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“FROM THE TUB TO THE CLUB:” BLACK WOMEN  
AND ACTIVISM IN THE MIDWEST, 1890-1920

by

Denise Lynn Pate Spruill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy  
degree in History in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Leslie Schwalm

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Graduate College  
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Iowa City, Iowa

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PH.D. THESIS

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To the memory of my father  
Gerald Ray Pate

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the activism of African-American club women in Iowa during the early twentieth century. As early as 1891, prior to the founding of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACW) in 1896 and Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs (IACW) in 1902, black women met in various cities throughout the state to discuss the need for education within the black community, proper etiquette for young women, current events, arts and culture, while planning community service activities. In the upper Midwest, clubs and early community activism served as a conduit for black women, providing a venue for them to hone their organizational skills, create networks, recruit members and develop programs to aid in racial uplift, increasing their authority and power as women in their communities. Through education, health, and welfare reform, club women created new forms of citizenship as they tried to make the needs of black Iowans a legitimate political concern for the state. Significantly, this occurred prior to and laid the ground work for the organization of regional branches of the Afro-American Council and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). My dissertation will show that the independent activism and organizing of black Iowa club women gave them the ability to influence other national organizations where women's leadership was suppressed. In 1917, the United States War Department named Fort Des Moines, located on the outskirts of Des Moines, Iowa, as the first World War I training camp for black officers in the country. Working with 1200 black servicemen and their migrant families, local African-American women harnessed both club and organizational capabilities to perform some of the most hands on war work in the United States, creating black "Company Mother's" groups and Red Cross auxiliaries.



My research shows that African-American women in Iowa had greater access to state NAACP leadership positions than their sisters in larger urban areas throughout the country. From 1915-1920, black women injected local goals and objectives into the agendas of NAACP branches throughout the state. Exploring the impact of race, class, gender and migration on African-Americans in the Midwest, my dissertation will challenge historians to rethink how they frame their approach to black women's activism by demonstrating the centrality of region to the history of African-American women's leadership and race work.

This dissertation is a social cultural history that draws upon the activism of individuals and organizational histories. A great challenge was piecing together the history of the eight clubs that existed 1891-1902, prior to the IACW. These clubs do not have any archived sources. I layered information found in issues of the *Iowa Bystander* from 1896 to 1902 with extensive research in national and state census data to better understand the lives of these women, who were also wives, mothers, and migrants. After the founding of the IACW in 1902, published primary material (annual meeting minutes, newspapers, bulletins, speeches) allowed me to recreate the conversations within African-American communities, as well as the dialogue between whites and blacks. I used the papers and national records of the IACW, NACW, and NAACP to identify club members as well as agendas, goals, outreach and fundraising efforts of various organizations, offering national and regional perspectives of the challenges faced by club women, while providing insight to conversations and concerns from the national to state level.

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

African-American club women have been active in Iowa since 1891. My dissertation argues that the independent activism and organizing of black Iowa club women gave them the ability to influence other national organizations where women's leadership was suppressed. In their clubs, black women considered issues of literacy, racial uplift, education, social welfare, and womanhood in black homes across the state. This grass-roots community-based organizing provided an opportunity for black women to focus on self-help or other goals of organizing apart from male-led denominational work. This dissertation brings a new regional focus to the literature on women's activism by introducing both prominent and ordinary African-American women race workers in Iowa.

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## Introduction

African-American women created clubs to improve social, political and economic conditions for black people in Iowa 1890-1920. These early “race workers” established clubs in towns and cities throughout Iowa where they discussed the need for education within the black community, proper etiquette for aspiring young women, current events, and culture, all while planning community service activities.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation examines the literary, social and political activism of African-American club women in Iowa from 1890-1920, chronicling their evolution into the Iowa Association of Colored Women in 1902, and their accumulated experience and knowledge as community organizers. By examining the unique structures those early club women created prior to 1902, this study reveals that prior to creating the larger state organization, local Iowa black women had been actively developing strategies and initiatives to challenge social and political oppressions fueled by racism. In addition, by exploring the “race uplift” efforts of Iowa African-American club women and activists through the lens of female goals and ideologies, this project traces their path to leadership positions in twentieth century male-led organizations, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Women’s activism in Iowa during this era built on a long history of race work efforts by African Americans who fought to transform American society by becoming leaders on issues of slavery, abolition, war, and women’s rights in the 1830s.<sup>2</sup> My project explores why, in a later time period, in a state with a relatively small black population, black women played key roles in

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<sup>1</sup> The term “race work” refers to the individual and/or collective efforts by African Americans to close social, political, and economic gaps between the races, while elevating the black race. I employ the term “race worker” or “activist” to refer to a person(s) who’s commitment to the African-American race is seen in their contributions and commitment to the community

<sup>2</sup> Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Women Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2-3.

fighting racism, discrimination, lynching, and in supporting wartime participation. In Iowa, clubs and early community activism served as a conduit for black women, providing a venue for them to hone their organizational skills, construct networks, recruit members and develop programs to aid in racial uplift, increasing their authority and power in their communities. Significantly, black women participated in race work prior to the organization of male-led regional branches of the Afro-American Council (AAC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This dissertation will demonstrate not only the extent of African-American women's activism but their achievements in injecting local goals and objectives into the veins of branch operations in Iowa. Finally, my research demonstrates that by molding national initiatives and fashioning new ideas to fit the needs of their communities, black women had greater access to state leadership positions than their sisters in larger urban areas throughout the country. This was true in the NAACP and other traditionally male-led early 20<sup>th</sup> century social, political, and civil rights organizations.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation brings a new regional focus to the literature on women's activism by introducing both prominent and ordinary African-American women race workers in Iowa. Current scholarship has neglected these Midwestern women, instead focusing on black female organizers in larger urban areas. For example, research on black communities in New York, Detroit, Boston, Washington, D.C. and Chicago has provided a homogeneous view of black women's activism, insinuating that the intersections of race, class, and gender in race activism were not only limited to large urban communities, but also the same in all African-American communities across the country, despite the different demographics in each location. This

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Black Professional Leadership, 1910-1966*. (Bloomington Press: Indiana University Press, 1997), 69. Reed argues that women had a limited voice in the Chicago NAACP, stating that no women served on the Executive Committee until 1925 or as Branch President until 1954.



scholarship often tells the story of female agency based upon the lives of a few prominent women from these large cities, implying that black women were more likely to be active only in cities with sizeable African-American populations.<sup>4</sup> By exploring the impact of race, class, gender and migration on African-Americans in Iowa, this dissertation challenges historians to rethink how they frame their approach to black women's activism by demonstrating the centrality of region to the history of African-American women's leadership and race work.

The long history of African American race work, which became widely practiced in the 1830s, is critical to this project because it reveals the continuity of black women's involvement in uplift efforts.<sup>5</sup> My research directly connects black women from Iowa to the larger historiographies on African American and women's activism by placing them at the center of the story, showing how traditions of race work manifested in the upper Midwest. The years 1890-1920 encompass the evolution of women's race work from their post-Reconstruction clubs that led to federated organizations, and the founding of national uplift groups, to leadership roles in the Des Moines branch of the NAACP branch presidencies. Scholars argue that the concept of racial uplift or self-help ideology, was a middle-class response to being condemned by whites for behavior of working-class blacks. During the antebellum period, African Americans worked to destroy slavery by joining and leading abolition organizations, speaking publicly, creating a Black press and by building their own social and religious institutions in response to the law and practice of racial exclusion and segregation by northern and southern whites. After

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<sup>4</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). See Wanda Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Clubwomen in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Patricia Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2001); Lee Sartian, *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Jones, *All Bound Up Together*, 8-9.

Reconstruction, African Americans found the civil rights they had gained through post-war political reforms eroded by increasingly racist policies, violence, and Supreme Court rulings. The withdrawal of federal troops from the South led to the disfranchisement and segregation of blacks throughout the entire United States. Male leaders in the North and South created organizations to fight increasing racism, segregation, and violence, often (although not always) prohibiting women from participation in formal meetings.<sup>6</sup> Women responded to growing violence by creating and strengthening their own clubs and societies, which later became federated as a nationwide network.

The Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs (IACW) has been the focus of several essays. However, previous authors have passed over the existence of organized women's groups prior to 1902, instead crediting the IACW as the beginning of black women's collective activism in the state. Chapter One reveals the origins of the activism sparked by eight clubs in Des Moines, Davenport, Ottumwa, Muchakinoch, and Muscatine from 1891-1901 demonstrating that prior to the development of IACW, Iowa women were already busy race workers.<sup>7</sup> Instead of initiating a new agenda, the IACW continued the efforts of these early trailblazers. Exploring the transition from black women's early race work to their federated work in Iowa reveals a "continual process" of training generations of twentieth-century women leaders.<sup>8</sup> Even more,

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<sup>6</sup> Works by Emma Lou Thornbrough about the legacy of the Nation Afro-American League offers little insight into the influence of women on the male organization led by T. Thomas Fortune and Booker T. Washington. See "The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908," *Journal of Southern History*, 27, no.4 (1961): 494-512. Similarly, later works by Elliott Rudwick on the Niagara Movement, and Eugene Levy's work on the NAACP relegates the role of women to the periphery. See Rudwick's "The Niagara Movement" in the *Journal of Negro History*, 42, no. 3 (1957): 177-200. See Levy's "James Weldon Johnson and the Development of the NAACP" in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982): 85-103.

<sup>7</sup> The words "racial uplift" are used throughout this research to encompass all tactics of race work used by African Americans to close social, political, and economic gaps between the races.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture 1830-1900*, 9. Jones has recently argued that the late nineteenth century uplift efforts by black women is best understood as a continual process that spanned generations.

literacy was the unifying thread of these early groups. Whether in name, practice, or both, early Iowa African-American club women centered much of their work and fellowship on adult literacy skills. My research grows preceding research, bringing to light the literary experiences and practices that later fueled the creation and publication of club constitutions and by-laws, histories, biographies, articles, minutes and pamphlets of the IACW.<sup>9</sup>

Although “race work” evolved during the early nineteenth century, the desire to close social, political, and economic gaps between the races consistently fueled the efforts of African-American activists across the country.<sup>10</sup> When black elites created and articulated race goals for all African Americans, class lines were quickly established. In search of what scholar Michele Mitchell calls “racial destiny,” after the Civil War participants in the black convention movement began proposing collective strategies of self-help, emphasizing dissemblance, respectability, and moralizing, with the hope of diminishing the barriers of white racism, thus opening doors to material and moral improvements for the race.<sup>11</sup> Chapter Two focuses on the women in the

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 19-20. McHenry has challenged historians to look at the long history of African-American literary groups and the large amounts of writing and publications they created. She and Victoria Matthews argue that black literary clubs are the base of the African-American women’s club movement. See also Matthews “The Value of Race Literature: An Address Delivered at the First Congress of Women of the United States, at Boston, Mass., July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1895.” *Massachusetts Review* 27 (Summer 1986): 169-91.

<sup>10</sup> Late nineteenth century scholarship on African-American history focused on the progress of blacks since the Civil War. Works by George Washington Williams and Booker T. Washington highlighted the ability for blacks to adjust, drawing attention to the growth and successes of the churches and an increased desire for education. Stressing the role of women in the household was often a secondary story to that of the increased success of black men. See William’s *History of the Negro Race in America 1619-1800*. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1883). See Washington’s *Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery*. ( New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1909). In 1899 W. E. B. DuBois called for talented blacks in Philadelphia to set better examples of the African-American race, while reaching out to provide means of “racial uplift” to the lower class. DuBois was providing a template for black improvement to communities throughout the country. See *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1899). See *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935). Kevin Gaines argues that the tactics of late 19<sup>th</sup> century “racial uplift ideologies” not only separated black communities but also transformed the tactics of struggle. See *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8-9.

Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle (1891-Des Moines) and the Ida B. Wells Reading Club (1895- Ottumwa). My research reveals that Iowa black club women were already supporting issues of racial uplift, education, health, education, and womanhood in black homes across the state, while creating their own spaces at the grassroots level prior to the creation of larger national and state groups. My dissertation shows that the activism and club work of women in Iowa during the 1890s can be seen as a direct extension of earlier nineteenth century efforts.

By late nineteenth century, the growing numbers of both black and white organizations led to the creation of state and national federations. Women actively made the decision to harness their collective political and social power to push a national agenda. The federation process unified women's clubs across the country, creating both national leadership and a national voice.<sup>12</sup> When the General Federation of Women's Clubs excluded African-American women in 1893, the National League of Colored Women and the National Federation of Afro-American Women united to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW hereafter) in 1896. With the motto, "Lifting as We Climb," this national organization united black women's clubs throughout the United States.<sup>13</sup> Endorsing the views of middle-class black women across the country who collectively embraced the ideology of racial uplift, the NACW bonded 5000 women in nationwide clubs.<sup>14</sup> From 1896-1933, the emphasis of this national group was on social morality, calling for the betterment of black households as a key to socio-

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the federation process for white women's clubs see Anne Freor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) and Karen Blair, *The Clubwomen as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Anne Beiser Allen, "Sowing Seeds of Kindness—and Change: A History of the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs," *Iowa Heritage* 1 (2002): 2-13. See Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women."

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (New York: G.K. Hall & CO., 1996), xv-xvii. Original edition written in 1933.

economic progress.<sup>15</sup> The federation movement provided direction, encouragement, and expert leadership for African-American women, while creating autonomous space for them to exercise their public authority and standing.<sup>16</sup>

Answering Stephanie Shaw's call for historians to formulate new interpretations of national black women's organizations, my research provides a "bottom up" interpretation, explaining how the agendas of local club women in Iowa impacted this era's three most important national civil rights organizations: the NACW, Afro-American Council (AAC), and NAACP. Chapter Three shifts the focal point of analysis to Midwestern cities, which were less urban and industrialized than major cities, the focus of Shaw's work. Looking at the more populated black communities in Iowa (Des Moines, Davenport, Ottumwa, and Buxton), this dissertation explores the gendered vision of upper Midwestern club women and how gender ideologies shaped how they assessed the needs of their communities.<sup>17</sup>

Focusing on the impact of Midwestern club women in larger organizations, including the NACW, AAC and the NAACP, this dissertation addresses a larger body of scholarship that ignores their momentous involvement in this region. In 1896, the NACW unified 5000 club women across the nation, yet scholarship by Elizabeth Lindsay Davis and Stephanie Shaw emphasize a national top down analysis of the organization, paying little attention to the impact of state and local chapter grassroots activism.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, my research focuses on how local

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>16</sup> Lerner, ed., *Black Women In White America: A Documentary History*, 437. See Jones' *All Bound Up Together*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Stephanie Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," *Journal of Women's History* 3:2 (Fall 1991), 11-25. The experiences of blacks in Iowa was not homogeneous. Those who migrated to the state for coal mining jobs in Muchakinock (1881-1900) and Buxton (1900-1925) often enjoyed the comforts of company built facilities like home, places of worship and recreation buildings. In Buxton, all men were apart of the union and interracial marriage was accepted unlike black men in Waterloo and Des Moines. Higher population of blacks in coal mining towns led to fewer battles with discrimination and racism than faced by blacks in other parts of the state.

<sup>18</sup> Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (New York: G.K. Hall & CO., 1996), xv-xvii. Original edition written in 1933. Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," 11-25.

and regional branches/clubs shaped the larger national organizations. It is impossible to fully understand national organizations without investigating branch offices in outlying areas, which influenced the parent group's direction.

Scholars have more recently begun to examine how the fascinating intersections between race, gender, and class impacted women's community activism. Eileen Boris argues that NACW members shared a "common heritage with the poor," claiming that all members were bound together by racism. Despite the shared bond, Boris finds that the forced closeness of "black classes" strained relationships between African-American women because of their varying views on the needs of their communities. She states that the class divide led to the development of "transformative education," programs developed specifically for "lower class" women. Club women created Mothers Clubs that focused on improving home life, thrift and cleanliness, while recognizing working mothers as worthy mothers. Strong mothers meant strong communities.<sup>19</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, however, has challenged this view of class, arguing that a desire for community survival led to a "communal consciousness" that blurred class lines, allowing women with "multiple principles" to fight struggles on multiple fronts.<sup>20</sup> In her research on African Americans in North Carolina, Glenda Gilmore not only looks at the agency of the "Best Men and Women" and the role of education in strengthening the black community, but also class lines.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, my examination in Chapter Four will expand on these analyses by investigating the impact of class on women's community activism, their goals, and their leadership in the

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<sup>19</sup> Eileen Boris, "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political'" in *Mothers of the New World* ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michael (New York: Routledge, 1993), 222-232. See Mitchell *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*, 96.

<sup>20</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "The Housewives' League of Detroit: Black Women and Economic Nationalism" in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, eds. Nancy Hewitt and Susan Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 223-241. Hine argues that the Great Depression was mentally more unbearable for African Americans because of the failure of short term post war gains that led to greater expectations for progress.

<sup>21</sup> Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*.

upper Midwest, inquiring if all Iowa female “uplifters” felt that the Victorian values of temperance, frugality, and hard work were mandatory goals of the “better class.”

One of the distinctive or unique developments Iowa activists confronted was the large numbers of black army trainees that entered the state to train at Fort Des Moines in 1917 and Camp Dodge in 1918.<sup>22</sup> Newer research by Nikki Brown emphasizes the national impact of World War I on African-American club women, who mobilized their communities on an unprecedented scale in support of the war effort.<sup>23</sup> Chapter Five explores how members of the IACW supported food conservation, the Red Cross, and other national and regional wartime initiatives.<sup>24</sup> This research will investigate how the arrival of large numbers of black soldiers impacted how both blacks and whites understood and responded to their presence.

This dissertation is a social cultural history that draws upon the activism of individuals and organizational histories. Focusing on the lives and struggles of the participants and observers of African American women’s activism in Iowa, this research highlights the goals and agendas specific to Iowa female agents of change, while comparing their efforts to those of other organizers regionally and nationally. A great challenge was piecing together the history of the eight clubs that existed 1891-1902, prior to the IACW. These clubs do not have any archived sources. By scouring every available issue of the *Iowa Bystander* from 1896 to 1902, I was able to reconstruct the work and activism of these early race workers through weekly club reports. I

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<sup>22</sup> Army training facilities at Fort Des Moines (1901) and Camp Dodge (1918) trained thousand of African Americans. Many soldiers and men who did not become candidates remained in Iowa. See Bill Silag, ed., *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa 1838-2000* (Des Moines, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Nikki Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women’s Activism from World War I to the New Deal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> “Reports of Clubs,” Proceedings of the Seventeenth Session, Des Moines, IA 1918, p. 15. Iowa Association of Colored Women Clubs, 1903-1920, IACWC.

layered this information with extensive research national and state census data to better understand the lives of these women, who were also wives, mothers, and migrants.

After the founding of the IACW in 1902, published primary material (annual meeting minutes, newspapers, bulletins, speeches) allowed me to recreate the conversations within African American communities, as well as the dialogue between whites and blacks. The Iowa Association of Colored Women Clubs papers (SHSI, Iowa City, Iowa) identified club members as well as agendas, goals, outreach and fundraising efforts of various organizations, while also revealing discussion of compliments and criticisms from the African American and local communities. Annual meeting minutes disclose the continued participation of women from the HBSRC and other early clubs, charting the careers of numerous club women who held both national and state positions in the NACW and other organizations. Annual state meeting minutes describe what black women throughout the state felt were the primary economic and racial concerns within their communities and what challenges they faced in implementing outreach.

National records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (Washington, DC) contain branch files of the IACW, offering national and regional perspectives of the challenges faced by club women, while providing insight to conversations and concerns from the national to state level. National records demonstrate how Iowa club women tailored national goals and programs to fit the needs of communities in both states. Iowa records highlight the national contributions of Iowans like Sue Brown, who served as the national Chairman of Social Sciences in 1915.

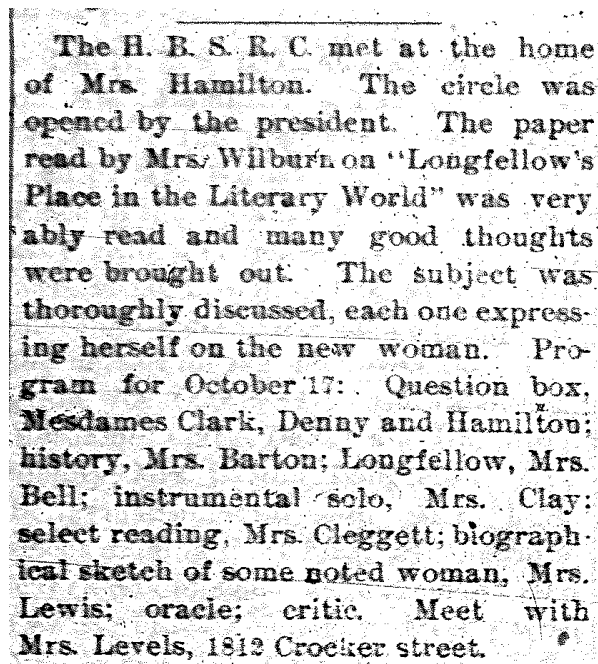
The papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the Library of Congress (Washington, DC) provide evidence of the interactions between local



women's clubs with a national organization, allowing a comparison between the initiatives and interactions of men and women in the community. Branch files and correspondence between state and national leaders Iowa reveal the active role of black women in the NAACP across the country, although their efforts rarely translated into leadership positions. Thus, national branch files are crucial to showing how Iowa NAACP Des Moines branch was the vanguard, allowing women to serve in positions of leadership before branches in other areas of the country. These records chart the careers of female branch founders Mrs. Jessye McClain (Secretary), Mrs. Sue Brown, Mrs. John L. Thompson, and Mrs. J. P. Hamilton, illuminating Brown's progression from executive board member in 1915 to her 1931 presidency of the DM-NAACP. Letters for the Des Moines Branch to the National office trace the increased emphasis throughout the state on education and youth outreach under the direction of black women.

By focusing on the time period between 1890-1920, this dissertation demonstrates that the vital contributions of black women to early twentieth century social, political, and civil rights organizations can be best understood by historicizing their activism in nineteenth century initiatives, relationships and responses to community challenges. While few scholars can deny the active role of black women in the efforts of racial uplift at the turn of the century, their work rarely evaluates how demographics contributed to the varied levels of racism these women faced in smaller cities or how and why location often offered greater autonomy for their groups. This dissertation reperiodizes women's activism, establishing that black club women and activists in the upper Midwest aggressively took actions to bring about change within their communities 1890-1920.

## Chapter One: The Origins of Black Women's Activism in Iowa, 1891-1902



The H. B. S. R. C. met at the home of Mrs. Hamilton. The circle was opened by the president. The paper read by Mrs. Wilburn on "Longfellow's Place in the Literary World" was very ably read and many good thoughts were brought out. The subject was thoroughly discussed, each one expressing herself on the new woman. Program for October 17: Question box, Mesdames Clark, Denny and Hamilton; history, Mrs. Barton; Longfellow, Mrs. Bell; instrumental solo, Mrs. Clay; select reading, Mrs. Cleggett; biographical sketch of some noted woman, Mrs. Lewis; oracle; critic. Meet with Mrs. Levels, 1812 Crocker street.

Figure 1. 1895 Meeting Announcement for the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle in Des Moines, Iowa, *Iowa Bystander* 11 October 1895.

African-American women began a women's club movement in Iowa late in the nineteenth century. The history of these organizers and their early clubs reveals two stages in Iowa black women's associational life: the creation of community-based and community-focused secular groups, followed by the drive to federate and embrace new state and national goals. Prior to the 1902 organization of a statewide federation, black women came together in local communities between 1891-1902 to establish eight different clubs in the cities of Des Moines, Davenport, Ottumwa, Muchakinock and Muscatine. In their clubs, black women considered local issues of literacy, racial uplift, education and womanhood in black homes across the state. This grassroots, community-based organizing provided a new opportunity for black women to focus on self-help and serve in leadership roles apart from male-led denominational

work. The emergence of Iowa's female-led secular clubs was not dependent on the large numbers of women found in more urban populations, but their success did require economic stability, availability and spousal support for club women's activism. While notably secular, club activism did not represent a complete shift away from church participation; instead, club organizing supplemented and strengthened women's religious and church activism. These groups provided training for a new cadre of female leadership, women who were public leaders in their own right rather than behind-the-scene supporters.

This chapter explores eight turn-of-the-century women's clubs, their membership, and the goals that these women developed. By looking at the personal, social and political concerns that galvanized these women, this chapter shows that Iowa black club women organized primarily around the challenges of migration and a low African-American population that never reached more than 1% in the state. Although the official records of the early eight clubs no longer exist, the importance of the clubs and the impact they had on local black communities and surrounding areas can be recreated by using over 400 club reports and meeting announcements published in the *Iowa State Bystander* between 1894 and 1902 (*Bystander* hereafter).<sup>25</sup> From the *Bystander's* regular notes of club activities we learn about the elected club officers, members and visitors, standing committees, literary and educational topics, historical interest and political concerns that united black women throughout Iowa.

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<sup>25</sup> Silag, ed., *Outside In*, 287-288. The *Bystander* – Iowa's African-American newspaper - began publication in June of 1894 in Des Moines. The ten owners of the new weekly were led by businessman William Coalson. In 1896 John Thompson became the editor, and under his leadership the paper hired reporters in major cities throughout Iowa and often included information from states throughout the country. See Sally Steves Cotton, "The Iowa Bystander: A History of the First 25 Years," MA Thesis, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1983. See Henry Lewis Suggs, *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865-1985* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 350, 352-254, 358. On the importance of the black press to African-American communities see Patrick Washburn, *The African-American Newspaper: Voices of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 25-27, 51. See Michael Fultz, "The Morning Cometh": African-American Periodicals, Education, and the Black Middle Class" in James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand ed. *Print Culture in a Diverse America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998). 129-135.

### ***The Foundations of Early Race Work***

The activism and club work by black women in Iowa is an unrecognized thread in the national history of race work. However, the race work by black women in Iowa changes our understanding of national history when we come to terms with the significant imperative to organize even in regions where black populations are small. The long history of African American uplift efforts, dating back to the 1830s, is critical to understanding the development of clubs in Iowa. Iowa women's efforts reveal a substantial history of black women's involvement in uplift work.<sup>26</sup> Race work, racial uplift, or self-help ideology challenging laws and practices of discrimination and denigrating representations, of African Americans, and advocating for self-improvement has existed since the early nineteenth century. During the antebellum period, northern African Americans worked to destroy slavery by joining and leading abolition organizations, speaking publicly, creating a Black press and by building their own religious networks in the North and South. As a small number of black elites created and articulated goals for the entire race, their leadership reflected and reinforced class differences in black communities. After Reconstruction, African Americans found the civil rights they had recently gained through post-war political reforms eroded by increasingly racist policies, violence, and Supreme Court rulings. While "race work" activism changed during the early nineteenth century, the desire to eliminate the obstacles in law and practice that created social, political, and economic gaps between the races consistently fueled the efforts of African-American activists

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<sup>26</sup> Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 8-9. See Wanda Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 130-131. See Michele Mitchell *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 12-13, 78-79.

across the country.<sup>27</sup> Privately, they increasingly began proposing different collective strategies of self-help by emphasizing dissemblance, respectability, and moralizing. After the Civil War, in search of what scholar Michele Mitchell calls “racial destiny,” blacks organized with the hope of diminishing the barriers of white racism and thereby opening doors to material and moral improvements for the race.<sup>28</sup>

Black women began asserting themselves on the national stage in the eighteenth century when they first established their own networks, founded self-help organizations, and made their mark on abolition. For example, The Benevolent Daughters, formed in Philadelphia in 1796, secured donations from more affluent blacks to dispense to widows and orphans in their communities. The significant increase in black women’s societies after 1830, which organized to increase support for churches, schools, and orphanages and to offer mutual aid, often included components of racial uplift, such as emphasizing education as a means to gaining greater

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<sup>27</sup> Late nineteenth century scholarship on African American history focused on the progress of blacks since the Civil War. Works by George Washington Williams and Booker T. Washington highlighted the ability for blacks to adjust, drawing attention to the growth and successes of the churches and an increased desire for education. Stressing the role of women in the household was often a secondary story to that of the increased success of black men. See Williams’ *History of the Negro Race in America 1619-1800*. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1883). See Washington’s *Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery*. (New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1909). In 1899, W. E. B. DuBois called for talented blacks in Philadelphia to set better examples of the African American race and to reach out to provide “racial uplift” to the lower class. DuBois provided a template for black improvement to communities throughout the country. See *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1899). See also *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1935). See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Gaines argues that the tactics of late 19<sup>th</sup> century “racial uplift ideologies” not only separated black communities, but they also transformed the tactics of struggle.

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8-9. See Elsa Barkley Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom” in *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* ed. By The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 141-142. See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) xiv, 89-90.

political access. By 1850, women were members of at least 200 black mutual aid societies operated in the country's major cities.<sup>29</sup>

When black men began volunteering for military service during the Civil War in 1861, and serving in 1863, black women quickly began organizing to support black regiments. Northern black women used their antislavery, social and civic groups to prepare food, sewing clothing and regimental flags. Leading speakers like Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth traveled, delivering speeches while raising money. However, thousands of ordinary black women worked as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and spies, some providing additional labor to dig ditches and other tasks when necessary. They provided much needed goods and services to large numbers of blacks who were migrating from the South to the North and arriving in cities both homeless and penniless. They taught literacy and industrial and economic practices to the former slaves, actively preparing them for life as free people. With the aid of their antebellum networks, they expanded the missions of older groups and created new organizations like the Contraband Relief Association to provide assistance to former slaves who had come to Washington, D.C.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1880s, African-American male leaders in the North and South created organizations to fight increasing racism, segregation, and violence. In 1889, prominent black editor T. Thomas Fortune organized over 100 black men and called a meeting in Chicago, IL to

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<sup>29</sup> Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 197. See Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 435. See Stephanie Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," *Journal of Women's History* 3 (1991): 11-25.

<sup>30</sup> Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 37-40, 51, 59, 66. See Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 34-55. See ed. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a brief discussion of the activities of Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Keckley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and others, see Dorothy Sterling's ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company).

create the National Afro-American League (AAL). This non-violent, non-partisan organization worked to reverse the failures of Reconstruction like the suppression of Southern voting rights, unequal distribution of public educational funds, the demoralizing penitentiary system, discriminatory treatment on public transportation, and unequal access to public accommodations in both the North and South. They also promoted anti-lynching legislation.<sup>31</sup> While black women were not formally invited to the 1889 Chicago meeting, by 1892, black Iowa men and women joined national efforts, forming AAL chapters in Des Moines and Muchakinock with members in Bloomfield, Colfax, Albia, Oskaloosa, Short Creek, Fairfield, and Colon by 1897.<sup>32</sup> Iowa club women's participation in chapters of the AAL and other male-led organizations prior to 1902 will be discussed in greater detail later in Chapter Two.

What prompted Iowa black women to organize in 1891? What challenges were they and their communities facing? Prior to the Civil War, although slavery was not legal in the state, blacks were held as slaves, faced discrimination, segregation, and disfranchisement. The 1839 Laws of the Territory of Iowa required all blacks who wanted to live in the area to register with the clerk's office and post a five-hundred-dollar bond to ensure good behavior, reflecting racist assumptions of likely criminal behavior and public dependency. Iowa laws barred blacks from voting, serving in the militia, and testifying in court cases concerning whites.<sup>33</sup> The 1840 census

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<sup>31</sup> Works by Emma Lou Thornbrough about the legacy of the National Afro-African American League offers little insight into the influence of women on the male organization led by T. Thomas Fortune and Booker T. Washington. See "The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908," *Journal of Southern History*, 27, no. 4 (1961): 494-512. Similarly, later works by Elliott Rudwick on the Niagara Movement, and Eugene Levy's work on the NAACP relegates the role of women to the periphery. See Rudwick's "The Niagara Movement" in the *Journal of Negro History*, 42, no. 3 (1957): 177-200; Levy's "James Weldon Johnson and the Development of the NAACP" in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 85-103.

<sup>32</sup> *Bystander*, 24 September 1897. The article "Afro-American League" reported the group was holding its Fifth Annual Meeting September 21-21, 1897 in Muchakinock, Iowa. *Bystander*, 1 October 1897, "Proceedings of the Afro-American League."

<sup>33</sup> Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro In Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1969), 8-9. Additional information on antebellum Black Iowans can also be found in James L. Hill, "Migration of Blacks to Iowa

reported that “188 Negroes” lived in the territory, sixteen of whom it listed as slaves.<sup>34</sup> On the eve of Civil War, the 1860 census reported just over one thousand black residents. Although state legislators approved a constitutional amendment granting black men the right to vote in 1868, African Americans were unable to hold public office or enjoy integrated schools or public accommodations.<sup>35</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the successes of Reconstruction waned, the status of African Americans in Iowa mirrored that of blacks across the country. Barred from access to civil institutions, black Iowans responded like blacks throughout the nation by creating their own spaces. In 1870, the number of black Iowans had increased dramatically, rising to 5,762. By 1890, the number of black residents had jumped to 10,685. Despite this growth, black Iowans still represented less than 1% of the state’s population. Many African-American workers and their families were drawn or recruited to Iowa by employment opportunities in coal mining, meatpacking, and steam boating. Some black women migrated to Iowa with white servicemen after the Civil War, to work as domestics or farm laborers. Scholars have demonstrated that black workers comprised three main categories during the late nineteenth century: small elite/professionals – physicians, lawyers, ministers, business owners; semi-skilled laborers, such as miners and dressmakers; and traditional service workers.<sup>36</sup> Despite varying levels of income, segregation meant that most of Iowa’s black residents lived in the same neighborhoods. As a result, they developed a “communal consciousness” even with important differences in

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1820-1960,” *Journal of Negro History*, (Winter 1981-1982): 289-303. See Leslie Schwalm’s *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 25-28. See Gabriel Victor Cools, “The Negro in Typical Communities of Iowa,” MA Thesis, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 1918.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 34. See James L. Hill’s, “Migration of Blacks to Iowa 1820-1960,” *Journal of Negro History*, (Winter 1981-1982): 289-303.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 219. See Leslie Schwalm’s discussion on Iowa African Americans being barred from industrial employment between 1865 and 1880 in *Emancipation Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 138. See Leslie Schwalm’s *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, p. 68.



backgrounds.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the state, black women countered racism and segregation by forming organizations that not only inspired the objectives of racial uplift, but also included efforts to strengthen black families.

Table 1. Early Eight Clubs and Their Communities

<b>Year Created</b>	<b>Club Name</b>	<b>City of Origin</b>	<b>Club Goal(s)</b>
1891	Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle	Des Moines, IA	Mutual improvement, charity, and creating a center of thought
1894	Silver Autumn Leaf Club	Davenport, IA	Literature
1895	Ida B. Wells Reading Club	Ottumwa, IA	Lifting as we climb
1897	Violet Reading Club	Davenport, IA	Higher standing intellectually
1900	Paul Laurence Dunbar Club	Muscatine, IA	For the betterment and co-operation among all women
1901	Toussaint L'Ouverture Club	Davenport, IA	Promote moral, literacy, and social evaluation
1901	Benevolent Club	Ottumwa, IA	Created to raise funds for Second Baptist Church in Ottumwa
Prior to 1902	Frances C. Williams Club	Muchakinock, IA	*Little is known about this club. Although listed in the 1903 Annual Meeting Minutes, it ceased to exist by 1905.

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<sup>37</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "The Housewives' League of Detroit: Black Women and Economic Nationalism" in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, eds. Nancy Hewitt and Susan Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 223-241.

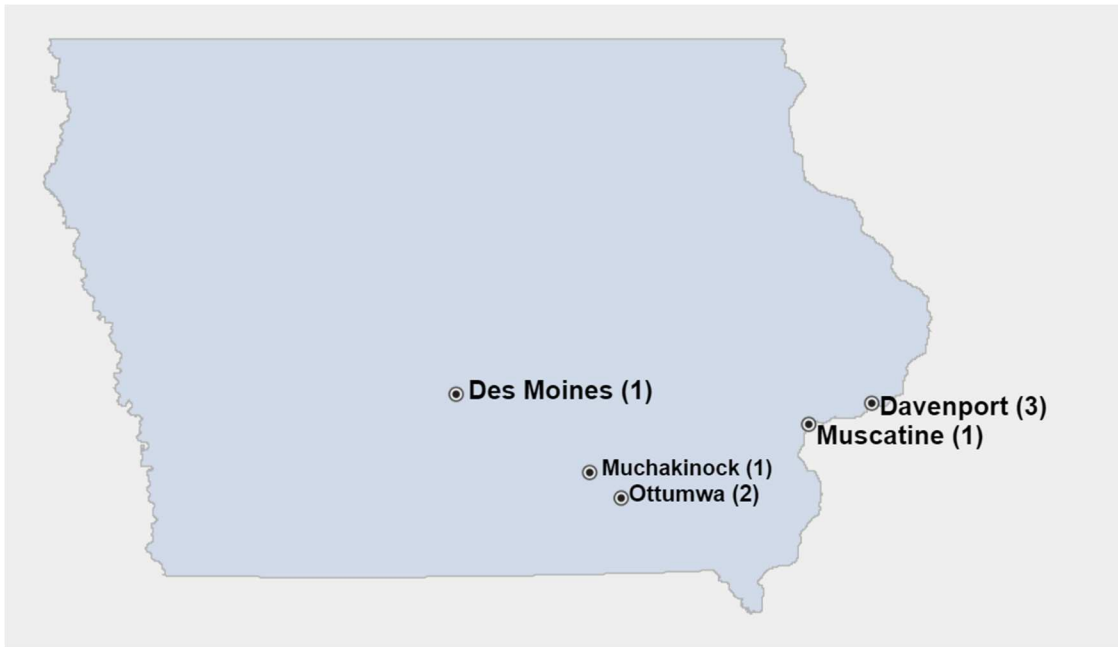


Figure 2. Map of Early Iowa Clubs

Migration is one of the most important aspects of the early black club movement in Iowa. Eighty-one percent of these early club women were migrants to Iowa, more than one-half coming from the South.<sup>38</sup> One explanation reflects the employment status and financial support offered by their husbands. Early black Iowa club women thrived in towns and cities that had established African-American communities tied to economic opportunities for black men. Thus, employment was a catalyst for residency and fueled the community group that powered organizing.

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<sup>38</sup> United States Federal Census. Iowa State Census.

Table 2. Place of Birth of Migrant Women

Place of birth	Number of Migrant Women
Alabama	1
Arkansas	2
Illinois	5
Indiana	2
Iowa	12
Kentucky	3
Michigan	2
Missouri	28
New York	1
Ohio	3
Pennsylvania	1
Virginia	3
Canada	1

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The steam boating industry drew southern migrants to work on the Mississippi River in Davenport and Muscatine, while Des Moines provided the greatest variety of labor and professional opportunities for African Americans in the state. Traveling from states in the midwest, south, and northeast, these black women uprooted themselves and their families in search of better opportunity and safety. Their nuclear families were at least temporarily cut off from larger kin networks – another impetus to come together. Research that looks specifically at the migration of black women to the Midwest often focuses on cities with the highest concentration of black people, like Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago in 1915 and beyond.<sup>40</sup> Future pioneers of the women's black club movement in Iowa moved to the state with their husbands; and, like other black women who decided to leave the South, they sought safety from violence and sexual exploitation along with greater autonomy, opportunity and pay. Migrant black women played a crucial role in not only creating clubs in Muchakinock, Des Moines,

<sup>39</sup> US Federal Census and Iowa State Census.

<sup>40</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945" in *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 87-88.

Ottumwa, Davenport and Muscatine, but also the construction of a support system of collaboration and institutions to uplift their race. In 1891-1902, HBSRC members and their spouses lived in a city that boasted the largest variety of job opportunities for black Iowans in the state.<sup>41</sup> A small influential group of men and women resided in the city, including “a physician, a lawyer, and four ministers,” along with small businessmen, a restaurant owner, [and] a rug-cleaning establishment manager. The majority of club HBSRC husbands were part of the larger pool of city workers and skilled, domestic, and industrial laborers. The occupations of twenty HBSRC husbands show that 40% were barbers.<sup>42</sup>

Table 3. HBSRC Husband Occupations

Barber	8
Conductor	1
Laborer	1
Foreman	2
Constable	1
Waiter	1
Janitor/Custodian	3
Porter	1
Fireman	1
Mail Carrier	1

<sup>41</sup> Bergmann, *The Negro In Iowa*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Bill Silag, ed., *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa 1838-2000* (Des Moines, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001), 219. For additional information on African Americans in Iowa in the nineteenth and early twentieth century see Bergmann’s, *The Negro In Iowa* and James L. Hill’s “Migration of Blacks to Iowa 1820-1960,” *Journal of Negro History* (Winter 1981-1982): 289-303. See Cools, “The Negro in Typical Communities of Iowa.” See Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 44-46. United States Federal Census. Iowa State Census.

In Davenport and Muscatine, African-American club women organized four clubs alongside a growing steamboat industry that drew black men and their families to Iowa's docks beside the Mississippi River: Silver Autumn Leaf (Davenport: 1894), Violet Reading Club (Davenport: 1897), Paul Laurence Dunbar Club (Muscatine, 1900), and Toussaint L'Ouverture Club (Davenport: 1901). Steamboat commerce began along the Mississippi River in the early 19th century, with the first vessel arriving in Davenport as early as 1835. By 1839, boats regularly stopped in Davenport and Muscatine carrying both passengers and mail.<sup>43</sup> The economy in both cities, tied up in steamboat-related trade and travel, meant the service sector was significant and provided employment opportunities even in the larger context of occupational segregation. Working as ratters, lighters, waiters, stewards, and cabin boys, black male workers could have nearly year-round employment, making steady wages in the 1890s. The steamboat industry also provided black women the opportunity to work as domestics, laundresses, cooks and housekeepers.<sup>44</sup> At the turn of the century, Muscatine County had a black population of 177 whose businesses and employment centered on the thriving steamboat industry.<sup>45</sup> Davenport, a major industrial hub of the "Tri-City" area, was a very attractive city to black migrants.<sup>46</sup> Between 1890 and 1900, the number of black residents nearly doubled to 496.<sup>47</sup> In both cities, at least half of all early club husbands held jobs that were directly connected to the steamboat industry, working in local hotels, restaurants or as laborers.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy Mahoney, *River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 112.

<sup>44</sup> Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 38. Silag, ed., *Outside In*, 219. Ratters caught and killed rats on the ships. Lighters moved cargo from the main boats to the shore in shallow waters. See Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 84-85.

<sup>45</sup> 1900 Iowa Census. See Bergman, *The Negro in Iowa*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the "Tri City" area consisted Davenport, Moline, IL and Rock Island, IL. See Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Silag, ed., *Outside In*, 233. US Census, Iowa Census. Local Davenport businesses that employed African-American men during the 1890s were: The Atlantic House, The Kimball House, The Windsor House, and the

In Ottumwa, black women created two clubs: the Ida B. Wells Reading Club (1895) and Benevolent Club (1901). From 1860-1925, Iowa was one of the nation's leaders in the preparation of beef and pork for human consumption. In 1890, Wapello County had 658 black residents. By 1900, African Americans were 13% of the Ottumwa-based John Morrell and Company's meatpacking workforce. Although strictly segregated, the meatpacking industry drew a significant number of black workers and their families. Black employees were often given the most dangerous and difficult jobs, primarily killing hogs until 1909. During the early trials of unionization, black workers were often recruited as strikebreakers. Enduring the physical and verbal battering from angry white workers, black laborers performed the most unskilled and hazardous jobs. Working long hours in the heat and stench of meat, they toiled as hog slackers and beef luggers, which often resulted in respiratory illness, lacerations and contusions.<sup>49</sup> The *Bystander's* occasional focus on the community in Ottumwa reports that meat packing employment was sporadic, offering at most three working days a week. Women and men in other industries (restaurants, barbers, hotel staff, blacksmiths, carpenters, etc.) had more stable employment. Street cars provided minimal transportation, as they ran only the "four points" of the compass. As a result, all workers made long walks between home and work. Editorials and articles recognized local black women for their prosperous groups, even while

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Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railway. US Census, Iowa Census 1900. A sample of thirteen husbands of the twenty-five married club women in Davenport reveals that one was a barber while twelve were employed at local hotels or restaurants as waiters, cooks, laborers, or porters. All four club husbands in Muscatine 1900-1902 were also employed; two laborers, one porter, and one chiropodist. A chiropodist is also known as a podiatrist, or foot doctor. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century podiatrists were independently licensed physicians. Although there is no evidence that club husbands worked at the Rock Island Arsenal, immigrants in the Davenport area also found employment there during the early twentieth century. Peaking and lulling with military activity, African-American men provided both unskilled and skilled labor, working as janitors or in the shops, foundry, and warehouses.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson J. Warren, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 23 and 50. See Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz's *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996) provides insight into the challenges faced by black Iowa meatpackers, focusing on employees at the Rath plant in Waterloo, IA. See Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 35; and Silag, ed. *Outside In*, 202, 214.

African-American men saw the demise of four secret societies. The city did have two African-American churches, an A.M.E Church and a Baptist church.<sup>50</sup> By 1897, employment opportunities in the meatpacking industry increased, with 200 black men out of 900 workers being employed in various departments.<sup>51</sup>

In Muchkinock, Iowa, members of the Frances C. Williams Club most likely came to Iowa because their husbands or fathers were recruited to the booming coal mining industry by the Iowa Central Coal Company (ICCC). In early 1880, white ICCC miners went on strike in response to changes in the wage structure, and the company responded by hiring seventy black men from Virginia as strike breakers. By the fall, 100 new black residents had arrived; a thriving racially diverse mining camp developed as miners sent for family members and friends back home. By the mid-1880s, Muchakinock was Iowa's largest unincorporated mining community, with black residents accounting for 83% of the population (1500 of 1800). Mining was extremely dangerous, but it offered independence to employees who worked their designated section of the mine with little to no supervision. Regarded as cheap labor by their employers, black miners nonetheless found economic opportunity in the work. Mining offered higher wages than service or farming jobs. Because of the large number of black residents in Muchakinock, African Americans did not suffer from segregation, violence, or disfranchisement that plagued other communities throughout the state and the nation. Since Muchakinock was not incorporated, it did not have a police force or elected officials; instead ICCC management appointed its own Constable and Justice of the Peace. Contrary to the rare election of African-American men to these positions in other Iowa communities, the ICCC appointed local black residents, placing qualified black men in positions of power regardless of race and politics. The

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<sup>50</sup> *Bystander*, 8 March 1896.

<sup>51</sup> *Bystander*, 25 June 1897.

black women who migrated to the area also benefited from the advantages of living in an integrated community, as they too gained leadership and organizing experience. They actively participated alongside black men in making decisions that affected their neighborhood. Often meeting at the community store during order days, black women gave advice to one another, debated current events, and planned women's gatherings. During the annual fair, club women displayed needlework and quilts.<sup>52</sup> Very little information is known about this club – it is not mentioned in any Muchakinock news reports. Although it is listed in the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Club's 1903 Annual Meeting Minutes, it ceased to exist by 1905; the history of the club and its members disappeared along with the coal mining camp.<sup>53</sup>

### ***The Impact of Migration on Early Iowa Clubs***

One of the most unique characteristics of the early Iowa black club movement was that it was populated by women who were first and second generation migrants to Iowa, and thus part of communities in-the making. Eighty-one percent of identified members of early clubs in 1891-1902 were women who migrated to Iowa. Even more, fifty-six percent of those women were born prior to the end of slavery in the United States. Depending on where they migrated from,

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<sup>52</sup> Pam Stek, "Muchakinock: African Americans and the Making of an Iowa Coal Town," *The Annals of Iowa* 1 (Winter 2009): 37-63. In 1881 white miners went on strike when new management of the ICC proposed a change to the wage structure from one based on total income from the sale to paying miners a fixed price of 69 cents for each ton of coal produced. See Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 141-142. See Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hraba, and Elmer Schwieder *Buxton: A Black Utopia in the Heartland* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003) for a detailed discussion of Muchakinock as the "historical antecedent" to Buxton, in Chapter 1, providing a brief discussion of black women's participation in church, education and lodge meetings. However, the Frances C. Williams Club is not mentioned. See Silag, *Outside In* 198-200, 222.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting," Davenport, Iowa 1903.



these women brought particular goals for their lives in the Midwest and in an organized women's movement.<sup>54</sup>

Nearly half (forty percent) of early Iowa black club women were born in the South during slavery, later migrating to Iowa. Black women from Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama left the South to achieve personal autonomy and escape sexual exploitation by black and white southern men.<sup>55</sup> Although they were leaving loved ones behind, none of these women migrated alone, all coming to Iowa with their parent(s) or a spouse. The largest number of early club women migrated from Missouri (43%), a former slave state along the southern border of Iowa. Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Missouri was settled by small slaveholding farmers and yeomen from the Upper South. Unlike large cotton plantations in the South, the state's economy was dominated by diverse agriculture and light industry led by slaveowners who owned few slaves. Different from the southern plantation system, scholars argue that slavery in Missouri was much more domestic, with white owners working alongside their property in the fields. Diane Mutti Burke argues that both climate and proximity to free states discouraged the migration of large planters. By 1860, 80% of Missouri slave owners owned fewer than twenty slaves, the majority held in central and western parts of the state on both sides of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. During the antebellum years, Missouri slaveowners feared losing their slaves to free states; however, after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, people in the bordering free states of Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas collected money for the capture and return of runaway slaves. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 sparked increasing flight of fugitive

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<sup>54</sup> Sixty-four early black Iowa club women have been identified from Des Moines, Ottumwa, Muscatine and Davenport. Fifty-two of these women (81%) migrated to Iowa. Thirty-six of these women (56%) were born in 1865 or before.

<sup>55</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in *The New African American Urban History*, ed. Kenneth Goings and Raymond Mohl. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication, 1996), 240-265.

slaves, especially after the Union Army began enlisting African-American soldiers in 1863. Missouri fugitive slaves filled the Union army's ranks in Kansas, Iowa, and Illinois. After the war, freed Missourians knew that violence and minimal job opportunities were a reality if they returned home, leading many to remain in Iowa, Kansas and Illinois when the regiments were mustered out after the war.<sup>56</sup>

It is no wonder that Ottumwa, the most southern club city during this period, had the highest number of club women from Missouri. Thirteen women from Missouri played an integral role in creating the Ida B. Wells Reading Club (1895) and the Benevolent Club (1901), constructing communal spaces of uplift for black women. Ten of these women were born 1848-1864, prior to the ending of the Civil War. The experiences of IBWRC members Susan Henderson and Viola Bradford offer two examples of migration from the deep south to Missouri, then to Iowa. Susan Henderson was born in Missouri in August 1862. Both her parents were born in Virginia and were likely sold to Missouri before her birth. She married Missourian John (or Jno) Henderson in 1875. John's parents were from Kentucky, and likely came to Missouri before he was born in 1854. The Hendersons moved to Ottumwa by 1883 when their first child, Blanche, was born. Their second child, Benjamin, was born in Ottumwa in 1885. Susan worked at home caring for their two children while John worked as a day laborer. In January 1895, Susan was the first treasurer of the IBWRC.<sup>57</sup> Susan worked alongside club member Viola Bradford in the IBWRC. Viola was born in Missouri in July 1862; her mother was a Missouri native, while her father was born in Virginia. At age twenty-four, Viola married her husband Alphonso, forty-

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<sup>56</sup> Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2010) 2-6, 19, 42, 96-97, 176, 181-182, 292, 303. See Schwalm's *Emancipation's Diaspora*, p. 66-69.

<sup>57</sup> 1885 Iowa Census. 1900 United States Federal Census. 1899-1900 Ottumwa City Directory, p. 133. *Bystander* 25 January 1895. Jno is a common abbreviation for Jonathon.

five years old. In 1896, the couple lived in Missouri with two children of their own, nine and five, and were caring for an infant nephew. Some time between 1896 and 1900, the family moved to Ottumwa. Viola worked as a washerwoman, and Alphonso was a day laborer. Interesting, census data reports that his father was from Ireland and his mother from Cuba. In 1900, Viola served as the History Teacher for the IBWRC, researching important topics and current events, presenting her research at club meetings.<sup>58</sup> Both of these women were born in Missouri during the Civil War to parents who were most likely slaves. Both women balanced marriage, family, and club work, thus helping create stability for their families while actively working to create stability for the black community in Ottumwa.

The experience for some early migrants from Missouri was “stepped,” their first stop in the North not their last.<sup>59</sup> Ada Gatewood Stewart was born in Missouri in 1858; however, by age 12 in 1870 (after the Civil War), she and her mother Amia Gatewood lived in Quincy, Illinois. A widow, Amia was born in Missouri in 1840 and was probably a slave. Unable to read or write, after moving to Illinois Amia worked as a washerwoman while Ada went to school. Ada married Charles Stewart, a Missouri native, in Illinois on July 7, 1875. By 1877 the three Missourians had left Illinois, and moved to Des Moines, Iowa where Stewart’s oldest child, Bessie, was born. By 1880, the young couple and Amia Gatewood lived on Sherman Street in Des Moines, with their two children Bessie (3) and Charles (1). Ada kept house, while Charles worked as a laborer. In 1891, black women in Des Moines came together, creating the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle. We know that the members of this club wanted to promote education and

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<sup>58</sup>*Bystander* 28 April 1899 reports Viola Bradford as History Teacher of the IBWRC. See 1895 Iowa Census. See the 1900 United States Federal Census. Ottumwa City Directory 1899-1900, p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945” in ed. Kenneth Goings and Raymond Mohl *The New African American Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), p. 240-265. See Anne Firor Scott “Most Invisible of All: Black Women’s Voluntary Association” in *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 56, Feb. 1990, p. 3-22.

charity work in their local community. By 1895 Ada was 37 and an active member in the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle, while Charles had improved his employment status; he now worked as a constable.<sup>60</sup>

The journey north for Mamie Hughes and her family touched Missouri, Tennessee, Kansas and Utah. Born in Missouri in September 1865 to parents from Tennessee and Mississippi, Mamie married Henry Hughes, a Tennessee native, in 1885. By 1886, the couple moved to Kansas where they lived for a decade, welcoming the birth of two children. In 1896 the family lived in Utah where their third child was born. By 1900 the Hughes family lived in Davenport, Iowa. The generational movement reflects the complex process of migration and the agency of black families determined to find better opportunities for their family. Living in Kansas 1886 to 1896, Mamie may have known about the Sierra Leone Club (1890s) in Lawrence or the Pierian (1894) book club in Kansas City, or witnessed the creation of the Kansas City League in 1893, a city league of club women that developed the first settlement house managed by black women in the state. In Utah 1896-1900, Mamie and her family lived in the new state, where black and white women had full suffrage in the former territory since 1890.<sup>61</sup> In Iowa Mamie stayed at home while Henry worked as a cook on a railroad dining car. Mamie managed marriage, motherhood, and housework while being an active member of the Davenport's Violet Reading Circle, hosting meetings and serving on the Educational Committee. By 1910 the

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<sup>60</sup> United States Federal Census 1870, 1880, 1885. 1895 Des Moines City Directory, p. 559. Illinois Marriage Records 1851-1900.

<sup>61</sup> Dorothea K. Williams, "Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women" 59-62. See Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 9.

family uprooted again, settling in Chicago where both Henry and their son Raymond worked for the railroad.<sup>62</sup>

Like Henderson, Bradford, Stewart, and Hughes, more than half of the early club women who migrated to Iowa were born in the South. Migrants from Kentucky, Arkansas, and Virginia were born in states that had some of the largest and most discriminatory peonage systems created by sharecropping.<sup>63</sup> Some of the women and their families who fled the South made their home in Muscatine, Iowa, working alongside members from Iowa and Illinois in the Paul Laurence Dunbar Club (PLD), founded for the betterment and cooperation among all women. In 1900, when the PLD was created, Virginia natives Mary and Edward Bains had been married nine years and were the parents of two young children. Living in Muscatine as early as 1897, the town offered the couple safety, job opportunity and education for the children. To make ends meet, the couple shared their home with as many as six boarders. Mary was elected PLD club president in early 1902, working at home while Edward worked as a laborer and porter at the Commercial Hotel.<sup>64</sup>

Arkansas native Fannie Grooms' life story is one of love, extended family, loss, perseverance and club work. Fannie was born in Arkansas in February 1862; both her parents were Arkansas natives, too. Fannie married Edward Grooms, a Kentucky native, in 1886. By 1900, Fannie and Edward lived with her brother and a boarder in Muscatine, Iowa in a home

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<sup>62</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census, 1910 United States Federal Census, *Bystander* 17 May 1901, Mamie hosted a Violet Reading Circle club meeting at her home.

<sup>63</sup> Gary Matthews, *More American than Southern: Kentucky, Slavery, and the War for an American Ideology, 1828-1861*. See Donald P. McNelly's *Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society, 1819-1861*. United States Census. Iowa State Census.

<sup>64</sup> 1900 Muscatine City Directory, p. 27. 1902 Muscatine City Directory, p. 46. 1900 and 1910 United States Federal Census. *Bystander* 28 February 1902 reported that Mary Bains was elected as President of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Club in Muscatine, Iowa. See Irving Berdine Richman's, *History of Muscatine County, Iowa: From the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time, Volume 1* (Muscatine County Iowa: S.J. Clark Publishing Company, 1911) p. 301-302 for a discussion of the Commercial Hotel.

owned by her mother Rosetta Watson on East 8<sup>th</sup> Street. During the early twentieth century, Edward worked as a porter while Fannie was a well-respected and leading member of the PLD, being nominated by club members to attend the 1902 statewide organizational meeting in Ottumwa where the IACWC was created. She was an active PLD and IACWC member during the first decade of the twentieth century. Sadly by 1910 Edward passed away and Fannie began to work as a “janitress” at the local courthouse for the next decade. By 1925 she owned her home on 8th Street free and clear, managing two boarders.<sup>65</sup>

Black women and their families who decided to leave the South sought decreased violence, increased autonomy -- having greater control over themselves and their family’s wellbeing -- increased job opportunities, and access to education. Pursuing change and prosperity did not mean they forgot where they came from. Black migrants brought their family histories, traditions, and values with them, southernizing Iowa. Their southern experience clearly influenced what they wanted their Iowa experience to be and how they created their club space within the state.<sup>66</sup>

Some migrants to Iowa came from cities and rural areas to the east. Seventeen percent of early club women made their way to Iowa from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York. These women were born in states that had significant free black populations during the antebellum period and where black women race workers were very active. Like her parents, Anna Hill was born in Pennsylvania in June 1857. During the antebellum period, Pennsylvania black women were very active race workers. Free black women like Sarah

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<sup>65</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census. 1910 United States Federal Census. 1920 United States Federal Census. 1902 Muscatine City Directory, p. 103. *Bystander* 9 May 1902.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham*, p. 7. See Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice* p. xix. See James L. Hill’s “Migration of Blacks to Iowa, 1820-1960”, *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 66, Issue 4, p. 289-303. See Hine “Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945” in Kenneth Goings and Raymond Mohl *The New African American Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 240-265.

Mapps Douglass and the Forten sisters – Sarah, Margareetta, and Harriet -- were very active in the Female Anti-Slavery Society and literary groups. Anna married Virginian Wood B. Hill in 1880 and the couple lived in Illinois where they had two children. Some time between 1884 and 1900, the family moved to Davenport, Iowa, living with Wood's brother. By the mid-1890s, Anna was Vice President of the Silver Autumn Leaf Club, Wood worked in a local restaurant while Anna worked at home. By 1910 Wood passed away, and Anna lived with her daughter and two boarders.<sup>67</sup>

Women from Illinois and Ohio peppered their way throughout Iowa black communities, leaving a significant imprint on the black club movement. Among them was Alice Phoenix, born in Minonk, Illinois in 1875. Her parents, James Phoenix and mother Eliza Smith were both Kentucky natives. Black women throughout Illinois were very active in clubs, organizations and mutual aid societies during the late nineteenth century. Near Minonk, members of the Peoria Woman's Club were among some of the earliest black women to join the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. By February 1902 Alice had migrated 146 miles to Muscatine, Iowa, serving as secretary of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Club. She was an active club woman before marrying Iowan Jeff Thompson in Muscatine in November 1902. Alice worked as a matron on the railroad, while Jeff as a janitor at the depot. The couple did not have children, often opening their home to extended family or boarders.<sup>68</sup> Ohio native Jamima Magill was born in 1864. Sometime between 1866 and 1870, her family moved to Galesburg, Illinois where her father

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<sup>67</sup> Davenport City Directory 1894-1895, p. 16. 1896-1897 Davenport City Directory, p. 224. 1900 United States Federal Census. 1910 United States Federal Census. *Bystander* 15 February 1895. See Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. VanHorne ed. *The Abolition Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 116-117. Regarding the Female Literary Association, see Marie J. Lindhorst, "Politics in a Box: Sarah Mapps Douglass and the Female Literary Association, 1831-1833," *Pennsylvania History* 65, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 263-78.

<sup>68</sup> Iowa Marriage Records. 1910 United States Federal Census. 1925 United States Federal Census. *Bystander* 28 February 1902.

Isaac, an Indiana native, worked as a brakeman or plasterer. Her mother Elizabeth, an Ohio native, worked at home attending to Jamima and her brother and sister. At age 25 she married Iowa native Charles Owens in 1892, the couple living in Ottumwa, Iowa. By the mid-1890s she was one of the earliest members of the Ida B. Wells Reading Circle. She stayed home while Charles worked various jobs as a butcher or janitor in the post office. Both Alice Thompson and Jamima Owens came of age in Illinois where black women like Fannie Barrier Williams and Ida B. Wells fought for greater social and political power throughout the state.<sup>69</sup>

African-American women born in Iowa were also present in every early club city. The activism of at least twelve women offer insight into the lives of black women living in Iowa prior to the twentieth century. Of the twelve natives, ten of these women were married, five had children, and only one appears to have worked outside of the home. Eight of these women lived in Ottumwa, seven were members of the IBWRC and one a member of the Benevolent Club. Emma Gardner's membership in Ottumwa's Benevolent Club (1901) provided a rare look this group's membership. Finding information on the group's earliest members in Ottumwa has been challenging. Emma Gardner was born in Iowa in 1871, her father from Missouri and her mother from Mississippi. Her parents migrated to Iowa some time before 1869 when her oldest brother Walter was born. Emma married Virginia native James Gardner on May 23, 1894 at age 23, and by 30 she was a founding member of the Benevolent Club (BC). Created to raise money for the Second Baptist Church, one could assume that the founders of the club were also members of the church. As a member of the BC, she would go on to be one of the earliest Iowa club women to

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<sup>69</sup> 1880 United States Federal Census. 1900 United States Federal Census. 1920 United States Federal Census. *Bystander* 28 February 1896. See Wanda Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013) and see Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).



hold state positions in the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs, serving as chairman of the Reciprocity Committee of the IACWC in 1905. Sadly, in 1910 at age 36, Emma was a widow-she and her fifteen-year-old daughter now living with her father and two older brothers. However, even during life's challenges she continued being active in the BC, serving as club president 1908-1909.<sup>70</sup>

Stella Davis's story is one of migration and extended family. Stella Mason was born in Iowa in September 1874. Her mother Delphia Mason was born in Indiana and her father was born in Ohio. Stella married John Davis in 1898. John was born in Kansas to parents from Virginia. By 1900, Stella, John, their three-month-old daughter Viola, her mother and a cousin from Missouri all lived together along with two boarders in Ottumwa, Iowa, where John worked as a janitor and hotel porter. By April 1899, Stella was elected secretary of the IBWRC at age 24.<sup>71</sup>

The White family's story provides a rare glimpse of not only migration but early inter-generational club work. Mary, an Arkansas native, married Missourian Forest White in 1887. Both were born on the eve of the Civil War in 1859. In Muscatine, Forest worked as a barber, while Mary stayed home with their two teenage daughters. In 1902 Mary and her oldest daughter Florence, 20, both held leadership positions in the PLD. Mary was elected Treasurer while Florence was elected Vice President and Musical Director.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 1905-1906 Ottumwa City Directory, p. 136. 1910 United States Federal Census. 1920 United States Federal Census. 1930 United States Federal Census.

<sup>71</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census. 1899-1900 *Ottumwa City Directory* p. 87 states that John and Stella Davis, janitor, 407 Milner, South Side. *Bystander* 28 April 1899 states Mrs. Stella Davis is elected secretary of the IBWRC.

<sup>72</sup> 1899 Muscatine City Directory, p. 224. 1900 Muscatine City Directory, p. 224. 1902 Muscatine City Directory, p. 217. 1900 United States Federal Census. 1910 United States Federal Census. 1920 United States Federal Census. By 1910, the Whites moved to Evanston, Illinois. By 1920 Florence had married Henry Powell, a railroad laborer, and they had three children. Florence and her family lived with her aging parents, and she did not work.

Francis Hamilton was born in Keosauqua, Iowa in about 1868. While Francis grew up in Ottumwa, her mother Jennie was an active member of the IBWRC. In November 1885, Francis married Henry Clay and ten years later the couple lived on Grand Avenue in Des Moines. Around the same time, she became a new member of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle. Surely, she watched and even participated in her mother's club activities as a child, as Ottumwa club women met frequently in the Hamilton home.<sup>73</sup>

Northern and midwestern migrants brought experiences and ideas about club work that they encountered in free states with them to Iowa. Unlike their southern sisters, these women came from states that had free black populations before the Civil War, where both race workers and abolitionists organized for change. Even if these women did not participate directly in their home states, they were able to see the positive results of organized group work. In Iowa during the 1890s, native and migrant black women united – each bringing with them their own experiences and ideas about what they wanted their communities to be. Empowered by their unity, early black women created spaces that led to greater influence and authority in their communities.<sup>74</sup>

### ***Wives and Mother Too***

Marriage is another key characteristic of the early black club movement in Iowa - 94% of early members were married. In 1900, more African-American couples in Iowa were married than living as single, divorced or widowed adults. Like Ottumwa's Viola Bradford and

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<sup>73</sup> United States Federal Census 1880, 1895 Des Moines City Directory, p. 202. Iowa, Marriage Records, 1880-1937, Francis (19) married Henry (27) November 12, 1885 in Ottumwa. *Bystander* 17 November 1899, Henry's Obituary. *Bystander* 26 May 1899, Francis's Obituary.

<sup>74</sup> Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Sought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women and Workers During The Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) xxi, 215, 219. See Hendricks *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest*, 74. See Brown *Upbuilding Black Durham* p. xxi.

Davenport's Anna Hall Wood, prior to the creation of the IACW, Iowa's earliest club members often worked in concert with their husbands, establishing a standard of strong companionate marriages amongst activists for future generations.<sup>75</sup> Club work required a delicate balancing act of collaboration, cooperation, political commitments and partnerships in African-American marriages and political communities. Activist women had to negotiate domestic responsibilities and club work. Both black and white women organized around notions of womanhood, Christianity, intuition, and compassion; however, white men were most willing to support women's activism when it was based on traditional gender roles, such as maternalism. Boycotts, petition campaigns and efforts to uplift women and children without explicitly challenging men's exclusive control of the franchise were supported by white men. The activism of black women was different because it was a means of pushing for racial equality; uplift work was political because the goal was to socially, economically and politically advance all African Americans.<sup>76</sup> The demands of home and club membership not only required flexibility and patience, but also the support of black husbands. While white men saw white feminists as attempting to undermine white men's privilege, African-American men across Iowa understood that weekly meetings and the frequent opening of their own homes to club gatherings and social events were necessary elements of club women's uplift goals that would benefit them, as well.<sup>77</sup> Early twentieth century scholarship on companionate marriages attributed increased equality in black unions to growing social involvement and service beyond the marriage. For white couples, the increase

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<sup>75</sup> US and State Census data.

<sup>76</sup> Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See Paula Baker, "The domestication of politics: women and American political society, 1780-1920" *The American Historical Review* 89:3, 620-647. See Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 78-85

<sup>77</sup> Biographical information from *Bystander* and US and State Census records.

was seen in marriages with few or no children. Christina Simmons' research argues that African-American couples were not obsessed with reshaping or reclaiming domestic and maternal roles for wives. Instead, black couples had greater concern for race loyalty and stronger communities. While there is no evidence that the husbands of early club women agreed to do more chores or provide childcare during club activities, it is clear that black women tailored their own schedules, allowing time for family, home, and club. Club reports show that husbands often were guests at meetings, especially those held in their homes. They were privy to topics of discussion and often commented on the subject matter, sometimes serving refreshments alongside their children at the close of a club meeting.<sup>78</sup>

More than half of Iowa's early club women were mothers. Black club women raised children while managing to work towards social and economic changes in black communities throughout Iowa.<sup>79</sup> Census enumerators reported that these women claimed to be able to read and write at some level, although none reportedly attended college. In fact, most of the women appear to not have had education beyond the elementary level. Instead, these women trained themselves in leadership and organization, interpreting the needs of their communities for themselves, with literary activities serving as a way to educate club members, their families, and their communities.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 164. See Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1998) whose work focuses on the life/marriage of the Wirts (white) from VA who moved to Washington, DC in 1817. From their letters, the couple's marriage demonstrates the difficulties that the couple experienced while trying to achieve a companionate marriage—one of intimacy and companionship instead of the traditional domestic patriarchy in which men wielded authority over the other members of the immediate and extended family and where open expressions of affection were limited. *Bystander* 30 March 1900.

<sup>79</sup> Hendrick, p. 28.

<sup>80</sup> Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be*, p. 104 and 202.

Although most black club women in Iowa did not work outside the home, some women did contribute cash to the family income by taking in boarders. Scholar Michele Mitchell argues that by 1900, fifteen percent of black households in the United States opened their doors to boarders to generate extra money.<sup>81</sup> As seen with club members Mary Bains, Fannie Grooms, Anna Hill and Alice Thompson, boarders were welcomed into some homes to supplement the household's income. At least eleven out of sixty-four early club women and their families opened their homes to lodgers.<sup>82</sup> In 1900, Davenport's Toussaint L'Ouverture Club member Lydia Moss earned household revenue by taking in boarders. At age 24, Lydia was an Iowa native; her parents were from Virginia and Kentucky. She and her husband Charles, from Missouri, had been married for eight years. Charles worked as a barber, while Lydia did "housework." The two received added income by having boarders in their home. In 1900, the two were renting a home on 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Davenport, sharing it with Lydia's mother and two boarders.<sup>83</sup> For the Mosses and other African Americans in the state and throughout the country, taking in boarders provided an opportunity for black women to earn money without working outside of the home. While this meant more time cooking, more laundry, and more cleaning, it may have made the schedule of work more flexible than if they worked outside the home. Census data recorded in the "Occupation" column is not reliable in determining the careers of these women. It is impossible to determine if black women did not work, even if this column was blank, marked "no occ," or marked "keeping house." Even more, it is unclear if "keeping house," "house keeper" or "domestic" meant that women stayed home and maintained her household or that the woman worked in someone else's home. Scholars argue that women's

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<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 150-151, 153-154.

<sup>82</sup> 1900 Iowa Census

<sup>83</sup> 1800 and 1900 United States Federal Census

work - mothering, cleaning, budgeting, managing a household - may not be paid labor, but is economically valuable work.<sup>84</sup> The high percentage of married early club women highlights both the support and belief in the sexual division of labor in which women performed this work and that the value of this work was key in maintaining strong families.

Early Iowa club women, native or migrant, capitalized on the freedom and opportunities to create social networks, unlike in the South where the threat of white violence in response to black activism was more intense. Early black club women developed strategies to individually and collectively navigate and rise above racial, economic, and social challenges that existed in Iowa during the early twentieth century. Migrant women played a significant role in establishing the foundation of the black club movement in Iowa as active community builders, while also carving a niche for themselves and their families in the state. The experiences of the earliest black Iowa club women from 1892-1902 greatly shaped the women and groups that would follow. These women, wives, mothers and wage earners, created new spaces outside of their homes, empowering one another. It was their assessment of needs and perception of community that not only laid the seedbed for future generations of black club women in the state, but also created a model of familial and community support needed for clubs to be successful.

### ***The Importance of the Black Church***

The significance of African-American churches to black communities throughout the United States has been unmatched by any other institution. Iowa black churches were not only a place of worship, but also a place for leadership, fellowship, politics, and organizing. African

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<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 10. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 150-151, 153-154. See Leslie Brown *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) 7, 10 153-154. See also Brown's *Uplifting Black Durham* p. 7-8.

Americans traveled miles by foot or carriage on Sundays—and some weekdays—to worship and for fellowship. Established as early as the late 1840s, these churches provided a venue for community functions and business meetings.<sup>85</sup> The “work” of churchwomen – fundraising, membership, outreach, and teaching - was essential for denominations and congregations to thrive. Yet, supportive leadership roles did not translate into access to the pulpit. While the great impact of women’s denominational work in the success of black churches was recognized by black men, gender biased traditions that mirrored larger society locked women into an unequal status and led female members to look for their own space outside of the church.

Black club women in seven of the early eight clubs sharpened their organizing abilities through church membership, learning lessons in leadership, membership, fundraising, and unity for the common good (see chart below).<sup>86</sup> Because Sunday schools, Bible study and segregated primary schools were located in their sanctuaries until the late 1870s, early club women transferred a commitment to literacy and education from the church to the seven early groups.<sup>87</sup> Black communities in Iowa were so small, club and denominational membership often overlapped. Iowa black club women’s experience and successes in community building and voicing citizenship concerns can be directly tied to their work in churches in their communities. Black women honed their leadership skills in church auxiliaries even if men controlled the pulpit.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 144. See Silag, ed., *Outside In*, 387-388. See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 1-2, 5. See Bettye Collier-Thomas *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, 2010) xx.

<sup>86</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 16-17.

<sup>87</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 147.

<sup>88</sup> Stek, “*Muchakinock*”, 37-63. See Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hraba, and Elmer Schwieder *Buxton: A Black Utopia in the Heartland* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003) 38. See Silag, ed. *Outside In*, 198, 221. See Schwalm’s *Emancipation’s Diaspora*, 157 for a discussion of the significant roles of black women in Iowa African American

For members of the Violet Reading Club (Davenport) and the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Club (Muscatine), their connection to local churches meant that women had space to meet and hold social events. Allowing club women to assemble in their sanctuaries was also profitable.<sup>89</sup> In 1901 black Ottumwa women created the Benevolent Club (BC hereafter) specifically to raise funds for the Second Baptist Church, created in 1875.<sup>90</sup> While the BC is the only early club whose main goal directly connected its members to a place of worship, early club women throughout the state whet their organizing skills doing denominational work. Thus, the reciprocal relationship between church and secular groups led to a sharing of members and goals emphasizing racial uplift, education, and strong black families.<sup>91</sup>

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churches. See Bettye Collier-Thomas *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, 2010) xx, 62-64, 81.

<sup>89</sup> *Bystander*, 13 October 1899. The Violet Reading Club in Davenport, IA had a close relationship with the Third Baptist Church in the city, holding joint social gatherings. See James L. Hill, "Migration of Black to Iowa 1820-1960," *The Journal of Negro History* 66 (Winter, 1981-1982): 289-303 for a discussion of blacks in Muscatine County. *Bystander*, 18 January 1901. *Bystander* 10 May 1901 (PLD)

<sup>90</sup> "Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting, Des Moines, IA 1906, p. 11, 19-20, 25. IACWC. Benevolent Club Report. Silag, ed., *Outside In*, 301-302.

<sup>91</sup> Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 17, 152-153. See Schwalm's *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 157. See Bettye Collier-Thomas *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publisher, 2010) xx, 62-64, 81.



Table 4. Club and Church Connections

Org	Member	Church
Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle	Isabelle Graves	Married to Rev. Horace Graves, pastor at St. Paul AME Church
Silver Autumn Leaf Club	Mrs. Richardson	Leader of the Bethel AME Church children's choir (2/15/1895)
Ida B. Wells Reading Club	Mrs. P.P. Taylor	Married to Rev. P. P. Taylor, pastor at AME church (5/31/1895)
	Mrs. W. F. Watts	Married to Rev. W. F. Watts (5/31/1895)
Violet Reading Club	Mrs. Hughes	Member at Third Baptist Church (5/17/1901)
Paul Laurence Dunbar Club	Mrs. Ousley Mrs. Florence White Mrs. Grooms	All members of the AME church (10/4/1901)
Toussaint L'Ouverture Club	Mrs. Lydia Moss	Elected Secretary of Third Baptist Church Sunday School (1/17/1902)
Benevolent Club	Second Baptist Connection	
Frances C. Williams Club	*	*

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***The Meaning of Early Club Work: Purpose, Literacy, Gender Perceptions, Member Support, and Challenges***

When black Iowa women began creating organizations during the 1890s, they incorporated prior denominational and organizing experiences within the mission of their new clubs. Demonstrating their fitness for citizenship, club members were disciplined in how they chose officers and conducted business. Reports show that each group typically held elections at

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<sup>92</sup> *Bystander*, 15 February 1895. *Bystander*, 31 May 1895. *Bystander*, 17 May 1901. *Bystander* 4 October 1901. *Bystander* 17 January 1902.

least twice a year, selecting President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and committee chairs. African-American club women were voting, having purposely created organizations that were modelled on civic behavior and the exercise of the franchise. Employing citizenship tools, they utilized parliamentary procedure (a common practice in government and religious groups during the nineteenth century) to promote debate. Rotating among members' homes, meetings consisted of club business and social time with lunch or refreshments. In January 1895, members of Ottumwa's Ida B. Wells Reading Circle (IBWRC) devoted a portion of their initial meeting to electing officers and "speech making."<sup>93</sup> To keep memberships and local communities up to date, clubs reported meeting cancellations due to weather, illness, or scheduling conflicts in the "Local News" section of the *Bystander*.<sup>94</sup>

Intellectual engagement and achievement was a unifying thread that connected all of these early groups. For example, Davenport club women sought a "higher standing intellectually" (Violet Reading Club - 1897) and to "promote moral, literacy, and social elevation" (Toussaint L'Ouverture Club - 1901), while the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Club (1900) in Muscatine came together "for the betterment and co-operation among all women."<sup>95</sup> Whether in name, practice, or both, early African-American club women in Iowa centered much of their work and fellowship on literature. Black literary societies began to flourish in the urban north in

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<sup>93</sup> *Bystander*, 25 January 1895. 19<sup>th</sup> century black newspapers reported use of parliamentary procedure at meetings of African American clergy and by state and national politicians. See *The National Era*, 20 June 1850 "Proceedings in the House," *The Christian Recorder*, 1 June 1861 "The Importance of Rules of Order," and 8 October 1885 – the article discusses the proceedings of a Bethel A.M.E. church meeting. Both Sarah Deutsch's *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Gayle Gullett's *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 200) do not discuss the use of parliamentary procedure in early white women's groups. However, Wanda Hendrick's *Gender Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 23-26, states that the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was formed in 1900 and that the office of Parliamentarian did not exist until after 1907.

<sup>94</sup> *Bystander*, 20 September 1895. *Bystander*, 18 September 1896. *Bystander*, 26 July 1901.

<sup>95</sup> *Bystander*, 13 October 1899. Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting, Des Moines, IA 1906, p. 11. IACWC.

the late 1820s. Men and women created “spaces” of self-improvement that both fostered a greater appreciation for literary practices and allowed for the exchange of information and political ideas. Scholars argue that through nineteenth century literary societies African Americans created locales that bolstered a greater appreciation for literacy activities as a way to voice demands for full citizenship. Black members of these groups tied literacy and literature to citizenship, the former providing necessary opportunities to swap information and political ideas. Continuing through Reconstruction, literary groups reemerged as political spaces, where blacks again began redefining themselves and their place in society. Iowa black women, the heirs of these early literary societies, used the club setting to confront these political challenges in the 1890s.<sup>96</sup> A closer examination of these groups reveals the views African-American women shared and debated in response to local and state hostilities. By broadly publicizing these debates, black women raised awareness of their demands for citizenship not only among African Americans, but also the white community. Realizing the significant connection between literacy and citizenship, Iowa’s black club women used the model of literary clubs to make legitimate claims on their citizenship rights.<sup>97</sup> These early clubs created a culture that emphasized literary work as central to club work. The focus on literacy is reflected in the practices that later fueled the creation and publication of club constitutions and by-laws, histories, biographies, articles, minutes and pamphlets of the IACW.

Like black literary groups around the country, early Iowa clubs helped to disseminate information to those who could not read. They also challenged literate people to expand their

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<sup>96</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 19-20, 53, 195-198, 203. See Ann Ruggles Gere and Sarah R. Robbins “Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn of the Century African-American and European-American Club Women’s Printed Text” in *Signs* v. 21, issue 3, 643-678. See Dorothy Potter “The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846” in *The Journal of Negro Education*, no. 4, Oct. 1936, 555-576.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 17-20.

reading. The Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle and Paul Laurence Dunbar Club named their groups after prominent authors and political writers. The specific goals of both the Silver Autumn Leaf Club and Toussaint L'Ouverture Club were literacy, meaning that early members wanted to focus on increasing their reading and understanding of literature. Several other groups reported that they read "colored authors" or "negro writers." Among the favorites were the works of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Booker T. Washington.<sup>98</sup> While a key objective of these groups was increased literary activity, black club women expanded their ideas about literacy not just by reading and writing, but also by crafting written and spoken presentations about the noted authors.

From 1891-1902, members of Iowa's eight fledgling women's clubs believed that the future of the race rested in the hands of African-American womanhood and motherhood. Scholars argue that black club women situated the moral future of the race on the shoulders of African-American mothers.<sup>99</sup> Advocating late eighteenth and early nineteenth century

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<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting, Des Moines, IA 1906, p. 14 and Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting, Keokuk, IA 1907, "Report of Clubs," IACWC. See D.B. Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5 (1936): 574. Deemed the first African-American poet to enjoy national and international acclaim, Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote of the difficulties and challenges faced by African-American people, often using black dialect to convey his powerful messages. By 1900 Dunbar was a member of the prestigious scholarly organization the American Negro Academy and had received worldwide praise for *Lyrics of a Lowly Life*. See Eleanor Alexander's *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Tragic Courtship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) 1. She argues that after the death of Frederick Douglass in 1895, Dunbar became the nation's second most famous African American, behind Booker T. Washington. See Herbert Woodward Martin and Ronald Primeau's *In His Own Words: The Dramatic and Other Uncollected Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002) xxi. In his Introduction, scholar Henry Louis Gates argues that during his lifetime, Dunbar was the most famous African-American writer in the world. In the late nineteenth century Booker T. Washington was quickly establishing himself as the African American race leader among both blacks and whites. Founder of Tuskegee Institute in 1881, Washington's school and speeches advocated industrial education as the key to African American social gains in the United States. See Robert J. Norrell's *Up From History: The Life of Booker T Washington* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) or Louis Harlan's *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>99</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): 12-13. See Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997): 63-65, for a discussion on Antebellum black women's acceptance of Republican Motherhood values.

sentiments of Republican Motherhood, early club members believed that racial uplift began in the home. In homes throughout Iowa, black club women began proposing collective strategies of self-help and respectability with the hope of diminishing the barriers of white racism, thus opening doors to material and moral improvements for the race.<sup>100</sup> Club women armed themselves with the necessary tools to educate their children and the children in their communities to be honorable citizens later in life.

Between 1891 and 1902, Iowa African-American women created clubs to elevate the image of black womanhood through their race work. In doing so, they worked to counter the immoral and sexual characterizations of black women circulated in written works and stereotypes. Different from denominational efforts that most often focused on bettering the church through fundraising and membership growth either under or alongside male leadership, club women seized on club work to provide more autonomy and a broader spectrum of community and educational work that could be done. Through reading lists, history lessons, music concerts, and plays, club members expanded their outreach efforts from church sanctuaries to their communities.<sup>101</sup>

Early Iowa clubs strengthened the bonds among black women that they had created during their successes and in times of hardship, illness and death. As early as the 1700s, African Americans organized societies that offered mutual aid to their members in times of need.

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<sup>100</sup> Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 8-9. See Victoria Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Wolcott argues that respectability in black communities was based on piety and cleanliness, not economics.

<sup>101</sup> *Bystander*, 25 January 1895. In January 1895, SALC members threw a New Year's Eve gathering, offering a program and hors d'oeuvres.<sup>101</sup> Later that month the group presented the Shakespeare play "Petruchio's Widow," to African Americans in the "Tri-City" area "Petruchio's Widow" was most likely an excerpt from the Shakespeare play "Taming of the Shrew" written between 1590 and 1594. See Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 38. Her research shows that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century "Tri City" area consisted of Davenport, Moline, IL and Rock Island, IL.

Portions of member dues were used to assist widows or pay costs associated with illness and death. The act of “funeralizing”—the commemorative conduct and honoring of the deceased—continues to be an important benefit to members in fraternal and civic groups today.<sup>102</sup>

Attending funeral services together and often passing public resolutions, early Iowa black club women developed their own formal rituals that emphasized the dignity and value of their lost friends’ and family members’ lives. These ceremonies were very important in a racist society where enslaved people were denied the dignity of a proper burial, as were the many victims of racist violence

For example, in 1894, the sudden death of G. W. Denny, the husband of HBSRC member L. V. Denny, shocked African Americans statewide. Bearing roses, her club sisters attended the funeral service in large numbers. In a unanimous showing of support for Mrs. Denny and her family, the HBSRC passed three resolutions saluting the deceased as a “beloved husband, friend, and co-worker,” emphasizing the collaborative relationship that the Dennys shared.<sup>103</sup> Nearly a year later no efforts were spared by the group when member Fannie A. Topson passed away in May 1895 at age 28. Draping her chair with heavy crepe and ribbons, the club held a memorial for Topson that included singing, delivering tributes, and offering condolences to her husband and young daughter, Sarah. Resolutions were passed emphasizing Topson’s excellence as a member, wife and mother.<sup>104</sup> In May 1899, the death of member Frances Clay must have left HBSRC members numb. Just 31, Clay died after giving birth to her fifth child. Born and raised

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<sup>102</sup> Karla F. C. Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 3-7, 25, 33-34, 150. Eds. Theda Skocpol, Ariane Liazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What A Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 4, 23, 129-130. See Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionist: A Study in Activism 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992) 77-78. See W. E. B. DuBois *Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company) for one of the earliest discussion of mourning in African-American communities.

<sup>103</sup> *Bystander*, 17 August 1894.

<sup>104</sup> *Bystander*, 10 May 1895.

in Ottumwa, she was the daughter of Ida B. Wells Reading Circle member Jennie Hamilton. A large number of friends and family attended her funeral, claiming "...perhaps no woman was more universally loved than was Mrs. Clay, a loving wife kind and affectionate to all who knew her."<sup>105</sup>

Similarly in 1899, IBWRC members submitted "Resolutions of Condolences" to the *Bystander* in honor of member Nancy Johnson. Exalting her merits and appreciation of service, the group resolved:

That in the death of sister Johnson this club has lost a sister who was always active and zealous in her work as an I. B. W. R. C., - ever ready to do her duty, prompt to advance the interest of the club – devoted to the welfare and prosperity, one who was wise in council and fearless in action, and honest and an upright lady, whose virtues endeared her not only to the sisters of the club but all to whom she met....<sup>106</sup>

This public decree, broadcast to the black weekly's expansive readership, cemented the legacy of Mrs. Johnson and her activism within Iowa history. Highlighting the sisterhood, comradery and virtuousness of race work to outsiders, this quote served as a declaration of the type of women who were members of the IBWRC. Through large attendance, resolutions, tributes, and condolences, Iowa black club women played an intimate role in the act of memorializing a club member or their extended family. Showing solidarity in death as they did in life, their efforts reflected the respect and high esteem held for members of their communities.<sup>107</sup>

Iowa's early club women tackled challenges that were sometimes unique to the region. Facing different problems than black women in larger cities such as Chicago and New York,

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<sup>105</sup> *Bystander*, 25 May 1899.

<sup>106</sup> *Bystander*, 7 July 1899.

<sup>107</sup> Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories*, 3-7, 25, 33-34, 150, 162. Eds. Theda Skocpol, Ariane Lazos, and Marshall Ganz, *What A Mighty Power We Can Be*, 129-130. See Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionist: A Study in Activism 1828-1860*, 77-78. See W. E. B. DuBois *Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company) for one of the earliest discussions of mourning in African-American communities.

early Iowa club members had to negotiate their race and gender in smaller Midwestern locales. Combating “disinterestedness” and low membership numbers were major challenges to these women in small rural towns and cities with very low black populations.<sup>108</sup> Because additional new recruits were not always available, club work was often carried out by a small, committed few. Unlike urban areas where the availability of industrial jobs was greater, Iowa club women were faced with the possibility of their towns dissolving or disappearing. For example, in the integrated coal mining community of Muchakinock, women’s clubs thrived. The community formed in part because employers made the unusual step of recruiting black employees. The club’s existence, however, was directly tied to the life of the coal mines. When the first mines and then the settlement dried up at the turn of the twentieth century, so did the Frances C. Williams Club.<sup>109</sup> Club women in the coal mining town of Buxton would later suffer the same fate.

Early club work encouraged members in the creation of essays, speeches, resolutions, meeting agendas and educational lessons. All of these materials not only aided the increased literacy of blacks in Iowa, but also encouraged intellectual advancement and engagement. Homes throughout the state were “classrooms” where black women could educate one another in literature, music, and theatre. Self-betterment was an integral part of early Iowa club women’s race ideology. By reading and debating, Iowa black club women expressed their tensions,

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<sup>108</sup> *Census of Iowa, 1890-1940*. From 1881 to 1925, the coal mining industry employed large numbers of African Americans in Iowa. From 1881-1900, blacks migrated from Virginia and Missouri to work for the Iowa Central Coal Company in Muchakinock, IA. In 1900, miners moved to Buxton, IA, where half of the town population of 6000 was black. See Silag, ed., *Outside In*, 198-200.

<sup>109</sup> Pam Stek, “Muchakinock: African Americans and the Making of an Iowa Coal Town,” *Annals of Iowa* 1 (2009): 37-63. See Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hrabá, and Elmer Schwieder *Buxton: A Black Utopia in the Heartland* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 38-39. See Silag’s *Outside In*, 198, 221. See Dorothy Schwieder’s



anxieties, and conflicts regarding race, gender and sexuality.<sup>110</sup> Although they were more often focused on the importance of domesticity—the home—instead of voting rights, Iowa black women nonetheless gained a political voice, which highlighted the state’s responsibility to insure the welfare of its citizens. Through their grassroots work, black Iowa club women tackled gendered political projects.<sup>111</sup> Together, women strengthened their management and leadership skills by using parliamentary procedure, and by speaking and debating. Through the creation of the first organized secular gendered mechanisms, black women increased their voice within their communities, while clubs also provided new safe spaces for African Americans in the state.<sup>112</sup>

Nearly 100 African-American women from five locales created and nurtured eight literary clubs in Iowa 1891 to 1902. Within these spaces black Iowa club women became the creators, preservers and distributors of race literature. These literary activists crafted a voice that was both uplifting and political, through their actions of reading, writing, and discussing. Becoming empowered in private parlors throughout the state, this collaborative agency led to public manifestations of race uplift.<sup>113</sup> The legacy of these groups is in the foundation they laid for future black women’s literary activities that would be autonomous and authoritative, effectively developing ways of creating and addressing their own political agendas.

Prior to 1902, women in these eight groups were actively gaining experience that would have future impact on the larger state organization. The ability to uplift all African Americans was imperative for advancing the race. Through trial and error these women found the right

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<sup>110</sup> *Bystander* 6 December 1901, the Dunbar Club debated “Resolved that a man will go farther for a dollar than woman.” Mrs. William Shackelford and Mrs. A. Seabrooks argued the affirmative while Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. Seay argued the negative. See Mitchell, *Righteous Discontent*, 139.

<sup>111</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 202. See Mitchell, *Righteous Discontent*, 137.

<sup>112</sup> Sara Deutsch, “Learning to Talk More Like A Man: Boston Women’s Class-bridging Organizations, 1870-1940,” *The American Historical Review* 97:2 (1991): 379-404. See Mitchell, *Righteous Discontent*, 139-140.

<sup>113</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 17, 198, 200, 203. See Gere, *Gendered Literacy in Black and White*, 644-645.

formula of racial uplift for their communities that included educational goals, fundraising and philanthropic initiatives, and growing economic awareness. Leaning on each other in times of illness and death, black club women met the challenges of membership loss and low morale head on by continuously trying to foster stronger relationships among the women in their communities. The legacy of these early groups provided a clear and honest model for the state organization and new groups that followed.

## Chapter Two: "Mutual Improvement" and "Lifting as We Climb:" The Women of The Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle and the Ida B. Wells Reading Club, 1891-1902

into the numbers of the nameless tide.  
H. B. S. R. C.  
 Mrs. I. E. Williamson opened the doors of her lovely home for the entertainment of the H. B. S. Reading Circle Thursday afternoon. After the historical studies, the president, Mrs. R. A. Wilburn, delivered her address, which contained wholesome advice and was well received. Mrs. Waricks read a well prepared paper on the life and character of Gustavus Adolphus. Mrs. Hamilton followed with an instrumental solo, which was highly enjoyed. Mrs. Gordon, nee Miss Nannie Reynolds, a former school teacher of St. Louis, Mo., but now a resident of Des Moines, was a visitor, and the circle enjoyed her short talk and felt benefitted for having met her, for Mrs. Gordon is one of the few women that we meet in a life time who possesses the happy faculty of making herself so agreeable that one feels as though you've always known her. The efficient committee on program arranged the following exercises for the next meeting, at Mrs. Waricks, on Tenth street: Mrs. Holt will lead the history class in the study of "France in the Seventeenth Century," and Mrs. Hughes that of the "Civil War;" Mrs. J. C. Berry a paper, subject, "Woman's Place in Modern History;" Mrs. C. S. Stewart, "Select Reading;" Mrs. M. N. Bell, "A Biographical Sketch." The hostess, assisted by Mr. Mosely, served an elaborate lunch, which was enjoyed 'mid bright, witty conversation, which of itself was an intellectual feast, and lasted until a late hour, when all left, thanking Mr. and Mrs. Williamson for their kind hospitality.

Figure 3. 1894 HBSRC Meeting Report

<sup>114</sup>*Bystander*, 26 October 1894, "H.B.S.R.C."

A closer examination of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle (Des Moines, 1891) and the Ida B. Wells Reading Club (Ottumwa, 1895) provide two examples of how and why African-American women organized in Iowa. These two groups offer valuable insight into how black club women created social and political spaces that advanced their communities. Examples of the kinds of work club women did, the challenges they faced, as well as the evolution of club goals between 1891 and the federation of state clubs in 1902 reveal how race work transformed Iowa black women. These clubs and their members would play a central role in the formation of new clubs and the ever-expanding state federation.

African-American women in Des Moines organized in 1891 to define their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Located in Polk County, the 1890 census registered 1,194 African-American residents, while the 1895-1896 *Des Moines City Directory* reveals that more than one-half of the city's black population were laborers. Although employment opportunities for African Americans were more diverse in this city than elsewhere in the largely rural state, blacks could theoretically choose their housing—as long as they could pay rent.<sup>115</sup> Like the job market, the city's neighborhoods were segregated. African-American residents lived in de-facto segregated communities and were often restricted in the use of public accommodations. African Americans in Des Moines responded like blacks throughout the state and the nation by creating their own spaces. The Center Street area, located north of downtown Des Moines, became the heart of the city's black community. Black residents and business owners created a cohesive neighborhood that consisted of lodges, churches, restaurants, beauty parlors, barbers, and other

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<sup>115</sup> Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro In Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1969), 8-9, 34, 47-48, 219. Additional information on antebellum Black Iowans can also be found in James L. Hill's "Migration of Blacks to Iowa 1820-1960," *Journal of Negro History*, (Winter 1981-1982): 289-303. See Gabriel Victor Cools, "The Negro in Typical Communities of Iowa" MA Thesis, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 1918.

entrepreneurial endeavors that provided service and support.<sup>116</sup> Developing a “communal consciousness,” Des Moines black residents often lived in the same neighborhoods, regardless of income, because of segregation. Similar to Jim Crow communities in the South, the consequences of discriminatory housing policies led black residents to create a rich and vibrant community. United by the goals of mutual improvement, charity, and the desire to create a center of thought, black women formed the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Club (HBSRC hereafter) on February 9, 1891.<sup>117</sup> These club women organized not because white organizations excluded them, but because they recognized the need both to defend their race from social injustice and to provide services that their community desperately needed.

Who were the early club women of the HBSRC and how did they become members? As discussed earlier, twenty-six of the early twenty-seven identified members from 1891-1902 were married. Over seventy percent of their husbands were laborers or barbers. Early club reports do not provide a clear picture of how local women became “eligible” for membership in the group; however, contemporary accounts in the state’s black newspaper, the *Iowa State Bystander* (*Bystander*), claimed that the club “contains some very advanced thinkers” who were making their organization “intellectually, second to none in the city.”<sup>118</sup> Some of the earliest reported club members were Mrs. Lillian Hamilton, Mrs. Georgia Holt and Mrs. Alice Banks, all migrants to Iowa.<sup>119</sup> In 1894, 33 year-old Lillian Hamilton had been married to husband Joseph for fourteen years and was the mother of a four-year-old son and two -year-old daughter. She and her husband were Missouri natives. By 1900, the family owned a home on Walker Street.

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<sup>116</sup> Bergman, 60-63. See Silag *Outside In* p. 192, 204-206. See Gabriel Victor Cools, “The Negro in Typical Communities of Iowa” MA Thesis, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, 1918.

<sup>117</sup> “Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting 1906,” box 1, folder 6, Iowa Association of Colored Women Clubs, 1903-1970, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa, IACWC.

<sup>118</sup> *Bystander*, 2 November 1894, “H.B.R.C.”

<sup>119</sup> *Bystander*, 17 August 1894, “Decease of G.W. Denny.”

Joseph worked as a city foreman, while Lillian worked at home.<sup>120</sup> Lillian's contributions to the club ranged from leading the group in song and presenting history lessons, to participating in discussions on topics like lynching.<sup>121</sup>

At age 25, Mrs. Georgie (Georgia) Holt was an Executive Committee member of the HBSRC in 1894. Married for seven years, she and her husband George did not have any children. Georgie was born in Missouri, while George was an Iowa native. She was a homemaker, and at the turn of the twentieth century George was a U.S. postman. They shared their home with her sister, Beatrice Hicklyn. Georgie was a dedicated club woman, leading history lessons and presenting essays that she wrote like "The Life of a Christian."<sup>122</sup>

The early twentieth century was a busy time for Alice and Edward Banks. Alabama natives, the couple moved to Iowa in the early 1880s. Race work kept the childless couple busy and very engaged in activities throughout the city. In her mid-40s, Alice was a very active member of the HBSRC, while Edward was a leading member of the local Masonic Lodge and very instrumental in organizing an African-American military company in Des Moines. He also worked as a janitor at the local courthouse. At club meetings, Alice opened discussion about Ida B. Wells and anti-lynching organizations.<sup>123</sup>

The activities of this oldest known group help us to better understand how the subsequent Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs (IACW) became a leading advocate and voice of African Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Iowa. Named after the 19<sup>th</sup> century white abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *The American Woman's Home* (1869),

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<sup>120</sup> 1900 US Federal Census.

<sup>121</sup> *Bystander*, 19 October 1894, "H.B.S.R.C." *Bystander*, 26 October 1894, "H.B.S.R.C."

<sup>122</sup> 1900 Federal Census. *Bystander*, 12 January 1895, "Local News."

<sup>123</sup> *Bystander*, 19 October 1894, "H.B.S.R.C." *Bystander*, 22 July 1898, untitled biographic sketch on Edward T. Banks. *Bystander*, 28 December 1900, untitled biographical sketches on HBSRC husbands Edward Banks and William Banks.

women of the HBSRC espoused the value of education, the importance of the home, and solidarity with women of the lower class a decade before the inception of the IACW.<sup>124</sup> The HBSRC met in member homes weekly and biweekly. From 1894 to 1902, more than 215 published club reports in the *Bystander* covered the HBSRC. Several factors contributed to this. Published in Des Moines, the black weekly heavily focused on its residents and events; and the wives of several black community leaders were members of the HBSRC, including *Bystander* owner William Coalson's wife, Mary.<sup>125</sup> After Harriet Beecher Stowe's death in July 1896, HBSRC member Mrs. A. O. Smith penned the editorial "Immortal Dead," stating "may we ever cherish the name Harriet Beecher Stowe which is a synonym of justice, love and truth."<sup>126</sup> These *Bystander* reports permit a closer examination of this club and reveal the long, rich history of African-American literary groups in Iowa whose activities of reading, writing, and organizing shaped the larger state organization that followed. Indeed, the HBSRC served as an important training ground for the state's future female civil rights leaders.

The HBSRC is the oldest African-American women's literary club that would become a member of the Iowa Association of Colored Women in 1902. This organization provided an environment for its members to both enjoy and debate literature.<sup>127</sup> It is not clear where or how these women acquired reading material, but surely their close relationship to the *Bystander* staff allowed them access to reading material at the local office. While a public library, located at the Methodist Church, was founded in Des Moines in 1866, black patrons were likely denied access.

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<sup>124</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890). *Uncle's Tom Cabin* highlights the contradiction between the promise of freedom in the United States and the institution of slavery. More than 300,000 copies of the books were sold in the first year.

<sup>125</sup> *Bystander*, 19 November 1894, "Local News."

<sup>126</sup> Mrs. A. O. Smith, "Immortal Dead," *Bystander*, 7 August 1896.

<sup>127</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 10. See Gere and Robbins, "Gendered Literacy in Black and White," 643-678.

A larger, integrated public library did not open until 1903.<sup>128</sup> The HBSRC provided a shared space for members to develop their own model for literacy based on shared values, which affected the way they consumed and produced printed texts together.<sup>129</sup>

Every meeting provided an opportunity for members to present their research on topics of US and international history, politics, the arts, education and health. Through the literary club, HBSRC members educated themselves with historical discussions on such topics as Charles VIII, President Lincoln and France.<sup>130</sup> Although the HBSRC was an African-American club, the group read works by both black and white authors. They enjoyed the works of William Shakespeare, Ellen Wheeler Wilcox, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Charles Lamb, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. The group even read *McClure's Magazine*, a national political and literary magazine created in 1893, which often published chapters of books in progress, providing national material for the women to read.<sup>131</sup>

Members of the HBSRC understood the connection between citizenship and literacy, the latter fostering the exchange of information and political ideas that contributed to a healthy democracy.<sup>132</sup> The group discussed and tracked the activities and activism of Ida B. Wells, who was quickly becoming a leading force against lynching in the South. The group spent time reading the work of Julia Ward Howe, a white 19<sup>th</sup> century wife and mother of seven, who

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<sup>128</sup> Ella M. McLoney, *Historical Sketch of the Des Moines Public Library* (Des Moines: Press of P.C. Kenyon, 1893) 3-8. See "Library History" Des Moines Public Library website, <http://dmpl.org/about-us/library-history>.

<sup>129</sup> Gere, "Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn-of-the-Century African-American and European-American Club Women's Printed Text" in *Signs* (23:3), 643-678. See McHenry, *Forgotten Readers* 17-18.

<sup>130</sup> *Bystander*, 1 November 1895, *Bystander* 1 March 1895, "H.B.S."

<sup>131</sup> *Bystander*, 3 April 1896, *Bystander* 24 April 1896. McClure's Magazine (1893-1911) was an American literary and political magazine. The illustrated monthly published chapters of books in progress while also drawing attention to the conduct of large corporations.

<sup>132</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 19. See Anne Firor Scott, "Most Invisible of All: Black Women's Voluntary Associations" *Journal of Southern History*, February 1, 1990, v. 56, p. 3-22.



became a leading reformer, abolitionist, and feminist.<sup>133</sup> The group also enjoyed the optimistic and cheerful poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, a Midwesterner from Wisconsin.<sup>134</sup> Like their meetings, the literary agenda offered club members the opportunity to tackle pressing political challenges, but also provided the respite of social fellowship.

Membership in a literary club afforded the opportunity for African-American women to not only appreciate literature, but also to produce written works. Through the production and circulation of materials, HBSRC members engaged in self-representation and in doing so controlled how black club women and their activities were perceived by the public. Dual membership in the HBSRC and local churches and having access to the state's most circulated black newspaper added to the collaborative agency among the women to both produce and circulate their work.<sup>135</sup> As early as 1895, club members were producing essays, poetry, opinion pieces and history lessons that reached communities throughout Iowa. Poetry and essay titles like "Longfellow's Place in the Literary World" were circulated in the *Bystander*.<sup>136</sup> Writings by club women served the larger black community by providing accurate information on all topics relating to African-American culture. Members expressed great race pride in March 1895 when the *Bystander* printed the poem "Frederick Douglass" by HBSRC member Mrs. H. H. Lewis.

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<sup>133</sup>Julia Ward Howe – 19<sup>th</sup> century wife, mother of 7, reformer, feminist, abolitionist, women's suffrage, educational reform, poet, and editor of the pro-abolition newspaper owned by her husband Samuel. She wrote the poem "Battle Hymn of the Republic" in 1861. She was separated from her husband for periods of time and authored a collection of poems "Passion Flowers," that detailed intimate details about the couple's relationship, including infidelity and the challenge of masculine authority. She is considered the creator of Mother's Day after her 1870s "Mother's Day Proclamation" ([juliawardhowe.org](http://juliawardhowe.org)). See *Bystander*, 2 November 1894. Drawing a connection between their own objectives for mutual improvements, the group reportedly endorsed Howe's idea "moving onward and upward to the eleventh and through the eleventh hour to God's high noon."

<sup>134</sup> *Bystander*, 9 December 1898, "Local League Meeting."

<sup>135</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 644, 650, 654. Gere, "Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn-of-the-Century African-American and European-American Club Women's Printed Text" in *Signs* Spring 1996 (23:3): 643-678. See McHenry *Forgotten Readers*, 189.

<sup>136</sup>*Bystander*, 18 March 1895. *Bystander*, 11 October 1895, a meeting summary reported the Mrs. Wilburn presented the essay "Longfellow's Place in the Literary World."

The poem honored the African American race worker after his death, highlighting his fight for “eternal justice.”<sup>137</sup> By its fourth anniversary, the club began writing an internal newsletter, “The Weekly Oracle.” The Oracle served as a testament to the significant amount of material being produced by members. While no copies of this bulletin or specifics about its content exist, club reports show that the HBSRC created an “Oracle” position. Holding this club position entailed the preparation of a report that was read but not distributed to the group. For example, between February and March 1895, Mrs. Denny, Mrs. Gordon, and Mrs. Barton all presented Oracle reports.<sup>138</sup> The HBSRC experience in creating a weekly/biweekly communiqué would prove very useful years later when the IACW would launch its own publication.

A priority of HBSRC members was to become stronger and better club women. Members of HBSRC defined themselves within both black and white society by emphasizing their roles as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters, while continuously discussing, debating and writing about ways to uplift the race and better themselves. In September 1895, newly elected Vice-President Mrs. Berry led the discussion “Do Afro-Americans Improve According to Advantages?”<sup>139</sup> The group entertained St. Paul A M. E.’s Reverend Timothy Reeves the following January, whose essay “The Waste of the Intellectual Force of the Afro-American Woman” was so well received that the group thought it should be printed in an upcoming issue of the *Bystander*, although there is no evidence that it was printed.<sup>140</sup> Mrs. Barton presented an essay to the group the following November titled the “Value of Character,” which the members insisted “be read again in the near

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<sup>137</sup> *Bystander*, 18 March 1895.

<sup>138</sup> *Bystander*, 15 February 1895, *Bystander*, 22 February 1895, *Bystander* 1 March 1895, *Bystander* 18 March 1895.

<sup>139</sup> *Bystander* 20 September 1895, *Bystander*, 27 September 1895. Berry, labeled “a very enthusiastic club member,” in 1894 also led history lessons and served as club president. However, after 1895 she is no longer mentioned in club reports.

<sup>140</sup> *Bystander*, 31 January 1896. See *Bystander* 7 January 1896 and *Bystander* 3 April 1896 for Reverend Reeves’ work at St. Paul A.M.E.

future.”<sup>141</sup> These topics show that the women of the HBSRC clearly understood that in uplifting the race and in “making community,” they needed to self-critique and redefine themselves by reshaping ideas about black womanhood held by society.<sup>142</sup>

In 1898, HBSRC members joined in the national colonization discussion. African Americans began to actively discuss black migration to Africa in the early 1800s. The movement had its advocates and its critics. Those in support argued that as long as slavery existed in the U.S., they would never be able to enjoy full citizenship rights in the United States. Those who opposed the movement asserted that African Americans were entitled to live freely in America and that race progress could be achieved through education and self-improvement. By 1880, it was apparent that black political and social successes of Reconstruction were short lived. African Americans throughout the country began to revisit the idea of colonization as an answer to the continued political, economic and social oppression and discrimination. At a December 1898 meeting, the HBSRC openly debated colonization. In considering the topic, “Shall the Negro be Colonized,” Mrs. Wilburn took an affirmative stance while Mrs. Palmer disputed the proposition.<sup>143</sup> While the specifics of the debate are not available, the club members felt that the topic was important enough to report its discussion. Although challenges to full citizenship were not as violence-driven in Iowa as in other parts of the country, HBSRC members were well aware that gains from racial uplift initiatives were sluggishly few both nationally and locally.

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<sup>141</sup> *Bystander*, 23 November 1896.

<sup>142</sup> Scott “Most Invisible of All: Black Women’s Voluntary Associations” *Journal of Southern History*, February 1, 1990, v. 56, p. 12-13. See Ann Ruggles Gere and Sarah R. Robbins, “Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn of the Century African-American and European-American Club Women’s Printed Text” in *Signs* v. 21, Issue 3 (Spring), p. 643-678.

<sup>143</sup> *Bystander*, 2 December 1898.

Using their own resources, the HBSRC and the other early clubs fought for equality and social change in homes throughout the state. Through readings, discussions, debates and written works, black club women simultaneously developed their political voices. Although established as a literary club, members of the HBSRC voiced their political views about violence against African Americans, political representation, military discrimination and party support. Through the exchanges of political views, Iowa club women enacted citizenship and joined the national demand for African-American social and political equality.<sup>144</sup>

HBSRC members did not shy away from rebuking white violence. Ida B. Wells spoke at the local Des Moines YMCA in September of 1894. On the first stop of her nationwide campaign, Wells addressed a crowd of more than two hundred that included local white families. Wells also met with the city's white pastors and attended the HBSRC's weekly meeting. This trailblazing race worker's attendance at the HBSRC meeting not only demonstrates the club's support for Wells activism, but also highlighted that Wells viewed the group and its members as a leading organization in the city.<sup>145</sup> It also reflected well on the club, and suggested that Wells was in contact with them. Months after Wells' visit, club members continued to draw public attention to the racial climate in the South when Mrs. Williamson led the discussion "What is the cause of the outrages of the south (sic) and what can we do to prevent it." Announcements like these informed the Iowa community, black and white, that the activities of the HBSRC were not restricted to their homes, families, and local community. Regardless of the backlash that a vocal public stance against white racism might provoke, club members did not quiet their political voices.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Hine, "Housewives' League of Detroit," 225 and 229. See McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 17-19, 200.

<sup>145</sup> Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 327. *Bystander*, 14 September, 1894. *Bystander*, 21 September 1894. *Bystander*, 19 October 1894.

<sup>146</sup> *Bystander*, 25 October 1895.

Alongside black women, African-American men continued their demands for political representation and equality in the state. HBSRC members were directly tied to the political activities of their husbands. African Americans throughout the state celebrated enfranchisement in 1868, with black men participating in their first Iowa Republican convention in 1869. However, the much-celebrated election of Alexander Clark as one of the convention vice-presidents did not render the increase in black political representation as hoped. The 1869 win by William Jones as constable for Perry Township had been the only selection of a black man for a significant state position. By the 1870s, black support of the GOP began to waver in the state. Black voters began discussing which party and candidates would be the most responsive to the black community. By the 1890s, black men demanded that their support of white candidates translate to greater political participation or black votes would be cast elsewhere.<sup>147</sup> In the May 1896 article entitled “To The People,” local black men expressed their dissatisfaction with being “neglected and overlooked” politically by the Republican party. Claiming that “we desire a representation for our rank,” they urged black support for Edward S. Willett as constable on the Republican ticket. Listing more than sixty names of support, the article revealed that these men, their wives, and the black community strategized about how to improve their political representation and their power in and recognition by the Republican party. Of the petitioners, two men were HBSRC husbands: W. A. Birney and I. E. Williamson.<sup>148</sup> In 1898, black male voters also used the threat of the ballot to demand fair employment practices, publicly alerting Des Moines Mayor John MacVicar that his hiring and firing of African-American employees were being closely watched and would be handled accordingly at the polls.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>Bergman, *The Negro in Iowa*, 51-53. See Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 189-193.

<sup>148</sup> *Bystander*, 1 May 1896.

<sup>149</sup> *Bystander*, 28 October 1898. Des Moines Mayor John MacVicar was a Republican, first elected mayor in 1896, reelected 1898, 1900, and 1928.

Although they could not vote, club women actively participated in politics alongside their husbands. HBSRC members openly debated the pros and cons of a possible Democratic vote with their husbands and visitors at a weekly meeting in October 1900. Mattie Warrick's husband aroused the group by reading the paper "Why the negro should not vote the democratic ticket." The following discussion led by the husbands of Mrs. Emma Carr, Mrs. Barton, Mrs. Williamson, and Mrs. Georgia Holt revealed strong support for the Republican Party.<sup>150</sup> HBSRC members were privy to the agendas of both parties, understanding that the African-American vote at the local and state level affected their racial uplift agendas. Even more, southern migrant club women infused their memories of white supremacy, discrimination, lynching, and distrust of the Democratic party into the HBSRC and other black clubs throughout Iowa. Like black club women in Illinois who actively supported the Republican party, Iowa black club members accompanied black men to political meetings, participating in discussions long before they had the right to vote.<sup>151</sup>

In the summer of 1898, the U.S. entered the Spanish-American War with the intent to liberate Cuba from Spain.<sup>152</sup> Opponents of U.S. intervention feared that U.S. military intervention against Spanish colonialism would ultimately weaken democracy at home. Yet, as they had during the Civil War, black men enlisted with hopes of gaining increased unity and equality stateside. For African Americans, military service offered the opportunity to possibly strengthen democracy at home. Nationally, Ida B. Wells and other black leaders assisted in the organization of black regiments, believing that war volunteerism could only increase equality

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<sup>150</sup> *Bystander*, 12 October 1900.

<sup>151</sup> Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of her Race: Black Club Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 2-3, 9, 60-73.

<sup>152</sup> Jules Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty In an Age of National Liberation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

between the races.<sup>153</sup> As black soldiers around the country and in Iowa began to prepare for service, members of the HBSRC debated whether or not Americans would benefit from the war.<sup>154</sup> Local and national leaders claimed that fighting in Cuba would not only highlight black manhood, but also offer an opportunity for African Americans to pursue business ventures like becoming planters.<sup>155</sup> Although black club women throughout the state did not have the right to vote, like the HBSRC they discussed the need for war and the quest for equality through military service because it affected their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. Black women had a political voice within their homes and communities and used club-based discussions and debates to argue the pros and cons of black military participation and its effects on their lives. Black men gathered in Iowa to create the all-black volunteer regiment Company M, 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Volunteer Infantry Immunes. Preparing to ship to Cuba, the company moved to Macon, Georgia, but the war ended before it was deployed and the unit dissolved by February 1899.<sup>156</sup>

Because the United States quickly turned its sights to the Philippines, Iowa black club women's concerns about African-American military participation did not end with Cuba. Unlike U.S. involvement in Cuba, most black leaders opposed U.S. rule in the Philippines, fearing that American racism would spread to the island. Although white women's clubs such as the League of Women Voters would debate U.S. policy in the 1920s, after they achieved the franchise HBSRC members debated African-American participation in U.S. interventionist plans in the late 1890s. The HBSRC scheduled the paper "The Philippines Island" to be given by Mrs.

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<sup>153</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 238-239.

<sup>154</sup> *Bystander*, 28 October 1898.

<sup>155</sup> *Bystander*, 23 September 1898. This article supports black participation in the war as another opportunity for black men to prove their manhood and may provide opportunities for them to become planters. See Willard Gatewood's *Black Americas and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 161-162. Gatewood discusses how Booker T. Washington felt that Cubans had solved the race problem.

<sup>156</sup> Silag, ed. *Outside In*, 103-104.

Hamilton. In the ensuing debate “Should we retain the Philippine Islands,” Mrs. Hamilton took an affirmative position, while Mrs. Warrick argued against the proposition.<sup>157</sup> Club members likely added their voices to national discussions that centered on whether conquest would spread U.S. racism to others.<sup>158</sup> Although the details of the debates do not exist, the preparation necessary to research points of debate shows that HBSRC members attributed importance to opportunities for women to debate these and other pressing current affairs. Indeed, it reflects the seriousness with which the club women approached the new global role of U.S. militarization.

Members of the HBSRC also consistently pushed to connect with other club women across the country. They sometimes entertained women, black and white, from other states at their meetings, while they swapped stories about the successes and challenges of community work, while offering support across state lines. Although a state federation did not yet exist in Iowa, HBSRC members were well aware of how larger state organizations worked. In February 1897, Miss Feller and Mrs. Seeley of the white Illinois State Federation each gave a talk about club work. Their presentations surely offered several perspectives: views of single and married women; similarities and differences in the issues facing Midwest club women; and issues that club women faced, regardless of race.<sup>159</sup>

Club members also attended national conferences of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Founded in 1896, the national body allowed clubs that were not part of the

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<sup>157</sup> *Bystander*, 13 January 1899. *Bystander*, 24 March 1899.

<sup>158</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, ed., *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 7-9. Both AME bishop Henry Turner and Booker T. Washington opposed U.S. intervention in the Philippines, Washington arguing that Filipinos should be given the opportunity to govern themselves. For U.S. soldiers’ racialized perceptions of Filipinos see Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>159</sup> *Bystander*, 5 February 1897. Yearbooks of The Illinois General Federation of Women’s Club (formerly the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs) begin in 1899. Staff at the Chicago headquarters were unable to locate any information about the cities or clubs that Miss. Feller and Mrs. Seeley belonged to or information about their February 1897 trip to Des Moines.



NACW to send delegates to meetings. Although non-members were not allowed to vote, their participation in the larger sisterhood was surely energizing. The club women from Des Moines were able to contribute to national goals and initiatives by offering ideas about organizing and discussing the advantages and drawbacks of belonging to the national organization. In August 1899, the NACW, led by Mary Church Terrell, held its biennial convention in Chicago. Representing more than 300 clubs, the conference highlighted the association's main purpose of "discussing serious questions of interest to the race... to foster all that is best for the intellectual and moral development of the race." Reports of the annual national meeting emphasized that the group was composed of "some of the best and ablest colored ladies that our race has produced." It outlined the focus of the gathering as addressing "Lynching, the Separate Car Law, the Disfranchisement Laws of the Southern States and Immigration."<sup>160</sup> The local press reported that HBSRC member Mrs. I. E. Williamson left Des Moines on August 13, 1899 to attend the meeting.<sup>161</sup> One of the group's earliest Presidents, Mrs. Williamson was a dedicated and seasoned club woman. This gathering provided Williamson with a stencil of national work that she and HBSRC members could implement in Des Moines. The fact that her trip was newsworthy reflects the great amount of respect and support the community held for Williamson and local club women who actively participated in national race work efforts.

During the mid-1890s, HBSRC members enlarged their uplift efforts by forming new relationships with white women and black men. In doing so, they infused the experience they gained from membership in this early club into other groups.<sup>162</sup> Immediately following Ida B. Wells' September 1894 visit to Des Moines, local black residents met at the courthouse to create

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<sup>160</sup> *Bystander*, 18 August 1899.

<sup>161</sup> *Bystander*, 18 August 1899.

<sup>162</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 207-208.

a new anti-lynching organization. Called to order by J. F. Blagburn and after a brief introduction, Wells discussed the need for African Americans in Des Moines and throughout the country to come together to “accomplish the best results” against the violence and racism directed at black people. Although Iowa black residents did not suffer daily from lynchings in their communities, being a part of this group meant that each member openly challenged the racist views that normalized lynching as a spectator sport among whites. Perhaps because many Iowa residents had direct ties to the South, the *Bystander* often printed stories about the most heinous crimes against African Americans in the South. Membership in this new group connected this Iowa group to the violence African Americans faced throughout the country. Two HBSRC members participated in the creation of this group: Mrs. A. O. Smith and Mrs. E. T. Banks. Smith was elected Secretary of the group, while Banks served on the Executive Committee.<sup>163</sup> The fact that Iowa black women served in executive positions in a political organization with men is a noteworthy example of how club work prepared black Iowa women to organize meetings and exercise citizenship skills in the public sphere.

The Temperance Movement began to grow in the early eighteenth century, emphasizing the negative physical, economic, and moral consequences of the consumption of liquor. During the late nineteenth century, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union(WCTU) was the leading temperance group in the country. Founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1874, the main goal of the organization was to protect homes across the nation from the dangers of alcohol and later tobacco and other drugs. Pledging total abstinence from alcohol and protesting a lack of women’s civil rights, landownership, child custody, rape and age of consent, members created local chapters called “unions.” In 1879 Frances Willard, the second National President, began to

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<sup>163</sup> *Bystander*, 21 September 1894.

politically broaden the scope of the organization by promoting the “Home Protection Ballot” which would allow women to vote alongside men on the granting of liquor licenses. Nineteen Iowa WCTU groups met for their first statewide convention in 1874 in Cedar Rapids, IA.<sup>164</sup>

White women’s support for women’s rights did not, however, include all women. For years, the WCTU excluded Catholics, Jewish, and African-American women. In 1881, Maryland native Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was appointed Superintendent of the Department of Colored Work. Harper hoped that she could strengthen the bond between black and white women nationwide. A leading educator, writer, abolitionist, mother, and widow, Harper turned her activist sights to suffrage, temperance, civil rights, education and economic opportunities for African Americans after Reconstruction. In 1891 she argued, “As a race, we have a right to be interested in the success of the temperance movement. The liquor power is too strong and dangerous to give it aid or countenance.” In 1883 the WCTU created the Department of Colored Work, organizing black women across the country who supported mutual temperance goals. Admittance to this group provided black women yet another point of entry into the political arena.<sup>165</sup> From 1893-1908, Lucinda “Lucy” Thurman served as Superintendent of the Department of Colored Work. Thurman later became the President of the NACW and brought temperance support with her. Black temperance supporters resembled members of other mutual aid, benevolent, self-improvement, and fraternal organizations, who were often middle-class activists and community leaders.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Papers of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/search/collection/wctu>. See the National Women’s Christian Temperance Union website “History” at <https://www.wctu.org/history.html>.

<sup>165</sup> Melba Joyce Boyd, *Discarded Legacy: Politics in the Life of Frances E. W. Harper 1825-1911* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994): 38, 201. See Frances E. W. Harper “Temperance,” *A.M.E. Church Review* 7 (1891) and Shirley Yee’s *Black Women Abolitionist* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992) for a greater discussion of black women’s race work during the antebellum years.

<sup>166</sup> Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (Xenia, Ohio: Aldine, 1926): 176-177.

In January 1896, black club women in Des Moines began to discuss the need for a separate black WCTU group in Des Moines, where at least one white union already existed. This was not only a discussion about temperance work, but also about the politics of working with an organization that practiced segregation, and whether African-American women would be better off organizing separately. Mrs. Horace Lewis and Mrs. Palmer led the debate “Will it be Beneficial to the Negro to have organized a Separate W.C.T.U.” After the discussion “it was decided in the negative.”<sup>167</sup> However, member Mrs. A. O. Smith took her support of the idea to the press, penning the editorial “To Organize a W.C.T.U” the following week. Her advocacy stemmed from the WCTU’s local and national support of white wayward women and girls. By 1882, the WCTU of Iowa had established the Benedict Home, a reformatory for “fallen” women, in Des Moines. White pregnant women and prostitutes received “Christian training” and followed a strict moral code while residing there. But black women were excluded.<sup>168</sup> Encouraging local black women to organize and “attach ourselves to the National W.C.T.U.,” Smith explained how club membership had positively affected her life,

Indeed I am lifted up to a larger and more relevant expectation of glorious possibilities of our race, and especially our women – but I do not mean by the ballot - who are becoming more united in local and national clubs.

Arguing that the organization was much larger than the right to vote and the trafficking of liquor, Smith asserted that only the raceless love of humanity could help lift the fallen. In doing so, she challenged the national WCTU’s unwritten exclusionary policies. While laws were in place to discourage the consumption of alcohol, she argued that through the WCTU and other

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<sup>167</sup> *Bystander*, 10 January 1896. *Bystander*, 17 January 1896.

<sup>168</sup> Papers of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa. In 1890, after the National WCTU began supporting political candidates who ran on Prohibition tickets across the country, the WCTU of Iowa split into two groups: the original WCTU of Iowa (nonpartisan) and the WCTU of the State of Iowa (partisan). Both groups co-existed in the state for the next sixteen years, reuniting in 1906.

memberships African-American women could make sure that the black “wayward girl has not altogether been forgotten.” Standing firmly on an unwavering confidence in the strength of organizational work, Smith believed that even without the vote women had the ability to unite and save those “overtaken in fault.” While complimenting the work of the WCTU of Iowa, she drew attention to the fact that errant black women and girls had no place to go in the city and challenged her club members to step up and take charge of the issue.<sup>169</sup> This charge would later fuel a push by HBSRC for the IACW to create a home for black women and girls in Des Moines. This move echoed the national beliefs held by African-American club women that there were unique problems affecting their communities that could be more effectively dealt with in separate forums.<sup>170</sup>

Attempts to create a separate black women’s WCTU in Des Moines did not come to fruition. Three months later in March 1896, Mrs. R. A. Wilburn joined the white East Side WCTU, one of the oldest and largest organizations on that side of town and that comprised of some of the city’s oldest families. After her admission, the former all-white union made several changes that resembled the inner-workings of the HBSRC, including the decision to follow an alphabetical order in determining when to hold meetings in certain members’ homes and in serving occasional lunches or refreshments at the gatherings. However, there is no evidence that the group ever met at Mrs. Wilburn’s home.<sup>171</sup> A year later, in September 1897, Wilburn was

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<sup>169</sup>*Bystander* 24 January 1896, Mrs. A. O. Smith, “To Organize A W.C.T.U.” See Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 105. Wood’s research focuses on how white women in Davenport, Iowa fought to preserve the respectability of working women who shared the streets with prostitutes. She discusses how the Charitable Alliance of the City of Davenport, comprised of ten white women’s groups, did not have any representation from the two local African-American churches or black women’s organizations, both ignoring their needs and excluding black women and girls from assistance.

<sup>170</sup> *Bystander*, 24 January 1896. See Hine’s discussion on African-American club women and the Temperance movement in *Hine Sight*, 69.

<sup>171</sup> *Bystander*, 3 April 1896.

selected as a delegate to attend the WCTU state meeting in Creston, Iowa.<sup>172</sup> In the span of a year, a black woman not only integrated Iowa's WCTU, but also served as a voting member at the state convention. Wilburn's acceptance to the group reveals how the local respect between black and white women trumped national resistance to organizational integration.

African-American men were also active in race uplift organizations in Iowa. As early as the 1850s, Iowa black men were members of the Prince Hall Masonry. By 1881 more than 200 members and eleven chapters existed in Iowa, under the leadership of the Missouri Prince Hall Grand Lodge. In August 1881, five Iowa lodges created the African Grand Lodge, independent of Missouri leadership. By 1884 a second Iowa lodge was formed, consisting of six city chapters. In 1887 the two lodges united to form the United Grand Lodge of Iowa, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons.<sup>173</sup> Through its women's auxiliaries, Prince Hall Masonry afforded leadership and organizational opportunities for black women. Iowa courts of the Heroines of Jericho were organized by 1870 and the Order of the Eastern Star by 1881. Like literary clubs, members of these groups carried out civic and social welfare agendas; however, only female relatives of Masons were offered membership.<sup>174</sup> In 1895, HBSRC husbands E. T. Banks and G. H. Cleggett traveled to Sioux City, Iowa to participate in the creation of the Commandery and Royal Arch Masons. In 1897, HBSRC member Mrs. Cleggett served as the Grand Most Ancient Matron (the highest office) of the Grand Court of Heroines of Jericho (HOJ). Being an officer and member of Masonic chapters and its women's auxiliaries brought great respect to members in African-American communities. Membership often included financial support in times of

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<sup>172</sup> *Bystander*, 10 September 1897.

<sup>173</sup> Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 161, 170, 173-174. See also Silag, *Outside In*, 405-407.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 157-159. See Sue Brown's *History of the Order of Eastern Star Among Colored People* (Des Moines: Bystander Press, 1925), 19-20. See also Silag, 405-407.

sickness, job loss, and death. Members were expected to maintain high moral standards and to carry themselves with pride.<sup>175</sup>

HBSRC husbands participated in other politically-based groups and often attended and contributed to the political discussions of HBSRC. As discussed in Chapter 1, in 1890 the National Afro-American League began fighting to end disfranchisement of Southern voters and the severe economic, educational and civil oppressions southern blacks were facing. While the national leadership suffered from internal friction and unsuccessful fundraising, Iowa black men and women organized branches of the League throughout the state as early as 1892 (IA-AAL). At the September 1897 Fifth Annual Statewide Meeting of the Afro-American League in Muchakinock, Iowa, HBSRC member Mrs. Coalson was elected to the Emblem Committee, while her husband held a position on the Insurance Committee. Other HBSRC husbands, Frank Blagburn and I.E. Williamson, also held state-level positions in the group.<sup>176</sup>

In December 1898, the State Afro-American League of Iowa had more than forty elected members (at least nine were women) from across the state, who served in positions/committees.

Calling for attendance at an upcoming statewide meeting, the IA-AAL stated,

*Whereas, The interests and rights of Afro-Americans have been denied in different parts of the United States, and particular in the Carolinas, as guaranteed to them by the constitution of the United States, it is earnestly urged the Afro-American League to send a full delegation from every district in the state to attend the call meeting at Des Moines, December 26 to assist in \_\_\_(illegible)\_\_\_ this great evil that comes so near to our homes...*<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> *Bystander*, 18 June 1897. See Silag, ed. *Outside In*, 405 -407.

<sup>176</sup> *Bystander*, 24 September 1897. *Bystander*, 1 October 1897. Detailed descriptions of the Emblem and Insurance committees are not provided. See Emma Thornbrough's, "The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908." Works by Thornbrough about the legacy of the National Afro-American League offers little insight into the influence of women on the male organization led by T. Thomas Fortune and Booker T. Washington. See "The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908," *Journal of Southern History*, 27, no.4 (1961): 494-512.

<sup>177</sup> *Bystander*, 9 December 1898.

It is apparent that members of the IA-AAL felt that African Americans suffered the most violence and social, political, and economic injustices in the South and were concerned that the same level of brutality could reach Iowa if they did not act. The national Afro-American League had “District Organizers” and three standing committees that required cooperation between black women and men from across the state, modeling how a larger group operated. In 1898, the Des Moines branch of the IA-AAL met to elect officers and delegates and to outline their goals. E. T. Banks was elected Vice-President and William Coalson as Assistant Secretary, both HBSRC husbands. An example of group unity in racial uplift, Blagburn attended two HBSRC meetings in September 1900 to discuss the successes of the Afro-American Council (AAC), presenting the paper “The Afro-American Council and the good it has accomplished.”<sup>178</sup> These cross-group interactions show how the activities of Iowa black race workers were truly intertwined. What is important to highlight is the organizational structure the AAL represented in the state. For club women, whose groups consisted of local women and had fewer elected positions, participation in the AAL provided an example of how statewide branches coexisted and how state members worked with a national body.

Through multi-group membership and cooperation, African-American female and male reformers addressed a wide range of issues throughout Iowa. While Deborah Gray White has shown that black male leaders felt threatened by the politicization of club women, the collaboration between the HBSRC and black male leaders suggests that this was not the case nation-wide. In a state with a black population less than one percent and even fewer individuals who had the time or resources to participate in efforts of organized uplift, Iowa women depended

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<sup>178</sup> *Bystander*, 13 September 1900. *Bystander*, 21 September 1900. See Thornbrough, “The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908.” The National Afro-American League dissolved in 1893 due to leadership strife and lack of funds. The organization returned in 1898 as the National Afro-American Council, adopting nearly identical objectives as the League.



and relied upon the strengths of one another. Black Iowa club women developed relationships with the WCTU, Masons, AAC and other groups in a relentless push to gain political access. The more “pots” that these women had their hands in, the more organizations and society at large would be forced to recognize their issues as humanitarian and not race based.<sup>179</sup>

The I. B. W. society met with the president, Mrs. G. Taylor, on last Friday afternoon. After the regular business was transacted, a short program was rendered, after which an elegant lunch was served and the meeting then adjourned to meet with Mrs. Wells Fowler next week.

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Figure 4. 1895 Ida B. Wells Reading Club Report

African-American women in Ottumwa organized in 1895 to define their rights and responsibilities as citizen. Located eighty-four miles southeast of Des Moines in Wapello County, 658 African Americans lived in Ottumwa in 1890. As discussed in Chapter 1, 13% of the city’s black population worked at the John Morrell meatpacking plant. Women and men also found employment in restaurants and hotels, and as barbers blacksmiths and carpenters.<sup>181</sup>

The Ida B. Wells Reading Circle (IBWRC hereafter) was formed in January of 1895. This literary group took shape just four months after Wells’ visit to Des Moines. It was established with the central objective of “lifting as we climb.”<sup>182</sup> The organization’s namesake,

<sup>179</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves* (New York: Norton, 1999), 217. Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest*, 70.

<sup>180</sup> *Bystander* 2 August 1895, “Ottumwa News.”

<sup>181</sup> Wilson J. Warren, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 23 and 50. See Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz’s *Meatpackers: An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and Their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996) provides insight into the challenges faced by black Iowa meatpackers, focusing on employees at the Rath plant in Waterloo, IA. See Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 35; and Silag, ed. *Outside In*, 202, 214.

<sup>182</sup> Sixth Annual Session Meeting Minutes, Keokuk, IA 1907, p. 25-26, IACWC. *Bystander*, 25 January 1895. The January 25, 1895 article in the *Bystander* states that the group was organized on Friday, January 18, 1895.

Ida B. Wells, was a former slave from Mississippi who learned to read and write at a school for freed people after the Civil War. Wells attended Shaw University (now Rust College) in Mississippi and later taught in her home state and in Tennessee. In 1895, Ottumwa women and black women across the country celebrated Wells' strength and tenacity as a fearless anti-lynching advocate and prominent race worker and club woman. Wells had successfully sued a railroad company for being forcibly removed from a first-class car and won a \$500 settlement. Although the decision was later overturned by a higher court, she quickly became revered as a trailblazing race activist among black people throughout the country.<sup>183</sup> While there is no evidence that any IBWRC early members attended Wells' 1894 talks in Des Moines, they had access to the detailed accounts of her visit through state media, especially the *Bystander*.<sup>184</sup> Inspired by Wells, Ottumwa's black club members united to elevate black women in their community. An examination of this club shows how literary activities and organizational strategies prepared this group of Iowa black women activists, who were both similar and different from HBSRC members in Des Moines.

Mrs. Queen Taylor, a Missouri native, hosted the first organizational meeting for the IBWRC at her home, being elected the club's first President. Of the fifteen identified members in 1895, all were married. Highlighted in Chapter One, thirty-six percent of the early members of the IBWRC from 1896 to 1902 were migrants from Missouri or first generation to the state. Mrs. Taylor married Reverend Zachariah Taylor in 1887, who led the AME church in Ottumwa and was also a Mason.<sup>185</sup> Early reports about the IBWRC show that this group had a very close relationship with the two local African-American A.M.E. and Baptist churches. Different from

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<sup>183</sup> Giddings, *Ida*, 39, 50, 61-64.

<sup>184</sup> *Bystander*, 14 September 1895. *Bystander* 21 September 1895.

<sup>185</sup> 1880 United States Federal Census. *Bystander* 8 February 1895. *Bystander*, 31 May 1895. *Bystander* 21 July 1899.

the HBSRC, several of the group's earliest members were married to the pastors at local churches; in addition to Mrs. Queen Taylor (AME), Mrs. Fannie Watts was married to Rev. W. F. Watts of the city's Second Baptist Church.<sup>186</sup> The group utilized church property to host picnics and benefits.<sup>187</sup> These relationships not only highlight collaboration between club and church, but also bring to light activist partnerships in Ottumwa. Coverage of the IBWRC in the state's leading black periodical was very frequent. Like the HBSRC, official documents from the group do not exist; however, from 1895 to 1902 more than forty entries followed the activities of the group, as the city had extremely thorough local reporters for the *Iowa Bystander*. It is important to note that, except for the HBSRC, meeting summaries for other state groups like the IBWRC are not very detailed. Des Moines news garnered the most coverage in the state black newspaper. Convening weekly and bi-weekly on Fridays, IBWRC club business mirrored that of other early groups in Iowa, beginning with the election of the officers, which included President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Chorister, and Chaplain.<sup>188</sup> Opening with gospel hymns and prayer, meetings consisted of history lessons, debating of current events, answering questions from the Question Box, discussing select readings, and eating lunch.<sup>189</sup> By the following March, the group was recognized throughout the state for its increase in numbers and for working in the best interests of club members.<sup>190</sup>

At their very first meeting, IBWRC members immediately took to strengthening their literary and club skills by discussing speech making.<sup>191</sup> *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the Civil War* was staple reading for

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<sup>186</sup> *Bystander*, 25 January 1895. *Bystander*, 17 May 1895. *Bystander*, 31 May 1895.

<sup>187</sup> *Bystander*, 28, August 1896.

<sup>188</sup> *Bystander*, 25 January 1895.

<sup>189</sup> *Bystander*, 18 and 22 March 1895. *Bystander*, 1 November 1895.

<sup>190</sup> *Bystander*, 18 March 1895.

<sup>191</sup> *Bystander*, 25 January 1895.

the group during its early years. The book was the center of discussion more than ten times from 1895-1896. This 1890 book written by African-American veteran Joseph T. Wilson was the first history of the black soldier in the United States. Conversations about this book were often followed by additional United States history discussions.<sup>192</sup> Like the HBSRC, members of the IBWRC also enjoyed the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; however, specific details about authors and books are not mentioned in published club reports. Literary activities are often described simply as “reading of current events,” “history lesson,” or “general history.”<sup>193</sup> Connected to the statewide press from the beginning, surely IBWRC members paid very close attention to the weekly reports of the HBSRC where they got ideas for lessons, discussions and essays.

IBWRC members wrote and circulated essays, focusing a large part of their work on advocating nineteenth century sentiments of Republican Motherhood. Members believed that mothers were the key to uplifting the race by instilling morals and values in their children—thus strengthening black homes. The essay “‘Duty’ of Parents to Children” presented by Mrs. Mary J. Scott in November 1895 and the July 1899 paper “Useful Women” presented by Mrs. Francis Hicks show that club members drew a strong connection between womanhood and motherhood. Indeed, forty-eight percent of early IBWRC members 1895-1902 were mothers.<sup>194</sup> Married for fifteen years, Francis was a stay-at-home mother of four, while her husband Ab was a hotel foreman. The couple rented a home on Center Street. As a club woman with young children, her

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<sup>192</sup> *Bystander*, 18 March 1895. *Bystander*, 22 March 1895. *Bystander*, 29 March 1895. *Bystander*, 28 February 1896. See Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, The War of 1812, and The Civil War*, 1890. Wilson, an African-American veteran, wrote the first history of the black soldier in the United States. *Bystander* reports reveal that the women discussed *The Black Phalanx* at least twelve times March 1895-April 1896.

<sup>193</sup> *Bystander*, 28 February 1896. At the meeting each club member stated a Longfellow quotation.

<sup>194</sup> *Bystander*, 1 November 1895. *Bystander*, 21 July 1899. Thirty-three identified early members of the IBWRC 1895-1902 were married.

works highlighted her efforts to juggle the many components of her life.<sup>195</sup> Approaching a more personal topic in April 1897, meeting hostess Mrs. M. Page posed the question “where and under what circumstances was the first kiss.” Page stumped fellow members who were unable to provide an answer. Maggie Page, a thirty-eight-year-old mother of an eighteen –year-old daughter, may have asked this question for her teenage daughter.<sup>196</sup> Following this query, an instructive paper emphasizing motherhood was presented by Mrs. P. P. Taylor.<sup>197</sup> IBWRC and black club women throughout Iowa drew a distinct connection between motherhood, the home, and the larger community, by situating the moral future of the race on their own shoulders, knowing that standards of racial uplift were often based on behaviors exhibited in appropriate home life and child care.<sup>198</sup>

IBWRC quickly began to focus on pressing political issues. In March 1895, members determined that “Woman Suffrage” would be discussed by Mrs. Jemima Owens at the next meeting. An Illinois native, Jemima moved to Iowa in 1892 when she married Charles Owens and quickly became an active member of the IBWRC. This public announcement about the suffrage discussion tell us that both the Ottumwa and larger state communities that the IBWRC discussed relevant progressive issues; it informed women, black and white, that women’s rights were a significant part of the group’s efforts; and it enticed members, interested women, and community leaders to attend the next meeting. This advertisement proved successful and the group continued the suffrage conversation for another meeting, placing it first on the program.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Bystander*, 1 November 1895. *Bystander*, 21 July 1899. 1900 United States Census.

<sup>196</sup> 1885 Iowa Census. Maggie Page was born in Missouri in 1859. She was married to Charles and had two children, Florence and Samuel. In 1885, her occupation was a washerwoman and her husband was a barber.

<sup>197</sup> *Bystander*, 2 April 1897.

<sup>198</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), 12-13.

<sup>199</sup> *Bystander*, 22 March 1895. *Bystander*, 29 March 1895. *Bystander*, 5 April 1895. Jemima McGill (first name sometimes spelled Jamima) was born in Illinois in 1865. In 1880 she lived with her parents in Galesburg, Knox,

IBWRC members, prominent within the black community, publicly questioned why local black women and men exercised minimal influence over political and economic matters in the city. In April 1899, the group announced that they would be discussing “Why We Have No Representative in the Business Affairs of the City?”<sup>200</sup> This sentiment of being excluded from political power was shared by African Americans in Iowa communities across the state. IBWRC members and local men were well aware of the issues in their city. In early March 1895, the city’s black men organized the Afro-American Congress. Two of the group’s leaders were related to IBWRC members Maggie Page and Mrs. Hall. This branch of the Afro-American Council was formed two years prior to the Des Moines branch.<sup>201</sup> By June, the city’s black women and men met at the Second Baptist Church to elect delegates to the Afro-American Council that met in Des Moines. Called to order by club husband, Reverend Watts, IBWRC’s Vice-President Mrs. L. M. Shelton was elected Assistant Secretary for the group.<sup>202</sup> Denied the vote, black club women in Ottumwa actively participated alongside their husbands in local politics. Even more, it appears that the IBWRC was more publicly vocal about their political views than black men—perhaps understanding that they were viewed as less threatening because they didn’t cast a ballot.

From 1890 to 1901, African-American women in Des Moines and Ottumwa formed a sisterhood that was the bedrock of the black club movement in Iowa. This sisterhood of club work united local black women, easing the transition of migrants and their families to the

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Illinois where her father worked as a plasterer she and her siblings attended school, and her mother worked at home. She married Iowa native Charles Owens in 1892. See 1880, 1900, and 1920 United States Federal Censuses.  
<sup>200</sup> *Bystander*, 28 April 1899.

<sup>201</sup> *Bystander*, 22 February 1895. *Bystander* 29 March 1895. See Emma Thornbrough’s “The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908.” Works by Thornbrough about the legacy of the National Afro-American League offers little insight into the influence of women on the male organization led by T. Thomas Fortune and Booker T. Washington. See “The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908,” *Journal of Southern History*, 27, no.4 (1961): 494-512.

<sup>202</sup> *Bystander*, 31 May 1895. *Bystander* 28 June 1895.

Midwest. Members of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle and Ida B. Wells Reading Club erected infrastructures within their small communities based on their abilities to diagnose the needs of African Americans in Iowa. Developing their own visions of their towns, civic reform quickly evolved to civic altruism as these women created new spaces for all African Americans to gain success in their communities.<sup>203</sup> Members of the HBSRC and IBWRC set a precedent of self-help and transformative education that would transfer to the larger state organization when Iowa clubs federated in 1902. Even more, the focus of these early Iowa club women on being better women, wives, and mothers provided a model for future groups that stressed the importance of gender progress for greater race progress.

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<sup>203</sup> Hine, *Housewives*, 226. See Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 107.

### Chapter Three: “No Race Climbs Faster Than Its Women:” The Politics of Race Work 1902-1906 <sup>204</sup>

*Iowa is the home of quite a number of loyal, enthusiastic race loving women, who are doing all they can to brighten the pathway of the race and are sacrificing much of their time to help push on the wheels of Negro progress. - Helena Downey, 1902<sup>205</sup>*

During the 1890s, Iowa black women’s activism grew alongside the national club movement. Very much in tune with race work across the country, Iowa club members were well aware of the national push to federate black women’s clubs. This chapter discusses the process leading to the formation of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW) in 1896. As black women across the country came together under the NACW umbrella, they were no longer simply local community organizers; they also became vocal state and national activists. This chapter examines the evolution of African-American women’s activism in Iowa by exploring the creation of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women (IACW) and the Federation’s growth during its formative years, from 1902 to 1906. During this period, some of the longest-active club women rose to leadership positions in the IACW, bringing with them elements of their early race work that emphasized motherhood, education and morality. During the infancy of the IACW, experienced club women did not alter their local focus of women’s activism to support a national race uplift agenda. Meeting in towns throughout Iowa, black club women gained local recognition as community leaders, even as they located their interests and activism in events taking place on the state, regional, and national stages.

By the late nineteenth century, the growing size and numbers of both black and white women’s organizations throughout the United States led to the creation of state and national

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<sup>204</sup> Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, Des Moines, 1905, p. 5 IACWC. This quote is taken from President Belle Graves’ address, “Needs of Race Organizations.”

<sup>205</sup> *Bystander*, 26 September 1902. This quote is taken from the first “Club and Club Women” column in the *Bystander*, written by IACW President Helena Downey.



federations. Post-Civil War women sought equal political and labor rights through public action. Women's societies and clubs provided women across the country with new opportunities for collective activities and intellectual growth that evolved to local service projects. By the 1890s, club women created national federations for increased political influence. Yet, the women's club movement operated along the racial constructs of the time, causing African-American women to create their own social welfare and self-help institutions within their own communities. Separately, the federation process unified black club women and white club women across the country, creating both national leadership and a national voice for each group.<sup>206</sup> Among white women, the federation process included an embrace of segregation: the all-white General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC hereafter) was created in New York, NY in 1890 under the motto "Unity is Diversity." Yet despite the motto by 1893, the organization openly excluded African-American women from membership. That same year white women's clubs across Iowa established the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs (IFOWC), which in practice, if not by law, was also all white.<sup>207</sup>

In 1896, the National League of Colored Women and the National Federation of Afro-American Women united to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW hereafter) in Washington, D.C, answering the charge by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a leading black club woman from Boston, Massachusetts, a national organization of women's clubs was needed. With the motto "Lifting as We Climb," this organization created a new, national venue

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<sup>206</sup> For a discussion of the federation process for white women's clubs, see Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) and Karen Blair, *The Clubwomen as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1980). See Ellen Carol DuBois and Lyn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2016) 282-283, 306-310, 414-415.

<sup>207</sup> Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs Bylaws 1890. While there is no evidence that black club women in the state were interested in joining this group, the IFOWC did not have any bylaws stating that black women were not allowed to join.

for the work of club women.<sup>208</sup> Endorsing the views of middle-class black women across the country who collectively embraced the ideology of racial uplift, the NACW allied 5,000 women in nationwide clubs.<sup>209</sup> From 1896-1933, the emphasis of this national group was on social morality, calling for the betterment of black households as a key to race progress.<sup>210</sup> The federation movement provided direction, encouragement, and expert leadership for African-American women, while creating space in which African-American women could exercise their public authority.<sup>211</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, African-American women pushed to integrate the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC hereafter), attending its 1900 national convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Black and white club women in Iowa supported this challenge. Unbeknownst to the GFWC, the all-black New Era Club from Boston registered for the convention and were given credentials. The New Era Club was founded by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin in 1893, and as the president of the club she was a delegate at the convention. But when Ruffin arrived and the General Federation realized its mistake, her credentials were not accepted. The Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs delegates, led by Mrs. Harriet Windsor, voted 17 to 6 in support of seating Ruffin. Black club women from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle sent a telegram of support to Mrs. Windsor, acknowledging her and expressing thanks to the IFOWC delegation for support of Josephine Ruffin's admittance to the GFWC.<sup>212</sup> Between 1900-1901, the HBSRC continued to "vigorously" discuss integration of the GFWC; they

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<sup>208</sup> Anne Beiser Allen, "Sowing Seeds of Kindness—and Change: A History of the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs," *Iowa Heritage* 1 (2002): 2-13. See Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women" *Journal of Women's History* 3:2 (Fall 1991):10-25.

<sup>209</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (New York: G.K. Hall & CO., 1996), xv-xvii. Original edition written in 1933.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* xxi.

<sup>211</sup> Lerner, ed., *Black Women In White America: A Documentary History*, 437. See Jones' *All Bound Up Together*, 8.

<sup>212</sup> *Bystander*, 8 June 1900 "Color Line Drawn in the National Federation of Women: Mrs. Windsor and the other Iowa Delegates Favor Equality."

believed that the admission of black women's clubs would be an important challenge to the white-imposed color line.<sup>213</sup>

In May 1902, the GFWC agreed to the "New York compromise" at their biennial meeting in Los Angeles, California. For the first time at a national convention, the GFWC decided that black clubs could be admitted to the white federation if, and only if, they obtained a unanimous committee vote or two-thirds vote among directors. In other words, while the GFWC did not exclude black women's organizations, the amendment made it impossible for them to secure the necessary votes from an all-white board of directors and committees. An editorial in the *Bystander* compared this injustice to the Missouri Compromise, the "compromise" challenged the GFWC to "stand for the education and broadening the sphere of women."<sup>214</sup> Not all black Iowans agreed on the best response. Reverend H. S. Graves of the Des Moines St. Paul AME Church told his congregation that because the color line would always exist, the best way for black club women to elevate the race would be to work among themselves. Reverend Graves and his wife Belle had just recently moved to Des Moines from Illinois, where he and his wife were leading race activists in the Chicago area. The *Bystander* openly disagreed with Reverend Graves' opinion, arguing, "To be a member of any white organization does not mean that you must leave your race." The strongest, most effective response to the racism of white club women was the NACW.<sup>215</sup>

The NACW gained prominence as the nation's largest secular African-American women's organization during the early 1900s. Its membership steadily increased as chapters of

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<sup>213</sup>*Bystander*, 3 May 1902.

<sup>214</sup>*Bystander*, 9 May 1902, "Colored Women's Clubs Ruled Out."

<sup>215</sup>*Bystander*, 16 May 1902, "The Wrong Idea: We Do Not Agree With Reverend Graves' Statement at A.M. Church, Last Sunday Evening." Reverend Horace and Belle Graves had recently moved from Galesburg, Illinois where he was a young rising star at Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church. See *Christian Recorder*, 18 July 1901.

the African American Council (AAC) continued to decline across the country. Black club women's unconditional support for the Republican party, contrasted to the clear divisions in the AAC over how far to press for equal citizenship rights. While club women convened in parlors all over the country, African-American male leaders continued to debate how to best advance the race, each group offering different race work and uplift strategies. Unlike their male colleagues, black women were able to unify on the need for organization if not the same priorities.<sup>216</sup> The NACW established three national goals: to morally and mentally "elevate and dignify black womanhood," increase socio-economic success, and the betterment of black homes. In contrast, the AAC offered six principal grievances to fight segregation and discrimination, by attacking issues of voter suppression, lynching, and unequal access to education, public accommodations and railroads. Perhaps to keep the focus on the strength of organizing, the NACW framed its work in the positive way, while the AAC framed its goals as grievances. During this period, membership and support of the NACW grew while the national AAC suffered from a lack of cohesive leadership, minimal funding and scant national support, the same problems that led to the demise of its predecessor, the Afro-American League. Furthermore, national AAC leader T. Thomas Fortune and his main supporter and financial backer, Booker T. Washington, disagreed vehemently about the correct course to secure the vote for black men. Fortune argued for universal suffrage for all men. In contrast, Washington did not oppose literacy and property requirements as long as they were applied equally to both black and white men.<sup>217</sup> Founder of

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<sup>216</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (New York: G.K. Hall & CO., 1996), xv-xvii. Original edition written in 1933. Melanie Susan Gustafson, *Women in the Republic, 1854-1924* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 77-79. Gustafson argues that early NACW leaders Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Margaret Murray Washington, and Victoria Early Matthews attended a 1895 Republican meeting in Detroit, all representing the National Federation of Afro-American Women (the predecessor to the NACW). All were invited to the event, although it is not clear if the women were there in service to their party or to lobby for their causes (77-78).

<sup>217</sup> Emma Lou Thornbrough, "T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Editor in the Age of Accommodation," in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. August Meier and John Hope Franklin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 18-37. See Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Washington preached black self-improvement before racial equality through industrial education, infusing his beliefs within the AAC alongside financial support.<sup>218</sup>

While Washington's model gained much support from white political leaders and businessmen, not all black men and women agreed with his vision. W. E. B. Du Bois, scholar and activist, voiced the opinions of those who believed that liberal arts education would create a "talented" group of intellectuals who could lead the race and promote racial progress while demanding civil and political rights—a very different strategy from that advocated by Washington. Du Bois attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, before becoming the first African-American man to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1895.<sup>219</sup> While the debate between these two race workers and their followers raged in the early twentieth century, activists established new national male-led groups like the Committee of Twelve and the Niagara Movement to confront racism, segregation and violence.<sup>220</sup> Yet, as with their precursors, these organizations continued to be guided by polarized visions of racial uplift. Unlike male-led groups, the NACW supported themes of self-improvement and the edification of black women,

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<sup>218</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1901). See Louis Harlan's "Booker T. Washington and the Politics of Accommodation" in ed. Franklin, Hope, Meier, *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1982), 1-18. Booker T. Washington argued that his industrial education curriculum, which focused on learning skills and manual labor, would allow black people to assume responsibility for their own economic progress. According to Washington, by learning to become skilled farmers, artisans and laborers, African Americans would—in time—lessen the economic divide between the races.

<sup>219</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1903).

<sup>220</sup> Cary Wintz, *African American Political Thought 1890-1930: Washington, Du Bois, Garvey, and Randolph* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 51-52. Formed in 1904, The Committee of Twelve envisioned itself as an executive committee of national black leadership which would attempt to maintain cooperation and harmony between factions in African-American leadership. Washington and Du Bois were group organizers, but the two split because Du Bois felt he was excluded from the organizing process. Letters from Washington to Du Bois show that southern voting rights and making southerners aware of specific voting requirements were a priority of the group. From 1905-1910 the African-American male race leaders in Niagara Movement placed the responsibility of the "Negro Problem" on the shoulders of white people demanding: freedom of speech, male suffrage, and access to and equal education. This group is often noted as the precursor to the NAACP. See Elliot Rudwick's "The Niagara Movement," *Journal of Negro History*, (July 1957, 42:3): 177-200.

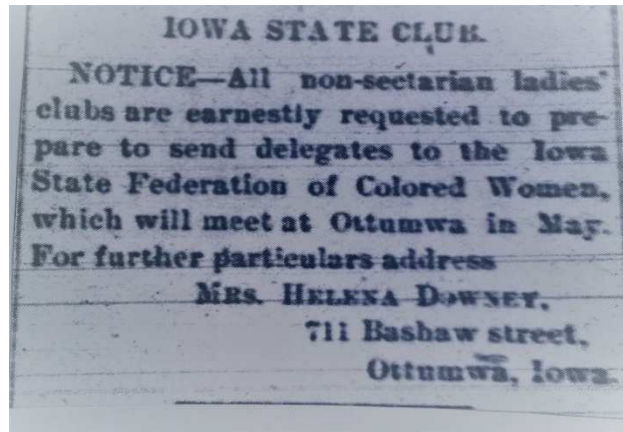
while creating ways for club women in both the North and South, rural and urban, to advance the race and challenge racial discrimination, including that practiced by white club women.

At the turn of the century, black women race leaders harnessed their power to create the NACW, quickly moving ahead of the male-led AAC, with more than 5,000 members nationwide. While black and white club women debated integration of the GFWC, black and white club women in Iowa agreed that integration at the national level was important for all women. By 1901, Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle members began discussing the need for an African-American club women's statewide body in Iowa, "anxious to help strengthen the idea of a state organization."<sup>221</sup> This prospect echoed throughout the state, and in January 1902 Ottumwa's Helena Downey, member of the Ida B. Wells Reading Club, submitted a notice to the *Bystander* calling for "all non-sectarian ladies' clubs" to send delegates to the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women (IACW) that would meet the following May. Her emphasis on "non-sectarian" may have been a way to tell interested women that the focus of the organization would be on racial uplift, not a specific political party or religion. Downey was the lead in organizing the state's black club women.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *Bystander*, 5 April 1901.

<sup>222</sup> *Bystander*, 31 January 1902 "Iowa State Club."



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Figure 5. 1902 Invitation to create an Iowa federation

### ***Laying the Ground Work: IACW 1902 and 1903***

Answering the January 1902 “statewide call” issued by organizer Helena Downey, club leaders convened their first state-wide meeting to federate their clubs, gathering in Ottumwa on Tuesday, May 27, 1902 at the city’s Second Baptist Church. For two days in late May, residents of Ottumwa, the largest city in Wapello County, hosted the first meeting of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women (IACW). Ottumwa was also the home of two of the oldest black women’s groups in Iowa, the Ida B. Wells Reading Club (1895) and the Benevolent Club (1901). These Ottumwa clubs had at least thirty-one active club members in the city prior to the 1902 gathering.<sup>224</sup> In 1900, the county had 793 black residents, about 2.24% of the county’s total population.<sup>225</sup>

From the start, the IACW quickly began fostering a relationship with NACW, inviting national club women to attend the first meeting in Iowa. It seems likely that they were highly motivated by the draw of qualifying for the statewide federation to qualify for the national

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Club reports in the “Ottumwa” Section of the *Bystander* identify more women who were active in the IBW and Benevolent clubs prior to the formation of the IACW in 1902.

<sup>225</sup> 1900 US Census, 1900 Iowa Census. In 1900 Wapello County’s population was 35,426.

organization. At this 1902 meeting, attendees from five cities listened intently to galvanizing words delivered by NACW President, Josephine Silone Yates. Yates, highlighting the NACW's recent membership in the National Council of Women and the National Mother's Congress (both nonpartisan), roused the group by emphasizing the new connection of Iowa black women to 10,000 black club women nationwide. Yates stressed the national organization's goals "to raise the plane of home, moral and civic life of the negro, and encourage everything that upbuilds (sic) the race." She reassured the group that "each club is left free to adopt the best work that is adapted locally."<sup>226</sup> Like the NACW, the IACW was also a non-partisan organization. However, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, early Iowa club women were directly and explicitly political through their participation in anti-lynching and temperance campaigns.<sup>227</sup>

Iowa black club women quickly began defining and shaping their newly formed organization, and their first actions asserted the importance of corporate identity to the group. One of the first in-depth discussions focused on the name applied to blacks in America. Joining the national debate among African Americans about the usage of "negro", "colored", or "Afro-American," the group agreed that the term Afro-American should be used, changing their name from the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women to the Iowa State Federation of Afro-American Women. They felt that "Afro-American" was not associated to slavery like the words "negro" and "colored."<sup>228</sup> They drafted a Constitution, which emulated the NACW's goals to

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<sup>226</sup> *Ottumwa Saturday Herald*, 31 May 1902. *Ottumwa Courier*, 29 May 1902. Josephine Silone Yates served as second NACW president from 1901 to 1906. Yates was, a writer, teacher, lecturer, and club woman. She organized the Kansas City Women's League 1893 in Missouri, joining the NACW in 1896. See Hallie Q. Brown *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* Xenia, Ohio: Aldine Publishing, 1926) 178-180. See eds. Hine, Brown, Terborg-Penn's *Black Women in America* p. 1298.

<sup>227</sup> In 1894 HBSRC members Mrs. A. O Smith and Mrs. E. T. Banks were elected members of an anti-lynching organization in Des Moines. In March 1896 Mrs. R. A. Wilburn, HBSRC member, joined Des Moines' East Side WCTU.

<sup>228</sup> *Ottumwa Saturday Herald*, 31 May 1902. From 1830-1890 black Americans began referring to themselves as negro or colored. By 1890 use of the term Afro-American began to emerge, as some blacks pushed to end the usage of words they felt were associated with slavery like colored and negro. In the 1890s the first black entities



strengthen bonds among women and to create clubs where they did not exist. Yet it also drew on members' previous experiences, particularly the challenges of building viable organizations. Their "Constitution" recognized the strength gained through cooperation. The Preamble stated, "WHEREAS, Experience has shown that knowledge may be more readily acquired by a combination of effort rather than by single ones, and feeling the need of an organized and united effort for the betterment of the home and social life of the Afro-American people, we hereby do unite into a state federation."<sup>229</sup> The "Objects" of the IACW called for unity among women "in raising their home, moral and civil life to the highest standard." They also set requirements for club eligibility into the statewide group, stating only those "who hold regular meetings and have not less than ten members shall be eligible to membership in the Federation."<sup>230</sup> These prerequisites both encouraged and rewarded club growth and activity throughout the state by offering statewide affiliation only to those clubs that increased their membership and met regularly. However, these rules also signaled that clubs should select women who had the ability to meet regularly as members. While this implicitly denoted a certain social standing in the community, it also brought to light some of the difficulties they experienced in their local clubs.<sup>231</sup> Regular meetings required women to have free time - time that most working women did not have. In a state with a small African-American population, the pool of women became even more limited based on availability.

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using "Afro-American" were formed nationally, including National Afro-American League, the National Federation of Afro-American Women and the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper. See Lerone Bennett Jr.'s "What's In a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black" in *Ebony Magazine* 23 (November 1967)46-48, 50-52, 54.

<sup>229</sup> "Minutes, Second Annual Meeting 1903," box 1, folder 4, IACWC.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Gerda Lerner, "Early Community Work of Black Club Women," *Journal of Negro History*, v.59, n.2 (April: 1974): 158-167.

The IACW established three important standing committees at the 1902 meeting that reflected both the formal (Du Bois) and informal (Washington) uplift paths. The IACW prioritized educational, financial, and academic values often associated with traditional liberal arts educations. Indeed, despite their lack of a formal higher education, IACW members envisioned themselves as talented leaders. In this vein, they established an Education Committee. The committee suggested literary subjects that clubs throughout the state should study, from contemporary black authors to world history. In contrast, the Domestic Economy Committee tackled more practical matters, addressing issues that more closely resembled informal education. For example, the committee recommended savings plans as one way that local communities could improve their financial situation. The committee also offered advice on subjects that ranged from the most effective way to grocery shop to the multiple uses of a potato sack. By disseminating these economic lessons, the IACW linked the prosperity of families with that of the larger community. Finally, the IACW also established the Reciprocity Bureau. Deemed “a bureau of general information and storehouse of information,” this Bureau served as the institutional bedrock of the new organization. It linked the state organization to local clubs and local clubs to one another. The Bureau furnished letters of application, created letters of introduction for IACW members who visited out-of-state groups, and supplied new clubs with constitutions and outlines of study.<sup>232</sup> Significantly, the Bureau’s responsibilities also included the maintenance of minutes, programs, and important papers, building an archive of the organization’s efforts and activities. Iowa black women, exercising collaborative agency, gained

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<sup>232</sup> *Bystander*, 3 February 1905. Sometime in early 1902 the General Federation of Women’s Clubs created a National Reciprocity Committee. At the May 1902 Biennial Meeting of the GFWC in Los Angeles the committee presented its first report, stating its goal to be a repository for all written work from across the country. See “Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Meeting” in General Federation of Women’s Clubs *Biennial of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs: Official Proceedings*, p. 46.

even greater control in shaping both their identity and literacy by safeguarding the preservation and distribution of IACW material.<sup>233</sup>

After establishing the foundational committees, like other state federation around the country, IACW activists continued to build their institutional infrastructure. During the next state-wide meeting in May 1903, forty delegates, representing ten clubs, met in Davenport, Iowa.<sup>234</sup> The club women created and staffed five additional committees that would carry out tasks for the 1903 sessions: Courtesy, Resolutions, Nominating Board, Rules, and Finance. Women from various regions of the state came together, including eighteen women from the earliest clubs, to develop an agenda for each convention committee. The Rules and Regulations Committee presented a timeline of how the meeting should flow and the official opening and closing times of each session, declaring that the doors be closed during the program and that delegates must occupy the first six seats. The Resolutions Committee was charged with writing and submitting the resolutions to be put on record by the group at the end of the session. Members of the Finance Committee were responsible for all money collected during each session, while the Nominating Board created ballots for election of officers for the following year.<sup>235</sup> Precisely organized, the appointment of convention committees mirrors the procedures of the NACW and other national black and white organizations. This close attention to procedure was an effort to provide evidence of their readiness for citizenship, by showing their excellent skills at governance.

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<sup>233</sup> *Bystander*, 21 August 1903. See Ann Ruggles Gere and Sarah R. Robbins, "Gendered Literacy in Black and White: Turn of the Century African-American and European-American Club Women's Printed Text," *Signs* 2:3 (Spring), 643-678.

<sup>234</sup> *Bystander* 29 May 1903, "Club and Club Women." Downey's summary of the 1903 IACW meeting list forty delegates representing ten clubs. Annual Meeting Minutes list fifteen clubs statewide with nearly 200 members. See the *Davenport Daily Times*, 26 May 1903 and *Davenport Democrat*, 26 May 1903. Both Davenport newspapers report that twenty-five delegates from across the state attended the meeting.

<sup>235</sup> 1903 Annual Meeting Minutes, IACWC.

The IACW placed the early success of the state organization in the hands of some of the most experienced women. At the 1902 meeting, one of the first orders of business was to elect the organization's officers. Iowa club women decided that if they were to successfully fight the obstacles placed in their way by discriminatory barriers, they needed to maximize the talent among them by pooling their literary, organizational, outreach and fundraising skills. The first seven elected officers represented cities where early clubs were located, including Ottumwa, Davenport, Muscatine, and Des Moines.<sup>236</sup> All brought a wealth of managerial, community services, and educational goals to the group, while each woman held a special understanding of the needs of African Americans in their home towns. The leaders would take their local knowledge to the state level.

### ***Iowa Club Women in a National Movement***

Iowa club women shared some characteristics with their counterparts across the country, but they were also different in significant ways. Although African Americans did not use the term "middle class" during the early twentieth century, historians have very closely examined the implications of class for black women, especially for club activists. Scholars have argued that by adopting Victorian values, black elites adopted notions of respectability through ideas of temperance, frugality, and hard work.<sup>237</sup> If we consider their own occupations, those of their husbands, their education, and other characteristics they shared, we discover that middle-class

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<sup>236</sup> Hine, "Housewives", 225-225. See Elsa Barkley Brown's discussion of black women's clear understanding of the link between race issues and women's issues in "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," *Signs* 14 (Spring 1989): 610-33.

<sup>237</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, xviii-xix. See Eileen Boris', "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political'," in *Mothers of the New World*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michaels (New York: Rutledge, 1993), 222. See W. E. B. Dubois' *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1899) for an early twentieth century discussion of race uplift goals for African Americans.

status was not a mandatory prerequisite for participation. In 1902, the IACW's first elected officers ranged from teenagers to matrons. Following similar patterns of club women around the nation, few had children and all but one of these early leaders appear to have been married.<sup>238</sup> Other significant, shared characteristics also emerge. Census data shows that none of these women were reported as working outside of the home when the IACW was founded. However, several had boarders in the home, as a form of income, which census enumerators failed to register as a female enterprise although it brought income into the household.<sup>239</sup> The fact that they did not work outside the home suggests a certain level of privilege that allowed some black club women in Iowa the flexibility and free time to take care of both home and community. While their employment status suggests a middle-class marker, during the early years of Iowa's clubs the activists' husbands were employed largely as skilled laborers, not as independent business owners or as members of the professions.<sup>240</sup> For example, the IACW's first president Helena Downey's husband worked as a slaughterhouse butcher, while the husband of the first Corresponding Secretary, Fannie Groom, worked as a porter.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, there is no evidence that any of these women were college educated. The only educational background noted was that of the youngest officer, Blanche Woods, a high school graduate. This finding departs from research on black Baptist "Best Women" in North Carolina and activists in Illinois.

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<sup>238</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census, 1910 United States Federal Census, 1905 Iowa State Census.

<sup>239</sup> Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 153-154.

<sup>240</sup> Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, xviii-xix. See Eileen Boris's, "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political'," in *Mothers of the New World*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michaels (New York: Rutledge, 1993), 222. See W. E. B. Dubois' *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1899) for an early twentieth century discussion of race uplift goals for African Americans.

<sup>241</sup> 1910 Federal Census listed William Downey as a butcher at a slaughterhouse. Fannie Grooms, in her early 40's, was one of the earliest members (pre-IACW) of Muscatine's Paul Lawrence Dunbar Club. The 1900 US Federal Census reported that she had an eighth grade education. The 1902 Muscatine City Directory listed Edward Grooms as a porter, p. 103. The Grooms did not have any children.

These studies suggest an evolution from student to teacher and then organizer. In contrast, in Iowa between 1891 and 1902 there appears to be no direct correlation between formal education and race work.<sup>242</sup> Thus, Iowa club women's class status did not emanate from either their or their husbands' educational or occupational privilege, but from their modest economic success. At the 1902 meeting, Davenport's Mrs. Fannie Grooms inscribed class difference in her speech "Women's Duty to Women" stating that it was the "duty of the fortunate to help the weak," an example that the IACW membership felt that the helpers had one class status, those being helped a different one. Club membership was also a way of claiming one's status as among the "more fortunate," those who did the healing.<sup>243</sup>

From the start, IACW members focused heavily on motherhood and the distinct challenges black women faced instilling race pride and self-respect in their children.<sup>244</sup> At the 1903 meeting, founding members set precedence by focusing heavily on their responsibility to better Iowa black youth. Mrs. Belle Graves of Des Moines HBSRC led discussion on "How to Instill more Race Pride in our Children," followed by Ottumwa's Mrs. Lillian Robinette's essay, "Mother and Child." IACW members understood that racism affected motherhood and how black women raised their children. Defending their reputations as mothers, discussions like these fostered conversations among ALL mothers - regardless of class - and the development of "tools" (topics of self-respect and race pride) to better prepare their children for the world in

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<sup>242</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent, The Black Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996). See Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest*, xxxi. At age 19-20, Blanche Woods from Davenport, IA is the youngest known member of the IACW to date.

<sup>243</sup> *Ottumwa Courier*, 29 May 1902.

<sup>244</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), 12.

which they lived.<sup>245</sup> For African-American women, the stakes were high. They were not working solely for their personal empowerment, but for that of an entire race.

Early on black Iowa club women sought to identify similarities between their work and that of white club women; yet they also drew important distinctions. In September 1902, IACW President, Helena Downey, tackled these distinctions by reprinting the following poem by Kate Field in the *Bystander*:

They talk about a woman's sphere  
As though it had a limit,  
There's not a piece in earth or heaven,  
There's not a task to mankind given,  
There's not a blessing or a woe,  
There's not a whisper "yes" or "no,"  
There's not a life, a death, a birth,  
There's not a feather's weight or worth  
Without a woman in it.<sup>246</sup>

Field (1838-1896) was a white St. Louis, Missouri native who, while in Europe, worked as a correspondent for several newspapers and magazines, establishing her own short-lived journal in Washington, DC, *Kate Field's Washington*, in 1889. Downey used Field's piece to introduce the *Bystander's* expansive readership to the newly formed IACW. In doing so, Downey politically connected the IACW to both black and white women who were challenging status quo ideas of their worth and limits. Downey also took this opportunity to draw a strong distinction between black and white clubs:

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<sup>245</sup>Ibid. Box 1, Folder 5, p. 11-12. Eileen Boris, "Reconstructing the "Family": Women, Progressive Reform and the Problem of Social Control" in Noralee Frankel and Nancy Dye ed. *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), p. 73-86. Belle Graves will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Research has uncovered little information about Mrs. Lillian Robinette. She was an early club woman from Ottumwa; however, the specific club is unknown.

<sup>246</sup> *Bystander*, 26 September 1902. For more information about Kate Field see Gary Scharnhorst's, *Kate Field: The Many Lives of a Nineteenth Century American Journalist* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008). Various sources have cited Field as the author of this poem. However, I have been unable to locate the title and date the poem was written.

The white woman's club works from her vantage ground of birthright for social and perhaps for political advance.

The Negro woman's club moves on from her heritage standpoint, and is earnest in the struggle for the uplifting of her home and her race. She is teaching the sacredness of home life to mothers who do not know that an elevated and improved future for our race rests on them. <sup>247</sup>

Downey's perception of the difference between the groups challenged any thoughts by outsiders that black Iowa club women were mimicking white women's groups. She argued that white club women promoted increased social and political advantages that were implied at birth, while black club women challenged their heritage (as former slaves and/or disfranchised people) through education and the strengthening of black mothers. While black and white women's clubs might structurally resemble each other, they were philosophically different, the former constantly confronting their presumed racial inheritance. Even more, Downey's words also highlighted class distinctions in the black community by presuming that working-class black women focused on their own family's survival, not linking their own struggle to the collective struggles of African Americans.<sup>248</sup>

Iowa black club women and the communities that they represented were deeply connected to African-American churches throughout the state in the early days of the IACW. Supporting the efforts of early clubs, Iowa black congregations bolstered efforts of the IACW and clubs throughout the state by offering the largest black-controlled venues where such meetings could be held and by offering a ready-made membership pool. From 1902-1906, four of the five IACW annual meetings were held at black churches in the host cities. Yet, tensions

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Eileen Boris, "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political'," in *Mothers of the New World*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michaels (New York: Rutledge, 1993), 216-217. See Linda Gordon's "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1904," *Journal of American History* 78:2: 559-590, for a discussion on how black and white women viewed "welfare" differently.



between black churches and the IACW also emerged. In November 1902, the Paul Laurence Dunbar Club (PLD) ended its two-year auxiliary connection to the local AME church by becoming an independent club in Muscatine. Prior to this, at the May 1902 state convention, PLD members saw how club women throughout the state were able to raise their own funds in rural Iowa locales, and how autonomy solidified both membership and community outreach.<sup>249</sup> By enlarging their reach beyond a particular congregation community, the PLD created a new space for all black women in Muscatine, regardless of denomination, to participate in race work. By 1903, members of the IACW openly debated whether or not church auxiliaries should be allowed to join the IACW. NACW National Organizer Lindsay Davis informed the group that all clubs were eligible for membership.<sup>250</sup> This rule was very realistic for black women in Iowa, whose small populations meant that they often served in multiple groups. The IACW, therefore, juggled its desire for autonomy with the exigencies of effective community action.

During the early 1900s, the Iowa African American Council (IAAC) remained very active, even when national leadership was in flux. IA-AAC members and friends of the IACW, worked alongside national leaders like Fortune, Du Bois, Fannie Barrier Williams and others. Leading Iowa African-American race workers like J.L. Thompson (editor of the *Bystander*), G. H. Woodson (attorney), and newcomer Samuel Joe Brown (attorney) had active roles in these national conventions and, in doing so, they transported discussions of the “undoing” of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, disfranchisement, Jim Crow, and emigration from the national stage to both local organizations and black communities throughout Iowa. They returned home to craft

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<sup>249</sup> *Bystander*, 31 October 1902, “Club and Club Women.”

<sup>250</sup> 1903 Annual Minutes, 7-8, IACWC.

local responses to topics like the “Needs of the Negro Ministry” and increased educational opportunities for African Americans.<sup>251</sup>

While nationally the AAC was characterized as being exclusive, in contrast the IA-AAC appeared very inclusive, publicly inviting local churches, clubs, and benevolent societies to send representatives to their meetings. These invitations were not without purpose, since the AAC allowed states to send one delegate for every fifty members to the national conventions.<sup>252</sup> Because of their longtime relationship with Woodson and Thompson (a club husband), IACW members were privy to firsthand accounts of the dissension at national male-led race conferences. IACW members tackled these issues at their own meetings. In doing so, they confronted tensions between proscriptive ideas laced with notions of bourgeois respectability and the on-the-ground realities of class in Iowa. Additionally, black club women worked to overcome the shortcomings evident in the national male leadership. For example, they stressed unity over divisive personality disputes, cronyism, and gossiping. They did so at a time when the national African-American leadership --especially men-- appeared to be trenchantly divided over two seemingly disparate methods of uplift.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> *Bystander*, 27 June 1902. The article “Two Great Meetings. Afro-American Press Association and Afro-American Council” discusses the upcoming national AAC meeting being held July 9-11, 1902 at the state capital building in St. Paul, MN. Fortune, Du Bois and Williams are all speakers at the conference attended by Woodson and Thompson, the theme of the meeting being “The Undoing of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments.” *Bystander*, 6 February 1903 “National Afro-American Council” reports that the July 1903 National Meeting of the AAC will be held in Louisville, KY and theme disfranchisement. *Bystander*, 29 September 1905 “Reports and Echoes From National Afro-American Council” reported that a national resolution was passed discouraging emigration of blacks from the south. See Carle’s *Defining the Struggle* 157-158.

<sup>252</sup> *Bystander*, 12 June 1903. *Bystander*, 3 June 1904.

<sup>253</sup> Hine, “Housewives’ League of Detroit,” 223.

***“Clubs and Club Women”: The Importance of Literary Activism***



Figure 6. “Club and Club Women” column title in the *Bystander*.<sup>254</sup>

The IACW established an important connection with the *Bystander*, continuing traditions set by early clubs. The African-American newspaper provided unlimited space for the new organization to develop its political voice. In September 1902, newly-elected IACW President Helena Downey wasted no time in broadening the reach of the nascent state group by acquiring space in the *Bystander* to write a monthly column, “Club and Club Women,” about the IACW and club women throughout Iowa.<sup>255</sup> Downey’s “Clubs and Club Women” provided an opportunity for the work of black Iowa club women to reach a larger audience several times a month. Different from the brief club announcements and summaries of the early groups, the column offered in-depth discussions on the importance of club women, methods for club organization, and the advantages to joining both the state and national federations. Notably, the

<sup>254</sup> “Club and Club Women” column title in the *Bystander*.

<sup>255</sup> *Ottumwa Saturday Herald*, 24 May 1902. Interestingly a column by the same name containing updates about local white women’s clubs was published in the *Ottumwa Saturday Herald*. Specific details of this achievement are not known, but surely longtime HBSRC member Mary Coalson and her husband William, a part owner of the newspaper, played an important role.

IACW was the only African-American organization, male or female, secular or non-secular, to have dedicated space in the black weekly. In her monthly submissions, Downey placed a consistent emphasis on education, community reform efforts, and support of black youth. Pieces showed the continuous growth of the state organization by introducing new clubs, promoting club membership, and by highlighting the rising female stars of state race work. Unlike federated black club women in Illinois (1899), Missouri (1900), and Ohio (1901) who did not have space in a weekly publication, IACW women had a vehicle for projecting their political voice to a larger audience as members of the IACW.<sup>256</sup> From May 1902-May 1903, the “Club and Club Women” column reached thousands of African Americans across the country.<sup>257</sup>

Education and literacy programs that existed in earlier clubs transferred to the IACW in 1902-1903. Black Iowa women continuously challenged one another to grow intellectually. Reading lists grew, and IACW members wrote and presented essays at local club meetings. In her columns, Downey stressed that literary organizations were a place for women to learn. For women who found reading and/or writing a challenge, Downey comforted them by clarifying that all who joined Iowa clubs were learners themselves. While she tried to minimize class distinctions by identifying literary groups as a common starting point for intellectual uplift, Downey set literacy as a necessity for participation.<sup>258</sup>

The 1903 IACW statewide meeting in Davenport, Iowa shows evidence of the literary influence of the early eight clubs. At least thirteen essays, discussions, and speeches were presented, several of the first essays specifically focusing on how to be “best women.” Harriet

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<sup>256</sup> Working with the Ohio Historical Society and Cleveland Library to find more information. Ohio Federation of Colored Women founder Carrie Williams Clifford did edit the women’s edition of the *Cleveland Journal* (1903-1910), trying to locate the column.

<sup>257</sup> To date, I have not found the “Clubs and Club Women” column reprinted in other papers.

<sup>258</sup> *Bystander*, 26 September 1902, “Clubs and Club Women.” *Bystander*, 19 December 1902, “Clubs and Club Women.”

Beecher Stowe Reading Circle member Mrs. Emma Jackson delivered the essay “Influence of Young Women,” while Ida B. Wells Reading Club member Mrs. M. A. Strothers presented the piece “Mother’s Responsibilities.” While only the titles are extant today, these topics reveal that IACW members from across the state considered these issues important enough to be included in the program. Davenport’s Violet Reading Club member Mrs. Saunders presented the essay “Needs of the Hour,” while Silver Autumn Leaf Club’s Mrs. Leanore Sheppard led a discussion on “How the Race may be helped through Women’s Clubs.” Ottumwa’s IBWRC member Mrs. Alexander offered the paper “Nobility of Federation Work,” while Mrs. Belle Taylor of Rock Island led a discussion on “Some Practical Methods of Social Betterment.” These talks imply that IACW members were modeling the importance of being able to speak persuasively about important issues. The programming suggests an apprenticeship in public speaking and public engagement—a civics exercise for the disfranchised.<sup>259</sup> IACW members began to redefine their presence in the public sphere on their own terms by challenging national, state, and local stereotypes of black women as passive.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> “Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting 1903,” box. 1, folder 4, IACWC See Hine’s “Detroit Housewives” and Hendrick’s *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest* for discussion on how black women’s clubs were play an integral part in both uplifting the race and challenging negative stereotype about African Americans. Mrs. Emma Jackson was one of the earliest members of Des Moines’s Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle. The 1900 US Federal Census shows that she married Fred in 1884. In 1900 the couple, who could both read and write, owned a home on 8<sup>th</sup> street and had two daughters, Bessie (6) and Lulu (4). Fred worked as city foreman. Emma served as the first Second Vice-President of the IACW in 1903. Mrs. M. A. Strothers, in her mid-30s, was one of the oldest members of Ottumwa’s Ida B. Wells Reading Club. In 1900, she and her husband, Jordan, had been married for nineteen years. Both, originally from Missouri, could read and write. She worked as a dressmaker and he was a day laborer (1900 US Federal Census). Little is known about Mrs. Saunders. She was a member of Davenport’s Violet Reading Club. Mrs. Leanore Sheppard was an early member of Davenport’s Silver Autumn Leaf Club. In 1903 she served on the Social Purity Committee of the IACW. Mrs. Alexander was an early member of the Ottumwa’s Ida B. Wells Reading Club. In 1903 she served on both the Education and Social Purity Committees. Mrs. Belle Taylor was a member of the IACW while living in Rock Island, IL. Because of the close proximity of Davenport and Rock Island, blacks often lived in one city while working in the other.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. See Boris’ “The Power of Motherhood” for a discussion on how black women’s perceptions of motherhood were affected by racism, 222. See Hine, “Housewives League of Detroit,” 232-233, and Boris, “The Power of Motherhood,” 217.

Additionally, all of the notes from this gathering were compiled to produce the first printed version of the IACW annual meeting minutes. Creating and distributing minutes from the Second Annual Meeting allowed the IACW women to claim “ownership” of their work by accurately providing information about their organization to the larger Iowa community. IACW publications like this and others that followed made the club women producers, preservers, and distributors of race literature.<sup>261</sup> This first statewide meeting of the IACW showed the Iowa community that unlike other race groups before it and different from religious groups, black women were willing to come together regardless of denomination to join forces for racial uplift. This was also the first time a group of club women met without the shrouds of secrecy that accompanied religious and fraternal organizations.

Iowa clubs were about more than self-education, and they also served as a launching pad for concrete community reform. Downey used her column to strengthen early clubs by providing concrete examples of how literary clubs were tending to the social welfare needs of their communities. For example, she highlighted how the IACW’s oldest club, the HBSRC in Des Moines, furnished a room in a hospital.<sup>262</sup> Ottumwa’s IBWRC began requesting local white businesses to hire young African Americans, promising patronage by the black community in return. Ahead of their time, black Iowa club women took the lead on emphasizing economic empowerment in their communities throughout the state.<sup>263</sup> Two of the oldest Iowa groups that had led reform efforts in their home towns now had a state and national voice in IACW to ignite

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<sup>261</sup> Hendricks, *Gender, Race and Politics in the Midwest*, 130. McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 191-194.

<sup>262</sup> *Bystander*, 26, September 1902, “Clubs and Club Women.” Unable to locate any detailed records about where the hospital was located.

<sup>263</sup> *Bystander*, 31 October 1902. Hine, “Detroit Housewives League.” Hine argues that black club women in Detroit mobilized based on principles of economic nationalism, participating in consumer activism to support black businesses and white businesses that hired African Americans.

social and economic change in Iowa. Efforts by the HBSRC and IBWRC show how club women were also black welfare reformers, publicly campaigning for resources and services.<sup>264</sup>

The “Club and Club Women” column allowed Iowa black club women to control how they and their activities were represented to the public. The printing of their weekly literary experiences provided examples of self-education and organizing for African Americans across the state when their efforts went mostly unnoticed by white newspapers and white club women. While writing and public speaking exercises prepared these women to be more engaged in social, economic and political discussions, publicizing these activities let the public know that they were publicly engaged.

*“There can never be a time when individuals can all think alike, but there can be with us at all times a desire for equal justice.”*<sup>265</sup>

*- IACW President Helena Downey*

From its inception, the IACW aggressively addressed problems that plagued earlier clubs in order to ensure that the state organization did not fail. IACW members openly discussed their successes, challenges, and strategies with the community at-large. In her 1903 “Annual Address,” President Downey paid tribute to the IACW delegates for pressing forward to make the “bounds of freedom wider yet.” Celebrating IACW growth to sixteen clubs, she assured the women that they would become more systematic in their procedures and better acquainted with individual strengths over time. In her first formal speech to the state group, Downey’s years of club experience in the IBWRC allowed her to speak directly to the early difficulties that she saw the IACW facing. She acknowledged that during the first-year committee work was sluggish;

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<sup>264</sup> Gordon, “Black and White Visions of Welfare.” Gordon discusses how prior to the New Deal, only white women and men had increasing access to government sponsored welfare programs. Black women welfare reformers were responsible for building their social reform networks.

<sup>265</sup> *Bystander*, 21 August 1903, “Clubs and Club Women.” In the August 21, 1903 column, Helena Downey printed a portion of the “Annual Address” that she delivered at the May 1903 IACW Second Annual Meeting.

individual clubs struggled to create club constitutions and maintain contact with IACW leadership. She argued that the IACW would not be at its strongest until clubs existed throughout the state and “the work” could be equally distributed.<sup>266</sup>

Downey used the *Bystander* column to fearlessly address sentiments held by her sisters throughout the state about sexism. In some of the earliest “Club and Club Women” columns, the IACW openly challenged traditional gendered notions held by black men and women in Iowa communities that “women were to be seen and not heard” or were only to serve in supportive roles under men. Speaking to the “reputation and sometimes blame” of club and church women “running things,” Downey dared idle club women and church goers (men and women) to not complain while “they complacently sat back on the cushions.” Weeks before the 1903 Second Annual Meeting she urged club women to take the federation process seriously or risk becoming a “clog in the wheel of progress.”<sup>267</sup> Downey challenged Iowa women to incorporate club work into their lives, to uplift their own families, but also to tackle broader community challenges.

Through the “Club and Club Women” column, the IACW offered detailed instructions for membership growth and club creation. These reports were significantly different from the pre-1902 club’s reports, which only provided summaries of monthly activities. It is important to note that while IACW editorials provided ways for ALL black women to engage in club work, these writings also offered an outline of how to participate in race work for African Americans throughout the state—organized or not. Shifting the focus from club women to African-American women across the state, Downey used the column to outline the necessary six steps to successfully start a club in her December 1902 piece. Claiming that it could be done by a woman anywhere in the state, she suggested that before writing a constitution it may be a good idea to

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> *Bystander*, 24 April 1903.



ask local established groups for a copy of theirs to use as a guide. The first constitution should briefly outline the club's name, objective(s), the number and duty of the officers, protocol for voting and how the document could be amended. With a new statewide emphasis on club growth, the IACW enjoyed some success but also failures. Sometime between May 1902 and May 1903, the IACW welcomed new members from Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, Keokuk, Ottumwa and Oskaloosa. However, while some clubs were strengthened during this period, one faltered. The new statewide network of club communication exposed the struggle of Muchakinock's Frances C. Williams Club (FCWC). As the coal mining camp began to disappear, so did any information about the FCWC. Listed in the May 1902 IACW Annual Meeting Minutes, neither Muchakinock nor the club was mentioned in the "Club and Club Women" column during the 1902-1903 club year. By February 1903, the once booming black community no longer had a practicing church.<sup>268</sup>

The IACW cultivated new relationships between clubs that were in the same city. While there is no indication that local rivalries existed, the creation of a new state group meant that local groups would have to come together in ways they had not done before. At the 1902 meeting, NACW President Josephine Yates proudly explained the existence of "city federations" in Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Topeka where there were multiple clubs belonging to state federations in one city. Yates argued that this pooling of resources surely increased club effectiveness in those areas.<sup>269</sup> Following the examples of these larger urban areas, Davenport members of the Silver Autumn Leaf Club, Violet Reading Club and Toussaint L'Ouverture Club

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<sup>268</sup> *Bystander*, 20 February 1903. See Pam Stek's "Muchakinock: African Americans and the Making of a Coal Town" for greater discussion to the decline and eventual disappearance of the community. Because so few details exist about the Frances C. Williams Club in Muchakinock, I have been unable to determine if these women show up in clubs during this time period.

<sup>269</sup> *Ottumwa Courier*, 29 May 1902.

formed a city federation, “realizing the strength and help to be derived from union,” in preparation for the upcoming 1903 annual meeting.<sup>270</sup> As local clubs joined together, they mirrored the strength in unity message preached by the IACW. Once disparate groups, they now increasingly consolidated their activism under the IACW’s umbrella.

Downey used “Clubs and Club Women” to stress the importance of the democratic process, representation, and open debate within the IACW. She emphasized that clubs were not meant to be run by a few like-minded individuals.<sup>271</sup> Her most straightforward comments centered on the process of electing club officers. She urged delegates to ensure that their clubs avoided the political evils of character assassination and caucusing for positions.<sup>272</sup> She challenged new club women to maintain enthusiasm about their work and to not take it personally when other members did not share the same views.<sup>273</sup> Finally, she spoke to club confidentiality, charging women with the responsibility of “holding thy tongue” to keep club matters confidential. Until the creation of the IACW, black Iowa club women had independence, their practices of electing the same friends and/or repeatedly being led by the same popular women never questioned. Having participated in some of these behaviors in the IBWRC, Downey hoped that by addressing them openly, she could stimulate dialogue and prompt internal changes when the women returned home from the state convention.<sup>274</sup> These public acknowledgements of the internal conflicts the IACW faced set them apart from other Iowa religious, fraternal, and non-secular groups like the AAC, Masons, and the Iowa International

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<sup>270</sup> *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 28 May 1903, “A Trolley Ride – Afro-American Clubs at Davenport for Second Session.”

<sup>271</sup> *Bystander*, 31 October 1902, “Clubs and Club Women.” *Bystander*, 16 January 1903, “Clubs and Club Women.”

<sup>272</sup> *Bystander*, 21 August 1903, “Clubs and Club Women.”

<sup>273</sup> *Bystander*, 19 December 1902, “Clubs and Club Women.”

<sup>274</sup> Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit*. Wolcott argues that black women were in charge of respectability in their neighborhoods, emphasizing behavior over economics.

Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters who misleadingly conveyed only positive information about their organizations to the public.<sup>275</sup>

In May 1903 NACW National Organizer Elizabeth Davis joined IACW members in Davenport, Iowa to celebrate their numerous successes in just two short years. In an interview with a local newspaper, Davis celebrated the IACW, claiming, “This Iowa organization compares most favorably with others even in infancy.”<sup>276</sup> Now consisting of thirteen clubs with nearly 150 members, seven new clubs (an additional 100 new black club women) were awaiting membership approval to the IACW. In a short amount of time, black Iowa club women had established a statewide network, greatly increasing their span of race work, while emphasizing an open and democratic culture of women’s organizing. With the necessary organizational methods in place and having an ongoing connection to the NACW, the IACW positioned itself to become the state’s leading advocate for African Americans.

### ***IACW 1904-1906: Attacking Local, State and National Issues***

Following two years of building a solid internal organizational structure and recruiting new members and clubs, IACW implemented new local agendas, new sources for state leadership and stronger ties to NACW. The organization’s first president, Helena Downey, was replaced by Belle Graves, an experienced social and civic leader from Illinois who was new to the state. As intrastate relationships developed, black Iowa club women built upon their core literary values by identifying additional goals of education, parenting, economics, politics and community improvement. In pressing their expanded agenda, IACW activists continued to

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<sup>275</sup> *Bystander*, 21 August 1903, “Club and Club Women.” See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* about secrecy in the black church. Meeting reports for the AAC see *Bystander*, 27 June 1902, 3 June 1904. See *Bystander*, 24 July 1903 for the Iowa International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters and the Iowa Grand Lodge of Masons.

<sup>276</sup> *Daily Times*, 28 May 1903, Davenport, Iowa.

confront tensions between rhetoric and reality. While acknowledging national black middle-class plans for racial uplift, Iowa club women often also recognized the disconnect between the prescriptions for change and local needs. Fundraising was a continuous challenge, as was the fact that IACW leadership did not always reflect women whom black club women were trying to uplift.

Still rooted in the communities they served, local clubs continued creating programs to meet local needs after the IACW was created. Women in Muscatine, home of perhaps the only African-American women's mandolin club in the state, focused on developing local musical talent, while Ottumwa women "endeavored to establish a higher standing of culture" by organizing a series of community lectures. Acknowledging the importance of concrete actions to ameliorate daily struggles, women in Keokuk supported a senior couple during the winter and assisted those in need during high waters earlier in the year.<sup>277</sup> As the Des Moines City Federation began taking shape, local club women created their own column in the *Bystander*, "City Club Notes." Different from Downey's "Club and Club Notes" that covered all IACW groups throughout Iowa, the new column focused specifically on the work of clubs in Des Moines. Coinciding with the beginning of a city federation and the upcoming state convention, the number of clubs in Des Moines may have fueled a desire for a separate space to report their club work in addition to reports about state-wide efforts.<sup>278</sup> Like other city federations that existed in larger cities like Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, Topeka and Davenport, united Des

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<sup>277</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904, "Iowa Federation." The article about the IACW Second Annual Meeting does not provide details about the "community lectures" organized by Ottumwa club women.

<sup>278</sup> *Bystander*, 3 November 1905, "City Club Notes."

Moines clubs controlled how their joint meetings and outreach efforts were communicated to the public.<sup>279</sup>

### ***Empowering New Clubs and Their Members***

IACW leaders tried to recreate the effectiveness of local clubs at the state-level. This meant creating and implementing leadership, membership, and fundraising policies that were achievable for clubs across the state. But, state prescriptions for effective organizing and notions of middle-class bourgeois respectability stood in tension to facts on the ground in communities throughout the state. IACW initiatives reveal the tensions between the middle-class status and aspirations of club women and the realities of much of Iowa's black communities. To resolve that tension, local club women selectively chose state prescriptions that met local needs, tailoring IACW plans for their own communities.

While the IACW recognized that creating broader access to leadership positions and increasing membership would strengthen the organization, it did not deter the concentration of leadership in the hands of a select few women. They developed processes that promised the rotation of leadership. For example, in 1904, it was agreed that officers could only serve two consecutive terms in the same position. However, as seen in that year's election, it did not stop members from holding consecutive executive positions. For example, Des Moines' HBSRC member Belle Graves was elected President; Downey took Graves' previous position as State Organizer. In short, the two officers swapped positions. At the same meeting, a new amendment determined that each club could elect one delegate for every ten members as representatives at the annual meetings, meaning that the largest local groups had the most representation and

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<sup>279</sup> *Ottumwa Courier*, 29 May 1902. In her speech to the newly formed IACW, NACW President Josephine Yates encouraged cities with multiple clubs to unite and create city federations so that they could work together in meeting the needs of their community better.

votes.<sup>280</sup> While challenging smaller groups to increase membership, this rule limited the representation of active black women in towns with the smallest black populations. At this third state convention, the largest thus far, it was becoming apparent to all club women that they needed to find a balance between experienced leadership and the desire to create greater accessibility and inculcate leadership skills in a wider group.

A symbol of organizational expansion and increased efforts towards efficiency, members agreed (also in 1904) that Executive Board members and committee chairs of standing committees should compose a Board of Directors, holding a mid-summer meeting to outline their work for the upcoming year. The group created the Club Extension Committee whose primary charge was to assist black women with starting clubs in the most rural areas of the state by providing the necessary IACW support and materials.<sup>281</sup> A year later, the Board of Directors divided the state into ten districts, appointing each a superintendent whose responsibilities included assisting in organizing new clubs, representing the IACW to non-federated clubs, and pushing for all clubs to become members of the NACW.<sup>282</sup> With the new administrative policies in place, the IACW welcomed new clubs, their members, and their communities into their statewide network. In 1904, the Third Annual Meeting was held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, hosted by the year-old J. Silone Yates Club (JSYC). This was the first time the convention was hosted by a city that did not have one of the oldest black women's clubs. In 1905 club women from Buxton, Iowa made their presence known at the Annual Meeting in Muscatine, Iowa, sending three delegates from the Industrial Club (1902), and The Self Culture Club (1904).<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904, "Iowa Federation."

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> *Bystander*, 29 September 1905, "Clubs and Club Women." Through September 1905, no Iowa clubs were financial members of the NACW. The number of unfederated clubs is not known, as that would be any woman's club (literary, social, civic, sewing, etc.) that existed in the state at the time.

<sup>283</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting, Muscatine, Iowa May 22-24, 1905.

To ensure state federation's economic stability, the IACW members from throughout the state shared methods for fundraising and membership growth. Having watched the financial struggles of the African American Council, IACW members knew that money was needed to maintain and expand their organization. At the 1904 Annual Meeting, Helena Downey highlighted that Davenport, Iowa's Silver Autumn Leaf Club (SALC) had raised money to purchase land and build a club house. The first club in the IACW to take such a substantial financial step, the SALC's attempt to increase economic power through purchasing property was surely inspiring to IACW members and African Americans throughout the state. Downey paid tribute to HBSRC for having the largest bank account, while honoring Ottumwa's Good Intent Club for raising \$108.04 (\$2,769 in 2012), the most money raised by any club 1903-1904. The 1904 meeting was also profitable for IACW treasury—having collected \$76 at the convention (\$1,966.00 in 2012).<sup>284</sup> By publicizing the IACW's growing economic success, a class marker held by blacks and whites, Downey highlighted the progress of black womanhood in *Bystander* for the community-at-large.<sup>285</sup>

The election of Isabelle "Belle" Graves to IACW President at the 1904 meeting reflects a shift in the organization to have both new and experienced women in leadership positions. Highlighting black women's membership overlap in both secular and religious groups, Graves and her husband, Reverend Horace Graves, moved to Des Moines from Illinois in 1901 when he took the helm at St. Paul AME Church and she joined the HBSRC. While in Illinois, she was one of three black delegates from the state to attend the 1895 International Convention of Christian Endeavors in Boston, Massachusetts, an integrated conference celebrating youth

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<sup>284</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904. This article does not provide specific amounts raised by Davenport's Silver Autumn Leaf Club to purchase land or how much money the HBSRC had saved. (Will check property records and municipal tax record to see if club house was built.)

<sup>285</sup> Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 125.

religious activities and ministry training. She also had held prominent positions on the committee for Provident Hospital and Old Folks Home in Chicago. Established in 1891, Provident was the first African-American hospital and nurse training school in Chicago that provided considerable opportunities for black physicians and nurses to practice. Alongside her husband, Reverend Graves, she was also a leader in the A.M.E. church. While Reverend Graves was head of Allen Chapel in Galesburg, IL, Belle was the President of the church's Woman's Mite Missionary Society.<sup>286</sup> The AME Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society was the first national organization established by black American women in 1874. By 1894 missionary societies had been established in each of the AME District conferences and geographic regions. Mite Missionary Societies were organized at AME churches throughout the country, led by wives of clergy and prominent members who were asked to assist failing male-led fundraising efforts for missions to Haiti. However, by church law, the existence of the woman's auxiliary was controlled by men because only male clergy could organize local groups. These groups were the core of women's collective religious power in the AME church. Through her activities in this group, she worked alongside Iowa club women from Davenport, Iowa. Prior to their move to Des Moines in 1901, Belle led The Women's Mite Missionary Conference Branch Convention in Galesburg, IL. Members of Davenport's Silver Autumn Leaf Club attended this conference, representing the local Wayman Mite Missionary Society. Ruth Richardson (secretary), Mrs. C. H. Marshall (treasurer) and Mrs. L. B. Bright (delegate) all traveled to the AME women's meeting.<sup>287</sup> Graves' regional and national reputation as a race leader, not to mention her prior

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<sup>286</sup> *The Christian Recorder*, 18 July 1901. *Chicago Defender*, 1 August 1931, "A Scrap Book for Women in Public Life" states that Isabelle Graves was a member of the Girls Aid Committee of Provident Hospital. 1903 *Des Moines City Directory*, p. 401. See Susan Smith's *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890—1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 20-25.

<sup>287</sup> Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 2010), 140-141, 151-154. See Martha Jones' *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African*



relationship with Iowa club women, obviously caught the eye of fellow IACW members who elected her president of the state organization even though she had lived in Iowa for only a few short years. Her presence in Muscatine for the 1905 meeting was celebrated by the local *Muscatine News and Tribune*; the newspaper ran an article with her photo a day before the convention began.<sup>288</sup> In 1905 Graves delivered her first annual address on the “Needs of Race Organizations.”<sup>289</sup> She opened her passionate declaration by drawing correlations between emancipation and race work claiming,

When the bells of liberty rang out a longed-for peal meaning freedom to a million or more of enthralled, each peal meant more--- more responsibilities; women and men...

...Many are living as yet, reaping in thought, if not in finance, the reward of their labors; and now that we are nearing the center of the ladder, having been pushed by kind-hearted philanthropist, Christian-like men and women, it behooves us to hold fast to the progress made and pull those behind us and push those in front, thus reaching higher ground together.

She then claimed a race-transcendent womanhood, where African-American, Chinese and white women would lead civilization, exalting, “No race climbs faster than its women. Today the Chinese women are crying for loosened feet, that they might be unhampered. All civilization cries for a united womanhood.” Attaching black women’s fight against social, economic, and political control and the international suppression of women (Chinese), Graves argued that no other women in America should be more united in work than African-American women, Graves

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*American Public Culture, 1830-1909* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 159-161. *The Christian Recorder*, 18 July 1901.

<sup>288</sup> *Muscatine News and Tribune*, 21 May 1905. The 14<sup>th</sup> International Christian Endeavor Convention was held in Boston, MA July 10-15, 1895. The Christian Endeavor was created in 1881 to encourage the youth to express themselves through Christ-like activities. By 1906 67,000 youth led Christian Endeavor Societies had been organized world-wide. See <http://christianendeavor.com/history/>. See <http://www.providentfoundation.org/history/index.html> for more information on Provident Hospital. See Susan Smith’s *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women’s Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

<sup>289</sup> “Minutes, Fourth Annual Meeting 1905,” box 1, folder 5, p 8, IACWC.

asked, “My dear listeners, are there any women who should understand and live closer then you and I?” Finally, she praised the dedication of black activists identifying issues and arenas for activism, stating,

We are an important factor in all things that help to make this so important a government, and when we speak of the needs of race organizations, we speak of a subject both broad and practical. It has been discussed so often, until we are almost unable to suggest anything new or promote a plan that has not been tried by someone of our race lovers.<sup>290</sup>

This speech is vital when trying to better comprehend and appreciate “who” IACW women were. As wives and mothers, these women, regardless of education, occupation, or class, had their own ideas of their value in society and their advancement since the ending of slavery, thus making womanhood important to government.

The IACW continued to develop their own educational and literary agendas, striving for more education, better homes, including home ownership, and the expansion of black business enterprises. Indeed, the agendas of Iowa club women were, no doubt, shaped by their contact with the leaders of national organizations. In 1903, the “Clubs and Club Women” column published the essay, “Mrs. Booker T. Washington’s Missionary Work Among Negro Housewives in the South.”<sup>291</sup> Margaret Murray Washington was not only the wife of Booker T. Washington, but she was also the Lady Principal at Tuskegee Normal Institute and a founding member of the NACW. In 1904 at the end of October, IACW members joined national African-American leaders as they converged on Des Moines, Iowa where Mrs. Margaret Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois and others participated in a lecture series. Mrs. Washington, who was the current Vice President-at-large of the NACW, spoke first to the city’s branch of the African American

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<sup>290</sup> Minutes, Fourth Annual Meeting 1905, p. 8. IACWC.

<sup>291</sup> *Bystander*, 6 November 1903, “Clubs and Club Women.”

Council and then to an over-capacity crowd at St. Paul A.M. E. church. IACW President Graves introduced her, while Mrs. Palmer of the HBSRC presented her with roses.<sup>292</sup> IACW members had greater access to her than most because of their shared ties to club work. While in Des Moines, Mrs. Washington stayed at the Grave's home. President Belle Graves clearly had quality time with her esteemed house guest.

President Graves, like Downey before her, encouraged IACW members to continue their literary and history education activities, stating, "We are not all graduates, yet this does not prevent our thirsting and seeking knowledge."<sup>293</sup> Under her leadership, members began pushing the organization to expand its educational reach through publishing. Emma Gardener, a longtime member of Ottumwa's Benevolent Club and chair of the Reciprocity Bureau, wanted the essays that women presented at meetings throughout the state to be collected and published in a book. Created every two to three years, these volumes could be used by clubs across the state as a "boost of educational value." Purchased by IACW clubs and other outside entities, the volumes could also be very profitable for the group. The Bureau recommended that all clubs should have these booklets on hand as an educational resource. Her vision was clear; the enriching benefits of original works would be ineffectual if not made available to the public. A request for IACW booklets by the Ohio and Indiana state federations reveals that interest in the booklets extended to club women in other states.<sup>294</sup>

Through essays and speeches, black Iowa club women developed their own criteria for respectability, emphasizing the roles of mothers in creating acceptable homes and raising

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<sup>292</sup> *Bystander*, 21 October 1904, "Mrs. Washington and the Club Women" and "Council Notes." *Bystander* 19 October 1904. Transcripts from the speech do not exist. In 1904, Mrs. Palmer was one of the longest serving members of the HBSRC in Des Moines. It is not clear who organized the lecture series in Des Moines, praised as one of the best in the city's history.

<sup>293</sup> *Bystander*, 25 August 1905, "To the Women's Clubs of Iowa."

<sup>294</sup> Minutes from the 1905 Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, Muscatine, IA, p. 16-17, 31.

virtuous children. Scholars argue that black club women drew a distinct connection between motherhood, the home and the larger community, situating the moral future of the race on the shoulders of African-American mothers. Standards of racial uplift were often based on behaviors exhibited in appropriate home life and child care.<sup>295</sup> In her speech “Not a Dying Race,” President Graves argued that the “dirty lives” of those who inhabited black slums only “need but a bathing in sunshine” and that members of the IACW should ease their sufferings.<sup>296</sup> From May 1904 to May 1905, Mrs. L. R. Palmer, HBSRC President, served as the chair of the IACW’s Education Committee. Having pursued motherhood and mutual improvement priorities at the local level, her statewide platform stressed the importance of traditional and social education. In her 1905 committee report she argued, “Mothers, the ‘Door of opportunity is open,’ if we neglect this great, this vital duty it will be required of us in the great Settlement.” Calling for the equal education of boys and girls, she challenged her peers to “train them up to be intelligent, virtuous and active men and women, capable of turning their talents to account in whatever situation they may be placed.” Emphasis on these topics show that black Iowa club women felt that behavior played a much greater role than wealth in determining respectability.<sup>297</sup>

By 1905, the IACW’s Education and Social Purity Committees began to increasingly focus on the financial and social welfare of Iowa black women and girls in need. Like cities and towns throughout the north and Midwest, Iowa communities were experiencing an increase in single working women who lived and/or migrated alone. Apart from their families and relatives, local organized women across the country felt that these new workers needed the ethical

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<sup>295</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), 12-13.

<sup>296</sup> *Muscatine Journal*, 23 May 1905, “First Days Session of Colored Clubs.” President Graves delivered the speech “Not a Dying Race” and the IACW Fourth Annual Meeting in Muscatine, Iowa, May 22-24, 1905.

<sup>297</sup> Minutes from the 1905 Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, Muscatine, IA, p. 16-17, 31.

protection of family life. These wage-earning women became referred to “women adrift” whose existence teetered on the very fine line between morality and immorality. It was thought that earning potential, or lack thereof, could force women into prostitution. For black women, who most frequently lived apart from their families in northern cities, racism and sexualized stereotypes predisposed them to financial hardship and increased accusations of immorality.<sup>298</sup> In the 1870s and 1880s, prostitution existed throughout the country in rural and urban areas.<sup>299</sup> By the mid-1880s, the WCTU took the lead in combating the sex trade, forming the Department of Social Purity. This committee was a way for respectable women to discuss prostitution and sexuality. By 1894, this department had succeeded in getting the national age of protection raised to fourteen. Iowa WCTU branches secured a law that required men who patronized brothels to be prosecuted as felons.<sup>300</sup>

Sharon Wood’s influential research on prostitution in Davenport, Iowa, from 1875 to 1910, offers insight into how local women responded to the intersection of work, sexuality, and race in the state. She argues that by the 1880s a new class of vulnerable women, black and white, entered the streets of the city seeking employment. For poor and working women, including African Americans, their unescorted presence in public marked them as sexually available. In 1886, white middle class women organized the Lend a Hand organization (LAH hereafter), setting up rooms throughout Davenport where working women could spend their

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<sup>298</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), xvi-xix. See Leslie Schwalm’s *Emancipation’s Diaspora* 139, 151. See Sharon Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>299</sup> Sharon Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 79.

<sup>300</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1981) 125-126. See Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 79. As discussed in Ch. 2, the Iowa WCTU would not be integrated until 1896 when Des Moines HBSRC member Mrs. R. A. Wilburn joined the East Side WCTU.

lunch breaks or wait for transportation safely. These rooms were open to all white women, but not to African Americans. In 1889, Davenport white women organized again after the arrest of a fourteen-year-old white girl for prostitution. The Charitable Alliance of Davenport (CAOD hereafter) consisted of ten women's groups, all white, lay and religious, middle and working class women. African-American women were again ignored, having no representatives from local black churches or organizations.<sup>301</sup> Black club women from Davenport's Silver Autumn Leaf Club (1894) and Violet Reading Club (1897) were not invited or consulted by LAH or CAOD to discuss solutions to a problem affecting the entire community.

This type of racially exclusionary benevolence took place in cities throughout the state and must surely have been an ongoing conversation at local club meetings. Now unified, IACW members began developing strategies to protect the social purity of black women and girls. Gertrude Culbertson, the Social Purity Committee chair, challenged the group "to stop this surface patchwork of Social Purity and go to the foundation of things" by emphasizing the importance of prenatal education. She stated, "Strive to make the "starting point" of each child's life harmonious and beautiful – beginning its education while you have complete control for its existence-endowing it with physical and mental strength-preparing it to be well born." Culbertson then asked that "Prenatal Motherhood" and "Prenatal Fatherhood" be discussed by all clubs throughout the state.<sup>302</sup> This shift from an external to internal focus on parenting set the IACW apart from the local AAC, which instead highlighted political, economic and educational goals for equality. While striving to own a home, become fiscally stable, and earn an education

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<sup>301</sup> Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 28, 50-52, 102-105.

<sup>302</sup> *Bystander*, 29 September 1905, "Clubs and Club Women." Little information about Gertrude Culbertson (Culbertson) is available.

were all important to uplifting the race, members of the IACW also wanted parents to invest more in raising and preparing strong children.

At the 1905 meeting, the IACW began discussing how their social purity agenda could better serve black women and girls in the state. Education Committee chairwoman Mrs. L. R. Palmer began soliciting support from IACW members to build a home for “colored girls” in Des Moines. Surely influenced by Graves’ prior work with a Chicago senior home and the challenges black club women faced in Davenport, women from the HBSRC and other local Des Moines clubs felt that it was their responsibility to protect the respectability of their neighborhoods and their girls, and a settlement home for young African-American women was needed to fill a void left by state politics and lethargic city policies. This new outreach endeavor corresponded with the national settlement house movement by African-American women to create permanent solutions to combat homelessness; their less-fortunate sisters were often excluded from white facilities that provided both training and services to prepare its patrons to live independently. While black homes often lacked funding and provided fewer services than white homes, they created safe public space for women of color who had nowhere to live.<sup>303</sup> Eleven women from across the state answered the “call” and began researching the project. Truly crossing the boundary between private and public social welfare responsibilities, Iowa

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<sup>303</sup> Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19,21,42. See Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn’s *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Lasch-Quinn’s research highlights the agency of African Americans in developing their own system of self-help outlets when mainstream settlement houses failed to address the needs of blacks. See *Muscatine Journal*, 24 May 1905. See Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 45, 54. She discusses the organized boarding home movement that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by middle-class white women to promote benevolence, moral reform, along with the maternal role of guardianship outside of home and church. Middle-class black club women organized homes that were especially concerned with the issue of morality. Degraded by hyper-sexual stereotypes, they sought to defend the “moral integrity” of working class black women. In 1905 Longtime HBSRC member Mrs. L. R. Palmer was President of the club while serving as chair of the IACW Education Committee.

black club women were ready to fill the gaps in public service that African Americans faced in the state.<sup>304</sup>

The IACW began an extensive push to collect data about African American hygiene, economics, and women's labor to better understand the concerns in households throughout the state. Following the examples set at the national level by the NACW, the IACW began to collect statistical data to help identify and show the need for social welfare work.<sup>305</sup> Newspaper articles and circulars distributed by the IACW Household Economics Committee identified the home as the center of the universe and the "mistress the center of the home," while provoking home economic discussions in black communities throughout the state. Understanding the economic value of women's unpaid labor in their homes, the IACW went through considerable efforts to advise club members, and the public too, how to save money and be more efficient. The committee praised, "In her hands are the keys of home happiness. She is the disbursing end of the marriage partnership and on the wisdom of spending depends the financial prosperity of the family;..."<sup>306</sup>

Framing women's unpaid work as essential to the empowerment of the community, the committee recommended topics on "Household Hygiene, Principals of Cookery, and Eggs" to be discussed by the groups that included the importance of sunshine versus darkness, how to save money when grocery shopping, and the many uses of eggs. The committee circulated questions that challenged the women to think about the cheapest way to buy groceries (by the day or by the week), cleanliness, and extravagant spending. Information submitted by nearly all of the clubs

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<sup>304</sup>Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Organizing and Racial Justice, 1880-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 160-170. Fourth Annual Meeting, Muscatine, Iowa May 1905 p. 25. Specific names of the women who volunteered are not available.

<sup>305</sup> Susan D. Carle *Defining the Struggle* 172.

<sup>306</sup> *Bystander*, 1 December 1905, "Home Economics."



showed that the club women knew that planning meals and buying groceries weekly was most cost effective, while spending twenty-five cents on a flour sack also meant that they had material to be used for napkins, table clothes, and dish towels.<sup>307</sup> In the hands of club women throughout Iowa, household economic handouts were some of the most far reaching uplift efforts of any African-American organization in the state. Through their written words, IACW members continuously pushed for greater community involvement by extending an invitation to all “race lovers,” not just local club women, to visit schools, jails, hospitals, and senior homes.<sup>308</sup> Iowa blacks who could not or did not want to participate in local groups could still implement elements of uplift and education on their own by following the ideas laid out by the IACW.

By 1905, the Reciprocity Bureau began to assess the talents and expertise of IACW members throughout Iowa, asking other standing committees to collect information from IACW members to identify their talents. The Arts and Craft Committee distributed a seven-question assessment that asked specific questions about access to textiles in clubs within the IACW, which focused on the importance of skilled labor.

How many dressmakers have you in your town?  
Have you one that designs?  
Have you any basket makers?  
Have you any milliners?  
Have you decorators of china?  
Have you lace makers?  
Can they sell their work?

Committee Chair and longtime member of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Club, Miss Maude Ousley, analyzed the data submitted by eight clubs reporting that “thirty-seven dressmakers, seven designers, nine milliners, twelve basket makers, sixteen lace makers and eight china decorators,

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<sup>307</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting 1905” box 1, folder 5, p. 18. IACWC.

<sup>308</sup> *Bystander*, 3 November 1905, “Clubs and Club Women.”

all of whom can sell their work” were members of the IACW. While identifying an internal network of women and their skill sets, she stressed not only the economic value but also that these women provided a “foundation for the growth of artistic taste,” which cultivated more intelligent buyers and fostered a greater appreciation for craftsmanship.<sup>309</sup>

The Social Purity committee sent out a questionnaire that shows conflicting ideas about pleasure, sociability and gender relations. Created by committee members Gertrude D. Culbertson, Alice Thompson, and Minnie Harris, questions gauged whether the home or community served as better role models for children, surveyed views on divorce, and evaluated the effectiveness of outreach for fallen women.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Minutes from the 1905 Fourth Annual Meeting Minutes, Muscatine, IA, p 17. Miss Maude Ousley (sometimes spelled Owsley) was a longtime member of Muscatine’s Paul Lawrence Dunbar Club. By 1905 she was the President of the PLDC, while also serving as IACW Arts and Crafts Committee Chair and Memorial Committee member. *The 1902 Muscatine City Directory* p. 168 Miss Ousley’s occupation is a hairdresser .

<sup>310</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting, Muscatine, IA 1905, 19-20. Mrs. Alice Thompson was a longtime member of Muscatine’s Paul Lawrence Dunbar Club. Little is known about Mrs. Minnie Harris. In 1905, she is a member of the Social Purity Committee; however, her city and club are not stated (1905 Annual Minutes, p. 20). See Carle, *Defining the Struggle*, 172.

Table 5. 1905 Social Purity Committee Survey

1. Do you approve of co-education? If so, why?	Four answered yes and seven no.
2. Does your club have talks on temperance?	Two answered yes and nine no.
3. (a) Is it customary for them to give card parties or dances?  (b) Do you think a social game of cards will lead to gambling?	(a) Eleven answered yes.  (b) Nine answered yes and two answered no.
4. (a) Do the parents of your city guard against late hours for their children?  (b) Which do you think the most beneficial for children, evenings spent at their own home or at the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A.?	(a) Ten answered yes and one no.  (b) Answers varied; depending on home surroundings, if homes were Christian homes, or if the home had the proper training.  **Four answered home and three did not answer.
5. Is there an equal standard of morality for boys and girls?	Six answered yes, three no, and two did not answer.
6. Do you favor divorces?	Five answered yes, five answered no, and one did not answer.
7. Is gossip ever fruitful or good?	Unanimously answered no.
8. Does it ever really pay to help fallen women?	Answers varied as follows: Sometimes it does. Yes, very often. The effort is worth it. Six answered yes and two did not answer.

The Social Purity Committee compiled answers from eleven clubs submitted via mail. These surveys collected data and provided topics for future discussion at local and state levels, providing space for black women to accurately communicate their opinions about black life in Iowa. Although the questionnaire offered leading questions about temperance and divorce, women responded in the negative. Some members responded with prescriptive language and

ideas of middle class respectability in their answers about children, gossip, and fallen women. However, varied responses about equal standards of morality for men and women and divorce show that personal experiences also weighed in their answers. The fact that some members did not answer queries about morality, divorce, and helping fallen women raises questions of whether their answers were truly anonymous. Even more, this also shows that local club women did not feel that they had to toe a moral purity line. Interestingly, answers to question eight regarding fallen women reveal that not all club women in Iowa had the same ideas about uplifting other women. Since Iowa black communities were so small, club women more likely knew their “fallen” neighbors, complicating their ability to adhere strictly to the state prescriptions. These surveys circulated by the Arts and Crafts, Household Economics and Social Purity committees now provide rich clues about the perceptions members held about education, art, family, gender, and economics--strengthening their notions of black bourgeois respectability.<sup>311</sup>

### ***Cooperative Uplift: The IACW and the Iowa African American Council***

The IACW’s relationship with the Iowa African American Council (IA-AAC), formerly the Iowa African American League, evolved during the early twentieth century as the number of black club women in Iowa far surpassed those of the latter. As discussed in Chapter 1 & 2, IA-AAC chapters had been active in Iowa since 1892. A decade later, the political activism of the IA-AAC shifted to Des Moines where the majority of the state black male leaders lived. Most news reports of the IA-AAC during this time focus on the group’s activities in Des Moines. The organization continued to challenge economic, political, and civil oppressions in Iowa. However, IACW member participation in the IA-AAC increased from one member to several,

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<sup>311</sup> Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*.

including Mrs. Waricks, Mrs. Holt, Mrs. McClain, Mrs. Graves, and Mrs. Williamson who were active in the organization alongside their husbands.<sup>312</sup> The IA-AAC support of the black club movement in Iowa was significant. IACW President Belle Graves was not only invited to address the group at their 1904 Third Annual Session, but she was also elected to the National Afro-American Council Executive Committee.

By June 1904, George Woodson was elected president of the group. Under his leadership the IA-AAC addressed the disproportionate numbers of unemployed or underemployed African Americans in Iowa by publicly demanding local employers to hire fairly, stating, “We deplore the fact that our skilled and educated laborers are not accorded the same opportunity to earn a livelihood that is accorded those of the dominant race who have had similar preparation and training;...by thus discriminating, drive our boys to acts of lawlessness and our girls to lives of shame.” Confronting local business owners in the media, Woodson was making it clear that local African Americans wanted to see black employees where they spent their money. Complementing IACW economic initiatives, Woodson appealed to blacks throughout the state “to acquire and invest wealth” by suggesting that building an African-American business block in Des Moines would be a good investment. Politically, Woodson made clear to state politicians that the IAAC refused to support any party or candidate who failed to guard the rights of blacks, while demanding a reduction of southern representation in Congress.<sup>313</sup>

By 1905, black Iowa club women’s vision for social equality stood in stark contrast to IAAC’s views. Woodson sent a poignant letter of support to the group, offering both words of

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<sup>312</sup> *Bystander*, 11 July 1902. The article “Council Celebrates Fourth” highlights the 1902 Fourth of July programming hosted by the Des Moines AAC branch at St. Paul A.M.E. Church. The husbands of IACW members Belle Graves, Mrs. Waricks, Mrs. Holts, and Mrs. McClain all participated in the festivities.

<sup>313</sup> *Bystander*, 8 July 1904, “Elect New Officers.” *Bystander*, 1 July 1904, “Third Annual Session.”

encouragement and warnings about the challenges that often stifle the progress of uplift organizations. He challenged the “best women” to “lift” the lower classes of people who “wanted” to be helped stating,

...But the scourge of slavery still leaves its mark on poor, illiterate and weak people among us. And I think it is to benefit and uplift these, that your highest aim should be directed.... give more attention to those who really need and beg for light, who hunger and thirst for your help, rather than longer waste your valuable efforts on that large class of worthless people who are always falling down in order to be pitied and helped up.

Woodson’s direct reference to “worthless people,” seemingly in Iowa, markedly diverged from the ideas conveyed by IACW members who often referred to those in need as “fallen.”

Representing the AAC, he argued that race work efforts should be geared towards only the receptive lower-class people. Abandoning notions of being about to lift everyone, this type of selective uplift was very different from the public language conveyed by the IACW who often referred to those in need as “fallen” or “less fortunate” sisters. He also warned that “bitterness” had destroyed preceding state race groups and dared the women to not let personal ambitions lead to their demise.<sup>314</sup> Woodson’s comments revealed top-down elitist sentiments that must have influenced his leadership of the IA-AAC. Under his leadership, it is apparent that the AAC was not an uplift organization for all African Americans. Knowing that the IACW published their meeting minutes, he clearly stood by his beliefs knowing that they would be printed for all to see. He did not fear repercussions from the black middle class or working class throughout the state.

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<sup>314</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting Muscatine 1905, 9-11. See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 89. Gains examines how racial uplift ideology shaped identity and tactics for elite African Americans 1890-1930, arguing that there were class tensions between black elites and black masses.

Interestingly, Woodson's local elitist views did not stop him from participating in other national discussions about how to stop discrimination and violence that blacks faced throughout the country. As lynchings and race riots continued to increase across the United States, African-American leaders began to form another organization to take aggressive action to secure full citizenship rights, freedom of speech and criticism, manhood suffrage, and abolition of distinctions based on race. In June 1905, W. E. B. DuBois and a group of young African Americans met at Niagara Falls, Canada. Known as the Niagara Movement, this group continued to meet in 1906 and 1907, fighting for the rights of blacks across the country by issuing declarations of protests to whites that included demands for freedom of speech without criticism, suffrage for men, dignity of labor, and recognition of courageous black leadership. Woodson was a founding member of this organization, just months after his contentious speech at the IACW state meeting. Although this group was comprised of some of the most influential African Americans in the country, they did not receive support from all blacks and very few whites. The movement ended in 1910 due to leadership feuds and lack of national support, scholar Elliott Rudwick claiming, "Niagara's program of uncompromising protest for equal treatment was too far ahead of white public opinion, and this fact damaged the movement's propaganda campaign."<sup>315</sup> Regardless of the Niagara Movement's demise, George Woodson surely brought back information from national meetings with black race men from around the country, sharing his insight on those discussions with the IACW and IA-AAC.

The growing influence of the IACW can be seen in public response to the organization by white Iowa elected officials. Often, mayors of cities that hosted IACW annual meetings and

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<sup>315</sup> Elliott Rudwick, "The Niagara Movement," *The Journal of Negro History*, July 1957, vol. 42, issue 3, 177-200. Bill Silag, ed., *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa 1838-2000* (Des Moines, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001), 303.

other prominent community leaders made it a point to attend opening sessions, welcoming the black club women to the area . Even if limited, the IACW had access to some white politicians in the state, contrary to the assertion by some historians that only white activist women had access to men of power in the early twentieth century.<sup>316</sup> Every year as local IACW members prepared to host annual meetings, the mayor, local officials, and business owners prepared for black women to tour and patronize their establishments, who then shared their positive and negative experiences with their communities. The 1904 Cedar Rapids meeting was the first time a mayor of a hosting city addressed the IACW. Mayor Charles D. Houston offered words of support on behalf of the residents of Cedar Rapids to the sixteen clubs that were present. He stated: “I wish to encourage you in your work and predict that you will exert a wholesome influence in all matters of public concern.” He connected himself to the work of the IACW by emphasizing that proper education of the young was most important. He informed the IACW of his goal to create public nurseries “where the working woman may leave her child,” and to build gymnasiums and playgrounds, and kindergartens “for the little ones.” Although he did not specifically identify differences between black and white education, he did state that technical training schools and free public lectures on morality, politics and economic questions would be places where all people could add to their knowledge.<sup>317</sup> His attendance at the meeting set precedence for the level of respect IACW members expected to receive in towns and cities across the state. Mayor Houston recognized that although African-American women could not

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<sup>316</sup> Boris, “The Power of Motherhood,” 232. Boris claims that only white women had access to white men who had power in their communities; black women were ignored.

<sup>317</sup> *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 23 May 1904, “Iowa Federation in Session Here: Colored Women’s Club Representatives Convene.” Mayor Charles D. Houston served four mayoral terms: April 1901-1902, April 1903-1904, April 1922-1924, and April 1928-1932.



vote, their advocacy translated into political support. He also knew that conventions brought money to his city and that their happiness could attract other events to his city.

While the IACW was dedicated to helping build black institutions, they did not feel encumbered by those commitments. The 1904 Cedar Rapids, Iowa meeting was not held at the city's one black church, Bethel A.M.E., founded in 1871.<sup>318</sup> Instead, black women from across Iowa converged on the Czech-Slovak Protective Society Hall (C.S.P.S. Hall).<sup>319</sup> The hall was built in 1891 by the C.S.P.S. to support the welfare of Czech-Slovak immigrants in Iowa.

Czech-Slovak immigrants began settling in Cedar Rapids in the early 1850s to work in meatpacking plants and by 1900 the growing community thrived along 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the city.<sup>320</sup> The fact that African-American women were allowed to meet at this building reveals that there was at least a positive relationship between African Americans and Czech-Slovak immigrants in Cedar Rapids.<sup>321</sup>

One year later Mayor McNutt welcomed IACW delegates to Muscatine, offering his opinion on how the IACW could both uplift African Americans and lessen the gap between the races in 1905 he stated, "I sincerely hope that as the years go by that the great success which has attended you in the past will be increased and that the colored race will be lifted up to a high plane and all will be educated both mentally and spiritually to such a degree that harmony will reign supreme between the white and black races, for all time to come."<sup>322</sup> McNutt's remedy for

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<sup>318</sup> *Bystander*, 20 November 1903, "Cedar Rapids Notes". The hosting JSYC did have a relationship with the church, passing a resolution in November 1903 to assist with needed repairs, which provides a clue to why the state group met elsewhere.

<sup>319</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904, "Iowa Federation."

<sup>320</sup> *Iowa Pathways*, "A Czech and Slovak Community," and "From Razorbacks to Refrigerated Steaks: Early Meatpacking," [www.lptv.org](http://www.lptv.org).

<sup>321</sup> Shelton Stromquist, *Unionizing the Jungles: Labor and Community in the Twentieth-Century Meatpacking Industry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997). Stromquist looks at packing towns throughout the Midwest and throughout the state of Iowa. He discusses recruitment of unskilled labor, largely among African Americans and "new" immigrants and the social relationship between the two groups.

<sup>322</sup> IACWC Fourth Annual Meeting, Muscatine, Iowa, May 22-24, 1905, p. 6.

the racial divide in the county was educating and uplifting blacks, not educating whites and challenging racism and segregation. What the Mayor did not make clear was how “to such a degree” would be measured or “who” (white or black people) would measure success.<sup>323</sup> IAWC members also had the attention of white women at this Muscatine meeting. Reports reveal that it is the only annual meeting in a four-year period (1902-1906) to be attended by “cultured white ladies of the city who were interested in the proceeding of the convention.”<sup>324</sup>

### ***The IACW’s Contributions to the Success of the National Association of Colored Women***

While the IACW labored to craft a state-wide agenda that continued to meet the needs of local communities, the organization also worked during 1902-1906 to strengthen its ties to the NACW and to connect African-American club women to the political and social challenges that the nation faced during the early twentieth century. An example of the state’s club women identifying more strongly than before with the national movement, the IACW voted to change their name for the second time from the Iowa State Federation of Afro-American Women to The Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs in 1905. While meeting minutes and club reports do not reveal why, the new name more closely resembled that of the NACW but also shows that IACW members remained a part of the national dialogue about the best term to define black Americans. White and blue were chosen as the official colors and “Sowing Seeds of Kindness” was unanimously selected as the motto, the same as the NACW.<sup>325</sup> Evidence of an

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<sup>323</sup> Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xx. Gaines argues that both black and whites used the same dominant language to define their middle class, but historically unequal social positions meant that white privilege would always win.

<sup>324</sup> *Muscatine News and Tribune*, 23 May 1905, “First Days Session of Colored Club.”

<sup>325</sup> “Minutes Fourth Annual Meeting 1905,” p. 15, IACWC. The National Association of Colored Women was one of the first national organizations to use the term “colored” in its name. The National Association of Colored People, formed in 1909, is the last major national black organization to use the term. See Lerone Bennett Jr.’s “What’s In a Name? Negro vs. Afro-American vs. Black” in *Ebony Magazine* 23(November 1967) 46-48, 50-52, 54.

endeavor by the NACW to create a higher status within the organization, Mary Church Terrell was named Honorary President of the organization after serving three consecutive terms as its first national president in 1901. Similarly, the IACW began the ritual of bestowing the title “Honorary” upon the most respected IACW members. Black Iowa club women unanimously agreed that Helena Downey be selected as the first Honorary President as a tribute to her untiring efforts to start the state organization. For her efforts as a long-time member of Ottumwa’s IBWRC, Mrs. I. B. Taylor became the first Honorary Member.<sup>326</sup>

As further evidence that Iowa’s club women were adopting patterns from other national organizations, in 1904 the women paid homage to the black state newspaper that had been diligently reporting the efforts of African-American club women since 1894, officially adopting the *Bystander* as the official organ of the IACW.<sup>327</sup> This action resembled those of other national groups like the AAC and NACW, but differed in that the IACW did not incur the cost of production. The “Club and Club Women” column was joined by other city columns like Des Moines’ “City Club Notes” as local club women pressed to report on their service to communities throughout the state. In September, there was a call for clubs throughout the state to place a “standing card” or long-term ad in the *Bystander*. This action assisted club women visiting the state with finding local “hospitalities” and addressed an audience outside of the organization.

Increased interactions with NACW reveal the IACW’s growing national presence. In July 1904 President Graves, a delegate for the HBSRC, and Mrs. Palmer, a delegate for the Des Moines Busy Bee Club, attended the NACW national convention in St. Louis, Missouri.

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<sup>326</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904, “Iowa Federation.” There are three Taylor women who were members of Ottumwa’s IBWRC. Their initials are often missing or incorrect when published. Still trying to determine exactly who she is.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

Although the IACW lacked the ten-club minimum to be official voting members of the NAWC, individual clubs that could pay national dues were eligible for membership and allowed to send delegates to national conventions. Graves and Palmer worked alongside women from around the country, listening to speeches by national leaders.<sup>328</sup>

The 1905 IACW meeting also marked a greater emphasis on connecting state efforts to national uplift platforms, tying African-American Iowa race workers to the larger narrative of the black club movement and race work in the United States. NACW President Josephine Silone-Yates sent greetings, expressing national pride for the victories of the IACW. In attendance, NACW Organizer Mrs. L. A. Davis, from Chicago, Illinois, addressed the group and offered praise for the existence of black clubs in all but thirteen commonwealths. Confirming that the progress of the club movement slowed in the South, she proudly reported that representatives of the NACW were organizing on plantations in Mississippi. President Carrie W. Clifford of the Ohio State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs charged those at the convention with increasing the number of quality homes "... to wipe out ignorance, poverty, crime and prejudice, these monsters which surmount us and drag us down."<sup>329</sup> This intermingling of black women from Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio shows that IACW members were recognized nationally as active participants in black club work. This appreciation of the black Iowa club women's participation in nationwide organizing by the other older federations reflects how forcefully IACW members entered the NACW network.<sup>330</sup>

Nationally, black club women continued to have an ongoing commitment to the black church, even when challenged by some male leadership. Nelson Baker, a black minister from

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<sup>328</sup> *Bystander*, 29 July 1904, "National Association of Colored Women Held in St. Louis."

<sup>329</sup> "Minutes, Fourth Annual Meeting 1905," box 1, folder 5, p 8-9, 12. IACWC. *Bystander*, 2 June 1905. *Muscatine News and Tribune*, 24 May 1905.

<sup>330</sup> IL Federation (1899), Missouri Federation (1900), Ohio Federation (1901).

Pittsfield, Massachusetts, authored a scathing letter to the Congregational Assembly that criticized the efforts of the NACW. Passing a resolution denouncing his actions, IACW members joined the public condemnation of Baker.<sup>331</sup> However, even while enthralled in this national dialogue, the IACW continued to make themselves accessible to more black women in the state by publicly inviting church groups to join Iowa's black club women at their annual meeting.<sup>332</sup>

Iowa's club women focused their research and studies on examples of racial violence and discrimination across the nation. For example, continuing their practice of educating each other on race work and politics across the nation, Des Moines' HBSRC's Mrs. L. R. Palmer presented a well-received paper entitled "Vardaman." James K. Vardaman, Governor of Mississippi from 1904 to 1908, was a radical advocate of white supremacy. He explicitly declared that, if necessary, every black person in Mississippi would be lynched in order to maintain white supremacy.<sup>333</sup> Palmer argued that he was a "race hunter" who was elected on an anti-black education platform that hurt both the United States and Mississippi.<sup>334</sup> Palmer's speech confirmed that members of the IACW were not afraid to discuss the most serious topics, knowing that their discussion would become public record. For African Americans in Iowa not up to date on the atrocities in the South, club women became reporters in their communities.

Iowa black club women were publicly and directly involved in the national fight against segregated passenger train cars and lynching. They sent a message to the Honorable W.P. Hepburn and the Iowa Delegation in the U.S. Congress asking that the Warner-Foraker

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<sup>331</sup> Minutes from the Fifth Annual Meeting, Des Moines, IA 1906, p. 11.

<sup>332</sup> *Bystander*, 17 February 1905, "Wanted 500 Women."

<sup>333</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904, "Iowa Federation." See William F. Holmes *The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970) for a greater discussion of Vardaman.

<sup>334</sup> *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 25 May 1904, "Meeting Arouse Great Interest: Second Day Session Afro-American Women."

amendment to the Rate Bill be struck down as it was not in the best interest of African Americans, nor the state of Iowa.<sup>335</sup> The amendment stated that railroad companies were to provide equal service and accommodations to all interstate customers paying the same rate. African American race leaders condemned the proposal because it federally authorized racially separate coaches throughout the United States. The Warner-Foraker amendment was eventually withdrawn.<sup>336</sup>

IACW members passed their first resolution publicly condemning lynching and mob violence.

That we voice our condemnation of lynching and mob violence, and redouble our efforts to arouse public sentiment to the demand that the majesty of the law prevail throughout this broad land of ours until every human being is guaranteed a fair trial by law for life and liberty.<sup>337</sup>

While this resolution denounced brutality against black and white innocent people across the country, it also placed IACW within the context of national anti-lynching sentiment. Mirroring anti-lynching declarations of the NACW at the 1904 St. Louis meeting, Iowa club women joined their sisters across the country in calling for an end to murderous attacks on black people.

Likewise, in 1906 the *Des Moines Register and Leader* ran the front-page article “Negro Club Women Roast Thos. Dixon” at the opening of the IACW’s fifth annual meeting. The piece described the IACW condemnation of the novelist Thomas Dixon whose work made “the negro race look immoral, uncultured and unworthy of consideration.” The group called for Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots*, *The Clansman*, and *The One Woman* to be excluded from the library and

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<sup>335</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting, Des Moines, Iowa, May 28-29, 1906. p.6. IACWC.

<sup>336</sup> Daniel W. Crofts, “The Warner-Foraker Amendment to the Hepburn Bill: Friend or Foe of Jim Crow?,” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 39, no 3 (Aug 1973): 341-358.

<sup>337</sup> Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting, Muscatine, Iowa, May 22-24, p. 26

“homes of culture and refinement.”<sup>338</sup> Dixon’s work supported racist stereotypes and advocated white supremacy. Interestingly, while this article focused primarily on the IACW’s discussion of Dixon, annual meeting minutes barely mentioned it, instead highlighting organizational business and the statewide activities for the year. Regardless, the IACW’s stance on topics showed the larger community that they were privy to what was being written about African-American people and were willing to take a public stance against it.

During the early twentieth century the United States Congress created the United States Forest Services to establish and protect national reserves so that they could provide recreation, timber, water, minerals, fish and wildlife for future generations.<sup>339</sup> With a Forestry Committee in thirty-four states across the country, the NACW took the lead in educating black women about gardening, lawn maintenance and forest preservation. In prioritizing forestry, IACW activists laid claim to the nation’s natural resources for their own future generations. IACW President Belle Graves was appointed National Superintendent of Forestry. By December 1905, IACW Forestry Committee Chair Mrs. Georgia Gray generated an agenda for IACW clubs to follow that included asking groups to plant trees along highways and fruit trees in yards, and to spruce up yards by artistically planting flowers. The IACW encouraged club women to visit the woods to learn about trees, asking clubs to submit a report of the number of visits to the woods, number of trees planted, and number of birds discovered. Later topics also included how to create window and porch gardens. The Forestry Committee relied on traditional ideas about the gendered division of labor in middle-class homes. The committee directly connected the beautification of homes to both women and men, arguing that men feel better about planting gardens and mowing lawns, while women find satisfaction in “tending” to these gardens and

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<sup>338</sup> *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 29 May 1906, “Negro Club Women Roast Thos. Dixon.”

<sup>339</sup> United States Forreest Service, [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us).

providing a vase of flowers in the home.<sup>340</sup> However, this proposed gardening presupposed the leisure time to engage in the activity and the resources necessary—however meager—to purchase flowers, shrubbery and the like.

### ***Tensions between top-down organizing and bottom-up activism***

For all of the IACW's successes during their first five years as the leading black women's uplift organization in the state, club work among women did not come without strife and animosity.

*Being a member of a club will not bring you the desired success any more than being a member of the church will take you to heaven. Success, like the kingdom of God, is within, and you must work it out. —Helena Downey, 1905 IACW State Editor*<sup>341</sup>

The frictions the IACW encountered show us that prescriptive national goals did not convert into successful grassroots activism. The IACW's untiring attempts to construct positive images of clubs and their work was probably in part rooted in a culture of dissemblance, and went hand in hand with their emphasis on creating positive images of blacks in the United States. Scholars argue that organizations and clubs offered an opportunity for black women to fashion autonomous images of independence, provide positive images of two-parent homes and examples of women and men collaborating on important issues.<sup>342</sup> A greater part of the annual meeting minutes reveal minimal discord among IACW delegates; yet the 1906 report coupled with the 1905-1906 "Club and Club Women Column" shed greater light on the internal frictions

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<sup>340</sup> *Bystander*, 1 December 1905, "Editorials." *Bystander*, 22 December 1905, "Forestry Work." Mrs. Georgia Gray was the Forestry Committee Chair of the IACW in 1905. I have been unable to find information about where she lived or of what local club she was a member.

<sup>341</sup> *Bystander*, 3 February 1905, "Club and Club Women." After leaving her post as President of the IACW in 1904, Helena Downey became State Editor. There is no detailed description of this position; however, Downey remained in charge of her "Club and Club Women" column, managing the content.

<sup>342</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight*, 46-47. Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, 135.



that these women faced at their fifth anniversary, which deterred some groups from joining the NACW.<sup>343</sup> The tensions revealed the challenges the IACW faced in trying to build a strong state-wide organization while also trying to meet the diverging needs of local communities. The discord revealed in the open letters, and even answers on questionnaires, demonstrates the tensions between the state's efforts to prescribe a program of uplift and resistance on the part of some club women. For instance, responding to an inquiry that asked how a club was to succeed if members disagreed, Downey challenged club women to look at the big picture, stressing that people must have harmony among themselves before seeking harmony in a group. She urged all members to protect their clubs from "knowledge of, or contact with anything harmful." Downey's emphasis on the larger idea that harmony within any group cannot exist without peace in one's personal life, family and home, placed the success or failure of an organization in the hands of the individual. Downey's efforts to address the topic publicly suggests that internal discord was affecting the movement.<sup>344</sup>

Statewide, the ongoing failure to meet submission deadlines (club reports, constitutions, by-laws) and charges of "disinterestedness" also exposed tensions. Individual club reports submitted in 1906 reveal how women throughout the state viewed the IACW after the first five years. Information presented by twenty-three groups showed that disinterestedness and poor attendance were the leading challenges.<sup>345</sup> Half of the clubs expressed that the IACW needed to provide more materials (constitution and budget templates) and ideas to increase the functionality of the groups. Six of the oldest founding clubs reported needing greater assistance

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<sup>343</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 195 -96. McHenry supports Matthew's definition of race literature – as not just a venue where African Americans praise themselves or an outlet for false pride. Race literature was a necessity as an outlet for the unnaturally suppressed inner lives of blacks.

<sup>344</sup> *Bystander*, 3 February 1905, "Clubs and Club Women."

<sup>345</sup> Minutes of the Fifth Annual Meeting, Des Moines, IA1906, p.14. Iowa Association of Colored Women Clubs, 1903-1920, IACWC.

from the state body. Ottumwa's IBWRC asked for greater efforts by the IACW in connecting women from across the state so that they could have a better understanding of statewide uplift initiatives. It is clear that clubs throughout Iowa thought that the lines of communication between local and state leaders were failing.

Growing to nearly 200 members statewide in 1906, at the close of the first five years only four Iowa clubs were financially solvent enough to pay the dues necessary to become official NACW members. While the Des Moines's Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle and Busy Bee Sewing Club, Ottumwa's Good Intent Club, and Davenport's Violet Reading Circle had joined the NACW; but strangely, Ottumwa's IBRC was not on the list. As a result, the IACW still had not met the ten-club minimum needed to entitle Iowa to representation at NACW conventions. At the 1904 NACW meeting in St. Louis, only Utah had fewer delegates than the three representing Iowa.<sup>346</sup>

From the earliest club meetings in the 1890s, black Iowa club women shrouded themselves in an armor of respectability. Printed club notes and yearly annual reports have revealed little more than debates and differences regarding IACW organizational business matters, never personal issues. Continuously challenging negative stereotypes of black womanhood, black Iowa club women adopted what scholars call a "culture of dissemblance," by trying to keep all internal disagreements secret from the public, so as not to diminish their achievements in race work.<sup>347</sup> But in 1906, for just two short months, they put their well-crafted

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<sup>346</sup> *Bystander*, 19 January 1906, "Clubs and Club Women." *Bystander*, 6 April 1906, "Iowa Club Women."

<sup>347</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Primary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs*, 14 (Summer 1989): 912-920. See also Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 37-38, 46-47. Hine defines dissemblance as "the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from the oppressors." See also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 193-194. Higginbotham discusses cultural dissemblance among black northern Baptist church women.

public persona to the test. In the months following the May 1906 annual meeting, members of the IACW had a very open debate about the history of the state group that played out in the pages of the *Bystander*. Some of the state's oldest club women began to challenge the narrative that Helena Downey had founded the IACW. Downey had been deemed the architect of the IACW by the paper's male editors by virtue of her "Call to all Club Women" that was published in 1902. In June 1906, the *Bystander's* accounts that Downey as founder of the IACW were challenged by Ottumwa's Ida B. Wells Club. A letter "To the Editor" asserted that Mrs. Q. B. Taylor, the oldest members of the IWBC, had spearheaded the organizing of the state group. Regarding the 1902 public call issued by Downey in the *Bystander*, the letter stated

Mrs. Downey was a member of our club for a short time and served as our secretary for about six months. she (sic) did as the club gave her power to do and that don't make her the founder of the federation, that being the fact makes the Ida B. Wells the founder of the federation.

Signed by President Taylor and six of some of the oldest members of the club, this letter ignited a very public dispute within the pages of Iowa black weekly that was now distributed all over the country. The letter sheds light on Downey's short membership in the IBWRC. Soon after calling for the creation of a state organization, Downey left the IBWRC and became a founding member of the Good Intent Club in Ottumwa. While it is unknown what led Downey to leave the IBWRC, it is clear that tensions remained.<sup>348</sup> Iowa club women from across the state quickly rose to Downey's defense. IACW Vice-President Belle Bannister penned her own editorial entitled "Truth to Light," deeming Mrs. Taylor as the organizer of the first woman's club in Ottumwa (IBWRC) and Downey as not only the originator of the IACW, but also as a main cultivator of the organization because her Presidency was followed by her serving as State

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<sup>348</sup> *Bystander*, 15 June 1906, "Ottumwa News." The Good Intent Club was founded in Ottumwa, Iowa in 1902 with the objective "to raise to the highest plane home, moral and civic life." See Annual Meeting Minutes, Keokuk, Iowa, May 27-29, 1907, no page number.

Organizer. Claiming that the club work of Iowa black women was “a grand missionary work in uplift,” she challenged Mrs. Taylor’s motives:

Mrs. Taylor indeed deserves much credit for out of the I.B.W. sprung others. But why comes this friction after four years of success, seemingly one woman wants all the honors bestowed upon herself;... If the good women of the state are working for honors their work will not be profitable and, it is an injustice to the national motto lifting as we climb as well as the state, “Sowing seeds of kindness.” Let us work hard another year to help the new president, and lay aside all prejudice.<sup>349</sup>

Letters from women in Cedar Rapids and Davenport supported Bannister’s push for the women to stay positive in their accomplishments and to not let “petty vexations” cause their demise.

Claiming “it is our duty to protect our sister,” Downey’s club mates in the Good Intent Club deemed the debate as an “ignorant controversy” in their own letter to the Editor.<sup>350</sup>

Never mentioned again in any other IACW communiqué, by August 1906 all evidence of this very high-profile difference of opinion disappeared. This brief period of in-house turmoil reveals much more about members of the IACW than simply a disagreement about the group’s history. It shows that even as black women created space for each other to meet and implement initiatives to strengthen African-American communities throughout the state, they did not always agree and they were not always friendly to one another. Even more, as writers and publishers in their own right, black club women placed a high value on their “origins” story and history of the organization. In the IACW, methods of respectability and dissemblance did not always equal homogeneity among its members.

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<sup>349</sup> *Bystander*, 29 June 1906, “Truth to Light.” IACW vice president Belle Bannister was a member of Keokuk, Iowa’s Cleave Circle Club which was created in 1905 with the objective “the mutual helpfulness among women and the highest welfare of the.” See Annual Meeting Minutes, Keokuk, Iowa, May 27-29, 1907, no page number.

<sup>350</sup> *Bystander*, 13 July 1906. Mrs. S. L. Terry wrote “To Club Women.” From Cedar Rapids, Iowa, I have been unable to determine if she was an IACW member. *Bystander* 20 July 1906, Mrs. E. J. Dillard Sanders wrote “Golden Chain.” Sanders was a member of the Violet Leaf Club, one of the oldest clubs in the IACW, see Chapter 1. *Bystander*, 29 June 1906 “Letter to Editor” from the Good Intent Club in support of fellow club member Helena Downey, signed by president Mrs. Jennie Wenston and Secretary Pro Tem. Amy Junkins.

## ***Conclusion***

From 1902-1906, club work provided a statewide space for Iowa black women to create practical policies to uplift African Americans. IACW members gained the confidence to push constraints embodied in other women's religious and/or fraternal groups to craft a more autonomous organization by integrating the literary and uplift agendas of its oldest groups. As other state race groups struggled or dissolved from assuming top down selective approaches towards race progress, Iowa black club women continuously critiqued themselves publicly while they also encouraged others to organize. Unremittingly working and reworking their solutions to the ills of black communities, they realized early on that there was not one set of answers. Local clubs adopted the language of middle-class bourgeois respectability, but their actions on the ground demonstrate that these race leaders recognized that the rhetoric did not always meet the needs of their communities. Unlike other large metropolitan areas, activists in Iowa's black women's clubs had intimate knowledge of those they aimed to uplift. Indeed, in most cases, they could very well have been their next door neighbor. As a result, local club women took a flexible approach to implementing the larger IACW and NACW goals in an effort to blur the lines of class in their tight knit communities. Yet activists' efforts to balance the promotion of bourgeois respectability with the realities of conditions on the ground reveal the challenges of working across class lines.

## Chapter 4: “Social Utility:” Cooperation and Welfare Activism, 1907-1919

*In these strenuous times through which our race is passing, it is time for us to show our worth, and the worth of a person in a club depends upon their social utility which causes the brain to work, the mind to develop and the thoughts to grow and be clothed in desirous language. –Gertrude Culbertson, IACW President, 1907<sup>351</sup>*

The IACW maintained a constant literary, social and political presence in the Midwest from 1902-1905, becoming leading reformers during the Progressive Era. This momentum fueled the IACW’s steady rise from a neophyte state group to a nationally recognized organization from 1907-1919, when the IACW became the principal provider of welfare services to blacks in Iowa. Black club women in Iowa responded to state and local leadership’s inadequate support of its African-American residents, harnessing their “social utility” to craft policies, customize mutual aid initiatives, and create safe environments for their sisters in need. Largely dependent on their own resources, black club women identified and reacted to the needs of their communities by engaging in the politics of public health, opening homes for black women and girls, creating their own newspaper and facilitating mothers’ and community meetings to strengthen black families outside of their parlors. They prioritized state needs alongside national objectives during the Progressive Era, becoming increasingly political as their civic goals highlighted inadequacies of the state bureaucracy.<sup>352</sup>

For African Americans in Iowa, the Progressive Era (1880-1920) looked different than in other Midwestern states with large industrial cities. Nationally, large urban growth, an increased

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<sup>351</sup> *Bystander*, 19 November 1907. Gertrude Culbertson pinned the open letter “To Club Women.” In it she welcomed clubs back to work after summer break and reminded women of the significance of their work.

<sup>352</sup> Glenda Gilmore, “Diplomats to the White Community: African American Women in Progressive-Era North Carolina” in Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander eds. *Major Problems in American Women’s History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 272-273.

labor market, and a rise of social reform agendas were all key developments associated with the Progressive Era. For example, while manufacturing and economic opportunities greatly increased in Chicago, agriculture remained the leading industry in Iowa. Although coal mining gave way to meatpacking during the early twentieth century in the state, farming benefited most from new machinery that did not require increased labor: thus, Iowa did not experience a large spike in African-American population growth. From 1890 to 1920, the number of black residents in Iowa increased 49%, from 10,685 to 19,005, in contrast to Illinois where the population more than tripled from 57,028 to 182,274 (69%).<sup>353</sup> Nationally, black and white women's organizations often addressed the same issues: family health, education and public services. However, racism and segregation affected the amount of white political support black women received, forcing them to create success from within.<sup>354</sup> Like women across the nation, the IACW took the lead in "cleaning up the city" and "protecting the family" in the wake of urban growth and industrialization.<sup>355</sup> This rhetoric held different meanings for African Americans, whose family life and imagined threat to white public health were so frequently the target of white progressive concern. Social welfare initiatives and support to members were cornerstones of the black club movement. By providing assistance during times of loss and raising money for churches in need, black club women created systems of support when state and local governments did not provide funding.<sup>356</sup> Iowa black club women recognized that the national Progressive agenda didn't match the local needs of black Iowans, creating a local agenda rather

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<sup>353</sup> Hendricks, 41.

<sup>354</sup> Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds. *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991) p. 7.

<sup>355</sup> Hendrick, 52-53.

<sup>356</sup> Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 37-38, 141-142. See Chapter 1, p. 16 for a discussion of Ottumwa's Benevolent club created to raise money for the local Second Baptist Church (fn 43). See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 16-17. See Chapter 1, p. 23 for a discussion of how black club women supported both members and members' families during their time of bereavement (fn 59, 60). See Kara Holloway, *Passed On*, 25, 33-34.

than following national trends. Integrating new economic, health, and welfare work into their grassroots activities, the IACW became the leading welfare activists for African Americans in Iowa from 1907-1919.

### ***Growth and National Membership***

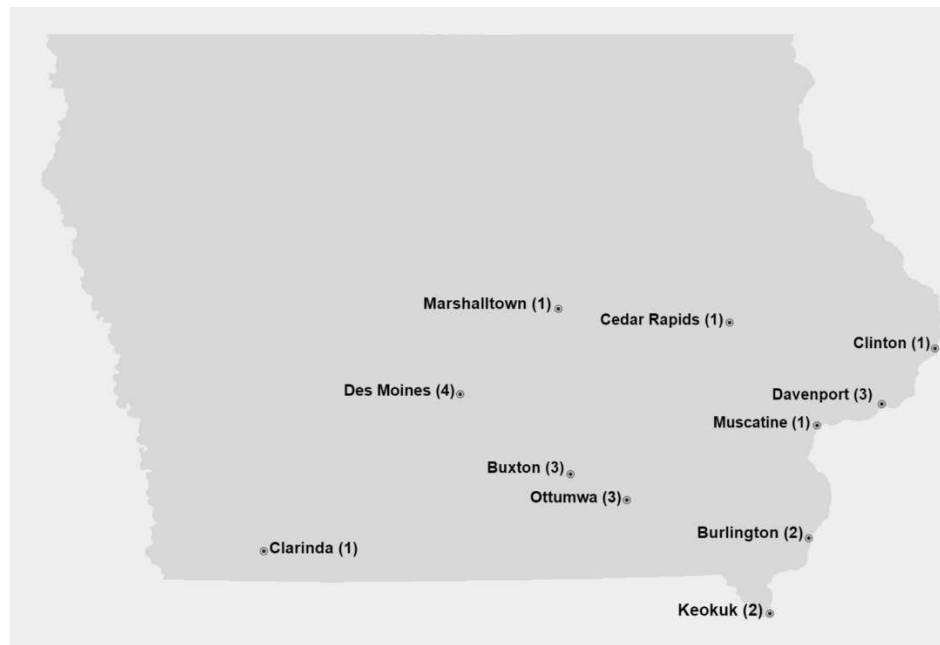


Figure 7. 1907 Map of the 24 Clubs in the IACW

IACW membership grew at an impressive pace during the early twentieth century. In May 1907, the organization boasted twenty-four clubs in eleven cities and more than 370 members statewide. By May 1917, 560 members represented thirty-three clubs in eleven cities. The steady state expansion of the IACW mirrors the ongoing development of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), that boasted 50,000 members and 1,000 clubs nationwide by 1914.<sup>357</sup> Increasing membership growth motivated Iowa club women to create

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<sup>357</sup> Hine, *AA Odyssey*, pg. 422. IACW May 1917 Annual Meeting Minutes. By 1921, there were eighty clubs in the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, throughout the state and more than 800 members. See Hendricks' *Gender Race and Politics in the Midwest*, p. xiii. In 1910, there were thirty clubs in ten Kansas cities, with at least 600 members. See Doretha K. Williams, "Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women," p. 82.



better accounting procedures and more intensive ways of raising money across the state. In 1907, the IACW created the Ways and Means Committee to keep an up-to-date report of collected monies.<sup>358</sup> The goal of this committee was to “raise money to replenish the treasury” to insure that the annual meeting minutes be printed on time. One member from each club was expected to report all funds collected once a month. Each club was responsible for developing ways to raise money such as providing entertainment or selling goods and turning the profits over to the committee.<sup>359</sup> In an era when black organizations were greatly weakened by financial instability, the IACW created a statewide plan to insure its permanence in the Midwest.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> *Bystander*, 24 June 1904, “Iowa Federation,” in this article about the IACW 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting held in Cedar Rapids, IA, May 24-25, 1904 (official annual minutes do not exist).

<sup>359</sup> *Bystander*, 1 February 1907, “Club and Club Woman” column.

<sup>360</sup> By 1907 IACW members were well aware of the Niagara Movement and African American Council at both the national and state levels. See Elliott Rudwick, “The Niagara Movement,” *The Journal of Negro History*, July 1957, vol. 42, issue 3, 177-200. See Emma Lou Thornbrough’s “The National Afro-American League, 1887-1908,” *Journal of Southern History*, 27, no. 4 (1961): 494-512.

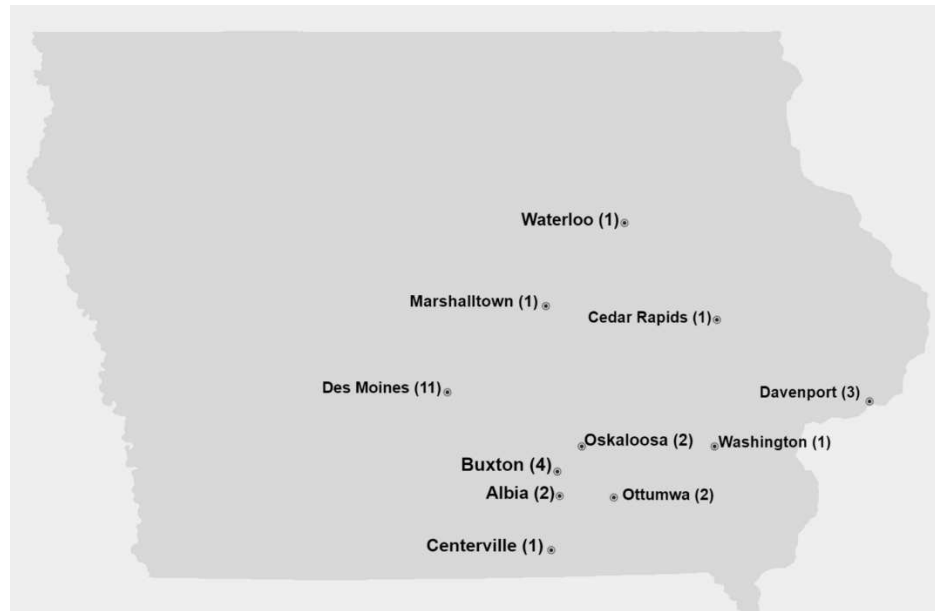


Figure 8. 1917 Map of the 33 clubs in the IACW

Club women's efforts to become fiscally sound fostered programming geared towards strengthening the financial stability of club women and their families. Self-help lessons on budgeting helped members save money via more effective grocery shopping and meal planning. Members circulated questionnaires that challenged women to cut extravagant spending and reuse household materials.<sup>361</sup> By 1907, the IACW Household Economics Committee Chair discussed the success of their efforts, claiming, "The great majority of club women are home-makers, thoughtful, earnest wives and mothers, who are giving their best efforts to the solution of the problems of their own and their children's lives."<sup>362</sup> Despite their limited employment opportunities, the majority of Iowa's black club women owned their homes. When the IACW asserted that this occurred through their "thrift and economy," they highlighted women's cash-

<sup>361</sup> Landon R. Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 19. Storrs argues that during the early twentieth century, working class groups began to wield their purchasing power as a reform tool.

<sup>362</sup> 1907 Sixth Annual Meeting Minutes, "Report of Chairman of Household Economics Committee." See Chapter Two, 10-11, 37-38. Helena Downey formerly served as IACW president in 1902 and 1903.

savings strategies and unpaid labor as well as their earned wages as crucial to the economic success of the households.<sup>363</sup> IACW members employed principles of economic nationalism by circulating papers like “Economic Ideas” and “Pure Food and Injuries to Health from Adulterated of Food” to IACW members and by recommending that each club practice cooking food thoroughly and in the cleanest environments. Using their financial knowledge, IACW members became leaders of black consumer activism; they were partners with black male leaders in debating the significance, strengths and weaknesses of African-American businesses. The IACW was not only concerned with domestic economy, but also entrepreneurial strategies. Leading conversations like “Shall We Patronize Our Own Businesses and Professionals” and “How to Encourage Business Enterprise Among Our People,” club women saw this self-education about economic issues to be about strengths and success of the communities, rather than a path to individual wealth.<sup>364</sup>

In spite of successful fundraising and impressive membership growth at the state level, the IACW could not meet the “ten financial club minimum” needed to officially join the NACW as a state organization in 1907. With only four clubs that were dues-paying members of the NACW, the IACW needed ten clubs to meet both financial and membership requirements. Meeting the ten-club minimum meant much greater Iowa representation at NACW national conventions, allowing up to ten additional voting delegates for each financial club.<sup>365</sup> Membership in the NACW meant IACW representatives could serve on national and regional

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<sup>363</sup>Ibid.

<sup>364</sup>Ibid. *Bystander*, 7 October 1908. See Darlene Clark Hine’s “The Housewives’ League of Detroit: Black Women and Economic Nationalism,” p. 224. Hine supports Nancy Cott’s argument that tactics of national efforts of consumer activism used by black women during the Great Depression in the 1920’s stem from early 20<sup>th</sup> century efforts of black club women.

<sup>365</sup> *Bystander*, 19 January 1906, “Club and Club Women.” *Bystander*, 6 April 1906, “Iowa Club Women.” The four Iowa clubs that were members of the NACW in 1906 were: Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle (Des Moines); Busy Bee Sewing Circle (Des Moines); Good Intent Club (Ottumwa); and Violet Reading Circle (Davenport).

committees and have greater input in shaping nationwide mandates that affected state and local club women. In turn, IACW members could offer national members well-tested grassroots strategies for club creation and sustainability in rural areas with fewer African Americans. IACW members often reported wanting to be national members, but they lacked financial resources to pay the cost of dues, travel, and fees for national materials. For black women in rural areas with small black populations, their financial resources were stretched thin by their support of churches and fraternal organizations. Iowa club women frequently asked for assistance with fundraising from the state leadership. Club presidents held special sessions at annual meetings to address local fundraising concerns and to discuss strategies to help clubs thrive.<sup>366</sup>

The IACW's financial struggles were not unique; other Midwestern black communities also faced serious obstacles. Like Iowa club women, members of the Kansas State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (1900) had limited financial means. Many of its members rebuffed the added burden of surrendering already limited funds to the NACW, and this dissension within the Kansas network put off national membership until 1922.<sup>367</sup> After eight years of work dedicated to increasing the membership and financial resources of the state's clubs, the IACW reached its

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<sup>366</sup> 1907 Annual Meeting Minutes, individual clubs report having difficulty raising money and/or requesting assistance from state leadership with fundraising. 1909 Annual Meeting Minutes, the first on May 25, 1909 was a council meeting of club presidents led by IACW President Mattie Lewis. From May 1908 to May 1910, Mrs. Mattie Lewis led the state organization. A 38-year-old mother of two, she and her husband Charles had been married for 23 years. In 1910, he worked as a cook in a dining car while she did not work. It is unclear when the Virginia native moved to Iowa; however, her daughter was born in the state in 1894. With a grammar school education, she was an early member of Davenport's Toussaint L'Overture (1901), later serving two terms as IACW treasurer 1904 to 1906 and president of Toussaint L'Overture Club in 1907 before heading the state organization.

<sup>367</sup> Doretha K. William, "Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Race Women: Black Women's Club Movement in Kansas 1900-30," PhD diss., The University of Kansas, 2011, 89-91. The Kansas Federation was created in 1900, but did not join the NACW until 1922, after years of club women being divided over the means versus ends. Kansas club women also felt that the financial burden of national dues would add too much financial stress to already burdened fundraising efforts. See Earl Spangler's *The Negro in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: T.S. Denison & Company, Inc., 1961), 82-83.

goal of joining the NACW in June 1910. For nearly twenty years, black Iowa club women thrived, surviving challenges of low membership, financial constraints, and even the disappearance of black communities and towns. The ability to send ten additional state representatives to NACW regional and national meetings meant that African Americans in Iowa now had stewards at the largest “table” where black women collectively created a nationwide social justice agenda.

Having attained NACW membership, the IACW set a new goal: incorporation of the state association. New president Gertrude Rush led the charge to incorporate the IACW. Rush, who simultaneously earned undergraduate and law degrees during her presidency in 1914, educated her sisters on the meaning and benefits of incorporation. This new designation would mean that the state organization could become a separate legal entity from its members, having its own income, expenses, assets, liabilities, and credit profile. Even more, it shows a sophisticated understanding of law, finance and culpability. A safeguard for the personal assets of black club women and their families, incorporation meant that they would not be personally liable for the IACW’s debts and obligations. Perhaps foreshadowing future projects, the IACW was preparing to take financial risks. President Rush presented a report about the incorporation process at the May 1913 state meeting, where letters from several lawyers were read in response to a question about legality. Shortly after the May 1913 meeting, the IACW became incorporated with unanimous support from the federation. African Americans throughout the state celebrated the IACW’s accomplishment, one that no other black organization in the state had achieved. Similarly, the white Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs was formed in 1893 and joined its national body that same year, but it did not become incorporated until 1914. The Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs was incorporated in 1913, while Michigan State

Association of Colored Women never incorporated. Maybe legal fees deterred these groups—Rush’s professional legal advice was free.<sup>368</sup> Being incorporated would be vital to the IACW’s ongoing push to acquire property to establish a home for women and girls in Des Moines.

Uninterrupted membership growth, increased financial stability and national membership placed the IACW at the forefront of African-American race work during the Progressive Era in Iowa. This chapter will show how these components galvanized the IACW’s creation of economic, political, and social reform to define and address the needs of blacks in Iowa and uplift the race. Scholars argue that black club women spearheaded self-help and social activism in black communities due to the virtual absence of social welfare institutions and/or the exclusion of African Americans from those that existed. However, there were additional motivating factors - including that shifting terrain of black women’s activism and their reach to shape national policy. Voluntarily, the IACW continuously assessed the needs of their neighborhoods, developing a wide-range of responses to local social and economic conditions from 1907-1919.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> 1913 Annual Meeting Minutes, p. 8. 1914 Annual Meeting Minutes, p. 7. At the end of the IACW Bylaws, it states that the group was incorporated in May 1913, under Mrs. Gertrude Durden Rush. *Bystander*, 6 June 1913 “Proceeding of Iowa Federation.” See *The Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs Yearbook 1915-1916*, compiled and edited by Mrs. W. H. Snider (Davenport, Iowa: 1915). The cover states that the organization was incorporated in 1914. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn eds., *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 997. Silag, *Outside In*, 272-273. Kharen Monsho, “RUSH, GERTRUDE DURDEN,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fruge>), accessed March 05, 2014. Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Rick L. Woten, “Rush, Gertrude Elzora Durden” *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*. University of Iowa Press, 2009. Web. 4 March 2014. All of these citations have varying dates and information. See Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 69-77.

<sup>369</sup> Lerner, “Early Community Work of Black Club Women” 161. Dye, 1-2 in ed Norton/Dye. Hendrick, 43. Sharon Harley’s article, 43 in Norton. Norton, 264.

## *The Iowa Colored Woman*

By 1907, the IACW began considering a new method of communication that would both encourage individual input and provide an even larger platform to amplify the voices of nearly 400 members throughout Iowa. As the organization continued to grow, club women continuously wrote and submitted information to the black press. Club reports of the late 1890s evolved to the “Club and Club Women” column by 1902, providing even more space for black club women to discuss their club work, uplift goals and political opinions.<sup>370</sup> Submitted only to the *Bystander*, at least twenty-six columns appeared from September 1902 through April 1907. Although individual club announcements and IACW committee reports were regularly published, by 1904 fewer clubs were submitting reports to column editors, and by 1906 the “Club and Club Women” was published irregularly.<sup>371</sup>

At the 1907 annual meeting, IACW President Gertrude Culbertson appointed longtime club woman Emma Gardner and newcomer Sue Brown to a new standing committee to research and report the benefits of the state organization having its own newspaper.<sup>372</sup> The world of journalism was not unknown to Iowa black club women. After all, black club women had been writing and editing submissions in church bulletins and the *Bystander* since it began publication in 1894. Even more, one of the oldest clubs in the IACW was named after Ida B. Wells,

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<sup>370</sup> Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice*, 5.

<sup>371</sup> *Bystander*, 30 December 1904, “Club and Club Women.” Helena Downey reported that she was often unable to write the column due to lack of submissions.

<sup>372</sup> IACW Fourth Annual Meeting, 1907, p. 16-17. See Chapter 3, 34-35. Gardner, a longtime member of Ottumwa’s Benevolent Club, was the former chair of the IACW Reciprocity Bureau who had led an earlier charge to create a published book of IACW essays. The first reference of Sue Brown in IACW records appears in the 1907 Annual Meeting Minutes when she was paired with Gardener to research an organizational publication. Listed as the President of the year-old Intellectual Improvement Club (1906, Des Moines), she and her club members supported an objective of “improvement of the intellect.” She was also a member of the Busy Bee Sewing Club (Des Moines), where members would sew and sell their creations, “using the proceeds to assist in paying off church debt.” See IACW 1906 Fifth Annual Meeting Minutes, p. 28 and *Bystander* 28 December 1906.

longtime anti-lynching writer and newspaper editor, who had been a guest of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle during her 1894 visit to Des Moines.<sup>373</sup> This exploration must have included research into the challenges faced by the black press. By 1907, IACW members had witnessed the rise and fall of at least twelve Iowa black newspapers due to production and financial problems in the state.<sup>374</sup> Nonetheless, at the end of the annual meeting, Gardner and Brown submitted the following recommendations in their “Press Report:”

*We the Publishing committee, beg leave to submit the following report:*

- 1. We recommend that the Iowa State Federation of Colored Woman’s Clubs organize a paper for the purpose of publishing all club matters or anything that is of interest to the club women.*
- 2. That the paper be under the management of the Executive board. We also recommend that the President appoint some efficient woman as State Editor, also an assistant Editor.*
- 3. That this paper be published once a month.*
- 4. That this paper be sold for 5 cents per copy, 25 cents per year for the first year to the club women, and fifty cents a year to all persons other than club women.*
- 5. That the local president from each club collect items for the paper.*

*Mrs. Emma Gardner, Chairman  
Mrs. S. Joe Brown, Committee*

A motion was made and carried that each club send \$5.00 for the “foundation of the club paper” and with that the *Iowa Colored Woman (ICW)* was created. A venture like this, once the IACW incorporated, could be attempted without financial risk to individual members. Sue Brown was

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<sup>373</sup> *Bystander*, 14 September 1895. *Bystander*, 21 September 1894. See Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), 327. See Chapter 1, p. 34-35 for a discussion of Wells’ visit to Des Moines, Iowa in 1894. See Streitmatter’s *Raising Her Voice*, p. 7 where he adopts a broader definition of journalist that not only includes writing and editing in newspapers, but also includes works written by women that appeared in magazines or other monthly publications.

<sup>374</sup> Silag, *Outside and In*, 286-289.



elected as the first editor of the *ICW* and the new monthly was to be printed in Des Moines, making its first appearance around July 1, 1907. IACW members felt that they had the means, skills and information needed to fill the pages of their own monthly newspaper. The literary activities that provided new spaces for black women in the 1890s would now catapult the activism of African-American club women into the most overt public space. The *ICW* would now provide another outlet for black advocacy spearheaded by black club women, and they believed they had an audience that would pay for it.



Figure 9. Image of *The Iowa Colored Woman*

The creation of the *ICW* and Sue Brown's editorship places black Iowa club women within the historiography of African-American women in journalism. James P. Danky and Maureen Hardy's extensive bibliography on African-American newspapers and periodicals in the United States does not list any newspapers published by any other NACW state organization at this time. Scholars argue that black women like Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Josephine Ruffin, and

Ida B. Wells used journalism to advocate for a wider vision of African-American women, challenging black men, white men, and white women who often ignored or muted their voices.<sup>375</sup> The *ICW* presented another venue for black club women to promote their uplift initiatives, share views about black and white America, and highlight the achievements of black Iowans. Injecting localism into the national story, the *ICW* offered in-depth regional, local, individualized and personal perspectives of black women's club work that a national publication could not.<sup>376</sup>

With the motto "Sowing the Seeds of Kindness," the *Iowa Colored Woman* was the fifteenth African-American newspaper to be created in the state and to date the only one created by black women.<sup>377</sup> Only one known copy of *The Iowa Colored Woman* exists today. There are no records that show how many newspapers were printed from 1907-1911; however, the existing December 1908 publication is noted as "NO. 6," indicating that five issues preceded it. The December 1908 issue's four pages included IACW updates, NACW articles, national and local news and advertisements. The newspaper was sold for .05 cents per copy or .50 cents for a subscription of at least ten to twelve issues per year, mirroring *Bystander* subscription rates. Des Moines printer, *Bystander* editor, and IACW husband John L. Thompson was its publisher. Brown's name does not appear on the masthead; however, a portrait of her is in the center of the

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<sup>375</sup>Danky and Hardy, *African American Newspapers and Periodical: A National Bibliography* where the editors have listed at least six black newspapers in Iowa that existed before 1907. Of the 140 entries listed by black women, none were created by black club women from 1907-1911. See Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice* 143. See David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell, Roy Morris Jr. eds. *Seeking A Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Press* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2009), ix. See Jane Rhodes' *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>376</sup> Francesca Sawaya, *Modern Women, Modern Work: Domesticity, Professionalism, and American Writing, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 41. Sawaya argues that Ruffin's inclusion of local club reports from across the United States in the *Women's Era* "creates its nationalism through its localism." I argue, however, that the bottom-up local scope of the *ICW* created a local narrative not found in national publications.

<sup>377</sup> Silag, *Outside In*, p. 288. See James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand eds. *Women in Print: Essays on the Print Culture of American women from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) for a discussion of unknown black women in journalism.

page, with the title Editor. Both Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Josephine Ruffin listed their names on the front pages of their publication at times.<sup>378</sup>

The chronicling of club efforts in the *ICW* was a testament to black women's capabilities, both illuminating their achievements and sharing them with the larger community in a way that had not been done before.<sup>379</sup> Space was also used to support African-American businesses throughout the state. African-American newspapers were often the one place where black entrepreneurs could advertise. The December issue contains twenty-two advertisements from Des Moines, Buxton, Clinton, and Colfax, Iowa. Advertisements were a critical revenue generator for any newspaper, especially black newspapers that often suffered from low subscription numbers.<sup>380</sup> African-American dentists, hair dressers, physicians, lawyers and restaurant owners used the *ICW* to promote their trades, breaking into the largest network of African-American women in the state. IACW husband J. B. Rush purchased space for his law practice, while club veteran Gertrude Culbertson publicized her spa-type services that included chiropody, manicuring, and facial massages.

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<sup>378</sup> *The Iowa Colored Woman*, December 1908.

<sup>379</sup> Fultz, "The Morning Cometh." P. 130.

<sup>380</sup> Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 25-27. See Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice*, p. 69, in his discussion of Ruffin's *Women's Era* he argues that the publication had financial problems because of the scarcity of black businesses and reluctance by white-owned businesses to advertise to black readers.

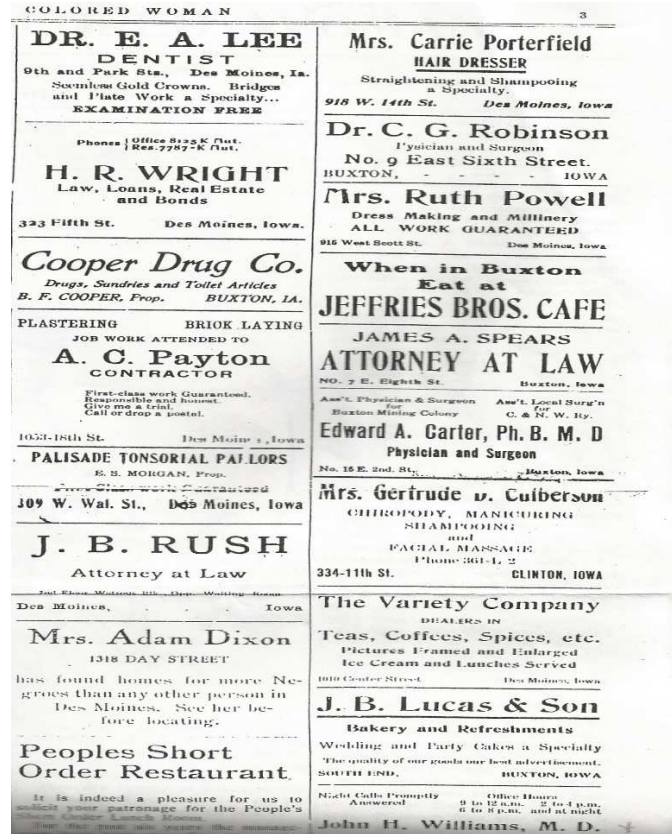


Figure 10. Image of the ads in The Iowa Colored Woman

While helping to sustain the *ICW*, black business owners knew that limited options existed for them to market their services. White publications typically ignored African-American entrepreneurs, while white business rarely advertised in black publications. None of the ad space in this issue of the *ICW* was purchased by a white business.<sup>381</sup> Among the businesses the paper promoted were other newspapers. The new *Sioux City Afro American Advance* was deemed a “mostly composed and carefully edited weekly race journal” in the “Editorial Notes.” Appearing in December 1908, the *ICW* gave a public endorsement not only

<sup>381</sup> Henry Lewis Suggs, *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865-1985* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press) 352. See Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, 25-27. See Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice; African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*, 69.

asking for greater support of another black newspaper, but also announcing to its readers that the paper existed in the state.<sup>382</sup>

A primary goal of the *ICW* was to connect black club women throughout the state. It offered another opportunity for IACW members to both advocate for black women and highlight their ongoing uplift efforts that were muted in the white press.<sup>383</sup> Having been in circulation for a little over two years, the IACW had by this time established “city editors” throughout the state who were responsible for submitting “all clubs doings or other news of interest from your vicinity.” Unlike prior IACW reports and columns in the *Bystander*, the one issue of the *ICW* shows that club women submitted more comprehensive committee reports, spotlighting both the IACW Music and Child Study Committees. More than encouraging black women to organize like writings in the “Club and Club Woman” column, the *ICW* provided social, political, and parenting topics that could be discussed and practiced in the home by anyone who read their words, even if they never attended club events.<sup>384</sup>

The *ICW* highlighted the IACW’s observations of local white club women’s activities in Iowa, not presented in other newspapers. The lead article, “White Lady Minister Denounces Gaudy Dress,” discussed the address given to the Des Moines City Federation of Women’s Clubs (white) by Reverend Eleanor Gordon. Ordained in Sioux City, Iowa in 1889, she was a white Unitarian minister who from 1891 to 1907 was the coeditor and principal writer for the *Journal of the Iowa Unitarian Association, Old and New*. She served in a Des Moines church

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<sup>382</sup> Silag, *Outside In*, p. 288-89. The *Sioux City Afro American Advance* began in December 1908 as a Republican paper, costing \$1.00 a year. Reverend Cornelius Reid, pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church led the newspaper until 1910 when it was taken over by J. Wilbur Norris, with the publication ending in 1912.

<sup>383</sup> Fultz, “The Morning Cometh:” African-American Periodicals, Education, and the Black Middle Class” in *Print Culture in a Diverse American* eds. James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, 129-148.

<sup>384</sup> Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African American Women Journalists Who Changed History*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 2. *Iowa Colored Woman* December 1908, “Report of Music Committee” submitted by committee chair Edna Atkins Martin. “Report of Chairman of Child Study Committee” was submitted by Mrs. A. M. Boyd from the Josephine Silone Yates Club in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

from 1904-1906 and in 1907 she became president of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association.<sup>385</sup> In her talk she argued, “When woman is taught that she is an individual and is not here just to attract or charm, then the social evil question will be answered.” She also warned the women of the evils of the street car waiting rooms and cheap theaters, advocating for police regulation of these houses. Gordon’s discussion of protecting women echoed the IACW’s ongoing efforts to shelter and educate single black women and girls when other benevolent organizations discriminated against women of color.<sup>386</sup> While it is not clear if an IACW member was actually present at the event, coverage of Gordon’s presentation to members of the Iowa Federation of Clubs in the *ICW* show that black club women were aware of her presence in the city and thought that it was important to report it to African Americans in the state.<sup>387</sup>

The *ICW* covered political, social, and economic topics, offering an African-American woman’s interpretation of the issues of the day. Iowa’s black female journalist understood state cultural politics that led the white press to ignore or distort black views and/or perpetuate myths of inferiority. Instead, the *ICW* celebrated the capabilities of the race by noting and applauding the achievements of African Americans, including black Iowans both in and out of state.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Peter Hughes, “Eleanor Elizabeth Gordon,” Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society (UUHHS) 1999-2013, [www.25.uua.org](http://www.25.uua.org). Collections held at the Iowa Women’s Archives of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa and the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs do not reveal relationships between black and women in organizational work. During her term as President of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, Gordon led a group of women who “removed physical obstacles to ballot box access, started a campaign to pressure political candidates, and introduced parades and other confrontational tactics. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, ed. *History of Women Suffrage: 1900-1920* (Fowler and Wells, 1922), p. 182. During her presidency, the 1907 and 1908 Iowa Equal Suffrage Conventions took place in Des Moines and Boone. The group marched through the streets of Boone on October 29, 1908, uniting with women from the state’s WCTU. There is no record that specifically states that black WCTU members participated.

<sup>386</sup> Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 28, 50-52, 102-105. See Chapter 2, 38-42.

<sup>387</sup> Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 6. Carby’s research challenges scholars to “discover a lost sisterhood” between black and white women, arguing that individual white women helped publish and promote black women.

<sup>388</sup> Fultz, “The Morning Cometh:” African-American Periodicals, Education, and the Black Middle Class” in *Print Culture in a Diverse American* eds. James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, 130. See Carby 7, Danky x, Suggs, 352-358.

Submissions from seven clubs offered a mixture of club “doings” with community news, activities, accomplishments, travels, employment and illness and the activities of black groups not affiliated with the IACW. In her “Oskaloosa Brieflets,” city editor Mrs. Cora Moore praised the purchase of property by Pierre Barquett, stating he “moved his family under his own vine and fig tree.” She also announced that local young men had organized the Modern Horseshoe Club. City editor Miss Edna A. Martin informed *ICW* readers in the “Ottumwa Happenings” of the passing of Mrs. Viola Bradford, one of the oldest members of the Ida B. Wells Reading Club, leaving a husband and two children and the larger city community to mourn her loss.<sup>389</sup> Club women’s participation in groups outside of the IACW was also emphasized. The HBSRC’s Emma Jackson and Intellectual Improvement Club’s Jessye McClain were also key organizers of the Sunshine Circle of Kings Daughters, a non-denominational religious organization created for the “development of spiritual life and the situations of Christian activities.”<sup>390</sup>

From the start, the *ICW* faced ongoing content and financial challenges. In the 1908 issue, Brown’s “Notice to City Editors” revealed her frustration with local reporters who were missing deadlines or not submitting reports. While the financial concerns of the *ICW* are not discussed in annual minutes or newspaper reports, the club women continued collecting money for the publication at annual meetings. While subscription data is not known, this reveals that the newspaper was not supported by subscriptions; it relied on club donations. After Brown was elected First Vice-President of the IACW in 1909, editorship of the *ICW* changed several times. In 1910, former “Club and Club Woman” columnist Helena Downey took the reins until 1911;

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<sup>389</sup> *The Iowa Colored Woman*, December 1908. An extensive search of county historical societies and local libraries throughout the state has not uncovered any other issues of this newspaper.

<sup>390</sup> The Order of Kings Daughters was founded in New York City January 13, 1886. Ten white women of Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian faiths created the group to develop religious activities. By 1887 there were 50,000 members worldwide, and in 1891 the group became Kings Daughters and Sons in support of men and boys seeking membership. See <http://www.iokds.org>. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 214-215.

however, even her publishing experience could not save the newspaper. Conflicted on how to move forward, in May 1911 the future of the *ICW* was “discussed at length” and a motion was made and carried that the publication would cease to exist. Leaving the option that the paper could be revived in the future, it was decided future printing and costs be left to the Board of Directors.<sup>391</sup>

Sue Brown’s editorship of the *ICW* from 1907-1909 and her contributions to African American journalism raise the question of whether there were a number of women at a more regional or state level who should also be recognized. Like Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Josephine Ruffin, Brown was respected by a black community that felt she had the skills, time, professional network, and means to create a financially successful monthly newspaper.<sup>392</sup> Scholars argue that while the “black press” was vital to the reporting of black news, these periodicals were guided by middle class, professional beliefs; failing to more specifically address the needs and concerns of the working class may have led to the demise of these papers. The elements of class that influenced IACW club work, transferred to the pages of the *ICW*. Reporting club work, news and events, Brown and “city editors” throughout the state infused their racial uplift agendas and beliefs within the pages of their newspaper. Different from the white press and the *Bystander*, Issue no. 6 of the *ICW* offers only positive articles to its readership, IACW members using the space to promote the activities of black club women in the state, while publicly advocating their ideas of reform and uplift. Even if the ideas and opinions

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<sup>391</sup>1907 Annual Meeting Minutes, 1908 Annual Meeting Minutes, 1909 Annual Meeting Minutes, 1910 Annual Meeting Minutes, and 1911 Annual Meeting Minutes, p 11. *Iowa Colored Woman* December 1908, see Mrs. S. Joe Brown’s “Notice To City Editors.” Buxton’s Mrs. A. L. DeMond was elected Brown’s successor; however, her editorship was cut short when she moved out of state. Marshalltown’s Jessie Walker took her place, but when she was elected IACW President 1910 she had to step down. In 1910 and 1911, the organization paid \$10 (roughly \$244.00 in 2013) Des Moines publisher J. L. Thompson for printing.

<sup>392</sup> Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, p. See Roger Straitmatter, *Raising Her Voice*, p. 61-72 for an extended discussion of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and her creation and editorship of the *Women’s Era*.



in the newspaper were written by a select “few,” the *ICW* challenged societal constraints by providing space for black female journalists to establish a larger public presence where they voiced their opinions, creating a permanent example of their impact on both public opinion and policy.<sup>393</sup>

*The Iowa Colored Woman* disappeared after May 1911. The short lifespan and financial struggles of the *ICW* reflect that of other black newspapers of the time. Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s *Provincial Freeman* had low subscription sales during most of its seven-year run before she ended printing. Ruffin’s *Woman’s Era* struggled financially, forced to a bi-monthly publication and then offering half-price subscriptions before the final issue appeared in January 1897. By 1911, more than ten black newspapers had come and gone in Iowa, most due to financial challenges. Money raised through advertisements was probably small relative to the number of black businesses in the state and the fact that what little advertisement money business owners had, they may have preferred to pay for space in the *Bystander*. Low circulation was probably an issue too; the *ICW* primarily appealed to middle-class black club women. Most newspapers suffered delinquency of subscription fees, especially if they had to be physically collected.<sup>394</sup>

*The Iowa Colored Woman* was the second contribution to periodical literature by black women in Iowa. Growing out of the “Club and Club Women” column, Sue Brown’s editorship and the *ICW* provided space for black women to have an impact on the development of public

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<sup>393</sup> Fultz, “The Morning Cometh,” in Danky and Wiegand’s *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, p. 130, 134, and 143. Using the research of Gunnar Myrdal’s *American Dilemma* and E. Franklin Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie*, Fultz argues that an increasingly influential group of middle-class and professional African-Americans projected their arguments and opinions in the pages of black newspapers. See Roger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice*, p. 145 where he argues that African American female journalists were not objective reporters, instead infusing their perspectives in their work.

<sup>394</sup> Silag, *Outside In*, 286-290. Silag details the black press beginning in 1881. Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 25-27. See Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 94. See Denise Pate’s “What should we do as a race?": Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s Journey as a Nineteenth Century Racial Activist,” Master’s thesis, Wayne State University, 2001.

opinion and public policy, by interpreting and reporting to the African-American community. The IACW used the *ICW* to promote a wider vision of African-American women, their race work, and their views, challenging black men, white men, and white women. In their own words, the *ICW* provided space for black women to have an impact on both public opinion and policy, pushing their ideas for racial reform. The 19<sup>th</sup> century contributions of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Josephine Ruffin and Ida B. Wells are well documented in the historiography of black journalists in the United States. However, Brown's work has been overlooked, maybe because she or the *ICW* never gained the level of national recognition as these women. Still, through the *ICW*, black women shaped African-American, Iowa and American history in their own words, effectively combining their literary roots and race work in print. By publishing club reports, political discussions, local news and advertisements, members of the IACW not only unified black communities throughout Iowa but also gave a voice to more than 300 black women from twenty-four clubs, in twelve cities and the larger Iowa community, who read or heard their words 1907-1911. Prior to gaining suffrage, the IACW used the *ICW* to extend their democracy by highlighting and chronicling the needs of African Americans in Iowa. Thus, the *ICW* created a public space where black club women could connect their literary roots, race work, and political input.<sup>395</sup>

After the IACW gained NACW membership in 1910, members Gertrude Rush and Sue Brown quickly rose to national leadership positions, their local successes promoting their ability

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<sup>395</sup> Barbara Sicherman, "Connecting Lives: Women and Reading, Ten and Now" in James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand eds., *Women in Print: Essays on the Print Culture of American Women from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 14. See Patrick Washburn's *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 51. Francesca Sawaya *Modern Women, Modern Work: Domesticity, Professionalism, and American Writing, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 38, 40. Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 141-144. David B. Sachsman., S. Kittrell Rushing, Roy Morris Jr., ed. *Seeking A Voice: Images of Race and Gender in the 19th Century Press* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2009), ix, 1. McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 188.

to work at a regional and national level. The national success of these local club women allowed them to increasingly implement black welfare priorities in Iowa. Nationally, black club women's welfare work highlighted the intersection between discrimination and poverty across the country; thus, their work directly connected political and social citizenship.<sup>396</sup> After her tenure as IACW president ended in 1915, Gertrude Rush became the NACW's Superintendent of Mother's Meetings, one of the oldest positions in the NACW.<sup>397</sup> Race leaders long professed that elevating the family elevated the race. In this position, she designed national programs to assist mothers in creating stable homes and families. Black club women across the country hosted meetings where local mothers had a safe space to discuss both successes and challenges in their homes.

While the NACW set national policy, state federations tailored these goals to fit their local needs. In Des Moines, the local committee of Mother's Department "cooperated with various local churches" and collected funds to provide Thanksgiving dinners for thirty families.<sup>398</sup> The IACW Child Study Committee supervised the Mother's Department. The committee suggested clubs hold mother's meetings monthly and that the last Friday of each month be observed as Parents Day, consisting of an all-day meeting and an evening session so that fathers could attend. This evening session supported ongoing efforts by IACW to provide time for working black fathers to participate in discussions with mothers about how to support black children. The following discussion topics were suggested:

1. Parents' responsibility.
2. Conflict of authority.
3. Early Habits.
4. Guarding a Child's Purity.
5. The Child's Home Life

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<sup>396</sup> Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 141.

<sup>397</sup> *Bystander*, 4 June 1915, "Iowa State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs Hold Interesting Session."

<sup>398</sup> *Bystander*, 3 December 1915, "Mothers' Dept. N.A.C.W. Brings Thanksgiving Cheer To(sic) Many."

6. Hygiene in the home.
7. Proper clothing for the child.
8. A father's relations to his boy.
9. Which influences a child's life most, environment or heredity?
10. Debate.

It should be noted that the IACW used the *Iowa Colored Woman* to distribute the above methods of “transformative education” to the larger Iowa community, creating larger outreach opportunities for discussion in the homes of those who could not attend meetings.<sup>399</sup> By 1910 “Citizen’s Night” was added to the yearly state meeting agenda. Taking place on the first night of the conference, this public community meeting offered residents of the hosting city an opportunity to meet club women from across the state. Local clergy would lead the invocation and black club women would offer greetings and give a public address. Citizen’s Night gave non-members, black and white, an opportunity to connect with club women outside of the closed convention sessions.

In 1915, IACW Sue Brown was selected as the NACW Social Science Department chair.<sup>400</sup> The former editor of the *Iowa Colored Woman* simultaneously held the national position and served as IACW President. Nationally, W. E. B. DuBois led the charge emphasizing the need for social science research in African-American communities, by African-American scholars and intellectuals, across the country. In *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899), DuBois argued that the “Negro problem” was rooted in social conditions rather

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<sup>399</sup> *Bystander*, 1 April 1907, “Club and Club Women.” See *Iowa Colored Woman* December 1908, Mrs. A. M. Boyd, Chairman Child Study Committee, “Report of Chairman of Child Study Committee,” p. 4. Mrs. A. M. Boyd was a member the Josephine Silone Yates Club in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. See Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 141. Streitmatter argues that black female journalists wrote to help bring about racial reform as a part of the ongoing struggle to secure equal rights for African Americans.

<sup>400</sup> Fourteenth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, May 24-26, 1915, p. 10. The NACW created this position sometime between 1901 and 1904. See Lavonne Leslie, ed. *The History of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, Inc.: A Legacy of Service* (Xlibris Corporation, 2012).

than heredity. His research went far beyond enlightening Philadelphia leaders of both the problems and remedies in the city, inspiring African-American organizations and race leaders to study the ills of their communities and create solutions.<sup>401</sup> As Social Science chair, Brown, like Rush, set national goals that included the collection of data about African Americans to both dispute white claims about race and to help better understand how to uplift blacks throughout the country.

Both Rush's and Brown's NACW positions placed them at a table alongside leading African-American women from around the United States. For example, Margaret Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington, served as NACW president from 1912-1915 and Lady Principal at Tuskegee Normal Institute. Mary Talbert, leading club woman from Buffalo, New York, led the national organization from 1915 to 1920. Talbert was a charter member of Buffalo's Phyllis Wheatley Club (1899) and led the club's establishment of a settlement home in the city. In 1915, Ohio native Josephine Bruce served as Editor of the National Notes. A charter member of the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. (1892) and former dean of Tuskegee, her husband Blanche K. Bruce was the first elected African-American U.S. Senator from 1875-1881 (Mississippi-R). Rush and Brown worked alongside these race leaders and many more at the Tenth Meeting of the National Association of Women's Clubs in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1916, learning and influencing one another. Methods of fundraising and a push to create a settlement home would resurface later in Iowa. Even more, before the existence of the chapters or branches of African-American sororities or Eastern Stars in Iowa, Rush and Brown

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<sup>401</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Press, 1899). See DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

were not only representing the IACW, but on a greater scale they represented all blacks in Iowa in the national race work efforts of the IACW.<sup>402</sup>

### ***Early 20th Century Efforts to Preserve African-American History and Culture***

During the early twentieth century, one of the national trends in which Iowa club women were particularly active was increasing the commemoration and preservation of African American history and culture. Building on obituaries, Emancipation Day celebrations, and postbellum slave narratives, black scholars sought to memorialize important African-American individuals and institutions, while rewriting the history of blacks in the United States. While the U.S. government's National Park Service (1916) commemorated parks and presidents, like Devil's Tower and the Washington Monument, no national monument existed for African-American achievements, no memorial commemorating slavery or emancipation. In 1915, black intellectual Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History with the intent on preserving, highlighting, and popularizing African-American history and culture by increasing biographies and monographs on black life, labor, and education. His efforts complimented the earlier achievements of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois that continuously shed light on increased education, wealth, and black adjustment post-Reconstruction.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds. *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), volume I, 187-188 (Bruce), volume II, 1137-1139 (Talbert), and 1233-1235 (Washington). See Lavonne Leslie, ed. *The History of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc.: A Legacy of Service* (Xlibris Corporation, 2012) p. 45. See Silag, *Outside In*, 407 and 419. The Zeid Court #50 of the Order of the Eastern Stars was founded in 1921 in Des Moines. Founded in 1923, the Phi graduate chapter of Delta Sigma Theta was the first African American sorority chapter founded in Iowa.

<sup>403</sup> John Hope Franklin, "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History," in *The State of Afro-American History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1986) 13-22. See Laurie Maffly-Kipp's "Mapping the World, Mapping the Race: Negro Race History, 1874-1915" in *Church History* 1995, 64:4, p. 610-626.

By 1916, the home of famed African-American race leader Frederick Douglass had fallen in disrepair. Born a slave in Maryland in 1818, Douglass escaped to New York City in 1838. Vowing to end slavery, he traveled throughout the North, becoming one of the most impactful abolition speakers and civil rights advocate of all time. During the Civil War, he met with President Abraham Lincoln to advocate for the creation of black regiments, his own two sons later serving in the famous Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup>. In 1877, Douglass moved to Cedar Hill in Washington, D.C., eventually expanding the home to a twenty-one-room mansion. He entertained many race leaders during Reconstruction on the property. After his death in 1895, his widow Helen left the home and its affairs to an all-male Memorial Association. When the group was unable to raise money for the mortgage, black club women responded by creating a new all-women's Memorial Association and formally establishing the Douglass Home Committee at the 1917 national convention. The NACW spearheaded national fundraising efforts to restore and protect the historical home. Efforts by IACW members played a noteworthy role in the NACW's ability to financially protect the home. At the 1917 IACW state convention, Sue Brown, as she ended her two-year IACW presidency, was appointed IACW chair of the Douglass Home committee. The group donated \$200 to the fund (\$3,636 in 2013) by the end of the conference.<sup>404</sup> By 1921, the IACW was recognized for having contributed the second largest amount to the Douglass Home Fund by being granted a seat on the home's national Board of Directors. That same year the NACW had raised enough money to burn the mortgage.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> 1917 Meeting Ottumwa Meeting, 14. See Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, 1945. See Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and Woman's Voice: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.), 217-218. See Frederick Douglass National Historic Site <http://www.nps.gov/frdo/index.htm>.

<sup>405</sup> 1921 Cedar Rapids Annual Meeting minutes, 21. See Polly Welts Kaufman's *National Parks and the Woman's Voice*, 217-218.

Inspired by national safeguarding efforts of the Douglass home, IACW members wanted to locally immortalize African-American race leader Booker T. Washington after his death in 1915. The IACW had a longtime relationship with his wife Margaret Washington, a founder of the NACW, dating back to her November 1904 Iowa trip when she and W.E.B. Du Bois spoke in Des Moines. At the time, Mrs. Washington was both the NACW's Vice President At-Large and Lady Principal at Tuskegee Normal Institute. In 1914 Sue Brown, while serving as chair of the NACW Social Science Department, invited Mrs. Washington to return to Des Moines to lecture. Now the President of NACW, Mrs. Washington was celebrated as the "first lady of the land" by local black press. During her two-day stay, the IACW escorted her to talks at local black churches, three local high schools where she spoke about social science, as well as meetings with Iowa Governor George W. Clarke (1913-1917)) and other elected officials. Maude Thompson, wife of *Bystander* editor John Thompson and member of the MCT, hosted an IACW reception for Washington at their home where she was celebrated by nearly 300 women. A guest in the Browns' home during her visit to Des Moines, Sue Brown's national NACW position surely influenced Mrs. Washington's attendance at the event, thus giving the IACW increased access to her.<sup>406</sup>

At the 1916 IACW Buxton meeting, black Iowa club women pledged their support toward "the erection of a tangible monument in memory of the late lamented Dr. Booker T. Washington." They agreed to hire world renowned African-American painter Henry Ossawa Tanner to paint a portrait of the late race leader. A Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania native, Tanner moved to Paris in the 1890s where he believed that both culture and race relations were years

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<sup>406</sup> *Bystander*, 13 November 1914. *Bystander*, 27 November 1914, "Mrs. Booker T. Washington." *Bystander*, 4 December 1914, "Mrs. Booker T. Washington Was Here," editorial by Editor John Thompson that celebrates efforts of Iowa black club women during Washington's visit. See *Bystander* 21 November 1904 for a discussion of her trip to Des Moines with W.E.B. DuBois and p. 34-35 of Chapter 2.



ahead of the United States. There he became the first African-American painter to gain international acclaim.<sup>407</sup> The IACW invited Edgar Harlan, curator from the State Historical Society of Iowa, to the 1916 state meeting where he addressed the group on ways to raise money for the painting.<sup>408</sup> The women planned to hold an Art and Industrial Exposition the following October to raise the \$500 cost of the painting (\$10,638.00 in 2013).<sup>409</sup> Held at the Des Moines Crocker Street roller rink, the space was filled with booths for the women to sell and display their craftsmanship, while a local auctioneer controlled bidding. From 2pm – to midnight, a large “crowd of both races” purchased articles that included dish towels, ladies’ gowns and gentlemen’s suits, collecting over \$225.00 (\$4,780.00 in 2013). Local white club women Mrs. Harvey Ingham, Mrs. C. H. Norris, and Mrs. H. H. Dodson all served as judges for the best decorated booth. The local black press touted the exposition as “one of the most elaborate affairs put on in the city.” Coverage of this event provided the most detailed example of interracial cooperation among black and white women during this time period, using their buying power to purchase goods made by local women, regardless of race.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Jack Lufkin, “Henry Tanner and Booker T. Washington: The Iowa Story Behind the Portrait,” *The Palimpsest* vol. 72, number 1, Spring 1991, p. 16-19. See Marcia M. Mathews, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). See Marcus Bruce, *Henry Ossawa Tanner: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>408</sup> 1916 Buxton Meeting p. 17.

<sup>409</sup> Patricia Carter Sluby’s *The Inventive Spirit of African Americans: Patented Ingenuity* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), xix, 86-89, 91. Colonel Giles B. Jackson helped to shape a successful black enclave in Richmond, Virginia that included African-American banks and, insurance companies, some of which were the first black-owned financial institutions in the country. Jackson was the first African American to pass the bar in Virginia. Like the 1907 Jamestown Exhibition where the “Negro Exhibit” in the “Negro Building” showcased the skills of African-American inventors and mechanics, Jackson took the lead in organizing the Mobile convention. Jackson organized the Negro Development and Exhibition Company of the United States of America in Jamestown. The 1907 exhibition was a catalyst for other fairs that showcased black ingenuity like the 1908 Negro National Fair in Mobile, Alabama, the Chicago Jubilee Exposition in 1915, and Jackson’s brainchild – the 1915 Second National Negro Exposition in Richmond, Virginia. See Giles B. Jackson and D.W. Davis *Industrial History of the Negro Race in the United States* (Richmond, Virginia: Presses of the Richmond Virginia Press, 1908).

<sup>410</sup> *Bystander*, 4 August 1916, “Des Moines Women to hold Exposition.” *Bystander*, 8 September 1916, “Exposition Committee to Meet.” *Bystander*, 13 October 1916, “Exposition Committee Making Large Preparations.” *Bystander*, 10 November 1916, “Federation Exposition a Great Success.” Mrs. Nellie Ingham’s husband, Harvey, was the editor of the Des Moines Register. Mrs. S. H. Dodson was the wife of a faculty history professor at

The May 1917 Sixteenth Annual Session of the IACW in Ottumwa was a special occasion. NACW President Mary Talbert, who fifteen years earlier had accompanied then-NACW President Josephine Yates to the city to assist with organizing the Iowa federation, had returned to address Iowa club women. During her “Annual Address,” on behalf of the IACW, President Talbert presented the 32 x 38-inch framed oil painting of Dr. Booker T. Washington to Edgar Harlan, curator of the State Historical Society. Following Harlan’s acceptance speech, Mr. W. L. Hutchinson, northern field agent for the Tuskegee Institute, read a letter from Robert R. Moton, Washington’s successor at the Institute. The oil painting was placed in the Iowa Hall of History in Des Moines (now the State Historical Society of Iowa).

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Simpson College. See *Iowa Official Register* Volume 25, 1913, p. 280 for information about S. H. Dodson. See Landon Storrs *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers’ League, Women’s Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000) p. 16-17.



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Figure 11. Portrait of Booker T. Washington by Henry Tanner

The IACW's successful participation in national efforts to save the Frederick Douglass home and preserve African-American history inspired Iowa black club women to make the same contributions in Iowa. The hiring of Henry O. Tanner sheds light on their knowledge of fine art and world-renowned African-American artists. Both the Douglass Home and Washington painting sparked a deeper understanding of the need to actively protect African-American legacies. At the 1916 Buxton meeting, the IACW accepted Curator Harlan's "suggestion and invitation" to collect papers presented before the Federation and deposit them at the state historical building to be bound and held for future reference. Circulated throughout African-

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<sup>411</sup> IACW May 1917 Annual Minutes, 20. *Bystander*, 1 June 1917, "Iowa Federation of Colored Women Hold Most Interesting Session in History of Organization." Jack Lufkin, "Henry Tanner and Booker T. Washington: The Iowa Story Behind the Portrait," *Palimpsest*, (Spring 1991): 16-19. The painting has traveled to other exhibits across the county that have focused on Henry O. Tanner's work. It is now in storage at the Iowa State Historical Society in Des Moines, IA.

American communities in the state for nearly twenty-five years, the IACW's literary legacy would now be collected and stored at the Iowa Historical Department. Edgar Harlan's relationship with the IACW grew during the early twentieth century; black club women even held meetings at the historical building. Harlan provided fundraising tips and helped Iowa black club women preserve history for future generations.<sup>412</sup>

### ***Social Welfare and the Settlement Home Movement***

One of the most vital contributions the IACW made to the African-American communities in Iowa was its public health programming. Scholar Susan Smith argues that from 1890 to 1950, legalized segregation led African Americans to create an internal health care system. Ignored by federal and state policy, black women implemented health reform measures at the local level. Nationally, black club women used local black male doctors, as well as black female midwives and nurses, to create a wellness network to provide adequate services. Dr. Jacob Dulin, one of the first black male physicians in Iowa, began practicing medicine in Iowa in 1878 and by 1908 five more had provided services in the state. Some black and white physicians treated patients from both races in the state. While the majority of early Iowa black doctors practiced in Des Moines, care could be suspended as some relocated to serve larger African-American populations in cities like Omaha, Nebraska or Indianapolis, Indiana.<sup>413</sup> Through their public health activities, the IACW led the black health movement in Iowa during the early twentieth century by addressing infectious disease, infant care, and the importance of cleanliness.

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<sup>412</sup> May 1916 Annual Meeting, Buxton, Iowa, p 17. For biographical information on Edgar Rubey Harlan, see Johnson Bringham, *Des Moines: The Pioneer of Municipal Progress and Reform in the Middle West* (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1911), p. 1181.

<sup>413</sup> Silag, *Outside In*, p. 246. See Des Moines City Directories, 1886-1902.

In 1909, the IACW joined a national movement to educate African Americans about tuberculosis (TB), a serious infectious bacterial disease. With no cure available, treatment consisted of educating the public on the importance of better nutrition, sanitation and housing, all of which were most often available to wealthier people. Thus, TB and poverty were often closely linked and often associated with African Americans and Native Americans. Just one year earlier, Booker T. Washington, with the aid of the National Tuberculosis Association and its traveling exhibit, held a five-day conference at Tuskegee on the study and prevention of the disease, emphasizing improvement to rural health.<sup>414</sup> At the 1909 state meeting, the IACW invited Dr. Edward A. Carter of Buxton, Iowa, to do a presentation about the disease. Dr. Carter was one of three doctors hired by the Consolidation Coal Company to treat miners, eighty percent of which were African American at the time. He delivered the address, “Tuberculosis a Social Question,” to the group during the Monday evening session, surely stressing the importance of keeping homes clean and well ventilated to prevent the spread of the disease.<sup>415</sup>

By 1914, Booker T. Washington’s added a day-long health conference to his Annual Negro Conferences held yearly on the Tuskegee campus. His efforts evolved into National Negro Health Week, observed from 1915-1951, that emphasized cleanliness as the most important focus of the early health week activities. IACW members answered Washington’s national call to all clubs and organizations to educate their communities on cleanliness and improving family health. “Cleanliness” during this time period referred to personal appearance

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<sup>414</sup> Virginia Lantz Denton, *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement* (University Press of Florida:1993), p 122-123. See Darlene Clark Hine, “Taking Care of Bodies, Babies, and Business: Black Women Health Care Professionals in South Carolina, 1895-1954” in Elizabeth Anne Payne ed. *Writing Women’s History: A Tribute to Anne Firor Scott* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011) 97-114.

<sup>415</sup>Silag, ed. *Outside In*, 245, 248-249. Dr. Edward A. Carter was an African-American physician who graduated from the University of Iowa Medical School. He was one of three doctors hired by the Consolidation Coal Company to work in Buxton, IA. In Buxton, Dr. Carter provided health services to miners and their families. After the Buxton mines closed, Dr. Carter moved to Detroit, MI where he had a successful practice. IACWC, B1, F 8, p (7)

and the appearance of one's family, tidy homes, clean eating utensils, and clean porches and yards. In 1914, IACW added a "Health Symposium" to the state convention agenda. Leading Iowa black physicians addressed the group on a variety of topics. For example, Dr. Arthur J. Booker, who practiced medicine in Des Moines, gave a "very instructive" lecture. Well respected by his white colleagues for his contributions to the health profession, Dr. Booker was a graduate of Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago, with additional training in London and Paris.<sup>416</sup> He was followed by Dr. Cornelius Wilson, who presented the paper "Care of Babies." Wilson had recently moved to the area from Hennessey, Oklahoma.<sup>417</sup> Dr. E. A. Lee discussed "Care of Mouth and Teeth or Oral Hygiene." Dr. Lee was a Des Moines dentist who supported the IACW by purchasing an ad in the *ICW* that boasted, "Seemless (sic) Gold Crowns. Bridges. and Plate Work a Specialty..."<sup>418</sup>

The IACW also used the 1914 state meeting to promote nursing as a career option for black women. Miss Tabitha Mash presented the paper "Nursing as a Profession." Mash was a 35-year-old Iowa native who in 1910 was a nurse living in Kansas City Ward 2. By 1914, she lived in Des Moines and was a member of the Mary Church Terrell Club.<sup>419</sup> The health session was appropriately closed by local undertaker, Mr. Vivian Jones, who presented the paper "When the Doctors Fail." The WWI veteran lived in Buxton, IA and would later move to Des Moines to open a larger funeral home business.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Silag, *Outside In*, p. 108-109, 245, 249. Dr. Booker graduated from the Black Officers Training Camp at Fort Des Moines on October 15, 1917. He began practicing medicine in Des Moines in 1910.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248. Wilson moved to Des Moines in 1913; however, he died three years later at the age of 42. His early death has been attributed to the stress of racism he endured in the city.

<sup>418</sup> *Iowa Colored Woman*, December 1908, p. 3.

<sup>419</sup> 1885 Iowa Census. 1900 US Federal Census. 1910 US Federal Census. *Bystander*, 5 June 1914. She was one of eight children whose father was a farmer and whose mother died by the time she was four.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.* p. 109, 114, 208, 407. Vivian Jones graduated from the Black Officers Training camp at Fort Des Moines on October 15, 1917. Silag states that Jones moved to Des Moines from Buxton in 1918 in response to the high increase in deaths due to postwar flu epidemic. Based on the topic of his essay and his invitation to present at the

The relationship that the IACW cultivated with local physicians provided opportunities for the membership to gain free consultation and the prospect for the presenters to gain patients. Even more, it is also evidence that the club women took seriously the racial politics of public health at the time. The IACW actively challenged racist medical research of the time that connected the spread of infectious disease like tuberculosis to race. Scientists argued black physical inferiority and impoverished living conditions aided in the spread of the disease. IACW members took the information they learned and disseminated it to their families, communities, and to the organizations and parsonages with which they were affiliated. For those who could not afford to see a doctor or dentist, information about how to detect an illness or the best way to stop tooth decay was critical. Even more, the IACW relationship with black doctors, nurses, and undertakers throughout the state supported black health care practitioners and provided options for black residents in a state where they were often turned away by white health professionals.<sup>421</sup> Scholarship on Iowa black club women has not recognized the group's pioneering grassroots health organizing that created a vital link between health providers and the black community.<sup>422</sup>

More than any other organization in the state, the IACW led the charge to protect both aging and young black women during the early twentieth century. Between 1910-1920, club women across the country were creating ways to provide shelter and financial assistance to homeless and impoverished black women and girls. A major component of the Progressive Era, state and local governments began establishing programs to aid the poor as the scale of black migration northward led to growing demand for housing in a segregated housing market.

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IACW state meeting, he must have been an undertaker in Buxton, too. See Charissa J. Threat's *Nursing Civil Rights: Gender and Race in the Army Nurse Corps* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2015), p. 22-24.

<sup>421</sup> Hendricks, 58-59. See Samuel Kelton Roberts, *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 53-56.

<sup>422</sup> Smith, *Sick and Tired*, 1-2, 168-169.

Increased racial segregation in housing, employment and transportation reduced African-American access to government funded housing. Nearly all white settlement homes across the country ignored or excluded blacks.<sup>423</sup> Recent scholarship by Iris Carlton-Laney argues that more attention needs to be given to the history of African Americans and the establishment of “old folks homes” during the Progressive Era.<sup>424</sup>

As early as 1905, the IACW identified a need to expand its charitable support to focus on black women and girls in Des Moines. That year the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle began researching the establishment of a settlement home in the city; however, the eleven women who agreed to investigate the project were unable to develop a plan.<sup>425</sup> Eight years later, the IACW amended its bylaws in 1913, stating that the organization would create an “intellectual, moral, and industrial training” center for girls. A motion passed creating a Board of Directors to guide the progress of the facility, yet another example where incorporation allowed them to undertake what might be a financially risky enterprise.<sup>426</sup> A year later the board defined the age parameters for the residence to be a home for “single, self-supporting, young girls over 12 and old ladies over 60.” Recommending that the word “home” be used instead of “industrial

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<sup>423</sup> Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare 1890-1935* (New York: The Free Press, 1994) 37-38, 87. See Hendricks *Gender, Race and Politics in the Midwest*, 43, 47. See Iris Carlton-Laney, “Old Folks’ Homes for Black During the Progressive Era” *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* March 2015, vol. 16, p 46-47.

<sup>424</sup> Carlton-Laney, “Old Folks’ Homes for Blacks During the Progressive Era,” 43-44.

<sup>425</sup> Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Des Moines, Iowa, May 23-26, 1910, p. 13. In 1911, IACW members voted that they would support The Davenport Industrial Home if a local club woman was placed on the board. The Ladies Industrial Relief Society (white) was created in 1886 to provide aid to the deserving poor, enabling them to eventually help themselves. The Industrial Home provided facilities for poor women to wash their laundry for free, care for children during the day and after school while mothers worked, food, clothing, and offered sewing classes. See 1911 Annual Meeting Minutes p. 12 and Scott County Iowa Genealogy, Chapter XXIV <http://www.celticcousins.net/scott/chapter34.htm>. Finding aid of Ladies Industrial Relief Society emailed to me from Davenport Public Library on 6/5/2013.

<sup>426</sup> Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Davenport, Iowa, May 26-28, 1913, p. 6, 9.



school,” the group agreed that the institution be known as the Federated Home.<sup>427</sup> Funds were slowly raised, but ten years later they had not purchased in Des Moines. Brief discussion in organization records reveal that the slow progress by the home’s Board of Directors fueled growing frustrations within the organization.<sup>428</sup> Finally, by mid-1915, the IACW announced plans to buy a home located at 12<sup>th</sup> and Park Street for \$1,400. By October, the Home Board announced that after four months of hard work the home was purchased.<sup>429</sup> Unfortunately, an ongoing dispute pertaining to the title of the property required the IACW to hire attorneys S. Joe Brown and J. B. Rush “to adjust the difficulties” over the home. Unable to successfully maneuver through the legal and public challenges for two years, the IACW decided to end its push to open the Iowa Federation Home for Young Girls and Old Ladies in May 1917.<sup>430</sup>

In her 1917 President’s Address, Sue Brown celebrated IACW women for creating alternative ways to aid young women throughout the state even when efforts to create a permanent space in Des Moines failed. Brown, who operated a Girls Social Center out of her home in Des Moines, praised the five other centers located in the club cities of Ottumwa, Albia, Marshalltown, Buxton, and Clarinda. All of the girls studied African-American literature, discussed the contributions of prominent men and women of the race. Providing instruction and leadership from prominent African-American women and men across the state, Brown exalted,

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<sup>427</sup> Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Des Moines, Iowa, May 25-28, 1914, p. 10.

<sup>428</sup> Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, May 24-26, 1915, p. 10. Elnora Gresham was a member of the Josephine Silone Yates Club in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. *Bystander*, 15 October 1915, “Home for Women and Girls” and “Notice.”

<sup>429</sup> *Bystander*, 26 March 1915. *Bystander* 15 October 1915. *Bystander*, 22 October 1915, 5 November 1915, 29 September 1916, 13 October 1916. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Buxton, Iowa, May 22-24, 1916, p. 16.

<sup>430</sup> Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Buxton, Iowa, May 22-24, 1916, p. 16. *The Des Moines Capital*, 27 July 1916. *The Des Moines Capital* was a daily (except Sunday) newspaper published in the city 1905-1907.

“...now these girls have come together seeking instruction in the higher things of life...”<sup>431</sup> Her report reveals the agency of IACW members and their ability to adapt to the needs of young women in their communities. Even more, the efforts of the IACW to open a home reveal the complicated legal and financial circumstances that continuously challenged them. Slowly, IACW members raised small amounts of money from a small black middle class, the poor and some white supporters to open a home. Des Moines club women added more “club hours” to their schedules by leading state efforts to secure the facility. Having raised the money, meeting minutes and media reports do not reveal if racism fueled challenges by the city regarding the title of the property.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Ottumwa, Iowa, May 21-23, 1917, p. 17. *Bystander*, 16 February 1917.

<sup>432</sup> Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 114-115. See Hendrick, *Gender, Race and Politics in the Midwest*, 47.

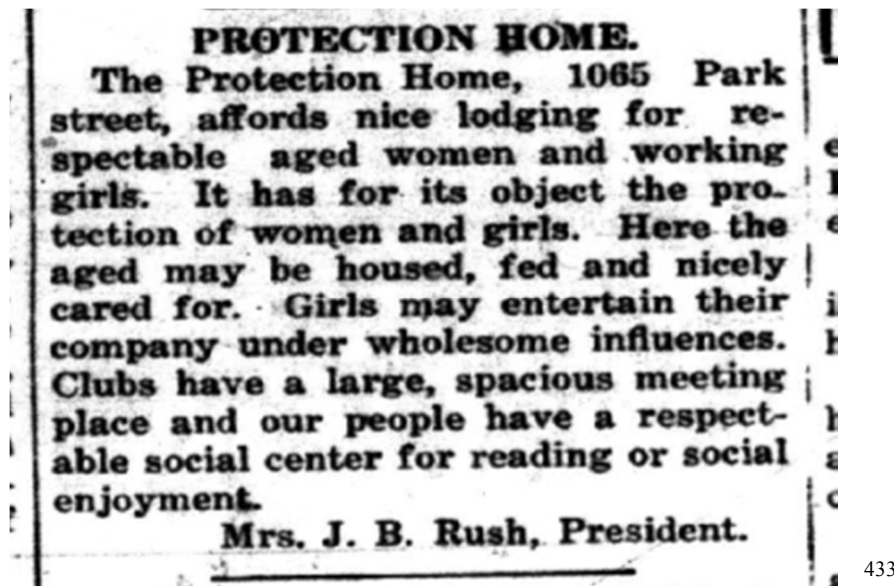


Figure 12. 1918 ad for the Protection Home

Although these first statewide efforts to open an IACW sponsored facility in Des Moines were unsuccessful, local Des Moines club women did not give up. Lillian Hamilton and Mrs. Harvey Brown (two of the oldest members of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle) and Gertrude Rush (founder of the Mary Church Terrell Club and the former president of both the IACW and Home Board of Directors) successfully opened the Protection Home for working girls and aged women at 1065 Park Street in November 1917. The home was quickly embraced by the Des Moines community with six local black churches raising more than \$80, the Corinthian Church Mission Circle donating canned goods, pillows, quilts and rugs, and the white-owned Mines at Keystone donating two tons of coal to the facility. By April 1918, the home reportedly provided lodging for “respectable” aged women and working girls and offered space for young ladies to entertain “under wholesome influences.” Space was also available for clubs and church auxiliaries to meet. In January 1919, thirteen months after the home opened, the Des Moines

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<sup>433</sup> *Bystander*, 5 April 1918.

black community celebrated Rush, Hamilton, and Mrs. Harvey Brown, championing the Protection Home as the “largest civic improvement for colored Americans in the state of Iowa” having served 100 homeless black people.<sup>434</sup>

Created by women who could not vote, the Iowa Protection Home not only highlighted deficiencies in public policy, but also represents their response to government neglect. The home provided space where black club women empowered themselves in public affairs, where men and the larger community met on women’s turf. Iowa black club women localized state welfare uplift initiatives in Des Moines, opening the first African-American run institution to care for the elderly black women and working girls in Iowa. Created during the Progressive Era, the Protection Home placed black Iowa club women within the history of institutionalized care for African Americans in the United States.<sup>435</sup>

### ***Iowa Federation Home***

Although plans to open an IACW-owned home for women in Des Moines were delayed by financial and legal issues, the twelve years of planning were not in vain as club women themselves purchased property and maintained the Protection Home. The processes of fundraising, securing land, and dealing with legal challenges spearheaded by the HBSRC prepared IACW members for future housing endeavors. In 1918, a “colored girl student” from

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<sup>434</sup> *Bystander*, 2 November 1917, 16 November 1917, 5 April 1918, “The Protection Home.” 10 January 1919, “The Wonderful Achievements of the Welfare Bureau and Their Silent Hard Working Women.” Silag, *Outside In*, 272. Pete Conrad, Property Description Clerk at the Polk County Auditor’s Office, was able to find a deed for a property in the vicinity of 12th and Park St. in Des Moines. “Warranty Deed” Independent School District of Des Moines to Women’s Home Missionary Society of Des Moines Conference of the Methodist, p. 536-537. That street intersection no longer exists and they are in now a part of Methodist Hospital. In 1906 the Keystone Coal Company owned mines Greene County Iowa (in Rippey, Angus, and Grand Junction). *The State University of Iowa Twenty-fifth Report of the Board of Regents to the Governor and the Thirty-Second General Assembly, 1905-1906* (Des Moines: Emory H. English, State Printer, 1907) p. 79.

<sup>435</sup> Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets*, 103-107. See Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 13. See Carlton-Laney, “Old Folks’ Homes for Blacks During the Progressive Era,” 58. See Robin D. G. Kelly and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 319.

the state university in Iowa City (now the University of Iowa) sent a letter to Sue Brown and the IACW requesting assistance in establishing a permanent residence for African-American students.<sup>436</sup> The letter drew attention to a long-standing housing issue affecting black college students in Iowa City. Although black students were admitted to the university, campus housing excluded them. De facto university policy banned black students from campus dormitories, forcing them to find off-campus accommodations with African-American Iowa City residents or white landlords who continuously let their racial views affect the renting of their property. Housing was not provided for black students attending private or public schools, including Iowa Wesleyan College, Amity College, Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa or Drake University in Des Moines.<sup>437</sup>

The IACW viewed a lack of safe housing for black women across the state of Iowa as an ongoing problem. Black club women, under the leadership of newly - elected IACW president Martha White, were prepared to respond to the needs of the young African-American students in Iowa City a year later when several female students traveled to and attended the 1919 Marshalltown meeting. Miss Mamie Diggs, a student at the State University of Iowa, presented “their conditions and struggles” at the school. Her claims were supported by alum and current IACW member Miss Ada Hyde who, along with Leta Cary, were the two first black women to graduate from the university in 1912. The group decided that the Scholarship Committee led by Helena Downey should develop a plan to assist the young women in the future.<sup>438</sup> Deciding to

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<sup>436</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Session of the Iowa Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Des Moines, Iowa, May 27-29, 1918, p. 11.

<sup>437</sup> Richard M. Breaux, “To the Uplift and Protection of Young Womanhood”: African-American Women at Iowa’s Private Colleges and the University of Iowa, 1878-1928,” *History of Education Quarterly* vol. 50, no. 2 (May 2010), p. 159-181. See Richard Breaux, “Facing Hostility, Finding Housing: African American Students at the University of Iowa, 1920s-1950s,” *Iowa Heritage* 1 (2002): 14-15.

<sup>438</sup> Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the Iowa Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Marshalltown, Iowa, May 26-28, 1919, p. 10. When Indianola’s Martha White was served as president in 1918-1920, she was a member of the city’s only group, the Indianola Progressive Club founded in 1909. At age 44, the Iowa native had

wage a statewide fundraising campaign, Downey spearheaded the “Club Drive” to raise money for the purchase of property. Quickly African Americans and their organizations began supporting the cause. In Keokuk, more than \$100 was collected from the city’s residents while donations from Order of Eastern Star chapters, the DM-NAACP, Old Fellows, and numerous church auxiliaries and fraternal organizations poured in. Even contributions from Professor Laurence Jones, founder of the Piney Woods Industrial School, were sent from Mississippi. Professor Jones, a 1907 alum of the State University of Iowa, had a relationship with the IACW, giving a talk at their 1917 state meeting in Ottumwa. By September 1919, IACW members had raised over \$2,000 within three months. However, white neighbors who were angry that the IACW was acquiring the property challenged the purchase, leading to the reassessment of the lot and an additional tax of \$179.00. The challenge failed and with the legal assistance of Attorney S. Joe Brown, the IACW purchased a home at 942 Iowa Avenue in Iowa City for \$5,300 (\$71,621.62 in 2013), welcoming its first occupants just two weeks later.<sup>439</sup>

The twelve-room two-story home quickly came alive with female residents in the fall of 1919. The IACW hired a matron to preside over the female residents. In the beginning, rent was a nominal fee, covering the room and one meal a day; that increased to \$24 per month in 1929.

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attended two years of college and her husband Sam was a janitor at a local church and they had one daughter. She was a relatively new club woman, serving as IACW Forestry Chair, Treasurer, State Organizer, and Second Vice President 1912-1918, before being elected president in 1918-1920. See the 1910 and 1920 United States Federal Census. See 1912-1920 Annual Meeting minutes. See Silag, *Outside In*, 144-145, for a discussion of Ada F. Hyde and Leta Carey.

<sup>439</sup> *Bystander*, 18 July 1919, “Women’s Club Drive.” *Bystander*, 22 August 1919, “Students Home Drive.” *Bystander*, 12 September 1919, “Home At Iowa City Is Purchased.” The headline of the September 12, 1919 *Bystander* read “Des Moines Women Go Over The Top in “Home Drive.”” The Allen, “Sowing Seeds of Kindness- and Change: A History of the Iowa Association of Colored Women’s Clubs,” *Iowa Heritage* 1 (2002): 9-11. See 1917 Annual Meeting Minutes, p. 14. See Richard M. Breaux, “To the Uplift and Protection of Young Womanhood”: African-American Women at Iowa’s Private Colleges and the University of Iowa, 1878-1928” *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 2 (May 2010) p. 159-181. See Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Meeting, May 24-25, 1920, “Scholarship Committee,” p. 16. The report discusses efforts by white Iowa residents to stop the purchase of the home at closing.

Operating under university regulations, renters did not have to be members of the IACW and were expected to adhere to university social regulations that included no visitors after 10:30pm on weekdays, no visitors in sleeping rooms, and rooms were subject to inspection by the University inspector at any time. The home quickly became the epicenter for African-American culture for all black students at the University, a safe space from discrimination where all black students would come to socialize. Benefiting black women from throughout the country, renters from Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Alabama, Mississippi, and Oklahoma lived in the home in 1929. Prior challenges faced in trying to open the home in Des Moines prepared the IACW for push-back from white Iowa City residents. The women created a strong Home Board led by Sue Brown and secured a resilient pro-bono team of attorneys led by S. Joe Brown to handle legal issues. By 1924, the IACW made its last mortgage payment. The home functioned as an African-American dorm and safe haven until 1949, three years after university housing was desegregated. The home was sold in 1950. Over the years African American women trailblazers lived at 942 Iowa Avenue, including Lorena Suggs (First African-American female Pharmacy graduate) and Beulah Wheeler (First African-American female Law graduate).<sup>440</sup>

## **Conclusion**

*I could not close without pointing out the material progress of the Afro-American woman. They have made such rapid progress during the last half century that we assume the old traditional barriers to their equality with men have been removed. Given equal opportunities, the Afro-American woman has proved herself capable as the women of their fairer race.*<sup>441</sup> –Mrs. L. W. Tucker, Buxton, Iowa, 1910

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<sup>440</sup> "Iowa Federation Home." An informational booklet created by the home Trustees in September 1929, to both commemorate the ten year anniversary of the home and provide information for prospective residents, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. Richard Breaux, "Facing Hostility, Finding Housing: African American Students at the University of Iowa, 1920s-1950s," *Iowa Heritage* 1 (2002): 14-15. See Peter Boylan, "This old house" in *Daily Iowan* 18 April 2001, p.1A, 4A. See Richard Breaux, "African-American Women at the University of Iowa 1907-1947" a list compiled in 1999. Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa.

<sup>441</sup> 1910 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Session. Taken from the speech "The Older Type of Woman and the New," presented by Mrs. L. W. Tucker of Buxton, Iowa.

Mrs. Tucker's words illustrate that members of the IACW knew their value to the African-American community in Iowa. Black women's race work had, in her eyes, proven that IACW members were equal to white women. Even more, the literary, social welfare and settlement home efforts put forth by black club women chipped away at racial and gender obstacles in Iowa, before all women had the right to vote. The social utility exhibited by the IACW 1907 to 1919 made Iowa black club women the most active and successful advocates for African-American welfare in the state. By designing, adjusting, and customizing their uplift initiatives, the IACW increased public meetings, health projects, and black settlement facilities for women and girls. The opening of the Protection Home in Des Moines and Federation Home in Iowa City were two of the largest black women's welfare initiatives in the state at this time. Their efforts were political in that they raised money, provided social services, and created institutions when state and local governments paid no attention to their needs. Black Iowa club women attacked issues of discrimination and inequality that affected African Americans throughout the state, thus the formation of brick and mortar facilities politicized their welfare work.<sup>442</sup>

Forever linked to their literary roots, the creation of *The Iowa Colored Woman* widened the reach of Iowa black club women and their initiatives, while giving them control of how their work was presented to the public. In their own words, IACW members reported on their beliefs, goals, and accomplishments while also providing both a gendered and racial interpretation of political, social, and economic current events to the African-American community. The *ICW* was a stage where members could showcase their journalistic talents to spread their uplift agenda throughout Iowa.

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<sup>442</sup> Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, 111-112, 141-142.



Increased cooperation with black men and white women only strengthened the ability for black club women to do successful race work. Crossing racial lines fostered new “working” relationships between some leading black and white women, creating new networks and infrastructure for future war work. Ongoing relationships with prominent black men and statewide councils of the Iowa African American Council provided both financial and legal support when needed, while cultivating a mutual respect that would fuel future work in the statewide branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

## Chapter 5: “Unnoted Heroes:” Bridging Gender Politics, Racial Uplift and War Work, 1915-1920

*The world is full of unnoted heroes; these are they who see their responsibilities and shoulder them;... These are they who do not wait for some one (sic) to find a place for them in this world, but who make a place from themselves. -IACW President Martha White, 1920*<sup>443</sup>

In 1915, the IACW boasted twenty-nine clubs, more than 430 members and a solid reputation as a social and political change agent in Iowa. However, between 1915 and 1920 two occurrences would profoundly affect African Americans in the state: the creation of a state branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the onset of World War I (WWI). Black club women amplified their political voices even more with their participation in Iowa branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and their hands-on wartime support of black regiments stationed at Fort Des Moines and Camp Dodge in Iowa during WWI. Utilizing more than two decades of social, welfare, and political experience, IACW members, now alongside black and white men, used their networks to help Iowa branches of the NAACP become the leading organization for race advancement in the state. Years of club work and increased mixed-gender political involvement in the NAACP cultivated a new political awareness among women and fueled hands-on war work at the United States’ first black servicemen training camp in Iowa during WWI. Their activism and participation in the NAACP and WWI efforts not only shaped their domestic political agenda, but also expanded their understanding of international events and the role of the United States in the world, ultimately becoming a catalyst to the slow decline of the Iowa black club movement thereafter.

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<sup>443</sup> IACWC, B1, F20, P 20. This quote was taken from the May 1920 Annual Address of IACW State President Martha White.

### *Early politicization*

Between 1907 and 1915, IACW's expanded economic, social and health welfare agendas included the creation of a newspaper and opening two settlement homes for black women. These initiatives successfully bolstered the IACW's political clout and reputation as effective change agents. Finding their collective voice in black parlors more than fifteen years before the NAACP organized in Iowa, black club women entered municipal politics through their ongoing anti-lynching efforts, activism against segregation, support of temperance, and cooperative work with the Iowa African American Council.<sup>444</sup>

Early Iowa club women brought their support of black suffrage to the IACW, embedding its importance in the foundation of the organization in 1902. Endorsing their husbands' demands for more political representation in the Republican Party as early as 1896, the importance of black enfranchisement was an ongoing theme of the IACW. Nationally, women in Wyoming gained the right to vote and hold public office in 1869; seven other states would follow, granting at least partial suffrage. At the state level, white women in Iowa (by 1869), Minnesota (by 1876) and Wisconsin (by 1901) all gained the right to participate in school elections and hold elective office on school boards. Unfortunately, Iowa woman's efforts to gain full suffrage were met with great resistance. In 1872, the Iowa General Assembly rejected a woman's suffrage resolution; however, twelve years later women were granted partial suffrage, allowing them to vote on bond issues and questions of tax increases for schools or municipalities in 1894.

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<sup>444</sup> Lisa Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) p. 13-14, 81.

Legislation to grant full voting rights in Iowa would fail in 1909 and 1915, with Iowa finally ratifying the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment on July 2, 1919.<sup>445</sup>

By the turn of the century, the NACW created a national “Suffrage Committee,” helping state and local federations create committees or departments to spearhead regional grassroots suffrage initiatives. State, regional and local representatives then began preparing themselves for full citizenship by educating themselves and their communities about national issues, candidate platforms, and voting procedures.<sup>446</sup> In Illinois, black club women waged an active battle to gain the right to vote, getting the attention of politicians by creating committees to monitor companies that discriminated against black men and women. Gaining the right to vote in 1913, black club women formed Republican women’s clubs in an effort to choose Republican candidates.<sup>447</sup>

Partial suffrage did not thwart the increased political participation of black Iowa club women.<sup>448</sup> By 1900, Des Moines members of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle and their spouses openly discussed the possibility of shifting their political support to a Democratic candidate because they did not feel the Republican party or its candidates supported African-American political concerns.<sup>449</sup> In 1910, IACW members began openly debating their ideas and opinions on the women’s suffrage movement at their annual meeting. During the May 24

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<sup>445</sup> Iowa Women’s Archives, Women’s Suffrage in Iowa collection. See Leslie Schwalm’s *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) p. 209.

<sup>446</sup> Roslyn Terorg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) 82, 92. See Floris Barnett Cash’s *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001) 63. See Nikki Brown’s *Private Politics and Public Voices: Black Women’s Activism from World War I to the New Deal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) 135. Brown argues that the NACW provided a guidepost for black women’s political activism in the 1910s and 1920s. See Hendrick, *Gender Racer and Politics in the Midwest*, p. 83.

<sup>447</sup> Hendricks, 83, Materson, 9.

<sup>448</sup> Hendricks, 80-81.

<sup>449</sup> See Ch. 1, p. 35-36. See Wanda Hendricks, *Gender, Race and Politics in the Midwest*, 79. Hendricks argue that in Illinois as black women became increasingly aware of political issues, they joined and created organizations devoted to enhancing their political power.

evening session, they formally debated women's suffrage, with the "affirmative" stance advocated by Mrs. Lenora Shepherd of Davenport, IA, while the "negative" stance was discussed by Mrs. Ella V. Morgan of Sioux City. Offering both pro and anti-positions was the typical format of these debates, making it hard to deduce variations in local politics.<sup>450</sup> These discussions highlight black club women's increasing grassroots activism in Iowa. In 1912, the IACW publicly endorsed the candidacy of longtime supporter and Honorary Member George H. Woodson into the State Legislature, pledging their influence and support while offering him "our active aid at the primaries and on election day." Woodson was the first African-American in Iowa to be nominated to the Iowa House of Representatives, highlighting the dearth of black elected officials in Iowa and the Republican party's failure to nominate black for elective office. The IACW openly urged black Iowans and "fair-minded" white women and men to stand by Woodson "as the Haytiens stood by Toussant LaOverture in the days of olden times." The women resolved that Woodson was the best candidate to represent Monroe County and fight for women's rights.<sup>451</sup> Although he did not win, black women's public advocacy translated into statewide support, even though they could not vote.

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<sup>450</sup> IACWC 1910 Eighth Annual Meeting Minutes, Des Moines, Iowa, p. 5. IACWC 1907 Annual Meeting Minutes, Keokuk, Iowa, "Report Blank," np. Lenore Sheppard was the secretary of the Elizabeth Lindsay Davis Club in Davenport, IA. To date, I am unable to determine to which club in Sioux City Mrs. Morgan belonged. See Terborg-Penn's *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote* p. 93 where she argues that the last decade before the 19th Amendment black women entered the discussion more actively than before, stimulated by gender-consciousness and political awareness often encouraged by their national organizations.

<sup>451</sup> IACWC, B 1, F 11, P 15. See *Bystander*, 10 May 1912 "Woodson for Representative." See Elsa Barkley Brown "The Labor of Politics" in *Major Problems in African-History*, eds. Thomas Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 407-416. Brown argues that when black women did obtain the vote, they were active in the political arena, ...voting in internal settings, their results translated in external settings. See Wanda Hendricks *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest* p. 87 where she argues that although Illinois black women "were locked out at a state level, they became actively involved in local elections....their voices forced politicians to alter their platforms." See Silag, *Outside In*, p. 345-346. See Bergman, *The Negro in Iowa*, p. 43. The Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs publicly endorsed suffrage in 1911. See Iowa Women's Archives, Iowa Suffrage Collection.

In 1913, black Des Moines club women created the Suffragette Club (DSC). With a membership of thirty women, it was the largest IACW club in the state by 1914. In 1915, the IACW state body resolved:

Whereas, the Negro women are uplifted and benefited by the granting to women the right of suffrage in the several states already enjoying the privilege, therefore be it resolved that the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women endorse women's suffrage.<sup>452</sup>

The DSC allied with white local and regional women in the suffrage movement. IACW member Gertrude Rush hosted a "Suffrage Tea" at her home, welcoming Miss Flora Dunlap (white), President of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association and Josephine Casey (white), a national women's labor organizer from Chicago, both addressing the group. Discussing strategy and sharing songs, this example of cooperation between black and white women reveals that both groups realized that they were more powerful working together in an effort to gain full suffrage.<sup>453</sup>

At the state level, sometime between 1913 and 1914, the IACW created the "Suffragette" committee, with Gertrude Johnson of Des Moines serving as its first chair. Existing from 1914-1920 (renamed Suffrage Committee in 1915), the club was led by women from Des Moines (3), Davenport, Waterloo, and Buxton.<sup>454</sup> The committee spearheaded voter education for members throughout the state. At both the 1915 and 1916 annual meetings, the IACW overwhelmingly

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<sup>452</sup> Fourteenth Annual Session of the IACW, "Resolutions." May 24-26, 1915, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, p. 21.

<sup>453</sup> *Bystander* 12 May 1916, "Suffrage Tea." Iowa Women's Archives, Suffrage Collection. This meeting was not the first collaborative effort between black and white women in Des Moines. Between 1885-1891, prominent African-American women and members of the Polk County Woman Suffrage Association (white) held five meetings; however white racism stifled the progress of interracial suffrage organizing. See Leslie Schwalm's *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) p. 210-212.

<sup>454</sup> 1914-1919 Annual Meeting Minutes. Each year IACW standing committees and elected chairs were listed. Gertrude Johnson, the first committee chair was from Des Moines and a member of the Intellectual Improvement Club (See 1907 Annual Meeting Minutes, p. 7).

supported women gaining the right to vote by passing resolutions to the fact.<sup>455</sup> Serving as the state and local arm of the NACW's Suffrage Committee, members of the Suffragette committee educated IACW membership on state issues and political platforms while emphasizing the importance of securing the right to vote. This increase in political activism at the state level coincides with the IACW's participation in the Northwestern Federation of Women's Clubs. Spearheaded by the Illinois federation, this regional coalition consisted of black club women from eleven Midwestern states who met in Chicago, Illinois in 1915 to combine their collective political voice to gain a larger sphere of influence.<sup>456</sup> Although they did not yet enjoy full suffrage, IACW members allied themselves with black women who could vote, noting political strategies from ten other Midwestern states that could be used in Iowa. This cooperative effort is an example of how IACW members took every opportunity at the local, state and regional levels to empower and advance their political knowledge and voice.

Black Iowa club women took a publicly declared stance against lynching that began as early as 1894 when Ida B. Wells lectured in Des Moines and attended the weekly meeting of the HBSRC. By 1915, the IACW expanded its attack on lynching by aggressively taking a stand against images and postcards that depicted African Americans in "vulgar and degrading" ways. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, photographs of lynchings, burnings and the large white crowds these atrocious affairs often drew were circulated as postcards and trading cards. These "souvenirs" were sent through the U.S. mail, distributing horrific images throughout the United

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<sup>455</sup> *Bystander* 6 June 1913, "Proceedings of Iowa State Federation." 1915 Annual Meeting Minutes, 22. 1916 Annual Meeting Minutes, 22. I have been unable to determine to which Davenport club Mrs. L. J. Phillips belonged. As early as 1890 Mary Coalson, one of the oldest members of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Circle in Des Moines, had attended an interracial women's meeting hosted by the Polk County Woman Suffrage Association. It was proposed at that meeting that a separate black woman's suffrage club be organized in the future; however, there is no evidence that the group was created. See Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 211-212. See Williams, "Kansas Grows the Best Wheat and the Best Women," 83-84.

<sup>456</sup> Hendricks, 82-83.

States. Harnessing twenty-one years of anti-lynching protest by black Iowans, the IACW publicly endorsed Cedar Rapids Mayor Lois Roth and the local city council for “taking a stand” against the commodification and circulation of these images.<sup>457</sup> These statewide efforts worked in concert with the emphasis of the National Association of Colored Women’s Club’s attack on the lynching of black women, for example condemning the 1918 murder and burning of Mary Turner who died trying to stop the lynching of her husband. She was pregnant at the time of the lynching, and the mob cut open her abdomen. After Taylor’s death, the NACW called for petitions, letters and publicity to be circulated and published in order to bring national attention to the heinous crime.<sup>458</sup> As black women, mothers, and wives – members of the IACW were outraged at the ongoing and unprosecuted murder of African Americans by whites across the United States. Regardless of class, status or even club membership, Iowa black club women did their part locally to protest lynchings and stop the circulation of the images that celebrated the lawless torture and execution of black women and men.

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<sup>457</sup> Fourteenth Annual Session of the IACW, May 24-26, 1915, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, p. 22. Fifteenth Annual Session of the IACW, May 22-24, 1916, Buxton, Iowa, p. 22. See James Allen, Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, Leon F. Litwack, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers, 2003), 10-12. See Chapter 1 p. 31-40 for a discussion of Ida B Wells’ visit to Des Moines in 1894 and the participation of HBSRC members in the creation of a new anti-lynching organization. See Chapter 2 p. 52-53 for the IACW’s passing of its first known public resolution condemning lynching and mob violence in 1905. See Chapter 1, p. 34-35.

<sup>458</sup> Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 25. *The Spokesman-Review* 20 May 1918, “Negro and Wife Lynched By Mob.” Mary and Hayes Turner were lynched in Valdosta, Georgia on May 19, 1918 for their alleged role in the murder of a white farmer and wounding of his wife. Find NYT article for May 20, 1918 “Negro Wife Lynched: Georgia Mob Hangs Two More for Complicity in Murder.” See Terborg-Penn *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, p. 96 where she discusses the NACW’s public stance on the Turner lynchings.



## *Iowa Afro-American Council*

For nearly fifteen years, civil rights activism fostered a bridging of ideas and activism between black club women and black male race workers in the Iowa Afro-American Council (IA-AAC). In the IA-AAC, black women and men created shared tactics to confront national attacks on African Americans at state and local levels. For the first time in the history of the state, women and men were partners in anti-racist activism. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, IACW members like Mattie Warrick, Belle Graves and others contributed to the growth of the Iowa African American League/Council, serving on executive committees and working alongside their husbands to demand an end of violence against African Americans, equal voting rights for black men, and fair employment practices in the state. Under the leadership of S. Joe Brown, the IA-AAC grew increasingly active from 1906 to 1911, becoming the leading legal organization for blacks in the state.<sup>459</sup> In 1904 S. Joe Brown served as the national AAC Sergeant of Arms; however, after delivering a resolution on the “simmering issues of disenfranchisement and reducing southern representation in Congress” at the national meeting in St. Louis that year, he was elected national director of the AAC’s Emigration Bureau. The position was created in 1899 after Georgia bishop Henry McNeil Turner presented his controversial plan for mass emigration to Liberia at the AAC Second Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois. Turner’s plan was met with great opposition from W.E.B. Du Bois and his followers who claimed that some racial progress had been gained in the South and to flee to Liberia would be cowardly. Three years later at the 1907 annual meeting, S. Joe Brown was re-

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<sup>459</sup> Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Organizing for Racial Justice, 1880-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 178. Carle argues that by 1890 the African American League nationally advocated for female membership, T. T. Fortune being a staunch supporter for women’s rights. The group even adopted a policy to promote women in leadership positions. See Chapter 1, 45-46.

elected to the same position. African Americans on either side of the emigration v. anti-emigration debate agreed that money was the greatest challenge in moving large numbers of black people to Africa. S. Joe Brown's national position in the AAC seated him at a table filled with African-American leaders of the time like Mary Church Terrell and Ida. B. Wells, while directly connecting Iowa efforts to the national agenda.<sup>460</sup>

Members of the IACW and IA-AAC joined national fights against some of the most egregious acts of racism and violence in the United States. In 1906, members of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, a unit of Buffalo Soldiers, were stationed at Fort Brown near Brownsville, Texas. Racial tensions quickly grew between white residents and the large number of black servicemen stationed there. On the night of August 13, 1906, a white bartender was killed and a police officer was wounded by gunfire, and Brownsville locals quickly accused the black soldiers. The U.S. Army ordered that 165 black servicemen be dishonorably discharged without a trial, stripping them of their pensions and any future military employment. Outraged that President Theodore Roosevelt refused to intervene on behalf of the soldiers, members of the AAC, NACW and Niagara Movement publicly advocated for the servicemen and protested their discharge.<sup>461</sup> At the July 1909 session of the IA-AAC, President George Woodson openly criticized President Roosevelt's inaction on the soldiers' behalf. IACW President Gertrude Culberson, who spoke at the meeting on behalf of the IACW, delivered the address "The Afro-American Woman and Her

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<sup>460</sup> Benjamin Justensen, *Broken Brotherhood: The Rise and fall of the National Afro-American Council* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008) 40, 43, 76, 145, 162, 194. In response to President McKinley's inaction regarding increasing mob violence in the South, Georgia bishop Henry McNeil Turner discussed his controversial plan for mass emigration to Liberia at the AAC Second Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois in August 1899. To move seven million black men, women and children to Liberia, he proposed asking Congress for \$105 million dollars. Turner was named the Director of the Emigration Bureau at this meeting.

<sup>461</sup> Carle, *Defining the Struggle* 119-120. See Benjamin Justesen's *Broken Brotherhood*, 172-186. Booker T. Washington refused to join the efforts by black leadership to encourage President Roosevelt to act on behalf of the servicemen. Washington's silence was viewed as support of President Roosevelt and fueled increasing distrust of his judgment in the AAC and among race leaders in the United States.

Part in the Solution of the Race Problem,” surely underlining the organization’s discontent with President Roosevelt, while emphasizing black women’s roles in fighting increasing violence and oppression towards African Americans. Local black press urged black voters to remember the president’s inaction at the polls. Still unable to vote, Iowa black women nonetheless executed political influence that affected the ballot.<sup>462</sup>

In March 1907, the play *The Clansman* began to make its way to Des Moines, Iowa. Based on Thomas Dixon’s 1905 book *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, the play idealized the pro-Confederate, pro-slavery Civil War memory of the Lost Cause, emphasized white stereotypes of black inferiority while portraying the KKK as the protectors of white purity and superiority. Shortly after the play began to tour in 1905, AAC branches across the country united to stop the theatrical production, protesting that the play was a catalyst for racial hostility wherever it was performed.<sup>463</sup> By 1906, the IACW had taken the lead in publicly denouncing Dixon’s books, arguing that *The Leopard’s Spots*, *The Clansman*, and *The One Woman* be banned from Iowa public libraries for being immoral. As the play set to enter Des Moines, the city’s AAC branch (DM-AAC) organized local black residents to block the performance, creating an Anti-*Clansman* committee. The play ran at the local opera house, receiving great reviews from Des Moines Mayor George Mattern. However, local black protesters led by DM-AAC members S. Joe Brown, IACW member Mattie Warricks, R.N. Hyde, and J.C. Williams were successful in getting the Des Moines city council to pass a resolution prohibiting future productions of *The Clansman* and other plays like it. Local white newspapers

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<sup>462</sup> *Bystander*, 9 July 1909. *Bystander*, 12 July 1907 (AAC meeting). See Alexander’s *An Army of Lions*, 284-287. IACW President Gertrude Culberson delivered the address “The Afro-American Woman and Her Part in the Solution of the Race Problem.” At the end of the meeting, Culberson was elected Vice-president of the IA-AAC alongside Buxton club woman Lelia Sheffy-Taylor who was elected Secretary.

<sup>463</sup> Shawn Leigh Alexander, *An Army of Lions: Civil Rights Struggle Before the NAACP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 259-260.

reported African-American resistance and attendance at the Des Moines City Council meeting, stating that the play “would create a feeling of hatred or antipathy against any race, nationality or clas (sic) of people.” Mayor Matteern was deemed “dull of comprehension or densely prejudiced, “as some of his past actions have proven the latter) ...” by the *Anti-Clansman* committee.<sup>464</sup> Similarly, several years later Ida B. Wells and local leaders in Chicago presented petitions to Mayor Fred Busse to have Dixon’s plays banned from that city, too.<sup>465</sup>

In 1910, the IACW and the IA-AAC held their annual meetings consecutively in Des Moines, Iowa at St. Paul A.M.E. Church. The IACW met on Tuesday and Wednesday, May 23-24, and on Thursday the 25<sup>th</sup> the IA-AAC held its session, closing out this statewide convention of black Iowa race workers. Side by side, Iowa black women and men discussed politically charged topics like “The Young Man Problem,” “The Demands of the Hour” and “The Negro in Politics.” IACW Honorary President Helena Downey delivered the address “The Dawn of Womanhood,” and was the only IACW member to be elected to a position in the IA-AAC in 1910, serving on the Executive Committee.<sup>466</sup> Membership in the IA-AAC connected IACW club women to a larger network of black female and male activists in Iowa. This collective effort of black race leaders to strategize and create new models for racial justice is a concrete

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<sup>464</sup> *Bystander*, 8 March 1907, “The Clansman.” *Des Moines Register and Leader*, 29 May 1906 “Negro Club Women Roast Thos. Dixon.” See Chapter 2, p. 53 for a discussion of the IACW’s 1906 efforts to expel Dixon’s books from Iowa libraries. *The Des Moines Daily Newspaper* 4 March 1907, “Councilmen May Keep “Clansman” Off Local Stage.” African Americans in the South also protested *The Clansman*. In 1905, black people in Lexington, Kentucky launched an unsuccessful campaign to stop a production of the play in the city. See Anne E. Marshall’s “The 1906 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Law and the Politics of Race and Memory in Early-Twentieth-Century Kentucky” in *The Journal of the Civil War Era* vol. 1, number 3, September 2011, p. 368-393.

<sup>465</sup> Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 125-125. In 1911 -1912, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and AME Reverend A. J. Carey, under the auspice of the Negro Fellowship League fought to have Dixon’s plays, “The Sins of the Father” and photoplays *The Clansman* and *The Nigger* banned in Chicago.

<sup>466</sup> Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the Iowa State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, Des Moines, Iowa, May 23-26, 1910. There is a “Programme” of the session that states both the IACW and IA-AAC are holding sessions May 23-26, 1910 at St. Paul A.M.E. Church. This is the only year that the IACW published their minutes with another organization. *Bystander*, 10 June 1910, “Afro-American Council.”

example of the activist commitment and cooperation of these two organizations in Iowa during the early twentieth century, setting it apart from white clubs. But even more, this joint session in 1910 foreshadowed the energy that Iowa black women and men race workers would harness in future branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the state.<sup>467</sup>

Across the United States, the African American Council united the political and social activism of black women and men. While the IA-AAC thrived at the state and local levels, however, the National Afro-American League (NAAL) declined after 1905. Like its predecessor the National Afro-American Council, the League was unable to gain mass support and financial backing. Scholars argue that after reorganizing in 1898, the League's appeal was undermined by its opposition to the increasing influence of Booker T. Washington on the group. While T. Thomas Fortune and other leaders tried to downplay Washington's role in the League, the race leader's public conservative views and ongoing strife with other race leaders prevented the group from keeping or increasing national support.<sup>468</sup> In stark contrast to the troubles of the national leadership, at state and local levels the Iowa AAC successfully deployed grassroots techniques previously used by separate women's and men's groups to challenge racial discrimination, disenfranchisement, and violence. Innovative for women's activism, men and women formed a new and unprecedented cooperative gender model of African-American race work in the state. From 1906 to 1911, an IACW member held a state or executive position in the Iowa-AAC each year. During this same period, at least one woman held an elected position in both the IACW and Iowa-AAC simultaneously. The successful example of mix-gendered cooperation between black

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<sup>467</sup> Carle, *Defining the Struggle*, 2-3.

<sup>468</sup> Alexander, *An Army of Lions*, 68, 278-279.

women and men would resurface later in Iowa branches of the National Association of Colored People and the war work of World War I.<sup>469</sup>

By 1915, more than twenty years of club experience and successful cooperation with black men would be the bedrock that Iowa black club women would stand upon to become state leaders in Iowa branches of the NAACP, while building new interracial relationships that they never had before. From 1915 to 1920, Sue Brown (1915-1917), Helena Downey (1917-1918) and Martha White (1918-1920), would navigate the activism of black Iowa club women through one of the most pivotal time periods in African-American history.<sup>470</sup>

### ***The Des Moines branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People***

As the IA-AAC continued to organize during the first decade of the twentieth century, national leadership would fade. In June 1905, twenty-nine male race leaders came together on the Ontario, Canada side of Niagara Falls to create a new “uncorrupted” organization to more forcefully challenge the declining social and economic conditions for blacks throughout the country. The Niagara Movement demanded manhood suffrage. Different from the African American Council, the Niagara Movement excluded women from leadership positions. While the organization claimed that it would defend women, women were not formally invited to

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 298-300. *Bystander* 12 July 1907, Alexander, xiv. Lelia Sheffey was an early club woman from Muchakinock, Iowa. She then moved to Buxton and then Oskaloosa. Although clubs in Muchakinock dissolved when the communities did, she remained an active member of the IACW. From 1906-1908 when she held positions in the IACW and IA-AAC, she lived in Oskaloosa where clubs in that city would not become a part of the IACW until 1912. *Bystander*, 13 July 1906, “Afro-American Council Holds State Meeting.” *Bystander*, 24 August, 1906. *Bystander*, 12 July 1907, “Iowa State Council Meets.” *Bystander*, 19 June 1908. *Bystander*, 10 July 1908, “Afro-American Council.” *Bystander*, 9 July 1909, “State Afro-American Council Meeting.” *Bystander*, 10 June 1910, “Afro-American Council.” *Bystander*, 2 June 1911, “Afro-American Council Meeting.” Ottumwa’s Emma Gardner served on the IA-AAC executive committee 1906 and 1907 and then served as President of the Benevolent Club. In 1908 Helena Downey, Honorary President of the IACW, was chair of the IACW Education Committee and on the IA-AAC executive committee. In 1909 Sue Brown was elected to the executive committee of the IA-AAC while editor of the *Iowa Colored Woman* (this publication will be discussed later in this chapter).

<sup>470</sup> See Chapter 3, pg. 2-4 for a more detailed discussion of Sue Brown, Helena Downey, and Martha White.

participate in its creation. Challenged by the exclusion of women by other founders of the organization, Niagara Movement creator W.E.B. Du Bois suggested the creation of a women's auxiliary group. Again, Iowa race leaders were directly connected to another civil rights organization. Prominent attorney George H. Woodson represented Iowa as a member of the "The Original Twenty-nine," the Niagara Movement's national executive committee, and headed the state chapter in Iowa. Surely transmitting information from national meetings to race leaders locally, Woodson's membership in the Niagara Movement not only connected Iowa race workers to the organization's demands for freedom of speech, access to better education and jobs, and equal treatment for all African Americans, but also to a masculinist model of race activism. During the early twentieth century, the Niagara Movement did not find a strong resonance in Iowa. This may be attributed to the fact that the IA-AAC was still very much active, thriving with the cooperation of black women and men throughout the state. A new organization that excluded women would have been counterproductive to the strong collaborative relationships that existed between the IACW and the IA-AAC for nearly a decade.<sup>471</sup>

As lynchings and race riots increased nationwide during the second decade of the twentieth century, African-American leaders began to take more aggressive action to secure full citizenship rights, freedom of speech, manhood suffrage, and abolition of distinctions based on race. Nationally, the African American Council and the Niagara Movement were formed for racial advancement, but both suffered from internal conflict, low membership, and very little white support. On February 12, 1909, a group of "fairminded whites and intelligent blacks,"

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<sup>471</sup> Silag, ed. *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa 1838-2000* (Des Moines, Iowa: Iowa State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001) 303. See Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle* 197-198. See Elliott Rudwick, "The Niagara Movement" in *The Journal of Negro History* (vol. 42:3, July 1957) 177-200. See Christopher Forth, "Booker T. Washington and the 1905 Niagara Movement Conference" in *The Journal of Negro History* (vol 72:¾, Summer - Autumn) 45-56.

which included black and white ministers, civil rights activists, and members of social and civic groups, formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP hereafter).<sup>472</sup> Unlike the AAC and the Niagara Movement, during its formative years the NAACP was led and largely financed by white progressives concerned with decreasing racial strife and lynchings. Unlike the Niagara Movement, women played a significant role in the NAACP from the beginning. Ida Wells Barnett and Mary Church Terrell were the black female leaders most involved with the formation of the group, the only two women signatories on “the Call” to create the organization. In 1910, three black women served on the 21-member NAACP Executive Committee. The overall goal of the organization was to use political and judicial systems to gain full citizenship and political rights for black people, and by 1915 the organization had grown to over six thousand members and fifty local branches. That same year the NAACP won its first momentous legal victory when the Supreme Court overturned Oklahoma’s grandfather clause in *Guinn vs. United States*, declaring literacy tests and poll taxes, used to disfranchise black voters, illegal. However, these and similar tactics continued to obstruct blacks from voting in other states. Nationally the NACW supported the civil rights agenda of the NAACP. Terrell, the first NACW president, and Wells were longtime club women and race activists. When the NAACP was founded in 1909, the NACW was the largest national black women’s organization, and by 1914 there were 50,000 members and 100,000 clubs nationwide. Wells’ and Terrell’s early involvement in the NAACP immediately connected the fledgling group to a grassroots organizational powerhouse.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Volume I 1909-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 30. Charles Edward Russell, *Bare Hands and Stone Walls: Recollections of a Side-Line Reformer* (New York: C. Scriboner’s Sons, 1933), 224.

<sup>473</sup> Dorothy C. Salem, “Black Women and the NAACP, 1909-1922 An Encounter With Race, Class, and Gender,” in *Black Women in American* ed. Kim Marie Vaz (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 54-70. John Hope Franklin and August Meier, “James Weldon Johnson and the Development of the NAACP,” in Eugene Levy’s *Black Leaders of the*



The Des Moines Negro Lyceum (DMNL), a mixed-gendered group of black residents who began meeting as early as 1907, began discussing the NAACP in the fall of 1914 when S. Joe Brown gave an “extemporaneous” review of the organization to the group.<sup>474</sup> Scholar Angela Ray argues that in the nineteenth century lyceums began as part of a movement by whites for public education, providing a venue for members to write, present information and debate current events. As seen with the early Iowa black women's literary clubs, for African Americans lyceums and literary societies provided adult education and served as centers of race work. In the early twentieth century, the national black Lyceum Movement consisted of groups of men and women who supported adult education, and like the early women’s literary clubs, pushed to improve the social, intellectual and moral fabric of society.<sup>475</sup> In 1912, after Iowa groups of the African American Council dissolved, the DMNL replaced the IA-AAC as the leading black secular, co-ed, public society in the city where all Des Moines race leaders came together. By 1914, membership included some of Des Moines’s most active and well-known black women and men, like the Browns, Rushes, Warricks, Dr. A. J. Booker and Reverend E.G. Jackson (IACW, Mason, Eastern Star, doctors, lawyers, clergy), who joined the DMNL to discuss Iowa political candidates, international conflicts, health matters, the NAACP’s national platform (outlined in the *Crisis* magazine) and topics affecting blacks in the state, infusing ideas from

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*Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 85-103. On February 12, 1909, Oswald Garrison Villard sent “the Call” to all prominent black and white Americans asking them to endorse the creation of a new organization that would advocate the civil and political rights of African Americans. See the Library of Congress, “NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom,” Committee on the Negro “Call” for a National Conference, February 1909. Typescript. Page 2 - Page 3 Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (018.00.00) Digital ID # na0018p1.

<sup>474</sup> *Bystander*, 30 October 1914 “The Lyceum.”

<sup>475</sup> Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century United States* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2005) 1-3, 30-32. See Dorothy Porter’s “The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846” *The Journal of Negro Education* vol 5, no. 4, October 1936, 555-576.

their numerous separate organizations.<sup>476</sup> In Des Moines, where the Niagara Movement never gained momentum, the DMNL provided an active mix-gendered space for race work after the decline of the IA-AAC. Women and men from the DMNL, already accustomed to working together, would lead the push for a NAACP branch in the city.

In the fall of 1914 Miss Mary Childs, the NAACP National Secretary, sent literature explaining the “plans and purposes” of the organization to S. Joe Brown in Des Moines. Recognizing his long-time race work efforts in the AAC and strong ties to African-American communities throughout the state, the NAACP national leadership determined that his support would help to make new Iowa branches a success. The information was accompanied by a request that he organize a branch in the city, including members of both races. The creation of the Des Moines branch coincided with the visit of Dr. Joel Spingarn, NAACP national board chair, to the city. Dr. Spingarn was traveling across the country to establish new branches of the organization and increase membership. On January 8, 1915, his picture and biography ran in the *Bystander* stating that Joe Brown, along with his wife Sue, had organized a committee of twenty-five of the “prominent colored men and women,” who each contributed one dollar toward Dr. Spingarn’s upcoming visit. It appears that both S. Joe Brown and members of the press knew the impact that Sue Brown would have on drawing the leading black women to the new organization. Four days later NAACP National Field Agent Kathryn Johnson arrived in the city to aid the local committee in preparing for Spingarn’s visit and to organize a branch before his

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<sup>476</sup> *Bystander* 7 August 1914 and *Bystander*, 11 September 1914, the DMNL reported discussing the 1914 state platform and Attorney J. B. Rush’s upcoming discussion of the Austrian- Serbian (spelled Servian) War. *Bystander*, 9 October 1914, Dr. Arthur J. Booker was going deliver a lecture on food. *Bystander*, 2 October 1914 and 9 October 1914 the DMNL reported that Sue Brown reviewed the October *Crisis*. *Bystander*, 30 October 1914, S. Joe Brown gave an “extemporaneous” review of the organization and work of the NAACP, leading to an extended conversation by the group. The *Crisis* would be discussed at the next meeting. *Bystander*, 1 January 15 at the next meeting Reverend E. G. Jackson would review the January *Crisis*. No official records of the Des Moines Negro Lyceum exit. This brief historiography of the group is based on reports that the group submitted to the *Iowa Bystander*.

arrival. It is important to note that the founding of DM-NAACP connected leading activist women from across the country, including Mary Childs (white, national NAACP), Kathryn Johnson (black, NAACP Field Agent from Kansas City, Missouri) and Sue Brown. On Monday, January 18, 1915 at Union Congregational Church, thirty-three charter members founded the twenty-fifth branch of the NAACP. S. Joe Brown was elected as the first president of the Des Moines Branch of the NAACP (DM-NAACP hereafter), joined by A. A. Alexander, Vice President; Mrs. Jessye E. McClain, Secretary; Wade H. McCree, Treasurer; with nine additional members of the Executive committee that included IACW members Mrs. J. P. Hamilton, and Mrs. S. Joe Brown. The first public DM-NAACP meeting was held at Corinthian Baptist Church, an African-American church, two days later. Prior to introducing Dr. Spingarn, Iowa Governor George W. Clarke addressed the group of nearly 800 people, expressing his hope that one day African Americans in Iowa would enjoy equal opportunities. His attendance at the meeting gave the DM-NAACP instant media attention and prestige. Within a week, the group's membership increased to more than 200 and included black and white civic leaders, professionals, and state and city officials, including Governor Clarke.<sup>477</sup> All of the African-American founders of the DM-NAACP had worked together previously in numerous literary, club, religious, fraternal, political groups or in business.

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<sup>477</sup> S. Joe Brown, "History of the Des Moines Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," March 1, 1927. See Jack Luftkin, "The Founding and Early Years of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Des Moines, 1915-1930," in *The Annals of Iowa* (Des Moines: Iowa State Historical Department, Fall 1980), 439- 461. *Bystander*, 8 January 1915. *Bystander* 22 January 1915, "Spingarn Meeting Great Success." *Bystander*, 15 January 1915. *Bystander*, 10 March 1916, p. 1. For more information on NAACP Field Agent Kathryn Johnson, see Dorothy Salem's "Black Women and the NAACP, 1909-1922 *An Encounter With Race, Class and Gender*," p. 60-62.

Table 6. 1915 Des Moines NAACP Executive Board and Executive Committee

<u>Executive Board</u>	<u>DM-NAACP Position</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Spouse</u>	<u>Community Ties</u>
*S. Joe Brown	President	Attorney	Sue Brown	University of Iowa graduate, longtime leading race worker in Iowa
A. A. Alexander	Vice-President	Contractor	Audra Alexander	Both wife and mother were members of the MCT Club <sup>478</sup>
*Mrs. Jessye McClain	Secretary	Seamstress	John McClain	Member of Des Moines Intellectual Club, IACWC
Wade McCree Sr.	Treasurer	Pharmacist	Lulu McCree	First black pharmacy owner in Iowa. Lulu was a member of the MCT Club <sup>479</sup>
<u>Executive Committee</u>				
Dr. Arthur Booker		Doctor, Chair of Human Anatomy Dept. at Drake University	Naomi Booker	Dr. Booker had a relationship with the IACW, having participated in their health symposiums <sup>480</sup>

<sup>478</sup> Archie Alexander was from Ottumwa, Iowa. He moved to Des Moines with his parents Price and Mary Alexander at a young age. He was the oldest of eight. He attended the University of Iowa and was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and a football star, graduating in 1912 with a degree in engineering. He and George Higbee owned a very successful construction firm in Des Moines. In 1914 he claimed to have made \$1200 as a contractor (\$28,000 in 2013). Both his wife and mother were IACW club women. His wife Audra was a member of the Mary Church Terrell Club. His mother Mary was a member of the Mother's Congress in Des Moines. Audra was president of the MCT 1917-1917 (1917 IACW). See Silag, 205, 347. United States Census 1910, 1920. Iowa State Census 1915. IACW 1917 Annual Minutes. Audra Alexander is listed as the President of the Mary Church Terrell Club, p. 4. IACW 1916 Annual Minutes, Mary Alexander is listed as the President and/or Delegate of the Mother's Congress.

<sup>479</sup> Wade McCree Sr. - a Fisk University graduate, who became the first black pharmacist and pharmacy owner in Iowa. He was later the first black narcotics inspector for the Food and Drug Administration. The Model Drug Company was located at 11<sup>th</sup> and Center Street in Des Moines. McCree sold drugs and toiletry items that included products by Madame C. J. Walker and Dr. Palmer. His wife Lulu was a member of the Mary Church Terrell Club in Des Moines. IACW 1918 "Souvenir Programme." McCree bought an ad in the program, that detailed items sold at The Model Drug Company. IACW 1917, p. 6.

<sup>480</sup> Dr. Arthur J. Booker, was a graduate of Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago, with additional training in London and Paris. Dr. Booker had been practicing in Des Moines since 1910 and was one of the first African-American physicians in the state to be acknowledged by white colleagues. In 1914 he participated in the IACW "Health Symposium" as a part of the state convention. While Naomi worked as an assistant in Dr. Booker's office, there is no evidence that she was a member of the IACW. Dr. Booker graduated from the Black Officers Training Camp at Fort Des Moines on October 15, 1917. By 1925, he and his wife Naomi moved to Los Angeles, California. See 1920 US Census. See Silag, *Outside In*, 108-109, 245, 249.

<u>Executive Committee</u>	<u>DM-NAACP Position</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Spouse</u>	<u>Community Ties</u>
Elbert Hall		Worked at Iowa capital	Frances Hall <sup>481</sup>	
Jesse A. Graves Jr.		Des Moines city clerk	Single <sup>482</sup>	
*Mrs. Sue Brown			S. Joe Brown	Member of IACW, NACW and numerous other clubs and organizations
*Mrs. Maude Thompson			John Thompson – Editor of the <i>Iowa Bystander</i>	Founder of MCT Club and member of the Des Moines Intellectual Improvement Club
*Mrs. Lillian Hamilton			J. P. Hamilton – former city foreman	In 1915 she was serving as HBSRC President, and IACW Historian
Casper Schnek (white)		Attorney		Graduate of Iowa Teachers College, University of Iowa, and Harvard Law School <sup>483</sup>
Harvey Ingham (white)		Editor of <i>Des Moines Register and Leader</i>		Graduate of U of I and former member of university's governing body <sup>484</sup>
Reverend E. G. Jackson		Newly appointed pastor of St. Paul AME Church		Recently moved from Minneapolis, MN to Des Moines, IA <sup>485</sup>

<sup>481</sup>United States Census 1910, 1920. Elbert R. Hall worked at statehouse/ capital in 1915 and 1920. In 1920 he was 38, and his wife Frances Hall was 36. In 1910 she is listed as a stenographer at Medicine Co.

<sup>482</sup>United States Census 1920. Jesse A. Graves Jr. was from Moulton, IA. He served as Deputy Treasurer of Polk County for years. In 1916 he was a Des Moines city clerk. He would later serve in WWI. The 1920 US census lists him as an editor of paper at age 41 and single. See Silag, *Outside In*, 114.

<sup>483</sup> Attorney Casper Schnek, an Iowa native, graduated from Iowa State Teachers college in Cedar Falls, IA with a BA and MA in Didactics 1898/1899. Graduated from U of I with BA in Philosophy in 1903 and BA in Law from Harvard in 1906. Served in WWI 6/1917-5/1919. Practiced law in Des Moines. See the University of Iowa, *Iowa Alumnus*, October 1914, vol. 12, p. 15.

<sup>484</sup> Harvey Ingham, an Iowa native, attended the University of Iowa and graduated from law school in 1881. He edited the *Upper Des Moines* newspaper, served as member of University of Iowa governing body 1892-1902 then became managing editor of *Des Moines Register and Leader*. See Arthur B. Ingham, *The Ingham Family: A Biography and Genealogy* (1968), held at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. See Dale A. Vande Haar, "Ingham, Harvey" *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*. University of Iowa Press, 2009. Web. 9 March 2018.

<sup>485</sup> In the fall of 1914 Reverend E. G. Jackson and his family moved from Minneapolis, Minnesota to Des Moines as the newly appointed pastor of St. Paul A. M. E. church. *Bystander*, 9 October 1914. *Bystander*, 2 October 1914. *Bystander*, 9 September 1914.

The DM-NAACP drew on the expertise of black club women, black and white journalists and attorneys, doctors, clergy engineers and professionals. All were held in high regard throughout the state, making their affiliation with this national civil rights organization much more widely accepted. Unlike members in southern states like Louisiana, DM-NAACP originators apparently did not experience economic or social reprisal for publicly joining the group.<sup>486</sup>

### ***Unnoted Heroes: Iowa Black Women and the NAACP***

Although the national agenda of the organization was comprised of educational programs, youth organization and legal action, the DM-NAACP focused on the latter during its early years. The new branch hit the ground running in 1915, quickly joining African Americans throughout Iowa in successfully challenging a proposed Jim Crow marriage bill introduced to the state legislature that would have made interracial unions illegal in Iowa.<sup>487</sup> By May, S. Joe Brown was before the Des Moines City Council making a formal request for the passage of “an ordinance against jim-crowism (sic) in local theatres.” The council argued that it did not have the authority to enact that type of decree and deferred that matter to the city legal department.<sup>488</sup> In 1916, the branch fought alongside the IACW and other groups to prevent the screening of the film *Birth of a Nation* in a local theatre using tactics similar to those deployed by the IA-AAC more than a decade prior to stopping performances of *The Clansman* in the state. Letters from blacks in Iowa cities where the film had already been shown described the negative effects it was

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<sup>486</sup> Sartain, *Invisible Activist: Women and the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945*, 6.

<sup>487</sup> *Bystander*, 19 February 1915, “N.A.A.C.P.” “A Protest Against Intermarriage Bill” this editorial was written by Dr. T. H. Phillips of Keokuk, Iowa, who argued that the bill was “of treachery, shame and disgrace upon the great state of Iowa.... Has not the Negro woman suffered enough at the hands of some unscrupulous white men?” In 1851 Iowa became the second state to legalize interracial marriage (between black and white people). Dr. Phillips was a longtime and well-respected physician who received both high praise and the keys to the city on his eighty-sixth-birthday celebration in Keokuk. See Silag, *Outside In* p. 250.

<sup>488</sup> *Bystander*, 14 May 1915.

having on their communities. Although a municipal court decision allowed the screening of the movie, the branch gained considerable publicity and public support for their valiant effort. Their public outcry closed the film two weeks early due to lack of attendance.<sup>489</sup>

By the end of 1916, the DM-NAACP was the ninth largest local branch in the nation, and second only to Chicago in the Midwest. Garnering national recognition by NAACP leadership for his successes in Iowa, S. Joe Brown was consulted by headquarters to provide information and his “confidential opinion” about African Americans in Iowa who were seeking to charter branches and any prominent white men and women who wanted to help. This request for a “confidential opinion” reflected the type of selectivity the national leadership preferred when it came to recruiting state and local branch leaders. African-American NAACP founders were leading race workers, journalists, teachers, and ministers. While they weren’t all rich, their occupations and reputations elevated their social class status. Surely it made sense for national leaders to tap prominent blacks and whites to create local branches; all eight executive board and committee members of the DM-NAACP had longstanding interracial relationships and networks in Iowa. The drawback was that the leadership of the DM-NAACP very much resembled that of the IA-African American Council, and the new organization did not bring new voices to the fore.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> *Bystander*, 10 March 1916, “N.A.A.C.P.” *Bystander* 9 June 1916, “N.A.A.C.P.” See Chapter 3 p. 29 for discussion of protest against *The Clansman* in Iowa. See “Proceedings of City Council and Ordinances of City of Des Moines, April 21, 1916, No. 239, p. 59. A motioned carried 4 to 1 that the council notify Elbert & Getchell Amusement Company that the show cannot be given.

<sup>490</sup> *Bystander*, 10 March 1916, p. 1. November 15, 1916 letter to S. Joe Brown from unknown person asking about “the character of the population” of blacks in Davenport. The letter also asks for the names of any prominent white men and women who may be willing to help the cause. The Papers of the NAACP, Folder 1 “Des Moines, Iowa 1916-1924,” Box G-68 See Salem, “Black Women and the NAACP,” p. 57-62, for a discussion of class in the NAACP during its founding years. See Michele Mitchell’s *Righteous Propagation*, 78-79 where she argues that uplift activists did not speak for all black people, but their actions affected every member of the race.

For fifteen years, Iowa black club women organized race and literary work, setting a precedence for race uplift efforts throughout the state. It is no wonder that the Browns and other influential African-Americans sought the assistance and experiences of local IACW members when the Des Moines branch of the NAACP was created. African-American women played an integral part of the local Des Moines branch from its inception. Their efforts contributed to increasing membership numbers, education, outreach, youth development, and organizational support. Although scholars have explored the gendered aspects of racial uplift, black women's significant role in Midwest branches of the NAACP has not been reflected in the scholarship. Dorothy Salem's broad analysis of the NAACP exposed the challenges black women faced in the organization at the national level; exploring the experiences of black women in the IA-NAACP will highlight the goals, strategies, and conflicts they encountered at the local and state levels in Iowa.<sup>491</sup> While newer scholarship considers black women as chief contributors to the NAACP uplift agenda, this work has ignored the Midwest. Instead, this research focuses on the efforts of activists in the South, in larger Northern urban areas, and in the later Civil Rights era, particularly the 1960s. When mentioned, women from the upper Midwest are often acknowledged for their support of national uplift initiatives without deeper examination of their agency locally.<sup>492</sup>

The four dynamic women appointed to the DM-NAACP executive board and committee in 1915 (Jessye McClain, Sue Brown, Maude Thompson, Lillian Hamilton) were all well-known

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<sup>491</sup> Dorothy Salem, "Black Women and the NAACP, 1909-1922: An Encounter with Race, Class, and Gender," in *Black Women in America*, ed. Kim Marie Vaz (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc. 1995).

<sup>492</sup> Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Lee Sartain, *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).



active IACW members. Sara Evan's *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* suggests that black women challenged male leadership within civil rights organizations in the twentieth century, yet placed race progress before gender equality.<sup>493</sup> However, in Iowa black female leaders in the DM-NAACP had a great deal of experience in creating racial uplift events and leading or working alongside black men throughout the state, offering a different perspective then suggested by Dorothy Salem and Lee Sartain.<sup>494</sup> These women were already community leaders who were in well-qualified positions of power in the DM-NAACP.<sup>495</sup> Focusing on black women's grassroots support of a national organization in Iowa cities reveals their significant impact on Iowa NAACP branches during the organization's formative years, 1915-1926. In Iowa, African-American women were not behind-the-scenes contributors in state branches of the NAACP. Instead, they brought years of gendered race work experiences into this new group.<sup>496</sup>

On that cold January evening in 1915, black Iowa club women united with other community leaders to create the DM-NAACP. The thirteen people elected to serve in executive capacities were not novices to grassroots organizing, all having worked together in some

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<sup>493</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1979). Focusing on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), Evans argues that the feeling of group empowerment often blurred women's perceptions of the strict gender roles that existed in both northern and southern organizations.

<sup>494</sup> Salem, "Black Women and the NAACP, 1909-1922: An Encounter with Race, Class, and Gender," in *Black Women in America*, ed. Kim Marie Vaz (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc. 1995). In her 1995 essay "Black Women and the NAACP, 1909-1922: An Encounter with Race, Class, and Gender," Dorothy Salem analyzed the "complex interrelationship between men and women during the early years of the organization. Salem argues that because of their connections to the community and by working locally, NAACP women "empowered" other black women.

<sup>495</sup> Lee Sartain, *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945*; Merline Pitre, in *Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lula B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999). See Dorothy Autrey, "'Can These Bones Live?': The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Alabama, 1918-1930." *Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 1 (winter 1997):61-73.

<sup>496</sup> Christopher Robert Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Black Professional Leadership, 1910-1960* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1997), 69, 116. Reed argues that black female members of the Chicago NAACP put race before gender, serving mostly as fundraisers, not having full access to decision making.

capacity before. From the start, the branch was led by women and men (black and white) who were members of numerous networks that could be tapped for support. Scholars argue that the success of male-led organizations like the NAACP were largely based on the often nameless female members who spearheaded membership drives, printed and disseminated promotional material, organized marches and ran youth divisions. National leaders' preoccupation with internal power struggles sometimes freed local leaders to act independently. Unencumbered by national dictates, the roles of Jessye McClain, Lillian Hamilton, Maude Thompson, and Sue Brown show that in Iowa, black women had greater opportunity to exert leadership in local branches than was true for women at the national level. Their interrelated memberships – all members of the IACW, Hamilton a member of the oldest IACW club and McClain, Thompson, and Brown all members of the same local club – helped them create literary, social welfare, and community service programming into the local branch of the NAACP and ensured that their concerns of black club women were addressed. Years of successful companionate marriages, club work and activism prepared these women to mobilize their networks around new political objectives.<sup>497</sup>

Mrs. Jessye McClain became the DM-NAACP's first secretary (a position held by women for the Association's first nine years). Through her club work, McClain had been serving the state and local communities of Iowa for at least eight years. She was the only woman

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<sup>497</sup> Ransby, Barbara, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 106. Earlier scholarship by Eileen Boris and Wanda Hendricks on the larger urban city of Chicago shows how black club women constructed internal networks, developing mutual associations to service and educate their communities. See Boris "The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the 'Political' in *Mothers of the New World*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michael (New York: Routledge, 1993), 213-245. See Hendricks *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). Work by Dorothy Salem shows how black women expanded their roles and responsibilities at the local and state levels in the NAACP, when they were passed over for leadership positions for white people at the national level. See Salem, "Black Women in the NAACP, 1909-1922." See Sartain, *Invisible Activist*, p. 4-5.

on the four-person Executive Committee. McClain was deeply involved in race work throughout the state as a member of the IACW and the Intellectual Improvement Club in Des Moines (IIC hereafter).<sup>498</sup> Serving as the IACW Recording Secretary in 1914, her duties included compiling the minutes from the annual meetings and having them professionally printed, and then distributing them to clubs throughout the state.<sup>499</sup> Her IACW position required her to correspond with clubs throughout the state and write letters to outside organizations when needed. Clearly a stickler for detail, she brought a wealth of experience to the DM-NAACP as Secretary without sacrificing her club activism. She continued serving as secretary in the IACW and DM-NAACP through 1917, receiving IACW honors for fundraising during this time.<sup>500</sup>

Lillian Hamilton also brought a wealth of leadership and organizational experience to the DM-NAACP.<sup>501</sup> When she was elected to serve on the Executive Committee of the DM-NAACP, Hamilton was a long-time member of the oldest club in the IACW, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Reading Club. A former President of the HBSRC, she also previously held numerous IACW elected leadership positions as Treasurer, Sergeant at Arms, Statistician and Historian, while married with two children at this time. Clearly an effective multi-tasker when she was elected to the DM-NAACP executive board, Hamilton was already diligently working in two

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<sup>498</sup> IACWC, B 1, F 6a, Report Blank (no page number). 1920 US Census, January 1925 Iowa Census – Ancestry .com. She and her husband John were both born in Missouri. In Des Moines, John worked as a custodian at City Hall while Jessye worked as a seamstress at home. Additional household income was sometime supplemented by a “lodger.” The IIC was organized June 5, 1906 with the main objective “to improve the intellect.”

<sup>499</sup> IACWC, B 1, F 13, Federation Officers 1914-1915 (no page number)

<sup>500</sup> IACWC, B 1, F 14, P 15). At the May 1915 IACW Annual Session, McClain was a recognized fundraiser in the IACW, receiving a souvenir for being the district chairman that raised the most money during the year.

<sup>501</sup> 1900 United States Census, Ancestry.com. Migrants from Missouri, Hamilton and her husband Joseph married in 1880, spending their early years in Illinois before moving to Iowa in the mid-1880s. Joseph worked as a county foreman while she raised their two children, Kenneth and Nina.

positions for the IACW. She would go on to co-found the Protection Home in Des Moines in 1917.<sup>502</sup>

Maude Thompson was a busy wife, mother and club woman when she was elected to serve on the executive committee. Married to *Iowa Bystander* editor John Thompson, the couple had two children, ages eleven and six. She was a founding member of the Mary Church Terrell Club (MCT, 1906) and also a member of the Des Moines Intellectual Improvement Club (IIC, 1906). This dual membership connected her to at least thirty local club members and their families. She simultaneously served as president of the IIC and on the DM-NAACP executive committee 1916-1917.<sup>503</sup>

Sue Brown was NACW Social Science Committee Chair and a member of the Intellectual Improvement Club in Des Moines, Iowa when she was elected to serve on the DM-NAACP executive committee. Shortly thereafter she became president of the IACW. Sue Brown served as a DM-NAACP executive committee member from 1915-1923 and IACW president from 1915-1917. The lives of McClain, Hamilton, Thompson, Brown and other “unnoted heroes” provide new insight into the substantial African-American uplift network that resulted from Iowa black club women’s methods of statewide community building. These women brought years of experience in writing, fundraising, outreach and affiliation with a larger national organization to DM-NAACP. By May 1915, there were 29 active IACW clubs and at least 433 members.<sup>504</sup> Dual and multiple memberships greatly increased these women’s access

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<sup>502</sup> IACWC, Minutes from the 1907-1915 Annual Meetings. See Chapter 3, p 40 for a discussion of Hamilton’s role in the opening of the Protection Home in Des Moines.

<sup>503</sup> IACWC, Minutes from 1907, 1916-1917. Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Session, May 24-26, 1915, “Statistical Report of Clubs,” 23. See Silag, 287-290. 1925 Iowa Census.

<sup>504</sup> IACW 1915 Annual Meeting Minutes, “Statistical Report of Clubs,” 23. An example of dual members is seen in Brown’s, Thompson’s and McClain’s members in the Eastern Stars, see *Bystander*, 29 January 1915 and *Bystander*, 19 March 1915.

to larger numbers of women— women to whom male organizers may not have had access. As IACW members, club women had long been tailoring national initiatives of the NACW to fit local needs. Nearly twenty-five years of assessing the needs of African Americans in Iowa quickly transferred to the DM-NAACP. Because the Iowa community knew these women, their transition to leadership roles in the DM-NAACP were seamless. Within their networks McClain, Hamilton, Thompson, and Brown interlaced policies of the IACW, NACW, DM-NAACP and the NAACP to develop more far-reaching strategies of racial uplift. Mary Ovington, founding member of the NAACP, maintained memberships in multiple women's groups while serving as National Chairman of the Board, claiming that their meetings were "where women could get together and not be hassled for their race or gender."<sup>505</sup> For nearly ten years prior to the formation of the DM-NAACP, Iowa black men watched their wives, sisters, and daughters take control of the neighborhoods they shared as members of the IACW, often having success where male-led groups like the Iowa African American Council had struggled and failed. The black women's club movement in Iowa grew throughout the early twentieth century, creating a model for the DM-NAACP to duplicate and with male leaders using the statewide networks created by their female counterparts. To ensure their success, it was a must to have club women involved with the DM-NAACP from its inception. This fact would become even more apparent when male leadership would take leave from their positions to volunteer for war service.

### ***World War I***

When World War I began between France and Germany in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson vowed that the United States would remain neutral. Throughout the country, African

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<sup>505</sup> Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP*. (New York: 1998), 172.

Americans debated how or if participation in the war abroad would lead to greater equality in America. W. E. B. Du Bois argued that war participation would offer black people future political opportunities, while black labor organizer and civil rights advocate A. Philip Randolph asserted that blacks should not defend democracy abroad, when they could not enjoy it in the United States. African Americans in Iowa participated in these debates locally. Weekly editorials in the *Bystander* questioned if large numbers of black men should defend a country where they were excluded from the United States Navy and Army training schools, and suffered from discrimination, violence and segregation on a regular basis.<sup>506</sup> The DM-NAACP publicly supported NAACP Executive Chairman Dr. Spingarn's efforts to convince the National War Department to make provisions for the training of colored men. He argued that instead of blocking black men from becoming commissioned officers the Army should train them early, preventing the United States from being unprepared "when war comes." Led by the DM-NAACP's Joe Brown and Dr. Booker, the local branch reported that it was having "great success" in securing the names of Iowa black men who would be willing to serve the country in any capacity. They organized the "Frederick Douglass Guards" military company of nearly 50 black men "representing all walks of life." Attorney George Woodson, former First Sergeant of the 25<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry during the Civil War, donated one hundred rifles, making the men the only armed military company in the city aside from the National Guard.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> *Bystander*, 6 April 1917. Editorials, "What Shall the Negro Do in the Present Crisis?" and "What is Patriotism?" See. W. E. Du Bois, "Close Ranks," *Crisis* 16 (July 1918). See Andrew E. Kersten, *A Phillip Randolph: A Life of a Vanguard* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007). See Brown, *Public Politics*, 105.

<sup>507</sup> *Bystander*, 6 April 1917 "N.A.A.C.P." *Bystander*, 20 April 1917 "Colored Men For Army Officers – Dr. Spingarn Tells Why Training Camp Is Necessary. Movement Must Not Fail." *Bystander*, 4 May 1917, "Military Company Organized." See Hal S. Chase, "Struggle for Equality: Fort Des Moines Training Camp for Colored Officers, 1917," *Phylon*, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 297-310.

### ***Fort Des Moines, June 1917***

With continued attacks by Germany on American vessels, U.S. neutrality in WWI ended on April 6, 1917. A month later the U.S. War Department named Fort Des Moines as the first and only training camp for black officers in the United States. On Sunday, May 20, 1917, the headline of the *Des Moines Capital* read “1200 Negro Officers to Train Here.”<sup>508</sup> Articles of support filled the pages of the *Bystander* claiming the three-month camp would be watched by the world, “...thereby demonstrating to the world that the Negro is capable of not only learning, but executing the highest possible gifts of military science.”<sup>509</sup> While no other state would accept a black army training camp, most Iowans, black and white, viewed Fort Des Moines as an opportunity for uplifting blacks. The Fort Des Moines Training Camp was located on the outskirts of the city and by July 1917, 1,250 black soldiers showcased marching formation and manual of arms at Drake University’s stadium.<sup>510</sup> IACW/DM-NAACP husbands Joe Brown, J. B. Morris, Jesse Graves, and Charles Howard were some of the first local men to enroll in the officer’s’ training school, directly tying Iowa black club women throughout the state to this historic camp.<sup>511</sup>

Just days after the May 1917 announcement that more than one thousand black trainees were heading to Iowa, President Sue Brown quickly began organizing IACW women to support the war effort at their May 1917 annual meeting in Ottumwa, stating,

*Moreover during this crucial period in which our nation is at war with a most powerful foreign foe and our brave husbands and gallant sons are being called to*

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<sup>508</sup> *Des Moines Capital*, 20 May 1917.

<sup>509</sup> *Bystander*, 22 June 1917. See *Bystander*, 25 May 1917, *Bystander*, 15 June 1917, *Bystander*, 27 July 1917, *Bystander*, 10 August 1917.

<sup>510</sup> *Camp Dodger* 5 October 1917. See *Silag Outside In* 108-109. A clear definition of the White Sparrow service cannot be found.

<sup>511</sup> *Bystander*, 15 June 1917 “Official Notes of the Colored Officers.”

*the colors, let us not be dismayed, but let us remember that we women also have a duty to perform, for a long with this call for men comes also a call for women to lend sympathy, encouragement and every possible assistance to these men, and to see to it that for every regiment of men who go to the front there is organized a regiment of women for the conservation of food and the other necessities of life at home.*<sup>512</sup>

Her words were heard by more than eighty IACW officers and delegates, representing the five hundred and sixty statewide membership. Sue Brown's "call" to black club women from across the state of Iowa was unlike all other wartime appeals made among NACW members. While the IACW would be participating in national war efforts, at the local and state levels Iowa's black club women would be providing hands-on support to 1200 black servicemen and their relatives from across the country, more than any other organization in the state. Living her own words, Sue Brown (although not officially elected President), took over the DM-NAACP branch in July 1917 when S. Joe Brown and other executive members began military training. She led both the IACW and DM-NAACP at the same time from July 1917 through November 1917, when the branch elected new officers.<sup>513</sup>

Black women, nationally and statewide, had a history of performing war work in the interest of the larger African-American community. During the Civil War they served as spies, enlistment agents, nurses, scouts, and cooks alongside black servicemen. They raised funds and visited black soldiers in recruitment camps and in hospitals. Black women dug ditches and took up guns, fighting to gain freedom alongside black men. While the roles of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth are often discussed, countless nameless, ordinary women participated in the Civil War. Black women used their involvement in anti-slavery literary and vigilance groups

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<sup>512</sup> 1917 IACW Annual Meeting Minutes, May 21-13, 1917, Ottumwa, Iowa, "Annual Address" p. 18-19. This quote is taken from IACW President Sue Brown's Annual Address. See p. 6-7 "Report of Credential Committee" for a list of the officers and delegates that attended meeting, and the clubs they represented.

<sup>513</sup> *Bystander*, 29 June 1917, "Notice." *Bystander* 9 November 1917, "N.A.A.C.P."



and networks to raise money and produce goods, clothing, and food for servicemen and African Americans who deserted to army camps.<sup>514</sup>

In Iowa, black women had a history of voluntarily participating in war work. During the Civil War, Muscatine's Alexander Clark Sr. wrote to Governor Samuel Kirkwood volunteering to organize a black military company for service with white Iowa units, but in 1862 his request was ignored. By May 1863, the organizing of ex-slaves in the Mississippi Valley began, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Iowa Volunteers of African Descent was officially organized in July 1863. Black women from Keokuk and Muscatine sewed the national banners carried by the regiment.<sup>515</sup> Like black women in Keokuk and Muscatine during the Civil War, members of the IACW quickly began volunteering and organizing war work during WWI. By June 1917, Des Moines members of the Mary Church Terrell Club played a crucial role in establishing a local Red Cross Society to provide support to local African-American servicemen.<sup>516</sup> A month later Sue Brown pushed to organize a group for the wives of officers stationed at Fort Des Moines, "with the purpose of becoming better acquainted with each other and discussing some of the social problems of today." On Monday, July 30, 1917 she gathered local women and army wives at the State Historical Building where the group received an escorted tour by curator E. W. Harlan. Organizing a local African-American Red Cross group comprised of the wives of officers stationed at Fort Des Moines, women came together from Wyoming, Arizona, Illinois,

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<sup>514</sup> Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 5, 37-40, 66. See Kate Clifford Larson's *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004) for a greater discussion of the life and contributions of Harriet Tubman. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) for a greater discussion of the life and contributions of Sojourner Truth.

<sup>515</sup> Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War*, 4. See David Brodnax Sr., "Will They Fight? Ask the Enemy": Iowa's African American Regiment in the Civil War," *The Annals of Iowa* (Summer/Fall 2007): 266-292. See Leslie Schwalm's *Emancipation Diaspora*, 107-134. See Silag's *Outside In*, 91-105.

<sup>516</sup> *Bystander*, 6 July 1917, "Red Cross Society Organized." The Des Moines Red Cross Society was led by the city's only black registered nurse Tabitha Mash.

California, Hawaii, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Mexico, Washington, D.C., Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska Missouri, Arkansas, and Iowa. Sue Brown was unanimously elected president.<sup>517</sup> In just two short months Sue Brown, local club members and the wives of servicemen who migrated to Des Moines from across the country created a local African American Red Cross group, quickly establishing itself as the local support system for the trainees by providing goods and social support. Sue Brown swiftly organized a large reception where more than 1000 black and white Iowa residents honored the black servicemen and their wives. On October 15, 1917, 639 candidates received commissions, including 9 Iowans. Black captains and lieutenants were dispatched to various camps, including Camp Dodge located just outside of Des Moines. Setting precedence, local black club women created war work opportunities for new migrant members of the community, so that they too could directly affect the success of black servicemen.<sup>518</sup>

Concern among white residents about the large influx of southern African-American men to Des Moines spread quickly. Racism and stereotypes dotted white newspapers throughout the state, sparking alarm. A. J. Kennedy, a white Fort Des Moines resident, expressed great concern over being forced to share public transportation between Fort Des Moines and Des Moines with black people. Another example of the disdain for black migrants from Alabama is the headline in the *Des Moines Capital*: “Pie-Eating ‘Cullud’ Lad At Soldier City – Sho-Nuff in Love With Birmingham, Agnes, and Camp.” The *Davenport Democrat* argued that Des Moines was

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<sup>517</sup> *Bystander*, 3 August 1917, “Officers’ Wives Form Organization in State Historic Building.” Attendees were also greeted by some of the most distinguished men, Mr. R. B. DeFrantz, Secretary of War for the Y.M.C.A, Morehouse University President John Hope, and *Bystander* Editor John Thompson. Mr. R. B. DeFrantz, Secretary of War for the Y.M.C.A., was in charge of the YMCA tent at Fort Des Moines. See Robert V. Morris’ *Black Faces of War: A Legacy of Honor from the American Revolution to Today* (St. Paul: MBI Publishing Company, 2011) 44-46. Morris writes that DeFrantz, a white man from Kansas City, Missouri was placed in charge of the YMCA tent at Fort Des Moines to provide space for the servicemen to relax, write letters home, and stay clear of interacting with local women.

<sup>518</sup> *Bystander*, 14 September 1917, “Our Soldiers Conduct.” *Bystander* 21 September 1917 “Des Moines Citizens Show Appreciation For Men At Fort Des Moines.”

becoming a destination for all southern African Americans who wanted to migrate North. Even more, the white press offered erroneous accounts of the training process at Fort Des Moines for the world to read, fueling claims that black soldiers were inferior.<sup>519</sup>

### ***Camp Dodge***

Shortly after the October 1917 commission ceremony, the local press reported that 3800 black soldiers from Alabama would be reporting to train at Camp Dodge. Unlike the training camp at Fort Des Moines where elite black men from throughout Iowa participated, again the *Des Moines Capital* and *Des Moines Register* reported that black and white locals feared the large influx of illiterate African-American men from the South. Des Moines African-American clergy and leaders responded by holding a public meeting at Maple Street Baptist Church to denounce white newspapers that reported that “leading Negroes of Des Moines” had protested the arrival of southern blacks in the city. They also requested that Governor W. L. Harding ask the United States Congress to make it treason for any person or group to refuse to furnish “reasonable compensation any of the necessities of life,” when the session convened in December. One hundred twenty-seven Iowans alongside thousands of black men from Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Illinois arrived at Camp Dodge to train.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 57. Bergman argues that Fort Des Moines resident A. J. Kennedy threatened to protest to the “Congressman from Iowa” because black and white residents would have to use the only carline between Des Moines and the post. See Silag, *Outside In*, p. 108. *Des Moines Capital* 7 March 1918. *Davenport Democrat* 24 June 1917. See Bill Douglas “Wartime Illusion and Disillusionment: Camp Dodge and Racial Stereotyping, 1917-1918” *The Annals of Iowa* v. 57, no. 2 (Spring 1998) p. 111-134.

<sup>520</sup> *Bystander*, 30 November 1917 “Des Moines Colored People Protest. Declare They Don’t Oppose Coming of Southern Negroes Here.” *Des Moines Capital* 1 November 1917, *Des Moines Capital* 10 November 1917. *Des Moines Register* 26 November 1917. See Bill Douglas “Wartime Illusion and Disillusionment: Camp Dodge and Racial Stereotyping, 1917-1918” *The Annals of Iowa* v. 57, no. 2 (Spring 1998) p. 111-134. Silag, *Outside In*, 110. See Bergman *The Negro in Iowa*,

Local club women and members of the WCTU welcomed the new influx of servicemen and their families by distributing housewares the union had prepared for the soldiers.<sup>521</sup> Again Sue Brown opened her home, inviting black and white women to organize a mothers group for the African-American army company, similar to those created by white women. Representatives from the Red Cross, Mrs. Jansen Haines and Mrs. W. O. Finkbine (both white) addressed the group. Seventeen “respectable married” black women became Company Mothers of the 366<sup>th</sup> Infantry: their role included providing motherly advice, supplying the men with items not provided by the government, organizing “positive” activities for the men, and overseeing social life both in camp and in the city. However, all of the black Company Mothers were required to report to Chief Mother Mrs. Irish (white), who appointed Sue Brown to assist her.<sup>522</sup> The Company Mothers, along with local women's organizations, provided Christmas stockings for each soldier containing postcards, pipes, tobacco, candy, pencils, toothpaste, tooth sticks, and playing cards. Black club women from Iowa united with women from across the country to provide war relief for black servicemen.<sup>523</sup>

Establishing the Company Mothers of the 366<sup>th</sup> not only gave black soldiers stationed at Camp Dodge a broader network of support, but also created new relationships between African-American women and middle-class white women, like Mrs. Haines and Mrs. Finkbine. As representatives of the Iowa Red Cross (white), surely these women were well aware of the black Red Cross Society that black club women created in June 1917. It is no wonder that in May

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<sup>521</sup> *Bystander*, 30 November 1917.

<sup>522</sup> *Bystander*, 14 December 1917 “Company Mother’s.” *Bystander*, 21 December 1917 “Des Moines Negro Women To Be Company Mothers To Colored Regiment.” *Bystander*, 21 December 1917 “Colored Soldiers.” Mrs. Finkbine was the wife of Des Moines millionaire lumber company owner, W. O Finkbine, who had been in business since 1901.

<sup>523</sup> *Bystander*, 28 December 1917 “Camp Dodge Christmas.”

1918 Sue Brown opened her home to host another interracial meeting to organize an official black women's Red Cross auxiliary. Mrs. Finkbine returned, now serving as Superintendent of Women's Work for the Des Moines Red Cross. The women were joined by Judge Utterback (white), President of the Des Moines Red Cross Chapter. The Charles Young Auxiliary of the Red Cross (CYRC) was created. Named after Lieutenant Young, the first and only African American commissioned Colonel in the Army, the group elected Sue Brown as their Chair. She was assisted by Mrs. Anna Reeves-Harris, wife of the Sergeant Harris of the 366<sup>th</sup> infantry. For the next nine months, the Charles Young Auxiliary of the Red Cross grew to more than 100 women and men, receiving both state and national praise for their efforts from NACW President Mrs. Mary B. Talbert. Meeting at a local church or YMCA, the group spent hours weekly turning out more than 1000 garments, making helmets, creating 500 gauze masks for those at Camp Dodge fighting a flu epidemic, visiting injured and ill soldiers at the hospital at Fort Des Moines, providing holiday gifts, and entertaining the loved ones of soldiers who traveled to the city. They also sent clothing to war refugees in Belgium. Although they most often worked separately, black and white Red Cross workers united in supporting soldiers at both camps near the city. Serving as Assistant Company Mother to Brown, Jessye McClain, IACW First Vice President, reported her work as including contacting local clubs and organizations regarding food conservation, creating a list of enlisted men at Camp Dodge, assisting with a Charles Young Red Cross financial drive, and assisting in the creation of "The Booker T. Washington Social Center" and club for the Red Cross, a place where servicemen could socialize, read and write to family. Together, NACW President Mary Talbert and Iowa Federation of Women representative Mrs.

Homer Miller visited soldiers at Camp Dodge; war work united national and local black and white club women.<sup>524</sup>

Like their sisters in Des Moines, African-American club women from across the state participated in national wartime initiatives. IACW members traveled to Camp Dodge to educate service men on the national efforts of black club women to save the home of Frederick Douglass, the soldiers donating their own money to the cause. They collected donations for the Charles Young Red Cross Auxiliary and created War Work and Food Conservation committees, repurposing their community service and homemaking expertise into patriotic volunteerism. IACW member Martha White created a statistical report of all war work in the state. Compiling information submitted by officers at Camp Dodge, ministers and IACW members, IACW Martha White created a report highlighting the purchase of \$62,750.00 in Liberty Bonds (\$1,172,276.31 in 2014), \$996 from citizens and organizations, and \$981 from volunteer Red Cross workers who each donated a dollar, and the donation of at least 140 items that included helmets, socks, scarves, and sweaters. Passing resolutions in support of President Woodrow Wilson and Newton Baker, Secretary of the War Department, they joined other national black leaders in urging both President Wilson and Baker to allow “colored” fighting units to be led by “colored men” officers. The women also recommended that black Red Cross units serve black servicemen at home and abroad.<sup>525</sup> Similarly, the following July NACW President Mary Talbert’s national war

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<sup>524</sup> *Bystander*, 24 May 1918. *Bystander* 21 June 1918, “Red Cross.” *Bystander*, 28 June 1918, “Red Cross.” *Bystander*, 19 July 1918. *Bystander*, 15 November 1918, “Colored Women Make Showing In Red Cross Work.” *Bystander*, 22 November 1918, “United War Work.” *Bystander* 13 December 1918, “To Club Women.” *Bystander*, 13 December 1918, “Red Cross To Hold Christmas Exchange.” *Bystander*, 20 December 1918, “Many Worthy Organizations Doing Their Bit To Make Our Boys More Comfortable” and picture of the women of the Charles Young Auxiliary of the Red Cross. *Bystander*, 31 January 1919, “Charles Young Auxiliary.” In 1919, Judge Hubert Utterback served the Ninth Iowa Judicial District and was an instructor at Drake University Law School. IACWC B1, F18, P. 9. May 1918 Annual Meeting. Ibid. P 16. Silag, *Outside In*, 109.

<sup>525</sup> IACW 1918 Annual Meeting, P 16-17, 20-21. The IACW donated \$16.28 (\$250 in 2013). See Wanda Hendricks *Gender, Race and Politics in the Midwest* p. 123-126 for a detailed discussion of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs relief work during World War I.

agenda mirrored that of the IACW's as she urged delegates at the national 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention to help with the Red Cross and relief work, to do their best with food production and conservation, and to buy as many Liberty bonds as possible. The synchronized war efforts were reflected in Martha White's report which poignantly described the tremendous effort put forth by IACW members: "We have not been content with doing a little, but have entered every avenue to sacrifice, save and serve, and as loyal women are standing ready to do more."<sup>526</sup>

During the war IACW annual meetings also provided opportunities for black and white club women to come together to discuss war work in the state. At the May 1918, Des Moines meeting, Webster City's Mrs. Francis C. Whitley (white), chairman of the National Defense of Iowa, discussed the needs of the time, followed by Miss Ritza Freeman (white), a representative of the Food Conservation Committee in Washington, D. C.<sup>527</sup> Again, black and white women discussed how national war efforts could be implemented locally, IACW members surely sharing how they tailored these national goals locally, while amplifying their political voice.<sup>528</sup> As the chill of fall in Iowa began to set in, the Charles Young Red Cross Auxiliary prepared "comfort bags and scarves for the soldiers."<sup>529</sup> Iowa black club women, like others across the country, used their patriotic service as an opportunity to show white Americans the strength of their influence and why they deserved full suffrage in the United States.<sup>530</sup>

A total of 5,981 black draftees trained in Iowa, 929 being inducted for service in the war. After waiting months to receive their commissions, many black candidates had become

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<sup>526</sup> Mary B. Talbert, "President's Address," in National Association of Colored Women 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention Minutes, July 1918, NACW Papers, 7. See Brown *Private Politics and Public Voices*, 9.

<sup>527</sup> IACWC B1, F18, P. 9. May 1918 Annual Meeting.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid. P 20-21. A Souvenir Programme was created to commemorate the Seventeenth Annual Session. Inside pictures of the IACW leadership are joined by images of Iowa black men serving in the war. Men from Des Moines and Colfax were recognized, highlighting where each lieutenant was serving. See "Souvenir Programme."

<sup>529</sup> *Bystander*, 19 October 1917, "Red Cross Society Meets."

<sup>530</sup> Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, 16.

discouraged, leaving Fort Des Moines to return home.<sup>531</sup> While the pride of black men training at Fort Des Moines and Camp Dodge spread throughout black communities all over the state, African Americans in Iowa were also witness to one of the most tragic incidents that overshadowed the success of black servicemen training in the state. In May 1918 at Camp Dodge, three black soldiers from Alabama were charged with the sexual assault of a seventeen-year-old white woman, Jessie Barnes, and the assault of her fiancé Private John Gustafson. Private Stanley Tramble, Private Robert Johnson, and Private Fred Allen were identified the next day by Barnes and Allen, although all three stated they barely knew each other. Three separate military trials were held at Camp Dodge. The three men stated that they had paid Gustafson to have sex with Barnes. Gustafson denied “selling” his fiancé to the men, claiming instead that he was beaten unconscious and did not witness the rape. The three men were found guilty and sentenced to a military execution by hanging. On July 5, 1918 3,000 unarmed black servicemen, 40, 000 white armed troops, city and county officials and police gathered at Hyperion Golf Club to watch the executions. Newspaper men were the only civilians allowed entry, as efforts were made to keep the general population from viewing the heinous incident. Local white newspapers reported that the three men were hanged simultaneously before the crowd of horrified black and white service men. Some witnesses fainted and others “called out loudly for the Savior to save them.” Interestingly, as if they had all agreed, no record of the executions can be found in major local or regional African-American newspapers or IACW records of any kind.<sup>532</sup> This horrific

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<sup>531</sup> Silag, *Outside In*, 109-110. See Bergman, 56-60.

<sup>532</sup> *The Des Moines News*, 5 July 1918, “Three Negroes Hanged at Camp Dodge.” *Des Moines Register*, 5 July 1918, “Negroes Are To Be Hung For Assault.” *New York Times*, 6 July 1918 “Whole Army See Negroes Hanged.” See Bill Douglas “Wartime Illusion and Disillusionment: Camp Dodge and Racial Stereotyping, 1917-1918” *The Annals of Iowa* v. 57, no. 2 (Spring 1998) p. 111-134. The trial and hanging of these men was not covered in the *Bystander*. Sadly this incident was not the first of its kind during WWI. Black southern migrants were met with violence in the North and Southwest, riots erupting in East St. Louis and Houston in 1917. The military executions in Iowa were preceded by the execution of 19 black soldiers in Houston, Texas who were convicted of mutiny and killing civilians. See *Bystander* 6 July 1917 editorial “Illinois Race Riot.” The author urged all race men to demand justice,



incident that took place on the outskirts of Des Moines was another devastating example that fueled growing sentiment among blacks that the equality that they hoped war participation would bring was unattainable.

Nearly twenty years of club work – political work - that included education, outreach, community building, welfare support, temperance and suffrage enabled black Iowa women to play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of African-American army trainees and their families. The participation of IACW husbands, family members, and friends in the training program like S. Joe Brown and J. P. Morrison gave Iowa club women an intimate connection to the goings on at Fort Des Moines and Camp Dodge. Historian Nikki Brown's important discussion of black women's increased political activism during World War I highlights the wartime activities of NACW members throughout the United States who similarly sent knitted materials, care packages, supplies for the Red Cross and money to support the Allied forces. Brown's findings highlight the need for more research at state and local levels.<sup>533</sup> Histories about African Americans in Iowa do not highlight the activities and volunteerism of local club women during the war.<sup>534</sup> IACW women welcomed large numbers of black men and their family members from across the country to Iowa and often into their homes, assisting in making their transition from civilian to U.S. servicemen as smooth as possible. Their war work helped shape their political agenda and consciousness after the war.<sup>535</sup>

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describing the incident as "one of the most appalling and intolerable murders, butcherings (sic) and destruction of human lives..."

<sup>533</sup> Brown, *Private Politics*, 11. Brown argues that the efforts of black club women across the country were the "backbone" of the NACW's support of the Allied forces. She highlights: women from the Pennsylvania State Federation who sent comfort kits to black soldiers in Europe and while others raised money for the Red Cross, women in California who collected bandages and knitted material, and coordinated efforts of women in Missouri from St. Louis, Kansas City, and Columbia who sent surgical dressings and hospital sheet to the Red Cross.

<sup>534</sup> Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa*, 56-61. Silag, *Outside In*, 106-112.

<sup>535</sup> Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, ix–xi, 86.

## ***Post-War Patriotism***

*I find myself many times wondering if in five years the constitution will be enforced; if we dare hope that the fourteen and fifteenth amendment will come into their .... Let us prove by co-operation and loyalty that we are standing by our own race and living up to our state and national motto.*

*– IACW President Martha White, May 1919* <sup>536</sup>

White's words reflect the tremendous sense of pride and hope for the future of the race held by Iowa black club women after World War I ended in November 1918. African Americans returned home from overseas feeling empowered by their participation. Black soldiers were exposed to other opportunities outside of the U.S. where they were respected and experienced life without segregation. Stateside, black women and men fought for and had access to different employment opportunities and actively participated in war work. Black Iowa veterans S. Joe Brown and J. B. Morris were welcomed home alongside new military migrants, who after training at Fort Des Moines or Camp Dodge, chose not to return to the more violent and racially oppressive South. Yet, African-American patriotism had minimal impact on race relations in America. Black soldiers' expectations for social change were squelched by the segregation and racism they had left.<sup>537</sup> African Americans across the country began reassessing what their role would be in the push for equal rights during this new "Reconstruction" period. In early 1919, John Russell Hawkins made a noteworthy talk to the Washington, D.C. branch of the NAACP that roused race leaders across the country, including members of the IACW. As national financial secretary for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Hawkins often used his position to publicly advocate for equal rights and citizenship for African Americans. During his

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<sup>536</sup> Martha White, "Reconstruction and the American Negro," Annual Address of the President in the "Proceeding of the Eighteenth Annual Session" IACW, May 26-28, 1919, Marshalltown, Iowa, p. 15-19.

<sup>537</sup> Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Marshalltown, Iowa, May 26-28, 1919, p. 18-19.

speech, he voiced fourteen points that would create a more inclusive democracy in the United States. His “points” format purposely bore resemblance to President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech to Congress in January 1918, where he outlined goals that would be gained by defeating the Germans and her allies during WWI. Instead of focusing on spreading democracy abroad, Hawkins’ list offered guideposts for equal rights for all in America. His list echoed the goals of the NAACP, including universal suffrage, an end to Jim Crow, better education systems in the South, trial by jury instead of lynching, better sanitary conditions in black neighborhoods cities and towns, and equality in the military.<sup>538</sup>

IACW members joined and helped direct the national conversation about the post-war status of African Americans in the United States. At the 1919 state meeting, President White claimed, “This war has opened my eyes to the possibilities of the race,” arguing that the best way to achieve John Hawkins’ listed goals for a more inclusive democracy would be through cooperation and loyalty to black churches, the work of clubs and national organizations, and by continuing World War I alliances with men and white women.<sup>539</sup> An example of the cooperation White advocated can be seen in the membership overlap between the IACW and IA-NAACP. While the IACW statewide membership was nearly four hundred, NAACP membership soared throughout the state. The Des Moines NAACP was now joined by branches in Davenport (1915), Ottumwa (1918), Cedar Rapids (1919), Keokuk (1919), and Centerville (1920). In November 1917, founding Executive Committee member Elbert Hall became the second

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<sup>538</sup> Jack Rummel, *African-American Social Leaders and Activists* (2003), 94-95. John Russell Hawkins (1862-1939) was a North Carolina native who was a devout member of the AME church, teacher, and President of Kittrell College before becoming AME’s Financial Secretary in Washington, D.C. See Mary White Ovington, “Reconstruction and the Negro,” *The Crisis* vol. 17-no. 4 February 1919, 169-173. See G. James Flemming and Christian E. Burckel, “John Russell Hawkins” in *Who’s Who in Colored America* (Yonkers, New York: Christian E. Burckel) 1933-37. See Rayford Logan and Michael Winston, *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982). See President Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points,” 8 January 1918. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp).

<sup>539</sup> IACW Annual meeting 1919, Annual Address “Reconstruction and the American Negro,” p. 15-19.

president of the Des Moines branch. Hall's administration brought increased numbers of young members to the group, significant overall membership growth to five hundred and increased state representation at national NAACP conferences. Under Hall's leadership, the branch also whet its legal teeth, successfully defending Dorothy Quail in a residential segregation case. Quail, a light-skinned black woman, was sold a home in an exclusively white neighborhood and after the agent realized she wasn't white, he tried to cancel the agreement. DM-NAACP attorneys argued that ejecting Quail from the home violated her Fourteenth Amendment rights and the Iowa Civil Rights Act of 1884, winning the case in municipal court.<sup>540</sup> Post-war IA-NAACP expansion also made Iowa a stop for national speaking tours. Mary White Ovington and W.E.B. Du Bois lectured at events hosted by the Des Moines branch; Du Bois openly criticized racism against black soldiers.<sup>541</sup> Sue Brown's affiliations linked both groups to the Eastern Stars, the Colored League of Women's Voters and prominent race leaders across the country.

Unfortunately, black soldiers returning to the United States faced increased violence and discrimination towards African Americans became the next national goal for black club women and members of the NAACP in 1919. The NACW took the lead of the national anti-lynching campaign until the early 1920's, pushing for the passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Act. Introduced in 1918 by United States Representative Leonidas C. Dyer, a Republican from St. Louis, Missouri, the bill demanded punishment of lynching and participants in mob violence. Locally, club women extended their ongoing efforts to end mob violence by joining Iowa

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<sup>540</sup> Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series C: Midwest. University of Iowa Law School Microfilm Collection. "Papers of the N.A.A.C.P.," Microform Collection – College of Law – The University of Iowa. Silag, *Outside In*, 302-205, for a list of early Iowa branches. *Bystander* 28 March 1919, "Branch Membership Increased." S. Joe Brown, "History of the Des Moines Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," pamphlet, March 1, 1927, p. 5-6 (PNAACP).

<sup>541</sup> *Bystander*, 18 June 1918, "Noted Woman Coming." *Bystander*, 16 May 1919, "Dr. DuBois Gives Lecture."

members of the NAACP and the larger black community.<sup>542</sup> Sue Brown's joint memberships took her to New York City as a representative for both groups. In May 1919, she was invited to attend the Reconstruction Conference in New York City where she and other black female race leaders from across the country, like Mary B. Talbert (NACW President), Margaret Washington, Madam C. J. Walker, and representatives from the Young Men's Christian Association and the National Negro Baptist Women's Convention, came together "for the purpose of outlining a program of work to be carried out by the colored women during the reconstruction period." Scant information is available about the Reconstruction Conference; however, during the same trip Brown represented the Iowa-NAACP at the NAACP's first National Anti-Lynching Conference in New York City in May. The conference coincided with the organization's publication of *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* and was a gathering to both bring increased awareness and develop goals to end mob violence.<sup>543</sup>

The onset of WWI led women across the country to make war work a priority, placing suffrage activism on the backburner. As discussed throughout this chapter, IACW members made supporting local black servicemen their main concern. Iowa black women's participation in the suffrage movement greatly increased 1915-1920, yet limited sources have made it easy for scholars to miss its strength and significance. Archives and research about the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, the leading white suffrage body in the state, reveals no African-American members during this period.<sup>544</sup> However, on the dawn of female enfranchisement, IACW members became more politically visible through their efforts to educate themselves and the

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<sup>542</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 52 and Chapter 3, p. 27-28.

<sup>543</sup> *Bystander*, 2 May 1919.

<sup>544</sup> The Iowa Woman Suffrage Association was organized in 1870 in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. By 1874 the group was renamed the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association (IESA). The IESA was the leading white suffrage body in Iowa. After the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was ratified, the group became the League of Women Voters of Iowa with the main goal of educating women on how to utilize their newfound political responsibility.

public about their rights.<sup>545</sup> In Des Moines, the Intellectual Improvement Club held an open suffrage meeting that included local white supporters Mrs. E. E. Higley and Mr. G. A. Wrightman.<sup>546</sup> This meeting is one of the first public examples of cooperation between IACW and white suffrage supporters. Soon a meeting was held at the home of Mary Church Terrell Club member Gertrude Rush to organize a women's suffrage club. Rush had recently finished both a three-year term as IACW president and law school. While the name of this group is not given, several biographical sketches note that Rush was a longtime member of the Colored League of Women Voters; unfortunately, the records of the organization are lost.<sup>547</sup> In the spring of 1919, members of the Mary B. Talbert Club hosted a debate where four women deliberated the pros and cons of the bill that would allow women to vote in primary elections and become candidates for all elected offices before a community audience. The three-judge panel agreed with the affirmative stance. For black club women in Iowa, the increasing demand for political accessibility after WWI was a direct consequence of their organized efforts during the war.<sup>548</sup>

On July 2, 1919, the Iowa General Assembly ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution. Sue Brown's far-reaching race activism included suffrage work as she was also a member of the Colored League of Women Voters (CLWV). While serving as chairman of the group, she was invited to speak at the forty-eighth annual convention of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association (IESA) in Boone, IA. Delivering the speech "Political Education of Colored Women" to the state's most active white women's suffrage group would have been a

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<sup>545</sup> Brown, 138.

<sup>546</sup> *Bystander*, 28 January 16, "Intellectual Club Hosting Suffrage Meeting." *Bystander*, 4 February 1916, "Intellectual Improvement to Hold Open Suffrage Meeting." *Bystander*, 18 February 1916.

<sup>547</sup> *Bystander*, 3 March 1916. This brief announcement states that a women's suffrage club was organized at the home of Gertrude Rush.

<sup>548</sup> Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, 160.

highpoint not only for Brown but for all black women in the state. Surely members of the IESA were well aware of the IACW membership's impactful war work. As her speech title shows, Sue Brown was not just representing the IACW but all black women. Her presence at the IESA state meeting showed white Iowans that black women were not only taking the right to vote very seriously, but that their ability to cast ballots would be very impactful in upcoming elections. The CLWV then hosted a public meeting in Des Moines where she provided a detailed report of the IESA convention to a mixed audience.<sup>549</sup>

When the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in 1920 giving all women the right to vote, Iowa black club women continued what they had been collectively doing for thirty years, publicly engaging in political activities. The NACW added the American Citizenship Committee, and the IACW added the Citizenship Chair, both national and local black club women wanting to get "citizenship" rights. The IACW added the Citizenship Chair mirroring the NACW's American Citizenship Committee, that advised club women around the country to purchase and read its pamphlet "Outlines for Study in Essentials of American Citizenship." As they had before, IACW members openly discussed who they would publicly support in upcoming elections and the importance of Iowa laws for working women. Along with NACW members across the country, the IACW sent a telegram to Iowa Senator Albert Cummins urging him to support the

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<sup>549</sup> *Bystander*, 14 March 1919, "Mary B. Talbert Club To Give Suffrage Debate." *Bystander*, 4 April 1919, "Equal Suffrage Debate Proves Interesting." *Bystander*, 3 October 1919, "Mrs. Brown Speaks Before State Suffrage Association." *Bystander*, 10 October 1919, "Colored League of Women Voters Hold Open Meeting." *Bystander*, 17 October 1919, "Colored League Women Voters Hear Report." See C. Mastalio *Women's Suffrage in Iowa: A Sneak Peak of a new Digital Collection* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from Iowa Women's Archives website: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/exhibits/Suffrage>. The Iowa Woman Suffrage Association was organized in 1870 in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. By 1874 it became the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association and was the main suffrage body in the state. After the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in August 1920, the ISEA became the League of Women Voters of Iowa with main goal of educating women on how to utilize their new political responsibility. See Leslie Schwalm's *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 210-214.

Dyer Anti-lynching Bill. Now armed with the right to vote, other organizations wanted to harness the IACW's electoral support.<sup>550</sup>

1915-1920 was a watershed period for black club women in Iowa. Nearly 500 women successfully bridged gendered literary and welfare advocacy with cooperative interracial political work. Nearly twenty years of civic "parlor work," literacy, suffrage, anti-lynching and co-ed race work evolved into sophisticated political strategies that crossed racial lines. Prioritizing suffrage, the IACW created an infrastructure to increasingly discuss obtaining the ballot, providing both a supportive argument and talking points for black women throughout the state. The debates and public endorsements demanded a response from the candidates, providing opportunities for African Americans across Iowa to be civically engaged. Long time anti-lynching activism evolved from passing organizational resolutions to taking a successful public stance against the dissemination of murderous images that resulted in a direct response from an elected official.

Iowa black women's club work was a training ground for their ongoing presence in the IA-AAC that directly led to active participation in Iowa NAACP and momentous volunteer work during WWI. Black men, white men and women realized that the influence of IACW, through its members and networks, was essential in expanding awareness of racial, political, and welfare agendas in Iowa. Often wearing multiple hats, IACW presence on local NAACP executive boards, creating Red Cross units and women's auxiliaries, set the standard for black women's political activism within male and white institutions in Iowa.<sup>551</sup> War work was a defining moment for black Iowa club women because it provoked their transition from gendered spaces to the center of politics, differently than their sisters across the country.

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<sup>550</sup> 1923 IACW Annual Meeting, Des Moines, 14-15

<sup>551</sup> Brown, *Private Politics and Public Voices*, 135.



## Conclusion

*Since the organization of Women's Clubs, many who were denied the educational privileges that young people of today enjoy, have made rapid progress along intellectual lines. They are working for the betterment of the races as they climb the rugged heights. They are trying to lift their less fortunate sisters.*

*Mrs. L. R. Palmer  
Chairman of the Educational Committee  
Iowa Association of Colored Women's Clubs<sup>552</sup>*

After WWI, club work in Iowa would never be the same. IACW membership numbers peaked in 1917, having a membership of more than 550 members. Numbers began to slowly decline as wartime participation increased, having 383 members in 1919. But even after a slight rebound to 443 in 1920, that IACW would never have over 500 members again. The postwar decrease in membership of the IACW and the expansion and increased membership of the NAACP in the state (more than 500 members and six branches) reveals postwar challenges facing black club women across the country. With the growing violence in the postwar period, African American women and men became more willing to challenge the social order, and the NAACP took the lead in legally confronting the status quo.

Table 7: 1917-1920 IACW State Membership Numbers

	Club	City	Total Membership in the State
1917	33	11	560
1918	29	11	437
1919	27	12	383
1920	28	10	443* (3 club didn't submit data- 2 city feds w/24 members)

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<sup>552</sup> "Report of the Education Committee," Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting, Muscatine, Iowa, May 22-24, 1905, p.21. Mrs. L. R. Palmer, of Des Moines, Iowa, served as the State Chair of the Educational Committee during 1905.

<sup>553</sup> 1917-1920 IACW Annual Meeting minutes.

Nikki Brown argues that after WWI, the NAACP became the leading race organization, taking full leadership of the anti-lynching movement. In Iowa, this changeover was not overnight. In spite of decreasing membership, IACW leadership in the Iowa NAACP had not yet reached its highest point.<sup>554</sup>

During WWI, Sue Brown spearheaded African American club women's war work at Camp Dodge. As discussed in chapter 5, she led efforts to create a Charles Young Auxiliary of the Red Cross, the Company Mothers of the 366<sup>th</sup> and in 1917, during WWI, she took over the Des Moines NAACP branch (DM-NAACP) during the war beginning in 1917 when her husband and other black male leaders volunteered for service.<sup>555</sup> By 1923, Sue Brown served as DM-NAACP second vice-president. It was during this time that she was appointed Director of the Junior Department in Iowa. Conceived by the NAACP national office in the early stages of the organization, Junior Chapters began to be established in 1920. Comprised of high school students, the organization's goal was to "...teach these young people the background of the history of our race, the accomplishments of their notables, the methods of organization, and the work of such work as that of the N.A.A.C.P."<sup>556</sup> For the remainder of 1923, Sue Brown cultivated this youth group in Des Moines, having an enrollment of fifty by December 1923.<sup>557</sup> Receiving great praise nationally for her work with the juniors, Sue Brown attended the organization's national conference in Kansas City, Missouri, giving the address "Junior Work."<sup>558</sup> By February 1924, twenty-nine members of the Junior Division performed the play

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<sup>554</sup> Nikki Brown, *Private Politics*, p. 130.

<sup>555</sup> See Chapter 5, p.34-37.

<sup>556</sup> Letter from Robert Bagnall, National Director of Branches to Mrs. S. Joe Brown, August 3, 1923, (PNAACP).

<sup>557</sup> Letter from Sue Brown, Director of Junior Division to Robert Bagnall, Director of Branches, December 8, 1923, (PNAACP).

<sup>558</sup> S. Joe Brown, "History of the Des Moines Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People", March 1, 1927, p. 6-8, (PNAACP).

“The Awakening.”<sup>559</sup> Written by Mary White Ovington, a founder of the organization, the play was used as a recruiting tool, emphasizing the need for an organization like the NAACP in America.<sup>560</sup> Elected the first female president of the Des Moines Branch of the NAACP in December of 1925, Sue Brown held the position until 1931. At this time, no other African American women presided over branches in the state.<sup>561</sup> Continuing her work with the juniors, she was asked by Robert Bagnall, the NAACP National Director of Branches, to assist in the national push to organize Junior Divisions across the country.<sup>562</sup> She quickly extended the reach of the organization further, focusing on education, outreach, and membership.

Sue Brown’s leadership and presidency of the DM-NAACP was a much different experience than that of black women in other Midwestern cities. In his research of the NAACP in Chicago, scholar Charles Reed argues that women in that city had a very limited voice, stating that no women served on the Executive Committee until 1925 or as a branch president until 1954.<sup>563</sup> However, women were also branch presidents in Minnesota. Marie Coles took the helm of the Duluth branch in 1923, while Lena Olive Smith would become the first woman president of the Minneapolis branch in 1930.<sup>564</sup> During Sue Brown’s headship (1925-1931), eight NAACP branches existed throughout Iowa, although several periodically became dormant.

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<sup>559</sup> William Taylor, Secretary, “Secretary’s Report of Local Events”, February 1924, (PNAACP).

<sup>560</sup> Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP*. (New York: 1998), 182.

<sup>561</sup> Eight NAACP branches existed throughout Iowa during Sue Brown’s presidency (1925-1931), although several periodically became dormant.

<sup>562</sup> Letter from Robert Bagnall, to Sue Brown, August 16, 1926, (PNAACP).

<sup>563</sup> Charles Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Black Professional Leadership, 1910 -1996* (Bloomington Press: Indiana University Press, 1997) 69.

<sup>564</sup> “Election of N.A.A.C.P.,” November 8, 1923, Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series C: Midwest, Duluth, Minnesota, reel 15. University of Iowa Law School Microfilm Collection (PNAACP hereafter). See Ann Juergens, “Lena Olive Smith: A Minnesota Civil Rights Pioneer,” *William Mitchell Law Review* 28, (2001) 397-453. See also Earl Spangler, *The Negro in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison and Company, 1961). The first NAACP branch in Minnesota was founded in St. Paul in 1913.

In the 1890s, African-American club women began meeting in homes throughout Iowa, creating spaces for self-education and gendered race work. Starting with themselves, black club women utilized methods of racial uplift within club meetings to strengthen members – in preparation for strengthening their communities. Scholarly and literary activities at club meetings evolved into community based educational and social work initiatives that helped African Americans throughout Iowa. Black women in Iowa actively assessed the needs of their communities, tailoring club agendas to engage black women and strengthen black families. Serving as an initiation into leadership for hundreds of Iowa black club women, members of the Iowa Association of Colored Women honed their organizational skills, constructed networks, recruited members, and developed programs to aid in racial uplift. From their parlors, black women emerged in the twentieth century not only as just club women, but also as writers, social workers, organizers, and leaders alongside black men in the state. Filling the void left by politicians, black club women created settlement homes in Des Moines and Iowa City and girls clubs throughout the state to provide safe spaces for their sisters in need. When the World War I brought thousands of black men and their families to Iowa, IACW members provided social and monetary support while creating war goods. Before they had the right to vote, the IACW provided an entry point for hundreds of black women into Iowa politics. Racism, economics, nor gender challenges stifled these women, instead motivating them to grow the numbers of clubs and outreach initiatives throughout Iowa to support black communities, improving the lives of African Americans throughout the state.

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