Black Women Historians from the Late 19th Century to the Dawning of the Civil Rights Movement

by Pero Gaglo Dagbovie*

From the 1890s through the first half of the 20th century, black women historians overcame a different set of barriers than their male counterparts in earning their doctorates, publishing, securing employment, receiving professorial promotions, and gaining respect in academia. In 1925, at the age of sixty-six, Anna Julia Cooper became the first African American woman to earn a doctorate in history (University of Paris, Sorbonne). In 1940, more than a decade after Cooper's monumental accomplishment, Marion Thompson Wright became the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in history (Columbia University) in the United States. The significant lapse in time between W. E. B. Du Bois earning his doctorate in history (Harvard University, 1895) and Anna Julia Cooper and Marion Thompson Wright receiving theirs is neither surprising nor difficult to explain. Historically, African American women have faced significant opposition from various fronts in pursuing and attaining higher education, especially in elite graduate programs. During what Rayford Logan deemed the "nadir of black life," the formative years for black intellectuals in William Banks's estimation, black women were widely and often systematically excluded from participating in mainstream U.S. and African American academic culture. From the 1880s through the 1950s, as Stephanie Shaw has demonstrated, black women professionals were carefully socialized to work in the "feminized professions—as social workers, librarians, nurses, and teachers." During these times especially, black women in the historical profession and academia as a whole faced multiple forms of oppression, including sexism and racism, and in some cases class discrimination. In response to this environment, Paula Giddings has suggested that black female intellectuals have historically possessed a distinct desire to persevere. "Since education is the key to the more attractive occupations, black women intellectuals have possessed a certain history of striving for education beyond what their gender or their color seemed to prescribe," Giddings observed. "Black men have not had the same motivation, historically, because they had a greater range of options." Clearly, African American women as a group have historically struggled to acquire an education and join the ranks of professionally trained scholars in white and black communities. During the era of segregation, they reacted to the pervasive exclusionary policies of the broader white society by promoting an ideology and strategy of self-help while also responding creatively.

*Pero Gaglo Dagbovie is an Assistant Professor of History and a member of the African American and African Studies Advisory Committee at Michigan State University in East Lansing, MI.
Early African American female historians created a range of coping strategies, survival mechanisms, and alternative ways to approaching and writing history. While less than ten black women earned doctorates in history before the mid-1950s thereby gaining access in some form to academic sanctioning, many black women intellectuals published historical scholarship without extensive academic credentials or the approval of the mainstream academy. Other black women, such as self-proclaimed "bibliomaniacs" and long time chief Curator for the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center Dorothy Burnett Porter Wesley (1905–1995), and black women librarians functioned as key resource personnel. Before Anna Julia Cooper or Marion Thompson Wright, many non-Ph.D.-holding black women published noteworthy historical scholarship and engaged in the historian's craft. They created authentic ideological "parallel institutions" for black women historians. The first major "parallel institution" for black women historians, the Association of Black Women Historians, was founded in the post Black Power era. But, during the era of segregation, black women historians, though not bound together by a single organization or institution, often shared a common cause, approach, and set of ideologies which ran parallel to those discursive spaces and positions of power existing in white and black communities.

The history of black women historians during the era of segregation, especially during the Progressive era, constitutes a dynamic narrative, challenging us to revisit the lives and works of lesser known black women scholars, re-conceptualize conventional definitions of what makes one an historian, and rediscover valuable scholarly insights. This essay explores the unique history of a diverse group of pioneering black women historians, professional and self-taught, from the 1890s through the mid-1950s, a history which has been largely ignored by the few historians who have chronicled the lives and works of black historians since the late 1950s.

CONCEPTUALIZING BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

Historians have conceptualized black historians in two major ways. In their exhaustive 1986 study, August Meier and Elliott Rudwick considered only "professionally trained historians, the products of the system of university graduate education that matured by the beginning of the twentieth century." They limited their study to those with doctorates and "a record of significant publication." On the other hand, Carter G. Woodson, Earl E. Thorpe, Benjamin Quarles, John Hope Franklin, Wilson Jeremiah Moses, and Julie Des Jardins broadened their criteria by democratizing the profession to embrace formally trained and self-taught historians. These scholars' research concurred with Moses' assertion that the black historical enterprise should include "the historical understanding of literate persons outside the academy." This category of black historians is especially helpful when analyzing and subdividing black women historians during the era of segregation. In this essay, I analyze three main groups of black women historians: Progressive era novelists, self-taught and self-proclaimed historians or "historians without portfolio" from the 1890s through the 1930s, and professionally trained, Ph.D.-holding historians.
BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

Many black women writers of the Progressive era employed their novels in multifaceted, complex manners. Claudia Tate has convincingly argued that post-Reconstruction "black domestic melodramas" written by African American women were "symbolically embedded" with "cultural meaning, values, expectations, and rituals of African Americans of that era." More importantly, Tate explored "how black women authors of the post-Reconstruction era used domestic novels, as did other politically excluded writers, as entry points into the literary and intellectual world as a means of access to social and political events from which [black women were] . . . largely excluded." Tate's theory can be applied to African American women as writers of history as well. Black women novelists, namely Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Pauline Hopkins, wrote "female-centered," seemingly unthreatening, "domestic novels" which critically addressed controversial issues and events in U.S. history, such as slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. "Without an historicized interpretive model, the black domestic novels seem maudlin, inconsequential, even vacuous," Tate concluded. In post-Reconstruction America, black women intellectuals who sought to write conventional historical texts may have faced more resistance than they did as novelists. They tapped into a literary genre perhaps more accessible to them as black women. In line with their pragmatic worldview, they also probably reasoned that novels had a much broader appeal than history texts among black and white middle-class readers. Harper and Hopkins, two of the most influential black women writers of the turn of the century, challenge us to broaden traditional definitions of historians.

According to Earl E. Thorpe, from the late 1890s to the Civil Rights Movement, there existed a significant group of black "historians without portfolio," a "group of non-professional persons . . . who have a fondness for the discipline of history, feeling that their life experiences peculiarly fit them for chronicling some historical events." More than a dozen self-taught and self-proclaimed black women historians fit within Thorpe's designation. They produced insightful, accessible, and practical historical scholarship. This diverse group included schoolteachers, clubwomen, social reformers, and journalists. Though not formally trained, they challenged the widely accepted notion that a woman's place was in the domestic sphere and their scholarship was often innovative, polemical, and vindicationist in nature. Julie Des Jardins has recently argued that they relied "more heavily on oral tradition, commemorative strategies, interdisciplinary methods, pedagogical techniques, and grassroots mobilization to shape the contours of race and memory and their legacies as black women." Unrestricted by the standards of academia, these pragmatic scholars' writings tended to connect the past to the present, address contemporary issues directly, target lay persons and youth in black communities, and in some cases sought to promote harmony between African Americans and whites. This group included Gertrude E. H. Bustill Mossell, Leila Amos Pendleton, Laura Eliza Wilkes, Susie King Taylor, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, Delilah Beasley, Elizabeth Ross Haynes, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, and black women teachers, activists, and researchers of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History from its founding through the mid-1950s.

Professionally trained, Ph.D.-holding black women historians before the emergence of the modern Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s can be best categorized by the decade during which they earned their doctorates. In the 1920s, Anna Julia Cooper was the only black woman Ph.D.-holder in history. In the decade after Cooper earned her Ph.D., no black
women appear to have earned a Ph.D. in history. This drought in the 1930s was followed by a decade in which the numbers of black female historians increased significantly. In 1940, Marion Thompson Wright earned a Ph.D. from Columbia University. Other black women, recognized in the field and lesser known, followed in her footsteps during the remainder of the decade. The first distinguishable coterie of formally trained black women historians included Lulu M. Johnson, Susie Owen Lee, Elsie Lewis, Helen G. Edmonds, and Margaret Rowley. Merze Tate, in 1941 the first African American woman to receive a doctorate in government and international relations from Harvard University, was not formally trained in history, but her scholarly writings and activism qualifies her as being a professional historian. The seven black women who earned doctorates in history during the 1940s, including Merze Tate, can be subdivided into two main groups. Wright, Tate, Lewis, and Edmonds published significant historical scholarship and were active in the national black history movement of Woodson's time and even, in some cases, joined the ranks of predominantly white historical associations. While they may have been first-rate historians and teachers, Johnson, Lee, and Rowley do not appear to have been active researchers and writers. In 1955, Lorraine Williams earned a Ph.D. in history, becoming the last black woman to earn a Ph.D. in history in the pre-civil rights era.

When viewed together, black women writers and students of history from the late 1800s until the mid-1950s developed distinct approaches and helped redefine the historian's function and identity in the United States. These black women intellectuals stand out for many reasons. They produced insightful and at times path-breaking scholarship; they proposed relevant and vital connections between the past, present, and future; they demonstrated abilities to balance scholarly writings with social and political activism; they successfully transcended the gender barriers of their times, and, like the members of V. P. Franklin's African American autobiographical intellectual tradition, they "demonstrated an overarching commitment to 'race vindication'" by challenging racist "historical discourse" which upheld "the mental and cultural inferiority of African peoples" and "lived lives that were personal vindications of racist notions about black people." They told "the truth about the history and culture of peoples of African descent in the United States" and at times throughout the diaspora.

BLACK FEMALE NOVELISTS AS HISTORIANS: HARPER AND HOPKINS

Novelists Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911) and Pauline E. Hopkins (1859–1930) meshed history with fiction in presenting and interpreting critical periods, events, and personalities in U.S. history. In 1892, at the age of sixty-seven, Harper—a feminist, public lecturer, poet, teacher, novelist, and in Bettye Collier-Thomas's estimation the "single most important black woman leader to figure in both the abolitionist and feminist reform movements," published her most famous book, Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted. Perhaps the best-selling novel by an African American writer before the 20th century, Harper's novel was aimed primarily at black Sunday school teachers and female readers. As she had done decades earlier in her poetry on slavery, Harper critically revisited America's past in hopes of generating debate among her wide readership. As Hazel Carby has argued, she sought to "promote social change," "aid in the uplifting of the race," and "intervene in and influence political, social, and cultural debate" about black life during the "nadir."
Harper's novel addressed many of the intricacies surrounding slavery, the wartime South, emancipation, and Reconstruction, it was also a historical discussion of the role and social responsibility of educated, privileged African Americans. Harper explored various issues in African American history to the Reconstruction era, but her message was especially applicable to the times in which she wrote. She made connections between the period of slavery and the contemporary period for pragmatic, political purposes. In analyzing *Minnie’s Sacrifice* and *Iola Leroy*, Melba Joyce Boyd has suggested that "these novels provide a connection between the past horrors of slavery and the present terror of lynching. The radical history Harper preserves in both novels is a time continuum essential to a liberated vision in the future. In both instances, the works are written for the black reading audience." Harper acknowledged the complex inner workings of slave culture long before the slavery studies of the post-civil rights era argued that recognizing slaves' agency was essential. In *Iola Leroy*, Harper identified slaves "as participants in the struggle for liberation" as "contrabands of war," the diversity within slave societies, and "the complex dynamics that characterize the master/slave relationship." Harper's discussion of slavery, though couched in a work of fiction, was revisionist in nature, yet sensitive to notions of historical objectivity or detachment. "Harper’s portrayals of the enslaved contradict popular opinion, manifesting vital, thriving voices of resistance. At the same time, Harper does not romanticize the slaves to benefit a counter argument." In dealing with Reconstruction, Harper also highlighted the significance of rebuilding the family for African Americans in the South.

Frances Harper used history to help dictate a program for the group Du Bois deemed the "Talented Tenth." In the novel, protagonist Iola, who had been living as a white person until her adult years, immediately accepted her African heritage upon discovering that her mother was "a quadroon." During the Civil War and following emancipation, this "Southern lady, whose education and manners stamped her as a woman of fine culture and good breeding," devoted her life to the black masses of the South as a nurse, a teacher, a church worker, and an organizer of mother's meetings. For Iola, being a servant and leader of the race "is a far greater privilege than it is to open the gates of material prosperity and fill every house to sensuous enjoyment." In response to Dr. Gresham’s plea that she no longer serve her oppressed people and marry him, Iola passionately asserted, "It was through their unrequited toil that I was educated, while they were compelled to live in ignorance. I am indebted to them for the power I have to serve them. I wish other Southern women felt as I do I must serve the race which needs me most." Harper stressed that middle-class, educated blacks owed a collective debt to black history, to the historical struggles waged by their enslaved ancestors. As Hazel Carby has observed, Iola and the other intellectuals and race leaders in Harper’s "entertaining and instructive" opus "gained their representativeness or typicality from an engagement with history. They carried the past in their individual histories and were presented as a historical force, an elite to articulate the possibilities of the future of the race." Like Harper, Pauline Hopkins also employed her writings in the struggle for racial uplift. "In giving this little romance experience in print," Hopkins introduced *Contending Forces* (1900), "I am not actuated by desire for notoriety or for profit, but to do all that I can in a humble way to raise the stigma of degradation from my race." During the late 19th century and the early 1900s, Hopkins was one of black America's most prolific journalists.
"The single most productive black woman writer at the turn of the century," from 1900 until 1905 Hopkins produced for publication four novels (one in book form), seven short stories, one brief self-published historical booklet, A Primer of Facts Pertaining to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by Its Descendants—with Epilogue (1905), two dozen biographical sketches in the Colored American Magazine, and many essays, columns, and editorials. She has accurately been called by one scholar a "performer, playwright, orator, novelist, journalist, short story writer, biographer, and editor."26

Hopkins was a self-proclaimed historian. She introduced her best known novel as being an historical study grounded in rigorous research. "The incidents in the early chapters of the book actually occurred," Hopkins challenged her readership to verify her sources for Contending Forces, "ample proof of this may be found at Newberne, N.C., and at the national seat of the government, Washington, D.C." Philosophically, Hopkins argued that history was instructive because of its direct connection with the present and future. She viewed the present as being part of a larger historical continuum, part of a vast body of inter-connected ideologies and events. Though she "tried to tell an impartial story," Hopkins was forthright about the need for black-authored revisionist historical accounts. "No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history, and, as yet, unrecognized by writers of the anglo-saxon [sic] race."27

Hopkins stressed that the conditions facing African Americans during the "nadir" were essentially the same as those of the antebellum era. She rejected the notion of black progress since emancipation and Reconstruction widely celebrated by the majority of black spokespersons. "Mob rule is nothing new," Hopkins declared, "Let us compare the happenings of one hundred—two hundred years ago, with those of today. The difference between then and now, if there be, is so slight as to be scarcely worth mentioning. The atrocity of the acts committed one hundred years ago are duplicated today, when slavery is supposed no longer to exist."28 Similarly, in her serial novel Winona, set in Kansas during the turbulent 1850s, Hopkins sought to "justify the need in 1902 for the kind of organized resistance to racist violence led by the anti-slavery leader John Brown in 1856." Hopkins interpreted the historian's role not simply in terms of recounting past events, but, more importantly, as a source of motivation and direction for the future. Like Contending Forces, Winona drew upon historical sources.29

"Throughout her tenure at [the Colored American Magazine](1900–1904), Hopkins acknowledged her obligation not simply to cultivate but to create an audience for her revisionist race history," C. K. Doreski has asserted, "She assumed the authority of race historian and mediated the issues of race and gender to incite a readership to pride and action." Hopkins's historical approach as an editor and journalist for the Colored American Magazine was essentially pragmatic. She strove to translate "representative lives into authentic history" and compose "history from exemplary lives in the hope of elevating the image of the entire race." Seeking to inspire her readers to uplift themselves and the more unfortunate of their race, Hopkins translated two dozen biographical sketches of "famous" black historical figures into "participatory exemplary texts."30 At the same time, Hopkins
BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

educated her large white Colored American Magazine readership, comprising about one-third of the total.31

"HISTORIANS WITHOUT PORTFOLIO": BLACK WOMEN NONFICTION WRITERS OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA OR THE NADIR

Other Progressive era black women "historians without portfolio" offered their interpretations of history in nonfiction works. In 1894, Mrs. Gertrude E. H. Bustill Mossell (1855–1948), editor, journalist, and feminist, first published The Work of the Afro-American Woman, an historical and contemporary assessment of black women intellectuals' and activists' monumental accomplishments from the era of the American Revolution. Joanne Braxton has posited that this volume "was, for the black woman of the 1890s, the equivalent of [Paula] Giddings's work of the 1980s—in sum, a powerful and progressive statement." The Work is subdivided into various sections, "original essays and poems . . . part intellectual history, part advice book, and part polemic." Like Hopkins, Mossell introduced her scholarship as being a vehicle of race pride and inspiration. "The value of any published work, especially if historical in character, must be largely inspirational," Mossell proclaimed, "this fact grows out of the truth that race instinct, race experience lies behind it, national feeling, or race pride always having for its development a basis of self-respect."32

In the first two essays of The Work, Mossell discussed a variety of black women historical icons and also offered some provocative thoughts on the deeper meanings of history to African Americans. In her opening essay "The Work of the Afro-American Woman," while Mossell highlighted the achievements of her contemporary "industrious" black women social reformers as well as the contributions of well-known black women historical figures, such as Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and F. E. W. Harper, she also noted the contributions of obscure women.33 In another "tribute to black womanhood" entitled "A Sketch of Afro-American Literature," Mossell prioritized history in the black struggle, validated social and oral history, and subdivided black history into three major "epochs." She was especially critical of the post-emancipation period which was "defrauded of its substance by every means that human ingenuity could devise."34 Mossell recognized the importance of using history within the African American community as a vehicle of racial pride and self-esteem and as a guide for the future.

Less than a decade after Mossell published The Work, in 1902 Susie King Taylor (1848–1912) published the only black woman's account of the Civil War. In Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, Late 1st South Carolina Volunteer, Taylor recounted her experiences as a laundress, teacher, and a nurse behind Union lines. Taylor, whose mother was a domestic slave, served the Union Army in various capacities from about 1862 until 1865.35 Nearly four decades following the end of the war, she self-published Reminiscences while living in Boston. Thomas Wentworth Higginson introduced her account with a few words of praise, noting that Reminiscences, "delineated from the woman's point of view," constituted an important contribution to U.S. military history.36 Taylor opened her account with a personalized history, tracing back her mother's family history and her own early life before the war. The bulk of Taylor's book is devoted to discussing the day-to-day experiences of the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, renamed the First
JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

South Carolina Volunteers. She glorified Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, as Booker T. Washington did in *Up from Slavery* (1901). Yet she also challenged the mythic antiblack accounts of the Civil War, emancipation, and Reconstruction. Taylor wrote, "these white men and women could not tolerate our black Union soldiers, for many of them had formerly been their slaves; and although these brave men risked life and limb to assist them in distress, men and even women would sneer and molest them whenever they met them." She also celebrated the role of black women during the Civil War. Though her statements were brief, they were ahead of their time. "There are many people who do not know what some of the colored women did during the war," Taylor proclaimed, "There were hundreds of them who assisted the Union soldiers by hiding them and helping them escape. Many were punished for taking food to the prison stockades for the prisoners. . . . These things should be kept in history before the people."^37

Taylor's tone was openly patriotic. In her account she separated history from polemics, saving her most scathing critiques of white America for the final chapter, "Thoughts on Present Conditions." Like Pauline Hopkins, she denounced the mistreatment endured by African Americans during the "nadir," stressing the similarity between contemporary and earlier racial oppression. In a Woodsonian fashion, Taylor asked younger generations to remember and study history: "I look around now and see the comforts that our younger generation enjoy, and think of the blood that was shed to make these comforts possible for them, and see how little some of them appreciate the old soldiers. My heart burns within me, at this want of appreciation."^38

Though perhaps not as widely known as Taylor, Washington, DC, public school teacher Laura Eliza Wilkes (1871–1922) joined the ranks of early black women "historians without portfolio" by publishing two relatively obscure historical studies. In 1899 she wrote a brief pamphlet printed by Howard University, *Story of Frederick Douglass, With Questions*.^39 Two decades later in 1919, Wilkes completed a study entitled *Missing Pages in American History, Revealing the Services of Negroes in the Early Wars of America*, published in Washington, DC, by the Press of R. L. Pendleton. In a letter she wrote to Carter G. Woodson on 22 July 1921, Wilkes, "a paying member of the ASNLH," articulated her anger with Woodson for not reviewing her work in *The Journal of Negro History*. "I submitted my work to you as soon as it came from the press and yet for some reason it has not received the courtesy, I had every right to expect for it," Wilkes told Woodson. She believed that she had a place among serious African American historians who met Woodson's high standards for rigorous, historical scholarship. Wilkes had a valid argument.

Wilkes appears to have been the first black woman to chronicle the history of African Americans in the military from the colonial era through the War of 1812. She dedicated six years to researching her study, taking great pride in the unwavering patriotism exhibited by black soldiers in the U.S. historically. "The facts found herein are taken from colonial records, state papers, assembly journals, histories of slavery, and old time histories of the colonies and of the republic," Wilkes assured, "The reader can easily verify this statement by using the bibliography at the end of the work."^41 Her study contains only eighty-four pages of text on black soldiers from 1614 until 1815, yet, *Missing Pages* is dense and covers a great deal of American history. She examined black soldiers during the conflicts in colonial America, the American Revolution, the French and Indian War, and the War of
BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

1812. Wilkes’s book was written in an overtly scholarly manner. Drawing from more than fifty sources and listing many “facts,” Wilkes adequately moved Africans’ contributions from the margins. Her sentiments reflected the thought of many black thinkers of her time. In 1919 during what James Weldon Johnson termed the “Red Summer,” African Americans increased their critiques of white Americans’ failure to acknowledge blacks’ willingness to help preserve American democracy. Black writers like Wilkes strove to prove to white Americans that the denial of fundamental citizenship rights to African Americans was unjust because of their contributions to the United States at home and abroad during World War I and all wars before it. “The Negroes of America,” Wilkes professed, “have done their bit in every war and taken no small part in every military movement made for the salvation of their country from the time of its earliest settlement.”

Between the publications of Wilkes’s two books, in 1912 a seasoned Washington, DC, educator and reformer, Leila Amos Pendleton, published A Narrative of the Negro, a brief work which she described as being “a sort of ‘family history’” for the “colored children of America.” In 1915 Du Bois hailed his book The Negro as the first major study of African descendants throughout the diaspora. Though not as comprehensive and analytical as Du Bois’s work, Pendleton’s study was ambitious and wide-reaching. It addressed Africans’ lives from ancient times through the era of colonialism, Africans in Haiti, Brazil, Jamaica, and Bermuda, and African American life from the colonial era through the nadir. Her young audience did not prevent Pendleton from embracing a militant tone. She chastised King Leopold of the Belgium Congo and the violent nature of the European colonial conquest, called slavery “evil,” and condemned the “long series of brutal outrages, murders, maimings, beatings, burnings” and “barbarous lynchings” of African Americans. The bulk of Pendleton’s study addressed African American history from the American Revolution through the “nadir” and in the tradition of African American juvenile literature relied heavily on many brief biographical sketches of a range of black leaders. Renowned Harlem Renaissance novelist and Crisis literary editor (1919–1926) Jessie Fauset heralded the publication of Pendleton’s book. “Now at last, it would seem, we have an historian who has arisen in answer to our need.” Five years after A Narrative of the Negro appeared, Pendleton published an article in The Journal of Negro History, “Our New Possessions—The Danish West Indies.”

In 1919 journalist and social activist Delilah Leontium Beasley (1872–1934) published The Negro Trail Blazers of California. Beasley’s monograph, the first major examination of blacks in California, contains vast amounts of valuable information still useful to those interested in African American history in California and the West. When judged within its proper historical context, her study is exhaustive. She was committed to challenging the notion that African Americans had not contributed to California’s history. She worked diligently on The Negro Trail Blazers of California for close to a decade. Charlotte A. Bass, editor of the California Eagle, praised Beasley’s commitment: “In gathering the data for this most unique volume, she has sacrificed money and health.” Beasley was a thorough, innovative, and persistent researcher. She took courses in “Colorado and Spanish Colorado history” at the University of California in Berkeley while writing her study and conducted meticulous research at the California Archives and Berkeley’s Bancroft Library. In addition, she incorporated oral history into her study by interviewing California’s black pioneers “in every section of the state wherever a railroad
or horse and buggy could go,” examined a wide array of California’s newspapers, combed carefully through personal family papers, letters, and memorabilia, and contacted county libraries throughout the state asking them for any materials dealing with African Americans.\(^9\) Carter G. Woodson acknowledged the value of Beasley’s findings and “the numerous valuable facts in the book.” However, he was very critical of her style, approach, and methodology, calling The Negro Trail Blazers of California “so much of a hodge-podge that one is inclined to weep like the minister who felt that his congregation consisted of too many to be lost but not enough to be saved.”\(^50\)

Several years after Beasley’s study appeared, Elizabeth Ross Haynes (1878 or 1879–1953), pioneering sociologist, author of juvenile literature, social activist, and “historian without portfolio,” published Unsung Heroes, a 279-page collection of biographical sketches of seventeen black historical figures, three of whom were women and three from outside the United States. Unsung Heroes, published by Du Bois’s short-lived Du Bois and Dill Publishers, was an attempt “to provide black children with historical biographies and was one of the books written especially for black children in the Twenties.” In the brief “Foreword” to her book, Haynes insisted that her story is about “the victories in spite of the hardships and struggles of Negroes whom the world has failed to sing about.” Haynes sought to inspire black youth to “succeed in spite of all odds.” As Francille Rusan Wilson has proposed, Haynes did not deviate from the basic “facts” of her subjects’ lives and works, but she “invented dialogues and offered her young readers access into the inner thoughts of children on the brink of greatness.”\(^51\) Several years after Unsung Heroes appeared, Haynes’s M.A. thesis, “Negroes in Domestic Service in the United States,” was published in The Journal of Negro History.\(^52\)

In the 1920s and 1930s, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis (b.1855), founder and long-time president of the Chicago Phyllis Wheatley Woman’s Club, Chair of the History Committee for the NACW, and key figure in the creation of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, published two illuminating historical narratives detailing the lives and works of black clubwomen, The Story of The Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (1922) and Lifting As They Climb (1933). Davis’s 1922 study chronicles the origins and evolution of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and described the organization’s contemporary achievements and leadership. Like Susie King Taylor, Davis believed that black history could help socialize black youth who “oftimes do not appreciate the fullness of organized effort.” Davis offered her study as an historical blueprint for social activism for the younger generation. “My greatest desire in presenting this volume,” Davis declared, “is that those younger women among our ranks will find in it, information that will give them a greater appreciation of the work and usefulness of the ‘Pioneers’ and that through this greater appreciation, they will be inspired to ‘Carry On.’”\(^53\) Davis’s larger study, Lifting As They Climb, constitutes the first major effort at chronicling the history and contributions of the NACW.

As the “official history” of the NACW, Lifting As They Climb recounts the history of the black women’s club movement from 1895 until 1933. Davis’s meticulous monograph still serves as an essential repository of primary sources. It served as inspiration for her black female readership. Davis’s monograph is more than four hundred pages long with more than twenty pages of photographs of black clubwomen from all over the country. Covering more than three decades of history, activities, and leadership, the book provides detailed records
BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

of annual NACW conferences, summaries of black women's club activism by region, and hundreds of brief biographical sketches of clubwomen, many of whose contributions have not yet been explored by modern historians.54

During the New Negro literary renaissance and several years after Davis's first study appeared, self-taught historian and journalist Drusilla Dunjee Houston (1876–1941) became the first black woman to examine ancient African history. Drawing from the various books from her father's personal library, Houston published Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire in 1926. While it is hard to pinpoint what sparked Houston to dedicate her life to chronicling ancient African history, W. Paul Coates has suggested that the race pride embraced by her family and her reading of Du Bois's The Negro played key roles in this regard. Houston's study represents a precursor to the Afrocentric tradition which has flourished in the post–Black Power era.55 Labeling African Americans "the modern Cushites," she wanted her black readership to claim Africa's ancient achievements, especially those of Ethiopia, as a source of cultural pride.56

Houston realized that the denial and falsification of African and African American history bolstered the oppression of African peoples throughout the diaspora, and argued that "the hatred of the races springs out of misunderstanding." With a sense of self-proclaimed authority and authenticity, Houston claimed that her facts were "convincing and absolute." She envisioned her scholarship as being an important platform for social reform. Like Marcus Garvey, Houston declared: "Lift your heads, discouraged and downtrodden Ethiopians. Listen to this marvelous story told of your ancestors, who wrought mightily for mankind and built the foundations of civilization sound and square in the days of old." Equally significant, Houston transcended the limitations of a philosophy of blind race pride, demanding that her readers draw inspiration to achieve "a greater consecration to the high idealism that made the masteries of olden days."57

PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS, 1925–1955

Professionally trained black women historians coexisted with their lay women counterparts, but emerged later. On 23 March 1925, roughly thirty years after W. E. B. Du Bois became the first African American historian to receive a Ph.D., Anna Julia Cooper, feminist pioneer, educator, and social activist became the fourth black woman to receive a Ph.D. and the first to receive a Ph.D. in the field of history and romance languages. She earned her doctorate from the prestigious University of Paris, the Sorbonne. Her dissertation, written in French, was entitled "L'Attitude de la France dans la question de l'Esclavage entre 1789 et 1848" ("The Attitude of France on the Question of Slavery between 1789 and 1848"). Cooper conducted meticulous research at the Library of Congress, various French archives, and the Bibliotheque Militaire, while immersing herself in the relevant secondary source materials. She was questioned during the defense of her dissertation by leading French historians, including M. Sagnac, M. Cestre, and M. C. Bougle.58

Cooper's achievements were remarkable on many levels. Author of the first major black feminist manifesto A Voice from the South (1892), Cooper did not conform to the "cult of true womanhood," the prevalent ideology that a woman's place was in the domestic sphere. She directly challenged the leading male spokespersons of the Progressive era for their sexism,
declaring "only the BLACK WOMAN can say when and where I enter ... then and there the whole Negro race enters with me." Cooper maintained this stance throughout her life, was an outspoken advocate for the higher education of women, and embraced the NACW's "Lifting as We Climb" motto. She earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees in mathematics, and as a doctoral student she studied literature, history, languages (French, Latin, and Greek), and phonetics. She was indeed multidisciplinary in her intellectual approach, combining her knowledge and expertise in history with other fields of intellectual inquiry to forge an original worldview. Remarkably, she earned her doctorate while serving as guardian to five grandnieces and grandnephews.

Cooper's dissertation went largely unnoticed in French and U.S academic circles. Yet she translated it into English and used it when she taught adult education at Frelinghuysen University in the 1930s. Frances Richardson Keller has suggested that perhaps Cooper "hoped that her study would be an example of scholarly achievement, a case-in-point for doubting male examiners, a model for other women scholars." Cooper's dissertation was a direct challenge to France's slaveholding past and that of the western world at a time when African peoples still suffered greatly from this tradition. Laying scholarly orthodoxies to the side, she introduced her study with unwavering indictments of slavery on moral terms. "In the European colonies of America," Cooper surmised, "black slavery was an institution founded solely on the abuse of power. In all aspects created by a barbarous and shortsighted politics, and maintained by violence, we shall see that it could be abolished by a stroke, a simple legislative measure." Ahead of her time and foreshadowing the work of historian Walter Rodney, Cooper also highlighted the devastating impact of the slave trade on Africa, estimating that for every slave imported, four lost their lives. Her fundamental argument was that slavery had a profound impact on debates among the French during the French Revolution and that the French revolutionaries in part failed because of their reluctance to recognize how slavery went contrary to their ideals. The tone of Cooper's study is polemical at times, but she understood and employed the standard historical methods of the period.

Following Cooper, a distinguishable cadre of professionally trained black women historians emerged. While no black woman appears to have earned a Ph.D. in history in the decade of the Great Depression, the 1940s was a watershed era for professional black women historians. In this decade alone at least six African American women earned Ph.D.s in history. Though at times politically and ideologically diverse, these scholars shared some important traits. Born in the early 20th century, they received their training from some of the most prestigious institutions in the country, often becoming the first black woman to earn a doctorate at their respective institution. They often used The Journal of Negro History and The Journal of Negro Education as outlets for their scholarship. Like their contemporaries John Hope Franklin and Benjamin Quarles, these women tended to write very well documented histories, a strategy dictated by their times. Not surprisingly, none focused on black women's history. These women often served as mentors for younger black female scholars and interpreted their roles as teachers very seriously, often developing new pedagogical strategies and approaches. As black female scholars, they developed mechanisms to cope with the sexism and racism prevalent in American society.

In 1940 Marion Thompson Wright became the first black woman in the U.S. to earn a Ph.D. in history. Her dissertation, The Education of Negroes in New Jersey, was published
BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

in 1941 by the Columbia University, Teachers College Series. After earning her doctorate, she returned to Howard University to teach, setting high standards for her students while influencing younger black women to at least consider the historical profession as a career. In the mid-1940s she also created a student counseling service at Howard. Wright was active in the university counseling services throughout the 1950s. She was known for her willingness to mentor and guide students. "Students often came to her Washington apartment with their work to ask for her criticism and help. She insisted on correctness of detail at the same time that she nurtured and supported them. She was unstinting in the number of hours she would give to her students." While at Howard, Wright published articles on African Americans in New Jersey in The Journal of Negro History, The Journal of Negro Education (for which she served as the book review editor), and The Journal of Educational Sociology.

Wright's The Education of Negroes in New Jersey was the first book to examine the "social and educational history of Negroes in New Jersey." She examined African Americans in New Jersey in five major time periods from the late 17th century through about 1881. Wright's study is straight-forward, balanced, and free from passion until the concluding chapters. In her closing chapter "Implications for Education," Wright drew the connections between the history of black education in New Jersey and the contemporary concerns. "The history of education in New Jersey has... revealed that unequal opportunities have been the usual accompaniment of segregated schools," Wright asserted. "Recent investigations show how that at the present time it is still a matter of inferior facilities, limited opportunities..., and few openings in the field for teacher training and placement." At the same time, Wright commended New Jersey's white legislators for never passing laws that required segregation in public education. Wright held the educator ultimately responsible for helping solve the educational problems facing African Americans in New Jersey. She called upon educators to study history and help alleviate racial discrimination—a practice which she believed harmed both African Americans and whites. She also denounced state officials for stigmatizing black students. Wright's critiques were perhaps more effective because she couched them in a discourse which seemingly praised positive efforts for reform. Wright concluded her study with a plea to white "educators of New Jersey and America" to "assume roles of leadership in telic or purposive planning instead of allowing themselves merely to reflect the sentiments, ideas, and practices of the social groups of which they are members." Woodson and members of the ASNLH were especially impressed with Wright's scholarship, and in 1943 "the first prize of One Hundred Dollars for the best article" published in the Journal of Negro History was awarded to Wright for "New Jersey Laws and the Negro."

Wright's scholarship revealed her commitment to social activism. Her research helped expose the negative impact of discrimination on American society. In 1947 the state officials in New Jersey announced that they would address some of the issues raised by Wright's research. Several years later, in part influenced by Wright's research, New Jersey passed a new constitution, "the first in the country to forbid segregation in both public schools and state militia." During the 1950s she was a researcher for the NAACP, amassing evidence for the Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas case. Wright was a social activist on other fronts as well, holding membership in numerous civil rights and professional organizations.
During her career as a professor at Howard University from 1941 until her untimely death in 1962, Wright faced significant gender discrimination. When she arrived at Howard, Wright was "one of only two female assistant professors." Margaret Smith Crocco has argued that sexism was common at Howard during Wright's undergraduate years. Several scholars have pointed out that Wright believed that her work was not adequately recognized by Howard's administration because she was a woman. Her assessment appears to have been accurate. "The affirmation of her accomplishments was muted by the sexism of Howard University and the racism of the larger society." Wright was convinced "that black women's contributions to the cause of 'racial uplift' were widely underestimated within the black community." She was not outspoken about this deeply rooted intraracial problem, yet she did discuss black women's dilemmas in higher education in a 1944 article in *The Journal of Negro Education* entitled "Negro Advancement Organizations."72

In 1941 the same year that Wright's opus was published, Lulu M. Johnson earned a doctorate in history from Iowa State University. Her dissertation was entitled "The Problem of Slavery in the Old Northwest, 1787-1858." This Rockefeller Foundation fellow published a manual entitled *The Negro in American Life* and taught at West Virginia State College.73 In the same year that Johnson received her degree, Merze Tate became the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. in government and international relations from Harvard University. Though not formally trained as an historian, Tate embraced an interdisciplinary approach. At Howard University where she remained from 1942 until 1977, she taught courses in history and published several historical monographs, such as *The Disarmament Illusion* (1942) and *The United States Armaments* (1948). "A significant influence among undergraduate and graduate students, Tate saw the economic and social aspects of society as central to understanding history," Rosalyn Terborg-Penn recounted. "A mentor through the years, she taught outstanding African American students who themselves have made contributions to public secondary education, higher education, and the history profession."74 In 1943 Susie Owen Lee received a Ph.D. in history from New York University. She completed a dissertation entitled "The Union League of America: Political Activity in Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Virginia, 1865-1870."75

Three years later in 1946, Elsie Lewis earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago. She completed her dissertation on the secession movement in Arkansas. In 1955, Lewis published a significant article, "The Political Mind of the Negro, 1865–1900," making her probably the second African American to contribute an article to *The Journal of Southern History (JSH)*.76 In this essay, the first article completed by an African American woman for the *JSH* and the first *JSH* article by an African American to focus on African American subject matter, Lewis analyzed black political thought from emancipation through the nadir.

Based upon a close and balanced reading of black convention proceedings, black newspapers, and a few speeches by African American leaders, she stressed that post-emancipation era black male political activists embraced the patriotic rhetoric found in the Declaration of Independence, fought tirelessly for "full citizenship rights and privileges," and drew upon "ethical teachings to bolster their arguments," while maintaining a commitment to their fundamental beliefs in natural rights, equal rights under the law of egalitarianism.77 Lewis debunked the widely held myth of universal black support for the
BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS

Republican party before the 1930s and acknowledged the disagreements among African Americans. She clearly drew inspiration from her subject matter, asserting in her opening paragraph that "as a group, they represented the highest type of professional and intellectual achievement of the Negro in America." Yet like her contemporaries Benjamin Quarles and John Hope Franklin, she was committed to rigorous historical scholarship. Lewis was one of the African Americans active early within the Southern Historical Association. She was also a member of the ASNLH, the American Historical Association, and the Organization of American Historians.

Helen G. Edmonds received her Ph.D. in history in 1946 from Ohio State University. In 1951, she published her dissertation, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894–1901*, a detailed examination of African Americans' role in politics in North Carolina during the pivotal 1890s. She focused on "the fusion between Populists and Republicans from 1894 to 1898 that overthrew Democratic rule and inaugurated a significant, if short-lived, experiment in inter-racial democracy." Her study, however, deals with both black political activism and the general political climate in North Carolina for almost a century. *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina* was reviewed in many journals and was well received. Reviewers, many of whom were well respected historians of the time, welcomed her cogent analyses, thoroughness, and meticulous examination of the available sources. One reviewer noted that "no fair-minded students of the story of the period of Fusion politics can afford to ignore this book." Rayford W. Logan praised Edmonds's "absorbing narrative" and called upon his colleague to "complete her analysis by a history of the Negroes in North Carolina politics since 1901."

Decades after her 1951 opus, she published a study on blacks in the government, *Black Faces in High Places* (1971). Edmonds was among the few black historians born during the Progressive era who wrote a monograph focusing on African American history on the eve of the Civil Rights Movement. Edmonds was also an important presence at North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina (NCCU), where she worked from 1941 until she retired in 1977. She held a host of positions at NCCU, serving at one point as the Chair of the Department of History. A steady supporter of the National Republican Party, she served in the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the National Advisory Council of the Peace Corps, and even as a U.S. delegate to the United Nations. In this instance, she preceded Mary Frances Berry who held U.S. governmental positions from the 1970s through the 1990s. The John Hope Franklin Research Collection of African and African American Documentation at Duke University house the Helen G. Edmonds Papers, 1951–1976, containing 4,000 items.

Margaret Nelson Rowley closed out the 1940s decade for professionally trained Black female historians, earning a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University. Rowley, who graduated summa cum laude from Hunter College in New York, encountered sexism as a Ph.D. candidate. According to her son, Dean Rowley, a Columbia professor told his mother that she was basically wasting her time pursuing a doctorate in history "because, chances were, she'd just get married and never make use of her degree or advanced education." Discrediting her foes, Rowley devoted her career to teaching history and mentoring young African American scholars. She died on 4 December 2003, having spent most of her career as a historian based in Atlanta. Rowley introduced African American Studies at Morris Brown College, chaired its history department, and served as one of its academic deans.
During the Civil Rights Movement, formally trained black women historians who came of age in the 1940s continued to be active in the profession, especially Wright, Lewis, and Edmonds. Yet like the 1930s, the 1950s appears to have been a challenging decade for professionally trained black women historians. Among the few black women to earn doctorates in history during the 1950s was Lorraine A. Williams (1923–1996). Focusing on American intellectual history, Williams received her doctorate from American University in 1955. The history of black women historians from the late 19th century until the emergence of the modern Civil Rights Movement is complex and vast. It is a history which constitutes an illuminating record of intellectual struggle, self-definition, and empowerment. Maneuvering around the different barriers before them, black women intellectuals declared themselves historians with and without formal scholarly training. In publishing historical studies for the black masses, white and black lay middle-class audiences, and for their colleagues in academia during the Jim Crow era, African American women created distinguishable and viable niches for themselves among the chroniclers of America’s past. They challenged the gender conventions of their times and entered the largely male-dominated public sphere of academic discourse. These pioneering historians’ scholarship held its ground and laid the foundations for many future historical endeavors.

In the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, the numbers of black women historians, professionally trained especially, increased; black women historians created vital organizational infrastructures such as the Association of Black Women Historians; black women’s history became a popular and advanced sub-field of U.S. history; and a handful of black women historians rose to significant positions of power within academia and government. The scholarship, strategies, activism, and visions of pioneering black women historians are essential components of black history and the black historical enterprise.

NOTES

The author would like to acknowledge Frances R. Dagbovie, Darlene Clark Hine, and the outside reviewers for the JAAH for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.


BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS


4In 1891, Anna J. Cooper noted in The Southland that only twenty-nine black women earned B.A. degrees, see Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women," in Black Women in Higher Education: An Anthology of Essays, Studies, and Documents, ed. Elizabeth L. Ihle (New York, 1992), 58. In the 1920s, the first four black women earned Ph.D.'s. In addition to Cooper, the fourth Black woman to earn a Ph.D., this pioneering group included Georgiana R. Simpson, Eva B. Dykes, and Sadie T. M. Alexander. During the first half of the twentieth-century, the presence of black women doctorates in all fields combined was very limited. According to Harry Washington Greene's research, forty-six to forty-eight black women received Ph.D.s by 1943. The vast majority of these women were engaged in education in some manner. See Harry Washington Greene, Holders of Doctorates Among American Negroes: An Educational and Social Study of Negroes Who Have Earned Doctoral Degrees in Course, 1876-1943 (Boston, MA, 1946), 22-29.


6Black women historians could be further broken down. A fourth group of black women historians which is not featured in this essay, yet is important, includes accomplished and professionally trained scholars who, though not formally trained as historians, published historical monographs and/or engaged in rigorous historical research. The two main scholars of this group, Dorothy Porter Wesley and the multitalented Shirley Graham Du Bois, applied their various scholarly skills to producing influential historical scholarship and promoting black history at other levels. During the era of segregation, Porter Wesley published several important bibliographical studies on African American history, collected valuable primary sources, and helped countless researchers. Simply put, her work was as important as that of Arthur Schomburg. Graham Du Bois was prolific. From 1944 until 1955,

13Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1992), 5 [italics added].

14Ibid., 19.


17This represents only a handful of the total number of black women "historians without portfolio" during the era of segregation. In an extended version of this study, the author plans to include many more scholars in this tradition. This article does not address the many black women "historians without portfolio" within the ASNLH during Woodson's years. This has already been extensively treated, see Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Black Women, Carter G. Woodson, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915–1950," *The Journal of African American History* 88 (Winter 2003): 21–41.

18There were other women besides Merze Tate to receive doctorates during the 1930s and 1940s whose dissertations dealt with historical subject matter. This larger group included scholars like Marie Carpenter, Jean Hamilton Walls, Nancy Wooldridge, Hilda Lawson, and Irene Caldwell Malvan Hypps.


28Ibid., 14–15.

BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS


31 According to Martha H. Patterson, of a total circulation of 15,000–16,000 per month, about 5,000 issues of the Colored American Magazine were purchased by whites. See Patterson, "Kin' o' Rough Justice," 458.


33 Ibid., 26.

34 Ibid., 48–49.


38 Ibid., 119–120.

39 See Laura Wilkes, The Story of Frederick Douglass, with Quotations (Washington, DC, 1899).

40 Laura Wilkes to Carter G. Woodson, 22 July 1921, quoted as it appears in Des Jardins, Women and the Historical Enterprise in America, 150.

41 Laura E. Wilkes, Missing Pages in American History, Revealing the Services of Negroes in the Early Wars in the United States of America, 1641–1815 (Washington, DC, 1919), "Foreword." The bibliography is several pages long and, beyond various state archives and state histories, includes Nell's scholarship, Bancroft's History of the United States, Wilson's Camp Fires of Afro-Americans, and several state studies on slavery. Wilkes drew from a wide range of sources and provided her reader with a helpful index.

42 Ibid.


45 Pendleton, A Narrative of the Negro, 46, 59, 90, 93.

46 Jessie Fauset, "What to Read," The Crisis, August 1912, 183.


48 Delilah L. Beasley, The Negro Trail Blazers of California (Los Angeles, CA, 1919), "Foreword."

49 Ibid., 121–122.


53 Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (New York, 1997), "Foreword."

54 Wanda Hendricks has suggested that much of what we currently know about the efforts of black club women is "due to the commitment" of Davis. See Wanda Hendricks, "Davis, Elizabeth Lindsay," in Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia: Volume I, A–L, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Bloomington, IN, 1993), 306.
Since the 1980s there have been many studies published on Afrocentrism. Although he did not pioneer the use of the term Afrocentrism, Molefi Kete Asante is, in many circles, considered the leading proponent. For his definitions of Afrocentrism, see, for example, Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia, PA, 1987); *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Buffalo, NY, 1980); *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton, NJ, 1990).

W. Paul Coates, "Drusilla Dunjee Houston: An Introductory Note About the Author and Her Work," in Drusilla Dunjee Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire, Book I* (Baltimore, MD, 1985), i-v; Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire, 8, 9.

Ibid., 11, 12.


To understand the connections between Rodney and Cooper, see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC, 1981).


Ibid., 209.

Ibid., 211.


While at Howard, Wright was an active member of the Urban League, the NAACP, Bethune's National Council of Negro Women, Delta Sigma Theta sorority, the ASNLH, the National Association of College Women, the NEA, and the American Teachers Association. See, Margaret Smith Crocco, Petra Munro, and Kathleen Weiler, *Pedagogies of Resistance: Women Educator Activists, 1880–1960* (New York, 1999), 73.

Crocco has suggested that Wright's death, declared a suicide by many, was in part the result of her failure to gain recognition and respect at Howard. Unlike some of her other female contemporaries and colleagues, Wright may not have had the support network necessary to help her overcome the prevalent gender discrimination within pre-civil rights era African American community and U.S. society in general.


Greene, *Holders of Doctorates among American Negroes*, 64.


Ibid., 189.

For a brief discussion of Lewis, see Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 128–130, 133, 151, 152, 154, 157, 174, 175, 187, 223.

BLACK WOMEN HISTORIANS


83 See Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 130–131. Meier and Rudwick note that Rowley wanted to do a study of the NAACP for her dissertation, but was “deflected by several considerations.”


85 For some information on Williams, see "In Memoriam and Tribute: Dr. Lorraine A. Williams, 1923–1996," *JNH* 82 (Winter 1997): 182, 183, 198.