Discouraged, she confided that if she had been able to, she would have left the United States: “I feel shorn of that belief and utterly discouraged, and just now if it were possible would gather my race in my arms and fly far away with them”<sup>535</sup>. Like many times in her young life, Wells felt that she was left to handle the matter on her own. She wrote in her memoir: “None of my people had ever seemed to feel that it was a race matter and that they should help me with the fight. So I trod the winepress alone”<sup>536</sup>.

Contrary to Anna Cooper, Fannie Williams – when she taught in the South in the 1870s – or to Ida B. Wells, who had to fend for themselves, Mary Church Terrell was relatively safeguarded from racial discrimination thanks to her father’s protection, social status and reputation<sup>537</sup>. Nevertheless, she experienced several traumatic experiences when travelling on her own, at the age of 5, 12 (in 1875) and 16 (in 1879)<sup>538</sup>. Terrell emphasized the

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he had already been badly beaten he didn't try it again by himself. He went forward and got the baggage man and another man to help him and of course they succeeded in dragging me out. There were encouraged to do this by the attitude of the white ladies and gentlemen in the car; some of them even stood on the seats so that they could get a good view and continued applauding the conductor for his brave stand [...] I had been pretty roughly handled [but] I had not been hurt physically”.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 19. She had initially hired a black lawyer from Memphis, Tennessee, but, finding out that he had been bribed by the Chesapeake and Ohio company, she resolved to hire a white man, Judge Greer.

<sup>533</sup> It was concluded that “her persistence was not in good faith to obtain a comfortable seat for a short ride”, as cited in Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*.

<sup>534</sup> Aware that her case would have constituted a legal precedent, Wells wrote: “The success of my case would have set a precedent which others would doubtless have followed. In this, as in many other matters, the South wanted the civil rights Bill repealed but did not want or intend to give justice to the Negro after robbing him of all sources from which to secure it”.

<sup>535</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 140-141. Diary entry April 11, 1887. She finished her diary entry praying God to come to her aid in this hardship: “O God is there no redress, no peace, no justice in this land for us? Thou hast always fought the battles of the weak & oppressed. Come to my aid at this moment and teach me what to do, for I am sorely, bitterly disappointed. Show us the way, even as Thou led the children of Israel out of bondage into the promised land”.

<sup>536</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 21.

<sup>537</sup> She apparently regularly travelled in white cars.

<sup>538</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 15-16, 295-296, 297. This first traumatic experience was a shock which Terrell remembered her entire life. In her autobiography, she explained that the young girl she was then looked for logical and rational reasons which had pushed the conductor to act so aggressively and disrespectfully. She wondered: Had she behaved contrary to propriety? Had she been careless about her personal appearance? Her mother reassured her about her behavior and said, disheartened: “Sometimes conductors on railroad trains were unkind and treated good little girls very badly”. She related to her mother and to all other

dangers African American girls risked when they travelled alone in some parts of the country– they could be sexually assaulted or molested: “spending the night in a Jim Crow car is a real peril for a colored girl”<sup>539</sup>. Contrary to many women in this study, Mary Church was repeatedly able to travel in first-class trains. When she travelled, being the daughter of a rich member of the Memphis black elite, she either benefited from Robert Church’s fatherly protection or from his social status and importance, being for example able to warn recalcitrant conductors that her father would sue the railway company if they continued to deny her the right to travel in white cars. As I have shown, things were quite different for women with a darker skin and who had no father or brother to protect them.

These women often grew up with a strong sense of their racial identity. Their first encounters with racism came as a shock and they probably durably affected the way these women understood and fought against racial discrimination. I will now examine how they developed a sense of regional identity during their childhood. How did they think and speak about the North, the South, the Midwest? How did their construction of region later influence their thinking and their understanding of race and region?

### **Building a Strong Regional Identity**

These women often developed a strong regional consciousness during their childhood, even if, as I will later argue, their regional identity was never fixed or rigid. How did these women – among whom many later became well-travelled women – feel and express this sense of regional identity in their young age?

Whether the North was their native or adopted region, female inhabitants of the North expressed their love for this region and tended to portray this section in a positive light. In their eyes, it was a land where they could live relatively free from racial discrimination, even if they knew that racial discrimination existed in certain areas. For example, although she had been born and raised in the South and had worked as a teacher in the South, Kate Drumgoold was deeply attached to her city of adoption. Brooklyn was in her eyes a “lovely city, where there are those that love and fear God, and who love the souls of the negro as well as those of the white, the red, the yellow or brown races of the earth, for we have ever found some of the

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black women in America, therefore highlighting the plight of women of color rearing children in a racist society. She said: “Seeing their children seared and wounded by race prejudice is one of the heaviest crosses which colored women have to bear”, as cited in “Being a Colored Woman in the United States”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 26-27.

<sup>539</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 298.



people who do not forget us day or night in their prayers, that God will send a blessing to us as a race”<sup>540</sup>.

As I will further examine in a later chapter, Fannie Barrier Williams also positioned herself as a northern woman in her writings. It appears that she developed a keener sense of regional identity once she had travelled outside of the North. In her autobiography, she clearly opposed the North and the South, presenting her native State as a place of tolerance where she had been sheltered from racial discrimination whereas the South was depicted as a place where African Americans were violently discriminated against. The discrepancy between North and South in her discourse is evident. Depicting the South as a hostile region, she portrayed Brockport as a model city where whites gladly welcomed and befriended African Americans. She depicted her wedding as taking place as in a dream. After “teaching a few years in the South”, she received a warm welcome in Brockport when she came back to be married:

I went back to my home in New York State to be married. After the buffetings, discouragements and discourtesies that I had been compelled to endure, it was almost as in a dream that I saw again my schoolmates gather around me, making my home beautiful with flowers, managing every detail of preparation for my wedding, showering me with gifts, and joining in the ceremony with tears and blessings<sup>541</sup>.

Black northern women loved their native region because it offered them – depending on the State or city they lived in – more racial equality than in the South. Moreover, these northern writers may have depicted the North as a tolerant region because they may have wanted to instill in their readers the idea that racial equality did exist somewhere in America and that this ideal was possible. I will now analyze how southern-born women reflected upon their regional identity. How strong was their sense of Southernness?

Perhaps more than northern African American women, southern women firmly asserted their regional affiliation in their youth. A sense of regional identity was often very visible in their first writings, as we can see in Ida B. Wells’ early journalistic work or in Anna Cooper’s early essays. Ida Wells’s early life writings reveal that she had an exacerbated sense of Southernness very early in her life. Young Ida Wells indeed positioned herself as a black woman from the South in the 1880s. For instance, in her early articles published in Memphis in the 1880s, Wells, under the pen name of ‘Iola’, exclusively defended “the black woman of the South”, often using examples that had autobiographical accents. In the article of 18 February 1888 entitled “The Model Woman: A Pen Picture of the Typical Southern Girl”, she

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<sup>540</sup> Kate Drumgoold, “A Slave Girl’s Story”, in *Women’s Slave Narratives*, 112.

<sup>541</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 7.

gives a definition of what “the typical girl of the South” is not. She explains that “‘The typical southern girl’ of today is not without refinement, is not coarse and rude in her manners, nor loud and fast in her deportment”. She added: “The typical girl’s only wealth, in most cases, is her character; and her first consideration is to preserve that character in spotless purity”<sup>542</sup>.

Wells clearly defined herself as a Southerner and spoke as a black woman of the South. When she began contributing to the newspaper entitled *Free Speech* in 1887, aged 23, she argued: “There are among us mothers, wives and maidens who have attained a true, noble, and refining womanhood. There are many such all over *this Southland of ours*, and in our own city they abound”<sup>543</sup>.

Moreover, several other educated black women of the South such as Wells and Cooper – believed that they were the exemplars of black womanhood in America and experienced a feeling of legitimacy when speaking for the rights of African Americans because as Southerners, they spoke for almost the entire African American community — who mostly lived in the South. For Ida Wells, Anna Cooper, Margaret Washington and several others, the black woman of the South represented *the* black woman in America<sup>544</sup>. In 1895, Margaret Washington – a Southern woman who became one of the most influential club woman of her time and was the third wife of Booker T. Washington – voiced the same idea. In the article entitled “The New Negro Woman” of August 1895, Margaret Washington contended that “The crucial race work was to be done in the South, a place that needed to be identified less with the degradations of slavery and more with the possibilities of reform”<sup>545</sup>. In 1896, in a letter to Ednah Cheney<sup>546</sup>, Washington believed that “[The South is] where work must be done for this is where the great mass of the colored women are”<sup>547</sup>. In 1893, to Fannie

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<sup>542</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 188.

<sup>543</sup> Ida B. Wells, “Our Women”, 1887, in *Memphis Diary*, 185. Italics mine. Wells added in “The Model Woman, the Pen Picture of the Typical Southern Girl”, *New York Freeman*, 18 February 1888, 187-188, “The typical southern girl of today is not without refinement, is not coarse and rude in her manners, nor loud and fast in her deportment. Nor is the stiff, formal, haughty girl the ideal”. *The Free Speech* was formerly known as *the Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* which J.L. Fleming also directed. She also regularly contributed to *The New York Freeman*, or the *Fisk Herald*.

<sup>544</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 63. Like Margaret Murray Washington, Cooper considered that most of the work was to be done in the South, where the majority of black women lived: “We must point to homes, average homes, homes of the rank and file of horny handed toiling men and women of the South (where the masses are) lighted and cheered by the good, the beautiful, and the true, -- then and not till then will the whole plateau be lifted into the sunlight”, 63.

<sup>545</sup> See the introductory note by Martha Patterson in *The American New Woman Revisited*, 54. Martha A. Patterson., ed., *The American New Woman Revisited : A Reader, 1894-1930*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London : Rutgers University Press, 2008).

<sup>546</sup> Ednah Dow Cheney (1824-1904) was a white social reformer, abolitionist, women’s rights activist born in Boston.

<sup>547</sup> Margaret Washington, “The New Negro Woman”, in *Lend a Hand*, as cited in *The American New Woman Revisited : A Reader, 1894-1930*. See pages 54-59. This was published in a Boston monthly newspaper owned by Edward Everett Hale. Washington wished to see [white] women [such as Frances Willard, Ellen Henrotin,

Williams who had spoken as a black woman of the North, Cooper replied: “I speak for the colored women of the South, because it is there that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears, and it is there too that the colored woman of America has made her characteristic history, and there her destiny is evolving”<sup>548</sup>. The sense of Southernness is clear in the writings of the young Anna Julia Cooper. The speeches she gave in the 1880s-early 1890s reveal her special concern for the South. The choice of the title of her 1892 collection of essays, *A Voice From The South By A Black Woman of the South* shows that the 34-year-old Anna Cooper spoke as a black woman of the South<sup>549</sup>.

Conversely, even if she came from Memphis, Tennessee, like Ida Wells, Mary Church Terrell felt that she had a dual regional identity. Terrell considered herself to be a Southerner because she was born and reared in the South and because her white family of Memphis anchored her there. Yet since she had left the South at an early age, she felt that she was also a Northerner. Since she had studied in Ohio from the age of six, had secured an education and had led a life relatively free from racial discrimination there, she soon felt that she had adopted the values and the lifestyles of the Northern States. She was “reared among Yankees” and had “imbibed the Yankee’s respect for work”, as she put it in her autobiography<sup>550</sup>. In her life writing, she portrayed herself as a woman who felt at ease navigating the social and racial codes of both regions<sup>551</sup>.

Mary Terrell was not the only one to be familiar with the customs of both the North and the South from an early age. Anna Julia Cooper had also become familiar with both regions at an early age and therefore understood the ways of both sections. Nevertheless,

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and Mary Dickinson] to “show a little less fear of their southern sisters’ and speak out in favor of colored women, thousands of whom ‘live a living death’”. Like Cooper, Margaret Murray Washington was resolutely a southern woman. A native of Mississippi, she studied at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and spent most of her life in Tuskegee, Alabama.

<sup>548</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation: A response to Fannie Barrier Williams”, 1893, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 201-206, 202. Cooper always spoke for women of the South, repeatedly using the pronoun “we”: “We are utterly destitute”, 202.

<sup>549</sup> In 1930, she considered herself a “Raleighite”. Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C. Throughout her life, she maintained bonds with the South and she chose to be buried with her husband in Raleigh, North Carolina. A later chapter will show that despite her cosmopolitanism, Cooper’s sense of Southernness remained strong throughout her life.

<sup>550</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 60-61.

<sup>551</sup> She later spent most of her adulthood in Washington D.C. and travelled widely, both domestically and internationally. Washington D.C. is considered as the northernmost city of the South, because it was a slave trade center and because its laws authorized racial segregation. Slavery was outlawed in Washington D.C. in 1862 with the D.C. Compensated Emancipation Act. I will later analyze how these women considered that their nationality took precedence over their feeling of belonging to a certain region – be it North or South.

Cooper considered herself to be a Southerner her entire life. In fact, all four women travelled in different regions at some point in their lives<sup>552</sup>.

These women developed a strong racial and regional consciousness early in their lives, which undoubtedly influenced their understanding of womanhood and their activism as adults. Few of them – such as Fannie Barrier and Mary Church thanks to their affluence – had led lives in tolerant communities at some point in their lives. While southern-born women such as Ida Wells denounced the racism existing in the South in their memoirs, northern women such as Fannie Williams or Susie Taylor tended to depict the North as a land of tolerance perhaps as a way to persuade their readership in the 1900s that this atmosphere of tolerance and brotherhood could exist – did exist, as in Brockport, New York – and that African Americans and whites would live together peacefully and in harmony. This was a way to suggest that racial equality was not only possible, but also beneficial and desirable for America.

In their life writings – especially in their early writings –, besides Mary Church Terrell, they generally positioned themselves as being from one specific region. Yet as I will later argue, their regional identity was not a fixed identity: it kept changing over time. In the second chapter, I will examine how these women envisioned education and constructed their future careers.

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<sup>552</sup> When they were in their twenties, all four women had already widely travelled in the country – which was quite exceptional at that time. For example, Fannie Barrier left Brockport and taught in Missouri and Washington D.C. At age 20, Ida B. Wells discovered California and travelled to New England in the early 1890s when she was thirty years old. Similarly, Mary Church and Anna Cooper left the South to study at Oberlin College in the 1880s, when they were in their twenties as well.

## Chapter 3: Building a Professional Life

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### 1. Primary and Secondary Education

Since the Antebellum era, African American women had viewed education as the main lever to social uplift. Linda Perkins has demonstrated that contrary to white women, for women of African descent, “education served as an avenue for the improvement of their race or ‘racial uplift’”<sup>553</sup>. Linda Perkins has also indicated that before the Civil War, “unlike women of the white society, black women were encouraged to become educated to aid in the improvement of their race”<sup>554</sup>. As a result, many women from all classes during the period under study, whenever they had an opportunity, strove to get an education and used it to pass it on to their community. Like many other scholars, Angela Davis has emphasized black women’s immense thirst for education, indicating that they were often more eager to learn than whites: “During Reconstruction, many teachers met black children of the South who had a stronger desire for knowledge than the white children of the North”<sup>555</sup>.

### Families Prizing Education

Oftentimes, attending school was made possible thanks to their families’ determination. Many of the women in this study – who mostly belonged to the black middle-class — had parents who highly valued men’s and women’s education – and who did everything they could to send their children to school. In fact, many had progressive and liberal-minded parents. For example, Maritcha Remond Lyons’s family had always praised education: “they endorsed that sort of education that produced the assimilation of ideas. They were alert to oppose injustice and would not suffer tyranny unrebuked”<sup>556</sup>. Her father also apparently did everything in his power to enable her “to attain what was regarded in my youth as a liberal education for a woman”<sup>557</sup>. When, in 1865, Maritcha Remond was denied admission to Providence, Rhode Island schools upon her arrival there – in the wake of the NYC riots —, her mother fought for her daughter’s right to a good education. In a letter addressed to “Hon. James Y. Smith, Gov. State of Rhode Island”, Mrs Remond wrote: “a

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<sup>553</sup> Linda Perkins, “The Impact of the Cult of True Womanhood on the Education of Black Women”, 1983, 183.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 184. See also Linda Perkins, “Black Women and Racial Uplift Prior to Emancipation”: 317-334.

<sup>555</sup> In 1900, W.E.B. Du Bois had evoked African Americans’ frenzy for education. See Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1983), 76. Angela Davis, *Femmes, race et classe*, 3<sup>e</sup> édition, (Paris: Éditions des Femmes-Antoinette Fouque, 2013). and W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 123.

<sup>556</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, 57.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

good education is all I can give to the young beings it has pleased God to place under my care". She pressed him to change the legislation, highlighting that Rhode Island had the "plain duty [...] to educate every soul. Every native and every foreign child that is cast on our coast"<sup>558</sup>. Fannie B. Williams also grew up in a family who "had a taste for good books and the refinements of life, were public spirited and regarded as good citizens". She had good memories of the days spent at school, which were free from discrimination: "We three children were sent to school as soon as we were old enough, and remained there until we [...] graduated"<sup>559</sup>.

Likewise, Anna Cooper's illiterate mother encouraged her children to study and Ida B. Wells benefited from the support of her literate parents who were actively engaged in the education for African Americans<sup>560</sup>. As part of the middle-class, Ida Wells was encouraged to attend school in the 1870s. She explained that her "mother went along to school with us until she learned to read the Bible. After that she visited the school regularly to see how we were getting along [...] Our job was to go to school and learn all we could"<sup>561</sup>. Later she attended "Shaw University which was then named Rust College, her father being "one of the trustees" there. Similarly, Mary Terrell's parents did everything in their power to offer the best education possible to their only daughter. Louisa Ayers in particular wanted Mary to get a good education in a bi-racial school.

For African Americans from humble backgrounds, acquiring an education in the 1870s and 1880s could prove difficult. While the vast majority counted on their parents to offer them an education, some pupils benefited from the support of benefactors, local Ministers or acquaintances who, willing to help them obtain an education, paid for their studies – partially or completely. For example, Fannie Jackson Coppin, who was a native of a northern State, benefited from the help of several benefactors during her childhood. Alfred Cope, whom Coppin called "a saintly character" sent [her] a check of eighty dollars, which wonderfully lightened [her] burden as a poor student" when she studied in Philadelphia in the 1850s. Later, she was able to attend Oberlin College thanks to the financial support of Bishop Daniel A. Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who gave [her] a scholarship of nine

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 14. Chapter 2.

<sup>559</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography", 5-6.

<sup>560</sup> Ida B. Wells's father served at Rust College.

<sup>561</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 9.



dollars a year upon entering Oberlin” in the 1860s. This gesture enabled Coppin to obtain her degree from Oberlin College in 1865<sup>562</sup>.

Brilliant pupils from humble origins were also awarded school grants or benefited from benefactors’ aid to further their education. Several women of this study were granted scholarships to pursue their education. For example, Anna Julia Haywood, who studied at St Augustine Normal and Collegiate School in North Carolina from 1866 to 1881, was such a brilliant pupil that she was selected to teach at a very early age at St Augustine school. In one of her writings, she said: “Under Dr Brinton Smith, I was made pupil teacher at the age of 8, first for board and tuition”<sup>563</sup>. Cooper was awarded a scholarship to attend Oberlin Academy, where she taught Advanced Algebra to white students<sup>564</sup>. Cooper mentioned this scholarship in one autobiographical sketch: “When hardly more than of kindergarten age it was my good fortune to be selected for a scholarship by Dr Brinton Smith, founder of St Augustine’s Normal School at Raleigh, North Carolina, – now St Augustine’s College – in the nucleus he was planning to train as teachers for the colored people of the South”<sup>565</sup>.

All women of this study were diligent pupils who revered education. Most of them did well or very well at school and were very curious and eager to learn. These activists – among whom many became teachers at some point in their lives – were generally passionate about learning and developed taste for book learning and teaching. For example, Maritcha Remond Lyons craved education: when she fell sick at age 15, “extremely anxious to resume regular studying”, she “implored the home folks to send [her] to school again”<sup>566</sup>. Anna Cooper explained that she wanted to go to College because she had always had “an indomitable innate ‘wanting to know’”. She recounted that in college, she “did her best and four Professors including Prest. Fairchild gave me letters rating me first in class”<sup>567</sup>. Throughout her life, this curious and cultivated reader, in addition to being well-versed, was fluent in foreign

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<sup>562</sup> Fannie Jackson Coppin, *Reminiscences of School life, and Hints on Teaching*, 12-13. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jacksonc/jackson.html>. See also: [http://www.oberlin.edu/news-info/02jun/discover\\_fannieJCoppin.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/news-info/02jun/discover_fannieJCoppin.html).

<sup>563</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Box 23-1. Form filled in 1930 or 1932. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>564</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Form, Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>565</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Autobiographical elements. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. She explained that she earned everything through self-help. To the question: “What part of your support was earned through self-help?”, she simply answered “all”.

<sup>566</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, 5-6.

<sup>567</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Box 23-1. Form. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

languages, in particular in French<sup>568</sup>. Mary Virginia Montgomery's diary shows that she spent her time reading and aspired to a career as a teacher. In her diary, she confided reading many books such as Plutarch or Darwin's *Origin of the Species* or historical books. She acknowledged being an "ambitious person"<sup>569</sup> and wanted to complete her studies at Oberlin College and her parents were both willing and able to assent to her wish<sup>570</sup>.

Like Anna Cooper at St. Augustine school, Fannie Barrier attended the local school in Brockport, New York, and was a precocious child. As the journalist of the *Brockport Republic* chronicled, she knew how to read "the original Caesar and Cicero before she was twelve years old. At an unusual early age she was graduated from the college department of the New York State Normal school before going to work as a teacher in the nation's capital"<sup>571</sup>.

Ida Wells also reported being a "voracious reader", and reading everything from the Bible to Shakespeare as a girl. Reading helped her forget "her troubles in no other way"<sup>572</sup>:

I had always been a voracious reader. I had read all the fiction in the Sunday school library and in Rust College. In the country schools where I had taught many times there was no oil for lamps and there were no candles to spare. [...] I could forget my troubles in no other way<sup>573</sup>.

Many of these women developed talents and were spotted at an early age. Mary Church easily positioned herself as a leader during her studies at Oberlin College. At a young age, she "was already speaking out for social justice and developing leadership skills"<sup>574</sup>. She was a very curious young woman as well: intellectually attracted to many different topics, she read many books in French during her stay in France for example. She read the classics by Corneille, Blaise Pascal and La Rochefoucault<sup>575</sup> and confided being deeply influenced by the

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<sup>568</sup> She studied French at Columbia University from 1914 to 1917, wrote several works in French and prepared and defended her dissertation in France in the 1920s.

<sup>569</sup> Montgomery wrote: "I was appointed general supervisor in the transplanting business [...] I only make mention of it because I of course feel proud of having a cognizable judgment. All ambitious persons do." Sterling, in Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 464 and 466.

<sup>570</sup> On 5 September 1872, she wrote: "Told papa and ma of my intentions. They assent to my wishes. Another light beams upon my future. Hope beats high.", in Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 468.

<sup>571</sup> *The Brockport Republic*. 6 December 1894.

<sup>572</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice*, 22.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 21. See Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 22-23. She read *MacBeth* by Shakespeare for her elocution class, *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott and *Vashti, or Until Death Do Us Part* (1869) by an important white woman writer of the South, Augusta Jane Evans Wilson (1835-1909). Wilson is not only famous for her contribution to Southern literature with her novels *St Elmo* and *Inez: A Tale of The Alamo*, but she was also famous for her Victorian sentimental style. It is interesting to know that Wells read the works of this supporter of the Southern cause and a former Confederate nurse who served the South during the Civil War.

<sup>574</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, "Black Club Women's Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens", 90. For instance, she spoke for her group in public debates at school. She gave speeches and encouraged her audience to "think about the children". In her Oberlin papers, Robbins was able to find one of her speeches made during her senior year, in which she praised the benefits of trials: "Terrell loved a challenge, the more complex and uncertain – the more attractive". See page 92.

<sup>575</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, "I have already read many tragedies by Racine, which I find outstanding. [I read] *Les Frères ennemis*, *Alexandre [Le Grand]*, [which were] very interesting, *Les Plaideurs*, and now, I am reading *Iphigénie*", 48. She also spoke about reading the autobiography of George Sand *Histoire de ma vie* and

works of these famous writers: “The *Les lettres provinciales* by [Blaise] Pascal opened my eyes to immorality and the doctrines [...] Of course I was awakened to new ideas [but] the power to write and the courage to start [writing] have abandoned me completely”<sup>576</sup>. Moreover, she liked studying music, art and foreign languages tremendously. During her stay in Europe, she planned to learn French, German and Italian and Greek, while studying music<sup>577</sup>. This gifted young woman was also an insatiable learner: she expressed her wish to learn how to play the piano and to take elocution courses as well<sup>578</sup>.

Women of lower classes also did everything they could to educate themselves. For instance, between 1866 and 1868, the domestic Addie Brown made great efforts at reading the press and novels in order to better her writing. The editor notes that Addie Brown “seem[ed] to read more books than her more educated friend” and that her attempts were unusual for a woman of her class: “her letters defy the stereotypes of black domestics”<sup>579</sup>. Likewise, valuing education more than anything else, Elizabeth Johnson Harris also prized professional achievements<sup>580</sup> and wanted her children to study as much as they could. She assessed her children’s achievements: “My girls and boys are all willing and honest workers, which is not a disgraceful move for poor persons, but I would feel so proud if they had only finished or gone higher in school”. Nevertheless, she several times rejoiced in her children’s personal and professional achievements in her account<sup>581</sup>.

Some women who came from humble backgrounds – or who, like Wells, did not have a chance to complete their studies because they had to devote themselves to their siblings – sometimes regretted not being able to further their education and did everything they could in their late twenties or early thirties to complete their education. This was for instance the case of Ida B. Wells and Helen James. When she was in her twenties, Wells confided in her diary

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other books such as *Un homme de Cour* or *Papiers curieux d’un homme de Coeur*, by Edouard Ferdinand de la Bonninière, Vicomte de Beaumont-Vassy, published in 1875. She also wished to read as many female authors as she could, such as Madame de Sévigné, Madame de Staël and George Sand. See page 21.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 1. She became fluent in French, German and to a lesser extent in Italian, and kept diaries in the languages of the country where she travelled. Her fluency in German would later enable her to write her speech in German at a 1904 Conference held in Berlin.

<sup>578</sup> Mary Church, Diary in French, see diary entry dated 28 September 1888, 42. See also page 27.

<sup>579</sup> Farah Griffin, ed., *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends*, 79.

<sup>580</sup> Elizabeth Johnson Harris, *Life Story*, 18. She emphasized the presence of the Bible in the house as an object of knowledge: “After the conversion of his father, the first book that was bought for the household was a large bible. The children all seemed proud to have this large and wonderful book to look at the beautiful illustrations.”

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 18. Some of her children had careers in the North: for instance, her son Charles lived in Boston as a married man and Peter James lived in Boston in 1904 for nine months, in Montréal for nine months as well, in Boston in 1906 and in Georgia. She initially wanted her children to have a career in music and she also insisted on being very religious: “Not that I am anxious that he or any of the others to be preachers, but glad to have them answer and abide at their master’s calling.” See page 35.

regretting not having enjoyed the opportunity that was given her at Rust University when she was younger: “There is nothing I lament more than the wasted opportunities as I do my neglect to pick up the crumbs of knowledge that were within my reach. Consequently I find myself at this age as deficient in a comprehensive knowledge as the veriest school-girl just entering the higher course. I heartily deplore the neglect.”<sup>582</sup>. As a result, Wells took additional courses in 1887 in order to complete her education: “I joined a lyceum composed mainly of teachers of the public schools. We met every Friday afternoon [...] The literary exercises consisted of recitations, essays, and debates interspersed with music. It was a breath of life to me”<sup>583</sup>. Like Ida Wells, Helen James also regretted not having been able to study more when she was young because of her mother’s illness. As a result, she spent her twenties trying to complete her education and graduated in her early thirties. In a letter to her sister Bertha, Helen advised one female member of the family “to profit by my example. Here I am away from home and friends to acquire knowledge that I lost for by being out of school so long and will probably be 30 years old before I am able to accomplish my desire”<sup>584</sup>. Helen battled an inferiority complex throughout most of her young adult life. In September 1904, when she attended Atlanta University and studied under the guidance of W.E.B. Du Bois, she was quite unsure of herself there, feeling unable to compete with students with class honors<sup>585</sup>. She took a teaching position in South Carolina soon after celebrating her thirtieth birthday<sup>586</sup>.

## 2. Completing Higher Education

By sending them to study at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, parents tried to model their daughters’ behavior so that they became tomorrow’s race workers, dedicated to the advancement of African Americans<sup>587</sup>.

Few black women had the opportunity to attend colleges or universities – this was quite extraordinary for the time. Three women of this study – Williams, Cooper and Terrell – benefited from exceptional circumstances, while some women such as Ida Wells were only able to attend institutions of Higher Education for shorter periods of time – and sometimes not

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<sup>582</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 151.

<sup>583</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 22-23.

<sup>584</sup> Helen James, *Can Anything Beat White?*, 128.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>587</sup> Shaw explains that the HBCUs promoted the idea of “socially responsible individualism” – that is, every black woman who had – or more exactly whose family had – the financial ability to labor for African Americans should engage in race work.

at all – because of lack of opportunity or money. Ida B. Wells briefly attended Rust College in the 1870s before taking care of her siblings in Tennessee or Mississippi. The goals they and their families set for themselves were very different from those set for white women of the same period.

### **Black and White Women's Different Approaches to Education**

In the 1890s, middle-class white women indeed approached education differently from black women. Among whites, there were often concerns that too much education would “unsex” women<sup>588</sup>. Linda Perkins argued that black and white women had different purposes in getting an education. “For white women, education served as a vehicle for developing homemaker skills, for reinforcing the role of wife and mother, and a milieu for finding a husband”<sup>589</sup>. In her study of turn-of-the-century North Carolina, Glenda Gilmore observed that compared to whites, “many African-American men and women prized a different ideal”<sup>590</sup>. Shirley Carlson also explained that while white society urged girls and women to “become educated so that they could become good wives and good mothers, especially to their sons”, black women had an additional challenge: “To this, the black community added the expectation that the female sex become educated for the same purpose as were males – that is, for self-improvement, as well as community and racial ‘uplift’”<sup>591</sup>.

What is more, the higher education experience of black and white women in the 1890s was also very different because black women tended to attend coeducational institutions whereas white women mostly went to single-sex institutions. Consequently, black women had a different experience from white southern women<sup>592</sup>. White women followed a separate curriculum and often married late – or never married – because of this single-sex rule, while black women often met their future husbands in the course of their studies<sup>593</sup>. However,

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<sup>588</sup> Shirley Carlson develops her argument on this question, she contends that “in the [larger (i.e. white) society], intelligence was regarded as a masculine quality which would ‘defeminize’ women.”, Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Spring, 1992): 61-73, 62.

<sup>589</sup> Linda Perkins, “The Impact of the Cult of True Womanhood on the Education of Black Women”, 1983, 183.

<sup>590</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43.

<sup>591</sup> Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, 63.

<sup>592</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 36. “As a result, African-American college and teacher training in North Carolina took place mostly at coeducational institutions, giving black students academic experiences quite different from those of southern whites”.

<sup>593</sup> This was the case for Anna Julia Cooper, who met her husband at St. Augustine in North Carolina when she was a student.

except for Anna Cooper, who met her husband at school – this was not the case for the women in this study<sup>594</sup>.

Perhaps because African American men were aware that, when educated, black women had the ability to aid the whole community, most of them had supported female education for a long time before the Civil War. For example, like W.E.B. Du Bois, the black historian William T. Alexander strongly believed that women, as much as men, should be offered the possibility to educate themselves: “Our miscalled education looks chiefly as to how a young woman may make a good figure in society [...] We see many who are afraid of saying openly what they think or feel, if it be in a position to the accredited opinion of the world [...] We want men and women who will think for themselves<sup>595</sup>. Yet in the late nineteenth century, as I will soon suggest, some black men came to see intelligent women as potential threats and were more hesitant about women’s education. In the post-war era, “[a]s black men sought to obtain education and positions similar to that of white men in society, many adopted the prevailing notion of white society, of the natural subordination of women”<sup>596</sup>. Of course, at the same time, many fathers of the middle and upper classes also promoted education for their daughters and agreed to send them – or insisted on sending them – to Colleges and Normal Schools, in order for them to be the architects of racial uplift, and also to be able to enjoy professional alternatives to domestic work – where women often suffered from sexual exploitation.

Young African American women were indeed expected to get an education whenever it was possible because their parents viewed education as the most important lever for their daughters and, by extension, for the race. After the 1890s, many black men still had different expectations for black women from those white men had for white women. As Glenda Gilmore has underscored, black men could advocate a “version of separate spheres for African American women and men”, in accordance with the prescriptive literature and white northern teachers. They did not advocate the ‘cause of southern ladyhood’ but “rather an evangelically driven ethos of ‘usefulness’. Pursuit of ‘usefulness’ gave women a middle space between the spheres into which they might venture on the business of the race”<sup>597</sup>.

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<sup>594</sup> Several women in this study met their husbands on the workplace: for instance, Mary Church Terrell and Margaret Murray Washington.

<sup>595</sup> See William T. Alexander, *History of the Colored Race in America*, (New Orleans, 1888), 595 as cited in Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, 64.

<sup>596</sup> Linda Perkins, “The Impact of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ on the Education of Black Women”, in L. Goodchild and H. Wechsler, eds., *The History of Higher Education*, 1983. Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues: 183-190, 187.

<sup>597</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 36.



All privileged women of this study who had the chance to get a higher education in the years 1860s, and up to the early 1890s, expressed intense satisfaction, gratitude and pride about being able to secure an education. Like all women in this study, Fannie Williams surely prized her education at the Normal School. Similarly, Mamie Fields voiced her pride about attending College: “To Hattie and me, Claflin was not only beautiful. It was splendid, and we felt proud to be students in such a grand place.”<sup>598</sup>. Mary Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper cherished their experience at Oberlin College, while Ida B. Wells remembered her time at Rust University with nostalgia.

### **Life on American Campuses**

Women’s experiences in Colleges could be very diverse. At that time, black students had limited choices as far as Universities were concerned, since very few of them, such as Oberlin College accepted black students. The vast majority of African American students attended other Institutions of Higher Education such as Howard University, Spelman College and other HBCUs such as Fisk University and Agricultural or Mechanical Institutes such as Tuskegee Institute, where courses were specifically designed according to gender. For example, boys were generally enrolled in mechanical courses, carpentry and bricklaying while girls followed courses in millinery, embroidery, sewing, cooking or domestic service. As a result, the vast majority of women followed courses specifically designed to train women to become future wives, mothers and teachers of the race. Of course, these Institutions also often had a Normal School in order to train the future teachers of the community. At that period, a handful of women attended Universities which offered “Classical courses” – the course intended for gentlemen. This is the case for Fannie Jackson Coppin in the 1860s and for Anna Cooper, Mary Terrell and Ida Gibbs Hunt in the early 1880s at Oberlin College. These women therefore benefited from exceptional circumstances.

Women such as Terrell, Cooper or Ida Gibbs Hunt had the rare opportunity to attend the “Gentlemen’s course” at Oberlin College, a liberal arts college of Ohio which accepted black students. They studied Greek, Latin, Mathematics and Algebra – topics judged “unwomanly” at that time. Even white women rarely studied these subjects. Interestingly, Mary Church Terrell explained that while she was studying in High School, she was advised not to take the Gentlemen’s Course because she might never be able to find a husband if she

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<sup>598</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 87.

did<sup>599</sup>. “Very much impressed and worried by the one which warned that [she] couldn’t get a husband”, she “decided to take a long chance” since she “loved school and liked to study too well to be allured from it by any of the arguments [her] friends advanced”<sup>600</sup>. Moreover, her liberal-minded father authorized her to study “as long as she pleased” and agreed to enroll her in this course. Like Terrell, Anna Cooper chose to study the Gentlemen’s Course at Oberlin after studying at St Augustine school. From September 1881 to June 1884, Cooper and Terrell studied to obtain their B.A. at Oberlin College. From 1884 to 1887, they studied to obtain their Master’s Degree<sup>601</sup>.

Many women of this study attended Universities founded by white Northerners after the Civil War where most of the teachers were white northern educators. For example, Ida B. Wells was deeply grateful to her white northern educators at Rust College – often called the ‘school marms’ – who left their native region to teach African Americans. She praised these “consecrated white men and women from the North who came into the South to teach immediately after the end of the war. It was they who brought us the light of knowledge and their splendid example of Christian courage”<sup>602</sup>. Likewise, Fannie Barrier Williams explained that northern white missionaries had inspired her to become a teacher in the South: “I had known of quite a number of fine young white women who had gone south to teach the freedmen, and, following my race instinct, I resolved to do the same. I soon obtained a situation in one of the ex-slave states”<sup>603</sup>. In 1892, when she was 34 years old and had been a teacher at M. Street High School for several years (since 1887), Anna Cooper listed the names of talented women – mostly educators – who had durably inspired her: Sojourner Truth, Amanda Smith, Sarah Woodson Early, Charlotte Forten, Hallie Quinn Brown, or Fanny Jackson Coppin “represent[ed] all shades of belief and as many departments of activity; they have one thing in common – their sympathy with the oppressed race in America and the

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<sup>599</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 32. “Some of my friends and schoolmates urged me not to select the ‘gentlemen’s course’, because it would take much longer to complete than the ‘ladies’ course.’ They pointed out that Greek was hard; that it was unnecessary, if not positively unwomanly, for girls to study that ‘old, dead language’ anyhow; that during the two extra years required to complete it I would miss a lot of fun which I could enjoy outside of college walls. And, worst of all, it might ruin my chances of getting a husband, since men were notoriously shy of women who knew too much. ‘Where’, inquired some of my friends sarcastically, ‘will you find a colored man who has studied Greek?’ They argued I wouldn’t be happy if I knew more than my husband, and they warned that trying to find a man in our group who knew Greek would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack”.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Cooper obtained her B.A. and her M.A. in Mathematics. She treasured the idea of obtaining a Doctorate for a long time. In her old age, she rejoiced in finally being able to embark on the adventure of “the long dreamed of Ph.D” at Columbia University, achieving a major step in her life at the age of 66. “The Third Step: Cooper’s Memoir of the Sorbonne Doctorate (1945-1950)?”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 320-330, 321.

<sup>602</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 22.

<sup>603</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 6.

consecration of their several talents in whatever line to the work of its deliverance and development”<sup>604</sup>.

Most graduates cherished the memories of their experiences in College and had deep affection for their Alma Maters and their former teachers. For example, like most black women who were able to attend College in the late nineteenth century, as an adult, Anna Cooper maintained deep affection for her Alma Mater Saint Augustine Normal School, located in Raleigh, North Carolina<sup>605</sup>. Similarly, Mary Terrell highly prized her College education and Alma Mater. Mary Terrell enjoyed her time at Oberlin College.

While I studied hard at Oberlin College and availed myself of all the opportunities afforded, I did not deprive myself of any pleasure I could rightfully enjoy. I entered into all the sports suggested by the fertile brains of others and played many of the pranks proposed. I learned early in my course that the fun derived from breaking the rules did not compensate for the trouble into which one was plunged by doing so<sup>606</sup>.

In 1898, she spoke of Oberlin in these flattering terms: “Oberlin, my dear alma mater, whose name will always be loved and whose praise will ever be sung as the first college in the country which was just, broad and benevolent enough to open its doors to negroes and to women on an equal footing with men”<sup>607</sup>. In a letter addressed to Florence Fitch, the Dean of women in October 1913, Terrell voiced her affection and sense of loyalty for the northern Institution, strongly wishing to see her daughters enter Oberlin as well<sup>608</sup>.

Similarly, Mary Church Terrell had extraordinary opportunities for her race, gender and time because she was able to complete her education in Europe, contrary to most black or white American women at the time. After obtaining her B.A. in 1884 and her M.A. in 1887 and teaching a few years in the United States, her affluent father Robert Church agreed to enable her to complete her studies in Europe in 1888-1890. As a result, contrary to Cooper, Wells or Williams – who had to undergo racial discrimination at home in the United States, Terrell was able to enjoy living far from American race prejudice. In Dresden, she explained

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<sup>604</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Status of Woman in America”, *A Voice from the South*, 142. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

<sup>605</sup> She made many references to St. Augustine Normal School and to her benefactor Dr J. Brinton Smith. Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Autobiographical elements. Even if it was impossible to find some of her writings dealing with her experience at Oberlin College, it is possible to say that she had deep respect and reverence for the Ohian Institution.

<sup>606</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 51. See Chapter 6: “Activities during College Course”.

<sup>607</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women”, in *African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907*, Library of Congress, 9.

<sup>608</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Letter of Mary Church Terrell to Florence Fitch, October 1913”, in Roland M. Bauman, *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College: A Documentary History*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 103-108.

that she was trying to “flee from the evils of race prejudice, so depressing in my own country”, as a result “it seemed very stupid indeed for me to place myself in a position to encounter it abroad”<sup>609</sup>.

### **Developing a Feminist Consciousness While Studying in Europe**

Mary Church also built her feminist consciousness during her trip in Europe. At 24 years of age, she was also deeply conscious that “her sex” and “race” as she calls them in French in her diary were important topics. She expressed a wish to discover more about famous women from other cultures – the French and English ones – and this shows that her gender seems to have been determinant in the formation of her identity. She wrote on 15 September 1888: “I would like to be diligent in my study of the lives, personalities and works of the most intelligent and renowned English and French female authors – but more particularly French ones. Madame de de Sévigné, Madame de Staël, George Sand, and others are worthy of being studied and would constitute an abundant source of information and inspiration”<sup>610</sup>. This period in Europe undoubtedly developed Mary’s feminist sensitivity.

Mary seems to have been very interested in women and women’s history at a very early age. In her diary, she talked about being interested in her “sex and race”, but she was also interested in everything related to the topic of women. When she read French literature, she was naturally interested in George Sand’s story. She was also interested in autobiographical approaches : “I would like to find [...] articles dealing with women. I started reading *Histoire de ma vie* by George Sand, which is very interesting. In it, she depicts many historical facts about the revolution and I think I will buy it. I intend to write articles about George Sand, Madame de Sévigné and other women”<sup>611</sup>. Additionally, her liberal-minded European female teachers<sup>612</sup> influenced her greatly. In her twenties, she developed feminist ideas when studying in Switzerland with Miss Louise Sécretan, whom she ceaselessly

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<sup>609</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 73. “When I reached Dresden I was glad I had decided to study in Berlin. The city was full of Americans and English. Wherever I turned on the streets, I heard my mother tongue. I knew that a foreign city full of my white countrymen was no place for a colored girl. I was trying to flee from the evils of race prejudice”.

<sup>610</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 21.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25. On 30 November 1888, Church recounted reading works which were of great interest to her: “I keep reading extracts which interest me more than I can say. *L’Edda et les Nibelungen* are very appealing and interesting. I made much progress thanks to hard work”. Church was increasingly interested in the lives of Jewish women as well: “I would like to work on an article entitled “La Juiverie” (?) de Frankfort. This subject is of a special interest for me. The persecution of Jewish women has a significant meaning for me”.

<sup>612</sup> She studied at an all girls’ school in Lausanne. See Joan Quigley, *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell’s Fight for Racial Justice in the Nation’s Capital*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

praised<sup>613</sup>. There, Church was told that women should know about politics in order to voice their opinion and should not be relegated to “mending stockings”<sup>614</sup>. The influence played by this Swiss feminist thinker on Mary Church is obvious: it enabled her, from the age of approximately 25, to be critical of sexist attitudes and ideas.

Many Spelman alumnae relate fond memories of their Alma Mater in letters they sent to the Deans of women years after leaving college. Many cherished their experiences alongside the teachings they received at Spelman Seminary<sup>615</sup>: “Spelman is twice as dear to me now as on my graduation day and I thought I loved it then” and “The experience that I have received during the time I have been teaching has meant more to me than I will ever be able to express”<sup>616</sup>. Like Terrell with Oberlin College, many wanted their own daughters to attend Spelman College. For instance, Olee Littlejohn Barbour, a graduate of 1916, wrote to Miss Tapley on 19 July 1927: “I have two children: I shall never forget my Spelman training and when my little daughter enters college, it will be Spelman”. Another, Daisy E. Brown Bonner, in a letter dated 9 December 1920 and addressed to Miss Brill from Greenville, Mississippi, said: “I am holding up to the standard of Spelman seminary and hope some day to send my girls to you”. Lastly, Maggie Millner Carter also wished to be able to send her daughters to her Alma Mater one day: “I intend with the help of the Good Lord to enter them into Spelman just as soon as they are old enough to leave, for to me no training is like Spelman’s”<sup>617</sup>.

Most women were raised in families who prized education above anything else. Quite naturally, these often insatiable learners were willing to pursue Higher Education and later naturally turned to teaching.

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<sup>613</sup> Mary Church was referring to Louise Secrétan (1846- 1920). “Miss Secrétan is so well-read and makes such interesting speeches”. Louise Secrétan taught for forty years in the Lausanne area. Mary Church followed her classes and seemed to be very impressed by her ideas and teaching. Secrétan taught at l'Ecole supérieure de Morges, à l'Ecole Vinet in Lausanne. In 1912, she published the biography of her father, Charles Secrétan: *Sa vie et son oeuvre*. She died in 1920, at the age of 74. See *Le Mouvement féministe: Organe officiel des publications de l'Alliance nationale des sociétés féminines suisses*. 8 (1920). N°110, 25 décembre 1920, 188. [https://archive.org/stream/charlessecrta00secr/charlessecrta00secr\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/charlessecrta00secr/charlessecrta00secr_djvu.txt).

<sup>614</sup> Mary Church, Diary in French, 72. “Women must know about politics so that they can give their opinion. If they find politics too boring, it is better not to speak about it. Here is what I think: in that case, they must remain quiet. A [narrow-minded] man mocked women who would like to interfere in politics since they must mend stockings and do not possess the necessary skills to understand politics”. A few days later, she expressed her love and admiration for Mlle Secrétan: “I like her so much! She is so good and so well-read! She asked me to write to her from time to time”, 60.

<sup>615</sup> It is now called Spelman College. Two white northern women educators, Sarah Packard and Harriet Giles, devoted their lives to the education of African American women and founded Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1881. At the Camille Cosby Center in Spelman College, I was able to consult the “Deceased Alumnae File”, which contains the documents of about 500 Spelman former students who have died over the last hundred years.

<sup>616</sup> “Annual Report, 8 April 1921”, *Spelman Messenger*.

<sup>617</sup> Alumna Letter, *Spelman Messenger*, April 1915, 5. Even if these letters were sent much later than the period under study, they show how graduates cherished their Alma Mater years after graduating.



### 3. Embracing Careers: Teaching and Journalism

Career choices were limited for women in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s – or even in the late 1910s. Many women from the middle-class naturally turned to teaching because it was an acceptable position for unmarried, educated black women of the middle and upper-class. It also represented the opportunity to serve the community by becoming “race leaders” and it finally offered women an alternative to back-breaking, low-paying domestic jobs. Most of the women in this study became teachers at some point in their lives. Some of them – such as Fanny Coppin, Fannie Williams and Mary Terrell – put an end to their career when they married but as Glenda Gilmore has emphasized, “African American women often taught after marriage, whereas most public school commiteemen would not allow married white women to teach”<sup>618</sup>. While white women of the middle and upper-classes were not allowed to continue working, black teachers benefited from greater liberty. Anna Cooper is the exception in this study since, being a widow, she could work as a teacher.

Some women from the middle-class such as Ida Wells turned to teaching out of financial necessity. Immediately after the war, many found employment thanks to the American Missionary Association and many others found private positions or even opened their own schools<sup>619</sup>. Susie King Taylor also worked because she needed to make a living after the Civil War. She opened a school at her home in Savannah, Georgia. Taylor taught successfully for one year to 20 pupils – whom she charged one dollar – and conducted an evening school, but she eventually had to close it after a free school named the “Beach Institute” opened and all pupils had deserted her school. In September 1866, she “was obliged to give up teaching”<sup>620</sup>.

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<sup>618</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43. In many States, it was customary for middle and upper-class women to stop working after their marriage. See Glenda Gilmore’s *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43. Gilmore explained that she could not find any rule in the “Department of Public Instruction” prohibiting white women from working in North Carolina. On the contrary, it seemed common for black women to continue teaching after their marriage in North Carolina. Gilmore explained that “the examples of married African American women teaching are countless, and often a woman taught in the school where her husband was the principal”, 458.

<sup>619</sup> See the work of Ronald Butchart on this question. *Schooling the Freedpeople: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010).

<sup>620</sup> Susie King Taylor, 54-55. She opened a new school in Liberty County, Georgia, and taught for a year. Yet, Taylor had difficulty adjusting to life in the countryside: “Country life did not agree with me, so I returned to the city”. Another woman, Mrs Susie Carrier took charge of her school. Back in Savannah, she realized she would again have to open a new school as the free school had taken all [her] former pupils”. She earned some money by conducting a night school but had to be assisted financially by her brother-in-law. She was able to teach until 1868, the year when a free night school also opened at the same Beach Institute. Discouraged, she then closed her school and decided to stop teaching. In her case, making a living from teaching proved impossible. During her later life, she worked as a domestic, a cook and much later, in 1886, she got involved in the Women’s Relief Corps, the association in charge of commemorating the memory of Civil War Union veterans.



## Devoting Oneself to Education

These women believed that education was paramount for racial uplift and therefore worked as educators at some point in their lives. The reasons for becoming educators could be very diverse. Overall, teaching was deemed as an acceptable position by Victorian standards. Teaching represented a desirable position for African Americans, especially for women. As Terrell explained in her autobiography:

Among colored people school teaching offers one of the most desirable vocations which well-educated representatives of the race can enter. Particularly is this true of the women. Consequently, those best equipped mentally and spiritually are eager to secure positions as teachers either in the public schools or in the colleges for colored youth<sup>621</sup>.

Even before slavery was outlawed, most black families often did not view Victorian ideals as incompatible with race work or public work. On the contrary, they understood them as complementary.

Yet African American women born into affluent families sometimes had to struggle in order to impose their career choices to their family members, who could very much be attached to the Victorian ideals of “True womanhood”. When Mary Church unveiled her ambition to become a teacher, the affluent member of the Memphis black elite Robert Church refused to hear about it. Regional gendered norms and class barred her from engaging freely in an occupation she had nevertheless always aspired to. Since keeping house was a mark of social success for southern women, Robert Church forbade his daughter to work<sup>622</sup>. Terrell analyzed his attitude this way: “Naturally, my father was the product of his environment. In the South for nearly three hundred years “real ladies” did not work, and my father was thoroughly imbued with that idea. He wanted his daughter to be a “lady”. Because she had been “reared among Yankees” in Ohio since the age of 6 and had “imbibed the Yankee’s respect for work”<sup>623</sup>, that is, had adhered to the Protestant hard work ethic, she had somehow “become” a Northerner. Terrell seemed to say that her blooming sense of Northernness enabled her to defy restrictive gender norms, thus implying that it would have been far more difficult to do so if she had stayed exclusively in the South – where gender norms were more rigid and where the sense of Victorianism was historically stricter than in the North<sup>624</sup>.

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<sup>621</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 141.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 60-61, Terrell explained: “I could not engage actively in any kind of work outside of the home, because my father did not approve of my doing so. [...] Since he was able and willing to support me, he declared, he did not understand why I wanted to teach or do any kind of work”.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>624</sup> See Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*. Chapter 1.

After graduating from Oberlin in 1884, when Mary informed Robert Church that she planned to work as a teacher in the public school system of Memphis, Tennessee, considering that this was her “duty”<sup>625</sup>, he bluntly opposed her project because he thought that she would be “taking the bread and butter of the mouth of some girls who needed it”. Pinpointing her father’s contradictions in her autobiography, indicating that his “money had prepared her” to become a teacher, Mary Church transgressed parental interdiction yet partially complied by accepting a position at Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio, after a year, in 1885<sup>626</sup>. Committing this act of self-assertion – disobeying her father – appears to have been difficult. She paid a high price for it: infuriated, Robert Church refused to speak or write to her for the remaining of the school year<sup>627</sup>.

Terrell’s situation remains almost unique. Unlike white women of their age and time, black women teachers often had no other choice but to build an identity that was either in sharp contrast with Victorian ideals or in partial contradiction. They indeed crafted what the scholar Shirley Carlson named a “dual womanhood” which respected two of the four prescribed pillars of true womanhood: purity, piety while rejected domesticity and submissiveness.

For many women, teaching was a vocation. For example, the devotion of Kate Drumgoold – a black woman from Virginia who worked as a teacher in West Virginia in the 1880s for many years, after completing her education at the Wayland Seminary in D.C. – to black education is reminiscent of many accounts: “I was willing to go to prepare to die for my people, for I could not rest till my people were educated”<sup>628</sup>. The sense of belonging to a wider community of African Americans is clear throughout many of these women’s accounts. For Maritcha Remond Lyons, teaching was a vocation. After serving for “48 and a half

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<sup>625</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 63. “Father realized that in doing what I believed was my duty I was simply proving that I was a ‘chip off the old block’. Some girls run away from home to marry men of their choice in this group their fathers displease you, so I left home and ran the risk of permanently alienating my father for myself to engage in the work which his money he had prepared me to do”.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 62. Terrell said: “When he learned I was working in the North instead of the South he would be reconciled to it. But my hopes were blasted”. Her father “upbraided me bitterly”. She was “literally stunned with grief” but she explained that her “conscience was clear [because she] knew [she] had done right to use [her] training in behalf of [her] race”.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>628</sup> Kate Drumgoold, “A Slave Girl’s Story”, 123. Kate Drumgoold was born in 1858 or 1859 in Virginia to slave parents. After 1865, when she was seven years old, she lived in Brooklyn with her mother. She identified the urban north as her “home”. “In New York, Drumgoold worked as a domestic, battled significant illnesses and worked toward obtaining an education”. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drumgoold/summary.html>. After completing her education in Washington D.C., she worked for eleven years in Woodstock, Shenandoah County, Virginia and Hinton, West Virginia. She wrote: “[God] led me on day by day, and after a while I found that he had let me to go away from home that I might get ready for the work that my heart was so full of, for every time that I saw the newspaper there was someone of our race in the far south getting killed for trying to teach and I made up my mind that I would die to see my people taught”.

years”, she never had “a doubt as to a proper choice of a vocation”<sup>629</sup>. When she was among the first black women to enter the Classical course at Oberlin College, Terrell had her heart set on sharing her knowledge with pupils or students one day. “All during my college course I had dreamed of the day when I could promote the welfare of my race”<sup>630</sup>. Terrell wrote years later. Again, race work is at the center of this woman’s concern. Likewise, Fannie Barrier explains in her autobiography that teaching was her “first ambition”<sup>631</sup>.

Moreover, teaching represented the noblest work. Anna Cooper believed that educating “neglected people” was her duty. For her, “teaching has always seemed to me the noblest of callings and I believe that if I were white I should still want to teach those whose need presents a stronger appeal than money. There may be a bit of vanity in this. It is human to be stimulated by appreciation where it is genuine”<sup>632</sup>. Cooper’s racial philosophy was that “the greatest happiness comes from altruistic service”<sup>633</sup>.

Ronald Butchart has underscored that “the two themes that ring[ed] through nearly every black teacher’s application to teach were: ‘racial solidarity and racial uplift and elevation’”<sup>634</sup>. His remarks apply to all women in this study. In their accounts, it is clear that educating and uplifting the race appear as the foremost motivations for becoming educators.

These women embraced a tradition of community work inherited from black women who had worked for social uplift for decades. As Linda Perkins has pointed out: “As the Civil War came to an end, black women for over half a century had sought to uplift themselves and the race”<sup>635</sup>. As Darlene Hine has indicated in *Hine Sight*, many women continued a tradition begun under slavery and their “benevolent actions had the added bonus of underscoring the moral and spiritual righteousness of African American women” at a time when it was under attack<sup>636</sup>. Long before the end of the Civil War, black women achieved community work for their “race” and were the forerunners of female community work in America. Women either

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<sup>629</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, 31, Chapter 4.

<sup>630</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 60.

<sup>631</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 6.

<sup>632</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers, Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>633</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Question 65 of the form. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>634</sup> Ronald Butchart, *Schooling the Freedpeople: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 43.

<sup>635</sup> Linda Perkins, “Black Women and Racial Uplift Prior to Emancipation”: 317-334, 332, in *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, ed. Filomena Chioma Steady. (Cambridge, MA: Schekman, 1981). They often took part in work for the poor, the aged, the orphaned and the sick.

<sup>636</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and Reconstruction of American History*, 1994, 65.

became race workers because they were strong Christian believers and/or because they believed that education was the solution to the problems met by African Americans<sup>637</sup>.

Moreover, educated African Americans were expected to help the community. “It was expected that blacks who were able to assist, i.e. “uplift”, other members of their race, would do so”<sup>638</sup> and “race uplift was the expected objective of *all* educated blacks; however, after the Civil War, the implementation of this philosophy was placed primarily on the shoulders of black women”. Additionally, black women were seen as the “nurturers and guardians of—not the thinkers or leaders of the race” and “most black women educators accepted that charge.”<sup>639</sup>. The women of our sample embraced this tradition of uplift.

Additional reasons pushed African American women to embrace teaching careers. During the Reconstruction period (1865-1877), the teachers’ main motivation was to help newly emancipated slaves. For the period 1877-1900s, all teachers were animated by the wish to pursue this enterprise and continue educating a group of blacks they felt committed to by the bonds of race. The strongest motivation was to offer literacy to illiterate African Americans. As Ronald Butchart has argued, “for the black teachers, education was intended to extend and secure emancipation”<sup>640</sup>.

For all generations of women in this study, teachers were deeply aware that education guaranteed a more complete emancipation and political empowerment for African Americans. This became more obvious when southern states started imposing literacy tests and discriminatory legislation – such as *The Grandfather-clause* – in order to disenfranchise African American citizens. Since political rights and literacy were related, providing

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<sup>637</sup> Religious beliefs could also play an important role in some women’s decisions to teach within the African American community. The teacher who expressed faith and reverence for God in the most striking way in her writings was perhaps Kate Drumgoold. She compared the black race to the “children of Israel who, after many weary years in bondage, were led into that land of promise”. Kate Drumgoold, 75. Feeling endorsed with a divine mission of teaching African Americans, she used very strong terms to describe her attachment to this almost sacred knowledge: God helped her “get ready for the work that my heart was so full of, for every time that I saw the newspaper there was someone of our race in the far south getting killed for trying to teach and I made up my mind that I would die to see my people taught”. See page 124. She referred to the work of missionary workers with religious terms: “[Teaching] is their meat and their drink”, clearly drawing a parallel with God’s flesh and blood. See page 149. Even if she had been baptized only in her teens, her faith was nonetheless central in her life. References to God literally inundate her account. She used a biblical terminology to describe her attachment to education, which she considered as almost sacred. As a Christian, she believed in universal freedom and in equality before God. Refusing political disempowerment or any form of bondage, she viewed all blacks as humans, bound together by the links of race. As a result, she felt that her duty was to help southern African Americans. Black ministers and preachers in both the north and the south relayed these ideas and promoted them in sermons.

<sup>638</sup> Linda Perkins, “Black Women and Racial Uplift Prior to Emancipation”, 332.

<sup>639</sup> Linda Perkins, “The Impact of the Cult of True Womanhood on the Education of Black Women”, 186-187, italics hers.

<sup>640</sup> Ronald Butchart, 44.

education for the race was at the heart of these women's efforts. Many teachers wished to offer African Americans better economic prospects.

Imogene Howard, who was born in Boston into an upper middle-class family, and pursued her career as a teacher in the Colored Grammar school No. 81 in New York City<sup>641</sup>, was committed to ameliorating the larger African American community's access to literacy and by extension, to political power. Contrary to other women, she remained in her native section her whole life and taught there for thirty years from the 1860s to the 1890s<sup>642</sup>. In her 1890 diary, Imogene Howard regretted that many pupils dropped out of school: "There is more higher education now among the colored people than ever before, but in too many instances the children have to give up when they get what they can in the grammar schools and go to work". Teaching the community was also indeed a way to offer pupils better opportunities to obtain desirable, better-paid jobs. This is why many viewed the South as the region where trained teachers were desperately needed. The southern-born Kate Drumgoold, despite several years spent living in Brooklyn with her mother, decided to teach in the southern section because she felt her aid was more needed there. Drumgoold rejoiced in being able "to help forward the great cause of education in those parts where there was so much need"<sup>643</sup>. Women educators felt useful to the black community because all thought that their help was necessary, in particular in the South.

All women in this study had been raised in families who highly prized education. Most black women who benefited from comfortable situations were willing to pass on their knowledge to their people and give back to their community in recognition of what they themselves had been given. Educated African American women of the North – such as Fannie Williams — and well-off black southern women – such as Mary Terrell — felt closely bound to less fortunate southern African Americans because they viewed racism as a national problem and wished to see the economic and political situation improve for all African Americans.

African American women teachers often explained feeling a sense of duty towards the less privileged of their community. Like many other educated women of her class, northern upper-middle-class Rebecca Primus felt it was her duty to help the wider African American

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<sup>641</sup> In West 17th Street.

<sup>642</sup> Imogene Howard's sister Adeline Howard was the school principal of the Wormly building, Washington D.C. and her brother Dr. E.C. Howard was a graduate of Harvard College. Imogene Howard graduated from the Girls' High Normal School of Boston. She received a M.A. from the College of the City of New York in 1879. She also obtained a M.A. in Pedagogy at the University of the City of New York.

<sup>643</sup> Kate Drumgoold, "A Slave Girl's Story", 154.

community in the South<sup>644</sup>. As teaching was an acceptable position for a woman of her section and class, her family agreed to send her to Maryland. Sara Stanley, an Oberlin graduate also “believed that she had an obligation to take her Oberlin training and the preparation that eight years’ teaching experience provided to the people she thought of as her own”<sup>645</sup>. Similarly, as seen before, Mary Church Terrell spoke about teaching as accomplishing her “duty”. After all, she emphasized that her father’s “money” and her College education had “prepared her” to become a teacher. In fact, for her, teaching almost amounted to an obsession. The idea of remaining idle at her father’s place for a year after graduating from Oberlin was unbearable<sup>646</sup>. She felt that all her educational achievements would lack meaning if she did not use her skills to uplift the race. What is more, Mary Terrell had indeed chosen to be trained for a career in teaching. After graduating from Oberlin, she “left Memphis and engaged in the work I had prepared myself to do”<sup>647</sup>.

In College, many students were encouraged by their teachers to help the community in their turn once they graduated. For instance, graduates of Hampton College in Virginia wrote about their sense of “duty” towards the community. For example, one graduate wrote to her former teachers in 1884: “I would feel very much ashamed to be called a daughter of Hampton if I did not try to do my whole duty”. Mary wrote: “Though I may never teach school again, I shall try to do the duty which lies before me and thus prove myself worthy of being a Hampton graduate”. Another student, “Jane”, voiced her will to aid women: “My mind and heart are in the work for women. I long to be able to do something for the women of my race. I am deeply impressed on this subject; my heart goes out for them. I am willing to make any sacrifice to help them”<sup>648</sup>.

Likewise, Mary Church felt that all her educational achievements would lack meaning if she did not use her skills to “promote the welfare of [her] race”<sup>649</sup>. During her stay in Paris in 1888, Church, who was then 25 years old, noted that she desired bettering African Americans’ lives, helping the poor, the oppressed and the uneducated. Advancement of society was

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<sup>644</sup> She felt it was a “political and moral calling”, Farah Griffin, ed., *Beloved Sisters*, 10. Women such as Charlotte Forten had done the same during the Civil War or after.

<sup>645</sup> Heather Williams, *Self-Taught*, 116.

<sup>646</sup> “After graduating from Oberlin, I grew more restless and dissatisfied with the life I was leaving in Memphis”.

<sup>647</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 60.

<sup>648</sup> “Letters from Hampton Graduates: What Hampton Girls are Doing”, *Southern Workman*, 1 March 1884.

<sup>649</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 60. She claimed having carefully prepared her future career since she entered the Classical course at Oberlin College: “I decided that life would be pleasanter [...] if I left Memphis and engaged in the work I had prepared myself to do”. Terrell would write years later: “All during my college course I had dreamed of the day when I could promote the welfare of my race”.



indeed foremost in her ambitions<sup>650</sup>. Again, unsure of herself, she belittled herself. Being very religious, she placed all her hope in God to help her in her mission. On her birthday on 23 September 1888, she wrote: “I wish to honor my race, I wish to obey God, and accomplish work for the poor, the uneducated, and the oppressed. God will help me. I am sure of it”<sup>651</sup>.

Even if Ida Wells did not enjoy teaching in the 1880s, this profession also largely inspired her. Teachers were those who assured the necessary uplift of the community. In “A story of 1900” published in *The Fisk Herald* in April 1886, Wells seems to use her own personal experience to show that African American educators had a special role to play for the race, that of educator for “those who dwelt in darkness”<sup>652</sup>. The author of her story realized that “the real want” for the community was “proper home, moral [and mental] training” and the teacher’s main goal was to prove to the world that “worth, not race, made the man”<sup>653</sup>. Very early in her career, Wells expressed the belief that the leaders, the educated, the privileged of the race had a special responsibility towards the less fortunate. She encouraged those teachers to set “a pure example in cleanliness and morals before the children” because their roles were “to supplement this lack” and to understand and make intelligent use of the scope of their influence as educators. “That the many teachers of the race may not be content simply to earn a salary, but may use their opportunity and influence”<sup>654</sup>.

These women’s common wish was to provide African Americans with literacy and education and subsequently to greater independence and political power. The future of the race was at the heart of these women’s selfless decisions to become educators. They were ready to confront race prejudice, dangerous situations in order to enable those of their race to get access to a more complete freedom. Despite exacting teaching experiences and daunting situations, African American women educators showed unabated motivation to promote racial uplift. They were driven not only by religious, family and philosophical motives but by political circumstances as well.

## Teaching Experiences

The experiences of these women teachers were very diverse. For example, Terrell and Cooper’s privileged situations make their cases exceptional because they both taught at an

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<sup>650</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 17-18.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>652</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 183. “A Story of 1900”. This was written on 29 February 1886 in Memphis, Tennessee.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

institution of Higher Education – Wilberforce University in Ohio – early in their career and at M. Street High School in D.C.. Mary Church Terrell taught French and Mineralogy at University level at Wilberforce University in the mid-1880s before securing a position at M. Street High School, where she taught foreign languages. Mary Church Terrell’s experience at Wilberforce College was sometimes challenging but she thoroughly enjoyed teaching there: “Nobody could truthfully claim that I had many idle moments when I taught at Wilberforce University. I certainly earned my salary. But I enjoyed every minute of my work there”<sup>655</sup>.

Likewise, Anna Cooper worked as a teacher yet from a much earlier age. Because she came from much humbler backgrounds, Anna Haywood started teaching at St Augustine school at age 8 and later taught Modern Languages and Literature at Wilberforce University, from September 1884 to June 1885. Making the most of her Oberlin classical education, she returned in the South to teach Mathematics, Latin and Greek at Saint Augustine Normal School for two years, between September 1885 and June 1887, before securing a position at M. Street High School in September 1887<sup>656</sup>. As a result, between 1887 and 1891 – considering that Mary Church was in Europe from 1888 to 1890 – Cooper and Church were colleagues for a short period of time<sup>657</sup>. Yet, Church withdrew from teaching after her marriage to Robert Terrell in 1891, while Cooper continued working there until her retirement in 1930<sup>658</sup>.

In the 1880s, Ida Wells taught in various places such as rural Mississippi, Memphis, Shelby County in Tennessee, Visalia, California, in September 1886, and Kansas City – when she came back from her aunt’s place<sup>659</sup>. Ida Wells’s experience as a teacher was destabilizing because she was surprised by the public, moral and advisory role teachers were expected to endorse in a community. She was surprised to see many Ministers fail to offer people

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<sup>655</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 62-63. “The school is beautifully situated in an entrancing rural spot, and everything in the community centers around the institution, which is a world in itself. At the end of the year I had actually saved \$150”.

<sup>656</sup> She became Principal of M. Street High School from December 1901 to September 1906 – until her dismissal.

<sup>657</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 8. In one of her diary entries, Mary Church spoke about a certain “Madame Cooper” who informed her that she had obtained her Master’s Degree. She referred to a letter dated 31 August 1888 in her diary in French.

<sup>658</sup> After her dismissal from M. Street High School in 1906, she worked at Lincoln Institute in Missouri, as a Professor of Foreign Languages – from 1906 to 1910. She resumed her job as a teacher of Latin at M. Street High School, where she worked until her retirement. After this, Anna Cooper kept working in the field of education, serving as President of Frelinghuysen University from 1930 to 1941.

<sup>659</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 31. “This is how it came about that in the year 1886 I had taught in one month in the states of California, Missouri and Tennessee”, 31. Because of the delay after her appointment in Kansas City, Wells was replaced by Miss Callie Jordan, “a home girl”. Other teachers “showed themselves to be hostile and resentful. Being very sensitive, I was much hurt over their attitude. [...] I could not bear to be a disturbing influence”, *Crusade*, 30. In her diary, she wrote that because of her “extreme sensitiveness”, she envisaged leaving. See *Memphis Diary*, 113. So she “left Kansas City that night and walked into the teachers’ meeting in Memphis the following Saturday morning, in time to receive my assignment for the coming year”, 30.

guidance and turn to their teachers for advice<sup>660</sup>: People “would come to me with their problems because I, as their teacher, should have been their leader but I knew nothing of life except what I had read”<sup>661</sup>. Additionally, Wells considered herself too young and inexperienced for the role of leader parents gave her: “As a green girl in my teens, I was no help to the people outside of the classroom, and at first, I fear, I was very little aid in it, since I had had no normal training. The only work I did outside of my schoolroom, besides hard study to keep up with the work, was to teach in Sunday school”<sup>662</sup>. A teacher’s task was quite varied indeed and educators were expected to play an important social role in their communities, as guides and advisors. New Yorker Imogene Howard stated that her influence as an educator stretched beyond the classroom: “They have the abilities to become “good and useful men and women” as long as teachers are here to “direct this precocity into the proper channels”<sup>663</sup>. Maritcha Remond Lyons – started her career in Brooklyn, New York, and served as a teacher in the Colored School No. 1 and later in No. 67 – thought likewise. In her mind, the primary mission of a teacher was to promote “bodily development and character building”<sup>664</sup>. Ida B. Wells did not enjoy school teaching and experienced it as a constraint. At age 66, she wrote:

I never cared for teaching, but I had always been very conscientious in trying to do my work honestly. There seemed nothing else to do for a living except menial work, and I could not have made a living at that [...] I was never promoted above the fourth grade in all my years as a teacher. The confinement and monotony of the primary work began to grow distasteful<sup>665</sup>.

## **Becoming Writers and Activists**

Some women such as Wells, Terrell or Cooper desired to embrace careers where they could use their intellectual qualities to serve the cause of women and the community early in their lives. When they did not teach, Wells and Cooper pursued diverse activities: they wrote speeches, essays, newspaper articles, gave lectures and some such as Terrell also dreamt of writing novels or other literary works. All of these women were generally active locally in clubs, associations or local Churches. For example, Anna Julia Cooper gave lectures in churches in the mid 1880s and wrote essays before publishing *A Voice from the South* in

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<sup>660</sup> “I wondered why the preachers did not give the people practical talks. I had already found out in the country that the people needed guidance in everyday life that leaders, the preachers, were not giving them this help”.

<sup>661</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 22.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Imogene Howard, *Diary 1890 (?)*. Alexander Street Press.

<sup>664</sup> Maritcha Remond, *Memories*, 22. Chapter 3. Mamie Garvin Fields summed up the roles of teachers this way in *Lemon Swamp*, 218: “At different times, the black teachers in the country schools served as extension agents, community workers, and a lot else besides”.

<sup>665</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 31.

1892. While working as a teacher in Mississippi, Ida Wells was starting a career as a journalist and was increasingly focusing her energy on this activity.

Mary Church nourished the ambition to become a writer very early. Her 1888-1890 diary reveals that in 1887, she strongly intended to become a novelist or an activist writer. On 28 October 1888, she penned: "I want to write. I have to write. Everything seems to indicate that this is my vocation, almost as if it were a holy duty"<sup>666</sup> and "I would like to be a writer, an author, and I am impatient to achieve something"<sup>667</sup>. In the Fall of 1888, she spoke about writing to her dentist, Dr. Chapman, saying that she was interested in questions dealing with race or sex:

I told him about my immense desire to become a good writer and asked his thoughts about it. He told me that if one has something to say, one will find the words to express it. One has to be inhabited by a subject before one starts to write. It is true. But what subject do I have? I am interested in so many different ones. For instance, my gender, my race.

At the age of 25, Mary Church knew that she wanted to write about her condition as a woman and as a woman of color one day, having the feeling that as a privileged woman, she had the duty to help those who were less fortunate than she was. Yet because she lacked self-confidence, she was often discouraged<sup>668</sup>. Nevertheless, she started contacting publishing houses in Paris in order to publish translations of articles into English, using her skills in French<sup>669</sup>.

## Embracing Careers in Journalism

Some women such as Ida Wells and Anna Cooper who were committed to race and gender equality naturally turned to journalism to spread their ideas. Ida B. Wells and Anna Cooper are the most explicit examples of such activism because they both started their career early in the South of the 1880s.

Ida B. Wells became interested in journalism in her twenties. When she was a teacher in Memphis, she made her first steps as a journalist for the *Evening Star*<sup>670</sup>. Her work as a

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<sup>666</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 54. Robert Terrell admired her literary talents and encouraged her to persevere in her efforts: "R.H.T. told me that I write such interesting letters than all other women he knows that he is surprised by the fact that I do not plan to be a journalist. We will see".

<sup>667</sup> Ibid. *Diary entry* 16 September 1888, 23.

<sup>668</sup> She confided: "Alas. Why so much ambition and so little wit, so little talent? I am sometimes discouraged and I would like to stop being ambitious or wishing to achieve something before I die. But this state of mind is not worthy of a person who has had so many opportunities as I did".

<sup>669</sup> She planned to contact "Routledge and sons, Broadway, Ludgate Hill, London", 31. Later, she also noted "la maison de publication Hachette & Co, 79 Boulevard St Germain.", and also "Galman Levy, 3 Rue Auber, Galerie d'Orléans, Palais Royal, Charpentier, 18 Rue de Grenelle", 34. *La revue bleue*, 38. She was a regular customer of Galignani, the famous Parisian bookseller, 38. She initially wished to write about the relationship between France and the United States and wanted to translate a book entitled: *La participation de la France à l'établissement de l'indépendance des États-Unis*. There is no trace that she eventually did it.

<sup>670</sup> Ida B. Wells- Barnett, *Crusade*, 22-23.

journalist enabled her to express her real self. “The correspondence I had built up in newspaper work gave me an outlet through which to express the real “me” and I enjoyed my work to the utmost”<sup>671</sup>. In her articles, she was free to express her true personality, voice her ideas and launch battles for racial and gender equality. When she began her work at *The Free Speech*, she explains: “In nine-months’ time I [...] felt sure that I had found my vocation. I was very proud of my success because up to that time very few of our newspapers had made any money”<sup>672</sup> and she “felt I had at last found my real vocation”<sup>673</sup>. In 1892, she “could make a living by my newspaper and need never tie myself down to school teaching”<sup>674</sup>. As a result, journalism provided a fascinating outlet for this determined young woman. She believed that she could be useful to the community elsewhere than in a classroom.

Ida Wells had her heart set on speaking in a “plain, common sense” way so as to be understood by most readers<sup>675</sup>. Her goal as a journalist was to reach as many people as possible, in other words, to be democratic. In 1889, Wells started on the adventure of owning a newspaper: “Since the appetite grows for what it feeds on, the desire came to own a paper. I was invited to be a writer on *The Free Speech and Headlight* of Memphis”<sup>676</sup>, she remembers in her autobiography. At that time, her outspokenness cost her a great deal both personally and professionally. When Wells denounced the “utterly inadequate” working conditions of the black schools of the city of Memphis and the morality of certain teachers in an article, she lost her position as a teacher, the School Board refusing to appoint her again after seven years of service<sup>677</sup>. When Wells lost her job as a teacher, she decided to try and see if she could make a living from her job as a journalist.

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid., 23. “In *The Living Way*, I wrote in a plain, common sense way on the things which concerned our people. Knowing that their education was limited, I never used the word of two syllables where one would serve the purpose. I signed these articles “Iola”, 24. *The Free Speech* was printed on pink paper so that the “poor illiterates” who wanted *The Free Speech*” could recognize it. See pages 41-42.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 35. “The paper was owned by Rev. Nightingale, pastor of the largest Baptist church in town, and by J.L. Fleming. I refuse to come in except as equal with themselves, and I bought a one third interest. I was editor, Mr. Fleming was business manager [...] And Rev. Nightingale was sales’ manager”, 35.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., 36-37. She felt it to be her duty to denounce a situation she judged problematic: “I felt that some protest should be made over conditions in the colored schools. The article was a protest against the few and utterly inadequate buildings for colored children. I also spoke of the poor teachers given us, whose mental and moral character was not of the best. It had been charged that some of these teachers have little to recommend them save an illicit friendship with members of the school board I was sure that such a condition deserved criticism, and that such a protest coming from a man in his position would be heeded [...] I had taken a chance in the interest of the children of our race and had lost out”. The criticism which she had troubles to bear was those of pupils’ parents: “The worst part of the experience was the lack of appreciation shown by the parents. They simply couldn’t understand why one would risk a good job, even for their children. The burden of their simple refrain was, “Miss Ida, you ought not to have done it: you might have known that they would fire you”, 37.

With the death of her parents, the lynching of Thomas Moss was another turning point in the life of Ida Wells, perhaps the most important one. Wells thought that the lynching “changed the whole course of [her] life”<sup>678</sup>. On 9 March 1892, a successful grocer named Thomas Moss and two of his business partners [Calvin McDowell and Henry Stewart] were lynched<sup>679</sup>. At that time, Wells was finally “doing the work [she] loved and had proved that [she] could make a living out of it” in Memphis. After days of violence between white and black inhabitants of Memphis, witnessing blacks’ lack of protection from the police, Wells wrote in one article:

The city of Memphis has demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival. There is nothing we can do about the lynching now, as we are outnumbered and without arms. The white mob could help itself to ammunition without pay, but the order was rigidly enforced against the selling of guns to Negroes. There is therefore only one thing left that we can do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give this a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons<sup>680</sup>.

Like Thomas Moss who purportedly said before dying: “Tell my people to go West – there is no justice for them here”<sup>681</sup>, Wells exhorted African Americans to leave the State and go west or north. Many black inhabitants of Memphis followed her advice. Focusing the attention on blacks’ economic weight, Wells encouraged the boycott of the railway company, the Atlanta street car company, in order to force the white inhabitants of Memphis to respect their black counterparts. She believed that fighting against discrimination by attacking whites’ purchasing power – when “the white man’s pocket is feeling it” – was the best strategy. Many black Memphians indeed left for Oklahoma. Soon, Ida Wells became a reporter. She travelled to Oklahoma to inquire about the new life of Memphians<sup>682</sup> and in May 1892, she wrote this famous editorial, which would influence the rest of her life.

Eight Negroes lynched since last issue of *The Free Speech*. Three were charged with killing white men and five with raping white women. Nobody in this section believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men assault white women. *If Southern white men are not careful they will overreach themselves and the conclusion would be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women*<sup>683</sup>.

By implying that white women willingly entered physical relations with black men, Wells not only attacked white women’s reputation by positing that rapes were in fact often

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., 48-50. Wells insisted in her autobiography that these three men embodied first economic competitors to white inhabitants of Memphis and secondly, the “manhood” of a race.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid., 57-58. “Mr. Norris a former member of the state legislature, whose wife was a relative of mine, suggested that I go out to Oklahoma and find out the truth for my paper [...] I spent three weeks in visited Guthrie, Oklahoma city, and other points. I saw the rush and opening up of government land to settlers grew up and wrote letters back to *The Free Speech* every week telling my readers exactly what I saw and of the chance they had on developing manhood and womanhood in this new territory”.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid., 65- 66.



consensual interracial sexual relations, but she also targeted white men who seemed to ignore white women's behavior and were therefore no longer in control of the women of their race – although they claimed they were, according to paternalistic southern mores. Southern white men were quick to give an answer: “It called on the chivalrous white men of Memphis to do something to avenge the insult to the honor of their women. They wrote: “The black wretch who had written that foul lie should be tied to a stake at the corner of Main and Madison Streets, a pair of tailor's shears used on *him* and *he* should then be burned at a stake”<sup>684</sup>. Ironically enough, the authors believed that this editorial had been written by a man. On 27 May 1892, nearly three months later, *The Free Speech* was destroyed. At that time, Wells was fortunately away in the North to attend an AME Conference. Wells was informed that “A committee of leading citizens had gone to the office of *The Free Speech* that night, run the business manager J.L. Fleming, out-of-town, destroyed the office, and left a note saying that anyone trying to publish the paper again would be punished with death”<sup>685</sup>. A resolutely independent woman, Wells decided to defend herself alone, again violating the gender conventions of her time by buying a pistol<sup>686</sup>. Although the author of the memoir presents herself as willing to confront the attackers, she must have been relieved to escape public violence, being away in the North at the time of the attack<sup>687</sup>.

Since going home to Memphis meant more violence and more deaths for the community, Wells resolved to stay in the East or West to advance the rights of African Americans: “Because I saw the chance to be of more service to the cause by staying in New York than by returning to Memphis, I accepted [to take] a position on the *New York Age*, and continued my fight against lynching and lynchers”<sup>688</sup>. Despite her forced exile – and all which

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 66. Italics mine.

<sup>685</sup> After the shock of discovering the violence of the attack, Wells inquired about Fleming. See pages 62 and 66-67. Fleming had already been the victim of an attack related to politics in Marion, Arkansas, in his paper the *Marion Headlight*. He resolved never to work on politics again and “blamed [Wells] very bitterly for that editorial”. Ida wrote that “perhaps he was justified in doing so”. He hoped to start his newspaper again, but “with no money and little help, he soon gave up and went west, connecting himself with a journal in Kansas”. Wells, on the other hand, persisted in her efforts for justice. Years later, she praised her professional partner: “He bequeathed a stainless manhood [to his children]. He was an ideal business manager who looked strictly and honestly after the business [...] and made the paper a success financially”.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 62. “I had bought a pistol the first thing after Tom Moss was lynched, because I expected some cowardly retaliation from the lynchers. I felt that one had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or rat in a trap. I had already determined to sell my life as dearly as possible if attacked”. This is reminiscent of Charlotte Forten's confession of keeping a pistol under her pillow on Saint Helena Island in 1864. See *The Journals of Charlotte Forten*, edited by Ray Allen Billington in 1981 and Brenda Stevenson in 1988. Carrying a weapon was obviously considered unwomanly.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 62. “Although I had been warned repeatedly by my own people that something would happen if I did not cease harping on the lynching of three months before, I had expected that happening to come when I was at home”.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 63. “Mr. Fortune and Jerome B. Patterson, the owners and editors of *The New York Age* gave her the “opportunity to tell the world for the first time the true story of Negro lynchings, which were becoming more

it entailed – and financial loss, Wells resolved to keep up the fight for racial justice<sup>689</sup>. She said: “Having lost my paper, had a price put on my life, and been made and exiled from home for hinting at the truth, I felt that I owed it to myself and to my race to tell the whole truth now that I was where I could do so freely”<sup>690</sup>. Consequently, Wells’s career took on another turn: she continued her work as a reporter, this time focusing her study on the statistics about lynching. Thus began “an investigation of every lynching I read about. I stumbled on the amazing record that every case of rape reported in that three months became such only when it became public”<sup>691</sup>. After 1892, she embraced the career of an activist more fully, working as a journalist and a reporter. This career took her to large cities of the United States and the United Kingdom. Her activism and journalistic work found a positive echo among black clubwomen of New York. Two women of the North East – “Victoria Earle Matthews of New York and Ms. Maritcha Remond Lyons, a Brooklyn schoolteacher” organized a dinner in her honor at Lyric Hall on 5 October 1892<sup>692</sup>. Wells spoke before an audience composed of women such as: “Gertrude Mossell of Philadelphia, Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston, Mrs. Sarah Garnett of New York City, Dr. Susan M. Kinner of Brooklyn and Emma Ray”. At this conference, “the feeling of loneliness and homesickness for the days of the friends that were gone came over me and I felt the tears coming”<sup>693</sup>. This moment is a singular one in Wells’s autobiography because it is the only one when Wells allows herself to be sentimental. Wells apparently rarely allowed herself to be moved to tears in public and was very modest when it came to her intimate feelings<sup>694</sup>. For a woman who deeply loved her native region like her, this forced exile must have been an ordeal. Wells subsequently used her talent and devoted her career to the fight against lynching after the terrible events of 1892 upset her personal and professional life.

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numerous and horrible. Had it not been for the courage and vision of these two men, I could never have made such headway in emblazoning the story to the world”.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid., 62-63. “They had destroyed my paper, in which every dollar I had in the world was invested”.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>692</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons deeply admired Ida B. Wells. This talented, efficient and astute orator, fascinated her: “I had the extreme satisfaction of listening to her when without notes she held an audience spell-bound for two hours. With a clear, logical disquisition of her subject, I could appreciate her because I had studied and mastered two rules assisting such an achievement. I repeat them for the benefit of any aspirant in the line of public speech making”. See Maritcha Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, 33.

<sup>693</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 79-80. “I was mortified that I had not been able to prevent such an exhibition of weakness. It came on me unawares. It was the only time all those trying months that I had so yielded to personal feelings. That it should come at the time when I wanted to be at my best in order to show my appreciation of the splendid things those women had done! They were giving me tangible evidence that although my environment had changed I was still surrounded by kind hearts. After all these years I still have a feeling of chagrin over that exhibition of weakness.”

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 80. “Whatever my feelings, I am not given to public demonstrations. And only once before in all my life had I given way to woman’s weakness in public”. Interestingly, in her opinion, crying was a manifestation of feminine “weakness”.

The lynching of Thomas Moss was an epiphany for Wells for several reasons. First, contrary to what southern whites were saying, lynching was not a way to punish black *rapists*. Instead, mob rule was a political tool to prevent the economic success of the black community. When she was thirty, Wells realized to her horror that lynching was baseless, organized terror aimed at limiting the economic perspectives of African Americans<sup>695</sup>. She retrospectively said that the lynching of Moss had “opened her eyes” on the political and economic aspects of the question. Thomas Moss and his two friends “had committed no crime against white women. This is what opened my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized and ‘keep the Nigger down’”<sup>696</sup>. Secondly, sex was a central issue since the whole justification of lynching lay upon the so-called *guilt* of black men. If black men were lynched when no rape had been committed, then what was the underlying reason for mob rule? Wells was among the first intellectuals to write about the importance of sex in southern and American politics. Wells was touching on the thorny question of gender, race and interracial sex in the South. “I thought then it was the white Southerner’s chivalrous defense of his womanhood which calls the mob to destroy my paper, even though it was known that the truth had been spoken. I know now that it was an excuse to do what they had wanted to do before but had not dared because they had no good reason until the appearance of that famous editorial”. She was sure that the editorial was an excuse used by white agitators to destroy the newspaper<sup>697</sup>. Wells realized that sex had a tremendous impact on racial relations and representations about gender and race in America. Gender and race relations between both black and white Southerners were fossilized around sex and fears of miscegenation on the part of whites. The question of southern white women’s protection from “black beasts” and the sexual abuse perpetrated on black women by white men were linked. A double standard regarding gender existed: color changed the nature of women’s respectability. Wells resolved to take her pen to denounce this unbearable situation by leading diligent statistical studies.

After being invited to New York City by Victoria Earle Matthews and Maritcha Lyons in 1892, she was invited to give a series of talks on lynching to white and black audiences in

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 64. She explained that prior to the lynching of Thomas Moss in 1892, it was believed – and she herself had come to believe – that because of the nature of the crime – often the rape of a white woman--, perhaps the “brute” “deserved death anyhow and the mob was justified in taking his life”.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 63-64. Perhaps because she did not wish to present herself as the person who precipitated her friend Fleming’s bankruptcy, she said that her editorial had not triggered the destruction of the newspaper. The psychological cost would have been too important.

“New Bedford, Providence, and Newport Rhode Island, and several other towns”<sup>698</sup>. Wells travelled widely: she lectured in Philadelphia, Wilmington, Delaware, Chester Pennsylvania and Washington D.C.. Lecturing was not a natural thing for Wells yet she soon mastered the art of oration. Wells grew discouraged because she felt that the white press remained silent to her denunciation. She confided years later:

For nearly a year I had been in the North, hoping to spread the truth and get moral support for my demand that those accused of crimes be given a fair trial and punished by law instead of by mob. Only in one city — Boston — had I been given even a meager hearing, and the press was dumb. I refer, of course, to the white press, since it was the medium through which I hoped to reach the white people of the country, who alone could mold public sentiment<sup>699</sup>.

Her struggle was echoed in Boston, Massachusetts, almost exclusively. In November 1892, when giving a speech in Philadelphia, Ida Wells sparked the interest of Mrs. Impey of Somerset, England<sup>700</sup>. Mrs Impey invited Wells – who was then unmarried – to tour England to raise British people’s awareness about lynching. Wells repeatedly travelled to the United Kingdom between 1893 and 1895 and her speeches received a favorable echo<sup>701</sup>. When she came back from Europe, Ida Wells sought to continue her fight against lynching. She “regarded [herself] as an instrument”, “a mouthpiece through which to tell the story of lynching and I have told it so often that I know it by heart. I do not have to embellish; it makes it its own way”<sup>702</sup>.

Women of African descent learnt from an early age that they were discredited because of their gender and race. They either had to rely on men to defend their reputation or to defend their reputation themselves – which was deemed as inappropriate.

Contrary to Terrell who grew up confident that her father could protect her, when Ida B. Wells learnt that some rumors circulated about her reputation in Vicksburg, Mississippi, she had to defend herself alone. For instance, in the mid-1880s, the wife of a Minister from Ohio – who had accommodated her in Vicksburg, Mississippi and with whom she had maintained cordial relationships, “had gotten a torn letter of [hers] out of the wastebasket” saying that “[she] had lost [her] position in Memphis”. The Minister – who came from one of the best families of Ohio – doubted Wells’s respectability and generally believed that

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 82. In November 1892, she had an interview with Mrs. Impey, a British woman involved in the struggle for race equality. Wells recounted that Impey “was shocked over the lynching stories [she] had told, also the indifference to conditions which she found among the white people in this country. She was especially hurt that this should be the fact among those of our own sect and kin. [Both] deplored the situation and agreed that there seemed nothing to do but keep plugging away all the evils [they] were fighting”.

<sup>701</sup> See chapters 12 to 24 of her autobiography.

<sup>702</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 226 and 231.

“morally there were no virtuous southern girls”<sup>703</sup>. This man, who from the start believed in the higher virtue of “northern girls”, believed he had found proof of southern women’s immorality<sup>704</sup>. To defend herself, Wells did not hesitate to confront the Minister and his wife. Telling him that “my good name was all that I had in the world, that I was bound to protect it from attack by those who felt that they could do so with impunity *because I had no brother or father to protect it for me*”<sup>705</sup>. During the interview, Wells demanded to have her name publicly washed and it was decided that the Minister would set the record straight about her in church<sup>706</sup>. By doing this, Ida B. Wells violated the gendered assumptions of the day. She insisted that regional affiliation had nothing to do with virtue: “I wanted him to note that virtue was not at all a matter of the section in which one lived [...] I wanted him to know at least one southern girl, born and bred, who had tried to keep herself spotless and morally clean as my slave mother had taught me”<sup>707</sup>. Even if Wells focused on her personal example in her memoir, she insisted that her action had permitted her to defend all black southern womanhood. In her diary, she wrote: “I felt that I had vindicated the honor of many southern girls who had been traduced by lying tongues”<sup>708</sup>. This episode convinced her that the “important question” of southern women’s respectability<sup>709</sup> deserved attention and that it was her duty to defend black southern womanhood in her articles<sup>710</sup>. In her eyes, the “preservation of honor, virtue and good name” of a woman was paramount<sup>711</sup>.

In the 1880s, Ida B. Wells started to write caustic articles which she signed under the penname of “Iola”. In 1885, in response to the repeated attacks against women of color, Wells answered:

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 43. She did not name this Ohio Minister.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid., 43. Ida Wells did not indicate why he thought so, perhaps he believed black southern women were less virtuous because of their slave past.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid., 44. Italics mine.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid., 44. “I said I would accept his apology provided he made it from his pulpit the following Sunday in case anyone else in town had heard of his remarks”.

<sup>707</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 44. See “A Story of 1900”, *Fisk Herald*, April 1886, in *Memphis Diary*, 183.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>709</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 42.

<sup>710</sup> Moreover, the fact that she chose to narrate this incident in her autobiography in 1928-29 shows that the question of regional propriety deserved attention, even more so in the 1920s – at the height of racial strife, in particular with the revival of the Ku Klux Klan since the early 1920s — than before.

<sup>711</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 188. When she became a public figure in the 1890s because of her anti-lynching activism, her life was searched. In 1893 and 1894, some people started looking for stories of improper behavior or scandals. In her memoir, Wells emphasized that the editor of the *St Louis Republic* had been unable to find any compromising story. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 234-235 and 238. Being concerned about her reputation, she used to keep newspaper clippings in which her name was mentioned. As the editor explains, she “had a trunk full of such clippings which would be of great interest now, but unfortunately there were all destroyed. This is sufficient, however, to show the way in which these important matter was written up, especially throughout the central and middle Western states”.



With all these accusations, allowed as we usually are, no opportunity to refute them, are hurtful to and resented by us, none sting so deeply and keenly as the taunt of immorality, the jest and sneer with which our women are spoken of, and the utter incapacity or refusal to believe there are among us mothers, wives and maidens who have attained a true, noble, and refining womanhood. There are many such all over this Southland of ours, and in our own city they abound<sup>712</sup>.

In the mid-1880s, Wells expressed burgeoning feminist ideas about women's roles in society. On 26 December 1885, Ida Wells published "Woman's Mission" in the *New York Freeman*. In it, she emphasized that women of color had proven themselves capable throughout History: "In colleges, she has nobly vindicated her right of equality; in the professions essayed she has borne herself with credit and honor; in positions of trust she has proven her ability and faithfulness"<sup>713</sup>. Ida Wells described *the black woman* of the South as a model of femininity. She indeed seemed to have *one* specific woman – she used the singular – in mind while writing, probably the educated, middle-class black woman of the urban South, a woman like herself. Yet Wells spoke for most women – members of the working class. She believed the influence of women was great when it came from the masses: "But it is not queens, conscious of power [who are real women...] but yet the many workers and artists who minister to their love of the truthful and beautiful, that most possess this influence for good; of whom men speak with tender love; but woman as embodied in the various characters of daughter, sister, wife, mother"<sup>714</sup>. Yet, in 1885, these masses had not received the call which was to come: "The masses of the women of our race have not awakened to a true sense of the responsibilities that devolve on them, of the influence they exert; they have not yet realized the necessity for directing a standard of earnest, thoughtful, pure, noble womanhood, rather than one of fashion, idleness, and uselessness"<sup>715</sup>.

Wells developed her ideas about who the perfect "Model Woman" was – using the singular to speak about black women, the way Fannie Williams would do in the early 1900s with "the colored girl" — , in an effort perhaps to instill high ideals of womanhood in her readers. Wells claimed that this typical southern woman was a model for all other women: "She's a model that people would like to copy. This type of Negro girl may not be found so often as she might, but she's the pattern after which all others copy"<sup>716</sup>.

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<sup>712</sup> Ida B. Wells, "Our women", *New York Freeman* January 1, 1887, in *Memphis Diary*, 185. In the Fall of 1886, "she wrote a letter to *The Scimitar* on behalf of virtuous colored women of Memphis, commanding Turner for his defense of Negro womanhood – G.P.M. Turner, the editor of a white Memphis newspaper had declared that "it was not now as it had been that colored women were harlots". See *Memphis Diary*, 121.

<sup>713</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 180.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>716</sup> Ida B. Wells, "The Model Woman: A Pen Picture of the Typical Southern Girl", *New York Freeman*, 18 February 1888. (Reprinted in the *Chattanooga Justice*), in *Memphis Diary*, 188- 189.



In her youth diary and early articles, Ida Wells borrowed a rhetoric imbued with Victorianism which put to the fore values such as dignity and refinement. According to her, women should be feminine and possess innumerable typical desirable qualities such as gentleness, propriety, self-restraint and refinement:

In the typical girl this jewel of character is enriched and beautified by the setting of womanly modesty, dignity of deportment, and refinement of manners; and the whole enveloped in a casket of a sweetness of disposition, and amiability of temper that makes it a pleasure to be near her. She is like the girl of fairy tales, who was said to drop pearls from her mouth as she talked, for her language is elegant from its simplicity and chastity, even though not always in accordance with rules of syntax, is beautiful because of absence of slang<sup>717</sup>.

Utilizing the concept of ‘True Womanhood’ still in vogue in the late nineteenth century, Wells called all women – members of the middle but also working-class – to strive for Victorian ideals – to aim at reason and reject frivolity. She also urged all Americans to realize that it was erroneous to assume that only elite black women strove for Victorian ideals.

In “The Model Woman, the Pen Picture of the Typical Southern Girl” *New York Freeman* February 18, 1888, Wells argued that the typical southern girl was “not without refinement, [was] not coarse and rude in her manners, nor loud and fast in her deportment. Nor is the stiff, formal, haughty girl the ideal”<sup>718</sup>. She insisted on propriety and respectability: “The typical girl’s only wealth, in most cases, is her character: in her first consideration is to preserve the character in spotless purity”<sup>719</sup>. Additionally, like Anna Cooper, she thought that the role of women of color was to redeem the image of the entire community:

Our race is no exception to the rest of humanity, in its susceptibility to weakness, nor is it any consolation for us to know that the nobility of England and the aristocratic circles of our country furnish parallel examples of immorality [...] For the sake of the noble womanhood to which she aspires, and the race whose name bears the stigma of immorality – her soul scorns each temptation to sin and guilt. She counts no sacrifice too great for the preservation of honor. She knows that our people, as a whole, are charged with immorality and vice; that it depends largely on the woman of today to refute such charges by her stainless life<sup>720</sup>.

To the question “What is, or should be woman?”, Wells insisted that [a woman] should not be “a soulless doll, a heartless coquette” but instead, a hard-working, active woman, therefore upholding the rules of a dual womanhood.

She should not be “merely a bundle of flesh and bones, nor a fashion plate, a frivolous inanity, a soulless doll, a heartless coquette – but a strong, bright presence, thoroughly imbued with a sense of her mission on earth and a desire to fill it; an earnest, soulfull being, laboring to fit herself for life’s duties and burdens, and bearing them faithfully when they do come; but a womanly woman for all that, upholding the banner and striving for the goal of a pure, bright womanhood through all vicissitudes and temptations. Her influence is boundless”<sup>721</sup>.

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<sup>717</sup> Ida B. Wells, “The Model Woman : A Pen Picture of the Typical Southern Girl”, 188.

<sup>718</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 187-188.

<sup>719</sup> Ida B. Wells, “The Model Woman : A Pen Picture of the Typical Southern Girl”, 187-188.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid., 186 and 188.

<sup>721</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 180-181. This is reminiscent of Anna Cooper’s “pretty doll” argument.

Moreover, she should be benevolent and always behave properly: “far above mean, petty acts and venomous, slanderous gossip of her own sex as the moon – which sails serenely in the heavens – is above the earth”. When it came to relationships with the opposite sex, “Her bearing toward the opposite sex, while cordial and free, is of such nature as increases their respect for and admiration of her sex, and her influence is wholly for good. She strives to encourage them all things honest, noble and manly”,<sup>722</sup>.

At about the same period, Anna Cooper analyzed the situation of black southern women similarly. Like Ida B. Wells, early in her life – she was still studying for her Master’s Degree in 1886<sup>723</sup> –, Anna Cooper voiced extremely innovative ideas not only about race relations but also gender relations in her native section. In 1886, when she was 28, like her counterparts – Terrell and Williams – this talented well-travelled thinker who had experienced life north and south of the old Mason-Dixon line had had the opportunity of observing southern race relations first-hand, since she was living in the South at the time she penned these lines. She had returned in Raleigh one year before, to teach at St Augustine College after obtaining her B.A.

In “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race” (1886), Anna Cooper emphasized the virtues and qualities of black southern womanhood: “I would beg, however, with the Doctor’s permission, to add my plea for the *Colored Girls* of the South: -- that large, bright, promising fatally beautiful class that stand shivering like a delicate plantlet before the fury of tempestuous elements, so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction”. Like Wells, Cooper highlighted women’s lack of protection, saying that she was:

often without a father to whom they dare apply the loving term, often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life’s blood; in the midst of pitfalls and snares, waylaid by the lower classes of white men, with no shelter, no protection nearer than the great blue vault above, which half conceals and half reveals the one Care-Taker they know so little of. Oh! Save them, help them, shield, train, develop, teach, inspire them! Snatch them, in God’s name, as brands from the burning!<sup>724</sup>.

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>723</sup> She obtained her M.A. in College training from Oberlin College in 1887 and moved to Washington D.C. to teach at the High School level.

<sup>724</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 60-61. Italics hers. She was referring to Dr. Crummell’s 1883 speech “The Black Woman of the South: Her Neglects and her Needs”. Crummell influenced Cooper’s thinking. She lived with the Crummell family in Washington the year after she wrote “Womanhood”. See the note by Charles Lemert, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 60.

These women used their gender, class, regional identity and education to voice their first defense of black southern womanhood. They started devoting themselves to the community. Despite their innovative activism and modern rhetoric about womanhood, it is possible to note that they conformed to Victorian ideals and tended to prize Victorian qualities in women. Additionally, they addressed working-class women in their discourses and aimed at bringing them closer to these Victorian ideals.

# Chapter 4: Blooming Into Womanhood

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## 1. Still Exemplars of Virtue and Morality

As seen for the period of their girlhood, acting according to propriety, behaving like a “proper” woman was a major concern for these young women. Some women wrote of constantly proving their self-worth, their morality and purity to white America. Many were conscious of this social pressure growing up.

### Having to Conform to Gendered Expectations: Social Pressure

Young women often felt the pressure exerted upon them as they came of age in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. Mary Church’s 1888-1890 diary reveals how strongly she was respectful of propriety rules. During her stay in Europe, she was indeed desirous to respect the etiquette and was, for instance, scandalized to learn that some German girls believed all American girls smoked and committed indiscretions, since this was deemed as improper for a woman at the time<sup>725</sup>. Raised as a modest woman, Mary Church felt “very embarrassed” when admiring some “naked statues in [Otto Von Dewitts’] presence” in a museum in Germany<sup>726</sup>. When dating Von Dewitts, Mary Church hesitated before arranging for a set time to “go for a walk” the next day<sup>727</sup>. The same day, she felt confident that as long as she behaved appropriately, her reputation would not be questioned: “I am not afraid of any person and as long as I behave like a lady, no harmless walk will be able to harm me”. Yet she was generally much concerned by what society would say about her behavior and her company.

When on January 19, 1890, Von D. asked her to go up to his room, her refusal commanded his respect for her. She proudly documented her virtuous behavior in her diary:

He invited me to go into his room with him to see how he lives. I said I didn’t want to do that. It would be awkward for me; I could, of course, do it for him. After that he led me close to his apartment – I told him I would prefer waiting for him; I could go for a walk in the meantime. Then we turned to walk in the direction of the horse tram. I asked him, ‘Are you mad at me because I didn’t go to your room?’

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<sup>725</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 89. “This young German girl had heard that all American girls smoked, and she believed I was misrepresenting the facts, to say the least, when I denied that allegation. [...] She firmly believed that American girls committed indiscretions of every kind without even attracting attention. After I had lived in Berlin a while it was easy to understand why and how this estimate was placed upon American girls. Freed from the restraint of home, a goodly number of them studying abroad had violated the proprieties, perhaps without any evil intent. Many Germans, therefore, judged American girls as a whole by the indiscreet few whom they saw in their country or about whose behavior they had heard. It was interesting as well as painful to me to see that American girls are the victims of the same kind of blanket accusations made by the Germans as those of which colored people are the victims in the United States”.

<sup>726</sup> Mary Church, Diary entry 18 January 1890, 53.

<sup>727</sup> On January 7, 1890 she wondered: “Mister von D. thought indeed we should go for a walk tomorrow night and we arranged a date for 7 o’clock. I am very uneasy. I am doing something like this for the first time and although I know he is respectable it seems questionable to me”, 40.

‘No, darling,’ he answered, ‘on the contrary; I like that about you, I much prefer that you didn’t go up.’ That is the best proof that he truly respects me<sup>728</sup>.

Yet, men seemed to exert constant surveillance over the young women they knew. When Mr. Wenckstern – one of Mary’s acquaintances – saw her on the street with Von Dewitts and started to ask questions, she seemed a bit hurt to see that his opinion of her seemed to have changed, as if he thought that her behavior had been improper<sup>729</sup>.

These women not only carefully respected propriety rules, they were also concerned about possessing the necessary feminine qualities deemed desirable in women at the time. They keenly felt their faults and often reproached themselves with not being sufficiently thrifty or not displaying a sufficiently agreeable character. For instance, in the late 1880s, at a time when women of the middle and upper classes were expected to display patience, gentility, calmness and docility, Ida B. Wells often felt guilty because she had difficulties balancing her budget or because she had issues controlling her temper<sup>730</sup>. Aware that her fits of anger were not in keeping with “feminine” attitudes, the young woman turned to God to ask for help. Her resolutions for 1887 were:

God help me to be a Christian! To so conduct myself in my intercourse with the unconverted. That should be an ever present theme with me, and O help me to better control my temper! [...] May I be a better Christian with more of the strength to overcome, the wisdom to avoid and have the meekness and humility that becomes a follower of thee<sup>731</sup>.

Young women grew up aware of their family and society’s expectations about them. In her youth diary, the 24 year-old Mary Church Terrell worried about her mother – Louisa Ayers because she was often unable to manage her budget<sup>732</sup>. Perhaps because of her

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<sup>728</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in German*, 54.

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid.*, February 2, 1890, 63. “He [Mister Wenckstern] had visited me this afternoon while I was at Dreyschock’s for the last time. He asked me where I had been; I answered truthfully “at Dreyschock’s.” “Really?” He asked with disbelief. “At what time?” “Between four and five,” said I. “Well, that might be,” he continued. “I saw you tonight, was maybe walking ten steps behind you [von D. and Mary]. I saw a paletot that I recognized and took a look at the person. It was you.” Of course I tried to make him understand that everything had been innocent. He seemed to doubt it even though he claimed that he didn’t find anything wrong with that. He accompanied me home and I saw that his opinion of me had changed a little”. Paletots were a type coat worn by women over their dresses in the nineteenth century. Mary Church felt constantly under watch but it seemed that in Europe, this supervision was exerted on all women and was not linked to her skin color.

<sup>730</sup> For instance, Wells referred to spending money on stylish clothes at Menchen, a Department store in Memphis. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 138. She also reported having had a “fit of crying” after hearing upsetting news. *Ibid.*, 88. She discussed episodes in her life where she lost her temper.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>732</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 67. When Mary’s mother had won \$ 15,000, Mary worried she would spend it all soon. “My mother was the lucky winner of the lottery in New Orleans. She bought diamonds right away. I hope that she will not spend all of her money and fall into poverty again”. It appears that Terrell’s mother was a spendthrift and had had financial difficulties in the past when Mary wrote in 1888. In her memoir, she wrote that her mother “was the most generous human being [she had] ever known. [She was] sure [her mother] would cheerfully have given away the last cent she possessed, if she had thought it was necessary. And the individual who wanted to get it would not have had to argue or persuade much to convince her it was necessary.” Louisa Ayers often treated her children, Mary and Thomas, with toys and gifts. When she was about to visit her

education and the example of her mother, Mary was careful to be thrifty and to manage her budget. Despite her father's wealth, she was worried about the expenses her travel in Europe occasioned. Another time, for her wedding in 1891, when her mother resolved to buy a hat "on Fifth Avenue and paid twenty dollars for it" – a significant sum back then —, Mary Church "was horrified and wretched"<sup>733</sup>. Concerned by propriety and the necessity to act in a thrifty manner, she thought this purchase unreasonable.

Additionally, parents of African American young women kept a careful eye on their daughters' romantic lives. For example, when Frances Rollin (1845?- 1901) and her suitor William Whipper decided to marry soon after their engagement, it was decided that the wedding should take place only one month later, in mid-September. Frances had to face the misgivings of her family about this marriage. Her father in particular thought that her decision to marry was premature. On 14 September, Frances wrote: "Met Pa on returning home. From dusk till nearly midnight the contest lasted between Pa and I. Pa consented at last not to interfere and allow the marriage to come off on Thursday morning. He thought it was too soon, etc."<sup>734</sup>. On her wedding day, Frances indicated in her diary that she was "very nervous" and was happy and relieved to see the wedding finally taking place<sup>735</sup>.

In the 1870s, 1880s and the 1890s, women's lives were indeed under close watch and women were expected to abide by strict propriety rules in society. Those who did not conform to social expectations sometimes became the targets of criticism.

For middle or upper-class women, getting pregnant before marriage also meant risking one's future career. Men were not the only ones to judge women's behavior: women also kept close watch of other women's conduct. They were conscious of the potential stigma that could bear on them for any *faux pas* and were also critical of those who ran the gauntlet. In her book, Shaw demonstrated that "family standards of respectable behavior also included Victorian ideals of restraint regarding matters of female sexuality"<sup>736</sup>. For instance, in a letter

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daughter in Europe in 1888-1889, Louisa Ayers Church spent lavishly on gifts and travels. See Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 10-11.

<sup>733</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 104: "I had never paid that much for a hat in my life and I did not think it was right for a woman in moderate circumstances to put so much money into one".

<sup>734</sup> Frances Anne Rollin, 1868 Diary, as cited in Dorothy Sterling, *We are your Sisters*, 368.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid. Diary entry 18 September 1868, 368. "Today I am beginning to realize the affairs of the past few days but am happy to have them behind me". She probably meant the difficulties which had erupted with her family over the wedding.

<sup>736</sup> Black women had to restrain from sexual relations before marriage, as relations out of wedlock could endanger one's career – since these could prevent them from entering college or educational institutions, necessary to achieve social work. As Stephanie Shaw has contended in *What a Woman ought To Be and To Do*, "a solid academic record, good character and a spotless reputation were prerequisites for admission", 23.



to Rebecca, Addie Brown ironically commented on a northern teacher who came back from the South: “I heard yesterday a young girl in New Haven went from there to go south to teach. Her health was miserable so her mother sent for her to come home. Since her return, she present her mother with a grand child. That is a new method of teaching”<sup>737</sup>. Additionally, when one of her friends named Emily came back home pregnant, Addie Brown wrote to Rebecca on 18 November 1866: “My Dear you must not be too hard on [Emily]. You must remember how they regard such things and just think for a moment how the girls act here. They don’t seem to have no shame here”<sup>738</sup>.

For example, in her memoir, Ida Wells referred to a forbidden love story, an interracial love affair that had agitated the community at that time. One of the black women teachers apparently maintained a relationship with a white man who served as a “lawyer for the Board of Education”. When the situation was discovered by her brother-in-law, the woman could not bear the reproaches made to her about her morality and committed suicide<sup>739</sup>.

Likewise, middle-class Laura Hamilton Murray<sup>740</sup> was quite conservative about sexual relationships before marriage. On 13 April 1885, she wrote down that she spent the whole day with her good friend Fannie Hamilton. “We had a nice time. I really believe she has ‘started’. I pity her if she has”<sup>741</sup>. Laura was right: on 20 August 1885, Laura noted that Fannie was “very large”<sup>742</sup>, and on 11 October 1885, she indicated that she found her friend Fannie Hamilton “in bed and a little boy. Well we were surprised. She has been married nine months on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The baby is real fat”<sup>743</sup>, indicating that she counted very precisely the number of months that elapsed between her friend’s wedding and the birth of her first child. This scrutiny shows that some conservative women cared about the reputation premarital sex could engender. Her opinion is not unlike that of other women who lived in that era.

Young black women keenly felt the social pressure of having to observe strict propriety rules. They had to possess qualities deemed “feminine” in the 1880s and felt guilty whenever they failed to display such womanly attitudes. They were generally respectful of propriety rules and strove to be virtuous, moral, modest and respectable.

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<sup>737</sup> Farah Griffin ed., *Beloved Sisters*, 79.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>739</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 36-37.

<sup>740</sup> Laura Hamilton Murray married Freeman Henry Morris Murray. His Papers (1883-1916) are located at Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. One of her writings is one of her diaries dated 1885. Dorothy Sterling published parts of her diary in her book *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>741</sup> Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 474.

<sup>742</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

## 2. Sentimental Lives

### First Romantic Idylls: Personal Experiences

These feminists in the making were girls who had often been raised in the strict observance of Victorian rules and propriety typical of the mid-nineteenth century. When they came of age, did they yearn for marriage or on the contrary, did they refuse to envisage matrimony? What were their views on marriage and men? These women had very different experiences of courtship, probably because it occurred in very different circumstances, in different locations, regions, at work or in other spheres, and at different ages – in their twenties or early thirties – and also because they had very different personalities.

It is generally not easy to find writings about women's courtship experiences because this is a subject which they generally did not publicly discuss. The most precious sources of information on this topic are youth diaries and private correspondence. For women who did not leave any of these writings – as in the case of Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams – it is unfortunately quite difficult to get a glimpse of their love lives as young women.

Anna Julia Cooper wedded George A. G. Cooper, an Episcopalian priest born into slavery in Nassau, in the British West Indies in 1847. The two met at Saint Augustine school, in North Carolina where George Cooper was teaching Greek. Anna and George married in 1877 when Anna was only 19 years old. When George Cooper died prematurely two years later in 1879, Cooper decided to start a College education: she left Raleigh, North Carolina, and enrolled at Oberlin College in Ohio<sup>744</sup>.

Some elements about the courtship of S. Laing Williams to Fannie Barrier leaked in the local press: *The Brockport Republic* kept track of S. Laing's visit to the Barriers in September 1886. On 18 September 1886, the journalist indicated that "Mr S. Laing Williams, a Chicago lawyer, has been lately in town, the guest of Mr. A. J. Barrier", probably asking for the hand of Fannie. The two had met in the nation's capital when Fannie was teaching and S. Laing Williams was a law student at Columbian University<sup>745</sup>. A few months later, on 21 April 1887, the newspaper chronicled the wedding. The northern-born Fannie Barrier tied her fate to that of a native of Georgia. After their wedding in 1887, the pair embarked "on a

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<sup>744</sup> Cooper obtained her B.A. in 1884 and her M.A. in 1887.

<sup>745</sup> Columbian University was founded in 1865 and is now called George Washington University Law School. S. Laing Williams later worked in the United States Pension Office. As her biographer, Wanda Hendricks, has indicated, Fannie met Samuel in Washington "through the aristocratic black social circle they both inhabited. They certainly attended the Monday Night Literary Society at the same time and more than likely socialized on numerous occasions as well. They had much in common", 45. For example, they loved literature and would later start the Prudence Crandall Literary Club in Chicago. See *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, pages 55-56.

wedding tour' [and] headed back to Washington to be properly presented as a couple to the aristocratic society that had welcomed and embraced them for more than a decade". They were entertained by several "intimate and influential friends" before settling down in Chicago, Illinois<sup>746</sup>. Shortly after, Samuel Laing Williams was admitted to the Illinois bar and began a successful law practice<sup>747</sup>. The pair never had children.

Youth diaries offer precious glimpses of the lives of young women of color in the 1880s. The youth diaries of Ida B. Wells and Mary Church reveal how they envisaged courtship and relationships with men.

### **Courtship: A Period Which Made Them Realize their Life Goals**

Mary Church Terrell met Robert Terrell, a Latin teacher at M. Street High School in 1887<sup>748</sup>. When she left for Europe, the two started to carry on a correspondence. Nevertheless, since she had not promised him anything, she was free to be in other relationships<sup>749</sup>. During her year in Germany, when she was about 25 or 26 years old, Mary Church Terrell had a romance with two young German men: "Aleck" and "Otto Von Dewitts". She therefore experienced her first relationships with foreign white men in a foreign country – where race did not influence gender relations as much as it did in America. She dated Aleck in early 1890. It is unclear who Aleck was and why their relationship came to an end. Later, she dated Otto Von Dewitts, who admired her culture and knowledge<sup>750</sup>. For Mary Church, who wished to be highly regarded for her intellect more than for her good looks, her education was an object of pride. Mary Church initially enjoyed Von Dewitts's company but things deteriorated

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<sup>746</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders*, 49.

<sup>747</sup> <http://rrlc.org/winningthevote/biographies/fannie-barrier-williams/>.

<sup>748</sup> Mary Church, Diary in French. Robert Terrell seemed to have written regularly and Mary seemed to enjoy his company and letters – which he signed "RHT". In her diary, she referred to having written to him several times and recounted receiving letters from him. See diary entry dated 7 September 1888, 13. On 10 September 1888, Robert had asked her to send him a picture of her. On 28 October 1888, Robert told her that he admired her greatly. See pages 54, 61, and 68-69.

<sup>749</sup> She dated two German boys : Aleck and Otto Von Dewitts. See her diary in German. I was able to peruse it thanks to Annika Rosaniewski, who translated the diary from German to English for me. Mary Church, Diary in German, 35.

<sup>750</sup> Mary Church, Diary in German, 55, entry dated January 20, 1890. Once, Mary Church emphasized Von D's admiration for her sound education and her knowledge of ancient languages: "They strongly admired me for studying Greek and Latin. Von D. appeared very proud of me because he said how vast my knowledge was". On another occasion, he compared her favorably to German women: "On the way back home, he talked about the stupidity of German women and how he lacked the conversation with sensible women. I, of course, spoke about my education at the College and recited the first line of the *Iliad* and Virgil. That surprised him very much. "Has anyone ever heard of something like this? A girl that can recite the first line of the *Iliad* and Virgil by heart. You couldn't find one like that in Germany; at least he never heard of such a one. Of course, I was a little proud". Diary entry dated 15 January 1890, 49.

in the course of 1890, when Von Dewitts committed several mistakes<sup>751</sup>. Church's story with Otto had in fact apparently been rocky from the start<sup>752</sup>. Yet for reasons Church does not mention, Von Dewitts and she kept seeing each other, even if she thought that their relationship was over.

When in January 1890, Von Dewitts offered to marry her, she carefully reflected upon her feelings for him and considered this life-changing decision. Since accepting his offer of marriage possibly meant reconsidering what she wanted to accomplish in life, his proposal made her reflect upon her life goals. One important hindrance was that she would have had to renounce living in the United States – where she wished to be of use for her community. Contemplating a potential exile if she married a foreigner further nourished her misgivings. She wondered: “Can I actually leave my fatherland, relatives, should I leave everything that is near and dear to me even if he truly loves me? Will he be happy with me? There are so many things one has to think about. Especially me”, she wrote. At this stage, she wanted to accomplish race work herself, not simply as the wife of an activist or as a helpmeet. This is why contemplating marrying a German man was the source of so much anguish.

Mary Church hesitated to give a favorable answer because at this stage of her life, she felt she had the duty to accomplish race work: “Where can I best achieve something? In America, since I'm an exception in every regard, I could possibly achieve a most-loved goal. In Germany, I probably won't be able to do anything sensible”<sup>753</sup>. At the age of 27, Mary Church knew that her race, class and gender placed her in a special category. This specificity, this exceptionalism – which she kept emphasizing throughout her life – made her one of the best women positioned to help her race in her native country. On 6 March 1890, she also wrote: “I really can't do anything, wouldn't it be cowardly to dismiss or not consider the opportunity of doing something good for my oppressed, ignorant race by marrying a German?”<sup>754</sup>.

In addition, this cultured and progressive woman, who was probably dreaming of a love match with a cultured young man who would encourage her to achieve her personal

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<sup>751</sup> Terrell grew increasingly ill at ease in his presence because he made several strange comments. He once evoked committing suicide, then he made a bad joke once after offering her a necklace, telling her “Now you're bound by a chain, darling”. Mary Church, *Diary in German*, 68. Diary entry dated 11 February. Later, he wrote to Mary's father to ask for her hand, an act she judged as outdated. One last episode settled the love story. When, in February 1890, he asked her to lend him some money, her affection for him came to a brutal stop. In her mind, it was totally inappropriate for a man to ask his fiancée for a loan.

<sup>752</sup> She wrote on January, 21, 1890: “I can't believe anything will come of our relationship.”. *Diary in German*, 46 and 55.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.*, 75. In her memoir, she explained that she could never have self-respect if she had chosen to expatriate herself for good: “I knew I would be much happier trying to promote the welfare of my race *in my native land*, working under certain hard conditions, than I would be living in a foreign land where I would make no effort to do the work *which I then believed it was my duty to do*. I doubted that I could respect myself for it”. Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 99, italics mine.

goals for her community, also realized that she wanted to marry an American man. As a result, at age 27 she was not ready to give up on America and her community<sup>755</sup>. On 14 March 1890, Robert Church's response to Otto Von Dewitts finally came. He refused to give his consent and Mary Church gladly accepted her father's decision<sup>756</sup>.

Many women of African descent, rejecting the possibility of marrying white men, chose to marry men of color. For instance, Fannie Williams chose a prominent black man as her spouse, and Anna Cooper married a black man born into slavery in the West Indies. The young Mary Church also chose to wed a man of color. As just discussed, when one of her beaux Otto Von Dewitts made her his marriage proposal in 1890, Church ruled out the possibility of marrying her white German suitor. Realizing that she did not wish to live abroad her whole life because she intended to accomplish race work, she could not marry a white man – and a foreigner for that matter. She wrote in her diary: "I had made up my mind definitely that I would not marry a white man if I lived in the United States, and I feared I would not be happy as an exile in a foreign land"<sup>757</sup>. What is more, Mary Church was "certain" that her father Robert Church "would not consent" to the match because he was opposed to intermarriage: "I knew father's views on intermarriage of the races", she noted in her diary<sup>758</sup>. Interestingly, even if she had agreed to date a white German man, one of the reasons she advanced for refusing to marry him was the idea of racial incompatibility: "People from different races and backgrounds should really not get married! I perhaps wouldn't admit it to the world, but in this case I felt this way"<sup>759</sup>. Robert Church politely refused to give his consent, explaining that he refused to see his daughter marry a foreigner and live in Germany<sup>760</sup>. In her autobiography, writing at an age obsessed with interracial

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<sup>755</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in German*, 75. Diary entry dated 6 March 1890. In another entry in which she anticipated homesickness if she lived in Germany, she wondered: "Could have my mother, my brother, and now and again a friend from America visited me? No. I can't be too sad and inconsolable about it – God willed it so and He gave me the power to calmly accept everything". She did not seem to have envisaged asking Von Dewitts to leave Germany and come to live in the United States.

<sup>756</sup> See her German diary. Diary entry dated February 6, 1890. After Dewitts' proposal, as the days and months passed by, the diarist was surer and surer that this match would not make her happy. On March 8, 1890, she confided: "I feel every day that I could not be happy as his wife. No." See also diary entry dated March 14, 1890.

<sup>757</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 92.

<sup>758</sup> Robert Church indeed wrote Von D. and informed him that "he would never consent to his daughter's marrying a foreigner and living abroad", *A Colored Woman*, 91-92.

<sup>759</sup> Mary Church, *Diary in German*, 77. Perhaps it was difficult for Mary Church to make her relationship with white European men public at a time when such relationships were looked unfavorably upon in America.

<sup>760</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 92. Years later, after the rise of Adolf Hitler's rule in the late 1930s Terrell reflected upon what her destiny might have been had she chosen to marry Von Dewitts: "What my fate would have been if I had married my German friend. Where would I be today? Would I have been forced to leave Germany? If there had been any children, what would be their status now?" and thanked "a beneficent Providence that I was spared the painful ordeal through which I would have been obliged to pass if I had married Herr Von D."

relationships and white supremacy, Mary Terrell emphasized the fact that not all African American women were eager to marry white men, explaining that during her stay in Europe, she had received three marriage proposals by white men and had declined them all. On the contrary, after rejecting three white suitors, she chose to marry Robert Terrell, an African American lawyer<sup>761</sup>.

In the early 1900s, Helen James also rejected the possibility of dating non-black men. When referring to a certain “Mr. Banks”, a Hampton graduate, she thought that she could not date him because he was “not colored”. As a result, she “could not meet [him] on a comfortable basis”. Later, when meeting Fred Bonner of New Haven – Yale class of 1901 —, who spent several days in Honolulu en route to a government-funded teaching position in the Philippines, Helen welcomed his company, both because he was “colored” and came from Connecticut. She rejoiced in the opportunity of speaking about people she knew back in Connecticut – she seldom had news because she rarely met people of color in Hawaii: “For not seeing any colored people here I know very little of them [...] The only news that I get comes in letters”. She enjoyed the time spent with Bonner: “You can imagine how we spent [time]. Just talking about Connecticut and the people. It did seem good to be able to ask questions once again about things of personal interest and to get answers”<sup>762</sup>. It appears that common ties with New England made the two young people feel closer to one another.

Therefore, some women experienced their first relationships in very varied and diverse ways, whether they lived in the North, South or outside of America – where mores were not affected by race the way they were in the United States. Because they firmly positioned themselves as women of color and were at ease with interracial relationships – as if it constituted some sort of betrayal to the community, women in this study rejected the idea of marrying white men.

### **3. Reflecting on Marriage and Wifhood**

The work of Mary Kaiser-Farmer shows that the institution of marriage was prized by newly-freed slaves – male and female – because of the stability it offered<sup>763</sup>. Many rejoiced

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<sup>761</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>762</sup> Helen James, *Can Anything Beat White?*, 122.

<sup>763</sup> See Mary Kaiser-Farmer, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).



in seeing that despite the heritage of slavery — which aimed at crushing familial bonds— the institution of marriage was praised by African Americans<sup>764</sup>.

In the 1870s and 1880s, many black women of all social classes still wished to enter matrimony. In fact in their families or at school, many girls were encouraged to consider marriage. University newspapers and the black press conveyed messages which posited that matrimony was politically crucial because it was an expedient for racial uplift. Many activists emphasized the links between matrimony and the highly necessary “racial uplift”, since marriage formed the basis of a home and since the home was the key to uplift the race. For example, the conservative Lucy Laney contended in 1897 that “marriage, the beginning of home, is a matter of great importance and should not be carelessly entered into. It is the place to take the proverbial stitch in time”<sup>765</sup>.

Consequently, divorce was disdained since marriage was a sacred institution, “a tie that only love and truth should weave and nothing but death should part”<sup>766</sup>. Many women leaders generally advocated avoiding divorce as much as possible. Yet when in some cases, situations demanded the departure of the wife, some women decided to obtain a divorce or a separation. This was the case for the diarist Frances Anne Rollin who, suffering from her husband’s drinking and gambling, decided to leave in 1881, after thirteen years of marriage. Frances Rollin settled down in Washington D.C. with her three children, Winifred, Ionia and Leigh, working as a government clerk and a stenographer<sup>767</sup>.

### **Considering Marriage or Spinsterhood**

Several women of this study never married for reasons which are sometimes difficult to discover, since few women discussed this highly personal subject in their public writings. For example, Ella Barrier, Fannie Williams’s sister, who was a teacher in the Washington D.C. public school system<sup>768</sup>, or Maritcha Remond Lyons from Brooklyn, never married. Perhaps these women did not marry because they did not find a person with whom to spend the rest of their lives, were too busy with their professional lives, or simply because they did not want to marry – it is often difficult to say.

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<sup>764</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro”, 1894, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 77. Fannie Williams spoke about the necessity of marriage for the community, criticizing the models fostered by the slave system: “Individuals, not families; shelters, not homes; herding, not marriages were the cardinal sins in that system of horrors”.

<sup>765</sup> Lucy Laney, “Address Before the Women’s Meeting,” *Social and Physical Conditions of Negroes in Cities*, ed. W.E.B. Du Bois, (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1897): 55–57, in *African American Feminisms, 1828-1923*, Vol V., Teresa C. Zackodnik ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 98-100, 99.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid.

<sup>767</sup> Frances Rollin, 1868 Diary. In Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 461.

<sup>768</sup> Ella D. Barrier (1852-1945).

The youth diaries kept by Ida Wells and Mary Church show that these two young women did not wish to marry at a young age for several reasons, some of which were that they wished to complete their education or pursue their career goals. In the case of Wells, her Memphis diary reveals that she lived the social pressure of having to marry around the age of 25 with difficulties.

Ida Wells did not wish to marry in her twenties for personal reasons. This decisively free-spirited and modern woman apparently wished to be free to date men without thinking about marriage<sup>769</sup>. This freedom of spirit caused her some anguish: Wells confided feeling like “an anomaly to myself as well as to others. I do not wish to be married but I do wish for the society of the gentlemen”<sup>770</sup>. She felt misunderstood by the society of Memphis and was at odds with other women of her race and class, sometimes not without reason. Several times, she wrote diary entries hoping the man she dated did not expect to marry her. For example, on 20 October 1886, she confided: “I hope [George] is not thinking seriously about marrying”<sup>771</sup>. Like many women of this study, she did not wish to marry too early, despite the expectations of people around her – including her suitors. It appears that she refused offers of marriage several times<sup>772</sup>.

Yet at age 25, Wells suffered from her status as an unmarried woman. Living out of the frame carved out for young middle-class women posed a number of issues in the Memphis of the late 1880s. Because of their gender, women fell victim to social pressure when they were not married at an age which was deemed as “normal” — 25 — by members of society. Wells’s single status in 1887 alarmed her and was a source of anguish. In her diary in February 1887, she confided: “I am the only lady teacher left in the building who is

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<sup>769</sup> The freedom with which Ida Wells led her life could be so disturbing to the larger society that it triggered virulent reactions. This resolutely modern woman hardly fit in the rigid social frame of nineteenth century America and her attitude caused her to be severely criticized in the conservative South of the 1880s. As DeCosta-Willis has pointed out: “Wells paid a high price – isolation, criticism, and calumny – for her professional ambition, the freedom with which she conducted her personal life, and her failure to comply with social expectations for women of her class. By age twenty-four, she should have been married, like other female teachers [...] and have a child on the way. Since she was not, she became the object of vicious rumors: that she was involved with a white Holly Springs man ‘for money’, that she and a male teacher were ‘immoral’, and that she had an illegitimate child”, Miriam DeCosta-Willis, *Memphis Diary*, 114.

<sup>770</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 80. Diary entry dated 15 June 1886.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 August 1886, 98. Italics mine. When she was in Visalia, California, in August 1886, she learnt that one of her suitors, Harry, had suddenly died of consumption. In her diary, she expressed her regrets about having refused his advances: “My heart smites me to think what a cool letter I sent in answer to this last declaration of love for me! A better boy, with kinder intentions never breathed and when I think of the last time he came to see me two years ago, and declared he was going away to work that he would come back for me I grieve that I did not treat him more kindly”. She praised this man, who had defended her reputation when she fell victim to gossips in Memphis, emphasizing his good-natured character: he was “a better boy”, “gentle, kind and tender *as a woman*” who “preserve[d] [her] faith in human nature”, interestingly attributing him feminine qualities.

unmarried”<sup>773</sup>. As a result, her defiance of Victorian customs and gender norms of her time, the liberty with which she lived her life brought numerous attacks and libel. After 1887, it is very difficult to account for Wells’s romantic life, for she ceased keeping a diary – or one could not be found – but it is possible to assert that she met the man who would become her husband around 1892.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to verify whether Williams, who married at 32, experienced this social pressure of having to marry before age 25 the same way or not. Mary Church Terrell, who married at age 28 after her return to the United States, seems to have experienced this situation quite differently, probably because she experienced coming of age in quite different circumstances – she notably lived in Europe from age 25 to 27. In fact, most women intellectuals of this study got married around the age of thirty<sup>774</sup>.

Ida B. Wells, Terrell and other women of the middle-class often chose to marry after the age of 25 and decided to postpone marriage because they either desired to complete their education or pursue a professional career. Marriage would have been a brake to their intended career<sup>775</sup>.

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<sup>773</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 110 and 130-131. DeCosta-Willis explains: “During the fall and winter, she attends or participate in several weddings and becomes increasingly conscious of her single status, pointing out that she’s the only unmarried female teacher at her school”. Several of her colleagues were getting married, among whom some of her former beaux. For example, after months of intense wooing, a certain Mr. Graham married another woman. She briefly mentioned him on 20 October 1886: “Mr. Graham was married very unexpectedly last week. I wish him joy”, 116. Wells was not the only woman who spoke about the age limit of 25 for women. Years later, in the 1910s, Mamie Garvin Fields also spoke about the fateful age of 25. In 1913, when Mamie Garvin Fields was on the verge of turning 25, she believed that even if she “hated to leave her profession” – teaching –, since she “was going to turn twenty-five that summer”, “it was time for [her] to think about getting married”. She indeed “didn’t want to become a spinster teacher” even if “quite a few teachers stayed single all their lives”. Mamie did not want to imitate Lala, a relative of hers – who had been her role model. *Lemon Swamp*, 141. In France, the now-lost tradition of celebrating “Sainte Catherine” each 25 November reminds us that 25 has been considered as a fateful age for unmarried women for a long time. It was thought that women might become confirmed spinsters if they had not married by the age of 25. See <http://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/actu-des-mots/2016/11/25/37002-20161125ARTFIG00107-savez-vous-ce-qu-est-une-catherinette.php>. These women were called “Catherinettes” on that day.

<sup>774</sup> Fannie Williams married at the age of 32 in 1887, Mary Terrell got married at the age of 28 in 1891 after her return from Europe, while Ida B. Wells married in 1895 at age 33. Anna Cooper stands as an exception since she got married at age 19, in 1877. Interestingly, Williams is the only woman who married a man who was much younger than she was. Indeed S. Laing Williams (1864-1921) was aged 23 when he married his wife. On the contrary, Ida B. Wells married Ferdinand Barnett (1859-1936), a man who was three years older than her – he was 36 when they married – and had previously been married and had children. Robert Terrell (1857-1925) was also older than his wife, being 34 at the time of their marriage. George Cooper (1847-1879) was also older than his wife, being 30 when he got married.

<sup>775</sup> She felt called for a nobler work. See her journal entry dated 2 October 1886, *Memphis Diary*, 110. She had “greater designs” as the editor of her journal Miriam-DeCosta Willis explains. By the Fall of 1886, Wells regularly wrote articles in the local press and was strongly involved in her work for racial equality. She presented papers, attended lectures and wrote newspaper articles such as “Race Pride”, “Iola on Discrimination” and “Our Women”. Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 111. Wells concentrated on building her career before espousing Ferdinand Barnett in 1895 at the age of 33.

It appears that Fannie Barrier married S. Laing Williams after accomplishing her duty as a teacher in the South; Ida B. Wells waited for her lectures in the United Kingdom to stop to marry Ferdinand Barnett; Terrell left her suitor in Washington for two years and finally accepted to marry him upon her return. Only Anna Cooper married young, at the age of 19.

Since Ida B. Wells did not wish to work as a public-school teacher her entire life and hoped to become a journalist, in the late 1880s, she decided to focus on her career rather than seeking matrimony. Then, when she met the man who would later become her husband in 1892, Ferdinand Barnett— a widower and the owner of the Chicago black newspaper *The Chicago Conservator*, and after he made her an offer of marriage, Ida Wells apparently chose to postpone these plans. Being then a well-known figure of the struggle against lynching after 1892, she chose to accept his offer of marriage *only after* she had accomplished her duty as an activist. In 1893, she left for Europe and in June 1895, [... she] accept[ed] the offer of a home of [her] own which had been made to [her] before [her] last trip to England”<sup>776</sup>.

It is quite likely that Mary Church Terrell chose to postpone her projects of marriage with Robert Heberton Terrell in order to complete her studies in Europe. Even if she had enjoyed the company of Robert Terrell at M. Street High School, she chose to go to France, Germany and Switzerland for an extended period of time. When she came back to the United States in 1890, Mary Church was sensitive to his kindness and their attachment became more profound:

Mr. Terrell came to see me regularly and was very attentive. The course of true love did not always run perfectly smooth, but it always became calm and peaceful after any little turbulent eddies that caused it to flow in the wrong direction, and we became engaged. He was the head of the Latin department, as he had been during the first year I taught in Washington, and I was his assistant. In explaining my decision to link my destiny with his, I used to say that I enjoyed assisting him in the Latin department so much, I made up my mind to assist him in all departments for the rest of my natural life. And this I certainly tried to do.

Their relationship was soon unveiled and pupils teased the pair about this burgeoning romance:

Now and then when I entered my room, I would see something like this written on the blackboard: ‘Mr. Terrell is certainly getting good. He used to go to dances, but now he goes to Church.’ My maiden name lent itself admirably to puns and there were many of them, of course<sup>777</sup>.

Like Terrell, the northern-born teacher Helen James also wished to complete her education and attend Columbia University and Atlanta University before getting married. She

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<sup>776</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 238.

<sup>777</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 102.

did not wish to get married at a young age<sup>778</sup>. At first, James did not have a big crush on Chisolm but she came to appreciate him more and more until intense feelings developed: “He’s very good and tries every imaginable way to be kind to me. I quite appreciate him.”<sup>779</sup>. She finally agreed to marry Franck Pierce Chisolm in 1910, at the age of 33. In one of her letters, she wrote: “He’s dearer and dearer to me lavishing on me all that love and tenderness which my long separation from home and family has deprived me of.”<sup>780</sup>.

Like many college-educated white women at that time, many educated black women chose to marry after the age of 25 – either because they had not yet found the ideal life partner, or because if they had, they chose to postpone marriage plans because they wished to complete their education or concentrate on building their careers.

Compared to other women of this study Anna Haywood married at an early age, at 19. She married a Reverend from the West British in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1877. Anna Haywood married one of her former teachers, George A.C. Cooper, a native of the Bahamas who had been ordained an Episcopal priest a year before<sup>781</sup>. The marriage ended two years later with the untimely death of Cooper in 1879 and the pair did not have children. Anna never remarried but her marriage with Cooper enabled her to pursue a long career in teaching – a rare opportunity then, since married women were often not allowed to work<sup>782</sup>. After her husband’s death – which left her a widow at the early age of 21, Cooper left her native State of North Carolina in 1881 at the age of 23 and attended Oberlin College from 1881 to 1887, alongside Mary Church and Ida Gibbs-Hunt<sup>783</sup>.

A few years later, in August 1887, after teaching in the South for almost ten years – from 1875 to 1887 —, the 32 year-old Fannie Williams married S. Laing Williams, a lawyer whom

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<sup>778</sup> Helen James, *Can Anything Beat White?*, 176-177. She hesitated marrying one of her suitors named Mr. Deveau: “He’s very handsome and most becomingly arranged. Wish you could have seen him”.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>781</sup> Unlike Wells, Williams and Terrell, who all married lawyers, Cooper is the only woman among the four main women in this study who married an educator – who eventually became a Reverend. Other well-known activists such as Fannie Jackson Coppin were married to Ministers (Levi J. Coppin). Cooper was also the only woman who married an alien, a native of Nassau, Bahamas.

<sup>782</sup> Some widows – such as Anna Cooper or Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, for instance – indeed never remarried. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin was widowed in 1886, at the age of 44, Cooper in 1879, at the age of 21. Anna Cooper unfortunately did not evoke her status as a widow in her writings. Nevertheless, one may think that her marital status may have played a role in the shaping of her thinking about Victorianism. Her widowhood made it difficult for her to abide by Victorian rules, since, as a widow, she had to be economically independent. She worked her entire life as an educator in Washington D.C..

<sup>783</sup> Anna Cooper is buried next to her husband in Raleigh City Cemetery. She offered a stained-glass window in honor of her deceased husband in St Augustine Historic Chapel. See <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=39777718>.



she had met in Washington D.C.<sup>784</sup>. Naturally, she chose to hold the ceremony in her native town, as was common for young women at that time<sup>785</sup>. After their marriage, Fannie stopped teaching and the Williams couple chose to settle down in Chicago, where S. Laing worked as a lawyer and where Fannie would soon start her work as a social worker and writer. She explained in her life writing: “After my marriage my husband and I moved to one of the largest cities of the North, where we have continued to live. In this larger field of life and action I found myself, like many another women, becoming interested in many things that come within the range of a woman’s active sympathy and influence”<sup>786</sup>. It was in this stimulating milieu that Fannie Williams started her activism for women’s rights.

Even if Mary Church’s decision to marry was very “natural”, she explains that she hesitated postponing her wedding after receiving a job offer as a registrar at Oberlin College from Mrs. A. A. F. Johnston, the Dean of women. She decided to decline this opportunity and wedded Robert Terrell in October 1891<sup>787</sup>. After the ceremony, the pair returned to Washington D.C., since Robert Terrell had professional engagements in the nation’s capital<sup>788</sup>.

In 1895, Ida B. Wells wedded Ferdinand Barnett. Since she was quite famous, the Barnett marriage was publicly chronicled<sup>789</sup>. In the late nineteenth century, at a time when matrimony signaled the end of women’s careers – as teachers or in other occupations —, members of her community interpreted her decision to enter matrimony as a signal of her desire to stop fighting against lynching. Wells felt severely judged for marrying – a decision which was yet highly personal – and she used her autobiography to answer potential detractors:

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<sup>784</sup> <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47de-1c35-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>. Samuel Laing Williams (1864-1921) was a light-skinned man from Georgia whom she had met in Washington D.C.. He worked in the United States Pension Office, was a law student at Columbian University in Washington D.C., which opened in 1865, and is now called George Washington University Law School). <https://www.law.gwu.edu/history>. It is possible to consult a picture of him at NYPL: <https://trlc.org/winningthevote/biographies/fannie-barrier-williams/>.

<sup>785</sup> Fannie Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 7 and *The Brockport Republic*, 21 April 1887.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>787</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 103. “I decided not to change my plans. Among other things, it seemed to me that I would be taking the position under false pretenses, if I knew, when I accepted it, I would keep it only a year, for I did not think it would be right to postpone my wedding any longer than that.”, 103. “In declining to become registrar of Oberlin College, whether I made a mistake or not, I certainly deprived myself of the distinction and honor of being the first and only colored woman in the United States to whom such a position has ever been offered, so far as I am able to ascertain”.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. He “resumed his duties as chief of the division in the Fourth Auditor’s office in the Treasury Department”, 105.

<sup>789</sup> When Wells got married, she received many tokens of friendships. For instance, Margaret Washington offered her congratulations in the *Woman’s Era*. In an article signed by Hannah Smith, L.C. Carter, Secretaries of Convention, it was written: “Resolutions endorsing Miss Wells’ work and congratulations on her recent marriage were offered by Mrs B.T. Washington, and adopted”.



As strange as it may seem, afterword was sent out to the country, there arose a united protest from my people. They seemed to feel that I had deserted the cause, and that some of them censored me rather severely in their newspapers for having done so. There were more outspoken because of the loss to the cause than they had been in a holding up my hands when I was trying to carry a banner. However, I felt that as they did not understand it would seem rather out of place for me to try to make them do so<sup>790</sup>.

Ida B. Wells's decision to marry was met with misunderstanding by feminists such as Susan B. Anthony. Wells interpreted the tone of her friend during a conversation as that of reproach. Anthony believed that women like Wells ought to continue their fights, for no one was better-suited than her to lead the fight against lynching. Placing pressure on Wells's shoulders, she implicitly reproached her for the fact that since her union with Barnett in 1895, agitation against lynching had almost vanished in America, as if Wells-Barnett had failed to accomplish her duty.

I noticed the way she would bite out my married name in addressing me. I asked her 'Don't you believe in women getting married?'; She said 'Oh yes but not women like you who had a special call for special work. I too might have married but it would have meant dropping the work to which I had set my hand'. She said, 'I know of no one in all this country better fitted to do the work you had in hand than yourself. Since you have gotten married, agitation seems practically to have ceased'<sup>791</sup>.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett felt severely judged by Susan Anthony, whom she considered as a friend and seemed to have construed this remark as a reproach. She should have devoted herself to the cause instead of having thought about herself. Similar comments were made in the press and interestingly, Fannie Barrier Williams also implied that Ida Wells was already married to the anti-lynching cause in one of her articles. In one issue of the *Woman's Era* in 1895, Fannie Williams wrote: "The public has become so interested in the unique career of Miss Wells that her determination to marry a man while still married to a cause will be a topic of national interest and comment"<sup>792</sup>. Ida Wells proceeded to justify her decision in her life writing, explaining that when she got married, she was on the verge of exhaustion. She said: "I did not know how utterly worn out I was physically until I reached the place where I could rest quietly without the feeling that I must be either on the train or traveling through the country to some place of meeting right was scheduled to speak"<sup>793</sup>.

In the late nineteenth century, women were expected to stop using their maiden names and bear their husbands' last names. White liberal-minded feminists opposed such practices and decided to refuse using the names of their husbands.

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<sup>790</sup> Ida Wells, *Crusade*, 241.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid., 255. My underlining.

<sup>792</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman's Era*. July 1895, 5. Mary Church Terrell Papers. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress.

<sup>793</sup> Ida Wells, *Crusade*, 241-242.

When they married, some African American women of the upper and middle-class, willing to retain part of their identity as independent women, did not want to stop using their maiden names or were keen to append their maiden names to that of their husbands, therefore bearing hyphenated family names. Shirley Carlson has explained that “many activist black women continued to be identified by their maiden names – usually as family domain or as a part of their hyphenated surname – indicating that their own identities were not since subsumed in their husbands.”<sup>794</sup> This was the case for nationally known and acclaimed well-educated African American women such as “Fannie Barrier Williams, Josephine Silone Yates, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin [who] all represented the black ideal of womanhood on a national level”<sup>795</sup>. In fact “some notable black women were better known than their husbands”, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett who would become “more famous than her husband Ferdinand Barnett”.

All women of the main sample except Anna Cooper chose to bear hyphenated last names<sup>796</sup>. Fannie Barrier was named Fannie Barrier Williams after her marriage to S. Laing Williams in 1887; Mary Church became Mary Church Terrell after her marriage to Robert Terrell in 1891; and when Ida Wells married Ferdinand Lee Barnett in 1895, she had her last name hyphenated. Contrary to these activists, after her wedding, the feminist Anna Haywood Cooper decided to abandon her maiden name and use exclusively her husband’s name in her personal and professional life. While this decision may at first sight appear as conservative – many wives took their husbands’ names at that time —, her decision most probably signaled her desire to mark the end of the link between her and her biological father. She was indeed probably happy to drop the name of her white “genitor”, which was a mark of the badge of slavery her mother had undergone. In her case, marriage seems to have been a way to break free from the shadow of her white southern father. Her decision to bear her husband’s name exclusively was therefore probably an act of self-assertion.

Some women did not think about marriage as a major life goal. Cooper – who was among the first women in this study to tackle the question of matrimony in her essays in the early 1890s – believed that a woman should not ask herself: “How shall I so cramp, stand, simplify and nullify myself as to make me eligible to the honor of being swallowed up into

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<sup>794</sup> Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, 67.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

<sup>796</sup> Frances Jackson Coppin, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Josephine Silone Yates, Margaret Murray Washington, Alice Moore Dunbar, Mary McLeod Bethune, most clubwomen and activists chose to add their husbands’ names to their maiden names. There are a few exceptions: Gertrude Mossell and Anna Julia Cooper.

some little man?”. Instead she thought that the success of a marriage “depended upon the man’s ability to direct his own efforts into ‘the noblest and best achievements of which he is capable’”, therefore “admonishing men to fulfill their potentials”<sup>797</sup>. For Cooper, a black woman had “as many resources as man, as many activities beckon her on”. As Guy-Sheftall has revealed, in 1890-1891, Anna Cooper “urged married women to seek employment outside the home and develop their intellects but hastened to add that marriage was not the only route to self-actualization”:

I grant you that intellectual development, with the self-reliance and capacity for earning a livelihood which it gives, renders woman less dependent on the marriage relation for physical support (which, by the way, does not always accompany it). Neither is she compelled to look to sexual love as the one sensation capable of giving tone and relish, movement and vim to the life she leads. Her horizon is extended. Her sympathies are broadened and deepened and multiplied. She is in closer touch with nature<sup>798</sup>.

Cooper thus voiced decisively feminist stances in 1890-1891 the way very few women did, believing for example that women’s professional careers could help them be less financially dependent on their husbands and could find “tone and relish” in diverse activities – all open to them – rather than merely in carnal love.

Contrary to white women, black women also viewed marriage as compatible with public life. In her study of North Carolinian black women, Glenda Gilmore has explained that many women continued public work after their marriage<sup>799</sup>. For example, Ida Wells confided that upon her marriage she had initially thought that she was leaving the public sphere and retiring to her private sphere: “I retired to what I thought was the privacy of the home”<sup>800</sup>. She indeed retired from public life, but not for long: like many other activists, she felt that she was called to accomplish her duty.

African American women whose lives are analyzed in this work generally broke free from the tenets of Victorianism, considering that marriage was foremost an association between two thinking beings. As Glenda Gilmore has explained when discussing Cooper’s views on marriage,

Educated black women sought to establish partnerships that maximized the potential and efficiency of both members, and they tended to do that by avoiding hierarchical ideas of male dominance and female subordination. Men and women were different, but they had complementary work to do; once trained for that work, women were anxious to establish domestic relationships that allowed them to get on with the job.

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<sup>797</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *The Voice from The South*, 70-71, as cited in Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43-44.

<sup>798</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, as cited in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 82-83, also cited in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 24.

<sup>799</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43-44.

<sup>800</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 239.

This type of reciprocal partnerships was almost unequaled in the United States of the late nineteenth century. As Glenda Gilmore has shown, compared to white women educated in the 1890s who “reshaped white marriage relationships”, “southern black women were a generation ahead [...] in forging companionate partnerships”<sup>801</sup>. She explained:

Southern white women would seek such marriages in growing numbers beginning in the Progressive Era, but it was still rare in the nineteenth century. This arrangement seems to resemble the much chronicled sort of partnership that a small group of well-educated northern white women formed, but its roots and stakes, and therefore its significance, differ markedly [...] Springing from slavery, poverty, religion, and black women’s daily contact with men rather than distance from them, this civic partnership played out in a society that rested on the subordination of black men as well as black women. In this case, the stakes had something to do with the question of ‘woman’s sphere’ but much more to do with the day-to-day survival of every southern African-American, male and female<sup>802</sup>.

Interestingly, black women were encouraged to view marriage as partnerships in etiquette books and on conservative University campuses of the South such as Tuskegee. For example, despite her conservative views upon courtship and marriage, Emma Hackley, the author of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, construed marriage as a “co-partnership”: “Married life is a co-partnership and the wife and husband pledge to mutual help, when they enter into the marriage contract”<sup>803</sup>.

While working-class women tended to view marriage as the association with a man who provided for his family, as in the case of Elizabeth Johnson Harris<sup>804</sup>, bourgeois women living in the late nineteenth century such as Wells or Terrell indeed tended to view marriage as a sort of partnership. As Marie Jo Deegan has explained, Fannie Barrier Williams similarly “celebrated marriage and a new equality in that relationship”<sup>805</sup>. In “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, speaking about middle-class women married to businessmen, she explained that black women were “destined to play an important part in the future businessman’s career. She is to be the conservative force in the business man’s career [...] Many a time he will turn to her in distress when, through over confidence or display, his credit is gone and bankruptcy is staring him in the face, to find his heart gladdened by the sight of many dollars, she has stealthily saved out of the surplus, he was trying to throw away”<sup>806</sup>. Moreover, Williams believed that gender equality within couples was paramount to achieve this work of racial uplift and self-help. This mutual respect and partnership was to benefit both members. While

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<sup>801</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 18.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>803</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 169.

<sup>804</sup> Elizabeth Harris, who was happily married, spoke about her spouse in her life writing as a dutiful husband, an ordinary laboring man” who always “provided satisfactorily for the home and his family”. Elizabeth Johnson Harris, *Life Story*, 24.

<sup>805</sup> Mary Jo. Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xli.

<sup>806</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 61.

African-American “ideal women” were dedicated partners to their husbands, their spouses should praise and honor them: “Every Negro businessman who takes his wife into his confidence, who respects her judgment when deserved, who does all he knows how to do due to exalt and idealize her talents and virtues and that of her kind, until she shall become the all-sufficient motive for his further endeavors, is doing his part to make Negro womanhood a part of all that is best and most beautiful in the world’s conception of an ideal woman”<sup>807</sup>.

As Hazel Carby has explained in her influential article dealing with black feminists such as Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells and Pauline Hopkins, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, these women “expanded the limits of conventional ideologies of womanhood to consider subversive relationships between women, motherhood without wifehood, wifehood as a partnership outside of an economic exchange between men, and men as partners and not patriarchal fathers”<sup>808</sup>.

Moreover, black women intellectuals thought that men and women were equal partners and equally potent in their fight against discrimination<sup>809</sup>. As a result, they naturally chose partners with whom they could work with and form an effective team. They made sure that they could count on their husbands to fulfill what they deemed was their mission. For instance, Mary Terrell and Ida B. Wells chose to marry men with liberal views. As Jean Marie Robbins emphasizes in her dissertation, “Upon her return to the United States, [Terrell] chose a marriage partner that supported her ambitions and uplift work and was therefore able to actualize what had seemed like competing goals”<sup>810</sup>. Although Ida Wells made few references to her husband in her life writing, it is possible to say that Ferdinand Barnett was “a loving, attentive, and supportive husband”. He “encouraged his wife’s activism, civic activities, and political aspirations throughout their marriage”<sup>811</sup>. Charlotte Grimké seems to have construed her marriage the same way: as Joanne Braxton has showed: “Together, the Grimkés braced each other, finding in their marriage a retreat from the anxieties of constant confrontation with the dominant culture [...] Charlotte Forten Grimké found love, not the glaring love of

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<sup>807</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>808</sup> Hazel V. Carby, “On the Threshold of Woman’s Era: Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in black feminist theory”, in Henry Louis Gates Junior, ed., *“Race,” Writing, and Difference*. (Chicago: the University of Chicago press, 1986), 301-316, 316.

<sup>809</sup> In *Gender and Jim Crow*, Glenda Gilmore points this out about black women in North Carolina in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s.

<sup>810</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 102.

<sup>811</sup> Miriam DeCosta-Willis, *Memphis Diary*, 166-167. It is possible to learn about his support in Dorothy Sterling’s interview with Alfreda Barnett Duster in the “Afterword”, 191-199.

subordination and domination that passes with the day, but a radiant, tender and enduring love – a higher marriage”<sup>812</sup>.

These women generally expected a reciprocal relationship. They wished to be able to count on their husbands’ support but they also offered their unlimited support, both personally and professionally. For example, Mary Church Terrell and her husband formed a team, encouraged one another and were active in helping the other fulfill their goals. She explains that every four years, with presidential elections, Mary Terrell lived the periods of re-appointment with great anxiety, perhaps with more anxiety than her own husband<sup>813</sup>. Because of the public nature of his position, Judge Robert Terrell was often attacked and libeled in the press<sup>814</sup>. Never getting used to this repetitive pressure, Terrell is careful to highlight her husband’s faith in justice, his position as a victim to southern men’s prejudice and her important role as a Judge’s supportive, dutiful wife. She wrote:

Every four years for twenty years [...] I was overwhelmed with discouragement and despair. Instead of becoming accustomed to the awful ordeal I felt it more and more as the years rolled by. With all my soul I hated that type of diabolical injustice which inspired prejudice-ridden men to try to ruin my husband's career for which he had shown such signal fitness. However much I might rage inwardly, I knew I was helpless to change or remove conditions against which I rebelled. Nevertheless, I did what I could. I did not sit supinely by and bemoan my cruel fate<sup>815</sup>.

When her husband was publicly attacked, she did everything she could to support him and intercede in his favor, using every connection she might have<sup>816</sup>. The partnership was reciprocal. In her autobiography, Terrell emphasized her husband’s support whenever she had important decisions to make throughout her active club life. For example, when she joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 against the will of some members of the black community, Mary Terrell explains that her husband had encouraged her to pursue the course of her activism within the NAACP, even if it could be a

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<sup>812</sup> Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 96-97.

<sup>813</sup> Judge Terrell was first appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1900 and reappointed in 1904, then by President Taft (1908), by President Wilson twice (in 1912-1916) and finally by President Harding (in 1920). Mary Terrell lauded Theodore Roosevelt and was personally acquainted with him. See *A Colored Woman*, page 277. Yet in her mind, Roosevelt’s main mistake – which, according to her, tarnished his reputation — was to dismiss three African American soldiers in Texas without any apparent reason and without consulting his Secretary of War in 1918. See her autobiography pages 268 and 278. Contrary to her husband, who was “an optimist from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet”, she suffered from the stress provoked these nominations. See page 260.

<sup>814</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 260. “Each time the appointment was for four years. So every four years he had to pass through the same humiliating ordeal of having his confirmation held up by Senators who were hungry for charges against him and who were determined to defeat him at all hazards”.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>816</sup> In 1914, when the possibility of Robert Terrell’s re-appointment was low, Mary decided to write to Senator Theodore Burton of Ohio to convince him to support her husband. Senator Theodore Elijah Burton (1851-1929) was a white Republican Senator from Ohio. Hoping that Senator Burton might turn a keen ear to her plea, Mary Terrell did not hesitate to contact this Oberlin College graduate so that he might intercede in her husband’s favor: “I felt freer to appeal to Senator Burton to do me this favor than to anybody else because he was an Oberlin man”, *Ibid.*, 264. It did work, since her husband was re-appointed two years later.



threat to his career. She said in her autobiography: “My husband said that if he had to lose his position because his wife lived up to the light she had and joined an organization which she believed would promote the welfare of the race, he was perfectly willing to lose it”<sup>817</sup>.

Moreover, these women also tended to mingle their personal and their professional lives, often associating their activities to those of their husbands. For instance, Ida B. Wells worked for her husband’s newspaper *The Conservator* from 1895 onwards, while Fannie Barrier Williams also worked with her husband Samuel Laing when she penned her books on the New Negro at the turn of the century. Conversely, Mary Terrell seemed to have separated her activity as a clubwoman from her husband’s even if she enjoyed his support in her political action<sup>818</sup>. As a result, for a few women, activism was often a couple’s business.

Therefore, contrary to many white activists of the time – who tended to choose not to marry – these women intellectuals generally viewed matrimony as a desirable condition and cherished their relationship with their husbands. They often had more modern ideas than white women about the roles each partner was to play in the relationship. These activists tended to envisage marriage as a partnership, to view the relation as the possibility to fulfill their mission as race leaders and to see marriage as the association between two lovers, but more importantly, between two supportive life partners. Some black bourgeois wives indeed mingled their private and public lives.

### **Offering Advice for a Happy and Healthy Marriage: Wives’ Duties**

Some women of this study envisaged marriage in revolutionary ways in the 1890s, at a time when views about wives’ duties were rather conservative. As seen before, in the late nineteenth century, middle and upper-class women indeed had to cope with a number of social injunctions: they were expected to be domestic, submissive, docile, gentle, patient, understanding, etc, in line with Victorian ideals. Some intellectuals, lecturers and writers – who were often married themselves – took their pen to denounce these injunctions, expressing very modern ideas about gender roles and marriage in the 1890s. Although these women had chosen to marry – and had therefore not rejected the institution of marriage, in their writings they encouraged women to question “proper” gender roles and to be modern women. For

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<sup>817</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 194.

<sup>818</sup> Margaret Murray Washington is another example of a modern woman’s collaboration with her husband. She constantly associated her action at Tuskegee Institute to that of her husband.

example, the activist and writer Gertrude Mossell made her views about the responsibilities of wives and husbands public in *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* in 1894<sup>819</sup>.

When discussing the duties wives owed to their husbands in her essay entitled “The Opposite Point of View”, Mossell debunked the stereotypes conveyed in “every paper and magazine”. Arguing that the feminine press was certainly written by “conservatives”, she denounced the diktat which posited that women should always be cheerful, good-tempered, perfect domestic workers and that “the wife must always meet her husband with a smile” or that “She must stay at home, keep the house clean, prepare food properly and care for her children”. Like other feminists of her time, Mossell seemed to believe that women’s roles were not to be circumscribed to the home<sup>820</sup>.

Mossell claimed that the messages conveyed about wives’ proper role as perfect housekeepers in magazines were erroneous. Even if she conceded that “to be sure it [keeping a house clean] will not drive him out”, she argued that “keeping a clean house will not keep a man at home” either. The solution for a long and happy marriage did not lie on a perfect home. Using very frank terms, Mossell warned her female readers the way an older sister or a mother would: “And you, dear tender-hearted little darlings, that are being taught daily that it will, might as well know the truth now and not be crying your eyes out later”.

At a time when Victorian ideals of submissiveness were in vogue and when women were expected to always be in control of their emotions and tempers, Mossell also lifted women’s feeling of guilt for not always displaying good tempers, explaining that deploying efforts to be above reproach did not guarantee men’s love: “Saints are rare and I don’t believe that history past or present proves that saintly women have in the past or do now *gain men's love often asked or hold it longest*”<sup>821</sup>. Nevertheless, she encouraged women to avoid “scolding and nagging”, for “no man desires a scolding, nagging wife, and no child desires such a mother”<sup>822</sup>.

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<sup>819</sup> Gertrude Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman by Mrs N.F. Mossell*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Philadelphia: Geo. S. Ferguson Company, 1908). First published 1894. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Gertrude Mossell (1855-1948) was a famous light-skinned teacher, activist and clubwoman from Pennsylvania. She married a Philadelphia physician named Nathaniel F. Mossell and had two children. Interestingly, Mossell adopted Victorian vocabulary in her dedication to her collection of essays. She lovingly dedicated her work to her “two little daughters, Mary Campbell and Florence Alma Mossell, praying that they may grow into a pure and noble womanhood”, 4.

<sup>820</sup> I will study this in further details in a later chapter.

<sup>821</sup> Gertrude Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, 123. Italics hers.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 123.

Gertrude Mossell explained that the ideal wife should possess a “well-balanced character”, for “The desirable partner for a successful, peaceful married life is a woman of well-balanced temperament, who is known among her associates as one not given to what is often called fits of temper”. Nevertheless, the perfect wife should at the same time possess “a mind of her own”<sup>823</sup>. In other words, the ideal wife according to Mossell should possess dual qualities – many of which were in contradiction to Victorian ideals. She should possess a good temper, should know how to control her emotions, display docility and sweetness yet at the same time possess intelligence and reasoning skills. What is more, for Mossell, who was one of the first women to voice such feminist ideas, women who have intellect, ideas and opinions of their own had more chance of keeping their husbands, contrary to women who have a sweet disposition because, since they are more interesting, their husbands tire less of them. She argued: “I believe that a woman who has a mind and will of their own will become monotonous to a less extent than one so continuously sweet and self-effacing; and I believe history proves it”<sup>824</sup>.

In addition, society believed that it fell upon women to remain feminine and attractive in order to prevent their husbands’ adultery. Surprisingly, some women agreed with such views. For example, in one of her articles, the happily married feminist but nevertheless conservative Mary Church Terrell incited her female readers to make sustained efforts to “keep a husband”, saying little about husbands’ duties. She indeed believed that women should always be careful to be neat and well-dressed for their husbands, especially after the birth of their children,

Women also owe it to their husbands to look [nice]. It is an old saying that it is easy enough to catch but very hard to hold a husband. While the catching process is going on, women look as sweet and as pretty as they can, but after marriage, when so many duties engross their minds and consume their time, it is hard to think of appearance sometimes. But however great the sacrifice, a woman should make it a part of her religion to look as neat and as tidy around the house as she possibly can <sup>825</sup>.

Remaining feminine, good-looking and attractive were the keys to a healthy marriage, Terrell believed. A woman had to make efforts if she wished to see her husband fulfilled and therefore, not inclined to commit adultery. While she insisted on the necessity for women to furnish daily efforts, Terrell did not refer to males’ responsibilities in a marriage – perhaps suggesting that she deemed women’s efforts to be greater than men’s.

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<sup>823</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>825</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “What Mothers Owe Their Daughters”, in *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*.

Mossell had diametrically opposed views. She thought on the contrary that society should cease to place undue responsibility on women's shoulders. On the topic of adultery, which constituted a threat to marriage, Mossell deplored the responsibility placed upon women again<sup>826</sup>. She denounced the fact that wives were repeatedly told that they should "smile always", never be "grumpy" in their husbands' presence, "dress in the latest style, and so on, or else [their husbands] will transfer [their] affections to the keeping of another". She contended: if men were told the same before marriage, "what would be his reply? We all know". Mossell aimed at lifting women's sense of guilt:

Women must not be blamed because they are not equal to the self-sacrifice of always meeting husbands with a smile, nor the wife blamed that she does not dress after marriage as she dressed before; childbirth and nursing, the care of the sick through sleepless, nightly vigils, the exactions and irritations incident to a life whose duties are made up of trifles and interruptions, and whose work of head and heart never ceases, make it an impossibility to put behind them at all times all cares and smile with burdened heart and weary feet and brain<sup>827</sup>.

Similarly, positioning herself as a protective and shrewd older sister or a mother to her female readers, Mossell warned her readership about the nature of "many men", about what she deemed their natural inclination to frequent saloons and adopt risky attitudes by gambling and drinking: "To be sure, many men, social by nature, are tempted by the allurements of the saloons and the chance of meeting their boon companions"<sup>828</sup>. Mossell tried to explain to her readership that such behaviors had nothing to do with wives' attitudes: such "bad men" could act this way even if they were unmarried, because *it is in their nature*: "These men would do the same if they had no home, or whether it was clean or not". Adopting a Victorian terminology, Mossell concluded by saying that "true husbands" generally appreciated their wives' efforts so long as they did "their best". She said: "doing the best she can in all things will be appreciated by a true husband"<sup>829</sup>. Consequently, according to Mossell, women should not reproach themselves with not being perfect housewives. In fact, they should also select husbands who were more "domestic in their nature" in order not to risk marrying men who would soon start drinking, gambling and commit adultery<sup>830</sup>.

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<sup>826</sup> Mossell argued that motherhood duties could play a part on the marriage because women tended to place their children's needs before theirs, for instance when it came to clothing: "Husbands and fathers usually buy what they *need* at least most mothers and wives will not even do that while children need anything". Gertrude Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, 121-122.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid., 120-121. She added: "Bad men go out for evil purposes; to be sure".

<sup>829</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid., 120. "The men that usually stay in at night are domestic in their nature, care little for the welfare or approval of the world at large, are not ambitious, are satisfied with being loved, care nothing for being honored. The men who used when single to kiss the babies, pet the cat, and fail to kick the dog where they visited are the men who remain at home most when married". Obviously, she believed that the situation was much different for women married to men who endorsed public roles and were often called for duties outside of home. Mossell,

As Mary Terrell has emphasized in her memoir, if a marriage failed, women were generally held responsible and they could also be thought to be accountable for the desertion of their husbands<sup>831</sup>. Mossell denounced the messages which conveyed that if women did not fulfill the role of the perfect little housewife and mother, they risked seeing their husbands desert them for the saloon: “or he will frequent the saloon and, go out at night and spend his time unwisely at the least”<sup>832</sup>. Mossell expected people to judge each partner in a fair manner in case the marriage did not work. Why should women always be designated as guilty for a marriage failure and never men?, she asked. Calling for a fairer representation of wives and husbands, she said:

But let me tell you, friend, it is all an excuse in nine cases out of ten. A husband’s ill-dong is never taken as an excuse for a wife’s turning bad, and why should a man be excused for doing wrong, if he has a bad wife? If he be the stronger-minded one, especially. If a husband is a true one in any sense of the word, his transference of the kiss at the door from the wife to the firstborn that runs before her to greet him will not cause even a sigh of regret<sup>833</sup>.

Since Gertrude Mossell favored complete equality in marriage, when it came to counting the spouses’ wrongdoings, she believed that no excuse should be searched to clear one of the spouses’ name:

A good husband will do his duty even if the wife fails, as so many wives are doing today with bad husbands. The man who wants to lead a reckless life, will complain of his wife’s bad housekeeping, extravagance, the children’s noise or, if not blessed with offspring, still complains that this fact makes home less interesting.

At the end of her article, after discussing the possible pitfalls of marriage, Gertrude Mossell provided her recipe for a satisfactory marriage. For her, righteousness, morality, Christian principles and love safeguarded marriages. She concluded:

It is not possessing a temper, but continuous outbursts of ill temper that undermine true happiness. The home should be founded on right principles, on morality, Christian living, a due regard to heredity and environment that provides good for the future. With these taken into consideration, backed by love, or even true regard, with each having an abiding sense of duty and a desire to carry out its principles, no marriage so contracted can ever prove a failure<sup>834</sup>.

How did these women speak about sexuality in their adult lives?

## **The Politics of Sex**

By the beginning of the twentieth century, women intellectuals were well aware that slavery had deprived African American women of their bodily integrity. At a conference in

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who was herself married to a prominent Philadelphia physician, encouraged such wives to accept being left alone at home: “The man who aspires to social preeminence, who is ambitious or who acquires the reputation of being a man of judgment and knowledge, useful as a public man, will be often out at night even against his own desires, on legitimate business”.

<sup>831</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 10. When her parents separated in the 1870s, “No matter what caused the separation of a couple, the woman was usually blamed”.

<sup>832</sup> Gertrude Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, 118.

<sup>833</sup> Ibid., 122-123. One may imagine that Mossell thought the same way about women who left their home when they had good and “true” husband who cared about them.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid., 125.

Berlin in 1904, Terrell emphasized the deprivation African American women had undergone: “Not only could they possess no property, but even their bodies were not their own. Nothing in short which could degrade or brutalize the womanhood of my race was lacking in that system from which Colored women then had no hope of escape.”<sup>835</sup> In an age of freedom and what is more during the “woman’s era”<sup>836</sup>, these women were nevertheless conservative about sex. Moreover, because they lived in an era when sex could hardly be dissociated from procreation, these women were careful about their sexual lives.

As appears clearly in Loretta J. Ross’s article entitled “African American Women and Abortion”<sup>837</sup>, black women displayed agency in their struggle to gain control of their bodies, under slavery and later in history. Like Deborah Gray White in her dissertation *Ar’n’t I a Woman?*, Ross emphasized the fact that under slavery:

African Americans covertly used contraceptives and abortions to resist slavery. Often they employed African folk knowledge to do so. In the context of slavery, abortion and infanticide expressed a woman’s desperate determination to resist the oppressive conditions of slavery. As Angela Davis points out, when Black women resorted to abortion, the stories they told were not so much about the desire to be free of pregnancy, but rather about the miserable social conditions that dissuaded them from bringing new lives into the world<sup>838</sup>.

Later on, bourgeois black women – who were often active in club work – often supported access to birth control and measures which enabled them to efficiently gain control of their bodies. According to Ross, “In the early twentieth century Black organizations were often visible supporters of fertility control for Black women, linking reproductive rights to racial advancement”<sup>839</sup>. In their writings, how did women reflect upon fertility control, if they did? Several women of my sample dreaded new pregnancies and confided in their diaries attempting to prevent being pregnant again, while other women – belonging to the upper-class – chose to marry late and have few children.

Additionally, since questions related to sexuality and birth control are intricately linked to definitions of womanhood, the pressure exerted upon women of color in these years forced them to redefine the way they viewed their womanhood and to adopt a rhetoric of defense in that regard. As Loretta Ross has explained, clubwork was instrumental in trying to improve the image of the community: “In this era the Black women’s club movement, the organized

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<sup>835</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Address Delivered at the International Congress of Women in Berlin”, Germany, 13 June 1904, in *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*.

<sup>836</sup> As I will study in the second part, the woman’s era was the name given to the Progressive era at the turn of the century when American women were particularly active in women’s clubs and in reform work.

<sup>837</sup> Her article was originally printed in *Abortion Wars: a Half-century Struggle*, edited by Rickie Solinger. <http://trustblackwomen.org/2011-05-10-03-28-12/publications-a-articles/african-americans-and-abortion-articles/31-african-american-women-and-abortion->

<sup>838</sup> Loretta Ross, “African American Women and Abortion”, 21-22.

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



voice of African-American women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directly addressed issues of Black women's sexuality and sought to confront and redefine morality and assess its relationship to 'true womanhood'”<sup>840</sup>. As a result, elite women attempted to better the image of African American womanhood: “Stereotypes about Black women's sexuality and alleged immorality prompted many African-American women to “make the virtues as well as the wants of the colored women known to the American people [...] to put a new social value on themselves.”<sup>841</sup>

Because of the “stigma of immorality” put on women of color, it was difficult for black women to officially support abortion. Yet as of the 1910s the National Association of Colored Women played a significant role in the struggle for birth control measures: “The club movement was integral to the networks that shared contraceptive information and supported “voluntary motherhood”<sup>842</sup>. Most advice consisted in advising women to refrain from having sexual intercourse if they did not want to have children. For example, clubwork aimed at lifting women's guilt about motherhood. In 1894, contributors to the *Woman's Era* – a woman's publication edited by Josephine St Pierre Ruffin – argued that “not all women are intended for mothers. Some of us have not the temperament for family life”. By insisting on “voluntary motherhood”, these clubwomen indirectly encouraged women who did feel a strong maternal instinct to refrain from having unwanted pregnancies. Loretta Ross has explained that black clubwomen became increasingly active in the struggle for contraceptive rights. Ross wrote that from 1915 onwards,

[i]n this spirit, the Black women's club movement supported the establishment of family-planning clinics in Black communities. In 1918 the Women's Political Association of Harlem became the first Black organization to schedule lectures on birth control. They were soon joined by dozens of other clubwomen seeking information about birth control in their communities<sup>843</sup>.

Very little personal information about sex and birth control can be found in these women's writings. In fact very few women discussed their sexual life in their diaries. It was nevertheless possible to find a few comments made on the subject. Like white women of the upper class, middle and upper-class black women tried to control their fertility, using methods which were often passed on to them by family members or friends. They resorted to different strategies to limit the size of their families.

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<sup>840</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>842</sup> Ibid., 28-29. The fight started in the 1910s and continued in the following decades: “The main organization for Black women's clubs, the National Association of Colored Women, had between 150,000 and 200,000 members, mainly middle-class women, in forty-one states in the mid-1920s”.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid., 34.

First, some of them chose not to marry at all. Secondly, those who chose to marry tended to marry late – in their thirties, which mathematically shortened the period during which they could have children. Ross has shown that “By the early 1900s Black women were making significant gains in controlling their fertility by marrying late and having few children”<sup>844</sup>. Educated black women indeed tended to have fewer children in America in the early twentieth century. As Ross explains, “By 1900, the average number of children per household was close to three”, whereas in the “mid-eighteenth century it was common for women to have eight to ten children”<sup>845</sup>. Despite whites’ fears of a sudden increase of the black population<sup>846</sup>, there was in fact a decrease in fertility, yet this decrease mostly concerned the urban black middle and upper classes.

To be sure, middle-class women had fewer children than the average black woman and rural women had more children than those who lived in urban areas. In general however, black fertility declined by one-third between 1880 and 1910. A combination of disease, poor nutrition, and unhealthful living conditions, as well as the voluntary use of birth control, led to this decline. Combined with the tragically incidence of child mortality, decreased fertility made black households smaller, even as it made motherhood potentially more distressing<sup>847</sup>.

What strategies did women of color adopt? It appears that married women tried to schedule their pregnancies to maintain their activities. For example, women shared information among themselves about how to avoid pregnancies. Ida Wells’s testimony reveals that women around her had informed her about the existence of some – probably home-made – contraceptive methods<sup>848</sup>. Despite the fact that motherhood and the responsibilities that came with it had a significant impact on her career, Ida B. Wells-Barnett retrospectively rejoiced in not having been “swayed by advice given me on the night of my marriage”<sup>849</sup>.

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<sup>844</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>845</sup> Loretta Ross has contended: “Throughout the nineteenth century, white southerners repeatedly expressed their racist nightmares about a huge Black population increase. In fact, the Black population of the South was growing much more slowly than the white population. In 1870 there were 5 million Blacks in the South, and in 1910 there were 8.7 million, whereas there were 8.6 million whites in 1870 and 20.5 million in 1910. By the early 1900s Black women were making significant gains in controlling their fertility by marrying late and having few children.”

<sup>846</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 22.

<sup>847</sup> Deborah Gray White, “Motherhood: 1880-1910”, in *Black Women in America*, ed., Darlene Clark Hine.

<sup>848</sup> Wells reported having been given some “advice given me on the night of my marriage which had for its object to teach me how to keep from having a baby”, *Crusade*, 252. As Darlene Hine has emphasized in “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women from the Middle West”, there was a decline “in black urban birth rates as women became more economically self-sufficient, better educated, and more involved in self-improvement efforts, including participation in the flourishing black women’s club movement in midwestern communities, they had greater access to birth control information”, 918.

<sup>849</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 252.

By describing their experiences and narrating their memories in their autobiographies and memoirs, these African American intellectuals crafted a certain narrative about themselves and constructed their self image and their self identities. Studying the public and private documents of these women unveil an unprecedented view of their lives and thoughts as well as their commonalities and differences.

A study of their childhood and early womanhood reveals that these women built their gender, racial and regional identity in very diverse ways. Yet, despite the fact that these women came from distinct social and regional backgrounds, they were raised in families who valued family history, highly prized education, believed in self-help and encouraged their daughters to observe strict propriety rules and become teachers for the community. I was also able to note that like educated white women, many of these African American women of the middle and upper-class interestingly often envisioned matrimony positively yet often decided to postpone marriage plans in order to pursue their educations or careers.

Their personal family influences as well as their first professional experiences enabled them to develop their feminist consciousness and as of the 1880s, these activists started to voice their views about womanhood and to begin defending the image of African American women. Undoubtedly, their early personal life experiences and their personalities influenced the way they understood what being a woman meant as adults.

In the second part, I will investigate how these women defined African American womanhood in the era marked by the emergence of the “New Woman” and analyzed their roles as women of color in America. To do so, I will first detail the context of the advent of the “New Woman” before exploring how these activists positioned themselves as representatives or models for the community in their writings.

Part TWO: Defining the New Woman of Color as the  
Protector of the Image of Black Women (1890s-1920s)

The study of black women intellectuals' writings reveals that many of them thought that they had a very special role to play to ensure the welfare of the race. Their testimonies also show that some of them adopted patronizing attitudes towards other members of the community, therefore revealing that social class played an important part in questions dealing with the image of the entire community. In this part, I will examine how some elite women positioned themselves as models for the women of the black community, at a time when the image of African American women was under attack. I will first give a brief perspective of womanhood in America, then I will study how these women presented themselves as protectors of the good name of women of color. Finally, I will show that they tended to stress the importance of morality and respectability.

# Chapter 1. Contextual Framework: Womanhood in Historical Perspective

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This part examines how these women negotiated the notions of Victorianism and more modern notions. When Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell came of age and started their lives as activists, writers, journalists or lecturers in the early 1890s, major changes were taking place in America for women. These changes – the demise of Victorianism in the larger society and the birth of the ‘New Woman’ undoubtedly influenced the thinking of black female intellectuals. This shift naturally influenced the way these women – who had only recently come of age – understood what being a woman meant. In order to understand how African American and white women understood the ideology of womanhood, I will begin with a brief perspective of womanhood in America.

## 1. Early American History to the 1890s

### The Antebellum Era

In Colonial America, as Mary Ryan has explained in *Womanhood in America: From the Colonial Times to the Present*, white women enjoyed relative liberty and were viewed as active economic contributors to society thanks to their labor accomplished both inside and outside of the domestic sphere<sup>850</sup>. In Victorian America, as of the 1830s, the role of women changed in society and women became increasingly relegated to the home, to the private sphere. The Cult of True Womanhood emerged and with it, women were expected to possess certain feminine values and live according to the four pillars of true womanhood: purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness<sup>851</sup>.

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<sup>850</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From the Colonial Times to the Present*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1979).

<sup>851</sup> For a definition of the cult of true womanhood, see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860.” *American Quarterly* 18/2. (1966): 151-174. In it, Welter exposed the four pillars of ‘true womanhood’: piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness. Victorian women were expected to abide by strict rules. On the question of the cult of domesticity, see Rothman, Sheila, *Woman’s Proper Place: A History of the Changing Ideals and Practises, 1870 to the Present*, in which she discussed the cult of domesticity, Republican motherhood and the ‘cult of true womanhood’. See for instance Mabel Donnelly’s “American Victorian Woman: The Myth and the Reality”. Ph.D dissertation, Greenwood Press, 1986.



Yet as Paula Giddings has shown, the novelty in the early nineteenth century was not the idea of true womanhood but that this idea had become an absolute goal for American women: “The idea of the lady was not new of course. What had changed was the *cult* idea, its elevation to a status symbol”<sup>852</sup>.

After 1865, the ideology of domesticity was transformed and Victorianism was gradually replaced. Sara Evans has termed this “the breakdown of Victorianism”<sup>853</sup>. According to this scholar, “between 1900 and World War I the old Victorian code which prescribed strict segregation of the sexes in separate spheres crumbled. The older images of the pure and submissive Victorian woman and her benevolent patriarch began to soften around their rigid edges”<sup>854</sup>.

Very early in the history of women in America, black women had to build a distinctive definition of womanhood. At a time when American society was experiencing important changes, women of color had to continue building an identity in a context of increasing racism and sexism that was dramatically different from that of white women. Moreover, black womanhood was understood differently depending on the region. Because of slavery and its heritage, but also because a more extreme form of Victorianism had existed in the South for decades, African American womanhood was defined differently there than in other regions.

The humanity and the womanhood of black women were not recognized for a long period in American history, since the establishment of slavery in the United States and for many years after its abolition. During the antebellum era, race became inextricably linked to slavery, and enslaved black women were exclusively regarded as chattel. When the State of Virginia passed a law in 1706 specifying that the free or slave status of a newborn was to be determined by the condition of the mother, black women came to be exclusively envisioned as breeders, as LaFrances Rodger-Rose has explained in her book *The Black Woman*<sup>855</sup>.

Because of their skin color, black women – free or not – were not considered “real” women and received a drastically different treatment from that of white women. For example, the Supreme Court case of *State of Missouri v. Celia* in 1855 illustrates the legal vacuum

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<sup>852</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: the Impact of Race and Sex in America*. 43.

<sup>853</sup> Sara M. Evans, *Born For Liberty: A History of Women in America*. (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

<sup>854</sup> Sara Evans, *Born For Liberty*, 160-161. Society began its quest for pleasure and consumption, supervision of family on young men and women decreased and women’s appearance also changed, as the figure of the Gibson girl shows.

<sup>855</sup> LaFrances Roger-Rose, *The Black Woman*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), 18. “The slave woman was defined in terms of her breeding capacity”.

women were in very well. When Celia, a slave who was repeatedly abused, defended herself from the sexual assaults of her master on a day she was ill, she was condemned to death on the charge of first-degree murder; the term “woman” was not used in the case. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has astutely shown that the womanhood of Celia was denied<sup>856</sup>.

Such images prevailed among white people after the end of the Civil War, when African American women obtained their freedom and citizenship. Freedmen and freedwomen, economic and social subjugation complicated the transition from slavery to freedom. Black southern people were more directly exposed to white racism after the war. Yet even if racist beliefs were expressed more openly in the South – where 90% of African Americans resided in 1860 –, the North was not free from racism either. Additionally, women were expected to work as hard as men in the fields on southern plantations and were denied the consideration reserved for white women.

Moreover, as Hazel Carby has explained in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, black women were still denied their status as women and excluded from the definition of women after the war<sup>857</sup>. As Hazel Carby and several other scholars have claimed, black women were for a very long time “relegated to a place outside the ideological construction of ‘womanhood’. That term included only white women”<sup>858</sup> and “the nineteenth century’s ‘Cult of Domesticity’, which defined the home as a woman’s proper sphere, did not apply to slave women”<sup>859</sup>, as Eric Foner has explained<sup>860</sup>. Slavery impacted the way African American women understood womanhood. As Marli Weiner has demonstrated in *Mistresses and Slaves, Plantation Women in South Carolina: 1830-1880*, definitions of womanhood by black women were shaped by

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<sup>856</sup> See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race”, *Signs*, Vol. 17. , No. 2 (Winter, 1992): 251-274, 257-258.

<sup>857</sup> Hazel Carby argued that “in order to gain a public voice as orators or published writers, black women had to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition ‘woman’”, Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1987, 6. Shirley Yee also investigates this question in *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*. (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

<sup>858</sup> Hazel Carby, “On the threshold of Woman’s Era : Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory”, in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1986), 301-316, 308-309.

<sup>859</sup> Eric Foner, *Give me Liberty! An American History*, (Single Volume, New York: Norton, 2012), 417.

<sup>860</sup> See also Elsa Dorlin, « De l’usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de Sexe et de Race dans les études sur le genre », *Cahiers du genre*. 2005. Vol. 2, No 39 : 83-105, 88. Elsa Dorlin argued that black women were not considered as “real women”, did not “embody the norm of femininity” and did not benefit from the privileges conferred by their gender. Yet, they fell victim to domination, because of their gender.

the experience of slavery on the plantations and had been constructed under the constraints of white supervision<sup>861</sup>.

In this context of constant denial of their humanity and femininity, several black women spoke up. Maria Stewart was among the first activists to voice her demands for black womanhood in 1833, opening up an avenue for women of color<sup>862</sup>. Sojourner Truth also famously claimed her womanhood and femininity at a Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851, where she asked the audience the now famous question: "Ain't I a woman?":

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?<sup>863</sup>

She thus emphasized that black women had been excluded from the notion white women had constructed of American womanhood.

## The Civil War and Reconstruction

In her study of plantation women in South Carolina, Marli Weiner has studied the "period of testing and change" the Civil War and Reconstruction represented and during which the ideology of domesticity underwent changes for African American women as well<sup>864</sup>. For Weiner, the Civil War and Reconstruction "allowed women of both races to consider, perhaps for the first time, the possibility of questioning the ideology of domesticity"<sup>865</sup>. Weiner has contended that a different ideology of domesticity emerged after 1865: "Although the ideology of domesticity that emerged after the war forbore a superficial resemblance to that of the antebellum years, the differences were momentous"<sup>866</sup>. Weiner has also explained that the meaning of domesticity then changed and with this change, the possibility for black and white women to view their "common gender experiences"

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<sup>861</sup> Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves, Plantation Women in South Carolina: 1830-1880*, 130. "African-American women's efforts to define the meaning of womanhood for themselves took place in the context of white interference, which ranged from insistence on women's labor to separating slave families to rape. Nevertheless, black women were able to define a consistent pattern of behavior that minimized white influence over their lives".

<sup>862</sup> Maria Stewart, 21 September 1832. "Lecture delivered at Franklin Hall". <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/stewart-lecture-delivered-speech-text/>.

<sup>863</sup> Sojourner Truth, « Ain't I a Woman ? » speech. <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/sojour.htm>.

<sup>864</sup> Marli Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves, Plantation Women in South Carolina: 1830-1880*, 179.

<sup>865</sup> Marli Weiner, 233.

<sup>866</sup> Ibid., 216.

disappeared as well: “Domesticity was privatized, and women believed that their only true calling was to their families. Whatever potential – and it was often only a potential – domesticity had had for transcending racial lines disappeared, and women now understood it to mean simply devotion to family”<sup>867</sup>.

During the American Civil War, as historian Nina Silber has argued, “[B]lack and Indian women were seldom granted the rights of refined womanhood, and many soldiers from both North and South believed that the honor and protection bestowed upon white women *did not apply* to women of color”<sup>868</sup>. Emancipation transformed African American women’s life experiences in dramatic ways. In *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber have contended that the abolition of slavery indeed durably “affected the status of women, both black and white”<sup>869</sup>. It affected the patterns of gender conventions among Americans of color.

Moreover, region is of paramount importance when one considers African American womanhood after 1865, since most women of color who had been slaves before still lived in the South after the Civil War. From the very beginning of their life in freedom, black women were not permitted to live according to the same standards as white women. After the war, women of African descent were expected to work alongside their husbands in the fields. In her study on freedwomen, Mary Kaiser-Farmer has shown that white agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau did not consider black women by the same standards of womanhood as those applied to white women. When African American women expected a gendered appreciation of their situation when soliciting the Freedmen’s Bureau, they had to deal with Bureau agents who acted with women of color as they would have with formerly enslaved laborers and not as they would have with white women. Their very womanhood was denied. As Mary Kaiser-Farmer has shown, there was a major contradiction in the Freedmen’s Bureau agents’ behavior because they demanded that black women sign contracts for employment, while expecting and encouraging black women to be submissive to their husbands. These agents – often white Northerners – often supported black men’s demands for their wives to conform to white Victorian mores and tried to have newly freedmen and freedwomen adopt Victorian ideals about the family<sup>870</sup>. Yet unlike white women, black women were viewed as

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<sup>867</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>868</sup> Nina Silber, “A Woman’s War: Gender and Civil War Studies”, *OAH’s Magazine of History*, Volume 8, Issue 1, 1993, 13.

<sup>869</sup> Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber. *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>870</sup> See Mary Kaiser-Farmer, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau: Race, Gender and Public Policy in the Age of Emancipation*.

workers. Therefore, regional affiliation affected the way African American womanhood, crafted by black women, was understood by non-black Americans who lived outside of the South.

As Paula Giddings has noted, interestingly, the experience of the Civil War later enabled black women to emphasize their humanity: “The Black woman argued that her experience under slavery, her participation in the work force, her political activism, and her sense of independence made her more of a woman, not less of one”<sup>871</sup>. In the late nineteenth century, black women, therefore, used these arguments to assert their humanity, their womanhood, as well as their historic participation in nation-making, their agency, and their distinct sense of independence as women.

## 2. 1890s- 1920: The Gradual Demise of Victorianism

### White Women

According to Sheila Rothman, after 1865, there were three successive phases in definitions of proper – white – womanhood<sup>872</sup>. In the post-war years, the concept of virtuous womanhood emerged; then, it gave way to educated motherhood in the Progressive era and in the 1920s, it gave way to notions of woman as a wife companion<sup>873</sup>. In the post- Civil War years, as Sheila Rothman has explained, the concept of virtuous womanhood – a “very special ideology that defined women’s social roles in narrow and restricted ways” – posited that “[B]oth in the private and public arena –in the home, in the club, and in the workplace – women’s actions had to be consistent with moral sensibility, purity, and maternal affection, and no other code of behavior was acceptable”<sup>874</sup>.

Because they were supposed to be endowed with superior morals, white women could legitimately try to “tame their husbands” because they had “a new and urgent charge to

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<sup>871</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 7.

<sup>872</sup> Sheila Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*. (Basic Books: New York, 1978), She addressed mainstream American women, i.e. white.

<sup>873</sup> Sheila Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place*, 21. “The Concept of Virtuous womanhood”: “[They] have changed dramatically over the past one hundred years. Just as the concept of virtuous womanhood. [...] In the post- Civil War decades gave way to ideas on educated motherhood in the Progressive era, so in turn did the ideal of educated motherhood give way in the 1920s to a view of woman as wife-companion”. See page 177. This model of the wife-companion would only be undermined after the 1940s. See also page 224.

<sup>874</sup> Sheila Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place*, 14. Kristin Waters has shown the differences between black and white women’s understandings of womanhood at that time: “These white-created myths [republican motherhood and cult of true womanhood] about the exalted position of women in society differ in important ways from black and feminist ideology. The dominant ideology served to constrain and maintain white women in the domestic sphere by glorifying the values of marriage, motherhood, and womanly virtue”, in *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 374.

civilize [them] by curbing their ‘animal’ instincts”<sup>875</sup>. Their goals were to “purify and amend society” and the home was “her only kingdom”<sup>876</sup>. At that time, “Women in these decades, far more keenly than their pre- Civil War sisters, had the mandate to “tame” society”<sup>877</sup>.

Subsequently, there emerged the concept of “domestic feminism”, which maintained that the role of women in society was to exert their influence through their roles as mothers of future generations. Karen J. Blair has pointed out in *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* that the term “municipal housekeeping” – the second phase of Domestic Feminism – “built on the premise that women possessed special moral qualities which ought to be applied outside the home. [... Members of the WEIU<sup>878</sup>] turned to civic reform. They insisted that the community was the extension of the home and that women must apply their special sensibilities to its problem”<sup>879</sup>. Then, at the turn of the century, the concept of educated motherhood emerged. It was believed that mothers had to be trained to take care of children, who were newly seen as “complicated and vulnerable creature[s]”<sup>880</sup>.

Furthermore, as Angela Davis has demonstrated, in that period, racism and sexism nourished one another and in the rhetoric of the time, motherhood was highly valued and regarded as the redemption of the (white) race in America: “As racism developed more durable roots within white women’s organizations, so too did the sexist cult of motherhood creep into the very movement whose announced aim was the elimination of male supremacy. The coupling of sexism and racism was mutually strengthening.”<sup>881</sup>. As the speech delivered by Susan B. Anthony in 1900 exemplifies, “[i]t was time for [white women] to fulfill their purpose of becoming saviors of ‘the Race’.” Thanks to the “intelligent emancipation that (the race) shall be purified [...] It is through woman [that] the race is to be redeemed. For this

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<sup>875</sup> Sheila Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place*, 22.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid., 23. These definitions had a special echo in the South, since there was a more extreme version of Victorianism in this region than anywhere else in the country. See the work of Anne Firor Scott on this question and see pages 430 and 558 of this dissertation.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid., 23. Women also had a new role to play: “This view of feminine traits also gave wives an enlarged and awesome responsibility within the marital relationship. Post-Civil War women had a new and urgent charge to civilize their husbands by curbing their “animal” instincts”, 22.

<sup>878</sup> WEIU is the Women’s Educational and Industrial Unions of Boston and Buffalo.

<sup>879</sup> Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914*, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), 74. This book deals with white women’s clubs. I will examine how women of African descent have construed domestic feminism in a later chapter.

<sup>880</sup> Sheila Rothman, *Woman’s Proper Place*, 97-98.

<sup>881</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 1981), 122.



reason, I ask for her immediate and unconditional emancipation from all political, industrial and religious subjection”<sup>882</sup>.

The ‘new woman’ emerged at a time when the idea of “progressive maternalism” was developing. New women such as Jane Addams and Lillian Wald believed that women “had a special capacity for nurture by virtue of being women, stressed women’s political obligation to raise the nation’s citizens, held privileged women responsible for all children’s welfare, and insisted on the virtues of an Anglo-American family structure that defined men as breadwinners and kept women and children at home”<sup>883</sup>. Moreover, the emerging ideas of Social Gospel in the Progressive era in the 1890s and 1900s “encouraged Christians to engage in society, challenge social, political and economic structures, and help those less fortunate than themselves”<sup>884</sup>. Women fought for better working conditions, voting and reproductive rights and such notions undoubtedly influenced elite black women. In the early twentieth century, racism, eugenics, and sexism came to influence the way all American women thought about womanhood<sup>885</sup>. Several scholars such as Linda Perkins or Angela Davis have explained that the rise of racist propaganda in the early twentieth century, the renewed theory of women’s inferiority, and the combined association of racism and sexism added to eugenics, affected the way women viewed womanhood<sup>886</sup>. With the stress placed on their roles as mothers and nurturers, white women felt entitled to apply racist practices in their everyday lives, even in their most radical struggles – i.e., their struggle for women’s right to vote<sup>887</sup>. At the turn of the century, what did these various ideals about womanhood mean for women of color?

## Black Women

As Beverly Guy-Sheftall has demonstrated, black women were submitted to dual – “male and white authority” and had to navigate their way in a context at a time when constructions about women were strongly polarized: “The Victorian ambivalence toward women,

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<sup>882</sup> Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. V (New York: J.J. Little and Ives Co., 1902), 5, as cited in Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 121-122. See Chapter 7.

<sup>883</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 9.

<sup>884</sup> See <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/ushistory2ay/chapter/mobilizing-for-reform-2/>.

<sup>885</sup> Eugenics is “a science that deals with the improvement – as by control of human mating – of hereditary qualities of a race or breed”, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

<sup>886</sup> Linda Perkins explains that “by the end of the nineteenth century, sexism had increased significantly among educated blacks”. Perkins also argues that many black men “adopted the prevailing notion of white society, of the natural subordination of women”, “The Impact of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ on the Education of Black Women”, 1983, 187-188.

<sup>887</sup> Angela Davis, *Femmes, Race et Classe*, 121.

‘symbolized by its obsession with two polar images – the angel and the prostitute’, is most apparent in conceptions of white and black womanhood at the turn of the century”<sup>888</sup>.

For women who were pre-war free women and newly freedwomen, the denial of their womanly qualities lasted after Emancipation. Having been excluded from the category “woman” for decades, black women were hardly seen as “Victorian ladies”, regardless of their social status or region. The four pillars of “piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness” seemed to apply only to white women and the image of “the lady” was reserved to white women. Linda Perkins has asserted:

Since most blacks had been enslaved prior to the Civil War and the debate as to whether they were human beings was a popular topic, black women were not perceived as women in the same sense as women of the larger [i.e. white] society. The emphasis upon women’s purity, submissiveness and natural fragility was the antithesis of the reality of most black women’s lives during slavery and for many years thereafter<sup>889</sup>.

In the eyes of northern or southern whites, the four cardinal Victorian attributes did not apply to women of color. Another scholar, Vicki Howard, has argued:

The traditional division of labor that developed into the idea of separate spheres by the end of the eighteenth century of course did not apply to slave women, who worked in the fields alongside men. Neither did the ‘cult of true womanhood’s’ mandate that a woman’s husband should be her whole interest and focus apply to black women during slavery. The idea of separate spheres of home and work continued to be an illusion for many African American women after slavery”<sup>890</sup>.

As a result, in the period 1865-1920s, during the Reconstruction and “Redemption” Eras, there was recognition that women of African descent had to approach the whole idea of “womanhood” from a different angle. After 1865, pre-war free women, ex-slaves and all the following generations of African American women created and asserted their own definition of womanhood in a predominantly white society, and built an identity distinct from that of white women, one which was either in sharp contrast or at least in partial contradiction with the romantic ideals of Victorianism.

In the late nineteenth century, as Guy-Sheftall has pointed out, black men realized that because black women “could not be expected to conform totally to the [ideal of true womanhood]”, they “could provide a new model of the ideal woman and could be seen as an alternative to the dominant cultural ideal of womanhood”<sup>891</sup>. Because “most whites, male and female” maligned black women “on the grounds of racial make-up and questionable moral character”, and therefore excluded them from the cult of True Womanhood, African

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<sup>888</sup> Regina Morantz, “The Lady and Her Physician”, in *Clio’s Consciousness Raised, New Perspectives on the History of Women*, eds. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner (New York, 1974), 44, as cited in Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 168.

<sup>889</sup> Linda Perkins, “The Impact of the Cult of True Womanhood on the Education of Black Women”, 183.

<sup>890</sup> Vicki Howard, in *A Question of Manhood*, ed., Darlene Clark Hine, 244.

<sup>891</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 12. Black males were also imbued with ideals of true womanhood.

Americans believed that women of color “should be perceived as new model[s] of the True Woman because of the unique qualities she had developed surviving in a hostile environment”<sup>892</sup>.

As I will argue in this dissertation, although some black women of the elite adopted the concept of educated motherhood at the turn of the century and built their rhetoric around the affirmation of their womanhood and motherhood, they did so having very different goals in mind than those of white women: they sought to advance, to “uplift” the community and defend the image of women of color.

### **The Rise of a Racist and Maternalist Discourse at the Turn of the Century**

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, racist and sexist discourses circulated with more force, and eugenic theories emerged. After being construed as a changing characteristic, race – particularly in the United States – came to be viewed as a static, irreversible characteristic of a person at that time<sup>893</sup>. As Angela Davis has shown, white women began to be viewed as the saviors of the white race at a time when they were viewed as inferior beings:

This escalated promotion of racist propaganda was accompanied by a similarly accelerated promotion of ideas implying female inferiority. If people of color – at home and abroad – were portrayed as incompetent barbarians, women – white women, that is – were more rigorously depicted as mother-figures, whose fundamental *raison d'être* was the nurturing of the male of the species. White women were learning that as mothers, they bore a very special responsibility in the struggle to safeguard white supremacy. After all, they were the ‘mothers of the race’. Although the term *race* allegedly referred to the ‘human race’, in practice – especially as the eugenics movement grew in popularity – little distinction was made between ‘the race’ and the ‘Anglo-Saxon race’<sup>894</sup>.

When discussing emerging eugenic theories in the early twentieth century, African American leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois viewed “the new science” in 1920 “as a vehicle of empowerment”. As Davis has pointed out, while Du Bois perceived eugenics as a means of racial uplift, for Marcus Garvey, “it promised a way of purifying what he saw as a mongrelized black population. Whatever the rationale, this outlook put the New Negro Woman in an untenable position. Even as Du Bois maintained that “only at the sacrifice of intelligence and the chance to do their best work can the majority of modern women bear children. This is the damnation of women”, he urged “families of the better class” to rear

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<sup>892</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>893</sup> On this, see Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The color of Race in America, 1900-1940*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and the work of Colette Guillaumin. Colette Guillaumin, *L'idéologie raciste*, (La Haye: Mouton, 1972), 39-41. Colette Guillaumin has contended that from the nineteenth century, the essence of a person was viewed as irreversible and unmovable.

<sup>894</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 121. See Davis, Angela. *Femmes, Race et Classe*. See Chapter 7 : « Le vote des femmes au début du siècle : la montée du racisme ». See also *New American New Woman Revisited*, 9-12.

more children. A number of black women writers of the period resisted such eugenic injunctions. Through her anti-lynching drama *Rachel* (1916), Angelina Weld Grimké, for example, dismissed eugenic reasoning by showing that eugenics and even black motherhood ceased to make sense, given the prevailing racial hostility within the United States”<sup>895</sup>. In this context, for the women in this study, how did motherhood make sense for the improvement of the race and for women?

### **The Birth of a New Era and of the “New Woman”**

The turn of the century was also a period of deep social changes in the United States – a period called the “Progressive era” – it was also called “the Woman’s Era”. As Martha H. Patterson has argued, “the rise of the American New Woman represents *one of the most significant cultural shifts* of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries”<sup>896</sup>. In popular culture, the image of the ‘New Woman’ emerged in the 1890s, along with the Gibson girl, created by the artist Charles Dana Gibson<sup>897</sup>. As Martha Patterson has emphasized, it is important to say that the New woman was construed differently according to race, class and region. She has stated:

The story of the New Woman’s emergence is far more complex, varying according to region, class, politics, race, ethnicity, while changing through time and depending greatly on historical conditions”. “[The New Woman] is conceived differently in the South, North, East and West – in working-class newspapers and highbrow monthly magazines, in socialist and sensationalist newspapers, in Marcus Garvey’s the *Negro World* and the nationally circulated black newspaper the *Chicago Defender*, in the Puerto Rican *Gráfico*, and in the Mexican American *La Crónica*”<sup>898</sup>.

What did the emergence of the “New Woman” change in white and black women’s definitions of womanhood? What roles did race and region play in these notions? I will answer these questions in the third and fourth parts of this dissertation. But before that, it seems important to define the notion of “New Woman”.

The term “new woman” is believed to have been coined in 1894<sup>899</sup>. The white “new woman” often belonged to the white middle or upper-class and possessed the following qualities: she was free, modern, independent, active, slim<sup>900</sup>, beautiful and always ready for

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<sup>895</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*. See Du Bois, W.E.B.. *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil*, published in 1920. Angelina Weld Grimké had expressed her doubts about her wish to be a mother quite early in her life. Her Papers at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C.

<sup>896</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 17. Italics mine.

<sup>897</sup> Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944) was an American artist who famously popularized the “Gibson girl” in the 1890s.

<sup>898</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 18.

<sup>899</sup> See Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 17. According to Patterson, the exchanges between Sarah Grand and Ouida in the *North American Review* brought it into general circulation.

<sup>900</sup> The new woman had to be slim. See *The American New Woman Revisited*, 4.

action. In the 1890s, the “Gibson girl” embodied the white “new woman” since in 1894 Charles Dana Gibson, using his wife as model, drew this feminine, delicate-looking yet resolutely modern woman. This “tall, distant, elegant, and white” woman possessed “a pert nose, voluminous upswept hair, corseted waist, and large bust”<sup>901</sup>. This modern woman had her hair cut short and refused to wear corsets. She was often portrayed in action – riding a bike. In addition, this resolutely modern figure was educated, wished to work outside of home and often postponed matrimony and motherhood. Undoubtedly, this image of modernity must have frightened conservative Americans. As Patterson has explained: “The Gibson Girl offered a popular version of the New Woman that both sanctioned and undermined women’s desires for progressive sociopolitical change and personal freedom at the turn of the century”<sup>902</sup>. This free model of womanhood influenced both white women and black women<sup>903</sup>.

The elevation of the “New Woman” to national fame was strongly linked to the popularization of magazines and the illustrated press<sup>904</sup>. The “New Woman” was a multifaceted, “evolving, fiercely contested icon”<sup>905</sup>. According to Patterson, it represented a “suffragist, prohibitionist, clubwoman, college girl, American girl, socialist, capitalist, anarchist, pick-pocket, bicyclist, barren spinster, mannish woman, outdoor girl, birth-control advocate, modern girl, eugeniscist, flapper, blues women, lesbian, and vamp”<sup>906</sup>. She was also seen as being more active in clubwork and as pursuing diverse activities. The white new woman was also college-educated and between 1865 and 1920, more and more white American women attended college:

In 1870, the percentage of college-age American women who attended College was 0.7 percent; by 1900 the rate had increased to just under 3 percent, and by 1920 to just under 8%, numbers proportionately small but signifying a substantial social change. Between 1900 and 1930, women’s attendance at colleges and universities tripled, and although women comprised only 35 percent of the college population in 1890, by 1920 they made up just over 47 percent of it<sup>907</sup>.

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<sup>901</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 3-4.

<sup>902</sup> Ibid., 3. Introduction.

<sup>903</sup> Martha Patterson has argued that a shift operated in 1913: the Gibson girl let room to “the Flapper”. Mary Pickford popularized the “flapper”, a woman who wore “short skirts, favored make-up and cigarettes” thanks to the cinema. Mass media played an important part in conveying images of women. “America’s sweetheart” earned a million dollars a year by 1920. <http://marypickford.org/home/about-mary/>. In 1917, a new modern consciousness emerged. See Martha Patterson, *American New Woman Revisited* and *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2008), 4.

<sup>904</sup> Martha Patterson, *American New Woman Revisited*, 3 Introduction. “In the late nineteenth century and through the last decade of the twentieth, the image of the American woman as drawn by Charles Dana Gibson and others whose work was in the same vein – Howard Chandler Christy, James Montgomery Flagg, and Harrison Fisher – dominated the marketplace”.

<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid., 11. Introduction.



Yet as I have argued in the first part, white women tended to envisage college education very differently from women of color. While black women defined education as the ultimate goal to serve and fight for the rights of their community, white new women entered college with often different purposes in mind. White women often attended College in order to expand their horizons and sought to meet their future husbands there. Yet because many white women attended single-sex Institutions, they often risked marrying late – or not marrying at all – contrary to black women who, because they attended co-educational Institutions, often met their future husbands during their studies. As Glenda Gilmore has pointed out:

Unlike white women of the period, black women did not usually have to choose between higher education and marriage or between teaching and marrying. White women risked passing prime marriageable age in single-sex schools. One half of the white women into new states normal schools 1896 graduating class never wed. African-American women often taught after marriage, whereas most public school committeemen would not allow white women to teach<sup>908</sup>.

Moreover, white women also discovered new social practices such as dating during this period of change. Courtship was replaced by unchaperoned dating. New entertainments and new places enabled young Americans to spend time together on “dates”. As Martha Patterson has contended:

Between 1890 and 1925, dating had trumped courting to become an almost universal practice in the United States. Instead of a ritual of courtship whereby a man hoped to be invited to call on a woman at her home, where watchful parents waited, young men now increasingly invited women on dates away from home for which they paid. Amusement parks, theaters, and move houses provided public places where working-class women especially might feel greater freedom to express themselves sexually with men, free from chaperones<sup>909</sup>.

In addition, some of these “new women” rejected patterns society expected them to embrace, such as marriage and family life. As Carol Rosenberg has shown:

Eschewing marriage, [the new woman] fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical, economic and social reforms, and wielded real political power. At the same time, as a member of the affluent new bourgeoisie, most frequently a child of small-town America, she felt herself part of the grass roots of her country. Her quintessentially American identity, her economic resources, and her social standing permitted her to defy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world. Repudiating the Cult of True Womanhood in ways her mother – the new bourgeois matron – never could, she threatened men in ways her mother never did<sup>910</sup>.

Such attitudes provoked anxiety among the larger society, and among men in particular. Some white women were influenced by certain white feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who started voicing radical theories in the late 1890s. Unprecedented radical

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<sup>908</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 43.

<sup>909</sup> Martha Patterson, *American New Woman Revisited*, 21.

<sup>910</sup> Carol Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman as Androgyne : Social Disorder and Gender Crisis, 1870-1936”: 245-296 in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 245-296. See page 245.



views on women's natural roles circulated at the time. For instance, in 1898, in *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman contended "that traditional marriage – for Anglo-Saxon middle-class women – was akin to prostitution because a woman was dependent on a man for her economic livelihood and therefore felt compelled to develop her sexual attractiveness at the expense of her productive skills". In 1903, in *The Home*, Gilman argued for "collectivist solutions to child rearing and for the professionalization of housework to help women realize their fullest human potential"<sup>911</sup>. As I will argue in the third part of this dissertation, the question of child-care was well-known to African American activists who fought for the creation of kindergartens and daycare centers<sup>912</sup>.

Cooper and other black women intellectuals publicly celebrated the birth of this new era – the "woman's era" which was full of promises – for both black and white women. In this period of great change for women, in *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South*, Cooper claimed that: "[the woman] stands now at the gateway of this new era of American civilization. In her hands must be moulded the strength, the wit, the statesmanship, the morality, all the psychic force, the social and economic intercourse of that era. To be alive at such an epoch is a privilege, to be a woman then is sublime"<sup>913</sup>. Fannie Barrier Williams emphasized the particularity of the period as well in April 1897 in her article entitled "The Awakening of Women" in the *AME Church Review*:

Colored women are fortunate to live in this era of freedom and interest in womankind. Never before has the world been so interested in woman and woman's work, and never before in our history have the people of this country been so much interested in colored women as it is today. [...] It is an inspiration to know and feel that whatever we do that is noble and far-reaching the world is ready to make note of and prize. It is said that this is 'woman's era', and with just as much distinctiveness is it the colored woman's era. Today is our blessed opportunity to stimulate all the spiritual and social forces towards standards that are higher, sweeter, and purer and more beautiful, because a greater love and diviner motive have made it so<sup>914</sup>.

She also believed that women had to act in order to take part in their nation's building: "Thus shall we have a conscious share in whatever is true, beautiful and good in the destiny of this republic"<sup>915</sup>.

Nevertheless, African American women were "New Women" years before white women, as Glenda Gilmore has argued. They had, in fact, been new women since the 1880s. Their thirst for education, their co-educational experience and their implication in race work

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<sup>911</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 147-150.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid., 147. See also "The New Womanhood", by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. *Forerunner* (Dec 1910): 17-18. In *The American New Woman Revisited*, 147-150.

<sup>913</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 143. Electronic version. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

<sup>914</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Awakening of Women", in *African American Feminisms*, Volume V, 295-296.

<sup>915</sup> Ibid., 296-297. Again, her sentence evokes Republican maternalism.

and politics made them modern, new women long before white women: “White women at the State’s Normal and Industrial College [soon] began to see themselves as ‘New Women’” after North Carolina finally founded a full-term Normal School for white women in Greensboro in 1892. “African-American women had been “new women” since 1877, when the reluctant state legislature, wary of black voting strength and white legislators’ years of forced integration, had established a state-supported Normal School in Fayetteville for African-Americans, the first such school in the country”<sup>916</sup>. The attributes of the new woman – being college-educated and having an active professional life – were attributes which women of color had possessed years before the advent of the new woman.

Moreover, Shirley Carlson has also proven in her study of middle and upper-class Illinois black women in the 1880s that African American women had early developed their own unique style in the United States, possessing dual qualities and developing a “dual womanhood”. Carlson has explained that women of color embraced certain Victorian values – embracing purity and piety —<sup>917</sup> and rejected values such as submissiveness and domesticity. They managed to combine qualities which seemed at first sight contradictory. Carlson has argued:

The late nineteenth century black community in Illinois fostered the development of a black woman who could address the needs of two societies. She was a “lady”, as defined by the larger society. As such she comported herself utmost propriety, according to the strictures of “the cult of true womanhood”. She generally married and had children. She was modest, pious, amiable, and domesticated but these ideal black women were also intelligent, outspoken, and activist, as appreciated by her own race<sup>918</sup>.

The ideal black woman embodied the genteel behavior of the “cult of true womanhood” as espoused by the larger society, yet retained “the attributes valued by her own race and community”<sup>919</sup>.

Black women were often direct, and frequently won community approval for this quality, especially when such a characteristic was directed toward achieving ‘racial uplift’. Even after her marriage, a black woman might remain in the public domain, possibly in paid employment. The ideal black woman’s domain, then, was both the private and the public spheres. She was wife and mother, but she could also assume other roles, such as school teacher, social activist, business woman, among others. And she was intelligent<sup>920</sup>.

African American women and white women indeed appreciated certain qualities in women quite differently:

The black community’s appreciation for and development of the feminine intellect contrasted sharply with the views of the larger society. In the latter, intelligence was regarded as masculine quality which

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<sup>916</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 37-38.

<sup>917</sup> Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”. *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (Spring, 1992): 61-73.

<sup>918</sup> Shirley Carlson, 73. My underlining.

<sup>919</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid., 62.

would “defeminize” women. The ideal white woman, being married, confined herself almost exclusively to the private domain of the household. She was demure, perhaps even self-effacing. She often deferred to her husband’s presumably superior judgment, rather than formulating her own views and vocally expressing them, as black women often did. A woman in the larger society might skillfully manipulate her husband for her own purposes, as she was not supposed to confront or challenge him directly<sup>921</sup>.

Carlson has pointed out that the ideal woman of color – able to craft a dual womanhood — was the “black Victoria”, the black equivalent of the white American lady, an African American paragon of femininity and virtue<sup>922</sup>. According to Carlson, the “black Victoria” managed to respect the cult of True Womanhood while embracing more assertive qualities, which might be thought as un-feminine by white or black Americans<sup>923</sup>. Carlson has explained:

The qualities of a black Victoria were those of a Victorian lady: virtuous, modest, amiable, pious, altruistic, and she dressed according to her status. Moreover, she was intelligent, well-educated, and she had a strong community and racial consciousness. She was self-confident, outspoken, and highly esteemed. Above all she was direct, contrary to her white counterpart<sup>924</sup>.

Contrary to white women, intelligence, self-confidence and outspokenness were prized in women of color:

Black Victoria had all the qualities which were emphasized by her own black community. First and foremost, she was intelligent and well educated. She displayed a strong community and racial consciousness, often revealed in her work – whether paid or unpaid -- within the black community. Self-confident and outspoken, she was highly esteemed by her community which frequently applauded her as a “race woman” and role model for young people<sup>925</sup>.

According to Carlson, the perfect, ideal black Victoria was a dutiful wife, a loving mother, an educated, moral, pious, good-tempered woman<sup>926</sup>. Black women retained Victorian values and

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<sup>921</sup> Ibid.

<sup>922</sup> Carlson’s study focused on elite women of Illinois. Obviously, these ideals were often difficult to attain for working-class women.

<sup>923</sup> Vicki Howard, “The Courtship Letters of an African American Couple : Race, Gender, Class and the Cult of True Womanhood”, in *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in US Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, Volume 2, The Nineteenth Century: From Emancipation to Jim Crow. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001): 234-248. 241, Vicki Howard has described Carlson’s work this way: “Scholars such as Shirley Carlson have recently taken “true womanhood” out of its white, early-nineteenth-century context and used it as a descriptive gender role for African American women in the late-Victorian era. In her study of black women in Illinois from about 1880 to 1910, Carlson has successfully demonstrated that “Black Victoria” embodied the qualities of “true womanhood” valued by the larger white society. At the same time, however, she shows how ‘Black Victoria’ exhibited qualities that made her successful in the public sphere”.

<sup>924</sup> Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, 62. See Barbara Welter: “The Cult of True Womanhood 1820 1860”, Gerda Lerner: “The Lady and the Mill Girls”, Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, Mabel Donnelly: *The American Victorian Woman: the Myth and the Reality*, Glenna Matthews, “*Just a Housewife*”: *The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>925</sup> Shirley Carlson, 62.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid., 61- 62. Carlson used newspaper columns to support this claim. “Black Victoria, like her white counterpart, was committed to the domestic sphere, where she was a wife and mother. She ran an attractive and well managed home, attended to sundry household chores, possibly with the aid of a domestic servant. She was a supportive and beautiful companion to her husband and a loving and nurturing mother to her children. While she assumed some responsibility for educating her offspring, this responsibility was increasingly shared with the school system whether teachers were likely to be female, also. This ideal woman spent her leisure time in a

adopted some African American ones, in order to serve their community to the best of their ability, as women. The expectations of the black community differed from those of the larger society in the sense that women were expected to be active for the community and committed to the cause of racial uplift while retaining certain feminine qualities. They had developed the image of the black Victoria and had crafted a dual womanhood yet another image was born at the turn of the century.

A new image was born: that of the “new negro woman”: “The new negro woman [...] was extolled and exemplified most prominently by Margaret Murray Washington, who often directly linked that figure to the optimistic uplift mission of the black women’s club movement, a movement in which [Pauline] Hopkins held a leadership position”<sup>927</sup>. Margaret Washington is thought to have coined the term “New Negro Woman” in 1895 and the term began to be used in the press: “Educator, clubwoman, and essayist, Washington certainly worked to claim Gibson Girl status for middle-class black women as it represented inviolability bourgeois womanhood”<sup>928</sup>. She used the term “new negro woman” to describe black women who promoted the middle-class ideals of home maintenance, etiquette, and “neatness of dress”. Both she and her husband Booker T. Washington insisted on African American women’s capacity to be successful, moral, respectable women, teachers, educated and loving mothers, hard-workers and race leaders. The Washingtons

argued that black Americans could present a more empowered and employable image of themselves, especially in the New South, by publicly downplaying Jim Crow abuses while personally committing themselves to racial uplift, what Kevin Gaines defines as ‘an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth’<sup>929</sup>.

They contended that African Americans should be regarded as full citizens. Margaret Washington’s work “suggests that as black women perform dominant middle-class identities – becoming New Negro Women – they not only inspire[d] their mates to embrace a bourgeois

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variety of social activities, including attendance at teas and luncheons, parties and church activities, among others. Morally unassailable, she was virtuous and modest. Her personality was amiable – or “sweet” to use black parlance – she was also altruistic and pious. In appearance, she was well groomed and presentable at all times. Her hair was carefully arranged and her costume was immaculate and appropriate for the occasion. In public she wore the traditional Victorian attire: a floor-length dress, with fitted bodice, a full skirt, and long sleeves often trimmed with a ruffle or lace. For formal wear, she would likely don a low-cut gown, which might reveal a considerable portion of her “neck”. The ever present hanky with tatted or crocheted trim displayed her delicate taste and her ability at fine needle work. In all these attributes, black Victorias appeal their expectations of “true womanhood” which were shared by the larger society. She was a ‘lady’”.

<sup>927</sup> Martha Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 52.

<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

<sup>929</sup> Ibid., 50. See also “The New Negro Woman”, Mrs B.T. Washington . *Lend a Hand*. 1895. ( p254-260), in *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930*, 54- 59.

production ethic, but they inspire[d] white Americans to recognize their fitness for inclusion in such national rhetorics of progress”<sup>930</sup>.

Interestingly, in those years, some women believed that the “New Woman” was not new but “awakened”. In a daring article, one Spelman student, Mrs W.W. Reddick, appeared at first conservative when she argued that this white new woman was awakened to her role in the domestic sphere: “Some have been pleased to call the woman new. She is not new, she is only awakened to her sphere as it was in the beginning. The new or mannish woman is a freak and the baby woman is a dwarf. Neither is considered here [...] She is awakened first to home [...] She knows that without women there will be no home [...] Home is “the greatest institution on earth save church” and “the greatest being in it is an intelligent mother”. Home meant more to her now, “home making is a profession”. The woman “is awakened to the fact that two standards of morality have wrecked and will continue to wreck the home [...] She is held largely responsible for the moral conditions of society. Therefore, she must gain sentiment for eugenic laws for the protection of home and the human race [...] but eugenic laws will not be general till woman is regarded as an equal factor in the political world”. Yet, the author also believed that these new women could enter both spheres without losing their womanly character: “Spelman has lifted her daughters from the dreamy or shadowy woman into the glory that may be hers by demonstrating to the world that she can be powerful both as a mother and a woman of career at the same time without losing any womanly qualities”<sup>931</sup>. The new woman was now asking for “freedom, pure and perfect freedom in the larger home, the world”. Women should finally be considered as equal to men and recognition for freedom was paramount for this awakened, modern woman: “She is not asking for man’s place, but an equal chance to measure up to a woman’s place in life”.

In the 1910s, for many black women, Mary Church Terrell was the perfect embodiment of the black modern “new woman”. As Katharine Smith has contended: “When the activist, educator, and clubwoman Mary Church Terrell discussed *The Modern Woman* in a 1916 lecture in Charleston, her decorous physical persona impressed her audience as much as did her ideas about the role of women to racial service”. Mamie Garvin Fields was one of Terrell’s admirers. In her life narrative, she praised her: “Oh, my, when I saw her walk onto

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<sup>930</sup> Ibid., 54-59.

<sup>931</sup> Mrs M. W. Reddick, TPC ’96, “The Awakened Woman”, *Spelman Messenger*, 1902. “And yet she feels that she must have enough of the masculine quality in her to contend for her right – that of a human being [...] It is Spelman that has given the light which makes her daughters feel that as long as woman must fill a man-prescribed sphere no individuality or personality can be developed, and no one will ever know what woman is or can be till she is free to act as a human being”.



that podium in her pink evening dress and long white gloves, with her beautifully done hair, *she was that Modern Woman*”<sup>932</sup>. For her, Mary Church Terrell embodied this new woman who could be at the same time intelligent, forceful and beautiful.

Black women intellectuals and activists rejoiced in the birth or the awakening of the black new woman and emphasized the importance of the role of women in society. Cooper repeatedly asserted the unique part the woman of color was to play: “The colored woman of today occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country”<sup>933</sup>. In this context, some women such as Anna Julia Cooper explained the African American women represented the morality of American womanhood. In “Womanhood” (1886), Anna Julia Cooper wrote: “Now the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the retraining of the race, as well as the ground work and starting point of its progress upward, must be the *black woman*” and added this now famous sentence: “Only the BLACK WOMAN can say, “when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me*”<sup>934</sup>. According to Hazel Carby, Cooper viewed black women as relegated “beyond the pale and simultaneously, as the touchstone of American manners and morals. Black women [...] could not retreat into an abstraction of womanhood dissociated from the oppression of their whole people; their everyday lives were a confrontation of the division between the inviolability of elitist conceptions of womanhood and that which it denied”<sup>935</sup>.

In “The Status of Woman in America” (1892), Anna Julia Cooper emphasized that woman had to play a key role in the 1890s – which marked the beginning of the woman’s era:

She stands now at the gateway of this new era of American civilization. In her hands must be moulded the strength, the wit, the statesmanship, the morality, all the psychic force, the social and economic intercourse of that era. To be alive at such an epoch is a privilege, to be a woman then is sublime [...] In this last decade of our century, changes of such moment are in progress, such new and alluring vistas are opening out before us, such original and radical suggestions for the adjustment of labor and capital, of government and the governed, of the family, the church and the state, that to be a possible factor though an infinitesimal in such a movement is pregnant with hope and weighty with responsibility. To be a woman in such an age carries with it a privilege and an opportunity never implied before. But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages<sup>936</sup>.

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<sup>932</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 189. See also Katharine Capshaw Smith, “Childhood, the Body, and Race Performance: Early Twentieth-Century Etiquette Books for Black Children”. *African American Review*. Winter 2006. Vol 40, no. 4. <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-164221528/childhood-the-body-and-race-performance-early-19th-century>.

<sup>933</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Status of Woman in America”, 1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 112.

<sup>934</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 62. Italics hers. Cooper’s sentence is reminiscent of the ‘Republican maternalism’ rhetoric.

<sup>935</sup> Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 104. Cooper insisted on manners several times in *A Voice from the South*.

<sup>936</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Status of Woman in America”, 1892, 109-117. See page 117.



In the *Woman's Era* (February 1895), Fannie Barrier Williams noted that black women used the opportunity of the woman's era to make their voice heard in the 1890s. She contended: "We are women yearning, aspiring and claiming for rights at a time when women's winsome voice of supplication or stern command is heard above all the din and clamor of the times"<sup>937</sup>.

Moreover, for Fannie Williams, the new century offered new hopes for women and was a powerful signal for the community but also for the nation. When discussing the notion of progress in 1893, she very early stressed the importance of the emergence of a "new generation" of African Americans. In "The Intellectual Progress of Colored Women since the Emancipation Proclamation", Williams regretted the "general failure of the American people to know the new generation of colored people, and to recognize this important change in them"<sup>938</sup>. Almost 30 years after emancipation, the progress of African Americans was not only refuted, it was scorned. This represented, in Williams's eyes, the most problematic obstacle to further racial progress: "further progress is everywhere seriously hindered by this ignoring of their improvement". This is why the recognition of this "new generation" of "new negroes" was strategically paramount for the race<sup>939</sup>. For these reasons, she later worked with her friend Booker T. Washington to convey the message to Americans that blacks were making progress and constituted assets for the country and that consequently, they should stop being viewed as a "problem". In 1900, in order to defend both men and women of the community – Booker T. Washington and Fannie Williams decided to publish the book *The New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-To-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race*<sup>940</sup>.

In a chapter devoted to clubwomen, Williams chronicled the history of the formation of black women's clubs and discussed the notion of "new woman" at length. The new woman was a pure product of uplift thanks to hard work and self-help: "New women in 1900 were former slave women, freedwomen who had managed to "lift [...] [themselves] as completely

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<sup>937</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman's Era*, February 1895, 6.

<sup>938</sup> Williams spoke of a diseased public opinion" and the "perversity of public opinion", 22-23.

<sup>939</sup> She believed that this new generation represented progress. Only the progressive "New Woman" could achieve reform work: "The Negro woman's club of today represents the new Negro with new powers of self-help, with new capacities, and with an intelligent insight into her own condition. It represents new interests, new anxieties, and new hopes. It means better schools, better homes and better family alignments, better opportunities for young colored men and women to earn a living, and pure social relationships. These are some of the things that have been made important and interesting to all of the people by the women's clubs". Fannie Williams, "Club Movement among Negrow Women", in *Progress of a Race: The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro*, published in 1902, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 32.

<sup>940</sup> eds. Booker T. Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams and Norman Barton, *The New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-To-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race*. (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900). Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America", 379-428. Fannie Williams was getting well-known in the African American community.

from the stain and meanness of slavery as if a century had elapsed since the day of emancipation". These women who had, thanks to education and racial uplift, become educators and leaders of "Afro-American womanhood", possessed numerous qualities, they were: "plain, beautiful, charming, bright conversationalists, fluent, resourceful in ideas, forceful in execution" and showed "delicacy of character"<sup>941</sup>. To [white] Americans who did not imagine that such a woman of color could exist in 1900, she was "a revelation"<sup>942</sup>.

Williams wished to demonstrate the new "social value" African American women deserved recognition for<sup>943</sup>. The educated, uplifted black "new woman" was not only necessary to act for the community, to serve as a leader in racial uplift, but with "the club behind her", she was indispensable, she believed, to changing American mindsets. She was "needed to change the old idea of things implanted in the minds of the white race". As she had done in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition, Williams insisted on the importance of changing a diseased public opinion. The new woman, she said, was "needed as an educator of public opinion" since she was "a happy refutation of the idle insinuations and common skepticism as to the womanly worth and promise of the whole race of women"<sup>944</sup>.

Moreover, Williams contended that black women were the embodiment of hope: the black woman "has come to bring new hope and fresh assurances to the hapless young women of her own race". She tried to raise a sentiment of sisterhood among her readers: the black new woman had "come to enrich American life [...] to enlarge the boundary of fraternity and the democracy of love among American women". According to her, the message at the time for "thousands discouraged and hopeless young colored women" was that the world "still yearn[s] for pure hearts, willing hands, and bright minds"<sup>945</sup>. As she had done in 1893, she argued in 1900 that the birth of this new generation had kindled in black men a sentiment of "care, pride, protection and chivalry"<sup>946</sup>.

In addition, importantly, she believed that contrary to the white woman – who did not *really* embody change – the black woman *really* and definitely embodied "the" new woman.

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<sup>941</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro for a New Century*, 424. She was thinking here about "linguists, mathematicians, musicians, artists, authors, newspaper writers, lecturers and reform agitators".

<sup>942</sup> Ibid, 424. "All of this of course is simply amazing to people trained in the habit of rating colored women too low and knowing only the menial type. To such people she is a revelation". Williams probably did not consider herself as a new woman – since she belonged to a pre-war free family of color of the North and had benefited from exceptional circumstances. If one follows Williams's stream of thought, true "revelations" were to be found in the South.

<sup>943</sup> Ibid, 427. Clubwomen "are striving to put a new social value on themselves". This process was to take time, since common sense dictated to realize that this would not happen in a few days. She concluded: "It takes more than five or ten years to effect the social uplift of a whole race of people", 428.

<sup>944</sup> Ibid, 426.

<sup>945</sup> Ibid, 426. "It is a real message of courage, a real inspiration".

<sup>946</sup> Ibid.

She singled the black woman out by saying that she was the only woman who was genuinely, truly new. This woman “thus portrayed is the real new woman in American life”, she hammered home: “The Negro woman is really *the new woman* of the times, and in possibilities *the most interesting woman* in America. This is the woman who is this time to play an important part in the future business man’s career. Indeed she’s to be the conservative force in the business of many a man who is today prosperous and hopeful.”<sup>947</sup>. Fannie Williams believed that the African American woman truly embodied the *only* new woman, in the sense that she could be completely moulded: “I do not think it too much to say that the American Negro woman is the most interesting woman in this country. I do not say this in any boastful spirit, but I simply mean that she’s the *only* woman whose career lies wholly in front of her. She has no history, no traditions, no race ideals, no inherited resources and no established race character”<sup>948</sup>. There is little doubt that other women – in particular Cooper – disagreed with this last sentence.

The figure of the black “new woman” – which Fannie Barrier Williams discussed at length – in the early twentieth century was strategically linked to the historical context of racial and gender discrimination – the fear of “Negro rule” and discussions of the “negro problem”, common at the time. It was used to fulfill a political goal – redeem the image of black womanhood and consequently, of the entire community.

The definition of the black new woman was definitely more modern and resolutely different from that of white women. As Beverly Guy-Sheftall has emphasized: “[Women in the 1890s] articulate[d] strategies of resistance which made possible the emergence of a ‘new Negro woman’ less hemmed in by outmoded gender definitions and unbridled racism”<sup>949</sup>. The emergence of the black new woman as she was understood after 1918 responded to purposes very different from those of white women. In the *Messenger* in 1923, one author wrote: “Yes, she has arrived. Like her white sister, she is the product of profound and vital changes in our economic mechanism, wrought mainly by the World War and its aftermath. Along the entire gamut of social, economic and political attitudes, the New Negro Woman, with her head erect and spirit undaunted is resolutely marching toward the liberation of her people in particular and the human race in general.”<sup>950</sup>. African American women had a specific contribution to

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<sup>947</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 1904, in *The New Woman of Color*, 61, italics mine. See also *The New Negro for a New Century*. See Chapter XVII, 379-428.

<sup>948</sup> Ibid., 59. Italics mine.

<sup>949</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Preface, xvi.

<sup>950</sup> Editorial, *The Messenger*’s “New Negro Woman” issue (1923), as cited in Susan Tomlinson, “Vision to Visionary: The New Negro Woman as Cultural Worker in Jessie Redmon Fauset’s *Plum Bun*”, *Legacy*, Vol. 19,

make to America and the community because of their gender and distinct racial identity. Contrary to white women who were concerned about woman's liberation and acquiring more rights, black new women were unique because they articulated a rhetoric imbued with notions of progress and civilisation and fought for the advancement of the black community before fighting for women's rights.

### **Enlarging Woman's Sphere: Women's Expanding Responsibilities**

The emergence or the re-awakening of the black new woman also meant the enlarging of women's heretofore prescribed sphere. Using a radical tone, Cooper expressed feminist ideas in "Woman vs. the Indian" (1891-1892), rejoicing about woman's widening horizons<sup>951</sup>. She first emphasized the need for women to finally speak up and be active: "Nay, 'tis woman's strongest vindication for speaking that *the world needs to hear her voice*. It would be subversive of every human interest that the cry of one-half the human family be stifled". Not only did women have to speak up, but she had to break the fixity of their world, the stranglehold in which they had been placed for centuries. "Woman in stepping from the pedestal of statue-like inactivity in the domestic shrine, and daring to think and move and speak, — to undertake to help shape, mold, and direct the thought of her age, is merely completing the circle of the world's vision"<sup>952</sup>. Using very modern and resolute terms, she encouraged women to become actors of their own destiny.

She also contended that the influence of women was exerted well beyond their so-called "sphere": The optimistic Cooper was convinced that new avenues were opening up to women, and that this enabled them to make a difference in the world: "All departments in the new era are to be hers, in the sense that her interests are in all and through all; and it is incumbent on her to keep intelligently and sympathically *en rapport* with all the great movements of her time, that she may know on which side to throw the weight of her influence"<sup>953</sup>. In "The Status of Woman in America" (1892), consciously sweeping away

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No. 1, 2002. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. Project muse.  
<https://csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/files/lavender/389/ReaderF.pdf>.

<sup>951</sup> In this article, Anna Cooper responded in part to an article written by Anna Shaw entitled "Woman vs. the Indian". Anna Shaw (1847-1919) was a white American suffragist and Methodist preacher who had, as Kathryn Gines has explained, "place[d] the issues of women's rights against the rights of American Indians" in this article. Cooper developed her inclusive philosophy, believing that all oppressed groups – blacks, women, Native Americans and the poor – had to be recognized inherent rights. As Gines has argued about Cooper, in this piece, she took "a strong stand against all forms of oppression" and "reject[ed] exclusionary reasoning". See Kathryn T. Gines, "Anna Julia Cooper", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/anna-julia-cooper/>>.

<sup>952</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman vs. the Indian", 1891-1892, as cited in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 107.

<sup>953</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Status of Woman in America", 117.

accents of Victorianism, Cooper spoke of the demise of “separate spheres”, believing that women had seen their responsibilities expand and move beyond the four walls of their homes.

Fifty years ago woman's activity according to orthodox definitions was on a pretty clearly cut ‘sphere,’ including primarily the kitchen and the nursery, and rescued from the barrenness of prison bars by the womanly mania for adorning every discoverable bit of china or canvass with forlorn looking cranes balanced idiotically on one foot. The woman of to-day finds herself in the presence of responsibilities which ramify through the profoundest and most varied interests of her country and race<sup>954</sup>.

As Kristin Waters has explained, Anna Cooper’s vision of womanhood was far from the “submissive, domesticated, ‘true woman’. It is a concept of genuine, proactive, ‘public virtue,’ of women engaged in every part of public life”<sup>955</sup>.

Many elite women such as Fannie Williams also believed that women were to be praised for possessing other attributes besides those of gentleness and gaiety. In “The Awakening of Women” published in April 1897 in the *AME Church Review*, Fannie Williams argued that “it ha[d] been, and to a considerable extent, still [was women’s] misfortune to be regarded and estimated as suited to no other purpose in life than to make the world gay with our vivacity, laughter and social attributes”. On the contrary, women’s intelligence should be counted as a distinctive factor in the uplift of the community: “When intelligence and that larger love referred to begins to lift women out of a state of social dependency into the larger world of social independence, duties, and responsibilities the very foundations of civilization begin to shake and move forward toward better ideals of life and living”<sup>956</sup>.

In 1903, Fannie Barrier Williams regretted that the condition of woman was improving in the United States for all women except for women of color. “[White] woman is constantly receiving a larger share of the work to be done. The field for her skill, her endurance, her finer instincts and faithfulness is ever enlarging; and she has become impatient of limitations, except those imposed by her own physical condition.”<sup>957</sup>. Yet, at the time of “the Woman’s Era”, the woman of color was still denied employment in many different areas: “Colored women, of course, are largely excepted. For reasons too well understood here to be repeated, ours is a narrow sphere. While the kinds and grades of occupation open to all women of white

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<sup>954</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, Electronic version. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>, 143.

<sup>955</sup> Kristin Waters, “The Politics of Black Feminist Thought”, in *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 374-375. “In both its classicism and its racism, the cult of true womanhood differed from its African American counterpart. The ideology of black female moral leadership may have modeled itself consciously on the white cult as a way of gaining credibility in a racist society, but in practice, the differences could not be greater” for several reasons, the first being that contrary to white women who were engaged in “delicate domestic chores”, black women were industrious. Then, the cult was a political ideology designed to restrain women and was not designed by women to liberate themselves: “In contrast to submissiveness, struggle against oppression is a key feature of black women’s leadership”.

<sup>956</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Awakening of Women”, in *African American Feminisms*. Vol. V., 295.

<sup>957</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Problem of Employment for Negro Women”, July 1903, in *The New Woman of Color*, 52.



complexion are almost beyond enumeration, those open to our women are few in number and mostly menial in quality”<sup>958</sup>.

In 1904, Williams nevertheless spoke of the woman’s era optimistically – as Cooper had done several years earlier. Like Cooper, she thought that the age was peculiar and beneficial to women because they could occupy a new sphere theretofore denied to women. In 1904, she celebrated the woman’s era because she believed that the woman’s sphere was finally expanding outside the home. In “Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, she argued:

There is still another view concerning the importance of the colored woman’s part in the business affairs of our men in the future. In the first place, we are living in what may be called a woman’s age. The old notion that women was intended by the Almighty to do only those things that men thought they ought to do is fast passing away. In our day, and in this country, a woman’s sphere is just as large as she can make it and still be true to her finer qualities of soul. Her world is constantly becoming larger and fuller of the things that are spiritual and beautiful by virtue of her wider influence and larger participation in human affairs. Man is becoming less savage and woman more positive in raising the standards of human living<sup>959</sup>.

Moreover, in “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, after arguing that woman was to be a helpmate for her husband, she added: “There need be no fear that because of her larger participation in the business affairs of life, the colored woman will lose her power and influence as a wife and home maker. A woman has a large degree of adaptability and hence is capable of doing almost everything that a man can do besides doing what is strictly a woman’s work”<sup>960</sup>.

One year later, in “The Colored Girl” (1905), Williams expressed quite revolutionary ideas when she contended that the woman of color was, in the early twentieth century, a resolutely modern woman acting upon her social environment in a woman’s age with femininity:

At this hour when a thousand social ills beset her, she is taking hold of life in a serious and helpful spirit. It is becoming more and more evident that she’s not afraid of the age in which she lives nor its problems. She is a daughter of misfortune but she contributes her full share to the joys of the life about her. She is the very heart of the race problem. She is beginning to realize that the very character of our social fabric depends upon the quality of her womanliness<sup>961</sup>.

At the turn of the century, even if these women were aware of the limitations imposed on women – and to black women in particular – Cooper and Williams were resolutely optimistic about the era which lay ahead of them and thought that woman’s “sphere” was enlarging.

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<sup>958</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>959</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business” 1904, in *The New Woman of Color*, 59.

<sup>960</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>961</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, *Voice of the Negro* 2, no. 6 (1905): 400-403, in *The New Woman of Color*, 64.



The New Woman emerging at the turn of the century changed many notions about womanhood. Not only class, but also racial and regional specificities affected definitions of the “New Woman”. Women of color believed that they had a specific role to play in American society because of their specific history. Slavery had placed them in a situation different from that of other women in America, even from Native American women. Contrary to the situation of white women who enjoyed relative protection from men, black women often did not benefit from protection and had to define and redefine what it meant to be an African American woman.

In an era qualified as “new” or as a “woman’s era”, where women’s influence finally expressed itself, some of the women in this study presented themselves as the representatives African American “new women” and tried to exhort other Americans to finally recognize and value black womanhood. To what extent did they represent black women they claimed to represent? How did they defend the image of women of African descent? I will now examine their strategies.

## Chapter 2: The Strategic Need to Change the Image of Black Womanhood

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### Defending the Image of African American Women after Decades of Libel

In a context of growing racism, at a time when black Americans were viewed as a “problem”, and when women of color were denied their very womanhood, men of color were also denied their manhood and their political rights. Many women thought that the best way to defend the image of the community and the interests of the African American community was through the voice of leading women. The rhetoric developed by these female intellectuals was the expression of the opinion of the middle or upper class. Most of these women indeed belonged to the middle-class and consequently often propagated its ideals and values.

These activists crafted a rhetoric based on a dual womanhood the way elite women of 1880s Illinois had done, as Carlson has theorized. To do so, they first insisted in their speeches and articles on the qualities which American women were expected to possess – that is, the conservative values of piety, modesty, dignity, and morality. How did class difference shape black women’s understanding of womanhood?

#### 1. Acting as Ambassadors of a Minority: The Question of Representativeness

In order to fight for their rights, black women in this study crafted a strategy of self-representation. As Evelyn Higginbotham has explained in her study of black Baptist women entitled *Righteous Discontent*, there was an important “discursive effort of self-representation, a free figuring themselves individually and collectively” in black progressive women’s writings at that time<sup>962</sup>. It should be noted that black female intellectuals tended to present the black women of America using the singular, in an effort perhaps to single out her unique experience but above all to present African American women as unique but also as united, embodying and representing “the best African American womanhood” had to offer. This is noticeable in articles written by Williams or in the essays penned by Anna Cooper<sup>963</sup>.

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<sup>962</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent : The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186. “The annual meetings of the women’s convention were themselves the production process of black women’s collective self construction and self representation”.

<sup>963</sup> In “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, she spoke about “the colored woman’s part”, the American Negro woman”, 59 and the “The Negro woman [who was] really the new woman of the times”, 61. In “The

From a very young age, many women in this study felt that they carried a special weight as educated members of a community who had been subjected to racism for so long. For instance, at Oberlin College Fannie Coppin remembered that she felt doubly obliged to succeed because of her color. She “felt as if she carried the weight of the entire African race on her shoulders for if she failed [to recite her lesson in class], it would have been attributed to the fact that she was black”<sup>964</sup>. Elite black women such as Fannie Williams, Anna Cooper, Margaret Washington or Josephine St Pierre Ruffin keenly felt the pressure of their color upon themselves because as representatives of a minority group, they represented thousands of women of color. As a result, they were very often raised with a strong sense of “responsibility and duty” towards the members of the “race” and this sense of duty echoes throughout the writings left by women of African descent I was able to consult<sup>965</sup>.

### **Building a Sense of Sisterhood Across Class Divisions**

Did upper-class women have a sense of sisterhood for the masses of women of African descent? Did they express some sort of class solidarity? The response seems to be in the positive. Despite their class affiliations, many of these middle and upper-class clubwomen showed evidence of their solidarity with working-class women. For example, Anna Cooper believed that women and men should act in solidarity:

*I am my sister's keeper!*” should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race and this conviction should purify and exalt the narrow, selfish and petty personal aims of life into a noble and sacred purpose” [...] “We need men who can let their interest and gallantry extend outside the circle of their aesthetic appreciation; men who can be a father, a brother, a friend to every weak, struggling unshielded girl. We need women who are so sure of their own social footing that they need not fear leaning to lend a hand to a fallen or falling sister”<sup>966</sup>.

As early as in 1886, she argued that men and women had to come to the aid of women in difficulty while refraining from being judgmental.

In their public writings, they acted as role models for what some of them called “the masses”. They believed that the “better” or “the best” class had a special responsibility towards their less advantaged brothers and sisters. In a very unique style, black female intellectuals defined what “a” certain “woman of color” ought to be and do. They believed

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Colored Girl”, the subject of her article was always singular, although she clearly spoke of a group of women: the colored girl may have character [...] The woman beautiful [...] courageous [...] capable”, 63.

<sup>964</sup> Linda Perkins, “Black Women and Racial Uplift Prior to Emancipation”, 329. Mary Terrell had the same impression growing up.

<sup>965</sup> Wolcott also came to this conclusion in her study of Detroit, Michigan. Wolcott, Victoria, *Remaking Respectability*, 11. This is also apparent in Stephanie Shaw’s *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*.

<sup>966</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race”, 1886, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*: 53- 71, 64. Cooper read this paper before the convocation of colored clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church at Washington D.C., see page 53.

that “the best” or “better” class of African Americans were the only representatives capable of redeeming the image of people of color in America. The most evident example is that of the affluent daughter of Robert Terrell. Mary Terrell thought that educated African Americans should help the “less fortunate” ones. At a conference, Terrell said: “We have more to do than other women. Those of us fortunate enough to have education must share it with the less fortunate of our race. We must go into our communities and improve them”<sup>967</sup>.

Like many of her counterparts, Fannie Williams maintained that the solution to what was then called the “negro problem” should come from educated middle-class clubwomen. She asked: “Who is to bring the proper pressure on the officers of the law to protect the family life in such communities from these destroying influences?” and added: “I firmly believe that a few energetic and sympathetic club women in any community can give full and perfect answer to all these questions”. She praised the work of conservative, upper and middle-class educated women of the South who were active in clubs such as Mrs Booker T. Washington in the “rural districts of Macon County, Alabama, Miss Laney and the Jackson sisters in Georgia”. These women were “demonstrating that it is within the power of women of intelligence and consecration” that black Americans could fight against “depressing conditions that menace the home and neighborhood life of our city and country communities”<sup>968</sup>. She thought that only educated clubwomen could organize the work efficiently: “As a general rule those who, in the proper sense, may be called the best women in the communities where these clubs were organized became interested and joined in the work of helpfulness. It is perhaps the first instance of the women of culture, social standing and independence availing themselves of the opportunity to make use of their superior training”<sup>969</sup>. Fannie Williams, like some conservative clubwomen of the South such as Margaret Washington, Lucy Laney or Ida B. Wells, believed that clubwomen were the key to the solution of the race problem because they were more suited to offering pragmatic responses to the social problems they were faced with.

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<sup>967</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields attended this conference. These are her words, as cited in Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*, 330. Fannie Barrier Williams shared similar views in 1900: “Among colored women the club is the effort of the few competent in behalf of the many incompetent”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement Among Colored Women of America”, in *A New Negro for a New Century*. (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900).

<sup>968</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Need of Organized Womanhood”, *The Voice of the Negro*, 1 January 1909. Digital copy. Library of Congress.

<sup>969</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *Progress of A Race: The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro*, ed. J.W. Gibson and W.H. Grogman, (1902; reprint, Naperville, Ill.: Nichols, 1912): 197-281, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 33.

Mary Terrell and Fannie Williams were not the only ones to use such rhetoric; other women such as Josephine Ruffin also adopted the “better class” argument. They argued that – refined, educated, well-travelled black women and members of the black aristocracy – had a unique role to play for the community and therefore, were to craft a unique ideology of womanhood.

### **A Moral Responsibility Towards the Less Fortunate**

Many women believed that it was the moral and religious responsibility of leaders to assist less privileged members of a community. As Jane Hunter would later do in Cleveland, Anna Cooper advocated a strong racial solidarity across class boundaries as early as 1892:

What all men of means need to do, then, is to devote their money, their enlightenment interests, their careful attention to the improvement of sanitation among the poor. Let some of those who can command real estate in healthful localities build sweet and clean and wholesome tenements *on streets* and rent them at reasonable rates to the worthy poor who are at present forced into association with the vileness and foulness of alleys and filthy courts by the unfeeling discrimination of white dealers<sup>970</sup>.

According to Cooper, black Americans should think collectively: “Sure it is that the burden rests on all till the deliverance comes. The richest and most highly favored cannot afford to be indifferent or to rest quietly complacent”<sup>971</sup>. She believed that solidarity should operate across social lines. Wealthy African Americans should help southern farm tenants live in decent accommodation: “Let some colored capitalists buy up a few of those immense estates in the South, divide them into small farms with neat, cheery, well-ventilated, health-some cottages to be rented to the colored tenants who are toiling all these weary years in the one-room log hut, like their own cheerless mules – just to fodder themselves”<sup>972</sup>. For instance, when discussing housing issues in American cities, she maintained that African Americans who had the financial ability to help less fortunate members of the community had the moral obligation to do so because “no man [could] dissociate himself from his kind”<sup>973</sup>, and because “it [was] God’s own precaution to temper our self-seeking by binding our sympathies and interests indissolubly with the helpless and the wretched”. Her entire philosophy of life was aimed at serving the poor and the “neglected”. In 1930, she believed that her vocation had been “the education of neglected people”<sup>974</sup>.

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<sup>970</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “What Are We Worth?”, 171.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid., 171-172. Cooper also spoke about her concern with the crop-lien system, this “new form of slavery” which impoverished thousands of African Americans. See page 174.

<sup>973</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>974</sup> Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

Moreover, such ideas were conveyed by educators and clubwomen to the youth in black institutions of Higher Education such as Howard or Spelman, a culture of service to the community was instilled in students and graduates by educators. Students wrote that they felt that they had a special duty to uplift and serve the community across classes. For instance, like the women of this study, female college students – who often belonged to the middle-class – often penned letters with this type of message: “My earnest desire is to lift up as many members of my race, intellectually and morally, as possible, and thereby raise the standard of civilization higher”<sup>975</sup>. In etiquette books or lectures given girls at Tuskegee Institute in the 1910s, African American students of the middle-class were taught that they had a responsibility towards their less privileged sisters: “Each one’s welfare is closely bound with that of the masses. The race as a whole must progress and prosper, or else no unit may prosper.”. Women had a moral obligation towards other African Americans: “The colored woman beautiful will try to love that she may be loved. She believes that ‘man is his brother’s keeper’ and she has ideals and visions for the race. She has a moral obligation; she reaches out a helping hand to others.”<sup>976</sup>.

These women were the best-suited to bring relief to the community. I will now analyze how the women of the elite envisaged defending the image of women of color.

## 2. Changing the Image of the Community: The Task of the Elite

The “colored aristocracy” – also called the “black 400”, or “Upper tens”, or “best society” –, lived in major northern cities such as Detroit, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, Baltimore and Washington D.C.. The southern communities lived in Charleston, Mobile, Savannah, Pensacola and New Orleans<sup>977</sup>. In the definitive study of the old black elite, Willard B. Gatewood showed how important wealth, income, occupation and complexion were for members of the elite<sup>978</sup>. He explained, for example, that the northern elite valued their free ancestry, their crusade for the abolition of slavery, and “placed a premium on education”<sup>979</sup>.

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<sup>975</sup> “A Spelman Girl’s Work”, *Spelman Messenger*, Ca. 1903, 6. This woman had entered Spelman in the Fall of 1886 and married a Baptist minister. She lived in Columbia county near Augusta.

<sup>976</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 163.

<sup>977</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>978</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>979</sup> *Ibid*, 12.



## Calling For Class Distinctions: the Necessary Visibility of the Black Aristocracy

These bourgeois women believed that their first task as members of the elite was to defend the image of the entire community by showing the class discrepancies among African Americans. For example, the elitist Williams regretted that the African American community should be viewed as a group composed exclusively of poor working-class people just out of bondage. As an upper-class woman, she deplored this “degrading habit” of seeing the “negro race as an unclassified people”<sup>980</sup> and the invisibility of educated black women of the elite in America. In “The Intellectual Progress of The Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation” (1893), she admitted having a sense of “desperation” when confronted to “that peculiar form of Americanism that shows respect for our women as servants and contempt for them when they become women of culture”<sup>981</sup>. According to her, white America seemed to consider them only as servants and not as women of intellect.

In 1905, she encouraged members of the elite to achieve wider visibility in society. For instance, she encouraged the “best representatives of our progress” to “put themselves in evidence in every place and on every location when and where it is proper for an American gentleman and lady to be. In the presence of these exigencies of what we are and of what we are striving to be, the unjust American who prates about our inferiority becomes himself an object of pity and contempt”<sup>982</sup>. Additionally, she believed that by going to luxurious summer resorts the way white Americans did, the black community would display its class diversity: “Each summer our moving well dressed and well mannered multitude make many new friends. Through these best examples the world is getting to note that *all colored people are not alike*”<sup>983</sup>. By showing class differences and proving to white Americans that a black elite did exist in the country, Fannie Barrier Williams hoped to prove their class, style and wealth, worth, and above all, that they deserved to be finally assimilated in the nation.

In 1905, Fannie Williams rejoiced in the emerging black aristocracy – which proved its culture and achievements. She believed that it had improved social standards of the community:

There is a lighter and brighter side to these freer intermingling of our people from all parts of the country, that is the purely social side. Society amongst us as seen in every important center, during the summer, was a very different thing from what it was twenty years ago. We can discover the buildings of the real aristocracy based on culture and achievement. It was possible, in more than a dozen cities, to

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<sup>980</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 379.

<sup>981</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, 1893, in *The New Woman of Color*, 24.

<sup>982</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Vacation Values”, 1905, in *The New Woman of Color*, 97.

<sup>983</sup> Ibid, 98. Italics mine.

meet in well-furnished parlors the company of ladies and gentlemen, every one of whom was a college graduate or successful man or woman in business. Our whole social life has been sweetened and brightened by these agencies of our social advancement<sup>984</sup>. [...] Social standards are higher and our ideals have their roots in culture and character. Hospitality has been abundant and beautiful and the touch of love and friendship have established relationships that shall long survive the social delights of the summer of 1905<sup>985</sup>.

Ida Wells-Barnett voiced the same idea in her autobiography. She contended that the visibility of black members of the better class would enhance the image of the whole race. Ida Wells was made aware of the wrong impressions people could have about the black community when travelling to England in the early 1890s. There, she met Reverend Aked, a British Reverend from Liverpool, who made her realize that “white Americans were not altogether to blame if their impressions of our people were based upon the contact which they had only with the menial class”. Solutions should therefore come from the upper-class, who should attempt to be more visible in society:

We should make it a point to be seen at lectures, concerts, and other gatherings of public nature and thus accustom white people to seeing another type of the race as well as their waiters and cooks, seamstresses and bootblacks. I had always had the same feeling, and after nearly two years of such delightful association with white people in England I was more than confirmed in his viewpoint<sup>986</sup>.

In order to publicly defend black women, the first task which these women had to accomplish was to speak about black womanhood in America in clubs but also in the press. In *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist*, the British scholar Hazel Carby has emphasized that women used such spaces since “organizing to fight meant also writing to organize”<sup>987</sup>. The press then became an important political arena for defending black women of all social classes. Women of color regularly contributed to local or national newspapers and women’s magazines. Some of them such as Anna Cooper, Mary Terrell or Gertrude Mossell or Fannie Barrier Williams published essays or books to defend the image of black women<sup>988</sup>.

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<sup>984</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid, 99. Cooper and Williams also interestingly advocated a fairer representation of African American in literature and Art. Cooper urged white writers to represent women of color more fairly – and not represent only light-skinned women, and Williams hoped that one day, the community would have artists such as Jean-François Millet to depict them fairly – the way he had done with French peasants. See Anna Julia Cooper, “The Negro As presented in American Literature”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 134-160 and Fannie Barrier Williams, “Refining Influence of Art”, 1906, in *The New Woman of Color*, 102.

<sup>986</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 248. The deep humanity and friendship of Reverend Aked was so important to Wells that she and her husband decided to “name [their] first born after this distinguished English preacher – Charles Aked Barnett”. He later visited her in America: “He was my guest at the University of Chicago and preached the Thanksgiving sermon there in the fall of 1895 they attended a football game”.

<sup>987</sup> Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 97.

<sup>988</sup> Anna Cooper published *A Voice from the South* in 1892, Gertrude Mossell published *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* in 1894 and Fannie Williams co-edited *The New Negro* with Booker T. Washington in 1900. Fannie regularly contributed in the NACW newspaper the *Woman’s Era*, *The New York Age* and *The Chicago*

Women's newspapers and magazines provide a unique place for exploring the way African American women conveyed messages about being a woman. As Noliwe Rooks has shown in *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture That Made Them*<sup>989</sup>, women defined personal as well as group identities in these magazines. One of the main fights was to "refute and at times rework the cultural understandings of narratives [of women's hypersexuality]"<sup>990</sup>.

As a result, in addition to founding clubs, elite women founded women's magazines and newspapers. In 1894, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin and her daughter Florida Ruffin Ridley from Boston decided to start a woman's monthly newspaper, the *Woman's Era*. This first newspaper published exclusively by African American women aimed at offering a national view of diverse questions in various domains such as politics, family, health, fashion, and community. At the beginning, the newspaper was organized among "departments" and several famous activists regularly contributed and became correspondents for the newspaper. For example, Victoria Earle Matthews wrote articles from New York, Fannie Barrier Williams from Chicago, Josephine Silone-Yates from Kansas City, Mary Church Terrell from Washington, Elisabeth P. Ensley for Denver and Alice Ruth Moore for New Orleans<sup>991</sup>. Moreover, the National Association of Colored Women also started its own publication *The Association Notes*. In this newspaper printed at the Tuskegee Institute for many years under the supervision of Margaret Murray Washington – the third wife of Booker T. Washington<sup>992</sup>, women authors discussed topics such as women's rights, kindergartens, club work, franchise, prison reform, education, etc.

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*Record Herald*. In the 1904, she was particularly active in the press, publishing numerous short articles in the *Voice of the Negro* and the *Southern Workman*. Even if she had been very active in the founding of the NACW – and in the newspaper the *Woman's Era* in the late 1890s, Williams concentrated more on writing than on club work in later years – as of 1904. See: <http://uudb.org/articles/fanniebarrierwilliams.html>. Mary Church Terrell was also an active contributor to the *Woman's Era* and other newspapers, under the penname Euphemia Kirk, but did not publish any book. She wrote for numerous black and white newspapers, such as the *A.M.E. Church Review*, the *Southern Workman*, the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Age* and the *Voice of the Negro*. Wells focused on the struggle against lynching and published several books on the topic.

<sup>989</sup> Noliwe Rooks, *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture That Made Them*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004). See also Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

<sup>990</sup> Noliwe Rooks, *Ladies' Pages*, 5.

<sup>991</sup> See Deborah Gray White. *Too Heavy a Load*, 83. The editorship of the *Woman's Era* was accomplished by Ruffin in Boston before being taken over by Tuskegee Institute. See <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3444701324/woman-era.html>. "*Woman's Era* [...] was a key factor in the creation of national networks of middle-class black activist women at the turn of the twentieth century. Ruffin served both as the club's president and as editor of the paper until 1903. After the merge between the National Federation and the into the NACW, it seems that Fannie Barrier Williams disappeared from the board.

<sup>992</sup> Records of the NACW's Clubs (1895-1992). Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.. Nadasen, Premilla. "National Association of Colored Women." *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. 2006. *Encyclopedia.com*. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3444700910/national-association-colored-women.html>.

In such women's newspapers, the definition given of womanhood was often that of elite black women<sup>993</sup>. The influence of African American newspapers spread widely and "[w]hat each of them wrote and lectured about influenced and was influenced in turn by wider constituency"<sup>994</sup>. What guidelines did elite women provide to women of lower social status? How did Victorianism – if it did – shape their discourse? I will address these questions in the third part of this dissertation.

### **Adopting Elitist and Patronizing Attitudes**

Many elite women adopted a patronizing attitude towards the women of the lower classes – the “masses” – of the South in particular. These women often adopted a superior attitude towards less privileged members of the community, which made them appear as elitist and at times haughty. For example, the biographer of Williams Wanda A. Hendricks has explained that Fannie Williams was an “aristocratic reformer who shared the class consciousness of her contemporaries”<sup>995</sup>. By using elitist terms, Williams often positioned herself as a member of the privileged class: she considered herself as as part of the “few competent” coming to the aid of “the many incompetent”<sup>996</sup>. Williams used region as a marker of social class, thinking that black Northerners tended to be better-educated and the embodiment of progress. In 1893, when Williams was chosen to speak about the progress of women of African descent at the World's Congress of Representative Women at the Chicago Fair, she voiced a message which was deemed as elitist by other activists such as Cooper. Williams positioned herself as a Northern educated woman in her speech, quite at odds with former freedwomen of the South. Calling the freedwomen “children of darkness”, Williams regretted seeing them falling completely out of the range of Victorianism after the Civil war. She argued that: “this new life of freedom [...] had to be learned by these children of darkness mostly without a guide, a teacher, or a friend. In the mean vocabulary of slavery there was no definition of any of the virtues of life. The meaning of such precious terms as marriage, wife, family and home could not be learned in a schoolhouse”, since “the blue-black speller, the arithmetic, and the copy-book contain no magical cures for inherited inaptitudes for the

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<sup>993</sup> Noliwe Rooks, *Ladies' Pages*, 6.

<sup>994</sup> Hazel Carby, 115.

<sup>995</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 152. She shared these ideas with one of her friends Booker T. Washington. For instance, he voiced a similar opinion in “An Era of Progress and Promise”, reprinted in the *Spelman Messenger*. He explained that jails and penitentiaries were full of uneducated people who had had “no chance”, “no college diplomas” , who were “the ignorant” whom the better class had the duty to uplift. Ca.1904.

<sup>996</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 383.

moralties”<sup>997</sup>. Contrary to Cooper, who would soon contradict her, the northern-born teacher who had taught in the South between 1877 and 1887 believed that education could not serve as a substitute to parents or family when it came to teaching morality.

Moreover, she spoke as a cultured, light-skinned woman of the North, and constantly seemed to have examples of northern cities in mind. For instance, when praising the benefits of education, she spoke about teachers who worked in northern cities although they hardly represented the efforts of most black educators of the country<sup>998</sup>. When discussing the moral progress of the race, she was indignant about seeing the morality of northern black women questioned, but she seemed to set aside that of black southern women: “All questions relative to the moral progress of the colored women of America are impertinent and unjustly suggestive when they relate to the thousands of colored women of the North who were free from the vicious influences of slavery”, drawing a clear line between pre-war free women and slave women.

What is more, in 1893, Williams seems to have regretted being in a position to defend the reputation of women of African descent: “I regret the necessity of speaking to the question of the moral progress of our women, because the morality of our home life has been commented upon so disparagingly and meanly that we are placed in the unfortunate position of being defenders of our name”. Unlike Cooper, she viewed the necessity of defending their names in 1893 as an indication of failure.

Positioning herself again as an elite black woman from the North who lived far from a region where such living conditions were a reality – i.e. the South –, Williams continued to adopt a patronizing and elitist attitude, speaking about the deplorable conditions in which many African Americans lived. For example, she indicated that in these neighborhoods, “colored girls with poor homes and no homes” were the “poor, weak, misguided daughters of ill-starred mothers and of dissolute and indifferent fathers” and could not even benefit from the aid of the Church while boys were: “educated in the streets and alleys and graduating from schools of crime, while the mother [was] at work and the father perhaps in the saloon”. Faced with such difficulties – which she did not ignore, thanks to the eleven years she had spent in the South as a teacher – she was sure that the elite could help the “masses”: “The intelligence

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<sup>997</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, 1893, in *The New Woman of Color*, 18.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid, 19. Women teachers “afford an apt illustration of the power of self-help. Not only have these women become good teachers in less than twenty-five years, but many of them are the prize teachers in the mixed schools of nearly every Northern city”. She was certainly influenced by her own life experience and that of the northern women she knew – probably her sister Ella and her classmates – who went to teach in the South.



reports of committees on reformatory work attempted and accomplished have helped to bring into public notice the real needs of enlightenment among the masses of the race and have developed altogether new agencies for carrying out these reforms”<sup>999</sup>. In her early career, Fannie Williams’s elitism was visible in her local action. When her husband Samuel Laing Williams organized a club – the Prudence Crandall Study Club in Chicago – it was founded for 25 couples from the African American elite<sup>1000</sup> and Fannie served as director of art and music.

Some elite women could at times be critical of some members of the black community. Fannie Barrier Williams contended that there was “a tendency even among our most intelligent men and women to be self-centered in their interests”<sup>1001</sup>. She was critical of African-Americans who, according to her, often seemed unconcerned by civic life: “To the credit of the Frederick Douglass Center this indifference to our civic responsibilities and opportunities has been recognized” and “one of the most interesting features of the program of activities has been the addresses by the head of the Civil Service Commission, prominent members of the teachers’ fraternity, one of the experts on the movement for new charter, and an address by the president of the woman's club on the value of vacation schools”<sup>1002</sup>. As Kevin Gaines has argued, some elite black progressive reformers “appeared to be driven as much ‘by the racial assumptions of elite whites’ as they were by their own disdain for the poor”<sup>1003</sup>.

The discourse Williams developed about freedwomen who constituted “the masses” was often generalizing and could appear remote from reality for women of the South like Anna Julia Cooper. Williams tended to view the country in dichotomous terms in 1893: North vs. South, antebellum era vs. new era, nineteenth century vs. twentieth century. She opposed two periods: the antebellum era when women were not organized, where, in fact, “organization” was “impossible” and the post-Civil War era when women were efficiently organized. It appears that, for her, the South would always be marked by the pre-1865 time period while the North – because it benefited from the presence of educated blacks – was a

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<sup>999</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, 36.

<sup>1000</sup> June Edwards. See: <http://uudb.org/articles/fanniebarrierwilliams.html>. Williams soon aided less privileged members of the Chicago area with her friend Celia Parer Wooley.

<sup>1001</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem”, *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7, 1906: 502-505, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 131.

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid., 131-132.

<sup>1003</sup> Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 80, as cited in Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 152.



region where progress was possible<sup>1004</sup>. According to her, it took 30 years, between 1865 and 1895 broadly speaking, for a spirit of organization fostered by black women to be born<sup>1005</sup>. Cooper would soon debunk this idea, by showing that association among women of color had existed for years before 1865. As mentioned earlier, in the post-war period, black women continued the tradition of activism acquired well before emancipation<sup>1006</sup>. Because they were refused access to white women's clubs, black women formed their own clubs in the 1890s and actively worked within women's clubs, associations, literary societies, mothers' clubs to foster education and social uplift among the community<sup>1007</sup>.

Anna Cooper replied to Fannie Barrier Williams after the Columbian Exposition. In her response entitled "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation" (1893), Cooper positioned herself as a woman of the South, speaking for the masses, not speaking for the light-skinned cultured elite of the northern States the way Williams had done: "I speak for the colored women of the South, because it is there that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears, and it is there too that the colored woman of America has made her characteristic history, and there her destiny is evolving", thus implying her larger legitimacy when speaking about black women's rights in America.

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<sup>1004</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Intellectual Progress", in *The New Woman of Color*, 20. "Emancipation found the colored American of the South with no sentiments of association", 20.

<sup>1005</sup> Ibid, 21. Williams, on the contrary, dated the birth of a feeling of sisterhood among black women to approximately 1865, and spoke about women having "purer and tenderer relationship to each other".

<sup>1006</sup> Local clubs had been efficiently functioning in several States for decades. See for example the Woman's Era Club launched by Josephine Ruffin, the National Federation of Afro American Women (NFAAW) founded in 1895 by Margaret Washington and the National League of Colored Women of Washington D.C.. See *The Power of Femininity in the New South: Women's Organization and Politics in North Carolina, 1880-1930*, in which Anastasia Sims has defined how politically active both white and black women were in the Jim Crow Era. Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow* also provides detailed information on this question in North Carolina. Moreover, Joan Marie Johnson provides an insightful analysis of the agency and political struggle of black women. See Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

<sup>1007</sup> For instance, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin founded the Boston Woman's Era Club with her daughter Florida Ruffin Ridley, Ida B. Wells formed the Ida B. Wells Club in Chicago and served as president. Whenever they tried to adhere to white women's clubs, they found the doors closed to them. When Fannie Barrier Williams required admission within the Chicago Women's Club in 1894, which then counted a membership of 800 progressive women, she was denied admission. "When the members of these great club came to know the color of this new applicant there was a startled cry that seemed to have no bounds. Up to this time no one knew that there was an anti-Negro sentiment in the club", Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography", 10. After "a determined minority" fought against her candidacy for fourteen months, she was finally admitted to the club. "When the final vote was taken I was elected to membership by a decisive majority". Fannie Barrier Williams was bewildered to learn that some members threatened to leave the club if she was admitted. Her admission revealed intense racial tensions in 1894 Chicago. Years later, she expressed her recognition to those who had supported her throughout this ordeal: "I owed something to the friends who had shown me such unswerving loyalty through all those long and trying months, when every phase of my public and private life was scrutinized and commented upon in a vain effort to find something in proof of my ineligibility", 10.

Likewise, Nannie Helen Burroughs later criticized affluent black clubwomen – whom she called the “‘Would-be’ Social Leader” – who [entered] these organizations devoted to uplift, for no other reason than to show her finery and to let her less fortunate sisters see how brilliantly she shines”<sup>1008</sup>. Burroughs was famous for her attacks on elite women who refused to support such actions. In 1905, she said: “It does not require very much character nor brains to scorn labor, but it requires a great deal of both in this day of false pride to earn your bread by sweating for it and holding up your head above public sentiment, feeling in your heart that though you are a servant, yet you are a queen”<sup>1009</sup>.

When she was suspected by Cleveland elite women of trying to enforce segregation, Jane Hunter – who was friends with Nannie Helen Burroughs and positioned herself as a woman of more humble backgrounds – was heavily criticized by elite Cleveland clubwomen who looked unfavorably on her collaboration with whites<sup>1010</sup>. She used the space of her autobiography to defend herself against the attacks formulated by her detractors. Criticizing elite black women who were dubious about her action, she targeted their “snobbishness”: “A position of this kind, motivated by fear of segregation, we have had to meet all along the way. It is of two kinds the unintelligent and somewhat snobbish dislike of that which seems to isolate the life of the colored population from that of the white man; and the genuine and sincere distrust of all that seems to be a part of the industrial and economy life of the Negro”<sup>1011</sup>. Like her mentor and role model, Booker T. Washington, she believed silence was the best weapon in such cases: “As for those who, from motives and prejudice, criticize my stand in this matter, I have found it wise simply to preserve silence -- following in this the example of Booker T. Washington. ‘I have made it a rule’ he said, ‘never to answer [...] critics’”<sup>1012</sup>. Despite these attacks, Hunter thought that women from different social classes should work together and unite in order to better the circumstances of the whole community. Overall, she disliked class divisions and thought that privileged black people should work hand in hand with African Americans of the working-class.

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<sup>1008</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 208. Nannie Helen Burroughs was famous for her attacks on elite women who refused to support such actions.

<sup>1009</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>1010</sup> Jane Edna Hunter (1882-1971) was a southern-born nurse trained at Hampton Institute in Virginia. She worked as a domestic in the South before migrating north in 1905. She settled in Cleveland, Ohio, where she stayed for the rest of her life and became an active clubwoman. When she wanted to create a Home for African American young women, Cleveland clubwomen thought that she wanted to enforce segregation. They opposed the project, deeming that women should go to the YWCA. They told her: “‘We have never had segregation. Our girls must go to the YWCA, along with white girls. Why should you’ turning the reproachful glance upon me, ‘come up from the South and tell us what to do?’ [...] We represent all the club women of Cleveland [...] and we will not permit you, a Southerner, to start segregation in the city”. Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 84.

<sup>1011</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>1012</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

I will now analyze the messages they conveyed in the press, in their lectures or speeches and see that they placed a paramount emphasis on African American women's womanhood and humanity.

### **3. Fighting for the Acknowledgement of their Womanhood and Humanity as of 1890**

As examined before, in spite of their hyper-sexualisation in the collective imagination, women of color were paradoxically not regarded or acknowledged as women. In order to obtain recognition of their womanhood and humanity, these women insisted on the necessity for all Americans – black and white – to adopt a new perspective on women of color in the United States, in particular on black women of the South.

Contrary to black men, some African American female activists centered their rhetoric on their womanhood and on their humanity. In newspaper articles, they asserted the progress of the race, chronicled the lives of many women of color, emphasizing their difficulties and their achievements, often giving personal examples to show their humanity. As Dobris and White, two scholars in Communication Studies have shown, black women also played with Victorian ideology to assert their long-denied humanity: “In negotiating their own womanhood, black women established their humanity by subverting the prevailing ideology of womanhood”<sup>1013</sup>.

The uniqueness of their standpoint enabled them to employ womanhood as topoi for the invention of arguments that removed the camouflage of white superiority and established the grounds for their participation in the whole community in ideologies that denied them their humanity by denying their womanhood, black women successfully expanded the scope and value of their work. Their arguments for “social uplift” validated the demand for the serious education of women and enlisted the support of men on their behalf. The substance of their rhetoric emphasized their place as the representative symbol of the possibilities, dignity, and nobility of the race<sup>1014</sup>.

To fight for their rights as women and as women of color, these modern and progressive African American activists used socially acceptable – Victorian – rhetoric, yet resorted to subversive actions. In order to defend the image of women of color, they first focused their discourse on their humanity and their womanhood. As Olga Davis has noted:

In order to gain the support of White women, Williams and Cooper faced the rhetorical challenge of crafting models of ‘true womanhood’. Placing Black women in the universal category of ‘woman’ offered Williams and Cooper the delicate rhetorical strategies necessary for the palability of their

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<sup>1013</sup> White and Dobris, “The Nobility of Womanhood: ‘Womanhood’ in the Rhetoric of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Clubwomen”, in *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*, eds., Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis, (Cresskill, N.J., Hampton Press, 2002), 182.

<sup>1014</sup> White and Dobris, 184.

message to White women auditors. (Logan, 1999). Their rhetoric was a discourse of struggle for the purpose of claiming gendered rights, racial equality, and universal humanity of Black women<sup>1015</sup>.

## The Emphasis on Humanity and Christianity

In “Woman vs. the Indian” (1891-1892), Anna Cooper argued that “the cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class, – it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity”<sup>1016</sup>. In a very Christian, humanistic way, she encouraged Americans to finally view the earth as being peopled by humans – not members of races – forming one great civilization. Moreover, during the discussion which took place in 1893 in the wake of the World Fair in Chicago between Fannie Barrier Williams, Anna Cooper and Fannie Coppin, Cooper demonstrated how central the question of black women’s humanity was. Contrary to Williams, she expressed her primal concern for poor black people – and especially women – of the South<sup>1017</sup>. Offering a decisively humanistic message to women like Williams, she chose to center her rhetoric on the necessity of the recognition of the basic humanity of black women. Her message to this congress of women was:

Let woman’s claim be as broad in the concrete as in the abstract. We take our stand in the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition. A bridge is no stronger than its weaker part, and a cause is not worthier than its weakest element. Least of all can woman’s cause afford to decry the weak. We want, then, as toilers for the universal triumph of justice and human rights, to go to our homes from this Congress, demanding an entrance not through a gateway for ourselves, our race, our sex, or our sect, but [through] a grand highway for humanity.

Contrary to many white feminists of the time, Cooper stressed that women’s rights were universal and that the grand principles of America – inalienable rights – should finally be granted to all women – including black women.

The colored woman feels that woman’s cause is one and universal; and that not till the image of God, whether in parian or ebony, is sacred and inviolable; not till race, color, sex and condition are seen as the accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman’s lesson taught and woman’s cause won<sup>1018</sup>.

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<sup>1015</sup> Olga I. Davis, “Public and Private Spheres of Experience”, in *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*, 41.

<sup>1016</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 106.

<sup>1017</sup> Fannie Williams had delivered this speech in 1892 at the Congress of Representative Women at the Columbian World’s Fair. As Lemert has indicated, Williams may have been chosen to represent the planning committee for the women’s building at the Fair because “she was northern, light-skinned, and of the affluent classes”. As Lemert has suggested here, Cooper left “no room for doubt as to the primacy she grants to the poorest, most oppressed women”, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 201.

<sup>1018</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Intellectual Progress of Colored Women”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 204-205.

According to her, “the acquirement of [woman’s] ‘rights’ will mean the final triumph of all right over might, the supremacy of the moral forces of reason, and justice, and love in the government of the nations of earth”<sup>1019</sup>. A fervent Christian, Cooper not only encouraged her readers to stop viewing the world in binary ways but also urged them to cease creating cleavages. Calling for the end of racial and gender oppression, she issued a call to white American women: “It is not the intelligent woman vs. the ignorant woman; nor the white woman vs. the black, the brown and the red, -- it is not even the cause of woman vs. man.”<sup>1020</sup>. For her, the solution to racism, sexism, ostracism to the poor lay in the adoption of a Christian benevolent attitude and in the forgetfulness of the “accidents” of life which sex, race, color or class happened to be. This was not the typical view of most black women at that time: Cooper was unique because she advocated a Christian, inclusive and all-encompassing philosophy, and was one of the first African American feminists who envisaged race and gender relationships through the prism of intersectionality.

### **John Jacks’s 1895 Libelous Letter Precipitated the Formation of the NACW**

In the 1890s, the image of African American women was regularly tarnished and attacked in the national press. Yet the most violent attack came in the form of a libelous open letter written in 1895 by John W. Jacks, a southern journalist and President of the Missouri Press Association, addressed to Miss Florence Belgarnie – a white British activist who forwarded it to Josephine Ruffin, a prominent African American elite woman and a member of the Woman’s Era Club of Boston<sup>1021</sup>. In his open letter, Jacks attacked Ida Wells, asserted that blacks lacked morality and that black women were “prostitutes, natural liars, and thieves”.

Many African American clubwomen reacted to this libel<sup>1022</sup>. Josephine Ruffin decided to organize a meeting rapidly. Ida Wells alluded to this episode in her autobiography:

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<sup>1019</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>1020</sup> Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, *A Voice from the South*, 121. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

<sup>1021</sup> Florence Belgarnie had become interested in the welfare of black Americans after Ida B. Wells had written about lynching while sojourning in the United Kingdom. The NACW later reprinted Mrs. Belgarnie’s letter dated 19 July 1895.

<sup>1022</sup> Ida DePriest, a clubmember who acted as Corresponding Secretary, wrote on 25 July 1895: “We have received your call and respond in spirit, if not in presence. We are not lacking in progressiveness neither in indignation at the slur cast upon our mothers, sisters, daughters, and ourselves by Mr. Jack’s letter [...] Every sentence of Mr. Jack’s letter – the most infamous ever written by a man possessing the attributes of manhood – has been literally burned in each and all hearts”. Letter dated 25 July 1895 by Ida DePriest to Women of the Era Club. Records of the NACWC, Part 1: Minutes of Conventions, 28. First printed 1902. Reprinted in 1978. Library of Congress. The women of Bethel Church also replied to this libel in one article published in the *Woman’s Era*. They asserted the need to believe in self-worth: “What we think of ourselves is always more important than what others think of us, that is to say, self-respect based upon truth is the foundation we seek to



Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston issued a call for a gathering of women's clubs [...] This meeting was to issue a protest against one Mr. Jacks, who, in his capacity as president of the Missouri Press Association, in his annual address, had libeled not only me, but the Negro womanhood of the country through me. These women met and the gathering was presided over by Mrs. Booker T. Washington. They issued the strongest kind of letter and protests against the insult to Negro womanhood as well as to myself. They sent out to the country a unanimous endorsement of the course I had pursued in my agitation against lynching<sup>1023</sup>.

Before the convention which would soon be held – on July 29, 1895, addressing Mrs Ruffin, Florence Belgarnie expressed her support to black clubwomen:

I shall think of you and your friends [...] and only wish I could be there. You have done just what I expected brave, true-hearted women would do, that is, put on a bold front to the traducers of your race and sex. I am sure great good will come out of your discussions [...] Please also convey my expressions of sympathy to your friends, and make it quite clear to them that in sending you the letter I was convinced of its utter and dastardly falsehood from the first. You have a hard fight before you in America, but never fear, right must triumph, and with God on your side you are in a majority. Your loyal comrade in the cause, Florence Belgarnie<sup>1024</sup>.

In the July 1895 issue of the *Woman's Era*, Victoria Earle Matthews, a famous clubwoman from New York City, also reacted to Jacks's letter. Placing the emphasis on "morality and virtue" in her argument, she explained that by attacking "women of negro extraction" – she doesn't put a capital n —, Jacks also attacked "the mothers of American morality and virtue" and admirable women from the North. She asked: "Where do Maria Lydia Childs, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Kemble, Harriet Martineaux, and hundreds of others who in pure lofty womanhood upheld the moralists – stand in this lewd fellow's sweeping statement?"<sup>1025</sup>.

Moreover, she attributed the attack on African American women to their invisibility: "We as women have been too unobstrusive, too little known: we have been hidden by our close adherence to high endeavor" and "our indignation should know no limit". According to the author, Jacks was a woman hater: "No man capable of reverencing his mother, or protecting the unsullied fame of any woman, would have written or forwarded such a communication to any woman". Now was time for the world to hear their response, to re-establish the truth about women of color, to redeem the name of these thousands of black women who proved their virtue in particular during the Civil War: "We should realize, and let

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lay". They continued by attributing the fault to the revelation of the truth about lynching – which posited that white women often condoned racial violence: "We recognize in the 'Jack's letter' [as...] the natural results of the resentment provoked by the fierce denunciation of the 'southern white women' that have been injudiciously indulged in by some of the 'mercurial person' of the race". Ida B. Wells was the person who penned the editorial in question. She had denounced the fact that white southern women were often the accomplices of lynchings. To redress the situation, they "look[ed] with more hope to the conservative workers who [sought] to lay true foundations" for the community. The Women of Bethel Church of New York, in *Woman's Era*. Mary Church Terrell Papers. Library of Congress. Manuscript Division.

<sup>1023</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 242.

<sup>1024</sup> Letter to Josephine Ruffin from Florence Belgarnie, 19 July 1895, NACW Papers. Minutes of Conventions.

<sup>1025</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, *Woman's Era*, Vol II, No 4, 2. In Mary Church Terrell Papers.



the world know that we realize it, that America, and the south in particular [there is no capital s] owes a deathless bond of gratitude to the now-slandered class, that the fair sons and daughters of the south were not corrupted or demoralized during their young and tender years”<sup>1026</sup>. She used an argument which white Southerners could never refute: white women and children had benefited from African Americans’ benevolence and morality when white men were on the war front during the Civil War. By using a historical example which she was sure white Southerners would not fail to grasp, Victoria Matthews aimed at proving that African American women were not immoral. In addition, she was also suggesting that because African American women had been in contact with white Southerners under slavery, the latter had influenced the morality of black Southerners. Implying that African Americans were immoral meant arguing that whites had exerted a negative influence on them under slavery. She kept on developing her clever argument with an attack on southern chivalry: “History can be out in evidence to prove that decency existed most generally among the negro women of the South, for they only were forced by iron law and brutish control to live under the harrowing conditions by the chivalric progenitors of possibly Jacks and his class”.

### **The Birth of the National Association of Colored Women**

John Jacks’s letter convinced African American leaders such as Josephine St Pierre Ruffin to form a national association. After the meeting, Ruffin formed the National Association of Colored Women in order for black women to set the record straight about black womanhood. The National Federation of African American Women, the Women’s Era Club of Boston and the National League of Colored Women of Washington D.C. merged into the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. This national association, whose motto was “Lifting as We Climb” was the first of its kind for women of color. Soon, Mary Church Terrell was selected as the first president of the national association. How did they organize both locally and nationally?

One of the main missions of the NACW was to educate public opinion about women of color. Elite African American women wished to redeem the image of black womanhood for political reasons. As Martha Patterson has explained, “the rhetoric of the ‘New Negro Woman’ in the black press, however, worked generally to transvalue racist discussions of the ‘New Negro Crime’ in the white press and to put forth more “evolved” images of African

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<sup>1026</sup> Ibid, 3.

Americans”<sup>1027</sup>. Victoria Matthews saw this attack upon women of color as the opportunity to educate the public on this common slander, and to reach better understanding between black and white women: “It will afford an opportunity not only of educating public opinion as to our status as women, but will be a test of the broadmindedness and zeal in the matter of mutual advancement existing between the women of the races. If the women will only read and think this matter over, we will have no fears as to the ultimate result”<sup>1028</sup>.

The NACW was created to defend the interests of women first, and secondly, of the community. Paula Giddings has pointed out that, according to Josephine Ruffin, “the clubs were organized *not* ‘for race work alone’, ‘but for work along the lines that make for women’s progress’”, therefore giving women latitude to fight for women’s rights within the NACW<sup>1029</sup>. The first National Conference of Colored Women took place at the Charles Street A. M. E. Church in Boston. On July 29, 1895 in her speech, Ruffin emphasized both black women’s womanhood and Americanness: “We are women, American women, as intensely interested in all that pertains to us as such as all other American women; we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work and welcoming any others to join us”<sup>1030</sup>.

According to Fannie Williams, the NACW signaled the birth of the black “New Woman”. In 1900, in *The New Negro*, insisting on the novelty of the movement and the regeneration of Americans’ mindsets, Williams emphasized the fact that the movement “was not an imitation” of white women’s organizations and was not a mere trend or “a fad”: “The club movement [...] is not a passing sentiment. It is rather the force of a new intelligence against the old ignorance. The struggle of an enlightened conscience against the whole brood of social miseries born out of the stress and pain of a hated past”<sup>1031</sup>. She stated the same view in “The Club Movement among the Colored Women” (1904): the club was more “than a mere imitation” of white women’s clubs because it was a grassroots movement and was the best evidence of innovative reform work in America<sup>1032</sup>. In 1895, Williams rejoiced in witnessing

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<sup>1027</sup> Martha Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 55-56. See “Margaret Murray Washington Washington, and the New Negro Woman”, in Martha Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, Chapter 2

<sup>1028</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, *Woman’s Era*, Vol II, No 4, 3. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>1029</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 78.

<sup>1030</sup> Josephine Ruffin, “Address to the First National Conference of Colored Women”, 1895. In June 1895, it was decided that Boston would be the place for the meeting organized to confer together women from all over the country. New England was chosen because “It has seemed to be the general opinion that here, and here only, can be found the atmosphere which would best interpret and represent us, our position, our needs and our aims.”, *Woman’s Era*, 8. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>1031</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 428.

<sup>1032</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among the Colored Women”, *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 3 (1904): 99-102, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 47-51, 49. “Because it has grown out of the organized anxiety of women who have only recently become intelligent enough to recognize their own social condition and

the first conference of the NACW because it was “highly representative of the best intelligence of the women of the colored race”<sup>1033</sup>. Likewise, at the first National Conference of Colored Women in 1895, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin had made a similar claim: “All over America there is to be found a large and growing class of earnest, intelligent, progressive colored women [...] Many of them warped and cramped for lack of opportunity, not only to do more but to be more”<sup>1034</sup>.

Leading women of the NACW such as Josephine St Pierre Ruffin, Mary Terrell and Fannie Williams celebrated the birth of a new class of educated clubwomen of color, who were finally able to defend women. By doing this, they inexorably insisted on their elite status and were viewed as elitist. In 1900, when rejoicing in the momentous birth of the NACW five years earlier, Fannie Williams underscored that the situation had dramatically changed since the 1860s and 1870s and that in 1895, a class of educated black women of the elite were present to respond to such an attack. In *The New Negro*, she wrote that John Jacks’s letter, which was “too foul for reprint” would “scarcely have been noticed twenty years to this time”, but because progress had been made – the proof that the race was capable of the best – a new generation of educated women such as Ida Wells or Josephine Ruffin was now ready to “refute the charges”. In 1895, she was delighted that “this open and vulgar attack on the character of a whole race of women [had] instantly and vehemently [been] resented, in every possible way, by a whole race of women conscious of being slandered”<sup>1035</sup>.

Nevertheless, the elitism of the NACW leaders was often targeted in the early years of the association. Elite women such as Josephine Ruffin, Mary Terrell or Josephine Bruce – who happened to be light-skinned – were leaders in the association. After attending the Convention of the NACW held in August 1899 in Chicago, Du Bois praised the fact that the NACW focused its attention on securing assistance to children and emphasized that the National Association was led by women of the elite. While praising the action of several clubwomen such as Josephine Ruffin, Mary Terrell, Josephine Silone Yates and Josephine K. Bruce and Margaret Washington, he was delighted to see the class and poise of these elite

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strong enough to initiate and apply the forces of reform. It is a movement that reaches down into the sub-social condition of an entire race and has become the responsibility an effort of the few competent in behalf of the many incompetent”.

<sup>1033</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *Progress of A Race: The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro*, ed. J.W. Gibson and W.H. Grogman (1902; reprint, (Naperville, Ill.: Nichols, 1912), 197-281, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 35.

<sup>1034</sup> Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, *Woman's Era* 2 (August 1895), 13-15. See <http://www.blackpast.org/1895-josephine-st-pierre-ruffin-address-first-national-conference-colored-women>.

<sup>1035</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 397. “This letter [...] stirred the intelligent colored women of America as nothing else had ever done”.

women because they represented the community well: “Undoubtedly the women assembled at Chicago were rather above the average of their race, and represented the aristocracy among the negroes. Consequently their evident intelligence and air of good-breeding served also to impress the onlookers”<sup>1036</sup>.

Nevertheless, even if Williams adopted an elitist position at times, she also insisted on the necessity for all women to act, regardless of their social class. In 1904, speaking about the exemplary actions of Chicago clubwomen who toiled to offer “vacation schools, public playgrounds, cleaner streets and better sanitation”, Williams debunked potential criticism by saying that it was the responsibility of women to act for all. What mattered was the work accomplished by women – whether they belonged to the elite or not. She said: “It will not be a fitting comment to say that these women are wealthy, more intelligent and had superior advantages. The point to be emphasized is that they are not satisfied with an organization that *merely pretends to do something* for society. The principles and purposes of the organization are translated into work that aims to touch helpfully every phase of humanity about it”<sup>1037</sup>. She thought that club were more efficient when they were run locally. Club members – whether they belong to the elite or not – should really act. “Unless many of our clubs can be reorganized on this common sense basis, [when each club “works out its own individuality, know its own needs, and find its own work”] the national Association will be in danger of losing its prestige for the large usefulness that it has so well earned”<sup>1038</sup>. According to Williams, the NACW should be active and adopt pragmatic measures to help women and the community. The organization would be “of little value unless it [could] and [did] actually do the things which it was called into being”<sup>1039</sup>. In other words, she advocated a philosophy of “deeds, not words”. Reminding NACW members of its primary purpose – bringing relief to African Americans through action, Williams warned the members about the danger of ego struggles and potential tensions within the association: “National Conventions will cease to be interesting in any important sense if they become merely an argument for clever essays, bright speeches and parliamentary tilts”. The NACW would primarily remain a laboratory to help

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<sup>1036</sup> W. H. Burghardt Du Bois, “Two Negro Conventions,” the *Independent*, (Sept. 7, 1899): 2425-27 (Microfilm, Mary Church Terrell Papers, reel 30, frames 450-55), as cited in *What Gender Perspectives Shaped the Emergence of the National Association of Colored Women, 1895-1920?*, eds., Thomas Dublin, Franchesca Arias and Debora Carreras. (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, 2000). Du Bois’s piece shows “a clear sense of the different approaches of black women and men, the former focusing on ‘work among children,’ while the latter passed resolutions condemning lynching and opposing racial restrictions on suffrage. He also contrasted the elite nature of the NACW women to the more representative assembly of men.”

<sup>1037</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among the Colored Women”, *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 3 (1904): 99-102, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 47-51, 50. Italics mine.

<sup>1038</sup> Ibid, 50. “What the country demands, and has a right to expect from these great national gatherings, is a report of progress on things practical”.

<sup>1039</sup> Ibid, 49.

other women and not a place where elite women could build their personal reputation as leaders, lecturers or activists<sup>1040</sup>.

When creating the NACW in 1896, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin believed that black women would only be able to refute charges of immorality if they stood united and organized publicly. Visibility and unity were absolutely necessary. During her first address, she stated:

Too long have we been silent under unjust and unholy charges; we cannot expect to have them removed until we disprove them through ourselves. It is not enough to try to disprove unjust charges through individual effort, that never goes any further. [...] Now with an army of organized women standing for purity and mental worth, we in ourselves deny the charges and open the eyes of the world to a state of affairs to which they have been blind, often willfully so, and the very fact that the charges, audaciously and flippantly made, as they often are, are of so humiliating and delicate a nature, serves to protect the accuser by driving the helpless accused into mortified silence.<sup>1041</sup>

Despite the elitism apparent in her rhetoric, Williams encouraged solidarity among women despite social class disparities. In the spring of 1896, Fannie Williams rejoiced in the success of the creation of the NACW at the occasion of the first Annual Convention of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, held in Washington: “This first note of sisterly interest of colored women in each other, the sentiment has grown to a point where it has become a ‘grave and serious work’ as to how we may have one instead of several National organizations”. Williams expressed her trust in these women’s guidance: “With such women as leaders and with such high purposes for inspiration it ought to be possible to find a basis of union.” And she was sure that this union would not be spoiled by women’s jealousies within the Association: “Fortunately for us, the personal ambitions that have been so fatal to all the large efforts of our men are not dangers to be feared in our efforts toward unity. There seems to have been a most happy freedom from the petty jealousies and envies that inevitably wreck social organizations”. The Chicagoan was full of hope for the whole of American women: “The opportunity is at hand for admittedly capable women to organize one of the most interesting and important parliaments of women ever attempted for the social amelioration of womankind in this country”<sup>1042</sup>. She was sure that the interests of women would be well defended. In 1900, she praised the birth of a feeling of solidarity and clubwork because it encouraged the “first touch of sympathy that has connected the progressive colored

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<sup>1040</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among the Colored Women”, 50. It is unclear who she had in mind here.

<sup>1041</sup> Josephine Ruffin, “Address to the First National Conference of Colored Women”, 1895, in *What Gender Perspectives...?*.

<sup>1042</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*. May, June 1896. Vol II, No. 12, 14. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

woman with her neglected and unprogressive sister” and rejoiced in seeing “a class of women” benefiting from help<sup>1043</sup>.

As discussed earlier, even if Fannie Williams positioned herself as a cultured educated woman of the North, quite distant from women whom she nevertheless called her “southern sisters”, she displayed boundless solidarity towards women of color of the South, sharing their pain and looking for solutions to their quotidian issues. In her 1904 autobiography, Williams emphasized her solidarity with black southern women and sympathized with women who were the habitual victims of segregationist laws, and also denounced the sexual oppression of the domestic workers of the South:

It is a significant and shameful fact that I am constantly in receipt of letters from the still unprotected colored women of the South, begging me to find employment for their daughters according to their ability, as domestics or otherwise, to save them from going into the homes of the South as servants, as there is nothing to save them from dishonor and degradation<sup>1044</sup>.

The leaders of the NACW not only believed that black women should be united to defend the image of women of color, they also felt that the question of women’s rights was important for all women, not just black or white women, and that they consequently had to build greater cooperation with white women. Soon after the creation of the NACW, its leaders called for interracial cooperation. Josephine Ruffin or Mary Terrell repeatedly stressed in their speeches black and white women’s common bonds and Ruffin made a decidedly open call to white clubwomen when founding the NACW, promising to welcome all persons ready and willing to help African American women. Ruffin contended: “We are not drawing the color line [...] We are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work and cordially inviting and welcoming any others to join us”<sup>1045</sup>. In November 1894, she clearly encouraged interracial cooperation, calling white women to come to the aid of black women. In “A Word to the AAW, [Association for the Advancement of Women]”, in the *Woman’s Era*, she spoke about the urgency of the situation:

It is a question which they can no longer evade. We thoroughly believe that it is the women of America – black and white – who are to solve the race problem, and we do not ignore the duty of the black woman in the matter. They must arouse, educate and advance themselves; they are to exert that influence through the homes, the schools and the churches that will build up an intelligent, industrious and moral people. Their duty is plain and must be done. But the white woman has a duty in the matter

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<sup>1043</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 418.

<sup>1044</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, in the *Independent*, 95-96.

<sup>1045</sup> Josephine Ruffin, as cited in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 443.



also; she must see to it that no obstructions are placed in the way of a weak, struggling people; she must no longer consent to be passive. We call upon her to take her stand<sup>1046</sup>.

Josephine Silone Yates issued a call to white women to fight against libel on black women as well. In “Woman as a Factor in the Solution of Race Problems” (1907), she insisted upon the noble joint work accomplished throughout American History by both black and white women<sup>1047</sup>. Like other counterparts, Yates thought that whites largely ignored the real state of the community, the “Negro, possibly, understands the Anglo-Saxon far better than the latter comprehends the Negro”<sup>1048</sup>. She was adamant that club work could serve as a powerful remedy to this mutual misunderstanding and that the solution to the race problem lay with women:

Here women may show themselves a strong factor in the solution of this part of the problem – a better understanding between the races – and the work accomplished by Women’s Clubs will do much in the way of counteracting this lack of knowledge of the Negro’s real status [...] Colored women have formed clubs because, having the same human nature as white women, they have felt the same needs, and they have accepted the partial remedy for these needs which white women have pointed out, in so far as it goes; but colored women have also special reasons of their own for feeling that association is needful<sup>1049</sup>.

Later, Mary Terrell continued to address white women in order to foster interracial cooperation. Appealing to the white audience of the National Council of Women, Terrell used the image of the Madonna in 1900 to reach her audience, trying to strike a chord with them:

Put yourselves for a minute in her place, (you would not endure the strain longer) and imagine, if you can how you would feel if similarly situated. As a mother of the weaker race clasps to her bosom the babe which she loves as fondly as you do yours her heart can not thrill with joyful anticipations of the future. For before her child she sees the thorny path of prejudice and proscription which his little feet must tread. She knows that no matter how great his ability, how lofty his ambition, there are comparatively [sic] few avocations in which anyone of his race may hope to succeed. She knows that no matter how skilfull [sic] his hand, how honest his heart, or how great his need, trade unions will close their doors in his face and make his struggle for existence desperate indeed. So rough does the way of her infant appear to many a poor black mother that instead of thrilling with the joy which you feel, as you clasp your little ones to your breast, she trembles with apprehension and despair. This picture,

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<sup>1046</sup> Josephine Ruffin, *Woman’s Era*. November 1894. Vol. I, No. 8. as cited in *African American Feminisms, 1828-1923*. Ed. Teresa Zackodnik. Vol. V. (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 103.

<sup>1047</sup> Josephine Silone-Yates, “Woman as a Factor in the Solution of Race Problems,” *The Colored American Magazine* (February 1907): 126–135, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 105-114. “In those days white and black women worked side by side, as it were, for the amelioration of a great evil. She said: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Anna Murray Douglass, Harriet Tubman”, 127 and 106.

<sup>1048</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 165. Terrell voiced the same idea. In her autobiography, Terrell recalled that while she “spoke in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut or New York, the questions asked [by the audience] were practically the same, and the evidence that those intelligent people possessed comparatively little knowledge about the race problem was equally convincing”.

<sup>1049</sup> Josephine Silone-Yates, “Woman as a Factor in the Solution of Race Problems,” *The Colored American Magazine* (February 1907): 126–135, 128-129, in *African American Feminisms*, 107-108.

Mothers of the Congress, is not overdrawn, and a moment[']s reflection upon the subject, which I have touched so lightly, will enable you to supply much that I have been obliged to omit.<sup>1050</sup>

Making a call to women of the National Congress, she asked white women to be magnanimous in “the name of justice and humanity”.

In the name of the children of my race, Mothers of the National Congress, I come asking you to do all in you power by word and deed to give them the opportunities which you desire for your own. In the name of justice and humanity; [illegible] in the name of the helplessness and [illegible] of childhood, of black childhood as well as white childhood, I ask you to do all in your power both by precept and example to make the future of the children of my race as bright and as promising as should be that of every child born on this free American soil.<sup>1051</sup>

Black women activists continued to be extremely active at the turn of the century. Conscious of the repeated attacks upon their names and of the image given of African American women in the larger society, they decided to strike back when an umpteenth attack came in the form of John Jacks’ letter in 1895. Some activists such as Fannie Williams, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin or Mary Terrell positioned themselves as elite women while others, such as Anna Cooper, did not. In any case, their foremost goal was similar: to defend African American womanhood.

In 1900, in *The New Negro*, five years after the creation of the national organ, Fannie Williams assessed the situation positively: The NACW “has certainly helped to emancipate the white women from the fear and uncertainty of contact or association with women of the darker race. In other words [the NACW] is helping to give respect and character to a race of women who had no place in the classification of progressive womanhood in America. The terms good and bad, bright, and dull, plain and beautiful are now applicable to colored women as to women of other races”<sup>1052</sup>. In addition, the national association had achieved much more according to Williams: it had enabled women to build or re-build a sense of self-esteem and to feel part of the womanhood of the nation: “To feel that you are something better than a slave, or a descendant of an ex-slave, to feel that you are a unit in the womanhood of a great nation and a great civilization, is the beginning of self-respect and the respect of your race”. She claimed that the NACW had “meant all this and much more to the women of the ransomed

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<sup>1050</sup> Mary Church Terrell, Speech, “Greetings From the National Association of Colored Women to The National Council of Women,” 1900, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress (Microfilm, reel 21, frames 738-742).

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1052</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 402.

race in the United States”<sup>1053</sup>. The work accomplished at the association had, at a certain level, not only given their humanity but also their womanhood back to these women.

Probably influenced by the ideas developed by Cooper and Williams in 1893, Josephine Ruffin viewed the NACW in 1896 as an association fighting not for one section or for one race, but for the whole of humanity as well: “Our woman’s movement is woman’s movement in that it is led and directed by women for the good of women and men, for the benefit of all humanity”<sup>1054</sup> and she naturally encouraged interracial cooperation. Black clubwomen’s wide mission transcended the established cleavages of gender and race. I will now study how and why black women activists and intellectuals put the emphasis on morality and respectability in their writings.

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<sup>1053</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>1054</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 443.

## Chapter 3: Asserting Women's Morality and Respectability

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To defend the image of women of African descent, it was very important for many intellectuals to show that women of color embraced fundamental virtues in American society at this time such as purity, dignity, morality, respect of Christian beliefs. They aimed at proving that they were able – and willing – to adopt the codes of white America which, at the turn of the century, was still partially subscribing to the “Cult of True Womanhood”.

Even though black women had been excluded from the Cult of True Womanhood for centuries, Victorianism had nevertheless impacted middle and upper-class American women's understanding of being a woman. For example, both Fannie Williams and Anna Cooper seemed to adhere in 1893 to Victorian ideals of womanhood and deemed some virtues as paramount. In their discourses they praised Victorian values. Williams posed as central qualities women's sense of “marriage, life, family and home” while Cooper used terms reminiscent of social uplift – “higher living” – and Victorianism – “purer thinking”, “dignity” – to speak about women's social duties<sup>1055</sup>.

In many different circles – in universities, in clubs and in the press —, middle and upper-class women crafted a discourse insisting on morality and respectability. As Evelyn Higginbotham has shown about Baptist women in *Righteous Discontent*, many African American women deemed respectability as very important in their writings to advance their agenda – racial uplift – between 1880 and 1920<sup>1056</sup>. In her book entitled *Remaking Respectability*, Victoria Wolcott has also underscored that respectability was used “as a collective strategy to enhance the reputation of all African American women and a means to define class distinctions in the black community”<sup>1057</sup>, further demonstrating how much women valued female respectability in Interwar Detroit<sup>1058</sup>. As Knupfer has explained about

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<sup>1055</sup> Fannie Williams and Anna Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress of Colored Women”, 1893, in *The New Woman of Color* and *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*.

<sup>1056</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*.

<sup>1057</sup> Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), introduction, 6- 7.

<sup>1058</sup> *Ibid*, 9. Wolcott argues that women of color held “Dress, demeanor and deportment” as important evidence of a woman's respectability before the 1930s, 4. This served racial uplift and advancement ideology. See page 7. Wolcott also showed how “Female respectability lost its salience as a reform strategy” because of a growing disillusionment.

Chicago, “respectability [...] was perceived and expressed as a collective strategy”<sup>1059</sup>, therefore black clubwomen put the emphasis on respectability in their rhetoric.

## **Insisting On Purity, Dignity, Modesty and Respectability**

Many middle and upper-class social workers thought that the best way to contradict negative stereotypes was to defend conservative attitudes and to conform to Victorian American standards. As Evelyn Higginbotham has shown, “Many black women linked mainstream domestic duties, codes of dress, sexual conduct, and public etiquette with both individual success and group progress”. Black leaders “argued that ‘proper’ and ‘respectable’ behavior proved blacks worthy of equal civil and political rights. Conversely, nonconformity was equated with deviance and pathology and was often cited as a cause of racial inequality and injustice”<sup>1060</sup>.

Clubwomen insisted on values such as purity, honor, virtue, reputation and nobility, and argued that a “noble” woman constituted the avowed goal for these women of the middle-class<sup>1061</sup>. Women such as Wells or Terrell were attached to Victorian ideals. Since they were in a position to help these young migrants, they assisted them and advocated Victorian attitudes among them, placing the emphasis on morality, purity and respectability – to defend the image of all women of color. As Miriam DeCosta-Willis has underscored,

like other nineteenth century middle-class women of color, such as Maria Stewart, Charlotte Forten and Frances Watkins Harper, Wells practised a Victorian social customs and conformed to strict codes of ethics. The codes mandated that, like other white counterparts, black women be noble and refined: they had to uplift the race by eradicating vice: drinking, gambling and fornication<sup>1062</sup>.

### **1. Respecting a Strict Etiquette (1890-1920)**

As explained earlier, African American women of the middle-class were influenced by Victorianism and by society’s understanding of what women should be and do, and men were often those who defined what appropriate womanhood was.

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<sup>1059</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women’s Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>1060</sup> S. Willie Layten, in *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, ed., Jessie Carney Smith, Book II, ed., Jessie Carney Smith, (New York: Gale Research Inc., 1996), 404. For instance, Sarah Willie Layten said in 1904: “Unfortunately the minority or bad Negroes have given the race a questionable reputation; these degenerates are responsible for every discrimination we suffer”.

<sup>1061</sup> Wells spoke about the “preservation of honor, virtue and good name” in her articles. See Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 188.

<sup>1062</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 121.

## Abiding by Guidelines Set by Men

Black men were important architects of “proper” black womanhood. In this period, Ministers and intellectuals made public their understanding of what “proper” womanhood was. In non-religious and religious black newspapers such as in the *AME Church Review*, male writers such as Frederick Douglass (1897-1895), the famous feminist and supporter of women’s rights, Alexander Crummell or W.E.B. Du Bois published articles and pamphlets indicating what was expected of women of the race, what was acceptable for them to do and what was not<sup>1063</sup>. This literature was meant to encourage African American women to respect propriety and conform to Victorian prescriptions: Anne Knupfer has explained that “such idealized images not only positioned women as moral guardians, but often also restricted their roles to the domestic sphere”<sup>1064</sup>. A significant body of literature on proper behavior was written and published by men. The *National Capital Code of Etiquette: Dedicated to the Colored Race* published in 1920 by Edward S. Green is an example of such literature<sup>1065</sup>.

Many conservative intellectuals pushed and encouraged women to adopt the ideology of domesticity even if they were aware that it could often be difficult to do. As Guy-Sheftall has argued “ironically, [black men’s attitudes] were also shaped by their acceptance of the True Womanhood ideal and their realization that black women, because of their historical circumstances, could not be expected to conform totally to this ideal; but black males argued, black women could provide a new model of the ideal woman and could be seen as an alternative to the dominant cultural ideal of womanhood”<sup>1066</sup>.

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<sup>1063</sup> See Alexander Crummell, “The Black Women of the South: Her Neglects and Her Needs”, in *Africa and America: From 1619 to 1880*, 60-61. Crummell seemed to adhere to traditional natural distinctions between men and women, believing women to be weak and needing protection while men were strong and protective. In the *AME Church Review*, it was common to read articles about proper or “noble” womanhood. When Du Bois spoke about black women in his writings, he often referred to them as mothers, workers and activists but rarely as intellectuals. W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Damnation of Women”: in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1920). See the article by Farah Jasmine Griffin on this topic. “Black Feminists and Du Bois: Respectability, Protection and Beyond”, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 568, The Study of African American Problems: W. E. B. Du Bois’s Agenda, Then and Now (Mar., 2000): 28-40. She argues that in “The Study of the Negro Problems” (1898), he seemed to envisage intellectuals as male.

<sup>1064</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, 16.

<sup>1065</sup> Edward S. Green, *The National Capital Code of Etiquette, Combined with Silas X. Floyd’s Short Stories. Dedicated to the Colored Race*. (Washington D.C.: Austin Jenkins Company Publishers, 1920). Austin Jenkins Company published “Bibles and special books for the colored race by Negro Authors”, see the first pages of the book, easily accessible on the internet. [https://archive.org/stream/nationalcapitalc00greerich/nationalcapitalc00greerich\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/nationalcapitalc00greerich/nationalcapitalc00greerich_djvu.txt). Silas X. Floyd published this etiquette book alongside his own book entitled: *Short Stories for Colored People: Young and Old*. In it, Floyd talked about the “Don’t care girl” which was the most dangerous girl for the race: “It is a foolish thing to take delight in trying to shock people by your boisterous and unladylike and unbecoming conduct”, 268. Yet, Floyd also provided advice to black men, by indicating for example how to act around women generally and on special occasions – such as at dinners, on the street, etc.

<sup>1066</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 12.



In this context, conscious that elite men had long defined propriety rules for women, African American women decided to voice *their* definition of womanhood. Educators, students and middle and upper-class women spoke about what constituted proper black womanhood in newspaper articles<sup>1067</sup> while others such as Emma Hackley – who had trained female students at Tuskegee – published etiquette books dealing with woman’s proper attitudes in the late 1890s and 1900s. These women “formed an educated elite, but an elite that tried to develop a cultural and historical perspective that was organic to the wider condition of black womanhood”<sup>1068</sup>.

### **Abiding by Guidelines Set by Women**

At the turn of the century, women activists and educators – who often belonged to the middle-class – insisted on propriety rules for women. As a result, in the feminine press, in etiquette books, in women’s and co-educational institutions, many articles dwelt upon the necessary observance of strict propriety rules<sup>1069</sup>. University newspapers were indeed full of guidelines and recommendations for young women on campuses<sup>1070</sup>.

Other middle-class women voiced their conservative views about womanhood by publishing etiquette books. These books advised young women of the middle-class to behave appropriately, according to propriety rules of the time. For example, Emma Hackley, a musician from Tennessee and a former teacher, published *The Colored Girl Beautiful* in 1916<sup>1071</sup>. It appears that the book “was written at the request of Booker T. Washington, after

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<sup>1067</sup> Katharine Capshaw Smith has analyzed this in “Childhood, the Body, and Race Performance: Early Twentieth Century Books of Etiquette for Children”, *African American Review*. Vol. 40, No. 4 (Winter 2006). In the presentation of her book, she argues: “From 1916 to 1920 members of the black elite became especially interested in codifying the rules of proper middle-class behavior in conduct books; addressed to children and young adults, texts were offered by writers who were either associated with public performance or who held some iconographic position within the community of the black elite”.

<sup>1068</sup> Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, 115.

<sup>1069</sup> I relied mostly on Howard University’s *University Journal* and Spelman College’s *Spelman Messenger*. Spelman is a Christian woman’s College founded by white educators. Howard was also founded by whites yet was then run by African American educators. The contributors of the articles often stated conservative views.

<sup>1070</sup> It is important to note that these documents reveal the mores of southern Institutions. Howard University, Spelman College, and the Tuskegee Institute – run by the Washingtons – were quite conservative. Emma Hackley’s book is a compilation of the lectures she gave at Tuskegee at the request of Margaret Washington. Her book provides an interesting insight of what constituted ideal womanhood for women like her at that time and also what female students were taught about women’s proper roles at Tuskegee Institute in the 1900s-1910s.

<sup>1071</sup> Born in 1867 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Hackley was raised in Detroit, Michigan. She worked as an elementary school teacher for eighteen years before marrying an attorney from Denver. “Her parents, business owners Henry and Corilla Smith, moved to Detroit where she attended Washington Normal School, graduating in 1886. Smith, a child prodigy learned to play the piano at three and later took private voice, violin and French lessons”. See <http://www.schillerinstitute.org/educ/hist/hackley.html>. During that period she met and married Edwin Henry Hackley, a Denver attorney and editor of the city’s black newspaper, the *Denver Statesman*. In 1900 Hackley received her music degree from Denver University. In 1905-1906 she studied voice in Paris with

Mme. Hackley had given a series of talks to the girls at Tuskegee Institute”<sup>1072</sup>. Her book therefore offers a glimpse of the type of lectures female pupils were given in a conservative, industrial school of the Deep South in the 1910s. Hackley explained that “The first talk [was an impromptu talk after an hour’s notice and] was given at the Tuskegee Institute at the request of the Dean of the Girls’ Department.”<sup>1073</sup>. Positioning herself as a role model for the students, she gave talks at the Tuskegee Institute, at the request of the Dean of the Girls’ Department. In the foreword of *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, Emma Hackley explained that she wished to teach girls to become a perfect embodiment of proper womanhood: “If I had a daughter I would desire that she should know these things and more, that she might be a beacon light to her home and to the race”<sup>1074</sup>.

Female students were expected to behave with propriety on campus. Rules were for example very strict at Howard University. In March 1908, dancing was still prohibited at suppers organized at Miner Hall. A supper had been organized by “some young ladies of the hall in honor of Miss Ardelle Smith’s eighteenth birthday”. Men were allowed to attend, many “sat down to whist tables” but “dancing was not allowed”<sup>1075</sup>. Moreover, authors of University newspapers often argued that women – the guardians of manners – should cultivate them. In the issue of 23 December 1904, one author, in the manner of a sermon, invited readers to “think more of them and less of yourself. Try to make [people around you] comfortable and happy in all little ways. At heart cherish high and unselfish ideals. If the mass of our school girls would do this a while, the manners of our people would improve, for it is always, in civilized lands, the women who set the standards of manners”<sup>1076</sup>.

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former Metropolitan Opera star Jean de Reszke. Hackley was also “an active member of black Denver’s civic and social life and founded for instance the Colored Women’s League and served as executive director of its local branch”. She died in 1922, three years before Margaret Washington. <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/hackley-emma-azalia-1867-1922>.

<sup>1072</sup> Emma Azalia Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 9. (Burton Publishing Company Publishers: Kansas City, Missouri, 1916). [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/31340?msg=welcome\\_stranger#Page\\_23](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/31340?msg=welcome_stranger#Page_23). The book is a compilation of her lectures given to students at Tuskegee Institute: “This volume has been compiled from talks given to girls in colored boarding schools”.

<sup>1073</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 9. Considering the period when Hackley was invited to give these talks, the Dean of the Girls’ Department was probably Margaret Murray Washington, Booker T. Washington’s third wife, who served as Lady Principal from the 1890s until her death in 1925. Unsure of what was expected of her, Hackley was required to “tell [the girls] anything you think they should know. They will believe an experienced woman like you who travels and knows the world and life”.

<sup>1074</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. Hackley wrote several other books such as *A Guide in Voice Culture*, *Public School Lessons in Voice Culture*. She dedicated her work “to colored women in whom I have faith and to colored children whom I love, I send this little message”.

<sup>1075</sup> “A Birthday Supper”, *The University Journal*, 25 March 1908.

<sup>1076</sup> “Manners”, *The University Journal*, 23 December 1904, 1. The author regretted that “many of our young men misunderst[ood] the meaning of College spirit” and wished to see them be less “noisy and boisterous in indoor gatherings” and “quiet as mice during the games on the campus”.

Between 1890 and 1920, women were continuously placed under strict scrutiny on black campuses. For her high school diploma, in 1905, Mamie Garvin Fields enrolled in a co-educational Institution, Claflin University in South Carolina. In her autobiography, Mamie described the strict behavioral code to which girls had to conform. Female students were chaperoned: “the school was careful anyway about the boys and girls. Nobody could go to town unless they had permission and were escorted by a matron or an upperclassman (and of course the names of everybody were marked in the checkhouse book)”<sup>1077</sup>. Likewise, Helen Lou Evelyn James, a native of Saybrook, Connecticut born in 1876<sup>1078</sup> who attended Hampton Institute from 1897 to 1901 did not like it when other students disobeyed the rules: “Some of the girls and boys of the senior class has been doing what they should not going off the ground without permission, dancing together, which is a crime. The school is much agitated about it in the meantime they almost tricked the others”. On campus, dinners were the only occasions of meeting boys: once, after a dinner, she and her friend were allowed to have two boys call on them: “two of the young men that we were allowed to have call on us”<sup>1079</sup>.

Furthermore, moral training was repeatedly seen as a sine qua non condition to all students at Howard University. In “Value of Moral Training”, the author insisted on the importance of “true moral development” and “good and noble character” which make men and women “true” gentlemen and ladies<sup>1080</sup>. The mostly male editorial board of the *Howard University Journal* published a short piece aimed at men on behaving as gentlemen. To the question of whether black men should yield their seats to all women – black or white, the author answered that “we heartily concur in the judgment that no gentleman can withhold courtesy and politeness to any woman, be she white or black”<sup>1081</sup>.

Female students’ propriety and respectability was definitely an important subject on black campuses which interested both male and female students, and interestingly, some female students wished propriety to be strictly observed on campus, so as to defend the image

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<sup>1077</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 92.

<sup>1078</sup> Helen James was born on 1 January 1876 into the James family from Hartford, Connecticut. She had several siblings: Willis James, Bertha and Louise. Bertha James Lane, who owned a linen-making business, married Peter Lane. Together they had two daughters, Helen Louise and Anna Houston, who later gave birth to Ann Petry. Helen James attended Hampton Institute from 1897 to 1901. In 1901, she left for Hawaii and worked as a teacher. She corresponded with members of her family for ten years (1898-1908). She died in 1971. Her letters were preserved by her sister Bertha. See the passage on her wish to preserve the letters in *Can Anything Beat White?*, 109.

<sup>1079</sup> Helen James, *Can Anything Beat White?*, 120.

<sup>1080</sup> “Value of Moral Training”, by F. J. 3 February 1905. *The University Journal*. It is unclear if the author was a man or a woman.

<sup>1081</sup> “Are you a Gentleman?”, *Howard University Journal*, 7 April 1911, 1. This article seems to have been written collectively. Men apparently gave up their seats to women of their respective race. By saying that black men should prove deferential to white women, they made a step forward towards whites of Washington D.C. and the South.

of black women. For example, when some hoaxes aiming at making Howard female students appear as immoral were published in the 1900s in the University journal, it triggered violent reactions among female students<sup>1082</sup>. The article conveyed the following message:

What in the world could keep the young men away from so many beautiful girls?" "[Boys] need not be afraid of being rejected for we are not so very choicy. One of our young ladies who had seven fellows last year (thus making morals of girls on campus be loose) has been unable to land one so far, and is one of the staunchest members of the dust gang. They say that she is making love strenuously to the chaperons, who, by the way, are more sought this year than ever before. Hoping this letter will brace up those backward sons of Howard and spur them on to wooing, I am, Yours, in hope, Gladys.

This provocative letter sparked an answer from a female student living in Miner Hall in the following issue. On 23 November 1906, "a sensible girl" signed "Another Letter from Miner Hall"<sup>1083</sup>, apparently believing that the opinion of Gladys was that of a real female student. She had read it "with marked annoyance": "I do not know who she is and it is well that such a foolish sophisticated person conceals her identity, but I do feel extremely sorry that she has lost her dignity as to entreat [men] to pay attention to her". She regretted living in the same dormitory and was determined to defend the honor of all other female students at Howard: "She only speaks for herself. The other young ladies have ideas far less frivolous and have higher purposes and are sober and serious-minded". She ended her letter with "a word of advice" for Gladys: "seek thou first dignity, high mindedness and worth and the other things will be added unto thee". The Howard University faculty and native of Illinois Laura E. Joiner was also concerned about her students' respect for propriety. In a letter dated 9 February 1911, she wished to convince Dean Cummings to prevent Lottie Ruddock, a student of the Normal School from living off-campus. Joiner had apparently accommodated her for months being informed by the student that she wished to "take a room with some one on 6<sup>th</sup> Street and board out elsewhere". Joiner did not "sanction this plan", thinking it unwise "for a young girl" to live on her own without any surveillance. "I wish her to either remain here under 'home protection' or else return to the Dormitory – Miner Hall"<sup>1084</sup>.

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<sup>1082</sup> "A Letter from Miner Hall", *The University Journal*, 16 November 1906, 3 and 5. The hoax, signed by a certain "Gladys" but probably written by one or several male students, was supposed to express "the sentiments of quite a number of the inhabitants of this hill", i.e. women students. The author(s) intended to make it appear as if a female student living in Miner Hall, had written the piece.

<sup>1083</sup> "Another Letter from Miner Hall", 23 November 1906. *The University Journal*, 3. Signed "A Sensible Girl". The editors, who were most probably embarrassed about having published the hoax noted: "NB: The journal will receive no more hoaxing communications concerning the social life of the students. Editor. The editor in chief at that time was Edward P. Davis (Col. '07), while Clement C. Gill (Theo '07) and M. Alvin Morrison, Col. '07 were associated editors. All were male. It is very strange that the first article was even published, for the editors must have realized that it was written as a joke.

<sup>1084</sup> Laura E. Joiner, in William A. Joiner Papers. Box 148-1. Folder 8. Letter dated 9 February 1911. Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C. Joiner graduated from Howard University Medical School – She earned a Ph.D in Medicine – on 22 April 1903 from Howard University. Laura and her brother William both graduated from Springfield High School in Illinois in 1886.

In 1906, contributors in College newspapers repeated that black women as a group formed exemplars of virtue and morality. “Negro womanhood when properly treated and educated will burst forth into gems of pure brilliancy unsurpassed by any other gems among any other race [...] Is virtue a matter of color and is she found only among the daughters of the Anglo-Saxon and is she a stranger among the daughters of ‘Ethiopia’s blameless race? Ask Spelman Seminary”, an author of Spelman College wrote<sup>1085</sup>.

Universities and colleges generally devoted a lot of efforts reassuring parents about the fact that their daughters would be correctly cared for and supervised on their campuses. For instance, the authorities of Howard University attempted to reassure parents – members of the upper and middle-class of the country – who planned to send their daughters to Howard University of the strict propriety which reigned on campus. In the 28 September 1906 issue of *The University Journal*, the author aimed at convincing parents that Howard University provided a perfectly healthy and respectable environment for young women:

Parents may be assured that the internal economy of Miner Hall will be sympathetic and motherly and conform to the highest standards of Christian discipline and culture. We have an exceptionally fine company of young women who come from the best homes of the country [...] It is our goal to have parents “look to Howard as the best finishing school for their daughters [...] Parents may send their daughters to this institution with the full assurance that they will be safeguarded by all the wholesome and refining influences of a well-ordered and refined home” while enjoying life in a bustling city such as Washington, which offered “the highest facilities of culture and improvement”<sup>1086</sup>.

The same was true for Spelman Seminary in Atlanta. One advertisement prepared by one woman willing to become an ad-writer entitled “Save Your Girls” was published as part of her article in the *Spelman Messenger*. In it, she encouraged parents to place girls under the care of Spelman because it offered protection and the assurance that their daughters would evolve in strict Christian traditions. Spelman was a “safe home where their daughters are protected from hurtful influences and trained in the homely, womanly virtue and in right ideas of Christian life”<sup>1087</sup>.

Yet despite such efforts, some parents hesitated to enroll their daughters in certain institutions, fearing that there should be too much “socializing” – which should be detrimental to their daughters’ reputations. For example, when Ida B. Wells-Barnett, being attentive to the proper activities proposed on campus, was looking for a university for her daughter Alfreda around 1922, expressed reservations about her attending Howard University. Despite her

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<sup>1085</sup> “Spelman Seminary, Our Virgin Queen”, *Spelman Messenger*, 1906. It celebrated the 25 years of Spelman College. (1881-1906).

<sup>1086</sup> “Our Girls’ Department”, 28 September 1906, 3.

<sup>1087</sup> “Spelman Seminary – My First Ad” by Evelina O. Werden. Save Your Girls”, *Spelman Messenger*, ca.1920. Miss Giles was President then.



daughter's enthusiasm, she refused, probably considering that Howard would offer an inappropriate atmosphere for her daughter<sup>1088</sup>.

Articles and etiquette books also encouraged women to be feminine, to pay attention to their physical appearance and deportment, in order to prove the morality and qualities possessed by women of African descent. Emma Hackley dispensed very general advice to women before focusing most of her discourse on propriety and respectability. For example, she advised women not to practice too much physical exercise in order to remain “eternally feminine”, to always eat healthy food, avoid chewing gum and drinking alcohol. Above all, as her title suggests, she encouraged her readers to remain “beautiful”. Hackley insisted that beauty was not merely physical: “Beauty is a combination of personal appearance and charm, and it can not be purchased”<sup>1089</sup>. Etiquette books or articles insisted that women should always be careful about their physical appearance<sup>1090</sup> because the way a woman dressed and the colors she wore, not only influenced the impression made upon other people, but it also had consequences on the reputation of the entire community<sup>1091</sup>. Appearance was paramount when you were to travel somewhere and meet someone for the first time. The narrative of Mamie Fields shows that middle-class women were repeatedly told to always dress up and look nice in order to make good impressions at all times. She recounted that when she and her sister arrived at Claflin University in 1905, they were very careful about their appearance: “We had the idea that the way you looked when arriving [somewhere, in that case Claflin] reflected where you came from and how your people carried themselves. Because of that, everybody cleaned up the best they could just before arriving”<sup>1092</sup>.

Moreover, in the same fashion, some conservative articles encouraging women to adopt appropriate dress codes were published in the black press and in etiquette books. Women should dress up for any occasion but should remain measured in all things and

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<sup>1088</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster (1904-1983), *Memphis Diary*, 195. Alfreda Barnett Duster wished to go to Howard University: “I had a notion I’d like to go to Howard for a year, for I’d never been to an all-Black school”, but “there were all sorts of parties and socializing” there at the time. Her mother “wasn’t for that”. Instead, Alfreda attended the University of Chicago where she “never encountered any prejudice”. She obtained her B.A. in 1924, married Ben Duster, whom she met at her father’s law practice and had five children with him. She later edited her mother’s autobiography.

<sup>1089</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl*, 50-51, 42-44, 32, 23, 26.

<sup>1090</sup> Hackley, 23 and 26. “As the girl grows she should be taught the value of personal appearance as a factor in her life problem and ultimate success.”.

<sup>1091</sup> Hackley, 72-73. “A modest girl dresses modestly; a sensible person makes her clothes fit her person, her height, head, back view, side view, ankles and heels. A woman’s dress soon tells the character of the wearer and betrays immorality. Even colors talk”.

<sup>1092</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 85-86. Remaining clean was difficult because on trains – which were segregated –, all the dust and cinders from the steam boilers fell on the clothes of African American passengers, who were seated at the front of the train. Mamie indicated “Up in front we had to fight to keep ourselves clean”.



therefore avoid eccentric clothes. For instance, at the turn of the century, Fannie Martin, a Spelman graduate, wrote that women should dress simply and modestly. According to her: “Discretion must be used both as to fabric and style. Let the child be taught that dress does not make the man, that true worth is in the soul, and does not consist of the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or putting on of apparel”. These women argued that women should teach their own daughters to dress modestly and avoid wearing improper dress: “The mothers of today are making a grave mistake in the manners in which they dress their children, especially the girls. They are allowing them to adopt a woman’s apparel too soon; in other words, the misses are dressed too gaudily and often immodestly”<sup>1093</sup>.

Likewise, the narrative of Mamie Garvin Fields reveals that she was indeed concerned about proper dress as well in this period. In Charleston, the way a woman dressed was of paramount importance because it informed people about a person’s social background. Mamie was repeatedly taught by her aunt Lala – who served as her role model – and her Aunt Harriet: “‘Dress. You never know’. It’s that way with quite a few of a woman’s habits. Sometimes the way you are dressed tells people, ‘Hold it a minute. Stand back.’ Sometimes it’s just the opposite: the way you look gives people liberty [...] I never would go out anywhere in my apron. That’s how I was reared too. When we would go out in Charleston, we dressed, no difference if it was around the corner to a neighbor or across town to church”<sup>1094</sup>.

Similarly, Ida Wells-Barnett esteemed that proper clothing was essential for women because it informed people of a person’s social affiliation. In the 1900s and 1910s, Wells was concerned by the fact that many women of color of the working-class wore boudoir caps in Chicago because she believed that wearing them did not make “good appearance” on the streets and that it conveyed a negative image of the community. In 1928-1929, in her autobiography, she rejoiced in the fact that African American women had finally ceased to wear them<sup>1095</sup>.

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<sup>1093</sup> Fannie S. W. Martin, “Home Training for Purity”, *Spelman Messenger*, ca. 1902.

<sup>1094</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 167 and 165. Mamie Garvin recounted this while telling an anecdote about having a car accident in her houseshoes. She argued that you could not earn respect if you were in your apron or houseshoes. Her aunt’s advice was to always dress nicely because one never knows what might happen. She said: “‘Keep those [sleepers or aprons] in the house’ was the point. And I followed Aunt Harriet’s rule strictly in Charlotte”, *Lemon Swamp*, 166.

<sup>1095</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 409. “Our employment office had quite a reputation for fair dealing with the people, and it was not long before no one refused assignment to a colored woman’s home. Not only this, but we got them to the place where they no longer came to the office with boudoir caps on by tactfully commenting on the necessity for making good appearance on the streets. I like to remember that in all that 10 years, only two women ever seemed to resent our suggestions. [...] Recently a woman made the statement at a public meeting that Mrs. Barnett was the cause of the working women ceasing to wear boudoir caps on the street”. Wells worked at the Negro Fellowship Reading Room and Social Center for ten years in Chicago.

Some conservative articles dealing with dress were sometimes re-published in University newspapers such as *Spelman Messenger*. For example, criticizing the fashion of the spring of 1917, one Atlanta author deterred readers from wearing short dresses: “Decent, sensible men will not be attracted; nor will decent, sensible women lift their dresses to such a height as to expose their legs while sitting or walking”. The length of the dress was of particular attention. The author feared seeing many girls lose their modesty and virtue if they wore short dresses. This style was, according to him, “an invitation to a large class of men who roams about and sit around, seeking whom they may devour”. He did not mean that women had to wear trains, but he insisted that they had to have long dresses since “exposing” one’s feet was not acceptable. Moreover, according to this author, the responsibility of girls’ respectability fell to mothers. It seems that mothers – not fathers – were in charge of their daughters’ behavior and had to supervise them – seemingly implying that fathers were exempted from this task. “The sensible mother” should not permit her daughter to wear dresses “above [...] shoes tops now” and “these old women who are wearing their dresses at any length, from shoe top to half way the calf of the leg should be arrested and charged five dollars for each offense”. The same was true for sleeves or transparent dresses. The author asked: “In the name of decency, what next?”<sup>1096</sup>.

Authors also particularly insisted upon the way women were to be dressed at Church. Emma Hackley argued that women should be particularly careful about the way they dressed at Church for the Sunday service, advising women to avoid certain colors such as pink or blue and to refrain from wearing “inappropriate fancy décolletés”<sup>1097</sup>. She said for instance: “Teach [girls] that church service is not meant for dress parade”. As regards dress, women should always be thrifty and measured<sup>1098</sup> in order to redeem the image of African American womanhood.

Furthermore, these writers encouraged women to dress humbly and simply, in order not to spend too much on clothes – which often seemed to be deemed as futility and

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<sup>1096</sup> “Do not Let your Daughters Wear Them”, *The Worker*, reprinted in the *Spelman Messenger*, May 1917. It was impossible to discover whether this article was written by a man or a woman. It was probably written by a man. Nevertheless, the fact that it was reprinted in the *Spelman Messenger* is interesting.

<sup>1097</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl*, 123 and 74-75. “The same religion or Spirituality which makes one shout, pray and sing should prompt a girl not to wear a pale pink or blue satin dress or other inappropriate fancy décollete dress to worship in God’s House. She cannot worship God and mammon at the same time and she should not be the means of distracting anyone from spiritual thoughts through envy or disgust.”, 123. “Appropriate clothes should be worn at all times. Pink or blue satin or silk dresses should not be worn on Sunday or at church, even if one can afford them [...] It is bad taste and sets a bad example to poorer girls who sometimes sell their honor, even their lives for these perishable, inappropriate costumes”, 74-75.

<sup>1098</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl*, 73-74. “Such clothes wear several seasons. No one minds wearing a becoming style a long time. Few colored women can afford to keep up the pace of styles. There are women who live to dress no matter what the cost may be but they are not to be envied for this slavish passion” 73-74.

inappropriate by conservative women. Spelman student Willie L. Mason wrote a piece entitled “Our Dress” in which she detailed the importance of dress-making and thrift. She explained that dressing simply and frugally was a sure way to contribute to the uplift of the community:

Our race doesn’t need over-educated, over-dressed men and women, who serve only as lights to show the utter darkness of ignorance and poverty that surrounds the lower classes. No. What we need is a force in our midst to enlighten and uplift the whole. Dress may play a greater part here than many imagine. Suppose our women should adopt simple, sensible dress. What a financial increase it would mean for the Negro. All that now go for extravagant dress might be turned into bank accounts or property. Such dress would make not only successful men and women, but a successful race<sup>1099</sup>.

In her article published in 1904 “The Smaller Economies” published in *The Voice of the Negro*, Fannie Williams provided her readers with advice regarding home management<sup>1100</sup>, urging women to be thrifty and efficient homemakers. The perfect wife should be a perfect manager who controlled the expenses of the household: “The art of living well without spending all our income is one of the most important problems in our everyday life”<sup>1101</sup>. As Hackley would argue years later, she insisted that thrift was the paramount virtue for women and the community: “In her home there can be no such thing as economy and a rainy day bank account. ‘She doesn’t know how to save’ is the worst indictment that can be brought against a self-respecting wife and mother. In any other calling in life she would not be tolerated a moment. The saving wife is a compliment that usually implies all the other virtues. Such a woman will be found exercising a discriminating knowledge of everything that enters into the domain of homemaker.”<sup>1102</sup>

Moreover, the ideal wife was expected to refrain from spending too much in fashionable outfits, for it hurt the family finances but also the image of the community. One great “danger” was fashion indeed. She encouraged middle-class women to refrain from buying expensive clothes and hats, and warned them from falling under the tyranny of the dressmaker, the millinery, the merchant and the grocer”<sup>1103</sup>, regretting that “the great majority of women were wholly” under their influence. The ideal wife should “not be a slave to her dressmaker, her milliner, or her grocer. She has learned the value of the thousand and one

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<sup>1099</sup> Willie L. Mason, Acad. ’04., “Our Dress”, *Spelman Messenger*, November 1904, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1-2. Hackley stated similar views. She wrote in *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 138: “Dressmaking is a science as well as an art and enough can be learned, by those not apt, to save many dollars — especially in the home that fate favors with children”. This may have been a response to the criticism made since emancipation about black women’s extravagant dress – especially at Church.

<sup>1100</sup> She used the press to advise women, who often lacked what she deemed proper recommendations on the matter: “The lessons that are needed to equip the ordinary woman for the high service of homemaking are scarcely ever suggested or taught in the public schools, the Sunday schools, the churches or the home.”

<sup>1101</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Smaller Economies”, *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 5 (1904): 184-185, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 90-91, 90.

<sup>1102</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>1103</sup> Ibid, 90.

things that cost either money, time, or thought. Such a woman, with a worthy husband, will soon be cashier, banker and conservator of all the precious interest that belong to the heart and head of the home”<sup>1104</sup>.

Warning women about their inner vanity – she interestingly included herself, using the pronoun “we” – saying: “We go to [the modiste or the milliner] with all our vanities, our social ambitions and our envies, but seldom with any independent judgment or individuality of taste as to our pocket book limitations or to what becomes us”<sup>1105</sup>. With this advice, Williams warned women about the scorn they might receive and urged women to adopt measured attitudes. The ideal woman should be sure of her own taste and not let herself be influenced by businessmen who only have their profit in mind: “The woman who cannot give any intelligent direction or suggestion to her dressmaker and milliner, except the generally impossible one, to make her ‘look pretty’, is almost sure to be imposed upon and perhaps ridiculed.”. Speaking as the member of the elite, she encouraged women to first acquire “good taste”: it should be learned, since it “cannot be bought”<sup>1106</sup>. Lastly, Williams advised women not to fall in the traps of jealousy and envy: “Such a woman does not live by imitating others, nor does she waste her time in envying the prosperity of her neighbors. She knows how and when and what to buy, how to use and how to save.”<sup>1107</sup>.

Such recommendations would have appeared as remote from reality for women of humble background. To middle-class fashion-lovers who read the paper, this advice may have appeared as difficult to follow or as shallow, yet the goal was not only to encourage women to manage their budgets. It did serve a wider purpose: changing the image of the black woman who was said to like fashion too much<sup>1108</sup>.

Similarly, years later, Emma Hackley encouraged women to be thrifty and buy with cash rather than on credit. Thrift was viewed as a paramount quality, both for a woman’s reputation but also for the advancement of the race: “The Colored Working Girl Beautiful

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<sup>1104</sup> Ibid, 91. Similar ideas were expressed by women in the black press. In 1909, Mrs B.E. Bradford, a conservative author, opposed two types of women: a superficial one, and a plain and simple one. She opposed the woman dressed “in gaudily decorated silks, adorned in coarse, vulgar ornaments, living futile lives, seeking pleasure rather than happiness” to “plain woman dressed in simple, becoming gowns, her eyes beaming with love and tenderness, her thoughts pure and noble, her heart full of pity for those in distress”. Bradford, Mrs B.E. “Woman”, *The Colored American Magazine* (August 1909): 103-104 in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 155-156.

<sup>1105</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Smaller Economies”, 90.

<sup>1106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1107</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>1108</sup> In another article written in 1904, Fannie Barrier Williams criticized some black women who had “extravagant notions of dress and style”, providing the example of a young man living in Chicago, who was “not married because he [could] not afford a wife, that is, a wife with the extravagant notions of dress and style that many of our colored girls ha[d]”, 110, and thus went to the saloon.

[...] should save her money. A bank account is always the most respected thing in the struggle of life”<sup>1109</sup>. For instance, one should not waste money on “fancy shoes” but should own only two pairs of shoes: black ones for the winter and white shoes for the summer. In her mind, this was the key to success and respectability in life<sup>1110</sup>.

Many women were probably importantly influenced by such publications. Interestingly, some intellectual women such as Maritcha Remond Lyons – who had been raised in the 1860s and 1870s – also felt an inner tension about fashion. Black female intellectuals like her sometimes had misgivings about displaying a feminine outfit if they were to give a speech and therefore endorse a public image. For instance, when Lyons was to speak in public in the early twentieth century, how she would dress was generally “the last thing” she thought about. But when she followed the advice of one of her nieces who had “ingenuously suggested that I give more than the usual attention to her “personal appearance” this time, buying ‘à la mode apparel’”<sup>1111</sup> in 1901, she was astounded and somewhat hurt to hear a negative comment from the very niece who had advised her to be more feminine and promised never to dress fashionably again for a lecture<sup>1112</sup>. It seems that assuming a feminine appearance and being an intellectual or public speaker could prove problematic for some women.

Women were faced with many injunctions in their families or at school and university growing up in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. They were repeatedly told to be feminine and womanly<sup>1113</sup> while being active workers, wives and mothers. This could appear as a challenge for many women. Some articles published in university newspapers exemplify society’s expectations about women at the turn of the century. For example, M.H. Lickliter detailed the qualities women should possess in an article entitled “The Womanly Woman”. Desirable

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<sup>1109</sup> This is reminiscent of what Margaret Washington advocated at Tuskegee: hard-work and thrift would enable the community to buy property.

<sup>1110</sup> Hackley, 156-157. “She will be taught that fine clothes can not cover up bad manners, nor take the place of good character; that it is foolish to buy what one can not afford; that the expenditure for clothes especially should be gauged by one’s salary and should be appropriate for her particular plane of life [...] The colored girl beautiful will be taught the value and use of money, and the relative value of character, education, and other things, which money cannot buy. She will be taught the care and cleanliness of the body, simplicity of wearing apparel and appropriate becoming inconspicuous costumes for church, school, street and home”, 136-137. See also pages 143 and 146.

<sup>1111</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, “During the meeting I was far more self-conscious of my à la mode apparel than of the importance of what proved to be my most successful [...] effort”, 34, chapter 4.

<sup>1112</sup> Ibid., 34. “Well, how do I look?” I queried. Her face fell, her lips parted, and with a half indignant gesture she replied: ‘If I could speak like you can aunty, do you imagine I would give a minute’s thought as to how I looked? [...] I pensively smiled; the remembrance of the money I had reluctantly expended at her insistence sealed my lips; but I then registered a vow ‘never to do it again’”.

<sup>1113</sup> Womanly is defined in the Oxford University Press as: “Relating to or having the characteristics of a woman or women”. Here it was understood as “feminine”.



qualities could at times appear as contradictory. For example, the author insisted on the necessity of possessing a combination of Victorian qualities and qualities often attributed to modern women – the dual womanhood which Carlson has theorized. The “womanly woman” was to be “strong and gentle, tender and firm, patient and just”, “intellectually honest, [refusing] to be mastered by her prejudice [...] positive in the expression of her own opinion, yet tolerant of the views of others”, but should also embrace her domestic and motherly duties, “regard wifedom and motherhood as the supreme purpose and function of her being”. Yet, if she could not marry and have children, she should seek a vocation of service. She should be an altruist and an idealist, be feminine, pious and independent. According to the author, she should be:

The embodiment of good taste in dress and manner. Dignified and independent, she is at the same time, gracious and responsive. Never appealing to the chivalrous in man, she challenges that chivalry to assert itself in his presence. Her modesty is based not upon prudery or ignorance, but upon the largest and completest knowledge of life. Passionately religious, she finds the ultimate expression of faith in self-forgetful and self-sacrificing love<sup>1114</sup>.

A student from Spelman College named Eula R. Nelson also voiced recommendations in her piece “Be a Woman!”. She contended that being a woman did not mean being unfeminine – refusing to wear dresses, wearing her hair on top, receiving callers or responding to every invitation of social amusements, the way the Gibson girl did – but “to be a woman one should be self-possessed, have self-control, have poise, and be able to face the many temptations of the world, and conquer them by having developed self-control and self-possession”<sup>1115</sup>. In the 1910s, the world wanted unrelenting women conquerors: “Women of noble character, who are trustworthy, who respect themselves, and who are not ready to give way to the first obstacle which might confront them. The world wants women with enthusiasm and energy, ready to push forward and grasp each thing that life gives to make it successful”<sup>1116</sup>. The piece also insisted on women having to lead useful lives devoted to others<sup>1117</sup>.

In her etiquette book, Emma Hackley stressed that a woman should exert constant self-control over her mind and body at all times, during courtship, when she was with female friends or men, or at work, because self-control was the key for women to maintain

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<sup>1114</sup> “The Womanly Woman”, by M.H. Lickliter, *Spelman Messenger*, 7. 1911.

<sup>1115</sup> This is reminiscent of Hackley’s recommendations. Such articles seem to suggest that some black women were rejecting models of the Gibson girl and were trying to reclaim Victorian ideals.

<sup>1116</sup> “Be a Woman!”, *Spelman Messenger*, ca. 1920.

<sup>1117</sup> “We should use the knowledge we have and exert such an influence over those who are less fortunate than we are so that the whole world will be benefited by our lives”. *Spelman Messenger*, ca. 1920.



respectability<sup>1118</sup>. Moreover, women should always be polite, quiet and above all, discreet<sup>1119</sup>, good-tempered, avoid vulgarity or get upset – in public or in private<sup>1120</sup> — in order to prove that the bad reputation of black women suffered from was ill-founded<sup>1121</sup>. She insisted that the ideal beautiful woman should always be charming when making encounters<sup>1122</sup>, master small talk, be tolerant, open-minded and accept friends as they are<sup>1123</sup>. On the other hand, Hackley encouraged women to always be careful in their relationships and never trust a person blindly<sup>1124</sup>. Besides, women should always refrain from gossiping or being judgmental – especially with other women<sup>1125</sup>. In her life writing, Mamie Fields emphasized the necessity of being discreet and of following the rules taught her as a child<sup>1126</sup>. Refraining from gossiping proved that she had education: “You just listen, keep quiet yourself. Don’t express any opinion. Don’t have any opinion. From a child I was taught ‘not to talk when you ought to be listening’”<sup>1127</sup>.

Hackley encouraged generosity, charity and altruism among her students and readers, saying that these qualities served the community: “There is an indescribable joy and satisfaction in serving others [...] It gives one a sense of power and wealth” and “By helping others we help ourselves. We must learn to give, give, give, in order to receive” because

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<sup>1118</sup> Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 48-49. “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 [...] There is health as well as beauty in self control. Culture is self control. The Colored Girl Beautiful should cultivate reposefulness. A display of emotion or restlessness indicates lost control.”. See also pages 103-104 and 106.

<sup>1119</sup> Hackley, 45. “She must be careful of what she says to others, and of what she writes in letters, for writing a thought intensifies its influence”. See also 154-155 and 157.

<sup>1120</sup> Hackley, 49. “A real lady never gets visibly angry. Anger drives away friends who really help to make us beautiful by giving us pleasant sensations”.

<sup>1121</sup> Hackley, 47. “The colored girl beautiful will be taught to keep her eyes open and her mouth shut that she may never betray how little she has really learned in her preparation for the real school — the school of Life.”, 134. “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 or his opinions [...] Talkativeness is another ‘Spot,’ and a sign of lost control. In public places, especially, it is a sign of ill breeding and bad taste. Good breeding should always keep a woman from loud talk. We must remove the stigma of loudness and coarseness that now rests upon the race. The less a person knows, the bigger noise she generally makes”.

<sup>1122</sup> See pages 36, 47, 135 and 50.

<sup>1123</sup> Hackley, 161-162. “One cannot argue, quarrel, or criticize and still expect real friendship. One definition of a friend is, ‘One you know all about and still like.’”

<sup>1124</sup> Hackley, 161. “Good begets good, so she will exert herself to make a wide circle of friends although she will be careful not to grow too intimate with any. She may be a real friend without undue intimacy. It is conceded that most women ‘must talk’ to someone but too much intimacy means too much freedom and this often destroys friendship”.

<sup>1125</sup> Hackley, 165. “A woman must not judge by her own standard for herself. Women are inclined to be too narrow in their viewpoint in judging other women. While one may boast of her virtues some women may have a bundle of lesser virtues of which to boast. It takes more than one virtue to make a good woman. Many women are unduly vain of their escape from the “sin of sins” and some of these may have known no temptation.”.

<sup>1126</sup> Since women of color were often easily slandered in society, it was important to be discreet and to avoid attracting attention.

<sup>1127</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 165.

“whatever is projected returns sooner or later.”<sup>1128</sup>. To sum up, women should try to be perfect embodiment of morality and respectability: display love, purity and goodness of heart<sup>1129</sup>.

As Camile Hadley Jones has argued, even if Hackley prized all the qualities described above, she devoted many pages to providing girls with advice about propriety, morality and respectability.

Though Hackley addresses the spiritual side of black women and their role in the uplift of the race, it is most telling that much of her advice focuses on refuting the notion of black women as harlots and jezebels (an image forced on them to excuse the indignities they faced from white men), and how to navigate being an educated, upwardly mobile young woman in a time where her intelligence and breeding was not appreciated<sup>1130</sup>.

Most of the advice dispensed indeed aimed at defending the image of African American girls and women. Morality, self-restraint, purity and respectability lay at the core of Hackley’s conservative discourse.

In etiquette books, women were warned, for example, that courtship was a perilous period for women. Hackley often depicted men as dangerous beings and presented women’s bodies as fortresses which should always be preserved before marriage<sup>1131</sup>. The former Tuskegee lecturer thought that women should always be careful to protect their “good name” and Hackley praised qualities such as passivity, patience, self-restraint and submissiveness in women, encouraging her female readership to “patiently wait for her ‘prince’” charming “and aim to give him unknissed lips, and virginity of mind as well as of body. It will be a tremendous satisfaction in fulfilling the definition of Love and Motherhood, besides giving the real beauty”<sup>1132</sup>. She encouraged women to resist any temptation before marriage. The

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<sup>1128</sup> Hackley, 90 and 56-57.

<sup>1129</sup> Hackley, 165. “It is a terrible thing to be a bad example along any line to young girls, so every colored woman should try to conquer herself and live down any weakness or error. She should give out the best that is in her that she may be a good example to younger women. She lets the light of love and purity shine in her face and transform it, and it will reflect in the faces of others and make her own soul the happier”.

<sup>1130</sup> Article dated February 16, 2010, by Camille Hadley Jones. <http://www.edwardianpromenade.com/etiquette/african-american-etiquette/>.

<sup>1131</sup> Hackley spoke about woman’s “vital strength”, or “vital forces” which risked being “wasted” – it seems to be a reference to their reputation and, at times, to their virginity.

<sup>1132</sup> Hackley, 66. Hackley encouraged women to prize their virginity. She warned her readers to adopt proper attitudes with their suitors and exert constant control: “Girls should not permit young men to caress them, to hold their hands, or to stroke their bodies. It is very weakening. It causes a girl to yield to temptation because it induces passiveness to the will of the projector”. Hackley, 63. “If a young man after a few calls thinks that he is entitled to a goodnight kiss he should be speedily set right”. Hackley, 65. She encouraged her women readers to refuse suitors’ kisses if the pair had been out together a few times. Hackley also encouraged girls not to write love letters “in too warm a strain” in case they might regret it one day – letters being evidence of a woman’s morality. She concluded that it was better to avoid putting anything on paper: “One may not even afford to write love letters in too warm a strain. One will not only be ashamed in after years when this particular fever has worn

conservative Hackley adopted an alarmist tone to speak about falling in love or trusting a man too rapidly, indicating that she might soon regret this “folly”<sup>1133</sup>. Speaking of “downfall”, “unpardonable crime”, “allurements”, “temptations”, “ruin” or “salvation”, she delivered a conservative message which was also imbued with religious undertones<sup>1134</sup>. According to her, any infringement of this rule would cause girls to being cursed and lost<sup>1135</sup>. Sex was obviously viewed as a temptation and a risk for women’s reputation<sup>1136</sup>. Hackley recommended breathing as the key to resisting temptation<sup>1137</sup>. According to Hackley, once the match had eventually been decided, the couple should not wait too long before exchanging their vows because long engagements generally “take away the charm and bloom of married life because the man learns to know his fiancée too well.”<sup>1138</sup>.

Therefore, at the turn of the century, there was a continuing emphasis on proper behavior and attitudes in women. In lectures given in certain southern insitutions, in colleges and universities, in their local communities, many women insisted on the necessity of observing strict propriety.

## 2. Denying Charges of Immorality: Proving One’s Morality and Respectability

Women of African descent also focused their rhetoric on morality and respectability. They first devoted their efforts to denying the charges of immorality by explaining that African American women suffered from such images because of slavery.

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itself out, but one will then be conscious of wasted vital strength”, 68. “She must be careful of what she says to others, and of what she writes in letters, for writing a thought intensifies its influence”, 45.

<sup>1133</sup> Hackley, 62-63. Girls should be very cautious with boys because any *faux pas* could endanger their reputation: “There is no present which a boy or man could give to a girl which is worth the tiniest atom of this precious invisible life current. In after life she realizes her folly, but it is then too late to remedy it”. According to her, because they were naturally inclined to believe in love, they fell prey to risk.

<sup>1134</sup> Hackley, 109-110.

<sup>1135</sup> Hackley, 67. “She must psychologize the mind with thoughts of resistance by practicing simple breathing movements, so that when temptation is imminent the holding of a deep breath will be her salvation. The action of her diaphragm and Solar Plexus will prevent any wavering”.

<sup>1136</sup> Hackley, 65-66. “She must resist the temptation to scatter her vital forces, so that when she marries she may hold all of her powers for the man she desires to hold”.

<sup>1137</sup> Hackley encouraged girls to refuse any sexual intercourse before marriage or any extramarital sex. See pages 64-67.

<sup>1138</sup> Hackley, 114. Not all women agreed with such conservative views though. In 1894, in *The Work of the Afro American Woman*, Gertrude Mossell (1855-1948), a famous African American teacher, activist and clubwoman from Pennsylvania, had expressed a more liberal message. Married to a Philadelphia physician Nathaniel F. Mossell, she gave birth to two children before resuming her career as a journalist in the early 1890s, working for *The New York Age* and the Indianapolis’s *World*. She called courtship “an era of deception”, and believed that it “lended itself readily to deception”. See page 116. *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, Second edition, (Geo. S. Ferguson Company, 1908). See “The Opposite Point of View”: 115-125.

## Responding to Attacks: The Stigma of Slavery

Black female intellectuals focused their attention on demonstrating that slavery was the main cause of the stigma put on black women in America and that they were not responsible for their subjugation. Wells and Williams in particular made it clear in their writings that slavery was responsible for the current situation. The cause of their economic difficulties as members of an oppressed minority, but also as women, slavery left them a terrible dowry, according to Ida B. Wells in her article entitled “Our Women”, published on 1 January 1887 in the *New York Freeman*. Ida B. Wells contended:

Unmindful of the fact that our enslavement with all the evils attendant there are was involuntary and that enforced poverty, ignorance and immorality was our only dower at its close, there are writers who have nothing to give the word in their disquisition on the Negroes, save a rehearsal of their worthlessness, immorality<sup>1139</sup>.

In 1904, Fannie B. Williams shared the same opinion:

I think it but just to say that we must look to American slavery as the source of every imperfection that mars the character of the colored American. It ought not to be necessary to remind a southern woman that less than 50 years ago the ill-starred mothers of this ransomed race were not allowed to be modest, not allowed to follow the instincts of moral rectitude, and there was no living man to whom they could cry for protection against the men who not only owned them, body and soul, but also the souls of their husbands, their brothers, and alas, their sons<sup>1140</sup>.

Furthermore, Fannie Williams argued in 1902 that women had suffered more in bondage than black men because of their sex: “Slavery in America was debasing, but the debasement of the Negro woman was deeper than that of the Negro man. Slavery made her the only woman in all America for whom virtue was not an ornament and a necessity”. Intellectuals publicly denounced the fact that because of their color and gender, black women were denied virtue, – being the victims of lustful white men – and were placed outside of the realm of true womanhood. Williams spoke of this exclusion as a “terrible inheritance [...] for the women of a race declared to be emancipated and equal sharers in the glories and responsibilities of the Republic!”<sup>1141</sup>.

Interestingly, Cooper and Williams did not see eye to eye on the question of black womanhood during slavery. At the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Williams spoke of former slaves – who had suffered from sexual abuse under slavery – who had created a “moral regeneration” and had “so elevated the moral tone of their social life that *new ideals of*

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<sup>1139</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 185.

<sup>1140</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 96. She later explained that this was still not the case in the South for many women: in 1909, her concern had become even stronger. The girls she helped “were the poor, weak, misguided daughters of ill-starred mothers and of dissolute and indifferent fathers”. See Wanda Hendricks’ biography of *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 152.

<sup>1141</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *Progress of A Race: The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro*, ed. J.W. Gibson and W.H. Grogman, first published 1902 (Naperville, Ill.: Nichols, 1912): 197-281, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 28-46, 28.

womanhood, instinct with grace and delicacy, are everywhere recognized and emulated.”<sup>1142</sup>. On this point, Anna Cooper disagreed and claimed that former slave women did not create new ideals of womanhood, but “maintained ideals of womanhood”<sup>1143</sup>.

### Just as Moral as White Women

While the white press and public opinion of the time attempted to depict women of color as immoral beings, black female intellectuals tried to show that the African American community was not less moral or less able than their white counterparts or than any other racial groups in America. For example, in 1890 Anna Cooper wrote:

The black man is not a saint, neither can he be reduced to an algebraic formula. His thirty or forty checkered years of freedom have not transfigured *en masse* 10 million slaves into experienced, thrifty, provident, law abiding members of society. There are some criminal, some shiftless, some provokingly intractable and seemingly uneducable classes and individuals among blacks.

Cooper insisted that the white community also had its share of immoral beings<sup>1144</sup>. In 1893, two years before the scandal of John Jacks’s slanderous letter and the formation of the national movement of women’s clubs, to a “diseased public opinion”<sup>1145</sup>, Williams voiced the “sense of outrage” felt by black women when faced with the criticism of the day and the “feverish anxiety to be free from the mean suspicions that have so long underestimated the character strength of [their] women”<sup>1146</sup>. Women of color in America should not be judged in the 1890s “by the standards of slavery, but by higher standards of freedom and of twenty-five years of education, culture and moral contact”<sup>1147</sup>.

Moreover, some intellectuals emphasized the normality of black women in the realm of womanhood. For instance, Anna Cooper said in 1893 “The majority of our women are not

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<sup>1142</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation”, in *The World’s Congress of Representative Women*, ed. May Wright Sewall. (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1894). 2 : 696-711, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 17-27, 22. Women wished to be free from “mean suspicions that have so long underestimated the character strength of our women”. Italics mine.

<sup>1143</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation”, 1893, in *A Voice from the South*, 202. Italics mine. “While considered as chattel, [the black woman] maintained ideals of womanhood unashamed by any ever conceived”, even if not all black women were heroines”. Here, what is noticeable is the highly personal dimension of this question. Where Williams seems to approach the subject as a pre-war free woman of color living in the North, and discussed the accusations of immorality against black women of the South, whom she lived with only for ten years in the 1870s-1880s, Cooper must have approached the matter more personally, because she was a Southerner whose own mother had been a slave forced in sexual intercourse with her master. This is precisely Fannie Williams’s emotional and intellectual distance to these questions which Cooper pointed out in her Response to Williams.

<sup>1144</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, 206-215, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 212. “As they are still unless I am misinformed, also among whites”. See the work of Colette Guillaumin on the question of representing minorities.

<sup>1145</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, 22.

<sup>1146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1147</sup> Ibid.



heroines – but I do not know that a majority of any race of women are heroines”<sup>1148</sup>. The same year, in “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation” (1893), Fannie Williams underscored: “The moral aptitudes of our women are just as strong and just as weak as those of any other American women with like advantages of intelligence and environment”<sup>1149</sup>. Another time, conceding that some black women did not always display appropriate behavior, she insisted that all other races on the planet had their share of “trifling girls”. On the contrary, instead of proving all black women’s lack of morality, this fact proved African American women’s profound humanity: “It is true that we have our trifling girls, and in this respect we are thoroughly human”<sup>1150</sup>. She explained that African American women were not better or worse than their white counterparts. In 1904, she reiterated this view: “I believe that the colored women are just as strong and just as weak as any other women with like education, training and environment”<sup>1151</sup>.

Like Williams, Mary Terrell argued in 1898 that women of African descent were not more immoral than white American women. On the contrary, they argued that they compared favorably to white women who had always benefited from protection and benevolence on the part of men. “In spite of environments which are so destructive of virtue, and “though the safeguards usually thrown around maidenly youth and innocence are, in at least one section of this country, withheld from colored girls”, statistics show that “immorality among colored women is not so great as among women” in countries such as Austria, Italy, Germany, Sweden and France<sup>1152</sup>.

She hammered home this idea at the International Conference held in Berlin, Germany on 13 June 1904:

Although conditions prevailing in that part of my country in which the Afro-American was formerly held as a slave are not always conducive to the moral elevation of Colored women, although safeguards usually thrown around maidenly youth and innocence are frequently withheld from Colored girls who are protected in this section neither by public sentiment nor by law, according to statistics compiled by men who would certainly not falsify in favor of my race, immorality among the Colored women of the

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<sup>1148</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress”, 202.

<sup>1149</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, 22. In her autobiography, she voiced the same opinion in quite a similar fashion: “But in spite of this dark and painful past, I believe that the sweeping assertions of this writer are grossly untrue and unjust at least to thousands of colored women in the North who were free from the debasing influence of slavery, as well as thousands of women in the South, who instinctively fought to preserve their own honor and that of their unfortunate offspring. I believe that the colored women are just as strong and just as weak as any other women with like education, training and environment.” Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Woman of Color*, 12.

<sup>1150</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, *The New Woman of Color*, 65.

<sup>1151</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 96.

<sup>1152</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women”, 1898, 11.



United States is not so great as among women with similar environment and temptations in certain foreign lands.<sup>1153</sup>

She reiterated this view in “A Plea to the White South By a Coloured Woman” (1906) in which she publicly presented herself as a woman of color:

Statistics [...] compiled by white men themselves, show that in spite of the fateful heritage of slavery, in spite of the numerous pitfalls laid to entrap coloured girls, and though the safeguards usually thrown around maidenly youth and innocence are, in at least one section of this country, withheld from coloured girls, immorality among coloured women in the United States is not so great as among women similarly situated in at least five foreign lands<sup>1154</sup>.

Fannie Williams insisted that despite their initial handicaps – as victims of prejudice –, black women nevertheless possessed the necessary feminine qualities desired in women. Williams insisted:

It must not be understood that during all of this period of the colored man's political ascendancy and the colored woman's social obscurity that she was altogether unprogressive. In spite of some of the unspeakable demoralization of slavery, the womanhood of the race was marked by many of the virtues, mental and social, that are characteristic of the women of all races who are capable of a high state of development<sup>1155</sup>.

According to Williams, because they had been subjected to greater prejudice in the United States than any other group of women, women of color in fact deserved greater praise for what they had accomplished in adversity: “From my own study of the question, the colored woman deserves greater credit for what she has done and is doing than blame for what she cannot so soon overcome”<sup>1156</sup>.

## Women as Moral Leaders

Moreover, African American clubwomen had in fact insisted on woman's morality in their writings for decades. In *Too Heavy a Load*, Deborah Gray White has explained that women of the woman's era emphasized “The superiority of women in matters concerning the moral welfare of black people and the equality of black men and women in everything else”<sup>1157</sup>. Black intellectuals such as Maria Stewart and Anna Cooper claimed that women were naturally moral beings. As Kristin Waters has explained, Maria Stewart had promoted

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<sup>1153</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Why We Need the Equal Rights Amendment”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 111.

<sup>1154</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “A Plea to the White Woman of the South”, *Nineteenth Century* (July 1906): 70-86, in *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 146-147.

<sup>1155</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 29.

<sup>1156</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro's Autobiography”, 96.

<sup>1157</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 39.

the idea that women had “a special role in promoting morality”<sup>1158</sup>. In the late nineteenth century, Anna Cooper reasserted the ideas of Maria Stewart, insisting on the fact that women were naturally inclined to do good and spread love around them<sup>1159</sup> and that “In a reign of moral ideas [woman] is easily Queen”<sup>1160</sup>. Moreover, she thought that women’s moral forces were especially needed in this society affected by materialism and capitalism in the early 1890s. In “The Status of Woman in America” published in 1892, Cooper thought that the United States should use women’s moral force.

Today America counts her millionaires by the thousand; questions of tariff and questions of currency are the most vital ones agitating the public mind. In this period, when material prosperity and well earned ease and luxury are assured facts from a national standpoint, woman’s work and woman’s influence are needed as never before; needed to bring a heart power into this money getting, dollar-worshipping civilization; needed to bring a moral force into the utilitarian motives and interests of the time; needed to stand for God and Home and Native Land *versus gain and greed and grasping selfishness*”<sup>1161</sup>.

During the Progressive Era, black intellectuals argued that because of their superior morality, women had a crucial role to play as mothers of future citizens. For example, as early as 1886, Anna Cooper emphasized the fact that women of color had the power to shape and mold the character of the future generations:

This is not because woman is better or stronger or wiser than man, but from the nature of the case, because it is she who must first form the man by directing the earliest impulses of his character. [...] Woman, Mother, — your responsibility is one that might make angels tremble and fear to take hold! To trifle with it, to ignore or misuse it, is to treat lightly the most sacred and solemn trust ever confided by God to human kind. The training of children is a task on which an infinity of weal or woe depends. Now after our appeal to history comparing nations destitute of this force and so destitute also of the principle of progress, with other nations among whom the influence of woman is prominent coupled with a brisk, progressive, satisfying civilization [...] We may conclude that these two equally varying concomitants are linked as cause and effect; in other words, that the position of woman in society determines the vital elements of its regeneration and progress”<sup>1162</sup>.

According to Cooper, women held the future of the community in their hands and therefore possessed the power to ameliorate the welfare of the black community and also of the nation. As Kristin Waters indicates, the image of the “‘custodian of the house of resistance’, a central insight tied to Stewart’s and Cooper’s notion of women as moral leaders” gained ground during the Progressive era. As Kristin Waters has pointed out: “The

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<sup>1158</sup> *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds*, 372.

<sup>1159</sup> For Cooper, the illustration of this is the noble work accomplished by the “noble army of women” who worked as nurses during the war and cared for the sick north and south of the Mason Dixon line. See “Status of Woman in America”, 1892, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 110.

<sup>1160</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Status of Woman in America”, 1892, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 112. Anna Cooper thought that the WCTU was an example of women’s morality: “There is to my mind no grander and surer prophecy of the new era and of woman’s place in it, than the work already begun in the waning years of the nineteenth century by the WCTU in America, an organization which has even now reached not only national but international importance, and seems destined to permeate and purify the whole civilized world”, 112.

<sup>1161</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Status of Woman in America”, 1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 111. Italics hers.

<sup>1162</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 59.

concept of women as moral leaders reached its zenith during the club women's movement in the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth centuries with the work of Josephine St Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, and the thousands of women who worked in and through the clubs"<sup>1163</sup>.

### **Calling for the Acknowledgement of their Femininity and Womanly Virtues**

In "The Higher Education of Women" of 1890-1891, Anna Cooper argued that African American women should finally be recognized for their womanly attributes:

A warm, rich flood of strong, brave, active, energetic, well-equipped, thoughtful women – women quick to see and eager to help the needs of this needy world – women who can think as well as feel, and who feel none the less because they think – women who are none the less tender and true for the parchment scroll they bear in the hands – women who have given a deeper, richer, nobler and grander meaning to the word 'womanly' than any one-sided masculine definition could ever have suggested or inspired – women whom the world has long waited for in pain and anguish till there should be at last added to its forces and allowed to permeate its thought the complement of that masculine influence which has dominated it for fourteen centuries"<sup>1164</sup>.

In Cooper's mind, women possessed qualities that men did not possess, despite their domination in the history of the world. She thought that women could bring a benevolent influence to the world, after years of barbarity and oppression of the Anglo-Saxon on other races, such as on Native Americans"<sup>1165</sup>. "I have ascribed to the thinking woman and to the contribution she is to add to the civilized world, or else the influence she wields upon our civilization may be potent without being necessarily and always direct and conscious"<sup>1166</sup>. She understood women's influence as a safeguard against men's violence"<sup>1167</sup>. To substantiate her theory, she gave the example of Oberlin girls who played a beneficial role in the preservation of peace on campus: "our girls are our police" and are brave "pure-minded young women". Cooper thought that womanhood was a controlling force against barbarity and violence.

Fannie Williams shared such views and in 1893 and praised black women's natural qualities as well. By attributing special qualities to black women, she singled them out of American womanhood. In her mind, these women who possessed "gentleness, good cheer and hopefulness", had "too warm and too large [hearts] for race hatred"<sup>1168</sup>. Like Cooper, Williams thought that black women had "a special sense of sympathy for all who suffer and fail of justice" which naturally pushed them to be active in "church, temperance and social

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<sup>1163</sup> Kristin Waters, "Core Themes of Black Feminism", *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions*, 376.

<sup>1164</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women", 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 73.

<sup>1165</sup> Cooper made clear references to the Manifest Destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race and the disappearance of the Native Americans. See pages 73 to 75.

<sup>1166</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women", 75.

<sup>1167</sup> She seemed to target Anglo-Saxon men here.

<sup>1168</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Intellectual Progress", 1893, in *The New Woman of Color*, 18- 21. She asserted that they did not bear a grudge against whites: "sullenness of disposition, hatefulness, and revenge against the master class [...] are not in the nature of our women".

reform” work<sup>1169</sup> and to defend the rights of “the sick, the indigent and the ill-fortuned” in their clubwork<sup>1170</sup>. Moreover, in the 1900s, Williams lamented because black woman’s femininity was still a subject of debate in America. In “The Colored Girl”, she said: “Has the colored girl the heart, spirit and subtle tenderness of womanhood? Such a question should be impertinent in an age where human life meant something too sacred to be loved or scorned, according to color”<sup>1171</sup>. She thought that the very existence of such a debate was not only irrelevant but also insulting to women of color at a time when “the colored girl” was “always doing something of merit and credit that is not expected of her [...] She is irrepressible”<sup>1172</sup>.

African American activists also denounced the fact that black women’s stigma of immorality originated in slavery and continued to exist because they kept suffering from sexual oppression – exerted by both white and black men. The black press relayed articles or testimonies which unveiled the sexual exploitation of southern domestic workers in order to show that black women’s purity was jeopardized because they were subjected to an immoral sexual domination imposed by white men – and sometimes by black men as well – in the South<sup>1173</sup>. By doing this, they asserted black women’s virtue. Women of the elite such as Fannie Barrier Williams denounced sexual abuse in the press by modestly speaking about the complaints of southern women who despaired to see their daughters work in the South in such monstrous circumstances. She used the space of her autobiography:

It is ‘shameful’ that I still receive [in 1904] letters from women in the south “the still unprotected colored women of the south, begging me to find employment for their daughters according to their ability, as domestics or otherwise, to save them from going into the homes of the south as servants, as there is nothing to save them from dishonor and degradation”<sup>1174</sup>.

Aware that these intolerable sexual abuses hurt the image of the community, African American women leaders continued to fight against such abuses by helping unprotected women in local associations whenever they could. In the article entitled “Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women’s History in Slavery and Freedom”, Hine has pointed out that black women leaders “believed that part of the overall struggle for true racial advancement depended upon the extent to which [women] obliterated all negative sexual

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<sup>1169</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, 1893, in *The New Woman of Color*, 21.

<sup>1170</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>1171</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, 64.

<sup>1172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1173</sup> On this question, see Darlene Clark Hine’s “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West”.

<sup>1174</sup> For example, Fannie Barrier Williams publicly revolted when receiving, as late as 1904, letters from mothers who worried about their daughters’ purity. Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 96 as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 12.

images of themselves”<sup>1175</sup>. This form of self-defense was to play an important role in these women’s sense of self-worth as it helped them restore their self-image.

A few working-class women decried the sexual exploitation they suffered from as late as the 1910s<sup>1176</sup>. This way, they made public the fact that in the early twentieth century, it was still very complex – not to say almost impossible – for many African American women of the South to maintain sexual purity, therefore showing that accusations of immorality were not only ill-founded, but also resulted from white men’s doings – and that white women often silently condoned these acts. As the testimony of one child- nurse shows, the economic and social situation for black domestics in the South was terrible. In “More Slavery at the South”, she denounced being the target of both black and white men as late as 1912:

On the one hand, we are assailed by white men, and, on the other hand, we are assailed by black men, who should be our natural protectors and, whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub, over the sewing machine, behind the baby carriage, or at the ironing board, we are but little more than pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves!

These domestics had limited options to defend themselves. She explained that when her husband tried to speak with the employer, the latter called the police and her husband was fined \$25 for “lying”. Her testimony revealed that women lacked protection.

I confess that I believe it to be true that many of our colored girls are as eager as the white men are to encourage and maintain these improper relations; *but where the girl is not willing, she has only herself to depend on for protection*. If their fathers, brothers, or husbands seek to redress their wrongs, under our peculiar conditions, the guiltless negroes *will be severely punished*, if not killed, and the white blackleg will go scot-free!<sup>1177</sup>

Black men who attempted to defend their wives or daughters from sexual aggressions often feared retaliation by southern whites, since lynching was used as a threat to maintain blacks in a subordinate condition.

Domestic workers and intellectuals rejected the charges of immorality by publicly denouncing in the press the immoral practices which domestic workers were victims of in the South as late as the 1910s.

### **3. Organizing Club Work in the Age of the Great Migration (1890-1920): Pragmatism and Christianity**

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<sup>1175</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women’s History in Slavery and Freedom”, in *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*, (Brooklyn: New York, Carlson Pub., 1994), 12.

<sup>1176</sup> Yet, as explained earlier, such testimonies are rare since many black women advocated silence on the topic of sexuality.

<sup>1177</sup> A Negro Nurse. “More Slavery at the South”. From the *Independent*. New York: published for the proprietors, 1848-1921. v. 72, Jan. 25, 1912: 196-200. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/negnurse/negnurse.html>.



In this context of racial oppression and discrimination, in an age which kept imposing strict propriety rules on women, middle and upper-class women often asserted conservative positions about women yet also adopted liberal stances at times. They urged Americans to finally recognize their womanhood and humanity. To do so, they continued to be active in women's clubs locally and nationally. When the Great Migration was intensifying, how did these clubwomen organize work? What messages did they convey – as members of the elite and representatives of the community nationally – to less privileged women?

As Glenda Gilmore has shown in her study of North Carolina, many African Americans began leaving the South as of the 1880s<sup>1178</sup>. Migrants came from two distinct parts of the South and settled in different parts of the North. In the early years of the Great Migration, African Americans left the Mid-Atlantic States such as Virginia and the Carolinas and arrived by boat in cities such as New York or Philadelphia. As a result, overpopulation occasioned the formation of what came to be known as “ghettos” in northern cities<sup>1179</sup>.

During the 1890s, northward migration was encouraged in the black feminine press in the North. Advertisements for northern migration were published in the late nineteenth century, encouraging southern blacks to come north. Some Northerners encouraged southern farmers to come and settle in northern States in the late nineteenth century. For example, in the May 1896 issue of the *Woman's Era*, an advertisement entitled “Are you Looking for a Home Among Friends?” followed by the subtitle “If you are Consult the New England Farm Agency”<sup>1180</sup>. The advertisement targeted southern readers of the *Woman's Era* and encouraged them to relocate in the rural states of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island and Connecticut. The New England Farm Agency “offer[ed its] assistance in aiding colored farmers to leave the South and to come and make their homes in the North.”.

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<sup>1178</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 130-131 and 279. “Between 1900 and 1910, 27,827 African Americans left the state; 14,792 men and 13,035 women”. Between 1910 to 1920: 29,162 emigrated. The increase between 1920 and 1930 was “less than 2,000 people”. She has argued that those who left North Carolina belonged to what was called then “the better class”: “Those who were the first to leave were probably the best educated”. Gilmore has contended: “In 1917, in an address to the southern sociological congress, a white lawyer and racial philosopher from Winston-Salem noted the rapid exodus from the state. He observed, however, that by that time the number of ‘young, collegebred negro men and women going north [...] is probably not as great, proportionately as it was a decade ago’” – in 1907. Gilmore added: “The migration pattern of North Carolina’s African Americans followed an east coast trail to Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and other northeastern states, according to Maslowski”, 280.

<sup>1179</sup> On the question of urbanization, see the works by Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), and Marcy S. Sacks, *Before Harlem: The Black Experience in New York City before World War I* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>1180</sup> *Woman's Era*, May 1896, 24. In Mary Church Terrell Papers. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress.



There, black Southerners could hope to purchase a farm “for a reasonable sum of money, and on easy terms of payment” and also receive aid and protection<sup>1181</sup>. The optimistic advertisement promised what must have appeared as an Eldorado for black Southerners: farms “near cities and towns” and “convenient to school houses, railroad stations and churches”. In an effort to reassure the readers, the advertisement said that almost all of the same crops could be grown in the North as in the South –which must have been quite inexact<sup>1182</sup>. To soothe possible anxieties about the smaller size of farms, the ad answered: “the farms of the North differ from those of the South in that they are more compact, better cleared and attended to in general. Being smaller they are easier to care for”<sup>1183</sup>. Nevertheless, most of the migrants settled in urban areas.

Migration accelerated at the turn of the century. Between 1900 and 1930, more than 1.5 million black men and women migrated from the South to the urban North<sup>1184</sup>. Jacqueline Jones has pointed out in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* that during this second phase of the Great Migration, “compared with their predecessors, the new migrants more often came from the Deep South; they travelled longer distances to their final destination [...] and chose to go to Midwestern cities”<sup>1185</sup>. As World War I drew closer, promises of industrial employment became more tangible for African Americans. As Jones has explained, migrants were attracted by opportunities opening in industrial jobs and more comfortable salaries. In fact,

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<sup>1181</sup> Ibid., “We shall give them all the aid in our power, and be only too glad to look them over and see that they obtain all the advantages possible in the respective neighborhoods, until they become accustomed to their new homes and neighbors”.

<sup>1182</sup> Ibid., “About anything that can be raised on farms in the South can be raised in the North”.

<sup>1183</sup> *Woman’s Era*, May 1896, 24. In Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>1184</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “Clubwomen and Electoral Politics in the 1920s”, in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*, eds., Bettye Collier-Thomas and Ann Gordon, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 134. “In the decade between 1910 and 1920 the black population soared upward in such cities as Chicago (from 44,103 to 109,458), Detroit (from 5,741 to 40,878), Cleveland (from 8,448 to 34,451), New York (from 91,709 to 152,467), and Philadelphia (from 84,459 to 134,229). Concentrated in ghettos of urban centers, the migrants soon transformed their restricted residential opportunities into political opportunity”. Between 1900 and 1970, millions of African Americans left the South and settled in the West and in the urban centers of the North. See also Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Between 1900 and 1970, millions of African Americans left the South and settled in the West and in the urban centers of the North. In *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, Jacqueline Jones explains that “between 1916 in 1921 an estimated half-million blacks, or about 5% of the total Southern black population, headed North. This number was larger than the aggregate figure for the preceding 40 years.

<sup>1185</sup> They also “relied on overland (rail) transportation rather than water transportation, and a greater proportion than previously”, Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present*. (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2010), 156. The impact of the Great Migration on African American life and history was important. African Americans were also more numerous than those of the first wave. Jones adds that “[b]etween 1916 in 1921, an estimated half-million blacks, or about 5% of the total Southern black population, headed north. This number was larger than the aggregate figure for the preceding 40 years”.

“the North eventually came to represent an ambiguous kind of promised land for the 2 million black people who participated in the exodus between 1900 and 1930”<sup>1186</sup>.

Some African American social workers of the South looked unfavorably upon northern migration at the turn of the century because they did not wish to see many of their counterparts leave their native region. As a result, they tried to deter them from migrating north, suggesting that the North offered limited job opportunities and terrible housing conditions. In some students' newspapers published in the 1900s, the North was sometimes negatively portrayed in order to deter Southerners from migrating north. For instance, in May 1908, one issue of *The University Journal* of Howard University informed readers of the difficult conditions in the North: “There are fewer opportunities for employment for Negroes” in the North than in the South, lodging was expensive — “rents are excessive” — and lower in quality than in the South — in terms of “sunlight and ventilation” — and the climate was harsher: it caused “illness and high mortality among the colored people”<sup>1187</sup>. The author concluded: “It is earnestly hoped [...] That kinder and fairer treatment may be accorded to the negroes [in the South] and that, as a result, fewer will feel impelled to the North”.

Nevertheless, thousands of southern African Americans moved north to flee poverty, an oppressive economic system<sup>1188</sup>, racial subordination, Jim Crow legislation, disenfranchisement and in the case of women, sexual exploitation<sup>1189</sup>. Some also left to follow family members or friends who had already settled in the North and were thus inspired by the

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<sup>1186</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love*, 153. “When World War I opened up employment possibilities in the industrial Northeast and Midwest, mass migration began in earnest; the lure of high wages and a freer life proved irresistible to a people limited to agricultural and domestic services in the land of neo- slavery”. Very few testimonies left by migrants are available today. Nevertheless, letters sent to the editor of the black newspaper *The Chicago Defender* in 1917 and some writings left by a few women offer interesting insights on men and women's motivations to move north. See Emmett J. Scott, Comp., “Documents: Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918”, *Journal of Negro History* 4. (July-October 1919): 290-340 and 412-465. Letters are those sent to the editor of the newspaper.

<sup>1187</sup> According to the author, these facts were laid out by the Committee for Improving the Industrial Conditions of the Negroes in New York, 10 May 1908. *The University Journal*.

<sup>1188</sup> A 1917 letter from a woman in Mobile, Alabama, shows that wages represented one of the main reasons for migrating: “My husband only get \$1.50 a day and pays \$7.50 a month for house rent and can hardly feed me and himself and children”. Working did not guarantee sufficient earnings to feed one's family. Another woman from McCoy, Louisiana, wrote in April 1917 to the editor of *The Chicago Defender*: “We are working people but we can't hardly live here; I would say more but we are back in the jungles and we have to live low”. Emmett J. Scott, Comp., “Documents : Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918”, 427.

<sup>1189</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 153. Jacqueline Jones has explained that the “The reason for their flight” lied in “the oppressive sharecropping system, disfranchisement, Jim Crow laws, the plague of boll weevils working its way up the cotton belt”. On their workplace, black women were confronted with sexual exploitation to an extent never known by any other racial or ethnic group in the United States. As a result, many of them chose to flee the South. Jane Hunter experienced it herself. When she was a teenager and worked as a servant in South Carolina, she “had to bolt [her] door, for the proprietor was as shameless in his pursuit of pretty mulatto girls as were any of his patrons”. Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 45. Jane Hunter was a southern-born African American woman trained as a nurse at Hampton Institute. She migrated to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1905, where she became a social worker and founded an association and a Home for girls in 1911.

positive accounts they heard or read<sup>1190</sup>. Additionally, migrants strongly wished to be able to offer better educational opportunities to their children<sup>1191</sup>. In her study of North Carolina, Glenda Gilmore has explained that “economic factors and kinship network affected emigration” but that these were not the only reasons: “Violence was an important factor in decisions to migrate”. Lastly, “Jim Crow cars, the passage of disfranchising amendments and the bitter political campaigns of 1898 and 1900” also pushed African Americans to flee the South<sup>1192</sup>. Therefore, with hopes and dreams of earning decent livelihood, of offering educational opportunities to their children and, for men, of gaining political rights – which were confiscated in the South as of the late 1890s –, many men and women decided to migrate.

When women started on the risky adventure of migrating, their trip was often fraught with pitfalls and they sometimes found themselves in dire circumstances upon their arrival in the North. From the 1890s to the late 1910s, some middle-class clubwomen organized to offer these migrants decent conditions in northern urban centers as part of an effort to redeem the image of African American women. What strategies did social workers develop to help female migrants? What values or qualities did they emphasize among African American women?

### **Assessing Social Problems Posed by Migration**

Numerous migrant women met difficult situations upon their arrival in the North, having a hard time adjusting to new surroundings, new customs, and having trouble finding proper accommodation and employment.

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<sup>1190</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 153. See also Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 280 and 131.

<sup>1191</sup> Mothers hoped to send their children to northern schools: they knew that in the South, “illiteracy rates were five times higher” for women than those “living in the Northern urban areas”, Jones, 193. For example, in a letter dated 25 April 1917 to the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, a 25 year-old mother of 8 children from Mobile, Alabama, explained: “I want to get out of [here] because I don’t know what I am raising them up for in this place and I want to get to Chicago where I know they will be raised and my husband is crazy to get there because he know he can get more to raise his children”. A woman from Greenwood, Mississippi, wrote: “I am very anxious to leave the South on account of my children”. Emmett J. Scott, Comp., “Documents : Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918”, 312.

<sup>1192</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 280 and 131. “Tolnay and Beck contend, as did Laura Arnold, that ‘violence was an important factor in decisions to migrate’”, 280. Even if they were still denied the right to vote before 1920, black women were hopeful that men – and their sons – could benefit from better circumstances in the North, where they would not be disenfranchised. For example, Sarah Willie Layten, who was the College-educated daughter of a black minister from the South and a social worker, encouraged African Americans to assert their political power after 1918”. In *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, ed., Jessie Carney Smith: 403-406, 405. “Immediately after the war, she encouraged blacks to use the Great Migration to their political advantage. She urged women, who themselves could not vote, to educate black migrant men about their political rights”.

Detailing the experiences of women from the Mid-Atlantic States who had arrived in New York City by boat in the late nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, Victoria Matthews and Frances Kellor – a white sociologist from Ohio who served as General Director of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research and was interested in black women’s experiences<sup>1193</sup> – warned potential migrants against potential traps. In “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North” (1898), describing appalling housing conditions, the African-American writer, activist and journalist Victoria Earle Matthews delivered a very alarmist message: “No woman’s daughter is safe”<sup>1194</sup>. Comparing the situation in New York City to southern slavery, she said “the company treats [girls] as so many heads of cattle. They are huddled in dirty ill-smelling apartments, many feeling lucky if a pallet is given them to sleep on the floor”. Economic actors sought to “make money out of the[se girls’] helplessness and ignorance”, and these women, surrounded by ‘innumerable dangers’, eventually fall down in a state of “moral degradation”<sup>1195</sup>.

When speaking about Chicago – where she lived – Fannie Williams showed that domestics from the South ended up leading an immoral life in the North, not because they were inherently immoral, but because they had been denied respectable employment. Williams cleverly pinpointed that racial discrimination on the job market was at the heart of the problem of prostitution in northern centers and that whites were therefore responsible for the ill-reputation of black women<sup>1196</sup>. Using religious terms, Williams in 1904 spoke of Chicago as a place of “temptation” for female migrants: they “were tempted to go astray in these big cities. Save our young man, protect all girls is the burdened heart cry of German, Jew, Greek, Swedish, Hungarian, Russian, and American, but not so with us; the way to crime, to demoralization and ruin is easy and unobstructed, almost, by a single effort in our large cities”<sup>1197</sup>.

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<sup>1193</sup> Frances Kellor was a white woman and social worker who had received a Law Degree Cornell University in 1897 and had also followed Sociology courses at the University of Chicago.

<sup>1194</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North”, *Hampton Negro Conference*, no. 2, July 1898. Hampton, Virginia: Hampton Institute Press, 1898: 62- 69, 64.

<sup>1195</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North”, 65.

<sup>1196</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Need of Social Settlement Work for the City Negro”, in the *Southern Workman* 33 (September 1904): 501-506, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 107-112, 108. “They come for better homes, only to find unsanitary tenements in the black belts of the city. Some of the more competent come with high hopes of easily securing employment in some of the higher class of occupations, but they find themselves shut out by a relentless prejudice, drifting at last into the easy path of immoral living. Hundreds of young women who have been trained for something better than menial service, failing to find such employment, fall easy victims to the flattering inducement of a well-dressed idleness, the handmaids of shame”.

<sup>1197</sup> *Ibid*, 110. Fannie Barrier Williams, denounced the passivity of the American society: “Society, in order to save the best of our generation to itself, is doing everything that heart and brain can utilize to save white young men and white young women, while practically nothing is being done for the colored young men and women, except to prosecute and punish them for crimes for which society itself is largely responsible”.

Social workers also warned that danger came from the agencies specialized in migration. In “The Servant Problem” (1907), Sarah Willie Layten, an African American social worker living in Philadelphia, revealed that “unscrupulous employment agencies in the North that imported large numbers of blacks from the South” had to be identified and attacked<sup>1198</sup>. Frances Kellor drew the same conclusion: in her 1904-1910 articles, she explained that migrant girls and women were often the victims of corrupted employment agencies and networks<sup>1199</sup>. Dishonest agents who made money out of migration indeed represented some danger for women migrants<sup>1200</sup>. Like Matthews, she made it clear that the culprits were Northern and Southern agencies which publicized false job advertisements and promised high wages in order to entice – often unprepared — girls into migrating.

Elite black women thought that migration endangered the reputation of young women. As early as the late 1890s, Victoria Matthews expressed her concern about the impact of migration on the reputation of black domestics in the North: “The trade which supplies Southern girls as domestics is too disreputable [and] has been carried to such an extent that many [white] ladies refuse to employ colored help for no other reason than that they are associated in the public mind with that class”<sup>1201</sup>. According to her, migration was discrediting women of African descent because those who had tried to migrate were “so many of the careless, unneat, untrained, shiftless class”<sup>1202</sup>. Some clubwomen sometimes adopted a patronizing attitude towards the migrants they sought to assist. In 1904, Sarah Willie Layten said: “Unfortunately the minority or bad Negroes have given the race a questionable reputation; these degenerates are responsible for every discrimination we suffer”<sup>1203</sup>. Like

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<sup>1198</sup> Sarah Willie Layten was raised in an affluent family. She was the daughter of a black minister from the South who encouraged black Americans to assert their political power. She was college-educated, having been able to study at LeMoyne College in Memphis and attend courses at the University of Philadelphia as a young woman. After living a few years in California, from 1882 to 1894, she finally settled down for good in Philadelphia. See her biography in *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, 404. See “A Woman’s Church Within the Church, The Woman’s Movement in the Church”, in *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion*, Bettye Collier-Thomas ed., (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 123.

<sup>1199</sup> Frances Kellor wrote the same in “Opportunities for Southern Girls in Northern Cities” (July 1905), and in “Associations For the Protection of Colored Women” in which she described the task of her associations: “to protect them if they come; to find them honest work; to lodge them in safe places, and to send them back if they cannot meet the requirements”, 699.

<sup>1200</sup> Migrants’ personal belongings were often confiscated. For instance, Kellor explained that “in some agencies she cannot even open her trunk without permission from the agent, and she must work two months without pay”. Agencies could then act they pleased with these defenseless girls, who soon found themselves destitute. For Kellor, “This cunning arrangement” was designed to enable the agent [to] hold [the girl] indefinitely in his power”. She deplored the fact that “At present little or no protection is afforded to women by the agents whose property they become”.

<sup>1201</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North”, 67.

<sup>1202</sup> Victoria Matthews, “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North”, 63 and 67.

<sup>1203</sup> Sarah Willie Layten, as cited in *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, ed. Jessie Carney Smith, 404.



Victoria Matthews or Sarah Layten decades before, Jane Hunter tended to adopt a patronizing attitude as well: “We must do something to improve these incompetent girls whose poverty made it necessary for them to leave school and find a job, but who were incapable of performing the simple tasks of household work, much less of earning a livelihood”<sup>1204</sup>.

As a result, it was highly important for clubwomen and social workers to try to warn and offer appropriate assistance to newly-arrived migrants. Restoring the honor of these women was essential to Matthews. Sarah Layten agreed with her years later in 1907, in her article entitled the “Servant problem”:

We appeal to our ‘race pride’ people to become interested in this work [domestic work], believing it to be one of the most helpful ways of solving the so-called race problem, North as well as South. Few of us recognize the possible power of our people in domestic service – while our brilliant orators plead eloquently the Negroes’ rights, their voices are seldom heard by the powers that be, but while those who serve acceptably and well, filling helpful positions or trust as domestics, are capable of creating a sentiment favorable to the Negro in his struggle for opportunity and a just verdict<sup>1205</sup>.

Some women of the elite believed that restoring the collective image of African American women would be possible only if members of the community actively sought solutions themselves to fight against immorality and discrimination. In “The Negro and the Public Opinion” (1904), Fannie Williams was quite critical of her community and thought that at a time of renewed hope for racial equality, of social and political advances, the community should find solutions to its problems itself: “Our race habit of looking up to somebody as superior to ourselves, of asking for everything and creating but little, of complaining more than trusting to our own individual efforts is a great handicap to the cultivation of manhood, courage and pride of race”<sup>1206</sup>.

Despite her fierce criticism, the optimistic Williams was confident that African Americans could “teach, convince and win [...] stubborn, stolid and self-sufficient” public opinion thanks to “valiant men and women” in order to finally “deserve a place in the family of races”<sup>1207</sup>. Consequently, clubwomen such as Victoria Earle Matthews in New York City, Sarah Willie Layten in Philadelphia, Ida Wells and Fannie Williams in Chicago, Anna Cooper in Washington D.C. and Jane Hunter in Cleveland developed a Victorian discourse based on purity, morality and respectability.

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<sup>1204</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 126.

<sup>1205</sup> Sarah Willie Layten, “The Servant Problem”, In *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, 405.

<sup>1206</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Negro and Public Opinion”, *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 1 (1904): 31-32, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 87-90, 88.

<sup>1207</sup> Ibid, 88-89. “The whole nation was interested in emancipation [in the antebellum era] and now only a few men and women of the white race are interested in the question of our emancipation for equality of opportunity. We cannot look to the successors of [the abolitionists] the Garrisons, Phillipses, Sumners, Stowes and Lincolns. If men and women of like courage and like insistence are needed today we must look to ourselves and not to the white race. We must become stronger in the virtue of patience, more efficient in good works, more deserving in our achievements, and more intelligent and co-operative in our contention for rights”.



Because these migrants risked deteriorating the image of the community, these journalists and social workers insisted on the necessity of carefully preparing their trip. In order to protect girls from the world of prostitution, they first advised their readers to migrate with companions and renounce coming alone and deterred unprepared or destitute women from migrating. Jane Hunter, who had reached Cleveland from the South herself in 1905, explained that she almost ended up living in a “house of prostitution” upon arrival but had been spared from living in dangerous, disreputable neighborhoods of Cleveland *precisely* because she had not arrived on her own<sup>1208</sup>. In New York City, Matthews saw first-hand the damages made on young women and on the group’s respectability. For instance, alarmed by the newly arrived “untrained youth”, Victoria Earle Matthews noted: “The sending of untrained youth into the jaws of *moral death* must be checked”<sup>1209</sup>. Frances Kellor was similarly alarmed because many women left the South without “money often, some with their little belongings done up in pillow cases or carpets sacks, many gaudily and poorly dressed with no other friend than the agent they come to be shipped” who was in charge of them<sup>1210</sup>. Like all other social workers, Kellor believed that migration was to be carefully prepared prior to departure. Likewise, Matthews posited that unless the whole journey was carefully financed and prepared thanks to the aid of reliable relationships, it was safer to give up or postpone one’s trip north: “Let the girls [...] stay at home, it is better to starve and go home to God morally clean, than to helplessly drag out miserable lives of remorse and pain in Northern tenderloins”<sup>1211</sup>. Black clubwomen such as Victoria Matthews or Jane Hunter used a rhetoric marked with Victorian accents to warn women migrants about the dangers of coming north alone. This advice not only aimed at making women safer but also at protecting the image of all African American women.

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<sup>1208</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 68. “Faith in God and hope for the future were the only assets I had when we arrived in Cleveland. My first quest found me knocking unknowingly at the door of a house of prostitution. The owner saw that my appearance was different from that of usual applicants; and besides, the Colemans were with me”.

<sup>1209</sup> Victoria Matthews, “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North”, 68. Italics mine. “Unless a girl has friends whom she and her family know are to be trusted, unless she has money enough to pay her way until she can get work, she cannot expect to be independent or free from question among careful people”.

<sup>1210</sup> Frances Kellor, “Assisted Emigration from the South”, *Charities*, 15.1. (7 October 1905): 1-14, 12.

<sup>1211</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, “Some of the Dangers...”, 69. “Looking for ‘easy work’ [was] one way to immorality”. In “Associations for Protection of Colored Women” (1905), Frances Kellor argued that girls who considered migrating had to possess three qualities. They had to have “strength of character, skill and willingness to work”. She argued that those who did not possess such qualities should not come north. She also wanted to inform women about the reality of the job market in the early twentieth century: “There is no industrial chance except in domestic service in homes, hotels, boarding houses”. She made it clear that migrants should expect to become domestic servants in the North as well. Frances Kellor, “Associations for Protection of Colored Women”, *The Colored American Magazine* (Dec. 1905): 695-699. See page 695-696.

## Building Settlement Houses For Girls and Women

In the Progressive Era, inspired by the work of white Chicagoan reformers Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr – who founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889 —, African American social workers and clubwomen actively worked in associations and clubs and offered their own pragmatic responses to the issues faced by migrants<sup>1212</sup>. The work of progressive clubwomen in the North was diverse. Jacqueline Jones has pointed out that:

Migrants from the South found the difficult way to their new life in the North East somewhat eased by middle-class black women. [Members of the ‘old elite’ – relatively prosper natives or long-term Northerners – and otherwise of a new class of businessmen and professionals] [They] joined forces to help working women, and they served as the driving force behind programs duplicated in cities throughout the North: day nurseries, homes for young working women and for the elderly, recreational facilities for girls<sup>1213</sup>.

In order to save young women migrants from what they termed “moral death”<sup>1214</sup>, both white and African American women of the middle-class such as Anna Cooper, Fannie Williams, Ida B. Wells or Victoria Earle Matthews, Sarah W. Layten, or Jane Edna Hunter were active in associations and settlement houses. One of the main goals was to protect women of color from sexual exploitation – from falling into prostitution. As Darlene Clark Hine has stated in “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West”, “determination to save young unskilled and unemployed black women from having to bargain sex in exchange for food and shelter motivated some NACW members to establish boarding schools and domestic service training centers, such as the Phillis Wheatley Homes, and Burrough’s National Training School”<sup>1215</sup>.

For instance, in the mid-1890s, Anna Cooper actively participated in founding a “woman’s building for educational and industrial work” with the Colored Women’s League of Washington D.C.<sup>1216</sup>. Showing how pragmatic her approach of blacks’ social problems was, she explained that “self-help and benevolence” were the master words. In 1893, with the

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<sup>1212</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 118. As Mary Ryan has underscored about Jane Addams, these progressive women developed a rhetoric of motherly care for their fellow citizens which had highly Victorian accents. “The class of 1881 of the Female Seminary of Rockford, Illinois, took at its model of womanhood, the ‘Saxon lady whose mission it was to give bread unto her household’. The seminary’s most illustrious graduate, Jane Addams, went on to explain her classmate appreciation of this ancient meaning of the term ‘lady’: ‘We have planned to be Breadgivers throughout our lives, [and] believing that in labor alone is happiness, and that the only true and honorable life is one filled with good works and honest toil, we will strive to idealize our labor and thus happily fulfill woman’s noblest mission’. Jane Addams believed in the solidarity of the human race, and in her mind, neighbors were “bound to regard the entire life of their city as organic, to make an effort to unify it, and to protest against its over-differentiation”. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*. First published in 1892 and republished in 1910, 126-127. <http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/addams6.htm>.

<sup>1213</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 190.

<sup>1214</sup> Victoria Earle Matthews, “Some of the Dangers Confronting Southern Girls in the North”, 68.

<sup>1215</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West”, 918.

<sup>1216</sup> Cooper was an early clubwoman who was very active in the nation’s capital. The National Federation of Afro-American Women and the National League of Colored Women merged to form the NACW in 1895.

League, she worked with Josephine Yates to build a settlement house for girls<sup>1217</sup>. Praising Yates – whom she regarded as an efficient leader – Cooper rejoiced in the fact that the club was getting organized in both the South and the West: “The League [...] has active, energetic branches in the South and West. The branch in Kansas City [...] has begun under their vigorous president Mrs Yates, the erection of a building for friendless girls”<sup>1218</sup>. Her colleagues “subscribed to a fund of about five thousand dollars to erect a woman’s building” which was also to serve as “headquarters for gathering and disseminating general information relative to the efforts of our women”<sup>1219</sup>.

In New York City, the clubwoman Victoria Matthews founded an Association in 1897 and opened a settlement home for young black women called “The White Rose Industrial Home for Working Class Negro Girls” – known as the “White Rose Mission” – in 1903<sup>1220</sup>. White women such as Frances Kellor founded protective associations in New York City and Philadelphia in 1905<sup>1221</sup>. Some black social workers formed the National League for the Protection of Colored Women in 1906 – which would become the National Urban League in 1911<sup>1222</sup>. Frances Kellor and Sarah Willie Layten actively worked together in this rapidly-growing interracial organization<sup>1223</sup>. The goal of the NLPCW was to educate both African American and white women who had recently arrived in big cities such as New York City and Philadelphia and to assist these women in finding accommodation and jobs<sup>1224</sup>. Sarah Willie Layten locally collaborated with Frances Kellor and got involved in the founding of Southwest Belmont Young Women Christian Association, thus working actively with white clubwomen to help bring relief to young women in Philadelphia, at a time when most of the

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<sup>1217</sup> Josephine Silone Yates was then serving as president of the branch in Kansas City.

<sup>1218</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation: A Response to Fannie Barrier Williams”, 201-205, 204.

<sup>1219</sup> Ibid., Anna Cooper served as corresponding secretary of the League.

<sup>1220</sup> She also helped found the NACW in 1896. <http://lostwomynspace.blogspot.fr/2011/06/white-rose-home-for-colored-working.html>, The White Rose Mission – White Rose Industrial Home for Working Class Negro Girls – is located in Harlem, New York City on 217 East 86<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>1221</sup> *Notable Black Women*, 404.

<sup>1222</sup> Three organizations merged in 1911 to form the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes – which became known as the National Urban League: the Committee for Improving the Industrial Conditions among Negroes in New York, formed in 1906; the League for the Protection of Colored Women, formed in 1906; and the Committee on Urban Conditions among Negroes, formed in 1910.

<sup>1223</sup> Jessie Carney Smith, Layten’s biographer, has indicated: “Kellor and Layten closely worked ‘in the National League for the Protection of Colored Women’ (NLPCW), In *Notable Black American Women*, 404. Kellor served as First Secretary of the organization from 1906 to 1910 and Layten then “replaced [her] as general secretary of the NLPCW in 1910”, 404. See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 180-181.

<sup>1224</sup> Branches were established in Philadelphia and New York in 1906 and between 1906 in 1910, other branches were added in Boston, Memphis and Baltimore, “to reach migrant women at key arrival points [...] The work would not be complete until branches in Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Jacksonville and New Orleans were added”, Biography of Sarah Willie Layten by Jessie Smith, In *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, 404.

YWCA branches were still segregated<sup>1225</sup>. She also helped build the Mary S. Tribbitt home for girls in Philadelphia.

Other women were active in northern urban centers. Also deeply inspired by the work of Jane Addams, who was active in their city, both Wells and Williams were committed to clubs or settlement houses<sup>1226</sup>. Ida B. Wells actively worked at the Negro Fellowship League in Chicago in the 1900s and witnessed the same issues in Chicago which Victoria Matthews or Sarah Layten had faced years earlier in New York or Philadelphia. She explained that in December 1917, “so many of our people from the South [...] arrived in Chicago in every conceivable state of unpreparedness, and so great was the confusion at the station, and so many of them were taken advantage of by unscrupulous taxi drivers and lodging house-keepers, that the matter was taken up by our league”<sup>1227</sup>. In Chicago, Fannie Williams supported the work accomplished at the Phyllis Wheatley Home in order to offer relief to female migrants as well. Praising the efforts made by Mrs L.A. Davis, she praised the “noble work” Davis was accomplishing for this “progressive club of colored women”<sup>1228</sup>. In the 1900s, members of the Chicago elite Fannie and S. Laing Williams, Celia Parker Wooley and Ida B. Wells-Barnett organized to found the Frederick Douglass Center. Ida Wells-Barnett and Fannie Williams worked together from 1903 to 1907 to found the Frederick Douglass Center<sup>1229</sup> and Williams closely worked with her best friend Celia Parker Wooley, a progressive white social worker who was one of the founders of the Frederick Douglass Center<sup>1230</sup>.

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<sup>1225</sup> *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, 406. Black women such as Layten formed their own chapters. Interracial cooperation existed yet was very limited.

<sup>1226</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Need of Social Settlement Work for the City Negro”, 108-109. For her, Addams was “always sisterly, motherly, or friendly as the case demands” and had “taught the world a new conception of the design element in humanity, which neither rags, dirt, nor immorality can entirely obscure”. In her mind, in the worst situation, “where people of the poorest and most neglected, whether saloons are the thickest, sanitary conditions the meanest, and where there are the fewest churches, [...] you will find Hull house. I speak of Hull house in particular because it is regarded as the finest, the most typical, and the most complete example of socialized kindness to be found in the world [...] Here shines the gentle spirit of Jane Addams, that apostle of the newest gospel of good deeds ‘in a naughty world’.

<sup>1227</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 371. Renting the place at 2813 State Street cost \$175 a month and since this was too expensive, they moved to 3005 State Street – where the rent was \$35 a month. They stayed there seven years. *Crusade*, 332. The League sent “a man of our own race” to meet the new comers at the Illinois Central station “to see that our people were given proper information and protection”, 372.

<sup>1228</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Colored Women of Chicago”, 68.

<sup>1229</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xl. Williams and Barnett worked together to open the Frederick Douglass Center.

<sup>1230</sup> Fannie Williams thought that special action should be enforced because racial tensions would otherwise escalate: “If [...] Negro population is treated and regarded as a reprobate race, the result will be an increase of crime and disorders of all kinds that will grow more and more difficult to handle and regulate”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “Social Bonds in the ‘Black Belt’ of Chicago”, in *Charities* 15 (7 October 1905): 40-44, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 117-124, 124. In this article, she spoke about the importance of black Churches, secret societies and settlement houses in Chicago to help the community.

In Cleveland, Ohio, Jane Hunter founded the Phillis Wheatley Association and a settlement house for girls – the Phillis Wheatley Home – in September 1911<sup>1231</sup>. Since she had migrated from the South herself six years earlier, and had experienced first-hand what migrants confronted, she offered pragmatic responses to their difficulties. These projects could be personal or could be the result of national policies set by the National Association of Colored Women. In 1897, as president of the NACW, Mary Terrell emphasized the necessity of helping less privileged women by establishing settlement houses. Adopting Victorian terms as well, she pledged to work for the protection of “the womanhood of the race” by assisting “fallen sister[s]” and opening and running “homes for friendless and unfortunate girls”<sup>1232</sup>. These women who engaged in club work often adopted pragmatic solutions, being active in the field of education, social service or women’s rights.

The goals of these associations and settlement houses were often very diverse and far-reaching. As Mary Ryan has underscored, “the avowed goals of most of these women’s organizations remained essentially altruistic, to serve the needy, weak, and defenseless, rather than to conquer wealth and power for either themselves or the female sex”<sup>1233</sup>.

Clubwomen first tackled the issue of housing because they were aware that poor housing – caused by racial discrimination —, and existing unsanitary conditions were the causes of problems the community was targeted for. Terrell argued in 1905 that delinquency among black youth was caused by poor housing and the social environment<sup>1234</sup>. By building and running settlement houses and fighting for better housing conditions, women were acting for the community and for the defense of African American women’s image. Consequently, as Frances Kellor indicated in her 1905 article, women sought to “rescue” migrants by sending agents to help them upon arrival, and secondly to “provide [them with] lodgings and

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<sup>1231</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 80. Hunter explained: “I turned instinctively, not to the wealthy and influential friends I had made among white persons, but to the poor and lowly of my own people [...] One September afternoon in 1911, a group of Negro working women, my closest friends, maintain a tiny parlor [...] to discuss the rooming house problem and find ways and means of ameliorating the hard lot of homeless girls”. The PWA still exists today.

<sup>1232</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “First Presidential Address to the National Association of Colored Women,” Nashville, Tennessee, 15 September 1897, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress (Microfilm, reel 20, frames 511-22).

<sup>1233</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 141.

<sup>1234</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 134-135. “The colored youth is vicious, we are told, and statistics showing the multitudes of our boys and girls who fill the penitentiaries and crowd the jails appall and dishearten us. But-side by side with these facts and figures of crime I would have presented the miserable hovels from which these youthful criminals come. Crowded alleys, many of them the haunts of vice, few if any in a proper sanitary condition, most of them fatal to mental or moral growth and destructive of healthful physical development as well, thousands of our children have a wretched inheritance indeed”.



work” in the North<sup>1235</sup>. Likewise, the goal of the Phyllis Wheatley Home in Chicago was to give “shelter and protection to the young colored women who wander into Chicago unacquainted with the snares and pitfalls of a great city” and “offered a home for young women until they have secured employment”<sup>1236</sup>. Similarly, Jane Hunter believed that the Home should be the substitutes for the healthy homes which these young women generally so desperately lacked. Her main concern was indeed to offer housing solutions to women migrants in Cleveland, Ohio, the search “for decent lodgings” being a “despairing” one there<sup>1237</sup>. Hunter also explained that she wished her settlement to be a “real heaven for the Negro girl” and as a “laboratory for the discovery of talent and ability”<sup>1238</sup>. Likewise, Anna Cooper viewed the Home as the opportunity to offer housing and the “substitute of a home” for children and young women and envisaged her role as fulfilling God’s will<sup>1239</sup>. The Social Settlement therefore served the needs of the generations to come by offering “lectures on economic, social and hygienic subjects attended by workers in various charitable and philanthropic institutions furnish a means of training specialists for other fields”<sup>1240</sup>.

Clubwomen also aimed at providing these young migrants with training. Like many social workers, Hunter not only aimed at developing the skills of these newcomers, offering them education, training in the domestic field to ensure their employability, but she also wished to offer them religious training: “My plan had been not only to furnish safe shelter for homeless girls, but to afford them special opportunities for recreational pleasures and religious training”<sup>1241</sup>. With the Home, one of Hunter’s goals was to train better workers and better future mothers and therefore, race leaders for the community:

It is the special mission of the Phillis Wheatley Association to discover, protect, cherish, and perpetuate the beauty and power of Negro womanhood. Thus protected and developed, it will become a

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<sup>1235</sup> Frances Kellor, “Assisted Emigration from the South”, *Charities*, 1905, 1-14. For Kellor, the best solution was for associations to create their own employment agencies, therefore offering a more reliable network to young women from the South so that “they can exert a more permanent influence upon the women who are strangers in the cities”. In “Southern Girls in the North” (March 1905), Kellor urged the authorities to adopt necessary measures to protect African American women, calling for the creation of housing agencies and schools. She also urged southern States to take rapid legal measures to protect women, in particular in the States of Virginia, Georgia and the Carolinas.

<sup>1236</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Colored Women of Chicago”, 68.

<sup>1237</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 80-81. “The despairing search for decent lodgings -- up one dingy street and down another, ending with the acceptance of the least disreputable room we encountered”. Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 80.

<sup>1238</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 115. “At last [probably in the 1930s] we had come to recognize [in the press] that [the Wheatley Phillis Association] was a real heaven for the Negro girl” and that it served “as a laboratory for the discovery of talent and ability in colored young women”.

<sup>1239</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Social Settlement: What It Is, and What It Does”, 1913, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 217. It was a quasi-divine responsibility to make the social settlement be a substitute for a home.

<sup>1240</sup> *Ibid.* 218.

<sup>1241</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 95.



regenerating force in American homes; and out of these homes will come an influence of godliness and devotion to the community in which we live<sup>1242</sup>.

Clubwomen wished to offer migrants a wide range of educational activities. In Chicago, the Frederick Douglass Center located on Wabash Avenue offered a variety of activities to black Chicagoans<sup>1243</sup>. Fannie Williams explained:

Among the activities already developed and being successfully carried on our department of civics, [...] a club for the study of sociology, [...] and arts and crafts club for boys, [...] the fiction classic literature, now studying George Elliott, the forum for the discussion of life questions, and a Bureau of information. These are not paper clubs. [There is] a real, earnest, and growing interest in the things we all need for the enlargement of mind and heart<sup>1244</sup>.

In many centers such as the Phillis Wheatley Home in Cleveland and at the Frederick Douglass Center of Chicago, some activities were specifically designed for girls and women. Williams indicated in 1906 that a woman's club, a kindergarten, "a sewing school for girls"<sup>1245</sup> and a "girls' club" had been created<sup>1246</sup>. Like many clubwomen who cared about providing "proper" activities to the young, Williams rejoiced in the respectable nature of the activities available: "The influences surrounding them here are thoroughly wholesome, interesting and uplifting. They engage themselves in a great variety of studies, health-giving exercises and innocent amusements." In many ways, this club functioned as a YWCA: "This is about the only place in the city where the 'younger set' of the young people can find intellectual and physical recreation similar in kind to that afforded to the young people of other races"<sup>1247</sup>. She also naturally favored the creation of a vacation school for pupils and encouraged practical work at the Center's Woman Club<sup>1248</sup>. There, children could follow a course of study which took the form of "nature studies, modeling, light manual training, games and plays properly conducted, free excursions into the country once or twice a week"<sup>1249</sup>. These clubs offered recreational and cultural activities. Like most clubwomen, Williams embraced a pragmatic approach, believing that local clubwomen were the best-

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<sup>1242</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>1243</sup> The Frederick Douglass Center, situated on 3032 South Wabash Avenue in Chicago opened on 8 May 1905. See *The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams*, 128.

<sup>1244</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Frederick Douglass Center", *The Southern Workman* 35 (June 1906): 334-336, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 125-127, 126-127.

<sup>1245</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem", *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7, (1906): 502-505, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 128-132, 129.

<sup>1246</sup> "The fact that the center can attract and hold together such a large number of young people, both sexes, ranging from 15 to 18 years of age, is one of the best evidences of its usefulness".

<sup>1247</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem", 129.

<sup>1248</sup> "As an example of how practical has been the work of the Center Woman's Club, we need only call attention to what has been accomplished in securing for the first time a 'Vacation School' in a District where its benefits will include colored children, almost entirely. The Vacation schools are, as the term implies, open during the vacation months. They are in no sense compulsory and are not wholly supported by the public school fund".

<sup>1249</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem", 130-131. Being an art lover herself, Williams was particularly keen on promoting Art among children in clubs.

suited to analyze the needs of the people living in their area. Employing a language close to that used by white progressive women, she held:

The members of individual clubs must study the needs of the community in which they live; they must lay hold of the problems that lie nearest them and be honest enough to attempt only that which they know most about and which ought to be done in the interest of their own homes, their own families and the community in which they live. They will thus become the civic mothers of the race by establishing a sort of special relationship between those who help and those who need help<sup>1250</sup>.

Several clubwomen of this study believed in interracial cooperation. Some black women such as Sarah Willie Layten worked with progressive white Americans in their associations and sometimes received financial support from black and white philanthropists to found and run settlement homes. Williams insisted that cooperation with white Americans was necessary in club work in 1895: “Then again the bright and progressive women of our race in the South need some contact with and a better relationship to the bright and progressive [white] women of the South”. She realized that this ideal could be difficult to reach:

This may seem an impracticable suggestion, yet we may safely believe that the time will soon come when the best women on both sides of the color line will come together and unite their forces in such a way that both may be able to preserve their self-respect. This contact is especially needed by our women in order to give them a proper sense of the larger relationships they bear to the best interests of our times<sup>1251</sup>.

The Williamses believed in the fecundity of interracial work to better the living conditions of African Americans. Well-known and respected, they worked with both black and white Chicagoans on various social services projects. Fannie served as member of the Chicago Library Board and of the Chicago Woman’s Club<sup>1252</sup>. In 1891, she and her husband helped establish Provident Hospital located in Cook County. The hospital was built thanks to a generous donation from Philip Armour – a white progressive entrepreneur whom the Williamses knew well and who was famous for his meat-packing plants in Chicago<sup>1253</sup>. Additionally, the case of Emma Reynolds – a black woman who ambioned to become a nurse and who was repeatedly denied admission when applying to the nursing schools of the

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<sup>1250</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among the Colored Women”, 1904, 49.

<sup>1251</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*. Vol I, no 11. February 1895, 4- 6, 6. My underlinings.

<sup>1252</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tender Humanity*, 157.

<sup>1253</sup> Philip D. Armour (1832-1901). See <http://uudb.org/articles/fanniebarrierwilliams.html>. “With the help of a few prominent white citizens as well as many black individuals and organizations, donations were collected. Rallies were scheduled on Chicago’s south and west sides. The donations included supplies, equipment, and financial support. One of the most important early contributions came in 1890 when clergyman Reverend Jenkins Jones secured a commitment from the Armour Meat Packing Company for the down payment on a three-story brick house at 29th and Dearborn. This building, with twelve beds, became the first Provident Hospital.” Fannie wrote a eulogy at the death of Philip Armour in 1901. See *The New Woman of Color*.

city – surely piqued the interest of the Williamses. After several members of the Chicago society collaborated, a new nursing school was founded for African American women<sup>1254</sup>.

Contrary to the White Rose Mission or the Phillis Wheatley Home, the Frederick Douglass Center (FDC) was *not* destined to function as a settlement house. In 1906 Williams insisted: “Center” is the vital term in its declaration of purposes and principles – a place or Institution from which shall generate influences helpful to a more cordial relationship between white and black people”<sup>1255</sup>. The FDC was created to “promote just and amicable relations between the white and colored people; [...] to establish a center of friendly helpfulness and influence in which to gather useful information and for mutual cooperation in attaining to right living and a higher citizenship”<sup>1256</sup>. This center mainly aimed at drawing progressive black and white Chicagoans together. It was indeed created to encourage interracial cooperation<sup>1257</sup>. The collaboration between Wells and Wooley sometimes proved difficult though. The policy embraced by Celia Parker Wooley at the head of the Frederick Douglass Center did not please Wells and others such as Julius Taylor, the editor of the *Broad Ax*<sup>1258</sup>. As Wanda Hendricks has underscored, Celia Parker Wooley “became a casualty of the disputes” between Wells and Williams over Williams’ s decision to work closely with Booker T. Washington and embrace his compromising attitudes at the turn of the century<sup>1259</sup>.

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<sup>1254</sup> See <http://www.providentfoundation.org/index.php/history/history-provident-hospital>.

<sup>1255</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem”, 128.

<sup>1256</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Frederick Douglass Center”, *The Southern Workman* 35 (June 1906) : 334-336, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 125-127, 125. It was also aimed to “remove the disabilities from which the latter suffer in their civil, political, and industrial life; to encourage equal opportunity, irrespective of race, color, or other arbitrary distinctions”.

<sup>1257</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem”, 128. Moreover, the founders all shared a friendship with Frederick Douglass. The center was created “out of a deep anxiety on the part of many prominent and large-souled white women and men, not only to help worthy colored people to realize all their citizenship rights and privileges, but also to save white people from the soul-bellitting effect of inherited and cultivated prejudices”.

<sup>1258</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams : Crossings the Borders*, 143. They thought Wooley had “paternalistic views”. As Mary Jo Deegan indicates, “Wells Barnett and Fannie Barrier Williams were both active in the early years of the FDC, from 1904 until approximately 1907, but Wells-Barnett had a falling out with the white head of the settlement – one of Fannie’s closest friends, Celia Parker Wooley – whom Wells Barnett considered a racist”, *The New Woman of Color*, xl.

<sup>1259</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams : Crossings the Borders*, 143. What fueled the argument was the question of the “debate over Washington’s leadership”. Fannie Williams was a life-long friend of Celia Parker Wooley and considered her as a prominent progressive activist. Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Frederick Douglass Center: A Question of Social Betterment and Not of Social Equality”, 1904, 113-116, 116. “She is a fine type of progressive womanhood. She has culture, social standing, literary training and ability. [She is] a preacher, a clubwoman and a humanitarian in its broadest sense. She comes of Abolition stock and she has always kept alive in her breast the spirit that has given it to us women like Ms. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe and their kind”. She praised her for being “a woman of such rare endowments and splendid consecration”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Frederick Douglass Center”, 116 and 125. In 1906, Fannie spoke highly of her: “Her heart has always been in the right place on this question and she has brought to its study years of thought and constant, growing effort”. When her friend died in April 1918, she could not “refrain from voicing the sense of personal bereavement in the death of Mrs. Wooley for she was my personal friend, but there is no conceit in this, for she loved us all and permitted us to read her heart”. Always available

Like Sarah Willie Layten and Fannie Williams, Jane Hunter firmly believed in interracial cooperation. She resorted to black and white financial aid to found and manage the Phillis Wheatley Association and desired to have a biracial Board. In March 1913, a “mixed board of trustees” was elected and “interracial cooperation was assured”<sup>1260</sup>. Retrospectively proud of her achievements, she thought interracial cooperation as the most efficient strategy for the progress of the community:

Here in the city of Cleveland the most civic-minded and unselfish elements of two races have worked together for twenty-nine years to build and maintain an institution which, while it ministers primarily to Negroes, has improved the cultural and economic conditions of the whole city by eradicating evils which were preying upon both colored and whites, by nurturing mutual sympathy between the two races<sup>1261</sup>.

In her autobiography, Hunter insisted on the harmonious work conducted by the Board all those years<sup>1262</sup>. For her, “the finest accomplishment” [of the Association] [had] been “the ideal of interracial cooperation” because it was “an extension of Christian comradeship beyond the hearthstone; beyond the barriers of class; beyond religious differences, or more of race”<sup>1263</sup>. Emphasizing the rich human adventure this cooperation had been, she used her autobiography to express her gratitude to her white friends: “The greatest wealth of the Phillis Wheatley Association lies not in its material possessions, but in the treasure of devoted friends”<sup>1264</sup>. Both races had benefited from this cooperation: “The only sufficient method of dealing with the submerged minority is not the paternalistic method of working for it, but the democratic spirit of working with it”<sup>1265</sup>. The settlement house gradually developed<sup>1266</sup> and by 1919, the house had grown<sup>1267</sup> and by 1922, the Phillis Wheatley Association was equipped

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for others, Wooley offered “her wholesome advice, her inspiring optimism, and her generous spirit of comradeship”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “Report of Memorial Service for Rev. Celia Parker Wooley”, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 138-139. She wrote that Wooley “also believed that the relationship between the two races could be adjusted in a way that would satisfy the demands of ethics, religion and the highest equity, for she felt that the spirit of human fellowship once understood would carry us across the superficial barriers of race lines and color lines that separate the stronger and weaker elements of human society”.

<sup>1260</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 93.

<sup>1261</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>1262</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. “I have learned that the right kind of friends can be of the greatest help in creating better relations between the races. Their attitude toward the Negro and their understanding of the peculiar social problems which I faced, brought about an interesting my efforts that was citywide. Through these fine associations, we derived most of our moral support”.

<sup>1263</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>1264</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>1265</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. Yet, as I will soon examine, she was criticized for opting to work with whites.

<sup>1266</sup> During World War I, the PWA was planned to merge with the YWCA. Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 97. In 1917, “The Phillis Wheatley Association had grown so large that some members of the boards felt it should be reorganized as a branch of the Young Women's Christian Association. During [her] absence from the city, a few women met to discuss again affiliation of the two institutions. [She was] told that the motion was made and carried to the effect that the Phillis Wheatley Association become a subsidiary of the Young Women's Christian Association”. Hunter was “deeply perturbed” by this project.

<sup>1267</sup> Hunter, *Ibid.*, 98-99. “During my absence, a three-story apartment building on East Fortieth St. and Central Avenue, with accommodations for seventy-five girls had been purchased by the board [...] We continued to

with a “music department, classes in handicraft, and dancing; had secured a gymnasium, and opened doors to church and neighborhood clubs. In the full sense of the word, we had become a community center”<sup>1268</sup>. Even if Hunter met resistance and criticism on the way, she held on to her beliefs of “mutual friendship”, interracial partnership, and Christian benevolence to further the cause of race advancement at a time when race relations were getting more and more complex because of the increasing influence of eugenics and white supremacy in the country<sup>1269</sup>.

In Homes and settlement houses created for young women, many social workers emphasized the necessity of insisting on morality and purity. Hunter’s autobiography entitled *A Nickel and A Prayer* shows the reverence of many African American social workers for traditional Victorian values of dignity, respectability, morality and “godliness”, although Hunter was particularly strict on these questions. Hunter often adopted conservative Victorian rhetoric when speaking about young women migrants she sought to assist in the 1910s. She noted that she had directed her efforts at “assist[ing] these young women to earn their living with efficiency and dignity, wherever there is opportunity to place them in positions of trust”<sup>1270</sup>. On top of insisting on propriety in leisure times, the head of the Phillis Wheatley Home also insisted on neatness and self-respect: “Then we gave attention to improving their manners and to laying a foundation of right attitudes toward work in their own homes and those of their employers”<sup>1271</sup>.

Logically, women reformers fought against any form of vice among the new women migrants they helped. Hunter viewed prostitution, gambling, and alcohol as great “evils” which black women had to avoid risking falling into because of their already stained moral reputation. In her opinion, night life was dangerous and the source of vicious habits. Jane Hunter frowned upon dancing, gambling, drinking – which she called “dreadful monster[s]” and “commercialized vice”<sup>1272</sup>. Dance floors were not places for ladies: “St. Louis voodoo blues, half naked Negro girls dance shameless dances with men in Spanish costumes, while daughters from highly respectable families, attended by escorts, clap their dainty, white hands

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expand, and in the spring of 1919 raised another sum of money with which we purchased a two-story building adjacent to the home, thus providing a large hall for the girl reserves and rooms for other clubs and community activities”.

<sup>1268</sup> Hunter, *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>1269</sup> As I will see in the fourth part, her regional affiliation caused her to be criticized in Cleveland.

<sup>1270</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 122.

<sup>1271</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>1272</sup> *Ibid.*, 104. See also 111-112. “The old evils still flourish in most places of amusement. The dice roll, strong liquor flows; lewd men and wretched women crowd about gambling tables in basements, often wagering as high as \$40, to emerge with a dime”.



and shout their approval. The whole atmosphere is one of unrestrained animality, the jungle faintly veneered with civilized trappings”<sup>1273</sup>. In order to offer what she deemed as proper leisure activities to her residents, she therefore created a “recreational hall” in 1922 next to the Home<sup>1274</sup>. Jane Hunter also exerted strict surveillance over the girls under her responsibility. She admitted, for instance, to eavesdropping on the phone conversations of her young residents in order to make sure they respected propriety rules:

In fact it was necessary at all times to guard our girls from evil surroundings. I kept a vigilant ear at the switchboard in my office to catch conversations of a doubtful character, and to intercept assignments. No effort we made to restrict tenancy to girls of good character could exclude the ignorant, the foolish, and the weak, for these had to be protected as well. In the company of the policeman whom I could trust, I would sometimes follow couples to places of assignation, rescue the girl, and assist in the arrest of her would-be seducer<sup>1275</sup>.

Clearly, she went beyond her prescribed role as a manager of a girls’ Home and apparently acted as a surrogate mother for these young women, sheltering them and protecting them from relationships which might endanger their reputation<sup>1276</sup>. Jane Hunter opposed the social changes of the early twentieth century and the more permissive emerging culture – in particular as regards dating and sexual relationships. In the 1910s, she therefore posited herself as a guardian of strict Victorian morals.

Religion played a special role in the organizing of social work. Churches were spaces where women could organize relief for migrant women and express their agency. For example, the Woman’s Convention – the women’s branch of the Baptist Convention —, an organization founded and run by Baptist women – became more and more influential from the 1890s onward. For instance, Nannie Helen Burroughs was active in the Woman’s Baptist Convention, as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has shown<sup>1277</sup>. Sarah Willie Layten was very active in the Woman’s Convention as well, helping organize relief for migrants before and after their arrival in northern cities<sup>1278</sup>. In these religious associations, members organized

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<sup>1273</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>1274</sup> Ibid., 106. “I now determined that the Phillis Wheatley should inaugurate a recreational hall [...] We rented a barn in the rear of our home for \$10 a month, put in a new floor, plastered the walls, and announced our first party. Guests came only on invitation; no admission was charged as the parties which were held twice a month. The new addition to the Phillis Wheatley Association proved a huge success”.

<sup>1275</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>1276</sup> In the Introduction, Rhondda Robinson Thomas explains that Hazel Carby has argued that “Hunter [saw] black female migrants as helpless victims and situate[d] herself as a matriarch who [had to] eavesdrop on [...] residents’ phone calls and interfere with the young women’s dating choices to keep them morally safe”, 11-12.

<sup>1277</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*.

<sup>1278</sup> S. Willie Layten became president of the Woman’s Convention in 1900 – she would serve as such until 1948. In her annual address before the women’s convention in 1915, Layten spoke about the contributions of Baptist women: “We have extended [...] membership to every state and territory in the union; we have found quiet and obscure women, who knew not their talents, and we have brought them forth, give them inspiration and



support for members by offering help for funeral services, providing solidarity funds, and special aid for mothers, etc.

Many clubwomen were very often pious and devout Christians. Jane Hunter thanked God for His guidance when she migrated north: “A girl alone in a large city must know the dangers and pitfalls awaiting her. She must have abiding faith in God’s love and care for His own. I was glad to have had a real Christian faith taught me; for in hours of distress and hunger, He, like a shepherd, has led me on my way”<sup>1279</sup>. Their belief in God pushed these social workers to help the needy, the poor and the oppressed. Like many other black women activists, religion definitely modelled Hunter’s experience and her philosophy<sup>1280</sup>. References to Christian love and duty inundate her life story. She said that she started the PWA in 1911 because it was “the supreme task for which God had designed [her]”<sup>1281</sup> and hoped the Home would “establish the kingdom of God in [the] municipal life. It is the “promised land” for which we must “work together, children”<sup>1282</sup>. In times of discouragement, faith gave her the strength to continue her work: “It was only because we continued in the spirit of prayer and work, animated by faith in the kingdom of God, that larger means were added to our small beginnings”<sup>1283</sup>. Hunter’s religious energy helped her tremendously throughout her life and activism.

Pushed by a strong religious drive and believing in the necessity to offer pragmatic responses to the community, at times acting as big sisters or surrogate mothers to young women migrants, these social workers played a significant role in their cities and neighborhoods and often proved to be conservative.

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work, and develop them into some of the strongest and most resourceful women of the age [...] The [Woman’s] Convention is in reality – an Institute – our effort is to teach and prepare women for service”, in *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, 405. Jessie Carney Smith explained in Layten’s short biography that “women who wanted to migrate worked through their churches and, in turn, the churches contacted Layten, who gave them directions and other pertinent information. The churches also facilitated Layten’s work by encouraging only those who seemed well able to travel to migrate and by sending representatives to meet them at ships and trains that carried the new arrivals. They also helped the migrants find lodging and suitable employment”, *Notable Black American Women*, Book II, 404.

<sup>1279</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 75. “Faith in God and hope for the future were the only assets I had when we arrived in Cleveland”, 68.

<sup>1280</sup> Ibid, 13. Hunter posited her journey as a spiritual quest. Hunter “fashioned her life story as a type of spiritual autobiography, similar to those penned by motherless daughters like Maria Stewart and Harriet Jacobs, as well as other black women writers who drew on a Biblical rhetoric to empower themselves to implement social reform within their communities”. With “her reliance on Biblical imagery and allusions to represent her racial uplift work as a battle between the forces of good and evil, Hunter places herself firmly within the tradition of spiritual autobiography”. For these reasons, the editor deems that her autobiography constitutes a spiritual autobiography, like those of Harriet Jacobs or Jarena Lee.

<sup>1281</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>1282</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>1283</sup> Ibid, 92-93.

At the turn of the century, Victorianism was losing ground when a new generation of African American women aspired to being more sexually liberated, wanted to live more freely, date boys without being chaperoned and adopted new leisure habits. Faced with such changes, social workers of earlier generations such as Hunter – who were products of Victorian America – had a hard time adapting and accepting these changes. It was perhaps harder for women of color to renounce Victorian values because they feared that if African American women lived freely – like white women at the time – they would again be accused of being immoral. As a result, they kept emphasizing the necessity for women of color to adopt Victorian attitudes especially when it came to dress, sexuality and leisure. Consequently, women of color in America had a very different experience of this time period from white women – a time of greater freedom for women – because of the negative assumptions about black women’s morality.

Nevertheless, while they believed in the necessary observance of propriety and insisted on morality and respectability in order to preserve the image of women of color, clubwomen adopted radical, liberal methods in their organizations and clubs for the time. Behind a rhetoric centered on Victorian propriety, respectability, morality, and religious obedience, African American women social workers carried out innovative and daring projects<sup>1284</sup>. As Higginbotham has pointed out about black Baptist women, ultimately “the rhetoric of the Woman’s Convention combine both the conservative and the radical impulse”<sup>1285</sup>. Behind this apparent conservatism, African American women social workers were in fact designing subversive action by opening settlement houses, homes and recreational centers, opening girls and boy’s clubs and by resorting to interracial work.

Many African American women had for a long time been denied their womanhood and their basic humanity in America. They were also historically excluded from the theory of Domesticity, since many of them, depending on their economic circumstances, had worked outside of home for decades.

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<sup>1284</sup> Introduction of *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 14. Rhondra Robinson Thomas notes that “Although Hunter relied on techniques that can be considered highly invasive and overly protective – such as eavesdropping on PWA residence phone calls – she emphasized innovative educational, employment, and cultural programs as the best means to empower African American females to resist the lure of starlight’s world and to become self-sufficient citizens”.

<sup>1285</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 187. “Through the discourse of respectability, [they] emphasized manners and morals while simultaneously asserting traditional forms of protest, such as petitions, boycotts, and verbal appeals to justice”.

In an age when the good name of black women was constantly under attack, some clubwomen decided to fight back. Aware that they represented only a group of educated, privileged women, they spoke for the voiceless, thinking that they were the best suited to redeem the image of women of color – thanks to their status, education and ability to express themselves. Because they had the possibility to express their voices in newspapers, women's newspapers such as the *Woman's Era* and other publications, elite women voiced their new ideal form of womanhood. They embraced the role of “representatives of the race” to defend the interests not only of women but of the entire community, by adopting innovative methods and, at times, turning to interracial cooperation. Importantly, they urged white Americans to finally acknowledge them as women and as human beings.

Between 1890 and 1920, when Victorianism was transformed and when the new woman was emerging, African American women kept redefining womanhood differently from white women. Many black women of the middle and upper-class partially subscribed to Victorianism. Beverly Guy-Sheftall has shown the importance of the cult of domesticity for black women. In her seminal book *Daughters of Sorrows: Attitudes towards Black Women : 1880- 1920s*, Guy-Sheftall argued that “ironically, however, that cult of True Womanhood or domesticity, was still an integral part of the ideological fabric, despite the push for equality, and it resulted in a complex set of ideas about the values and code of behavior that women should adopt”<sup>1286</sup>. As Charles Lemert has emphasized, scholars such as Mary Helen Washington showed that Cooper “was never able to discard totally the ethics of true womanhood”<sup>1287</sup> and believed in the virtues of piety and purity. Additionally, as Mark Giles has contended: “Cooper wrestled with many notions of the Victorian era norms that shaped her and what it meant to be an American Black woman”<sup>1288</sup>. What is more, Esme Bhan has argued: “One of the common criticisms of “Cooper’s thinking is that she was too beholden to traditional values – those, perhaps of true womanhood, but also those of her Christian belief”. Lemert has tried in chapter 1 to demonstrate that Cooper’s thinking, and indeed her life, were motivated always by a larger concern with the world of the poor and the world as such”<sup>1289</sup>. Because they were influenced by Victorianism growing up and were trying to redeem the image of women of color, they were in a dilemma.

What strategy did they use? Black female intellectuals at the same time partially embraced and rejected Victorian norms and used Victorianism for their own political battles.

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<sup>1286</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall. *Daughters of Sorrow*, 2.

<sup>1287</sup> Charles Lemert, “The Colored Woman’s Office”, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 25.

<sup>1288</sup> Mark S. Giles, “Dr Anna Julia Cooper, 1858-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (Fall 2006): 621-634, 627.

<sup>1289</sup> Esme Bhan, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 268.

As Mark Giles has noted: “Cooper’s life and work crossed several cultural borders and modeled an embracing of and resistance to the nineteenth century notions of ‘true womanhood’, and early twentieth century Black progressivism.”<sup>1290</sup> Kristin Waters has also argued about Anna Cooper that while she partially adhered to Victorianism, she “critique[d] the cult [of true womanhood] in her identification of decadent white southern culture with medieval chivalry, both of which she finds hypocritical. [...] True womanhood was reserved for a class of elite white woman who derived their elevation from the slavocracy that supported them”<sup>1291</sup>.

As Kristin Waters has convincingly pointed out, black women embraced Victorianism to gain further credibility in the nation, and to liberate themselves from both gendered and racial oppression. “In both its classism and its racism, the cult of true womanhood differed from its African-American counterpart. The ideology of black female moral leadership [which Cooper crafted] may have modeled itself consciously on the white cult as a way of gaining credibility in a racist society”. As Waters has suggested, in practice, the differences between black and white understandings of the cult of true womanhood were immense:

First, in the cult of true womanhood, women engaged in only the most delicate domestic chores. In contrast, black women as moral leaders were industrious, performing domestic or field labor as well as educating children and maintaining the home. Second, the cult of true womanhood was a political ideology designed to restrain women; it was not generated primarily by women themselves for the purpose of liberation, but by a white southern Christian sensibility for the purposes of oppression and control<sup>1292</sup>.

As Claudia Tate has demonstrated, Cooper, like most women of this study, used the *language* of true womanhood to establish a point of communication with those to whom she spoke – with blacks and whites alike – in order “to isolate and define the political position of the black woman”, on the topic of women’s right to Higher Education<sup>1293</sup>.

At the turn of the century, these black intellectuals using the language and the rhetoric of true womanhood, redefined the contours of black womanhood and remodeled Victorianism, crafting a “dual womanhood” and developing a unique style. Cindy L. White and Catherine

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<sup>1290</sup> Mark S. Giles, “Dr Anna Julia Cooper, 1858-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist”, 627.

<sup>1291</sup> Kristin Waters, “Some Core Themes of Nineteenth- Century Black Feminism”. *Black Women Intellectual Traditions*, 374. As Kristin Waters has pointed out, Cooper was conscious that in the nineteenth century, white women embraced the cult of True Womanhood in order to conform to gendered expectations of their time and to benefit from a certain status – conferred to them thanks to gender and sometimes class – and thanks to their race in the South. “True womanhood was reserved for a class of elite white women who derived their elevation from the slavocracy that supported them”.

<sup>1292</sup> Kristin Waters, “Some Core Themes of Nineteenth-Century Black Feminism”. *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 374- 375.

<sup>1293</sup> Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*, 156-157, as cited in Lemert, Charles. *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 27.

A. Dobris – two scholars in the field of Communication – have said that the African American assertion of their identity as women was a political struggle:

For black women, the rhetorical negotiation of identity in such a rhetorical and ideological milieu was a significant *political struggle*. Moreover, it was a political struggle different from that of white women. Investigating black women's rhetorical stances in relation to prevailing ideological standards of *sanctified womanhood* – their negotiation of the standard as simultaneously conformist and subversive – is necessary to the project of deconstructing the ideology and making sense of women's lives<sup>1294</sup>.

Instead of seeing the ideology of Victorian womanhood as a burden, African American club women used the ideology as “an expedient” to achieve greater agency. As Dobris and White have underscored: “What is generally viewed as ‘a topoi for oppression’ by white women, the ideology of womanhood “was used by black women as a strategic means for liberation”<sup>1295</sup>. Contrary to white women for whom the ideology of womanhood offered a certain protection – elite African American women used the rhetoric and ideology of womanhood – the image of the black lady for instance – for their own liberation as women and as African Americans, at a time when many American women were in fact trying to challenge this ideology of womanhood<sup>1296</sup>. Black women of the elite, who presented themselves as ambassadors of their race, used the Cult of True Womanhood in their favor. As Dobris wrote: “They were to claim and win the privileges of womanhood by strategic enactment of the ideology that denied their humanity, in other words, by being ladies”<sup>1297</sup>.

This did not constitute the only strategy. Anne Knupfer, among others, has pointed out in her study that Chicago black clubwomen partially adhered to models of white womanhood but resorted to different, innovative strategies from white women as social workers:

The rhetoric of motherhood, home life, and children's welfare was common to both African-American and white women's clubs. So, too, were the images of the cult of true womanhood and of Christianity, despite their culturally specific expressions, socially appropriate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for club women. *Yet the subtext of the practices, rituals, and activities remained distinctly their own*<sup>1298</sup>.

Knupfer has further explained that black clubwomen “reshaped” their rhetoric and actions:

This is not to suggest that African American club women merely transplanted the templates of True Womanhood or Republican motherhood onto their club activities. Rather, as many feminist club scholars have elaborated, the club women reshaped their language, rituals, and practices to correspond to historically and culturally veritable expressions of motherhood and womanhood [...] African

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<sup>1294</sup> White and Dobris, “The Nobility of Womanhood: ‘Womanhood’ in the Rhetoric of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Clubwomen”, 174. Italics mine.

<sup>1295</sup> Cindy White L. and Catherine A. Dobris, “The Nobility of Womanhood: ‘Womanhood’ in the Rhetoric of Nineteenth Century Black Club Women”, 184.

<sup>1296</sup> See Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 4-5. Nevertheless, interestingly, white women used the image of the lady to gain public influence and used the rhetoric of womanhood as a liberating force as well: “As active agents, nineteenth century women utilized the domestic and moral traits attributed to the ideal lady to increase autonomy, assert sorority, win education, and seize influence beyond the home in the forbidden public sphere”, 4.

<sup>1297</sup> Dobris and White, “The Nobility of Womanhood”, 182.

<sup>1298</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 23. Italics mine.

American women consequently relished their *own* versions of domesticity, as they reinscribed the primacy of motherhood and home life<sup>1299</sup>.

In the third part of this study, I will analyze how some African American women intellectuals organized the work of racial uplift. I will first examine how these women insisted on woman's education, on the necessity for women to exit woman's so-called "sacred" – domestic – sphere. Then, I will study how they focused their arguments on "better homes" and insisted on women's crucial roles as Christian mothers and homemakers, even though some of their recommendations were sometimes difficult to follow. Lastly, I will see that woman suffrage was also a central, sine qua non condition for women of color to defend the image of African American women and the community at the turn of the century.

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<sup>1299</sup> Ibid., 12. Italics hers.



## Part THREE: Redeeming Black Womanhood Through Racial Uplift

## Architects of Racial Uplift

After having examined how African American intellectuals organized their defense of the image of women of color in the woman's era by placing emphasis on their womanhood and humanity, it is necessary to study how they used the image of the new woman to organize racial uplift, which was critically linked to the work they were accomplishing to defend women of color in the nation. At the turn of the century, while the emergence of the white new woman resulted from women yearning for more freedom from gender oppression, the creation of the black new woman was on the contrary strategically linked to discourses of racial uplift<sup>1</sup>. As Martha Patterson has pointed out, for Margaret Murray Washington the mission of the "new negro woman"<sup>2</sup> was not to embrace "the 'selfish' attributes of the white 'New Woman' – sexual freedom and individual accomplishment – the black expression of New Womanhood epitomized refinement, domestic accomplishment, and race progress"<sup>3</sup>.

## Developing A Rhetoric Centered on Education, Motherhood and Home-Making

During the period 1890-1920, both black and white progressive women's discourses about woman's role focused on women's inherent morality. In her study of American womanhood, Mary Ryan has underlined that white women used the rhetoric of morality and purity to demand more rights:

The most dramatic remodeling of woman's sphere was accomplished by the female social reformers of the Progressive Era, who capitalized on the presumed moral superiority and purity of their sex to justify an active female campaign to clean up society and politics. [...] However active socially and economically, these women of the late nineteenth century still retained the characteristics of occupants of woman's sphere<sup>4</sup>.

For Anne Knupfer, the rhetoric employed by progressive black women is common with that of white women because clubwomen stressed the importance of "motherhood, home life, and children's welfare" as well as "religion and the cult of true womanhood"<sup>5</sup>. Like white reformers who asserted that women's natural qualities would have a purifying effect on society, progressive black women's rhetoric rested on the idea that African American women's main mission was to uplift the entire community and that women were naturally

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 58. Martha Patterson has explained that in the black women's club movement, racial uplift was central.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 58. See Washington, Margaret Murray. "The New Negro Woman's, *Lend a Hand*, 1895. "In an 1895 article for the reformist magazine *Lend a Hand*, Margaret Murray Washington offers what may have been the first use of the term "New Negro Woman" to define a woman whose primary concern is racial uplift within the home".

<sup>3</sup> Martha Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, xvi. Introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, 23.

well-suited to achieve this goal. As a result, they put special emphasis on woman's morality, woman's education, Christian motherhood and the necessity of building purer, "better" homes. This message was conveyed in the press and on university campuses. In an issue of Howard *University Journal*, in a piece entitled "Mother's Influence", an anonymous author contended that "the great need of the race, the great need of the world, is mothers – Christian mothers. It is hardly necessary to add Christian, for no woman can be a better mother in the best sense of the word unless she is a Christian"<sup>6</sup>.

African American female activists developed what Guy-Sheftall has termed "Cultural Feminism" in *Words of Fire* – a philosophy that was at the same time conservative and innovative.

The feminist discourse here has been impacted by other discourses, particularly the Victorian 'cult of true womanhood', which dictated that women embraced values such as piety, chastity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Women who embraced these values might be labelled 'cultural feminists' because they did not reject altogether the gender prescriptions of their times. Though they espoused greater independence for women, they also insisted that enlightened wifehood and motherhood were appropriate aspirations<sup>7</sup>.

When the NACW was created, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell – its first president – placed special emphasis on home, motherhood and childcare. The goals of the association were clearly not only community-oriented but also family-oriented, the social, educational, political needs of both women and children being at the core of their preoccupations<sup>8</sup>. The ideology of the NACW was imbued with Victorianism. For Dobris and White, "[Margaret Murray] Washington made clear [that] 'social uplift', captured in the NACW's motto ["Lifting as we climb"] was the primary agenda of the national association. Rhetorically, the motto [...] and the leaders of the movement like Washington and Terrell adopted the prevailing ideology of womanhood as the grounds by which women should be judged and their activities directed<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> "Mother's Influence", *The University Journal*. Vol. 2, No. 12, 1. Howard University.

<sup>7</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> See Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin's First Address at the National Conference of Colored Women in 1895. The objectives of the NACW were to: 1: promote the education of women and children, 2: raise the standards of the home, 3: improve conditions for family living, 4: work for the moral, economic, social and religious welfare of women and children, 5: protect the rights of women and children, 6: to secure and enforce civil and political rights for the African American race, 7: promote interracial understanding so that justice may prevail among all people.

<sup>9</sup> White and Dobris, "The Nobility of Womanhood: 'Womanhood' in the Rhetoric of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Clubwomen", 177.

## A Special Duty For Racial Uplift

Paula Giddings has suggested that the strategy of liberation and simultaneous adherence to the cult appear was paradoxical, because the words “uplift”, “lift” or “climb” have a Victorian connotation<sup>10</sup>. However, in order to be efficient architects of racial uplift, they had to embody and advocate models of Christian, educated motherhood, efficient homemakers, and unwavering supporters of woman suffrage. As Dublin, Arias and Carreras have stressed:

The main novelty in the perspective offered by clubwomen in the NACW was their assertion that women should lead the effort of racial uplift, that women were particularly well-suited to train the young, to guide young mothers, to offer examples and lessons to the masses of African Americans who had scant education and little exposure to dominant white culture<sup>11</sup>.

Many African American clubwomen have stated the view that men could not play that role. The first to do so was Anna Cooper who asserted in 1886 that women were the main architects of racial uplift: “The fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the retraining of the race, as well as the ground work and starting point of its progress upward, must be the *black woman*”<sup>12</sup>. To “elevate” the community, “the indispensable agency of an elevated and trained womanhood” was needed since “a race [could not] be purified from without”<sup>13</sup>. There are numerous other testimonies that this belief was widely shared. More than twenty years after the development of Cooper’s philosophy in the 1890s, Cornelia Bowen wrote in 1907: “Woman occupies the highest position in the growth of any race. She holds within her hands the reins of progress”<sup>14</sup> and Emma Hackley explained, in the 1910s, that African American women indeed had a special role to play “For race advancement. She works, thinks, and reads to be ready for the need of the tomorrow and its problems”<sup>15</sup>. Advancing the interests of the race was like a leitmotiv in their writings and statements. In a

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<sup>10</sup> ASALH, “97th Annual Conference”, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 24-27 September 2012. Plenary session of September 26, 2012. Paula Giddings contended that “Social or racial uplift was a Victorian concept”. It conveys the idea that working-class women had to be “succored” from a lower position by upper-class women.

<sup>11</sup> See the introduction of the electronic book entitled: *What gender Perspectives Shaped the Emergence of the National Association of Colored Women, 1895-1920?*. Ed. Dublin, Thomas and Franchesca Arias and Debora Carreras. Binghamton, New York: State University of New York, 2000. “Woman and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000”, Alexander Street Press. <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/nacw/doclist.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, 62. Italics hers.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 62. The question of helping women of the racial uplift themselves was paramount and “the race cannot be effectually lifted up till its women are truly elevated we take as proven”, 69. She then praised the work of Alexander Crummell “The Black Woman of the South : Her Neglects and Her Needs”. Crummell was the pastor of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., from 1879-1898.

<sup>14</sup> Cornelia Bowen, “Woman’s Part in the Uplift of the Race”, *The Colored American Magazine* 3(March 1907): 222-223, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol. V., 153. Bowen (1865-1934) was an African American teacher from Alabama who founded Mt. Meigs Colored Institute.

<sup>15</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 163.

chapter entitled “Originality”, Azalia Hackley argued that working for the race should be women’s central concern: “A colored woman especially should have some purpose in life to further race advancement. It should not only be a high purpose but it should be something real”<sup>16</sup>. In a 1916 speech, Mary Talbert was also adamant about the involvement of woman in her social environment. She had to act, Talbert told an assembly of delegates to the NACW: “No Negro woman can afford to be an indifferent spectator of the social, moral, religious, economic, and uplift problems that are agitated around [her]”<sup>17</sup>.

Moreover, some black clubwomen hammered home that because women possessed “womanly” qualities, were naturally and biologically planned to bear and raise children, were essentially moral and nurturing, they were particularly well-suited to take care of children and of the community at large and were therefore of particular help in schools, prisons or correctional homes. For example, Anna Cooper remarked in “The Higher Education of Women” in 1890-1891 that women had a “mothering influence”: “Homes for inebriates and homes for lunatics, shelter for the aged and shelter for the babes, hospitals for the sick, props and braces for the falling, reformatory prisons and prison reformatories, all show that a “mothering” influence from some source is leavening the nation”<sup>18</sup>.

Fannie Barrier Williams had similar ideas. In May 1895, she argued in an article entitled “Need of Cooperation of Men and Women in Correctional Work” in the *Woman’s Era*, that women could bring “the home spirit in the management” of correctional institutions and make “these institutions less of a prison”. Visibly adhering to Victorian ideas about natural gender qualities – attributing women “feminine” qualities and men “masculine” attributes —, she asserted: “It should be the mission of woman, with her warmer heart and finer instincts for home training, to make the great body of society absorb into its home life every dependent child susceptible to tender influences. [...] Give woman a chance and the great warm heart of human society will beat close to every human being capable of rescue from the blight of the vices”<sup>19</sup>. For Fannie Williams, reform clubs were purely feminine enterprises: “The colored women's club as a reformatory movement is wholly the creation of

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<sup>16</sup> Emma Hackley, 85.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Talbert, “The Vice-president’s Report,” *National Association Notes*, Vol. 18, Oct. 1916, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 77. What is more, Cooper said “Woman should not, even by interference, or for the sake of argument, seem to disparage what is weak. For woman’s cause is the cause of the weak”, Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 1891, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Need of Co-operation of Men and Women in Correctional Work”, *Woman’s Era*, II: 2 (May 1895): 3-4. Women came “with a burning desire to make better the world by helping to make better and sweeter the lives of the children of men”. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

women. [...] The conscience call for kindergartens, day nurseries, reading rooms etc., was not man made”<sup>20</sup>.

Because women were naturally inclined to help the defenseless, the duty of educated black women, or their “burden”, as Lucy Craft Laney called it in 1899, was to “teach the ‘Black babies’, [The black educated woman] must come forward and inspire our men and boys to make a successful onslaught upon sin, shame and crime”<sup>21</sup>. Many women like Laney thought: “Women [were] by nature fitted for teaching very young children: their maternal instincts makes them patient and sympathetic with their charges”. In the first chapter, I will examine how these activists – many of whom were educators – placed the emphasis on woman’s education in their discourses.

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<sup>20</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *Progress of A Race*, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 32. She said: “An examination of the Constitution and by-laws of these first organizations among colored women shows a degree of earnestness and freedom from affectation and pretense that is very refreshing, and speaks much for the strong character of the workers. Temperance, mothers’ meetings, sewing school, rescue agencies, night schools, home sanitation and lectures on all subjects social interest were some of the many things attempted and carried on by these clubs.”, 33. In some places these groups of women constituted “the only organized force among the colored people for any purpose”, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Lucy Craft Laney, “The Burden of the Educated Colored Woman,” *Hampton Negro Conference* 3 (July 1899): 37–43, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 40–46, 44–45. “In the kindergarten and primary school is the salvation of the race”, 44. Another clubwoman, Sylvanie Francaz Williams, believed that educated black women “was the most to be pitied” because thanks to her education she saw the “degradation of her own race”, Sylvanie Francaz Williams, “The Social Status of the Negro Woman”, *Our Woman’s Number. The Voice of the Negro* 1(7) (July 1904): 298–300, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 92.



# Chapter 1: Racial Uplift Through Education and Work

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## 1. Uplift Through Education

Education had been highly prized for many years by the African American community but the education of girls increasingly became an important subject of attention as of the 1890s because in a context of social, economic, political and racial tensions, as a result of black men being increasingly disenfranchised, many women intellectuals of color believed that acquiring education was of paramount importance<sup>22</sup>. Many male and female black thinkers thought that the educated members of the community had a special duty to educate less privileged members of their group<sup>23</sup>. For example, like many other women, Azalia Hackley, who had penned *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, an etiquette book, stressed the necessity for women to pursue an education because it was critically linked to self-help, racial uplift and citizenship<sup>24</sup>. The advancement of the race would only be secured through education.

For black women intellectuals, acquiring education was essential. As the discussion between Fanny Jackson Coppin, Anna Cooper and Fannie Barrier Williams at the Columbian Exposition of 1893 shows, all three women agreed education was the key to progress of the race because schools were places where children could obtain access to opportunities or values their parents were sometimes unable to give them. Consequently, all of them demanded that black girls have the same access to education as any other women in America<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Black men's disenfranchisement was particularly fierce between 1890 and 1906. See Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 645.

<sup>23</sup> The most famous black intellectual who favored such views is W.E.B. Du Bois, a famous sociologist and author of the seminal book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), who thought that the "talented tenth" had the mission to uplift the rest of the community. Du Bois had started working on the question of the Great migration in the 1890s. He published his study *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* in 1899. See Le Dantec-Lowry, *De l'esclave au président*, 89-90.

<sup>24</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*. Education was the key to social uplift, since the aim of education was "to lift one above the animal". [Woman] "will endeavor to lift herself to the highest plane of true womanhood that she may pull others higher.", 135. Hackley thought that "education [was] the process of developing all man's powers, physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and religious for the proper discharge of the duties of citizenship", 53. She also contended: "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.", 136.

<sup>25</sup> "Fannie Jackson Coppin's Response to Fannie Williams", 1893. [https://archive.org/stream/worldscongressof00worluoft/worldscongressof00worluoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/worldscongressof00worluoft/worldscongressof00worluoft_djvu.txt). Coppin explained that the desire for education among African Americans "did not come out of wanting to imitate any one" but it "grew out of the uneasiness and the restlessness of the desires we felt within us: the desire to know, not just a little, but a great deal" at a time when it was deemed useless because of their race or sex. Coppin hoped to arouse the sense of sisterhood among the members of her white audience. She argued that the question: "Why educate the woman – what will she do with it?" was "impertinent and unwise", and hoped that such "selfishness [and]

Anna Cooper praised former slaves, the humble “heroines” who, in freedom, selflessly sent their children to school when they themselves “never had the chance”: “Not even then was that patient, untrumpeted heroine, the slave-mother, released from self-sacrifice, and many an unbuttered crust was eaten in silent content that she might eke out enough from her poverty to send her young folks off to school”<sup>26</sup>, the way her mother had done for her in North Carolina in the 1860s.

In 1893, contrary to Fannie Barrier Williams who believed that school could not teach the “virtues of life”, Anna Cooper thought that the mission of black schools was to palliate the flaws of society. Using Victorian rhetoric that insisted on purity, domesticity and dignity, Cooper asserted that the work done in southern schools “lift[ed] up ideals of home and of womanhood; diffus[ed] a contagious longing for higher living and purer thinking, inspire[ed] woman herself with a new sense of her dignity in the eternal purposes of nature”<sup>27</sup>. One year before, in “What Are We Worth?”, she had claimed that America and African Americans also needed Christian education because it was the key to “Negro’s uplift and amelioration”<sup>28</sup>.

### **Being on an Equal Footing With Men**

Many intellectuals insisted that men and women of color were on an equal footing regarding education, since most of them had had access to primary education approximately at the same time – after emancipation. In 1893, praising schools such as “Hampton, Fisk, Atlanta, Raleigh, and other central stations” as well as “the Wilberforce, the Livingston, the Allen, and the Paul Quinn”, Anna Cooper explained that “These schools were almost without exception co-educational” because “funds were too limited to be divided on sex lines, even had it been ideally desirable; but our girls as well as our boys flocked in and battled for an

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discourtesy that would push down a poor, weak, innocent creature because it could not protect itself” was “bound to succumb to the better education that is everywhere being given, till people will call it after a while by its right name, viz.: very bad manners”. Fanny Jackson Coppin, Fannie Barrier Williams, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell all worked as teachers – Cooper even taught her entire life. Although Terrell and Wells left few or no writings dealing with the question of woman’s education, both of them favored Higher education for women. Both of them wanted their daughters to go to college. For instance, Wells wanted her daughter to go to Law School. See the interview of Alfreda Duster in *Memphis Diary*. Phyllis Terrell and Mary Terrell both attended institutions of Higher Learning such as St. Johnsbury Academy in Vermont and Howard University.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress of Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation”, in *A Voice From The South*, 203.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Intellectual Progress of Colored Women”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 203. She added: “Education, then, is the safest and richest investment possible to man. It pays the largest dividends and gives the grandest possible product to the world – a man”. Anna Julia Cooper, “What are We Worth?”, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 168 and in *A Voice From The South*, 244-245.

<sup>28</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, 1902, *A Voice From The South*, 211-212.

education”<sup>29</sup>. Years later, in “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business” (1904), Fannie Williams also emphasized men’s and women’s evenness:

The progress of the colored woman is normal. In our development as a race, the colored woman and the colored man started even. The man cannot say that he's better educated and has had a wider sphere, for they both began school at the same time. They have suffered the same misfortunes. The limitations put upon their ambitions have been identical. The colored man can scarcely say to his wife, ‘I am better and stronger than you are’, and from the present outlook, I do not think there is any danger of the man getting far very far ahead<sup>30</sup>.

As a feminist, Anna Cooper had deplored the fact that girls were denied education in the South and she did not hesitate to criticize the policies of the Church in the South in 1886. According to her, the Church tended to favor indigent male students who would later be trained for the ministry. The number of girls who were “supported, sheltered and trained” was “phenomenonally small”: “Girls being a sort of *tertium quid* whose development may be promoted if they can pay their way and fall in with the plans mapped out for the training of the other sex”<sup>31</sup>. She supported education for all and believed girls’ education was even more necessary. In “Higher Education of Women” (1890-1891), she claimed: “At the present stage of our development in the South [the earnest well-trained Christian young woman, as a teacher, as a homemaker, as wife, mother or silent influence even] is ever more important and necessary. Let us [...] recognize this force and resolve to make the most of it – not the boys less, but the girls, more”<sup>32</sup>. Having been offered the opportunity to study the Classics as a young woman and married a progressive man, she encouraged men to provide women with Higher Education, lamenting that they were “drop[ping] back into” what she called “sixteenth century logic”:

I fear the majority of colored men do not yet think it worth while that women aspire to higher education. Not many will subscribe to the ‘advanced’ ideas of Grant Allen already quoted. The three R’s, a little music and a good deal of dancing, a first rate dress-maker and a bottle of magnolia balm, are quite enough generally to render charming any woman possessed of tact and the capacity for worshipping masculinity<sup>33</sup>.

## Asserting Women’s Right to Higher Education

In 1886, Josephine Turpin Washington, a southern-born educator and progressive intellectual, addressed the question of women’s right to education. In “Higher Education for

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<sup>29</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress of Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation: A Response to Fannie Barrier Williams”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 203.

<sup>30</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in Man’s Business”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 62.

<sup>31</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886. *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 70.

<sup>32</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 72-87, 87.

<sup>33</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, 85. The three “R.” were: Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

Women”, she wrote: “The very fact that woman has a mind capable of infinite expansion is in itself an argument that she should receive the highest possible development”<sup>34</sup>. She “has a head” on top of having “a heart”. Therefore she asked rhetorically: “Should not those who have capacity and inclination be allowed to receive this higher education?”. Drawing on examples from French History, the way Cooper would do a few years later, Josephine Turpin Washington claimed that it would be unjust on behalf of men to “attempt the restraining” of [women’s] education” on the ground that it is “unfeminine”<sup>35</sup>.

In 1890-1891, Anna Cooper advocated Higher Education as well, explaining that women should be stimulated to pursue their studies: “If there is an ambitious girl with pluck and brain to take the higher education, encourage her to make the most of it”, she said<sup>36</sup>. She also insisted that girls should be convinced to learn to think for themselves in order to play an active part in the world: “Now I claim that it is the prevalence of the Higher Education among women, the making it a common everyday affair for women to reason and think and express their thought, the training and stimulus which enable and encourage women to administer to the world the bread it needs as well as the sugar it cries for”<sup>37</sup>. In order to fight for women’s education, Cooper concluded that women could only achieve their mission if they were educated: “The feminine factor can have its proper effect only through women’s development and education so that she may fitly and intelligently stamp her force on the forces of her day, and add her modicum to the riches of the world’s thought”<sup>38</sup>.

Like Anna Cooper and Josephine Washington, Fannie Williams was a strong supporter of woman’s education. In 1893, she argued that women ought to benefit from Higher Education. Criticizing the “nineteenth century’s narrowness that still keeps women out of the higher institutions of learning”, she rejoiced that “our women [we]re eagerly demanding the

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<sup>34</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Higher Education for Women,” *The People’s Advocate*, 12 April 1884, as cited in *African American Feminisms*, Vol III, 194-198, 194. Josephine Washington (1861-1949) was born in Virginia to slave parents. She was said to have famous white ancestry – she was supposedly a great-granddaughter of Mary Jefferson Turpin, a paternal aunt of Thomas Jefferson. Josephine Turpin Washington was a prolific writer, she wrote the foreword to *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*, compiled and edited by Hallie Q. Brown and first published in 1926, The Black Heritage Library Collection. (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971). She taught at Wilberforce University for many years and died in Ohio.

<sup>35</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Higher Education for Women,” 196. Turpin Washington spoke about Madame Recamier and Roland, Madame Levigne – who was “hated by Louis XIV”, “Madame de Staël, persecuted by Napoleon”, 195. Cooper spoke about Sappho, Aspasia, the Renaissance period, Italian examples and then spoke about French History with Abbé Choisi and the Duchess of Fontanges. See “The Higher Education of Women”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, pages 79-80.

<sup>36</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, 87.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 78.

best of education open to their race”<sup>39</sup>. She thought that the more educated a woman was, the more efficiently she could help her community.

In an article published in June 1895 in the *Woman’s Era*, Fannie Williams asserted that education was a way to develop one’s skills, abilities and intelligence: “Women who have daughters capable of culture can do nothing better for womankind, as well as for the daughters, than give them the advantage of a college training, or an education that will have an equivalent value in the quality of their intelligence”<sup>40</sup>. Moreover, a college education equipped women with rigor and self-control. Williams interestingly argued that because it equipped women with “discipline and culture”, education could prove a useful tool to make women more mature, open-minded and generally less inclined to be influenced by jealousies and envies. For her, this “kind of culture or talisman [that] will save us women from being consumed by each other in our ambitions to be useful in this world of ours!”<sup>41</sup>.

In a period when the subject of woman’s education was still disputed, black intellectuals not only voiced their support for woman’s right to get an education, but they also aimed at explaining how and why society would benefit from it. Their first goal was to show men that education was not “de-feminizing” or “un-sexing” women.

## **2. What the College-Educated Woman Has to Offer**

### **Allaying Men’s Fears About “Unsexed or Masculine” Educated Women**

Up until the late 1910s, educated women were viewed with mistrust because they dared enter men’s sphere by studying certain topics reserved to men at University and therefore were thought to be unable to run a household if they happened to marry one day. Moreover, people commonly deemed it impossible for an educated woman to know how to cook or iron or accomplish other domestic duties properly<sup>42</sup>. Many College-educated black women of this study – whether they attended college in the 1880s or the 1910s – were indeed

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<sup>39</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation”, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*, June 1895, Vol II, No. 2., 4. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Williams spoke about irritability in particular. She reiterated this view in later writings, when discussing tensions within women’s clubs. She indeed often attributed tensions and disputes to woman’s inner nature.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 120. “College-bred women had a bad reputation for neatness both as to personal appearance and in the home. Words simply failed the public when it talked about them as housekeepers! It was enough to make angels weep to behold the awful homes kept by women with college degrees, people declared. The comedians on the stage always represented them as wearing bad-looking, unbecoming hats, long dresses with the hem ripped half out, and shoes run down at the heel. And as for cooking! Of course college-bred women knew nothing whatever about that! Women who had studied the higher mathematics, the sciences, and Greek had so violated the laws of nature that it was never possible for them to learn afterwards to do well the work which the Creator had ordained they should do”.



subjected to society's conservative expectations about women. Terrell had indeed been warned in the 1880s that taking "the gentleman's course" at Oberlin was deemed "unwomanly" and could put her marriageability at risk<sup>43</sup>.

In the woman's era, black and white men were afraid that women's education might "unsex" them and might encourage them to reject matrimony. College-educated women were often seen as unkempt, unattractive, undesirable partners who rejected all trappings of femininity. Mary Church explained in her autobiography that when she was studying at Oberlin College in the 1880s, she tried to change men's views by adopting proper dress – of course, she was able to look neat and dress well thanks to her social status:

I resolved, therefore, that I would prove all those charges against college-bred women were false, so far as I myself was concerned. In the first place, I would dress as well as I could. I would not wear shoes run down at the heel. I would not walk around the streets with a portion of the hem of my skirt ripped, and I would try to select becoming hats. All this I promised myself solemnly to do<sup>44</sup>.

Other women tried to reassure men. For instance, in April 1884, Josephine Turpin Washington asserted that higher education would not unsex women: "She will be none the less a woman when she has received an education; she will have lost none of that grace and sweetness of character which men admire"<sup>45</sup>.

In the period 1890-1920, such fears were even more widespread, since many more women attended College. Aware that they were still viewed with mistrust or scorn, educated black women continued to try to allay men's fears in their writings. Some activists such as Anna Cooper kept claiming that modern, educated women retained their femininity, sometimes replying sarcastically to the criticisms formulated by men. For example, Cooper mocked men's chivalric attitudes and expectations about women in 1890-1891. According to her, men thought that education "Must inevitably unsex woman destroying the lisping, clinging, tenderly helpless, and beautifully dependent creatures whom men would so heroically think for and so gallantly fight for and [must give] in their stead a formidable race of blue stockings with corkscrew ringlets and other spinster propensities"<sup>46</sup>. In fact, some women such as Anna Cooper argued that education contributed to develop women's innate

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 32. "Some of my friends and schoolmates urged me not to select the 'gentlemen's course,' because it would take much longer to complete than the 'ladies' course.' They pointed out that Greek was hard; that it was unnecessary, if not positively unwomanly, for girls to study that 'old, dead language' anyhow; that during the two extra years required to complete it I would miss a lot of fun which I could enjoy outside of college walls. And, worst of all, it might ruin my chances of getting a husband, since men were notoriously shy of women who knew too much". She had decided to take it anyway.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 120-121. She discovered this when she was studying for her B.A. at Oberlin College in the 1880s. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that her father had said about her that she "did not know how to boil water" after graduating, 120.

<sup>45</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, "Higher Education for Women," *The People's Advocate* 12 April 1884, 198.

<sup>46</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women", 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 72-87, 80.



feminine qualities instead of the contrary. As Hazel Carby has underscored: “Cooper felt strongly that the only effective counter to patriarchal abuse of power – the feminine – had to be developed through the education of women”<sup>47</sup>.

In her usual scholarly style, Cooper also demonstrated – using examples of Sappho, Aspasia, and of the Renaissance – that many women had enjoyed access to education early in History and that men later decided to forbid it. Because women’s attempt to acquire Higher education had been repeatedly “received [with] fear” throughout History, being judged as “a monstrous usurpation of man’s prerogative”, women’s “little aspirations, when they had any, were chilled and snubbed in embryo”<sup>48</sup>. Despite the Victorian recommendations she made at times, Cooper voiced feminist views which few women of African descent dared to express then:

I ask the men and women who are teachers and co-workers for the highest interests of the race, that they give the girls a chance! [...] 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 something more of them than that they merely look pretty and appear well in society”<sup>49</sup>.

As a strong supporter of woman’s right to be educated, Cooper deplored the fact that women had been denied education for several centuries and that for example, in the seventeenth century, “the ideal of the day” was that “woman [had to] be pretty, dress prettily, and not be too well informed”<sup>50</sup>. Women had too long been viewed as nice-looking dolls or mere ornaments. Therefore, Cooper advocated woman’s education in order for women to play active roles in society.

Cooper denounced black men’s “chivalric” and sexist attitudes on the question of woman’s education, despite their progressiveness on all other subjects. In 1890-1891, in “The Higher Education of Women”, Cooper stated:

It strikes me as true, that while our men seem thoroughly abreast of the times on almost every other subject, when they strike the woman question they drop back into sixteenth century logic. They leave nothing to be desired generally in regard to gallantry and chivalry, but they actually do not seem sometimes to have outgrown that old contemporary of chivalry — the idea that women may stand on pedestals or live in doll houses, (if they happen to have them) but they must not furrow their brows with thought or attempt to help men tug at the great questions of the world. I fear the majority of colored men do not yet think it worth while that women aspire to higher education. Not many will subscribe to the ‘advanced’ ideas of Grant Allen already quoted. The three R’s, a little music and a good deal of dancing,

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<sup>47</sup> Hazel V. Carby, “On the Threshold of Woman’s Era: Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory” in *“Race,” Writing, and Difference*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates Junior, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986): 301-316, 305.

<sup>48</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 72-87, 79.

<sup>49</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Higher Education of Women” 1890-1891, 86. In this very learned article, Cooper demonstrated her knowledge of world History and women’s History.

<sup>50</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South*, 80. “Higher Education of Women”. Cooper referred to the Duchesse de Fontanges and l’“Abbé Choisi”, therefore placing her discourse in seventeenth century France, 80. The Duchess of Fontanges was the young Marie Angélique de Scorailles (1661-1681) who became Louis XIV’s favorite before dying prematurely at the age of 20.

a first rate dress-maker and a bottle of magnolia balm, are quite enough generally to render charming any woman possessed of tact and the capacity for worshipping masculinity<sup>51</sup>.

Clearly, Cooper thought that woman's "proper" sphere was not *exclusively* in the house, therefore rebuking gender norms of her time.

Moreover, in 1890, when discussing the compatibility between education and marriage – a topic which was in vogue with the birth of the New Woman – this knowledgeable scholar explained that throughout History, marriage has been used to prevent women's access to education, it was "the most serious argument ever used against the higher education"<sup>52</sup>. Although she agreed with Grant Allen that "there must be marrying and giving in marriage even till the end of time", she acknowledged that education, "intellectual development, with the self-reliance and capacity for earning a livelihood which it gives, renders woman less dependent on the marriage relation"<sup>53</sup>. Nevertheless, since many men dreaded to see educated women reject the institution of marriage, women of color tried to prove that contrary to what was commonly believed, college-educated women continued to embrace marriage –and that men agreed to wed them!. At the same period, Cooper – who was herself an educated woman who had chosen to get married – asked "Is the intellectual woman desirable in the matrimonial market? and answered in the positive: "Judging from the number of female names I find in College catalogues among the alumnae with double patronymics, I surmise a number of men are willing to put up with them"<sup>54</sup>.

Students used the same argument years later on American campuses. For example, in January 1913, an author published a piece on "The College Woman" in the *Howard University Journal* discussing the article published in the *Independent* in May 1912 on "Tabulated College Women" by Miss M. Lansing of Mount Holyoke College<sup>55</sup>. In this article, Miss Lansing had indicated that "college women marry" and "do play their part in the discouragement of race suicide". 44% of graduates tended to marry around the age of 30 and had fewer than three children. The conclusion given by Lansing – and reprised here by PBL – was that women should "Educate themselves from the standpoint of culture for its own sake

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<sup>51</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women", 75, as cited in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women", 1890-1891, 82. "If it interferes with marriage, classical training has a grave objection to weigh and answer".

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Grant Allen was the author of *Plain Words on the Woman Question* who defended the idea that women should continue focusing on their roles as wives and mothers and feared that women's rights might distract women from their domestic duties.

<sup>54</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, Ibid., 84.

<sup>55</sup> P.B.L., "The College Woman", *Howard University Journal*, 31 January 1913. Vol. 11, No 15, 1. Mount Holyoke is one of the oldest women's colleges in America. Created in 1837 by Mary Lyon, a schoolteacher and chemist in South Hadley in Massachusetts, it was named Mount Holyoke Female Seminary until 1893.

and not for the economic values which are derived from its application”<sup>56</sup>. Likewise, in one issue of the *Spelman Messenger* of 1914, one author explained that out of the 18 graduates of 1913-1914, nine had married, thus contradicting common beliefs about educated women: “One-half of the graduates of this [College] department are seeking to perform the most noble and sacred duty put upon woman – the making of a home. This shatters the argument which many produce that a College training unfits a woman for marriage because she thinks its duties too commonplace.”<sup>57</sup>. In addition to proving that educated women did continue to enter matrimony, they also spoke about the educated wife as an ideal companion and helpmeet.

### **The Image of the Wife-Companion: College Forming “Better Wives” and Better Mothers...**

Decades before white progressive women, some liberal black women such as Josephine Turpin Washington used the image of the wife-companion – later used by white feminists during the Progressive era – to convince her male and female readers that black women should gain access to higher education. As early as in 1886, she asserted that “perfect companionship between two people” could only be achieved if the wife was educated. A wife could “truly [be] the helpmeet for her husband” if her mind was “equally broadened and deepened”. Being educated enabled her to provide her husband with “wise counsels and judgments”<sup>58</sup>. Cooper also wanted men to realize what an opportunity women’s education meant for them and castigated those who were blind to women’s ambitions and prevented them from pursuing grand “ideals and standards”: “Nature never meant that the ideals and standards of the world should be dwarfing and minimizing ones, and the men should thank us for requiring of them the richest fruits which they can grow. If it makes them work, all the better for them”<sup>59</sup>.

Furthermore, intellectuals and authors of newspaper articles on American campuses argued that College-educated women would become better mothers. In their innovative essays – which bore some similarities – Josephine Turpin Washington and Anna Cooper tried in 1886 to show that higher education represented an important opportunity for both men and

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<sup>56</sup> P.B.L., “The College Woman”. *Howard University Journal*. January 1913. It was said that higher education guaranteed higher salaries and “better living”.

<sup>57</sup> *Spelman Messenger*, 1914.

<sup>58</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Higher Education for Women,” 1886, 196-197. She reiterated this view at the end of her essay: “Would you have her assist her husband in his vexed problems of thought? [...] Then give her a higher education!”, 198.

<sup>59</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 72-87, 83.

women because it would serve both the interests of the race and the nation. The image of Republican motherhood was indeed widely used by defenders of higher education for women<sup>60</sup>. Josephine Turpin Washington was the first to use this conservative argument to justify her progressive view that educated mothers would train a better generation and would therefore serve the interests of the nation: “It is even more necessary that women be well educated than men, for they are to be the mothers of future generations” and while “men make laws and institutions, women make men”<sup>61</sup>. Refusing to educate mothers meant weakening the “sons, and finally, the commonwealth”<sup>62</sup>. Anna Cooper developed the same idea in her 1890-91 essay. To defend woman’s education, she argued that marriage and motherhood were not incompatible with education:

They hold that their knowledge of physiology makes them better mothers and housekeepers; their knowledge of chemistry makes them better cooks; while from their training in other natural sciences and in mathematics, they obtain an accuracy and fair-mindedness which is of great value to them in dealing with their children or employees<sup>63</sup>.

Like Terrell and other clubmembers of the time, Cooper used the ideas of the separate spheres and the cult of domesticity to claim that education trained better housewives. Whatever her occupation, an educated woman would carry with her the benefits of her education her entire life: she would be a trustworthy person and a source of strength for the United States: “The earnest well-trained Christian young woman, as a teacher, as a homemaker, as wife, mother or silent influence even, is as potent a missionary agency among our people as is the theologian; and I claim that at the present stage of our development in the South she is ever more important and necessary”<sup>64</sup>. Cooper – who did not have children herself – also maintained that education was compatible with a home life since it did “not necessarily remove [educated women] from the home and fireside”<sup>65</sup>.

By the 1900s and 1910s, many students defended, in university newspapers, the view expressed by black elite women at the turn of the century, that women should have access to

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<sup>60</sup> Although “Republican Womanhood” was a theme used in the 1800s by white American women to contend that they had a special role to play as mothers of the future generations of American citizens, one may assert that black women used this theme as well but to argue that at the turn of the century, black women had a special role to play as the mothers of the future generations of black Americans – who had played and continued to play a role as citizens of the nation. See Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Higher Education for Women”, 1886, 197-198. In this daring article, Josephine Washington advocated the right for women to get an education. To do so, she insisted on women’s role as mothers: “Would you have her train her children aright and be a fountain of knowledge to her family? [...] Then give her a higher education!”.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, 83. Cooper quoted Mrs. Armstrong’s response to “*Plain Worlds of Mr Allen*” to support her claim.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 84. “That a great want of the world in the past has been the feminine force; that that force can have its full effect only through the untrammelled development of woman; that such development, while it gives her to the world and to civilization, does not necessarily remove her from the home and fireside”.

Higher Education. For instance, H. R. Watson – a graduate of College '07 – was decidedly in favor of it because it brought wealth and culture to the mother and therefore to the race, “It has been proven that a college education gives a woman a broader vision of life and helps her to run her home more intelligently and systematically”<sup>66</sup>. However, the author wondered whether marriage would perhaps prevent her from the opportunity to pursue “what her friends may call a brilliant career” and sarcastically added that this “brilliant career” would probably “have ended only in disappointment”. In her mind, the educated mother should wholeheartedly renounce her career and enjoy what she has “reaped: a *normal* life, a happy home, and a devoted and appreciative husband, and in many cases children whom they are proud to call their own”<sup>67</sup>.

### ... And Better Workers For the Nation

Black female intellectuals had another argument to defend education for women: educated women would provide the nation with well-trained workers. In the mid-1880s, Josephine Turpin Washington emphasized that their skills would offer them better professional prospects, which would subsequently ensure them stable economic and social statuses as bread-winners: “The possession of a higher education multiplies woman’s bread-winning opportunities”<sup>68</sup>. She also thought that women – who often had no choice but to work outside of home – should broaden their professional horizons thanks to education and training. Probably thinking about teaching or bookkeeping – positions only few educated middle-class women of color could obtain – Washington said that not all women were willing to work as seamstresses or childnurses: “All women do not enter the domestic state; and even many who do are afterwards so situated as to require a resort to some means for earning their own living, and that of others dependent upon them. What shall these women do? True, sewing is considered a very respectable occupation, and nursing is certainly a most feminine; but some women have no desire to sing the ‘song of the shirt’ and possess no taste for minding babies, least of all, those of other people”<sup>69</sup>.

In the 1900s, in American university publications, some writers asserted that educated women were better citizens and therefore, assets for the community. In “Possibilities of College Women” published in the issue of 19 January 1906, the author – who was most

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<sup>66</sup> H.R. Watson, College Dpt '07, “From the College Department”, *Spelman Messenger*, 1914. She concluded: “With well trained women the future of the race is brighter and more promising”.

<sup>67</sup> Italics mine. It appears that conforming to social norms was important for many women.

<sup>68</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Higher Education for Women,” *The People’s Advocate*, 12 April 1884, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol III, 194-198.

<sup>69</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Higher Education for Women”, 1886, 195-196.



probably a woman – spoke about “new women” attending college<sup>70</sup>. Countering the argument that in college, women lost their “health, womanly charm, desire for matrimony and taste for domestic life”, the author argued that the “amount of learning and culture” she gained in college, her “forming personal character”, the “self-forgetfulness, respect for others and standards of behavior” she got from her higher education made her an asset for society – where “chaos reign[ed]”. What is more, she should not be discouraged if her first job was not up to her expectations: “The college-woman must not fear being degraded should her first occupation be a meager one [...] Opportunity is always ripe to make her qualities felt”<sup>71</sup>.

Educated new women were the future architects of racial uplift. Because they had wider knowledge and culture, they would not only be valuable helpmeets to their husbands, train their children more efficiently but they could also become successful teachers for the community<sup>72</sup>. At the same period, black men were less inclined to oppose women’s education than white ones. Perhaps it was due to the fact that a large number of them were sensitive to such arguments and to the community’s difficult social situation.

Importantly, black intellectuals argued that women should no longer be confined to the domestic sphere *exclusively*. Though her rhetoric showed her attachment to Victorian values, Anna Cooper rejected notions of Victorianism such as domesticity and submissiveness and several times reproached men for their chivalric notions about women. At the turn of the century, she deplored that many men still viewed women as pretty and silent ornaments in a house: “Actually [they] do not seem sometimes to have outgrown that old contemporary of chivalry – the idea that women may stand on pedestals or live in doll houses, (if they happen to have them) but they must not furrow their brows with thought or attempts to help men tug at the great questions of the world”<sup>73</sup>. She believed that women should step down from their pedestals, put an end to their silence and immobility and embrace a natural life, and be actors of their destinies. Though they made references to Victorian ideals, Josephine Turpin Washington and Anna Cooper were among the first feminists to craft definitions of such modern, new women. As early as the 1890s, they claimed that: “Stepping from the pedestal of

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<sup>70</sup> *The University Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 9. Pages 1 and 4. Unsigned.

<sup>71</sup> *The University Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 9. Pages 1 and 4. Unsigned.

<sup>72</sup> Williams later spoke about the work a man and woman should accomplish together in business in 1904 and emphasized this specific, beneficial partnership. See “A Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 1904 in *The New Woman of Color*, 58-62.

<sup>73</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Higher Education of Woman”, *A Voice from the South*, 85. As Kristin Waters shows, Cooper generally criticized men’s chivalric attitudes. See Kristin Waters, in *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 374-375. With the phrase “If they happen to have [doll houses]”, she had in mind the double standard existing in the United States regarding notions of ‘chivalry’ – i.e. the discrepancy of treatment between black and white women in America.



statue-like inactivity in the domestic shrine”, woman was at last “daring to think and move and speak, -- to undertake to help shape, mold, and direct the thought of her age” and was “merely completing the circle of the world’s vision”<sup>74</sup> for the sake of the black community and the nation. Cooper urged women to exit the shrine of their homes. Similarly, in the *Howard University Record*, Helen Tuck, AB and instructor in Physical Education at Howard University, explained that in 1920 the “new woman” should invest in a “fine, strong, resistive body” in order to live “a larger life”<sup>75</sup>. Because the “woman of to-day”, the new woman “has freedom of carriage, is more independent, moves on to success more rapidly, becomes broader in thought and speech and thus lives a larger life”, she should be careful to practice a physical activity to be up to the task. Some African American intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois partially subscribed to these ideas and supported woman’s education<sup>76</sup>. In one of his lectures given on the Howard University campus around 1914, one student noted that “Du Bois [had] said [...that] women were entitled to a career the same as men, and [...] pointed out some of the paths these careers might take”<sup>77</sup>.

These women – who were often educators or former teachers – prescribed Higher Education for all women. As mothers, how did they encourage their daughters to obtain an education?

Many women cherished the time spent in college and as mothers, they often naturally wanted their daughters to have an education, either sending them to HBCUs or to white integrated institutions of Higher Education such as Oberlin College or the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania.

At the turn of the century, very few women could enroll their children in integrated schools, since racial discrimination was intensifying in the country, both north and south. Contrary to the 1870s and 1880s, black Americans were discriminated against in many institutions in the 1900s and 1910s – even if the North –. Since the Supreme Court case had held in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that racial segregation did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, the “separate but equal” had begun to affect the accommodation policy of various institutions in the country. Consequently, in the early

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<sup>74</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 107.

<sup>75</sup> Helen Tuck, “Physical Education and the New Woman”, *Howard University Record*. January 1920. Vol XIV, No. 3, 140-141.

<sup>76</sup> Du Bois indeed had progressive views about women. For instance, he thought that they had the right to get an education and to build a career.

<sup>77</sup> Du Bois, W.E.B.. “The Work of Women”, *Howard University Journal*, 17 April 1914, no. 25. The editors of the *Howard University Journal* wanted to convey Du Bois’s message about the role women should play in the American society in the 1910s. the author unfortunately did not list the types of paths Du Bois had spoken of.

twentieth century, even northern Institutions of Higher Education and historically progressive institutions such as Oberlin College yielded to the influence of the South and started to segregate black students on campuses or refuse enrolling them because of their color<sup>78</sup>. Sending one's daughters to a white school often required the intervention of white friends – which was something African American women could rarely do<sup>79</sup>.

Mary Terrell personally experienced the stronger racial prejudice of the early twentieth century when she attempted to offer an education to her two daughters. Since she had thoroughly enjoyed studying at Oberlin College in the 1880s, she wanted her children to benefit from the same opportunity in the early 1910s<sup>80</sup>. Yet, when she tried to enroll them at Oberlin, she had the greatest difficulties to have them accommodated in an integrated dormitory on campus. In October 1913, when Terrell learned that Mary and Phyllis would be housed in a segregated dormitory on account of color<sup>81</sup>, she attempted to use her influence to enroll her daughters at Oberlin College and decided to write to the Dean of College women, Florence M. Fitch. Pointing out that: “When I attended Oberlin College, no one could have made me believe that the day would ever come, when colored students would be segregated”<sup>82</sup>, she voiced her strong disapproval of the college policy: “I do not want my daughters segregated in Oberlin College. I believe segregation is unchristian, unjust and unkind [...] Segregation [...] is a[n unnecessary] badge of inferiority” and lamented the change in the racial climate: “The friendly feeling which formerly existed between white and colored seem to be lacking today [...] Colored students do not have the same chance of development [...] as did those of former years.”<sup>83</sup>. Moreover, she emphasized that her

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<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the narrative of the romantic reunion between North and South which was being crafted in the country played a part in these decisions.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Being a Colored Woman in the United States”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 40-41. When Mary Terrell tried to enroll the daughter of some friends in a northern school in the 1900s or early 1910s, it proved very complicated.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 243. “After the older graduated from the high school and the younger had finished the first year, I took them to Oberlin [College]. I decided to do this because I thought it would be wrong to bring them up having contact with nobody but their own racial group. I felt it was my duty to give them the same chance of measuring arms with white youth that I myself had had.”

<sup>81</sup> Terrell had asked that her daughters Mary and Phyllis be accommodated at Talcott Hall or at Tenney Cottage the following year. Apparently, she had understood that Mrs. Fitch would arrange to have them live in Tenney Cottage. Seeing that her request met an unfavorable response, Terrell proceeded to ask politely for reconsideration.

<sup>82</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Letter of Mary Church Terrell to Florence Fitch, October 1913”, in *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College: A Documentary History*. Bauman, Roland M., (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 103-108. See pages 104-105. She repeated this idea in her letter: “When I was a happy student here years ago, little did I think that I should ever live to see the day when I should be obliged to implore any official in this institution to make it possible for my daughters or any colored girls to enjoy the advantages which residence in a dormitory controlled by the college secures”.

<sup>83</sup> *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College*, 103-104 and 107.

experience on an integrated campus had changed her entire life<sup>84</sup>. Explaining that her daughters had attended black schools all their lives, she argued that she now wanted them to have the opportunity to “measure arms with white boys and girls, for [she] felt this would give them an outlook upon life, and a breadth of vision and knowledge and experience which they could secure in no other way ~~in the United States~~”. Calling on her mother’s emotions, Terrell tried to make Mrs Fitch change her mind and reconsider the matter: “I implore you to do everything in your power to remove the bans which are segregating Colored students and give them the chance which you would desire for your own children or for yourself”<sup>85</sup>.

Mary and Phyllis only attended Oberlin College for a year<sup>86</sup>. The love Terrell had had for her Alma Mater had been deeply affected by this crisis. Her older daughter Mary then “graduated, returned to Washington, studied a year [at] Howard University, entered the Normal School [and] graduated” while Phyllis graduated from St Johnsbury Academy in Vermont, returned to Washington, entered the Conservatory of Music of Howard University [and] graduated”<sup>87</sup>.

These mothers were vigilant to offer their daughters the best possible education in order for them to be in the professions and have economically stable lives<sup>88</sup>. For example, Ida B. Wells-Barnett enrolled her daughter Alfreda Barnett Duster at the University of Chicago in the early 1920s. In an interview with Dorothy Sterling, Alfreda explained that there were “only twenty-five Negroes [were] there from all over the country”, that she “never encountered any prejudice” there and that it had been a “fantastic experience”. Then, Ida

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 108. Mary Church Terrell, “Letter to Florence Fitch”. This letter can be found in “the microfilm edition of the Mary Church Terrell Papers at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.. Microfilm held by the Oberlin College Library, courtesy of the Manuscript Division, LC. Mary Terrell crossed out portions of the text. The unedited letter has not been located”. This was probably the draft she worked on and planned on sending to Mrs. Fitch.

<sup>85</sup> *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College*, 106-107.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 243-244. Terrell did not refer to this episode in her autobiography though. She simply explained: “Mary, the older of the two girls, entered the freshman class. Phyllis, the younger, matriculated for two subjects in the Academy and took violin and piano in the Conservatory of Music. [...] The girls remained in Oberlin a year”, 243-244.

<sup>87</sup> See *A Colored Woman*, 185 and 244. Mary Terrell used her father’s inheritance to offer her daughters an education, send them to good schools and offer them opportunities which were then reserved to the black upper-class, although she and Robert sometimes had financial difficulties. She was indeed able to pay the expenses thanks to the money she had inherited from her father, Robert Church: “My husband was relieved of the responsibility of defraying the expenses incident to sending both girls to Oberlin and one to St. Johnsbury later on, because I used the income from the property left me by my father to do this”. In the early 1900s, before her father’s death in 1912, the couple had financial difficulties and borrowed money from Robert Church several times. For instance, on 23 April 1902, Robert Terrell referred to an additional “debt” he owed his father-in-law – \$2,000, quite a large sum at the time. Dennis Fradin, *Fight on!*, 101. Inheriting her father’s money in 1912 did not make Mary rich though : in the 1910s, she had to work and often “paid her bills late”, 102. Terrell explained that in 1917, she regretted having to leave her position at the War Risk Insurance Bureau because she “needed the money, to be sure”, and “the salary [...] would have filled a long felt want.”, Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 258-259.

<sup>88</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster became a writer and later edited her mother’s autobiography.

wanted her to continue in Law School for three more years but Alfreda, after working as a clerk at her father's practice, decided otherwise<sup>89</sup>. These mothers also encouraged their girls to wed professional men. For example, Ida Wells-Barnett wanted Alfreda to marry a professional man, which would ensure her a stable financial situation<sup>90</sup>. In her life writing, Mary Terrell reveled in her daughters' professional accomplishments and rejoiced in their family situation. Both became teachers and married professional men<sup>91</sup>.

These women fostered woman's education with all their might and encouraged their own daughters to work in the professions – as teachers for example. At the turn of the century, when a debate emerged on the question of whether to favor classical training or industrial training, what did black women intellectuals think?

### 3. Classical vs. Vocational Training: Encouraging Education

In the period 1890-1920, many black and white institutions offered gender-based courses and applied a strict gender role ideology<sup>92</sup>. Female students were taught domestic science and housekeeping as well as sewing, cooking, hygiene, or teaching while male students were taught carpentry, bricklaying or agriculture<sup>93</sup>.

The “model” of industrial education was the Tuskegee Institute, situated in Tuskegee, Alabama, and founded and run by Booker T. Washington. Washington and his wife Margaret Murray Washington – an educator and clubwoman from the South educated at Fisk Institute.

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<sup>89</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster, *Memphis Diary*, 195. Interview by Dorothy Sterling. Duster said: “It confirmed my desire not to practice law”. Alfreda Barnett Duster (1904-1983) obtained her B.A. in 1924. See ed, Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1993).

<sup>90</sup> She was disappointed when her daughter did not because she worried about her daughter's future financial situation. See *Memphis Diary*, 195. Instead, Alfreda married Benjamin Ceil Duster in 1925. Ida Jr. lived with her parents as an adult. Her sons Charles and Herman followed in their father's footsteps. See Mia Bay, *To Tell The Truth Freely*, 320.

<sup>91</sup> Phyllis Terrell became a teacher in the Washington D.C. public schools and later married Mr Langston, a school Principal. See *Fight On!*, 107. Her sister Mary Louise Terrell – who was adopted by the Terrells in the early 1900s – also became a teacher and married a physician named Leon Tancil. “One of my daughters married a physician, who taught in Rush Medical College, in Chicago, and recently passed away at the height of his career. The husband of the other daughter is the principal of one of the Washington schools”, in *A Colored Woman*, 244.

<sup>92</sup> See for instance the curricula at Clark Atlanta University, Hampton College, Fisk and Tuskegee Institutes and other black Universities.

<sup>93</sup> As Vicki Howard has explained, educators – including Booker T. Washington – who designed these courses according to gender deemed that woman's work accomplished outside the home contributed to the uplift of the community. Vicki Howard, “The Courtship Letters of an African American Couple”, 243. “Earlier in the nineteenth century, a white woman's education emphasized the female's role as mother and wife. The ideal “companion wife” required education, but her intellectual sphere was confined to the home. Similarly, black colleges such as Spelman and Tuskegee trained their female students to be good wives and mothers with courses in housekeeping and domestic science; female students, however, were also given an industrial education for work outside the home. Booker T. Washington, a “proponent of the domestic ideology,” also believed that working outside the home contributed to the improvement of the race”.

Both believed that industrial training should be favored because it was the key to the social advancement of African Americans<sup>94</sup>. Booker T. Washington was often criticized within the community because he was deemed to be an accommodationist<sup>95</sup>.

The opposite model – called “classical education” was promoted by intellectuals such as Du Bois, a famous sociologist. It was possible to pursue a classical education in institutions such as Howard University and other black institutions – which had Schools of Dentistry, Medicine or Law Schools – which opened doors to the professions. Intellectuals such as Du Bois, a sociologist who belonged to what he termed the “talented 10%”<sup>96</sup>, thought that African Americans should be encouraged to study classical courses if they possessed the necessary natural inclinations.

What type of education did they think was “appropriate” for female students? The study of black women intellectuals’s articles reveals that they did not see eye to eye on this topic.

### **Pro-Classical Studies: Anna Julia Cooper**

Out of principle, Anna Julia Cooper, a teacher of Latin and Greek at M. Street High School shared Du Bois’s views and supported classical training<sup>97</sup>. She encouraged all her students at M. Street High School to study the classics if they enjoyed such subjects. Talents should not be spoilt for lack of opportunity. For instance, “What Are We Worth?” (1892), she

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<sup>94</sup> In his autobiographical book *Up From Slavery* published in 1901, Washington explained that between 1885 and 1889, when working with his second wife Olivia A. Davidson at Tuskegee, “it became apparent at once that, if we were to make any permanent impression upon those who had come to us for training, we [had to] do something besides teach them mere books”. Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), iii. First published 1901. He published his second autobiography with the help of a journalist named Max Bennett Thrasher. His first autobiography *The Story of My Life and Work* had been published in 1896 and “distributed primarily by door-to-door sales in black districts”, as he indicated in *Up From Slavery*, iii. Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 61. “The students had come from homes where they had had no opportunities for lessons which would teach them how to care for their bodies [...] We wanted to teach the students how to bathe, how to care for their teeth and clothing. We wanted to teach them what to eat, and how to eat it properly, and how to care for their rooms. Aside from this, we wanted to give them such a practical knowledge of some one industry, together with the spirit of industry, thrift, and economy, that they would be sure of knowing how to make a living after they had left us. We wanted to teach them to study actual things instead of mere books alone”.

<sup>95</sup> Booker T. Washington is famous for the following statement made in 1895 before a predominantly white audience at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress”. This speech is now known as the “Atlanta Compromise Speech”. Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 3, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 583–587, as cited: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/>.

<sup>96</sup> In this article, Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that Du Bois did not coin the term “talented tenth” in his 1903 *The Negro Problem*, but that Henry Lyman Morehouse coined it in 1896, as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has shown in *Righteous Discontent*. Du Bois nevertheless defined the concept. See <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/who-really-invented-the-talented-tenth/>.

<sup>97</sup> Harley, Sharon. “A Voice for Black Women”, in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, 87- 96. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997). First published 1978. “She opposed Booker T. Washington’s emphasis on vocational training for black youth, because she felt that all students should have the opportunity to pursue academic courses”, 92.



wrote: “I believe in allowing every longing of the human soul to attain its most reach and grasp”<sup>98</sup>.

Nevertheless, she believed that students’ natural aptitudes and tastes should always be taken into consideration: “The power of appreciation is the measure of an individual’s aptitudes; and if a boy hates Greek and Latin and spends all his time whittling out steamboats, it is a rather foolish to try to force him into the classics. [...] If his hand is far more cunning and clever than his brain, see what he can best do, and give him a chance according to his fitness; try him at a trade”<sup>99</sup>. She was aware that economic realities forced many parents to encourage their children to study industrial subjects in order to earn a living and though, she supported classical education, she deplored that industrial education was too often looked down upon by many African Americans who could have benefited from it<sup>100</sup>.

Industrial training has been hitherto neglected or despised among us, due, I think, as I have said elsewhere, to two causes: first, a mistaken estimate of labor arising from its association with slavery and from its having been despised by the only class in the South thought worthy of imitation; and secondly, the fact that the Negro’s ability to work had never been called in question, while his ability to learn Latin and construe Greek syntax needed to be proved to sneering critics<sup>101</sup>.

According to Cooper, who articulated a Christian and humanistic philosophy on this question, the only important element to consider about education was: Does it make people better, nobler, truer? She encouraged her readers to see that what mattered was to become benevolent, hard-working and – above all morally and also economically – valuable beings.

What sort of men do you turn out? *How* are you supplying the great demands of the world’s market? What is your true value? This, we may be sure, will be the final test by which the colored man in America will one day be judged in the cool, calm, unimpassioned, unprejudiced second thought of the American people.

To conclude, while Cooper favored classical training for students who wished to pursue such studies because she thought that all should have a chance to develop one’s talents, she was pragmatic enough to acknowledge that industrial education was a better choice for some of them. As a devout Christian, she urged African Americans to consider one key element: self-help, self-fulfillment which would permit further universal progress<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “What Are We Worth?”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 1892, 175.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 176. “We began at the wrong end. Wealth must pave the way for learning. Intellect, whether of races or individuals, cannot soar to the consummation of those sublime products which immortalize genius, while the general mind is assaulted and burdened with ‘what shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed’”.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>102</sup> The study of Mary Church Terrell’s life writings reveals that she also thought that women should be given a chance to study the subjects they enjoyed. Having been educated at Oberlin College with Anna Cooper in the 1880s, she had benefited from this opportunity herself. However, she adopted a nuanced stance on these questions.



## Pro- Industrial Education Women

Many women favored industrial education. Obviously, Margaret Murray Washington, who worked at Tuskegee as Dean of Women for years, was a strong supporter of this type of education. Josephine Silone Yates, a black teacher who was a very active clubwoman in Kansas City, favored industrial education as well. After Booker T. Washington had delivered an address to the students of Fisk University, she claimed, in one issue of the *Woman's Era* in June 1895: "We must repeat that industrial training through its resultant – skilled labor – has been for every race, and will be for the Negro race, the most potent force in its development"<sup>103</sup>.

Jane Edna Hunter adhered to Booker T. Washington's ideas and like Margaret Washington or Nannie Helen Burroughs – who was a well-known supporter of industrial education and a friend of hers – thought that black southern women had to be trained for jobs which they would certainly be able to secure, such as domestic work, cooking or ironing. At the Phillis Wheatley Home in Cleveland, Hunter placed the emphasis on manual training and opened a six-week housekeeping course<sup>104</sup>. Like Cooper, Hunter believed that children must not be forced to study the classics if they were not inclined or fit to do so. She wrote in her autobiography:

Observation of the children who come after school hours to take part in the activities of the Phillis Wheatley has convinced me that it is futile to force upon many of them and academic training, when they are best adapted to some form of industrial training. Sewing, cooking, and dramatics are far more attractive to some children than the Latin, algebra, and history which they study at school<sup>105</sup>.

Middle and upper-class social workers convinced less privileged women to train for positions which were certainly available to them – such as manual work.

## Moderates

Other clubwomen – who often happened to be teachers – took a more nuanced stance on these questions. For example, Maritcha Remond Lyons – a New York teacher – seemed to believe that both types of education were beneficial to the black community. According to

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<sup>103</sup> Josephine Silone Yates, *Woman's Era*, June 1895, 10. Mary Church Terrell Papers. Library of Congress. Yates worked closely with Mary Terrell in the first years of the NACW to found kindergartens, before serving as president of the national association.

<sup>104</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 122. In a letter to Burroughs dated 2 November 1929 to Burroughs, Jane Hunter praised the work accomplished by Nannie Burroughs at the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C.. See the Introduction, 9. The letter read: "It was so nice to see you and know your real sweet self. Surely we will continue to cultivate a lasting friendship. I want to be your devoted sister in kindred thought and love. You are so deserving and so capable. Your work is unique and remarkable; to me it fulfills a need that is not ever attempted by other educators. I shall not be happy until I have made a definite contribution in a tangible way to your school".

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 129. She added: "To make our children were the members of their community, we must develop character in them through the art of doing".

her, the American nation needed the combined efforts of intellectuals and manual laborers: “All will agree that the general welfare requires leaders as well as manual workers; some citizens of great ability and large attainments. It is the man of brain and the ‘men of brawn allied that make a nation irresistible”<sup>106</sup>. Other women – including Fannie Williams and Mary Church Terrell – sided with her.

At first sight, one should think that Fannie Williams should have naturally been inclined to side with Du Bois. According to Mary Jo Deegan, “[Williams] favored higher education, encouraged the talented tenth as leaders [and as a former art student] championed the fine arts”<sup>107</sup>. Being a product of the pre-war free black elite of the North, like Du Bois, she had many things in common with him: region, class, education and experience in the South. As Deegan pointed out,

Both Williams and Du Bois shared several vital interests [... and] supported the work of female sociologists at Hull house and the work of the NAACP in Chicago. Both were born and raised in the East and experienced relatively happy and stable childhoods as the children of free African-Americans. Both traveled to the South as late adolescents and became school teachers there. Both were appalled by the color line and the Veil they experienced during Reconstruction, and this became a life-altering experience”<sup>108</sup>.

Yet in this debate, she supported Booker T. Washington’s views on education. Despite their differences – in terms of regional affiliation and class –, Williams sided with Washington – a friend she admired. Fannie Barrier Williams and her husband S. Laing indeed closely collaborated with the southern educator in the 1890s and 1900s. In March 1895, in the *Woman’s Era*, she praised him when he first visited Chicago: “It is delightful to come in contact with a colored man who is so sane, so sincere and so direct in the stronger virtues of manliness as Booker T. Washington”<sup>109</sup>. She thought that he was a progressive leader. At the turn of the century, Fannie worked with him on several projects<sup>110</sup> and as Wanda Hendricks

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<sup>106</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories*, 23, Chapter 3.

<sup>107</sup> Mary Jo. Deegan, *The Woman of Color*, xlv. She was also “a persuasive orator and community leader”. As a former art student, she defended the teaching of Arts: “Let our schools begin to pay some attention to the fine arts, and it will appear how practical such teaching may become in the measure of the refinements of life about us [...] Art can drive us toward the very heart of nature and the artist become a teacher and preacher of true righteousness [...] We can see more clearly the largeness, the glory and the brightness of the world, the beauty of women and the nobility of men when the love and knowledge of art enters more fully into our everyday lives”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Refining Influence of Art”, *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 3 (1906): 211-214, as cited in *The Woman of Color*, 100-103, 103.

<sup>108</sup> Mary Jo. Deegan, *The Woman of Color*, xlv.

<sup>109</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*. March 1895, 4. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>110</sup> Fannie Williams and Booker T. Washington published *A New Negro for a New Century* together in 1900. In 1903, they renewed their professional partnership for the project named *The Colored American from Slavery to Honorable Citizenship*, edited by J.W. Gibson and W.H. Croghan. In it, while Booker T. Washington wrote about the National Negro Business League and the introduction, Fannie Williams expressed her ideas about women in her article “Club Movement Among Negro Women”. What is more, it appears that the Williams

made it clear, Fannie “benefited from her closeness to Washington. As a writer and public intellectual, access to his publication and organization empire helped her spread her messages about gender, race and labor”. Because he “heavily financed or controlled key publications with a national distribution [such as the *New York Age*, the *Southern Workman* and the *Colored American*] and many other major publications”, he helped her reach national fame, and Hendricks has explained, “Washington’s backing gave her a national platform”<sup>111</sup>. He also “contributed to [her] celebrity by featuring her prominently in histories and anthologies” and in the book *A New Negro For a New Century* – called “the best selling book of the age”—their portraits appeared next to each other, “almost as if they mirrored each other”<sup>112</sup>. Moreover, Fannie and her husband maintained amicable relationships with the Washingtons<sup>113</sup>. Samuel Laing enjoyed the support of Booker T. Washington when he had difficulties being appointed at desired positions – at the head of the black branch of the Republican Party<sup>114</sup>.

Yet, as her biographer has pointed out, Barrier Williams “paid a high price for her loyalty” to Booker T. Washington in the 1900s. Increasingly accused of being an elitist and an accommodationist, Fannie Williams was bitterly criticized in the press<sup>115</sup>. She was “branded as a race traitor [and] became one of the few black female faces of disloyalty and dishonesty of the decade. As late as 1908, she was referred to as a ‘warm worshiper of Prof. Booker T. Washington’ and was accused of lying to promote his agenda”<sup>116</sup>. Moreover, on a personal

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ghostwrote a book on Frederick Douglass, published in 1906. See Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 146. Common admiration for Frederick Douglass was an important element of their friendship.

<sup>111</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 144.

<sup>112</sup> Hendricks, *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>113</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams must have known Margaret Murray Washington personally, but since Fannie Williams’s letters are rare – some can be found in Booker T. Washington’s Papers —, it was difficult to learn more about the relationship or the affinities between the two women.

<sup>114</sup> Wells-Barnett’s spouse Ferdinand Barnett opposed S. Laing Williams’s appointment. With the aid of Booker Washington, S. Laing finally obtained a desirable position as assistant attorney in the Northern District of Illinois and special assistant to the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois. See Hendricks, *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>115</sup> Hendricks explains that the “attacks were so hostile that in many ways it resembled a public flogging”, 146. In the Fall of 1904, the article published in the *Broad Ax* entitled “Mrs Fannie Barrier Williams Booker T. Washington Slops Over on the Negro Question” questioned her loyalty to the black community. The same year, the following resolution was taken at a Chicago club meeting: “Mrs Fannie Barrier Williams [...] is attempting to convince the white people in the Northern States that the colored people are being better treated in the Southern states than they are in the Northern states [...] Such statements are calculated to do much mischief and thereby create a false impression [...] We do enter our solemn protest against the unkindly and unwarranted conduct on the part of Mrs Williams”. See Hendricks, *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>116</sup> Hendricks, *Ibid.*, 147. It was unfortunately difficult to know much about how she experienced these difficult moments. She continued her fight in the Chicago Woman’s Club in the late 1900s and 1910s before withdrawing from public life in 1926.

level, the early 1900s was a difficult period for Fannie Barrier Williams: the loss of her brother in 1907 and her nephew in 1909 plunged her in a severe depression<sup>117</sup>.

The study of the correspondence between Fannie and Booker T. Washington reveals that Fannie Barrier Williams suffered from severe accusations since as a member of “his inner circle” she knew that her friend was discreetly pursuing liberal political goals and “complemented his accommodationist public position with a private and secret attack on violence against blacks and the racial restrictions under which black southerners lived”. Washington entrusted his friend with a number of tasks; for instance, she “collect[ed] statistical evidence on the number of lynchings that occurred in the United States” – very much like Ida Wells-Barnett had done in the 1890s – to gather information about racial violence<sup>118</sup>. Like Booker T. Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams was *not really* the accommodationist many accused her of being. They both fought she fought for racial justice with innovative and subversive actions – using underground methods – while adopting a smoother rhetoric, deemed acceptable by most. Although Booker T. Washington was also the target of criticism for his accommodationism, it is likely that Fannie Barrier Williams faced more severe criticism because she was a woman<sup>119</sup>.

The Williamses’ ideas and closeness with the Washingtons made Fannie a natural supporter of industrial education. She believed Washington’s philosophy was *the* solution. As opposed to Anna Cooper, she argued in favor of industrial education for the major part of the community<sup>120</sup>. In her articles, Fannie Williams stressed that industrial education was in fact promoted by most black and white professional educators in the country, at the beginning of the twentieth century: “It should be stated in passing that nearly all of the most competent educators of the county, including presidents of the leading universities, believe in the

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<sup>117</sup> George A. Barrier (1850-1907) suddenly died in Detroit in 1907. See *The Brockport Republic*, January 31, 1907. He “dropped dead in the street” at the age of 56. Barrier was a prominent man in Detroit, the home city of his wife, Delia Pelham. He was “one of the leading Republicans of that city, in 1891, he was appointed sidewalk inspector in the board of public works. A few years later he was promoted to the position of permit clerk”. *The Brockport Republic*, January 31, 1907. He had three children. His daughter, Harriet Barrier, was a young woman engaged in woman’s clubs, as was the tradition in the family. She was president of the Detroit Study Club and was also one of the directors of the local federation. His son, Robert Barrier (1888?- 1909) was the youngest. He won a prize for the best essay on “cigarette smoking” in the Central High School at the age of 14 in 1902. *The Brockport Republic*, July 19, 1906. Fannie’s nephew Robert drowned on a class field trip in the summer of 1909. See Hendricks, *Ibid.*, 147-148.

<sup>118</sup> Letter dated 10 August 1905, in Booker T. Washington Papers. See Hendricks, *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>119</sup> Williams was “branded as a race traitor” and was soon forgotten, being a “casualty of history”, as Hendricks has indicated, contrary to Booker T. Washington whose thinking is still widely studied today. Hendricks, 147.

<sup>120</sup> Even if she asserted the necessity of finally redeeming domestic work, Williams’ arguments appeared as elitist again.

Washington idea of industrial education, for white as well as colored people”<sup>121</sup>. She was critical of those who, having “a fixed bias” against industrial education, opposed it in principle without really knowing what the true teachings of industrial training were<sup>122</sup>.

Moreover, like Maritcha Remond Lyons, being a pragmatic woman, she thought that African Americans should be trained for occupations which they could secure. She thought that the educational system should provide “direct and helpful answers” to social issues. For her “industrial education aim[ed] to reach these conditions” and “if agriculture must, for a long time to come, be the chief occupation of our people, then let their education for long time to come be inclusive of all that which makes for thrift and intelligence in husbandry”<sup>123</sup>. She advocated training black people as field hands because they were in high demand whereas the professions were not: “The demand for colored artisans of all kinds is always in excess of the supply. The supply of lawyers, doctors and ministers and other professions always exceeds the demand. The race is not only poor in the resources and means of wealth, but poor also in the practical intelligence that create wealth.”<sup>124</sup>.

Williams explained that the “advocates of industrial education [...] realize[d] the danger of equipping young colored men and women for occupations from which they are excluded by it an unyielding prejudice”<sup>125</sup>. In pure Washingtonian terms, Fannie Barrier Williams argued that for the time being, African Americans should embrace careers in the fields because they were equally paid: “The positions and occupations from which they are now barred are not more honorable or more remunerative than those which they are permitted to enter”. Undoubtedly, Cooper must have disagreed with such compromising views. For Williams, choosing to reject industrial education for purely intellectual reasons would be damaging to the community, which desperately needed paid employment in available occupations: “It will prove an immeasurable blunder if we shall now lack the foresight to provide for our young men and women the kind of training that will enable them to do everything in the line of industries that will equip them to become the real builders of the future greatness of the South”, otherwise they will be “relegated to a position of hopeless servitude”<sup>126</sup>, she argued.

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<sup>121</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Industrial Education – Will It Solve the Negro Problem?”, *Colored American* (July 1904): 491-495, as cited *The New Woman of Color*, ed. By Mary Jo Deegan, 78-83, 80. The *Colored American* was “financed or controlled” by Booker T. Washington.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*



In her mind, Tuskegee, by teaching lessons of thrift and encouraging black people to buy land, was providing black Southerners with the proper keys to freedom. Like the Washingtons, Williams argued that land ownership was the key to economic equality: “It has been predicted already that the colored people will someday own the South, to these ownership can be realized only by the exercise of thrift, character and practical intelligence that can be gained in the best of the industrial schools”<sup>127</sup>. Moreover, manual jobs should be brought back to former glory. In 1904, Fannie Barrier Williams hammered home that manual jobs were as noble as any other – intellectual –job. For instance, being a blacksmith or a domestic was as respectable as being a professional man: “In fact, industrial training has dignified everything it has touched. It is not only banishing drudgery from the workshop in the home, but is widening the opportunities for talents of all kinds”<sup>128</sup>.

Intellectuals such as Fannie Williams argued in the years 1903-1905 that no one should scorn manual labor. In particular, Williams urged members of her community in 1903 to acknowledge the nobility and respectability of domestic work and her readers to stop considering domestic work negatively: “We are afraid of the word servant”, she said, adding: “The first thing to be done is to bring it strongly to our consciousness that domestic service is not necessarily degrading”. She thought that *only* the competence of domestic workers mattered and that domestics were those who had “the power [...] to change and elevate the character of domestic service”<sup>129</sup>.

In “The Colored Girl” (1905), Williams criticized African American men’s snobbishness, emphasizing the fact that by acting this way, they prevented racial progress. She urged them to “encourage, protect and honor” women in general and in particular, working-class women, who deserved praise rather than scorn.

Those who make up and are responsible for what is called the higher life amongst us are apt to scorn the colored girl who works with her hands. Only the parlor girl finds social favor. This sort of borrowed snobbishness is responsible for the going wrong of many of our girls. What our girls and women have a right to demand from our best men that they cease to initiate the artificial standards of other people and create a race standard of their own [...] What the colored girl needs to day is encouragement to do whatever her hands find to do, and be protected and honored for it. If the colored girl of character and

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 79. Talents as domestics or blacksmiths were useful for the community, gave workers “a new empire of power” and therefore, should be praised. She aimed at restoring the prestige of domestic and manual labor, believing that “A professional man is not better than the mechanic unless he has more intelligence. An intelligent blacksmith is worth more to the community than an incompetent doctor, a hungry lawyer or an immoral minister”. The main element to consider was service to the community. “We will soon begin to learn real source of evidences of what industrial education passed on for these black builders of a new empire of power”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “Industrial Education – Will It Solve the Negro Problem?”, 81-82.

<sup>129</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Problem of Employment for Negro Women”, 54-55.



intelligence must cook, who shall say that she's not as deserving of the honors of the best social life as the girl who plays the piano or manipulates the typewriter?"<sup>130</sup>.

Taking northern domestics' wages as a reference, she argued that domestic work, like "book-keeping" or "typewriting", was an "occupation that intelligence elevates, that character adorns and ennobles, and that even now brings a higher salary to women than almost any other kind of employment"<sup>131</sup>. As a result, she urged domestic workers to be proud of their occupation – their work was comparable in worth to intellectual occupations:

In my opinion, the training of this new profession should be elevated to the dignity and importance of the training in mathematics and grammar and other academic studies. Our girls must be made to feel that there is no stepping down when they become professional housekeepers. The relative dignity, respectability, and honor of these profession should first be taught in our schools"<sup>132</sup>.

Her arguments highlight that she adhered to Washingtonian ideas about industrial education and supported industrial training for girls. She thought that domestic science should be taught because it not only ensured that these women would get a well-paid job but also because it would make them better mothers and housekeepers. Williams thought that "the colored girl who is trained in the arts of housekeeping is better qualified for the high duties of wifehood and motherhood"<sup>133</sup>. She thus shared the ideas of many educators in industrial schools who adhered to middle-class, Victorian ideas about woman's sphere.

Williams, optimistically, believed that if domestic service was regarded in higher esteem, African American workers would soon be offered better salaries: "The colored graduate from the school of domestic science will be more honored and better paid than are many white women who now hold the positions colored women cannot enter."<sup>134</sup>. Years later, in her 1916 etiquette book, Emma Hackley shared these views, also arguing that domestic workers should be proud of their employment: "If a girl is obliged to work in a kitchen she should respect her work and dignify her position. She may be a 'Somebody' washing dishes or scrubbing a floor, if she does not depreciate her work and if she will give it status instead of half doing it and complaining about it"<sup>135</sup>. For Fannie Williams and Anna Cooper, what mattered most was a worker's self-esteem:

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<sup>130</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl", 1905, 66. She added: "The way to exalt the colored girl is to place a higher premium on character than we do upon the quality of her occupation. A fine girl is the supreme thing. Let her be loved, admired, encouraged, and above all things directly protected against the scorn and contempt of man, black as well as white".

<sup>131</sup> She was referring to Chicago domestics who earned approximately \$4 to \$7 a week in 1903. "The Problem of Employment for Negro Women", See page 53.

<sup>132</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Problem of Employment for Negro Women", 55.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>134</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "Industrial Education – Will It Solve the Negro Problem?", 82.

<sup>135</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 152-153. Williams thought likewise in 1903-1905, as I will soon argue. Moreover, many women of diverse social origins such as Wells-Barnett and Mamie Garvin thought that manual work could offer rich possibilities and praised black women such as Madam C. J. Walker who had

Whether we do our share of the world's work with the pen or with the tool, in the office or in the shop, in the broad green acres on the hill slopes, or in the senate hall, the question is always the same – how much intelligence and character do you bring to your work. We believe that it is not too much to say that this is the spirit, the purpose, and the results of industrial education<sup>136</sup>.

Although Fannie Williams was a proponent of industrial education, she had adopted a compromising attitude regarding classical education. She thought that if African American students had the skills and the will to embrace higher education, they should be encouraged to do so: “The heroic efforts of Dr. Washington and others to furnish the system of education that shall be of the greatest good to the greatest number should not and does not discourage what is called the higher education. In their tastes and aptitudes our young men and women are like those of other races. The doors of the universities are always open to the few who have the gifts and tastes of scholarship”<sup>137</sup>. Consequently, on that point, she agreed with Cooper and thought that ideally, any black person who desired to go to college should be able to do so and that this would be a source of pride: “Such an education will make the Negro efficient, self-respecting, proud, brave, and prove against every prophecy of evil that would consign him to a destiny of ‘hopeless inferiority’”<sup>138</sup>.

Yet, being aware that the reality of the job market for African Americans often did not leave room for such idealistic visions at the beginning of the century, she therefore concluded, saying “The colored people are entitled to the best possible education that this country can afford, but this education should fit them for the life they must live.”<sup>139</sup>. What life *must* they live? The use of the modal “must” suggests that she supported Washington’s ideas and was thinking of occupations available for members of the working-class at the time – agricultural work, domestic work – and the professions for the educated members of the upper-class who could hope to secure a job according to their qualifications. In this article published in 1904, Williams developed an accommodationist rhetoric while asserting the right for some lucky few to pursue the education they wished.

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managed, thanks to hard work and determination, to achieve economic and social success despite their humble beginnings. For example, Ida Wells wrote: “[Walker] was a woman who by hard work and persistent effort had succeeded in establishing herself and her business in New York City. [...] She] is giving demonstration of what a black womanhood vision and ambition can really do”. Wells, *Crusade*, 378. This woman could serve as a model of determination to many and her success was illustrative of what black women could achieve in white America. Likewise, Mamie Garvin deeply admired Madam Walker because she had been the architect of her own success: “She never went to school for this. But [...] that lady really could inspire you with her lectures, because they told how she started from a humble beginning, and everybody there could see how far from that beginning she had come”. Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 187-188.

<sup>136</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Industrial Education – Will It Solve the Negro Problem?”, 79. See also Cooper’s opinion on this topic. Anna Julia Cooper, “What Are We Worth”, 175.

<sup>137</sup> Williams, *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 82-83.

Overall, Williams's position regarding education was a nuanced one: she believed that any form of education was beneficial to people of color: "In the term industrial education, the emphasis is always upon education". For boys, "Mathematics, drawing, chemistry, history, psychology, and sociology go along with the deft handling of the carpenter's and engineer's tools, with the knowledge of farming, dairying, printing, and the whole range of the mechanical arts. To the students in the industrial or manual training schools, their education means more than the mere names of the various trades imply"<sup>140</sup>. The "newer education" enabled girls to invest in new "occupations that concern our health, our homes, and our happiness"<sup>141</sup>. She did not believe that privileging industrial education *only* would be beneficial to the black community. When others argued that only this could solve the race problem, she thought it was problematic: "So the discussion goes on from one extreme to the other, with more or less earnestness and noise, truth and falsehood, sense and nonsense"<sup>142</sup>.

Mary Terrell was initially not inclined to support industrial education. She received a classical education at Oberlin in the 1880s, notably thanks to the progressivism of her father. In her autobiography, she explained that when she was a teacher at M. Street High School, it "often wrung [her] heart" to have students "who possess[ed] brilliant intellects" come to her and say: "What is the good in our trying to get an education? We can't all be preachers, teachers, doctors and lawyers". These remarks, probably made in the mid-1880s, made her fear that these promising pupils risked shirking their vocations because they knew they wouldn't have the chance to secure jobs in the professions one day. She was disheartened to think that not only the M. Street High School was training young men and women who would soon be denied employment because of racial prejudice – despite their abilities and education – but also that young black people may think this way and compromise their future<sup>143</sup>.

Yet like Fannie Williams, as a former teacher of languages, she adopted a measured attitude about education, believing that both types of training were acceptable for African Americans. For instance, in May 1895, Mary Church Terrell wrote in the *Woman's Era* that girls needed to receive training in order to be able to secure employment upon graduation. "As to my views on industrial work, I have only to say that I should give some kind of a trade to each and every young woman who graduates from our [in Washington D.C.] public

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 79. She praised the "influence of schools of domestic science" and provided examples of satisfactory occupations for women. According to her, women could be cooks, trained nurses, dressmakers, milliners, etc.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>143</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 396.

schools” because for those who did not become teachers, finding a job proved difficult. “Let the public schools equip our young women with trades, which they can acquire nowhere else. Let our girls be instructed in all the occupations in which women may engage”, implying that women should remain employed in jobs deemed “feminine” – therefore showing that she somewhat subscribed to the views of her time about gender roles<sup>144</sup>. Moreover, educated women might also have had in mind the fact that without proper training, there was a risk for girls to be taken advantage of or of falling into the hands of procurers – as Victoria Earle Matthews had warned in the late 1890s.

In “The Progress of Colored Women” (1898), she explained that she thought that industrial education was beneficial for some African Americans. Praising the work of “one good woman” named Cornelia Bowen – a graduate of Tuskegee Institute and founder of Mt. Meigs Institute — who displayed “courage, industry and sacrifice”, Terrell stressed the success of the Institute, saying that it was “an excellent example of a work originated and carried into successful execution by a colored woman”<sup>145</sup>. She supported industrial education when it proved economically beneficial for the locals: “Instruction given in this school is of the kind best suited to the needs of those people for whom it was established”. For example, “Along with their scholastic training, girls are taught everything pertaining to the management of a home, while boys learn practical farming, carpentering, wheelwrighting, blacksmithing, and have some military training.”. In 1898, Terrell already praised the work accomplished in industrial schools both north and south. She also commended the actions led by clubwomen in Chicago: “Chicago clubs and several others engage in rescue work among fallen women and tempted girls”<sup>146</sup>.

After receiving an invitation from Booker T. Washington in 1903, Mary Terrell paid a visit at Tuskegee Institute. From that moment on, she embraced industrial education wholeheartedly<sup>147</sup>. Despite her initial doubts, she confided in her autobiography having finally been won over by the model of the Tuskegee Institute. Years later, she said:

I had never seen a Commencement like Tuskegee’s before. On the stage before our very eyes students actually performed the work which they had learned to do in school as a part of the exercises. They showed us how to build houses, how to paint them, how to estimate the cost of the necessary material

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<sup>144</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Woman’s Era*, May 1895, 3. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>145</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women”, 1898, 13. “The school was established for the benefit of colored people on the plantations in the black belt of Alabama, because of the 700,000 negroes living in that State, [...] the population is practically all colored.”

<sup>146</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Women”, 1898, 13. This is reminiscent of the language used by Victoria Earle Matthews and Jane Hunter in club work in the 1890s-1910s.

<sup>147</sup> Terrell was a graduation speaker at the Tuskegee Institute in 1903. See Adele Alexander Logan, *Homelands and Waterways: The American Journey of the Bond Family, 1846-1926*. (New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 2000), 310.

and so on down the line. I was completely taken off my feet. I was a convert with all my heart. Here was a school giving just the kind of instruction that the majority attending it needed<sup>148</sup>.

She thus became a strong proponent of the Washingtonian model and refused to discuss this issue with people who criticized Booker T. Washington's approach having "formed [their] opinion from hearsay"<sup>149</sup>. She gained an even higher opinion of the man and of his work during her stay there: "After I had seen Tuskegee with my own eyes I had a higher regard and a greater admiration for its founder than I had ever entertained before. I realized what a splendid work he was doing to promote the welfare of the race, and that he was literally fulfilling 'a long-felt want'"<sup>150</sup>.

Several years before white progressive women, black female intellectuals had defended the right for women to get an education and had emphasized the importance of educated womanhood. They argued that racial uplift would only be possible through education. Thanks to it, African Americans could build better homes, become better workers and better citizens, in brief, assure the advancement of the community. These middle and upper-class women actively supported education since many of them had served as teachers for a significant length of time. Cooper is definitely the strongest voice on this topic because of her long career as an educator in Washington D.C. as Williams and Terrell had ceased to be educators upon their marriage.

The two mothers of the sample – Ida Wells and Mary Terrell – encouraged their daughters to pursue an education and work in the professions, rejoicing when the latter obtained positions as educators for instance. Depending on their regional and class affiliation and on their personal affinities, black female intellectuals sided with Du Bois or Booker T. Washington. Probably influenced by their personal histories and sensibilities, by their class and regional affiliation, black female intellectuals did not see eye to eye on the question of classical vs. industrial education. Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams had particularly diverging opinions. The southern-born educator Cooper supported classical education while the northern-born Washingtonian Williams advocated Washingtonian views – deeming that

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<sup>148</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 192. Unfortunately, Terrell did not provide examples of what girls did.

<sup>149</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 192-193. She said: "I felt that it was a waste of time and energy to enter into a discussion with anybody who had not been to the school, but had formed his opinion from hearsay".

<sup>150</sup> As Debra Newman Ham has interestingly pointed out, Terrell was also "further influenced in Washington's favor because he was influential in helping her husband retain his judicial appointment". Debra Newman Ham, "Mary Church Terrell", *Notable Black American Women*, Vol. I, ed., Jessie Carney Smith, 1118.

this would help most members of the community. Yet both women offered nuanced positions, agreeing that classical education should be encouraged when students possessed the necessary talents and that the job market in the South – where most African Americans still lived then – required that pupils should be trained in industrial jobs. Overall, whether they endorsed industrial or classical education, all women agreed that education in all its forms should be fostered among African Americans, in order to ensure the progress of the community.

In the following chapter, I will examine how black female intellectuals weaved their discourses about education and motherhood and how some of them – members of the NACW such as Mary Terrell and Josephine Yates – placed a special emphasis on motherhood, home and child-care in the progressive era. To analyze this, I will study how these activists experienced motherhood themselves and managed – if they did – to combine work and domestic duties.



## Chapter 2: Racial Uplift Through Motherhood and Home-Making

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### 1. Home-Making: Recommendations and Experiences

During the progressive era, in industrial schools, institutes or in articles and manuals, black and white progressive women gave much advice about how to be good mothers and effective homemakers to working and middle-class women, providing them with instructions on various subjects such as hygiene, food, child-rearing, home-management and other domestic subjects<sup>151</sup>.

While making such recommendations, black clubwomen promoted conventional family models – the nuclear family – alongside their middle-class values. Interestingly, despite their own work in the public sphere, as clubwomen, many defended the theory of separate spheres, arguing that husbands should be the sole providers of the family while wives exerted their influence in the domestic sphere<sup>152</sup>. They used a language imbued with Victorianism about women’s mission of building “better, purer homes” and stressed the “sacred” importance of motherhood – even though some of them did not have children themselves<sup>153</sup> or did not have to take on home duties themselves<sup>154</sup>. Their rhetoric could therefore appear as elitist and patronizing.

Several intellectuals argued that in order to defend the image of the community, one had to remove the stigma on African American homes. In 1904, Fannie Williams underlined the essential role women were to play in this regard: “The Negro race is learning that the things which our women are doing come first in the lessons of citizenship, that there will never be an unchallenged vote, a respected political power, or an unquestioned claim to

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<sup>151</sup> These manuals could be written by black or white men who were often physicians, and women. The first manuals were written by white Americans. See for instance *The American Woman’s Home*, published by Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1869 or the treaty written on women by Grant Allen, which Anna Cooper discussed in “The Higher Education of Woman”.

<sup>152</sup> See Hélène Le Dantec Lowry, *De l’esclave au président*, 90-91.

<sup>153</sup> Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams did not have children. Ida Wells-Barnett had four children and two stepsons while Mary Terrell had two daughters.

<sup>154</sup> Deborah Gray White has indicated that, “according to historian Linda Gordon, forty-three percent of the NACW’s leaders, and thirty-four percent of those who were married, had no children. Being childless meant more time to manage marriage, clubwork, and a job outside of the home”, Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of the Welfare 1890-1935*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 121, as cited in *Too Heavy a Load*, 88-89.

position of influence and importance, until the present stigma is removed from the home and the women of the race”<sup>155</sup>. The question of home and women was therefore closely linked. Williams implied that to redeem the image of women of color, one had to redeem the image of African American homes.

These clubwomen used a Victorian language in their discourses. In her first inaugural address as the president of the NACW, in 1897, Mary Terrell said: “Believing that it is only through the home that a people can become really good and truly great the National Association of Colored Women has entered that sacred domain, hoping to inculcate right principles of living and to correct false views of life. Homes, more homes, better homes, purer homes is the text upon which our sermons have been and will be preached”<sup>156</sup>.

In her early 1900s writings, Fannie Williams supported the ideal of “pure homes” as well. She agreed that “raising the ideals of the home” was one of the most important goals of the era. In “An Extension of the Conference Spirit” (1904), she held that “one great need was declared to be education in domestic economy and raising the ideals of the home”<sup>157</sup>. According to Williams, women of color occupied essential “primary” social roles because they were in charge of creating and maintaining pure homes and family life<sup>158</sup>. In 1900, in *A New Negro in a New Century*, she had argued that clubwork should focus on teaching, that domestic life was vital for the community and that *a house* did not equate *a home*<sup>159</sup>. Like Cooper ten years before, Williams was trying to instill in her readers Victorian concepts about the home.

Many reformers believed that they had the necessary authority and the required exemplary positions to provide women of the lower classes with advice and therefore adopted patronizing discourses. For instance, in 1905, Terrell said:

We [the women of the NACW] have taught [lower-class women] the A.B.C. of living by showing them how to make their hovels more habitable and decent with the small means at their command; how to care for themselves and children more in accordance with the rules of health. Plans for ministering unto the indigent, orphaned and aged have been projected and in some instances have been carried into successful execution. Sewing classes have been formed, and mothers meetings held<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>155</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 47-51, 51.

<sup>156</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Address Delivered at the National Council of Women Convention, 9 April 1905”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 134.

<sup>157</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “An Extension of the Conference Spirit”, 1904, in *The New Woman of Color*, 94.

<sup>158</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, 1902 and *The New Negro*, 1900.

<sup>159</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro in a New Century*, 417. “Homes are something better and dearer than rooms, furniture, comforts and food. How to make the homes of the race the shrines of all the domestic virtues rather than a mere shelter, is the important thing that colored women are trying to learn and teach through their club organizations”.

<sup>160</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Address Delivered at the National Council of Women Convention”, 9 April 1905. *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*.

What advice did they offer and how strong was the class divide between elite clubwomen and women from humble backgrounds?

### **Obligation to Master the Art of Housekeeping**

At a time when domestic duties were still strictly determined by gender, men expected women to be in charge of housekeeping and many women agreed that they had to master domestic skills. Many women of color of the middle-class were raised and educated to become “well-trained mothers” and housekeepers.

At school and at University, women were encouraged to become efficient housekeepers. For instance, at Howard University, instructors taught the art of home management within Departments of “domestic science”. In the college newspaper, students spoke about the benefits of such teachings. In “What does Manual Training Contribute to Education” (1908), Florence A. Hill praised manual education, which was “connected with home life, domestic art and science”, and argued that a woman should “wisely direct her own household, and give her children the foundation of true character building”<sup>161</sup> and underlined that the “need for educated mothers [was], perhaps, as great today as it ever ha[d] been”. In the same fashion, Elizabeth D. Palmer defended the Manual Arts Department in a following issue: “Give the girl knowledge of scientific principles at the basis of domestic affairs, and *she has power*. Give her practice in doing what she thinks, and she has power; power to save income, health and life, and she feels conscious of a power within herself”<sup>162</sup>. She quoted Miss Arnold, Dean of Simmons College<sup>163</sup> giving New England women’s colleges as models for Howard University: “It is vitally important that a girl should early have her interest aroused in domestic affairs, should – so to speak – get her mind to working that way”<sup>164</sup>. One author chose to quote Senator Smoot in January 1917 in the *Spelman Messenger*: “Every girl should know what to eat, how to eat, and how to cook [...] Our leading schools for girls do not teach the one thing that every girl should be taught, namely, how to manage a home [...] I am an

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<sup>161</sup> “What does Manual Training Contribute to Education?” by Florence A. Hill, *The University Journal*, 19 March 1908, 1 and 5. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

<sup>162</sup> Elizabeth D. Palmer, “The Value of Domestic Science in the Schools”. *The University Journal*, 25 March 1908, 3 and 5. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C. Archives. The quotation is from page 3. Italics mine.

<sup>163</sup> Simmons College located in Boston opened in 1899 thanks to the initiative of John Simmons, a progressive white man who wished to offer women the opportunity to “earn independent livelihood and lead meaningful lives”. The first African American student graduated from Simmons College in 1914. <http://www.simmons.edu/about-simmons/why-simmons/history-of-simmons>.

<sup>164</sup> Elizabeth D. Palmer, “The Value of Domestic Science in the Schools”, 5.

advocate of the highest education possible for woman, but I do believe no woman's education is complete until she knows how to, and could, if required, manage a home successfully”<sup>165</sup>.

Many articles underscored the central role women were to play as homemakers because they conveyed positive values in their communities and were the guardians of hygiene, industry and good morals. For example, Minnie Lee Thomas – who must have been of the instructors of the Industrial Department – taught Spelman students that “there cannot be any thing more necessary in a home than a good keeper of that home” and “a home is made happy in accordance as the keeper is neat, clean and industrious [... The] home is what the keeper makes it [...] It is a pity to have a single home without a well-trained mother”. In her mind, a good housekeeper brought happiness to the family and as long as the home was pleasant, husbands and children should live happily<sup>166</sup>. Another Spelman graduate shared these beliefs. She viewed home as the “center”, the “haven” and the “foundation” for all children. Arguing for a pure home, purity of speech, dress and environment, Fannie S.W. Martin fought against any form of behavior she deemed improper<sup>167</sup>. Moreover, relaying the information given by other instructors of Manual Arts at Tuskegee, Spelman College or Howard University, the author believed that “home making should be regarded as a profession [...] The most profitable, the most interesting study for women is the home, for in it centers all the issues of life”<sup>168</sup>.

Bourgeois women had precise ideas of what the perfect homemaker should do. Fannie Barrier Williams promoted Art in its various forms: music, painting, decoration, focusing her efforts on pictorial Art and painting in her articles. For instance, in “The Influence of Art on Home Life” (1896), she thought that art should be displayed in every home so as to inspire all children and girls in particular and to remind them of the noble acts of illustrious foremothers. “Every home”, she argued, should “inspire their daughters to be womanly and strong in all the virtues of perfect womanhood, place before them the faces of women who have done so much to glorify womankind”<sup>169</sup>. In 1906, she reiterated this view almost word for word: “Let our

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<sup>165</sup> Senator Smoot, “For Better Cooking”, in *Spelman Messenger*, January 1917, 1. Senator Reed Smoot was a Mormon and a Republican Senator for Utah from 1903 to 1933.

<sup>166</sup> “The Work of the Industrial Department of Spelman Seminary”, *Spelman Messenger*, April 1896.

<sup>167</sup> Fannie S.W. Martin, “Home Training for Purity”, *Spelman Messenger*, ca.1902.

<sup>168</sup> Elizabeth D. Palmer, “The Value of Domestic Science in the Schools”. *The University Journal*, 25 March 1908, 5.

<sup>169</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Influence of Art on Home Life”, in *Woman's Era*, June 1896, 13.

daughters gather strength and inspiration from the pictured faces of women who have done much to glorify womankind”<sup>170</sup>.

In “The Refining Influence of Art”, she argued, once more, that Art should enter every home again because it was beneficial for the family and the community<sup>171</sup>. She stressed that women had a paramount role in the promotion of art and refinement among children as homemakers:

It is because the world of art with all its joyousness and beauty is being more and more brought within the reach of everyone who would appropriate its treasures that we are coming to believe that no woman sufficiently realizes the sacredness of her trust and privileges as a home-maker who is not ambitious to make her home bright, beautiful and refined, as well as comfortable and convenient<sup>172</sup>.

In 1894, Fannie Barrier Williams put her ideas into practice, decorating her Chicago home with her paintings<sup>173</sup>.

Moreover, she thought that women were in charge of decorating the house because they possessed natural artistic tastes. Like Anna Cooper<sup>174</sup>, Fannie Williams subscribed to a gendered-based ideology, thinking that thanks to their supposed sensibilities, women were better-suited to select the furniture and the decorations for the house: “Indeed it seems that the entire art world, by the use of the decorator’s skill, is assisting women to understand and appreciate the uses of art as seen in the simplest articles of home-furnishings”<sup>175</sup>. Partially adhering here to Victorian beliefs about woman’s finer sensibilities, she seemed to crown women as queens or angels of the home, and opposed them to men – she depicted them as

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<sup>170</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Refining Influence of Art”, *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 3 (1906): 211-214, as cited in *The Woman of Color*, 100-103, 103.

<sup>171</sup> Williams was an art lover herself. From a very young age, she pursued artistic interests, playing the piano and painting on a regular basis. *The Brockport Republic* chronicled her development as an artist, explaining that while studying music and drawing at the Boston Conservatory of Music in 1884, she sent her father several “beautiful large crayon sketches of himself and wife” which were later exposed in one of the stores of the city”. *The Brockport Republic*. 15 May 1884. On 28 August 1884, one could read: “The beautiful crayon sketches prepared by Miss Fannie Barrier of this village, and exhibited at Messrs. Smith & Pearse’s store, have commanded a great deal of admiration”.

<sup>172</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Refining Influence of Art”, 100.

<sup>173</sup> *The Brockport Republic*. December 6, 1894. “Since her marriage she has painted but little, but the walls of her home contain many creditable works from her brush [...] Her cleverest work has been that of portraits. At the New Orleans exposition she exhibited several canvases, which called forth most favorable criticism from other artists”.

<sup>174</sup> Anna Cooper argued in 1890-1891: “All I claim is that there is a feminine as well as a masculine side to truth; that these are related not as inferior and superior, not as better and worse [...] but as *complements* in one necessary and symmetric whole [...] The man is more noble in reason’ while ‘the woman is more quick in sympathy’ [...] ‘There is a general consensus of mankind that the one trait [reason] is essentially masculine and the other [consideration and helplessness] peculiarly feminine”. Anna Julia Cooper, “Higher Education of Women”, 1890-1891, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 78. Italics mine.

<sup>175</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Refining Influence of Art”, 100.

able breadwinners who should provide for their wives' apparels<sup>176</sup>. Williams's recommendations must have appeared as quite unrealistic to working-class women.

Williams and other women of the middle-class argued that music and elocution were to be encouraged as well. Williams – who played the piano very well herself – encouraged women to master the art of cooking and playing an instrument<sup>177</sup>. Addressing middle-class women<sup>178</sup>, Emma Hackley advised them to take piano or elocution lessons in 1916: “She should not push or try to climb; she should bide her time. In the meantime she might improve herself; she might study the piano, elocution or singing, and prepare for the day when opportunity will open the long-closed social door”<sup>179</sup>. These suggestions appear as somewhat disconnected with the reality of many African American women.

Other women of the middle-class also provided women with instructions on how to become “perfect homemakers”. In the *Spelman Messenger*, Trudie Houser not only argued in favor of cleanliness, order, decorating a home with flowers, intelligence but also for “intellectuality”, clever conversation, love of music, thrift, regular meals, industry and economy. In this article full of injunctions for Spelman students, she promoted a Victorian model: while the man should be “at his workshop” the mother “sewed”, the oldest sister sang, the brother gardened and children played or read Dickens’ stories<sup>180</sup>. The home should also be a religious place where a “spirit of devotion” reigned<sup>181</sup>. It had to be made beautiful, economy should reign in order to ensure uplift: “If we as a race want to be elevated we must improve our home life”.

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<sup>176</sup> It appears that Williams had gendered preconceptions about home-management as well. Men – generally husbands — were expected to make the necessary expenses for their wives’ outfits: “Every woman has an inherent right to be well-gowned, and since it is for some man, as well as for the other woman, that becoming dress is coveted, it is man’s primal duty to make fitting acknowledgment of her success”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Smaller Economies”, 90.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 91. “The accomplished woman of the future must be the woman whose accomplishment will include the kitchen and pantry as well as the drawing room and the piano”.

<sup>178</sup> These pastimes were probably too costly and time-consuming for working women from humble backgrounds.

<sup>179</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 157.

<sup>180</sup> Trudie Houser, “The Essentials of an Ideal Home”, *Spelman Messenger*, December 1898. She used two opposed views of home: the first home being full of chaos – where the man was drinking alcohol, the mother, “overcome with vice” had “almost abandoned her children” while the oldest sister had gone to a ball – thus being potentially fallen – while the brother was “left to die alone”. The second home was a peaceful, quiet model – where a dutiful and loving wife was married to a serious and hard-working man. Vol. 15, No. 2. Many other articles were published by members of Spelman staff. For instance, Mary A. Speer, Acad. Dept. wrote “No Place like Home”, *Spelman Messenger*, November 1899, 4. She advocated “peace and quiet”, a “beautifully furnished” home where happiness reigned. Houser was a graduate in 1901. She worked as a principal of a campus school in Birmingham, Alabama, owned by a large industrial company”, this information is taken from a Graduates’ Corner in which alumnae discussed the death of Miss C. Marie Grover.

<sup>181</sup> Mrs. MacVicar of Virginia Union University, “The Work of Negro Women in the Home”, reported by Lillie White, Academic Dept. *Spelman Messenger*, February 1902.



Furthermore, black female intellectuals argued that the home should be a place where intellectual achievements should be encouraged. For instance, as early as 1894, some feminists such as Gertrude Mossell demanded to have the opportunity to have “a room of one’s own” – a study in the attic, since family libraries were often used by husbands. Again addressing the black elite, she said that writers should have a silent, well-furnished, nicely-decorated room in order to be able to concentrate and dedicate oneself to one’s leisure – writing<sup>182</sup>. Then, many women required that there should be several books in every household – including the Bible. In the 1910s Emma Hackley advised homemakers to have at least three books at home: “In every inventory or collection one finds a Bible, a dictionary, and an atlas” because “a house without books is indeed an unfurnished home”<sup>183</sup>. This opinion was shared by many Spelman College alumnae: for instance, Trudie Houser, Class of 1898 wrote an article about the ideal home and argued that “the more intelligent the home, the higher the type of social life”.

Fannie Williams used a Victorian language to say that women should embrace their home duties and in “this noble place” should “reign” love and affection. “What a miserable creature the woman to whom housekeeping and homemaking are drudgery! Think of the high uses and obligations that gather around the term home. The place for the preservation of health, the shrine of our best affections, the theater of our surest loves and the ties innumerable”<sup>184</sup>. However, among the women mentioned in this study, several had difficulties putting these recommendations into practice.

### **Bourgeois Women: Difficulties Mastering Housekeeping**

Interestingly enough, some of the women who dispensed advice in etiquette books or in the feminine press were not always model homemakers themselves. It appears that although they were adamant that women should know the art of housekeeping, they sometimes had difficulties accomplishing housekeeping duties themselves. Mary Terrell, Ida B. Wells or Fannie Williams did not embody what one would term “perfect housewives”. For example, in one of her 1895 articles, Fannie Williams’s distaste for home duties is palpable. Calling housekeeping duties “drudgery” – the very term she would later use in “The Smaller

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<sup>182</sup> Gertrude Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, 127-128. This modern woman demanded to have a room of one’s own several decades before Virginia Woolf penned *A Room of One’s Own* in 1929.

<sup>183</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 147.

<sup>184</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Smaller Economies”, 1904, 91.

Economies” (1904), she did not understand how some women could willingly self-inflict to be perfect housekeepers. In an article published in the *Woman’s Era* in June 1895, Fannie Barrier Williams explained that she dreaded the month of June because it implied “moving and house-cleaning” – a “subject so dreary and irritating”. This was “such a season of misery for all of us that the thought of it intrudes itself in spite of ourselves. This is the season of the year when all of our weaknesses seem to be on trial”. Humorously describing this annual ritual of Spring-clean, she denounced the fact that men and women were the accomplices of a system which subjugated women: “By the general consent of all womankind and the amiable tolerance of our ‘lords and masters’, we lay aside our sweetness, our loveliness and charms and put in evidence all our hatefulness and biting impatience against every body and every thing. Womankind seems to take a savage delight in this season of cleaning, renovating and reordering of her household”. Deploing that gender roles evolved so slowly in the 1890s, she pointed out that social mores would never change if women went on embracing such burdens willingly: “What poor creatures we are, and how slowly we emancipate ourselves from many of our self-imposed afflictions! Fretfulness over housecleaning, like tight-lacing and balloon sleeves, seem to be some of our cherished miseries. Perhaps the college bred woman will, by and by, show us how to meet and treat philosophically these many disagreeable necessities”<sup>185</sup>.

Like many other black and white women of her time, Fannie Barrier Williams hoped to see housework become increasingly mechanized: “Then again, we have some hope in those useful inventions that year by year are diminishing the drudgery of home keeping. It really looks as if steam and gas and electricity, in various ways, are soon to make all kinds of housekeeping so delightfully easy that woman’s only cause for ill-temper will be too much leisure”. But before this time came, she criticized women’s natural tendencies to lament and get upset about domestic subjects and argued that their attitudes might have a negative impact on their roles in the public sphere:

It is to be fervently hoped that we will become strong enough in the command of our better selves to endure more gracefully the trials of our little responsibilities. Woman will make a sorry figure in the contentions of politics and business, and in the larger questions of public concern if she fails to cultivate the patience, the good judgment and good sense that she now so often lacks in the domestic sphere<sup>186</sup>.

It seems likely that by the early 1900s, Williams – who disliked housekeeping duties – paid a domestic worker at home. At the beginning of “The Problem of Employment for Negro Women” published in July 1903, she used a phrase which seems to indicate that she

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<sup>185</sup> Williams, *Woman’s Era*, June 1895, 4.

<sup>186</sup> Williams, *Woman’s Era*, June 1895, 4-5. Williams several times in her writings criticized women’s natural “tendencies” to be “petty” and to lack self-control.

considered herself as being part of “the average [middle-class] housewife” who employed domestics “to do housework”. She wrote: “Although I am a woman and a housekeeper, I must admit that the average housewife is apt to be a petty tyrant”<sup>187</sup>. At that time, Fannie Williams, who had become a well-known writer and clubwoman, had perhaps difficulties juggling her career as an activist and writer and her domestic duties, even though she did not have any children. In her writings, however, she encouraged women to view domestic work as a real profession and hoped to see electricity and other technological inventions lift this burden from women’s shoulders.

In 1907, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman – the author of *Women and Economics* who advocated the professionalization of housework –, other women such as Josephine Yates wanted domestic duties to be accomplished by professional workers<sup>188</sup>. According to Yates, this would enable couples to enjoy gender equality and would limit the number of divorces. In the *Colored American Magazine*, she remarked: “When housekeeping is reduced to a science, and is pursued on the strictly business principles that the twentieth century should inaugurate, marriage will hardly be looked upon as bondage or failure; not the rearing of children as an aim too low for an intellectual being, and the divorce courts practically will be deserted”<sup>189</sup>.

Other women nevertheless thought that women had to master the art of housekeeping regardless of their occupation or social class. For example, Ida B. Wells-Barnett – who had been taught household duties at a young age – also disliked housekeeping. In an interview, her daughter Alfreda Duster indicated that doing housework “bothered her” because she was under the impression that she “wasn’t *accomplishing* anything”, since the dust would be there

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<sup>187</sup> Williams, “The Problem of Employment for Negro Women”, 1903, in *The New Woman of Color*, 52-57. In this article, she was speaking about northern domestics in Chicago – who earned between \$4 to \$7 a week. Explaining that part of the domestics, who entered the job unwillingly because they had “more or less education and who are ambitious to do something in the line of ‘polite occupations’”, were responsible for the bad reputation of domestics. There were “complaints” about their work because they were deemed “unreliable”. She also wanted to emphasize the fact that white or black employers were also difficult to work for, indicating that the average, “ordinary mistress” was “far from being an angel” and was in fact “apt to be a petty tyrant”, seemingly including herself. Again, in this article, her elitist stance is noticeable. She lamented that several women gave a bad reputation to the entire black womanhood: “While there are thousands of of worthy and really noble women in domestic service who enjoy the confidence and affection of their employers, there is a large percentage of colored women who, by their general unworthiness, help to give the Negro race a bad name”, 56. Yet in this article, she did not want her readers to understand that she deemed that all black women should enter the domestic service, since she was defending its nobility. Instead, her plea was: “That we shall protect and respect our girls who honestly and intelligently enter this service, either from preference or necessity”, 56.

<sup>188</sup> She also viewed the home as an economic unit, a “firm, or cooperative union” where “on some substantial and equitable basis, husband and wife, and children are to share in the accruing profits”.

<sup>189</sup> Josephine Silone Yates, “Woman as a Factor in the Solution of Race Problems,” *The Colored American Magazine* (February 1907): 126–135, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 105-114, 134 and 113 of *African American Feminisms*.

again the next day<sup>190</sup>. Instead, she preferred to focus on activism. Yet, as her daughter explained, she wanted her daughters to know how to keep a house because she thought that her daughters should “know how to keep house, how to wash, how to iron, so even if we had someone else to do it, we would know how it should be done”<sup>191</sup>.

Women should be skillful as both housekeepers *and* cultured wives. In her 1906 article, Williams – who disliked housekeeping as well – argued that the ideal woman would soon have to be accomplished: she must be a perfect cook and housewife while also being a cultured, well-versed, well-dressed conversationist and musician. She thought that “the time [was] certainly coming when it [would] be discreditable, yes, a disgrace, to any woman who [had] had no training in household economy. The accomplished woman of the future must be the woman whose accomplishment will include the kitchen and pantry as well as the drawing room and the piano”<sup>192</sup>.

Mary Church Terrell also adhered to such conceptions. Her autobiographical writings suggest that she tried her best to conform to the role which was expected of her as a wife and as a housekeeper. While it did not seem to trouble Ida B. Wells or Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Terrell appears to have somewhat suffered from her inability to be a perfect housewife<sup>193</sup>. Her affectionate and understanding husband often mocked her cooking skills, calling her “the Queen of all Puddings”<sup>194</sup>. Each time she had guests over for dinner, a “tragedy” occurred. Either she burnt the dinner, or some coal oil in her freezer had ruined the ice cream she had prepared, or the chicken she had bought was tough. Despite her “hospitable” nature inherited from her parents, she dreaded having guests over for dinner because she was sure that nothing would go the way she wanted<sup>195</sup>. Nevertheless, as Deborah White has noted, even though she “usually had household help, she generally managed her

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<sup>190</sup> “Afterword”, Interview of Alfreda Barnett Duster by Dorothy Sterling, 1976. *Memphis Diary*, 194, italics hers.

<sup>191</sup> *Memphis Diary*, 194. The Barnetts wanted Alfreda to help at home when she was old enough: “When I got big enough, I was supposed to help”, 194. Unfortunately, Alfreda Barnett Duster (1904-1983) did not precise in the interview to Dorothy Sterling if her mother wanted *all* of her children to master housekeeping but one may imagine that it concerned only her daughters.

<sup>192</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Smaller Economies”, 91.

<sup>193</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 120. Her father said about her that she “did not know how to boil water” when she started housekeeping. Even if she used humor in her autobiography, one understands that she wished she could master this art.

<sup>194</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 122. “My husband enjoyed joking about my mistakes in cooking, and for a long time he talked about ‘that wonderful Thanksgiving dinner’ which it took me twelve hours to cook; and he often referred to me as ‘The Queen of All Puddings’ for years.”

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* “Both my mother and my father were hospitable, and I inherited that trait from them. But I dreaded having company for dinner like a toothache, because something was always sure to go wrong, no matter how hard I tried to have everything right”.

household and sewed, varnished woodwork, and upholstered chairs”<sup>196</sup>. Interestingly, these three busy clubwomen seemed to consider housekeeping as an art women should master but they were not keen on domestic tasks.

Consequently, these women developed several strategies to help them juggle work, motherhood and home-making. It is likely that Fannie Williams hired a domestic worker to do her housework in the early 1900s. As mentioned earlier, since Ida Wells detested housekeeping chores, the Barnetts hired help so that she did not have to worry about housecleaning for many years during her marriage. Alfreda Barnett Duster indicated that “mother didn’t worry about the house. Dad had somebody there to clean it up”, explaining that at that time it was quite easy to hire people who had recently arrived in Chicago to do this sort of job<sup>197</sup>.

What is more, she could count on her husband to accomplish part of the daily chores. While Ida “made bread”, Ferdinand Barnett did “most of the cooking” at home since Ida disliked cooking. Alfreda Duster explained that her father “came home first, on the streetcar” and cooked, his wife [being often] busy reading and writing<sup>198</sup>. Women who could afford to hire workers benefited from their assistance at home. For example, Laura Hamilton Murray was able to hire help at times when her grandmother – probably because of her old age – was unable to help. On 5 March 1885, she noted: “The woman I engaged did not come to wash so I did it all myself, Mamma not being able”<sup>199</sup>. Similarly, since Mary Terrell did not excel in cooking, the pair hired a cook – whom Mary Terrell called her “dearly beloved Eula” – to help her at home. Her mother also helped her at home as well in the 1900s<sup>200</sup>.

Williams, Wells and Terrell could count on supporting husbands who were ready to assist their wives in their missions for women and the community. These strategies undoubtedly helped these busy activists focus on their professional tasks. They were not only writers, they also often travelled throughout the country to give lectures. Their life experiences were exceptional: few black women of color benefited from such circumstances

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<sup>196</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 91.

<sup>197</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster, *Memphis Diary*, 194. She explained: “Mother was very displeased by the fact that if you swept the house today, there’d be more dust tomorrow”. One understands that the domestic workers the Barnetts hired were recently-arrived migrants. Before World War I, the Barnetts lived in a two-story house situated on 3234 Rhodes Avenue. After 1919, they moved to a big eight-room house located on 3624 Grand Boulevard in Chicago. *Memphis Diary*, 195-196. In her 1930 diary, one understands that this was more and more difficult for Ida Wells to pay for help.

<sup>198</sup> “Afterword”, Interview of Alfreda Barnett Duster by Dorothy Sterling, 1976. *Memphis Diary*, 194. This is reminiscent of what Glenda Gilmore has noted in her study of North Carolina. Gilmore spoke of the “companionate partnerships” forged one generation before whites. See *Gender and Jim Crow*, 18.

<sup>199</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 476 and 473.

<sup>200</sup> Louisa Ayers Church lived with the Terrells for fifteen years until her death in 1911.

to build their careers. Class, in addition to gender, definitely impacted the way these women envisaged housewifery and housekeeping duties<sup>201</sup>.

At the turn of the century, middle and upper-class black women deemed it central to stress the necessity of building better homes to redeem the image of the community. They developed an elitist discourse and used a Victorian language to make recommendations about how to keep a house properly to working women and often conveyed their own conceptions of the ideal family model – a nuclear family on the model of the Victorian family composed of a male breadwinner and a dutiful housewife. They also defined ideals of perfect housewives and housemakers in the press, using a Victorian rhetoric. They insisted that women should not only master the art of cooking or housekeeping, but also, ideally wished to see as many women as possible be accomplished, cultured ladies, conversationists, able pianists and art lovers. These demanding recommendations surely appeared as almost unattainable for most women of African descent in America at that time. Interestingly, the study of their articles, life writings or the interviews of their family members reveal that while some women made such strict restrictions, some of them – Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell or Ida B. Wells – did not enjoy housekeeping<sup>202</sup>.

In addition to homemaking, motherhood duties were still largely attributed to their gender. What do their writings reveal about their experience of motherhood and the difficulties they may have faced to juggle work and motherhood?

## 2. The Strategic Importance of Motherhood

As Beverly Guy-Sheftall has made clear, elite black women internalized “the values of the cult of domesticity” and were aware that motherhood was viewed by black men and women as “the most essential function of women”<sup>203</sup>. In a context of racist propaganda where white women were to embody “mothers of the race”, clubwomen thought that black mothers’ mission was of paramount importance. They represented the future of the community because

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<sup>201</sup> On these issues, see Sharon Harley’s article: “For the Good of Family and Race: Gender, Work, and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880-1930”, in *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives*, 159-172. ed., Micheline R. Malson, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, Jean F. O’Barr, and Mary. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>202</sup> As Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry has pointed out in the study about women reformers, interestingly, these women “imposed strict rules about hygiene, food or children’s education which reflected the values of their own social group, even when these very women broke away from these models because of their political activities!”, *De l’esclave au président*, 91.

<sup>203</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 12.



of their nurturing roles as mothers for the generations to come. In their articles, intellectuals explained that mothers had a special role to play towards not only their children but also towards the children of the community. For example, Emma Azalia Hackley claimed in her etiquette book that women of African descent had a special role to fulfill as mothers of the race:

The colored mother beautiful carries a heavy burden — the weight of future generations of a handicapped, persecuted people. She may bless or curse each succeeding generation; she may change race history; she may make a more beautiful race with the beauty that comes from beauty of character and right living. What a privilege to carve the destiny of a race! How glorious to look into the future and see lines of ancestry influenced and advanced by her thought and example, to see her stamp of personality upon a posterity which will point to her in pride and thankfulness! The time has come when each colored girl must prepare herself for this rare privilege, when she must distribute her powers and talents for race good. Whatever the colored mother is, millions of colored children will be. A colored mother lives not only for herself and for her own children, but she must live for the race. A colored mother is a success as she measures up to her relation and obligation to the race<sup>204</sup>.

Hackley went even further when she said: “Any crime that she commits against herself or her body she commits against the race.”, therefore arguing that a woman embodied the entire community<sup>205</sup>.

### **The Origins of the “Crowning” of Motherhood in America For White Women**

Motherhood had historically benefited from “absolute veneration” in America, as Mary Ryan has explained<sup>206</sup>. Women were responsible for transmitting certain Victorian values to their children. Parents had to “strive to instill in their own offspring those general traits of characters deemed conducive to success in the bourgeois world: propriety, diligence, conscientiousness. The task of implanting these virtues in human minds while they were young and malleable was allocated to mothers, conveniently cloistered with children in the antebellum home [...] This was the preeminent social function carried on within woman's sphere”<sup>207</sup>.

In the early twentieth century, motherhood was invested with a new glory. According to Mary Ryan, “Motherhood was proclaimed the essence of femininity [...] Expectant mothers were forewarned that this female role would absorb the bulk of their time and energy.” They were told that ““It truly require[d] all the affection of even a fond mother to administer judiciously to the numerous wants of a young child””. Woman’s “proper” sphere was at home. As a result, in the early 1800s, women’s noblest role in society was that of Republican

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<sup>204</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 181-182.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>206</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 99.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

mothers: “It conferred upon women the function of socialization, transforming infant human animals into adult personalities suitable to the culture and society in which they were born”<sup>208</sup>. Moreover, “Breast-feeding was sanctified as ‘one of the most important duties of female life’, ‘one of peculiar, inexpressive, felicity’, and ‘the sole occupation and pleasure’ of a new mother”<sup>209</sup>. Motherhood was more and more thought of as a profession in itself<sup>210</sup>. Yet, some women such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman challenged these ideas and advocated a “New Motherhood”, encouraging women to redefine traditional conceptions of motherhood. For Gilman, women had to be economically independent and be fulfilled as individuals. To achieve this, she believed that the duties of home – cleaning, cooking and child-care – were to be accomplished by professional workers<sup>211</sup>.

In the Progressive era, as Martha Patterson pointed out, motherhood was “inextricably tied to state-building and public policy” and “became a dominant theme in the Progressive Era politics, and the discourse of its activists ranged from sentimental to progressive to feminist”<sup>212</sup>. Eugenicists also took the matter into their hands and evoked motherhood in order to defend the Anglo-Saxon race. As she underscored, “most white feminists’ arguments of the period, by contrast, emphasized women’s need to be economically independent and their right to be fulfilled as individuals, even as they stressed women’s duties to the race as mothers”<sup>213</sup>.

### **A Very Special Meaning For Black Women in the Context of Freedom**

Motherhood had always had a special meaning for black women under slavery. Freedom gave black motherhood a new significance since mothers raised their children as their *own*. As Martha Patterson has highlighted, “because under slavery black women had had no rights to their children, maternal rights had special resonance for the New Negro Woman and would be central to defining both her ambition and her purview, which would extend to uplift the entire race”<sup>214</sup>.

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

<sup>210</sup> For instance, Professors wrote about the topic of homemaking in the 1900s. Titles read: “Home Economics, A Complete Home-Study Course on the New Profession of Home-Making and Art of Right-Living: The Practical Application of the Most Recent Advances in the Arts and Sciences to Home and Health”. See “The New Profession of Home Making”, by Maurice Le Bosquet, S.B., Dean American School of Home Economics, *Spelman Messenger*, ca.1920. “It is universally admitted that the first years of a child’s life, during which it is entirely dependent upon its mother, are the most important from the physical, mental and moral standpoint”.

<sup>211</sup> Martha Patterson, *The New American Woman Revisited*, Introduction, 11.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 11.

In her analysis of Chicago black clubwomen, the scholar Anne Meis Knupfer has explained that because humanity and femininity had been denied to black women for decades, they organized differently from white women and adopted a rhetoric centered around motherhood and home. At the turn of the century, elite black women did give new salience to motherhood, home and family because a large number of them had been denied these rights before 1865: “The African American club women’s ideologies of motherhood, home, and family issued from the historical denial of their womanhood during slavery”<sup>215</sup>.

Some intellectuals spoke about the denial of motherhood under slavery. For example, Williams argued in 1894, that with its inhuman system of slaves’ auctions and sales, slavery had attempted to “damage family instincts” among the members of the community and to create a sense of individualism among African Americans: “In nothing was slavery so savage and so relentless as in its attempted destruction of the family instincts of the Negro race in America. Individuals, not families; shelters, not homes; herdings, not marriages were the cardinal sins in that system of horrors.”<sup>216</sup>.

In freedom, African American mothers therefore had to play a paramount role in the development of their children as future citizens. In the Progressive era, motherhood thus became a strategic role for women of color for different reasons than white women. Because of the denial of motherhood rights, many black clubwomen – whether they had personally experienced slavery or not – gave special significance to motherhood in their writings. They repeatedly emphasized motherhood as woman’s sacred mission on earth. For example, Ida B. Wells-Barnett believed that it was a God-given mission. In her old age, she spoke about the beauty of motherhood: “I cannot begin to express how I reveled in having made this wonderful discovery for myself”<sup>217</sup>. Using religious tones, the way Cooper had done in *A Voice from the South* when discussing motherhood, in her autobiography Wells assured her readers in her memoir that maternity and motherhood represented the most “wonderful” things that existed on earth for a woman. She described motherhood as one of the “most glorious advantages in the development of their own womanhood”, adding:

I had become a mother before I realized what a wonderful place in the scheme of things the Creator has given woman. It is she upon whom rests the joint share of the work of creation, and I wonder if women who shirk their duties in that respect truly realize that they have not only deprived humanity of their contribution to perpetuity, but that they have robbed themselves of one of the most glorious advantages in the development of their own womanhood<sup>218</sup>.

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<sup>215</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, 15.

<sup>216</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 77.

<sup>217</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice*, 252.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. See Cooper’s piece: “Woman, Mother, — your responsibility is one that might make angels tremble and fear to take hold! To trifle with it, to ignore or misuse it, is to treat lightly the most sacred and solemn trust ever confided by God to human kind”, 59.

## Motherhood and Racial Uplift

Motherhood was often connected with racial uplift in their writings. For example, Frances Harper in “Enlightened Motherhood, an Address to Brooklyn Literary Society” of November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1892, praised black women as mothers for the key role they played:

The work of the mothers of our race is grandly constructive. It is for us to build above the wreck and ruin of the past more stately temples of thought and action. [...] We need mothers who are capable of being character builders, patient, loving, strong, and true, whose homes will be uplifting power in the race. This is one of the greatest needs of the hour<sup>219</sup>.

Many activists spoke about the sacred duty of motherhood, stressing the importance of ‘responsible motherhood’ for the community. Nevertheless, a few liberal-minded black leaders argued that woman’s sphere should not be narrowly restricted specifically to the home: women should use their influence at home in order to fight for the rights of all African Americans because this influence would impact the community positively.

Many clubwomen emphasized the central role women were to play in the nation. Some of them, like Cooper, believed that God had given women the sacred role as procreators and mothers and that as a result, mothers had a crucial influence on the future of the African American community. In “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race” (1886), Anna Cooper asserted, like many white women, that motherhood was linked to race progress. “The position of woman in society determines the vital elements of its regeneration and progress”. She was sure that woman was “destined to be a potent force in the betterment of the world” since “this is not because woman is better or stronger or wiser than man, but from the nature of the case, because it is she who must first form the man by directing the earliest impulses of his character”<sup>220</sup>. Woman had “influence on the individual personality, and through her on the society and civilization which she vitalize[d] and inspire[d]”<sup>221</sup>. A few years later, Cooper famously exclaimed: “What a responsibility then to have the sole management of the primal lights and shadows! Such is the colored woman’s office. She must stamp weal or woe on the coming history of these people. May she see her opportunity and vindicate her high prerogative”<sup>222</sup>.

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<sup>219</sup> Frances Harper, *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances E.W. Harper Reader*, 285-292. ed., Frances Smith Foster, (New York: Feminist Press, 1990). See page 292 in particular. She added: “No race can afford to neglect the enlightenment of its mothers”.

<sup>220</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, 58-59.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 58-60.

<sup>222</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Status of Woman in America”, 1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 109-117, 117.

Fannie Williams used a rhetoric reminiscent of that of “Republican motherhood” – used in the early 1800s by American women to emphasize their vital roles as mothers of future generations of citizens who would build the Republic as a way to emphasize the importance of the role of women of color in America at the turn of the century<sup>223</sup>. Arguing that since women of African descent were the mothers of citizens of the United States, she claimed that like white mothers in America, they had a special mission to fulfill for the nation. Williams repeatedly emphasized the word ‘Republic’ in her articles, representing black women as the “equal sharers in the glories and responsibilities of the Republic!”<sup>224</sup>. This rhetoric was linked to the discourse on nation-building which was widespread at that time<sup>225</sup>. Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams argued for an educated, progressive motherhood to liberate women while others had a much stricter understanding of it.

### Traditional Views and Domestic Feminism

Several women of color such as Lucy Craft Laney – a Southerner who founded Haines Institute – embraced “Domestic Feminism” in their discourses<sup>226</sup>. Like white progressive women, they believed that woman’s influence was to be exerted primarily in the home because motherhood and home-making constituted her most noble work. In 1897, Laney stated that home was “the nearest approach on earth to heaven” and “the chief joy of home is mother”. For women, “the blessedness of motherhood is the greatest joy, a crown more costly than pearls of royalty”. Motherhood was “the crown of womanhood”<sup>227</sup>. These black women thought that woman’s “proper” place was in the domestic sphere and deemed that mothers’ influence was greater than fathers’, often quoting famous phrases such as “The hand that

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<sup>223</sup> It was vital at this period for blacks to claim their citizenship. This may explain why these leaders used the vocabulary of Republican Motherhood or insisted on the “Republic”. See Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Womanhood*, 12.

<sup>224</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *Progress of A Race: The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro*, ed. J.W. Gibson and W.H. Grogman (1902; reprint, Naperville, Ill.: Nichols, 1912): 197-281, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 28-46, 28.

<sup>225</sup> Kristin Waters, “Some Core Themes of Black Feminism”. *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 373. “Understanding the theme of black women as moral leaders and guides is complicated by the corresponding but not analogical 18th and nineteenth century ideologies of ‘Republican motherhood’ and the ‘cult of true womanhood’ that emerged from the creation of the nation.”

<sup>226</sup> Domestic Feminism maintained that the role of women in society was to exert their influence through their roles as mothers of future generations.

<sup>227</sup> Lucy Craft Laney, “Address Before the Women’s Meeting,” *Social and Physical Conditions of Negroes in Cities*, ed. W.E.B. Du Bois, (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1897), 55–57, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 98-100, 99. Lucy Laney (1854-1933) was a well-known Southern educator and the founder of Haines Normal and Industrial Institute located in Augusta, Georgia. Among the graduates of Haines Institute were Mary McLeod Bethune, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Nannie Helen Burroughs. Lucy Laney was conservative on many questions. She advocated close supervision of girls, supported “noble” men and women’s work for the race, thought that marriage was the basis of home and rejected the possibility of divorce. See page 99. She did not have any children.

rocks the cradle rules the world [...] No nation can rise above its homes”, or a mother’s “influence does more in the making of the man or woman than the father’s”<sup>228</sup>. In 1907, Cornelia Bowen asserted:

Woman is the supreme ruler. Without her presence there is no home. In a large measure the race problem is hers to solve. Home teaching is more lasting and effective than that of any other”, urging every black woman to “take care of the children. Let every man see that he puts the ‘woman nobly planned’ as ruler of his household. When we shall have done our duty in the uplift of our home life, the race is safe”<sup>229</sup>.

Sylvanie Francaz Williams expressed the same view in 1904: “The impelling motive of [the black woman] life, is self-sacrifice for her home and children”<sup>230</sup>. In other words, woman’s power lay in the home. Emma Hackley also believed in the 1910s that a woman’s most important mission on earth was to become a mother<sup>231</sup>.

## Irreplaceable Beings

Moreover, middle-class women such as the southern-born educator and Spelman graduate Selena Sloan Butler subscribed to the model of the Victorian family, arguing that men and women should have clearly defined roles. In 1905, this mother of one believed that *only* mothers should take care of children: “It is woman’s duty, it matters not how high she stands socially, not how humble her lot, whether her home is a palace or a hut, to give her own household her first and best care”<sup>232</sup>. Her recommendation for educated or non-educated

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<sup>228</sup> “The Value of a Missionary Training to any Young Woman”, by Lena F. Clark, miss. Tr. Dept., *Spelman Messenger*, 7. Ca.1902.

<sup>229</sup> Cornelia Bowen, “Woman’s Part in the Uplift of Our Race”, *The Colored American Magazine* 3 (March 1907): 222–223, as cited in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 154. Bowen was an active and influential clubmember from the South.

<sup>230</sup> Sylvanie Francaz Williams, “The Social Status of the Negro Woman,” Our Woman’s Number. *The Voice of the Negro* 1(7) (July 1904): 298–300. Williams thought that whites had no right to judge the women of the black community since they refused to see how they lived: “to judge her, she must be seen in her home, where her detractors never can enter”. As a result, they were not in the position to judge the womanhood of the black community. Sylvanie Francaz Williams was a native of New Iberia, Louisiana, who worked as school principal with her husband. She also helped found the Phyllis Wheatley Club of New Orleans in 1894, of which she was president. They were active in the founding of the Phyllis Wheatley Sanitarium and Training School for Negro Nurses in New Orleans.

<sup>231</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 181. “When a woman enters into the marriage contract — into the partnership of home making — it is understood that parenthood is to be the chief aim and hope”. Emma Hackley maintained that motherhood was the logical consequence of marriage and women’s main purpose in life. “The school of the colored girl beautiful will so educate her that motherhood will be her highest ideal in life, the glory of colored womanhood”, 139. On the contrary, “A woman who marries and does not intend to have children is merely an object of convenience who has sold herself [...] To assume the position of colored motherhood is the greatest privilege and responsibility that can come to any woman in this age”, 181.

<sup>232</sup> Selena Sloan Butler, Acad ’88, “Woman’s Highest Calling”, *Spelman Messenger*, November 1905, 2. Sloan Butler was a graduate of Spelman Seminary who later famously championed the Parent Teachers Association. She married a prominent Atlantan doctor and had one son.



women was to invest the domestic sphere again: “Let woman return to the home and there concentrate her forces and dedicate her life to the health, peace, happiness and success of her household”. She advised graduates of Spelman College to: “turn [their] thought and attention to the home life which is being so sadly neglected” because “the door of the home is opened wider; not because clerical work is not honorable, but because the home is more honorable; not because the business world does not need you, but because the home needs you more. This I believe to be woman’s true place”<sup>233</sup>. Praising the “wise and earnest work” work done by conservative women of the South such as Margaret Washington at Tuskegee Institute, she thought that “all reforms must begin in the home, which is the starting place in life; and woman is the prime mover”. For her, the responsibility of racial uplift rested mainly with women: “The imperative need of the hour is more model homes and model home-keepers. If every home in Georgia had a model-keeper at its head, there would be less crime and fewer lynchings”.

Selena Sloan Butler – who adhered to Victorian family ideals – also argued that women were naturally better suited than men to become the guardians of “pure homes”. She believed that men were unable to fulfill the mission of raising children. For example, she maintained that “man cannot fulfill woman’s place in the home; he is not endorsed with the requisites conducive to a happy and well-ordered home”<sup>234</sup> and that when women became bread-winners, “The result [was] home wreck, and the future happiness and good of [members of home] marred”. She looked unfavorably upon “mothers, wives, sisters and daughters” who worked for the support of “an army” of “idle men and boys” and had a very traditional understanding of gender roles, considering that men were to be the sole providers of the family. For her, a man’s place was at work: “Let man return to the factories, shops, and other vocations, and dedicate his life to the support and protection of his home and family”<sup>235</sup>. Consequently, she advocated the Victorian models of the nurturer and the provider.

Likewise, Anna Cooper seemed to essentialize men and women’s roles, thinking that women were better-suited to take care of children because they were those who took care of children in their early years. She wrote: “This is not because woman is better or stronger or wiser than man, but from the nature of the case, because it is she who must first form the man

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 1-2. She disapproved of the increasing need for day nurseries: “If all women could remain at home and performed conscientiously their duties, there would be little need for the day nurseries, the missionary, or reformist”, 1.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 2.

by directing the earliest impulses of his character”<sup>236</sup>. In this regard, she partially adhered to the theory of separate spheres. Kristin Waters has explained:

Cooper takes as axiomatic that women will be responsible for the care of young children. But although she calls this ‘a priori’, is not as she makes clear because of the women's nature but because Cooper cannot imagine man performing the tasks of caring for infants and young children. From our standpoint it is easier to grasp the need not to essentialize women’s role in childcare and education, but from her point of view, only slightly removed from slavery and immersed in nineteenth century patriarcalism, it is difficult to imagine men performing these duties. Still, for Cooper, the concept of a special moral role for women is grounded not in childbearing; it comes about because women “direct the early earnest impulses of [...] character. [...] Since moral education is part and parcel of early childhood training. Cooper argued that such training was the special moral responsibility of women. Women, therefore, had to be moral leaders and guides”<sup>237</sup>.

Nevertheless, she did not understand men and women’s roles as strictly as women such as other clubwomen.

Therefore, it appears that many clubwomen used the argument of motherhood for the purpose of racial uplift but in quite different ways. Two visions about the role women were to play in society collided. While some women such as Anna Cooper or Fannie Barrier Williams adopted more modern views about motherhood, others, like Selena Sloan Butler expressed traditional ideas about motherhood and woman’s “proper” sphere. In any case, in their rhetoric, motherhood was used as an expedient to achieve greater power as women in the community but also in the nation.

### **3. Experiencing Motherhood First-Hand**

#### **Class Discrepancies: Working-Class Women’s Motherhood was Often Sacrificed**

During the years 1890s-1910s, like for all other groups of women, motherhood represented an important goal in the lives of women of color, regardless of their social class. Many African American women entered matrimony and had children during the Progressive era and their experiences of motherhood varied dramatically depending on geographical, social and economic factors.

Social class played a determining factor in African American women’s experiences of motherhood. In the South, where most African Americans still lived in the 1890s and where educational opportunities for blacks were sometimes limited, many African American women – who had little or no education, few opportunities and no financial means to leave the South – still often had no other alternatives but to become domestic workers or child-nurses and live

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<sup>236</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 58-59.

<sup>237</sup> Kristin Waters, “Some Core Themes in Black feminism”, *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 373.

in difficult circumstances<sup>238</sup>. This situation lasted after the 1890s. The testimony of a child-nurse published in the *Independent* in 1912 reveals the dire situations these women faced. Comparing her living conditions in the 1910s to those endured by slaves before 1865, a child-nurse – who was a widow and the mother of three children<sup>239</sup> – explained: “You might as well say that I’m on duty all the time – from sunrise to sunrise, every day in the week. *I am the slave, body and soul, of this family*” and complained about her wages: “What do I get for this work—*this lifetime of bondage?* The pitiful sum of ten dollars a month!”<sup>240</sup>. In the South, salaries were dramatically low compared to other occupations and would remain very low until long into the twentieth century. She also protested against the abusive contracts child-nurses were imposed, indicating that on top of working “fourteen to sixteen hours a day”, she had to take care of several children and accomplish diverse domestic chores:

I not only have to nurse a little white child, now eleven months old, but I have to act as playmate, or ‘handy-andy,’ not to say governess, to three other children in the house, the oldest of whom is only nine years of age [...] So it is not strange to see ‘Mammy’ watering the lawn with the garden hose, sweeping the sidewalk, mopping the porch and halls, mopping the porch and halls, helping the cook, or darning stockings. Not only so, but I have to put the other three children to bed each night as well as the baby, and I have to wash them and dress them each morning<sup>241</sup>.

Moreover, since she was forced to live with the white family which employed her, being “compelled to, by [her] contract, which is oral only, to sleep in the house”, she was rarely able to spend time with her own children, who could only benefit from her presence on her days off. White families indeed often demanded that child-nurses should work six days a week. She was “allowed to go home to [her] own children, the oldest of whom [was] a girl of 18 years, only once in two weeks, every other Sunday afternoon – even then [she was] not permitted to stay all night”. She deplored that she could “see my own children only when they happen to see me on the streets when I am out with the children, or when my children come to the ‘yard’ to see me, which isn’t often, because my white folks don’t like to see their servants’ children hanging around their premises”<sup>242</sup>. Her testimony exemplifies the suffering of many domestic workers and child-nurses in the South in the early twentieth century. She stressed that these abusive working conditions gave these women the impression that they sacrificed their roles as mothers to their own children. Many domestics had the feeling that they were working harder at raising white children to the detriment of their own offspring. Similar

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<sup>238</sup> Those who worked as washerwomen had slightly more liberty because they could work from their own homes.

<sup>239</sup> A Negro Nurse, “More Slavery at the South”. The child-nurse said: “I am now past forty years of age and am the mother of three children. My husband died nearly fifteen years ago, after we had been married about five years”, 196.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., italics mine.

<sup>241</sup> A Negro Nurse, “More Slavery At the South”.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

conditions existed outside the South. When African Americans left their native region and settled in the North or East, they realized that employers also demanded long hours of service for a meager salary<sup>243</sup>. Consequently, after the 1890s, working-class mothers also met difficulties because of abusive contracts in other regions as well. Despite the natural joy, future mothers from humble backgrounds felt anxious when contemplating welcoming a child, and worried about financial difficulties. This was a widespread feeling since they tended to have more children than middle-class women and those who lived in rural areas also had more children than those who lived in urban centers<sup>244</sup>.

Not all women of the South experienced motherhood in such difficult circumstances, as the example of Elizabeth Johnson Harris shows. She experienced motherhood differently because despite the fact that she belonged to the working-class, she had married a propertied man, Jacob Walker Harris. Since Harris's husband could make a decent living on their land from the 1870s through the 1910s, she did not have to be self-reliant the way other women had to and was able to stay at home taking care of her children. After her marriage, Elizabeth Johnson soon expected her first baby and eventually became the mother of seven children. Her life writings suggest that this loving, affectionate mother enjoyed her role as a mother tremendously. She devoted several chapters to her children and delighted in their achievements<sup>245</sup>.

Depending on their place of residence, some women of the working-class could secure the help of family members or local clubs to assist them in motherhood. Although the women of this study did not speak about such networks in their writings, some women benefited from the work accomplished to offer child-care solutions by local clubwomen<sup>246</sup> and regardless of social class, women benefited from the assistance and support of family members whenever it was possible.

To some extent, black women of the middle and upper-classes somewhat met less difficulties than their counterparts of the working-class, mainly because some of them married later, had fewer children, kept house and could rely on their husbands' financial support. I will now analyze how these women experienced motherhood and how they envisaged their roles towards their children.

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<sup>243</sup> Angela Davis, *Femmes, Race et Classe*, 67.

<sup>244</sup> Deborah Gray White, "Motherhood: 1880-1910", in *Black Women in America*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine.

<sup>245</sup> She married Harris in 1883 and gave birth to nine children in 1884, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1890, 1892, 1894, 1903 and lastly in 1905. Two died in infancy. She devoted whole chapters to her children's studies and careers.

<sup>246</sup> Many clubwomen such as Lugenia Burns Hope in Atlanta, Georgia, worked actively to offer child-care solutions to working mothers. Child-care was one of the main goals of the NACW. Mary Terrell actively supported such work.

## Experiencing Motherhood

In the 1900s, at a time when black fertility was decreasing, pressure was exerted on middle-class women. Black men intellectuals urged educated black women to have more children. For instance, Du Bois wished to see more educated women of the “better-class” have more children because they represented hope for progress for the community: “It is not sufficient to have the increase of the race come from the one-room cabins of the plantations and the hovels of the alley, while the better-class homes and better educated girls neglect the duties of motherhood. It is not only insufficient, it is fatal to rapid progress; since each generation will start far behind the generation that preceded it,”<sup>247</sup>.

It is quite difficult to learn whether having or not having children were deliberate choices or resulted from other circumstances, since these writers very seldom wrote about this deeply private subject. When they did speak about motherhood in their writings, it was often in the form of short and modest comments, again probably because of what Darlene Hine has termed the “culture of dissemblance” and the silence observed by women of color on these questions<sup>248</sup>.

In their writings, some married women indicated not having children but often did not provide the reasons for these situations. For instance, like several women of this study, Ethel Hall Jewell – a Radcliffe College graduate who was happily married – gave no information about whether not having any children resulted from a choice or from other factors. The lively tone of her piece seems to indicate that she had accepted this situation at the time she wrote: “No children, but several nieces and nephews who are very close to us [...] Just a busy, happy life!”<sup>249</sup>.

Two women in this study did not have children: Anna Cooper and Fannie Barrier Williams. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know the reason why they did not become mothers, although in the case of Anna Cooper, it is probably due to her husband’s untimely death two

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<sup>247</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, as cited in William W. Harris, *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>248</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West : Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance”. As Deborah Gray White has pointed out, most African American women leaders were “cautious about putting their private lives and histories in the hands of the media that had for centuries stereotyped and slandered black women. Rather than take such a risk, black women learned to practice what historian Darlene Clark Hine called the art of dissemblance. They let their public see only what they wanted them to see. As far as their audience was concerned, the public was the private”, *Too Heavy a Load*, 87-87.

<sup>249</sup> Ethel Hall Jewell, Radcliffe Alumnae File. Schlesinger Library. She may have been at peace with it at the time she wrote, decades later, but it is difficult to know if this state of things resulted from a choice or not at the time.

years after their marriage. Nevertheless, Cooper became a surrogate mother in her fifties when she adopted her five nieces and nephews Regia, John, Andrew, Marion, and Annie in the 1910s. She said that she had taken them “under [her] wing with the hope and determination of nurturing their growth into useful and creditable American citizens”<sup>250</sup>, even if she courageously and generously did it at a period of her life when she was pursuing one important professional project which would soon take her overseas<sup>251</sup>. Similarly, in her autobiography, Fannie Williams did not refer to motherhood or provide details about her intimate life. Contrary to other women such as Wells and Terrell – who evoked both their public and private persona in their memoirs, Williams’s “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography” deals with political subjects and does not dwell on any personal matter<sup>252</sup>. Nevertheless, for those who left writings, one can discover that several factors in their lives influenced their becoming mothers.

Family circumstances could sometimes temporarily – or definitively – deter some women from having children. In her autobiography, Ida B. Wells explained that she did not have a strong desire for children when she got married, probably because she had served as a surrogate mother to her siblings when she was a very young woman:

My mother had eight children. I was the oldest of the eight, and from the time I was old enough to help nurse them, I had my share of that responsibility. [...] My father and mother died before I was fifteen [seventeen] years old, leaving six sisters and brothers ranging in age from 12 years to nine-month. I had to be the breadwinner<sup>253</sup>.

As the account of this period of her life shows, her experience as a surrogate mother for her siblings was trying<sup>254</sup> and she later recounted: “The responsibility of helping care for these sisters and brothers lasted until I was able to somewhat emancipate myself when I became a

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<sup>250</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Third Step”, as cited in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 322. Otherwise, Cooper did not reflect upon motherhood. She adopted them before matriculating at Columbia University for her Doctorate in 1914.

<sup>251</sup> Her siblings were musician and bandleader Rufus Haywood (1836?-92), and Spanish-American War veteran Andrew Jackson Haywood (1848-1918). Andrew married Jane Henderson McCracken in 1867. They adopted a son, John R. Haywood, who married Margaret Hinton, whose untimely death led Cooper to assume guardianship of their children — Regia, John, Andrew, Marion, and Annie — at a time when she was pursuing higher education. She assumed a mortgage to house her burgeoning family (1915). Their ages ranged from six months to twelve years. The infant Annie, her namesake and future heir, died from pneumonia at the youthful age of 24, a devastating blow to Cooper and her hope of a successor. She was also foster mother to Lula Love Lawson, an 1890 graduate of the M. Street High School, and her brother John, orphaned by the death of their parents. See “Voices from the Gaps, Anna Julia Cooper”, University of Minnesota, 2009. © 2009 Regents of the University of Minnesota. See <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/166130>.

<sup>252</sup> It is difficult to obtain information about her married or private life with Samuel Laing Williams since her articles rarely referred to personal aspects of her life.

<sup>253</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 251.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. “After teaching the country school all week, I came home Friday afternoon, 6 miles out from town, and spend the time from then until Monday morning washing clothes, cooking food, and preparing things so they could do without me until the end of the next week”.



schoolteacher in Memphis. And somehow I felt entitled to the vacation from my days as nurse after that time”<sup>255</sup>.

Moreover, her career also played a part in her choice not to have children at a young age. She became famous when she was thirty and this influenced her wish not to have children – at least not right away after getting married:

I had not entered into the bonds of matrimony with the same longing for children that so many other women have. It may be that my early entrance into public life and the turning of my efforts, physical and mental, in that direction had something to do with *smothering the mother instinct*. It may be that having had the care of small children from the time I was big enough to hold a baby also had its effect<sup>256</sup>.

Nevertheless, after one year of marriage, Ida Wells-Barnett gave birth to her first child Charles Aked in 1896 at the age of 33. She married a widower who had had two sons from his previous marriage and also raised his two children, Ferdinand Lee Barnett Jr. and Albert Graham, who were then 11 and 9, therefore acting as a surrogate mother as well<sup>257</sup>. In her autobiography, she explained that motherhood delighted her and spoke of it as women’s most “glorious advantages” – perhaps in an effort to counterbalance her earlier rejection of motherhood – which she knew could be viewed negatively by her readers:

I had become a mother before I realized what a wonderful place in the scheme of things the Creator has given woman. It is she upon whom rests the joint share of the work of creation, and I wonder if women who shirk their duties in that respect truly realize that they have not only deprived humanity of their contribution to perpetuity, but that they have robbed themselves of one of the most glorious advantages in the development of their own womanhood. I cannot begin to express how I reveled in having made this wonderful discovery for myself or how glad I was that I had not been swayed by advice given me on the night of my marriage which had for its object to teach me how to keep from having a baby<sup>258</sup>.

Wells experienced motherhood in various ways during her life: after raising some of her siblings and being a surrogate mother to her step-sons, she had several children. She gave birth to another son named Herman Kohlsatt in 1897 and then to two daughters, Ida B. Wells Jr. in 1901 and Alfreda in 1904.

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 251, italics mine.

<sup>257</sup> Ferdinand’s first wife was named Molly Graham Barnett. The boys were respectively aged four and two when their mother died in 1888. Barnett’s first wife was the first African American woman to graduate from the University of Illinois. *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present, From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century*. Volume 1. ed. Paul Finkelman. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137. See also <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/barnett-ferdinand-lee-1864-1932>. It is very difficult to learn much about Wells’s experience as a surrogate mother. Both sons later became associates to their father’s law firm. Other women such as Margaret Murray Washington played the role of surrogate mothers and Booker T. Washington’s third wife raised his three children: Portia Washington, Booker Taliaferro Washington Jr. and Ernest Davidson W. She also later adopted her niece and nephew Thomas J. Murray and Laura Murray. See Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), Chapter 5: “Family Matters”, 107-127.

<sup>258</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 251-252. Italics mine.

Some women had no or few children because they suffered from medical conditions or because poor conditions – at home or at hospitals – prevented these women from becoming mothers<sup>259</sup>. It was common to have miscarriages or to give birth to still-born babies and several women in this study painfully experienced this. For instance, although Charlotte Forten desperately wanted to become a mother, she was unable to fulfil her desires of motherhood and confided her pain in her diary. She lost one child in the late 1870s and six years later, on 19 December 19, 1885, she wrote:

We have been married seven years today – they would have been seven happy years had it not been for that one great sorrow! Oh my darling, what unspeakable happiness it would have been to have her with us to-day. She would be nearly six years old, our precious New Year's gift, how lovely and companionable I know she could have been. But I must not mourn. Father, it was Thy will. It *must* be for the best. I must wait<sup>260</sup>.

As Joanne Braxton has argued, she not only used her diary, “for restoration and self-healing”, she also used it to express her faith, her reverence and confidence in God’s will.

Other women in this study experienced loss as well. Contrary to Ida Wells, Mary Terrell explained that she had always felt that her maternal feelings were quite developed and wanted to have children soon after her marriage<sup>261</sup>.

The maternal instinct was always abnormally developed in me. As far back as I can remember I have always been very fond of children. I cannot recall that I have ever seen a baby, no matter what its class, color, or condition in life, no matter whether it was homely or beautiful according to recognized standards, no matter whether it was clad in rags or wore dainty raiment, that did not seem dear and cunning to me<sup>262</sup>.

When the Terrells attempted to start a family in the 1890s – from 1891 to 1896 —, they lost three babies. She recounted how much they suffered from this situation: “In five years we lost three babies, one after another, shortly after birth. This was a great blow to Mr. Terrell and to me”<sup>263</sup> and described this pain in her autobiography:

When my third baby died two days after birth, I literally sank down into the very depths of despair. For months I could not divert my thoughts from the tragedy, however hard I tried. It was impossible for me to read understandingly or to fix my mind on anything I saw in print. When I reached the bottom of a page in a book, I knew no more about its contents than did someone who had never seen it<sup>264</sup>.

As Dennis Fradin has explained, Mary Terrell sank into depression to the point that her husband worried about her health and advised her some change settings<sup>265</sup>. She used the space

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<sup>259</sup> Most women gave birth at home, helped by midwives and occasionally, by doctors.

<sup>260</sup> Charlotte Forten, *Diary 5*. As cited in Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 99.

<sup>261</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*. See Chapter 24 entitled: “My Children and I”.

<sup>262</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 106-107.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>265</sup> Dennis Fradin, *Fight On!*, 55. “She sank into deep depressions on and off during the 1890s. Her physical health also broke down to the point that her family feared for her life”.

of her autobiography to answer people's misunderstandings about her supposed excessive reaction:

A few of my friends could not understand how a woman could grieve so deeply as I did over the death of a baby that had lived only a few days. But I sometimes think a woman suffers as much when she loses a baby at birth as does a mother who loses a baby who has been with her much longer. There is the bitter disappointment of never having enjoyed the infant at all to whose coming the mother has looked forward so long and upon whom she has built such fond hopes<sup>266</sup>.

Paradoxically, she emphasized her courage and the impact the struggle for the community had on her life, saying that the terrible lynching of Thomas Moss in 1892 – whom Mary Church Terrell also knew, like Ida Wells – paradoxically helped her during her depression<sup>267</sup>. This dramatic event is depicted in her life narrative as having helped her cope with this third loss: “The more I thought how my depression which was caused by the lynching of Tom Moss and the horror of this awful crime might have injuriously affected my unborn child, if he had lived, the more I became reconciled to what had at first seemed a cruel fate”<sup>268</sup>. When she was grieving her third child, she recalled being told by “one of [her] white friends” that she could not understand how women of color could imagine having children in a segregated America<sup>269</sup>. For this thirty-year old woman who was then suffering from being childless, the words uttered by a white woman who bluntly questioned black woman's desires for motherhood and seemed to forget the common bonds of gender provoked a real shock<sup>270</sup>.

Moreover, when one of her children died in infancy because of sub-standard equipment in a segregated hospital of Washington D.C., she keenly felt the injustice done to African American mothers in the United States and decided to fight for equal standards and against segregation in public hospitals. She used the space of her autobiography to castigate the lower health standards which existed for African Americans: “Right after its birth the baby had been placed in an improvised incubator, and I was tormented by the thought that if the genuine article had been used, its little life might have been spared. I could not help

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<sup>266</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 107.

<sup>267</sup> Terrell had been nominated a member of the Board of Education in Washington when she was expecting this child but she lost the baby shortly before the lynching of Thomas Moss 1892. See her autobiography, 107-108.

<sup>268</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 108. One may imagine that this narrative written – when Terrell had become a mother – decades later must erase the pain and uncertainty she felt in the 1890s.

<sup>269</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 107. “I was greatly impressed by a statement made by one of my white friends who met me on the street one day shortly after I was bereaved. “I do not see,” she said, “how any colored woman can make up her mind to become a mother under the existing conditions in the United States. Under the circumstances,” she continued, “I should think a colored woman would feel that she was perpetrating a great injustice upon any helpless infant she would bring into the world.” I had never heard that point of view so frankly and strongly expressed before, and while I could not agree with it entirely, it caused me much serious reflection.”

<sup>270</sup> I could not find documents in which African American women spoke about this, but they did suffer from giving birth to children in a racist society.

feeling that some of the methods employed in caring for my baby had caused its untimely end.”<sup>271</sup>. As Jean Marie Robbins has pointed out, “Terrell attributed the deaths of her newborn babies to the substandard black health care in Washington”<sup>272</sup>. In 1898, she finally gave birth to a girl, whom she named Phyllis in honor of Phyllis Wheatley, and later adopted her niece, Mary Louise Terrell in the early 1900s<sup>273</sup>.

Both Ida Wells and Mary Terrell wanted to have children, yet the voice of women who did not wish to have children was seldom audible. Yet, when these women expressed their ideas, they asserted their rights to be seen as more than “just” potential mothers.

Being childless was often viewed as an anomaly at the turn of the century. In 1894, in the woman’s era club of Boston, presenting the benefits of clubwork to women, Josephine Ruffin tried to reassure those who did not feel a strong maternal instinct, saying: “Not all women are intended to be mothers. Some of us have not the temperament for family life”<sup>274</sup>. In 1898, in one article published in the *National Association Notes*, one unknown author quoted Lizzie M. Holmes – who claimed that woman’s sphere was not to be restricted to the home –, indicating that she adhered – at least partially – to the ideas developed by Josephine Ruffin in 1894. She wrote: woman “simply wants to be a human being, not a slave, not a toy, not a queen. She wants the equal personal liberty that every man demands in order to become a fully developed well-balanced, happy and useful being. Only this and nothing more”<sup>275</sup>.

The author also presented Holmes’s views on motherhood, arguing that it was not *the* sacred occupation of woman. In fact, she maintained that since men did not value their fatherhood “blessed thought [*sic*] it be,” as “not the fullest and best manifestation of their existence”, the idea was “in every way as applicable to woman as to man” and wondered: “Why should all the faculties and energies of woman be turned to the fulfillment of this one function of her being?”. She wrote:

Let the woman live for herself, not for her unborn children. Let her fill her life to the brim with happiness, knowledge, mental and physical activity; let lofty emotions and vigorous thoughts fill her

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<sup>271</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 107.

<sup>272</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 97.

<sup>273</sup> Mary was the daughter of Mary Terrell’s brother Thomas. Mary was born in 1894 to an unknown mother and was adopted by the Terrells in the early 1900s. See Fradin, *Fight On!* 112.

<sup>274</sup> See Josephine Ruffin, “The Woman’s Era Club”, Boston, 24 March 1894. *Woman’s Era*. Vol. 1. No. 1. See online:

[http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era1\\_we.1.01.03.08&document=era1&&running-header=on](http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era1_we.1.01.03.08&document=era1&&running-header=on). She added: “Clubs will make women think seriously of their future lives, and not make girls think their only alternative is to marry”. See Loretta Ross, “African American Women and Abortion”, in *Abortion Wars: a Half-century Struggle*, ed., Rickie Solinger.

<sup>275</sup> “Untitled Editorial,” *National Association Notes*, 2:4 (September 1898), 2 (N.A.C.W., Microfilm, part 1, reel 23, frames 261-268).

being; let her whole existence expand to the fullest extent; let her forget her motherhood; she will be a better mother for first being a woman, and to be this, she must first be free’.

She concluded with the words of this liberal author:

‘Woman’s position is further expressed in these words: ‘Woman has been considered too much as woman, and not enough as a human being. The constant reference to her sex has been neither ennobling, complimentary nor agreeable. Either as a slave, toy, pet or queen, this senseless thinking of her sex instead of herself, has been degrading. To finally arrive at her best, she simply needs consideration as a fellow member of society’<sup>276</sup>.

This article shows that some women expressed different ideas about motherhood from those advocated by elite clubwomen. Defending their views, at a time when motherhood was deemed as so sacred by both black and white women in society, was quite daring.

### **Juggling Work and Domestic Duties**

Juggling work and domestic duties was difficult for black and white women in America during the period 1890-1920, especially for working-class women. For white women, as Mary Ryan has stressed, combining motherhood, domesticity and breadwinning was no easy task in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The contradictions that continued to well up between the spheres of male and female caused the greatest distress among those women who attempted to combine domesticity and breadwinning. Some women, in particularly fortunate circumstances and possessed of extraordinary stamina, did manage to combine the roles of mothers, housewife, and woman of the world. It was relatively easy for middle-class, educated young women to achieve independence and acquire broad experience before marriage<sup>277</sup>.

Since the Antebellum period, African American women had a work tradition and had a work tradition and had often been encouraged to work outside of home. Vicki Howard, who studied the importance of Victorianism in the life of an African American couple living in Texas in the 1880s, has accounted for this quite well. “Black women have historically had a tradition of working outside the home, even among the middle classes. Their ideal of womanhood included and even required work within the public sphere. Black women were encouraged by their community to educate themselves, but with the purpose of assisting in uplifting their race.”<sup>278</sup>. Shirley Carlson has also claimed that for upper-class women in 1880s and 1890s Illinois, marriage was compatible with work and domestic achievements.

Even after her marriage, a black woman might remain in the public domain, possibly in paid employment. The ideal black woman’s domain, then, was both the private and the public spheres. She

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<sup>276</sup> “Untitled Editorial”, *National Association Notes*, 2:4 (September 1898), 2 (N.A.C.W., Microfilm, part 1, reel 23, frames 261-268). The article dealt with all American women – i.e. white. The argument of humanity has particular resonance for women of color.

<sup>277</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 144-145.

<sup>278</sup> Vicki Howard, “The Courtship Letters of an African American Couple: Race, Gender, Class, and the Cult of True Womanhood”, 69.

was wife and mother, but she could also assume other roles, such as school teacher, social activist, business woman, among others<sup>279</sup>.

In the early twentieth century, many women of color belonging to the middle and upper-classes combined the roles of workers, housewives and mothers. While most white women tended to stop working after their marriage, working was still a necessity for most African American women at the time. “In 1900 and 1920, approximately 40% of all black women [...] were paid employees, and they would remain employed for their entire adult lives, relegated, for the most part, to jobs as domestic laborers in white households”. While “white women were being hired as switch-board operators, stenographers and sale clerks”, black women made “beds and wash[ed] dishes”<sup>280</sup>. At that time, only a few women who belonged to the upper or upper-middle-class – such as the women in this study – could imagine pursuing a “career”.

Yet this does not mean that these women did not want children or were less eager to experience motherhood. In fact, as the writings of the women of this study show, motherhood was an important aspect of a woman’s definition of womanhood and of racial uplift.

Some middle-class clubwomen or educators felt that women should devote themselves to their duties as housewives and thought that combining motherhood and a career proved impossible. At that time, it was very difficult for women to raise children and work outside of home, since kindergartens or day-care centers were often available only in large cities or in a limited number of areas – where clubwomen ran such centers.

Many women were happy to become housewives and to dedicate their time to their family. This was the case, for instance, of a Spelman graduate Dora A. Murden Jackson, from Athens, Georgia who felt useful as a housewife: “Last year I taught three months, but I find that I reap better results by staying at home ; my children need my care. I am trying to do the good I can”<sup>281</sup>. Nevertheless, some testimonies suggest that this situation sometimes caused anguish or disappointment among some women. For example, some housewives asserted leading fulfilling lives yet felt that the reality differed from the ideal they had imagined upon

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<sup>279</sup> Shirley Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, 62. What is more, between 1865 and 1900, half of the educated African American women did not marry. W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1900 study of the black college graduates indicates that only “50% of the black women college graduates from 1860-1899 were married”. Linda Perkins, “The Impact of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ on the Education of Black Women”, 185.

<sup>280</sup> Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 12.

<sup>281</sup> Dora A. Murden (Acad. ’89), “From Our Letter File”, *Spelman Messenger*, 7. ca. 1904. The study of the letters of Spelman Seminary graduates reveals that many graduates belonged to the middle-class and married Ministers after working for several years as educators.



their marriage and did not seem to be entirely satisfied with their lot. Miss Leanna Peters from Mobile, Alabama, explained in the “Graduates’ Corner” of the *Spelman Messenger*: “Life seems so different to me from what I expected. However I’m happy and am trying to do my best”<sup>282</sup>.

Then, many women thought that motherhood was a profession in itself and that juggling work and motherhood was almost impossible; Ida Wells explained in her memoir that once she was the mother of two, she became convinced “that the duties of wife and mother were a profession in themselves”<sup>283</sup>. Interestingly, in the 1910s, other childless educated women believed that it was impossible for women to juggle a teaching career and motherhood. An unmarried Radcliffe graduate named Sarah Elizabeth Withers – a graduate of 1908 who lived in New York State – having to answer, in one of the forms at Radcliffe College the following question: “Can a woman successfully carry on a career and marriage simultaneously?” – wrote: “I believe not adequately” and to “Can she if she has children?”, she answered: “Her success will be problematic”<sup>284</sup>. Unfortunately, she did not explain why she thought this way.

In the 1890s or in the 1910s, many women were expected to conform to the gendered norms of the time yet a large number of them met difficulties to do so because they had to be the family’s second bread-winner, while others deliberately chose to conform to these norms. As Guy-Sheftall has highlighted:

Most black women could not afford the luxury of staying at home and devoting their lives to white hooded motherhood given the pressing economy needs of their families. An examination of the lives of such women as Mary Church Terrell, Ida Wells Barnett, Lugenia Burns hope, and Margaret Murray Washington, to name only a few, reveals the extent to which black women juggled the demands of their private and public lives through most of their adulthood<sup>285</sup>.

Consequently, because they were aware that entering both spheres was deemed as abnormal, many women such as Fannie Williams, Anna Cooper or Josephine Turpin Washington resolved to demonstrate in their essays that women’s influence not only could, but should be exerted both inside and outside the home. As Guy-Sheftall has pointed out,

Many of these black clubwomen, feminists if you will, were at the opposite end of the argument from the more fervent upholders of the cult of true womanhood and were less rigid in their beliefs than the middle of the roaders. Though they valued motherhood, they also realized that the realities of black women's lives were in conflict with the major tenets of the cult of true womanhood<sup>286</sup>.

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<sup>282</sup> “Graduates’ Corner”, *Spelman Messenger*, ca. 1920. She wrote: “I enjoy it and have learned quite a bit”. Having her sick mother at home, she got up at six and took the children to school. She also taught Sunday school.

<sup>283</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 249. She concluded that “it was hopeless to expect to carry on public work”.

<sup>284</sup> Sarah Elizabeth Withers, Radcliffe College Alumnae File. Black Alumnae File. Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>285</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 157-158.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

These “new feminists” had to work in their homes *and* in the public arena for their activism to be efficient. For Guy-Sheftall: “It is fair to say that the majority of those who engaged in discussions about the proper roles for black women recognize that they must be both indoor and outdoor agents. It was imperative, in other words, that black women have a reverence for home and hearth, but also a commitment to the important work needed to be carried out in the public arena”<sup>287</sup>. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contrary to white women, black women activists juggled private and public lives and crafted an innovative discourse on what womanhood should be.

Moreover, the emerging debate dealing with what was considered as women’s biological or natural role and what was socially acceptable interested activists such as Fannie Williams. In *Daughters of Sorrow*, Guy-Sheftall has underscored that some women intellectuals such as Fannie Barrier Williams or Josephine Turpin Washington developed a more nuanced vision of womanhood, which scholars have called “Domestic Feminism”.

Assuming a middle of the road position in the debate was a group of black women, primarily, who felt that the True Woman was man’s equal, though they did not reject entirely certain aspects of the Cult of True Womanhood. They felt, for example, that women were certainly different from men, but they rejected the notion that women should confine themselves exclusively to the domestic sphere<sup>288</sup>.

According to her, these women were saying that “Women should not suppress their innate femininity and become like men. In their estimation, the progressive woman, though she enters the professional world, still takes seriously her duties as wife and mother. In other words, there is no incompatibility between her professional and domestic roles.”<sup>289</sup>. In 1893, Josephine Turpin Washington – a light-skinned native of the South who worked as a teacher – maintained that woman should “‘retain her womanly dignity and sweetness, which is at once her strength and shield’ whether she is a housewife and mother at home ‘or struggling in the ranks of business and professional life’”, arguing that: “this widening of woman’s sphere of thought and action is a thing to be encouraged rather than denounced, even in those who reverence most highly the home life and believe that woman finds there her true element and highest usefulness”<sup>290</sup>.

In “The Woman’s Part in A Man’s Business” (1904), Fannie Barrier Williams acknowledged women’s natural role as mothers, saying: “Of course a woman must always be a woman”. However, she contended that women should not understand their roles narrowly or

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>288</sup> See Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 155-158, 155.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>290</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character*, by Lawson Scruggs. (Raleigh: Lawson Andrew Scruggs (1857-1914), 1893), ix, as cited in *Daughters of Sorrow*, 155-156.

let men restrict their influence to the home: their only limit should be their hopes and ambitions: “Nature’s laws, and not mere prejudices, must fix the boundary lines to her mind, ambitions and aspirations.”<sup>291</sup>. Because black men were worried about woman’s expanding sphere, Fannie Williams aimed at reassuring them by saying that the domestic sphere would not be negatively impacted by the entrance by women into the public sphere and that women would retain their femininity because they possessed immense resources and could efficiently enter both spheres: “There need be no fear that because of our larger participation in the business affairs of life, the colored woman will lose her power and influence as a wife and homemaker. A woman has a large degree of adaptability and hence is capable of doing almost everything that a man can do besides doing what is strictly a woman’s work”<sup>292</sup>.

In those years, as Guy-Sheftall has noted, “In the *National Association Notes*, the official organ of the National Association of Colored Women, numerous articles appeared acknowledging “The Awakening of Woman” as “the great social phenomenon of our times”<sup>293</sup>. Women such as Josephine Turpin Washington argued “that a woman’s influence should be exerted in the public arena and that her community work should be as important as her family duties”<sup>294</sup>. In *The National Notes* in October 1916, Turpin Washington wrote:

I am not one of those who believe that woman’s sphere should be confined to the home. Woman must become familiar with social and economic conditions; she must be a working force in the larger influences that affect her trade as homekeeper. Her highest duty to her family is to exert an influence in the making of laws governing unsanitary meat markets, filthy bakeries and dirty groceries [...] She should be allowed the privilege of the ballot<sup>295</sup>.

Obviously, investing both spheres was the source of numerous difficulties because some educated women met the disapproval of their husbands as the latter adhered to Victorian mores and refused to allow their wives remain in the public sphere once they had children. For instance, in one of her letters to Misses Tapley and Brill, one Spelman College alumna named Tolula R. Dixon Bigby confided that she suffered because her husband refused to let her work. She felt that she had “sacrificed her desires [and] ambitions” and her talents by agreeing to renounce her career as an educator:

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<sup>291</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 59.

<sup>292</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 61.

<sup>293</sup> These are the words of Josephine Turpin Washington in her article “The Awakening of Woman”, *The National Notes* 19 (October 1916), 3, as cited in *Daughters of Sorrow*, 156. As Guy-Sheftall has explained, women such as Josephine T. Washington were “at the opposite end of of the argument from the more fervent upholders of the cult of true womanhood and were less rigid than the middle-of the roaders. Though they valued motherhood, they also realized that the realities of black women’s were in conflict with the major tenets of the cult of true womanhood”.

<sup>294</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 156.

<sup>295</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “The Awakening of Women”, *The National Notes* 19 (October 1916), 3, as cited in *Daughters of Sorrow*, 156.

I taught school for 4 years before I left my parents and received the highest recommendation where ever I went". "Next, I married a man I knew had not the same chances I had had, but I thought the principal was there and with my help, he would soon reach my standard. He is a good man. – but remember I am writing to you right out of my heart. He has called for me to sacrifice my desires, my ambitions to his, and he, with his shorter insight has made it hard for us to prosper and I feel that my parents and friends see me as being hampered from making as brilliant a career as they had expected of me. Yet I am not utterly cast down, because I have never ceased to pray for guidance and I must either feel that it may all of for the best, or I must loose faith in my prayers which I can never do. [...] But now I feel that it must arise from this succumbed position, since I have been entrusted with five little bright girls and boys and do all with in my power to prepare them to meet the demands of a higher life [...] I have not made a complete failure in trying to help my husband. I have by giving in raised his standard and he has the reputation of a quiet Christian deacon. He is a farmer and works as hard as he dares to – under the conditions of a weak body. Now, I have taken you into the secret chambers<sup>296</sup>.

It was difficult to juggle work and motherhood. When they did enter both spheres, how challenging was it for the women in this study to combine their roles as mothers and activists? What strategies did they develop to cope with difficulties?

### Adopting Different Strategies

Thanks to their more comfortable economic situations, middle and upper-class mothers were very often able to devote themselves more fully to their children than working-class women. Many – who had worked as teachers prior to their marriage – willingly devoted themselves to home-making once they were married and felt that it was a time-consuming task<sup>297</sup>. For instance, one Spelman alumna named Della R. Gadson who had married a Minister wrote in the *Spelman Messenger* that being a mother took her whole time and energy: her “work as a Minister’s wife, a mother, a teacher, and a part of many Christian organizations” made her life full<sup>298</sup>. Another graduate and former teacher S. Frances Martin also testified that her duties as a homemaker and a minister’s wife took all of her time. Yet she later started teaching again<sup>299</sup>.

Contrary to these Ministers’ wives and to many other women of the middle-class, other women – such as the women in this study – juggled activism, motherhood and homemaking. They were able to do so thanks to several factors.

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<sup>296</sup> Spelman College Archives. “Deceased Alumnae File”, Letter dated 24 January 1917. Tolula R. Dixon Bigby was a southern woman living in Levil Land, South Carolina, who had married in 1907. The Dean of women were the recipients of many alumnae’s confidences.

<sup>297</sup> Moreover, married women were generally not allowed to work.

<sup>298</sup> Della R. Gadson, (HS ‘1892). She worked as teacher at the Jeruel Academy until May 1899. She resigned to marry Reverend J.H. Gadson of Savannah, Georgia, on 7 September 1899. Many of the Spelman graduates who addressed letters to the Deans of Spelman I was able to consult were married to Ministers.

<sup>299</sup> S. Frances Martin. « Alumna Letter”. *Spelman Messenger*. April 1915. She wrote: “With household cares and the duties of the parsonage, all my time is fully taken”. After graduating from Spelman College in 1892, she taught for six years at the Florida Baptist Institute, Live Oak, Florida. “After six years in this State, I felt impressed to change fields of labor and hence I entered the state of matrimony” and went to Milledgeville, Georgia to work at her husband’s Parish. She had one daughter and they moved to Chicago, Illinois, in 1906. There, she was in charge of a “class of girls” and organized the Woman’s Baptist Missionary Congress of Chicago and Vicinity”. She concluded: “The only true life is a life of service”.

Many middle-class women such as Gertrude Mossell, Mary Terrell or Ida B. Wells-Barnett could count on the financial support of their professional husbands. For example, Ida Wells-Barnett enjoyed the financial and emotional support of her husband, a successful Chicago editor and lawyer during her marriage<sup>300</sup>. Likewise, Mary Church Terrell – who was the wife of the first municipal judge of Washington D.C. – also benefited from her husband’s financial situation, even if the pair sometimes had financial difficulties<sup>301</sup>.

Upon her marriage in 1895, Ida Wells-Barnett did not wish to start a family immediately. Instead, she set herself a new career challenge, buying a share of her husband’s newspaper *The Conservator*<sup>302</sup> and working as an editor. She explained: “Having always been easy at some work of my own, I decided to continue work as a journalist, for this was my first, and might be said, my only love”. She was also an active clubwoman within the Ida Wells Club. Her several duties “as editor, as president of the Ida B. Wells Woman’s Club, and as speaker in many white women’s clubs in and around Chicago kept [her] pretty busy”<sup>303</sup>. Although these activities took a considerable part of her time, she retrospectively pointed out that she “was not too busy to find time to give birth to a male child the following 25 March 1896”<sup>304</sup>.

When they were expecting children or when these were infants, these activists often chose to focus temporarily on their motherly duties. For example, in July 1895, when Josephine Ruffin called for the formation of a national association, Terrell, who was pregnant with another child, decided to slow down the pace of her activities and declined Ruffin’s invitation: “The meeting was held in July and at the time I was expecting a little stranger who would arrive, I hoped, the last of September. He came but did not tarry long with me. It was a bitter, grievous disappointment to Mr. Terrell and myself”. After the baby’s death, she

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<sup>300</sup> As DeCosta-Willis has explained, “by all accounts”, Ferdinand Barnett was “a loving, attentive, and supporting husband [who] encouraged his wife’s journalism, civic activities, and political aspirations throughout their marriage”, *Memphis Diary*, 166-167. Ferdinand Barnett was able to pay for help at home for years, until the pair had financial difficulties in the late 1920s. See her 1930 diary in *Memphis Diary*.

<sup>301</sup> Despite her father’s affluence, the Terrells sometimes struggled financially. For example, in 1902, the pair borrowed an important sum (\$2,000) to Mary’s father Robert Church. See Fradin, Dennis, 101. See the letter dated 23 April 1902. Robert Terrell referred to an additional “debt” he owed his father-in-law. In her autobiography, Terrell explained that in 1917, she regretted having to leave her position at the War Risk Insurance Bureau because she “needed the money, to be sure”, and “the salary [...] would have filled a long felt want.”, Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 258-259. With her lectures and her occasional jobs, Terrell became the second bread-winner of the family.

<sup>302</sup> “I had already purchased *The Conservator* from Mr. Barnett and others who owned it, and the following Monday morning after my marriage, I took charge of *The Conservator*”, *Crusade*, 242.

<sup>303</sup> Her husband Ferdinand Lee Barnett was the founder of *The Conservator*, the first black newspaper in Chicago.

<sup>304</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 242-243.



resumed her work as a member of the Washington Board of Education, stressing that her work had helped her to overcome the feelings of loss and pain she was experiencing:

Like other mothers who have passed through this Gethsemane, I pulled myself together as best I could and went on with my work. I had to go on with it. The teachers, the parents of children and others who wanted to talk with the only colored woman who was a member of the Board of Education insisted on seeing me and presenting their respective cases, anything my nurse might say to the contrary notwithstanding. And they rendered me a great service for which I am grateful today. Obligated to be interested in the troubles and trials of others, I had little time to think of my own aching heart<sup>305</sup>.

Josephine St Pierre Ruffin did not face the same issues as Mary Terrell or Ida Wells-Barnett since she was 53 years old when she launched the NACW and her children were grown-ups by then. She became increasingly active in clubwork after her husband passed away in 1886, when her four children needed her much less than before<sup>306</sup>. It must have been far easier for her to juggle her activism within woman's clubs in Boston, the NACW and family life than for clubwomen whose children were young in the late 1890s.

Like Mary Terrell, when Ida B. Wells first became a mother in 1896, at age 34, she temporarily slowed down the pace of her activities because she thought that a mother owed it to her children to be as attentive and as present as possible during the early years of a child – that is, before he or she was seven. She wrote “If the mother does not have the training and control over her child's early and most plastic years, she will never gain that control”, adding: “In other words, I've already found that motherhood was a profession by itself, just like school teaching and lecturing, and that once one was launched on such a career, she owed it to herself to become as expert as possible in the practice of her profession”<sup>307</sup>.

Mary Church Terrell found innovative solutions to combine her career and her duties as a mother. She looked after her children, prepared lectures and served as a member of the Board of Education in the nation's capital. For example, on 17 November 1905, she wrote in

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<sup>305</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 151-152.

<sup>306</sup> Robert Ruffin and Josephine St. Pierre married in 1858. The pair had five children and four lived to adulthood. Robert Ruffin died in 1886 at the age of 52. See <https://www.biography.com/people/josephine-st-pierre-ruffin-9466659>. Their children were: Hubert, an attorney; Florida Ridley, a school principal and co-founder of *Woman's Era*; Stanley, an inventor; George, a musician; and Robert, who died in his first year of life. <http://www.civilwarwomenblog.com/josephine-st-pierre-ruffin/>. Florida Ruffin Ridley (1861-1943) worked with her mother in women's clubs in Boston.

<sup>307</sup> She also wrote: “I fully agreed with the Catholic priest who declared that if he had the training of a child for the first seven years of its life, it would be a Catholic all the rest of its days”. Wells, *Crusade*, 250-251. Her daughter Alfreda Duster explains in the introduction that Wells “firmly believed in the importance of the presence of a mother in the home during her children's formative years. She did not take work home until the youngest child was eight years old and able to attend school alone”. Ida Wells, *Crusade*, xxiii.



her diary that she “dictate[d] letters” while “rocking Phyllis”<sup>308</sup>. Yet, Terrell sometimes had to prioritize her career before her children when they were older. For example, in 1914, when her daughter graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy in Vermont, she was unable to attend the celebration because she was on the West Coast delivering a speech<sup>309</sup>.

Interestingly, even if she juggled her career and her role as a mother, Mary Terrell thought that a woman could embrace a literary career on the condition that she was only a housewife because juggling both would prove problematic. She explained that she had been unable to do so herself. In her autobiography written in the late 1930s, perhaps to justify why she had not fulfilled her dream of writing a novel – a dream she had had since she was 25 years old –, Terrell pointed out that, as a result of her professional engagements, she was often disturbed by daily visitors who asked for favors or advice and was thus unable to focus on writing. Because of her gentle nature, she did not take some time for herself to do “what she really wanted to do” and though she gladly assisted her visitors, she had the feeling that she had sacrificed the career she had really wished to pursue<sup>310</sup>.

Anna Cooper met similar difficulties when she adopted her nieces and nephews in the 1910s. At that time, she was studying for her Doctorate and had started taking French courses at Columbia University and she later experienced financial and personal difficulties combining her role as an aunt, a teacher and a scholar<sup>311</sup>. She nevertheless successfully managed to continue her doctoral work and fulfill her duties as a surrogate mother.

Ida Wells-Barnett juggled her career and family life as well, thanks to the help of her husband but also of other club members who, considering that her action against lynching should be made public and that her voice should be heard, assisted her in her mission<sup>312</sup>. For example, her husband hired a nurse to enable her to attend the NACW Convention in Washington D.C. in July 1896 and she went to the Convention with her four-month old baby, Charles Aked Barnett<sup>313</sup>.

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<sup>308</sup> Mary Church Terrell, 1905 Diary, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Microfilms Collection. Also cited in Beverly Washington Jones, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954*, 52-53.

<sup>309</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 185.

<sup>310</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 236. She recounted not having enough time to write a novel.

<sup>311</sup> See Anna Julia Cooper, “The Third Step: Cooper’s Memoir of the Sorbonne Doctorate (1945-1950?), in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 320-330.

<sup>312</sup> Dorothy Sterling, *Black Foremothers* (Westbury, New York, 1979), 97-98, as cited in Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 174.

<sup>313</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 243. “The Ida B. Wells club had sent to me as a delegate, and my husband sent a nurse along to take care of the baby”.

Moreover, when the members of Women's State Central Committee wanted her to give a series of lectures in Illinois, "as [she] had done [two years earlier] in 1894", Wells inquired about whether it was possible to hire a nurse to help her during her tour<sup>314</sup>. Since the Committee agreed, she embarked on the adventure: "And so I started out with a six-month-old nursing baby and made trips to Decatur, Quincy, Springfield, Bloomington, and many other towns. At all of these places there was a nurse on hand to take care of the baby while I went to the whole and delivered the address"<sup>315</sup>. With reason, she presented this episode as a proof of her strength and determination, emphasizing the uniqueness of the situation since she was one of the rare activists who took a baby on tours<sup>316</sup>. Charles Aked was affectionately nicknamed the "baby of the association" and when he started crying during one of his mother's speech, Wells was assisted by the chairman<sup>317</sup>.

It appears that Wells-Barnett successfully managed to juggle her activism and her role as a mother when she had one child. Difficulties were felt more keenly when her second child Herman Kohlsatt was born in 1897. Years later, she explained:

Although I tried to do my duty as mother toward my first born and refused the suggestion not to nurse him, I looked forward to the time when I should have completely discharged my duty in that respect. It was because I had to nurse him that I carried him with me when I went over the state making political speeches. Just as the time came for him to be read, I found that I was not to be emancipated from my duties in that respect for 8 months afterward I gave birth to another son<sup>318</sup>.

However, when she met difficulties trying to combine a career and family life when her children were young, she was assisted by members of her family. For example, when she was urged by Mr. Thomas Fortune to attend a meeting to resurrect the Afro-American League, she was able to attend thanks to the assistance of her mother-in-law. Yet, at that time, her friend Susan B. Anthony warned her: "You have a divided duty. You are trying to help in the formation of this [Afro American] league and your eleven month-old baby needs your attention at home. You are distracted over the thought that maybe he's not being looked after

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<sup>314</sup> They "wanted to arrange for me to travel throughout the State again", I said I would be very glad to do so, provided the committee would employ a nurse to take care of my nursing baby, who was only six month old.". At first the committee said that "it could not afford to employ a nurse to travel with me", but that "if I would go, the local committee had every place where we held meetings would have a nurse on the job ready to take care of the baby". Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 243-244.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid. "I have often I have often referred to it in my meeting with the pioneer suffragists, as I honestly believe that I am the only woman in the United States who ever traveled throughout the country with a nursing baby to make political speeches".

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 244-245. "Everything went on very smoothly with the exception of one town. [...] When the time came for me to speak I rose and went forward. The baby, who was wide awake, looked around, and failing to see me but hearing my voice, raised his voice in angry protest". The chairman took care of him because the nurse who had been hired to take care of Charles wanted to listen to Wells-Barnett's speech: she "took the baby out into the hall where he could not hear my voice and kept him there until I had finished my task. This she did in order that the nurse, who had expressed very great desire to hear me speak, should not be deprived of the opportunity to do so".

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 248-249.

as he would be if you were there, and that makes for a divided duty”<sup>319</sup>, underlining the difficulty of juggling a role as a mother and as an activist proved impossible. Wells heard this warning yet noted in her autobiography that trying to unite her community was too important for her:

Although it was a well merited rebuke from her point of view, I could not tell Miss Anthony that it was because I had been unable, like herself, to get the support which was necessary to carry on my work that I had become discouraged in the effort to carry on alone. For that reason I welcomed the opportunity of trying to help unite our people so that there would be a following to help in the arduous work necessary<sup>320</sup>.

Years later, she explained that she had decided to temporarily withdraw from public life after the birth of her second son, Hermann, in 1897, retiring “to the privacy of [her] home to give [her] attention to the training of [her] children”<sup>321</sup> and that she made this difficult decision because she “was thoroughly convinced by this time that the duties of wife and mother were a profession in themselves and it was hopeless to expect to carry on public work”<sup>322</sup>.

In 1898, after nursing her son Herman, Ida Wells-Barnett gradually returned to political activism because she felt that she had a special mission to fulfill. She resumed her career because the issue of lynching was too important for her to remain a housewife – even if she had enjoyed being one: “Even though I was quite content to be left within the four walls of my home, it seems that the needs of the work were so great that again I had to venture forth” and later “despite my best intentions, when I got back home to my family, I was again launched in public movements”<sup>323</sup>. As Guy-Sheftall has emphasized: “Her concerns for the race appear to outweigh the constraints imposed on her by gender. So, again, she took her five-month-old nursing baby with her as she launched the most ambitious and tight lynching campaign ever mounted”. Many black women got involved in activism and accepted the challenge: “For progressive black women like Ida Wells Barnett, a woman's proper sphere was wherever there was important work to be done. And, despite the obstacles, not the least of

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 255. Anthony was speaking about the call Mr. T Thomas Fortune had made to resurrect the Afro-American League. Wells's second son had then “just been weaned” and she could “safely leave him with his grandmother” to attend the meeting.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 250. “With the birth of my second son, all the public work was given up and I retired to the privacy of my home to get my attention to the training of my children. I fully agreed with the Catholic priest who declared that if he had the training of a child for this first seven years of life, it would be a Catholic old the rest of its days”.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 249. She resolved to end all professional engagements: “I therefore gave up the newspaper and very shortly thereafter resigned from the presidency of the Ida B. Wells club, after five years of service”.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 252 and 256. She seemed to have used her life writings to explain that she entered the political arena again in spite of herself, perhaps in order to justify herself to people who could deem her decision as unworthy for a mother. This was perhaps a strategy to cope with her guilt feeling to have renounced being “only” a housewife. Interestingly, she chose the word “walls” to refer to domestic life and opposed it to the word “ventures” to refer to activism, as if she meant that domestic life was confining.

which was a barrage of attitudes about the greater importance of the home, black women knew that there was much to be done and responded in large numbers to the challenge”<sup>324</sup>. As I showed in the second part of this dissertation, she was active locally in Chicago within the Frederick Douglass Center and within other national associations such as the NACW.

Her two daughters, Ida Jr. and Alfreda, were born respectively in 1901 and 1904. Ida authorized herself to embark on professional adventures of greater scale only once the youngest of her two girls was about eight years old<sup>325</sup>. In the meantime, she devoted herself to local clubs in order not to have to be absent from home. Her determination to be both a good mother and an active clubwoman is exceptional. The difficulties she met, however, exemplify those of other women activists who had several children. Wells-Barnett was remarkable because of her resourcefulness and commitment. She is among the rare women in this study who had several children and who succeeded in building such an astounding career<sup>326</sup>.

In order to cope with the difficulties of motherhood, these middle and upper-class women resorted to other strategies. They often secured the assistance of female family members or friends who provided assistance, advice and comfort to new mothers and housewives – a strategy common to women of all social classes. As Deborah Gray White has explained in her article dealing with motherhood:

Whether single or married, black women did as they had done during slavery and looked to other women to share the responsibilities of motherhood. In the period after slavery, and even after black people began migrating North in the 1930s, black women depended on their female kin to provide help with child care. Starting as early as age eight, daughters began looking after their younger siblings. Aunts and female cousins pitched in when they could, and grandmothers became a staple in many an African American household. In fact, migration for women often began with child care – a young girl or young woman was sent North to look after the children of a woman who needed help juggling work and her children<sup>327</sup>.

Some women secured the help of grandmothers or mothers. For example, in 1885, Laura Hamilton Murray benefited from the assistance of her beloved 75-year-old “Mamma” during her pregnancy<sup>328</sup>. She apparently needed her reassuring presence assistance to perform her domestic tasks, and after the birth of the baby, to accomplish her motherly duties. When on 28 August 1885, “Mamma went out”, she seemed to have experienced some sort of anguish:

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<sup>324</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 158.

<sup>325</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster, Introduction to *Crusade*, xxiii.

<sup>326</sup> As opposed to Ida B. Wells, Fannie Williams and Anna Cooper did not have children. Mary Terrell was not confronted to the same problems because she had two children – Phyllis, born in 1898 and Mary, probably born in 1894. Josephine Ruffin appears as an example of a clubwoman who managed to work actively and give birth to five children, yet she engaged in activism when her four children were adults.

<sup>327</sup> See Deborah Gray White, “Motherhood: 1880-1910”, in *Black Women in America*.

<sup>328</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 473. On 9 March 1885, Murray indicated: “Mamma’s birthday 75 years old”. Her grandmother came to live with the Murrys at some point and helped her in her chores. For instance, when her granddaughter was recovering from her delivery, “mamma washed two quilts”.

“The baby was very troublesome and worried me greatly”<sup>329</sup>. Murray could also count on other women friends and kin and often rejoiced in having a network of benevolent women around her<sup>330</sup>.

Other women solicited their mothers, grandmothers or aunts on a regular basis as well. Mary Terrell seems to have relied upon her mother at various – happy and sad – moments of her life. In the 1890s, after the deaths of her babies, Mary joined her mother in New York City. She wrote in her autobiography that her motherly emotional support was extremely precious:

Acting upon my physician’s advice, my husband insisted upon my leaving home, where everything reminded me of my sorrow, and I went to visit my dear, sunny mother in New York. She would not allow me to talk about my baby’s death and scouted the idea that its life might have been saved. This short visit to my mother with her cheerful disposition and her infectious laugh did much for me physically, mentally, and spiritually. Many a human being has lost his reason because he has brooded over his trouble indefinitely, when a slight change of scene and companionship might have saved it. I do not like to think what might have happened to me if I had not left home and gone to see my mother at that crucial time in my life<sup>331</sup>.

Besides, Mary Terrell’s mother Louisa Ayers actively helped her daughter juggle her career and motherhood, regularly taking care of her granddaughters in the 1900s<sup>332</sup>. Her help undoubtedly enabled the busy writer and lecturer to be more active politically:

After my dear mother came to live with me, I was relieved of much responsibility and I was able to leave home to fill lecture engagements occasionally, which I could never have done with a clear conscience but for her presence in the home. But Mother was not well and it was difficult for her to walk, so that I could not allow her to do any manual labor if I could prevent it.<sup>333</sup>

Whenever she left home for an extended period of time, it was always difficult<sup>334</sup>. In 1904, when she was invited to attend the International Congress of Women in Berlin, Terrell had misgivings about accepting the invitation because she was very worried about being separated

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<sup>329</sup> The fact that she wrote down “mamma went out” may indicate that she needed the help and guidance of her grandmother when her child was still young. This feminine mother figure seems to have played a central role in her construction as a mother. Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 474-475.

<sup>330</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 474-475. For instance, on 10 June 1885, she penned: “Mrs. Graham is so good. She comes and combs my hair for me. She is such a nice lady”, 475. Other women offered care and affection in other ways, by paying visits and offering presents: one day, she had a call from her cousin Kate Triplett from Baltimore, who offered the baby “a zephyr sacque” and a “pretty water pitcher” to Laura. Yet, she was also sometimes dissatisfied with her relationship with other women, because she thought they were shallow. On 2 April 1885, she noted: “Mrs Fisher and Fannie Hamilton called. Women make me so angry. They seem to think of nothing but the lower things of earth. Mrs F. said she wanted to see if I looked like a married woman. I hope she can rest easy”.

<sup>331</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 107.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 197-198. She lived with the family for fifteen years until her death in 1911. When she went to Europe in 1904, her mother took care of her two daughters in her absence.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 239. “After a lecture bureau booked me for Chautauquas in the West I made an arrangement, already mentioned, by which I would never be obliged to remain away from home more than three consecutive weeks.”,



from her daughters. She finally agreed to go only after she had made sure that her mother was able to take care of the girls:

How could I summon courage enough to leave my family? Especially my small daughter! But like most difficulties which seem impossible to smooth out when they first appear, those which confronted me the morning I read that memorable letter soon dwindled in size and finally disappeared. Both my husband and my mother were eager to have me go to Berlin. Mother would and could take care of my little daughter just as well as I could, she said, so there was no reason in the world why I should decline such a wonderful invitation<sup>335</sup>.

Yet up to the very last moment, Mary Terrell hesitated to take her young daughter with her. Her husband convinced her that she would work more efficiently if she went alone. Listening to her husband's advice, she resolved to go to Berlin on her own as planned<sup>336</sup>.

Like Terrell, Wells-Barnett relied on her relatives in order to continue her work as an activist. For instance, she explained that she could exceptionally attend a meeting if "Ferdinand's mother" took care of her second son<sup>337</sup>.

### Providing Advice for Child-Rearing

Clubwomen gave recommendations about child-rearing, either in manuals or orally to their children. Emma Hackley gave numerous advice on motherhood to Tuskegee Institute students and readers – future mothers<sup>338</sup>. She encouraged mothers to act as "health officer[s] of the race"<sup>339</sup>, as role models, to teach the same morals to both boys and girls<sup>340</sup>, to supervise children's education and see to children's proper occupation and play. She also argued that it

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 198. "A short time before the steamer sailed from Baltimore my little daughter, Phyllis, who had gone there with her father to see me off, begged me to take her with me. I was never more tempted to do anything in my life than I was to grant her request. But my husband argued me out of it by showing how impossible it would be for me properly to attend to the business for which I was making the voyage and to care for a little girl among strangers at one and the same time.". Additionally, like Wells-Barnett, this affectionate mother of two also made specific arrangements to combine her career as a lecturer and her role as a mother. She explained that she made sure that she never left home for more than three weeks.

<sup>337</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 255. Because their financial situation often pushed them to work outside of home and did not enable them to hire work, African American women had to rely on female kin perhaps more than white women at the same period and in any case before white women – who could proportionately keep house in far greater number than women of color.

<sup>338</sup> Interestingly, Emma Hackley did not have any children. She got married but separated from her husband in 1905. See *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*. ed. Edward T. James. Vol. I. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971). See page 107.

<sup>339</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 194. "The colored mother beautiful is the health officer of the race as well as her own posterity. It is her duty to see to it that her children have clean bodies inside and outside. She will see to it that in her neighborhood there will be more regard for health, drainage, and other sanitary conditions".

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 202. "Early in the boy's life the colored mother beautiful will teach him to keep as pure in thought and deed as girls are expected to be. He will be given a right idea of the sacred sex organs and will be taught their health—value and the price of their abuse. Self mastery will be the watchword in thought, even in sleep and recreation."



fell to women to teach children to read on their own and cultivate their minds since reading and acquiring culture was a rampart against “idleness” and “vice”<sup>341</sup>. She also told mothers not to be too harsh on themselves if parenthood was challenging<sup>342</sup>.

Acting as a role model was essential for the benefit of the whole black community. Emma Hackley and many other clubwomen claimed that raising boys demanded equally important supervision as raising girls, arguing that mothers had to be very equally careful to embody a flawless role model when raising boys because: “boys, also, get their estimate of colored womanhood from their mothers”. As a result, she underscored that boys should be taught good manners and always have the highest regard for women and be galant.

Many women like Hackley stressed the importance of education and “good homes” for boys because they linked delinquency to the social and economic circumstances of young black men – who often lacked, they believed, a strong home model<sup>343</sup> and who had not sufficiently been encouraged to study. As a result, women such as Josephine Yates urged mothers and teachers to send boys to schools: “We earnestly call upon our women to use all the influence in their power to get the boys in school and to endeavor to keep them there, until, either from an industrial, or a literary standpoint, or from both, they are to some extent well equipped for life and its duties”<sup>344</sup>.

Moreover, they emphasized that boys should be thrifty, honest, keep clear of addictive behaviors, in a word, display self-control. Mothers were particularly vigilant to limit their sons’ addictive behaviors and often worried if they frequented bars or started gambling. Wells-Barnett made this painful experience as a parent when she found out that her 33 year-year old son Herman had a gambling problem. Distressed, she confided her anguish in her

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<sup>341</sup>Ibid., 194-195. “She controls the child’s play which is so necessary to health and which at the present day aims for educational results.”, 194-195. “The habit of reading good books should be made a part of his daily work as a preparation for the idle hour when he would otherwise seek excitement and harmful association.” See also page 203. All children should be taught to read and be curious about the world around them. The way parents brought up their offspring showed how they lived and thought: “Children very accurately reflect the thought of their parents.”. See pages 187 and 189.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 205. She told her readers that if despite their efforts their children proved to be “disgraces”, they should “conceal [their] agony and grief” and remain “serene” and dignified, convinced that they had done their best and leave it to God to see what should occur to the child.

<sup>343</sup> Josephine Silone-Yates, “Woman as a Factor in the Solution of Race Problems,” *The Colored American Magazine* (February 1907): 126–135. The “Negro boy” ends up in jail or in a penitentiary “not because he is naturally vicious, but because of our present social and economic conditions”, 130, as cited in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 109.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 130 and 109.

1930 diary. She was worried that his addiction might put his career plans in peril<sup>345</sup>. As a public figure, Ida Wells was also worried that her son's acts might negatively impact her career in politics since she was running as an Independent for the State Senate elections at that time<sup>346</sup>.

In her etiquette book, Emma Hackley also advised her readers to prepare boys to their duties as husbands – telling them that they must marry women of color<sup>347</sup> and help with domestic chores. Even if she did not have children herself, Cooper also argued that men should enter matrimony. As an educator and writer, she influenced future generations and tried to instill in young men a sense of Christian duty, encouraging them to study, work and marry – three “sacred obligations to social order”. In the February issue of 1904 of *The University Journal* of Howard University, Cooper maintained that men ought to “marry, make homes and rear families” because it was “necessary for the perpetuation of the species”<sup>348</sup>, and because God intended to see men leave his family and found their own since family was “the God-appointed unit of human society”<sup>349</sup>.

These women felt that raising or educating girls who would soon become mothers meant playing a singular role within the nation. Emma Hackley thought that being a mother meant embodying a model of motherhood: “A colored girl's estimate and idea of colored womanhood comes from her mother”<sup>350</sup>.

Like Fannie Williams in the early 1900s, Mary Terrell thought that mothers owed their children a “happy home”, where peace and harmony reign[ed]” and where they can provide their children with agreeable pastimes – this limited temptations – she was thinking of going

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<sup>345</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 174. In 1930, he had left without a word to go to California. He was working as a porter in Denver and was refusing to come back to Chicago. On 19 May 1930, she wrote in her diary: “Have been thro hell over revelations of Herman's actions [...] He is up before the Bar Association & there seems nothing in sight save expulsion & disgrace [...] He doesn't seem to realize that such a record will follow him there & perhaps prevent the realization of his ambitions tho I hope not”. She intended to keep her diary private.

<sup>346</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Memphis Diary*, 174. She wrote: “I did not know of his embezzlements till I had announced my candidacy & it was too late to withdraw”, implying that she might have contemplated not running for the position if she had been aware of her son's acts earlier. Diary entry dated 19 May 1930, 174. Wells-Barnett was running as an Independent in the Republican primary against Warren B. Douglass and Adelbert H. Roberts. She lost the primary and ranked third.

<sup>347</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, See pages 198-199, 202-203, 199-200, 201, 203-204, 202 and 199.

<sup>348</sup> In her mind, men who made a decent living should not remain bachelors: “I hold that just as soon as a man has a steady job paying a resonable wage and is capabe by economy and thrift of supporting a wife and little ones, he should shoulder that responsibility. Society expects it. Right living demands it”.

<sup>349</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Duty of Young Men” *The University Journal*, 15 Feb 1904. Vol I, No. 6, 1-2.

<sup>350</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl*, 195.

out and adopting bad behaviors<sup>351</sup>. In “What Mothers Owe to Their Daughters”, Mary Terrell recommended mothers to teach their daughters “to love”<sup>352</sup> but also to share their experiences and knowledge so as to prepare them for the future. For her, mothers should be confident enough to tell them about their own mistakes<sup>353</sup>. Elizabeth Johnson Harris – who had herself been kept under close supervision during her youth – also thought that it was her duty to guide her children whenever it was necessary and to warn them about bad decisions they might make. She naturally thought that “regardless of the size or age of the son or daughter, there is always room for advice from the parents.”<sup>354</sup>.

African American mothers wanted to convey models of decency and good behavior and generally offered pragmatic advice to their daughters. Mary Terrell aimed at making daughters conform to “proper” norms. For example, she argued that mothers should always be dignified and moral and never tell “obscene jokes, tell vulgar stories, gossip about their neighbors, rehash scandals, the awful crimes in the newspapers in the presence of their children” because “Bad jokes poison children’s minds and incline them to think of the impure rather than the pure things of life.”. Mothers should properly clothe their daughters, so that they feel respected and have self-respect.<sup>355</sup> Moreover, it appears that despite their modern understanding of being a woman, the women in this study imperceptibly passed on a Victorian ideology to their daughters. This is visible in the writings of Ida B. Wells-Barnett. She tried to instill Victorian ideals in her daughters. In one letter dated 30 October 1920, she wished to see Ida Jr. and Alfreda “be shining examples of noble true womanhood”. When informing them that she could not be present for Halloween because of her engagements, using a language full of Victorian overtones:

I know my girls are true to me, to themselves and their God wherever they are, and my heart is content. I have had many troubles and much disappointment in life, but I feel that in you I have an abiding joy. I

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<sup>351</sup> Terrell said: “Home should be [...] so attractive to young people that they prefer to stay there rather than go anywhere else.”. See Williams, Fannie. “The Smaller Economies”, 1904, 91.

<sup>352</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 78. “Love and tell them so. Not love in a perfunctory way, simply because it is expected of a mother to love her daughter, but such overflowing abounding love that the daughter will know and feel it”.

<sup>353</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 78-79. “Many a girl is disgraced, simply because her mother was so unsympathetic that she did not have the courage to confide in her, and thus she has made first one mistake and then another, until her ruin has been accomplished. Driven from their mothers girls often go to their young companions for advise, who are neither competent to counsel them nor worthy of their friendship in many cases.” Besides, they should also disclose any necessary information about themselves to their daughters.

<sup>354</sup> Elizabeth Johnson Harris, *Life Story*, 23.

<sup>355</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “What Mothers Owe Their Daughters”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 79-80. This is partially reminiscent of guidelines provided by Hackley in the 1910s. See the second part of this dissertation for a discussion of the notions of respectability and morality.

feel that whatever others may do, my girls are now and will be shining examples of noble true womanhood”.

She hoped to see her daughters – who were then respectively 19 and 16 years old – become models for the society: “Mother’s heart is glad and happy when she thinks of her daughters, for she knows that wherever they are and whatever they are doing they are striving to please her and reach the ideal of true womanhood”<sup>356</sup>. The notion of “ideal of true womanhood” did influence her own life and activism because she had been raised according to Victorian standards. Yet, here Wells-Barnett understood true womanhood differently from the way white American women understood the “cult of true womanhood” in the mid-nineteenth century. For her, “true women” were moral, proper, well-educated, active, well-travelled and intelligent women willing to embrace womanhood.

Furthermore, women intellectuals, teachers or activists encouraged young black girls – their daughters or pupils – to cherish their African origins and appreciate their black beauty. Some conservative women from the South were ideologically opposed to hair-straightening or skin-bleaching practices and encouraged women to keep their hair natural. In 1904, Nannie Helen Burroughs – a southern activist and educator – opposed the use of hair-straightening systems such as the Poro system and advocated race pride, stressing the importance of “character” rather than beauty. Like Emma Hackley, who claimed that “there is character in ebony as well as in marble”, Burroughs asserted that true worth came from the mind and not from the physique: “A true woman would not give a cent for a changed appearance of this sort of a superficial nothing. What every woman who bleaches and straightens out needs, is not her appearance changed, but her mind”<sup>357</sup>. Emma Hackley, who shared similar views, declared in her etiquette book that black hair should be a source of pride:

Kinky hair is neither a disgraceful nor a shameful heredity. It is an honorable legacy from Africa. A kind Mother Nature protected her children from the torrid sun which kept the oils and waxes in a fluid state or else the hair would have dried up. The chemical action of the atmosphere caused a shrinking into spirals which further protected the uncovered heads from scorching<sup>358</sup>.

Other women such as Mamie Fields thought otherwise and used hot combs and hair products designed by either Annie Malone or Madame Walker to straighten their hair. In her

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<sup>356</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett Papers. Series VI. Box 8, Folder 9. 30 October 1920. “My Dear Folks” from “Mother”. To her daughters Ida and Alfreda, who were respectively aged 19 and 16. Ida was born in 1901 and Alfreda in 1904.

<sup>357</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, “Not Color But Character”, *The Voice of the Negro*, 1 June 1904. The Poro System was designed by Annie Malone who made a fortune in the early twentieth century with her hair straightening system, first in Saint Louis and later in Chicago, where she founded the “Poro College”. Burroughs deplored this practice: “If Negro women [used] half the time they spend in trying to get white to get better, the race would move forward apace.” The “production of more white Negroes [...] does not bring to the race more character and worth”. Women should devote their energies to better their characters rather than their “outward appearances”.

<sup>358</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 36.

autobiography, she explained that she once taught a class of girls how to use the hot comb and that she had opened a hair salon – which she called “the Poro room” – with her friend Mamie Rodolph in her home in Charleston<sup>359</sup>.

Some of these women’s writings reveal that they often experienced an inner struggle juggling career and family life. For example, Wells-Barnett sometimes felt uneasy, when the issues she championed took her far from home. Although she tried to be present for her children as much as she could, she sometimes had to travel to give lectures. In a letter dated 30 October 1920, she wished she were with her daughters and apologized for not being present for Halloween<sup>360</sup>. Reassuring them, she told them that she would be “home in time for dinner Monday night with my loved ones”<sup>361</sup>. Alfreda remembered that although she was “always busy, always reading, always writing”, Ida “kept [her children] very close” and “kept up with all [their] activities”. She would always write to them when she was away<sup>362</sup>. A loving yet demanding mother, she expected her children to bring satisfactory reports from school but she also offered dancing lessons to Alfreda and had a costume made for her<sup>363</sup>. She enjoyed making cakes with her children, as her 1930 diary shows<sup>364</sup>. Ida Wells-Barnett was not the only one to experience such inner conflicts. Mary Church Terrell, Anna Cooper and Margaret Washington were also faced with these arduous questions and actively sought to solve such problems.

Like Wells, Terrell tried to be a caring, present, thoughtful and considerate mother for her daughters. She often worried about her daughters’ well-being, education and projects. For instance, on 16 November 1905, the 42-year-old mother wrote in her diary that she took care of Phyllis, her “poor little sufferer”, who had a bout of “malarial fever” in her diary. She tried to dedicate as much time as possible to Mary and Phyllis: “I enjoyed my children thoroughly,

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<sup>359</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 189. She did this when she raised her children at home. With the help of her husband, she opened a salon in one of the rooms of the house and used the money she made for her family. She wrote: “The income I earned in the Poro Room enabled me to put lots of little extras in my home. Bob and I both were moving ahead in our life”, 189.

<sup>360</sup> “So I won’t be home tonight to help my girls celebrate Halloween. I am so sorry about this as I wanted to be with you. As it is, you will have to do the very best you can without Mother”. “I hope you have a perfectly splendid time and enjoy yourselves in the best ways”.

<sup>361</sup> Letter dated 30 October 1920, *Ida B. Wells Papers*. Series VI. Box 8, Folder 9. To daughters Ida and Alfreda. Signed “Mother”.

<sup>362</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster, *Memphis Diary*, Interview, 194-195.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 195 and 198.

<sup>364</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Memphis Diary*, 167. On 1 January 1930, Ida B. Wells wrote: “Herman and I made a cake for New Year’s Day and it was good”. In 1930, her daughter Ida lived with her parents and Herman was an associate of his father in the family law practice. Alfreda Barnett Duster, *Memphis Diary*, 197-198. Duster remembered: “We used to play cards – whist, that was the family game. Mother and Ida played whist as partners against my father and me” and Ida “relaxed a little bit”. Alfreda depicted her mother as being very serious and even “austere” whereas her father was “by nature [...] more easy-going”, 193.



while they were growing up, and spent as much time with them as I possibly could. We went on long hikes together. Occasionally I took them to the theatre, to the movies and to the operas which they could understand.”<sup>365</sup>. Each summer, the Terrells enjoyed travelling as a family – either in the North or to their second home, at Highland Beach, Maryland<sup>366</sup>, Mary being happy to make her daughters discover New York City or other places of historical importance.

In many ways, in the 1890s and 1900s, these women were embracing what Carlson has termed “a dual womanhood”. In “The Damnation of Women” (1920) Du Bois described this phenomenon<sup>367</sup>. In this article, the northern-born, light-skinned and upper-class sociologist moved away from Victorian norms and argued that the ideology of the separate spheres was not relevant anymore for white or black modern women. He wrote: “We cannot abolish the new economic freedom of women. We cannot imprison women again in a home or require them all on pain of death to be nurses and housekeepers.”<sup>368</sup>. He also claimed that if “in other years women’s way was clear: to be beautiful, to be petted, to bear children”, changes now permitted black women not to be “expected to be merely ornamental” anymore. For him, the cult of true womanhood was a thing of the past: “[Women] have girded themselves for work, instead of adorning their bodies only for play. Their sturdier minds have concluded that if a woman be clean, healthy, and educated, she is as pleasing as God wills and far more useful than most of her sisters”. As many other African American female intellectuals had claimed since the 1890s, he emphasized in 1920 that since their very humanity and beauty were denied, women of color were subsequently asked to possess additional qualities – unsolicited in other women. They were “asked to be efficient, to be strong, fertile, muscled, and able to work. If they marry, they must as independent workers be

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<sup>365</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Women*, 238.

<sup>366</sup> Jones, Beverly Washington, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954*, 53. Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Women*, 239 and *Quest for Equality*, 53. “For several summers we went to Harper’s Ferry, the scene of John Brown’s raid and execution. We had quarters in Storer College, a splendid school for colored youth, whose lawn was an ideal playground for children.”, and “Several vacations were spent in Opequon, a small country resort about seven miles from Winchester, Virginia.” They also spent time in the North: “Twice we went to Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, and the girls had a good visit in New York City, when they returned home.”

<sup>367</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Damnation of Women”, in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. ed. Du Bois. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920). He underlined the necessity for women of African descent to work because black men suffered from economic discrimination on the labor market. “The Negroes are put in a peculiarly difficult position, because the wage of the male breadwinner is below the standard, while the openings for colored women in certain lines of domestic work, and now in industries, are many.”

<sup>368</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Damnation of Women”, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Chapter VI.



able to help support their children, for their men are paid on a scale which makes sole support of the family often impossible.”<sup>369</sup>.

Women of color experienced motherhood very differently depending on their regional and social affiliation. While working-class women struggled to juggle home duties and professional obligations and often felt that they made immense sacrifices as mothers, middle and upper-class mothers were faced with less difficulties. The study of these women’s life writings reveal that activists who happened to be mothers such as Mary Terrell and Ida Wells developed several strategies in order to be able to combine activism, housewifery and motherhood the way white reformers did not often have to.

Activists such as Ida Wells-Barnett or Mary Terrell experienced motherhood in quite singular ways. They faced this “divided duty” – which was specific to their gender and had to cope with additional difficulties. While they benefited from the financial support of their husbands like other middle-class women of color, they had a harder time juggling domestic and professional duties because of the scope of their political engagement.

These activists successfully juggled their personal and professional life thanks to the assistance of loving and supportive family members – including their liberal-minded husbands – or generous and supportive fellow club members to help them in their task. They also took breaks in their careers when their children were very young. In any case, combining motherhood and activism proved difficult. Despite the fact that these women devoted most of their lives to the community and to activism and often experienced an inner conflict, they fully enjoyed being mothers and were caring, present, affectionate and demanding ones. In many ways, they were “modern” women.

Women like Anna Cooper or Fannie Williams who did not have children – willingly or not – and who dedicated themselves to teaching or writing – seldom voiced their opinions about motherhood, and like other women, deemed that this woman’s natural function was important for the progress of the community.

I will now examine how middle-class women interested in these issues promoted the creation of “better, purer homes” among women of the lower classes.

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<sup>369</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Ibid.* He also delivered a liberal message, saying that women should have the right to control their bodies and that motherhood should be a choice. He wrote: “The future woman must have a life work and economic independence. She must have knowledge. She must have the right of motherhood at her own discretion”.

#### 4. Clubwork For “Better Homes”

Black and white clubs pursued different goals in the Progressive era. As Martha Patterson has noted in *The New American Woman Revisited*, it appears that contrary to white women’s clubs whose aims were to “encourage a better understanding of social, political, or cultural issues, thereby enabling greater engagement in issues of national importance, [...] Black women’s clubs tended to be more service-oriented” since they founded “kindergartens and day nurseries” and took care of “old people”<sup>370</sup>.

#### Voicing An Elitist Stance About Motherhood and Home

Black clubwomen thought that it was highly important to teach future mothers “proper” home management. Helping the “mothers of the race” was strategically important to uplift the race. Resorting to Victorian language and patronizing tones, they adopted elitist discourses to advise less privileged women on how to organize their homes, raise their children and juggle work and domestic duties – when it was necessary. Their discourse towards working-class women – whom women like Mary Church Terrell often judged as “poor” and “ignorant” – revealed the class divide existing between the leaders of the race and the rest of the community<sup>371</sup>. In her addresses as president of the NACW, Terrell used Victorian language and repeatedly stressed the need to “purify homes”, to build “better homes”, “inculcate right principles of living and correct false views of life. Homes, more homes, purer homes, better homes, is the text upon which our sermons to the masses must be preached.”<sup>372</sup>.

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<sup>370</sup> Martha Patterson, *The New American Woman Revisited*, 10.

<sup>371</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women”, 11. “Talks on social purity and the proper method of rearing children are made for the benefit of those mothers, who in many instances fall short of [women’s] duty, not because they are vicious and depraved, but because they are ignorant and poor. Against the one-room cabin so common in the rural settlements in the South, we have inaugurated a vigorous crusade.”

<sup>372</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “First Presidential Address to the National Association of Colored Women,” Nashville, Tennessee, 15 September 1897, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress (Microfilm, Reel 20, frames 511-22). In her inaugural address in 1897, the first president of the NACW encouraged clubwomen to “Purify the atmosphere of [their] homes ‘till it becomes so sweet that those who dwell in them will have a heritage more precious than great riches, more to be desired than silver or gold.”. Terrell added: “Believing that it is only through the home that a people can become really good and truly great, the N.A.C.W. shall enter that sacred domain to inculcate right principles of living and correct false views of life. Homes, more homes, purer homes, better homes, is the text upon which our sermons to the masses must be preached” and argued: “So long as the majority of people call that place home in which the air is foul, the manners bad and the morals worse, just so long is this so called home a menace to health, a breeder of vice, and the abode of crime. Not alone upon the inmates of these hovels are the awful consequences of their filth and immorality visited, but upon the heads of those who sit calmly by and make no effort to stem the tide of disease and vice will vengeance as surely fall”.

Nevertheless, despite their elitism, because many of these clubwomen had been – or still were – personally affected by the “divided duty” and even if they were less impacted by these questions because of their social status, they wished to offer pragmatic solutions to the problems met by working-class women. Despite their traditional Victorian rhetoric – they spoke of “pure homes” –, clubwomen sought innovative and far-reaching solutions.

One of their goals was to fight for better housing. Whether they were activists, clubwomen or social workers, they inveighed against the dire housing conditions of millions of African Americans – in the rural and urban South and in other regions since many African Americans lived in dilapidated or insalubrious apartments in overcrowded northern urban centers. They underscored that these conditions were comparable to those existing under slavery. Adopting a moralizing tone and promoting the model of the nuclear family, they castigated promiscuity and insalubrity and called for better hygiene. In “The Progress of Women” (1898), Mary Church Terrell stated: “Families of eight or ten, consisting of men, women and children [which] are all huddled together in a single apartment [are] found not only in the South, but among our poor all over the land” and “under the evil influences of plantation owners, and through no fault of their own, the condition of the colored people is, in some sections to-day no better than it was at the close of the war.”<sup>373</sup>. Many activists criticized the fact that more than thirty years since Emancipation, many African American families still lived in close proximity in log cabins in some areas of the South.

Elite women like Terrell thought that this promiscuity favored immorality – and immorality was precisely what women of African descent were accused of. Since “there [was] little hope of inculcating morality or modesty” in such conditions, members of the elite believed it was imperative that these families live in a house with several rooms and observe strict hygiene rules. Because of their economic circumstances, it was obviously difficult for many humble African American families to follow these rules.

Clubwomen such as Mary Terrell or Josephine Yates actively worked within the NACW to center their efforts on children’s welfare, home and family. During her presidency, Terrell devoted her energy to children’s welfare. In her first inaugural address in 1897, she argued: “To the children of the race we owe, as women, a debt which can never be paid, until herculean efforts are made to rescue them from evil and shame for which they are in no way

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<sup>373</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women”, 1898, 10. “In some sections”, “the condition of the colored people is [...] today no better than it was at the close of the war”.

responsible.”<sup>374</sup>. Elite women – who focused on the prevention of delinquency and on prison reform – advocated a strong, well-balanced family model for youngsters because they thought it was the key to prevent juvenile delinquency and crime and that kindergartens would foster this family model. Terrell wrote in 1898:

How imperative is it then that as colored women, we inculcate correct principles and set good examples for our own youth, whose little feet will have so many thorny paths of prejudice temptation, and injustice to tread. The colored youth is vicious we are told, and statistics showing the multitudes of our boys and girls who crowd the penitentiaries and fill the jails appall and dishearten us<sup>375</sup>.

As they were aware that most black women had no other choice but to work for wages – not exclusively in the South — they believed that offering child-care solutions: founding kindergartens and daycare centers would enable women to be the architects of “better homes” and foster racial uplift and consequently redeem the image of women of color.

### **Founding Kindergartens and Mothers’ Clubs**

Many black women – of all social classes – supported the creation of kindergartens and day-care centers. Some intellectuals such as Josephine Ruffin, Fannie Williams, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Anna Cooper and Josephine Silone Yates opted very early for this solution and encouraged the training of specific teachers. Elite women knew that because black men’s salaries were so low families were often unable to make ends meet<sup>376</sup>. Of course, to avoid leaving their children unattended, working women actively sought solutions to juggle work and motherly duties. Many tried to take in some work at home and washed or ironed clothes so as to be able to take care of their children during the day. Those who were unable to do so, since they worked as domestics or cooks for white families relied on family members – grandmothers, aunts, sisters or friends – to look after their children in their absence. Nevertheless, when such help was unavailable, some children could happen to be home unattended.

Elite women greatly admired these hard-working courageous women. In “Colored Women of Chicago” (1914), Fannie Williams praised them:

A class of women that cannot be ignored, in this story of the life of the colored women of Chicago, is the women who work with their hands in the humbler walks of life, as cooks, housecleaners, laundresses, caretakers, and domestics. One of the most interesting sights in our public streets in the early morning hours is the large army of colored women going in all directions to do their day’s work.

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<sup>374</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “First Presidential Address to the National Association of Colored Women”.

<sup>375</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Progress of Colored Women”, *Pamphlets From the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection*, 14.

<sup>376</sup> Black men received lower wages than other workers because of racial discrimination.

These women deserve great credit for their eager willingness to aid their husbands in helping to provide a living for themselves and their families<sup>377</sup>.

Conscious of the difficulties they faced, clubwomen founded kindergartens to solve the problem of childcare.

All women of this study favored their creation and mothers' clubs and actively took part in local work. Mary Church Terrell started to support the creation of kindergartens in the 1890s when she was involved with the Colored Woman's League. The Washington League:

[e]stablished a training school for kindergarten teachers, October 1896, and for two years maintained seven free kindergartens. Later the kindergarten system was introduced into the public schools of Washington [...] The women of the League are at present engaged in carrying on a Day Nursery to provide a place where poor mothers who work out may leave their little ones during the day, knowing that they will be kindly cared for<sup>378</sup>.

Fannie Williams also became a strong supporter of such facilities. In 1900, she felt that they were socially indispensable, in particular in the South:

A lack of kindergarten teachers more than a lack of money has retarded the work of establishing kindergartens, especially in the South, where they are specially needed. The progressive woman feels that an increased number of kindergartens would have a determining influence in shaping and moulding the character of thousands of colored children whose home lives are scant and meager<sup>379</sup>.

According to her, they could – and should – be positive models or substitutes of homes. Likewise, Ida B. Wells thought that it was the key to solve the problem of child neglect in Chicago<sup>380</sup> and in Atlanta, Georgia, Lugenia Burns Hope advocated their creation as well<sup>381</sup>. Several Spelman alumnae also worked in or helped found kindergartens in their communities. Gertrude H. Ware worked at the five free ones in Atlanta<sup>382</sup>. In 1913, Anna Cooper rejoiced in the creation of the first “colored social settlement in Washington”<sup>383</sup>. It offered a “day

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<sup>377</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Colored Women of Chicago”, in the *Southern Workman* 43 (October 1914): 564-566, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 67-69, 68.

<sup>378</sup> “Colored Woman's League”, as cited by Gerda Lerner in the Chapter: “Club Activities”, in *Black Women in White America*, 450-451.

<sup>379</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among Colored Women in America”, in *The New Negro*, 417-418.

<sup>380</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 250. The Ida B. Wells Club opened a kindergarten at Bethel church.

<sup>381</sup> “Work of the Neighborhood Union”, *Spelman Messenger*, ca.1920. Her husband John Hope also supported the creation of kindergartens and mothers' clubs. See John Hope, Speech to Atlanta Colored Woman's Club, c. 1900, John and Lugenia Hope Papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center (microfilm, reel 21, frames 302-11).

<sup>382</sup> Gertrude H. Ware. “Free Kindergartens, Atlanta”, *Spelman Messenger*, February 1916. “Can you help us?”, she asked, using the newspaper to make a call to the community of Atlanta.

<sup>383</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Social Settlement”, 1913, 220. Cooper praised the action of a young white woman who despite her humble background, — she was a “salaried clerk in government employ” —, donated rent-free a small six-room house on M. Street Southwest” to found this settlement.

nursery, a kindergarten, penny saving through the stamp system". Moreover, young mothers benefited from the presence of "a nurse and doctor" who provided them with advice<sup>384</sup>.

In 1895, according to Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, one of the main goals of the association was to:

Talk over [...] things that are of especial interest to us as *colored* women, the training of our children, openings for our boys and girls, how they can be prepared for occupations and occupations may be found or opened for them, what *we* especially can do in the moral education of the race with which we are identified, our mental elevation and physical development, the home training it is necessary to give our children in order to prepare them to meet the peculiar conditions in which they shall find themselves, how to make the most of our own, to some extent, limited opportunities"<sup>385</sup>.

Under the leadership of elite women such as Mary Terrell and Josephine Yates<sup>386</sup>, solving child care problems became the NACW's "special mission"<sup>387</sup>. In her first address as president, the latter said: "It is kindergartens we need. Free kindergartens in every city and hamlet of this broad land we must have, if the children are to receive from us what it is our duty to give"<sup>388</sup>. She reiterated this view in "The Progress of Women" (1898):

As an organization of women nothing lies nearer the heart of the National Association than the children, many of whose lives, so sad and dark, we might brighten and bless. It is the kindergarten we need. Free kindergartens in every city and hamlet of this broad land we must have, if the children are to receive from us what it is our duty to give. Already during the past year kindergartens have been established and successfully maintained by several organizations, from which most encouraging reports have come. May their worthy example be emulated, till in no branch of the Association shall the children of the poor, at least, be deprived of the blessings which flow from the kindergarten alone<sup>389</sup>.

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 221. "They gave them "instruction in "what to do and how to do it" to numbers of little mothers whose slender shoulders have burdens beyond their years", and a "milk station" had even been created, allowing "sixty babies each day" to have sufficient amount of milk. Cooper concluded that "the influence of the settlement on the neighborhood [had] been marvelous" and that many black people had willingly and "admirably" taken part in the effort."

<sup>385</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 441. Italics hers.

<sup>386</sup> As Robbins has indicated, "Kindergarten never regained the level of emphasis that Terrell and Yates had placed upon it in the NACW". See Jean Marie Robbins, "Black Club Women's Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens", Chapter 6 dealing with Josephine Yates, 142.

<sup>387</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women", 14. *Pamphlets From the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection*, as cited in Jean Marie Robbins, "Black Club Women's Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens", 100. "As an organization, the National Association of Colored Women feels that the establishment of kindergartens is the special mission which we are called to fulfill. So keenly alive are we to the necessity of rescuing our little ones, whose noble qualities are deadened and dwarfed by the very atmosphere which they breathe, that the officers of the Association are now trying to secure means by which to send out a kindergarten organizer, whose duty it shall be both to arouse the conscience of our women, and to establish kindergartens, wherever the means therefor can be secured."

<sup>388</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "First Presidential Address to the National Association of Colored Women," Nashville, Tennessee, 15 September 1897, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress (Microfilm, reel 20, frames 511-22). "Already during the past year kindergartens have been established and successfully maintained by several organizations, from which most encouraging reports have come. Let their worthy example be emulated till in no branch of the association shall the children of the poor be deprived of the blessings which flow from the kindergarten's love."

<sup>389</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "Progress of Colored Women", 1898. *Pamphlets From the Daniel A.P. Murray Collection*, 14.



In 1897 and 1898, in a speech delivered to the – white – National American Women’s Suffrage Association, Terrell proclaimed that her ambition was to see the NACW become a “national kindergarten organizer”<sup>390</sup>. In 1900, as the second term of her presidency was about to end, she went on claiming that the creation of free kindergartens should be the NACW’s main priority: “We believe especially in the saving grace of the kindergarten, and feel that the establishment of free kindergartens wherever they are not incorporated in the public school system is the special mission which the N.A. of C.W is called upon to fulfill”<sup>391</sup>. Black women’s clubs were more active in founding kindergartens than white women’s clubs at the turn of the century because of the specific economic and social situation of women of color. White clubs would tackle these issues years later than black women, since white women tended to keep house when a far greater proportion of black women worked outside of home in this period.

Terrell and Yates thought that it was the responsibility of educated members of the community to help the lower classes. As Robbins has pointed out, these two leaders adopted patronizing attitudes, “Yates reasoned that the influence of the educated, and in her mind, more evolved black women providing kindergarten instruction and guidance to poor women in mothers’ clubs, would ‘purify the entire chain’ and improve the trajectory of poor blacks”<sup>392</sup>. When serving as second president of the NACW from 1901 to 1905, Josephine Silone Yates continued the fight for kindergartens<sup>393</sup>. A large number of them were founded thanks to such policies and many clubwomen went on promoting and developing kindergartens after the NACW ceased to make it a priority. Elite clubwomen not only opened and ran them and trained instructors, they also founded mothers’ clubs with the same goal in mind: building “better homes”.

In the 1890s, many black clubwomen founded mothers’ clubs in order to give young mothers “proper” advice about child-rearing and motherly care. Margaret Washington famously ran a mothers’ clubs at Tuskegee Institute which was active in the local vicinity.

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<sup>390</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 100.

<sup>391</sup> Mary Terrell, 1900. As cited by Jean Marie Robbins, 100.

<sup>392</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 167. She added: “Sexual promiscuity, alcohol consumption, and crime were the high priority moral problems mentioned in club records from at least, 1897 through 1905”. Yates continued the task accomplished by Terrell during her presidency of the NACW between 1900 and 1904.

<sup>393</sup> See Josephine Silone Yates, “Kindergartens and Mothers’ Clubs as Related to the Work of the National Association of Colored Women”, *The Colored American Magazine* (June 1905): 304-311, *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 226. For a detailed account of Josephine Silone Yates’ work for the creation of kindergartens, Jean Marie Robbins’s dissertation. Chapter 6, 138.

She believed her work to be essential to solve the “Negro problem” because “the home and the family [was] the starting point<sup>394</sup>”. She thought: “Mothers should have a wide knowledge of all matters pertaining to the moral, spiritual and intellectual training of her children” and with other club members, she did the foundation work.

Fannie Williams supported the work accomplished at the Frederick Douglass Center in Chicago – which ran a mothers’ club. In 1900, she praised mothers’ meetings because they had “a more direct and beneficial influence on the everyday problems of motherhood and homemaking than any other activity”. Like Terrell, who as president of the NACW claimed in 1900 that “mothers’ meetings a special feature of our work” because the association “keenly need[ed] an enlightened motherhood”<sup>395</sup>, Fannie Williams particularly praised the work of Margaret Murray Washington at Tuskegee Institute in that regard: “Meetings of this sort have been the chief feature of the women’s clubs organized by the Tuskegee teachers [...] within reach of the Tuskegee Institute [...] There has come to them scarcely a ray of light as to a better way of how to live for themselves and their offspring”<sup>396</sup>. Many women actively participated in their local communities once they graduated, like many Spelman alumnae were active and faithful members of mothers’ clubs. For example, Dora A. Murden (HS ’89) who lived in Athens, Georgia explained in a letter sent to the *Spelman Messenger* that she had “worked in the Woman’s Mission Club” for 20 years. While conducting mothers’ meetings at Jeruel Academy, she rejoiced in being useful to “many mothers [who told her] that they have gained much that was helpful in their home life by attending these meetings”<sup>397</sup>.

Nevertheless, not all black activists adhered to the policies decided by Mary Church Terrell in the late 1890s. The political orientation she was giving the NACW was criticized by several members. The fact that the leaders of the NACW placed much emphasis on home, child care dissatisfied more militant women such as Josephine Ruffin or Ida Wells. They also deemed that Terrell’s increasingly “accommodationist and domestic” policy was problematic for both women and the community. As Mia Bay has indicated: “Under Terrell’s leadership the NACW would continue to embrace a ‘politics of respectability’ that marginalized activists such as Ruffin and the even more outspoken Ida B. Wells-Barnett –

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<sup>394</sup> Article by Mrs. Margaret Murray Washington, a reprint from the *Independent, Spelman Messenger*, written ca.1915.

<sup>395</sup> Mary Church Terrell, Speech, “Greetings From the National Association of Colored Women to The National Council of Women”, 1900, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress (Microfilm, reel 21, frames 738-742). After 1901, Terrell worked more actively for “women’s suffrage, anti-lynching and other political causes”. Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 100.

<sup>396</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 418.

<sup>397</sup> Dora A. Murden, “Alumna Letter”. *Spelman Messenger*, April 1915.

who both parted company with the NACW after 1899”<sup>398</sup>. Mary Church Terrell was considered as too compromising and insufficiently vindictive in her demands for recognition of the cause of black women in the 1890s.

Many clubwomen of the middle-class – who were often mothers themselves and were deeply interested in children’s welfare issues – actively sought to solve problems of child-care, which constituted an economic and social problem not only for women, but for the entire community. They often often used a moralizing tone and conveyed Victorian ideals about the family.

Members of local clubs and of the NACW posited as central the struggle for “better homes” and child-care solutions because it was through women that the advancement of the race should be ensured and the image of the community was redeemed. Locally, clubwomen went on developing innovative solutions to assist working women in their daily tasks, by founding mothers’ clubs, day-care centers and kindergartens. In many ways, they were forerunners. White clubwomen would indeed be faced with such questions on such a scale several years later.

In the following chapter, I will examine how and why woman suffrage was considered as a determining factor of racial uplift.

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<sup>398</sup> The emphasis was put on “‘individual home life’ and the belief that proper child care was the ‘chosen kingdom of women’”. In Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920*, (Ph.D diss., Kent State University, 1986), 23, as cited in Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 228. See also page 230.

## Chapter 3: Racial Uplift Through Women's Rights

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African American clubwomen labored for racial uplift by placing special emphasis on women's education and on women's roles as mothers and homemakers. In their writings and speeches, they also argued that woman suffrage was paramount to ensure the advancement of the community. At the turn of the century, most women of African descent thought that it was central for women to obtain the franchise to influence politics so as to improve the living conditions of the black community.

Most women of this study had developed a feminist consciousness very early in their lives. Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Fannie Williams as well as many other activists such as Mary Talbert and Adella Hunt Logan fought for woman suffrage. They not only used arguments which were similar to those employed by white suffragists, they also relied on different arguments because of their specific situation as women of color.

As Mary Ryan has pointed out, white suffragists resorted to a complex, sophisticated rhetoric to fight for the vote in the early twentieth century. They played with the idea of woman's natural sphere – insisting for instance that women voters – because of their natural roles as mothers and protectors of children – would efficiently fight against child-labor, and relied on a Victorian rhetoric, “[exploiting] women's Victorian attributes of purity and selflessness”<sup>399</sup>. In order to argue in favor of women's right to vote, progressive women hammered home the idea that women's benevolent and moral nature would help purify not only politics, but society. What arguments did women use to defend women's right to vote?

### 1. Women's Arguments For The Vote

Soon after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, women of color started to voice their support for woman suffrage. Generally speaking, as Nancy Cott has emphasized, they favored it because they believed it would help them efficiently defend their interests, not only in the field of education and in the workplace, but also as a means to defend their sexual integrity – which was critical to defending their image in the nation.

Black women often argued that the ballot would bring within their reach long-sought and not conventionally political aims; it would enable them to preserve their interests as workers, improve their

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<sup>399</sup> Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, xvi. Introduction. “The successful conclusion of the suffrage campaign testified to the sophistication of a movement that was built around woman's sphere and often rhetorically exploited women's Victorian attributes of purity of selflessness.”

chances for education, rally against black male disenfranchisement, and also protect themselves against the bane of sexual exploitation by white men<sup>400</sup>.

## Franchise As A Political Weapon

In the Progressive era, both black and white suffrage advocates “identified the absence of civil and political rights as barriers to the progress of women”, and argued that “female reformers could better solve the problems of their society if they were armed with the ballot”<sup>401</sup>. Many used the lexical field of war and spoke of the ballot as a “weapon” in their articles. For instance, Mary E. Jackson said that the vote “is a fundamental necessity of modern civilization” and that the ballot was “the most effective weapon of defense”<sup>402</sup>. Mary Terrell also spoke of the vote in these terms<sup>403</sup>. Similarly, when women were granted the right to vote in the Chicago municipal elections in 1913, Fannie Williams rejoiced, saying that this “new and important responsibility”, this “power granted to the women of the state of Illinois” was “going to lift colored women to new importance as citizens” and was “an effective weapon with which to combat prejudice and discrimination of all kinds”<sup>404</sup>.

## Woman’s Special Qualities Gave Her Expertise in Domains Such as Child Labor and Education

Many women argued that women should have the right to vote because their sex gave them specific expertise in certain domains deemed “feminine” – such as children’s welfare or education. For example, in 1915 Anna Holland Jones thought that women’s natural qualities made them well-suited for the franchise. Adhering to and promoting traditional visions of gendered roles, she held that since “the home was woman’s kingdom”, woman could act on “child labor laws, inspection of the health of school children, safeguarding the youth in the home, in the school, in the court, in the street, in the place of amusement”, since her “work is the prevention of vice”<sup>405</sup>. According to her, “the century awaited the ‘finer issues’ of woman’s ‘finely touched spirit’”. The same year, Mary Talbert also claimed that the domains in which women would be particularly active and well-suited to act were “prison [and] school

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<sup>400</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 32.

<sup>401</sup> Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “African American Women and the Vote, An Overview”, in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*. Gordon, Ann D. and Bettye Collier-Thomas et al., (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>402</sup> Mary E. Jackson, “The Self-Supporting Woman and the Ballot”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915), 187-188, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 443-444, 444. She added: “The self-supporting woman asks for and will accept nothing less”.

<sup>403</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 310. She spoke of the Nineteenth Amendment as “a weapon of defense”.

<sup>404</sup> Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of her Race*, 102.

<sup>405</sup> Anna Holland Jones, “Woman Suffrage and Reform”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 189-190, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 445-446.

reforms”, questions related to “childhood and adolescence”. These efforts were oriented towards “building [...] an ideal country”<sup>406</sup>.

Like white suffragists, some black women used the idea of gendered spheres to argue in favor of suffrage. For example, Carrie W. Clifford from Ohio believed that the motherly instinct and woman’s “sphere” put women in the best position to fight for future generations. She contended that the ballot would help black women protect future generations. In 1902, Mary Lynch of Livingston College, Salisbury, North Carolina, also believed that women’s “special sphere to which God has divinely called her” was “home”. However, she shared the view that women must get the vote because her natural benevolence would encourage her to support policies for Temperance and push her to vote “against the saloon, the gambling house, the den of vice and all the corruptions of politics” as Mary Britton had maintained in the 1880s<sup>407</sup>. At that time, some black suffragists had demonstrated that women’s role in politics would positively influence society, because they could for instance encourage Temperance – and fight against vices such as gambling and drinking – which they attributed to men. Mary E. Britton explained: “When woman begins to tell the bad men this, they say: ‘Mind you own business’, as you are out of your sphere’. Well, she is minding her own business in her sphere. When woman becomes a voter, law makers will stop spending the public money for cigars and fine drinks”. With woman’s vote, “men shall do right” and “the voting of woman will be the safety of men throughout the nation”<sup>408</sup>.

Likewise, in 1915, other women such as Coralie Cook used motherhood as an argument to voice their support for the franchise. “Mothers are different [and peculiar] people”, and since by being a mother, she [is] the mother of “other children” in her grows “a passion to serve humanity; not race, not class, not sex, but God’s creatures as he has sent them to earth”<sup>409</sup>. This statement highlights that she agreed with Anna Cooper on women’s nurturing qualities and sense of service to humanity. She stressed that: “Disenfranchisement

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<sup>406</sup> Mary Talbert, “Women and Colored Women”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 184, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 465.

<sup>407</sup> Mary A. Lynch, “Social Status and Needs of the Colored Women”, *The United Negro : His Problems and His Progress. Containing the Addresses and Proceedings of the Negro Young People’s Christian and Educational Congress. Held August 6-11, 1902*, eds. I. Garland Penn and J.W.E. Bowen, (Atlanta: D.E. Luther, 1902): 185-187. In *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 454-456, 455-456.

<sup>408</sup> Mary E. Britton (“Meb”), “Woman’s Suffrage. A Potent Agency in Public Reforms”, *American Catholic Tribune* 22 July 1887, as cited in *African American Feminisms*, 402-406, 404. Mary E. Jackson agreed with her in “The Self-Supporting Woman and the Ballot” (1915), as cited in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 443-444. Mary Ellen Britton (1855-1925) was an African American civil rights activists who became a physician in the early 1900s.

<sup>409</sup> Coralie Franklin Cook, “Votes for Mothers”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 184-185, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 423-424.



because of sex [was] curiously like disenfranchisement because of color [...] It handicap[ped] progress” and progress was necessary for the nation, she concluded.

## Purifying Politics and Encouraging World Peace

Moreover, these suffragists asserted that thanks to their special role as mothers, they could – and should — exert their influence in the public sphere to purify national politics. Therefore, they should not be locked in the domestic sphere. In 1894, Fannie Williams believed that women could bring their feminine, “wholesome influence” to American politics. They were expected to act in favor of “Temperance, municipal reform and better education” and according to her,

[i]t is now a good time in woman’s clubs and organizations of all kinds for women to prepare themselves, by the best lessons of citizenship, to exert a wholesome influence in the politics of the future”. “The importance of the suffrage as a means to complete emancipation from the impositions of prejudice should be eagerly taught, and brought home to the conscience of our women everywhere<sup>410</sup>.

In University newspapers, female students also defended this idea. For instance, as one class at Spelman College debated this topic in 1920, one of the students named Juanita Paschal, stated: “Women in Congress would be the means of purifying politics and raising the standard of morality”<sup>411</sup>.

Some women did not share these beliefs. Ida Wells-Barnett – who was nevertheless very active in the struggle for women suffrage, thought that women’s “petty outlook on life” would not necessarily contribute to improve the “political situation” and doubted that woman suffrage would change politics. She confided her doubts to her friend Susan B. Anthony, who was apparently taken aback by such a cynical comment. Yet, her silence let Ida suppose that she did not entirely disagree with her:

Whatever the question up for discussion as to wrongs, injustice, inequality, maladministration of the law, Miss Anthony would always say, ‘Well, now when women get the ballot all that will be changed’. So I asked her one day, ‘Miss Anthony, do you really believe that the millennium is going to come when women get the ballot? Knowing women as I do, and their petty outlook on life, although I believe it is right that they should have the vote, I do not believe that the exercise of the vote is going to change women’s nature nor the political situation.’ Miss Anthony seemed a little bit startled, but she did not make any contention on that point<sup>412</sup>.

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<sup>410</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Women in Politics”, in *Woman’s Era*. November 1894, vol I, no 8, 13.

<sup>411</sup> In a 1920 piece dealing with women in Congress, one could read: “Profane, obscene language [...] would be prohibited by woman’s presence because of men’s natural respect for womanhood and because she would demand it”. This was a response to a subject of discussion given in class. *Spelman Messenger*, ca.1920.

<sup>412</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 230. Ida Wells-Barnett wrote these lines years after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, being certainly influenced by her experience in the struggle for voting rights – when she faced white southern women’s resistance – and the context of the late 1920s when black women were gradually being disenfranchised in the South. See Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn, “African American Women and the Vote” in

Moreover, during the First World War, some students emphasized women's natural love for peace to convince readers that women should have the vote. While World War I was raging in Europe, Carrie W. Clifford – who felt, in 1915, that African American women had already been able to accomplish so much – they ran “kindergartens”, organized “vacation-schools”, opened “playgrounds” and ran “societies for temperance” – “*in spite of not having the ballot*” – was sure that with the ballot – this “sign of power”, this “talisman” – woman would be able to “save her children from war”<sup>413</sup>, that is, to influence politics so as to prevent the United States from taking part in the international conflict. In other words, women would be able to influence politics and promote world peace.

The work accomplished by journalists and correspondents in woman's newspapers such as in the *Woman's Era* in the mid-1890s enabled women of African descent to circulate information about women's rights in the entire country. From 1894 to 1915, journalists supporting woman's franchise chronicled the acquisition of suffrage by women in foreign countries and some Territories in America, emphasizing their progressiveness. In 1892, Gertrude Mossell presented Iceland and the Wyoming Territory as examples to follow<sup>414</sup>. Some suffragists also emphasized that a number of Western States had already granted women the right to vote and that it yielded positive results. While chronicling the first vote in Colorado in the *Woman's Era* of December 1894, Elizabeth Piper Ensley praised the adoption of such measures<sup>415</sup>. In 1912, Adella Logan used the same argument, declaring that “in Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho and Utah, women have for year had full suffrage, and none of the evils that the hysterical anti-suffragists predict have come upon those vigorous Western commonwealths” and underlining that the beneficial influence of women was visible there: “Their schools are better, their prisons less full, and civic affairs” are in better conditions than

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*African American Women and the Vote: 1837-1965*, 19. “In spite of [their] efforts to implement their political rights, black women in the South were disenfranchised in less than a decade after the Nineteenth Amendment enfranchised them in 1920”.

<sup>413</sup> Carrie W. Clifford, “Votes for Children”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 185, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 421.

<sup>414</sup> Gertrude Mossell, “Our Woman's and Children's Department [...] Woman Suffrage in Iceland”, *Indianapolis World* 9 July 1892, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 461.

<sup>415</sup> Elizabeth Piper Ensley, “Election Day”, *Woman's Era* 1 (9) (December 1894), 17-18, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol. VI, 426-427.

where women don't have the vote<sup>416</sup>. She also claimed that "where [woman] has the ballot she is reported as using it for the uplift of society and for the advancement of the State"<sup>417</sup>.

Like white suffragists, women of color argued that several Founding Documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were unquestionable evidence that black Americans, regardless of sex or race, should have the right to vote. For example, in an article published in 1872, Mary Olney Brown relied on the Fifteenth Amendment to demonstrate that women should be legally granted the right to vote, pointing out that it "was intended to be given to colored women as well as to colored men" because the only terms used were "citizens" – which meant "all citizens of whatever race, color or sex". As a result, she called any person interested in fighting this battle to "take the lead" on this issue<sup>418</sup>.

This argument was used again in the early 1900s. In "Woman Suffrage" (1905), Adella Hunt Logan claimed that franchise was a constitutional right as well. She thought that since the Declaration of Independence and the National Constitution posited as central that a country was to be ruled with the consent of the governed: "All government derive their just powers from the consent of the governed", this right was violated so long as women were denied the right to vote, since the latter were prevented from giving their consent.

Moreover, Logan argued that woman's rights were twice violated because women were denied the opportunity to give their "consent" about the passage of a law for example but were nevertheless required to abide by them. She said: "Let a woman violate the law, her sex in no measure annuls the law's grip on her"<sup>419</sup>. She also stressed that, living in a country where all laws were "man-made", American women were "punished by man-made laws"<sup>420</sup>. According to Logan, this was particularly blatant as regards women's property rights since the wife often had "no redress before the law" and the argument according to which women were represented by their husbands was falsity<sup>421</sup>. She repeated this idea in her article "Colored Women as Voters", quoting Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to express her hope that

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<sup>416</sup> Adella Hunt Logan, "Woman Suffrage", *The Colored American Magazine* (September 1905): 487-489, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol. VI, 449-451, 450. Logan reiterated this view in a 1912 article, giving the examples of Washington, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho.

<sup>417</sup> Adella Hunt Logan, "Colored Women as Voters", *The Crisis, Woman's Suffrage Number*, 4 (5) (September 1912): 242-243.

<sup>418</sup> Mary Olney Brown, "The Right of Colored Women to Vote", *New National Era* 24 October 1872, in *African American Feminisms*, 407- 408, 408.

<sup>419</sup> Adella Hunt Logan, "Woman Suffrage", 449.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid. She added that reading "the Declaration of Independence and the National Constitution at least once a year" was "helpful to one's political thought and strengthening to one's patriotism".

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 450.

one day, “The United States shall indeed have a government of the people, for the people and by the people – even including the colored people”<sup>422</sup>.

Adella Logan compared the denial of woman’s franchise by the United States in the 1910s to the denial of colonists’ rights by Britain in the Eighteenth century. Drawing a parallel between British “tyranny” of “taxation without representation” the Founding Fathers had rebelled against and women who paid taxes but were denied franchise, she castigated the hypocrisy of the arguments used to prevent women from voting.

These arguments were widely used by white suffragists. Yet black activists also developed another discourse, arguing that woman suffrage would finally enable African Americans to fight against racial discrimination and violence, promote education, protect women of color from sexual violence and finally make them as citizens.

## **2. Special Issues for Black Female Voters**

Soon after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, black women got involved in the fight for woman suffrage and kept on fighting for it until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. In the 1910s, when this issue was more and more widely discussed, they voiced their support in the press. A special issue in *The Crisis* published in the summer of 1915 is informative of the way many women of African descent envisaged and fought for women’s rights. Black suffragists strategically linked the question of franchise with women’s and racial progress. For them, securing the vote was a key factor to ensure the progress of the community in America in the future. They argued that they needed – more than white women – to be represented in order to pursue their main goals: racial uplift, bring a feminine influence in politics to defend and encourage black education, which was still denied, in many areas of the South in particular.

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<sup>422</sup> Adella Hunt Logan, “Colored Women as Voters”, *The Crisis, Woman’s Suffrage Number 4* (5) (September 1912): 242-243, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 452-453, 453. On 19 November 1863, Abraham Lincoln said: “It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth”.

## Promoting Education, Defending Womanhood and Black Women's Image

They argued that obtaining the right to vote would enable women of color to promote and defend African Americans' access to education, which was heavily threatened in some areas of the South. Black schools were allotted very limited fundings and racial discrimination hampered many black students from pursuing an education. Adella Hunt Logan claimed that without the vote, women had "no voice in educational legislation, and no power to see that her children secure their share of public-school funds"<sup>423</sup>.

The struggle for woman suffrage was inextricably intertwined with the question of womanhood. Many activists such as Nannie Helen Burroughs believed that obtaining franchise would help black women defend their self-image. She argued in favor of the vote, saying that "when the ballot is put into the hands of the American woman the world is going to get a correct estimate of the Negro woman". Underscoring the "great moral and spiritual [and economic] asset" black women represented for the country<sup>424</sup>, she claimed that: "she need[ed] the ballot, to reckon with men who place no value upon her virtue, and to mold healthy sentiment in favor of her own protection", meaning that the vote would finally enable women to protect their sexual integrity, expose sexual oppression and finally prove their morality to the nation<sup>425</sup>. The ballot would ensure the defense of black women's national image.

## Fighting Against Racial Violence and Disenfranchisement

Black activists very early argued that suffrage would enable women – who were naturally moral and benevolent – to combat racial violence. Frances Harper said in 1894 that women were those who could "mold" the character of the United States thanks to their "aristocracy of character" and that men were not as naturally inclined to do this as women. This impacted the nation because the evils which threatened it – the "lawless and brutal cowardice that lynches, burns, and tortures your own countrymen" – had to be prevented by women<sup>426</sup>.

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<sup>423</sup> Adella Hunt Logan, "Colored Women as Voters", *The Crisis* (September 1912): 242-243, 242, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 452.

<sup>424</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, "Black Women and Reform", *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 187, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 410.

<sup>425</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, as cited in Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 32.

<sup>426</sup> Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "Woman's Political Future", *The World's Congress of Representative Women*, Ed. May Wright Sewall, (Chicago: Rand, Mc Nally and Co., 1894): 433-438, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 434-439, 435. Harper used her rich experience to put the question in international

Some black women advocated woman franchise by emphasizing their Americanness. A few years after the Civil War, in an address delivered at the NAWS Convention in Chicago in 1869, Naomi Talbert argued that since she was “an American, because here [she] was born”, she should have the right to vote and added that she was “true, because [she] love[d] the dear old flag”, thus pointing out that women of color should be granted franchise because they were loyal American citizens – contrary to many white Southerners who had recently betrayed the Union<sup>427</sup>.

Although Margaret Murray Washington admitted that she had not been an early supporter of woman suffrage: “Personally, woman suffrage has never kept me awake at night”, she changed her mind and finally thought that black American women should be able to vote and finally be considered as first-class citizens. She pointed out: “I am sure before this country is able to take its place amongst the great democratic nations of the earth it has got to come to the place where it is willing to trust its citizens, black as well as white, women as well as men, to be loyal to their Government, to be willing to leave the carrying out of governmental offices to the intelligent part of the citizenship”<sup>428</sup>.

After World War I, some black women emphasized blacks’ Americanness and their sense of patriotism to argue in favor of woman suffrage. For example, in “Suffrage and Our Women” (June 1920), Willie May King underlined African Americans’s loyalty to the nation: “We are American citizens and Negro women as American citizens are entitled to vote. They have proven themselves as loyal and as true to their country as any other women”. She argued that, like white women, women of color had largely contributed to the war effort during the First World War, serving as nurses, going “across the seas and help[ing] to lighten the burden of our soldiers”, “invest[ing] in thrift stamps and liberty bonds” and “sacrific[ing] sons and husbands on the blood-soaked fields of France”<sup>429</sup>. For her, “the story of the loyalty,

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perspective, speaking about Australia, 438. She also added: “What we need today is not simply more voters, but better voters”.

<sup>427</sup> Naomi Talbert, “A Colored Woman’s Voice [Delivered at 1869 NWSA Convention in Chicago],” *The Revolution* 3 (4 March 1869): 139, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 466. She also emphasized the fact that she was “a helpmate for man”. Only four years after the end of the sectional conflict, some white Southerners were still denied their voting rights for having sided with the Confederacy. Because she opposed white Southerners’ betrayal to the nation to black Americans’ loyalty, this argument was a clever demonstration of blacks’ patriotism and right to have civil rights.

<sup>428</sup> Margaret Murray Washington, “Club Work Among Negro Women”, in J.L. Nichols and William Croghan, eds., *Progress of a Race*, rev. ed. (Naperville, Illinois: J.L. Nichols Co. 1929): 178, 182, 192-195, 209, as cited in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 446.

<sup>429</sup> Willie May King, “Suffrage and Our Women”, *The Competitor* 1 (5) (June 1920): 60-61, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 447-448, 447. King was a graduate of the 1920 class at Wilberforce University, in Ohio.



patriotism, suffering and sacrifice made by our women previous to and during the world war” proved it<sup>430</sup>.

Southern States instituted laws which deprived black men of the right to vote between 1890 and 1906 by establishing the poll tax, literacy tests, or the grandfather clause<sup>431</sup>. In this context, what did the hope of woman suffrage represent for these women of color? While they had argued for woman suffrage and gender equality in the 1870s – when black men had obtained the right to vote through the Fifteenth Amendment – the situation was remarkably distinct in the 1900s, since black men were disenfranchised in the South. As a result, the arguments they used were different.

Most women inveighed against the disenfranchisement of African American men in their writings. In 1906, Mary Terrell raised people’s awareness about the South’s growing political influence on racial views – white supremacy – in the nation. She denounced the propagation of Jim Crow streetcars and the disenfranchisement of black men even in Border States: “So pernicious has been the influence of the far South that a border State like Virginia, only a stone’s throw from the district in which the national capital is located, has disfranchised colored men”. Terrell reminded northern citizens that acquiescing to disenfranchisement in the South was an act of national treason:

Let me beseech the men of the North, who have it in their power to redress the wrongs of which their disfranchised brothers so unjustly complain to be as untiring and uncompromising in their efforts to propagate those principles in which they and fathers have always professed to believe as are the advocates of oppression in supporting their unhappy cause. [...] I insist that Northern Neutrality on Southern Disfranchisement is treason- treason to the Constitution of the United States- treason to the principles of liberty, justice and equality before the law of every human being for which the Pilgrim Fathers fought- in short, treason to the very principles upon which this government was built<sup>432</sup>.

Moreover, black intellectuals such as Fannie Williams, Ida B. Wells, Du Bois and Charlotte Hawkins Brown particularly wanted to obtain woman suffrage because they knew that it would enable black men to vote again in the South since white Southerners would have more difficulty preventing black men *and women* from voting if all women obtained the right to vote<sup>433</sup>. As Glenda Gilmore has shown, these leaders thought that “if black women could not be driven away from the polls, perhaps their presence would open space for black men”

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<sup>430</sup> Willie May King, “Suffrage and Our Women”.

<sup>431</sup> Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, 645. The grandfather clause was invalidated by the Supreme Court in 1915 on the ground that it violated the Fifteenth Amendment.

<sup>432</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Remarks Made at Cooper Institute, Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 1906”. *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 178.

<sup>433</sup> White Southerners worried that woman suffrage would enable black women to “outvote white women” in the South and also that it would “reopen national discussions about black men’s voting rights”. See Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of her Race*, 115-116.

while others “predicted that woman suffrage would in fact ease voting restrictions on black men”. As Gilmore has pointed out, Charlotte Brown – a Southerner who was particularly active in North Carolina – believed that “African Americans might use woman suffrage as an entering wedge to regain a place in electoral politics”<sup>434</sup>. Ida Wells-Barnett – who was born a Southerner who lived in Chicago – supported woman suffrage because she thought that it was a way to protect African American men’s franchise. She was convinced that black men should be elected at the Head of the City Council and did everything in her power to help them in this direction. She wrote: “I urged each one of the workers to go back and tell the women that we wanted them to register so that they could help put a colored man in the city Council”<sup>435</sup>. For her, in the early 1910s, female voting rights was a means of ensuring black men’s political weight. As Lisa Materson has pointed out, after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, she got involved in the Republican party and devoted her energy to demand the end of segregation in the federal government and “to reduce congressional representation from those states that disenfranchised residents”<sup>436</sup>, therefore showing her solidarity with black Southerners.

Conscious that they had more political rights than most Southerners, northern activists such as Fannie Barrier Williams and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis also dedicated much energy to defend the rights of black Southerners. In the 1910s, Williams was in charge of the publicity at the Colored Women’s Hughes Republican headquarters in Chicago and actively worked with Davis. Lisa Materson has explained in *For the Freedom of her Race* that Northerners believed that they had a special responsibility towards their southern brothers and sisters. Both pressured their political party to combat the policies of southern Democrats. Materson has pointed out that both “Davis and Williams’s experiences further focused on the southern orientation of northern women’s campaigning. Their belief in women’s responsibility to protect the race buoyed their determination to do battle with the profound power of southern white Democrats in the arena of national party politics”<sup>437</sup>.

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<sup>434</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 211-213.

<sup>435</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 346. She wanted a black man to serve as alderman. Mr Oscar DePriest won the election and became Chicago’s first black alderman in 1915.

<sup>436</sup> Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 118.

<sup>437</sup> Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race*, 102. Materson has explained that Fannie Barrier Williams and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis were both northern women and residents of Chicago who had taught in the South in the 1870s as missionary teachers. Contrary to many other women, “Neither had come of age in the South or had made the difficult decision to leave all that they knew for the unknown challenges of Chicago. Still, surely they had encountered the rabid white supremacy that was rampant in the 1870s and 1880s during their temporary teaching assignments.”

## Black Opponents to Women's Franchise: Arguments and Responses

Not all African Americans favored women's suffrage. Some opponents relegated women to their prescribed "natural" sphere: the home. Contrary to Frederick Douglass who had ardently championed woman suffrage, some African American men such as Kelly Miller unsurprisingly opposed women's suffrage<sup>438</sup>. In "The Risk of Woman Suffrage" (1915), Kelly Miller expounded very traditional ideas about women, home and gender roles. For him, it was clear that "the human race [was] divided horizontally by age, vertically by sex and diagonally by race.". Arguing that women should remain in the private, domestic sphere because their natural roles was to bear and raise children, he thought men's natural place was the public sphere. According to him, it "represented [...] the ideal relation between the sexes" and woman suffrage would not only threaten this fragile balance, but it would "seriously jeopardize" the existing harmonious relationship between men and women.

Each individual passes from the minor to the adult stage in course of a life time; the cleavage of race is subject to indefinite modification through environment and intermingling of blood; but sex is the one fixed and unalterable separatrix of mankind. The function of sex in human economy is clearly defined and well understood. The bearing and rearing of the young constitute the chief duty and responsibility of the female, and this task absorbs her highest energies during the most energetic period of her life. The family constitutes the fundamental social unit. Woman's sphere of activity falls mainly within while man's field of action lies largely without the domestic circle. This represents the traditional and, presumably, the ideal relation between the sexes. It has the sanction of divine authority and the test of human experience. Woman suffrage could not possibly enhance the harmoniousness of this relationship, but might seriously jeopardize it.<sup>439</sup>

Moreover, he thought that woman was not physically fit for public roles, since "[she] is physically weaker than man"<sup>440</sup>. More importantly, he thought that women did not possess the necessary qualities for public life: "She lacks the sharp sense of public justice and the common good, if they seem to run counter to her personal feeling and interest. She is far superior to man in purely personal and private virtue, but is his inferior in public qualities and character". In brief, Miller not only argued that a woman's place was in the private sphere, his goal was also to prove that women were unfit for politics. As a result, he was opposed to suffrage for women because he disapproved of: "the logical sequence of [it that is] office-

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<sup>438</sup> Kelly Miller (1863-1939) was a well-known black intellectual, writer and professor of Mathematics and Sociology. He worked at Howard University for years.

<sup>439</sup> Miller, Kelly, "The Risk of Woman Suffrage", November 1915. [http://www.math.buffalo.edu/mad/special/miller\\_kelley.html](http://www.math.buffalo.edu/mad/special/miller_kelley.html). He also used a religious argument to defend the idea that no change should shake up this natural state of things: "What God has made different man strives in vain to make identical.". This very conservative man reasoned in terms of "norms", considering for instance that the status of "widows and [...] spinsters" was abnormal. In his mind, normality for women rested in marriage. He wrote: "There may be some argument for suffrage for unfortunate females, such as widows and hopeless spinsters, but such status is not contemplated as a normal social relation".

<sup>440</sup> "She is incapable of competing with him in the stern and strenuous activities of public and practical life".

holding”. He stressed that “Female suffrage [would] never reach its full fruition until fully one-half of all public offices, legislative, judicial and executive, local and national, are filled by women” and asked if the “the public mind [was] ready for this risky innovation”. When Kelly Miller discussed the fact that female suffrage had been tried before, he disproved suffragists’ arguments, contending that the benefits of franchise were either barely palpable, or non-existent: “Female suffrage has been tried in twelve states of the Union, but so far no genuine public benefit has resulted therefrom, nor has the lot of woman been ameliorated more rapidly than in other states under exclusive male suffrage”<sup>441</sup>.

In his mind, the answer was simple: “Suffrage is not a natural right, like life and liberty. The common sense of mankind has always limited it by age, sex, possession, attainment and moral character” and as a result, things should remain the way they were. Miller was not the first or the only man to voice such traditional ideas, many other men and women of color adhered to such conservative views.

Some female students at Spelman College opposed women’s franchise because they thought that women’s intervention in politics would not only threaten their femininity but also put their roles as dutiful mothers at risk. For example, one of them who feared that these women should start dressing “in mannish garb”, wrote: “It is evident that a woman desirous of leaving her home, taking the reins of government in her own hand, has lost or depreciated this instinct divinely her own or else endeavors to extinguish the flame of her vitality or suppress its evolution”. She did not understand why women should want to shirk their duties as mothers: “Is she ashamed of her womanhood, her motherhood? Her sphere of existence? Is she tired of her sacred duty? Or would she rather take on masculine qualities, functions, and dispositions, made her sex extinct? If so, she hopes to improve on the world’s creation” and accused suffragists of risking being unworthy mothers, ready to abandon their home and children: “What is more abominable than a law-making mother with a law-breaking child?”. She remarked: “As a civilized nation we pretend to elevate woman and make home the earthly Garden of Eden, and yet some twentieth century reformer hopes to tear it down by pulling both man and wife out of the home, leaving the children to come up as voluntary alfalfa hay of the middle west”<sup>442</sup>.

Not all women shared such extreme views. Other women of color such as Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins were in favor of limited franchise for women and argued that they should

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<sup>441</sup> Kelly Miller was here referring to the States which had allowed women’s vote such as Wyoming (1890), Colorado (1893), Utah and Idaho (1896), Washington (1910), California (1911), Arizona, Kansas, Oregon (1912), Montana and Nevada (1914).

<sup>442</sup> “Extemporaneous Debate in H.S. Civics Class”, *Spelman Messenger*. ca. 1920.

have the right to vote on specific questions which were closely associated to woman's traditional sphere. Hopkins defended the view in 1900: "It seems to us that the franchise in its fullest sense is not desirable [...] We believe it to be a good thing if limited in some degree", specifying: "It is right that women vote on such questions as property rights and rights in her children, and in all that pertains to the public school". Moreover, she supported Miller's opinion that "physically women are not fitted for the politician's life". In her mind, women's natural role was to be with children, thus she mainly objected to woman suffrage because it would distract woman from her sacred "sphere" and make her step down from her pedestal: "Morally, we should deplore seeing woman *fall from her honorable position* as a wife and mother to that of the common ward heeler hustling for the crumbs meted out to the 'faithful' of any party in the way of appointments to office"<sup>443</sup>. In brief, women should not agree or even less desire to be perverted by politics.

Faced with such traditional conceptions about gender roles, female black suffragists voiced their disapproval and debunked these arguments. Female intellectuals very early disparaged the arguments which posited that suffrage would make women less feminine. For example, in 1894, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin spoke about "the constantly repeated argument and fear that through suffrage woman will lose her womanliness". To counter these attacks, she pushed her readers to dismiss such arguments and argued that it was "impossible for woman to turn back [...] They are bound to march on" and advised activists to let them be "patient and calm – not unduly excited and aggressive over these small attacks; let them treat them as the strong womanly treat all pin pricks"<sup>444</sup>.

A fervent supporter of women's suffrage, in "The Justice of Woman Suffrage" (1912), Mary Terrell was stunned by the fact that African Americans could actually oppose women's suffrage. For her, such positions were preposterous: "It is queer and curious enough to hear an intelligent colored woman argue against granting suffrage to her sex, but for an intelligent colored man to oppose woman suffrage is the most preposterous and ridiculous thing in the world"<sup>445</sup>.

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<sup>443</sup> Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, "There is Quite a Ripple [...] Just Now in favor of Woman Suffrage", Woman's Department, *The Colored American Magazine* (July 1900): 122-123, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 440.

<sup>444</sup> Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, "Woman's Place", *Woman's Era* 1 (6) (September 1894): 8, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 462. Itaclic mine.

<sup>445</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "The Justice of Woman Suffrage", *The Crisis* 4 (Sept 1912): 243-245, as cited in the *Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 64-67.

In the same article, she targeted black men more specifically, pointing out that she could not comprehend how African American men – who constantly fell victims to racial discrimination in their country and were disenfranchised in the South – could actually support discriminatory practices against any other group. She explained that by denying women the right to vote on account of sex, black men were discriminating women of their own group – who had previously helped them secure their rights – and were therefore guilty of the same sin as whites – who denied them the franchise on account of color: “What could be more absurd than to see one group of human beings who are denied rights which they are trying to secure for themselves working to prevent another group from obtaining the same rights?”<sup>446</sup>. Terrell took the same stance in 1915: “Nothing could be more inconsistent than that colored people should use their influence against granting the ballot to women if they believe that colored men should enjoy this right which citizenship confers”<sup>447</sup>. Terrell wished that all men of African descent come to their senses and support woman suffrage. Other suffragists such as Adella Hunt Logan thought that women should not be denied franchise simply because “many” women opposed it and wrote: “It is claimed by some that women do not want to vote. Many do not. A great many do. The elective franchise has not been made compulsory for men, neither should it be for women”<sup>448</sup>.

In her autobiography published 20 years after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Mary Terrell argued black women needed suffrage more ardently than white women because they had to defend their rights and those of the community: “However much the white women of the country need suffrage, for many reasons which will immediately occur to you, colored women need it more”<sup>449</sup>. Some African American women such as Mary Talbert argued, in “Women and Colored Women” (1915), that women of color should obtain the right to vote because they had acquired what she called: “powers of observation and judgment” – wider expertise than any other group of women in America, as a result of being discriminated against and denied their rights for so long. Their experience of oppression made

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid., Terrell wrote: “If I were a colored man, and were unfortunate enough not to grasp the absurdity of opposing suffrage because of the sex of a human being, I should at least be consistent enough never to raise my voice against those who have disfranchised my brothers and myself on account of race. However, the intelligent colored man who opposes woman suffrage is very rare, indeed.”

<sup>447</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Woman Suffrage and the 15th Amendment”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 191, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 467. “What could be more absurd and ridiculous than that one group of individuals who are trying to throw off the yoke of oppression themselves [...], should favor laws and customs which impede the progress of another unfortunate group and hinder them in every conceivable way”.

<sup>448</sup> Adella Logan, “Women Suffrage”, 450.

<sup>449</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 310.



them the best-suited group of American women to put an end to any kind of discrimination and to “build an ideal country”.

It should not be necessary to struggle forever against popular prejudice, and with us as colored women, this struggle becomes two-fold, first because we are women and second, *because we are colored women*. Although some resistance is experienced in portions of our country against the ballot for women, I firmly believe that enlightened men are now numerous enough everywhere to encourage this just privilege of the ballot for women, ignoring prejudice of all kinds [...] By her peculiar position the colored woman has gained *clear powers of observation and judgment* - exactly the sort of powers which are today peculiarly necessary to the building of an ideal country<sup>450</sup>.

In the 1910s, several women castigated black men’s behavior in politics. In 1915, Nannie Helen Burroughs accused male voters of having “misused the ballot” since 1870. She argued that women needed the ballot to “get back, by the wise *use* of it, what the Negro man has lost by the *misuse* of it [...] Because the black man does not know the value of the ballot, and has bartered and sold his most valuable possession, it is no evidence that the Negro woman will do the same”<sup>451</sup>. Like Burroughs, Ida Wells-Barnett condemned African American men’s attitudes in politics in her memoir, in the late 1920s. According to her, some of them little valued franchise since they accepted to “sell” their votes to white men. She wrote that in the 1910s – at a time women were still denied the franchise – that she was “tired of having white men come out in the Second Ward [in Chicago] just before or on election day and buy up the votes of Negroes who had no higher conception of the ballot than to make it a question of barter and sale”<sup>452</sup>. When women were *only* granted municipal franchise in Chicago, as a feminist and suffragist, she was disheartened by this situation.

## **Influences and Strategies Adopted by African American Women**

Most women of this study praised early feminists and abolitionists such as Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Frances Harper. All of the four main women in this study deeply admired Susan B. Anthony in particular and spoke about her in their writings. For example, in 1891-1892, Cooper praised women models such as Susan B. Anthony and Anna Howard Shaw, whom, she thought, were eminently liberal, tolerant and benevolent, contrary to white southern “ladies” who had never left their forefathers’ estates in

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<sup>450</sup> Mary Talbert, “Women and Colored Women”, August 1915. *The Crisis*.

<sup>451</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, “Black Women and Reform”, *The Crisis, Votes for Women Issue* 10 (4) (August 1915): 187, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 410. Italics hers. Also cited in Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race*, 103. Since African American men had lost the right to vote because of Jim Crow laws in the South, this argument applied only to black northern men, who still had the right to vote.

<sup>452</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 350. She added: “I had always felt that the man who bought votes was just as much to be condemned as the man who sold them”.

the South and were therefore “provincial”<sup>453</sup>. Mary Terrell also forged numerous friendships with progressive white women – including Reverend Anna Shaw and Susan Anthony. She personally met Susan Anthony when she was invited to speak in Rochester, New York and recalled years later that her visit had been a “rare and delightful experience”<sup>454</sup>. Likewise, Fannie Barrier Williams also deeply admired Susan B. Anthony for her fight for racial and gender equality. When she died in March 1906 at the age of 86, Fannie Williams paid a vibrant tribute to this feminist figure<sup>455</sup>. Ida Wells-Barnett held Susan B. Anthony in high esteem as well and considered her as a mentor. Grateful for her supervision and guidance, she praised this motherly figure whom she portrayed as an open-minded, tolerant and curious woman<sup>456</sup>.

Mary Church Terrell is undoubtedly the most famous suffragist of this group of women. From an early age, she asserted that she had always been convinced that women should have the right to vote. She wrote in her autobiography: “I can not recall a period in my life, since I heard the subject discussed for the first time as a very young girl, that I did not believe in woman suffrage with all my heart”<sup>457</sup>. She explained that naturally, as a young woman, she could not imagine marrying a man who opposed woman suffrage. She said that when she publicly endorsed franchise before her marriage in 1891, her suitor Robert Terrell “laughingly [warned her] that [she] had ruined [her] chances for getting a husband” and she replied to him that she “would never be silly enough to marry a man who did not believe a woman had a right to help administer the affairs of the Government under which she lived”<sup>458</sup>. Nevertheless, as Mary Terrell testified in her writing, supporting woman’s suffrage was not an

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<sup>453</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 1891-1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 89. “Susan B. Anthony and Anna Shaw are evidently too noble to be held in thrall by the provincialisms of women who seem never to have breathed the atmosphere beyond the confines of their grandfathers’ plantations. It is only from the broad plateau of light and love that one can see the petty prejudice and narrow priggishness in their true perspective; and it is on this high ground, as I sincerely believe, these two grand women stand”.

<sup>454</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, Chapter 16, 144-145. “Miss Anthony once invited me to speak in Rochester, New York, where she and her sister Mary lived, and entertained me in her home. If my espousal of the cause of suffrage in the early days had done nothing but make such a rare and delightful experience possible and bring me into intimate relationship with Susan B. Anthony, I would have felt that I had been more than fully repaid for taking an unpopular stand. During this visit, Miss Anthony sent her biography which had been written by Mrs. Ida Husted Harper to my little daughter, Phyllis, in which she had also written a sentiment expressing the hope that the little girl would follow in the footsteps of her mother.”.

<sup>455</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Eulogy of Susan B. Anthony”, April 1906, in *The New Woman of Color*, 137.

<sup>456</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 230. “She gave me rather the impression of a woman who was eager to hear all sides of any question”.

<sup>457</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 144. Another time, she explained that she had always been fervently in favor of women’s franchise: “Since I had believed in and advocated woman suffrage all my life, I was happy in the prospect of being able to practice what I preached”, 309.

<sup>458</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 144. “When I told [Mr. Terrell before his proposal] that I had stood up in Albaugh’s Theatre and had publicly taken a stand for woman suffrage, he laughingly replied that I had ruined my chances for getting a husband. I told him that I would never be silly enough to marry a man who did not believe a woman had a right to help administer the affairs of the Government under which she lived. Mr. Terrell, however, believed ardently in woman suffrage when few men took that stand”.

easy task to do during the 1890s: “In the early 1890s it required a great deal of courage for a woman publicly to acknowledge before an audience that she believed in suffrage for her sex when she knew the majority did not”, stressing that she had to “force [her]self to stand up, although it was hard for [her] to do so”<sup>459</sup>.

In the late 1930s, while penning her autobiography, almost 20 years after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, she rejoiced in having participated in this great adventure because in addition to being a noble and just cause, it had enabled her to work closely with many activists: “I am glad I always believed in this great cause, not only because it gives me satisfaction to know that I was on the right side of the question when it was most unpopular to advocate it, but because it was the means of bringing me into direct, personal contact with some of the brainiest and finest women in the country.”<sup>460</sup>.

As Wanda Hendricks has shown, Ida Wells and Fannie Barrier Williams, though they were Chicagoans, did not see eye to eye on the question of franchise. While Williams advocated self-help, access to education and tended to downplay the importance of franchise for African Americans at a time when most men had been disenfranchised in the South because of Jim Crow laws, Ida Wells-Barnett ceaselessly fought against lynching and championed the right to vote to end racial violence<sup>461</sup>. When women were on the verge of getting the right to vote for municipal elections in 1913, she tried to arouse women’s interest in the city: “The women who joined were extremely interested when I showed them that we could use our vote on the advantage of ourselves and our race”<sup>462</sup>. Her comrades were nevertheless often disheartened by the existing ambient sexism: “The women at first were very much discouraged. they said that the man jeered at them and told them they ought to be at home taking care of the babies. Others insisted that the women were trying to take the place

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 145, Chapter 16. She must have thought of suffragists of the NWP with whom she worked to obtain franchise.

<sup>461</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossings the Borders*, 144. At a church in Evanston, Illinois, Fannie Barrier Williams argued that “the much talked of right to vote is not nearly as important as the right to be educated”. In the *Record-Herald*, she noted that the disenfranchisement of black men had “been a great blessing in disguise; since he [was] not permitted to vote, he [was] acquiring land and money”. As Hendricks underlines, Wells had “built her career around highlighting the atrocity of lynching, and believed that the franchise was an essential key to ending the violence”, consequently, Wells “found little reason to hide her disgust” towards what she thought were Fannie Barrier Williams’s accommodationist views.

<sup>462</sup> Ida B. Wells was a member of the Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago and of the Woman’s Suffrage Club since she had settled in Chicago. Wells established the Alpha Suffrage Club in January 1913 with the “assistance of Belle Squire, a white woman who was a member of the No-Vote-No-Tax League”, as Wanda Hendricks has explained in *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 158. See Wells, *Crusade*, 365. “I had been a member of the Women’s Suffrage Association all during my residency in Illinois, but somehow I had not been able to get very much interest among our club women [...] When I saw that we were likely to have a restricted suffrage, and that the white women of the organization were working like beavers to bring it about, I made another effort to get our women interested”. She remembered that “it was about this time [1914] that the Illinois legislature was considering the question of enfranchising the women voters of the State”.

of men and wear the trousers”<sup>463</sup>. Overall, in her memoir, Wells-Barnett stressed that she was repeatedly disappointed in the way politics were conducted<sup>464</sup>. Fannie Williams was also active in the fight for woman suffrage. In 1913, when municipal franchise was granted to women in Chicago, she rejoiced in what she thought it was a harbinger of further progress and hoped to see women seize this opportunity to solve the community’s problems:

This splendid extension of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments [women’s municipal franchise] will make many things possible and open many avenues of progress that have heretofore been closed to colored women. It is the hope of the leaders of the race that these new citizens will cultivate whatever is best in heart and mind that will enable them to meet the common tasks of life, as well as the higher responsibilities, with confidence and hope<sup>465</sup>.

Mary Terrell believed that it was imperative to work across racial barriers to obtain suffrage. During the 1910s, at the height of the struggle for woman suffrage, the energetic and dynamic Terrell ceaselessly fought for women’s rights with both black and white suffragists. Praising the work of Susan B. Anthony, she indeed wished to bring white and black women together in the fight for the vote. She actively worked with the National Woman’s Party (NWP), led by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns<sup>466</sup>, alongside white women, picketing the White House for woman suffrage<sup>467</sup> and did not hesitate to bring her daughter Phyllis – who was then barely 20 – with her on picketing actions or parades in the freezing weather of Washington D.C..<sup>468</sup> Although she regularly picketed for the NWP, she was not among the

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<sup>463</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 346.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 351 and 353. The Alpha Suffrage Club endorsed the candidacy of “Mr. William Hale Thompson for Mayor”, yet Wells’s hopes were wronged after he did not honor his promises.

<sup>465</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Colored Women of Chicago”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 69.

<sup>466</sup> The National Woman’s Party was founded by Lucy Burns in 1913. Lucy Burns (1879-1966) was a native of Brooklyn who was raised into a well-off family – her father being a banker. Graduating from Vassar, Burns became a teacher. In the late 1900s and early 1910s, she met Alice Paul in the United Kingdom and discovered the methods of the British suffragettes. In 1912, she returned to the United States and founded the NWP. The goal of the NWP was to obtain franchise with drastic methods Lucy Burns had learnt while fighting for suffrage in the United Kingdom. The NWP broke from the NAWSA, which resorted to less virulent ones and opposed President Woodrow Wilson’s policies because it believed that Wilson was against women’s rights. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns organized the Women’s Suffrage March of 1913 together. Burns and Alice Paul opposed the NAWSA, led by Susan B. Anthony, and then led by Carrie Chapman Catt and by Anna Howard Shaw. Lucy Burns withdrew from political life after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified.

<sup>467</sup> The women picketing before the White House were called the “Silent Sentinels”. See Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, Chapter 2. Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 316-317. Mary Church Terrell had the honor of receiving a pin from the National Woman’s Party on 20 January 1921: “On February 18, 1921, my daughter, Phyllis, and myself were each presented a pin at the Washington Hotel by the National Woman’s Party because we helped picket the White House as a protest against the disfranchisement of women. There is no doubt that this gesture on the part of determined women called attention to the injustice perpetrated upon them by denying them the suffrage and hastened the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment the year before”.

<sup>468</sup> Phyllis was born in 1898, she was therefore in her teens in the early 1910s and her mother was in her mid-fifties.

women who were arrested in 1917 and taken to Occoquan because she had not been able to come on that very day.<sup>469</sup>

Mary Church Terrell's affluence, international fame, long career in the nation's capital and compromising style enabled her to form numerous friendships with "some of the brainiest and finest women in the country". Providing the long list of prominent white Americans she had befriended in her autobiography, she said that she was "well-acquainted with Mrs. May Wright Sewall, at one time President of the National Council of Women" and "Rev. Anna Howard Shaw, one of the first regularly ordained woman ministers and also one of Miss Anthony's co-workers; with Alice Stone Blackwell and with Henry Blackwell, her father, who was the husband of Lucy Stone". She also mentioned that "for years [...she] enjoyed the friendship of Harriet Stanton Blatch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter"<sup>470</sup>, along with "Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, one of the twelve foremost women in the United States, has demonstrated her freedom from race prejudice and her friendship for me over and over again"<sup>471</sup>.

Terrell was invited several times to deliver addresses at the meetings of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), of which she was a member. In her 1904 address, she urged white women to defend African Americans' rights. She said: "My sisters of the dominant race, stand up not only for the oppressed sex, but also for the oppressed race!"<sup>472</sup>. Her interracial philosophy and the compromising tone she used during her speeches made her popular among some whites. For example, when she was invited to speak in Berlin in 1904 at the International Congress of Women, she emphasized white women's benevolence and support, somehow downplaying national race issues and giving to the world a favorable image of relations between black and white women in America<sup>473</sup>. As a result of her

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<sup>469</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 316-317. She explained that she used to receive phone calls from Headquarters, asking: "'Will you come to picket the White House this afternoon?'". She generally "complied with the request and several times Phyllis would come with [her] to swell the number. Sometimes it was necessary to stand on hot bricks supplied by a colored man employed expressly for that purpose to keep our feet from freezing". Occoquan was the work house where suffragists were incarcerated. During the "Night of Terror" on 14 November 1917, many suffragists such as Dora Lewis were beaten and force-fed. Since this was revealed to the public, it convinced many Americans to side with suffragists.

<sup>470</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton had expressed prejudice towards African Americans when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, antagonizing several feminists such as Frederick Douglass and breaking from Susan B. Anthony. It is thus quite surprising to see that Terrell befriended her daughter.

<sup>471</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 144-145.

<sup>472</sup> See Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998). See also <http://nationalwomansparty.org/womenwecelebrate/mary-church-terrell/>.

<sup>473</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "Address Delivered at the International Congress of Women", Berlin, Germany, 13 June 1904. *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 110. "In their earnest endeavor to work out their own salvation, Colored women have often been generously aided and encouraged by their more fortunate sisters of the dominant race, many of whom are broad in their views on the race problem, just and kind in their



compromising attitude, some white Americans held her in high esteem whereas she was criticized by members of her community, who accused her of being too lenient with whites.

Collaboration with white suffragists was difficult at a period when the South was increasingly influencing national politics and white supremacy was gaining ground. Region played an important role in these questions since, as Marjorie Spruill Wheeler has shown, white southern suffragists – adhering to white supremacist ideas – refused to collaborate or march publicly with African American suffragists on account of color and encouraged white women of other regions to act likewise<sup>474</sup>. To make sure women would soon be granted suffrage, white northern suffragists – willingly or unwillingly — complied<sup>475</sup>.

Black suffragists such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett fell victim to racism within woman suffrage clubs: white northern and southern women refused to collaborate with African American women on account of color. The influence of the South could be strongly felt within clubs. Prejudiced white southern suffragists refused to collaborate with black suffragists and demanded their northern counterparts to take discriminatory measures against African American activists. Northern suffragists – such as Grace Wilbur Trout in 1913 – yielded to their demands. For example, on 13 March 1913, when the National American Woman Suffrage Association organized a parade in Washington D.C., the organizers<sup>476</sup> asked black women to march at the end, in order not to antagonize white southern suffragists<sup>477</sup>. As a result, despite the support of Illinois white women suffragists such as Belle Squire and Grace Brooks, Wells-Barnett was denied the opportunity to march with the white delegates of her State. As Mia Bay has explained, Wells-Barnett “stepped out from the crowd that had assembled to watch and ‘walked calmly out to the delegation and assumed her place’” with

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treatment of their sisters of a darker hue and strong in their determination to render them any assistance in their power. In the United States of America there is a goodly number of who us near the ideal of perfect womanhood as can be found anywhere in the civilized world. Without the sympathy and hearty cooperation of such women, the lot of Colored women would be sad and hard indeed. It is a great pleasure, therefore, for me to express in this public way on a foreign soil my own heartfelt gratitude and that of the [...] 3,000,000 Colored women in whose name I speak to night, to the white women of the United States, who could not possibly have more capable or more noble representatives than Susan B. Anthony, the veritable Abraham Lincoln in the emancipation of women, May Wright Sewall, Anna Howard Shaw, G. Solomon, Mary Wood Swift and Ida Husted Harper, who are present with us to night.”

<sup>474</sup> See the work of Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women in the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>475</sup> Some Northerners approved while others, such as Belle Squire or Grace Brooks, opposed such practices.

<sup>476</sup> Grace Wilbur Trout (1864-1955) was one of the organizers who agreed to segregate black suffragists at the 1913 march. Interestingly, this native of Iowa, who fought for woman suffrage in Illinois, moved to the South in 1921.

<sup>477</sup> The President of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association Grace Wilbur Trout had yielded to the demands of the organizers of the parade. See Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 290. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was to take part in this march.



Squire and Brooks<sup>478</sup>. Consequently, color but also region affected women's actions in the fight for woman suffrage. A few weeks before the text of the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted, in a letter to Walter White of the NAACP, Mary Terrell wrote that if white suffragists could have gotten the Nineteenth Amendment passed without enfranchising black women, they would have done it<sup>479</sup>. Despite her belief in interracial cooperation, her compromising rhetoric and her attachment to the National Woman's Party, Terrell privately castigated the attitudes of certain white suffragists – some were too lenient while others believed in white supremacy.

The Nineteenth Amendment was passed by the House of Representatives on May 21, 1919. Two weeks later, the Senate followed suit and the Amendment was sent to the States for ratification. Once the process started, Terrell actively worked for ratification, lecturing in various States such as New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island in order to convince audiences of the necessity of ratifying the Amendment: "Then I began to build up an organization by appointing women to take charge of the political work in their respective States. I sent out letters saying we should reach each and every one in the State, so that they would all register and vote for the Republican candidates"<sup>480</sup>. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the Amendment, and the required number of three-fourths of the States was reached. Women were officially granted the right to vote on 26 August 1920. Glenda Gilmore has chronicled how woman suffrage caused anxiety among whites in North Carolina in 1920 and how they viewed it as a threat – to the point that they considered intimidation and violence against black women<sup>481</sup>. Yet, this was not a long-lasting victory for black women; black men were still disenfranchised and as Rosalyn Terborg-Penn has highlighted, "In spite of [their] efforts to implement their political rights, black women in the South were disenfranchised in less than a decade after the Nineteenth Amendment enfranchised them in 1920, and black women outside the South lost the political clout they had acquired"<sup>482</sup>. Gilmore has also demonstrated that some women of color such as Charlotte

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<sup>478</sup> "Illinois Women Participants in Suffrage Parade", *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1913, as cited in Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 290. The parade was disturbed by crowds of men, and Wells's act seemed to have remained quite unnoticed by southern women activists – who would surely have disapproved of her presence in the parade. Wells-Barnett unfortunately did not refer to this important moment in her memoir and did not refer to Alice Paul, Lucy Burns or the NAWSA.

<sup>479</sup> Mary Church Terrell's letter to Walter White of the NAACP, dated 14 March 1919, as cited in Beverly Washington Jones, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954*, 50-51.

<sup>480</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 310.

<sup>481</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 205.

<sup>482</sup> Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn, "African American Women and the Vote" in *African American Women and the Vote: 1837-1965*, eds. By Anna D. Gordon with Bettye Collier-Thomas, 19. She added: "In spite of [their] efforts to implement their political rights, black women in the South were disenfranchised in less than a decade after the

Hawkins Brown were instrumental in organizing registration for black women in the State and were partially successful<sup>483</sup>. Brown's impressive work enabled black southern women *and men* to register to vote after the Nineteenth Amendment in North Carolina<sup>484</sup>.

Female black supporters of woman suffrage resorted to a variety of arguments to convince black and white men and women to support woman suffrage. Like white suffragists, they relied on Victorian language to assert that woman's special sphere made them the best-suited to influence politics on issues such as child labor, children's welfare, prison reform or education. Yet very early after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, unlike white women, black suffragists also argued that the vote would enable black women to further the "advancement of the race" because it would enable women to foster education and finally be acknowledged and respected as women and as citizens. To do so, they highlighted their historic loyalty to the nation and after the First World War, their patriotism and infallible contribution to the war effort.

Before 1920, famous activists such as Mary Church Terrell and Adella Hunt Logan as well as students wrote numerous articles, dedicated special numbers to the question of woman suffrage not only in women's magazines, newspapers but also in university newspapers, therefore showing how important the question was for them and how much it was linked to the defense of their rights and their image. Many women dedicated a lot of energy in their cities and States to obtain franchise and like Mary Terrell, advocated interracial cooperation to obtain the right to vote.

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Nineteenth Amendment enfranchised them in 1920, and black women outside the South lost the political clout they had acquired". Mary Terrell and Anna Cooper could not vote, being both residents of Washington D.C.. See Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C.

<sup>483</sup> As Glenda Gilmore has indicated, she "was busy crafting a sophisticated campaign to register black women". White Southerners were surprised to see black women come to register to vote in the first days. See *Gender and Jim Crow*, 218-219. Registrars quizzed black women for "inordinate amounts of time" and "failed them whenever possible, and then turned away the hundreds left in line at the end of the day", 219. Nevertheless, some women managed to register despite the literacy tests which were reinforced in order to prevent black women from registering to vote.

<sup>484</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 221. Gilmore has shown that some black men successfully managed to register to vote in the wake of the Nineteenth Amendment.

At the turn of the century, in order both to organize racial uplift and to defend the image of women of color, African American clubwomen placed emphasis on woman's education, women's roles as mothers and homemakers and woman suffrage. As they had done to demonstrate their womanhood and humanity, black female intellectuals drew on a Victorian rhetoric which promoted traditional values to exert their paramount role in the uplift of the race. They argued that racial uplift would be made possible only if educated, Christian mothers and homemakers accomplished their missions and underscored that woman's education and woman suffrage were paramount to complete and ensure racial uplift.

The study of these women's discourses on motherhood show that clubwomen had different approaches: some were convinced of the necessity for women to remain within the domestic sphere whereas others argued that modern, "new" women *could and should* enter both spheres to defend the interests of the community. In any case, motherhood was of paramount importance. The study of their private writings reveals that activists who happened to be mothers juggled work and motherhood and that some of them did not hesitate to break the boundaries of "proper spheres" at the turn of the century. In fact, the four women of this study thought that women should embrace their roles as mothers – whenever nature gave them the opportunity – and penetrate the public sphere through their roles as educators and writers. By doing this, they went on crafting a new, singular definition of dual womanhood – which combined Victorianism *and* modernity. While they did not wholeheartedly reject nineteenth century culture and traditions and even embraced many aspects of Victorian mores, they also advocated a modern and progressive social role for women. They encouraged black women to go ahead and act both the private and the public sphere, the way they had done for decades, with one goal in mind: uplifting the community. The model of womanhood they crafted differed from white women's definitions of womanhood and appeared as traditional though was, in fact, eminently modern.

In the fourth and last part of this dissertation, I will focus on the way region and nation influenced these women's activism. I will first examine how some of black female intellectuals – Anna Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett in particular – viewed the increasing influence of the South on national politics since the Civil War as the main cause of America's racial problems in the period 1890-1920. Then, I will analyze to what extent regional affiliation guided their strategies as clubwomen and activists. Finally, I will study how these women emphasized their Americanness in their discourses in order to defend the community and the image of African American women.

## Part FOUR: Defending Black Womanhood, Region and Nation

## Chapter 1: Denouncing the Influence of the New South

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Black women ceaselessly worked for the defense of their image in the nation, through their work for racial uplift, within local clubs and nationally within the NACW, by building “better homes” and by encouraging woman’s education and woman suffrage.

African American intellectuals maintained that regional questions had to be taken into account to defend the image of women of African descent because they knew that thirty years after the end of the Civil War, when the reconciliation between North and South was taking place, the South was gaining more and more influence on national politics but also culturally, as scholars such as Nina Silber and Karen L. Cox have shown<sup>1</sup>. They were aware that the increasing influence of the South in the country, politically and culturally, was problematic for African American women because southern culture conveyed not only white supremacy and the culture of the Confederacy, and negative images about black men with the myth of the “black rapist” – and about women – in the form of two dichotomous images of the “Mammy” and “the immoral black woman”.

As early as the 1890s, women such as Anna Cooper denounced the manipulation of the South by writing about the way the Civil War had been “settled” between North and South, and about how the North handled sectional conflicts since the end of Reconstruction. Other intellectuals such as Ida Wells also tackled the problem of these negative images by fighting against racial violence and denouncing the double standard existing in the South about women. Wells demonstrated that lynching revealed the links between race, sex and region, showing that African American men and women were the victims of a region obsessed with gender and race purity. Black activists also denounced the sexual exploitation of women of color by white men and urged black men to help them protect their sexual purity and their reputation.

Black female intellectuals used their pens as weapons to defend the reputation of women of color by denouncing this double standard, women’s lack of protection and the

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<sup>1</sup> On the question of the national reunification and the development of tourism in the South, see Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993). On the promotion of southern culture (through popular songs, radio shows, cinema and literature) between 1890 and 1945, see Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in American Popular Culture*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

dangerous influence of the South in the national collective imagination at the turn of the century.

## 1. The “Romance of Reunion” and the Creation of the “Old South”

At the turn of the century, thirty years after the end of the fratricidal war which had caused thousands of deaths, the United States was trying to bury the sectional conflict and to start a reunification process. The sectional re-marriage between North and South was visible in the policies of the different American Presidents from the 1870s and up to the 1900s<sup>2</sup>. The Spanish-American War of 1898 further influenced this phenomenon. As Nina Silber – who has worked on the way the South was portrayed in 1865-1900 in literature and popular culture in *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* – has explained, this new conflict rekindled certain representations about masculinity during the Civil War:

The patriotic propaganda of the Spanish- American War rested on the foundation of the reunited, military patriotism of northerners and southerners, especially the white people of the two regions [...] The men of the North and the South, [...] whether soldiers or cattle ranchers, epitomized the spirit of masculine, virile patriotism, the ideology that could finally bridge the bloody chasm of the Civil War<sup>3</sup>.

In the 1910s, the Southerner Woodrow Wilson encouraged this culture of reunification. As Matthew Guterl has explained:

The political reunification of the national polity, symbolized by the election of the self-styled southerner Woodrow Wilson, likewise encouraged an intellectual marriage of North and South. The racialized politics of Wilson and *Birth of a Nation* [first screened in 1915] thus signaled the intertwining of two crucial components of the southernization of northern racial discourse: the wartime nationalism of the period between 1914 and 1918 and the related emergence of the film and entertainment industry<sup>4</sup>.

In a context of rising xenophobia with the intensification of immigration, with the development of eugenic ideas, white Americans came to prize their whiteness and view it as a bond they commonly shared with the descendants of white settlers. As Michael Perman has pointed out: “Leaders in both the North and South embraced and proclaimed the reunion of the sections on the basis of a shared Anglo-Saxon, white supremacy”.

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<sup>2</sup> In her book, Nina Silber has shown that President Roosevelt encouraged this image of the manly North versus the feminine South: “Theodore Roosevelt, who infused all of his rhetoric with references to manhood, frequently connected the will of the nation with the virility of its men”, p 167. The memory of the Civil War in the 1890s evoked the importance of manhood – won and regained for the Union part, lost for the southern fighters. Nina Silber explained that “For many men in the 1890s – veterans and sons of veterans as well as noncombatants – the Civil War represented the pinnacle of manliness”, *Romance of Reunion*, 169.

<sup>3</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 196.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Guterl, *The Color of Race in America*, 12. See also Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, 741-742. Foner indicates: “Wilson allowed D.W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation*, which glorified the Ku Klux Klan as the defender of white civilization during Reconstruction, to have its premiere at the White House in 1915”.



Moreover, northern politicians came to consider the South as a “model” when it came to race relations in the country. After the end of Reconstruction, once the Federal government and the Republicans lost their influence on southern politics, there was a sense that the South was better-suited to know how to solve the problem of race relations in the United States. As Michael Perman has explained: “As the nation took up the “white man’s burden” to uplift the world’s racially inferior peoples, the North looked to the South as an example of how to manage non-white populations. The South had become the nation’s racial vanguard”<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Karen Cox has shown the links between the discourse of reunification process and white supremacy. In *Dreaming Of Dixie*, she has argued:

White supremacy was central to the culture of reconciliation, too, because northern and southern whites shared similar views on African Americans. In truth, northern whites sympathized with the South regarding the ‘Negro’, not only because of the migration of southern blacks to their cities but because they held similar attitudes towards immigrants from southern or eastern Europe, who also made their homes there<sup>6</sup>.

### **The Creation of the “Old South”: “An Idealized Image of the American Past”**

Moreover, soon after the Civil War, the South celebrated the antebellum era and the memory of the Old South. As C. Vann Woodward has famously underscored: “One of the most significant inventions of the New South was the Old South”<sup>7</sup>. In the 1870s and 1880s, the region came to be increasingly depicted as a romantic land, a land of harmony and of untouched beauty – whereas the North was more and more depicted as a land perverted by industrialism and immigration. Nina Silber has shown that at that time, the South was seen as a retreat from modernity and the agitation of the industrial North. The South appeared as rural and untouched<sup>8</sup> and conveyed an “idealized image of the American past”<sup>9</sup>. Americans created this image, this myth of the Old South soon after the Civil War, as early as the 1870s. As Silber has demonstrated, Southerners used the imagery of the Old South to serve their political agenda – promote white supremacy – while Northerners seemed to adhere to such imagery for different reasons: “Northerners used the southern image not in the way that

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in American Popular Culture*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>7</sup> C. Vann. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*.

<sup>8</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 82. Nina Silber has shown that “in the tourists’ eyes, the South ceased to be a sectional problem and became more of a regional antidote to northern distress”, 70.

<sup>9</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 98.

southerners did, but to soothe their own specific set of social and psychological needs”<sup>10</sup>. As Karen Cox – who has worked on the development of popular culture from the late nineteenth century through World War II – a period when the radio and film industry were booming – has similarly concluded that the Old South appeared as a place where Americans could soothe their “anxiety about modernity”<sup>11</sup>. Like Silber, Cox has pointed out that the “South was frequently portrayed in popular culture as a region that was either primitive or exotic and was seen through the haze of moonlight and magnolias”<sup>12</sup> and was also depicted as a land where one could “escape from the frenetic North”<sup>13</sup>.

Nina Silber has also demonstrated that southern tourism developed tremendously from the 1870s onwards<sup>14</sup>. In the 1870s and 1880s, southern resorts became increasingly popular destinations for Northerners and “tourism became one of the principal roads to romantic reconciliation, helping to shape a formula for sectional harmony that dominated the American cultural scene in the years between Reconstruction and the Spanish-American War”<sup>15</sup>. Professor Silber has also shown that codes of femininity and masculinity were re-evaluated in the context of sectional reunion. On the one hand, the images of the Southern lady – or “Belle” – used for instance to convey a romantic idea of the region in seaside resorts and widely used in the national press and literature – influenced American codes of femininity. As Nina Silber has explained: “Women such as Irene Langhorne served as “resort belles” and embodied “the southern belle”, and “offered a model of charming and sociable femininity to which all American women could aspire”<sup>16</sup>. Southern manhood was similarly celebrated. As Silber has underscored: “Most northerners found themselves paying homage to a new and invigorated image of southern white manhood – to the manly, even patriotic veterans of the Confederacy”<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>11</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming Of Dixie*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>13</sup> Cox has explained that the northern travel writer Julian Ralph published *Dixie ; or Southern Scenes and Sketches* in 1896 and “wrote fondly about his adventure as an escape from the frenetic North [...] His observations captured the mood of many Americans concerning the intrusion of modernity into their lives. And it was in the South, the least modernized region of the country, where he and others found comfort”, 4.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 3 and pages 69-71 in particular. As Karen Cox has later said, “The culture of reconciliation could also be found in post-Civil War tourism”, 2.

<sup>15</sup> See Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, Chapter 3: “Sick Yankees in Paradise: Northern Tourism in the Reconstructed South”, 66-92. See page 92.

<sup>16</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 89. This trend also influenced models of white American womanhood in the years 1880s – 1900s. This was visible in the press, such as in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. See 118.

<sup>17</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 12.

In addition to seaside resorts, tourism was partially organized around the memory of the Old South<sup>18</sup>. Former plantations became trendy touristic destinations<sup>19</sup>. In an age viewed as spoilt with modernity and industrialization, the images of the southern Belle, the faithful and “happy” slaves – the images of the “old uncle” and “aunty” – and the cotton plantations appeared as reassuring images to northern tourists. As Silber has pointed out: “Northern elites longed to travel to the old, patriarchal retreats of the plantation class, even as they effaced the plantation landscape with the new railroads and factories of the industrial society”<sup>20</sup>.

At that period, the New South promoted the culture of the Confederacy and with it, white supremacy, its white standards of beauty and manhood and womanhood – with the image of the southern Belle and the southern gentleman – by reinventing an image of the Old South. Yet, scholars such as Nina Silber and Karen Cox have shown that these efforts were national and largely came from Northerners. In 1993, Nina Silber pinpointed that the culture of reconciliation was largely promoted by “politicians, journalists, and even financial leaders” who “usually raised the bridge of sentiment and emotion in elaborating on the ties that now bound the people of the sections together. They all, in effect, paid homage to a romantic and sentimental culture of conciliation that characterized the North-South relationship in the Gilded Age years”. Silber has additionally demonstrated that Northerners of the middle and upper classes were those who “imagined, and occasionally acted upon [...] the idea of reunion”<sup>21</sup>. In 2011, Cox similarly demonstrated that efforts to promote the Old South came from Southerners – for instance, they created sites of reconciliation where commemorative monuments were erected – but also largely came from the North, since the industries of mass media which disseminated such images in the nation were located in the North<sup>22</sup>:

The irony was that this narrative of southern identity was being disseminated for consumption by industries from outside of the South, whether they were New York advertising agencies, radio shows broadcast from Chicago, or Hollywood films. This is not to say that white Southerners did not see themselves as preservers of the ‘southern way of life’ or contribute to this perception. Rather, the industries responsible for the spread of popular culture nationally were located outside of Dixie and had far more influence over what ideas Americans consumed about the South than did native Southerners themselves<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 2. Cox has explained that “Chapters of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) organized trips to the South as early as 1881”, “well before there were veterans’ reunions”.

<sup>19</sup> Tourists visited former plantations, mansions and slaves’ quarters.

<sup>20</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

As Karen Cox has underscored, “Sectional reconciliation following the Civil War was by no means limited to reunions of veterans, nor was it simply a matter of politics. The process of reconciliation was also broadly evident in American culture”<sup>24</sup>. In *The Romance of Reunion*, Nina Silber has demonstrated that the image of a romantic regional alliance was widely used in the press and in the literature of the time<sup>25</sup>. The theme of the sectional re-marriage between the two regions was illustrated in popular culture soon after the end of the Civil War. In novels and plays published in the 1880s and 1890s, the industrial North often appeared as a young northern Beau coming south to find love with a southern bride<sup>26</sup> whereas the South was always personified as a feminine character – the Southern Lady or Southern Belle<sup>27</sup>. Interestingly, in “Woman vs. the Indian” (1891-1892), while discussing American politics during the Civil War, Reconstruction and the Redemption, Anna Julia Cooper denounced how the conflict had been misrepresented in the United States since 1865. Explaining how the Civil War had been “resolved” and how the two regions were transformed in the collective imagination, she constructed a parable of the antebellum era and in the post-war era according to which the South was continuously represented as a woman – Cooper called her “Arabella” – whereas the North was always characterized as a man – and remained unnamed – in the collective imagination<sup>28</sup>. Denouncing the manipulation of the South, she explained that after the Civil War, the South was no longer represented as a little sister but as a Belle, a potential match for the northern suitor. Meanwhile, the North was no longer a big brother, but had become a Beau, a suitor, eager to win the favors of the South again<sup>29</sup>. This

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 91. Silber analyzed literature – plays, novels and short-stories published in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. See page 118. For her analysis of literature, see pages 106-123. Professor Silber worked on numerous plays and novels written on the theme of the sectional reunion, such as William Gillette’s *Held by the Enemy* or J.K. Tillotson’s *The Planter’s Wife*, etc.. She also analyzed tourism-related data and political speeches for her research.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 122. Nina Silber has added: “Southern roles, those which embodied the full spirit of southern sectionalism, were usually played by the least unthreatening characters”.

<sup>28</sup> With a parable, she mocked the politics of the 1860s-1870s which accounted for the existing situation – the early 1890s. Moreover, Cooper sarcastically analyzed the resolution of the conflict as the victory of the little sister – the childlike Arabella – over the apologetic, negligent and compromising big brother – the North. Faced with the South’s determination to resist the North’s conditions, the North compromised and yielded to the girl’s whims in 1877: “Still, Arabella sulked, -- till the rest of the family decided she might just keep her pets, and manage her own affairs and nobody should interfere”. This passage obviously refers to the period of the 1876 election where the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes won to the Democrat Samuel L. Tilden after the compromise of 1877. See Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 88-108, 100.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 1891-1892, 99. She sarcastically wrote: “When, in [18]61, ’62 and ’63, it became necessary for the big brother to administer a little wholesome correction and set the obstreperous Miss vigorously down in her seat again, she assumed “such an air of injured innocence, and melted away so lugubriously, the big brother has done nothing since but try but try to sweeten and pacify her back into a companionable frame of mind”, thereby mocking Northerners’ leniency in dealing with the sectional question.

Southerner, who deeply understood the politics of reunification denounced the South's domination not only on American culture but also in national politics after the 1890s.

Additional images of the Old South were conveyed in various media such as magazines and advertisements. As Cox has emphasized the “catalog of southern imagery” conveyed at the time was composed of images of “the old Confederate colonel, the mammy, the belle, the opulent plantation big house, bolls of cotton, and the hillbilly”<sup>30</sup>.

### **The Image of the Southern Lady: Class and Race as Defining Factors**

After the war, the South used the idealized image of the Southern Lady to build the image of an idealized Old South. This idealized image of white southern womanhood corresponded to a small percentage of white southern women who had belonged to the slaveholding elite before the war. The southern lady was a white slaveholding woman – the plantation mistress – who belonged to the elite of the South, lived a life of leisure in a luxurious “big house” on a plantation, surrounded by faithful and “happy” slaves and benefited from the protection of chivalrous southern gentlemen.

Scholars such as Catherine Clinton have pointed out that there was a wide discrepancy between the idealized image of the southern lady and the reality. In *The Plantation Mistress*, Catherine Clinton has demonstrated that the southern lady as it was later depicted in the post-war era was a myth: “The clash of myth and reality was monumental” and that the life these white plantation women led was far from the life of leisure many imagined<sup>31</sup>. As she explained, the southern lady of the antebellum era was more a symbol, “a symbol of gentility and refinement for plantation culture”. The antebellum southern lady enjoyed this status thanks to her social class – her exceptional affluence – and her gender.

Importantly, like the Victorian “true woman”, the southern lady had been placed on a pedestal as of the 1830s – partly because of the influence of southern chivalry. Yet as Anne Firor Scott has underscored in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*, there was a more extreme form of Victorianism in the South than anywhere else in the country because of

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<sup>30</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 17. Clinton has deconstructed the myth of the southern lady: “These women did not inhabit mythical estates, but rather productive working plantations: the routine was grueling, life was harsh [...] The plantation mistress found herself trapped within a system over which she had no control, one form which she had no means of escape. Cotton was King, white men ruled, and both white women and slaves served the same master”, 35.

slavery and the nature of race relations there<sup>32</sup>. As Scott has suggested, despite the advent of the new southern woman, “the outward forms of ladylike behavior were carefully maintained” in the South<sup>33</sup>.

According to Anne Firor Scott, in the post-war era, the image of the ‘Southern Lady’ did not die with the New South,<sup>34</sup> but was reinvented: “The image [of the southern Lady] had not entirely disappeared. It lived on, not as a complete prescription for woman’s life but as a style which as often as not was a façade to ward off criticism of unladylike independence or to please men. It gave an illusory uniformity to the southern female personality”. Whereas during the antebellum era class had played a prominent factor in the definition of the southern lady – only elite white women could claim to be “southern ladies” in the antebellum era —, after the war, it appears that white southern women were sometimes seen as forming a whole, as if only race – and not class – had become a defining factor<sup>35</sup>.

Regardless of their social affiliation, black women were excluded from this image. In the Old or New South, the term “southern lady” was indeed reserved to white women. Cooper’s famous sentence: “Now the Southern woman (I may be pardoned, being one myself)” exemplifies the predicament in which black southern women of the middle and upper classes found themselves in after the emancipation: they were southern women yet could not be called “southern ladies”, thus showing that the notion of “southern lady” had to do with race and white supremacy. Black women were not only excluded from the category “woman” and could not claim to belong to the category “southern lady”, they were caught between two South-made myths: that of the immoral woman and the Mammy.

### **The Myth of the “Immoral Black Woman” and the “Mammy”: Reviving the Memory of the “Old South”**

At a time when the New South promoted images of the southern Belle living on wealthy estates surrounded by happy slaves, when the southern lady was celebrated and when white southern womanhood was viewed as a “uniform” group as Anne Firor Scott has emphasized – asserting and defending one’s womanhood was difficult for women of color regardless of social class differences. This difficulty arose from the New South’s aim to misrepresent black women through two opposed myths – that of “the immoral woman” and

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<sup>32</sup> See Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*. See the first chapter and page 16 in particular.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-226.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, poor white women were often still excluded from this definition.



“the Mammy”. These myths complemented each other in terms of what Kristin Waters has called their “specific political functions”. The Mammy was “tied to acceptable roles for black women such as domestic worker or service worker” while the Jezebel was tied “to unacceptable (but equally controlled) roles such as sex worker”<sup>36</sup>. Contrary to the myth of the Mammy, the myth of the immoral black woman had been created under slavery. Black women were seen as lascivious women<sup>37</sup>. The myth of the “Mammy”<sup>38</sup> was created by white Southerners as a way to rekindle the Old South in the late nineteenth century. The Mammy was represented as a faithful slave who lived “happily” as a “house slave” in the antebellum era. She was represented as a big, motherly, asexual – and therefore harmless figure. In other words, she was the epitome of the devoted and caring slave who acted as surrogate mother for the white children of the planter.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, these myths and images about the Old South were conveyed everywhere in the United States, well-beyond the frontiers of “Dixie”. Karen Cox has pointed out how popular imagery about the antebellum South and the culture of reconciliation continued to be disseminated in the early twentieth century thanks to the rise of mass consumerism: “Pastoral images and themes of the Old South and of Southerners were used to sell goods and entertainment to American consumers, all of which was made possible by the modern urban-industrial world in which they lived”<sup>39</sup>. Imagery about the Old South was conveyed in the form of “advertisements, movies, early radio, popular literature” [in novels whose plot revolved around a marriage between a southern Belle and a northern suitor], “and even music”<sup>40</sup>.

Cox has pinpointed that images about “Dixie” were widely disseminated in the country thanks to objects of mass consumption which influenced all Americans’ views on the South. As Cox has argued, these objects “worked in tandem to shape national perceptions of the South [...] American became consumers on a mass scale, they also *consumed ideas about the products they purchased*. When those products were marketed using southern imagery

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<sup>36</sup> Kristin Waters, “Some Cores Themes of Black Feminism”, *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 376.

<sup>37</sup> See Hélène Charlery’s dissertation entitled: « Les Africaines-Américaines, Entre Deux Identités. Sexualisation et Déssexualisation des Représentations journalistiques, puis cinématographiques des Africaines Américaines de 1869 à 1966 ». Bibliothèque du Centre. Université Paris XII Val de Marne.

<sup>38</sup> As Grace Hale has explained, “All mammies were in an important sense white fiction of black womanhood”, 105.

<sup>39</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

very often it was the South of the American imagination”<sup>41</sup>. As in the period 1865-1900 analyzed by Nina Silber, this un-real, imagined, dreamed-of “Old South” – “ideal and desired South” as Silber has termed it<sup>42</sup> – was conveyed everywhere in America, much to the dismay of African Americans. Obviously, as Cox has explained, African Americans revolted against the emergence of this popular culture and denounced the fact that, as one black journalist explained, “such characterizations [...] damaged black morale and symbolized how the nation had capitulated to the South”<sup>43</sup>. This is precisely what Anna Cooper aimed at doing when she penned “Woman vs. the Indian” to condemn the mechanisms of reunification.

## **2. African American Intellectuals’ Responses to The Creation of the Old South**

After the withdrawal of Federal troops in 1877 and during the period of the “Redemption”, African American leaders denounced the fascination exerted by the South upon American politics and the national stage. In the 1890s, they viewed the South as a region unduly dominating national politics since the official end of Reconstruction. In a country which was heavily influenced by southern politics, the women of this study tried to show that the national narrative had to be re-assessed and re-written and that the political and cultural domination of the South had to be publicly denounced. In 1891-92, Cooper mocked the politics and manipulations of her time and sarcastically decried both the South’s manipulation and the North’s leniency toward white Southerners<sup>44</sup>.

### **Denouncing The Political and Racial Politics of the Reunion**

In “Woman vs. the Indian” (1891-1892), Anna Cooper demonstrated that the New South had not only dominated the country’s historical narrative but had also manipulated the nation for decades:

One of the most singular facts about the unwritten history of this country is the consummate ability with which Southern influence, Southern ideas and Southern ideals, have from the very beginning even up to the present day, dictated to and domineered over the brain and sinew of this nation [...] The Southerner has nevertheless with Italian finesse and exquisite skill, uniformly and invariably, so manipulated

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 5. Italics mine.

<sup>42</sup> Nina Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 2. Professor Silber explains in her Introduction that her work was an analysis of “the metaphors and cultural images of reconciliation” and of “northern images of the North”.

<sup>43</sup> Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 1891-1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 99. “Father Lincoln he could to get her to repent him about violence and behave herself. [...The South] had to be spanked. Just a little at first, merely to teach her who was who”.

Northern sentiment as to succeed sooner or later in carrying his point and shaping the policy of this government to suit his purposes. Indeed, the Southerner is a magnificent manager of men, a born educator<sup>45</sup>.

Years later, in her autobiography, Mary Church Terrell similarly denounced the fact that in the 1890s, the New South was trying to “redeem” itself, its society, its institutions and its past<sup>46</sup>. When some Southerners tried to create the myth of the benevolent, and kind master, this tireless activist wanted to publicly set the record straight about the reality of slavery:

When slavery is discussed and somebody rhapsodizes upon the goodness and kindness of masters and mistresses toward their slaves in extenuation of the cruel system, it is hard for me to conceal my disgust. There is no doubt that some slaveholders were kind to their slaves. Captain Church was one of them, and this daughter of a slave father is glad thus publicly to express her gratitude to him. But the anguish of one slave mother from whom her baby was snatched away outweighs all the kindness and goodness which were occasionally shown a fortunate, favored slave<sup>47</sup>.

Many activists exposed the North’s leniency towards the South since the end of Reconstruction. In “Woman vs. the Indian” (1891-1892), Anna Julia Cooper denounced the lack of courage of northern politicians in America since 1877. Using the analogy of the broken family, she explained that the North was happy to leave the matter of African Americans’ rights to white Southerners: “The rest of the family [the North and other regions] decided she [The South] might just keep her pets, and manage her own affairs and nobody should interfere”<sup>48</sup> – the “pets” were of course African Americans, represented as childlike in Cooper’s satirical presentation. She also mocked the discourse northern politicians adopted at the end of Reconstruction which consisted in saying that the South was better-suited to know what to do with African Americans since they had lived with them in the same section for so many decades: “Ah, well, the South must be left to manage the Negro. She is most directly concerned and must understand her problem better than outsiders. We must not meddle. We must be very careful not to widen the breaches.” Moreover, she condemned the emerging racist discourse and the sense of solidarity among whites encouraged by the eugenic

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<sup>45</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. The Indian”, 97. On this question, see Hazel Carby, “On the threshold of Woman’s Era : Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory”, in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986): 301-316. Hazel Carby has written that: “Cooper understood that the smokescreen of social equality obscured questions of heritage and inheritance which appeared in the figure of “blood” and gained consensual dominance both North and South (v, 103, 104). She became convinced that the key to understanding the unwritten history of the United States was the dominance of southern “influence, ideals, and ideas” over the whole nation. Cooper saw that the manipulative power of the South was embedded in the southern patriarch, but she describes its concern with “blood” , inheritance, and in entirely female terms and is a preoccupation that was transmitted from the South to the North and perpetuated by white women”, 306.

<sup>46</sup> The memory of slavery.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 88-108, 100.

movement in post-war years: “The negro is not worth a feud between brothers and sisters”<sup>49</sup>. Likewise, in *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* of 1893, Ida Wells condemned the policies of white southern politicians such as Henry W. Grady in the post-war era. According to her, such white supremacist policies not only encouraged the negative images conveyed about black Americans, they condoned lynching:

Henry W. Grady in his well-remembered speeches in New England and New York pictured the Afro-American as incapable of self-government. Through him and other leading men the cry of the South to the country has been ‘Hands off! Leave us to solve our problem.’ To the Afro-American the South says, ‘the white man must and will rule’. There is little difference between the Antebellum South and the New South [...] The result is a growing disregard of human life<sup>50</sup>.

Additionally, when Northerners – often keen on voting Republican – attempted to defend the rights of African Americans, they were accused by southern politicians of using the memory of the bloody Civil War, whereas the South was slowly but with impunity depriving black men of their rights<sup>51</sup>. Cooper exposed the violation of the Fifteenth Amendment after 1870: “So now, if one intimates that some clauses of the Constitution are a dead letter at the South and that only the name and support of that pet institution are changed while the fact and essence, minus the expense and responsibility, remain, he is quickly told to mind his own business and informed that he is waving the bloody shirt”<sup>52</sup>.

In “Ethics of the Negro Question” (1902), Anna Cooper kept denouncing the apathy and leniency of northern politicians in national politics. According to her, the North was “too polite or too busy or too gleeful” to block southern exigencies: “The South [was] intolerant of interference from either outside or inside, [whereas] the North [was] too polite or too busy or too gleeful over the promised handshaking to manifest the most distant concern”<sup>53</sup>. Mary Church Terrell developed the same discourse in the early 1900s. In 1904, she denounced the existing sectional connivance – in particular lynching, which she thought was the cause of countless slaughters:

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>50</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. “The South’s Position”. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>. “Henry W. Grady (1850-1889), the ‘Spokesman of the New South’, served as managing editor for the *Atlanta Constitution* in the 1880s. A member of the Atlanta Ring of Democratic political leaders, Grady used his office and influence to promote a New South program of northern investment, southern industrial growth, diversified farming, and white supremacy”. See <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/henry-w-grady-1850-1889>.

<sup>51</sup> “This technique of ‘waving the bloody shirt’ was most often employed by Radical Republicans in their efforts to focus public attention on Reconstruction issues still facing the country. Used in the presidential elections of 1868, 1872, and 1876, the strategy was particularly effective in the North in attracting veterans’ votes”. Britannica Encyclopedia. “Waving the Bloody Shirt”, <https://global.britannica.com/event/bloody-shirt>.

<sup>52</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 100.

<sup>53</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the negro question”, 1902, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 209. Cooper delivered this address on 5 September 1902 to the General Conference of the Society of Friends at Asbury Park, New Jersey.

The North frequently sympathizes with the Southern mob, because it has been led to believe the negro's diabolical assaults upon white women are the chief cause of lynching. In spite of the facts, distinguished representatives from the South are still insisting, in Congress and elsewhere, that 'whenever negroes, cease committing the crime of rape, the lynchings and burnings will cease with it.' But since three-fourths of the negroes who met a violent death at the hands of Southern mobs have not been accused of this crime, it is evident that, instead of being the 'usual' crime, rape is the most unusual of all the crimes for which negroes are shot, hanged and burned<sup>54</sup>.

Her personal experience as a southern-born woman who had studied in Ohio enabled her to compare the North of the pre-war period to the turn-of-the-century one and to conclude that the region seemed to have turned its back on its heritage of tolerance. In 1906, Terrell condemned the acts of the "compliant" and "criminally silent" North:

When I see the shameful compliance and the criminal silence of the North. Verily the North is suffering from a terrible disease. In trying to diagnose its case I have carefully taken its temperature and felt its pulse and after mature deliberation and consultation with the highest medical authorities I am convinced that the North is suffering from fatty degeneration of the brain accompanied by acute atrophy of the heart<sup>55</sup>.

She urged northern politicians to be more daring towards southern politicians and to organize regular meetings in the North in order to raise public awareness<sup>56</sup>:

I love the North with all the intensity of affection of which my heart is capable. For I cannot forget how great a debt of gratitude this nation on general principles and my own race in particular owe it for valuable services rendered in the past. But when I see how quietly, shall I say how cowardly the North acquiesces in crimes against the very class of American citizens whom every dictate of humanity, decency, duty and honor commands it to protest, I feel like expressing myself about the decay of noble sentiment and the decadence of courageous citizenship in the North as did one of Shakespeare's characters who lamented the decline of Rome<sup>57</sup>.

In order to set the record straight about the reality about the national political climate, these activists not only denounced the leniency of northern politicians in the 1890s and 1900s, they also publicly decried the racial discrimination African American women fell victims to in the American South in their articles.

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View", 1904, in *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 121.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "Remarks Made at Cooper Institute, Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 1906". *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 177. She wrote this piece in a context of growing tensions after the Russian revolution and the slaughter of thousands of Russian Jews – the Pogroms —, and drew a parallel between Russian Jews and African Americans in the South.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 178. "If meetings like this could be held in every city and town in the North, I verily believe that the slumbering conscience and the patriotic pride of the nation would shortly be so aroused that the lawlessness which reduced more than a million American citizens to the level of serfs and slaves would soon be a thing for the past."

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

Black writers, activists and lecturers ceaselessly denounced racial discrimination and racial violence. Women such as Susie King Taylor who had left the South to live in the North wrote about the great discrepancy which existed between the two regions. In 1906, this southern-born woman – who had toiled in her native region for years, had fought for the Union during the Civil War and now enjoyed liberty in Boston – hoped that “the day [was] not far distant when the two races [would] reside in peace in the Southland, and [one would] sing with sincere and truthful hearts, ‘My country, ‘t is of thee, Sweet land of Liberty, of thee I sing’”. Disheartened by the horror of lynchings taking place everyday in America, she added: “I wonder if our white fellow men realize the true sense or meaning of brotherhood?”<sup>58</sup>. In her writings, Mary Terrell also repeatedly chastised Southerners for their racial prejudice. When travelling in various parts of the South – such as Pensacola, Florida or Hattiesburg, Mississippi, — Terrell was struck by the way white Southerners conceived of black people, considering them to be members of an inferior race who should “know their place”. She wrote that when she was in the South, she felt that she “could hear voices from the past”<sup>59</sup>.

At a time when black men were disenfranchised, Jim Crow legislation was enforced and racial violence was a reality, several activists encouraged black Southerners to leave the South in the 1890s – as Ida Wells had done in 1892. In one article published in 1896 in the *Woman’s Era*, one activist – probably living in the North – denounced the influence of southern prejudice in the country, indicating that racism was a national issue:

‘The growing spirit of the time’ was that of ‘sympathy with the South and its methods, a growing belief in the inferiority of the negro, a disposition to put him down and back – these are the sentiments which are growing daily stronger in the North as well as in the South’.

She contended that African American women had to react and organize their response to these attacks orchestrated by the South and therefore exhorted black Southerners to leave the region:

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<sup>58</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 326. In Pensacola, Florida, one member of the Committee whom she met told her that African Americans should “stay in their place”: “I am not opposed to niggers [...] I would not like to live in a country where there are no niggers. But I want a nigger to stay in his place. There is as much difference between a white man and a nigger as there is between day and night. Conditions down here can never be changed.” “, 325-326. Another activist, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a Southern-born activist and educator, voiced a similar idea in 1922, denouncing how slowly Americans’ mindsets changed: “Many people, North and South, are still thinking in 1865 though living in 1922”. See Brown, Charlotte. “Cooperation Between White and Colored Women” 486, in *African American Feminisms*, 503. In this article, she confided her thoughts on interracial cooperation in the context of the early 1920s after attending a conference where black and white women gathered to further interracial cooperation.



As Mr. Higginson says, 'let us be bold'. Life is more than meat. Let the people of South Carolina leave a state which gives them no good thing but food. [...] Here in the North the spirit of the times is felt, but here a black man is a *man*, and if forced to it can physically force the respect which is his due. In the South we are powerless to strike for ourselves with everything against us. But there are more ways than one. The negroes can leave and end a situation which grows worse rather than better. The time for resistance, wise resistance, has come. Our hope for creating public sentiment grows dimmer and dimmer, and patience and humility have ceased to be virtues<sup>60</sup>.

Presenting the North as a place where African Americans' humanity was recognized, she called for resistance.

Because they thought that racial relations and African Americans' civil rights were questions of national importance, several intellectuals called for the end of the South's domination and urged other sections to take necessary measures. For example, Terrell thought that it was "plainly the duty of the North, East, and West to protect the South from itself"<sup>61</sup>. Like Cooper in the 1890s, Terrell used the analogy of the family to discuss sectional conflicts:

It is plainly the nation's duty, therefore, to do everything in its power to emancipate the South from the thralldom of its own prejudices; release it from the slavery of the brain-blighting, soul-crushing intolerance of other people's views; teach it the difference between the highest, purest patriotism and a narrow, sectional pride; instill into it a sense of justice which will prevent it either from inflicting or withholding penalties for wrong-doing and crime on account of the colour of a man's skin; and finally breathe into the hearts of the people as a whole a broad, Christian charity which will extend even to their former slaves<sup>62</sup>.

Black female intellectuals knew that even if the problem was national, the origin of the problem was regional<sup>63</sup>. All women intellectuals in this study fought against lynching with all their might<sup>64</sup>. These women showed that racial violence in America was linked to notions of sex, race and region. They wanted to demonstrate that the myth of the black rapist created by the New South revealed a lot about the way the South construed manhood and womanhood and impacted not only black men – with the myth of the black rapist – but also black women – with the myth of the immoral black woman. To do so, they first resolved to debunk the myths which were used to condone lynching.

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<sup>60</sup> *Woman's Era*. Vol III, No. 3, August and September, 1896. Italics hers.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "A Plea For the White South by a Colored Woman", *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 136.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>63</sup> Most lynchings occurred in the South but in the early twentieth century, racial violence was also used in northern States such as Illinois, where Wells-Barnett and Fannie Williams lived.

<sup>64</sup> Ida B. Wells never stopped fighting against lynching, Anna Cooper also condemned it in her articles, Mary Terrell dedicated her energy to the fight against lynching after ceasing serving as president of the NACW in the early 1900s, hammering home that this unbearable violence had to cease immediately, while Fannie Barrier Williams discreetly worked with Booker T. Washington by collecting data on lynching in the State of Illinois.

## Lynching: The Myths of the Black Rapist and the Immoral Black Woman Revealing Manipulations

As Gerda Lerner has pointed out, in order to fight against lynching, black women “attacked [it] by exposing the falsity of the rape charge, case by case, and by trying to convince white women [...] that black women had the same moral standards, religious beliefs and ambitions as white women”<sup>65</sup>. As mentioned earlier, Ida Wells was the first activist to tackle the issue of racial violence in the early 1890s. After the lynching of Thomas Moss in 1892, she compiled thousands of data on lynchings everywhere in the country and published *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* in 1892 and *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States* in 1895. Thanks to this journalistic work – which was close in nature to that of a sociologist, Ida Wells proved that lynching was one of whites’ responses to their fear of blacks’ growing economic success<sup>66</sup>. She also demonstrated that the question of lynching was strategically linked to mental representations about sex and gender, white women’s purity and Southern chivalry<sup>67</sup>. She stated that white southern men’s exaggerated reverence for southern white womanhood – the so-called southern sense of “chivalry”— was used to condone lynching – and to keep blacks in positions of economic, social and political subjugation. Black women intellectuals were convinced that the myth of the black rapist had been invented in the post-war era for political reasons – to assert that African Americans were “dangerous” and therefore unfit for democracy and should be deprived of their rights – and disenfranchised.

Black intellectuals demonstrated in their writings that the creation of the myth of the black rapist was the result of a political manipulation. Many – among them Ida Wells – argued that rapes were used as excuses to justify racial violence. In her autobiography, she wrote: “In order to justify these horrible atrocities to the world, the Negro was being branded as a race of

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<sup>65</sup> Gerda Lerner, “Black Women Speak of Womanhood”, *Black Women in White America*, 562.

<sup>66</sup> Ida Wells worked like a reporter, travelled and collected information about lynching in order to write her articles and books. This enabled her to provide very detailed accounts to her readers and to formulate very precise arguments.

<sup>67</sup> Wells was severely criticized for her stance. In 1894-1895, Frances Willard asked her to justify what she asserted and advised her to be more cautious and to justify the accusations she formulated against white women. Wells reasserted her accusations and the two women never reconciled. Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record*. In addition, Wells denounced the comments Frances Willard had made in favor of lynching when she was in England in the early 1890s. Wells copied the content of a letter published in the *New York Voice* on October 23, 1890.

rapists, [being] especially mad after white women”<sup>68</sup>. Likewise, in 1904, Mary Terrell maintained that accusations of rape were most of the time false or falsified in the press and highlighted that most victims of lynching were proven innocent afterwards: “Everybody who is well informed on the subject of lynching knows that many a negro who has been accused of assault or murder, or other violation of the law, and has been tortured to death by a mob, has afterward been proved innocent of the crime with which he was charged”<sup>69</sup>. She pinpointed that the problem was regional, “the thirst for the negro’s blood [being “so great”] in the South” and racial violence being more exacerbated there than in any other region<sup>70</sup>.

Thanks to her work, Wells was able to demonstrate that alleged ‘rapes’ were often consensual relations between black men and white women in a region obsessed with white supremacy at a time when the stress was put on white racial purity in America<sup>71</sup>. She argued that in reality, white women often willingly maintained relationships with black men<sup>72</sup>: “Hundreds of such cases might be cited [...] There are white women in the South who love the Afro-American’s company even as there are white men notorious for their preference for Afro-American women”. She held that contrary to what was being said, black men were not increasingly attracted to white women, it was the opposite<sup>73</sup>. She also explained that thanks to their class and status, some white women committed adultery with black men freely and were never punished<sup>74</sup>. She blamed white women for the continuation of lynching and the

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<sup>68</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 71.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Lynching From a Negro’s Point of View”, 1904, 124. Also available on this website: [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3615](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3615). Terrell demonstrated that the coverage of lynchings in the press was often erroneous: “The facts are often suppressed, intentionally or unintentionally, or distorted by the press”.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 123. She described southern mobs as bloodthirsty crowds willing to beat and kill any representatives of the black race: “When once such a bloodthirsty company starts on a negro’s trail, and the right one cannot be found, the first available specimen is sacrificed to their rage, no matter whether he is guilty or not.”

<sup>71</sup> She emphasized that interracial relations had existed for decades in the United States. See *Crusade*, 69-70.

<sup>72</sup> In *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases, 1892, 1893, 1894*, Ida Wells argued that white women often enjoyed the company of black men yet the latter paid a heavy price for it: “The editor of the *Free Speech* has no disclaimer to enter, but asserts instead that there are many white women in the South who would marry colored men if such an act would not place them at once beyond the pale of society and within the clutches of the law”.

<sup>73</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases, 1892, 1893, 1894*. “The Black and White Of It”, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>. Also available at: [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3614](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3614). “A few instances to substantiate the assertion that some white women love the company of the Afro-American will not be out of place. Most of these cases were reported by the daily papers of the South”. “The whites of Montgomery, Ala., knew J.C. Duke sounded the keynote of the situation — which they would gladly hide from the world, when he said in his paper, the *Herald*, five years ago: ‘Why is it that white women attract negro men now more than in former days? There was a time when such a thing was unheard of. There is a secret to this thing, and we greatly suspect it is the growing appreciation of white Juliets for colored Romeos’”. Chapter 1: “The Offense”.

<sup>74</sup> For example, in Natchez, Mississippi, “Mrs. Marshall, one of the *creme de la creme* of the city, created a tremendous sensation several years ago. She has a black coachman who was married, and had been in her employ several years. During this time she gave birth to a child whose color was remarked, but traced to some

continuing denial of African Americans' civil rights<sup>75</sup> and defended the view that by their passivity, they encouraged racial violence. In 1892, in *Southern Horrors*, Wells pointed out that in many cases, when the interracial relationship was discovered, white women often did not overtly recognize maintaining relationships with their partner of color because it meant rejection, social ostracism and opprobrium<sup>76</sup>.

Intellectuals also denounced white women's participation in the culture of lynching. Grace Hale's study reveals that some white women actively encouraged and/or took part in the culture of racial violence by attending lynchings with their children and by bringing "souvenirs" from these tortures<sup>77</sup>. For example, Mary Terrell urged women to stop taking part in these and to finally raise their voices against it. Like Wells, she was convinced that women could influence society positively, and regretted that many white southern women did not raise their voice against racial violence:

It is too much to expect, perhaps, that the children of women who for generations looked upon the hardships and the degradations of their sisters of a darker hue with few if any protests, should have mercy and compassion upon children of that oppressed race now. But what a tremendous influence for law and order, and what a mighty foe to mob violence Southern white women might be, if they would arise in the purity and power of their womanhood to implore their fathers, husbands and sons no longer to stain their hands with the black man's blood!<sup>78</sup>

In her opinion, through their lenient attitudes, either their active support of mob rule or their passivity, white women were morally responsible for the propagation of white supremacy and racial hatred.

Moreover, in their writings, all black women of this study defended the view that southern whites manipulated the image of black men and had *conveniently* created the myth

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brunette ancestor, and one of the fashionable dames of the city was its godmother. Mrs. Marshall's social position was unquestioned, and wealth showered every dainty on this child which was idolized with its brothers and sisters by its white papa. In course of time another child appeared on the scene, but it was unmistakably dark." *Southern Horrors*. "The Black and White Of It", <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>.

<sup>75</sup> See also Mary Church Terrell, "A Plea to the White South", 1906, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*.

<sup>76</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law*, "The editor of the *Free Speech* has no disclaimer to enter, but asserts instead that there are many white women in the South who would marry colored men if such an act would not place them at once beyond the pale of society and within the clutches of the law".

<sup>77</sup> See Anna Julia Cooper, "Ethics of the Negro Question", in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 210. She spoke about Southerners' fascination for horrific details: "Human creatures with their behavior all the hyenas contended with one another for choice bones of their victim as souvenirs of the occasion [...] So once and was the cannibalistic thirst for blood that the Negro preacher who offered this last solace of the Christian to be doomed man was caught in the same mad frenzy and made to share his fate". See also Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 204. Chapter 5: "Deadly Amusements". Grace Hale has shown that lynchings had indeed become part of southern culture and had become "a modern spectacle" in the early twentieth century.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching From a Negro's Point of View", 1904, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 126.

of the black rapist *after 1865* to justify racial violence. To denounce this legerdemain, they emphasized slaves' infallible respect for and protection of white southern women during the Civil War – when white southern men were away on the war front. In *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law*, Ida Wells asserted: “The thinking public will not easily believe freedom and education more brutalizing than slavery, and the world knows that the crime of rape was unknown during four years of civil war, when the white women of the South were at the mercy of the race which is all at once charged with being a bestial one”<sup>79</sup>. According to Ida Wells, the charge was an invention created after the war to subjugate black Americans. Similarly, in 1894 Fannie Williams debunked the myth of the black rapist in her article dealing with religion, emphasizing black men's moral qualities and benevolent protection of white southern women during the Civil War:

The men who degraded the race and were risking everything to continue that degradation [white men of the South for the war] left their widows, their daughters, their mothers, wealth, and all the precious interests of the home in the keeping of a race who had received no lessons of moral restraint. It seems but tame to say that the Negro race was loyal to that trust and responsibility. Nowhere in Christendom has such nobleness of heart and moral fortitude been exemplified among any people, and a recollection of the Negroes conduct under this extraordinary test should save the race from the charge of being lacking in moral instincts<sup>80</sup>.

One year later, in *The Red Record* (1895), mocking so-called “southern chivalry”, Wells reiterated this view: “The Negro may not have known what chivalry was, but he knew enough to preserve inviolate the womanhood of the South which was entrusted to his hands during the war”<sup>81</sup>.

Several years later, in 1902, Anna Cooper developed the same arguments, similarly demonstrating that the myth was white-made at a particularly opportune time. She ironically commented on the sudden change – which had supposedly taken place within black men between the early nineteenth century and the 1890s, — wondering: “Is it credible that this race which has under freedom caught so eagerly on the rungs of progress in other respects has so shockingly deteriorated [...] as to reverse all claims to humane consideration which they had won by patient service during long years of slavery?”<sup>82</sup>. She could not understand how a people – who had never attacked white women under slavery and had ensured the protection

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<sup>79</sup> Ida. B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*.

<sup>80</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro”, 1894, in *The New Woman of Color*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record*. On 23 April 1894 in the *Daily Inter Ocean*, Wells also voiced this idea: “The same white men of the South who were not arguing that black men rape white women “were not afraid to go beyond the sight of their rooftrees during the civil war and leave the safety and honor of their homes, their wives, daughters, and sisters only in the protection of the negro race”, in *Ida From Abroad: The Timeless Writings of Ida B. Wells from England in 1894*, 41.

<sup>82</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, 1902, 211.



of the women and children of the South during the Civil War – could, over the course of a few years – become rapists<sup>83</sup>. Like Wells-Barnett and Barrier Williams, she believed that this manipulation was aimed at subjugating African Americans politically. These intellectuals were particularly worried that negative images about black men were invading the entire country, not just the South. In 1906, Mary Church Terrell denounced the spread of this South-made myth in the entire nation: “By a continual exaggeration of the coloured man’s vices [...] the South has almost succeeded in persuading the whole world that it is a martyr and the coloured American is a brute”<sup>84</sup>.

Black clubwomen contended that white men used the argument of white women’s honor to justify racial violence against African American men. African American activists demonstrated that a double standard existed in the United States, since interracial relationships – consensual or not – were punished only if the woman was white<sup>85</sup>. According to activists such as Wells, white Southerners considered themselves free to assault black women and used the excuse of “defending white womanhood”, applying “chivalry” to justify lynchings. As Ida Wells argued: “The South is shielding itself behind the plausible screen of defending the honor of its women”<sup>86</sup>. Lynching served the purpose of denying black southern men and women their manhood and womanhood. As Guy-Sheftall has shown, at that period, black manhood and womanhood were both denied. While “black women were not permitted to conform to the dominant culture’s model of True Womanhood, [...] the black male was unable to act out the majority culture’s definition of ‘true manhood’”<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., Black men had “without one single exception demonstrated remarkable fidelity, trustworthiness, reverence for women and kindness toward children” could have “suddenly become[s] such monsters of lust and vindictiveness that a woman [was] not safe on the same highway with them?”.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “A Plea for the White South by a Coloured Woman”, *Nineteenth Century* (July 1906): 70-84, as cited in *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 145. “By a continual exaggeration of the coloured man’s vices, by a studied suppression of the proofs of his marvellous advancement, by a judicious though malicious use of epithets, such as social equality, negro domination, and others which poison and mislead the public mind; by a watchful, searching skepticism with respect to evidence in the coloured man’s favour, and a convenient credulity with respect to every report or tradition which can be used to prove the coloured man’s depravity, the South has almost succeeded in persuading the whole world that it is a martyr and the coloured American is a brute”.

<sup>85</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Lynch Law in All Its Phases, 1892, 1893, 1894*. Ida Wells explained: “The miscegenation laws of the South only operate against the legitimate union of the races; they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but it is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women. White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women.”

<sup>86</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3614](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3614).

<sup>87</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*, 169.



## The Devaluation of Black Womanhood

Black female intellectuals defended the view that the myth of the black rapist functioned with another myth, that of the immoral woman<sup>91</sup>, aimed this time at discrediting black women. Contrary to the myth of the black rapist, the mythology around black women's supposed immorality had been created under slavery and was reinforced in the post-war era for political purposes as well. As Paula Giddings has explained, "Black women were seen as immoral scourges. Despite their achievements, they did not have the benefit 'of a discriminating judgment concerning their worth as women', as the Chicago activist Fannie

<sup>91</sup> On this question, see Angela Davis, *Femmes, Race et Classe*, 127 and Hélène Charlery's dissertation « Les Africaines-Américaines. Entre Deux Identités ».

Barrier Williams noted. [...] Black women were seen as having all the inferior qualities of white women without any of their virtues”<sup>92</sup>.

As I argued in the second part of this dissertation, at the turn of the century, the attacks on the reputation of black women were increasingly violent – John Jacks’s letter is an example of such violence – and activists and clubwomen such as Josephine St Pierre Ruffin united to fight against the continuous slander they fell victim to in the mid-1890s. Nevertheless, the attacks continued in the early 1900s. For example, one commentator for the *Independent* wrote in 1902: “I sometimes hear of a virtuous Negro woman but the idea is absolutely inconceivable to me [...] I cannot imagine such a creature as a virtuous Negro woman”<sup>93</sup>. Arguing that region exerted an important role in these questions, black intellectuals actively worked to demonstrate that such images had been created under slavery and that the immense progress accomplished by African American women in thirty years since emancipation contradicted all accusations of immorality.

Importantly, African American activists demonstrated that many women of color were accused of being immoral because they were victims of sexual abuse committed by white men. They contended that by accusing African American women of being “impure”, one blamed the victim instead of the culprit. They attempted to debunk the myth of the immoral woman by proving white men’s immorality. For example, as Paula Giddings has explained, at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Fannie Williams had daringly implied before a white audience that white men were the real culprits of these accusations: “I do not want to disturb the serenity of this conference by suggesting why this protection is needed and the kind of man against whom it is needed”<sup>94</sup>. As Paula Giddings has shown, in 1893, when women such as Fannie Williams addressed this question, they demonstrated that “The onus of sexual immorality did not rest on black women but on the white men who continued to harass them. While many white women in the audience were fantasizing about black rapists, [Williams] implied, black women were actually suffering at the hands of white ones.”<sup>95</sup>. Similarly, Ida B. Wells condemned white men’s continuing sexual oppression in her two publications and in her autobiography: “I found that this rape of helpless Negro girls and women, which began in

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<sup>92</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 82.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>94</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, 1893, as cited in Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 86. This daring statement surely owed her some criticism. Only two black women had been invited to speak at this conference and the fact that Barrier Williams addressed the questions of sex, race and region must have come as something of a surprise – or a shock – to the audience.

<sup>95</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893, as cited in Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 86.

slavery days, still continued without let or hindrance, check or reproof from church, state, or press until there had been created this race within a race – and all designated by the inclusive term of ‘colored’”<sup>96</sup>. In her autobiography, she stated that while the “white man who had created a race of mulattoes by raping and consorting with Negro women were still doing so wherever they could, the same white men lynched, burned, and tortured Negro man for doing the same thing with white women; even when the white women were willing victims”<sup>97</sup>. Likewise, in “Lynching from a Negro’s Point of View” (1904), Mary Terrell decried white southern men’s continued abuse of black women: “White men are neither punished for invading [“the negro’s home”], nor lynched for violating women and girls.”<sup>98</sup>.

Moreover, black activists dared to assert publicly that white southern women were the accomplices of this oppression. As Paula Giddings has pointed out about Fannie Barrier Williams’s 1893 message, “If white women were so concerned about morality, then they ought to take measures to help black women”<sup>99</sup>. In her writings, Williams made it clear that young black women’s lack of protection was caused by white men but was rendered possible by the passivity and complicity of white women. She regretted in her autobiography that “white women [would] not, or [did] not [wish to help women of color]”<sup>100</sup>. The same year, she deplored the fact that she kept receiving numerous letters from southern mothers begging her to “save” their daughters from “dishonor and degradation”<sup>101</sup>.

Women from humble backgrounds took up the pen to denounce this sexual abuse as well. In an article published in the *Independent* in 1912, a southern child-nurse explained that

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<sup>96</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Lynching from a Negro’s Point of View”, 1904, 128. “But even if the negro’s morals were as loose and as lax as some claim them to be, and if his belief in the virtue of women were as slight as we are told, the South has nobody to blame but itself. The only object lesson in virtue and morality which the negro received for 250 years came through the medium of slavery, and that peculiar institution was not calculated to set his standards of correct living very high, Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles. Throughout their entire period of bondage, colored women were debauched by their masters. From the day they were liberated to the present time, prepossessing young colored girls been considered the rightful prey of white gentlemen in the South, and they have been protected neither by public sentiment nor by law. In the South, the negro’s home is not considered sacred by the superior race”.

<sup>99</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893, as cited in Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 86.

<sup>100</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, the *Independent*, 94-96. “From my own study of the question, the colored woman deserves greater credit for what she has done and is doing than blame for what she cannot so soon overcome”, 96 and in *The New Woman of Color*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 96 and in *The New Woman of Color*, 12. “It is ‘shameful’ that I still receive letters from women in the south the still unprotected colored women of the south, begging me to find employment for their daughters according to their ability, as domestics or otherwise, to save them from going into the homes of the south as servants, as there is nothing to save them from dishonor and degradation”.

women of color often fell victims to both black and white men's sexual assaults and did not benefit from any protection: "I didn't know then that what has been a burden to my mind and heart ever since: *that a colored woman's virtue in this part of the country has no protection*"<sup>102</sup>. She emphasized that women of color were not only unable to protect their sexual integrity but risked losing their jobs if they dared to speak up. When she was a young married woman, she was dismissed after rejecting the advances of her white employer:

I lost my place because I refused to let the madam's husband kiss me. He must have been accustomed to undue familiarity with his servants, or else he took it as a matter of course, because without any love-making at all, soon after I was installed as cook, he walked up to me, threw his arms around me, and was in the act of kissing me, when I demanded to know what he meant, and shoved him away<sup>103</sup>.

Her testimony revealed that many African American working women were still exposed to sexual oppression and that black men were often unable to offer them protection because of a racially, economically and sexually oppressive system. As a result, many women of color felt that they had to fend for themselves and continue a tradition of self-reliance in the post-emancipation period.

These activists denounced the double standard existing between black and white women in the South and in the entire country. Although they rejected southern chivalry – judging it as outdated and exclusionary, they demanded to finally be regarded as women deserving both black and white men's courtesy and respect.

### **Demanding African American Men's Protection**

Faced with sexual violence as well as a broader denial of their womanhood, African American women activists urged black men to protect them. The study of these women's writings reveal that these members of the middle and upper classes used Victorianism to fight against the image of the immoral woman. They emphasized woman's need to benefit from men's protection. For example, in "Negro Womanhood Defended" (1904), Addie Hunton, an educator and race and gender activist from Virginia who grew up in Boston, claimed that all

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<sup>102</sup> A Negro Nurse, "More Slavery at the South", 1912, the *Independent*. New York: published for the proprietors, 1848-1921. v. 72, Jan. 25, 1912: 196-200. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/negnurse/negnurse.html>. "On the one hand, we are assailed by white men, and, on the other hand, we are assailed by black men, who should be our natural protectors and, whether in the cook kitchen, at the washtub, over the sewing machine, behind the baby carriage, or at the ironing board, we are but little more than pack horses, beasts of burden, slaves!". She explained that white men remained unpunished and that when black men attempted to defend them, they were "accused of lying".

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Italics mine.

women should benefit from men's protection: "In the light of Christianity all women must be protected if for no other reasons than that they are akin to be the Christ-mother". According to her, this was the only way to fight against the myth of the immoral woman: "Until this is done, it would, at least, be charitable to leave the discussion of the morality of the Negro woman to those who are earnestly laboring for her uplift"<sup>104</sup>. Similarly, in 1904, Nannie H. Burroughs contended: "Our women need the protection and genuine respect of our men [...]. When the womanhood of a race is unprotected by its manhood, it is written that that race has no premium on virtue and whoever will may come". Therefore, Nannie H. Burroughs encouraged all black women to teach "all men that black womanhood is as sacred as white womanhood"<sup>105</sup>.

Many African American women deplored being denied respect and courtesy. In "The Woman's Part in A Man's Business", Fannie Barrier Williams regretted women's lack of protection: "She is the only woman in America who is almost unknown; the only woman for whom nothing is done; the only woman without sufficient defenders when assailed; the only woman who is still outside of that world of chivalry that in all the ages has apotheosized woman kind"<sup>106</sup>. Using a typical Victorian rhetoric, Williams lamented that "chivalry" did not apply to women of color: "The women of other races bask in the clear sunlight of man's chivalry, admiration, and even worship, while the colored woman abides in the shadow of his contempt, mistrust, or indifference"<sup>107</sup>. She reiterated this view one year later in "The Colored Girl": "Man's instinctive homage at the shrine of womanhood *draws a line of color*, which places her *forever outside its mystic circle*"<sup>108</sup>. These activists not only spoke out against white men's denial of protection, they also publicly objected to the disregard some black men showed to women of color.

Moreover, as Paula Giddings has explained, black women "were frustrated by the negative epithets hurled at them, and by the failure of black leaders to defend them or the race

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<sup>104</sup> Addie Hunton, "Negro Womanhood Defended," Our Woman's Number. *The Voice of the Negro* 1(7) (July 1904): 280–282, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V, 35–37, 37.

<sup>105</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, "Not Color But Character", *The Voice of the Negro*, 1 June 1904. Deeply religious, she prayed: "God help us to so live that we may raise the standard higher" and said: "Let character, and not color, be the first prerequisite to admission into any home, church or social circle, and a new day will break upon ten million people".

<sup>106</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Woman's Part in a Man's Business", *The Voice of the Negro*, 1904, in *The New Woman of Color*, 59. It seems that by "chivalry", Fannie Williams had courtesy in mind, not chivalry as it was understood in the South.

<sup>107</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl", 1905, *Voice of the Negro* 2, no. 6 (1905): 400–403, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 63.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 63. Italics mine. "The colored girl may have character, beauty and charms ineffable, but *she's not in vogue*. The muses of song, poetry, and art do not woo and exalt her. She's not permitted or supposed to typify the higher ideals that make life something higher, sweeter and more spiritual than a mere existence."

as a whole”<sup>109</sup>. Consequently, they urged men of color to show them more consideration and to hold them in higher regard. Although Fannie Barrier Williams had rejoiced in the emerging chivalric attitude emerging among men of color of the middle and upper classes in 1893<sup>110</sup>, it appears that, in the early 1900s, she decried the lack of protection for women of the lower social class. In “The Colored Girl” (1905), she chastised African American men for their apparent absence of solidarity with women of color, lamenting that many judged women of their own community severely and as lacking cardinal Victorian qualities: “We have all too many colored men who hold the degrading opinions of ignorant white men, that all colored girls are alike. They lose sight of the fact that colored girls like other girls are apt to be just as pure, noble, and sweet as the best of our men shall insist upon their being.”<sup>111</sup>. She argued that the racial situation in America could only be settled once men of color should recognize women as assets for the community:

We hold our girls too cheaply. Too many colored men entertain very careless, if not contemptible, opinions of the colored girl. They are apt to look to other races for their types of beauty and character. For the most part the rivalry of colored men for colored women has in it but little heart and no strength of protection. They ought to appreciate that a colored girl of character and intelligence is a very precious asset in our social life, and they should act accordingly<sup>112</sup>.

At the turn of the century, several intellectuals such as Anna Cooper publicly denounced black men’s tendency to let women of color fend for themselves. In “The Status of Woman in America” (1892), Cooper regretted that black men were generally not inclined to support the efforts made by black female activists or clubwomen. According to her, while white women benefited from the support of white men to accomplish their duties in the woman’s era<sup>113</sup>, African American women did not receive the same amount of support from men of color when they were confronted “by both a woman question and a race problem” in extraordinary times – the woman’s era: “The colored woman too often finds herself hampered and shamed by a less liberal sentiment and a more conservative attitude on the part of those

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<sup>109</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 22. “Out of this social purification and moral uplift have come a chivalric sentiment and regard from the young men of the race that give to the young women a new sense of protection”.

<sup>111</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, 66. “If they are to be respected and admired [...], it must be for what they are and not for what they have. In this respect they are unlike the women of other races. The very unpopularity of their complexion obscures their merits”.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>113</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Status of Woman in America”, 1892, 109-117, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 113. She argued: “The women of the white race can with calm assurance enter upon the work they feel by nature appointed to do, while their men give loyal support and appreciative countenance to their efforts, recognizing in most avenues of usefulness the propriety and the need of woman's distinctive cooperation”.



for whose opinion she cares most”<sup>114</sup>. She then adopted a more nuanced position, indicating that fortunately not all men of color adopted such stances: “This is not universally true I am glad to admit. There are to be found both intensely conservative white men and exceedingly liberal colored men”. Nevertheless, she suggested that men of African descent were somewhat less inclined to support women’s agency: “As far as my experience goes the average man of our race is less frequently ready to admit the actual need among the sturdier forces of the world for woman’s help or influence”<sup>115</sup>.

At a time when women of color were continuously attacked and refused recognition of their womanhood, elite women consequently stressed the necessity for the community to be united and for black men to honor and defend women of color. Mia Bay has argued that this “ladylike but unsatisfying pose” [the culture of silence about sex which Darlene Hine has discussed] left [women such as “Cooper and Terrell and other middle-class black women of their day”] looking for others for protection<sup>116</sup>.

These women – who often did not break completely free from the cult of True Womanhood – used the language of Victorianism to demand the same rights and consideration as white women, in brief, to claim equality with white American women. Barrier Williams hammered home that what the African American woman wanted at the beginning of the twentieth century was respect: “What the colored girl craves, above all things, is to be *respected and believed in*. This is more important than position and opportunities.”<sup>117</sup>. For this to be possible, African American women argued that the collaboration of men was essential. In “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business” (1904), Fannie Barrier Williams contended that black men “of ability” – that is, of the professional middle or upper-classes – should champion womanhood in the early 1900s. She thought that

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<sup>114</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Status of Woman in America”, 1892, 109-117, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 113.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Almost forty years later, in 1930, as she had just retired from her position at M. Street High School, Anna Cooper assessed the situation more severely. To the question what is your racial philosophy, Cooper answered that women of African descent had to fend for themselves for both racial and gender discrimination: “Our own men as a group have not inherited traditions of chivalry (one sided as it may be among white men) and women are generally left to do our race battling alone except for empty compliments now and then. Even so, one may make the mistake of looking at race handicaps through the wrong end of the telescope or imagining that oppression goes only with color. When I encounter brutality I indeed not always charge it to my race. It may be – and generally is – chargeable to the imperfections in the civilization environing me for which as a teacher and trained thinker I take my share of responsibility”. Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1. Form.

<sup>116</sup> Mia Bay was referring to Cooper and Terrell. She indicated that Ida Wells had a very different outlook on the question, probably because she was used to defending herself – she carried a pistol with her – and because she lived in Illinois. Cooper indeed called for black men “to be a father, a brother, a friend to every weak, struggling unshielded girl”, Anna Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 32, as cited in *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 120.

<sup>117</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, 65, in *The New Woman of Color*, Italics mine.

these men had paramount responsibility towards women of color: “We believe that it is to be the high privilege of ‘the Negro business man’ to “lift the colored woman up” and “out of her hateful obscurity” until she “shall be known, loved, and exalted because she is a woman and not be despised and mistrutred simply because she is a black woman”<sup>118</sup>. In 1905, as Addie Hunton and Nannie Helen Burroughs had done, still using a rhetoric imbued with Victorian accents, she explained that African American men should bestow their protection upon women because it was the only way for black women to finally earn the respect of all Americans: “Colored women can never be all that they would be until colored men shall began to exalt their character and beauty and to throw about them that chivalry of love and protection which shall command the recognition and respect of all the world”<sup>119</sup>.

African American activists contended that men should shield women from attacks. In one issue of the *Woman’s Era*, at the time elite women were organizing the work of the NACW, Mary Terrell urged African American men to come to black women’s defense: “I want our intelligent men to be more ready to resent insults and stand up for the right that are denied. I want to see them less willing to preserve the silence they call “golden” when a word of manly independence and righteous indignation would raise them so much higher in the estimation of themselves and everybody else. We need to cultivate self-respect as a race”<sup>120</sup>. Even if she understood the occasional hesitations of male government employees to speak up when the image of women of color was attacked, she asked them to be more outspoken and assertive:

If our men displayed more pluck and independence in the dealings with the Anglo-Saxon brothers the latter would have more respect for them. We can never command respect from others until we possess a sufficient quantity ourselves, and no man or woman can respect himself or herself who dares not stand up for what he or she conceives to be right<sup>121</sup>.

Likewise, in 1905, Fannie Williams stated that black men should publicly fight against negative images circulating about women of color. To convince male readers of *The Voice of the Negro* to respect women of color and show them proper deference, she provided the example of Jewish men who always respected and supported the women of their community: “[Jewish] women are safeguarded and exalted in ways that make that character and womanhood sacred”<sup>122</sup>. She stressed the necessity for men of color to defend their good name: “The colored girl of character and accomplishments [...] wants and deserves many things, but

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<sup>118</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 60.

<sup>119</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, 66.

<sup>120</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Woman’s Era*, June 1895, 4. Mary Church Terrell Papers. Library of Congress.

<sup>121</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Woman’s Era*, July 1895, 4. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>122</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”, 65.

the greatest of her needs is the respect and confidence of those who should exalt and respect her”<sup>123</sup>. She also wondered whether the colored man was brave enough to stand out and say to the world: “Thus far and no farther in your attempt to insult and degrade our women”<sup>124</sup>. This solidarity was crucial to the work of racial uplift. She explained that the community would be able to be economically and socially successful only if black men and women worked together. She argued, for instance, that men should prove racial pride and solidarity by giving preference to black women at work. In “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, she encouraged black professionals and businessmen to hire women of color whenever they could – rather than white women – as clerks or book-keepers: “It can truthfully be said that it is no longer necessary for colored businessman, in any kind of business, to employ white girls as accountants or clerks, as he can always secure a competent colored girl”<sup>125</sup>. For her, African-American men’s economic and social success directly impacted African American women: “With the interest of this kind of woman in a man’s business he cannot fail, and without her he has already failed.”<sup>126</sup>

In their writings and speeches, black women of the elite voiced their longing for men of color to display racial solidarity and to come to their defense: by doing this, they relied on traditional ideals of gender roles, to which they appeared to subscribe, being the products of Victorian America. They used the language of Victorianism and demanded to benefit from men’s protection. Even though they used the term “chivalry”, they rejected it – deeming it as an outdated notion being associated to a racist and restrictive ideology. They simply asked men of their community to honor and defend them and to benefit from their protection<sup>127</sup>.

Furthermore, some conservative women intellectuals such as Fannie Barrier Williams believed that African American women would only be able to achieve uplift if men of color managed to rise. In “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, speaking as a woman of the elite again, she argued that black men would only be able to protect women of color if they climbed the social ladder through their hard work. As a result, she encouraged men to keep working – in business in particular, as the title of her article suggests –, according to the ideal of self-help, for their own benefit and that of black women: “Colored women will never be

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>125</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business”, 60.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>127</sup> These women asked for men’s protection, that is, black and white men’s respect and courtesy towards women.

properly known and the best of them appreciated, until colored men have become more important in those affairs of life where character and achievements count for more than prejudices and suspicions.”<sup>128</sup>. She argued that self-help and social uplift were the key for black American women to finally benefit from courtesy exactly the way white women did: “Every colored man who succeeds in business brings his wife and daughter a little nearer that sphere of chivalry and protection in which every white women finds shelter and vindication against every hateful presumption”<sup>129</sup>.

Although she evidently wished to see all men finally respect and honor and behave courteously with women of color, Anna Cooper criticized the prevalent use of chivalry in the South, viewing it as a an old and outdated notion<sup>130</sup>. As Anne Firor Scott has demonstrated, southern chivalry was an old heritage of western medieval traditions<sup>131</sup>. Kristin Waters has pointed out that “Cooper in fact critiques the cult [of true womanhood] in her identification of decadent white southern culture with medieval chivalry, both of which she finds hypocritical”<sup>132</sup>. As early as in 1886, despite her partial subscription to the ideology of true womanhood, Cooper rejected separate spheres as well as the reverence for chivalry that was particularly prevalent in the South. Importantly, she rejected southern chivalry because she was conscious that it further placed women in a subordinate position and was a means to further exclude black women from womanhood, being aware that American men showed respect only to women of their own caste and excluded women of African descent. In 1886, she noted: “Respect for woman, the much lauded chivalry of the Middle Ages, meant what I fear it still means to some men in our own day – respect for the elect few among whom they expect to consort”<sup>133</sup>. Where the elitist Northerner Fannie Williams expressed hope for the members of the black middle-class of the North – who, she said, would soon benefit from black men’s chivalry thanks to self-help – Cooper was concerned by the fate of black southern women – who were not only denied gentlemanly behavior, but remained largely unprotected.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> When she visited Canada in July 1891, Cooper celebrated Canadians’ manners and courtesy towards women, regardless of their skin color. See Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Springarn Moorland Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C..

<sup>131</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 15. “The myth of the lady was associated with medieval chivalry”.

<sup>132</sup> Kristin Waters, in *Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, 374-375. When Cooper spoke about some women who “happen[ed] to have [doll houses]”, she had the exclusion of black women from notions of ‘chivalry’ in mind.

<sup>133</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, 55. White and Dobris have analyzed that Cooper rejected chivalry this way: “Black womanhood, the means for authenticating women’s agency, had to be unfettered by useless constraints that were tied to the false chivalry of an oppressive Southern ideology”. White and Dobris, 179.

Other black women such as Ida B. Wells and Nannie Helen Burroughs inveighed against white southern men for their so-called “chivalrous nature”. These activists stated that they could not claim to be self-respecting gentlemen because they denied them equal protection, had repeatedly abused black women – and continued to do so – and because they failed to respect women in general. Black female intellectuals maintained that because white southern men excluded black women from the category “woman”, they were therefore not the moral defenders of all white womanhood they claimed to be: their prejudice and their inhuman attitude placed them outside of the category “gentleman”. In the mid-1890s, Ida Wells argued:

To justify their own barbarism they assume a chivalry which they do not possess. True chivalry respects all womanhood [...] That chivalry which is ‘most sensitive concerning the honor of women’ can hope for but little respect from the civilized world, when it confines itself entirely to the women who happen to be white. Virtue knows no color line, and the chivalry which depends upon complexion of skin and texture of hair can command no honest respect”<sup>134</sup>.

Consequently, in her eyes, in the South, chivalry was a mockery. To illustrate her point, she used the example of the northern school marms who came south to teach freedmen after the war<sup>135</sup>. She indicated that because they had defied the racial norms of their region – by being inclined to help black people and promote racial equality—, these white women – who should naturally have benefited from white men’s protection – became in the eyes of white southern supremacists race traitors and “social outlaws in the South”. Consequently, they were denied the protection which southern white men claimed they gave to *all* white women. She explained that because they were “‘Nigger teachers’ – unpardonable offenders in the social ethics of the South”, they “were insulted, persecuted and ostracised, not by Negroes, but by the white manhood which boasts of its chivalry toward women.”<sup>136</sup>. With this example, Wells showed that gender had in fact little to do with white men’s chivalrous attitudes, in reality race conditioned white southern men’s protection of women. White southern men defended only the white women who promoted – or at least did not represent a threat to – white supremacy. She also denounced the immoral behavior of many white southern men in the antebellum era, implying that they could not claim to be “gentlemen” after – having been unfaithful to their white wives while sexually assaulting African American women. In *The*

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<sup>134</sup> Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record*.

<sup>135</sup> Fannie Williams shared this admiration for the school marms of the North. In 1893, in her famous address at the World’s Columbian Exposition, she spoke about “those saintly women of the white race who for thirty years have been consecrated to the uplifting of a whole race of women from a long-enforced degradation”, *The Intellectual Progress*”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 17.

<sup>136</sup> Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*. Chapter 1: “The Case Stated”. The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Red Record*, by Ida B. Wells. <https://ia800501.us.archive.org/23/items/theredrecord14977gut/14977.txt>.

*Red Record*, she contended: “No one who reads the record, as it is written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard for the honor due the women of his own race or respect for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power.”<sup>137</sup>. White Southerners obviously resented such assertions while members of the black community paid tribute to Wells’s courage. Thanks to her journalistic work and her distinctive outspokenness, Ida B. Wells became the most famous anti-lynching crusader of the United States. Another southern-born woman, Nannie Helen Burroughs, took the same stance in 1904: “A man who is truly a gentleman respects a woman, not because she is white or black [...] but because she is a woman, and he has been early taught that there is a certain amount of respect due *every* woman”<sup>138</sup>.

Thirty years after the end of the Civil War, at the time of the sectional reunification of the country, several intellectuals denounced the myths created by the New South and showed how region influenced visions of both black and white manhood and womanhood in America. As they analyzed sectional relations at the turn of the century, these women demonstrated that images of black and white womanhood were closely related to race, gender, sex and region. Black female intellectuals first denounced the double standard regarding women in America, underscored how the myths of the “black rapist” and the “immoral black woman” had been created to assert white supremacy and to justify racial and sexual violence. Moreover, they fought against the South’s growing and devastating political and cultural influence in the nation, combatted the mythology of the “happy slave” and the “Mammy” and demanded to be finally considered as women worthy of respect and courtesy. To continue fighting against negative images about women of color fostered by the New South throughout the country, African American women – of all regions who nevertheless prized their regional identity – ceaselessly advocated inter-regional collaboration.

In the second chapter, I will study to what extent region impacted African American women’s clubwork and activism.

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<sup>137</sup> Ida B. Wells, *The Red Record*. See also [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active\\_learning/explorations/lynching/wells2.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/lynching/wells2.cfm).

<sup>138</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, “Not Color But Character”, *The Voice of the Negro*, 1 June 1904. Italics mine.



## Chapter 2: Region Influencing African American Women's Activism

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In this chapter, I will examine to what extent region impacted women intellectuals' activism and their understanding of what the best method to defend the image of women of color was at a time when the South's influence was so strong in the country. I will address questions such as: How important was their sense of regional identity in their defense? Did they position themselves as being from one specific region or did they tend to emphasize their Americanness? Some of the women in this study such as Anna Cooper or Fannie Barrier Williams voiced their regional identity quite strongly. How and why did they emphasize their regional identity? At a time when Southernness was equated with support of white supremacy and memory of the Old South and the Confederacy, how did black southern women express their Southernness? How did women speak about being a Northerner or a Midwesterner?

### 1. Expressing Their Regional Identity

Region exerted tremendous importance in defining both black and white women's sense of identity. The attachment to one's native or adoptive region differed from one woman to another yet it is possible to assert that regional identity was an important part of these women's identities.

#### **Eastern, Northern and Midwesterner Women Prizing Freedom**

Black women who lived in the North, East and Midwest valued the freedom and the opportunity to live relatively free from discrimination their regions offered them. They viewed the North as a land which offered them wider perspectives, where relative racial equality could be achieved, although the presence of white Southerners could ruin this fragile balance<sup>139</sup>. As noted earlier, the northern-born Fannie Williams depicted Brockport, New York, in her 1904 autobiography as a place where she grew up with a sense of relative social

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<sup>139</sup> Williams noted that the only times she was confronted to racism was in the presence of Southerners. For example, she left the art school in Boston after southern students demanded it in the 1870s and much later, in Chicago, one of the clerks she had helped hire was targeted by a southern patron of the firm, telling her that in the South, one made black women "know their place". See Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography", 9.

equality. Fannie Barrier Williams recounted that she was happy not to travel in the South too often, because of the intense racial discrimination reigning there – although she did travel in the South in the late 1890s and early 1900s for her work<sup>140</sup>.

Another woman also portrayed the North – and in particular New England – positively. The southern-born Susie King Taylor – who had lived in both the North and the South before settling down in Boston – was very happy to finally be able to enjoy freedom and justice in the North. In her autobiography, she insisted that New England was exceptional as regards race relations: “I have been in many States and cities, and in each I have looked for liberty and justice, equal for the black as for the white; but it was not until I was within the borders of New England, and reached old Massachusetts, that I found it”. Taylor observed that liberty had its full meaning in Boston: “Here is found liberty in the full sense of the word, liberty for the stranger within her gates, irrespective of race or creed, liberty and justice for all”<sup>141</sup>. She used strong dichotomous terms to speak about the North and the South and hoped to see racism disappear in the South: “I know I shall not live to see the day, but it will come – the South will be like the North, and when it comes it will be prized higher than we prize the North to-day”<sup>142</sup>.

## Expressing Love For the South

Because of its distinctive history and culture, the South triggered a stronger sense of regional identity among Americans than any other regions of America. White Southerners had a strong sense of regional identity and understood being southern as being essentially different from other Americans. In *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South: 1890-1940*, Grace Elizabeth Hale has shown that after 1890 white Southerners “crafted their modern racial and regional identity” and that this had an impact on the rest of the nation<sup>143</sup>. They “created their modern sense of themselves, different, externally, from the rest of

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<sup>140</sup> In the mid-1890s in *Woman's Era*, Williams praised the achievements of the Memphis black elite and in her 1904 autobiography, she explained that she passed for white in order not to travel in a Jim Crow car in Louisiana.

<sup>141</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences*, 62. Taylor worked in various places in the South before settling down in Boston.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>143</sup> Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South: 1890-1940*, 10. Hale studied popular culture in the South and its national impact.

Americans and different, internally, from African Americans, at the level of culture”<sup>144</sup>. Hale has chronicled the creation of a certain Southern exceptionalism, the singular place of the South within the nation, the South being at turns “part and yet outside of the nation”.

How differently did black and white southern women envisage the South and their Southernness? The study of these women’s writings reveal that black southern women had a stronger sense of regional identity as well and asserted their sense of regional identity perhaps with more force than black Northerners or Easterners because they lived in a region which was increasingly defining itself as white at the turn of the century.

### **Whites’ Understanding of Southernness as “A Regional Whiteness”, White Supremacy and The Lost Cause**

White Southerners crafted a distinct definition of “Southernness” at the turn of the century, presenting the region as white, as a place marked by the experience of the Civil War and the Confederacy. As Grace Hale has pinpointed in *Making Whiteness*, white Southerners defended the idea that “Southernness [...] was regional whiteness [and] did not have to mean geographic residence”<sup>145</sup>. The region was additionally distinct from the rest of the nation because of its continued respect for a strict patriarchal system. As Joan Johnson has pointed out, contrary to progressive northern women who fought for liberty at that time, white southern women were careful not to “tread on the patriarchy, which used notions of women’s need for protection to underscore the need for segregation and maintain the status quo”<sup>146</sup>. As Anne Firor Scott has argued, white southern women’s power historically and strategically relied on race as well as on a white patriarchal system<sup>147</sup> and the sense of Victorianism was stronger in the South than anywhere else in the country.

At the turn of the century, some white southern women actively took part in the creation of the New South by reviving the Old South, supporting white supremacy, the culture

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 9- 10.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 143. Grace Hale added that the meaning of Southernness was even extended: “‘Provincialism does not at all imply living in the place where you base your beliefs and choices. It is a state of mind or persuasion. It is a source [...] you need not, for instance, live in the South, but you feel your roots are there’. From this perspective, southern whiteness became simply one among many identities in the fractured, mobile and consuming world that twentieth-century American whites could now choose”. Hale used Stark Young’s words.

<sup>146</sup> Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 205.

<sup>147</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady*, Chapter 1.

of segregation and the Lost Cause. As Joan Johnson has demonstrated in *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930*, “After the war and Reconstruction some southern white women were the architects of a culture of segregation: they defined the New South around the idea of white supremacy, embracing the ‘Lost Cause’ and promoting racial segregation. They worked actively to build a new southern identity and a sense of pride in the Confederacy”<sup>148</sup>. Some white southern clubwomen “rehabilitated the Old South through the Lost Cause” and defended the cause of segregation and white supremacy. They supported the culture of the Old South in various ways. Some were active in clubwork – for example within the United Daughters of the Confederacy – in which they supported efforts to build a culture of segregation. For example, they raised funds to erect commemorative monuments or statues for Confederate soldiers and generals or “Mammies” and they organized events to celebrate the memory of the Old South. They also paradoxically contributed to further white supremacy with their passivity, in particular as regards lynching. Joan Johnson has pointed out:

Both white clubwomen and Daughters [the United Daughters of the Confederacy] embraced the Lost Cause that justified and strengthened segregation. Thus their social reform was linked to the Lost Cause, which was in turn rooted in the racial ideology of white supremacy. Through their monuments and their reformatories, they built a culture of segregation and helped define the New South around white supremacy<sup>149</sup>.

When a veritable fascination for Mammies swept the region and the nation between the 1890s and the 1920s – the historian Cheryl Thurber has termed it “a mammy craze”<sup>150</sup> – white Southerners actively promoted the image of the Mammy. The image was increasingly widely used in literature, in the press and in advertisements<sup>151</sup>. In *Making Whiteness*, Hale has demonstrated that many white Southerners sang the praises of their much beloved mammies in their autobiographies and poems published in the 1900s<sup>152</sup>.

Moreover, when various projects destined to commemorate and “honor” former slaves were launched in the United States – although these projects were initiated by white men –,

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<sup>148</sup> Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 204-205.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>150</sup> Cheryl Turber, as cited in Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 98.

<sup>151</sup> Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 98. As Hale has explained, it appeared “in books, magazines and films, in advertisements, on menus, in the names and iconography of restaurants and cookbooks, and as the shape of commodities from salt shakers to cookie jars”. See also Karen Cox’s *Dreaming of Dixie*. The figure of Aunt Jemima is the most famous example of the mammy in advertisements.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

white clubwomen often acted in support of this perpetuation of southern culture<sup>153</sup>. For example, when the Senator for Mississippi John Sharp Williams proposed a bill to commemorate black mammies and faithful slaves in 1923, the Virginia Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy planned to erect a Black Mammy monument on the Mall in Washington D.C.. Associations and clubs further fueled the growing fascination for the imagery of the Old South. Through such projects, southern white women aimed at resuscitating the Old South and strengthening their influence on the national culture – the choice of Washington Mall being significant in the case of the “Black Mammy Monument” of 1923. Women were therefore active supporters of white supremacy and the culture of the Confederacy in the press, literature and on the southern landscape.

As Joan Johnson has argued: “Region [...] was important to black clubwomen in the South as well as to white women”<sup>154</sup>. At a time when the New South was viewed nationally through the image of the Old South and when Southernness was associated with whiteness and the Confederacy, how did black women understand and express their Southernness?

### **Black Southern Women’s Understanding of Southernness: The Emphasis on Freedom, Citizenship and Civil Rights**

Black and white Southerners obviously had different understandings of the meaning of Southernness<sup>155</sup>. While they asserted their attachment to the nation, black women also aimed at defining and asserting African Americans’ Southernness after the 1890s. Several studies reveal that black southern women placed the emphasis on liberty, emancipation and civil rights. Antoinette Van Zelm’s 2000 study of Virginia has shown this well. Van Zelm has demonstrated that “between 1861 and 1890, black and white women throughout the South

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<sup>153</sup> In *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, Nina Silber has demonstrated that the philosophy of northern and southern women in clubwork differed in dramatic ways. For example, in the post-war years, when white northern women actively worked to help war widows obtain pensions, white southern women – in particular the members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy – devoted funds to the erection of Confederate buildings in the South. Nina Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>154</sup> Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 206-207.

<sup>155</sup> On these questions, Joan Johnson’s monograph *Southern Ladies, New Women* and Antoinette G. Van Zelm’s “Virginia Woman as Public Citizens: Emancipation Day Celebrations and Lost Cause Commemorations, 1863-1890” are informative. Antoinette Van Zelm, “Virginia Woman as Public Citizens: Emancipation Day Celebrations and Lost Cause Commemorations, 1863-1890”: 71-88, in *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing with the Powers that Be*, eds. Janet L. Coryell, Thomas Appleton Jr., Anastasia Sims and Sandra Gioia Treadway. (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

engaged in a vigorous debate over the meaning of slavery, the war, and freedom”<sup>156</sup> and that while African Americans celebrated Emancipation Day, “publicly proclaim[ing] their devotion to freedom and experience[ing] the empowerment associated with the re-creation of history”, white women “arranged Lost Cause commemorations”<sup>157</sup>. In *Southern Ladies, New Women*, Johnson has underscored that “African Americans clearly rejected the Lost Cause; instead, they favored a history that focused on emancipation, American citizenship, and black pride”<sup>158</sup>. Black women actively crafted a certain definition of Southernness, insisting on the importance of teaching American history and black literature.

African American clubwomen in South Carolina attempted to resist that culture in many ways, from teaching black history to lobbying for State reformatory for black girls. They rejected the Lost Cause history and instead promoted American history and black literature. Simultaneously, through their social reform agenda they also demanded that their needs be met and that they be granted respect and recognition as legitimate citizens in the New South<sup>159</sup>.

While white women prized the culture of the Confederacy and the memory of the Confederacy, black women defined their southern identity by speaking about the South as “home” – the land of their ancestors –, stressing the importance of freedom and political rights.

Asserting one’s Southernness was an important political act for black southern women such as Anna Cooper or Margaret Murray Washington because it was a way to assert one’s role in the History of the South and of the country. As Joan Johnson has pointed out: “For black women to emphasize their regional identity was to write themselves into the very history white Southerners had written them out of”<sup>160</sup>. They voiced the historic contribution of the black community in the building of both the region and nation, putting their labor and faithfulness to the fore:

Although they experienced shame and inferiority in relation to their Northern sisters, black women had to claim their place in the South when they dealt with white women in the interracial movement. They had to believe that they had helped build the South and that they belonged there. They had to exert their

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<sup>156</sup> Antoinette Van Zelm, “Virginia Woman as Public Citizens: Emancipation Day Celebrations and Lost Cause Commemorations, 1863-1890”, 72.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 73 and 88. For instance, African American women “participated in Emancipation Day ceremonies as eager citizens, impatient to bring the reality of freedom closer to its ideal and determined to protect their newly acquired rights” whereas white women who organized Lost Cause commemorations did so as reluctant citizens, animated by a vision not of the future but of the past”.

<sup>158</sup> Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 90.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 205-206. In her conclusion, Johnson argues that these black clubwomen “helped lay the foundation for what would become the Civil Rights movement”, 206.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 91.



rights as Southern citizens to fight the degree of oppression experienced in the South and to claim state support for their social reform agenda<sup>161</sup>.

Some black women voiced these ideas in lectures and in etiquette books. For instance, in 1916 Emma Hackley argued that African Americans' history in America should be taught to instill race pride in young people: "A child should be taught to love and be proud of its race and to know the good points of the race [...] The colored child should be taught Negro History that she may be proud of her dark skin [...] Let [the "colored girl"] know that the black man was the author of much of the world's history",<sup>162</sup>.

Furthermore, many women affectionately spoke about the South as "home" and voiced their fondness for their native section. As Roberta Maguire has underscored, Anna Cooper indeed displayed a "vital interest in region"<sup>163</sup> and "was necessarily shaped by the region of her birth", since she spent "nearly the entirety of her life in the South, the first 23 years in North Carolina and over 70 of the next 82 years in Washington, one of the region's northern outposts"<sup>164</sup>. Repeatedly in her essays and articles, Cooper presented herself as a Southerner and claimed her affection for her native State<sup>165</sup>. Likewise, Margaret Murray Washington expressed her devotion for her native region throughout her life and dedicated her life to bettering the living conditions of black southern women. For instance, in 1920, in an address delivered to white and black women of the South at the occasion of the Memphis Women's Interracial Conference in October 1920, Margaret Washington, who was then in her mid-fifties<sup>166</sup>, claimed her interest in the welfare of the South: "It affords me great pleasure [...] to be able to say a word or two in the interest of the women of my race and therefore in the interest of the South, which I love and of which I am a definite part"<sup>167</sup>. She proudly spoke of

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 206-207.

<sup>162</sup> Emma Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 24 and 27-28.

<sup>163</sup> Roberta Maguire, "Kate Chopin and Anna Julia Cooper : Critiquing Kentucky and the South", 123- 137. *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. xxxv, Fall 2002, No. 1, 125.

<sup>164</sup> Roberta Maguire, "Anna Julia Cooper: The Postbellum South", 220 to 224. In *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, ed. By Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks. (New Orleans: Louisiana University Press, 2002). See page 223. In adulthood, Anna Cooper lived in LeDroit Park in the black neighborhood of the nation's capital.

<sup>165</sup> In a letter addressed to "My dear Mr Daniels", the son of Josephus Daniels, a North Carolina editor, Cooper defined herself "as a colored woman and a Raleighite". Anna Julia Coopers Papers. Moorland Spingarn Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1.

<sup>166</sup> Margaret Murray Washington was born in 1865 and she died in 1925, at the age of 60. She was then 55 when she made this address.

<sup>167</sup> Margaret Murray Washington, "The Negro Home, An Address by Mrs Booker T. Washington at the Interracial Conference held in Memphis, TN, October 1920". Container 5. Mss 18.185, Booker T. Washington's Papers. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Page 1. Also available: Margaret Murray Washington, "The Negro Home", a speech at the Memphis Women's Inter-Racial Conference, October 1920, Papers of Margaret Murray Washington, Frissell Library, Tuskegee University (N.A.C.W. Microfilm, reel 6, frames 47-52).

being a Southerner: “I was born in the state of Mississippi, educated in the state of Tennessee, and am a citizen of the state of Alabama [...] There is no question which affects any part of the South in which I am not interested and for which I am not willing to give both time and strength”<sup>168</sup>.

Moreover, several prominent black clubwomen from the South such as Anna Cooper and Margaret Washington positioned themselves as the best representatives of black women in America because it was there that the vast majority of African American women still lived – despite the effects of the Great Migration – at the turn of the century. They argued that it was in the South that help was desperately needed. In 1893, at the age of 35, Anna Cooper famously stated: “I speak for the colored women of the South, because it is there that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears, and it is there too that the colored woman of America has made her characteristic history, and there her destiny is evolving.”<sup>169</sup>. Likewise, in “The New Negro Woman” published in August 1895 in, Margaret Washington said: “The crucial race work was to be done in the South, a place that needed to be identified less with the degradations of slavery and more with the possibilities of reform”<sup>170</sup>. Because they had lived in the South most of their lives and because they thought that their duty lay in that section, they voiced their regional identity perhaps more firmly than women of other regions<sup>171</sup>.

In the early twentieth century, when black southern women were accused of being ‘anti-southern’ by whites in the press – because they criticized the section for its discrimination against African Americans, — many of them publicly justified themselves, speaking about their love of their native region. They explained that they cherished the South because it was their home yet rejected and resented the racial injustice and discrimination they suffered from in that section. In the *Voice of the Negro*, one author wrote: “We are thoroughly and distinctly Southerners. By birth, by reading, by training, and by every tie of kinship we belong to this section. We love this great Southern country with all its golden glory... We do love this land. It is revenge, murder, lynchings, lies and injustice we hate”. Another woman

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Intellectual Progress”, 1893, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 202.

<sup>170</sup> Margaret Washington, “The New Negro Woman”, August 1895, *Lend a Hand*, as cited in Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*, 54. *Lend a Hand* was a Boston monthly newspaper owned by Edward Everett Hale.

<sup>171</sup> Margaret Washington (1865-1925) lived in the South her entire life. Born in Macon, Mississippi, she studied at Fisk Institute in the 1880s before working at Tuskegee Institute and marrying its founder and president. Besides a few years studying at Oberlin College and teaching at Wilberforce University in Ohio, Cooper spent most of her life in the South as well.

said: “We do like the South, it is our home”<sup>172</sup> while Amanda Smith Jemand stated in 1901: “When the Southerner says if we do not like the South let us leave it, I answer him, we do like the South, it is our home, and we shall stay here”<sup>173</sup> and insisted on the necessity to demand civil rights: “We shall continue to ask for civil, not social, equality”<sup>174</sup>.

Ida Wells was similarly attached to the South and called for political action in the region in the early 1890s. As mentioned earlier, in 1892, she did not hesitate to call for an exodus from the South due to the unbearable racial violence existing in the section: “Tell my people to go West – there is no justice for them here”<sup>175</sup>. After her forced exile, Ida Wells-Barnett fought for her native region from afar. Although she had extensively written about the black woman of the South in her late twenties, she said little about her personal sense of Southernness in adulthood. Yet her acts reveal that she went on fighting for the rights of black Southerners through her struggle against racial violence – which was largely a southern phenomenon, although mob rule also occurred out of the South such as in Cairo, Illinois in 1909 or in East St. Louis, Illinois in 1917. Even if her study focused on a later period, Glenda Gilmore’s *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* reveals that like Ida Wells, many Southerners defended their section from outside<sup>176</sup>.

For those who lived in the South at the turn of the century, like Mamie Garvin Fields, it was important to celebrate freedom and the memory of the Emancipation Proclamation in the region. The testimonies of many women suggest that black Southerners stressed the importance of freedom and the sense of nationhood in their speeches and writings. For example, Mamie Fields recalled in her autobiography that she celebrated the Fourth of July in Charleston, South Carolina, as a young girl. This holiday was the occasion for children to read the Emancipation Proclamation and recite quotes by role models such as Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: “On the Fourth of July many of our parents were actually celebrating their own freedom [...] When I was a child, oh my, [...] the Fourth was a big day – although

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<sup>172</sup> Article published in *The Voice of the Negro*, as cited in *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 91.

<sup>173</sup> Amanda Smith Jemand, “A Southern Woman’s Appeal for Justice”, the *Independent*, Vol. 52, No. 2725 (February 21, 1901): 438-439, as cited in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 540-541. She also aimed at debunking the idea that the South was a white man’s country. She added: “The Southerner boasts this is a white man’s country. I deny it; it is my country as well as his”.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 50-51. Ida Wells encouraged black Memphians to leave in order for whites to realize how the absence of African Americans would impact white businesses and hurt the economy of the city.

<sup>176</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

not for everybody.”<sup>177</sup>. Whites were opposed to such celebrations in the 1890s because they thought it was an American holiday, therefore revealing whites’ strong sense of distinctiveness and the intense and ongoing sectional tensions between North and South: “The old-time Southerners considered the Fourth of July a Yankee holiday and ignored it. So the white people stayed home and the black people “took over” the Battery for a day”<sup>178</sup>.

As Mamie Fields explained, during World War I, contrary to many white Southerners who tended to prize more their regional identity, black Southerners seemed to value their United States citizenship much more than their State citizenship<sup>179</sup>. Interestingly, it appears that in 1917-1918 many African American soldiers made a difference between fighting for their State and fighting for the United States. According to Fields, “some [men] really wanted to get into those uniforms and stand tall in South Carolina in the uniform of the United States government. Not the government of South Carolina. *The government*”<sup>180</sup>. Although they loved their native region, African Americans generally prized their United States citizenship more than their State citizenship. When they spoke about the southern section in the period 1890-1920, black women denounced white Southerners’ support of white supremacy and memory of the Old South.

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<sup>177</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 55-56. “The Emancipation Proclamation was always either read out or some child would have memorized it for the occasion”. Some even recited some of James Weldon Johnson’s poems such as: “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”. For elements dealing with celebrations of the Civil War by African Americans, see the work of David Blight *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* published in 2001. See in particular Chapter 3: “Decoration Days” where David Blight discusses “Decoration Day” also called “Memorial Day”.

<sup>178</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 55-56. The Battery is a historic promenade in Charleston, South Carolina. African Americans could enjoy spending time in the Battery one entire day each year. Black Charlestonians were “happy to be there, able to do what they felt like”. They organized barbecues, fish-fry, and music shows. She explains that “later on, [they] were allowed there no time of year”.

<sup>179</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 160. Preference for State citizenship over U.S. citizenship in the South was revealed during the Nullification crisis of 1832-33 and the Civil War. During the Civil War, many white Southerners repeatedly attached more importance to their State than to the Federal Government. Mamie Fields explained that black American men wanted to join the army for various reasons: they wished to flee a region and a country where they were ill-treated, see the world, “get away from South Carolina or North Carolina, or whatever; they wanted to get ‘over there’”, prove their patriotism, defend the ideals of liberty in Europe but also prove their masculinity, valor and love for the nation. Fields indicated that some believed that African Americans had a particular duty to go and fight in order to prove to America their valor, courage and belief in freedom: “Negroes especially ought to go: we must show the whole world how we can fight; we must show that we believe in freedom just like the white folks do – all that kind of thing”.

<sup>180</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 160. Italics hers.

## Denouncing White Southerners' Support of Southern Culture

In their writings, African Americans condemned white women's support of "southern" culture, the promotion of the image of the Old South – through the image of the Belle and the Mammy – and white supremacy. African American writers denounced white southern women's support of the culture of the Confederacy. In her youthful diary, Mary Church confided being shocked by the way Jefferson Davis was honored at his funeral. On December 22, 1889, she was bewildered to witness how the South venerated the memory of the Confederacy and defended the idea of the Lost Cause<sup>181</sup>. Likewise, the writing of Mamie Garvin Fields reveals how white Southerners were trying to promote the culture of the Confederacy in the southern landscape. She recounted that when she was a young girl, a statue of Senator John C. Calhoun was set up in the Citadel Green in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1890s, provoking the ire of all African Americans in Charleston<sup>182</sup>. Similarly, in the early 1900s, Susie King Taylor lamented the role played by white southern women in fostering the cultural supremacy of the South. In her autobiography, she decried the bad faith of some "ex-Confederate Daughters" – who petitioned to ban certain plays such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because it supposedly "exaggerated" slaves' living conditions and because it negatively affected children – but remained silent and impassive when they witnessed lynchings<sup>183</sup>.

African American activists also decried the cultural hegemony of the South in the nation. Alarmed by the growing fascination for "Mammies", many African American leaders demonstrated that the image of the 'Mammy' was a pure product of the new narrative crafted by Southerners in the post-war period. In "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View" (1904), Mary Terrell denounced the hypocrisy of white Southerners by showing the discrepancy between the words they employed to speak about their beloved nurses and their racist attitudes which aimed at keeping these domestic workers in subjugated positions: "The dictionary is searched in vain by Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen for words sufficiently ornate and strong to express their admiration for a dear old 'mammy' or a faithful old 'uncle',

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<sup>181</sup> Mary Church Terrell, 22 December 1889. German Diary. See pages 20 to 28.

<sup>182</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 57.

<sup>183</sup> Susie King Taylor, "To the managers of the local theatres in Tennessee to prohibit the performance of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', claiming it was exaggerated (that is, the treatment of the slaves), and would have a very bad effect on the children who might see the drama. [...] Do these Confederate Daughters ever send petitions to prohibit the atrocious lynchings and wholesale murdering and torture of the negro? Do you ever hear of them fearing this would have a bad effect on the children? Which of these two, the drama or the present state of affairs, makes a degrading impression upon the minds of our young generation?" 65.



who can neither read nor write, and who assure their white friends they would not, if they could.”<sup>184</sup>.

Moreover, as Grace Hale has pointed out, some white Southerners tried to convince other Americans that a special bond existed between African Americans and them. To do so, they insisted on the very personal relationship they maintained with their treasured “mammies”<sup>185</sup>. By doing this, they conveyed the image of the Mammy outside of the South. Black intellectuals criticized such hypocritical stances, showing how Southerners placed “their” cherished mammies on pedestals in their narratives yet kept on denying them proper working conditions and decent salaries. In her autobiography, Mary Terrell decried this phenomenon, providing the example of a southern Captain from Pensacola, Florida – the “perfect archetype of the aristocrat of the South” – who sang his Mammy’s praises because she had raised his daughter and was “a member of the family, or so he said proudly”<sup>186</sup>. Likewise, in 1922, in a very autobiographical piece, Charlotte H. Brown denounced this as well, indicating that one white woman once told her: “We Southern women understand you perfectly. We have been reared with you, nursed by you. You folks have been everything in our homes and we know you through and through”<sup>187</sup>. She regretted that only this class of women of color – domestic workers – was praised and honored by white Southerners<sup>188</sup>. Black intellectuals denounced the fact that the image of the Mammy conveyed the erroneous idea that all women of color were former slaves and that all belonged to a class of domestics and manual workers. When the 1923 Mammy monument project became public, Mary Terrell contended that white southern women chose to celebrate this unthreatening type of womanhood of the South *precisely* because this category of low-paid women workers

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<sup>184</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Lynching from a Negro’s Point of View”, in *North American Review*, 178, (1904): 853-68. The Unpublished Documents of Mary Church Terrell, 122. An electronic copy is available at this address: [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3615](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=3615).

<sup>185</sup> Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South: 1890-1940*, 95-97. See Chapter 3: “Domestic Reconstruction, White Homes, ‘Black Mammies’ and ‘New Women’”, “Whiteness Makes a Home” where Hale provides the examples of Lillian Smith or Belle Kearney, 96-97.

<sup>186</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 326. She said: “This Captain informed me with a great deal of pride” that his daughter’s nurse was a member of his family.

<sup>187</sup> Charlotte Hawkins Brown, “Cooperation Between White and Colored Women”, *The Missionary Review of the World* 45 (1922): 484-487, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol VI, 501-504, 502. Brown explained that she met this woman when she was a teacher in black schools. “Nine times out of ten, a white woman speaking to a colored audience must refer to ‘black mammy’ or her cook as her source of information on questions regarding the Negress of her locality”.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. This was becoming “distasteful to the cultured Negro woman” because a whole class of educated blacks was made invisible in southern discourses about African Americans in the New South. It participated to the “elimination of that large class of Negro women who are not menials but who are plying their hands daily, sinking their very souls into the problems of uplift among their people”, 486, in *African American Feminisms*, 503.



represented in white minds the perpetuation of white supremacy – a sort of racial status quo. In other words, “mammies” embodied the only acceptable image of worthy African Americans for southern whites.

At a time when several southern writers expressed their love and affection for their mammies, Mary Terrell used her influence as a well-known activist and leader to try to show that the antebellum “Mammy” had in reality been a house slave deprived not only of her liberty, but also of her very womanhood and motherhood. “The Black Mammy had no home life. In the very nature of the case she could have none. Legal marriage was impossible for her”. She “was often faithful in the service of her mistress’s children while her own heart bled over her own little babies were deprived of their mother’s ministrations and tender care which the white children received”<sup>189</sup>.

As Hale has underscored, the mammy figure also became important because of a class factor: “Mammy embodied the fiction of continuity between the Old South and the new southern world, anchoring the emerging white middle-class within a romanticized conception of the antebellum plantation elite”<sup>190</sup>. The ability to hire black child nurses or domestic workers became a symbol of southern whites’ social success and stature in the New South. Interestingly enough, the myth of the mammy worked with another myth – that of the southern lady. Hale has explained that “crossing both time and space, the black mammy supported another crucial New South fiction, the southern lady – an image of white purity and gendered passivity”, partly because mammies were seen as surrogate, nurturing mothers who “loved unconditionally and lived for others”, leaving white women free to “leave the home and still be ladies”<sup>191</sup>. In other words, the myth of the mammy made possible that of the southern lady at the turn of the century. Because black domestic workers “labored in their homes”, white southern women could dedicate themselves to other activities besides their domestic duties. They worked for “Temperance, suffrage, anti-suffrage, and UDC work” partly thanks to a racist system which maintained black women in menial positions<sup>192</sup>.

Obviously, African American intellectuals opposed projects aimed at promoting myths of the Old South. The 1923 Mammy monument project was met with much protest on behalf

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<sup>189</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Black Mammy Monument”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 221.

<sup>190</sup> Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*. 101.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

of the African American community. In “The Black Mammy Monument” (1923), Mary Terrell firmly voiced her disapproval of the project: “Colored women all over the United States stand aghast at the idea of erecting a Black Mammy monument in the Capital of the United States.”<sup>193</sup> She argued that such projects – celebrating the Old South, its southern Belles, magnolia gardens and faithful ‘Uncles’ and ‘dear old Mammies’ – was part of a wider political project, aiming at celebrating whites’ racial superiority and asserting African Americans’ inferiority in the nation<sup>194</sup>. These undertakings also revealed that Southerners manipulated collective memory and aimed at promoting the memory of the Old South throughout the country – considering that the statue was to be erected in the nation’s capital. Terrell could not understand “how any women, whether white or black, could take any pleasure in a marble statue to perpetuate her memory.”, because “The condition of the slave woman was so pitifully, hopelessly helpless”<sup>195</sup>. Because such projects fostered images of the Old South and the myth of “happy slave”, African American leaders had the duty to fight against them: the image of black women depended upon it<sup>196</sup>. Some black women suggested that instead of proposing to erect commemorative monuments to honor Mammies, white clubwomen should instead use their agency to ameliorate black Southerners’ economic and social conditions. In her short-story entitled “Mammy, An appeal to the Heart of the South”, Charlotte Perkins Brown incited white women to honor Mammies with better working conditions and wages instead of commemorative monuments<sup>197</sup>.

African American activists stated the view that white women were not only responsible for the perpetuation of lynchings and black women’s repeated sexual abuses and that some of them were also responsible for the propagation of racist attitudes, the culture of white supremacy, the memory of the Confederacy in southern minds and landscapes.

Black intellectuals demonstrated that white women built this culture of the Old South because they believed in whites’ racial superiority and were unwilling to accept racial

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<sup>193</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Black Mammy Monument”, *The Star*, 10 February 1923, in *The Unpublished Documents of Mary Church Terrell*, 221-223.

<sup>194</sup> On the question of the memory of Mammies in whites’ narratives, see Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South: 1890-1940*.

<sup>195</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “The Black Mammy Monument”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 221-223. She added: “One can not help but marvel at the desire to perpetuate in bronze or marble a figure which represents so much that really is and should be abhorrent to the womanhood of the whole civilized world.”

<sup>196</sup> Fighting against such statues also meant resisting the influence of the South on the national scale.

<sup>197</sup> Charlotte Hawkins Brown, “Mammy: An Appeal to the Heart of the South”. (The Pilgrim Press: Boston, 1929).

equality, being anxious to lose the privileged status that was conferred upon them by their racial affiliation. In “Woman vs. the Indian” (1891-1892), Anna Cooper pointed out that this was true of the “southern lady” who was locked in her ways:

Shop girls and serving maids, cashiers and accounted clerks, scribblers and drummers, whether wage earners, salaried toiler, or proprietress, whether laboring to instruct minds, to save souls, to delight fancies, or to win bread, — the working women of America in whatever station or calling they be found, are subject, officers, or rulers of a strong centralized government, and bound together by a system of codes and countersigns, which, though unwritten, forms a network of perfect subordination and unquestioning obedience as marvelous as that of the Jesuits. At the head and center of this regime stands the Leading Woman in the principality. The one taslimanic word that plays along the wires from palace to cook-shop, from imperial Congress to the distant plain, is *Caste*. With all her vaunted independence, the American woman of to-day is as fearful of losing caste as a Brahmin in India<sup>198</sup>.

Cooper condemned elite white women’s belief in African Americans’ inferiority and support of white supremacy. For her, the southern lady – who considered herself to be part of the former aristocratic class of plantation and slave owners – categorically refused to grant black people with racial and social equality, as if opposing blacks’ rights after Reconstruction had become a defining factor: “The southern woman – I beg her pardon – the Southern *lady*. She represents blood, and of course could not be expected to leave that out; and firstly and foremostly she must not, in any organization she may deign to grace with her presence, be asked to associate with ‘these people who were once her slaves’”<sup>199</sup>. Using irony to show the southern lady’s adherence to a system fostering her racial superiority – and ironically simultaneously fostering her subjugation to a patriarchal system, Cooper used a syllogism to show how simplistic the reasoning of white southern supremacists was: “Civility to the negro implies social equality. I am opposed to *associating* to dark persons on terms of social equality. Therefore, I abrogate civility to the Negro”<sup>200</sup>. In 1891-1892, Cooper mocked former slaveholding women’s limited reasoning powers about race as well. Explaining that white southern women often had difficulty understanding that not all African Americans were enslaved before the war, she argued that she “imagine[d] that because her grandfather had slaves who were black, all the blacks in the world of every shade and tint were once in the position of her slaves. [...] Now the southern woman (I may be pardoned, being one myself) was never renowned for her reasoning powers, and it [was] not surprising that just a little

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<sup>198</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 91.

<sup>199</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 108. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>. In her essay, similarly to what she had done with “the black woman”, she used the singular to speak about the southern lady.

<sup>200</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 101. Cooper wrote: “This is like: Light is opposed to darkness. Feathers are light. Ergo, Feathers are opposed to darkness”, using a meaningless example to denounce the manipulation on the part of Southerners.

picking [would] make her logic fall to pieces even here”<sup>201</sup>. According to her, it was therefore natural that she missed the fact that “the black race constitutes one-seventh the known population of the globe; and there are representatives of it here as elsewhere who were never in bondage at any time to any man, — whose blood is as blue and lineage as noble as any, even that of the white lady of the South”<sup>202</sup>. Here, Cooper not only targeted the southern woman’s narrow-mindedness and provincialism, but she also stressed her prejudice and fear of loss of status.

Several activists chastised white women for their lack of sense of sisterhood. In 1894, Fannie Williams – who strongly believed in inter-racial cooperation – deemed white women as responsible for the discrimination black women suffered from at the work place in America: “We should never forget that the exclusion of colored women and girls from nearly all places of respectable employment is due mostly to the meanness of American women”. She added that as a result, she could not wait to obtain the right to vote to finally be able to defend her rights<sup>203</sup>. She also questioned white women’s support in politics: “The sincerity of white women, who have heretofore so scorned our ambitions and held themselves aloof from us in all our struggles for advancement, should be, to a degree, questioned”<sup>204</sup>. In 1896, Margaret Murray Washington – who also advocated solidarity among women across racial barriers – privately regretted white women’s lack of solidarity. In a 1896 letter to Ednah Cheney<sup>205</sup>, she said that even though she did not belong to the “‘aggressive class’ of female reformers, she wished to see women such as Frances Willard, Ellen Henrotin, and Mary Dickinson “‘show a little less fear of their southern sisters’ and speak out in favor of colored women, thousands of whom ‘live a living death’”<sup>206</sup>. Likewise, in 1891, Anna Cooper lamented white southern women’s indifference, reflecting that though black women had tried to be understanding to their sisters’ hesitations for decades, it was time for white women to fight against racial

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., For instance, Cooper said sarcastically that she was afraid of black people because her slaves were black, or feared whites because “villains were white”, using the example of Charles Julius Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield in 1881 – who was white – to show that some white women often reasoned simplistically. At the core of her demonstration lay the implication that blacks were pointed out because they belonged to a minority which was easily identifiable. See the work of Colette Guillaumin *L’idéologie raciste* on this question.

<sup>202</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Woman vs. the Indian”, 101.

<sup>203</sup> Fannie Williams, “Women in Politics”, in *Woman’s Era*. November 1894, vol I, no 8, 13. “In every way that we can check this unkindness by the force of our franchise should be religiously done”. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ednah Cheney (1824-1904) was a white activist, reformer, writer, supporter of abolition who worked for African Americans’ rights.

<sup>206</sup> Margaret Murray Washington “The New Negro Woman”, 1895, *Lend a Hand*, as cited in Martha Patterson, *The American New Woman Revisited*.

prejudice and enforce racial and social equality in the South, as they were responsible for the cultural attitudes of their country<sup>207</sup>.

The black woman has tried to understand the southern woman's difficulties; to put herself in her place, and to be as fair; as charitable, and as free from prejudice in judging her antipathies, as she would have others in regard to her own. She has honestly weighted the apparently sincere excuse, 'But you must remember that these people were once our slaves'; and that other, 'But civility towards the Negroes will bring us on social equality with them'<sup>208</sup>.

Likewise, in 1922 Charlotte Hawkins Brown blamed some white women for their coldness towards black southern women. For her, the typical white woman "knew little of [the black woman's] soul's deepest cravings for home and all that goes to make home pure [and] comfortable" but also "never seeks to know her desires and aspirations for her black babies" and knew "nothing of her schools, her churches or any form of recreation". She concluded: "What a chasm there is between us – deep, fathomless!"<sup>209</sup>. Like Anna Cooper, Brown envisaged race relations through a religious perspective, arguing that Americans would never live in peace so long as women behaved in an un-Christian manner: "There can be no cooperation between white and colored women, North or South, unless we approach it by way of the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'. She stated that the solution to peaceful race relations would be for the white woman to put themselves in black women's place: "If the white woman could think black twenty-four hours better still, be black for two hours, there would be no Negro problem in America"<sup>210</sup>, and concluded that the only way racial cooperation could effectively work was to adopt a Christian attitude:

I verily believe that for the next twenty-five years the races' great efforts would better be directed inward to teach the white folks to love colored folks, to teach colored folks to love white folks, to teach every man to love and hate not. This is the Gospel of the Lowly Nazarene who braved the prejudice and narrowness of His own people to save the world. Our steps toward cooperation must be along these lines<sup>211</sup>.

Clearly, while there was a strong sense of regionalism among southern whites, black Southerners simultaneously prized the nation, asserted their attachment to their native region

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<sup>207</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman vs. the Indian", 1891-1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 92. She deemed the American woman "responsible for American manners" and said ironically that since the phrase went: "like master, like man", the conclusion on American manners could be "like mistress, like nation". She argued: "I have determined to plead with our women, the mannerless sex on this mannerless continent, to institute a reform by placing immediately in our national curricula a department for teaching GOOD MANNERS. Now, am I right in holding the American woman responsible? Is it true that the exponents of women's advancement, the leaders in woman's thought, the preachers and teachers of all woman's reforms, can teach this nation to be courteous, to be pitiful, having compassion one of another, not rendering evil for inoffensiveness, and railing in proportion to the improbability of being struck back; but contrariwise, being *all* of one mind, to love as brethren?". See pages 96-97.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>209</sup> Charlotte Hawkins Brown, "Cooperation Between White and Colored Women", 1922. 486 and *African American Feminisms*. Vol. VI., 503

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 487 and *African American Feminisms*, 504.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

and crafted *a distinct* definition of Southernness, celebrating emancipation, freedom, civil rights and black history and culture.

Some compromising women such as Margaret Washington contended in 1920 that they had to unite with white Southerners because of their common bond with the region. Contradicting women of the South who denied any common bonds with black southern women, Margaret Murray Washington envisaged love for the South as a bond which black and white women commonly shared. Using terms in the same vein as those used by her husband at the International Exposition of Atlanta, she claimed: “We are living here in the South together; *you in your home and I in mine. This is exactly as it should be*, I think”<sup>212</sup>. Hoping to further more inter-racial understanding, Washington believed that their regional identity should bring these women together: “But we can be interested in the things which have to do with the development and growth of each other and of our beloved South.”<sup>213</sup>. Washington understood her Southernness quite uniquely, differently from Cooper. In 1920, using the compromising discourse she commonly adopted to speak about reform work, this decidedly conservative woman emphasized the special – almost paternalistic – duty white women supposedly had toward African Americans:

What responsibility therefore rests upon the white women of the South. It is somewhat as the responsibility of mother and father to their children. You are the people who have had the opportunity, you have had the chance, and naturally one feels that the women who have had the chance are the women who know what to do.

Positioning herself in a submissive position towards whites yet in a superior, paternalistic position towards lower-class African Americans, her strategy differed from that adopted by other clubwomen such as Anna Julia Cooper<sup>214</sup>.

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<sup>212</sup> Margaret Murray Washington, “The Negro Home,” a speech at the Memphis Women's Inter-Racial Conference, October 1920, Papers of Margaret Murray Washington, Frissell Library, Tuskegee University (N.A.C.W. Microfilm, reel 6, frames 47-52). Italics mine. This separation between black and white is reminiscent of her husband Booker Washington’s famous formula used on 18 September 1895 at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta on September 18, 1895 before a predominantly white audience: “In all things that are purely social we can be separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress”.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> The editors Thomas Dublin, Franchesca Arias and Debora Carreras have pointed out that “her paternalism toward lower-class blacks was matched by her deference toward whites.”, in *What gender Perspectives Shaped the Emergence of the National Association of Colored Women, 1895-1920?*. Introduction to Margaret Murray Washington, “The Negro Home”.



Gender, race and class influenced the way women defined womanhood, but regional identity – being an important constitutive component of these women’s identity – shaped their visions of womanhood, their activism and views on national politics as well. While Northerners, Easterners and Midwesterners such as Fannie Williams prized their region for their values of freedom and tolerance, Southerners such as Anna Julia Cooper and Margaret Murray Washington voiced their Southern identity and crafted a definition of black Southernness by emphasizing their attachment to liberty, political rights, black pride and racial equality at a time the South was more and more represented as a white region. Contrary to many white women who cherished memories of the Old South and supported white supremacy and the culture of the Confederacy, black southern women were resolutely turned towards the future. They expressed their attachment to the South by demanding civil rights, the recognition of their citizenship and the end of racial violence.

Regional identity shaped the personalities and influenced the activism of these women. According to whether they lived in the North or in the South, they had different views on how to organize the fight against racial hatred and violence and to defend the image of women of color. How did their regional identities influence them as activists? What strategies did they use to defend the image of black women and of the community?

## **2. Strategies at Work Within the NACW: Striving for Unity**

### **Working Across Regions Within the NACW**

In the mid-1890s, African American activists emphasized the necessity for women of color to unite across social barriers and they also insisted on the necessity to strike down regional boundaries and work across regions. Increased unity across regions fostered more efficient clubwork. In February 1895, Fannie Williams explained that one of her trips among the Memphis, Tennessee, elite enabled her to change her preconceived ideas about the South<sup>215</sup>. This proponent of solidarity and sisterly feeling across regions encouraged other

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<sup>215</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*. Vol I, no 11. February 1895, 4- 6. Williams’s “happy” week was full of “interesting experiences”. Particularly appreciating Southerners’s sense of hospitality – although she insisted that it was not their main quality – this firm believer in the importance of land ownership celebrated Memphians’ inclination to acquire property. She reveled about black Memphians’ “passion to acquire and hold so much of the earth in a great commercial city. [...] What property rights!” she exclaimed. She also admired their comfortable and elegant homes. Visibly impressed by the wealth and refinement of black Southerners, the Chicagoan socialite barely hid her surprise in her article: “The home life of these good people is a happy surprise to all who go south for the first time. All the modern comforts and refining elegancies that bespeak culture and ample income are found in these Memphis homes [...] This is not said in any patronizing spirit, but rather from a sense

northern women to visit the South the way she had done to foster better understanding despite sectional difference. When only the Federation and the Woman's Era Club of Boston was formed, she contended:

What the clubwomen of Memphis (whom she had recently visited for a week) most need[ed] is not intelligence, nor money, nor moral sense, nor even ambition, for all these they seem to have in large measure. They need most of all the sympathetic cooperation of our best women in the North, and in respectful contact with the best and most progressive white women of the South. If our best women could more frequently visit the south with messages of helpfulness much good might result<sup>216</sup>.

Being able to travel quite extensively in different parts of the country thanks to her work as a clubwoman, Fannie Williams praised and appreciated the feeling of sisterhood existing among clubwomen and the warm welcome she received wherever she went. In 1896, she wrote:

At the risk of seeming merely personal, I can most heartily testify to the gracious hospitality of these clubs in nearly every city that I have visited. In the cities of Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham, Memphis, Washington, Boston and Minneapolis I have found our women's clubs, not only an inspiration, but the embodiment of everything that enters into the meaning of hospitality and fellowship. It is a high privilege to be the guest of any of these clubs and experience the strong current of sisterly interest that welcomes you in their folds<sup>217</sup>.

Fannie Barrier Williams was a firm proponent of inter-regional cooperation, as the title of her biography suggests<sup>218</sup>. In *The New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-To-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race* which she co-authored with Booker T. Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams believed that inter-regional collaboration was beneficial: "The club in Mississippi could have a better understanding of its own possibilities by feeling the kindship of the club in New England or Chicago, and the womanhood sympathy of these northern clubs must remain narrow and inefficient if isolated in interest from the self-emancipating struggles of southern clubs"<sup>219</sup>. Convinced that clubs had to work hand in hand, Fannie Williams advocated national cooperation among women from diverse regions. In July 1895, she encouraged southern teachers to attend summer courses in the North – which she presented positively as a place offering superior education. In the *Woman's Era*, she claimed: "People in the North can help the cause of education in the South to a

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of pride and joy that in spite of so many depressing things our women are living a higher a higher life than many of us have any idea of". See page 5.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>217</sup> *Woman's Era*, August and September 1896, 1. Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress. Washington D.C..

<sup>218</sup> Wanda Hendricks entitled the biography of Fannie Barrier Williams: *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*.

<sup>219</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 396.

considerable extent by affording a hospitable welcome to such of our overworked and underpaid sisters in the South who come North to drink from these fresh fountains of inspiration and high knowledge”<sup>220</sup>. Instead of emphasizing southern women’s specific needs – the way Cooper or Margaret Washington did in their articles –embracing a national vision, Williams highlighted the needs of women across the nations and seemed to state the view that the efforts to assist black southern women should be the same as those employed to help northern or western women:

What our southern sisters need and what we all need, is to seek more earnestly by all the agencies of enlightenment about us to broaden our views of life as to make us see and feel the forces that are making for better conditions; and that what we complain of is but transitory; and what we devoutly wish for is surely coming by every high way of civilization<sup>221</sup>.

In 1900, she reiterated this view: “A study of the plans and purposes of these clubs reveals an interesting similarity. They show that the wants, needs, limitations and aspirations of the Afro-American are about the same everywhere – North, South, East and West”<sup>222</sup>. For her, the question of African Americans’ rights transcended the barriers of regions and had to be envisaged from a national perspective.

At the turn of the century, conscious that cultural discrepancies could be wide among the different regions, many women actively worked for better mutual understanding across regions. In 1905, Fannie Williams regretted the mutual ignorance among black Northerners, Easterners and Southerners. In her mind, many African Americans:

Were almost [...] strangers to one another. We are all too wide apart in our understanding of our common problem. Most of the Northern people are ignorant of the true situation of the South and the marvelous achievements of our people South of the Ohio River. It is quite common to hear Northern colored people express their contempt for those who live south because the latter endure so much without a protest<sup>223</sup>.

Consequently, she celebrated the opportunity to reach a better understanding through various local associations:

Those who have honestly studied the situation cannot fail to see a marked change of feeling since the Northern position of the race have had an opportunity to meet and know the hundreds of southern people who can be found in every important Northern community. We are each year coming into a more intimate association with each other. Mutual respect has succeeded misunderstanding. The successful business man of the South has set a stimulating example that is being followed energetically in Chicago and other Northern centers of Negro population. These men of the South who come North with their

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<sup>220</sup> Fannie Williams, *Woman’s Era*, July 1895, 5. Mary Church Terrell Papers.

<sup>221</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*, July 1895, 6.

<sup>222</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, *The New Negro*, 415-416.

<sup>223</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Vacation Values”, 1905, in *The New Woman of Color*, 96-99, 98.

families and other evidence of their prosperity furnish interesting proof that the real man or woman is in many cases stronger than the forces that are formed and fashioned to overthrow them<sup>224</sup>.

In 1905, she believed that better relationships between Northerners and Southerners would ensure unity and benefit African Americans in their struggle for freedom, racial progress and civil rights:

This better knowledge of each other will eventually make for larger strength for race advancement and a more united contention for justice [...] Prejudice is sectional, but freedom is National. In other words what has been going on during the past few years in bringing large bodies of our people together socially or for more serious ends has wonderfully strengthened the spirit of unity amongst us<sup>225</sup>.

Like Williams, in the early twentieth century, some northern clubwomen stressed the necessity of unifying women's clubs – within the NACW for instance – and of igniting a strong national consciousness among black clubwomen of their town or region. Some clubwomen thought that the leader – who was then the editor of the *National Notes*, the Association publication — Margaret Washington could help them achieve this. In the summer of 1903, Mrs Elizabeth Carter<sup>226</sup>, a clubwoman from Providence, Rhode Island, invited Margaret Washington to come north on behalf of the Northeastern Federation of Women's Clubs in order to federate different clubs:

Now Mrs Washington, I really believe this will be a grand opportunity for you to help our women of the north. They so seldom have a chance to come in contact with any of our national workers, that they have not the interest in the national that they should have. "I am very [anxious to ?] have a talk with you.

Carter believed that Washington's visit would incite some clubs to join the NACW: "This would be a good opportunity for you to help our women here in the north"<sup>227</sup>. She wrote:

Do try to arrange in some way to go to them [the Prov. Club...] True Mrs Dickerson and I are doing all we can for the Nat'l Asso. Among our women, but they so seldom see or come in contact with any of the officers of the National that I think your visit would mean a great deal. There are 6 clubs in Providence and not one belongs to the National although I have urged them to join<sup>228</sup>.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 99. She added: "There is beginning to be such a thing as pride of race, because it is possible for us to see and know much to be proud of. A race that has no pride of self is not fit for responsibilities".

<sup>226</sup> Elizabeth Carter was a northern black woman who worked in the State of Massachusetts and Rhode Island and was active in organizing a national movement among black women. Her letters reveal that she supported Booker T. and Margaret Murray Washington.

<sup>227</sup> In her letter, she added that she was shocked by the welcome Booker T. Washington had recently received in Boston, Massachusetts: "I am perfectly disgusted with that element in Boston and regret that they have made our state their headquarters, for the people of Massachusetts, both black and white endorse Mr Washington and the work he is doing, with your help" and assured her that she would "have a much better reception than that of last week given to Mr Washington." Underlining hers.

<sup>228</sup> *Records of the NACW's Clubs (1895-1992)*. Papers. Part 1: Minutes of National Conventions, publications and Presidents' Office Correspondence". Reel 6. "Papers of Mrs M.M. Washington". Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.. Underlinings hers.

Clearly, receiving the visit of a national organizer such as the famous Margaret Washington meant a lot for these clubwomen, who saw her visit as the opportunity to work across regional barriers.

Aware that they were subjected to less discrimination, had more political rights, and therefore had more latitude than their southern counterparts in the early twentieth century, northern and eastern women aimed at fighting for the rights of black southern women. For example, when they fought for woman suffrage in Illinois, Northerners such as Fannie Barrier Williams and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis pressured their political party to combat the policies of southern Democrats. As Lisa Materson has shown in *For the Freedom of her Race*, Davis and Williams – who had both spent a long time in the South as teachers dedicated much energy to defending the rights of black Southerners. They believed that as northern women, they had a special responsibility towards their southern sisters. As Lisa Materson has pointed out, both “Davis and Williams’s experiences further focused the southern orientation of northern women’s campaigning. Their belief in women’s responsibility to protect the race buoyed their determination to do battle with the profound power of southern white Democrats in the arena of national party politics”<sup>229</sup>. Clearly, Fannie Barrier Williams and other northern, eastern or western women were staunch supporters of work across the borders of region.

On the other hand, southern clubwomen also called for unity and solidarity across regions. In “The New Negro Woman” (1895), Margaret Washington regretted the lack of solidarity that often existed among northern and southern women of color. She explained being shocked when she once heard a black northern woman say on a streetcar: “Oh, we don’t have anything to do with those folks [black southern people] down there; they are none of us”. She insisted: “We certainly have no time to be idle in reference to these sisters of ours, for sisters they surely are”<sup>230</sup>. One year later, she regretted the isolation black southern women suffered from because of Jim Crow legislation and held that northern women made little efforts to come south, where most of the work was yet to be accomplished: “The women who live north object to coming south to hold a meeting because of the travel. [but] This is where

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<sup>229</sup> Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race*, 102. Materson explains that contrary to many other women, neither Fannie Barrier Williams nor Elizabeth Lindsay Davis “had come of age in the South or had made the difficult decision to leave all that they knew for the unknown challenges of Chicago. Still, surely they had encountered the rabid white supremacy that was rampant in the 1870s and 1880s during their temporary teaching assignments.”

<sup>230</sup> Margaret Murray Washington, “The New Negro Woman”, August 1895, *Lend a Hand*, as cited in *The American New Woman Revisited*, 55.

work must be done for this is where the great mass of the colored women are”<sup>231</sup>. As Wanda Hendricks has noted, “Barrier Williams certainly was one of the northern visitors she had in mind”. Despite the fact that she championed inter-regional cooperation, Williams felt perplexed when she travelled in the South, being both “impressed with southern black women’s activism and dismayed by the segregated rail cars”, as Hendricks pointed out. Travelling in the South was “a nightmare”<sup>232</sup>. Williams wrote in her autobiography: “The “Jim Crow” cars were almost intolerable to me [...] Fortunately, since my marriage [in 1887] I have had but little experience South of Mason and Dixon’s line”, and indicated that she “was fortunate enough to escape them in every instance”<sup>233</sup>. Nevertheless, when she was to give a lecture in the South, Fannie Barrier Williams once used her light complexion and social status to avoid being forced to travel in a smoking car in New Orleans<sup>234</sup>. She justified herself in her life writing, noting that passing was the source of inner turmoil: “Adapting one’s self to these false conditions does not contribute to one’s peace of mind, self-respect or honesty”<sup>235</sup>. Importantly, Williams explained that she passed for white in order to serve her political purposes since the purpose of her trip was precisely to raise awareness and to alert white southern women to the problems met by women of color: “It gave me an opportunity to call the attention of these white women to the many cultured and educated colored women living right in their midst”<sup>236</sup>. Hendricks has underscored: “Although this practice may have been a contradiction for lighter-skinned women who battled racism on the one hand but seemed to

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 54-59.

<sup>232</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 110.

<sup>233</sup> Fannie Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 10. Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 111.

<sup>234</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”. *Independent* 57, (14 July 1904): 91-96. As Wanda Hendricks has indicated, Williams could “circumvent the injustice” thanks to “her light skin and her economic status”. Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams : Crossing the Borders*, 111. Having paid for a first-class ticket, she refused to risk missing her train. When the conductor inquired about her racial identity, she pretended to be French. Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 10-11: “There is such a cosmopolitan population in some of the southwestern states, made up of Spanish, Mexican and French nationalities, that the conductors are very often deceived; beside they know that an insult can scarcely go further than to ask the wrong person if he or she be colored”.

<sup>235</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 95. “I quieted my conscience by recalling that there was quite a strain of French blood in my ancestry, and too that their barbarous laws did not allow a lady to be both comfortable and honest”. This strategy – although limited in time – caused Williams to be severely judged. As Mary Jo Deegan indicated, a few historians hastily wrote that Williams “sometimes” passed for white, which is erroneous. “Although this fleeting event consisted of only five French words, it is criticized even in short biographies and interpreted as a sign that she regularly passed as white. Such a harsh interpretation of Williams, who did *not* pass as white in her everyday life and who fought for African American rights, ideas and history throughout her life, blames the victim of discrimination instead of the oppressor”. Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, Introduction, xvi- xvii, italics hers.

<sup>236</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”, 95, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 10-12, 11. Williams also explained that she was intimidated by white men who surely belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, who attended her lecture to supervise the content of her message.



cooperate with the racist system by passing, it nevertheless mocked the certainty of white southerners that they could determine racial identity and the laws that bound and constrained the lives of blacks because of color”<sup>237</sup>. Conversely, Mary Church Terrell – a resident of Washington D.C. – kept on travelling in the South, giving numerous lectures there throughout the years. However, whenever she had to travel long distances, she used Pullman cars – sleeping in berths and therefore passing for white – which caused her to be heavily criticized by members of her community<sup>238</sup>. Like Williams, Terrell’s passing was circumscribed in time and space. Alison M. Parker has shown that she “viewed her temporary passing as a form of dissemblance and an act of resistance”. As Parker has underscored,

Terrell’s multiple identities, based mainly on her sex, race, and class, were often in flux. While travelling on the lecture circuit, her light-coloured skin sometimes allowed her to pass as white. When she could, she passed in order to be more comfortable on her long journeys, as well as to dupe her oppressors. Not ambivalent about being what she termed “a colored woman,” nor interested in passing permanently, Terrell was always willing to not reveal to others what they might not immediately discern<sup>239</sup>.

Because they were willing to work across regions despite the terrible discrimination imposed by Jim Crow laws in the South, light-skinned activists such as Fannie Barrier Williams or Mary Church Terrell developed strategies to dupe white Southerners so as to fight for women’s rights and at the same time show how absurd racial discrimination was. They did this in order to guarantee national unity and to fight for the rights of women of color.

### **Defining Regional Strategies: “The Quiet Working Hammering Away” of Southern Women vs. the Loud Activism of Northern Women**

Just as their personal family histories shaped these women’s personalities, African American clubwomen’s respective regional identity and culture undoubtedly – directly or

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<sup>237</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams : Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 111. Contrary to Mary Jo Deegan – who had insisted on the exceptional aspect of this episode in Louisiana –, Fannie Barrier Williams’s biographer, Hendricks, implied that Williams passed for white on a regular basis, explaining that other light-skinned elite women such as Mary Church Terrell and Victoria Earle Matthews also passed. She wrote: Williams “was not the only black aristocrat who passed”.

<sup>238</sup> See *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 295 and 306. Mary Terrell justified herself in her autobiography, saying that she travelled in berths in order to be more comfortable and therefore, more efficient as a lecturer. She said: “I felt it was my duty to my family, to myself and to the audience I had been invited to address to keep as fit as possible by taking the proper rest, so that I could give the people the very best I had to offer”.

<sup>239</sup> Alison M. Parker, “‘The Picture of Health’: The Public Life and Private Ailments of Mary Church Terrell,” *Journal of Historical Biography* 13 (Spring 2013): 164-207, [www.ufv.ca/jhb](http://www.ufv.ca/jhb). © Journal of Historical Biography 2013. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License, 168.

indirectly – influenced their activism as well as their strategies. In *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* Deborah White has convincingly shown that women in the different areas had “different ideological leanings”<sup>240</sup>. Northern, Eastern, Midwestern and Southern women indeed adopted distinctive strategies in their fight for their civil rights and the redemption of African American womanhood<sup>241</sup>. What were these “different ideological leanings”? What representations about gender and region caused these differences of opinion?

The professional correspondence of the presidents of the NACW reveal differences of opinion. It appears that African American women’s strategies within local chapters of the NACW differed and that two philosophies co-existed – and sometimes collided – within the national association. Northern and eastern clubwomen tended to adopt a more direct style whereas their southern counterparts were more conservative. As Deborah Gray White has stated: “By and large Southerners were more conservative in race and gender ideology than Northerners. Not that on any issue a Northern clubwoman was more activist or militant than a Southern clubwoman; rather, on average Southerners tended to be *more tentative* and *less bold*”. According to White, this was due to two factors: it was “a function of the severe hostility of Southern whites towards blacks [...] but it also grew out of the conservatism of Margaret Murray Washington”<sup>242</sup>. Conservative pro-South clubwomen such as Margaret Murray Washington and Josephine Yates – a native of New York State and a clubwoman of Kansas City, Missouri – adopted a more cautious approach in their political than their northern counterparts. Southern clubwomen often looked unfavorably upon the methods employed by the northern members of the NACW because they deemed northern, eastern and midwestern women’s methods as either too aggressive or inadequate. For example, in one letter addressed to Margaret Washington dated 1904, the Southerner Josephine Yates believed

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<sup>240</sup> Deborah White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 83-84. White has explained that “North and South mostly thought alike within the NACW, but there were regional differences among these women. Northerners, Southerners, and Midwesterners were loyal to their section of the country when it came to elective office, and NACW leadership always tried to balance the executive board. This was a good thing, but it ignored another tension – the different ideological leanings of the women of the different areas”, 83.

<sup>241</sup> This division into three or four regions is relevant when one studies black women’s clubs during this period. African American clubwomen indeed conferred importance to the regional affiliation of their different club members because they considered that it had an impact on their political opinions and on the strategies they chose to endorse. They indeed spoke of “northern”, “eastern”, “midwestern” and “southern” clubwomen.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, Italics mine.

that women from the East and North were, as White has termed it, “too smug” in their presumptions of their civil rights”<sup>243</sup>.

Deborah White has also shown that this difference in strategy sometimes caused tensions within the NACW. The South was more represented within the national association, in particular thanks to the influence of Margaret Washington. As Joan Marie Johnson has indicated, since “the southern was the first regional federation in the NACW”, this could provoke imbalance. Yet, southern women apparently had the impression that they received less consideration than other club members from other sections, since southern clubs had been created later than northern ones<sup>244</sup>. Further tensions could originate in the fact that a stronger sense of regional identity existed in the South than in other regions, where clubwomen seemed to have developed a wider national consciousness. Southern members and delegates “experienced stronger regional identity than other clubwomen”<sup>245</sup>.

Clubwomen indeed adopted distinct strategies according to their region of residence. For example, when “The Clansman” was released, as a play, in 1906<sup>246</sup>, clubwomen from different areas did not see eye to eye on how to manage the situation. Southern women did not

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<sup>243</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 83-84. Italics mine. Southern women of the NACW did not appreciate the methods used by Northerners in 1904.

<sup>244</sup> Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 206-207. Johnson explains that black southern women “experienced shame and inferiority in relation to their Northern sisters”.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 96-97. For instance, she believed that Margaret Murray Washington was “probably the driving force behind” the call for a meeting in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 28-29, 1899.

<sup>246</sup> *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* was a novel written by Thomas F. Dixon, the author of the *Leopard's Spots*. The publication of *The Clansman* caused an uproar in the North and throughout the South. *The Clansman, an Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) is the second novel of Thomas Dixon's Klan trilogy, the first being Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902). In his preface to *The Clansman*, Dixon explains that the book offers the “historical outline of the conditions from the enfranchisement of the Negro to his disfranchisement,” *The Clansman* presents “the true story of the ‘Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy,’ which overturned the Reconstruction regime.”. The novel toyed with several notions: the birth of the New South, the rightful triumph of white supremacy and the romantic reunion between North and South. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Dixon presents “the Ku Klux Klan as an “institution of Chivalry, Humanity, Mercy and Patriotism,” which seeks to protect helpless women and children, uphold the United States Constitution, and to restore order to the benighted South (p. 320) [...] Dixon suggests [that] the great beast of Reconstruction will be toppled. Furthermore, out of this embattled state, two separate love stories emerge, that of Ben Cameron and Elsie Stoneman as well as Phil Stoneman and Margaret Cameron. In these pairs of lovers, the North and the South appear reunited. Thus at the novel's close, Thomas Dixon seemingly promises that from these ashes, the South will rise again.” See the summary of the novel: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/dixonclan/summary.html>.

condone the bold methods used by northern or eastern club members<sup>247</sup>. In a letter dated 19 February 1906, Josephine Yates told Margaret Murray Washington<sup>248</sup>:

But after all – our problems are much the same wherever our people are in America, and we need about the same careful treatment. “The Clansman” comes to Kansas City this week and after its advent the results will be just about the same, on a smaller scale perhaps, as if it were shown in the heart of the South. Now what are we to do about it? Do you think starting and tearing around as at various points in the North men and women are doing now in opposition to this terrible play is going to do much good? Or is it going the quiet working hammering away day after day with a purpose in view, or are both needed? Truly, I do not know, but I believe I am one of the “quiet hammerers”<sup>249</sup>.

On the opposite side, women such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett – a southern-born Chicago resident – wanted club members to take firmer stances on the subjects of civil rights, racial equality and the end of lynching. As Jone Johnson Lewis has explained, Booker T. Washington’s wife

represented the conservative wing of the organization, focused on more evolutionary change of African Americans to prepare for equality. She was opposed by Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who favored a more activist stance, challenging racism more directly and with visible protest. This reflected a division between the more cautious approach of her husband, Booker T. Washington, and the more radical position of W.E.B. Du Bois<sup>250</sup>.

When the film *The Birth of a Nation* was released and ran “for many weeks” in Chicago in 1915, clubwomen handled the situation differently depending on their regional affiliation<sup>251</sup>. Some demanded the play to be banned while others adopted a more cautious approach. When the play was released in Chicago, Ida Wells-Barnett was extremely shocked. As Matthew Guterl has indicated, *The Birth of a Nation* encouraged the propagation of the idea of the Lost Cause. It “helped to nationalize white male dominance by making it seem vital and necessary and by shrouding it in cherished myths of reunion and the “Lost Cause”<sup>252</sup>. Wells-Barnett was disheartened. About this episode, she later said: “[The play] has always been a very sore spot with many of us”. She contended that the black leaders of Chicago had

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<sup>247</sup> They protested publicly by organizing demonstrations against plays such as “The Clansman” and organized days of prayers in support of black rights. As Deborah Gray White has shown in *Too Heavy a Load*, Josephine Yates opposed these methods, deeming them as “too public and confrontational” and saw “no point in this ‘ranting and tearing around’”, 84.

<sup>248</sup> The novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) was immediately adapted into a play that was released in many theaters throughout the country. It served as the basis for the movie *The Birth of a Nation*, in 1915.

<sup>249</sup> NACW letter to “Dear Mrs. Washington”, *Records of the NACW’s Clubs* (1895-1992). Letter 19 February 1906, 2. NACW Papers. Part 1: Minutes of National Conventions, publications and Presidents’ Office Correspondence”. Reel 6. “Papers of Mrs M.M. Washington”. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.. Mary Terrell thought that Tom Dixon’s “The Clansman”, “[a]s a novel, a movie and a talkie, has done a great deal of harm. It has been an instrument of evil, appealing to race prejudice, inciting to riot and arousing the murderous passions of the mob”. Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 160.

<sup>250</sup> “Margaret Murray Washington, First Lady of Tuskegee”, Article written by Jone Johnson Lewis. <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/African-American-Women-Educators/fl/Margaret-Murray-Washington.htm>.

<sup>251</sup> President Woodrow Wilson had authorized the release of *The Birth of a Nation*. See Foner, Eric. *Give Me Liberty!*, 741-742.

<sup>252</sup> Matthew Guterl, *The Color of Race in America*, 12.

not anticipated the release to allow them to deal with it appropriately. Thinking that it should never have been shown in the first place, Wells regretted that Chicago had not followed the examples of other cities such as Philadelphia: “There are many places in this country today which have never permitted a showing of *The Birth of a Nation*. And if the case had been properly managed here it would not have been shown in the city.”<sup>253</sup> She believed that Chicagoans should have convinced influential people in the city to ban the play, the way Dr. N.F. Mossell – a physician married to Gertrude Mossell –, had done in Philadelphia: “That could have been done as a last resort here in Chicago as easily as it had been done in Philadelphia, if only we had had leadership with vision and with a mind concentrated on the principle of denouncing attacks upon our racial integrity.”<sup>254</sup> For her, the NAACP had not properly managed the situation: “The NAACP, which was supposed to be functioning in the matter, had failed utterly to prepare itself to make the showing” of “that diabolical picture”<sup>255</sup>.

Northern or midwestern women also criticized the work accomplished by or the methods used by southern activists. Southern-born women living in the North could be suspected of adopting conservative attitudes and northern women generally looked unfavorably on programs and activities launched by these newcomers in their communities. For example, Jane Edna Hunter’s methods at the head of the Phillis Wheatley Association were often disparaged by Cleveland clubwomen. Hunter’s narrative reveals that there was a class aspect to consider. When she founded the Phillis Wheatley Home in the early 1910s, she met resistance on behalf of local black women of the elite: “The opposition came from Negroes – a small group of club women who, blessed with prosperity, had risen from the servant class and [were] now regarding themselves as the arbiters and guardians of colored society”<sup>256</sup>. They opposed her project because they thought that by founding a Home for black girls exclusively, Hunter would in fact encourage residential racial segregation in Cleveland<sup>257</sup>. She remembered the scene: “‘We have never had segregation. Our girls must go to the YWCA, along with white girls. Why should you’ turning the reproachful glance upon

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<sup>253</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 342.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 343. Wells targeted the passivity of members of the African American community: “One could not blame Judge Cooper for refusing to grant an injunction against *The Birth of a Nation* when no case had been made out to show him why you should do so, and especially when so little interest had been shown by the colored people themselves.” Moreover, Ida Wells was bewildered by the way D.W. Griffith – who “was a great artist [...] prostitute[d] his talents [...] in an effort to misrepresent a helpless race” with *The Birth of a Nation*, 342-344.

<sup>256</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 84.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95. She confided that a woman once told her: “We represent all the club women of Cleveland [...] and we will not permit you, a Southerner, to start segregation in the city”.



me, ‘come up from the South and tell us what to do?’”<sup>258</sup>. Besides, because of her decision to nominate a biracial Board and to solicit white funding, Hunter was also mistrusted by members of the black community. As Rhondda Robinson Thomas has pointed out, because Hunter “continued to rely on white patrons [...] Some black Clevelanders characterize[d] her as an accommodationist in the vein of her role model Booker T. Washington”<sup>259</sup>.

Such disagreements could also take place among women living in the same city or sharing the same regional affiliation. In Chicago, for example, Wells-Barnett believed that Williams was insufficiently daring in her activism and was an accommodationist because the latter embraced a Washingtonian philosophy and befriended Celia Parker Wooley, a white clubwoman<sup>260</sup>. Despite the fact that Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Fannie Barrier Williams had much in common and respected each other<sup>261</sup>, the two women had a falling out as of 1897 because they did not share the same political ideologies. Ida B. Wells had diverging opinions from Williams’s best friend Celia Wooley over the best methods to use at the Frederick Douglass Center<sup>262</sup>. Mia Bay has indicated that Williams and Wells-Barnett even “developed

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 84. Jane Hunter was also criticized because rumors were spread about her practices. She was accused of favoring light-skinned boarders: “It had been rumored that admission would be regulated by a caste system, based upon color”. Initially not paying attention to such rumors, she started to worry when she noticed that most applicants were light-skinned: “but when applicant after applicant appeared, all mulatto girls, I became worried. Then came Emma Henderson of ebony hue. You may be sure that I felt relieved, and welcomed Emma with open arms and that I smiled triumphantly at my detractors”.

<sup>259</sup> Rhondda Robinson Thomas, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, Introduction, 7.

<sup>260</sup> As Mia Bay has explained, “The relationship between the Barnetts and the Williamses went downhill as the latter couple became increasingly closely affiliated with Booker T. Washington, whose accommodationist politics won no favor with the Barnetts”. See *To Tell The Truth Freely*, 228.

<sup>261</sup> In the late nineteenth century, (1894-1896), Fannie Williams and Ida Wells-Barnett had maintained good relationships. When Wells defended the rights of African Americans in England in 1892-1893, Williams condoned her energetic methods. In July 1895, admiring her “plucky little friend”, Williams praised Wells’s engagement against lynching. She said to other club members: “The public has been so accustomed to think of Miss Wells’ remarkable zeal for the cause of law and order that, I suppose, no one ever reads of a case of lynching without associating with it the indignant protest of our plucky little friend”. Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*, July 1895, 5. During the summer of 1896, Williams praised Wells’s work within the Ida Wells Club: “In our city the I.B.W. Woman’s Club, and the more recently organized Phyllis Wheatley Club, are doing a remarkable work in members cultivating a sense of duty and responsibility among its members”. Fannie Barrier Williams, “Clubs With Well-Defined Purposes”, in *Woman’s Era*, Vol III, No. 3. August and September 1896. Papers of Mary Church Terrell, Library of Congress. Page 1. See also the electronic version on this website :

[http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era3\\_03&document=era3&keyword=lucy%20stone](http://womenwriters.library.emory.edu/advocacy/content.php?level=div&id=era3_03&document=era3&keyword=lucy%20stone). Moreover, when Ida Wells married Ferdinand Barnett – who was a friend of S. Laing Williams’s — in 1895, Williams rejoiced for her friend. She wrote in *Woman’s Era*: “The approaching marriage of Miss Ida B. Wells to Mr. F.L. Barnett has an interest that exceeds all local bounds.” Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*, July 1895, 5. The two women lived in the capital of Illinois, were concerned about women’s rights and the welfare of the community and were married to prominent black lawyers. S. Laing Williams and Ferdinand Barnett were successful professionals and business partners at some point. As Mia Bay has indicated, S. Laing Williams was “an attorney who was Barnett’s law partner throughout the 1890s”, Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 228. Yet, Barnett and Williams put an end to their business partnership after some time.

<sup>262</sup> Fannie Williams cherished her partnership and friendship with her best friend Celia Parker Wooley.



a deep personal enmity”<sup>263</sup> and that from the late 1890s onwards, both were “rival leaders within Chicago’s female black community”<sup>264</sup>.

Furthermore, many women seemed to believe that regional identity influenced club members’ style and activism and that Northerners, Westerners, and Easterners possessed a unique and bold style. The women of the editing board of the first volumes of the *Woman’s Era* depicted Western women as bright, energetic and dynamic colleagues. In the issue of August 1895, they sang the praises of club members of the Woman’s Club of Omaha, Nebraska: “The western delegates were typical western women, bright and alert, and thoroughly at home on the floor”<sup>265</sup>. Likewise, in her autobiography, the southern-born Mary Church Terrell depicted Westerners as “the personification of determination”<sup>266</sup>. When she arrived in Milwaukee from the National Purity Congress – which had taken place in LaCrosse, Wisconsin – in October 1905, a “little woman” from Wisconsin greeted her before noon and insisted that she deliver a speech to the white pupils of the local Normal School the same day at 1.00pm. Unprepared, “speechless with surprise”, Terrell refused but the “typical western woman, determined and bound to have her way” insisted until Terrell gave in<sup>267</sup>.

It therefore appears that some club members believed that women did possess certain qualities – specific to their region of birth or residence – which impacted the way they organized clubwork.

### **Different Political Approaches Within the NACW**

Despite their common goal – the defense of black womanhood —, internal dissensions erupted within the National Association of Colored Women a few years after its formation. Color could, to some extent, be part of the discussion. For instance, some club members criticized the fact that in its first years the NACW was run by light-skinned women and contended that the national association was consequently unrepresentative of most black

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<sup>263</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 228.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Club of Omaha”, *Woman’s Era*. August 1895, Vol II, no. 5, 7.

<sup>266</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, see Chapter 19, 172-173.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 172-174. Terrell finally complied and found the topic of her speech on the way to the school: “I was completely subdued. There was no such thing as refusing to do what she had planned”. She explained in her autobiography that she made the most of this unpleasant experience. She enjoyed talking to students at the Normal School and did not regret coming there, for she later received numerous letters from these pupils, telling her that her address had made an enormous impression upon their minds and that they now realized how difficult the situation was for black people in their country. She resolved never to refuse addressing pupils in Normal Schools and subsequently “accepted every invitation to address pupils in the public schools, or students in colleges and universities, which was received”.

women in America. This changed when Josephine Silone Yates was elected in 1900<sup>268</sup>, becoming the first dark-skinned woman to hold this position<sup>269</sup>.

In the early twentieth century, Fannie Williams was among the first clubwomen to warn her readers about the dangers of rivalries, indicating that personal competitions threatened the interests of the association and of women. In her opinion, personal ambition, vanity and jealousies could jeopardize collective achievements. She emphasized the fact that either locally or nationally, the association was “[not] entirely free from an admixture of some of the meanness of our poor human nature” and explained that women were naturally inclined to be jealous or to focus on “petty things”:

It is due to candor to admit that unworthy ambitions, jealousies, envies, spitefulness, piques, tale-bearing, suspicions, affectations and many of the other little sins peculiar to human nature generally, and to femininity in particular, have played their part in retarding the progress of the club movement [...] The only danger to the future usefulness of the national Association of the weaknesses that are common to most women’s organizations, and the tendency to imitate man in their political organizations where strife for place in honor too often obscure the noble purposes and urgent needs of the work in hand, and also the purely womanly peculiarities of emphasizing the petty things that make for envy, jealousy and personal vanities<sup>270</sup>.

At that time, she may have been thinking about Mary Church Terrell’s disputed 1899 re-election which had caused so much dismay among clubwomen<sup>271</sup>. In 1904, approximately at the time of the election of Josephine Yates – whom she greatly admired –, Williams warned the association about potential “dangers to the future usefulness of the association” but this time rejoiced that so far “the federation has a membership sufficiently intelligent to save it from much politics” despite “‘Petty envies & jealousies [which were] purely womanly peculiarities’ [...] The temptations of office, the chance for moneymaking, the thirst for power and ‘influence’, and the other baleful incidents of politics have played but a small part

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<sup>268</sup> The main architects of the association were indeed light-skinned women from the upper class: the founder Josephine St Pierre Ruffin from Boston, Margaret Murray Washington from Mississippi, and the first president of the association, Mary Church Terrell – who served from 1896 to 1900. During the 1900 election, Josephine Beall Wilson Bruce – a light-skinned woman from Pennsylvania who had married the first black Senator for Mississippi Blanche K. Bruce – ran against Margaret Murray Washington and Josephine Silone Yates, a dark-skinned woman born supposedly in 1852 or 1859 in Mattituck, New York, who lived in Kansas City. Yates won the election, becoming the second president of the NACW and serving from 1900 to 1904.

<sup>269</sup> As Jean Marie Robbins puts it: “The election of the brown-skinned Yates [...] upset the hegemony of the light-skinned leaders that had founded the NACW”. Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 174.

<sup>270</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, 1902, 36-37, 45 and “The Club Movement among the Colored Women”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 48.

<sup>271</sup> Even though, as May Jo Deegan has suggested, Fannie Williams and Mary Terrell did share interests as clubwomen, it appears that Williams did not condone the way Mary Church Terrell had accepted – or sought – to be re-elected in 1899. Likewise, Ida B. Wells judged Terrell severely for this re-election. See *Crusade*, 259-260.

in this development of women's clubs"<sup>272</sup>. Since she was nevertheless aware of the dangers of competition, she warned her fellow club members of the necessity to somewhat quell their ambitions: "In saying all this I am not unmindful that these clubs [clubs and leagues] do carry a certain burden of incompetency, petty ambition and unseemly vanity"<sup>273</sup>.

Her articles reveal the inner tensions existing within the NACW during its early years. Williams believed that the main source of competition lay in the biennial election of the "national organizer" – the president of the NACW: "The struggle for the presidency and other offices of the national Federation is one of the danger points in the developments of club work as a national movement"<sup>274</sup>. She criticized the secret alliances and negotiations going on behind the scenes every two years before each new election and encouraged women to avoid committing the same mistakes as men in politics:

To be president of the NACW is a worthy ambition, and it is perhaps too much to say that worthy methods have always been used by every candidate who has posed, and in devious ways, planned, for her own election. Indeed, it seems to be just now an open secret that slates are being made and broken, 'promises' exchanged, and 'trade' arranged to land some favorite daughter, mother, sister in the presidential chair at the coming St Louis Convention [...] This biennial stirring of ambitions is so thoroughly human that it cannot be helped and for a while at least can be openly deprecated. We have learned the lesson all too well from the masculine side of our humanity that if you want to fill in an honorable office, you must not out go out to meet it, but you must fight for it and be not over scrupulous as to weapons or methods<sup>275</sup>.

She also urged other members to put an end to political calculations and other strategies which were detrimental to the association:

There must be a determination to avoid the possibilities of the 'boss' as that term is understood in political parties. The next thing in meanness, in usurpation of other people's powers, to the political 'boss' would be a political 'mistress' in a woman's organization. Such terms as 'the big four', 'secret caucus', 'trading', 'trimming' and 'combining' should not be heard in a woman's organization, committed to the high tasks that the National Association stands for. Such terms suggest factions that are more or less hostile to the large ideas and purposes of the whole organization<sup>276</sup>.

Finally, she thought that presidents should be designated for their merit and not for their political manoeuvres:

Everything should be done to foster and promote the idea among the rank-and-file of the club members that they are sovereigns and the source of power and authority, that primarily the organization exists for them, that the honors and responsibilities of office can be won by merit and not by any finesse of 'boss' manipulations of delegates<sup>277</sup>.

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<sup>272</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement Among the Colored Women", 1904, 48.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 48. Interestingly, although she was an important and early member of the NACW, Williams did not attempt to earn a position of responsibility within the NACW. In 1904, quite disheartened by such attitudes, she was concerned that this could be not only detrimental to the interests of women of color but also damaging for the image of women of color.

The 1897 and 1899 biennial conferences revealed the occasional dissent which could arise because of distinct clubwomen's regional strategies and philosophies. While Mary Church Terrell and Fannie Williams adopted an accommodationist approach within the NACW, Wells-Barnett favored a more militant approach. When it was decided that the 1897 bi-annual conference would take place in Nashville, Tennessee, Wells was unable to attend – being then still unwelcome in the South<sup>278</sup>. Two years later, in 1899, although Mary Church Terrell invited Wells-Barnett to attend the conference of the NACW – which was to take place in Chicago, Illinois, she failed to offer her to take part in the organizing committee<sup>279</sup>. Terrell apparently followed the suggestion of a few Chicago women including Fannie Williams and Agnes Moody – who did not want to see Wells-Barnett attend the NACW conference<sup>280</sup>. Upon learning that Terrell had decided not to call on her, Wells-Barnett was surprised and saddened. In her memoir, she remembered that it was “strange to say” that Terrell, “an old acquaintance of mine [...] did not ask my cooperation in making local arrangements”<sup>281</sup>. Wells's and Terrell's mutual admiration was given a sad blow. As Mia Bay has explained, “deeply hurt, Ida never forgave Terrell, even after [the latter] explained that she had only omitted her name on the request of several ‘women in Chicago’<sup>282</sup>. The press chronicled Williams and Wells's “enmity”, indicating that it was “so bitter that they never

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<sup>278</sup> She was still in exile from the South, since her sudden departure after Thomas Moss's lynching.

<sup>279</sup> See Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 228. Wells's biographer, Mia Bay has explained that “in 1896, [...] Wells and Terrell were not close friends, and the gulf between them dramatized the class differences between Wells and the leading club women”, Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 223- 224. Mia Bay has indicated that Wells blamed Terrell for this slight, yet it seemed that Wells's exclusion had “been initiated by Fannie Barrier Williams”.

<sup>280</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 228. Terrell had apparently received “letters from women in Chicago declaring that they would not aid in entertaining the national Association if [Wells was asked to make local arrangements for the Conference of the NACW]”. Wells reproached several Chicago clubwomen for having been sidelined from the 1899 NACW Biennial Convention. Wanda Hendricks, *Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 143. “The animosity that had been festering for some time was clearly visible by the dawn of the new century. Wells-Barnett blamed Barrier Williams, Agnes Moody, and other local black women for the fact that she had not been an integral part of the planning of the NACW meeting in 1899. Angry over the slight, Wells-Barnett did not attend many of the meetings of the association, choosing instead to focus her attention on the Afro-American Council.”.

<sup>281</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 258. The two women knew each other. Mary Church's father was the one who lent Ida Wells the necessary sum to reach Kansas City in the 1880s. The two young women met in Memphis, Tennessee, when they were young women. At that time, Ida Wells felt that they shared common points. She wrote: “Her ambitions seem so in consonance with mine [...]he is the first woman of my age I've met who is similarly inspired with the same desires hopes & ambitions”. Wells admired Mary Church for her ambition, personality and courage to stand against her father's objections to become a teacher. DeCosta-Willis, *Memphis Diary*, 6, Introduction. DeCosta-Willis has pointed out: “She admires Mollie, perhaps, because she, too, is an independent, accomplished, and ambitious young woman, who chooses a teaching career over the stringent objections of her patrician and patriarchal father [...] The two Memphians, however, never became friends, although they had similar interests and were both involved in the women's club movement”.

<sup>282</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 229.

speak when they meet face to face”<sup>283</sup>. After having an explanation with the president, Wells refused to “inflict [her] presence upon the organization.”<sup>284</sup>. As a result, Ida had difficulties finding her place within the NACW.

Moreover, the election of certain members to different key positions – such as the presidency – was the source of tensions. Since the “national organizer” gave the association its political orientation and defined the policies embraced by the NACW, this election was of paramount importance. Mary Church Terrell’s re-election in August 1899 created a controversy. After serving as president of the NACW for two terms, Terrell claimed that she did not wish to serve again as President and therefore did not seek reelection while Josephine St Pierre Ruffin – supported by New England clubwomen – sought to be elected. It was believed that the incumbent president could not be re-elected, since a rule stipulating that an officer could not serve more than two consecutive terms had been adopted two years earlier in Nashville. Some saw a legal vacuum because Terrell had been re-elected for a second term before the adoption of this rule. Yet, as Mia Bay has explained, “in Ida [Wells]’s absence, Ruffin had little support from women outside her own region, and Terrell won her re-election easily”<sup>285</sup>. Despite the fact that she had not presented herself as a candidate, Terrell was re-elected by a two-third majority in 1899. In spite of her resistance and somewhat pushed by her supporters to serve another term, she accepted the presidency<sup>286</sup>. Many women such as Josephine Ruffin, Wells-Barnett and New England members of the NACW challenged the validity of this election.

It seems clear that regional affiliation played a part in this election, but it also appears that more importantly, political questions were at the heart of the controversy. Many members wished to see a Southerner at the head of the association and adhered to Terrell’s polite style and condoned the policies she supported, such as children’s welfare and questions related to

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<sup>283</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 143.

<sup>284</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 258-259. “It was a staggering blow and all the harder to understand because it was women whom I had started in club work, and to whom I had given all the assistance in my power, who had done this thing. Mrs. Terrell claimed not to understand why. Even so, she had obeyed their bidding. I told her that although I was very much surprised at the action of the women of Chicago, I was still more surprised that she had obeyed the dictates of women whom she did not know against one she did know, who had come from her own home in Memphis Tennessee. And that since she had done this I would promise not to inflict my presence upon the organization”. In her memoir, Wells explained that the only appearance she made at this conference was at Quinn Chapel when she served as the messenger of Jane Addams – whom she considered as “the greatest woman in the United States” – to invite clubwomen of the NACW to a luncheon at Hull House.

<sup>285</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 230.

<sup>286</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 154-155. 106 out of 145 women cast their ballot for her.



motherhood yet others, such as the members of the Boston Woman's Era Club<sup>287</sup> contested the election, criticizing Terrell's policies and the way she had managed the proceedings of the last Convention in Chicago<sup>288</sup>. Two philosophies collided. As Mia Bay has shown, in 1899, several clubwomen were "troubled by the increasingly accommodationist and domestic tenor of the NACW under Terrell's leadership"<sup>289</sup>. In a resolution dated April 1900, they claimed that during her two terms, Terrell had failed to satisfy the different sections of the country, although the ultimate goal of the NACW had been to unite and voice the demands of all sections:

To secure to each section represented, a directing voice in developing the plans formed for it at its inception, especially to New England, which had, after giving of its best, mentally and financially, stood aside, and for three years allowed itself to be ignored, while the larger and more clamorous sections divided the offices, which, in many cases, they have shown wo[e]ful lack of ability to fill.

These clubwomen from New England felt that their work and contribution had been "ignored"<sup>290</sup> and refused to accept the re-election of a woman who seemed to favor clubs from other regions – i.e. the South –, especially since they had been patiently waiting for two years for her presidency to come to an end<sup>291</sup>. Mary Terrell was in a delicate position. Her methods were criticized and her authority as president was contested.

Mary Church Terrell received the support of clubwomen from Memphis, Tennessee, and other women from the NACW<sup>292</sup>. In the following issue of the *National Notes* (May

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<sup>287</sup> The signers of this resolution were Arianna Sparrow, Ellen M. Taylor, Pauline E. Hopkins, Agnes Adams, Hannah Smith and Geo Lewis. This resolution was reprinted in *The National Notes* then edited by Margaret Washington. The editor of *Gender Perspectives* explained: "Given the seriousness of the charges, it is striking that they were reprinted in *The National Association Notes*, reflecting perhaps some coolness in the relationship between Margaret Murray Washington, the editor of *Notes*, and Association president Mary Church Terrell", in *What Gender Perspectives Shaped the Emergence of the National Association of Colored Women, 1895-1920?*, eds. Dublin, Arias and Carreras. The resolution was allowed to be printed in both *the National Notes* and the *New York Age*. Nevertheless, in the next issue of *the Notes*, Washington showed her impartiality since she printed a response from clubmembers in Memphis to support Terrell.

<sup>288</sup> Excerpts from "The Report of the Woman's Era Club For 1899," *The National Association Notes*, 3:10 (April 1900), 1, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress (N.A.C.W. microfilm, part 1, reel 23, frames 346-353).[6]. The club disapproved of "the conduct of all the business sessions of the convention, to the high-handed, unparliamentary rulings of the presiding officer, and the unconstitutional elections, and as the time limit of the president had legally expired, our Northeastern delegation was sent to [the Convention of 1899 held in] Chicago, instructed to work for the election of one who could and would be both able and willing to accomplish two things, considered by us necessary to the healthy growth of the National Organization."

<sup>289</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 230.

<sup>290</sup> They believed that from the "inception" of the NACW, New England had been especially active and had given "its best, mentally and financially" to further the goals of the National Association.

<sup>291</sup> "Having utterly failed to do the work expected of her, the most earnest, best informed club leaders in every section, looked forward with calm resignation to the expiration of the constitutional time-limit of that officer; and the righteous resentment expressed by our delegate for the illegal means used to force her upon us for another two years, is heartily endorsed by this club."

<sup>292</sup> "The Woman's Era Club and The National Association", *The National Association Notes*, 3:11 (May 1900): 1, 4, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress. Container 41 (Microfilm, reel 29, frames 291, 294). The



1900), Terrell's fervent supporters asserted that she had been legally elected since the resolution had been taken while she was president. They also defended the work accomplished by their president, condoning her more accommodationist methods – often favored by southern women such as Margaret Murray Washington or Josephine Yates. More than personal questions or regional affiliations, political philosophies were at the heart of the matter. Memphis clubwomen declared that they did not understand why southern clubwomen should support the candidacy of Josephine Ruffin, whom they apparently considered as a member of the smug, light-skinned northern elite. On the contrary, Terrell – with her compromising style, class and southern roots – won their approval:

We can't see why a lady [Josephine Ruffin] who several years ago boasted of her superior blood, and that no Southern blood flowed in her veins, of which she was proud; could expect the people from this section to support her in anything. Again, in Chicago she used language that intimated that all the ignoramuses came from the South<sup>293</sup>.

Feeling that they were treated with disdain by New England clubwomen like Ruffin, southern women such as this group of Memphians expressed their support for Terrell's more polite approach and her dedication to reform work in the fields of children's welfare – the establishment of kindergartens and daycare centers and the founding of mothers' clubs to promote "better homes" and "better mothers" –. These southern women did not condone the "loud activism" New England clubwomen favored. Moreover, Memphis clubwomen also severely criticized Margaret Washington for having allowed the resolution of the Woman's Era club:

But how in the name of all that is just, right and honorable, *THE NOTES*, the organ of the National Association and supported by it, could print such a tirade and multiplicity of untruths against its own officers and delegates, is beyond our comprehension. [...] We also think it very untimely in the editor of *NOTES* to allow one club to rule the whole National Association. If an individual or an individual club is to rule and insult the entire Association, we think is best to stop printing *THE NOTES* and disband the National Association of Colored Women.<sup>294</sup>

Upon leaving the presidency of the NACW after four years of service in July 1901, Terrell proudly stressed the achievements of the association and sought to normalize relationships with the association: "Difference of opinion in an organization is only a sign of healthful progress and growth, when the members abide by the law, and are generous enough to credit

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group was composed of Mrs F. P. Cooper, Chairman Committee, Mrs. T. J. Gray and A. Whitlow, Delegates, Coterie Migratory Assembly. Mesdames G A. Hodges, D.E. Harvey, H. Taliaferro, D. Lightfoot, Delegates, Orphans' and Old Ladies' Home Association and Mrs. Epsie Freeman, Sojourner.

<sup>293</sup> "We, as delegates and members of the N.A.C.W., do enter our solemn protest, and assert that every word said by Mrs. Josephine St. R. Ruffin regarding the conduct of the meetings, the lack of ability in any officer to fill the same and her scurrilous, heartless and malicious attack on the president, especially, are falsehoods of the deepest dye."

<sup>294</sup> "The Woman's Era Club and The National Association," *The National Association Notes*, 3:11 (May 1900), 1, 4, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress container 41 (Microfilm, reel 29, frames 291, 294).

those who cannot subscribe to their views with the same honesty of purpose which they themselves profess” and called for benevolence and tolerance within the NACW in the future<sup>295</sup>.

Years later, Ida Wells believed that Terrell had sidelined her in 1899 in order to be re-elected, and had sought to be re-elected, contrary to what she was saying<sup>296</sup>. As mentioned earlier, because she did not condone the domestic orientation that Mary Terrell was giving to the NACW, and because she refused to dedicate her efforts to home life and children’s welfare, Wells-Barnett distanced herself from the association after 1899. As Mia Bay has pointed out, “Ida remained both unwilling and unable to limit her political concerns to the domestic realm [because] she was not willing to leave political matters in the hands of the men of her race”. As a result, her interest in the club movement “diminish[ed] as the movement’s scope became more domestic”<sup>297</sup>. She wanted clubwomen to be more assertive in their activism and to launch battles against lynching, segregation, disenfranchisement and to fight for political rights<sup>298</sup>.

Moreover, it appears that like Williams, collaborating with women was sometimes the source of frustration for Ida Wells-Barnett. She believed that women sometimes had “petty outlook[s] on life”<sup>299</sup> – and did not always feel at ease working with them<sup>300</sup>. Another episode

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<sup>295</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "A Personal Letter From Our President," *The National Association Notes*, 4:1 (January 1901): 1, 4 (N.A.C.W. Microfilm, part 1, reel 23, frames 378-79, 384-85).

<sup>296</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 259-260. Retrospectively, Ida Wells felt sure that Terrell “wanted to be elected for a third term as president of the Association” and had used “the narrow minded attitude of my own home women [Memphis] to ignore me lest I might become a contender for the position she wanted again” in order to be elected “for a third term as president of the association”. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 260. She wrote that when Terrell ceased serving the association in 1901, “In some respects this was a great loss, because Mrs. Terrell was by all odds the best educated woman among us and had proved herself an able presiding officer and parliamentarian. She had in the beginning the undivided affection of older women who formed that organized nation, and it seemed such a pity that selfish ambition should destroy her opportunity to lead the organization to even greater heights”. Mia Bay has explained that by ousting Wells-Barnett in 1899, Terrell managed to keep potential competitors at bay: “Although Terrell never saw Ida as a real challenge for her own position, in ousting Wells-Barnett [Terrell] killed two birds with one stone. She placated Fannie Barrier Williams, who led a large group of Chicago club women, while also undermining Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin’s bid for the leadership of the NACW”. Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 230.

<sup>297</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 228.

<sup>298</sup> Wells engaged in the work with the Afro-American Council as of 1898 and later with the NAACP and supported its efforts to launch legal actions to fight against racial inequality. She was also active within the National Urban League. Wells dedicated her energy to struggle against disenfranchisement, lynching and racial discrimination.

<sup>299</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 230. When discussing woman’s suffrage with Susan B. Anthony in 1894, she explained in her autobiography having told her: “Knowing women as I do, and their petty outlook on life, although I believe that it is right that they should have the vote, I do not believe that the exercise of the vote is going to change women’s nature nor the political situation”. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 230.

<sup>300</sup> Mia Bay has analyzed the word “petty” Wells used as reflecting “how hard it was for her to marshal the patience, social background, or diplomatic skills necessary to flourish the genteel world of female reformers”, 230.

convinced her of women's propensity to create squabbles. When she attended the biennial conference held in Louisville, Kentucky in 1910, she apparently antagonized several women – including Mrs Lucy Thurman, the former president – on the subject of the publication of the *National Notes*<sup>301</sup>. Being very ill at ease, she did not attend the banquet which was given to the delegates that night and the president of the association Elizabeth Carter was very upset by the turn of events<sup>302</sup>. Retrospectively, regretted women's propensity to be afflicted by jealousies: “Always the personal element. It seems disheartening to think that every single move for progress and race advancement has to be blocked in this way”,<sup>303</sup>.

Her daughter Alfreda Barnett Duster revealed in an interview that her mother was increasingly critical of the policies of the leaders of the NACW as the highly energetic activist grew more and more dissatisfied with the slow pace of the work within the association: “When [Mother] came home from a meeting, she'd be unhappy about the way things had gone because she had plans for the meeting to *do* something. That's the reason why she left the National Association of Colored Women. They weren't *doing* anything”<sup>304</sup>. Moreover, Wells-Barnett seemed to think that the NACW was elitist and that its leaders were more concerned with personal ambition than by actual work. Duster emphasized that her mother viewed “The National Association [as] top-heavy with social life” as if “they weren't willing to get out into the fray”<sup>305</sup>. As a result, since Wells-Barnett believed that the work should be accomplished more quickly and efficiently than within the stranglehold of the association, she left the NACW to continue her fight against lynching “With none of the delicacy or discretion that the NACW deemed appropriate”<sup>306</sup>, as Bay has underscored. She was active in the Afro-American Council, and was later a founding member of the NAACP, alongside Du Bois.

After 1900, region continued to affect the internal politics of the NACW. At each new election of the president of the NACW, the regional affiliation of the new president caused

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<sup>301</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 328. Elizabeth Carter was from New Bedford, Massachusetts, and served as president of the NACW from 1908 to 1912. She succeeded Lucy Thurman, who had served as president from 1904 to 1908. Several supporters of Margaret Washington had understood that Ida Wells wished to take control of the editorship of the *National Notes* away from Washington.

<sup>302</sup> Ida Wells-Barnett had been Carter's “special guest”. Carter regretted this situation, saying that she had “never dreamed that her partisans would go to such extremes”, *Crusade*, 329.

<sup>303</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 329.

<sup>304</sup> 1976 Interview of Alfreda Duster by Dorothy Sterling, *Memphis Diary*, 194. Italics her. “She didn't have time for gossip. She was really a very positive and controversial person”.

<sup>305</sup> Alfreda Barnett Duster, *Memphis Diary*, 194. Italics Dorothy Sterling's.

<sup>306</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 231. This is reminiscent of the phrase used by her daughter in Dorothy Sterling's 1976 interview: Ida Wells wanted things to be *done*. See *Memphis Diary*, 194.

much concern<sup>307</sup>. When Josephine Yates' term came to an end in 1904, members of the NACW privately discussed who the best candidate was. For strategic and political reasons, some southern women wanted the next president to be a southern woman. For example, Josephine Yates told Margaret Washington: "I quite agree with you that the Southern Federation has done a good work, also that the National Organizer, when again chosen, should be a Southern woman for all other sections either through the North East or through State Federations are now fairly well organized"<sup>308</sup>. As Johnson has emphasized, Josephine Yates thought that "a resident from the Southern section could do more satisfactorily than someone outside"<sup>309</sup>. Lucy Thurman, a native of Canada and a citizen of Michigan was elected as the third president of the NACW, thus ruining the hopes of southern clubwomen.

Despite the efforts of many clubwomen to foster unity across regions, the early years of the National Association were marked by disagreements over which policy to embrace to further the goals of the association. While southern club members – such as Terrell, Yates and Washington – tended to support a compromising approach, northern and eastern members favored a more militant stance and called for active resistance against racial violence, discrimination and disenfranchisement. As Joan Marie Johnson has noted: "Despite the efforts of leaders in the South to increase sectional participation in the NACW and Northern attempts to welcome them, antagonism still marked the relationship between Southern and Northern black clubwomen. The supposed inferiority of Southern women was most often at the root of this conflict"<sup>310</sup>. As Deborah Gray White has underscored, in 1912, the election of Margaret Washington as president of the NACW<sup>311</sup> "signaled current and future difficulties". Some members from New England decided that "a new direction" was necessary for the Association: "The Northern and Midwestern leadership of the NACW were now convinced of a need for more vigorous opposition, in order to stem the tide of lynching, disenfranchisement, and segregation". As of 1912, the NAW opened up to other causes. Women of the NACW – such as Wells-Barnett, Terrell, Talbert and Maria Baldwin – encouraged members to join chapters of the NAACP and get involved in the efforts of the

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<sup>307</sup> The first two presidents were Southerners: Terrell was a born Southerner and a resident of Washington D.C. and Josephine Yates, despite being born in the North, was active in Kansas City.

<sup>308</sup> Josephine Yates to Margaret Washington. Letter dated 19 February 1906, 3-4. Records of the NACW. Library of Congress. Underlinings hers. Also cited in Deborah White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 83-84.

<sup>309</sup> Josephine Yates to Margaret Washington, January 8, 1904, Records of the NACW, reel 5; February 19, 1906, Records of the NACW, reel 6. February 28, 1906, Records of the NACW, reel 6, as cited in Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*.

<sup>310</sup> Joan Marie Johnson, *Southern Ladies, New Women*, 101. See Chapter 4 entitled: "Unity in Diversity".

<sup>311</sup> She succeeded Elizabeth Carter Brooks, who served from 1908 to 1912.

National Urban League, “an organization dedicated to the problems of housing, unemployment, health, crime, and the training of blacks in the urban areas”<sup>312</sup>. Some members who favored interracial partnership – like Terrell – worked with the American Woman Suffrage Association<sup>313</sup>. Yet, as White has made it clear, the election of Margaret Murray Washington in 1912:

reflected an unwillingness on the part of [the association] to move from the less confrontational community and individual oriented self-help asocial uplift programs. Pulled in both directions, would the NACW move at all? Its ‘uplift’ ideology had proved increasingly *out of step* with a mainstream black America that was bolder in its demand for civil and political rights<sup>314</sup>.

Nevertheless, the NACW was about to change.

Many club members developed long-lasting friendships with other fellow clubwomen. Despite their social, regional and at times cultural differences and their political sensibilities, the four women in this study had common points and often started fruitful collaborations to further the cause of women of color. For example, Fannie Williams and Mary Terrell shared the same interests. As Mary Jo Deegan has emphasized:

Williams and Terrell were allies in the founding of both the NLCW and the NACW, as noted. Their husbands were both lawyers, allies of Washington, egalitarian partners, and more conservative than their wives. Williams and Terrell both became society leaders in their black communities and lived in Washington D.C. at some point in their lives. There were college graduates, authors, orators, and allies of white females sociologists based at Hull House. Terrell does not single out Williams as a close friend in her autobiography, but they clearly shared many common interests and supported each other on significant occasions<sup>315</sup>.

Fannie Barrier Williams and Mary Terrell indeed had similar goals and philosophies. In the late 1890s, they sometimes met while the NACW was being founded, took part in the same meetings<sup>316</sup> and were both correspondents for the *Woman’s Era* – Williams for Chicago and Terrell for Washington. Both women supported Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist

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<sup>312</sup> As Debra Newman Ham has explained, Mary Terrell grew more and more incisive in her activism as the years went by. After the 1900s, she dedicated her energy to fight against lynching, disenfranchisement, racial segregation and fought for woman suffrage and civil rights: “As Terrell grew older, she became bolder in her expressions of social and political dissent”, “Mary Church Terrell”, in *Notable Black American Women*, Vol I. ed. Jessie Carney Smith, 1118.

<sup>313</sup> Addie Hunton is an example of what White has termed the NACW’s “new direction”. This fervent suffragist was involved in the NACW, the American Woman Suffrage Association, with white women at the YWCA and in the NAACP. See Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 86.

<sup>314</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 85-86. Italics mine. Washington appears as being at odds with this new direction, since she was not an early supporter of woman suffrage and did not condone the methods of the NAACP.

<sup>315</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xli. The NLCW was the National League of Colored Women. It is interesting to note that none of the four main women discussed in this study were close friends or even spoke about one another in their autobiographies or memoirs. Only Ida B. Wells did speak about Mary Church Terrell in her memoir when she discussed the 1899 election.

<sup>316</sup> For instance, both attended the anniversary of the Woman’s Era Club of Boston.



philosophy<sup>317</sup>. As Gerda Lerner has underscored, Williams and Terrell shared the same vision about women and the race: “The feminism of Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Mc Leod Bethune, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell was of a different kind [from that of Cooper]. They saw the separate organization of women as an expedient, a means for elevating not only women but the race. Female suffrage was similarly viewed pragmatically as a necessary tool for winning black rights. Their feminism was also inspired by the hope that it would be easier for black and white women to find some common ground for cooperation than it would be for men.”<sup>318</sup>

On the contrary, Ida B. Wells opposed accommodationism and believed that African Americans should be more vocal about their rights. As a result, her relationship with Fannie Williams – who also lived in Chicago and was active in the same clubs – and Terrell deteriorated over the years. because all three women did not embrace the same philosophies. Was was Anna Julia Cooper’s stance on these questions? Cooper shared common points with Wells-Barnett, being vocal about African Americans’ rights and adopting an assertive tone in her writings<sup>319</sup>. Nevertheless, Cooper remains unique because she was mainly interested in fighting for women’s rights<sup>320</sup>. She was very active in the nation’s capital and lived close to Mary Church Terrell in Le Droit Park at some point<sup>321</sup>. Both took part in Howard University campus life, occasionally wrote for the *University Journal* or sat as jury members at students’ writing competitions which were organized on campus. Yet, nothing seems to indicate that the two women were friends. It appears that Anna Cooper had a rich, diversified social life in Washington D.C.. She was a life-long friend of Francis and Charlotte Grimké<sup>322</sup> and was also

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<sup>317</sup> As examined earlier, although Terrell initially “vacillated in her feelings toward the Booker T. Washington philosophy of accommodation and education”, she became a supporter of his ideas. Besides, at some point, Robert Terrell received the assistance of Booker T. Washington to retain a position as a judge. See “Mary Church Terrell”, Debra Newman Ham in *Notable Black American Women*, Vol I. ed. Jessie Carney Smith, 1118.

<sup>318</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 562.

<sup>319</sup> As Deborah Gray White has noted, when Yates criticized the methods adopted by Northerners to prevent “The Clansman” from being shown in 1904, Anna Cooper “believed that blacks won nothing with silence”, Deborah White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 84.

<sup>320</sup> Cooper is one of the first black feminists. As Gerda Lerner has pointed out, like Sojourner Truth, she made women’s rights a priority: “Cooper offered a distinctly feminist argument and asserted, with great conviction, that the needs of black women were different and distinct from those of black men”, Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 561-562.

<sup>321</sup> Mary Terrell lived at 328 T. Street N.W., Washington D.C. while Cooper bought a place at 201 T. Street N.W. in 1916. In the 1910s, after being entrusted with the care of her brother’s grandchildren (in 1915), Cooper bought a “spacious house in LeDroit Park, formerly the home of Civil War General Benjamin LeFevre”, Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 61. See also *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* by Charles Lemert, 346.

<sup>322</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Early Years in Washington: Reminiscences of Life With the Grimkés” 1951, 310-319. Cooper thoroughly enjoyed the company of Charlotte Forten Grimké (1837-1914) and Francis James Grimké (1850-1937). In 1951, Cooper wrote: “I think I owe any cultivation I have now in the taste for teas to



a friend of Ella Barrier's, Fannie Barrier Williams' sister. Cooper and Barrier travelled together in Canada in the early 1890s and remained acquainted throughout the years<sup>323</sup>. Cooper was also acquainted with Fannie Barrier Williams: both travelled together to attend the Pan-African Congress of 1900 in London<sup>324</sup>.

Although these women were not close friends and did not share the same political sensitivities, it is very likely that each of them were familiar with the writings and the philosophies of the others and influenced one another throughout the years. While Ida B. Wells promoted a more militant approach to the struggle for civil rights and voting rights, the fight against lynching and segregation, Williams and Terrell tended to adopt an accommodationist stance at the turn of the century<sup>325</sup>. Cooper also favored a militant approach and wrote very political pieces which account for her assertive stance yet believed that the needs of black women were distinct from black men's and had to be addressed. In any case, despite their distinct political sensitivities, their innovative activism and thinking and their occasional collaborations fostered mutual admiration and inspiration.

### **3. Cultural Crossings: Being Cosmopolitan Women**

Although some women continued to emphasize their regional perspectives throughout their lives – as in the case of Fannie Williams for the North or Anna Cooper for the South--, the sense of regional identity they had developed during their youth transformed over time. They believed that it was necessary to collaborate across the borders of regions and class – and sometimes race, as in the case of Fannie Barrier Williams – and nation. Many of these clubwomen travelled extensively in various regions of the country, beyond the borders of the United States and were deeply cosmopolitan women.

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that acquired at Mrs Grimké's hospitable board". Anna Julia Cooper, "The Early Years in Washington: Reminiscences of the Life with the Grimkés", 1951, 314.

<sup>323</sup> In a letter dated 18 July 1891 addressed to her mother, Cooper explained that "Parker Bailey and Miss Barrier and I went shopping and want to go down to Niagara Falls [...] Miss Barrier goes on home from there Monday afternoon. I will stay here about two weeks. If [Bailey] gets her tickets on the 23<sup>rd</sup> for Niagara she can stop a week at Brockport with Miss Barrier on my way home". Brockport was the home of the Barriers in New York State. Letter dated 19 July 1891 to "My dear Mother". Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1. Ella Barrier was a teacher at M. Street High School then and served as secretary to the Washington D.C. Colored Women's League. Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 23.

<sup>324</sup> Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 50.

<sup>325</sup> As I noted earlier, Terrell became increasingly militant in the early twentieth century.

## Trans-Regional Experiences

Most women of this study crossed the borders of region several times or even repeatedly throughout their lives and therefore benefited from the influences of other regions at some point in their lives. Even though she often positioned herself as a black woman from the North – as the title of her autobiography : “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography” indicates –, Fannie Barrier Williams travelled widely and was well-acquainted with the cultures of the different regions<sup>326</sup>. Williams – who grew up in Brockport, New York, knew Washington D.C. particularly well, having worked there as a teacher for eleven years in the 1870s and 1880s. In adulthood, Fannie regularly visited her sister Ella who worked as a teacher in the nation’s capital. According to Wanda Hendricks, she travelled there so often that her name appeared in the city directory well after her departure in 1887<sup>327</sup>. Fannie Williams also regularly travelled throughout the country to deliver lectures.

On the other hand, Ida Wells-Barnett ceaselessly fought against lynching from the viewpoint of a Southerner who had experienced this violence personally as a child and as a young woman<sup>328</sup>. Although the South strongly influenced her activism – particularly in her twenties and early thirties – she was also a well-travelled, cosmopolitan woman<sup>329</sup>. By the age of 26, she had lived in Holly Springs, Mississippi, worked in Memphis, Tennessee, and left her native region to work as a teacher in Visalia, California. Living in forced exile from the South after 1892, she travelled to New York and overseas before permanently settling down in Chicago, Illinois. Upon her arrival in the North, she received the support of northern women such as Maritcha Lyons and Victoria Matthews.

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<sup>326</sup> Williams went south several times throughout her career as an activist and was faced with racial discrimination in Louisiana. See Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”. *Independent* 57, (14 July 1904): 91-96. Another time, she reported having visited Memphis, Tennessee, in 1895 and having met western women. Fannie Barrier Williams, *Woman’s Era*. Vol I, no 11. February 1895: 4- 6. Like many other clubwomen, she was able to discover many facets of America and a diversity of people from different origins and regional affiliations.

<sup>327</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders*, 174.

<sup>328</sup> She explained in her memoir that she heard her mother speak of the Ku Klux Klan as a child.

<sup>329</sup> Her southern identity shaped Wells’s philosophy. In the book *For the Freedom of Her Race*, Lisa Materson shows that “Wells’s encounters with white supremacy in the South would shape the trajectory of her life for years to come, transforming her into one of the leading civil rights and women’s rights advocates until her death in 1931”. Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932*, 29. Materson has added that “Wells’s experiences in the South informed her interest in party politics”, 29. Her roots were southern “like those of so many politically active black women of her generation”, 28.

Like Wells-Barnett, Anna Cooper's Southernness deeply shaped her activism<sup>330</sup>; Anna Julia Cooper was perhaps the most definitive southern woman of this study<sup>331</sup>. Besides a few years spent in the North in the 1880s – she began studying at Oberlin College at age 23, in the 1880s and then taught at Wilberforce University from September 1884 to June 1885 as a Professor of Modern Languages and Literature –, Cooper lived in the South her entire life<sup>332</sup>. Nevertheless, her regional and cultural crossings between North and South helped her to build a career as a writer. Even if she lived south of the Mason-Dixon line most of her life, the short periods of time when she lived out of the South shaped her destiny. Northerners she met in Ohio assisted her in becoming a writer and an essayist. For example, she was able to publish *A Voice From The South* in the early 1890s thanks to the help of influential people such as Bishop Benjamin William Arnett – a northern Minister born in Pennsylvania living in Ohio – who supported her project<sup>333</sup>. She published her work with The Aldine Printing House, whose offices are located in Xenia, Ohio, near Wilberforce University – where she taught for one academic year.

Interestingly, Margaret Murray Washington – who spent her entire life in the South<sup>334</sup> and always positioned herself as a southern woman in her writings – also had bonds with the North. Although her relief work was accomplished at Tuskegee – she founded and ran mothers' clubs among other activities, — Washington regularly collaborated with women from other regions, as the correspondence of the NACW indicates<sup>335</sup>. Margaret Washington not only left the South at times to deliver speeches in conventions but also travelled north

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<sup>330</sup> When she started working on gender, race and region in the mid 1880s, she was living in the South. Upon her graduation, she had decided to go back to North Carolina in September 1885 to work as an Instructor of Mathematics, Latin and Greek at Saint Augustine Normal School.

<sup>331</sup> See the articles written by Roberta S. Maguire, whom I met in Paris in June 2014 at the conference organized by Professor Dow on Literary Journalism. Roberta S. Maguire, "Anna Julia Cooper: The Postbellum South", in *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weak. (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 2002): 220-224. "Kate Chopin and Anna Julia Cooper: Critiquing Kentucky and The South", 123- 137. *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. xxxv, Fall 2002, No. 1.

<sup>332</sup> From 1885, she worked many years at M. Street High School – and served as Principal from December 1901 to September 1906. From 1906 to 1910, when she was "exiled" from Washington, she worked as a Professor of Foreign Languages at Lincoln Institute in Missouri before coming back to M. Street High School. She retired in 1930.

<sup>333</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol. VI: "Interracial and Black Feminist Organizing", 10. Cooper certainly met Bishop Benjamin Arnett (1838-1906) when she was in Ohio since he served as Ohio House of Representatives from 1887 to 1889 and as Bishop of the AME Church in 1888. Cooper thanked Bishop Arnett in her preface: "With profound regard for the heroic devotion to God and the Race, both in Church and in State, -- and with sincere esteem for his unselfish espousal of the cause of the Black Woman and of every human interest that lacks a Voice and needs a Defender, this, the primary utterance of my heart and pen, is affectionately inscribed".

<sup>334</sup> Margaret Murray Washington was born in Macon, Mississippi, studied at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and then went on to work with her husband Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

<sup>335</sup> See the letter in which she was invited by Elizabeth Carter, a clubwoman from Rhode Island.

every summer and was therefore familiar with this section<sup>336</sup>. Moreover, the Washingtons sent all of their children to northern schools after attending the Tuskegee Institute<sup>337</sup>, which brought them severe criticism from the black and white press<sup>338</sup>.

Conversely, Mary Church Terrell presented herself in her autobiography as a product of multiple regional – and national – influences. Despite the fact that she had been born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee, she deemed that she had acquired northern mores like the “Yankee’s respect for work”<sup>339</sup> from the early age of six, growing up at the crossroads of both regional cultures. She regularly spent time in New York City with her mother and in Memphis with her father as a child. Additionally, like all women of this study, she travelled widely for her work, particularly after becoming a lecturer. In her autobiography, she remembered travelling in the North, East, South and West. Being perhaps the most famous of the women in this study and the most famous clubwoman – partially due to her work accomplished as president of the NACW – Terrell was well-acquainted with clubwomen of both races in different areas in the country.

Like Anna Cooper, she later settled down in Washington D.C., spending most of her life in this northernmost part of the South. As a clubwoman, she benefited from the support of

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<sup>336</sup> It is believed that the couple travelled to Booker T. Washington’s northern fund-raising headquarters in Massachusetts and then to New York each summer. As Louis Harlan has indicated in his biography of Booker T. Washington, Margaret “usually spent summers with her husband at his northern fund-raising headquarters, first in Massachusetts and later in New York, but she seldom travelled with him on his busy lecture tours and hard all-night train rides”. Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 108.

<sup>337</sup> Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 108. See Chapter 5: “Family Matters”. For example, Portia studied in Framingham, Massachusetts, from 1892 to 1895. She later returned north to prepare to enter Wellesley College in 1901. Booker’s second child Booker T. Jr. also attended Tuskegee but then went on to study at Rock Ridge Hall in Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts, in 1902 and remained there until 1904. See Harlan, 113. Because of his son’s misconduct, Booker T. Washington enrolled him at the Institute of Colored Youth of Cheyney, Pennsylvania but he later changed his mind and enrolled him at Tuskegee. In 1907, Booker Jr. entered Philipps Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, thus returning north again. See page 115. Lastly, Ernest Washington entered Oberlin College in Ohio in 1904, before returning south to Tuskegee. He “spent several years teaching penmanship at Tuskegee, while studying College preparatory subjects part time”, Harlan, 117.

<sup>338</sup> In November 1902, the *New York Times* questioned Washington’s decision to send his daughter to an institution of higher education since he believed in industrial education. See *New York Times*, 4 November 1902. Booker T. Washington defended himself by saying in the issue dated 15 November 1902: “I sent my daughter north to take some special studies after she had finished two regular industrial courses at the Tuskegee Institute in the same way that I have sent at least a dozen of our students to other institutions in order to better prepare them for work at the Tuskegee Institute”. A black newspaper voiced criticism as well: the *Boston Guardian*. On 22 November 1902, the article read: “Thus is our ‘greatest’ man compelled to excuse the education of his children”, as cited in Harlan. *The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 111. The *Guardian* was an African American newspaper founded in 1901 by William Monroe Trotter and George W. Forbes. Trotter (1872-1934) was a northern-born African American editor who co-founded the Niagara Movement and who fiercely opposed Washington’s accommodationist policies and regularly criticized him. Washington seemed destabilized by these attacks, and confessed “that the editorial in the *Times* seems to me very contemptible”. See the letter from Booker T. Washington to Baldwin, published in the *New York Age* and reprinted in the *Boston Guardian*, 22 November 1902, as cited in Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 111.

<sup>339</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 59-60.

southern clubwomen from Memphis. Yet, like Jane Hunter – who was criticized by local clubwomen in Cleveland, Mary Terrell seemed to have suffered at times from being mistrusted as an activist and suffragist because she “hailed from the South”. When she was “appointed to take charge of the colored women of the East during the campaign” and deliver speeches in the States of New York with the Women’s Republican League after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment<sup>340</sup>, she confided:

Efforts had been made to prejudice the Eastern women against me, both because I had no vote myself and because some folks said I hailed originally from the South, and they weren’t going to be led by a southern woman! I was also informed that a few disgruntled souls had tried to create sentiment against me on the ground that it was a reflection upon them to send a woman from anywhere to the East to teach them to vote<sup>341</sup>.

Other southern women who had settled in the North such as Jane Hunter often suffered from being judged according to her regional affiliation. In her autobiography, Hunter referred more to her adoptive State than her native section, providing more details about the work she accomplished in Cleveland than about her youth in the South. Interestingly, even though she was born and educated in South Carolina – she was a graduate from Hampton Institute – Hunter did not emphasize her identity as a Southerner in her autobiography. This “accidental migrant”<sup>342</sup> – as Thomas called her – tended to position herself as a Northerner – and more precisely as a Clevelander – because this is where she accomplished her work at the head of the Phillis Wheatley Association<sup>343</sup>. Nevertheless she retained her conservative education and southern mores throughout her life. As Rhondra Robinson Thomas has suggested in the

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<sup>340</sup> This was for the first election in which all American women had the right to vote. This was the Harding-Coolidge campaign. See her autobiography, 308-309.

<sup>341</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 309-310. A resident of Washington D.C., Anna Cooper also did not have the opportunity to vote after 1920. She indicated it in the form she filled in in 1930. See Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C.. Terrell’s comment suggests that there was a growing tension between northern and southern women after the Nineteenth Amendment. However, I was unfortunately unable to find any other element on this topic. Although northern women such as Wells-Barnett and Fannie Williams – along with Elizabeth Lindsay Davis – were active politically, trying to curb white Southerners’ attempts to deprive blacks of their rights, neither of them alluded to tensions among women of the different regions in their autobiographies.

<sup>342</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 4. In 1905, when she was about to settle as a trained nurse in Florida, a family friend of hers – the Colemans – convinced her to move north. Thomas has indicated: “In 1905, Hunter became an accidental migrant one-family friends she was visiting in Richmond Virginia convinced her to drop the plans to move to Florida, where she had found a job after completing more nursing training at Hampton Institute, and join them on their journey to Cleveland, where she faced the challenges of finding a good job, safe housing, and suitable recreation”, 4. As she embarked on her journey to Cleveland, Ohio in May 1905 and was caught in a storm while aboard the train near Delaware, Ohio, she envisaged this as a new “adventure”: “The storm, while it did not frighten me, to my imaginative spirit, standing on the threshold of a new adventure, suggested the turbulence and inclemency which I might encounter there”.

<sup>343</sup> Despite her constant implication in the welfare of Cleveland women, she suffered because she was perceived as a dangerous envoy of segregation. This unpleasant experiences seemed so perturbing for Hunter that she chose to write about them in her autobiography years after the facts. See Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 84.



foreword to her autobiography, she adopted conservative methods to run the Home for girls: “Hunter, a conservative social activist, implemented a multifaceted political, economic, and religious strategy informed by personal experiences, southern traditions, and early twentieth century social reform movement to elevate black womanhood”<sup>344</sup>.

Moreover, regionalism appeared to have played a part in some activists’ stance towards other women. Discussing the clubwomen of turn-of-the century Chicago, Anne Knupfer has shown that for African American women in the 1900s, regionalism was “particularly significant because of the migration of Southern African Americans to Chicago”<sup>345</sup>. According to her, regional tensions did exist: Knupfer has pointed out that “African-American women mediated but did not always resolve the tensions of social class, regionalism, and gender”<sup>346</sup> and Jane Hunter’s narrative seems to corroborate her assertion. It reveals that this native of the Upper South sympathized yet distanced herself from migrants from the Deep South – whom she judged as “backwards”<sup>347</sup>. Not all southern-born women had such impressions about their experiences in the North. Susie King Taylor praised New England in particular after leaving the South – probably perhaps Boston and Cleveland were different cities with distinct histories and also because she was not a prominent social worker like Hunter who advocated interracial cooperation. Although she was born in the South, Taylor seemed to have embraced her northern life and cherished the only place where she could find “liberty and justice”<sup>348</sup>. Her experience of the war exerted an important influence in this question. During the Civil War, she served as a nurse and a laundress in the Union army for three years, following her husband, Edward King, an African American soldier. Her love for “the Union” and deep patriotism remained strong throughout her life<sup>349</sup>.

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<sup>344</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 14.

<sup>345</sup> Anne Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity*, 6. She has “relied mostly upon scholarship that is grounded in the daily experiences of community members, as well as that which acknowledges how race, class, and gender are intricately connected” and that she would say that regionalism was “particularly significant because of the migration of Southern African Americans to Chicago”.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>347</sup> Jane Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, 116. “Some of the [girls], coming from the deep South, are amazingly backward, and their reactions are conditioned by the feeling of inferiority which tradition and a lack of education have bred in them. To these defenseless souls, the Phillis Wheatley owes protection and love quite as much as to those whose greater intelligence may bring greater returns”.

<sup>348</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences*, 62. “I have been in many States and cities, and in each I have looked for liberty and justice, equal for the black as for the white; but it was not until I was within the borders of New England, and reached old Massachusetts, that I found it”.

<sup>349</sup> Susie Baker King Taylor (1848-1912) served on the war front from 1862 to 1865. Edward King died in 1866 and she then returned to teaching. In the 1870s, after travelling to Boston in order to work as a domestic for a white family, she married Russell Taylor and remained in New England until her death. She returned to the South once to nurse her dying son in the late 1890s.



Throughout their lifetime, all of these women crossed regional lines for significant periods of time, and their trans-regional culture evidently influenced their philosophies. Because of their frequent travels north, south, east and west, many of these women were acquainted with the mores of all regions in America.

### **Experiences Abroad: Denouncing America's Exceptional Racism**

In addition to touring America to give lectures, these activists travelled internationally – which was quite exceptional for the time. These women's experiences abroad were often life-changing experiences because they opened their eyes on the exceptional nature of American racism. They were generally warmly welcomed. When Ida Wells travelled throughout Britain in order to raise people's awareness to the conditions of African Americans in the early 1890s, she was always received with hospitality<sup>350</sup>. Likewise, Mary Church received a kindly welcome in France, Switzerland and Germany and enjoyed relative freedom and equality there. The only moment she risked falling victim to discrimination in Europe was in the presence of Americans so she naturally tried to avoid being with Americans as much as possible, rejoicing in her choice to live in a cosmopolitan city such as Berlin – rather than Dresden, which was full of Americans:

When I reached Dresden I was glad I had decided to study in Berlin. The city was full of Americans and English. Wherever I turned on the streets, I heard my mother tongue. I knew that a foreign city full of my white countrymen was no place for a colored girl. I was trying to flee from the evils of race prejudice, so depressing in my own country, and it seemed very stupid indeed for me to place myself in a position to encounter it abroad<sup>351</sup>.

After these trips, these activists were even more critical of the racial oppression existing in their native country. Realizing the uniqueness of American racial prejudice in their twenties enabled them to denounce its exceptional brutality later in adulthood. Such a realization caused some anguish among these young American women. When Mary Church was about to go home to the United States in 1890, she recalled thinking:

Now the time had come for me to return to my native land, and my heart ached when I thought about it. Life had been so pleasant and profitable abroad, where I could take advantage of any opportunity I

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<sup>350</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 89. "Miss Impey, her mother, and her sister Kate welcomed me to their home in Street, Somersetshire". Ida Wells then visited Mrs Mayo (1843-1914), a British woman, poetess, activist and "co-worker in the cause". The group went to Aberdeen in the north of Scotland and Ida recalled: "We received a most hearty welcome from Mrs. Isabella Fyvie Mayo, who was most well known in Scotland and England under the pen name of Edward Garrett", 89. In 1893, Ida Wells was greeted in Great-Britain by Catherine Impey, a British activist who had invited her to discuss issues of racism in the United States. See Ida B. Wells's *Crusade*, 87.

<sup>351</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 73.

desired without wondering whether a colored girl would be allowed to enjoy it or not, and where I could secure accommodations in any hotel, boarding house, or private home in which I cared to live<sup>352</sup>.

She apparently did not want to come home and even doubted her love for her native country. She confided in her diary: "I love America [...but...] My state is a peculiar one. My own country I may not love; I should not be patriotic at all"<sup>353</sup>. In her 1940 autobiography, Terrell acknowledged feeling ambivalent about coming back to her native country:

But now the time had come for me to return to my native land, and my heart ached when I thought about it. Life had been so pleasant and profitable abroad, where I could take advantage of any opportunity I desired without wondering whether a colored girl would be allowed to enjoy it or not, and where I could secure accommodations in any hotel, boarding house, or private home in which I cared to live<sup>354</sup>.

Mary Church feared the humiliations and limitations of her opportunities: "The injustices and discriminations of many kinds rushed through my mind like a flood [...] I knew that when I returned home I would face again the humiliations, discriminations, and hardships to which colored people are subjected all over the United States"<sup>355</sup>. After being relatively sheltered from discrimination in France, Switzerland and Germany, her apprehensions were high. Yet, perhaps because she retrospectively downplayed the apprehension and anxiety she had felt when she was about to come back to the United States in 1890, and because she wanted to assert her patriotism publicly, she probably over-emphasized her patriotic feelings years afterwards in her memoir. Explaining that tears came to her eyes when she saw the America flag in Berlin in 1890, she remembered thinking then that even though the United States had "been cruel to us in the past and it [was] often unjust to us now", she thought "it [was] my country after all" and that "with all its faults I love[d] it still"<sup>356</sup>.

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>353</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Mary Church Terrell Papers*. German Diary (1889-1890), 11. Diary entry: 28 November 1889.

<sup>354</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 98.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 99. "Nevertheless, I loved the country in which I was born. There was no doubt about that. I had indisputable proof of that fact over and over again. Even though one's mother has been unkind to her at times, one loves her just the same.". As I have pointed out earlier, when Otto Von Dewitts proposed to her, the 27-year-old Mary Church could not imagine expatriating herself and living in Germany for the rest of her life, because she felt that she had a duty to accomplish in the United States, because of her special privileged status as an affluent, college-educated woman of color. Nevertheless, these women sometimes had mixed feelings about patriotism. Terrell's comments reveal that she had misgivings about coming home in 1890. Cooper and Wells were critical of the United States government as well, and so would Terrell be years later after being dismissed from a federal government job, during World War I. Mamie Fields's narrative also indicates that during the First World War, she and her husband did not feel patriotic and did not want to fight in distant Europe. It seems that for black women, patriotism meant respect for the federal government more than their respective States. They prized the rights the United States was supposed to guarantee to its citizens and hoped that soon, racial discrimination would stop and that equal opportunities would be available for all Americans. In this difficult period for African Americans, these activists understood patriotism as love for a nation they considered as their

Moreover, whenever they travelled abroad, these women were shown gentlemanly courtesy. No longer seen in a negative light, they enjoyed being simply acknowledged as Americans. Anna Cooper's travels abroad influenced her understanding of American race relations and her activism. As Vivian May has underscored, Cooper's interest in "developing cross-cultural understanding of Black identity and fostering alliances with other communities of African descent in the Americas", led her to take part in a Toronto, Canada cultural exchange program in the 1890s. This program was arranged by the Bethel Literary and Historical Association, along with her friends and colleagues Ella D. Barrier – Fannie Barrier Williams' sister – and Parker Bailey<sup>357</sup>. As May has pointed out, this trip was "personally transformative for Cooper", because it was "a crucial if brief experience of bodily freedom as a Black woman in the public sphere"<sup>358</sup>. This trip was a turning-point indeed for Cooper. In "Woman vs. The Indian", she explained that at the age of 33, "It was the good fortune of the black woman of the South to spend some weeks, not long since, in a land over which floated the Union Jack" and where she met "matter-of-fact courtesy", "genial kindness", "manly assistance", and "a hospitable, thawing-out atmosphere". This experience abroad made Cooper realize America's racism even more intensely. She asserted that she was unable to say whether she felt "self-pity for her own wounded sensibilities or of shame for her country and mortification that her countrymen offered such unfavorable contrast."<sup>359</sup> She severely criticized her home country and condemned its backwardness, its general un-gentlemanly attitude towards women of color and lack of respect towards non-whites in general<sup>360</sup>.

Mary Terrell and Anna Cooper were not the only women who realized the exceptional virulence of American racism while travelling. Several women of this study noted in their personal writings that they were generally not discriminated against on account of color abroad<sup>361</sup>. When Sarah Dudley Pettey, a teacher and activist from North Carolina, visited

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own and unique one. They thought that, as citizens of this nation, they had the duty to fight to finally obtain civil rights.

<sup>357</sup> It was a "pre-eminent debating society and forum for racial issues in Washington D.C.", Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 30.

<sup>358</sup> Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 31.

<sup>359</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman vs. the Indian", 92. She was probably referring here to Canada where she had recently travelled with Ella Barrier. See Letter dated 19 July 1891 to "My dear Mother". Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1.

<sup>360</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "Woman vs. the Indian", 92. She deemed the American woman responsible for American manners and concluded ironically that since the phrase went: "like master, like man", the conclusion on American manners could be "like mistress, like nation".

<sup>361</sup> On this, see the letters of the Jubilee Singers from Fisk University in the 1870s. For instance, in her 1877 diary, Ella Sheppard, a graduate of Fisk University noted that her group was welcomed with kindness by the Europeans in general in the streets and in the courts they visit. In the United Kingdom, Queen Victoria greeted the Jubilee Singers very courteously. The whole court admired their talents, paying no attention to their skin

Europe in the 1890s while serving as national officer in the AME Zion Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, she recalled "register[ing] at the Imperial Hotel [in Cork, Ireland] where we met not a colored face. All were white, and yet we were royally entertained"<sup>362</sup>. In the early 1920s, Amanda Gray Hilyer made similar observations. On 11 July 1922, this young woman who had recently married Andrew Franklin, an activist, teacher and pharmacist, wrote to her sister from Florence, Italy: "There is absolutely no prejudices here on this boat". During her Grand Tour, she confided being courteously welcomed in Europe and treated simply as a woman. In a letter to her sister dated 28 July 1922, she recounted being regularly mistaken for an Italian woman and noted that overall, people behaved in a "most courteous" manner towards her<sup>363</sup>.

### **International Experiences: Opening Up To a Global Perspective**

Furthermore, these women's international experiences enabled them to acquire a wider outlook on the living conditions of people of color and of women in the world. As mentioned earlier, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell both travelled internationally in their mid or late twenties and therefore benefited from the influence of either British, French or German cultures quite early in their lives. After travelling to Britain in the early 1890s, Ida Wells was well-acquainted with the British tradition of activism and woman clubwork. The friendships she formed there – Reverend Charles Aked and Catherine Impey in particular – greatly influenced her as a person and in her activism<sup>364</sup>.

Likewise, Mary Church Terrell's stay in Europe in the late 1890s, in 1904 and after World War I and her contacts with the French, German and Italian cultures influenced and shaped her philosophy about racial oppression in the world and her personality as an adult.

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color. Ella Sheppard's Diary. Black Americans could be viewed as objects of curiosity. The remarks made by America Robinson in her letters to her fiancé James Burrus reveal that the Jubilee Singers were often objects of admiration. Letter dated 2 June 1875 from America Robinson to James Burrus. Fisk University Special Collections.

<sup>362</sup> Sarah E.C. Dudley Pettey's *1890? Diary*, 61, in Alexander Street Press Collection. Glenda Gilmore extensively worked on Sarah Dudley Pettey in *Gender and Jim Crow*.

<sup>363</sup> Andrew Franklin Papers Hilyer, Box 47-1, Folder 12-13. Manuscript Division. Moorland Spingarn Research Center. Howard University. Washington D.C. On her way back home through Montréal, all passengers – there were French, German, Dutch, English passengers and five Americans who were "very friendly". On 4 August 1922, from Genoa, Italy, seemingly surprised, she wrote to her sister: "Have seen only five dark people since we came [...] They paid no attention to us at all. Even Americans think we are Italians, Indians or South Americans", Folder 12.

<sup>364</sup> She named her first-born after Reverend Charles F. Aked, one of the leaders of the anti-lynching crusade in Liverpool, England.

For example, Mary used her personal experience of the increasing anti-Semitism in late nineteenth century Germany<sup>365</sup> as a lecturer and activist, often comparing the discrimination to which the Jewish and African American communities fell victim to in her speeches and writings and drawing other activists' attention to the need to fight against all forms of racial hatred<sup>366</sup>. Her repeated travels in France not only nourished her conviction to fight for world peace but also enabled her to compare the living conditions of African Americans in the United States and those of French people of African descent in France. When this fervent Francophile<sup>367</sup> travelled to France again in 1919, she celebrated the French government for refusing to implement discriminatory practices against black people and its army for shielding black French soldiers from discrimination<sup>368</sup>. This further convinced her to fight against racism and to fight for the rights of people of color on an international level, as I will soon demonstrate. Nevertheless, like other women in this study, she was conscious that people of color were discriminated against throughout the world, notably in the colonies of the different European powers. As I will soon explore, for these reasons, many of these activists – including Terrell – actively worked to defend the rights of people of color – and women in particular as of 1922 – throughout the world.

Additionally, although they started travelling abroad at a later age than Terrell and Wells, Fannie Barrier Williams and Anna Julia Cooper were also well-travelled women. Both

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<sup>365</sup> Mary Church Terrell became familiar with the customs of the Jewish community during her stay in Paris in the late 1880s. For example, she attended several events organized by the Jewish community of Paris. She once attended a ceremony officiated by the Grand Rabbin de France and was interested in the customs of Jewish women. Mary Church, *Diary in French*, 28. See diary entry dated 19 September 1888. When she witnessed antisemitism in Germany, she deeply sympathized with the Jewish community and resented any form of racial hatred. See *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 90.

<sup>366</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 206-207. She referred to the moment she was accommodated by a Jewish couple when she attended the International Congress of Women in Berlin in 1904: "My hosts told me of the injustices of many kinds to which Jews in Germany were subjected. Naturally, I expressed great sympathy with the oppressed group". When speaking with other delegates, the activist explained: "I said that just as the Jews are misrepresented and disliked in Germany, so Negroes were victims of falsehood and hatred in the United States".

<sup>367</sup> In adulthood, Mary Terrell believed the United States as her "fatherland" and France as her "motherland". She wrote in her memoir: "Goethe says that everybody has a fatherland and a motherland. The country in which I was born and reared and have lived is my fatherland, of course, and I love it genuinely, but my motherland is dear, broadminded France in which people with dark complexions are not discriminated against on account of their color". Mary Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 209.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 339. She met "French Africans" such as Blaise Diagne in order to see for herself if blacks were discriminated against at that time. She was glad and relieved to learn that it was not the case. She said: "Nobody who has a drop of African blood in his veins can fail to honor and love France on account of the way she treats her black subjects, when they live on her own soil and mingle with other citizens of the great Republic". Blaise Diagne (1872-1934) was the first African – Senegalese — Deputee elected at the French *Chambre des Députés* from 1914 to 1934 under the Third Republic. Blaise Diagne organized the Pan-Africanism Congress of Paris with W.E.B. Du Bois in February 1919. Mary Church Terrell did not discuss the treatment of the inhabitants of the French colonies but focused on the way black people were treated in France, based on the information Blaise Diagne gave her after World War I.



visited Canada: Cooper travelled to Niagara Falls in her thirties in the early 1890s with Ella Barrier while Fannie Barrier Williams travelled to Toronto with her sister Ella in 1911<sup>369</sup>. Importantly, Cooper and Williams travelled together in Europe in the early twentieth century to attend the Pan-African Congress that was held in London in 1900<sup>370</sup>. These experiences abroad and the ideas exchanged at the Congress certainly shaped Cooper's and Williams's philosophies and outlooks on racial and gender equality and race relations in the world.

In addition to giving her an international outlook, Anna Cooper's experiences abroad and travels across the Atlantic in the early twentieth century influenced her professional projects. As Leona Gabel has indicated, "a tour of Europe in the summer in 1900 had deepened [her] interest [...] in modern languages and literature". She visited "major countries from Scotland to the Mediterranean", London, Paris and Oberammergau<sup>371</sup>. When this gifted scholar – whose "training [was] deeply rooted in the history of Western philosophy and the classics" as Kathryn Giles has pointed out<sup>372</sup> – started on the adventure of the long-dreamed-of goal of the Doctorate, she had become keen on the cultures and histories of the countries she had visited and from the early 1900s and was increasingly interested in France<sup>373</sup>. As Leona Gabel has argued, Cooper probably decided to devote her doctoral work to French History because "three summer sessions in France had given a new direction to her choice of a field of specialization as well as the experience of living in a community free of race consciousness"<sup>374</sup>. In 1911, 1912 and 1913, upon the advice of her dear friend l'Abbé Klein<sup>375</sup>, Cooper took four graduate courses at La Guilde Internationale de Paris<sup>376</sup>. She later

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<sup>369</sup> "Additional Personals", *The Brockport Republic*, August 31, 1911, 1, as cited in Wanda Hendricks, *Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 174. Fannie Williams was 67 years old then.

<sup>370</sup> Cooper gave a lecture at this Congress and made a tour of Europe on this occasion, visiting Paris and other European cities. See Leona Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne*, 64 and "Voices from the Gaps, Anna Julia Cooper", 5.

<sup>371</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 60. According to Kathryn Giles, Cooper "toured Europe with her foster daughter Lula Love (visiting the Paris Exposition, Oberammergau, Munich and several cities in Italy). Kathryn T. Gines, "Anna Julia Cooper", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/anna-julia-cooper/>>.

<sup>372</sup> Kathryn T. Gines, "Anna Julia Cooper", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. This learned scholar abundantly used examples of French and World History in *A Voice from the South* in 1892.

<sup>373</sup> Anna Cooper was deeply interested in French History and the topic of colonialization. She had attended the 1900 Pan-African Conference in Paris. What is more, her personal history may have played a role in the choice of the topic. Cooper's decision to work on one island of the West Indies may also have been influenced by her marriage with George Cooper, a native of the Bahamas who had personally experienced slavery.

<sup>374</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 61.

<sup>375</sup> Félix Klein (1862-1953) was a French Catholic priest who travelled widely. Correspondence with l'Abbé Klein may be consulted in Anna Julia Cooper's Papers at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center.

<sup>376</sup> Cooper studied the history of French civilization with Professor Paul Privat Deschanel (1867-1942) and also French literature and linguistics.



took additional French courses in the Department of Romance Languages of Columbia University for her Ph.D and completed a thesis entitled *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne: Voyage à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*<sup>377</sup>. Yet, because recent changes had affected her life in the mid 1910s, it was difficult for her to satisfy Columbia University's one year-in-residence requirement in 1917<sup>378</sup>. As a result, in the 1920s, Cooper transferred her credits to the Université de Paris La Sorbonne<sup>379</sup>. She wrote a dissertation in French entitled *L'attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la révolution* and defended her work at the University of La Sorbonne in March 1925, becoming the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D from the Sorbonne<sup>380</sup>. This study reflected her concern for the oppressed and her work in favor of racial justice. Like Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells, Fannie Barrier Williams's and Anna Julia Cooper's experiences abroad – in France in particular – certainly shaped their thinking – and in the case of Cooper, led her to conduct her doctoral work.

It appears that travelling beyond the borders of the United States also enabled these women to redefine their identity. While Anna Cooper pursued her doctoral studies in France in the 1920s in her sixties<sup>381</sup>, she was treated as an American woman and not as a woman of color. She must have rejoiced when a journalist of the *Chicago Tribune* failed to mention her skin color in one of his articles: “It is a most laudable ambition *for an American woman* to

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<sup>377</sup> From 1914 to 1917, she took French 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106. Her thesis is a translation into modern French of an eleventh-century French epic.

<sup>378</sup> Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 61. Several events indeed upset her life in that decade: Cooper lost her dear friend Charlotte Forten Grimké in 1914 and adopted her nieces and nephews in the 1910s, complicating the perspective of spending a full year in New York City.

<sup>379</sup> Cooper's dissertation is a study of the revolution of Saint Domingue – now Haiti —, “a subject tailored, [as Leona Gabel has said], to her interest in the Pan-African experience”, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne*, 64. She spoke about her doctoral achievements in “The Third Step: Cooper's Memoir of the Sorbonne Doctorate”, 1945-1950?, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 320-330.

<sup>380</sup> Her doctoral committee was composed of three Professors, Philippe Sagnac, Charles Cestre and Célestin Bouglé. As Jacques Rancière has explained, Cooper “establishes a moment of democracy at the Sorbonne”, and “sets for herself a stage on which she can articulate and perform a new form of emancipation”, 48. Rancière, Jacques, *On the Shores of Politics*. (London: Verso, 2007): 39-61, as cited in Arlette Frund, “Phyllis Wheatley, Anna Julia Cooper and the Black Atlantic Diaspora”, *Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines*, N° 149, 4e trimestre 2016. Anna Julia Cooper was also the fourth African American woman in the United States to earn a Ph.D. The first three women were Georgiana Rose Simpson, Eva Beatrice Dykes and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander. See “Voices from the Gaps: Anna Julia Cooper”, 4. University of Minnesota. Anna Julia Cooper was officially awarded her diploma during a ceremony chaired by Alain Locke taking place on 29 December 1924 at Howard University. Leona C. Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 65.

<sup>381</sup> Like Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper was a Francophile. She studied French at Columbia University in 1914 in the Department of Romance Languages, took French 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106 and probably other courses, before taking four graduate courses at La Guilde Internationale de Paris. She then travelled to France for her Ph.D in the 1920s and defended her doctoral work in French. She was well-versed in French, French History, which she abundantly used in *A Voice from the South* in 1892. She was also extremely knowledgeable in American and World History. See Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Form. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

earn the degree of Ph.D from the Sorbonne”<sup>382</sup>. Like other black Americans who travelled outside of the borders of the country, she was designated simply as an “American woman” and therefore having the stress be put on her nationality, rather than on her color.

African American women’s regional affiliation was important because it influenced their activism. Depending on their regional identity, clubwomen resorted to distinct strategies: while southern women tended to adopt more conservative attitudes, their northern and eastern counterparts adopted more direct and audacious methods. This difference of approach revealed women’s different political sensitivities, the two philosophies which were colliding within the NACW in its early years: while some members – such as women from the North-East and Midwest – favored a more militant approach, southern women tended to adopt a compromising approach, in keeping with the ideas of Booker T. Washington. This difference of approach could cause internal strife since some club members deemed certain methods as improper or inappropriate. However, these occasional tensions did not prevent these women from organizing nationally. Despite their different political sensitivities, members of the NACW dedicated their energy to unifying women from all regions so as to defend the image of women of color. As of the 1910s, some members of the national association expanded their spheres of influence, getting involved within the NAACP, the YWCA – therefore further favoring interracial cooperation – and the movement for woman suffrage. These members no longer only fought for women and children’s welfare – for “better homes” –, they tackled more political issues: they fought against lynching, racial discrimination and disenfranchisement. While accomplishing this mission, many club members developed long-lasting friendships.

Like many other clubwomen active in this period, regional identity was not a fixed parameter of the personalities of the four main women in this study. The sense of regional identity of these four women kept evolving throughout their lives – as they travelled, visited and lived in different places in the country. Even though they were born and/or raised in a specific region, all four women were well-travelled, American women. This cosmopolitanism influenced the way they envisaged activism, womanhood, gender roles and race relations.

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<sup>382</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Third Step”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 325. Italics mine. The journalist was certainly a white American man.

Thanks to their experience, these activists understood questions about racial justice, gender equality on a national and international level.

In the last chapter, I will examine how black clubwomen and intellectuals emphasized their Americanness in their writings. Asserting their American citizenship was one of the keys to prove that they should finally be considered as women, as first-class citizens and simply, as Americans.

## Chapter 3: Asserting Americanness

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African American women valued their Americanness tremendously and believed it constituted a very important component of their identity. From the early 1890s, black women demanded to be finally acknowledged as being fully American and as belonging to American womanhood. In 1895, Josephine Ruffin emphasized her Americanness when she launched the Woman's Era Club in Boston: "We are women, American women, as intensely interested in all that pertains to us as such as all other American women"<sup>383</sup>. In 1915, Addie Dickerson's phrase encapsulated the demands of African American women. She demanded to be acknowledged as other American women: "There must be no status of the Negro woman different from that of any other American woman"<sup>384</sup>.

These women stressed their citizenship rights and also expressed their sense of patriotism and love for the United States in their public and private writings. How and why did they voice their sense of Americanness in the post-Civil War period and at the beginning of the twentieth century and after the First World War?

### **1. Being Finally Acknowledged as Being Part of "American Womanhood"**

As Paula Giddings has explained in 1984, in the 1890s, "black women began demanding to be recognized as 'an integral part of the general womanhood of American civilization' (as Fannie Barrier Williams had insisted)"<sup>385</sup>. In August 1895, when founding the NACW, the president of the conference Josephine Ruffin claimed the legitimacy of women of color to be considered simply as Americans within the nation. For her, the creation of a national association of women of African descent was the proof that they were embracing their destiny as American women: "It is a good showing, it stands for much, it shows that we are truly American women, with all the adaptability, readiness to seize and possess our

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<sup>383</sup> Josephine Ruffin, "A Call for Black Women: Women's Era Club Speech delivered at the first Congress of Colored Women of the United States, 1895", in *Broken Utterances: A Selected Anthology of Nineteenth Century Black Women's Social Thought*. ed. Michelle Diane Wright. (Baltimore: Three Sistahs Press, 2007), 242 and in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 443.

<sup>384</sup> Addie W. Dickerson, "The Status of the Negro Woman in the Nation", National Association Notes 17 (January- February 1915): 3-9, in *African American Feminisms*, Vol V., 165-171. "We must not rest or falter until America realizes that God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth, and until she lives up to her policy and creed that this is a government of the people, for the people, and by the people", 170-171.

<sup>385</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 132.

opportunities, willingness to do our part for good as other American women.”<sup>386</sup>. Other women such as Mary Terrell, Josephine Ruffin, Fannie Williams or Anna Cooper shared these views. For instance, Fannie Williams asserted in 1904 that African Americans were thoroughly American: “When it is remembered that the so-called Negro race, or colored race, is in language, religion, and instinct as thoroughly American as any of the other races who have come to America and lost their race identity, there is no reason why thousands of them should be known and designated as anything else than Americans”<sup>387</sup>.

Many intellectuals such as Anna Cooper or Fannie Williams denounced the fact that black women were singled out and ostracized within American womanhood. In 1902, Williams regretted that more than thirty-five years after the abolition of slavery, black women remained invisible and unknown in the American society: “With individual exceptions, the colored woman, as the mother of that distinctive race in America, has been unknown. She has excited neither pity nor hope [...] Through all the club more and confusion of those stirring times, the woman, scorned, subjective and silent, was covered with a hateful obscurity. She was simply unknown and unconsidered”<sup>388</sup>. Three years later, the Chicagoan wrote: “That the term colored girl is almost a term of reproach in the social life of America is all too true; she is not known and hence not believed in; she belongs to a race that is best designated by the term problem, and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelopes and obscures her”<sup>389</sup>.

Moreover, she emphasized that after black men were granted citizenship and given full political rights thanks to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment in 1868 and 1870, women – still denied political rights – were not recognized for their real contribution to the nation. Fannie Barrier Williams added that while prominent African-American men such as Blanche K. Bruce or Hiram R. Revels<sup>390</sup> were given political responsibilities, women occupied highly

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<sup>386</sup> “Address of Josephine St. P. Ruffin,” *Woman’s Era*, 2:5 (August 1895), 13-15, in *What Gender Perspectives Shaped the Emergence of the National Association of Colored Women, 1895-1920*.

<sup>387</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Do We Need Another Name?”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 85. Her husband Samuel Laing Williams shared the same opinion. In a speech given on 5 January 1913 at the Abraham Lincoln Center for the “Jubilee Celebration 1863-1913”, S. Laing Williams argued in favor of the recognition of black Americans’ citizenship: “Fair play to all classes who are clothed with the mantle of American citizenship should be the watchword of our government”. “Fifty Years of Emancipation”.

<sup>388</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement Among Negro Women”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 28-46, 28.

<sup>389</sup> Fannie Williams, “The Colored Girl”, 1905, in *The New Woman of Color*, 63.

<sup>390</sup> Hiram R. Revels (1822-1901) was the first black citizen to be elected Senator for Mississippi in 1870. Blanche Kelso Bruce (1841-1898) served as Senator for Mississippi from 1875 to 1881. He was married to Josephine Beall Wilson Bruce (1853-1923). The pair moved to Washington D.C. after 1878 and belonged to the elite of the nation’s capital.

strategic yet less visible positions<sup>391</sup>. She pointed out that while men occupied visible positions, women's active contributions "that make for race character were not thought of."<sup>392</sup> In 1902, Fannie Barrier Williams lamented that it had taken such a long time for men to recognize the important social role women played in the American society through their roles as mothers and homemakers:

It took the colored people a long time to realize that to be a citizen of the United States was serious business, and that a seat in Congress was an insecure prominence unless supported by good women, noble mothers, family integrity, and pure homes. It was not until the Negro race began to have some consciousness of these primary things, that the women of the race became objects of interest and study<sup>393</sup>.

It was only when the vital importance of "pure homes" to the nation, was evoked, that women were considered to be citizens.

According to elite women such as Williams, the contribution of the black woman to American womanhood finally had to be taken into account and acknowledged. As a result, in their writings, these public speakers and activists emphasized black women's influence on American womanhood. For example, Fannie Williams asserted in the "Colored Girl" (1905): "The character of American womanhood is, in spite of itself, affected by the presence of the colored girl [...] We cannot comprehend the term American womanhood without including the colored girl. Thanks to the all wise Creator of man and things, the law of life is infinitely deeper than the law of society"<sup>394</sup>.

Moreover, women intellectuals often emphasized black and white Americans' common interests and bonds. In 1893, before a white audience assembled in Chicago, Fannie Williams emphasized black and white Americans' common bonds and common interests, namely, – the welfare and future of the United States: "We are so essentially American in speech, in instincts, in sentiments, and in destiny that the things that interest you equally interest us", she said, emphasizing the "common interests and [...the] common destiny"<sup>395</sup> that black women shared with white women.

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<sup>391</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women". They "filled the public eye", men "were elected as governors of states, as State legislators, as Congressmen, as United States Senators", 29.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 29. She was referring to "such commonplace things as homemaking, family establishment, industrial and social independence, and the many social economies and refinements".

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. Williams had voiced this idea in 1900 in *The New Negro in a New Century*, 417. She seemed to think, like some white Americans after the war, that African Americans would be ready to enter politics only if women were associated to them.

<sup>394</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl", 63. Williams chose to entitle this article "The Colored Girl" yet in it, she discussed "the colored girl", "the colored woman", the "colored girl who works with her hands" and the "parlor girl", and seemed to use the two terms – girl and woman – interchangeably. See *The New Woman of Color*, 63 and 66.

<sup>395</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The intellectual Progress", 1893, in *The New Woman of Color*, 26.



## Emphasizing Common Points

Black female intellectuals explained that they were thoroughly American and that they shared many common points with white Americans such as language, culture and religion.

Intellectuals emphasized the common heritage and culture black and white Americans shared. In “Womanhood” (1886), years before eugenic thoughts were gaining ground, Cooper argued that black Americans were “aliens neither in language and customs”<sup>396</sup> therefore setting black Americans apart from the millions of new immigrants who often did not master the language upon arriving from southern Europe or Russia. Likewise, in 1904, Williams stated “the so-called Negro race, or colored race, is in language, religion, and instinct as thoroughly American as any of the other races”<sup>397</sup>.

In their autobiographical and political writings, African American women emphasized the fact that black Americans were English-speaking Protestants who shared the values of America. They actively denounced white Americans’ ignorance and racial and class prejudice against people of color. For example, they explained that some viewed African Americans as a community exclusively composed of menial workers speaking English imperfectly. Some whites had difficulty imagining that some black Americans could belong to the educated black middle-class or elite. In *Memories of Yesterday*, Maritcha Remond Lyons denounced Americans’ racial and class bias, explaining that when she spoke at a meeting – of a Constitutional League – organized in New York City in 1901, she overheard a white clergyman “ejaculat[ing]: ‘Did you listen to that colored woman? Why, *she speaks as good English as I do*’”. Maritcha Remond Lyons had already fallen victim to whites’ racial assumptions about blacks, having been depicted in the press a few years before as “a mustard colored girl in a chocolate frock” who “spoke quite correctly”<sup>398</sup>.

Religion was an important factor in the definition of Americanness. Many activists argued that because most black Americans were Christians – unlike many immigrants arriving *en masse* at the turn of the century —, they were already assimilated into the American society and as a result, the question of blacks’ assimilation should not even be debated.

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<sup>396</sup> Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, *A Voice From The South*, 33. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

<sup>397</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Do We Need Another Name?”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 85.

<sup>398</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories of Yesterdays*, Chapter V, 33. Italics mine.

By emphasizing African Americans' common religion with white Americans – Christianity – in their writings, many women intellectuals such as Anna Cooper, Fannie Barrier Williams, Nannie Helen Burroughs or Mary McLeod Bethune emphasized the values which they commonly shared with white Americans. Women such as Fannie Williams and Anna Cooper highlighted African Americans' Christianity to justify their assimilation to the American nation. In 1894, Williams defended the view that the Church had contributed to the uplift of African Americans and to making them better citizens. For her, the black American was “by every mark, impulse and aspiration an American Christian, and to the American church belongs the credit and responsibility of all that he is and is to be as a man and citizen of this Republic”<sup>399</sup>. Nevertheless, as Wanda Hendricks has shown, the elitist Williams – who had become a Unitarian – positioned herself as a member of the elite and distanced herself from the majority of African Americans. During a 1888 interview by a white journalist of the *Chicago Tribune*, Williams explained that “‘Most [African Americans] are [... religious] but not all. Some of us are interested in science and we no longer accept all the old ideas’”<sup>400</sup>. Interestingly, as Hendricks has pointed out, Williams seemed to believe that the “vast majority of blacks” embraced “old ideas and irrational and illogical thought” whereas the black aristocracy to which she belonged “represented rational thought, and new ideas”. As her biographer has shown, Williams was a free woman who refused to “be limited by denominational or racial strictures” in adulthood. Although she had been “raised a Baptist, had attended a segregated black Presbyterian church in Washington”, she was happy to join All Souls Unitarian Church in Chicago<sup>401</sup>.

Likewise, Anna Julia Cooper's religious ideology guided her activism but here again, the differences between the two women were significant. While Williams rejected the holy Trinity and refused “denominational strictures” by embracing Unitarianism, Cooper remained faithful to her church. In her writings, this devout Episcopalian underscored black Americans' Christianity, explaining that they shared many common points with white Americans – perhaps more than Native Americans. Moreover, at a time when the waves of immigration were at its highest point, Cooper claimed that, contrary to the thousands of immigrants who flocked on the American soil speaking foreign languages and having other creeds, African

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<sup>399</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro”, 1894, 73-77, 73.

<sup>400</sup> See “Cultured Negro Ladies”, *Chicago Tribune*, October 28, 1888, 26, as cited in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Race*, 59.

<sup>401</sup> Wanda Hendricks, “The congregation of All Souls Unitarian Church fulfilled her progressive vision of an intellectually stimulating, racially broad-minded, and integrated community”, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Race*, 68.

Americans shared many common points with white Americans: they not only shared the same language, habits and customs, they also importantly shared the same religion – and therefore, the same values: “Alien neither in language, religion nor customs, the educated colored American is today the most characteristic growth of the American soil, its only genuinely indigenous development”. According to her, contrary to these millions of immigrants who would soon enter the great American melting pot, black Americans, who had peopled this nation since the beginning, had only one nation, common with white Americans: “He is *the most American of Americans* for *he alone* has no other civilization than what America has to offer”<sup>402</sup>. As a result, the United States was their only nation.

African Americans’ desire to finally be acknowledged simply as Americans was made visible in the discussions launched by black leaders in the early twentieth century. When women such as Fannie Barrier Williams started to discuss which term to use to designate black Americans, a debate ensued among black thinkers<sup>403</sup>. African American leaders hesitated between the terms “Negro” – theretofore widely used and favored by Du Bois — and “Afro-American” – used by certain intellectuals and leaders such as Dr A.R. Abbott of Toronto and Gertrude Mossell, who chose it for her publications<sup>404</sup> — while others preferred the term “colored” – favored by Mary Church Terrell, who also used the term “Negro” at the turn of the century<sup>405</sup>. Anna Julia Cooper widely used the term “Negro” as well in her articles but simply designated herself as “black”, as the title of her collection of essays *A Voice from the South, by a Black Woman from the South* shows.

In “Do We Need Another Name?” (1904), Fannie Williams argued that the community needed to “rethink old designations”<sup>406</sup> because of the recent progress accomplished by

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<sup>402</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 213. Italics mine.

<sup>403</sup> They discussed this question in several essays. For example, see Sylvia Mason Maples, *Woman’s Era*. Vol II, No. 2. June 1895, 3. Fannie Williams, “Do we need another name?”, *Southern Workman* 33 (January 1904): 33-36, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 84-86, 84. Williams argued: “We need to rethink “old designations”.

<sup>404</sup> Dr A.R. Abbott was a famous physician from Toronto who had served in the Union Army during the Civil War. Gertrude Mossell entitled her book *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* in 1894.

<sup>405</sup> Mary Church Terrell often used the term “colored” in her speeches and articles and she also used it for her autobiography *A Colored Woman in a White World* but she also used the term “Negro” in articles such as “Lynching from a Negro’s Point of View” of 1904. In the 1940s, Mary Church Terrell asked Americans to stop using the term “Negro”. See Mary Church Terrell, “To the Editor of the *Washington Post*”, 14 May 1949, in Mary Church Terrell Manuscript, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., as cited in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 547. “Please stop using the word ‘Negro’. No ‘one color can describe the various and varied complexions in our group’, emphasizing the fact that African Americans were the ‘only human beings in the world with fifty seven variety of complexions who are classed together as a single racial unit’”, 548.

<sup>406</sup> See Williams, Fannie. “Do We Need Another Name?”, *Southern Workman* 33 (January 1904): 33-36, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 84-86, 84-85.

African Americans and the advent of the “New Negro”<sup>407</sup>. While highlighting the difficulty of finding a term that would be deemed appropriate to designate the entire American community of people of African descent, – which was so diverse, Fannie explained that the term ‘Negro’ was insufficiently accurate<sup>408</sup>. At the same time, Williams thought that “the milder term colored” was more “suggestive of progress toward respectful recognition yet [was] lacking in precision and ethnic meaning”<sup>409</sup>. Nevertheless, she hoped to see it become more common<sup>410</sup>.

On this question, it appears that regional sensibilities played a part as well. Some clubwomen such as Josephine Yates thought that such a debate was sterile and irrelevant. In 1906, she criticized debaters, saying that these reflections were questions which only elite women of “the East” had time to discuss. They argued that women of the West and South – Yates included Kansas City where she was active — did not have time for discussions, for “quibbles” as they termed them, but had to be “practical workers”. Josephine Yates wrote to Margaret Washington:

Some are quibbling over the word by which we are to be called “negro” or “Afro American”, but I wonder if we really have time for that in the West and South where there are so many weightier matters to look after. Yes, I realize that the problem in the East appears to be different from the Problem in the South, but in the South and West it appears much the same, one that requires intensely practical workers. There is little time left for quibbling as to the name by which we shall be called [...]”. The East has something to learn<sup>411</sup>.

Despite the disagreements, all activists concluded in the end that despite the inaccuracy of certain terms, one element mattered more than others: nationality. Fannie Barrier Williams held that the Americanness of black citizens should be brought to the fore:

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 84-85. “All the designations by which the American descendents of Africans are known and described are hopelessly and disproportionately associated with all the miseries of bondage and race prejudice; that the existing names are hindrances to progress and persistently suggest inferiority to the educated young men and women of the race. In other words, there is now by grace of new laws and new conditions, a new Negro, and in order to force this important fact the poverty attention and conscience of the American people, there is need of new name that shall be more in harmony with the new conditions”.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 84- 86. Williams said: “There are so many negroes who are not Negroes, so many colored people who are not colored, it is simply impossible even to coin a term that will precisely designate and connote all the people who are now included under any one of the terms mentioned. [...] The chief objection urged against the term Negro is that it is not effectively ethnically descriptive when applied to hundreds of thousands of people who have been so completely transformed as to leave no physical resemblance to any of the African races. A mulatto, a quadroon, an octoroon, or a Creole, is not a Negro except by a false classification, based upon the common condition of an inferior status”.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 85. William favored the use of the term “colored” and in 1904 did not like the term “negro”, “although she did use it later, the word that Du Bois championed”, as Mary Jo Deegan has indicated. That same year, Williams entitled her autobiography: “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography”. Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xliv.

<sup>411</sup> NACW letter to “Dear Mrs Washington”, *Records of the NACW’s Clubs (1895-1992)*. See Letter 19 February 1906, page 2. Papers. Part 1: Minutes of National Conventions, publications and Presidents’ Office Correspondence”. Reel 6. “Papers of Mrs. M. M. Washington”. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Washington D.C.. Underlining hers.

“There is no reason why thousands of them should be known and designated as anything else than Americans”<sup>412</sup>.

Likewise, when Ida B. Wells-Barnett gave thoughts to these designations in her autobiography in 1928-29, she highlighted that Americanness was to be regarded as essential: “Negro leaves out the element of nationality, and we are all Americans, nor has the Republic more faithful and loyal citizens than those of our race. Some of the ‘colored’ people are not distinguishable from whites, so far has their negro blood been diluted, but they are all Afro-Americans – that is, Americans of African descent.”<sup>413</sup>.

In their writings, African American women intellectuals stressed African Americans’ common interests with white Americans and their Americanness. They also underscored the fact they were born in America, their historic contribution to the building of the nation and their loyalty to the flag.

### **Proving One’s Americanness**

At a time when nationalism and xenophobia were rising and when waves of immigration were seen by some as threats to the nation, it was strategically important for elite black women to assert the historic contribution of African Americans in nation-building. Women such as Naomi Talbert and Anna Cooper emphasized the Americanness of people of African descent by alluding to *jus solis*. In an address delivered at the NAWS Convention in Chicago only a few years after the end of the Civil War in 1869, Talbert insisted: “[I am] an American, because here I was born”<sup>414</sup>. In “The Ethics of the Negro Question” (1902), Cooper took the same stance, stressing that contrary to millions of newly arrived immigrants – who, according to many eugenicists active at the time, endangered the Nation –, African Americans were “Americans, true and bona fide citizens – not by adoption or naturalization but *by birth and blood incontestable*”<sup>415</sup>. She highlighted their loyalty and patriotism, commending: “the million and [a] half colored boys and girls in the public schools of the South [who salute the

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<sup>412</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Do We Need Another Name?”, 85.

<sup>413</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 108. Like Gertrude Mossell, in the 1890s, Ida B. Wells-Barnett generally used the term “Afro-American” and “Negro” in her 1892 book *Southern Horrors* yet widely used the term Negro three years later in *A Red Record*. She used the term “Negro” 194 times whereas she used “Afro-American” only once in this book, although in *Southern Horrors*, she had used the term “black” 17 times, “Negro” 52 times and “Afro-American” 61 times.

<sup>414</sup> Naomi Talbert, “A Colored Woman’s Voice [Delivered at 1869 NWSA Convention in Chicago],” *The Revolution* 3 (4 March 1869): 139, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 466.

<sup>415</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, 215. Italics mine.

flag “with hearty earnestness”]”<sup>416</sup>. Likewise, in her autobiography, Remond Lyons also argued for the recognition of the Americanness of African Americans: “Everywhere throughout our land could and can be found men and women of African descent, worthy 100% Americans, fully entitled, to such honorable appellation”<sup>417</sup>. To assert their Americanness, many intellectuals put the emphasis on black people’s long historical presence in America.

Many African American women hammered home that blacks were legitimate citizens because they had lived on the American soil longer than many other Americans – longer than immigrants who were arriving on the shores of America in the early twentieth century – and that their presence since the early 1600s (1619) entitled them to American citizenship. For example, in “Has America a Race Problem? If Yes, How can it best be solved?” (1892), Anna Cooper stated the view that except for the Native Americans who were present on the territory before, African Americans were among the first settlers of this nation:

[Native Americans], perhaps, have the best right to call themselves ‘Americans’ by law of primogeniture. They are at least the oldest inhabitants of whom we can at present identify any traces.... At least the cleavage cannot be made by hues and noses, if we are to seek for the genuine F.F.V.’s as the inhabitants best entitled to the honor of that name<sup>418</sup>.

In 1893, Ida B. Wells-Barnett voiced a similar idea. In the preface to *The Reason Why The Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, she contended: “The colored people of this great Republic number eight millions – more than one-tenth the whole population of the United States. They were among the earliest settlers of this continent, landing at Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 in a slave ship, before the Puritans, who landed at Plymouth in 1620.”<sup>419</sup>. Less than ten years later, Anna Cooper also proceeded to show in “The Ethics of the Negro Question” (1902) that black Americans were early settlers: “From the beginning was he here, a strong, staunch and not unwilling worker and helper. His traditions, his joys, his sorrows are all here. He has imbibed the genius and spirit of [his country’s]

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, *Memories*. See Chapter 6, 42.

<sup>418</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Has America a Race Problem?”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 128. Lemert indicates that FFV is “a reference to obscure, perhaps, from the context, “First Foreign Visitors”.

<sup>419</sup> Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Irvine Garland Penn and Ferdinand Lee Barnett eds., *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). First published 1893. <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/wells/exposition/exposition.html>. To reach a wider audience, the preface was written in English, French and German.



institutions, growing with their growth, gathering hope and strength with their strength and depth”<sup>420</sup>.

Besides, black female intellectuals defended the view that African Americans had not only proven that they could assimilate, they had also actively – economically and technologically – contributed to the making of America throughout these centuries. Black activists asserted that black Americans had built the country through their free and enslaved labor. In her autobiography, Mary Church Terrell emphasized the importance of African Americans’ two hundred years of free labor: “My African ancestors helped to build and enrich [this soil] with their unrequited labor for nearly three hundred years, while they were shackled body and soul in the most cruel bondage the world has ever seen”<sup>421</sup>. In 1928, Maritcha Remond Lyons also emphasized that numerous northern African Americans had worked hard and acquired real estate, showing a spirit of enterprise early in the history of the country<sup>422</sup>. By doing this, Lyons underscored her Americanness, very much the same way Terrell did in *A Colored Woman in a White World*. Similarly, Cooper stressed the centrality of labor in her writings. In 1902, she appeared to believe that African Americans were more American than African because they had labored for this country for centuries, and they belonged in America: “[The African American worker] sweat and his toil have, more than any others, felled its forests, drained its swamps, plowed fields and opened up its highways and waterways”<sup>423</sup>.

Activists also emphasized that after the Civil War, African Americans kept on contributing to the building of the nation. In *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, Ida B. Wells explained that the reconstruction of the South had been made possible after the Civil War thanks to northern investors and African Americans’ hard-work: “To Northern capital and Afro-American labor the South owes its rehabilitation. If labor is withdrawn capital will not remain. The Afro-American is thus the backbone of the South”<sup>424</sup>. In the preface to her book *The Reason Why the Colored American is not at the World’s Columbian Exposition*, she claimed that African-Americans “ha[d] contributed a large share to American prosperity and civilization”.

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<sup>420</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, 213. Cooper emphasized African Americans’ hard work under slavery, implying that many of the riches produced in the antebellum era in the South had been produced by black Americans. She referred to slavery using the term “sorrows” and also underscored African Americans’ hard-work in freedom.

<sup>421</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 99.

<sup>422</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, Chapter 4, 27.

<sup>423</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, 1902, 213.

<sup>424</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law*. See Chapter entitled “Self-Help”.

The labor of one-half of this country has always been, and is still being done by them. The first crédit this country had in its commerce with foreign nations was created by productions resulting from their labor. The wealth created by their industry has afforded to the white people of this country the leisure essential to their great progress in education, art, science, industry and invention”<sup>425</sup>.

She stressed that black people had not only contributed to America’s wealth but had also enabled white Americans to enjoy wealth in the late nineteenth century as well – this information being often disregarded in the national narrative.

Moreover, black Americans’ strong involvement in social affairs – at Church and in various associations and organizations – made them deserving citizens. Maritcha Remond Lyons emphasized that her family – who was quite famous in the State of New York – had historically been present for generations since the Colonial period<sup>426</sup> and active in the Underground Railroad, therefore underscoring that she was more American than many other newly-arrived immigrants<sup>427</sup>.

Black intellectuals did not only argue that black Americans had been among the first settlers of the continent, they also pointed out that African Americans had ceaselessly contributed to the economic and social life of the country, and were therefore legitimate citizens.

Furthermore, many intellectuals stressed that Americans of African descent had also largely contributed to the American culture. For example, Anna Cooper – who actively promoted black American culture, being active in the Hampton Folklore Society, as Kathryn Gines has indicated<sup>428</sup> – praised African American rich artistic culture. According to her, they belonged to:

A race that has produced for America the only folk-lore and folk songs of native growth, a race which has grown the most original and unique assemblage of fable and myth to be found on the continent, a race which has suggested and inspired almost the only distinctive American note which could chain the attention and charm you’re the ear of the outside world – has as yet found no mouthpiece of its own to

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<sup>425</sup> Ida B. Wells, *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*. Preface.

<sup>426</sup> Maritcha Remond Lyons, Chapter 7, 57. “Many colored New Yorkers were more or less closely connected families dating prior to the Revolution” of 1774 and “the Remond family of New England attain[ed] more than local celbrity” and of which several members became “noted for ability and traits that determined” successful careers.

<sup>427</sup> Her grandmother Marshall (1780-1860) was a famous figure in New York City who “knew personally or by reputation, every colored person in the city”. In addition, Remond Lyons showed that by the time she wrote this autobiographical piece, (in 1928), she had witnessed several wars: “I have survived three wars, noted the taking of the anti-slavery contest from Congresss to Kansas and thence into the arena of what was then described as, and thought to be, the greatest conflict of modern times”, 42. Lyons also reminded her readers that numerous African Americans accomplished this important work. Chapter 6, 46. She said: “They were only samples of the great majority of our people in the free states who worked, suffered and prayed, that no one who had the courage to start on the ontoward venture should fail to reach the goal”.

<sup>428</sup> Kathryn T. Gines, "Anna Julia Cooper", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/anna-julia-cooper/>>. She worked as an interim editor for the *Southern Workman*.

unify and perpetuate its wondrous whisperings – no painter-poet to distil in the alembic of his own imagination the gorgeous dyes, the luxuriant juices of this rich and tropical vegetation”<sup>429</sup>.

Cooper highlighted African Americans’ natural musicality: “We are a song loving people and that song of all songs we would love to sing, and we challenge the lustiest singer to sing it more lustily and more eloquently than we.”<sup>430</sup> At a time blacks were mocked in shows and plays or ridiculed in advertisements, Cooper aimed at redeeming the image of African American culture and at showing that African Americans could and should combine both the European and the African cultures.

On the contrary, a few writers believed that black Americans had assimilated and had lost their African roots. In one article, Fannie Williams argued that black Americans did not have any link with Africa anymore: “The fetiches and crudities of the dark continent have long since ceased to be a part of his [the black person’s] life and character”<sup>431</sup>. She claimed that African Americans should easily assimilate precisely because contrary to immigrants who came from other countries with their traditions, black Americans were ready and willing to embrace exclusively American culture – i.e. European or Anglo-Saxon culture. In “Club Movement among Negro Women” (1902), she contended: “In America the Negro has no history, no traditions, no race ideals, no inherited resources, either mental, social, or ethical, and no established race character. The race is coming into its own power of self-respect, self-help and self-pride by the forces of the initiatives, submission and assimilation.”<sup>432</sup>. Two years later, she reiterated this view: “The so-called Negro race, or colored race, is in language, religion, and instinct as thoroughly American as any of the other races who have come to America *and lost their race identity*”<sup>433</sup>. Two visions, two understandings of African American identity collided here: while Anna Julia Cooper favored the celebration of their African heritage and assimilation by combining both cultures – European or Anglo-Saxon and one inherited from their African roots —, Fannie Barrier Williams thought that blacks had completely lost their African heritage while assimilating.

Black intellectuals did not only maintain that African Americans were early settlers and historic actors of the American economy, they also emphasized their historic patriotism.

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<sup>429</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Negro in American Literature”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 158.

<sup>430</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, 215.

<sup>431</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro”, as cited in *The New Woman of Color*, 73.

<sup>432</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Club Movement among Negro Women”, 45.

<sup>433</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “Do We Need Another Name?”, 1904, 85.

## 2. Patriotic Duties: Loyal Defenders of their Country

Many women highlighted blacks' historic heroic and infallible support for the nation. In one of her articles, Amanda Jemand bluntly asked her white readers in 1901: "Tell me, white man, North and South, for whose country did the black soldiers fight in the Revolutionary War?" in order to emphasize African Americans' heroic contribution to nation-building, at a time when the community was considered to be a "problem"<sup>434</sup>.

### Historical Patriots

Interestingly enough, on this topic, many women in this study seemed to have tended to make references to men's roles in different armed conflicts, and were often silent about their mothers' contributions to the nation, as if they associated the question of patriotism with masculinity. Intellectuals emphasized black Americans' patriotic contribution in their public writings. For example, Anna Cooper indicated that black men's "blood has mingled with the bluest and the truest on every battle field that checkers his country's history."<sup>435</sup> Similarly, in 1906, Mary Church Terrell underscored African Americans' patriotism by reminding her readers that African Americans had fought in every single war: "There are no truer patriots in the United States to-day than are the 10,000,000 coloured people who know and love no fatherland but this. In every war which this country has waged in the past, coloured men have fought and died with a courage and a patriotism surpassed by none."<sup>436</sup> When denouncing white Northerners' employers prejudice, Fannie Williams stressed black Americans' infallible patriotism as well:

Do these women not belong to a race that has never faltered in its support of the country's flag in every war since [Crispus] Attucks fell in Boston's streets? [...] Are they not the daughters of men who have always been true as steel against treason to everything fundamental and splendid in the republic? In

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<sup>434</sup> See Amanda Smith Jemand, "A Southern Woman's Appeal for Justice", the *Independent*, Vol. 52, No. 2725 (February 21, 1901): 438-439, as cited in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 540-541.

<sup>435</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Ethics of the Negro Question", 1902, 213.

<sup>436</sup> Mary Church Terrell, "A Plea for the White South by a Coloured Woman", *Nineteenth Century* (July 1906): 70-84, in *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 143. In order to instill in children this sense of patriotism and to highlight African Americans' contribution to nation-building, many African American intellectuals insisted upon the necessity of passing on the stories of African Americans' historic contribution to the future generations. For example, in her etiquette book, Emma Hackley argued that girls should be taught black History so that they could pass it onto others – their children in particular: "Tell her the record of the Negro as a soldier, statesman, and explorer. Read to her about the brave part that he played in the war of 1812 and subsequent wars, even in the recent terrible war, he was among the bravest. Help her to make a scrap book that she may pass her knowledge on to others". Hackley, *The Colored Girl Beautiful*, 31. Transmitting this memory was fundamental to not only justify the community's Americanness and citizenship but also to celebrate its historic, noteworthy contribution to nation-building.

short, are these women not as thoroughly American in all the circumstances of citizenship as the best citizens of our country?”<sup>437</sup>.

By evoking Crispus Attucks, Williams made sure to emphasize African Americans’ historic presence since the Revolutionary period<sup>438</sup> and their infallible support to the nation: using the term ‘treason’, she implicitly opposed it to white Southerners’ support of the Confederacy against the Union during the Civil War.

In their autobiographies, many of these women also claimed that their forefathers had distinguished themselves in many wars since the war for Independence. For example, women such as Charlotte Forten, Susie King Taylor or Rebecca Primus emphasized that their ancestors all fought against the British during the Revolutionary War<sup>439</sup>. In her autobiography, Terrell pointed out that her ancestors had fought in each war since the founding of the country: “My African ancestors suffered and died for [America] as soldiers in every war which it has waged”<sup>440</sup>. Susie King Taylor stands as an exception since she recounted in her autobiography how she accomplished her patriotic duty during the Civil War. She highlighted that she had been faithful to the Union, working as a nurse and laundress in the Union army for three years<sup>441</sup>. She used the space of her memoir to emphasize the action of African American women during the war: “There are many people who do not know what some of the colored women did during the war. There were hundreds of them who assisted the Union soldiers by hiding them and helping them to escape. Many were punished for taking food to the prison stockades for the prisoners”<sup>442</sup>. Yet, like many of her counterparts, Taylor insisted on black men’s infallible devotion for the nation during the Civil War when she evoked her late husband Edward King – who had fought during the fratricidal conflict.

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<sup>437</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Intellectual Progress”, in *The New Woman of Color*, 24.

<sup>438</sup> Crispus Attucks (c. 1723-1770) was an African American man killed during the Boston massacre. He is thought to be the first casualty of the American revolution.

<sup>439</sup> There are numerous examples of these heroic contributions in the writings of many African American women. See *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké* (1988), the letters and biography of Rebecca Primus in *Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends*, 1999, and Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of my Life in Camp*, first published in 1902.

<sup>440</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 99. Her great-great grand-father had fought the Revolutionary war. She was also probably thinking about the members of her white southern family who fought during the Civil War.

<sup>441</sup> See her narrative *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp*. She worked as a teacher before marrying a black soldier named Edward King. On the war front, she also taught black soldiers how to read and write.

<sup>442</sup> Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences*, 67-68. “There has never been a greater war in the United States than the one of 1861, where so many lives were lost, — not men alone but noble women as well.”, 68. Taylor served as president of the Women’s Relief Corps in 1893. “In 1886 I helped to organize Corps 67, Women’s Relief Corps, auxiliary to the G. A. R., and it is a very flourishing corps to-day. I have been Guard, Secretary, Treasurer for three years, and in 1893 I was made President of this corps”, 59.

Moreover, since she was active in the Women's Relief Corps at the turn of the century, she had her heart set on rekindling the memory of black Americans' heroism during the Civil War. In her account, she stressed the necessity for African Americans to honor their veterans and deplored that, in the early 1900s, few black Americans seemed to respect the memory of fallen soldiers:

I look around now and see the comforts that our younger generation enjoy, and think of the blood that was shed to make these comforts possible for them, and see how little some of them appreciate the old soldiers. My heart burns within me, at this want of appreciation. There are only a few of them left now, so let us all, as the ranks close, take a deeper interest in them. Let the younger generation take an interest also, and remember that it was through the efforts of these veterans that they and we older ones enjoy our liberty to-day<sup>443</sup>.

When she visited her son in Shreveport, Louisiana, in the late 1890s, Taylor was shocked to learn that black veterans hesitated to wear their war buttons for fear of being denied employment<sup>444</sup>. She was conscious that displaying war buttons in the South might spark white Southerners' resentment because these buttons represented black pride, patriotism, resistance to white supremacy and promise of racial equality. Additionally, these buttons exemplified blacks' support of the Union and whites' "betrayal" of it during the war.

### **More Faithful Americans Than White "Rebels"**

Black women indeed highlighted African Americans' faithfulness as citizens which they opposed to white Southerners' betrayal of the Union during the Civil War. In an address delivered at the NAWS Convention in Chicago only four years after the end of the sectional conflict Naomi Talbert stressed her loyalty to the country during the Civil war: "I am true, because I love the dear old flag". This was at a time when many former Confederate generals and officials were still deprived of their rights, during Reconstruction<sup>445</sup>.

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 51-52. Her memoir ended on this enthusiastic assessment and prayer: "What a wonderful revolution! In 1861 the Southern papers were full of advertisements for 'slaves', but now, despite all the hindrances and 'race problems', my people are striving to attain the full standard of all other races born free in the sight of God, and in a number of instances have succeeded. Justice we ask,-- to be citizens of these United States, where so many of our people have shed their blood with their white comrades, that the stars and stripes should never be polluted, 75-76.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 73. Some wore them anyway: "Still some would wear their buttons in spite of the feeling against it."

<sup>445</sup> Naomi Talbert, "A Colored Woman's Voice [Delivered at 1869 NWSA Convention in Chicago]," *The Revolution* 3 (4 March 1869): 139, in *African American Feminisms*, Volume VI, 466. She explained having multiethnic origins, typical of many Americans: "I present myself to you as a composition of humanity, for there flows through my veins a combination of the blood of four distinct nations, of which the greater part is Dutch, part Indian, part African, and the lesser part Irish". Yet, *jus solis* unquestionably made her an American woman.



Likewise, in 1893, Cooper underscored that African Americans should be regarded as more loyal citizens than white Southerners, because they had “owned no other allegiance, have bowed before no other sovereign. Never has a hand of ours been raised either in open rebellion or secret treachery against the Fatherland”<sup>446</sup>. This statement set black Americans apart from the white supporters of the Confederacy. Again, this argument reveals that contrary to whites who, by fighting for “Dixie”, chose region in betrayal of the nation, black Southerners tended to prize nation more than regional affiliation.

## **Serving the Nation and Supporting the War Effort During World War I**

After the First World War, black female intellectuals emphasized black women’s participation in the war effort in order to prove their Americanness and to claim their right to be finally recognized as citizens. Many – such as Cooper, Terrell or Wells – pointed out that they had participated in the war effort and had acted as patriots. For example, Mary Church Terrell explained that she, “caught up in the whirl of enthusiasm [...] decided to join the ranks of the women who were working to make the world safe for Democracy”<sup>447</sup>.

Yet, some African American women were denied the right to take part in the war effort. When Terrell applied for a position as a typist in the United States Army during World War I, the recruiter – a certain General Crozier – thinking that she was a white woman, agreed to interview her but dismissed her application once he realized that she was African American. Crozier did not consider her skills in French, German and Italian, which could undoubtedly have proven strategically useful during the war<sup>448</sup>. For Terrell, the opportunity of serving her country and obtaining “a desirable and a lucrative job” vanished because of racial discrimination<sup>449</sup>. Consequently, because she knew her racial affiliation would prevent her from serving in the army, she did not reveal her racial identity and was hired as a clerk at the

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<sup>446</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, 215.

<sup>447</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Being a Colored Woman in The United States”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 34-35.

<sup>448</sup> She had simply written “American” on her application form. *A Colored Woman*, 251. “Perhaps I should state here that, in replying to the question concerning race, I simply wrote “American,” without specifying what particular kind of an American I am.”. He was initially cordial, emphasizing her “very fine training” yet suddenly, “a shadow passed over his countenance. He began to appear puzzled and then displeased, as he looked at me”. When she answered his questions, indicating that she had taught at M. Street High School, a black High School, “instantly an expression of pronounced displeasure swept over the General's face, and I knew my doom was sealed. He tossed the paper aside immediately”, 251.

<sup>449</sup> Mary Church Terrell, “Being a Colored Woman in The United States”, *The Unpublished Papers of Mary Church Terrell*, 34-35.

War Risk Insurance Bureau. When after two months her racial affiliation was discovered,<sup>450</sup> she was subjected to such heavy pressures – she was accused of having committed “numerous mistakes” in her work –, she left<sup>451</sup>. When she later found another position in the Census Bureau, there again, black women who had omitted to indicate their racial identity were asked to leave the room one day<sup>452</sup>. Although the head of the division wanted her to stay, she decided to resign because she felt that the atmosphere of racial prejudice was too deleterious<sup>453</sup>. Terrell was not the only black woman who was denied the opportunity to serve her country during the First World War; many other women were denied the opportunity to work in government departments as clerks or secretaries. The discriminatory policies decided by the administration of President Woodrow Wilson – who was a native of the State of Virginia – account for this situation. By 1914, racial segregation was indeed imposed in the federal departments in Washington D.C. and many African American federal employees lost their jobs. These measures hit hard the black middle-class living in the nation’s capital<sup>454</sup>.

Other women supported the war effort in women’s clubs. For example, Ida Wells-Barnett was active in bringing relief to the soldiers. During World War I, with the City Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Wells organized a committee to offer a “Christmas token” to each of the “twelve hundred soldier boys” stationed at Camp Grant. After making an appeal to raise funds in the *Chicago Tribune*, she received the help of Fannie R. Smith, the “Dean of girls at the Wendell Phillips High School” and a few others and all were able to send African American soldiers “three large boxes of Christmas cheer [containing “candy boxes,

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<sup>450</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 252-256. “I am certain I know by whom the agitation to remove me was started. A doctor, who hailed from the South and who had charge of the section in which I worked, walked into the room one day and saw me at my desk. [...] It was shortly after this doctor’s visit that the notice of charges preferred against me was received”. She decided not to make a fuss for the sake of her husband’s career: “If my husband had not occupied such a prominent position in the city, I should never have submitted to that outrage without waging a righteous war against it. I knew that any contest on my part would embarrass him and might easily hurt his standing as a judge in the Municipal Court. I have always believed that a wife has no right to injure her husband’s career by what she says or does”.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 252, 254-259. Terrell concluded: “There was not a scintilla of truth in any of these charges”.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 256-257. Mary Terrell sadly reflected upon these moments. “It was doubtless a very depressing and humiliating experience to these victims of race prejudice to be forced publicly to leave their desks at which they had been happily doing their duty and marched like culprits into strange surroundings, the cynosure of all eyes. They themselves had done nothing to justify this humiliation to which they had been subjected. They had not tried to deceive anybody”. Terrell ironically added: “They had simply neglected to place a placard on their backs notifying the world that they belonged to a socially ostracized race in the United States.”

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 258-259. “The head of the division in which I worked urged me to remain in the Bureau, but I decided to resign. The work was enjoyable and I needed the money, to be sure. But the idea of remaining in a section over which were placed men who had no regard whatever for the feelings of colored women was abhorrent to me. I simply could not stay even for the sake of the salary which would have filled a long felt want.”

<sup>454</sup> Segregation was implemented in work areas, lavatories and lunchrooms. See Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, 741.

cigarettes, pipes, tobacco, and other things”<sup>455</sup>] to the men at Camp Grant” in December 1917. Like Wells, Anna Cooper also worked at a War Camp in the summer of 1919 in Indianapolis<sup>456</sup> and Mary Church Terrell worked in a War camp within the War Camp Community Service<sup>457</sup>.

World War I enabled American women to expand their so-called prescribed “sphere” and show that they were strong, active, trustworthy, efficient workers in the industry, for instance — and therefore able and reliable citizens. For Aurelia Hudson — who was probably speaking here generally about white women —, all these “activities led the world to know as never before the worth of its women; they saw the opportunity for service, grasped it, and gave the world a new conception of their capabilities”. She was convinced that “as a result, women stand upon the threshold of a new era, willing and ready to share in every kind of human progress”<sup>458</sup>. Other women thought that their engagement during the war proved that the attacks formulated against women of color were fallacious. For example, one Spelman student believed that World War I had helped women prove women’s patriotism and value. She explained that each woman helped “maintain, uplift, and replenish the country” during the last war<sup>459</sup>.

Other women defended the view that the war — which had widened woman’s sphere — had enabled women to be better citizens. A woman’s sphere should no longer be reduced to home but should expand from “her household” to “her community, and her nation”, Annie Latimer, a graduate of Spelman College, argued enthusiastically in the early 1920s — therefore making them better patriots. After the war, women of color indeed accessed more jobs, especially manufacturing jobs in northern cities, notably in “Saint Louis, Baltimore, Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia and Chicago, where the exodus of Negro labor from the South has been greatest” and it fell upon women of the educated “better-class” to train the masses to contribute to the “economic conditions of our country”<sup>460</sup>.

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<sup>455</sup> Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 371.

<sup>456</sup> Charles Lemert, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 346.

<sup>457</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 318-328. See Chapter 32.

<sup>458</sup> Aurelia Louise Hudson, HS ’20. “Women in the New Era”, *Spelman Messenger*, January 1921, 2. Moreover, she emphasized that American women had recently been granted the right to vote at the federal level with the Nineteenth Amendment, therefore “reaching a plane of equity”.

<sup>459</sup> “The Value of Home Economics”, by Annie C. Latimer, HE ’20, *Spelman Messenger*. She said: “Each girl must prepare herself for the betterment of her country so that now and in the future she may be able to hold the position which she has won in the activities of a nation”.

<sup>460</sup> Ruth Lois Murden, College, 1919, “Women in Industry”, *Spelman Messenger*. ca. 1920. “Leaders of industry almost always prefer the educated type of girls and the burden of educating them falls upon the leaders of our race”.

Conversely, some women did not feel as patriotic as Mary Terrell or Ida B. Wells due to a variety of personal, political or philosophical reasons. A few women wrote about hesitating or refusing to support a nation which denied them their rights and treated them as second-class citizens. Mamie Garvin Fields explained in *Lemon Swamp* that in 1917 she kept matters of war at a distance. First, although Mamie worked as a teacher, she feared the economic difficulties and the loneliness her husband's departure would signify and therefore did not want him to leave for the front<sup>461</sup>. Secondly, she recounted that when the war erupted in 1917, she and her husband Robert viewed the conflict as remote in distant Europe. Robert Fields and other men did not register to fight because they didn't "really understand the war" and because they "didn't feel it [...and] didn't feel the war personally". Of course, they knew that the war "was for self-determination and freedom", that it was "to help the English people and the French people, the-this-and-the-that, against the Germans"<sup>462</sup>, but the recently married couple yearned to build a family and live happily rather than get involved in a war miles away for other people's freedom. The Fieldses hoped that Robert would never be sent to the front and when it "began to look as though they might call him after all", they moved back to Charleston in order to avoid conscription<sup>463</sup>.

In addition to proving their patriotism and their participation in the war effort, these women emphasized the qualities of African Americans.

### **3. Faithful, Hard-Working Citizens**

To prove their Americanness and demand to be recognized as first-class citizens, many intellectuals stressed African Americans' historical loyalty to the United States, hard-work and contribution to nation-building in their writings.

### **Criticizing Nationalism and the Rising Xenophobia**

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<sup>461</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 159. Mamie Fields openly said in her autobiography that she did not want her husband to enroll in the army: "Bob didn't want to go, and I didn't want Bob to go". Other African Americans shared these views: "Quite a few people we knew felt the same way".

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 159. They decided "to go back to Charleston quietly, hoping to get lost between the records of both places."

Intellectuals such as Anna Cooper denounced the rising racism, nationalism and xenophobia of the late nineteenth century. In 1892, in the age when America was undergoing important changes with successive waves of immigration, she mocked the attitude of white Americans who chanted at the turn of the century: “America for Americans! This is the white man's country! The Chinese must go, shrieks the exclusionist. Exclude the Italians! Colonize the blacks in Mexico or deport them to Africa. Lynch, suppress, drive out, kill out! America for Americans!”<sup>464</sup>. She argued that the argument of the eugenicists and the advocates of white superiority were exclusionary rather than inclusive. Cooper encouraged her readers to think about the very definition of American identity. To the questions asked “by ten million throats”: “*Who are Americans?* [...] Who are the home folks and who are the strangers?”<sup>465</sup>, she answered that Native Americans constituted the only group which could truthfully claim to be the original inhabitants of this continent: “The red men used to be owners of the soil, -- but they are about to be pushed over into the Pacific Ocean. They, perhaps, have the best right to call themselves ‘Americans’ by law of primogeniture” because “they are at least the oldest inhabitants” of America. She therefore implied that white Americans had no rights to oust or deprive of their rights any other inhabitants – Native or African Americans – and were therefore exerting undue pressure on the members of other ethnic groups<sup>466</sup>. Likewise, in her autobiography, Mary Church Terrell developed the same argument, emphasizing the fact that America was a melting pot<sup>467</sup>.

By contrast, Anna Cooper did not develop an exclusionary discourse against immigrants. With her usual all-encompassing, inclusive philosophy for humanity, she claimed that America’s diversity represented a strength and not a handicap and that foreigners represented assets for the United States<sup>468</sup>. Since American society was a melting pot,

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<sup>464</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Has America a Race Problem?”, 1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 127.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., Italics hers. In Cooper’s philosophy, inclusion was the master word. Deeply Christian, she believed in the necessity among human beings to love and include all rather than hate and exclude others.

<sup>466</sup> Cooper was familiar with the work of Helen Hunt Jackson’s about Native Americans and was sensitive to the cause of the Native Americans. See “The Status of Woman in America”, 1892, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 109-117.

<sup>467</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 185. When recalling that she was once called an “alien” in 1915 when she went to deliver a speech at the Woman’s Congress of Missions held in San Francisco during the Panama-Pacific Exposition. She noted: “I had never thought of myself as an “alien,” and I was greatly shocked and pained. As I arose to speak, I remarked that even if I were technically an alien in the United States, I certainly did not feel like one. It occurred to me afterwards that everybody in this country is an alien except the Indians”.

<sup>468</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Has America a Race Problem?”, 1892, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 126. In 1892, while discussing the possible sclerosis of a society which excluded instead of including its members, Cooper provided her reader with a thought which resonates with force today: “That exclusiveness and selfishness in a family, in a community, or in a nation is suicidal to progress. Caste and prejudice mean immobility. One race

composed of people from diverse origins, Cooper contended that a philosophy of inclusion and equality should always prevail among the different races represented in the nation: “There was never a time since America became a nation when there were not more than one race, more than one party, more than one belief contending for supremacy. Hence no one is or can be supreme. All interests must be consulted, all claims conciliated”<sup>469</sup>.

Following a deductive reasoning as she often did, Cooper concluded that the path that the Anglo-Saxon race was following in the 1890s – disenfranchising and depriving African Americans of their rights – was not only unlawful and contrary to common sense but was also importantly contrary to the principles promoted by the Founding Fathers. When the nation was founded, the power was given to the people: “The will of the majority must rule simply because no class, no family, no individual has ever been able to prove sufficient political legitimacy to impose [its] yoke on the country”. By strengthening racial discrimination, white Americans undermined these sacred founding principles: “A general amnesty and universal reciprocity are the only *modus vivendi* in a nation whose every citizen is his own king, his own priest and his own pope.”<sup>470</sup>.

### **Patriotic Workers Embracing Capitalism**

After the turn of the century, elite black women argued that Americans of African descent not only represented economic assets for the country – the way they always had –, because of their hard-work and seriousness, but they were also deeply patriotic workers at a time when unionism was developing in the United States. These arguments were crucial at the time black female intellectuals penned these lines because the successive massive waves of immigration taking place were causing anxiety for many white Americans. In “Has America a Race Problem?” (1892), Cooper demanded the recognition of African American rights, emphasizing African Americans’ nature as loyal and law-abiding American workers. According to her, contrary to newly-arrived immigrant workers – depicted as being likely to join unions and champion socialism or communism, then viewed as threats to the nation’s welfare, — African Americans had a natural:

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predominance means death. The community that closes its states against foreign talent can never hope to advance beyond a certain point. Resolve to keep out foreigners and you keep out progress”.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.



instinct for law and order, [an] inborn respect for authority, [an] inaptitude for rioting and anarchy, gentleness and cheerfulness as a laborer, and [a] deep-rooted faith in God [which] will prove indispensable and invaluable elements in a nation menaced as America is by anarchy, socialism, communism, and skepticism poured in with all the jail birds from the continents of Europe and Asia. I believe with our own Dr. Crummell that 'the Almighty does not preserve, rescue, and build up a lowly people merely for ignoble ends'. And the historian of American civilization will yet congratulate this country that she has had a Race Problem and that descendants of the black race furnished one of its largest factors<sup>471</sup>.

She therefore astutely opposed two types of workers: English-speaking, Christian workers likely to support American values such as capitalism and free-enterprise to aliens who did not master the English language and American cultural codes and mores and who were likely to betray national ideals by joining unions and embracing communism. Booker T. Washington used this argument in his Atlanta Compromise speech of 1895 before a white audience: "Cast down your bucket [among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides"]. As Matthew Guterl has explained,

Washington astutely recognized that regional variations between 'alien menaces' and 'the Negro problem' grew stronger with each shipload of immigrants landing at Ellis Island and with each invented 'rape' in the New South, and that – for the New South – the Negro could appear less dangerous in certain ways than the new Immigrant. This, writes, Wilson Moses, 'was Washington's *tour de force*, his suggestion that Protestant English speaking blacks were culturally superior to non-American whites [...and] that black people who already had a place in the South were potentially less disruptive than immigrants, and less likely to contaminate society with radical ideas'<sup>472</sup>.

One may imagine that Booker T. Washington was probably influenced by the ideas of Anna Julia Cooper, who had formulated these thoughts three years earlier.

A few years later, in 1902, in a context of anxiety due to the arrival of thousands of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and the rise of communist ideas, Cooper used these two dichotomous images again: by evoking immigrants' likelihood to adhere to communist ideas and join unions, she stressed black Americans' adherence to American values one more time:

Scandinavians, Poles and Hungarians can tie up the entire country by a strike paralyzing not only industry but existence itself, when they are already getting a wage that sounds like affluence to the hungry black man [...] The Negro is the most stable and reliable factor today in American industry. Patient and docile as a laborer, conservative, law-abiding, totally ignorant of the anarchistic, socialistic radicalism and nihilism of other lands<sup>473</sup>.

Moreover, as many feminists and activists of the twentieth century would later do, Cooper pinpointed the visible factor of their discrimination: color. In "What Are We Worth?", she lamented that color remained an inexorable, continuous brake to assimilation. She

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 121-133, 132-133.

<sup>472</sup> Matthew Guterl, *The Color of Race in America*, 108.

<sup>473</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "Ethics of the Negro Question", 1902, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 208 and 212.

explained that thanks to their whiteness, newly arrived immigrants were offered better-paid jobs in the industry, even if they did not master the language, while African American men were relegated to menial, low-paying jobs<sup>474</sup>. Contrary to white immigrants – who could assimilate after a few years more easily thanks to their white skin —, African Americans had more difficulties assimilating because of racial prejudice<sup>475</sup>. Mamie Fields’ life writing reveals such a reality. In *Lemon Swamp*, she recounted that on her way to Boston via New York in the summer 1913 to work as a domestic worker and seamstress in Massachusetts, noticing white immigrants, she was aware that they would soon easily assimilate thanks to their color. Among this “crowd of all different kinds of white people”, some came north “some stayed in the North” – she indicated that “she met some more of them up in Boston”— while “some went on to South Carolina, where they got to be plain ‘white folks’ after a while”, pointing out the easiness with which these immigrants assimilated and mingled with the white southern population<sup>476</sup>.

In “The Ethics of the Negro Question” (1902), Cooper regretted the permanence of racial discrimination and racism and noted the comparative ease with which white immigrants assimilated in America, while black Americans continued to suffer from racism because of their skin color: “A foreigner can learn the language and out-American the American on his own soil. A white man can apply burnt cork and impute his meanness to the colored race as his appointed scapegoat. But the Ethiopian cannot change his skin. On him is laid the iniquity of his whole race and his character is prejudged by formula”<sup>477</sup>. She concluded her article by advocating for patience, dignity and faith: “But when the wound is festering and the heart is so sore we can only suffer and be silent, praying God to change the hearts of our misguided

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<sup>474</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “What Are We Worth?”, 1892, 173-174. Cooper wrote: “The unorganized mass has found neither tongue nor nerve. In the free and liberal North, thanks to the amalgamated associations and labor unions of immigrant laborers, who cannot even speak English, – the colored man is relegated to the occupations of waiter and barber, unless he has a taste for school teaching or politics. A body of men who still need an interpreter to communicate with their employer, will threaten to cut the nerve and paralyzed the progress of an industry that gives work to an American-born citizen, or one which takes measure to instruct any apprentice not supported by the labor monopoly”, 174. See Matthew Pratt Guterl, *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940* on this question.

<sup>475</sup> This did not mean that immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe did not suffer from discrimination, but their whiteness facilitated assimilation. Matthew Guterl explained that on the contrary, African Americans had more difficulty being assimilated because they were non-white.

<sup>476</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 142.

<sup>477</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, 208. Matthew Pratt Guterl discusses the common prejudices of that period in *The Color of Race in America, 1900-1940*. For example, the scholar analyzes the release of *The Passing of the Great Race*, a 1916 publication dealing with white supremacy. See pages 38 and 32.

countrymen and help them to see the things that make for righteousness...”<sup>478</sup>. Hoping to see white Americans behave according to Christian rules, she encouraged her reader to keep faith in the future. Like many times in her writings, humanity and Christianity were central to her discourse.

In the age of national reunification, at a time when questions of nation-building were widely discussed, women of color emphasized their love for the nation and asserted African Americans’ citizenship, patriotism and importantly, the fact that they had already begun to assimilate. As a result, many naturally opposed projects of repatriation.

## Views on Repatriation

In the late nineteenth century, because they thought black Americans were thoroughly Americans, many black women intellectuals opposed the ideas of repatriation to Africa. For example, Cooper vehemently rejected deportation to Africa in 1892: “Above all, for the love of humanity stop the mouth of those learned theorizers, the expedient mongers, who come out annually with their new and improved method of getting the answer and clearing the slate: amalgamation, deportation, colonization and all the other ‘ations’ that were ever devised or dreamt of”<sup>479</sup>. She thought that the United States could not legally, morally or decently organize the project of repatriation without even consulting the first people concerned by such measures: “No power or element of power on this continent [...] possesses the right to begin figuring beforehand to calculate what it would require to *send* 10 millions of citizens, whose ancestors have wrought here from the planting of the nation, to the same places at so much per head – at least till someone has consulted those heads”<sup>480</sup>. She argued that the idea of forced repatriation was not only undemocratic, but was also contrary to the Law and to morality.

Many others agreed with Anna Julia Cooper. Libbie C. Anthony was similarly opposed to deportation to Africa<sup>481</sup>. In June 1895, in the *Woman’s Era*, she contended that the presence of European colonialists would prevent repatriated Americans from enjoying a life of opportunities in Africa: “The simple act of departing for ‘Africa, the home of our fathers’,

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<sup>478</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Ethics of the Negro Question”, 215.

<sup>479</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “Has America a Race Problem? If So, How Can It Best Be Solved?”, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 121-133, 132.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., Italics hers.

<sup>481</sup> Mrs Libbie C. Anthony was Superintendent of Department of Colored Work of WCTU in Jefferson City, Mo.

is not sufficient to secure even a foothold in a country already largely under the control of the English, French, Belgians, Germans, Italians, Portuguese and Turks, each pressing to the utmost the development of the immense riches to which they have laid claim". She also denounced European colonialism and the deprivation of Africans of the riches of their continent. For her, it "seem[ed] highly probable that the African in Africa, like the Indian in America, [would] soon be dispossessed of his own soil"<sup>482</sup>. Anna Julia Cooper – who was committed to the Pan-Africanist movement in 1900, must have agreed with her. Other black intellectuals expressed anti-repatriation views. The summary of the sermons of some ministers were published in HBCUs's University newspapers. For example, a summary of Reverend T.J. Morgan LLD's speech delivered in April 1897 was printed in the *Spelman Messenger*. In it, one could read that African Americans were "destined to remain in America, [were] constantly increasing and [formed an] integral element of our national life. They [would] not migrate, they [could not] be deported, but they [were] here to stay"<sup>483</sup>.

In "The Ethics of the Negro Question" (1902), Cooper reiterated her views on repatriation, arguing that America, not Africa was African Americans' only home: "The Negro is [...] capable of contributing not only of his brawn and sinew but also from brain and character of the much-needed element in American civilization, and here is his home. The only home he has ever known"<sup>484</sup>. Additionally, she maintained that blacks and whites needed each other to continue writing History together – a shared history they had built together for centuries, because their fates were interwoven: "For weal or for woe the lots of these two are united, indissolubly, eternally and thinking people on both sides are convinced that each race needs the other"<sup>485</sup>. In 1902, she believed that deportation was impossible because of this common history: "The past, in which the Negro was mostly passive, the white man active, has ordained that they shall be neighbors, permanently and unavoidably. To colonize or repatriate the blacks on African soil or in any other continent is physically impossible even if it were generally desired, and no sane man talks of deportation now except as an exploded chimera"<sup>486</sup>. Consequently, she insisted: "*We cannot expatriate ourselves. Even if we would*", since "our proudest aspiration has been but to serve [the nation], the crown of her glory to die

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<sup>482</sup> Libbie C. Anthony, *Woman's Era*. June 1895, 11-12.

<sup>483</sup> "What the Twentieth Century has in Store for the Negroes of America", by Rev. T.J. Morgan. *Spelman Messenger*, April 1897, 4-5, 5.

<sup>484</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Ethics of the Negro Question", 1902, 212.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., The address was delivered on 5 September 1902 to the General Conference of the Society of Friends at Asbury Park, New Jersey. See page 206.

for. We were born here through no choice of our own or of our ancestors”<sup>487</sup>. While denouncing the manipulation of the New South about the fears of “Negro domination” in America, she hammered home that America was the “land of destiny” where African Americans had to continue writing their history, along with other Americans of other ethnic groups:

I believe, moreover, that America is the land of destiny for the descendants of the enslaved race, that here in the house of their bondage are the seeds of promise for their ultimate enfranchisement and development. This I maintain in full knowledge of what at any time may be wrought by a sudden paroxysm of rage caused by the and meaningless war whoop of some obscure politicians such as the rally word of ‘Negro domination’ which at times deafens and bemuddles all ears<sup>488</sup>.

In keeping with this assertion, she must have opposed Marcus Garvey’s ideas about repatriation in the 1920s.

While most women emphasized their Americanness, some women writers criticized America. Rose Berthenia Clay Williams – who was born in 1910 in Tampa, Florida – recalled that at the age of 13, she received an assignment whose topic was “What America and its pledge means to me”. The pupil, who was then in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 1923, asserted that she told the class: “I said America didn’t mean a darn thing to me, and the pledge less. All we were doing was breathing and living a bunch of lies [...] America has been stolen from the Indians in the first place”<sup>489</sup>. Probably over-emphasizing her boldness in her autobiography, she nevertheless dared to express a dissonant voice in her life writing published in 1961. Some openly considered – if they had the financial ability to do so – leaving the country at some point in their lives. In her memoir, Mary Church Terrell confided having contemplated expatriating but reconsidered mainly because of financial reasons. She explained that when Mrs. Warner, the wife of an Oberlin College patron, once asked her why she did not flee America’s discriminations with her family – she candidly admitted that she had been unable to do so first because of financial reasons and secondly because she did not want her daughters to ignore the issues of America and marry “white foreigners” – because this would have led to family conflicts<sup>490</sup>. She explained that she did not want to force her daughters to

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<sup>487</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question”, 1902, 215. Italics mine.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>489</sup> Rose Berthenia Clay Williams, *Black and White Orange: An Autobiography*. (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 20-21. Rose explained that her classmates applauded but her outspokenness owed her to be spanked by the teacher, “not for what you have said, but for the vulgar words used in your speech”, the teacher said. Rose Williams said retrospectively: “Well that was one spanking I didn’t mind because I had to speak my mind and get it off my chest”.

<sup>490</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 372-373. Chapter 38: “Crossing the Color Line”. “In the first place, I could not afford it. My husband’s salary was not large enough to defray the expenses which going abroad with two daughters, living there and sending them to school entailed. I was well aware that if they were educated

pass for white, passing being “both hazardous and hard” because it entailed social ostracism and isolation<sup>491</sup>. Despite their attachment to the cause, to the community and to their country, some elite women of color confided having contemplated leaving the United States. Whether this was only a vague idea or a serious project is difficult to say. Nevertheless, Mary Church Terrell went on dedicating her energy in the defense of the interests of the community throughout her life.

#### **4. Views on the International Movement for Black Rights, Pan-Africanism and Garveyism**

Many activists like Cooper were opposed to repatriation to Africa yet expressed solidarity with people of color throughout the world; some of them even actively took part in the blooming movement of Pan-Africanism in the late nineteenth century. As they became increasingly conscious of the dangers of colonialism and the oppression of black people throughout the world, people of color began to organize for the defense of their rights internationally.

#### **Pan-Africanism and Garveyism**

In 1897, Henry Sylvester Williams, a West-Indian, formed the African Association to encourage Pan-African unity, especially throughout the West Indies. The association aimed at raising awareness of European colonialist nations to “acknowledge and protect the rights of people of African descent” and to respect the integrity and independence of “the free Negro States of Abyssinia, Liberia, Haiti”<sup>492</sup>. When colonization was at its peak, with imperialism rising – at home with the Spanish-American War as well as throughout the world — many black leaders developed a keener sense of belonging to a wider community as people of color. African Americans had felt a sense of solidarity with Africa and Africans for decades.

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abroad and lived there they would know nothing about the disagreeable experiences which would sooner or later overtake them here, from which neither I nor anybody else could shield them. And that appealed to me greatly, of course. Then, too, I gave the matter more serious consideration than I might otherwise have done, because I was acquainted with several colored women who have married abroad and whose unions with foreigners seem to be a success from every point of view. But in spite of these successful marriages of colored women to white foreigners the idea did not appeal to me for my own daughters”.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 372-373. “He must make up his mind to renounce his family if he has one, and give up his friends. Crossing the color line separates mother from daughter, father from son, sister from brother, and relatives from their nearest kin”.

<sup>492</sup> See for example: <http://www.blackpast.org/perspectives/pan-african-congresses-1900-1945>.



Women in particular wanted to help people of color throughout the world, feeling that they had a special connection with them because of their common points – their skin color – and not *in spite of* their differences – their nationality – .

The feeling of belonging to a wider community was being expressed more and more vehemently among black Americans in these years. At the turn of the century, cherishing the land of their ancestors and feeling strong bonds with Africans, whom they considered as brothers and sisters, many African American women volunteered as missionaries in Africa. This is particularly noticeable in the writings of several devout students enrolled in Christian institutions such as Spelman College. Numerous women such as Emma B. De Lany – a graduate of 1896, M.T. who worked for years in Monrovia, Liberia – or Lena F. Clark – who was stationed in Congo – volunteered as missionary workers in Africa after their studies. These regular contributors to the *University Journal* in the 1900s and 1910s<sup>493</sup> explained that their mission was to help, teach and convert the locals to Christianity. Their letters reveal their paternalistic attitudes – they tended to depict Africa as a heathen land which they had to evangelize.

Some women sometimes had difficulties volunteering in Africa because their families feared for their health and safety there. For example, Mamie Garvin Fields explained that upon graduation in 1909 “her heart was set on going to Africa”<sup>494</sup>, although she was initially trained to be a teacher. Her mission was probably encouraged by her teachers at school. She confided in her autobiography that she won the first prize at the school hymn-writing competition with her poem entitled “Africa” – which advocated the evangelization of “heathens”<sup>495</sup>. Yet, when she asked her parents the permission to enroll, both refused to give their consent, deeming it too dangerous. “They were afraid for me to go, because they thought I might get sick and die over there”<sup>496</sup>. Though initially disappointed by her parents’ refusal, the twenty-year-old came round and embraced a career as an educator in the United States.

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<sup>493</sup> Lena F. Clark, “Three Letters from One of Our Missionaries”, *Spelman Messenger*. February 1900. From Ikoko Station, Congo, Africa. See also January 1915. *Spelman Messenger*, 8.

<sup>494</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 103-104. “I decided that year that I wanted to go to Africa as a missionary. I applied through the Friends of Africa, was accepted, and the church was ready to pay for everything. All was set. All I needed was my parents’ permission”.

<sup>495</sup> Aware that the content of her poem could be interpreted as paternalistic at the time when penned her life story in the 1980s, she said that it “represent[ed] what we used to think back *then*”, italics hers, 103. The poem started this way: “There is a land across the sea/ Where bands of heathen dwell/ Who hunger for the Living World/ That saves a soul from Hell”.

<sup>496</sup> Around them, several volunteers had died of the yellow fever in Africa. For example, men named Dr. Crum and Reverend T. Willard Lewis had died there. Fields wrote: “My parents wouldn’t give me permission to go. And they thought they had done right when the news came a few years later” that some of those around them who went there “had died of the fever.”. Her parents – who wanted their daughter to work as a teacher – had enrolled her in a “summer course at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn” immediately after graduation.

She said retrospectively: “Anyway, when I found that nothing would change their mind, I decided to be that missionary right in South Carolina”<sup>497</sup>. As was the case for many other women, Mamie Garvin’s faith was an important factor in her desire to work in Africa. These very devout women felt that they had a special mission as privileged, educated, black American Christians towards other people of color both in their local community and in the larger world.

As a result, women of color naturally became actively involved in the movement of Pan-Africanism in the 1890s. Elisabetta Vezzosi, a scholar who has worked on Pan-Africanism, has pinpointed the difficulty of finding documents on women’s work within the movement<sup>498</sup>. Yet it is possible to note that several women such as Anna Cooper and Fannie Barrier Williams were deeply interested and active in the movement launched by Sylvester Williams. Believing that all people had the right to self-determination and full citizenship, six black activists and clubwomen – including Anna Cooper, Anna H. Jones, and Fannie Barrier Williams<sup>499</sup> — attended the first Pan-African Congress in London in July 1900. The Congress was organized to defend the rights of people of color worldwide and to protest against colonialism. As Vivian May has pointed out, this Congress was attended by approximately fifty representatives of African countries and the African diaspora. Three topics were examined: first, Africans’ living conditions were discussed, secondly, “Euro-centric approaches to African history and culture were reevaluated and reframed away from a deficit model toward a more diasporic evaluation of the significant (but usually overlooked or suppressed) contributions of Ethiopian and Egyptian cultures”. Finally, the “plight of southern Africa” to “object to the rise of empire, and the opposition to the Boer War” was discussed as

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<sup>497</sup> Mamie Garvin Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, 103-105.

<sup>498</sup> Elisabetta Vezzosi, “The International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy: Pan-Africanism, Decolonization and Human Rights”, in *Moving Bodies, Displaying Nations National Cultures, Race and Gender in World Expositions Nineteenth to Twenty-first Century*, ed. Guido Abbattista, (Trieste, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2014): 67-88. Vezzosi has indicated: “It is difficult to define and articulate the role of African American women’s organizations within the realm of the Pan-African movements, both because research in this area remains scarce, recent and often superficial and because, as emphasized by Milfred C. Fierce, the term Pan-Africanism is often used in a simplistic way, without distinguishing between movements and ideologies”, 80. Nevertheless, She has noted that: “Six African American women participated in the inaugural congress [of the Pan African Association]: Anna Julia Cooper, Anna H. Jones, Fannie Barrier Williams, Ada Harris, Jane Roberts (widow of the first president of Liberia James Jenkins Roberts) and Harriet Loudin”.

<sup>499</sup> Cooper “was one of two women (Anna Jones) to represent African American views at the Pan-African Conference in London (1900)”, in “Voice from the Gaps: Anna Julia Cooper”, 5. (2004). Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/166130>.

well. The members of the committee “urged Queen Victoria to end colonial rule throughout the British Empire and to end the Boer War in South Africa”<sup>500</sup>.

Among this group of six, only two women – Anna Cooper and Anna Jones – were invited to speak. As Vivian May has indicated, Anna Cooper was becoming increasingly well-known in the 1890s for her black feminist scholarship<sup>501</sup>. In 1900, at the age of 42, she delivered a speech about “The Negro Problem in America”<sup>502</sup> while her friend Anna Jones, a linguist from Kansas City, Missouri, gave a talk about “The Preservation of Racial Equality”. As Vivian May has noted, in her activism, Cooper hoped to “transform the polity and eradicate all institutionalized abuses of power, in domestic and international policy, as her work at the 1900 Pan-African Congress in London indicates”<sup>503</sup>.

At the same time, African Americans also actively fought for their rights nationally. Within the United States, African Americans continued to combat racism first with the Niagara Falls movement from 1905 to 1909 under the leadership of W.E.B. Du Bois and later with the NAACP in 1909 – as a response to the bloody Springfield, Illinois lynching of 1908. Efforts to work across borders were continued in the 1910s. Elisabetta Vezzosi has asserted that “although it is difficult to trace the presence of African American women in the Pan-African Congresses, it seems that Mary Burnett Talbert, Addie Waites Hunton and Ida Gibbs Hunt attended the second one, which took place in Paris in 1919”<sup>504</sup>. Addie Hunton was a staunch suffragist who also helped to organize the 1927 Pan-African Congress<sup>505</sup>.

These efforts continued in the 1910s and some African American women supported another movement which had been launched at the turn of the century by Marcus Garvey, a West-Indian. The founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) started a movement which came to be known as “Garveyism”. As Ula Taylor has explained, Garveyism was a “movement based on the idea that the needs and interests of people of African descent throughout the diaspora were linked to Africans on the continent, since the

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<sup>500</sup> Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 50.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>502</sup> Dr. Ajamu Nangwaya, “Pan Africanism, Feminism and Finding Missing Pan Africanist Women”, <http://www.aaihs.org/pan-africanism-feminism-and-finding-missing-pan-africanist-women/>.

<sup>503</sup> Vivian May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, 50. This conference was organized so as to enable the participants to attend the Paris Exposition which was organized the same year.

<sup>504</sup> Elisabetta Vezzosi, 81. Hunton and Hunt were also members of the International Committee of the Third Pan-African Congress of 1921, which was held in London and Brussels and was far more radical. In fact, “one result was a document supporting the independence of Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia”.

<sup>505</sup> This well-travelled woman visited troops in France during World War I with her friend Kathryn Johnson and wrote a piece about her experience entitled: *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces* (1920). See <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/hunton-addie-waites-1866-1943>.

collective identity of both groups lay in Africa”<sup>506</sup>. In the mid-1910s, desiring to start an industrial school on the model of Tuskegee Institute in Jamaica, Garvey was invited by Booker T. Washington to visit the United States. When he arrived in America in 1916, Garvey travelled in various places on a fund-raising tour and stayed longer than planned<sup>507</sup>. As Mia Bay has pointed out, Garvey was present when the East St. Louis riot of 1917 erupted. For him, this riot revealed that the core of the problem lay in blacks’ “disunity”. To combat racial violence and racial subjugation, Garvey believed that blacks had to unite throughout the world. He opened a chapter of his organization in Harlem and promoted “racial uplift, racial unity, and political independence among American blacks”<sup>508</sup>. Active in the late 1910s and early 1920s, he launched a weekly paper: the *Negro World Newspaper*, organized yearly summer conferences and founded an international shipping company named the Black Star Line.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett and her husband met Marcus Garvey in Chicago while he was touring the United States in the mid-1910s<sup>509</sup>. As Mia Bay has underscored, Ida and Ferdinand Wells-Barnett believed in Garvey’s project of “worldwide Negro unity” and Ida B. Wells worked within the UNIA yet the Barnetts “never embraced his belief in a separate black nationality”<sup>510</sup>. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, Ida Wells-Barnett supported his movement and in the 1920s, she was invited to deliver a speech at the Manhattan Casino in New York City before nearly 3,000 persons<sup>511</sup>. In her memoir, she explained that Garvey’s growing influence in the United States helped strengthen a sense of racial unity among black Americans: “For a time it seemed as if this program would go through. Undoubtedly Mr. Garvey made an impression on this country as no Negro before him had ever done. He has been able to solidify the masses of our people and endow them with racial consciousness and racial solidarity”<sup>512</sup>. She emphasized that countries were getting anxious about Garvey’s growing power: “Already the countries of the world were beginning to worry very much about the influence of his propaganda in Africa, in the West Indies, and in the United States. His month-long conference in New York City every August [...] attracted a great deal of

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<sup>506</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, “Negro Women are Great Thinkers as well as Doers: Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism in the United States, 1924-1927”, *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (summer): 104-124, 104.

<sup>507</sup> Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was the organizer of Pan-Africanism and the founder of UNIA. Booker T. Washington had unfortunately died the year before (in 1915).

<sup>508</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 299-300.

<sup>509</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 380. Ida B. Wells explained that the Barnetts invited him over for dinner.

<sup>510</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, 300. See also Ida B. Wells, *Crusade*, 380.

<sup>511</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 380-381. This must have taken place in the early 1920s.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

attention”<sup>513</sup>. In her memoir, she seemed to think that Garvey was partially responsible for the failure of his project: “Had Garvey had the support which his wonderful movement deserved, had he not become drunk with power too soon, there is no telling what the result would have been”<sup>514</sup>. Nevertheless, in the late 1920s, Wells-Barnett remained convinced that Garvey’s movement would have important consequences among the black population of the nation and of the world: “It may be that even though he has been banished to Jamaica, the seed planted here will yet spring up and bring forth fruit which will mean the deliverance of the black race – that cause which was so dear to his heart”<sup>515</sup>. Even if several of these activists did not agree with Garvey – in particular about repatriation to Africa – they were convinced that unity among people of color was necessary to achieve full equality and freedom.

Black clubwomen not only organized to promote and defend the rights of people of color throughout the world through Pan-Africanism, but they also actively promoted working for the rights of women of color throughout the world. In particular, they were concerned by the fates and living conditions of women of color throughout the world. Some educated women like Anna Cooper studied the conditions of foreign women in *A Voice From the South* and Spelman students wrote articles about women’s living conditions throughout the world in the *Spelman Messenger*<sup>516</sup>.

### **Keeping Building Bridges With Women of the Darker Races Throughout the World in the 1920s**

Therefore, in the course of the 1920s, some black women continued to give a resolutely international dimension to their work. As Rosalyn Terborg-Penn has noted, during that decade,

[t]here was a growing awareness among black women leaders of the international nature of racism and its effects upon women of color throughout the world. As a result, during the 1920s some African American women reached out to their sisters in Africa and the African diaspora in an attempt to sensitize them to their common struggle against racism, poverty, and political neglect<sup>517</sup>.

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 382. Wells appears to be the only one of the four women to support the ideas of Marcus Garvey. Garvey was not popular among elite black Americans. As Eric Foner has pointed out, “Du Bois and other established black leaders viewed Garvey as little more than a demagogue. They applauded when the government deported him after a conviction of mail fraud. But the massive following his movement achieved testified to the sense of betrayal that had been kindled in black communities during and after the war”, Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, 746.

<sup>516</sup> They wrote pieces about Chinese, African or Turkish women. See for instance: “The Education of the Turkish Woman”, by Beatrice E. Smith, HS ’11, *Spelman Messenger*, in the late 1900s or early 1910s.

<sup>517</sup> Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “African American Women and the Vote”, in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and Ann Gordon, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 19-20.



After joining the International Council of Women, an interracial group, some members of the NACW wanted to form a separate council so as to defend the interests of women of the African diaspora. The southern-born clubwoman and educator Mary McLeod Bethune was the main architect of this international impulse<sup>518</sup>. As Cynthia Neverdon-Morton has explained, in 1922, the International Council of Women of the Darker Races (ICWDR) was “formed as an adjunct to the NACW”<sup>519</sup>. The ICWDR involved many other women – among them Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Barrier Williams, Addie Hunton, Mary Talbert and Nannie Helen Burroughs<sup>520</sup>. In 1922, the ICWDR started to hold its own conventions, separately from those of the NACW, which were attended by representatives from various countries of the African diaspora – but not exclusively<sup>521</sup>. The creation of the ICWDR appears as the natural consequence of the work accomplished since the early 1890s to defend the interests of women of color examined in this dissertation. As Elisabetta Vezzosi has pointed out, some scholars refer to the ICWDR “as a place of transition between nineteenth-century strategies of racial uplift and “newer global race consciousness ideas”, tying together the contributions of African American women to the Columbian Exposition [of 1893] with the foundation of the NCNW in 1935 and its future internationalist developments [...]. Often, its leaders not only supported the Pan-African movement but also organized related events, most importantly the 1927 Pan-African Congress in New York”<sup>522</sup>.

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<sup>518</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) was a South Carolina-born teacher and activist and founder of the Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona, Florida.

<sup>519</sup> Elisabetta Vezzosi, “The International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy”, 76. Surprisingly, Mary Terrell did not refer to this in her life writing. The membership was composed of fifty African American women and fifty foreign women of color. See Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, “Advancement of the Race Through African American Women’s Organizations in the South, 1895-1925”, in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*, 130.

<sup>520</sup> Neverdon-Morton has underscored that Terrell and Hunton were “vice-presidents while Maggie Walker, Mary McLeod Bethune and Nannie Helen Burroughs were members of the Executive Council”, “Advancement of the Race”, 130. See also Vezzosi, Elisabetta. “The International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy: Pan-Africanism, Decolonization and Human Rights”, 76. According to Elisabetta Vezzosi, it was “initially called the International Council of Women of the Darker Races of the World, its members demanded civil rights and global citizenship for women of color. Its initiators included well-known African American women like Mary McLeod Bethune, Mary Church Terrell and Margaret Murray Washington, as well as less famous women who were nevertheless leaders among women of color at the time, especially in the NACW, including Nannie Helen Burroughs, Addie Waites Hunton, Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Janie Porter Barrett. The African American women speakers and attendees in Chicago involved in its creation were Hallie Quinn Brown, Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Burnett Talbert and Lugenia Burns Hope. Many of these women had multiple affiliations with various kinds of organizations, including the YWCA, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the NAACP, the National Urban League and the International Council of Women.”

<sup>521</sup> Neverdon-Morton has explained that representatives came from “African nations, Haiti, Ceylon, and the West Indies”, 130.

<sup>522</sup> L. G. Materson, “African American Women’s Global Journeys and the Construction of Class-ethnic Racial Identity”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009): 35-42, 6, as cited in Vezzosi, Elisabetta. “The



Defeating Ida B. Wells-Barnett in the 1924 NACW election, Mary McLeod Bethune served as President until 1928. During her four-year presidency, she tried to modernize the strategies of the national organization, moving away from the traditional notions theretofore encouraged by the NACW – self-help and moral uplift — by focusing on demanding integration for African Americans in the United States. Bethune and other clubwomen were increasingly convinced that the fight for equality had to be fought internationally. In her 1926 address at the Biennial Convention of the NACW given in Oakland, California, her concern for women’s welfare throughout the world is evident. She was convinced that one had to “reach out to ‘the scattered people of African descent’ [...] and declared: [...] ‘We must make this national body of colored women a significant link between the peoples of color throughout the world’”<sup>523</sup>. Bethune insisted that clubwomen should “create a literature propaganda for the education of our people and all people in America, about the purposes and any international program of this Association” and spread it “over the world wherever colored people abide [...] We must in truth create a literature that will make all races of the world know that we are their human equals and determined to have just consideration in all the affairs of world society”<sup>524</sup>.

In the mid-1930s, dissatisfied with the way the NACW was run, Bethune decided to break free from it and adopt a more progressive strategy. As Audrey Thomas McCluskey has pointed out, after serving the national association for four successful years, “Bethune decided that a new, more activist organization was needed. In 1935, she founded the more politically attuned National Council of Negro Women”<sup>525</sup> in order to fight against racial discrimination, segregation and to organize the movement on the international level. She “desire[d] to unite all of the Negro organizations of women” and recounted in her *Spiritual Autobiography* that her first purpose was to give a national women’s club a more progressive tone. In order to do so, she thought – like Williams, Terrells or Ruffin several decades earlier – that privileged women should assist less privileged groups: “The National Council of Negro Women purports to blend the energies, the faiths, the aspirations, the abilities and powers of all the Negro women in order that those who have leadership gifts may use them for the good of the

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International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy: Pan-Africanism, Decolonization and Human Rights”, 88.

<sup>523</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, “NACW Presidential Address, 2 August 1926”, as cited in Elaine M. Smith, “Mary McLeod Bethune”. *Notable Black American Women*. Vol. I, 89.

<sup>524</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, *Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents*, ed. Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 162.

<sup>525</sup> Audrey Thomas McCluskey, in Mary McLeod Bethune, *Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents*, Introduction, 6.

whole”. Her second purpose was to raise the interest and unite women of color throughout the world: “Through this organization we hope to make and further relationships with other groups of women throughout the world. We extend the collective hand and add beauty and force to our voices as we plan together and work together with courage, self-reliance and heroism.”<sup>526</sup>. As Elisabetta Vezzosi has underscored, the National Council of Negro Women was a “new organization of African American women with a strong global vision and international activism centered on the subjects of race, gender, economic justice and decolonization”<sup>527</sup>. In her *Spiritual Autobiography* published in 1946, this open-minded, energetic, diplomatic and deeply Christian woman who had been brought up by a “consecrated, clear-thinking, careful” mother and a “principled” father who had “more than average devotion to his family and to the best that he knew”<sup>528</sup> described herself as “strongly *inter-denominational, inter-racial and inter-national*”<sup>529</sup>. Being raised a Christian, she was guided by her wish to “build the tomorrow”. Like Anna Julia Cooper, she had an inclusive approach<sup>530</sup>, and like many women of this study, love, brotherhood, justice, peace and progress were at the heart of her philosophy. Her purpose was to foster brotherhood: “Act with faith and love and wisdom for justice and progress and peace. I am ready to keep an open mind – to follow the guides toward upward trends and forward progress which will make our world the ONE GREAT WORLD – A world where all men are brothers.”<sup>531</sup>.

In their writings, during the period Rayford Logan has termed the “nadir” of race relations in America, at a time when legal racial segregation and disenfranchisement were imposed in the South, African American women asserted their Americanness in order to

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<sup>526</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, *Spiritual Autobiography*, [Abridged], published in 1946, 55. Alexander Street Press. In 1946, at the time Bethune penned these lines, she was serving as president of the NCNW – she served as its president until 1949. Additionally, she directed the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration and belonged to an informal Black Cabinet under the Roosevelt administration. She was also a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt’s.

<sup>527</sup> Vezzosi, “The International Strategy of African American Women at the Columbian Exposition and Its Legacy: Pan-Africanism, Decolonization and Human Rights”, 82. Vezzosi has added: “Many ICWDR activists joined the new organization, including Lugenia Burns Hope who in 1937 became the assistant of Bethune, then the director of the Bureau of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration”.

<sup>528</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 51-52. Original manuscript in Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation, Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona, Florida. She also added that her mother played a central and determining role in her activism, since she “disciplined my life in order that I might know humility, stamina, faith and goodness. I was shown goodness by precept and example. And because my parents believe[d] so implicitly in me and my understanding I learned to believe in other people”.

<sup>529</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 55.

<sup>530</sup> Audrey Thomas McCluskey, in Mary McLeod Bethune, *Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents*, Introduction, 7.

<sup>531</sup> Mary McLeod Bethune, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 55.

defend their rights as women and as citizens. In the midst of anarchist and communist threats that pervaded America at the dawn of the twentieth century, black women intellectuals had their heart set on demonstrating that African Americans had actively contributed to the historic, economic and cultural construction of the nation and should therefore finally be considered as first-class citizens. As a result, many of them rejected projects of repatriation to Africa, arguing that black Americans were entitled to stay in America.

By contrast, in the age of colonialism, several women in this study such as Anna Cooper and Fannie Barrier Williams believed in the necessity to fight for the rights of people of color throughout the world and actively engaged in Pan-Africanism in the 1900s. When Bethune, Terrell and Washington launched the ICWDR in 1922 – and when Bethune started the NCNW in 1935 —, they were in fact continuing the efforts made by the thousands of women who had been active within women's clubs since the 1890s, this time giving a resolutely international dimension to their work and defending the ideals of racial equality, economic and social justice in America but also throughout the world.

## Conclusion

All these women who had ceaselessly worked for woman suffrage witnessed the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Fannie Barrier Williams and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, living in Chicago, were allowed to vote while Mary Terrell and Anna Cooper, both residents of Washington D.C., could not. These talented and inspiring clubwomen kept fighting for the rights of African Americans throughout their lives. Ida B. Wells-Barnett ran for the presidency of the NACW in 1924, but lost to Mary McLeod Bethune. She also ran for the State Senate in Illinois as an Independent but was defeated in the primary. In 1928, she started writing her life story but did not have time to complete her manuscript<sup>532</sup>. She died on 25 March 1931 of kidney disease, leaving a tremendous legacy of activism and dedication to justice. In her memoir, in the chapter dealing with the year 1927, Wells warned her readers about the necessity for African Americans to be careful about maintaining their rights. She argued: “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty”<sup>533</sup>. Her husband Ferdinand died in 1936. Today, Michelle Duster preserves the memory and legacy of her great grand-mother<sup>534</sup>. To this day, Ida B. Wells-Barnett remains the foremost figure of the anti-lynching struggle.

After the accidental death of her husband in 1921, Fannie Barrier Williams remained active in Chicago in the early 1920s, serving at the Board of the Chicago Public Library, before gradually slowing down the pace of her activities<sup>535</sup>. Because she was experiencing health problems, Fannie Williams withdrew from public life in 1926. She returned to Brockport, New York, to live with her sister Ella D. Barrier<sup>536</sup>. Both kept each other company until Fannie’s death in 1944<sup>537</sup>.

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<sup>532</sup> She wrote the first third of her manuscript herself in 1928 before dictating the rest to the secretary of her son Herman and made necessary revisions until 1930. The last sentence of her autobiography is incomplete. See the Introduction to *Crusade*, xxx- xxxi.

<sup>533</sup> Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade*, 415.

<sup>534</sup> I had the honor of meeting her in 2012 at the 97<sup>th</sup> annual Convention of the ASALH in Pittsburgh. One of her projects to erect a statue of Ida Wells-Barnett in Chicago. See <http://www.idabwellsmonument.org/>. She has written numerous articles, essays and books including *Ida In Her Own Words*, published in 2008 and *Ida From Abroad*, published in 2010. She also worked on a documentary film on Ida B. Wells-Barnett: *Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice*. See her website: [http://www.mldwrites.com/Goal\\_of\\_My\\_Writing.php](http://www.mldwrites.com/Goal_of_My_Writing.php).

<sup>535</sup> As June Edwards indicates, “In 1924 she was the first woman and the first African American to be appointed to the board of the Chicago Public Library”. See <http://uudb.org/articles/fanniebarrierwilliams.html>. From the biography of Fannie Barrier Williams written by June Edwards in the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, an on-line resource of the Unitarian Universalist History & Heritage Society.

<sup>536</sup> Throughout their lives, the two sisters had remained extremely close to each other. Hendricks indicates that Ella visited Fannie for long periods and Fannie also came to Washington D.C. “so often that she continued to be listed in the city directory long after she had left in 1887”, Fannie Barrier Williams, *Crossing the Borders*, 174. They also “vacationed together, as they did in 1911 when they visited Toronto”. Ella and Fannie had much in common: both became teachers and were active clubwomen. Ella never married and began an “illustrious career as a teacher, a principal and an activist” in Washington D.C., as Wanda Hendricks explains in *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*. Ella was also active in the Colored Women's League in

Mary Church Terrell continued to be an extremely active clubwoman, lecturer and a prolific writer until the age of 80. She remained in Washington D.C. after the death of her husband in 1925. As of the 1920s, Terrell was increasingly audacious in her political activism, moving away from the politics of respectability she had embraced in the late 1890s. As Debra Newman Ham has pointed out, “as [she] grew older she became bolder in her expression of social and political dissent”<sup>538</sup>. While she was struggling against segregation in the nation’s capital, she encouraged boycotts and took part in demonstrations against racial discrimination<sup>539</sup>. With her colleagues of the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of District of Columbia Anti-Discrimination Laws, she won a major victory in 1953, when the case *Washington D.C. v. John R. Thompson* outlawed racial discrimination in the nation’s capital<sup>540</sup>. In many ways, she was one of the early actors of the burgeoning Civil Rights movement. Throughout the years, Terrell received several honorary Doctorates from Howard University, Wilberforce and Oberlin Colleges in recognition of her work. She is one of the most renowned black women in the United States, partly because in 1940, she published *A Colored Woman in a White World*, one of the best-known autobiographies written by a woman of African descent. Yet, she is also widely renowned for her numerous articles, speeches as well as for her fight in favor of women’s rights, and against lynching and racial discrimination. She died in her summer home in Highland Beach, Maryland, on 24 July 1954 at the age of 91, shortly after the Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in public schools in the United States in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

After Williams E. Chancellor’s “reign had come to a close” at M. Street High School in 1910, Anna Julia Cooper resumed her position as a Latin teacher until her retirement in

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Washington and “played a major role in the development of the Washington branch of the YWCA”. In the summer of 1907, Ella sought to pursue her education at the School of Education of Chicago University. *The Brockport Republic*, 11 July 1907. She was also “an international traveler who promoted the reform activities of black women”. *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 173.

<sup>537</sup> Fannie died of a stroke and Ella died one year later, in 1945. Both sisters are buried at High Street Cemetery in Brockport, along with their parents. Wanda Hendricks, *Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 175. <http://uudb.org/articles/fanniebarrierwilliams.html>. June Edwards, in the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, an on-line resource of the Unitarian Universalist History & Heritage Society.

<sup>538</sup> Debra Newman Ham, “Mary Church Terrell”, in *Notable Black American Women*, Vol. I, ed., Smith, Jessie Carney, 1118.

<sup>539</sup> See Denis Brindell Fradin and Judith Blum Fradin, *Fight On! Mary Church Terrell’s Battle for Integration*. Joan Quigley has written a monograph about this: *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation’s Capital*. (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>540</sup> Segregation had become the norm in Washington, despite the 1872 and 1873 laws, which had forbidden discrimination in the district. Terrell, who served as chair of the Committee, decided to start a legal procedure to demand the end of segregation in the district. Segregation was outlawed in Washington D.C. as of 1953, through the case *District of Columbia v. John R. Thompson*. See Debra Newman Ham, “Mary Church Terrell”, in *Notable Black American Women*, Vol. I., 1119.



1930<sup>541</sup>. In 1924, she obtained a Doctorate from the University of La Sorbonne at the age of 66, being the fourth African American woman to obtain a Ph.D. From 1930 to 1941, she served as President of Frelinghuysen University in Washington D.C.<sup>542</sup>, taking part in the erection of a building to help disadvantaged young women. Particularly proud of this achievement, she named the building after her beloved mother, Hannah Stanley Haywood, and modestly believed that this was her noblest accomplishment<sup>543</sup>. Cooper humbly wished to be remembered as a woman who “ha[d] done what she could”, stating that her “one aim [was and had] always been [...] to hold a torch for the children of a group too long exploited and too frequently disparaged in its struggling for the light”<sup>544</sup>. She died in 1964 at the age of 106, being the sole woman of our study to have had the opportunity to witness the Civil Rights movement and some of the legal victories of that period<sup>545</sup>. In July 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited racial discrimination in employment, hospitals and schools and privately-owned public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels and theaters<sup>546</sup>. One year later, in July 1965, the Voting Rights Act finally enabled African Americans to vote, almost one century after the Fifteenth Amendment (1870).

During the period 1860s-1920s, each woman defined models of black womanhood which were profoundly influenced by their own personal life stories. The study of these women’s early writings (1860s-1800s) reveals their mindsets at a time when they formed their understanding of being a woman. These letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, articles and essays unveil how these women experienced their childhood, work life, how they regarded men, love and marriage, but also how they construed womanhood, motherhood and activism throughout the years, both in America and internationally. Their early writings reveal

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<sup>541</sup> Leona Gabel, *From Slavery to the Sorbonne and Beyond*, 59. After serving as the principal of M. Street High School for several years, Cooper had been dismissed by William E. Chancellor in 1906 for voicing diverging views about education and worked in Missouri as a Professor of Foreign Languages at the Lincoln Institute from 1906 to 1910.

<sup>542</sup> Frelinghuysen University was founded in 1906 by Dr. Jesse Lawson and his wife Loretta E. Lawson.

<sup>543</sup> To the question: “What do you regard as your outstanding accomplishments since graduation?”, Cooper answered in 1930: “Perhaps others will think first of the Defense in French before a jury of French Doctors at the Sorbonne [...] in 1925. My own preference is the building of a beautiful home at the Capital from unsubsidized earnings to be dedicated in the name of my slave Mother to the education of colored working people”. Form filled in 1930. Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.. Box 23-1. She referred here to one building of Frelinghuysen University.

<sup>544</sup> This extract is taken from the Souvenir leaflet she prepared for her Ph.D ceremony in 1925. “Souvenir Xi Omega Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. 29 December 1925. Washington D.C.. Anna Julia Cooper, University of Paris”. Anna Julia Cooper Papers. Box 23-1. Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C..

<sup>545</sup> Cooper was alive at the time of Rosa Parks’s 1955 struggle, the Montgomery bus boycott and Martin Luther King’s struggle for equality through non-violent protest.

<sup>546</sup> Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty !*, 966.

that these activists were quite strongly influenced by Victorian ideals and often construed womanhood in somewhat rigid ways. Studying their writings has enabled me to see how their understanding of being a woman of color evolved throughout the years, at a time of transition for American women, at a moment when Victorianism was gradually yielding ground to notions of modern, “new women”.

Because they had been continuously accused of being immoral since slavery times, black clubwomen – who had organized clubwork for decades already – kept defending the image of women of color during the Progressive Era (1890-1920), believing that as members of the black elite, they had an essential role to play in their community and in their country. In the 1890s, they formed a national organ – the National Association of Colored Women – to organize the defense of black womanhood nationally. They developed a discourse centered on notions of self-help, moral and racial uplift in order to defend the reputation of women of African descent. In newspaper articles published in the *Woman's Era*, the *National Notes* or in various newspapers, many of them contended that women were to be the architects of racial uplift. These privileged, college-educated women – like Fannie Barrier Williams for instance – positioned themselves as models, sometimes adopting elitist or patronizing attitudes towards less privileged members of the community. They crafted a unique definition of African American womanhood – deemed respectable by all – different from that of white activists. Black female intellectuals crafted a traditional discourse about womanhood in order to fight against negative images about women of color. In their writings, black female intellectuals not only asserted their womanhood and humanity, they also emphasized the strategic role they were to play as women for the community and the nation as mothers and as citizens and, ultimately, as voters.

These women used a Victorian language to defend women of color in their publications. Yet, they also partially subscribed to these ideals throughout their lives, beings the products of Victorian America. As Jacqueline Rouse has shown in her work dealing with Lugenia Burns Hope, this group of elite clubwomen “were members of a privileged class, yet who used their time, influence, prestige, and contacts to advance their race [...] These women, [who] were not only activists but also mothers, wives, and educators”, were “independent, outspoken, assertive – even aggressive – but submissive when it was expedient

to be so”<sup>547</sup>. As Mark Giles has pointed out, Cooper in particular did not break free from Victorian ideals:

Cooper wrestled with many notions of the Victorian era norms that shaped her and what it meant to be an American Black woman. [...] Cooper’s life and work crossed several cultural borders and modeled an embracing of and resistance to the nineteenth century notions of ‘true womanhood’, and early twentieth century Black progressivism<sup>548</sup>.

Yet, Cooper was not the only one to display reverence for the cult of true womanhood. Several women of this study did not break free from the gendered assumptions of their times. According to Jean Marie Robbins, although Mary Terrell “epitomized the New Woman, popularized around the turn of the twentieth century, who was independent, educated, confident and adventurous”, she “maintained Victorian propriety and gentility”<sup>549</sup>. The strategies she endorsed within the NACW between 1896 and 1900 reveal her personal stance: Mary Church Terrell’s fight for kindergartens matched her fight for uplift at the Colored Women’s League and at the Washington Board of Education<sup>550</sup>. Ida Wells and Fannie Williams also partially subscribed to Victorian ideals, despite the fact that they embraced careers as activists and lecturers and were resolutely modern, “new women”. This is visible in the ways Wells raised her daughters and the way Williams spoke about the role women were to play in society. For example, Williams contended that women should master the art of cooking while being also cultured hostesses, able to entertain guests by playing the piano. Like Terrell, Wells or Cooper, Williams did not break away from the feminine role expected of women of her class and times.

Although these elite women did not totally break free from Victorianism in the age of “the Woman’s Era”, they resorted to innovative strategies to defend American womanhood and manhood and asserted their agency in very modern ways. While adopting a Victorian language, they challenged accepted gendered expectations and defied the norms set for women at that time. As Mark Giles has pointed out: “Although Cooper mediated her self-image as a Victorian black woman, her thinking and actions demonstrate a critical perspective on race and oppression in America and her role in it”<sup>551</sup>. While adopting a traditional language imbued with Victorianism, they used modern, innovative strategies to organize their

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<sup>547</sup> Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope: Black Southern Reformer*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 129-130.

<sup>548</sup> Mark. S. Giles, “Dr Anna Julia Cooper, 1858-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist”. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (Fall 2006): 621-634, 627.

<sup>549</sup> Jean Marie Robbins, “Black Club Women’s Purposes for Establishing Kindergartens”, 101.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>551</sup> Mark. S. Giles, “Dr Anna Julia Cooper, 1858-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist”, 631-632.

defense, insisting on morality, purity, piety and respectability. At the turn of the century, they founded associations, women's and mothers' clubs, opened and ran settlement houses and Homes for destitute young women and female migrants.

Among the different women in this study, many developed what Carlson has termed a "dual womanhood", conforming to the image of the "black Victoria" and artfully managing to combine apparently opposing qualities. They went on investing the public sphere, working outside the home as they had always done, engaging in clubwork, lecturing and writing against injustice and being at the same time dutiful wives, mothers and skillful homemakers. At the turn of the century, Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams contended that the woman of color was evolving out of the domestic sphere, adopting resolutely feminist arguments. This new definition encompassed both a Victorian discourse and a more modern, progressive one, different from the one white women were developing at the time. The modern definition these black female intellectuals gave to womanhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dramatically influenced all of American womanhood.

Furthermore, this work has enabled me to show that region was an important part of their identity and that many women in this study expressed their regional identity quite strongly. It appears that the regional identities of these activists impacted the way they understood womanhood and activism and that a specific regional black womanhood did exist, especially in the South. The study of their articles reveals that at a time when white Southerners were reviving the Old South and advocating white supremacy, black southern women prized their region because it was their "home", the land where their ancestors had toiled for generations, a land where liberty, emancipation and black culture should be celebrated. Overall, African Americans tended to prize their United States citizenship over their State citizenship, in particular in the South. It also seems that black southern women tended to embrace traditional, Victorian notions more than women from other regions, because there was a more extreme form of Victorianism in that section.

Additionally, in the age of Jim Crow, when they were faced with the growing influence of the New South in the nation, many women worked to finally be acknowledged as American citizens. In their writings, black female intellectuals repeatedly argued in favor of the recognition of the historic roles played by African Americans in the building of America, as patriotic workers and as soldiers in the different armed conflicts.

Some scholars have argued that African American activists fought for their rights as members of the oppressed black community rather than as women. Aileen Kraditor held in

1968: “Hence Negro and working-class women have always put their needs and grievances as Negroes and workers first and as women second. Primary emphasis on feminism seems to have been a luxury that only white, middle-class women have been able to afford”<sup>552</sup>. In 1972, Gerda Lerner stated a similar view, contending that black women, “speaking with many voices, ha[d] been near unanimous in their insistence that their own emancipation c[ould not] be separated from that of their men. Their liberation depend[ed] on that of the race and on the improvement of the life of the black community. Their main concern [was] with their families and their children. [...] Black womanhood speaks with dignity, pride and a strong sense of community”<sup>553</sup>.

The analysis of their private and public writings unveil that these women used the different facets of their identities – being a woman, black, American, a Northerner, Easterner or Southerner – to fight against injustice and oppression. These feminists developed different philosophies about womanhood to defend the image of women of color.

Gerda Lerner has argued that two types of black feminism emerged at the turn of the century. On the one hand, women such as Anna Julia Cooper – and Sojourner Truth –believed that black women’s needs were distinct from those of black men and that activists should focus first on acquiring women’s rights before focusing on the rights of the whole community<sup>554</sup>. Cooper, a fervent Christian intellectual, ceaselessly denounced oppression and injustice, developing an inclusive and all-encompassing philosophy. As Mary Jo Deegan has pointed out, she “spoke for the majority of African-American women, who endured lives in which there was no voice to represent them and suffered from the oppression of capitalism, feudal relations, sexism, and racism”<sup>555</sup>. Cooper is one of the major black feminists in American history. As Mark Giles has pointed out, *A Voice from the South* “remains a touchstone for Black feminist theory”, and Cooper “contributed to and reframed notions of Black feminist thought and activism through her writings, service as an educator and social activist, and by her personal example”<sup>556</sup>.

On the other hand, Lerner believed that “the feminism of Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Mc Leod Bethune, Josephine St Pierre Ruffin and Mary Church Terrell was of a

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<sup>552</sup> Aileen Kraditor, *Up From the Pedestal*, 15, Introduction.

<sup>553</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 563. Gerda Lerner meant that their “liberation [as women] depend[ed] on that of the race”.

<sup>554</sup> Despite being very progressive, Cooper did not completely break free from Victorianism in her discourse. Yet she was a modern woman because she endlessly advocated education for women, and ceaselessly fought against sexism and racism.

<sup>555</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xli.

<sup>556</sup> Mark Giles, “Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, 1858-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Journalist”, 622 and 632.

different kind” since they saw that the separate organization of women “as an expedient, a means for elevating *not only women but the race*”<sup>557</sup>. Female suffrage was viewed “as a necessary tool for winning black rights” and so was interracial cooperation. Nevertheless, although these clubwomen prized the interests of the community before theirs as women, it seems that by founding the NACW, they also aimed at defending the interests of women. As Paula Giddings has indicated, in 1895, the NACW has been organized “not ‘for race work alone’, said Ruffin, ‘but for work along the lines that make for women’s progress’”<sup>558</sup>. In this study, it appears that in their attempts to advance women’s rights, these women always made sure that they also fought for the community at the same time.

These clubwomen worked for racial uplift and for the defense of women of color in various ways. While Fannie Barrier Williams and Mary Church Terrell advocated “better, purer homes” and better mothers, Anna Julia Cooper particularly stressed the importance of woman’s rights and woman’s education, insisted on the importance of educated, Christian education and spoke for black women of the South.

As an activist, Ida Wells-Barnett aimed at securing political rights for the black community and denounced racial violence. Her work as a journalist and a reporter shows this distinct approach. By ceaselessly dedicating her energy to the fight against lynching and disenfranchisement, Wells-Barnett defended the image of African American *men and women*. Because she publicly denounced the links between sex, gender, race and region in America and demonstrated the existence of a double standard as regards women in the South, she debunked the myths of the black rapist and the immoral black women.

On the contrary, Fannie Barrier Williams embodied the educated, refined, and cultured black new woman of the elite who believed in the necessity of interracial cooperation to advance the cause of African Americans. As Mary Jo Deegan has underscored, “Williams [...] articulated a dream of America, a democratic vision that called for national unity and justice. She chose to approach urban America, represented by Chicago, and tried to understand the role of women as both leaders and as embodied females with a unique culture.”<sup>559</sup>. She shared many common points with Mary Terrell, who often advocated measured and compromising attitudes at the turn of the century. Both Terrell and Williams embraced the accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington, and the latter co-authored several monographs with the leader of Tuskegee.

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<sup>557</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 561-562. Italics mine.

<sup>558</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 83.

<sup>559</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xli.



This stance was resented after 1900 by women who advocated more militant methods, such as Josephine Ruffin and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. The study of the NACW papers reveals that some tensions erupted within the Association, as to the methods which members should use to serve the interests of African American women. Southern-born women such as Margaret Murray Washington and Josephine Silone Yates – and Mary Terrell, who adopted a rhetoric of respectability while she was serving as president of the NACW from 1896 to 1900 –, tended to be more conservative and adopt more cautious measures than their northern or eastern counterparts.

These women's personal histories somehow influenced the manner with which they addressed the woman question. Perhaps because she had grown up in a town in relative social equality, quite sheltered from prejudice until coming south in the 1870s, Fannie Barrier Williams conveyed in her writings the idea that this ideal was attainable, that Americans should fight to build a society where racial equality existed – hoping that it would, one day, be colorblind. Also probably because she had been used to working with whites, she embraced compromising ideas in the line of Booker T. Washington's, called for self-help, yet also discreetly pursued more militant projects<sup>560</sup>. Likewise, Mary Church Terrell, who had grown up in a biracial family of white Southerners, relatively protected from racism as a child and given many opportunities as a young woman – able to study abroad for an extended period of time in Europe in the late 1880s –, also adhered to compromising views at the turn of the century, before adopting more militant methods as of the 1900s – notably in the fight against lynching, women's votes and, later, against segregation.

On the contrary, Anna Julia Cooper, who was the daughter of a slave and her owner, had been raised by a loving mother who did her best to enable her to study, voiced a more militant philosophy. She particularly promoted access to education for all, through her involvement as an educator and supporting institutions of learning such as Frelinghuysen University. A deeply devout woman, she also ceaselessly worked in favor of a more benevolent, tolerant society, praying that one day, white Americans would open their eyes on the atrocity of prejudice and racial violence. As Mark Giles has contended, Cooper's sense of authentic voice and identity “was grounded in her deep spirituality as a Christian, her heritage

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<sup>560</sup> For example, she discreetly carried out research about lynching statistics in the State of Illinois for him.

as an ex-slave and child of her slave owner, and her strong belief in womanhood and women's rights to learn, develop and lead"<sup>561</sup>.

The life circumstances of Ida B. Wells were quite different: orphaned at a young age, she was rapidly faced with virulent racism – often having to fend for herself, having no men to protect her<sup>562</sup>. Also raised with an ideal of a loving, nurturing, Christian and community-oriented mother, she turned into a young, energetic and determined woman who dedicated her entire energy to fight against racial injustice, lynching and disenfranchisement. Their early lives undoubtedly shaped their styles as activists. Moreover, these women all grew up having feminine role models who possessed qualities which encouraged them to become women with “dual feminine qualities”: feminine, loving, nurturing yet undeniably resourceful, independent, hard-working and committed to the welfare of the community. At the turn of the century, they became independent, free-spirited, modern, new women.

Additionally, being able to travel internationally – either as young women, as in the case of Mary Church and Ida B. Wells, or at a later age, for Anna Cooper and Fannie Barrier Williams – enabled these activists to acquire an international outlook which further shaped their activism, in particular on the question of the rights of people of color throughout the world and Pan African unity. These four women were particularly influenced by the British and French cultures. The two francophiles of this study, Mary Church and Anna Cooper, enjoyed the freedom and equality which seemed to reign in France, while Ida B. Wells – through her work against lynching in the early 1890s – and Anna Cooper and Fannie Williams – through their engagement in the Pan-African movement in 1900 —, had become familiar with British activism and collaborated with activists from many different nations. The cultural border crossings these women durably experienced influenced them.

These lecturers and writers did not adopt the same rhetorical style. Wilma Peebles-Wilkins and E. Aracelis Francis argue that in her writings, Mary Church Terrell developed a feminine style:

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<sup>561</sup> Giles, Mark. S. “Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, 1856-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist”. *Journal of Negro Education*, Fall 2006, Vol. 75 ( No. 4): 621- 634, 631. Cooper's life experience indeed shaped her views about women. For example, the fact that this educated young woman was widowed at such a young age – at the age of 21 – must have influenced her views about women's roles in society and the necessity to be educated and economically independent. Her marital situation probably challenged her attachment to Victorian notions. Because she was widowed at such a young age and never remarried, she was financially self-reliant throughout her life – working as a teacher her entire life – and did not experience motherhood herself, although she adopted her nieces and nephews in the 1910s.

<sup>562</sup> Contrary to Mary Church who reported being repeatedly sheltered from violent behaviors on trains, thanks to her father's presence, Wells was forced out of a train in the 1880s.

[She] tended to use effective persuasion to sensitize whites to the unequal treatment and the inhibited aspirations of black Americans resulting from racism by evoking empathy and identification [...] Her personal presentation was more characteristic of the 'feminine' style [...] A content analysis of her writings demonstrates that her ideas were consistent with the 'place' of woman in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her vision of the world was reflected in her focus on the role of women in the family and on services to support family life<sup>563</sup>.

Her policies in favor of kindergartens within the NACW in the late 1890s show this well. Her writings were "subjective and tended to be characterized by inductive reasoning"<sup>564</sup>. Ida Wells-Barnett used a very different style in her work. She used a "logical, scientific and fact-finding approach (deductive reasoning)" both in her articles, books dealing with lynching and her memoir<sup>565</sup>. She "did not fit the traditionally feminine mold [...] was authoritative and objective [...] and argued effectively without projecting the feminine stereotype"<sup>566</sup>.

Despite her apparent accommodationism – which caused her to be accused of being a race traitor in the 1900s –, Williams's rhetorical style was audacious, oftentimes daring. She openly chastised white men for committing sexual oppression on black women and white women for their passivity in 1893 –, and urged white Americans to build a society where justice reigned and where women could enter both spheres without being accused of being unfeminine. Similarly, Cooper, who was a well-read intellectual penned highly well-researched, caustic essays using a sarcastic tone, as for instance, when she condemned white southern women for their provincialism and prejudice in "Woman vs. the Indian" (1891-1892).

Despite their differences of opinion, their different – regional and social – origins, their distinct approaches – shaped by their family history, early lives, personalities, the turning-points in their lives – all women in this study were driven by a similar desire: to defend the image of women of color in America and fight for the rights of the community at a time when the woman's era opened new avenues for American women. Each in their own respective way, with their respective personality, history, and sensitivity, developed their own style and ceaselessly toiled to advance the cause of women in the United States at a time when African American women's reputation was continuously slandered.

Some of these African American activists and intellectuals were the casualties of history. The contributions of these remarkable women have tended to be either forgotten or

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<sup>563</sup> Wilma Peebles-Wilkins and E. Aracelis Francis, "Two Outstanding Black Women in Social Welfare History: Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett", *Affilia*. Vol 5, No. 4, Winter 1990: 87-100, 98.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, One could notice this in the letter she addressed to Mrs. Fitch in 1913, in her various articles as well as in her memoir.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

downplayed. Besides Ida B. Wells, who is well-known for her fight against lynching, and Mary Church Terrell, who is renowned for her work within the NACW and her engagement in international work, these women have for a long time not received the attention they deserve in United States History. Alfreda Duster argued that the “measure of success [her mother] achieved goes far beyond the credit she has been given in the history of the country”<sup>567</sup>. Fannie Barrier Williams’s biographer, Wanda Hendricks, has similarly contended that Williams “became a victim of history, a casualty of a gendered narrative that marginalized women”, but she has also argued that because of her polished style, she became “a martyr to history’s penchant for celebrating heroic figures who waged public, aggressive, and often protracted battles against individuals, institutions and government”<sup>568</sup>. Hendricks has explained that only three years after Fannie’s death – in 1947 –, when Carter G. Woodson honored Booker T. Washington, he mentioned only *one* woman – Ida B. Wells-Barnett. This episode reveals the tendency among black intellectuals of sidelining women in those years.

These African American men intellectuals were the early architects of the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century. Their work and activism largely laid the foundations of the movement of the 1950s and 1960s<sup>569</sup> and must undoubtedly have influenced following generations of African American women activists<sup>570</sup>. As Wanda Hendricks has pointed out about Fannie Barrier Williams, she was “a symbol of privilege, resilience, and defiance during the budding years of the modern-day civil rights movement”<sup>571</sup>. America owes much to these extraordinary and admirable women. I humbly hope that these remarkable women will eventually achieve the recognition they deserve.

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<sup>567</sup> Alfreda Duster, Introduction to *Crusade for Justice*, xxxii.

<sup>568</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 176. On the contrary, Mary Jo Deegan believes that Fannie Barrier Williams tends to be a lesser known figure of African American fight because she died before the Civil Rights movement: “Terrell, unlike Williams, lived to witness the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and to take part in them. During these years, Terrell assumed a leadership role once again, making her legacy as a community activist clearer to scholars than is that of Williams.”, Mary Jo Deegan, *The New Woman of Color*, xlii.

<sup>569</sup> Today, the guarantees obtained during the 1950s and 1960s seem to be threatened in some parts of the United States. For instance, racial segregation is enforced legally through economic segregation in cities such as Selma, Alabama. The France 5 documentary broadcast on Tuesday 2 November 2016, entitled “Les États-Unis: le nouvel apartheid”, revealed that racial segregation exists in southern cities and that the American society tends to become more and more withdrawn in certain areas. <http://www.france5.fr/emission/etats-unis-le-nouvel-apartheid>.

<sup>570</sup> A future study might reveal how importantly these intellectuals influenced following generations of black intellectuals. To what extent were activists of the 1950s and 1960s influenced by the thoughts of Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church Terrell or Fannie Barrier Williams? Did they read essays and articles? What did they think about their philosophies?

<sup>571</sup> Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams : Crossing the Borders of Region and Race*, 176.

The writings of Elise McDougald<sup>572</sup> and Amy Jacques Garvey in the mid-1920s suggest that African American female activists kept conceptualizing the notion of “modern woman”, discussed “woman’s sphere” and gender roles and were influenced by the ideas developed by clubwomen active one generation earlier between the 1860s and the early 1920s<sup>573</sup>. For example, in “The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation” (March 1925), McDougald stated a resolutely feminist view. She addressed the way women of African descent were denied “what [was] left of chivalry” and were ridiculed in America through the “grotesque Aunt Jemimas of the street-car advertisements”, deploring the fact that “ideals of beauty, built up in the fine arts, exclude[d] her almost entirely”<sup>574</sup>. As Cooper, Williams, Terrell and many others had done at the turn of the century, McDougald denied the accusations of immorality against black women. To those who asserted that the black woman “ha[d] been more immoral than other groups of women”, she replied: “This I deny. This is the sort of criticism which predicates of one race, to its detriment, that which is common to all races. Sex irregularities are not a matter of race, but of socio-economic conditions. Research shows that most of the African tribes from which the Negro sprang have strict codes for sex relations. There is no proof of inherent weakness in the ethnic group”<sup>575</sup>.

The same year, Amy Garvey was similarly inspired by early feminists such as Anna Cooper and other women in this study. In “Women as Leaders” (1925), using the rhetoric used by the members of the NACW in the 1890s, Garvey initially appears as conservative, stressing mothers’ important social roles, the way Terrell had done at the head of the NACW in 1896-1900: “Many a man has risen from the depths of poverty and obscurity and made his mark in life because of the advice and counsels of a good mother whose influence guided his footsteps throughout his life”. She also used phrases which are reminiscent of Anna Cooper’s essay entitled “Womanhood” (1886): “Do [women] not mold the minds of their children the future men and women? [...] Imagine the early years of contact between mother and child,

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<sup>572</sup> Elise Johnson McDougald (1885-1971) was an African American educator, writer and activist from New York City.

<sup>573</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, “Women as Leaders”, 1925, as cited in *Words of Fire*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 93-94. Garvey stated very modern views as regards women.

<sup>574</sup> Elise Johnson McDougald, “The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation,” as cited in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed., Beverly Guy-Sheftall, (The New Press, New York, 1995), 80-83, 80. She also contended: “We find the Negro woman, figuratively struck in the face daily by contempt from the world about her. Within her soul, she knows little of peace and happiness. But through it all, she is courageously standing erect, developing within herself the moral strength to rise above and conquer false attitudes”, 83.

<sup>575</sup> Elise Johnson McDougald, “The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation”, 81.

when she directs his form of speech, and is responsible for his conduct and deportment”<sup>576</sup>. Nevertheless, Garvey praised the advent of the modern woman in 1925, rejoicing in the fact that her sphere was expanding beyond the walls of home:

No line of endeavor remains closed for long to the modern woman. She agitates for equal opportunities and gets them; she makes good on the job and gains the respect of men who heretofore opposed her. She prefers to be a bread-winner than a half-starved wife at home. She is not afraid of hard work, and by being independent she gets more out of the present-day husband than her grand-mother did in the good old days<sup>577</sup>.

To those who conveyed images of “mannish women” in the 1920s, Garvey replied – the way Josephine Turpin Washington had done in the mid-1880s – that women could enter both spheres while remaining feminine:

Some men may argue that the home will be broken up and women will become coarse and lose their gentle appeal. We do not think so, because everything can be done with moderation [...] The doll-baby type of woman is a thing of the past, and the wide-awake woman is forging ahead prepared for all emergencies, and ready to answer any call, even if it be to face the cannons on the battlefield<sup>578</sup>.

It would be interesting to examine more deeply the way the following generation of black female activists – active in the late 1920s up until the 1950s – defined the roles of African American women in the community and to analyze the similarities and differences with the philosophies of the women in this work. Studying the life, work and philosophy of Elise McDougald and other activists of her generation, for instance, would offer fascinating perspectives on the intellectual philosophy of African American activists in America.

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<sup>576</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, “Women as Leaders”, 93. See Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood”, 1886, in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, 59.

<sup>577</sup> Amy Jacques Garvey, “Women as Leaders”, 93.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 94. Like Anna Cooper in “The Status of Woman” (1892), Garvey chastised black men for their passivity and lack of solidarity toward women of their community: “Black men are less appreciative of their women than white men [...] We are tired of hearing Negro men say, ‘There is a better day coming,’ while they do nothing to usher in the day.”, and even accused black men of being “halting [and] cowardly”.



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# Appendices

## Photographies of Several Women in this Study, in Alphabetical Order

The photographs of Kate Drumgoold (ca. 1858?-1898), Elise Johnson McDougald (1885-1971), Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (1842-1924), Elizabeth Johnson Harris (1867-1923), Jane Edna Hunter (1882-1971), and Mamie Garvin Fields (1888-1987) could not be inserted because they are protected by copyright law.



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Bethune, Mary McLeod (1875-1955)



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Cooper, Anna Julia Haywood (1858-1964)





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Coppin, Fannie Jackson (1837-1913)



E. AZALIA HACKLEY

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Hackley, Emma Azalia (1867-1922)



Public domain. Maritcha as a young girl. (probably in the 1850s)

Lyons, Maritcha Remond (1848-1929)



Circa 190. Public domain.

Lyons, Maritcha Remond (1848-1929)





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Mossell, Gertrude E.H. Bustill (1855-1948)



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Taylor, Susie King (1848-1912)





Mary Church Terrell Photographs, courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-54722.

Terrell, Mary Church (1863-1954)



Circa 1935.

Scurlock Studios. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History.

Terrell, Mary Church (1863-1954)



Circa 1915. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Washington, Margaret Murray (1865-1925)





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Photograph taken in the late 1890s.

Wells-Barnett, Ida B. (1862-1931)

[601]



Public domain

Williams, Fannie Barrier (1855-1944)



Circa 1902. Author unknown.

From the Project Gutenberg archives.

Yates, Josephine Silone (1852-1912)



## Brief Biographical Sketches

### Fannie Barrier Williams (1855-1944)

- 1855: Born in Brockport, New York State. Has one brother, George A. Barrier (1850-1907) and one sister, Ella D. Barrier (1852-1945). Studies in Brockport.
- 1870-1885: Works as a teacher in Missouri and then in the Washington D.C. area. Meets Samuel Laing Williams, a southern-born young man who studies Law at Columbian University.
- 1887: Marries S. Laing Williams in Brockport, New York.
- 1887: Settles down in Chicago, Illinois. Husband starts a career as a lawyer.
- Late 1880s-1900s: The Williams are leaders of the African American community. Husband founds the Prudence Crandall Study Club. The Williams join All Souls (a Unitarian Church). Befriends Celia Parker Wooley – white –, who becomes her best friend.
- 1890s-1900s: Is a member of several women's clubs in Chicago. Writes numerous articles, in particular about women's rights.
- 1900: Publishes *The New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-To-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race*, eds. Booker T. Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams and Norman Barton (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900), with her friend Booker T. Washington.
- 1893: Is a member of the National League of Colored Women, and of the National Association of Colored Women (1896).
- 1890s: Is a regular contributor to the *Woman's Era*.
- 1900: Attends the Pan-African Congress in London with Anna Julia Cooper.
- 1900s: Fannie, S. Laing Williams, Celia Parker Wooley and Ida B. Wells-Barnett found the Frederick Douglass Center.
- 1907: Sudden death of her brother Thomas.
- 1909: Accidental death of her nephew Robert Barrier (1888?-1909). Deeply saddened by these untimely deaths.
- 1911: Travels in Toronto, Canada, with her sister Ella D. Barrier, a schoolteacher, clubwoman and activist.

- 1918: Death of her best friend Celia Parker Wooley.
- 1921: Death of her Husband.
- 1926: Withdraws from public life and settles down in her native city, Brockport, New York, with her sister Ella.
- Dies in 1944. Her sister Ella dies one year later, in 1945. Buried in Brockport, New York.

### **Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964)**

- 10 August 1858: Born in Raleigh, North Carolina, to a white father, and Hannah Stanley Haywood, an African American domestic worker. Has two brothers, named Rufus and Andrew.
- 1868-1873: Studies at Saint Augustine College, North Carolina. Teaches at an early age.
- 21 June 1877: Marries George A. Christopher Cooper, an Episcopalian priest, who dies two years later.
- 1881: Begins her studies at Oberlin College in Ohio.
- Obtains her Bachelor's Degree in 1884 and her Master's Degree in 1887.
- 1884-1885: Teaches at Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio. Meets Bishop Benjamin William Arnett, who later helps her publish a collection of essays entitled *A Voice from The South by A Black Woman of the South* (1892).
- 1886: Starts writing and giving conferences in churches. Writes “: “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race”.
- 1892: Publishes *A Voice from The South by A Black Woman of the South*.
- 1887-1902: Teaches at M. Street High School, in the Washington D.C. school public system.
- 1894: Co-founds the Colored Women's League, in Washington D.C..
- 1900: Attends the Pan-African Congress with Fannie Barrier Williams in London.
- 1901: Appointed principal of M. Street High School.
- 1906: Controversy over “classical” versus “vocational” education. Dismissed by William E. Chancellor.
- 1906-1910: Teaches at Lincoln University in Missouri, as a Professor of Foreign Languages.
- 1911: Returns to M. Street High School in Washington D.C..
- 1910s: Raises the five children of her nephew John R. Haywood: Regia, John, Andrew, Marion, and Annie.
- Summer 1911: Studies in Paris, France at “La guilde internationale” with Professor Paul Privat Deschanel.

- 1914: Begins doctoral studies at Columbia University, in New York, but must change her plans because of her inability to satisfy the one-year-residency requirement.
- Publishes her thesis written at Columbia University: *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne: Voyage à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*.
- Summer 1919: Works at War Camp in Indianapolis.
- 1924: Obtains her PhD at the University of La Sorbonne, being the fourth African American woman to earn a Doctorate. Title of her dissertation written in French: “L’attitude de la France à l’égard de l’esclavage pendant la Révolution”.
- 1930: Retires from M. Street High School, now called Paul Dunbar High School.
- 1930-1941: Works as an instructor and president of Frelinghuysen University in Washington D.C., founded by Dr. Jesse Lawson and his wife Rosetta E. Lawson in 1906.
- 1945?: Publishes *The Third Step*.
- 1951: Publishes *Personal Recollections of the Grimké Family*.
- 1958: Celebrates her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday
- 27 February 1964: Dies in Washington D.C.. Buried in Raleigh, North Carolina.

### **Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)**

- 16 July 1862: Born in Holly Springs, Mississippi.
- 1878: Parents die in the yellow fever epidemic. Helps raise her siblings.
- 1880s: Works as a schoolteacher.
- 1885-1887: Keeps a diary.
- Late 1880s-1890s: Publishes articles in the *Memphis New Speech and Headlight*, defends the cause of black southern women in her articles.
- 1890s: Launches her struggle against lynching after the death of her friend Thomas Moss (1892).
- 1892: Publishes *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All of Its Phases*. (The New York Age Print, 1892).
- 5 October 1892: Victoria Earle Matthews and Maritcha Lyons organize a “Testimonial Reception Committee” in her honor at the New York Lyric Hall.
- 1893: Founds the Ida B. Wells Club in Chicago, Illinois.
- 1893: Tours England to raise public awareness about lynching in the United States.
- 1893: Protests against the exclusion of African American from exhibits at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Meets Ferdinand Barnett.
- March 1894: Second trip in England. 12 March 1894: Delivers a speech in Liverpool. Then returns to the United States.
- 27 June 1895: Marries Ferdinand Barnett, a lawyer and editor. Settles down in Chicago. Becomes editor in chief of the newspaper *The Conservator* (a newspaper active until 1914).
- 1895: Publishes *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States (1892 - 1893 – 1894)*, a statistical compilation of lynchings.
- From 1895 onwards: Raises two children (Ferdinand Lee Barnett Jr. and Albert Graham) her husband had with his first wife.
- Between 1896 and 1904: Gives birth to four children.
- 1896: Birth of her son Charles Aked.
- 1897: Birth of Herman Kohlsatt. Announces that she withdraws from public life, but continues her struggle in favor of African Americans’ rights.

- 1901: Birth of Ida B. Wells Junior.
- 1904: Birth of Alfreda.
- 1909: Helps found the NAACP, but later withdraws from it.
- 1910: Founds the Negro Fellowship League.
- 1913: Founds the Chicago's Alpha Suffrage Club.
- 1924: Runs for the presidency of the NACW but loses to Mary McLeod Bethune.
- 1928-1930: Writes her autobiography.
- 1930: Keeps a short diary.
- 1929-1930: Runs for public office in the State Senate (Illinois) as an Independent candidate but is defeated.
- 25 March 1931: Dies of kidney disease in Chicago, Illinois, at the age of 66.
- 1936: Husband Ferdinand Lee Barnett dies.
- 1970: Her daughter Alfreda Barnett Duster finally manages to publish her mother's memoir entitled *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, after decades of struggle.



### **Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954)**

- 23 September 1863 : Born in Memphis, Tennessee. Has a brother, Thomas Church (1867-1937). Parents soon separate.
- 1869: Leaves the South to study in Ohio.
- 1884: Obtains her Bachelor's Degree from Oberlin College.
- 1885: Works as an instructor at Wilberforce University in Ohio, against her father's will.
- 1886-1887: Teaches at M. Street High School in Washington D.C.. Meets Robert Heberton Terrell.
- 1888: Obtains a Master's Degree from Oberlin College.
- 1888-1890: Travels in Europe (France, Switzerland, Germany and Italy) and completes her studies to speak French and German fluently. January 1890: Goes back to the United States.
- 18 October 1891: Marries Robert Terrell in her hometown, Memphis, Tennessee. Settles down in Washington D.C..
- 1890s: Gives birth to several children. Only one daughter, Phyllis, survives. (Born 1898).
- 1890s- Until 1906: Works at the Board of Education of Washington D.C..
- Circa 1901: Adopts her niece Mary.
- 1896: Helps found the "National Association of Colored Women".
- 1896-1900: Serves as the first president of the NACW. Encourages the creation of kindergartens.
- 1896-1911: Her mother Louisa Ayers Church lives with her and her family in the nation's capital.
- 1900s: Regularly publishes articles to struggle against racial discrimination and for women's rights, sometimes using the penname "Euphemia Kirk".
- 1904: Attends the International Congress of Women in Berlin and delivers her address in German.
- 1911: Death of her mother Louisa Ayers Church.
- 29 August 1912: Death of her father Robert Church, at the age of 73.

- 1913: Attempts to enroll her daughters at her Alma Mater, Oberlin College.
- 1919-1920: Travels in France and witnesses the extent of the devastation.
- Late 1920s: Begins writing her memoirs. Writes and rewrites for ten years.
- 1938: Completes her manuscript.
- 1940: Publishes her autobiography *A Colored Woman in a White World*. (London: G.K. & Co, 1996), at age 77.
- 1954: Witnesses Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision.
- 24 July 1954: Dies at her home in Highland Beach, Maryland, at age ninety.

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