

HITCHING A WAGON TO A STAR: AN ORAL HISTORY STUDY EXPLORING AFRICAN
AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION IN CINCINNATI, OHIO, 1930-1949

by

LISA RENEE MERRIWEATHER HUNN

(Under the Direction of Talmadge C. Guy)

ABSTRACT

African Americans have a long and varied history in Cincinnati, Ohio and in adult education. These histories were subjugated for the most part to the historical narratives of the dominant European American population especially within adult education. Some writers of history from within and outside of the field of education explicated the history of African American adult education and these contributions enriched our knowledge of the various institutions, leaders, programs, and philosophies of African American adult education. Few studies included the learners' voices in the historical narratives. By employing an Africentric theoretical framework and using oral history, this study created a historical narrative that was inclusive of the adult learners' voices and provided a local history of African American adult education in Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s.

This oral history study named racism as a pivotal factor in the delivery, structure and curricular emphasis of adult education at both the national and local levels. It detailed some of the learning opportunities that were available to African American adults in Cincinnati and outlined three themes with respect to those opportunities. First, most planned organizational learning opportunities under European American control were circumscribed by a system of racism that resulted in educational opportunities being separate, inferior, and disempowering for

African American adults. Second, educational and occupational opportunities and their subsequent outcomes existed in a state of paradoxical tension. That is, those opportunities were designed to maintain a racial caste system that held African Americans in subservience. By design those opportunities were not structured to have the enormous benefit that they did on the lives of African American adults. Finally, the learning experiences of African American adults can be understood as part of a broader resistance effort to racism in Cincinnati. This study showed that African Americans displayed resistance to that racism by developing culturally relevant programs, by maintaining strong social networks, and by exhibiting self-determination. They turned “lemons into lemonade” thus undermining the effects of Jim Crow in adult education and in the society at large.

INDEX WORDS: African American Adult Education History, African American Adult Learners, Adult Education, African American, Oral History, Africentric, Cincinnati, Racism, Jim Crow, Resistance

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my children, Reggie, Gloria and Jahia. You mean the world to me and inspired me to pursue my dreams even when life's circumstances made the pursuit challenging and frustrating. You were patient, understanding, supportive and encouraging throughout each stage of this process. Thank you for allowing me to be a student in addition to being your mom. I learned so many things by watching you grow up and hope that this work will encourage you to never give up, always try your best, and always know that you have a history worth remembering.

With love forever and always,

Your Mom

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Grandma Lu Bell Coleman: You lived such an incredible life, always so stylish, and poised. You were revered by all that knew you but no one looked up to you the way that I did and still do. You were the one who helped me with my homework. You finished the math problem in your head before I had a chance to write it out on paper. You were the one that I confided my deepest and truest feelings to. You always knew just what to say. When I left for college, no one could have been more proud of me than you. I remember feeling so overwhelmed

by the prospect of being away at college but you made me believe in myself. I recall that I was given this list two miles long of things that I needed for college. I still smile as I think about your gift to me (a pail decorated on the outside with flowers to carry my toiletries back and forth to the communal showers in the dorm). You were my flower and I wish that you were still here to share this moment in time with me. I love you.

Granddaddy Jesse Merriweather: I love you so much. I can't imagine who I would have become if God had not allowed your quiet presence to fill the space in my life that it did as I grew into adulthood. I didn't recognize your genius as a man of God until it was much too late. I wish that you were still here so that I could ask you questions and soak up your knowledge. The love you shared with me and had for my children makes me smile when the going gets tough.

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James Merriweather (my nephew): I cry tears of pride whenever I think about how at the tender age of three you confronted adversity. You smiled and laughed and knocked the sting out of the death. I didn't get to know you like I would have liked to but the short time that I had with you taught me a wonderful lesson about how to live life: Just smile and laugh. I know you are in heaven and are dazzling the angels with your gorgeous smile. Love you James. You'll always have a special place in everyone's heart.

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1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. 3 Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. 4 One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord

all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. 5 For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. 6 And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. 7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. 8 When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. 9 Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation. 10 When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up. 11 Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. 12 Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty. 13 I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. 14 Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

Many thanks to all and may God richly bless you!

With Sincere Appreciation,

Lisa Renee Merriweather Hunn

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of the body, spirit, and mind has been an objective of African Americans since colonial times. As slaves, some ran away from their lives of bondage; others took their own lives and those of their children to escape to freedom. Some African Americans in the 1800s hitched a wagon and traveled toward the “black West, particularly Ohio.”¹ African Americans wanted justice, equal rights and to be treated like human beings. African Americans packed their wagons full of everything they thought they would need in their life in the new land. Food, clothing, and other supplies were needed to satisfy their physical needs but civil rights, education and self-determination were needed to meet their non-material needs. As they hitched their wagons, I am sure that they eagerly looked forward to leaving behind racism, discrimination, and personal devaluation, which were part and parcel to their past and looked forward to living out their dreams of equality and their aspirations for better opportunities. Katz wrote,

It has been one of our enduring myths that the western lands offered people – all people — an escape from inhibiting social customs and mores of the East, that the frontier environment was a stage upon which each performer would be judged by his performance, not his ancestry, sex, color, or wealth.... But the black person who came west, whether slave, slave runaway or free man, found neither social mobility, geographical mobility, social acceptance, nor an absence of inhibiting customs and laws.²

¹ Katz, *The Black West*, 44. In *The Black West*, Katz uses the terminology of the “The West” to apply to northern states like Ohio in addition to states like Kansas and Texas.

² Ibid., 45.

African Americans did not anticipate that racism, discrimination, and personal devaluation awaited them in their new homes but as Katz observed “to expect so fundamental an American ideology to remain behind when families collected their belongings and headed west, is to expect too much.”³ Their wagons inevitably bore scars that represented all that they desired to leave behind. Those wagons were symbolic of the struggle that they faced while attempting to forge their identity in a new land as well as the vehicles that would be used to do so. Education, agitation, protest, social networks and other forms of resistance were the vehicles employed by African Americans to achieve social justice, equal opportunity, and fair play. However, much more would be needed to dispel the notion of African American inferiority and the perception of European American superiority held by most European Americans. Much more would be needed to create a society that lived up to its creed of liberty and justice for all. When one looks to the sky, the stars sometimes shine so brightly that they seem close enough to touch, but it would be impossible to touch the stars in this manner. From where African Americans stood the aims of liberty and justice shone just as brightly and were just as far off and their efforts represented that which was implausible, hitching a wagon to a star.

Nonetheless African Americans used means such as protest, riots, education and social networks which were at their disposal to reach those stars. In Cincinnati in particular, adult education was among the supplies in their wagons. “Hitch your wagon to a star”⁴ was the promotional slogan adopted by the Adult Education Council of Metropolitan Cincinnati in 1947, which facilitated adult education in Cincinnati. Its goal was “to bridge the gap between statements of educational objectives and the realization of the objectives.”⁵ This gap was much

³ Ibid., 307.

⁴ Adult Education Council Bulletin, May 1947, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 1, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵ Ibid.

more pronounced for African Americans in Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1930s and 1940s than for European Americans because of Jim Crow racism,⁶ as were gaps between occupational and social objectives and the realization of those objectives. Since colonial times, African Americans possessed an unwavering faith in education to expand their horizons, to increase their opportunities, and to secure their inalienable rights granted in the Constitution. Three themes surfaced relative to African Americans pursuit of adult education in Cincinnati, Ohio. First, most planned organizational learning opportunities under European American control were circumscribed by a system of racism that resulted in educational opportunities being separate, inferior, and disempowering for African American adults. Second, educational and occupational opportunities and their subsequent outcomes existed in a state of paradoxical tension. That is, those opportunities were designed to maintain a racial caste system that held African Americans in subservience. By design those opportunities were not structured to have the enormous benefit that they did on the lives of African American adults. Finally, the learning experiences of African American adults can be understood as part of the broader resistance to racism in Cincinnati and in adult education. African Americans displayed resistance to that racism by developing culturally relevant programs, by maintaining strong social networks, and by exhibiting self-determination.

Racism in Society and Education

Racism was deeply entrenched in the functioning of the society and represented a key issue that African Americans had to contend with during the 1930s and 1940s. It was this deep-seated prejudice that led W.E.B. Du Bois to declare that the “problem of the twentieth century is

⁶ Chafe, Gavins and Korstad , *Remembering Jim Crow*; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, xiv; Packard, *American Nightmare*.

the problem of the color-line.”⁷ African Americans were disfranchised, mistreated, and viewed with disdain by the Eurocentric dominant culture. The 1930s and 1940s were characterized by a system of de jure and de facto segregation and racist practices called “Jim Crow,”⁸ which, according to Litwack, denoted “the subordination and separation of black people ... much of it codified, much of it still enforced by custom and habit.”⁹ De jure segregation was a matter of law and was prevalent throughout the South. For instance, it was illegal for African Americans to ride in the same compartments on public conveyances or to drink from the same water fountain as European Americans. On the other hand, de facto segregation was a matter of custom and social practice. These were the unwritten rules that everyone knew and followed. Elders¹⁰ in this study talked about knowing their place and staying in it. De facto segregation abounded in northern cities like Cincinnati as well as southern cities. In this study I use the term “Jim Crow” to refer in particular to the de facto segregation and racism that occurred in the Cincinnati. Though the disfranchisement of African Americans was more severe under the system of Jim Crow in the South, I argue that Jim Crow is an apt term to use to describe the disfranchisement of African Americans’ in Cincinnati. Packard said, at its core, “Jim Crow was a structure of exclusion and discrimination devised by white Americans to be employed principally against black Americans.... Its central purpose was to maintain a second-class social and economic status for blacks while upholding a first-class social and economic status for whites. Jim Crow discrimination existed in every state in the nation.”¹¹

⁷ Du Bois, *Souls*, 45.

⁸ Chafe, Gavins and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, xiv; Packard, *American Nightmare*. The time period of Jim Crow extends from the late 1800s until the mid -1960s when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. This study covers only two decades, the 1930s and 1940s, within the Jim Crow era.

⁹ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, xiv-xv.

¹⁰ The term “elder” refers to the African American women and men who were interviewed in this oral history study because it is consistent with the Africentric philosophy that frames this study. A fuller description of this term is found in Appendix A.

¹¹ Packard, *American Nightmare*, viii.

American society employed this system of segregation to disfranchise its African American citizens. Consequently, the Jim Crow era was notable because it represented the time in the history of African Americans, outside of enslavement, when they were the most disfranchised. African Americans were regulated by unfair rules much like the slave codes in the time of slavery and the Black Codes in the Reconstruction Period.¹² These laws and rules were designed to control the African American population by limiting their civil, political, and social rights.¹³ Drimmer astutely noted that by the dawn of the twentieth century, the descendents of African slaves lived “in almost total segregation and disenfranchisement with an increase in violence, lynching, and farm peonage.”¹⁴

The Jim Crow era marked the height of racial brutality and discrimination and signaled the consignment of African Americans to a place of social inferiority. Litwack wrote, “America was founded on white supremacy and the notion of black inferiority and black unfreedom.”¹⁵ African Americans were not viewed as equal to European Americans in any area of life. This phenomenon was not limited to the South. Wilson said, “The majority of people in the North also looked upon Negroes as inferior and denied them practical equality.”¹⁶ European Americans, as a whole, held positions of political and social dominance and power in American society. Anna Julia Cooper, an African American scholar during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, argued for inherent value in African Americans.¹⁷ She recognized the dual function that the subjugation of African Americans served and realized that the real issue was not about the qualities of African American people, whether positive or negative, but that the issue

¹² Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Whiteaker, *Adult Education*; Wilson, *The Black Codes*.

¹³ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*; Chafe, Gavins and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*.

¹⁴ Drimmer, *Issues in Black History*, 135.

¹⁵ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, xvi.

¹⁶ Wilson, *The Black Codes*, 141.

¹⁷ Cooper, *What are we worth?*

centered on the power difference between the African Americans and the European Americans. The latter possessed the power to define what was positive and what was negative, what was valued and what was not valued. The alleged inferiority of the African American was simply a social construction based on the norms and privileges of those who had power and was designed to help maintain the racial status quo.¹⁸

This system of cultural dominance was supported in part by the prevailing laws of the United States. Berry wrote, “Law and the Constitution in the United States have been a reflection of the will of the white majority that white people have, and shall keep, superior economic, political, social, and military power while black people shall be the permanent mudsills of American society.”¹⁹ In fact, the entire social and political system of the United States reflected this assumed inferiority and was designed to maintain that hierarchy. Jim Crow symbolized the ultimate “struggle of one individual [race] to define himself [itself] and maintain his [its] humanity, integrity, and self - respect.”²⁰ The Ku Klux Klan is just one manifestation of the European Americans’ struggle to create and maintain the illusion of their superiority. Fear and intimidation ran rampant among African Americans in states like Indiana and Ohio where the Ku Klux Klan was active and aggressive.²¹ The Klan harassed African American citizens in Cincinnati in an effort to control them and inhibit them from competing with European Americans for employment and social status.²² The members of the Klan believed that they were superior in every way to African Americans and used strong arm tactics to maintain the racial status quo.

¹⁸ Berry, *Black Resistance*, 240; Chafe, Gavins and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*.

¹⁹ Berry, *Black Resistance*, 240.

²⁰ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, xii.

²¹ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Peoples*, 109.

²² *Ibid.*, 109.

Issues of power and cultural dominance were intricately involved in racial disfranchisement and discrimination. “Once the Negro was disfranchised, everything else necessary for white supremacy could be done.”²³ Educational systems were not immune to this prejudice and were devices used in the subjugation of African Americans. Mohraz in her book, *The Separate Problem*, wrote, “Discrimination accompanied the hostility and confronted the Negro in all aspects of his life, forcing him into the bottom layer of urban society. His inferior position in the social, economic, and political sectors was also reflected in the educational sphere.”²⁴ Those who held the most political power, European Americans, manipulated education in such a way that it served their best interests and controlled the Black populace. Spivey noted, “The ideal, however, was white rule, and the method was a dissemination of educational ideas that were conducive to perpetual slavery.”²⁵ European Americans formed the dominant class in America’s social and political hierarchy and employed a discriminatory system in education to preserve and validate their own political power. Woodson illustrated this phenomenon.

The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.²⁶

Educational opportunities instituted by the dominant society for African American

²³ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 266.

²⁴ Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 4.

²⁵ Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, 129.

²⁶ Woodson, *Miseducation*, xix.

adults were implemented with the intent of educating African Americans to their proper place. Education was a potential threat to European American's domination. Education of the wrong sort would "unfit [the Negro] for the work which the white man had prescribed, and which he will be forced to perform."²⁷ The education of African Americans during this time was part of a vicious cycle fueled by European American's fears of African American social, political, and economic parity.

These fears also contributed to the evolution of educational strategies that called for educating blacks for only lower level jobs. The predominance of blacks in these low-level jobs in turn became the rationale to developing and maintaining restricted curricula in African American schools. Such curricula, in turn, did not prepare African Americans for higher level jobs. Thus a system was established that did not educate African Americans beyond what was perceived to be their "position."²⁸

If African Americans received an education that empowered them to fight against the oppressive conditions they encountered, then they would be more difficult to control and would be more dissatisfied with their lot in life.²⁹

Educational opportunities constructed by the dominant culture were subsequently handed out based upon their perceived utility for the African American community and their perceived impact on the European American community. Franklin wrote, "In the twentieth century Negroes manifested the same intense interest in education as they did in the period immediately following emancipation....but the triumph of white supremacy meant that Negroes would not share in educational opportunities on any basis that can even remotely approach equality."³⁰

²⁷ Drimmer, *Issues in Black History*, 137.

²⁸ Potts, *The Du Bois – Washington Debate*, 28.

²⁹ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Spivey, *Schooling for a New Slavery*.

³⁰ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 402.

Some of those opportunities were industrial school training, teacher training, and basic literacy training. Bullock addressed the issues of the intersection of race with the purpose of schooling. “The point at which this biracial society began forming a way of life for Negroes, tailoring them into a particular social type, and utilizing the schools to serve the ends of segregation marks the real beginning of Negro education as a traditional American institution.”³¹

Industrial education was recognized by some as an instrument of oppression for African American people³² and is used in this study as an exemplar of how education was used as a means of control. Spivey provided a detailed argument for why industrial education was such an instrument. “It has been documented that sharecropping, debt peonage, and convict lease were means used to resubjugate black labor and that the South sought through jim crow (*sic*), night riders, and lynch law to nullify the civil and political rights guaranteed to blacks under the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments. But another tool was also used against blacks: industrial education.”³³

According to Anderson, industrial schools were detrimental because of the philosophy of accommodation they espoused not because of the skills they taught.³⁴ The industrial schools were known for advocating accommodationists’ strategies in dealing with racism and prejudice. Students at Hampton, Tuskegee, and other industrial schools were taught that seeking political and civil rights should be postponed until African Americans gathered material capital and proved themselves worthy of social equality. This was significant in that many of these students were to become the teachers in many of the schools throughout the South. The power of industrial schooling came in the making of ambassadors who would propagate this social

³¹ Bullock, *History of Negro Education*, 148.

³² Anderson, *Education of Blacks*; Du Bois, *Souls*; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Sherer, *Subordination or Liberation*; Spivey, *Schooling for a New Slavery*.

³³ Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, ix.

philosophy to their future students.³⁵ Those newly trained educators, unknowingly in some cases, attempted to create a docile and subservient African American population. It follows then that industrial education was not a benevolent force that sought to prepare African American people for political and social equality but rather was designed to relegate African Americans to subservience and reinforce the idea that African American people were inferior.³⁶

In spite of this strategic use of education by the dominant society, education had a decidedly different purpose for African Americans. African Americans did not buy into the notion of inequality and inferiority and used their education as a way to assert their self-determination³⁷ and uplift themselves and their community.³⁸ Spivey concluded, “They [African Americans] believed that freedom meant, among other things, self-rule and self-reliance, and they asserted themselves toward those ends.”³⁹ Education became a means through which African Americans defined themselves. It allowed them the opportunity to shed the skin that White America tried to fit them into. This unveiling of their true selves and pushing to be treated with respect and dignity were radical ideas to most of White America.⁴⁰ Higginbotham wrote, “In an era when crude stereotypes of blacks permeated popular culture and when ‘scientific’ racism in the form of Social Darwinism prevailed among professional scholars and thinking people, African Americans’ claims to respectability invariably held subversive implications.”⁴¹

Because of Jim Crow laws and practices, the American dream was not a viable option for most educated or undereducated African Americans. The possibility seemed as remote as

³⁴ Anderson, *Education of Blacks*.

³⁵ Anderson, *Education of Blacks*; Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*.

³⁶ Anderson, *Education of Blacks*; Chafe, Gavins, Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*.

³⁷ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be*; Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*.

³⁸ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be*; Sherer, *Subordination or Liberation*; Shircliffe, *We Got the Best of that World*; Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*.

³⁹ Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*.

⁴⁰ Berry, *Black Resistance*, 119, Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 188.

hitching their wagons to the stars. For them as Drake eloquently put it, “the dream, at any given moment of our history -- the vision of what America ought to be -- is always in tension with reality.”⁴² In the same way, the material world and the symbolic world of African Americans were also in tension with each other. Situations in African Americans’ material realities, on the surface may appear to be adverse and detrimental to them but through their symbolic realities, they are able to put a positive spin on that negative situation. One might say that during this time, African Americans became masters at using the lemons they were handed in life and making lemonade from them.

An essay written by Naomi Ward in 1940 titled *I am a Domestic* describes how difficult the task was of maintaining integrity during Jim Crow and demonstrates how lemons were used to make lemonade. In the essay she talks about how domestics were treated, the low wages that they received and the inferiority that their employers attributed to them. Her employer thought one of the domestics had taken a Box a candy.

We domestics, whatever our background, are supposed to be natural born thieves.

“Lucille! You took my Box of candy!” “No, madame!” with a flash of peasant temper, banging open several bureau drawers, “here is your candy where you yourself put it, madame!” No apology. Why apologize. We needed our jobs, didn’t we?⁴³

At the conclusion of the essay, she describes how she was let go from the position. In spite of the fact that she was now without an income, she said, “I still felt a wild sense of joy. For just a few days I should be free and self respecting.”⁴⁴ Her material reality was adversely affected by the loss of her job but her symbolic reality was positively affected because for a short time she could

⁴¹ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 188.

⁴² Drake, *The American Dream*, 53.

⁴³ Ward, *I am a Domestic*, 329.

⁴⁴ Ward, *I am a Domestic*, 331.

live life without having her integrity and self-esteem attacked. She in effect took a situation that was sour like a lemon and squeezed out something that was sweet like lemonade.

The notion of meritocracy had little validity among populations that were actively discriminated against. Because of their disfranchisement, African Americans were not given equal opportunities vocationally, socially, or politically, even if they possessed the necessary credentials.⁴⁵ Many African Americans were educated as teachers, clerks, and lawyers, but they were denied the opportunity to work in their professions at levels equal to European Americans because of Jim Crow prejudice. Menial jobs with minimal advancement characterized the opportunities available to this population. The authors of *Remembering Jim Crow* pointed out that these jobs were contradictory in that “on the one hand, a job could be a source of pride,on the other hand, the same job often carried with it daily reminders of the humiliating power that whites held over their black employees.”⁴⁶

As a number scholars have observed, education was viewed as necessary and important to the economic and social advancement of the African Americans.⁴⁷ Mohraz wrote, “The effect of limited job options on Negro attitudes toward the value of education cannot be overestimated....While black Americans often despaired about the ability of education to open closed doors to satisfactory employment, many Negroes nevertheless greatly valued the power of education to bring about racial advancement.”⁴⁸ Even though education did not guarantee them economic and professional advancement, African Americans were astute enough to know that lack of education was a guarantee of economic and professional stagnation. As Shaw noted, “Not having the proper education, position, or commitment could certainly keep them [African

⁴⁵ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*; Chafe, Gavins and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*.

⁴⁶ Chafe, Gavins and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*, xxxi.

⁴⁷ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*; Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be*.

⁴⁸ Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 31.

Americans] out of the nationally defined professional class, but meeting those qualifications did not automatically let them in.”⁴⁹

This advancement did not always and necessarily translate into gain of economic or social equality, but it did provide psychological benefits like increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence and benefits for the community. Education was not just an individual endeavor within the African American community even though it was pursued at an individual level. Education was “broadly conceived as a primary means for racial ‘uplift’ and envisioned far-reaching benefits to individuals and to the race as a whole as a result of schooling.”⁵⁰ There was an expectation that as individual members of the community bettered themselves, they would in turn reach back and into their communities to elevate them economically, educationally, and socially.⁵¹ The motto of the Colored Women’s Federated Club, “Lifting as we climb,” expresses that sentiment.⁵² The connection between individual success and community advancement was especially salient for African American women.⁵³

This attitude is expressed in Colin’s concept of selfethnic reliance⁵⁴ in which the community and the individual are intricately connected to each other. Colin noted that it represents the “irrevocable bond between the members of the race and the collective whole.”⁵⁵ That relationship is so strong that the fate of one impacts the fate of the other. Williams observed how African Americans “used their own social institutions to design programs addressed to the specific problems they confronted in the cities.”⁵⁶ Communities shouldered the responsibility for providing for the individuals in the community. “Social responsibility, living not solely for

⁴⁹ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought To Be*, 163.

⁵⁰ Fultz, *Education in the Black Monthly*, 81.

⁵¹ Shaw, *What a Women Ought To Be*.

⁵² Jones, *Quest for Equality*, 144; Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, 102.

⁵³ Eugene, “Lifting As We Climb”; Shaw, *What a Women Ought To Be*.

⁵⁴ Colin, *Marcus Garvey*,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

oneself but for the advancement of the group, was a common way of life during the Jim Crow era.”⁵⁷ Education was equated with community advancement, emancipation, and social action. Shaw noted that “community was also more than a romantic metaphor for racial solidarity.... It was a social institution or arrangement of people who possessed a common understanding of history, mutual interests in the present and shared visions of the future for the group and all its members. But community was based on more than philosophical impulses; it was also rooted in activism-theory balanced with practice.”⁵⁸ Education was one manifestation of activism-theory balanced with practice. An imperative to do something for the betterment of the community came with education and women in particular were obliged to comply.

Education was not only a means of gaining economic prosperity, of redefining on their own terms what it meant to be African American, or a means of uplifting the community, but it also provided the blueprint for combating oppression. African American adult education required commitment to confronting and dismantling racist assumptions. Colin said, “Marcus Garvey saw as his mission the emancipation of his race and was astute enough to know that the race's freedom was dependent upon an understanding of the major means of oppression, which was in his view the mis-education of the race. For Garvey, the psychological and spiritual enslavement of his people was created by a racist society, maintained by its legal and social systems, and protected and perpetuated by the educational system.”⁵⁹ Colin suggests that selfethnic reliance was a feasible and effective way to challenge racial oppression. A closely related concept is self-determination. Self-determination represents the agency of African Americans and as well as the African American community to define and construct on their own terms their own material and

⁵⁶ Williams, *Black Communities*, 137.

⁵⁷ Shaw, *What a Women Ought To Be*, 66.

⁵⁸ Shaw, *What a women Ought to Be*, 66

⁵⁹ Colin, *Marcus Garvey*, 59.

symbolic realities. It involves looking inward (within African American culture, history, and community) to develop conceptions of worth and respect, as opposed to looking out toward society. Self-determination and selfethnic reliance are natural forms of resistance employed by African Americans against Jim Crow racism and African American adults molded their education in such a way that both could take place.

Apart from those types of adult learning opportunities, most of the education for African American adults was purposely designed to sustain a caste system in which they would occupy the lowest social position. The material world of the African Americans, as such, did not benefit as much from education. This system of discrimination and prejudice had a devastating effect on many African American adult educational opportunities because its power lay not just in its ability to affect the laws, customs, and opportunities available in the material world of African Americans, but also in its ability to affect the way African Americans were perceived.

Racism, the Adult Education Movement, and the Impact on the Education of African Americans

As African Americans ventured into the 1900s, American society was transforming itself in meaningful ways.⁶⁰ Adult education was in its formative stages at that time. A small number of adult educators believed that the ideology of the progressive movement should guide adult education.⁶¹ This movement had a modest influence on adult education. Frankel and Dye wrote,

The movement called progressivism flourished in the years between the depression of 1893 and the United States' entry into World War I, as Americans struggled to come to terms with the profound dislocations wrought by massive industrialization, the rise of the corporation and rapid urban growth. A complex, sometimes contradictory amalgam of

⁶⁰ Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement*; Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

⁶¹ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

social criticism, popular protest, political restructuring, economic regulation, social welfare legislation, progressive reform embodied a vast array of responses to the changes taking place in American society at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶²

This heightened sense of awareness about social conditions in the United States resulted in a focus on social change and justice.⁶³ These conditions included poverty, racism, domesticity among women, and social justice. The problem with the Progressive Movement was that it had a tendency to operate from the top down and in doing so had the potential to be paternalistic in nature. In the 1920s, adult education became a more organized branch of education, and the diffusion of knowledge⁶⁴-- not social justice-- was the central goal. According to Guy, the diffusion of knowledge “was seen as a way to make available to the general public the growing store of specialized, technical, and/or scientific knowledge in society.”⁶⁵ That is, it was concerned with the accessibility and spread of knowledge. These goals were based in liberal education ideology.⁶⁶

The Carnegie Corporation was heavily involved in spearheading the adult education movement. The corporation was founded in “1911 for the general purpose of promoting and diffusing knowledge among the people.”⁶⁷ Part of the push for organizing adult education came from the corporation’s “anticipating that leisure time and demand for postschool education for adults would increase”⁶⁸ and the hope that providing such education would empower adults to be able to decide things in their lives.⁶⁹ With the formation of the American Association for Adult

⁶² Frankel and Dye, *Gender, Class, and Reform*, 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Guy, *The AAAE*; Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

⁶⁵ Guy, *The AAAE*, 91.

⁶⁶ Liberal education in this sense does not refer to the liberal arts education found in higher education programs like Fisk University during the 1930s and 1940s.

⁶⁷ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 192.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Education (AAAE), which was developed with funding from Carnegie in 1926, the subject of adult education was propelled into national view.⁷⁰ Consistent with its guiding philosophy of liberal education, AAAE adopted as its charge the role of acting as a “clearinghouse for information for all types of adult education.”⁷¹ Morse Cartwright was selected as the executive director, and he worked in conjunction with Fred Keppel, the president of the Carnegie Corporation. AAAE, through a variety of initiatives, delivered adult education to the American public. It not only considered what type of adult education should be provided, such as - classroom based versus non-classroom - based but it also looked at how to deliver those services and what the topics should be. Some initiatives of AAAE were the *Journal of Adult Education*, “research, experimental projects, demonstrations, and institutional and special-population studies....It brought together educators, civic leaders, and intellectuals, and promoted the use of the term *adult education* to give a name to the scattered impulses for individual self-improvement, community betterment, and the diffusion of knowledge. These efforts led to a recognition of a new level of education that was more than schooling, an education for adults in their life roles.”⁷²

The leadership of AAAE felt that “adult education in a democracy must create informed citizens, promote tolerance and understanding of differences, and maintain social stability,”⁷³ but did not feel there was a need for specific platforms for social justice dealing with issues of race and class. Such leaders in AAAE as Eduard Lindeman and Alain Locke advocated for adult education geared toward social justice,⁷⁴ but as a whole, the AAAE’s focus was on liberal education as opposed to progressive social reconstructionist education. Liberal education was not

⁷⁰ Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement*; Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

⁷¹ Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement*, 195.

⁷² Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 193.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 194.

an activist theory balanced with practice. Education developed from that base in theory could have effectively challenged Jim Crow racism by contesting the presumed correctness of the racial status quo and its concomitant social conditions. But liberal education turned a blind eye to the social conditions and in doing so reinforced Jim Crow racism and its attendant social problems. By promoting liberal education as the guiding philosophy, AAAE in effect promoted racism.

Although Morse Cartwright in 1945 wrote “Negro adult education has always formed an important part of the Association’s program and it continues to do so,”⁷⁵ in reality, this was not the case. Given the focus on liberal education, it is not surprising that issues related to African American adult education within the national organization were sidelined and trivialized. Stubblefield and Keane remarked, “By several actions, the Carnegie Corporation and the AAAE reinforced the segregated and inferior status of African Americans in American society.”⁷⁶ The treatment of African American adult education by AAAE reflected the social times of the nation in which European Americans held positions of authority and African Americans were made subject to that authority. Adult education as a general term implied “Non-African American adult education.” This is evidenced by the manner in which issues related to African American adult education were addressed by the AAAE.

African American adult education was seen as a temporary project, not as an integral part of the broader adult education program. Alain L. Locke, the first African American president of the AAAE, envisioned the embracing by adult education of a “new Negro culture...[which] reflected the democratic ideals of society and focused on the education, culture and economic

⁷⁴ Ibid., 194.

⁷⁵ Cartwright, *The History of Adult Education*, 292.

⁷⁶ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 217.

conditions.”⁷⁷ Locke was a “philosopher, writer, critic, and an educator who...sought to bring the local and universal segments of social and economic racial differences into a harmonious balance.”⁷⁸ He advocated for cultural pluralism⁷⁹ in adult education. He believed that adult education should be culturally relevant and specific. For example he felt that knowing and understanding the history and culture of African Americans, while simultaneously attending to the needs of African American adults that were universal to all adults, like being happy and fulfilled were important. Guy wrote, “Consistent with his progressive adult education philosophy, Locke’s goal was much more subtle. On a human level, African American adult learners had needs and concerns similar to those of European Americans. But because of racism, Negro needs were different in degree which made all the difference in terms of adult education.”⁸⁰ In order to be effective in the African American community, adult education needed to reflect that. Toward that end, Locke was instrumental in advocating and supporting programs of adult education that recognized the particular needs of the African American population while also appealing to its more universal needs.

Under the auspices of the AAAE, programs of adult education were developed for African Americans. AAAE provided support for what were called experiments in African American adult education; the publication of materials for African American adult education which took place in the 1930s; and a series of conferences on African American adult education.⁸¹ The experiments were called the Harlem and Atlanta experiments in Negro education because they were located in those cities.⁸² These experiments started in 1932 and

⁷⁷ Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*, 71.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁹ Guy, *Adult Education and Democratic Values*, 231; Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*, 71.

⁸⁰ Guy, *Adult Education and Democratic Values*, 221.

⁸¹ Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement*; Franklin, *Education for Life*; Guy, *The AAAE*, Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

⁸² Franklin, *Education for Life*; Guy, *The AAAE*; Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*.

1931 respectively. The experiments offered a variety of educational opportunities dealing with both vocational and cultural issues. “In both centers emphasis has been placed on cultural history and economic status of the race....Offerings of this nature have met with sustained response and have been found the most effective motivation for the program as a whole.”⁸³ The experiments were prototypes of the cultural pluralist education supported by Locke. They were deemed to be extremely successful and were favorably received by the African American populace in those two cities. In spite of this, the experiments were terminated in 1934. This was an indicator of AAAE’s commitment to African American adult education. The goal was never to provide long-term adult education to African Americans but rather to determine by experimentation what type of learning activities worked best in African American communities. This information was gathered not for the sake of improving service to these communities; it rather represented the notion of acquiring knowledge for knowledge’s sake, which is a principle in line with a liberal education philosophy. The liberal education philosophy focused on the diffusion of knowledge not application of knowledge.⁸⁴ This stands in sharp contrast to the necessity that action follows education in the African American community. This accounts in part for why AAAE did not attempt to replicate programs of African American adult education based on the results of these experiments in other communities with a high African American population.

AAAE, through Carnegie, also provided short-term support for the publication of materials by the Associates in Negro Folk Education. This organization was charged with the task of developing educational materials for the African American adult.⁸⁵ Its efforts resulted in a series of eight books called the *Bronze Booklets*, which were written to highlight various aspects of African American life and were published between 1936 and 1938. According to the *Journal*

⁸³ “Negro Adult Education,” *Journal of Adult Education*, 360.

⁸⁴ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

of *Adult Education*, “these booklets or syllabi have been written by Negroes for Negroes....The booklets have received an immediate response from the Negro audience and are being distributed through Negro institutions, extension agencies, etc.”⁸⁶ Ira Reid wrote the first book - length account of African American adult education for this series.⁸⁷ This was the only book that specifically took up the question of African American adult education. This book described adult education activities available to African Americans and situated these activities within the larger framework of adult education. The *Bronze Booklets* series was a successful and popular endeavor among African Americans and held great promise for promoting interracial understanding. Kohn wrote,

The booklets are intended to form the groundwork for a constructive and intelligent program of adult education among Negroes by helping them to a better understanding and a deeper analysis of their own problem. But I am even more interested in another purpose, which the booklets can admirably fulfill: the study of Negro life and culture by all white persons who wish to understand the Negro problem in America and who wish to face it in that spirit of fairness and intelligent openmindedness that is often regarded as typically American.⁸⁸

In spite of this, the AAAE and Carnegie were not willing to provide the long-term support that was needed to sustain the project. For a field whose goal was to increase democracy, “create informed citizens, promote tolerance and understanding of differences,”⁸⁹ it was ironic that AAAE and Carnegie were unwilling to provide ongoing support for those endeavors. Reddick stated, “Any close student of democracy in America can scarcely fail to note the seeming

⁸⁵ Franklin, *Education for Life*, Guy, *The AAAE*, Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*.

⁸⁶ “Negro Adult Education,” *Journal of Adult Education*, 367.

⁸⁷ Reid, *Adult Education*.

⁸⁸ Kohn, *Negro Folk Education*, 312.

reluctance with which the people use the available democratic processes to achieve the aims of society.”⁹⁰ Adult education was one of those processes that failed to achieve the aims of society. Hans Kohn wrote, “Adult education is one of our most potent means for transforming democratic ideals into actualities. In seeking to extend and improve adult education, we can not afford to overlook the Negro problem or continue to relegate it to the very minor place that, until now, it has occupied in our programs.”⁹¹ By withdrawing its support from programs for African American adult education, AAAE revealed its true nature, which was little different from that of the Jim Crow society in which it functioned. Its actions provided evidence that the adult education needs of African Americans were of little concern to the larger field of adult education.

Issues of African American adult education were apparently not important enough to warrant inclusion in the main national conferences sponsored by AAAE so separate conference on African American education were held on African American college campuses.⁹² African American adult educators developed their own conferences to discuss issues that were of importance to the African American community.⁹³ There were eight conferences on adult education for African Americans between 1938 and 1949.⁹⁴ The immediate aim of the conferences was threefold: “To portray conditions and trends in adult education among Negroes; to discover and make recommendations as to the future development of the work; and to consider the place of adult education for the masses in American democracy.”⁹⁵ The conferences were organized around such themes as “The World Crisis and the Negro”⁹⁶ and “The Negro in

⁸⁹ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 194.

⁹⁰ Reddick, *Adult Education*, 488.

⁹¹ Kohn, *Terra Incognita*, 80.

⁹² Franklin, *Education for Life*, 127-129; Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*, 80; Days, *Alain Leroy Locke*, 111.

⁹³ Franklin, *Education for Life*.

⁹⁴ Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*, 80.

⁹⁵ “Annual Report of the Director,” *Journal of Adult Education*, 351.

⁹⁶ “Meetings Held,” *Journal of Adult Education*, 221.

the National Crisis.”⁹⁷ Even though they did not garner the attention of most people involved in the adult education enterprise, these conferences were important because they provided a forum to discuss the particular needs of people of African descent. White adult educators attended the conferences “never quite identified themselves with their fellow conferees.”⁹⁸ This was symptomatic of the problem between African American adult education and the AAAE, the national body of adult education. AAAE never quite identified with African American adult education in the same way most European Americans never quite identified with African Americans. Jim Crow segregation dictated how African Americans and European Americans interacted with each other. African Americans danced an intricate waltz with European Americans, being careful not to get too close or too involved with their reluctant partners out of the fear that they would not be permitted to dance again.

The African American adult education movement was not integral to the functioning of the broader adult education movement. The manner in which it appeared in the *Journal of Adult Education* during the 1930s and 1940s provides further evidence of this. Each quarter the journal featured full-length articles on topics deemed to be of importance and interest to the field. It also included small paragraph-length articles that highlighted issues that were perhaps of lesser importance and interest. Issues related to African American adult education rarely were featured in full-length articles. They typically and regularly appeared in the small paragraph-length articles under the heading of *Negro Education*. Guy wrote, “African American culture should serve as a basis for culturally relevant adult education that would address the fundamental issues of self-definition, self-determination, identity, and community faced by African Americans.”⁹⁹ The articles, however, rarely spoke specifically about the intersection of African American

⁹⁷ “Meetings Held,” *Journal of Adult Education*, 216.

⁹⁸ Reddick, *Adult Education*, 488.

culture with African American adult education. African American culture and history were included as reading material in the journal in even fewer instances.

African American adult education as evidenced by the experiments in Harlem and Atlanta, the *Bronze Booklets*, and the *Journal of Adult Education* was of negligible consequence to adult education in general. Adult education was not immune to the societal disease of racism that ran rampant during the 1930s and 1940s. The liberal education philosophy limited the reach of adult education into the African American community because it did not attend to the unique situation created by Jim Crow racism that African Americans faced. Programming for the African American adult under the liberal education ideal was separate, inferior, and disempowering in terms of quantity, quality, and duration. The adult education movement consciously separated the races and deliberately provided unequal opportunities to African Americans. These attributes mirrored the situation that African Americans confronted in the every day. African American adult education was circumscribed by the education of European American adults and the needs of African American adults never occupied center stage in the formation of AAAE policy. This, however, did not prohibit African Americans from being active in conceptualizing and forming adult education activities for themselves. They developed programs that “represented a strong cultural commitment to self-improvement and social advancement in an oftentimes hostile urban environment.”¹⁰⁰ This tradition of self-determination was evident during the time of slavery¹⁰¹ and continued into the twentieth century.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Guy, *Adult Education and Democratic Values*, 221.

¹⁰⁰ Franklin, *Education for Life*, 130.

¹⁰¹ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Whiteaker, *Adult Education*; Ihle, *Education of Free Blacks*.

¹⁰² Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*; Colin, *Marcus Garvey*; Denton, *Booker T. Washington*; Franklin, *Education for Life*; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Williams, *Black Communities*.

Self-determination and the African American Community

It should be clear to any student of history that the African American story is not simply a story of victimization. In fact, it is more so a story of resistance through self-determination and agency. African Americans' agency in education has been evident since their forced immigration to the United States. The Africans who were stolen from Africa demonstrated this upon their arrival in America. They were previously educated and skilled in such various crafts as cotton weaving and metalworking and used this knowledge to better their working conditions.¹⁰³ They also quickly realized that in order to survive they needed to understand the social system of America. Undoubtedly, this took place informally through observation, social networking (conversation), and trial and error (experience).¹⁰⁴ To manage the plantations efficiently, European American slave owners provided education and training for a limited number of the slaves in skills that were deemed beneficial to the plantation. The African slaves were not content to wait for their masters to decide to educate them. Peterson said, "It is evident that black people felt education was the way to gain equality. Using every avenue available to them, they set out to educate themselves."¹⁰⁵ They sought out and created their own learning opportunities through the unofficial apprenticing of the fellow slaves and through the formation of clandestine schools. Schools were located anywhere that the slaves could find to assemble outside of the master's eye. The bedroom by candlelight and the swamp by the evening sun were equally as likely to be used as formal school quarters.¹⁰⁶ While African slaves were stealthily acquiring

¹⁰³ Whiteaker, *Adult Education*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Whiteaker, *Adult Education*.

¹⁰⁵ Peterson, *Freedom Road*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Whiteaker, *Adult Education*.

education, free people of African descent also struggled to develop means of educating themselves through the black church, black social organizations and formal schools.¹⁰⁷

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth century, opportunities opened in elementary, secondary, industrial, and higher education and were attended by African Americans of all ages.¹⁰⁸ These opportunities were equally as likely to be the result of African American self-initiative as they were to be the result of European American philanthropy or government aid. African Americans raised money to start schools, protested for an equitable allocation of resources, and volunteered their homes and their time to further education among themselves.¹⁰⁹ African American people were never just passive recipients of education. There were numerous examples of African American educators and organizations who were proactive in providing learning opportunities for African Americans. They were proactive in creating, maintaining, and acquiring education from whatever source it sprang because they “saw the connection between education and the eventual freedom or uplift of the African American people.”¹¹⁰

Nannie Burroughs, through her pioneering work with the Women’s Convention Auxillary of the National Baptist Convention and the Women’s Industrial Club, provided leadership training, vocational education, religious education, parent education, homemaking education, and cultural education to generations of African American women. Nannie Burroughs’ life exemplified this sense of self-determination and agency. Burroughs was smart, experienced, and talented. She passed the civil service exam but was unable to obtain work in areas that required it because those areas refused to hire colored clerks. Jim Crow racism forced her to work as a

¹⁰⁷ Ihle, *Education of the Free Blacks*.

¹⁰⁸ Bond, *Education of the Negro*; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*.

¹⁰⁹ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*; Peterson, *Freedom Road*.

janitress. Understanding from first-hand experience the incongruence between ability and job obtainment, she saw education in a broader way. Like that of other African American women, Easter noted that Nannie Burroughs' education "was influenced by two philosophies. The 'Cult of True Womanhood' which emphasized innocence, modesty, piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity, and 'uplifting the race' which emphasized the economic, educational and social improvement of the entire race."¹¹¹ She believed that "education was the single most important area of activism for Black women."¹¹² Nannie Burroughs practiced what she preached and preached what she practiced. She believed in the power of education to elevate the status of African American women and the African American community. She did not wait for educational programs to be developed. She was proactive in developing programs that she felt would be beneficial to African American women.

Booker T. Washington was another pioneer in adult education.¹¹³ Denton said, "The philosophy and programs of Booker T. Washington in the late 1800s were in surprising harmony with modern practices of adult education."¹¹⁴ Under the auspices of the Tuskegee Institute, Washington made significant inroads for African American adult education. Washington felt that education must be accessible to the African American learners. Like the policy of liberal education that was promoted by AAAE and Carnegie, Washington supported the diffusion of knowledge, but unlike AAAE and Carnegie, he believed education must be tailored to meet the perceived needs of the African American adult learners. To help make learning accessible, he developed conferences for African American farmers, mechanics, schoolteachers, ministers, and

¹¹⁰ Peterson, *Freedom Road*, 2.

¹¹¹ Easter, *Nannie Helen Burroughs*, 13.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹³ Denton, *Booker T. Washington*; James, *Booker T. Washington*.

¹¹⁴ Denton, *Booker T. Washington*, xii.

workers.¹¹⁵ In these conferences, Washington focused not only on vocational skills but also on life management skills.

Experiential learning was another key part of Washington's adult education program. Through the "Movable School," Washington, with the help of George Washington Carver, was able to reach a greater number of people and provide demonstrations and opportunities for the farmers to implement what they had learned.¹¹⁶ The example he provides brings into sharp focus the contradictions inherent in African American adult education. Washington's program was positive for African American adult education in that it made vast stores of usable knowledge available to a wide range of African American adult learners and emphasized the self-efficacy of the African American community. His accommodationist's view, however, represented as Potts notes a, "major miscalculation"¹¹⁷ because it "unwittingly strengthened the cause of those who sought to repress the freedmen."¹¹⁸ Washington walked a racially strung tightrope. He wanted to see African Americans advance and implemented programs that would lead to that end, but at the same time he thought it was important to do so without upsetting the then current racial order. In other words, he did not want to upset the European Americans. What he failed to see was that any progress no matter how it was obtained would upset the customary relationships between African Americans and European Americans because that progress would necessitate European Americans admitting that African Americans were not inherently inferior.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey, through the Universal Negro Improvement Association-African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), also provided a variety of adult learning activities to the

¹¹⁵ Denton, *Booker T. Washington*, James, *Booker T. Washington*, 62-63.

¹¹⁶ Denton, *Booker T. Washington*, James, *Booker T. Washington*, 64- 54.

¹¹⁷ Potts, *The Du Bois- Washington Debate*, 30.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

African American community in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁹ His most poignant contribution was in his recognition for the need of adult education to reflect and develop the cultural pride and worth of African Americans. He developed an educational program of “selfethnic reliance and empowerment.”¹²⁰ It emphasized that education should be beneficial to the whole race and actively combat the onslaught of negative connotations from White America. Most importantly, his central contribution to adult education was an endorsement for not relying on outside communities to meet the needs -- educationally or otherwise -- of the African American community; rather they should fill those needs through systematic intra- racial cooperation. Marcus Garvey’s conception of adult education “reconceptualized the purpose and aims of adult education for those people who bear the burden of institutional racism....and provide(d) an educational philosophy that had as its goals racial liberation and empowerment.”¹²¹

Self-determination and agency were not seen just in the philosophies of such African American leaders as Nannie Burroughs, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey who engaged in adult learning activities, but also in the African American press and community organizations. Fultz’s study found that “The black press, as a forum of protest and self-definition, provided vehicles for a form of adult education in black communities, allowing readers to absorb and to articulate new values and meanings appropriate for a social milieu vastly more complex than their forbears had known.”¹²² Fultz’s review of the Black press provides further evidence of the African American communities’ belief in education and self-determination. He quotes from the *Voice of the Negro*, an Atlanta periodical: “Educate! Educate!

¹¹⁹ Colin, *Marcus Garvey*.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹²¹ Colin, *Marcus Garvey*, 61.

¹²² Fultz, *The Black Monthly Periodical Press*, 78.

Educate!...Get all the knowledge within reach. Then use it for the good of the race.”¹²³ The periodicals represented a variety of ideals about the purposes of education and the best type of education, but most of all they showed the power of the African American community to lift itself up through a “broad civil rights agenda”¹²⁴ that included education.

Williams noted that organizations like the “Black churches, fraternal organizations, and social clubs designed pragmatic educational programs to attack specific problems.”¹²⁵ African Americans were often denied access and full participation rights in White churches and social clubs. Women’s clubs, like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and local Mothers’ Clubs, are examples of how adult education for African Americans was conducted in the community. The NACW “sought to combat racial discrimination and to express a sense of identity among black women on a national level.”¹²⁶ Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the NACW, was instrumental to the proliferation of adult education in African American communities.¹²⁷ She organized “a program that addressed racial problems through the elevation of black women.”¹²⁸ Terrell created and took advantage of numerous opportunities to impact the lives of African American women. She used the press in the form of newspapers and newsletters to educate women; she organized conventions, and encouraged “innovative and progressive programs” like day nurseries and Mothers’ Clubs¹²⁹ -- all in an effort to education African American women. Similar to the White women’s clubs during that time, the NACW suffered from middle class parochialism by insisting that the lower classes adopt its middle class values, but the NACW differed in one significant way. Frankel and Dye suggest that “Black women’s

¹²³ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹²⁵ Williams, *Black Communities*, 136.

¹²⁶ Jones, *Quest for Equality*, 17.

¹²⁷ Neverdon-Morton, *African American Women*.

¹²⁸ Jones, *Quest for Equality*, 21.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 24.

definitions of civic improvement and social justice centered on racial consciousness and were shaped by the Progressive Era realities of segregation and disenfranchisement.”¹³⁰ Because of this, the education that it encouraged was ultimately aimed at the amelioration of problems that resulted from Jim Crow racism.

Jim Crow racism played a powerful role in the lives of African American women and men. The liberal education philosophy of AAAE masked this fact by not attending to the unique characteristics and situations that affected the material reality of people who were oppressed. The primary goal simply was to diffuse knowledge, to make it accessible to the American populace for the purpose of developing more informed citizens to strengthen the democracy. Reddick observed that “adult education in the United States has not only done little to improve race relations but has never conceived of this as an objective of its endeavor.”¹³¹ Racism and discrimination were part and parcel to living and learning in the United States -- even in cities like Cincinnati -- but they were not the final determinants of the education and impact that that education would have on African American adult learners. That was something African Americans determined for themselves by creating meaningful learning opportunities. African American adults took the education that was provided and molded it into something that was useful to them as individuals and beneficial to the community. They also developed their own educational venues that worked toward dismantling the racial status quo that the AAAE so easily acquiesced to. Consequently, African American adult education was a function of Jim Crow racism or more often than not an act of resistance toward it.

¹³⁰ Frankel and Dye, *Gender, Class, Race and Reform*, 7.

¹³¹ Reddick, *Adult Education*, 490.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

This study sought to understand the relationship between Jim Crow racism in Cincinnati and learning experiences of African American adults during the 1930s and 1940s. This experience has not been previously delineated. This delineation has not occurred in part because the history of African American adult education for many years suffered from what Franklin called the “conspiracy of silence.”¹³² DuBois stated, “We have in fifty years, by libel, innuendo, and silence, so completely misstated and obliterated the history of the Negro in America... that today it is almost unknown.”¹³³ The conspiracy of silence resulted in people of African descent being viewed ahistorically; that is, they were seen as being without a past or at least without a past worth mentioning, or they were misrepresented in the historical literature. Franklin noted that “what actually happened [in the past] is one thing and what has been described by writers of history as having happened is quite another thing.”¹³⁴ A cursory glance at the general histories of adult education written in the middle of the twentieth century validated this point.¹³⁵ Because historical knowledge of African American adult education is extremely limited and its presence is, at best, fleeting in the historical discourse of adult education,¹³⁶ African American people and the field of adult education would profit from more research on African American adult education.

To be sure, literature from both inside and outside the field of adult education exists,¹³⁷ but there is still much to be learned. For instance, Anderson looked at the institution of industrial education and Butchart described the education of the Freedmen in the late 1800s. Adult

¹³² Franklin, *Race and History*, 44.

¹³³ Dubois, *The Propaganda of History*, 723.

¹³⁴ Franklin., *Race and History*, 42.

¹³⁵ Adams, *Frontiers of American Culture*; Grattan, *In Quest of Knowledge*; Knowles, *The Pursuit of Knowledge*.

¹³⁶ Johnson-Bailey, *A Quarter Century*; Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*.

¹³⁷ Anderson, *Education of Blacks*; Bond, *Education of the Negro*; Butchart, *Education of Adult Freedman*; Colin, *Marcus Garvey*; Guy *Prophecy from the Periphery*; Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*.

educators, Colin and Guy advanced the field's knowledge about the contributions Marcus Garvey and Alain Locke made to adult education, respectively.¹³⁸ Much of what has been written about the history of African American adult education focused on African American leaders and the institutions that served the African American people. Most did not include observations about the African American learners from their perspectives. In order to increase the presence of African American adult learners in historical narratives, historians must not limit themselves to written sources but should also consider using oral history to help flesh out African American adult education historical narratives from the recent past.

The Jim Crow period is one area from the recent past that could be explored more effectively if historians and other scholars used the oral historical method to reconstruct that history. Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad wrote, "No where was that need more clear than in seeking to understand the experience of African Americans who lived during the age of Jim Crow. And in no instance was there greater urgency to move forward immediately to recover that experience, lest death take from future historians the vital sources necessary to understand better this critical and neglected period in America's recent past."¹³⁹ This study used oral history to document the sources of education open to African American adults in the 1930s and 1940s in Cincinnati, Ohio. This study also contributed to the local history of adult education for African Americans in that city.

Obtaining input from the learners themselves was a critical part of this study and is a component that other histories of adult education have neglected. When one considers the typical evidentiary sources educational historians use, it becomes easier to see how this population of

¹³⁸ Anderson, *Education of Blacks*; Bond, *Education of the Negro*; Butchart, *Education of Adult Freedman*; Colin, *Marcus Garvey*; Guy *Prophecy from the Periphery*; Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*.

¹³⁹ Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*, xxv.

learners came to be left out of the history of adult education.¹⁴⁰ Historians usually rely on written records, but accessible written records are biased in that they document the actions of those who were privileged in society, the institutions within society and the educational programs offered by society. Though one could expect to find demographic information on the individual learners in the written records, those records rarely contained information about or from the learner's perspective. Consequently, the histories that were written neglected the African American adult learner, and the material that does exist needs to be mined for additional information about this population of learners. Given the scarcity of sources available to them, others who have written about African American adult education have done a remarkable job of writing African American education and its learners back into the history of adult education but, more must be done to give this topic full justice.

To capture more of this history, historians of adult education will have to not only use sources tied to the archives but also will also have to use such methods as oral history to highlight the voices of African American learners and adopt a philosophical framework that encourages and lends itself to the honoring of the participants' voices. Oral history is a method that can be employed to give voice to these learners from recent times and Africentrism is a theoretical frame that insists upon the centering of the African American experience. This concept is further detailed in Appendix A. While oral history maintains the same high level of integrity that the archival method does, it is unique in that it provides an avenue for historians to focus on the experiences of the learners. It not only allows the learners to be included in the ensuing historical narrative but it also allows the story to be told from the African American learners' point of view. Because of this feature, oral history has been described as "a social

¹⁴⁰ Thomson, *Fifty Years*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

history or history from the bottom up, which accented the nature of the historical enterprise.”¹⁴¹

Oral history studies can be a means of breaking the “conspiracy of silence” that surrounds African American adult learners in adult education history.¹⁴²

Previous studies have looked at the philosophies, leaders, organizations and social purposes of African American adult education but this study was different because it focused on the programs available to African American adults in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1930 to 1949 and sought to include their experiences with those programs. The purpose of this oral history study was to document and understand the adult education experiences of African Americans in Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1930s and 1940s. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What adult educational opportunities were available to African Americans during this period?
2. In what ways were these opportunities influenced by the Jim Crow racism exhibited in Cincinnati, Ohio?

Significance.

“History is continually rewritten according to the needs and interests of each generation,”¹⁴³ and the history of adult education needs to be rewritten to include the history of African American adult education. Rockhill commented, “Our limited historic record abounds with optimism about the potential of adult education for promoting individual and social change — for creating a new society — yet we see how little success we have had in arriving at those goals. By and large, it appears that adult educators have supported the values of the status quo.”¹⁴⁴ Some scholars have alluded to the racist nature of adult education.¹⁴⁵ In this study, I

¹⁴¹ Grele, *Directions for Oral History*, 68.

¹⁴² Thomson, *Fifty Years*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

¹⁴³ Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies*, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Rockhill, *The Past as Prologue*, 205.

¹⁴⁵ Colin and Preciphs, *Perceptual Patterns*; Colin and Guy, *An Africentric Interpretive Model*; Manglitz, *Challenging White Privilege*.

sought to identify and explicate the “color line” that existed within adult education’s history. This is a history that managed to slip under the radar of racism’s watchful eyes but was as guilty as other levels of education of having its contours shaped by racism. It sought to dispel any myths about the romanticized nature of adult education with respect to African Americans and provided documentation that segregated adult education was the norm rather than the exception in the 1930s and 1940s in Cincinnati, Ohio. The significance of this study is that it named the “elephant in the room:” racism.

Historical studies generally serve another useful purpose as well. Stubblefield wrote, “The value of history —its unique task in the professional study of adult education — is evident when we view history as a way of learning....Going to the past permits people to see what they once were, how they have changed, and how the changes took place. Aware of the restrictions imposed by their former outlooks, they can be more aware of their alternatives in the present and thus be better able to make choices.”¹⁴⁶ In other words, a thorough understanding of history is one way of ensuring that the choices made by contemporary adult educators are informed choices. Contemporary practitioners of adult education can gain valuable insight into their practice by having accurate historical accounts as the foundation for building their practice and informing their theories.

Understanding the impact of adult education on the lives of African American adults from 1930 to 1949 has historical implications, as well. From a historical viewpoint, this study enriched the knowledge base that we currently have about the African American adult learner. It provides a small piece of the puzzle that can be used to write a more complete history of the African American adult learner. Stubblefield noted, “History has several roles to perform in the

¹⁴⁶ Stubblefield, *Learning from the Discipline of History*, 325.

adult education curriculum. In its most elementary role, history socializes novices in the field”¹⁴⁷ by presenting those learners with the “facts” and encouraging them to think about the impact of those “facts” and to interpret their significance in light of their role as future adult educators. This study named racism as a pivotal force in the subsequent shaping of African American adult education in the 1930s and 1940. It enriched the history of adult education by providing a local history of African American adult education in Cincinnati, Ohio, and provided novice and veteran adult educators with more information that can be evaluated and interpreted for usefulness in their research and practice.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 335.

CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION

Historically adult education has included a matrix of both informal and formal learning opportunities whose purposes included religious and moral concerns, social engineering, and self-improvement. Stubblefield and Keane wrote,

Provisions for educating adults...did not take shape around a single institutional form. In some instances, activities grew out of the efforts of individuals to improve themselves in various ways. In others, they were initiated by an institution to achieve some larger institutional purpose. In still other instances, people with a common interest formed associations for specific educational purposes or used education to achieve a broader social purpose.¹

This shifting emphasis has been recorded in the general histories written about adult education, but the roles played by African Americans have not been sufficiently detailed in those histories, even though the roles they played have been documented. This chapter provides a brief historiography of African American adult education by reviewing five general histories of adult education: A survey of Adams' *The Frontiers of American Culture*; Grattan's *In Quest of Knowledge*; Knowles' *The Adult Education Movement in the United States*; Kett's *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1900*; and Stubblefield and Keane's *Adult Education in the American Experience*; and by reviewing three texts that focus specifically on the history of African American adult education: *The 1945 Summer Edition of the Journal of Negro Education*; *Education of the African*

American Adult: An Historical Overview; Freedom Road: Adult Education of African Americans. These texts were selected because they provided a breadth of material that was greater than what could be obtained by selecting a resource that focused on a single individual, movement, or activity within adult education. I fully realize that these works do not represent all of the past of adult education or African American adult education, but I do feel they are representative samples.

Review of General Adult Education History Texts

Merriam and Brockett are correct in saying, “the history of adult education is filled with rich stories....These stories give us perspectives on our past...”² The general histories of adult education that have been written unfortunately have been remiss in telling the stories of all of those involved in the American adult education enterprise, especially with respect to the African American adult.³

The history that Adams wrote is recognized as being the earliest general history of adult education. His racist’s attitude is evident in the way he described America. He called it “the greatest and richest white man’s country then left in the world.”⁴ He recognized that there were many learning opportunities available to White Americans, but he failed to elaborate on how various populations, such as that of the African American, were affected by the lack of access to those opportunities. When describing literacy in the early twentieth century, Adams justifies America’s high percentage of illiteracy by saying,

It must be remembered, however, that, apart from backward sections, particularly in the South and mountain districts, the percentage is thus high largely because of the native

¹ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 1.

² Merriam and Brockett, *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education*, 51.

³ Adams, *The Frontiers of American Culture*; Grattan, *In Quest of Knowledge*; Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge*; Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement in the United States*; Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*.

Negroes (our own fault), who form one-tenth of our entire population, American Indians, and the very considerable Mexican and other Spanish-speaking population of our Southwest, not to mention illiterate foreign immigrants. Eliminate these groups and the percentage figures would tell a very different story.⁵

In my opinion, Adams, instead of enumerating the various instances of how African Americans sought and pursued literacy education, chose to use this population as a scapegoat for America's problem with illiteracy. In another reference to African Americans, he briefly mentions some of the adult educational activities they participated in during the 1930s. However, he draws the conclusion that "in spite of what is being done from the outside, and by the Negroes themselves, from the inside, the field of Negro Adult Education still presents a discouraging picture, and demands far more intensive and intelligent cultivation."⁶ His portrayal of African Americans in adult educational history is demeaning and incomplete.

In Grattan's general history, African Americans were essentially omitted. An index typically lists subjects deemed to be of importance. Neither "Negro" nor "Black" is listed as a subject heading in Grattan's history. Grattan states that his book "is neither a formal nor a complete history; it is, rather, a long essay using historical materials....The material available was weighed for intrinsic significance, illustrative (*sic*), and accessibility of sufficient information to make a discussion meaningful."⁷ Grattan was woefully neglectful of the historical documentation that included the stories of African Americans and other minority groups. For example, the *Journal of Adult Education* would have been one source for procuring a limited amount of historical information about African American adult education; and simply consulting

⁴ Adams, *The Frontiers of American Culture*, 58.

⁵ Ibid., 208.

⁶ Ibid., *The Frontiers of American Culture*, 318.

⁷ Grattan, *In Quest of Knowledge*, vi.

with contemporaries like Alain Locke could have provided meaningful information about the history of African American adult education.

Knowles also wrote a general history of adult education in 1977. His general history is one of the most respected texts in the field. Knowles, unlike Adams and Grattan, was an adult educator. In spite of having “insider” knowledge about the field, he fell short of his responsibility to tell the story of adult education and all of its participants. Like Grattan, Knowles did not include any direct references to African Americans in the book’s index. Only by carefully reading the text does one find one-line references to African Americans. In laundry list-fashion, he mentions the Associates for Adult Education and its publication of the *Bronze Booklets*, major developments in African American adult education, along with other adult learning projects funded by the Carnegie Corporation.⁸ Even prominent figures such as Alain Locke, president of the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) from 1946-1947, and his contributions failed to receive more than a passing reference. When agricultural and farmers’ education is discussed, figures, such as Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver, are not mentioned at all.⁹ Knowles’ history is filled with these types of glaring omissions with respect to the education of African American adult.

Seventeen years after Knowles’ history was written, two more books on the history of adult education emerged. In 1994, Kett, as well as Stubblefield and Keane, published general adult education histories. Merriam and Brockett said, “taken together, the two will ultimately advance our understanding of our past in a way that was not possible prior to their publication in 1994.”¹⁰ This statement seems less than accurate when the inclusiveness of “our” is closely examined. Kett is guilty of negatively portraying African Americans in adult educational history.

⁸ Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement*, 208.

⁹ Denton, *Booker T. Washington*; James, *Booker T. Washington*, Knowles, *The Adult Education Movement*.

While he includes more snippets about this population, his account either constructs an image of a people who passively received adult education or omits the educational activities and influences of this population. For instance, he makes several references to the importance of the Morrill Act of 1862, also known as the Land-Grant College Act¹¹, but does not mention the second Morrill Act of 1890, which established land-grant colleges for African Americans.

Kett's history, like his predecessors' histories, missed a multitude of opportunities to be more inclusive. As an educational historian writing in the 1990s, he had access to huge amount of historical data relating to African Americans. He highlights the link between the arts and adult education during the mid-twentieth century, but makes no reference at all to the Harlem Renaissance. The significant activities of the Civil Rights Movement, like the voter registration and literacy campaigns, in the African American community, are also omitted from the text. Perhaps this resulted from his apparent desire to write a unified history of a field that has a segregated past.

In contrast to the others Stubblefield and Keane's history of adult education does a commendable job of representing the diversity of participants in adult education's history. In particular, African Americans and their contributions are infused throughout the text. Additionally Stubblefield and Keane are critical of the treatment of African Americans within adult education. While this effort is a step in the right direction, it, too, has shortcomings. The book was structured in such a way that when narratives of African American adult education were inserted, they often appeared as appendages to the narratives of European Adult Education, which was masqueraded, perhaps inadvertently, as the general history of adult education.

¹⁰ Merriam and Brockett, *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education*, 62.

¹¹ Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge*, 36.

Like Kett, Stubblefield and Keane do a good job of highlighting areas in adult education where African Americans were excluded, but in many instances they do not follow the discussion with the related activities with which the African Americans were involved. For example, they mention that trade union membership was denied to African Americans but they do not provide additional information about what this meant for African Americans or what alternatives this population devised in lieu of being permitted to participate in the trade unions.¹² Similarly, after reading the section devoted to women and adult education, one is left with the impression that the story is inclusive of all women. The contributions and challenges of African American women, like Nannie Burroughs and Charlotte Grimke, are excluded from the text.¹³ In spite of omissions like those, Stubblefield and Keane do provide a critical analysis of adult education in American history. The title of their last chapter is “Becoming responsive to the needs of all learners,”¹⁴ and they wrote, “In a democratic and putative classless society, there would seem to be little agreement about the rights of all citizens to have access to knowledge. In reality, many factors circumscribed access to education and thus diminished social and occupational mobility.”¹⁵ Their text provides the best coverage of African American adult education. It is understood that space precluded the mentioning of every instance of African American adult education, and recognition is due because Stubblefield and Keane in large measure placed the African American adult educational activities within the context of American racism. No other general histories had done this.

The writing of history is an art form much like painting, composing music, and writing plays. “Historians like playwrights (Baritz, 1962), ring up the curtain on the period they choose.

¹² Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 101.

¹³ Ibid., 41, 162-164. Stubblefield and Keane made numerous references to women throughout the text.

¹⁴ Ibid., 309.

¹⁵ Ibid., 313.

They select the lead characters and the bit players. They develop the plot by selecting and arranging the facts. Through the narrative, they illuminate the idea, issue, or thesis related to some topic. And they bring the curtain down when they choose.”¹⁶ More often than not in adult education historical writing, African Americans were chosen as the bit players and the plots involving them were not integrated into the play. Most of the general histories, while providing a description of the various activities in adult education’s history, chose to tell a story in which African Americans were either peripheral to or absent from the plot.

Plots developed by authors like Kett and Adams had critical omissions. They were written from a Eurocentric worldview that was biased in favor of the dominant European American population. They highlighted the history and accomplishments of this population to the virtual exclusion of other racial and ethnic groups. More culturally pluralistic¹⁷ histories are needed. That is, as Gyant noted, histories that “reject the idea of one group having the best culture or history and being without virtues”¹⁸ are needed in adult education. General histories that build on the example presented by Stubblefield and Keane would represent a step in the right direction.

Selected Writings on African American Adult Education

As a field adult education has failed to adequately document the history of African American adult education. “Despite the fact that adult education looms large in the history of African American education, little mention is made of this fact by most standard histories of American education or adult education.”¹⁹ Fortunately, the field of adult education does not have to rely solely on those general histories for information on African American adult education.

¹⁶ Carlson, *Humanistic Historical Research*, 42.

¹⁷ Gyant, *Alain Locke*, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁹ Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*, vii.

Others have written about this history. In particular, *The Journal of Negro Education*, *Special 1945 Edition*, *Education of the African American Adult*, and *Freedom Road: Adult Education of African Americans*. These three sources were selected because they discuss a wide range of activities within African American adult education's history.

The Summer Edition of the *Journal of Negro Education* in 1945 was dedicated to issues related to African American adult education. It was a compilation of articles by different authors. These articles covered many subjects, from an overview of adult education for African American people to types of education available to them like health education, community and government sponsored programs. These articles considered formal schooling, informal schooling, and the “kind of education [that] does not depend upon the use of text-books, and that there are no regularly established classes,”²⁰ like those offered by the National Urban League and African American sororities and fraternities. It is evident from these articles that many adult education activities existed during the mid-twentieth century for African Americans and that there was some interest among scholars in this area.

The primary goal of the articles was to characterize adult education in the mid-1940s. The articles were contemporaneous pieces about adult education, as opposed to being retrospective. Many were studies that focused on particular organizations that provided adult education. Some authors sent surveys to various organizations like YMCAs and Negro colleges to gather data to help them describe the adult education programs.²¹ Others provided narrative descriptions of adult education programs such as those sponsored in the church and by public libraries.²² Still others discussed issues like the history of, philosophy of and race relations in

²⁰ Henningburg, *Adult Education*, 402.

²¹ Bullock, *The Adult Education Program of the YMCA*; Redd, *Adult Education for Negroes*.

²² Williams, *Adult Education*; Grady, *Negro Church*.

adult education.²³ Consistent with the goals of the special edition of the *Journal of Negro Education*, the articles were primarily descriptive. They provided concrete examples and highlighted the similarities and incongruencies between that program and what adult education purported to be. Finally some made recommendations as to how the program could function more consistently within adult education principles.

Because the focus was on African American adult education, the primary issue was one of accurate representation, not inclusion. Many of the authors noted whether or not the programs or organizations that they were studying had integrated services. Many of these programs purported to offer integrated services. In reality, this integration was seen more in stated policies than in actual practices. For instance, the YMCA and YWCA had facilities that were for African Americans, but African Americans were also free to participate in activities sponsored by branches that were not specifically designated for them.²⁴ Unfortunately, statistics were not readily available to indicate the extent to which those branches were truly integrated and used by African Americans. This was the case for organizations like the public library as well.²⁵ The articles paint a picture of African American adult education as being segregated and inferior in terms of funding, staff support, and facilities.

Most of the organizational operating philosophies were consistent with adult education's guiding principles. The AAAE supported a liberal education platform that focused on individual improvement in terms of vocational skills, personal self-improvement and diffusion of knowledge. Reddick stated three reasons why most adult education programs failed to embrace social changes, like racial parity, as programmatic goals. First, social change was not the platform supported by AAAE and Carnegie or the government through programs like the Works

²³ Cartwright, *History of Adult Education*, Reddick, *Adult Education*, Reid, *Development of Adult Education*.

²⁴ Bullock, *Adult Education*; Height, *Adult Education*; Williams, *Adult Education*.

Progress Administration (WPA) which provided funding. So, if the programs wanted to continue to receive funding, they had to develop programs that aligned with the educational platforms of those agencies. Second, “The Association has deliberately pursued a policy of emphasizing and encouraging the direct *self*-improvement, strictly ‘cultural’ side of adult education to the neglect of the direct *social*-improvement side.” Finally “the fierce spirit of individualism permitted and encouraged a person to get more education and thus help *himself* but it did not go beyond this to assume a social responsibility for the whole community.”²⁶ Much like the “cast down your buckets where you are”²⁷ philosophy espoused by Booker T. Washington, this strategy for adult education was shortsighted. Without actively combating the societal racism and prejudice that limited African Americans socially, politically, and economically, programs aimed at individual self-improvement were destined to be only minimally effective at improving the overall quality of life for African Americans. Only a few of the articles in the 1945 Summer Edition of the *Journal of Negro Education* addressed this point. The authors critically evaluated the programs, but the barometer for effectiveness was the degree of compliance with AAAE’s educational philosophy. Few looked underneath those philosophies to determine if they provided the necessary tools to develop and sustain social justice. If they had, they would have seen that there was a general acceptance of the racial status quo of the day by adult educators and AAAE and that the programs were not structured to challenge that racism.

For about forty years following the comprehensive coverage of African American adult education in the Summer Edition of *Journal of Negro Education*, there was little written about it. Johnson-Bailey notes that “writings and research by and about African Americans essentially

²⁵ Height, *Adult Education*.

²⁶ Reddick, *Adult Education*, 492.

²⁷ Washington, *The Atlanta Exposition*, 182.

vanished from the journals, the handbooks, and conference presentations”²⁸ after the 1940s.

Some scholars wrote about African American adult education’s history during the intervening decades but it was in the 1980s that the level of interest in African American adult education paralleled that of the 1940s. These contemporary scholars turned their focus to the understanding of the history of African American adult education and understanding the level of participation in adult education by this population.

Neufeldt and McGee edited a volume whose purpose was to “highlight some of the efforts by both blacks and whites in promoting adult education for the African American community.”²⁹ The volume was not intended to be a comprehensive history of African American adult education but rather a “remarkable story of a minority community confronting the issue of race.”³⁰ Some of the essays were primarily descriptive and told powerful stories about African Americans in adult education.³¹ Given the dearth of material dedicated and published on the subject of African American adult education, descriptive essays play an important part in the historical discourse. However, it is also important for scholars to provide a critique of how the education of African American adults was impacted by their race and how that education in turn affected the material and symbolic realities of African Americans. The majority of the essays attempted to do this in some form or fashion.³²

Throughout the essays, the authors highlight the fact that African Americans were consigned to lower-level occupational positions even after the World War II, which was credited with expanding the employment market for all Americans.³³ This was a function of both the fact

²⁸ Johnson-Bailey, *A Quarter Century*, 93.

²⁹ Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*, vii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, ix.

³¹ James, *Booker T. Washington*; Whiteaker, *Adult Education*.

³² Butchart, *Schooling for a Freed People*; Grant, *Adult Education*; Lovett, *Black Adult Education*.

³³ Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*.

that racism limited their job opportunities and the fact that racism limited their educational opportunities. Butchart wrote, “Just as emancipation yielded “one kind of freedom” in the economic arena, and not necessarily that kind which the African American sought, so the struggle for knowledge yielded one kind of schooling, not demonstrably that kind which held the greatest promise of black freedom.”³⁴ The essays situated the adult educational activities and organizations within the appropriate sociopolitical and sociocultural context and recognized that all of the education that African American adults received was filtered through the prism of racism.

Curriculums, for the most, were either developed in accordance with African American self-determination goals or in accordance with the racist status quo of the day. According to Butchart, the institutional and curricular pattern “reflected the fears and fantasies of its authors’ imaginations”³⁵ and they were used to “achieve black aspirations, on the one hand, or to deflect and redefine those aspirations in line with white agendas.”³⁶ Neufeldt and McGee, through their edited volume, accomplished three goals. They wrote African Americans back into the history of adult education, raised the awareness of their readers about the insidious and pervasive nature of racism in adult education and highlighted the varied approaches that African Americans undertook in response to that racism.

Freedom Road: Adult Education of African Americans is a volume edited by Elizabeth Peterson. Its focus also was on the history of African Americans within adult education. In the Foreword, Phyllis Cunningham writes that *Freedom Road* “provided us with a beginning history of African Americans’ contributions and participation in adult education.”³⁷ She also indicated

³⁴ Butchart, *Schooling for a Freed People*, 46.

³⁵ Ibid., 51.

³⁶ Ibid., 53.

³⁷ Cunningham, *Foreword*, viii.

that one of the purposes of the book was to “begin to fill the “structured silences” in graduate curriculums on African American history.”³⁸ The authors who contributed to the volume helped to fill the voids left in the general histories of adult education by providing biographical sketches of African Americans involved in adult education. As such they were descriptive and celebratory in nature. I examined the essays to determine the extent to which they went beyond description to unveil the role that race played in the historical stories they wrote for the book. Throughout the chapters, there was a general acceptance of the idea that “black people felt education was the way to gain equality.”³⁹ The chapters addressed the impact of that education within a racialized context in different ways and to varying degrees.

One goal of education cited in the book was racial uplift within a racially oppressive system.⁴⁰ Colin demonstrated in her chapter on Marcus Garvey that his educational philosophy and practice through the Universal Negro Improvement Association-African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) were deliberately formed to combat racism in America. “The organization’s commitment to this educational goal would be the first (and some would say the only) instance in which adult education programs were developed for African Ameripeans (*sic*) by African Ameripeans with the socioeducational goal of education for selfethnic reliance.”⁴¹ Through periodicals and UNIA-ACL activities like “cultural education, vocational education, adult basic education/literacy, community development, and experiential learning,”⁴² Garvey effectively implemented a program of racial uplift that provided opportunities beyond that which had been prescribed by the dominant society.

³⁸ Ibid., xiii.

³⁹ Peterson, 1.

⁴⁰ Peterson, *Fanny Coppin*, 7

⁴¹ Colin, *Marcus Garvey*, 47.

⁴² Ibid., 41.

Two chapters were dedicated to the contributions of Alain Locke, who was a strong advocate for education of African Americans that prepared them for political, social, and economic parity.⁴³ Gyant wrote that Locke's philosophy "reflected the democratic ideas of society and focused on the education, culture, and economic conditions of all human beings, especially African Americans."⁴⁴ The programs he supported assisted in the democratization of adult education and the elevation of African Americans above the racial status quo, which said they were inferior by encouraging "them to study and be proud of their culture and history."⁴⁵ He felt that adult education should be universal and simultaneously culturally specific. Locke was instrumental to the Harlem and Atlanta Experiments in African American adult education, the formation of "special materials for study in African American adult education,"⁴⁶ and a series of conferences dedicated to African American adult education. These chapters, along with the chapter contrasting Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois⁴⁷ and the chapter on Septima Poinsette Clark,⁴⁸ demonstrated how instrumental the philosophical leanings of the educators were to the development and implementation of programs of adult education for African Americans.

While all the chapters to some extent explored issues related to the impact of that education within a racialized context, few tackled it directly. By exploring the philosophical perspectives of selected African Americans involved in adult education, it was evident, according to Neufeldt and McGee, that "education has been one of the major components of the black adult cultural value system. What is also evident is that blacks as well as whites played a

⁴³ Guy, *The AAAE*; Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*.

⁴⁴ Gyant, *Alain Leroy Locke*, 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁴⁶ Guy, *The AAAE*.

⁴⁷ Potts, *The Du Bois – Washington Debate*.

⁴⁸ Easter, *Septima Poinsette Clark*.

major role in promoting and providing educational activities for both the young and adults. What is not clear is the extent to which these educational programs were able to effectively challenge an American value system that viewed the black adult as a second-class citizen.”⁴⁹ Throughout most of the selections reviewed, this remained an underdeveloped aspect of African American adult education. Analysis of adult education in relation to Jim Crow racism is a natural and logical next step for historians exploring African American adult education.

General histories of adult education describe what adult education was like for White American adults. Peterson’s edited volume highlighted the contributions of various African Americans involved in the adult education. Neufeldt and McGee’s book illustrates the multitude of learning opportunities that were available to African Americans. The 1945 Summer Edition of the *Journal of Negro Education* documents contemporaneously the adult education of African Americans. Each in its own way, whether by omission in the case of the general histories or by focusing on African Americans and the adult learning activities that they participated in, raised our awareness about the plight of African American adult education. Collectively, these works demonstrate the subordination of the interests of African American adult education to the interests of mainstream adult education, which reflected the interests of European Americans.

The fact that African American education was separated from and inferior to the larger movement of adult education is not surprising. However, it is ironic that African American adult education within the social context of Jim Crow America peaked in the 1940s with a series of conferences and the Summer Edition of the *Journal of Negro Education* dedicated to the subject. One would think that Jim Crow racism would have limited the development of African American adult education during this time. While there was not a complete absence of writing about African American adult education’s history between the 1950s and the 1980s, the 1980s saw a

⁴⁹ Neufeldt and McGee, *Education of the African American Adult*, 260.

resurgence of interest in this topic by more scholars. Those efforts have continued through the development of a national annual pre-conference. This pre-conference on African American adult education is part of the Adult Education Research Conference, which is the national conference for adult education. The pre-conference is important because it ensures that issues related to the African American adult education experience are discussed and documented. This documentation will be valuable for future historians and adult educators who wish to understand and learn more about adult education among African Americans. Critical evaluation of African American adult education history must continue. Historians cannot just describe the programs, institutions and people involved. They must also consider how the contours of African American adult education were shaped by American racism and prejudice. This study did both and therefore continues the trend of critical revisionistic historical writing.

CHAPTER THREE

JUST SOUTH OF FREEDOM: AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE IN CINCINNATI

African American adult education in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1930 to 1949 cannot be fully appreciated without being aware of the history of the city with respect to its African American citizens. Just as many southern African Americans made conscious decisions to migrate North in the nineteenth century in hope of better life opportunities, African Americans during the Great Migration made a similar exodus and held similar aspirations.¹ The Great Migration occurred between 1915 and 1960 and “about 5 million rural southern African Americans migrated to the northern industrialized cities of America.”² Northern cities like Cincinnati were perceived as having more and better social and economic opportunities than the South.³ Unfortunately, these African Americans were met with disappointment as they crossed the Ohio River into Cincinnati. Much to their dismay, they soon discovered that they had arrived just south of freedom. According to Koehler, they discovered that “Cincinnati was far from the land of freedom for Blacks.”⁴ Their life experiences in the South had fully prepared them for life in the Cincinnati because Cincinnati was not as different from the South as they might have imagined. In fact, Taylor said, “Cincinnati holds a distinctive place in the history of race relations and African Americans in the United States. It is part of the borderland, a border city in a border state and sits astride the boundary between the North and South.”⁵ Cincinnati’s history belies its true intentions with regard to its African American citizens.

¹ Gerber, *Black Ohio*; Giffin, *The Negro in Ohio*; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Harrison, *Black Exodus*.

² Harrison, *Black Exodus*, vii.

³ Carr, Van Leeuwen, and Stewart, *Religion, Feminism, and Family*, 338; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 310.

⁴ Koehler, *Cincinnati’s Black Peoples*, 8.

⁵ Taylor, *Race and the City*, xiii.

Nineteenth Century Cincinnati: Bucktown, USA

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Cincinnati was located in what was known as the Northwest Territory and was governed by the Northwest Ordinance. Early settlers opposed slavery for economic reasons and, to a lesser extent, moral ones.⁶ Wilson wrote, “While agreeing completely that slavery should not be permitted in the state, the early settlers could not reconcile preconceived ideas of the advisability of admitting the colored man into the community as a freeman.”⁷ The Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1802 did not mention African Americans, Indians, or even foreigners, but did specify that the rights of which it spoke were for its White citizens.⁸ African Americans were permitted to live in Ohio but through the use of Black Codes, the Ohio Legislature hoped “to render conditions in the state so uncomfortable for the negro (*sic*) that he would be discouraged so far as immigration was concerned. Furthermore, they wished to persuade those free negroes (*sic*) living in Ohio to go elsewhere.”⁹

The original Black Codes in 1804 said that Blacks and Mulattoes had to furnish a certificate of freedom, which not only permitted them to stay in the area also but was required for them to be able to work. The Black Codes had a provision that fined people for harboring fugitive slaves.¹⁰ Giffin noted, “The racial discrimination in the fundamental and statute law of Ohio reflected the fact that contempt was felt for Negroes by many, if not most of the white people of the state.”¹¹ This was evidenced by the positive correlation between the increase in the number of Black Codes between 1804 and 1831 and the increase in population of African Americans in the territory. Approximately 337 African Americans lived in the territory in 1800

⁶ Wilson, *The Negro in Early Ohio*, 9.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 32.

⁹ Wilson, *The Negro in Early Ohio*, 40.

¹⁰ Ibid., 41-46.

¹¹ Giffin, *The Negro in Ohio*, 2.

which was four years before the first Black codes. By 1810, the population had increased to 1,899 and the number of restriction increased as well. This can be seen in Table 1. The delegates from Hamilton County, where Cincinnati is located, supported the 1807 Black Codes. This was, as Giffin pointed out, “a stand to be expected inasmuch as the Negro problem was menacing Cincinnati perhaps more than any other town.”¹² These Black Codes, however, were not consistently enforced, which encouraged the continued migration of African Americans into Ohio.

Only the unevenness of western enforcement kept discriminatory laws from being as consistently oppressive for blacks as the codes they faced in eastern states. Having once bestowed the power of legal sanction on their hatred and fears, the white communities became calm enough to feel little need to enforce the most stringent laws. However, as the luckless blacks of Cincinnati, Ohio found out in 1829, laws that lay dormant could be activated at any moment by enraged whites. More than a thousand black Cincinnati residents suddenly had to flee to Canada.¹³

African Americans were recorded as living in Cincinnati as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century. They lived cloistered in the wooded areas immediately adjacent to the Ohio River named Deer Creek, later known as Bucktown and in the central riverfront area in shanties rented to them by White Cincinnatians. Bucktown was also called “The Swamp,” “Little Africa,” and “Nigger Town.” In Koehler’s description of Deer Creek, he said “Deer Creek ran red with the blood of hogs slaughtered at the many houses along it, creating a health problem. Blacks walked about amongst the many pig tails and jawbones piled up along the creek’s

¹² Giffin, *The Negro in Ohio*, 46.

¹³ Katz, *The Black West*, 309.

shores.”¹⁴ Such health concerns as poor sanitation and disease became worse as more African American migrated to the area, which caused overcrowding in the areas where they were forced to live. The African American men were employed primarily in low-end manufacturing and river industries. The women typically did domestic work. The riverfront area of Cincinnati was

Table 1: Black Codes and Year Enacted¹⁵

Year	Black Code
1800	None
1804	Furnish a Certificate of Freedom Register with the county clerk at 12.5 cents each Penal Office to employ a Negro who does not have a certificate Penal Office to aid a fugitive slave
1807	Provide a \$500 bond signed by two white men who “guarantee his good behavior and support” Fines were increased for aiding a fugitive slave Negroes were not permitted to testify against a White person
1824, 1828, 1831	Excluded from juries Could not obtain public charity Could not serve in the militia Taxed for public education but could not attend public school

¹⁴ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black People*, 11.

¹⁵ Wilson, *The Negro in Early Ohio*, 41-46.

primarily populated by the Germans and the Irish at this time and an antagonistic attitude existed between them and African Americans because they competed with each other in the labor market.¹⁶

In just about every sphere of life, African Americans in Cincinnati lived in environments that foreshadowed the Jim Crow segregation of the early twentieth century. They were segregated in churches,¹⁷ White public establishments like stores and entertainment places,¹⁸ and in the workplace where African Americans were often relegated to menial jobs that White citizens did not want.¹⁹ However, those positions were few and far between, because even the most menial of jobs were usurped by members of White ethnic groups like the Irish and Germans.²⁰ The ability to secure work was also hampered because African Americans often could not get training in skilled-labor professions like masonry, carpentry and other trades.²¹ Furthermore, the privileges of freedom were not as abundant for African Americans as they would have liked in nineteenth century Cincinnati and violence erupted periodically. Riots started by both African Americans and European Americans were commonplace during this time as European Americans sought to restrict that freedom and African Americans worked to secure it.²²

African Americans were thought to have few morals so they were assumed to be criminals and were looked upon as inferior. A quotation from the *National Press and Cincinnati Weekly Herald* on July 24, 1847, illustrates this.

¹⁶ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*.

¹⁷ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*; Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Citizens*.

¹⁸ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*; Gerber, *Black Ohio*; Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Citizens*.

¹⁹ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*; Gerber, *Black Ohio*.

²⁰ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*; Gerber, *Black Ohio*; Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Citizens*.

²¹ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*; Gerber, *Black Ohio*; Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Citizens*.

²² Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*; Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Citizens*.

History informs us that the White Skin, from time immemorial, has been of superior order. Civilization and all the arts and sciences have originated with the white race, whilst the blacks have made scarcely any advance from the state of nature. The darker the various shades of color, descending down to jet black, the lower they descend in the scale of intellect and enterprise, this is an obvious truth to every reader.²³

The public school system was established in 1829, but African Americans were not permitted to attend even though African Americans property owners had to pay taxes to support the public schools. In those early days, they typically sought instruction from private schools. As early as 1825, efforts toward selfethnic reliance and self-determination were seen in Cincinnati's African Americans. They opened schools and raised funds to support educational activities for children and adults. Koehler discovered that "evening and writing schools were then attended by 75 persons, chiefly adult."²⁴ Other more established institutions like Lane Seminary, which was known for its abolitionist tendencies, "began offering lectures on literary and scientific subjects to an average of 225 Blacks twice a week and established an evening school for Blacks, as well as three Bible schools..."²⁵

Financial struggles and prejudice hindered the development and progress of many of the private institutions started for African Americans. Charles McMicken, a prominent White citizen of Cincinnati, showed this prejudice when asked

to do something for the education of colored youth. He responded by paying for a tract of land containing 10,000 acres, lying north of Liberia, between that republic and Sierra Leone, called it "Ohio in Africa," and told them to go there and settleHaving done so much, Mr. McMicken inserted a clause in his will prohibiting colored youth from sharing

²³ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black People*, 32-33.

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

in the benefits of any educational facilities he might provide for youth of the Queen City.²⁶

McMicken supported the idea of African Americans leaving America and resettling in Africa. This stance went beyond merely wanting a segregated environment. He and others of his ilk wanted African Americans to leave the city completely.

Black churches like Baker Street Baptist, the Colored Christian Church, and the African Methodist Church provided elementary education through Sunday Schools. Dabney wrote that the Black churches “directed their attention not only to moral and religious welfare of the colored people but also to their mental development. Through their well-attended Sunday Schools these institutions furnished many Negroes of all classes the facilities of elementary education.”²⁷ African Americans in Cincinnati were persistent in securing education for their community. Through the latter half of the 1800s, the African American community in Cincinnati continued to develop. Three Black Masonic lodges formed with sponsorship from the Black Masons in Pittsburgh.²⁸ Peter Clark, the editor of the *Afro-American*, a weekly newspaper published in 1882, formed a Literary Club.²⁹ There was no lack of weekly reading material for African American during this time. In addition to the *Afro-American*, the *Colored Citizen*, the *Colored Patriot*, and the *Voice of the People* were published. The *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* featured a column written by Charles W. Bell that was aimed at the interests of African Americans. In 1890, the Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs was formed and a number of Black churches representing a variety of denominations were also started.

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 100-101.

²⁷ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 45.

²⁸ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizen’s*; Koehler, *Cincinnati’s Black People*.

²⁹ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizen’s*; Koehler, *Cincinnati’s Black People*.

Life in Cincinnati did not improve much for African Americans even after some civil liberties were obtained. Gerber found that

Though the Black Codes had been rescinded by 1850 and African Americans had gained some civil rights, by 1890 their living conditions in Ohio had worsened. “Slowly in the 1890s, and more rapidly thereafter, Ohio’s race relations deteriorated, blacks did not lose their vote, nor were laws passed to segregate them, but there was a marked increase in racial conflict and de facto segregation.”³⁰

The vast majority lived in segregated housing, were very poor, had limited employment opportunities, and were generally treated with disdain.

Twentieth Century Cincinnati--Jim Crow Flies North

The Jim Crow of the South was not a stranger to Cincinnati. Mohraz stated, “Jim Crow had stalked the North as well as the South, although his mark on the northern states was not as harsh or as total as it was below the Mason-Dixon line.”³¹ There were no laws that limited the freedom of African Americans, but social customs were so firmly entrenched that they accomplished the same end. So much so that Ollie Bolton, an elder who participated in this study, referred to Cincinnati as a miniature Mississippi.³² Segregation was practiced from the prisons to the hospitals to the classrooms. In the February 24, 1910, edition of the *Independent Weekly Magazine*, Frank Quillan provided a detailed portrait of the face of Jim Crow in Cincinnati. His list included sanitary workers being unable to go into the home of a White family, and African Americans being barred from theaters, hotels, and other entertainment spots like the amusement park, Coney Island, and being unable to gain admission to the YMCA.³³

³⁰ Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 249.

³¹ Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 143.

³² Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

³³ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 73.

Segregation was also evident in the residential distribution of African Americans. By 1949 they made their homes in three primary neighborhoods: The West End, which was an outgrowth of Bucktown, Walnut Hills, and Lincoln Heights. Figure 1 provides a visual of the layout of Cincinnati and the African American communities. The West End, beginning in the

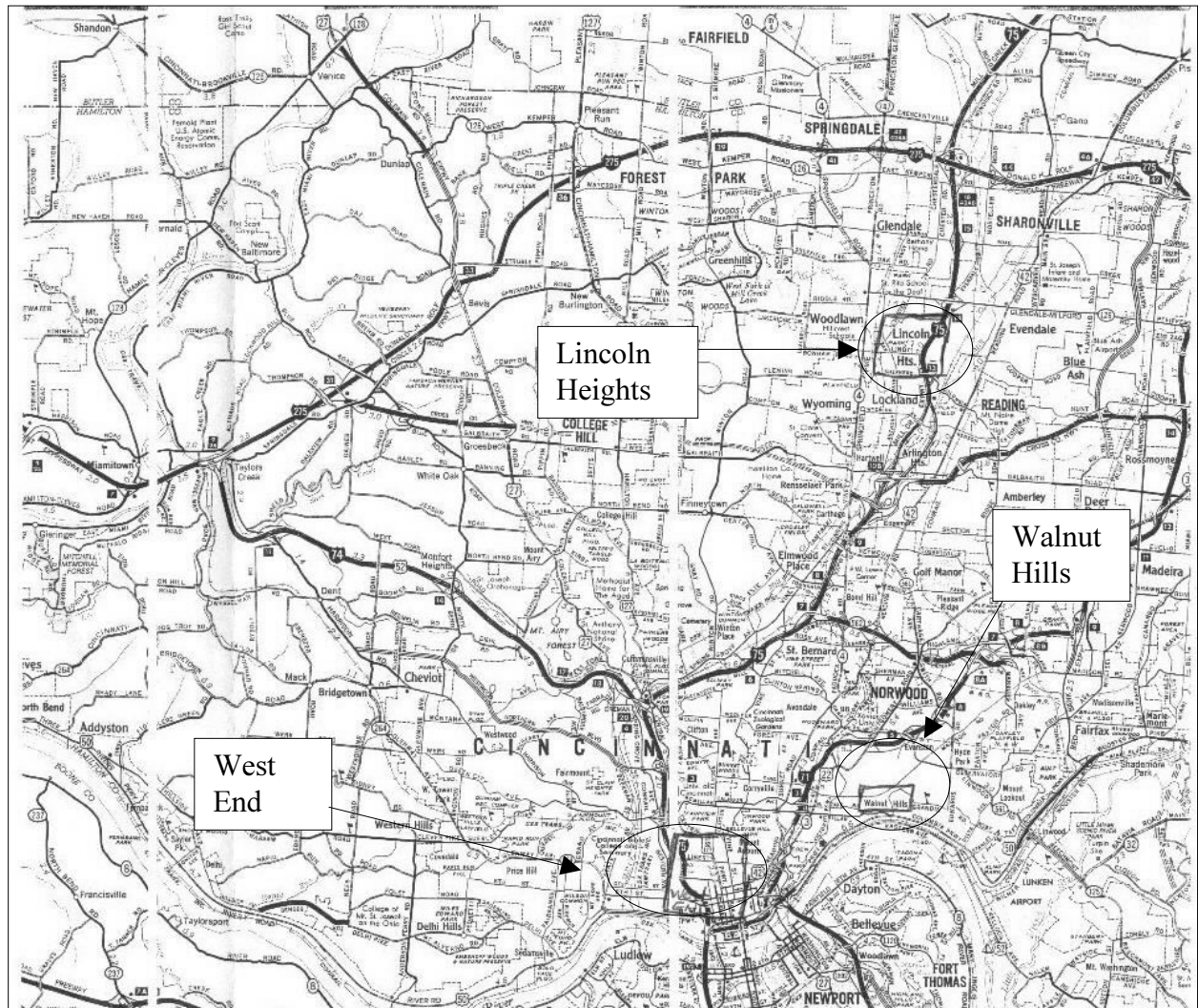


Figure 1: Visual Layout of Cincinnati and the African American Communities³⁴

³⁴ "Map Of Cincinnati," Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

1900s, became home to the city's largest numbers of African Americans and was characterized by overcrowding, crime, and poor health. "Greedy landowners, in order to increase their profits, converted single family housing that had been vacated by affluent White Americans into multi-family tenement housing that lacked private baths and adequate sanitation. The buildings themselves were dilapidated and were crowded together. Figure 2 depicts this.³⁵ With each

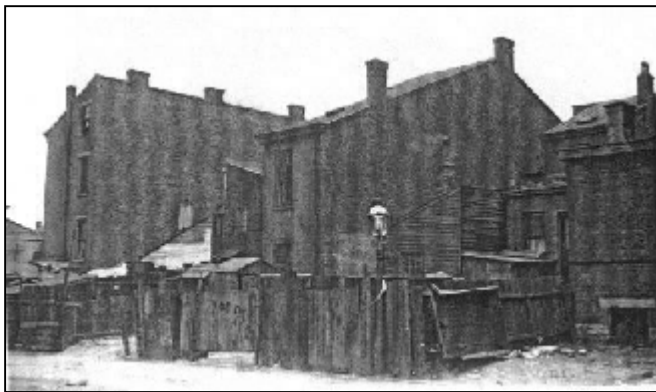


Figure 2: West End Alley and Street Corner

³⁵ Photographs, nd, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 7, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

decade the African American population in the West End increased and the living conditions decreased.”³⁶ The West End’s African American community “had a strong sense of identity that was often developed and expressed through its institutions.”³⁷ Both the rich and the poor lived in the West End. The West End was a bustling community that sported a hotel for African Americans and a club called the “Cotton Club” that attracted many famous jazz musicians and other performers. The Cotton Club was one of the few interracial entertainment spots in Cincinnati.³⁸

The West End was self-sufficient in that it had many businesses and churches. Residents of the West End did not have to venture far to meet their needs. In spite of the many positive attributes of the West End, it was targeted by city in the 1920s for partial demolition. The city cited the area’s reputation as a slum as the reason for this decision but one can not help but wonder if the prosperity of a few African Americans and self-reliant nature of the neighborhood had anything to do with that decision. In 1929, the first demolition project took place in the West End to make space for the Union Terminal, the city’s train station. Giglierano and Overmeyer stated, “for the next forty years, the city would practice urban renewal by bulldozer.”³⁹

In the 1930s, more areas of the West End would be destroyed to make room for industry. By the 1950s, even more of the area was demolished so that the Mill Creek Expressway, also known as Interstate 75, could be built. Some of the people displaced were able to move to the housing projects east of the Union Terminal and the highway that were developed in the 1930s and 1940s. In spite of the shrinking area, the African American population in the West End continued to increase, but it was never the same as it had been prior to the demolition. The

³⁶ Giglierano and Overmeyer, *The Bicentennial Guide* , 102-103.

³⁷ Ibid., 102-103.

³⁸ Ibid., 102-103.

³⁹ Ibid., 104.

neighborhood was so fragmented that many of the residents moved to neighborhoods like Walnut Hills. Those who were not as financially secure moved into housing projects that were built. The strong African American business center of the West End had disappeared, as did much of the social scene. By the conclusion of the urban renewal in the 1970s, the West End was no longer the bustling community it once was.

Walnut Hills was home to the second largest number of African Americans in Cincinnati.⁴⁰ Other such areas as Walnut Hills also had a large African American population. The Reverend James Kemper, a European American, in the 1790s founded the area whose general population grew once cable cars were introduced which made it easier to get to the area. Their population size was greatly increased in the 1930s because of the urban renewal project in the West End. “Up through the mid-twentieth century, black families usually could move only into neighborhoods where members of their race already lived. The largest concentration of African Americans in the Walnut Hills area was to the northeast of Peebles’ Corner.”⁴¹ This area was especially attractive to the African American middle class.

Cincinnati’s African American citizens were scattered throughout the city and the county but primarily lived in a few neighborhoods. The census of the population of the United States taken in 1930 showed that the population of Walnut Hills and the West End were 24.8 percent and 62.6 percent African American, respectively.⁴² The census conducted in 1940 indicated that 37 percent of Walnut Hills residents were African American and that 90 percent of the West End’s residents were African Americans. Those two neighborhoods accounted for 45,811 of the

⁴⁰ Savoti, *Women and Their Roles*.

⁴¹ Savoti, *Women and Their Roles*, 26.

⁴² United States Government, *Census of the Population for 1930*.

55,593 African American citizens of Cincinnati in 1940.⁴³ The Upper Mill Creek Valley, which is about 15 miles north of Cincinnati proper, was targeted by developers as a potential residential site for African Americans. It was initially an industrial area. Other areas in the Valley--Lockland, Woodlawn, and Reading--were already populated but few African Americans lived in there. In spite of the lack of amenities like curbs, water service, and access to community activities, African Americans purchased land in this area in the early 1920s and lived in shantytown housing. This area was called Lincoln Heights. About two decades later in 1944, it became incorporated as a city making it one of the nation's first African American independent municipalities.⁴⁴ It experienced continuous growth throughout those two decades. Lincoln Heights experienced its greatest population swell during World War II after the Wright Aircraft engine factory was opened in 1940 near Lockland. At the urging of the company, a public housing project in Lincoln Heights was constructed to provide housing for the African Americans who worked there.

In 1930, African Americans made up 10.6 percent of the city's population. By 1940, they comprised 12.2 percent of the population and in 1950, they accounted for 15.5 percent.⁴⁵ By 1950, the majority lived in the West End and Walnut Hills, and the majority was still employed in low paying, menial jobs. According to the census of the population of the United States for Cincinnati, 36,573 persons were counted in the professional occupation category and only 952 were African Americans. The greatest number of African Americans were counted in general laborer, service worker, and private-household categories.

⁴³ Fourteenth Census of the United States.

⁴⁴ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black People*, 174-175; Giglierano and Overmeyer, *The Bicentennial Guide*, 1955.

⁴⁵ United States Government, *Census of the Population for 1930*; United States Government, *Census of the Population for 1940*; United States Government, *Census of the Population for 1950*.

African American families had to figure out ways to negotiate through the many hurdles placed in their paths in order to survive, living and learning in Jim Crow Cincinnati. In order to be accurately understood, learning opportunities for African American adults must be situated within the historical and sociocultural backdrop that characterized Cincinnati. Taylor describes the special character of Cincinnati well. He wrote,

Cincinnati was not simply a northern city looking South. The city had a dual personality, a schizophrenic northern and southern personality occupying the same urban body.

Across time Cincinnati would feel this duality--a northern city, a southern city; two cultures, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in a single city. And throughout Cincinnati's history these warring souls produced constant tension while simultaneously providing Cincinnati with a unique culture and way of life. This duality, this dialectic, this contradiction, is central to understanding the history of both Cincinnati and its African American population.⁴⁶

Cincinnati is a city that possessed northern sensibilities that extolled parity and social justice while holding southern inclinations toward Jim Crow prejudice and racism. This brief review of Cincinnati's history revealed that it was city just south of freedom for African Americans.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Race in the City*, xiv.

CHAPTER FOUR

LEARNING IN THE COMMUNITY

The community offered a plethora of adult education activities through various organizations. It was in these organizations that the schism between African American and European American adult education was clearly articulated. Jim Crow seemed to be a permanent guest in adult educational activities in Cincinnati's communities. This is not surprising given that these activities took place within the confines of neighborhoods and those neighborhoods clearly were demarcated by racial boundaries. Black churches, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, the Division of Negro Welfare Division of the Community Chest (Negro Welfare Division), the Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS), the YMCA, the YWCA and many other organizations received assistance from the federal government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) program and the Adult Education Council of Metropolitan Cincinnati.¹

The WPA was a part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal."² The New Deal was momentous -- it was the first time the federal government took such an aggressive and active role in stimulating the economy for American citizens.³ It was a concrete way to help ease the suffering of millions of Americans who lost nearly everything during the Great Depression. The Great Depression had a negative impact on most Americans. Though the effects of financial devastation seem to be indiscriminately spread across the nation, African American families

¹ There were other organizations in Cincinnati that provided adult education to the African American community such as the NAACP, the League of Women Voters, African American sororities and fraternities, and Marcus Garvey's UNIA-ACL but they were not discussed in this study because the elders in the study did not mention them as sources for adult education .

² Grant, *Adult Education for Blacks*.

were among those most seriously affected.⁴ The combination of the Great Depression with Jim Crow practices levied an incomprehensible toll on the African American populace. Poverty and unemployment ran rampant in African American communities, and recovery from these conditions was extremely slow.⁵

The New Deal was implemented by two waves of legislation, one in 1933 and the other in 1935. During that second wave, the Works Progress Administration was formed. It aimed to put people to work on projects that would benefit the community. The jobs ranged from general labor to the creative arts. African Americans benefited from the WPA's programming. In fact, Morse Cartwright said, "On the whole, the Negro population fared better educationally than the white in the WPA effort."⁶ He went on to say the reason African Americans reaped such significant benefits was because they had suffered such significant losses during the Depression. "This is merely another way of saying, however, that the economic depression hit the Negro harder than the white as evidenced in the quality of those available to be hired on a relief program."⁷ The 1940 census shows very little fluctuation in the unemployment rate for European Americans in Cincinnati between the 1930 (56 percent of all European Americans) and 1940 census (57 percent of all European Americans) where as in 1930, 49 percent of all African Americans were unemployed and in 1940, 56 percent of all African Americans were not gainfully employed.⁸

Furthermore, the opportunities presented to African Americans did not parallel the level of those that were offered to European Americans. African Americans were still being passed

³ Ibid.

⁴ Grant, *Adult Education*; Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be*; Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression*.

⁵ Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression*.

⁶ Cartwright, *The History of Adult Education*, 289.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 708.

over for the lion's share of higher-level jobs. J. Harvey Kerns, secretary for the Negro Welfare Division of the Community Chest in Cincinnati, received a letter from J.W. Seautt of the Sherman School that alluded to this.

That was a very timely letter of yours which so clearly and cogently urges that letters be sent immediately to WPA Administration insisting that Negroes be given an (*sic*) fair distribution of the new labor force which it is to put on its payroll....Past experience has shown how frequently Negroes are passed up as workers on projects especially in the South where colored men have little judicial relief.⁹

Emma Smith, my great-aunt, grew up in Ferristown, Kentucky. When her father lost his job on the railroad, he was given a job through the WPA and she participated in the National Youth Administration (NYA) program when she was 16 or 17 years old. She talked about the struggle she had in getting her position as a clerk inspecting and preparing sweaters for shipment for the NYA. She had taken the test and had passed it with high marks but the people over the NYA program did not want to give her the position because she was African American but they had to because of her test score. This was her first state job, and she was proud of what she did there. She earned money that she shared with her parents and learned merchandising skills that she applied later in her career as a hat shop manager.¹⁰

In addition to providing employment opportunities, the WPA offered educational opportunities to adults. The WPA issued a set of operating procedures to guide the learning activities it was supporting. The operating procedures detailed twelve different types of classes that were eligible to receive WPA assistance. Of those twelve, ten specifically targeted adults. They included such classes as literacy, homemaking education, leisure time, and vocational

⁹ Letter to J. Harvey Kerns, Secretary, Negro Welfare Division, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 55, Folder 1, Works Progress Administration Procedures, 1937-1939, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

education.¹¹ The one element central to all of the adult educational opportunities was that the WPA insisted that the programs keep in mind the fact that they were serving adults as opposed to children. These operating procedure said, “Instruction should be kept at the level of adult intelligence and should be related to the activities of adult life.”¹² Given the latitude of program options, many of Cincinnati’s organizations capitalized on the opportunity provided by the federal government to develop and further support their adult educational endeavors.

African Americans were hired to work in WPA programs and participated as learners in WPA educational programs, but because Jim Crow discrimination and prejudice were practiced in the organizations that received WPA assistance the opportunities available were segregated and inferior. At every level, African Americans combated racial discrimination in order to secure what they were entitled to. In spite of the fact that the community organizations supported through WPA funding implemented their programs in a way that was consistent with Jim Crow practices, the WPA program was a silver lining in the cloud for unemployed and undereducated African American workers.

The Adult Education Council of Metropolitan Cincinnati in downtown Cincinnati, also helped those community organizations to provide adult education. The Adult Education Council drafted its constitution in the mid-1940s. Its primary functions were

- to promote adult education in metropolitan Cincinnati by: a. serving as a clearing house and coordinating agency for organizations and agencies concerned with adult education;
- b. assembling and distributing information about facilities for adult education; c.
- stimulating an interest in and understanding of the problems and methods of adult

¹⁰ Emma Smith, Oral History Interview.

¹¹ Operating Procedures, Works Progress Administration, March 11, 1937, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 55, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹² Ibid.

education; d. initiating and carrying out programs of adult education where community facilities are lacking.¹³

The Adult Education Council titled its 1946-1947 annual report, “Hitch your wagon to a star” because “it dramatized the discrepancy that exists between the faith that education will solve problems and the frequent absence of specific information on how education can be put to work..”¹⁴ It sought to “bridge that gap between statements of educational objectives and the realization of these objectives.”¹⁵ It did so by functioning as a general resource, referral, and planning center for all types of adult education, including vocational, traditional academic, recreational, cultural, health, religion and homemaking. It compiled such books as the *Directory of Adult Education Opportunities*, the *Program Planning Handbook*, and a monthly bulletin called *Live and Learn*. Like AAAE, the Adult Education Council of Metropolitan Cincinnati promoted the use of varied media in the delivery of instruction. It encouraged adult educators to use films, visual aids, group discussions, role-playing, and demonstrations in addition to the traditional lecture and book format.¹⁶

The Adult Education Council worked in conjunction with AAAE and the state adult education organization¹⁷ which created a chain of influence that flowed from the national organization to the local organization to the community organizations. Similar to AAAE, the Adult Education Council was in the business diffusing knowledge, but it also recognized theoretically that different social conditions required different educational responses. The Adult Education Council bulletin said

¹³ Adult Education Council Constitution, nd, Urban League, MSS 580, Folder 2, Box 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁴ Adult Education Council Bulletin, May 1947, Urban League, MSS 580, Folder 2, Box 1. Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid

Education, like all the other social forces, is neither a formulae nor a recipe; it cannot be reduced to a slogan. It is a process of reconciling and adjusting individual and social needs to an ever growing and ever changing social and intellectual climate. The expressions of adult education are as diverse and as numerous as there are individuals who seek to equip themselves better to face perennial individual problems and the new, critical problems now facing the whole community of mankind.¹⁸

Unfortunately, like its parent organization, the Adult Education Council in Cincinnati reinforced the racial schisms in the community by not actively combating them. This study does not provide an exhaustive list of agencies within the community offering adult education but it does highlight some of the agencies that functioned in that capacity and were instrumental to adult education in the African American community.

Black Churches

African Americans desired economic, social, and personal opportunities that were both quantifiably and qualitatively better than what they previously had. The black church was one vehicle through which they acquired such opportunities. Spirituality has always been a major force in the lives of people of African descent¹⁹ and was not a result of African slaves being inculcated with religion by their slave masters.²⁰ Prior to their Middle Passage experience, Africans had strong spiritual leanings.²¹ The subsequent development of the black Christian church was not as a result of, the bondage experience. In early times, the church, as an

¹⁷ Document entitled Brief History of the Adult Education Council, Adult Education Council, MSS VF4, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁸ Adult Education Council Bulletin, May 1947, Urban League, MSS 580, Folder 2, Box 1., Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁹ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 22.

²⁰ Whiteaker, *Black Adult Education*.

²¹ Mbiti, *African Religions*.

institution, was used as a means of control.²² It taught that good Christians were obedient to those in authority, and it highlighted examples in the Bible that would support the idea of being content with one's lot. As time progressed the church was yet another vehicle used to reinforce the idea of African American inferiority. Many white churches either barred African Americans from attending or made African Americans sit in the black pews, which meant that they had to sit in the back of the church segregated from white parishioners.

The black church became an integral force in African American communities and served many purposes. According to Carr, Van Leeuwen, and Stewart,

Historically, the domestic black church has been the fiery furnace through which systematic faith affirmations and liberating principles for biblical interpretation have been developed by black people. Within this "invisible institution," hidden from the observation of slave masters, black women and black men developed an extensive moral value system and religious life of their own.²³

The black church became a place where African Americans could be free of discriminatory policies, like the black pews. It provided physical, mental, and social sanctuary for African Americans. It was a place where African Americans were in charge and could see their fellow African Americans in a more positive light. They were the leaders and the organizers and were not relegated to positions of inferiority.

Records indicate that the first church for African Americans in Cincinnati was organized in 1809-1810.²⁴ The black churches were engaged in anti-slavery activity, academic training and spiritual development.²⁵ Many black churches had been established in Cincinnati by the

²² Woodson, *Education of the Negro*.

²³ Carr, Van Leeuwen, and Stewart, *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, 332.

²⁴ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, 363.

²⁵ Dabney, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*, Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Peoples*.

1930s and were an integral part of the African American community. Higginbotham stated, “The church served as the most effective vehicle by which men and women alike, pushed down racism and poverty, regrouped and rallied against emotional and physical defeat.”²⁶ The black church served as a site for spiritual development, civil rights activism, leadership development, community unity, and education.

The elders who participated in this oral history study said, black churches were not as involved with basic elementary education in the 1930s and 1940s, but these churches did offer other educational opportunities: biblical study, leadership development, and teacher training. Sunday Schools, Bible studies and Sunday morning services. Services on Sunday morning were in a lecture format and Bible studies, like the Baptist Young People’s Union (BYPU), and Sunday School classes were in small group formats that included discussions. Ollie Bolten has lived in Cincinnati since she was five years old. After graduating from high school, she attended the Evening College at the University of Cincinnati. She has been a life-long member of Southern Baptist Church, which was initially located in the West End. She attended and continues to attend Sunday School, Bible studies, and Sunday morning church services on a regular basis. Through these venues, she said, “You learn, you grow in knowledge, and you have to grow in your Christianity.”²⁷

Though each medium varied in terms of the depth of instruction, the delivery of instruction, and the time instruction, they focused on developing a relationship with God, which in turn affected the relationships African Americans had with each other and with the world. Beulah O’Conner was born in Henderson, Kentucky and graduated from an all black high school in Henderson in 1937. She moved to Cincinnati with her husband and the first of her ten children

²⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 1.

²⁷ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

in 1945 when she was 25 years old. Beulah O'Conner found Cincinnati to be just as segregated at her Kentucky hometown. She said, "I didn't like it (Cincinnati). I still don't like it. But my husband came here and he got a job..."²⁸ She described how learning took place: "We would discuss the Bible, then we would discuss how it affected us." In her opinion Biblical learning was never intended to be static; it was dynamic in nature and was to be applied to all of life's situations.²⁹ Learning how to navigate through life was one of the purposes of attending church.

Training for leadership was another critical function in black churches. The black church developed leaders within and stewards for the African American community. Sunday School teachers, auxiliary officers, and ministers all played significant roles in leading the church at large. As leaders they had to be trained for service in order to effectively serve in those capacities. They not only had to have a solid understanding of biblical principles but they also needed to understand how to lead in a pragmatic way. At Southern Baptist, Sunday School teachers did not teach unless they had received training on how to teach. Ollie Bolton described Southern Baptist Church as a teaching church. The focus was on developing good teachers and strong leaders who would serve the congregation and the community. She said, "I joined under Rev. Moore. He was the first one who instilled in me that we had to go to classes. You didn't teach unless you were trained. We had to take training for service in order to be a Sunday School teacher." This training involved learning "pedagogy" or how "to teach according to the ages....You learned their traits and your lesson was bent toward that."³⁰ Another part of her training stressed learning about the Bible. Her teacher training combined learning content and learning method.

²⁸ Beulah O'Conner, Oral History Interview.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

Another dimension of training for service focused on leadership skills. Training in parliamentary procedure was provided for auxiliary presidents. Additional training might take place in the local church or in a different town. It was not unusual for church leaders to be sent to the National Baptist Convention or the Baptist Ministers Conference or another forum similar to that. The pastor of Lincoln Heights Baptist, Beulah O'Conner's church, asked her and some of the other women in the church to attend some classes to prepare them for leadership in the church. The classes were held at the American Bible College in Kentucky. She felt honored to have been asked but she was not able to participate because of her family obligations.³¹

"You learned something to use. Yes, you went out to serve, you went out to do. And it changed your life" Ollie Bolton said. Training was not just for the personal benefit of the learners but was to be used to help benefit the wider community as well. The local church from Ollie Bolton's perspective was the starting place for service to others. She said, "You really had to get it [training] at home first," and then the commitment to service branched out to the neighborhood community, to the city, to the state, and to the nation. For Ollie Bolton, Southern Baptist Church provided her with the training necessary to serve both her church and her community. This was consistent with the idea of "social responsibility, living not solely for oneself but for the advancement of the group"³² that Shaw talked about in her study. Ollie Bolton described the importance of taking her training "out of those walls, you had to take it to the people."³³ Often she and other members of the church would meet on Saturday and go into their West End community to tell others about Christianity and to help the community by visiting the sick and assisting people in the community with their day-to-day activities.

³¹ Beulah O'Conner, Oral History Interview.

³² Shaw, *What a Women Ought to Be*, 66.

³³ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

In addition to the biblical instruction, the various venues for leadership and stewardship development, and cultural education, churches sponsored programs for the community. The Union Baptist Church sponsored an annual Institute Series. In 1944, it covered topics such as social welfare , health, and recreation from a religious perspective. One symposium was titled, “Explaining Christian living through planned recreation and character building programs.”³⁴ This type of learning through the church was not atypical. The purpose of the institute was described as demonstrating “the twentieth century approach to being a Good Samaritan. Together, Christian leadership and organized social work extend a helping hand to those in need of service.... One of the virtues of Christianity is that it permits greater happiness in this life.”³⁵ The black church was proactive in educating African Americans within the community about both spiritual matters and practical everyday matters.

African American adult education typically took place within the local African American community, but outside of the schools, most communities lacked space sufficient to host educational activities that might be deemed useful to the African American adult. The black church stepped in to fill this gap. Its building was often used to host community events. These events were varied, included lectures and forums, covered a variety of topics of special interest to the African American population. *The Union*, which was the African American periodical published in Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s, promoted these activities and reads like a virtual who’s who list when it comes to the celebrity status of some of the speakers. W.E.B. Du Bois spoke in 1934 on the subject of the “The Negro and the New Deal.” This was held at Allen Temple in conjunction with the NAACP. Charlotte Hawkins Brown spoke at Mt. Zion A.M.E. in 1943. Through the church, African American adults were able to take advantage of a

³⁴ Union Baptist Fifth Annual Institute Series program, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 43, Folder 6, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

variety of educational opportunities. These were opportunities in which they played a significant role in developing and implementing. Ollie Bolton was correct in saying that if there was anyone in the church who did not get an education, it was his or her own fault because the learning opportunities were available to who ever was interested in them. The black church did not, according to Higginbotham, represent “dramatic protest but everyday forms of resistance to oppression and demoralization.”³⁶ Education through the black church within the African American community was one of many forms of resistance to Jim Crow racism in Cincinnati.

The Division of Negro Welfare

The forerunner to Cincinnati’s Urban League was the Division of Negro Welfare of the Council of Social Agencies, Department of the Community Chest (Division of Negro Welfare). This division began its work in the early 1930s under interracial leadership. The migration of African Americans into Cincinnati spurred its formation. Upon their arrival in the city, African Americans were faced with challenges in all areas of life like housing, unemployment and race relations.³⁷ An activity report stated, “the Division of the Negro Welfare was developed as part of the Council’s program to correlate and coordinate the Negro work of the community and to serve as a clearing house through which the work may be discussed, planned, and promoted by the social agencies.”³⁸ It studied the conditions facing African Americans and developed programs that addressed those conditions.³⁹ These programs were the result of interagency planning and execution. The Division of Negro Welfare worked with such organizations as the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 2.

³⁷ Some Activities of the Division of Negro Welfare of the Council of Social Agencies, nd, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 31, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

YMCA, many churches and the Woman's City Club. The WPA provided funding and workers for several of the projects sponsored by the division.

Most of the programs sponsored by the Division of Negro Welfare had an educational component. Adult education was a focal point for the Division of Negro Welfare and played an important role in inculcating those who participated in the programming with principles consistent with the philosophy of the Division of Negro Welfare. It believed "if you write upon marble it will perish; if you write upon brass time will efface it, if you rear temples they will moulder into dust; but if you write upon immortal souls and imbue them with principles, you inscribe on these tablets something that will brighten all eternity."⁴⁰ Education was the means to accomplish that task.

The Division of Negro Welfare was proactive in imbuing its constituency with its values. One way that it did this was by capitalizing on the "strength of the Negro church and the Negro people through the creation of a strong, effective organization of ministers."⁴¹ The Division was able to communicate its values to a larger number of people. A program's suggestion report indicated that "a program to encourage ministers to persist in the practice of delivering practical sermons related to everyday problems"⁴² was set forth and helped to bolster program areas like homemaking education and civil education. In doing so, it was hoped that African Americans would hear consistent messages across a variety of settings about what behaviors, attitudes, and values were deemed appropriate.⁴³ Some areas included "instruction in home improvement, home economics, domestic adjustment, moral and cultural development, etc."⁴⁴ Though the

⁴⁰ Speech to Graduates –WPA Opportunity School, 6/15/39, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 42, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴¹ Program Suggestions, 1937, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 1, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

managing board was integrated, it is not clear as to the extent to which the African American participants were able to participate in planning the educational activities or in contributing to the development of the organizational value system.

The Division of Negro Welfare sponsored a variety of vocational programs that included conferences, forums, and training classes “in an effort to help Negro workers realize the advantages and necessity in the performance of their work.”⁴⁵ These programs were directed at all levels of workers, though it was a more difficult task for the Division of Negro Welfare to prepare and assist African Americans wanting to enter such higher level jobs as engineering, teaching, and clerical work. “Chief among the problems of Negroes in relation to educational opportunities is the inhibiting of the Negro from certain trade training and professional opportunities in public and private institutions of higher learning.”⁴⁶ The United States Censuses of 1930 and 1950 for Cincinnati show that the general-labor and domestic-servant occupational categories had the greatest representation of African American males and females, respectively.⁴⁷ Tables Two and Three show this in greater detail.

Table Two: Number and Total Percent Employed by Gender and Race⁴⁸

Occupation	Black Female/ 1930	White Female/ 1930	Black Female/ 1950	White Female/ 1950
Domestic Servant	4569 / 48%	5054/ 52%	5829/ 64.5 %	3197/ 35.5 %
Clerical	75/ .5%	12436/ 99%	467/ 1%	33373/ 99%

⁴⁵ Third Annual Report, 1939-1940, Division of Negro Welfare, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 1, Folder 11, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ United States Government, *Census of the Population for 1930*, Table 12, 1281-1284, United States Government, *Census of the Population for 1950*, Table 77, (35)368-(35)-370.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Table Three: Number and Total Percent Employed by Gender and Race⁴⁹

Occupation	Black Male/ 1930	White Male/ 1930	Black Male/ 1950	White Male/ 1950
General Laborer	2879/ 71%	1174/ 29%	6914/ 39%	10972/ 61%
Professional	415/ 4.5%	8684/ 95%	444/ 1.78%	20926/ 85%

As the nation moved from the Great Depression to World War II, the Division of Negro Welfare sought to prepare African Americans for jobs in war-time industries and even negotiated entry into apprenticeship programs for African Americans.⁵⁰ Only limited numbers of trained African American were able to gain entry into skilled and professional occupations.⁵¹ The vast majority was employed in low-status labor-type positions. The Division of Negro Welfare and other community agencies had to contend with the problem of “how could they create an educational program to meet their long-range goals, yet satisfy the immediate goals of securing jobs for their constituents?”⁵² This was the slippery slope that agencies of this nature dealt with and that often resulted in African Americans remaining on the bottom of the economic ladder.

A concomitant issue that surfaced as a result of high unemployment among African Americans was that they had an inordinate amount of free time on their hands. Improving the overall quality of life for African Americans in areas such as health, leisure, and homemaking was another goal of the Division of Negro Welfare. For instance, it sponsored programs during the national Negro Health Week. During this week, throughout the city, a special effort was

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Third Annual Report, 1939-1940, Division of Negro Welfare, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 1, Folder 11 Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Franklin, *Education for Life*, 142.

made to increase the awareness of health among African Americans.⁵³ Leisure activities were essential to the overall program of adult education sponsored by the Division of Negro Welfare and included activities such as the development of hobbies, and cultural and aesthetic interests.

As was characteristic of agencies that served the Cincinnati communities, the Division of Negro Welfare clearly denoted by its name, purpose, and subsequent work its target population: African Americans. It was “developed as part of the Council’s program to correlate and coordinate the Negro work of the community, and to serve as a clearing house through which the work may be discussed, planned, and promoted by the social agencies.”⁵⁴ The Division of Negro Welfare actively tried to improve race relations in Cincinnati. “The promotion of inter-racial good will is one of the primary functions to which the Division has devoted considerable time and effort.”⁵⁵ Through public forums, lectures, newspapers, radio broadcasts, inter-racial dinners and individual programming in local churches, clubs, and schools, the Division endeavored to dispel racial stereotypes.⁵⁶ It also saw civic education as an integral part of their work. One of their goals was to compile and disseminate statistics and information on legislation pertinent to the welfare of African Americans to the African American community. This information, coupled with knowledge about the importance of voting, was one means of attempting to improve the overall quality of life for African Americans in Cincinnati.

The Division of Negro Welfare’s role in the education of the African American adult was unparalleled in terms of its scope in content and outreach ability because it had nearly perfected the art of interagency cooperation. For example, during Race Relations Week, eighteen

⁵³ Program Suggestions, 1937, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 1, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵⁴ Some Activities of the Division of Negro Welfare, nd, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 31, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵⁵ Third Annual Report, 1939-1940, Division of Negro Welfare, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 1, Folder 11, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

organizations participated with representation from twenty-six different groups during the Second Inter-racial Fellowship Dinner, “340 persons of whom more than half were white attended the Dinner which was the most representative affair of its kind ever held in the city.”⁵⁷ Often programs sponsored by the Division of Negro Welfare were held in conjunction with other organizations and at local community locations. Statistical data was not available to discern how effective the Division of Negro Welfare was at combating “the special problems of colored people,”⁵⁸ but the amount of cooperation among community agencies indicates it was successful in raising awareness and interest in problems faced by the African American community.

Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority

By the 1930s Cincinnati was home to more slums than each of the following cities: Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. The slums in Cincinnati were considered to be the worst in Ohio.⁵⁹ Cincinnati, prompted by this realization and the risk of losing \$10,500,000 worth of federal funding, developed slum clearance projects. The Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) that “was established in December, 1933, under the provisions of the Ohio Housing Authority Law”⁶⁰ managed these projects. The projects were twofold in purpose. One purpose was to move people out of slum areas into housing that was cleaner. The other purpose was to renovate those areas into industrial zones, which would ultimately boost the city’s economy. These types of slum clearance projects had already been undertaken in other Ohio cities.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Some Activities of the Division of Negro Welfare, nd, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 31, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵⁹ Report of CMHA, 1938, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁶⁰ 8th Annual Report, CMHA, 1941 Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁶¹ Ibid

The first slum clearance project took place in the West End, which was by far the worst neighborhood in Cincinnati. In 1940, the majority of Cincinnati's African American population lived in the West End. Approximately 37,369 of the 55,583 African Americans in Cincinnati lived in the West End as opposed to 23,498 of the 399,853 European Americans in Cincinnati who lived in the West End. Between 1938 and 1944, four slum clearance projects were completed. Two were earmarked for African Americans -- Lincoln Court in 1943 and the original housing project, Laurel Homes in 1938 and 1940 -- and two for European Americans, Winton Terrace in 1941 and English Woods in 1942. Winton Terrace and English Woods were located in northern sections of the city and were several miles from the West End. Lincoln Court and Laurel Homes were in the West End. The city's managers planned these segregated housing projects. This was characteristic of Jim Crow in Cincinnati. Provisions were made for both African Americans and European Americans but those provisions were clearly indicative of the racial status quo. That is by confining African Americans to the stigmatized West End, African Americans were consigned to a place of both physical and social inferiority. In 1944, temporary housing for African Americans working in the defense industry was built in Lincoln Heights. It was called the Valley Homes and was managed by CMHA. The Valley Homes are still used as low-cost housing for that area.⁶²

As the slum clearance projects progressed, housing for African Americans would prove to be the nemesis of the project. "Every year 500 to 600 low-rent tenement dwellings in the Basin become so bad that they have to be wrecked. It is obvious that we can't go on clearing slums largely occupied by Negro families, for whom the Building Department reports there are

⁶² Eighth Annual Report, CMHA, 1941, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

now only 1% vacancies, without creating an intolerable situation.”⁶³ The records indicated that those living in the worst West End housing would be moved into the Laurel Homes first, but ironically the Laurel Homes initially had a majority population of European Americans who were the minority population in the West End. Race was a primary and driving component in the decision-making about the housing projects.

The housing projects were comprehensive in function. They provided many services for the tenants beyond of housing. During the early years of the Laurel Homes, to ensure that the tenants had adequate activities and services, the CMHA appointed two people to manage those activities and services: one for the African American tenants and another for the White tenants. A Citizens Advisory Committee to the CMHA on Colored Housing was formed. This committee had representation from most of the organizations in the community that catered to African Americans, like churches, businesses, and schools.

The Committee meets once a month and is studying Negro housing conditions and making suggestions from time to time to the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority. It is organized into six committees – Educational, Nursery School, Policy and Program, Publicity, Recreational, and Welfare and Social, and acts in an advisory capacity to the Colored Management Aid and the colored tenants in the project.⁶⁴

The color line was always visible as the CMHA attempted to serve its tenants. “The activities of white and colored families, although entirely separate, run fairly parallel.”⁶⁵ This was typical of many organizations that offered educational opportunities to the community.

⁶³ Letter to Members of City Council from Stanley Rowe, 10/24/1938, Rowe Paper, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

⁶⁴ Report of CMHA, 1938, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

CMHA worked from a presumed policy of separate and equal but in actuality it was separate and unequal. According to the report, the services that were provided to White Americans was the same as what was provided to African Americans.⁶⁶ Some of these services were educational and all were available to the African American adult living in a CMHA housing project. Classes focused on home management in the form of interior home design and Mothers' Club activities; on leisure activities, like dramatics and photography; on to civic activities, like forums dealing with race, prejudice, and discrimination; and on specific skill training, like advanced sewing and tailoring.

Everything possible is done for the enjoyment and help of the tenants. They have craft shops where they are allowed to make furniture, etc. for themselves. They do not make it to sell. In the mornings the women are taught in the craft shop, after school the children are taught, and the shop is used by the men at night. All tools are furnished for their use. However, they must buy their own material.⁶⁷

In many instances, the activities that were offered were a direct consequence of the tenants requesting particular courses or through the cooperation of other agencies such as the Red Cross, WPA and the Public Recreation Commission provided leadership for many of the activities. The tenants, through fundraising efforts, helped to finance some of the activities.⁶⁸

The adult education classes sponsored by CMHA were well attended. The 1938 report said that about 150 tenants participated in various programs offered.⁶⁹ Two of the programs for adults that garnered a significant amount of tenant attention were the Men's Club programs and

⁶⁶ Report of CMHA, 1938, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁶⁷ Report on Cincinnati Public Housing Projects, Laurel Homes and Winton Terrace by Members of Junior League (Provisional Group 1941), December, 1942, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society.

⁶⁸ Eighth Annual Report, CMHA, 1941, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁶⁹ Report of CMHA, 1938, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

the Mothers' Club. The Men's Club sponsored forums that featured prominent speakers in Sunday afternoon forums. The forums were interactive and open to any adult tenant. One forum featured J. Harvey Kerns, executive secretary of the Negro Welfare of the Community Chest. His topic was *The Lessened Importance of Individual Aims Under the Pressure of Modern Living Conditions*. He pointed out that the individual was turning more and more to the protection offered by various cooperative movements in securing economic and social advantages. He closed with the suggestion that the members study these trends as they affected the Negro."⁷⁰ Preparing the tenants for life beyond the confines of the housing project was a key concern of the Men's Club.

The Mothers' Club held monthly meetings in which "every mother will have an opportunity to hear an outstanding speaker and discuss subjects of childhood and child training."⁷¹ The Mothers' Club emphasized the role of the mother and strove to make certain the mothers in the housing project had sufficient opportunity to develop and expand their parenting skills. The following as excerpted from the *Laurel-Ville-Life*, shown in Figure 5, ⁷² sums up the mother's role. "Patience and common sense are the watchword in training children. As usual, 'It's up to 'mother'."⁷³ This was not unlike the progressive reform ideology popular in the 1920s and was reminiscent of the values of thrift and cleanliness stressed in Booker T. Washington styled industrial education programs. It was trite, condescending and it devalued the experiences of African American people.

⁷⁰ *Laurel-Ville- Life*, March 1939, Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority, MSS 682, Box 3, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.



Figure 3: *Laurel-Ville-Life* Bulletin

Adult education in Laurel Homes, Lincoln Park, and Valley Homes was not only open to African Americans but it also was designed for them. It was tailored to meet their needs and interests, at least as defined by the CMHA. Some of the activities were held under the direction of outside agencies and were top-down in terms of management deciding what should be offered. But in some instances, the activities were developed by the African American tenants or were requested by them. They had an active hand in planning some of their educational programs and aggressively used the resources available to them in acquiring what they desired.⁷⁴ Even though programs were made available, not all of the residents were able to take advantage of them. For instance, Beulah O'Conner lived in the Valley Homes for about ten years and she mentioned that she was aware that CMHA provided learning opportunities, but as a mother of ten very young children, she could not afford the time to participate in them.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Eighth Annual Report, CMHA, 1941, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society, *Laurel-Ville Life*, March 1939, Rowe Papers, MSS 682, Box 3, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁷⁵ Beulah O'Conner Oral History Interview.

Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Early on, the library took on the challenge of adult education, which entailed dispelling myths about the library's function.

There are many who still look upon the library as a repository of books and not as an educational institution. It is only by constant repetition of the fact that education is a continuous process which in most cases must be carried on through readers and that it is the library upon which the students must lean eventually for material and guidance, that the library will be granted its rightful position in the educational world.⁷⁶

The library was able to fulfill this mission in part by the development of branch libraries, deposit stations, and bookmobiles. Figure 6 features a picture of bookmobile in 1937 in Hazelwood a suburb of Cincinnati. These options offered African Americans, in particular, a greater opportunity to take advantage of the services the library offered. The library did not keep statistics on its use based on race so it is not possible to know the extent to which African Americans used the branches or the main branch. Dorothy Williams noted the same phenomenon when she wrote about the libraries in 1945.

In those libraries to which Negroes are admitted on the same basis as are other patrons, Negroes have the opportunity of sharing the adult education programs and facilities which have been made generally available, although the extent to which they actually have done so cannot be documented, since these libraries do not normally keep their records of use on the basis of racial groupings.⁷⁷

The first branch library was opened in 1906. Eventually, the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County boasted of twenty-four branch libraries, ten of which "have their own

⁷⁶ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Decade of Service*, 77-78.

⁷⁷ Williams, *Adult Education in Public Libraries and Museums*, 325.

buildings, all but one of which were erected with Carnegie funds.”⁷⁸ Andrew Carnegie donated \$303,000, and his philanthropy proved to be instrumental to the development of several neighborhoods’ branch libraries. These branches served a vital function in the neighborhoods where they were situated. The branch libraries were the “social as well as the book center for the community.”⁷⁹

Although precise numbers on library usage by African Americans are not available, it seems reasonable to surmise that those branch locations located near dense populations of African Americans were the branches that were most frequently accessed by them. But this statement does not prove to be entirely accurate. The branches that were most accessible to African Americans were the Walnut Hills and Douglass Library branches in Walnut Hills, and the West End and Stowe Library branches in the West End. European Americans and African Americans lived in both areas. The Douglass Branch and the Stowe Branch were both located within the “colored” public schools that bore their names and were primarily accessed by African Americans.

In fact, they were considered colored branches. They occupied one room of the schools and were coincidentally situated in the areas of Walnut Hills and the West End, respectively, which were closest to the African American populations for those areas. “One of the most interesting is that located in the Douglass School (colored), which connects with the social center work done by that school for the large settlement on Walnut Hills.”⁸⁰ The Walnut Hills Branch and the West End Branch were both freestanding buildings erected with funds from Carnegie and were in the section of those neighborhoods close to where White Cincinnatians lived. These

⁷⁸ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Handbook*, 14.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

branches were multiroom libraries with meeting rooms, auditoriums, and modern décor.⁸¹ The branches within these neighborhoods were just blocks away from each other, but were miles apart in terms of building characteristics, library holdings, and overall quality. Figure four shows the proximity of the branches to each other.⁸²

“The Douglass School for Negroes has become altogether inadequate, even though some Negro readers use the Walnut Hills Branch on the southern edge of their community,”⁸³ most did not. The Douglass Branch suffered from overcrowding because public housing constructed in the West End resulted in an increase in the West End African American population. The Stowe

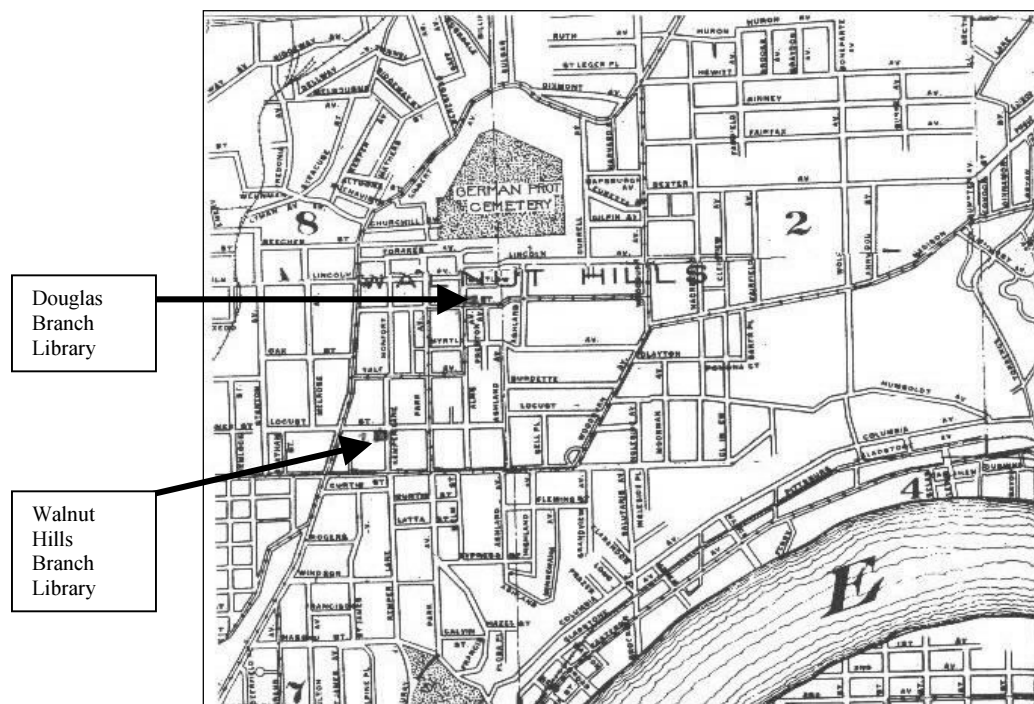


Figure 4: Map showing proximity of the Douglas Branch to the Walnut Hills Branch

⁸¹ Savoti, *Women and their Roles*, 29.

⁸² Hill, *Walnut Hills City Neighborhood*, x.

⁸³ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Decade of Service*, 52.

Branch had with the same problem. African Americans in the West End patronized the neighboring Dayton Street Branch.⁸⁴ Library officials also considered forming another colored branch in the West End.⁸⁵ Given the problem of overcrowding and the noticeable differences between the colored branches and the other branches, it is surprising that more African Americans did not take advantage of the library services offered at the non colored branches.

Perhaps the experience of Pastor Richard Waldrop with the Walnut Hills Branch Library sheds light on why African Americans did not more frequently access those branches. Pastor Waldrop was largely self-educated and actively sought out adult learning activities that would help him in his ministry and his life. He recalled an incident at the Walnut Hills Branch Library. He went there and told the librarians he wanted some books on Black History but the librarians told him they did not have any. He told them that he knew they had them but they did not want African Americans to have access to them. He replied, “Why would you keep us in the dark?” He never was able to get the books on Black History, nor were librarians willing to advise him as to where he could find them. He answered his own question later in the interview by saying, “The reason they [White people] don’t want us [African Americans] to hear our history is because they know we got something [special].” Pastor Waldrop recognized the role that the librarians played as the gatekeepers to knowledge.

The librarian staff, however, represented just one level of access. Figure 5 shows the all African American library staff at Douglass Branch and the Stowe Branch and the all White library staff of the Walnut Hill Library.⁸⁶ The library’s management, who determined what books would be ordered and what programs would be sponsored, also controlled access to knowledge. As the gatekeepers within a society that functioned under Jim Crow, denying patrons

⁸⁴ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Decade of Service*, 52.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

materials on African American history and culture reinforced the presumed inferiority of the African American community. I was not able to obtain records from the Douglass and Stowe branches to ascertain what their programs were like in the mid-twentieth century, but both were community centers for their neighborhoods. “It was clear that Douglass fulfilled several important roles.



Figure 5: Left, Staff of the Douglass, Middle, Walnut Hills, and Right, Stowe Branch Libraries.

It was the neighborhood school for local residents, as well as the center for adult community activities. Since its enrollment was open city-wide, however, it had a broader reputation as a symbol of Black education.”⁸⁷

By the mid-1940s, the Walnut Hills Branch Library and the library system were actively attempting to combat the perception that the Walnut Hills Branch Library was not a library open to all.⁸⁸ Discrimination was a hot topic across the nation and the city. In an effort to alleviate the problems caused by systemic discrimination and prejudice, the Walnut Hills branch stated the following, “Our Walnut Hills Public Library, supported and conducted by all the people

⁸⁶ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *A Pictorial Record*.

⁸⁷ Hill, *Walnut Hills City Neighborhood*, 25-26.

⁸⁸ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Ten Year Report*, 27; Newspaper article, “Discrimination”, *DeSales Corner News*, September 1946, Walnut Hills Library Archives.

regardless of race, color, and creed, will sponsor an **Open Evening Forum** once each month beginning in October, where all the above classified groups are not only welcome, but urged to attend.”⁸⁹ The open forums consisted of a series of public forums titled “Better Human Relations.” A variety of media were used in the forums. Such films as “American All”⁹⁰ and “Man, One Family”⁹¹ were shown and discussions were encouraged. Prominent members of the community took part in the panels, including members of the Mayor’s Friendly Relations Committee, the Adult Education Council, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, church ministers, and public school administrators. The Walnut Hills community responded favorably to the forums. One resident wrote the following to the editor of the *DeSales Corner News*, “It is about time the people of the world learned to live together, and the first step in that direction will be when the people in any single neighborhood can learn to get along together.”⁹²

Walnut Hills was a neighborhood that was a prime candidate for inter-racial understanding and cooperation as was the Walnut Hill Branch Library. If programs like the aforementioned Open Forum were prevalent, then that would indicate that the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County espoused a philosophy of non-discrimination, but the practice of maintaining segregated, inferior libraries for African Americans betrayed its true nature. The demonstration of not repudiating second-class citizenship by simple acts of helpfulness and interest in a library patron who desired to learn more about his history also suggests that Jim Crow had infiltrated the library system. Other elders, especially those who had resided in the West End, were asked if they patronized the public library, like the Stowe Branch or the West

⁸⁹ Newspaper article, “Discrimination”, *DeSales Corner News*, September 1946, Walnut Hills Library Archives.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

End Branch. None of them had and most of them were not aware that the Stowe Elementary School housed a public library that was open to adults. Consistent with the national norm, the library system in Cincinnati did not serve the needs of African Americans well. “Except in isolated instances, Negroes have no access to the main libraries and the separate branches provided for them, for the most part, have inaccessible locations, microscopic budgets, small and poorly selected book collections, and part-time staffs, the majority of whom are untrained.”⁹³ The library offered unique opportunities for adults to explore a vast array of topics leading to liberal education and social justice, but given the structure of the local public library system in the 1930s and 1940s, it was not very effective in doing either for African Americans. Figure 6 shows a picture of the inside of the Douglass Branch library.⁹⁴



Figure 6: Left, Stowe Branch Library, Right, Douglass Branch Library.

⁹³ Williams, *Adult Education in Public Libraries and Museums*, 325.

YWCA

The YWCA espoused a philosophy of diversity and interracial cooperation. “The early leaders of the Young Women’s Christian Association believed deeply that the organization should embrace ‘all women and girls in all types of communities.’ Therefore, they made special efforts to reach different groups of girls and women including members of racial minority groups.”⁹⁵ The Young Women’s Christian Association has served women in many ways. It has provided a smorgasbord of learning activities to women in Cincinnati since 1868. Cincinnati was a forerunner in the nation when it did so because only seven other cities had organized a YWCA at that time. In 1926, it had as a motto, “An open door to every girl of whatever nationality, creed or race.”⁹⁶ As early as 1876, it had lived up to that motto because in that year it offered services to “colored girls and women.” This division was called the War Council Club, which was then known as the Blue Triangle Club.⁹⁷ Eventually, in 1920, a branch for African Americans was organized in the West End. It was called the West End YWCA branch and this branch was located at 700 West Eighth Street. The Central YWCA branch was located at 20 East Eighth Street (See Figure 8 for a visual of locations). It primarily served European American women.

The West End Branch was organized like the other YWCA branches. It had different departments that were subdivided into different clubs that met particular needs of the women who attended the YWCA programs. Many of its programs were educational in nature. The programs fell into five general categories: work-related, home-related, personal improvement, leisure, and civic. While the organization of the branches was quite similar in terms of the

⁹⁴ Souvenir Program, New Douglass School, November, 1920, Douglass School Manuscripts, MSS 815, Folder 4, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁹⁵ Height, *The Adult Education*, 390

⁹⁶ History of the Cincinnati Young Women’s Christian Association, nd, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 19, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁹⁷ 125 Years of Celebrating Women, 1993, YWCA, Pam 267.5 Y74c, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

departments that were formed, the specific programs were tailored to the needs of the women and girls who lived in the area it served.⁹⁸ The branches also offered programs in response to requests made by the women themselves. For example, in November, 1931, the West End Branch of the Business and Industrial Girls Club said that “they voluntarily expressed an interest in knowing more about the Negro and have selected the Negro from all angles as a project. The Negro in Africa was the first approach. They are learning the Negro National Anthem and reading books from a selected list by and about Negroes.”⁹⁹ Branch program specificity was not just in the topics chosen for learning but also in the selection of people to discuss particular topics. The West End Branch sponsored talks by A. Phillip Randolph and W.E.B. Du Bois.¹⁰⁰

Educational programming related to work concerns at the West End YWCA focused mainly on trades that African American women were entering. In 1931, “in cooperation with the city employment office, a class in Household Engineering is being conducted. Many of the women who apply for work know very little about modern cleaning and household service.”¹⁰¹ African American women were primarily employed as domestic workers. They cleaned, cooked and attended to the houses of affluent White families. Another subject was English. It was important that the workers speak good English when they were working in these domestic positions, so classes were offered to help them to develop those skills.¹⁰² Although there were clubs for business and professional workers, most of the West End YWCA participants sought help in procuring and maintaining lower tiered positions. Ollie Bolton graduated from Woodward High School in 1933. Woodward was a predominately White integrated high school

⁹⁸ YWCA, MSS 619, Boxes 36, 37, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁹⁹ Report of Business and Industrial Secretary, November 1931, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 36, Folder 10, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Report for February 1935, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

with an all white teaching staff. She recalled that there was one Black high school, the McCall Industrial School. The industrial school offered training in secretarial work, but the African American students at Woodward were discouraged from taking typing, shorthand, and business administration. She said, “They [the White teachers] said you are just wasting your time, no one was going to hire you Black girls.” They were encouraged to take household arts like making beds and cooking.¹⁰³ Experiences like hers no doubt were what led to the greater participant interest in the YWCA Household Engineering programs over the Business and Professional Girls Workers.

Other programming was aimed at filling leisure time. The Garden Club was particularly active during the 1930s and 1940s. It had monthly meetings in which topics related to gardening, like “insects and methods of destroying them,”¹⁰⁴ were covered. Classes like dance were also popular at the West End Branch. Home-improvement related topics like marriage and child rearing were important. A Young Married Women’s group (also called Mothers’ Club) met twice a month to read literature and discuss issues related to being a wife and mother. Personal improvement included physical fitness and health-related topics. Civic education typically focused on topics dealing with being African American in Cincinnati.¹⁰⁵ Figure 7 shows a partial monthly statistical report for the YWCA of Lincoln Heights in 1948.¹⁰⁶ This YWCA was not in operation for a long duration because the main YWCA felt that the needs of that women and girls in that community were adequately met by the Lockland YMCA .

¹⁰³ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

¹⁰⁴ Narrative Report Health, Recreation and Activities, February, 1935, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁰⁵ YWCA, MSS 619, Boxes 36, 37, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁰⁶ Monthly Statistical Report Form, April, 1948, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 33, Folder 5, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

Various approaches were used for instruction. Films, lectures, small group discussions, and hands-on learning (when applicable) were among the methods used. There also was a big push toward assessing and meeting the needs of the women. "In order to make our work

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April 1948

MONTHLY STATISTICAL REPORT FORM
FOR ADULT GROUP REPORT- LINCOLN HEIGHTS

A. ORGANIZED GROUP PROGRAMS	Enrollments	Number	Sessions	Attendance	
				Enrollees	Visitors
1. Groups with definite enrollment					
(1) Clubs:					
Young Matrons	17	1	4	22	
Club Committee Meetings: (list)					
Club Interest Groups: (list)					
Fashion Club	16	1	1	12	
(2) Classes: (list)					
Tap	32	2	10	86	
Intellect	8	1	6	24	
Business (Wednes)					
(5) Committees:					
Committee of Management	22	1	1	17	
Membership	22	1	1	10	
Public Affairs	11	1	1	103	
Young Adults	11	1	1	8	
Home & Hostess	14	1	2	14	
(6) Other (specify)					
World Fellowship	10	1	1	2	
Personnel Comm.	5	1	1	3	
2. Organized group activities without definite enrollment				Partici- pants	Visitors
a. (1) Regularly scheduled activities:					
Barre Room			23	1836	
Dance	5	5		384	
(2) Special Events: (specify)					
Event itself (give name)					
Committee meeting on event					
Practices for event					
Training Course		4		36	

OVER

Figure 7: YWCA Monthly Statistical Report, 1948

effective in the lives of our girls and women, we realize we must know them individually.

Throughout the month a conscious effort to know each individual better has been made. Informal conversation at group and class meetings and personal interviews have been utilized.”¹⁰⁷

At the local level, the branches were racially segregated. African Americans could participate in activities sponsored by any branch but they primarily attended the West End YWCA.

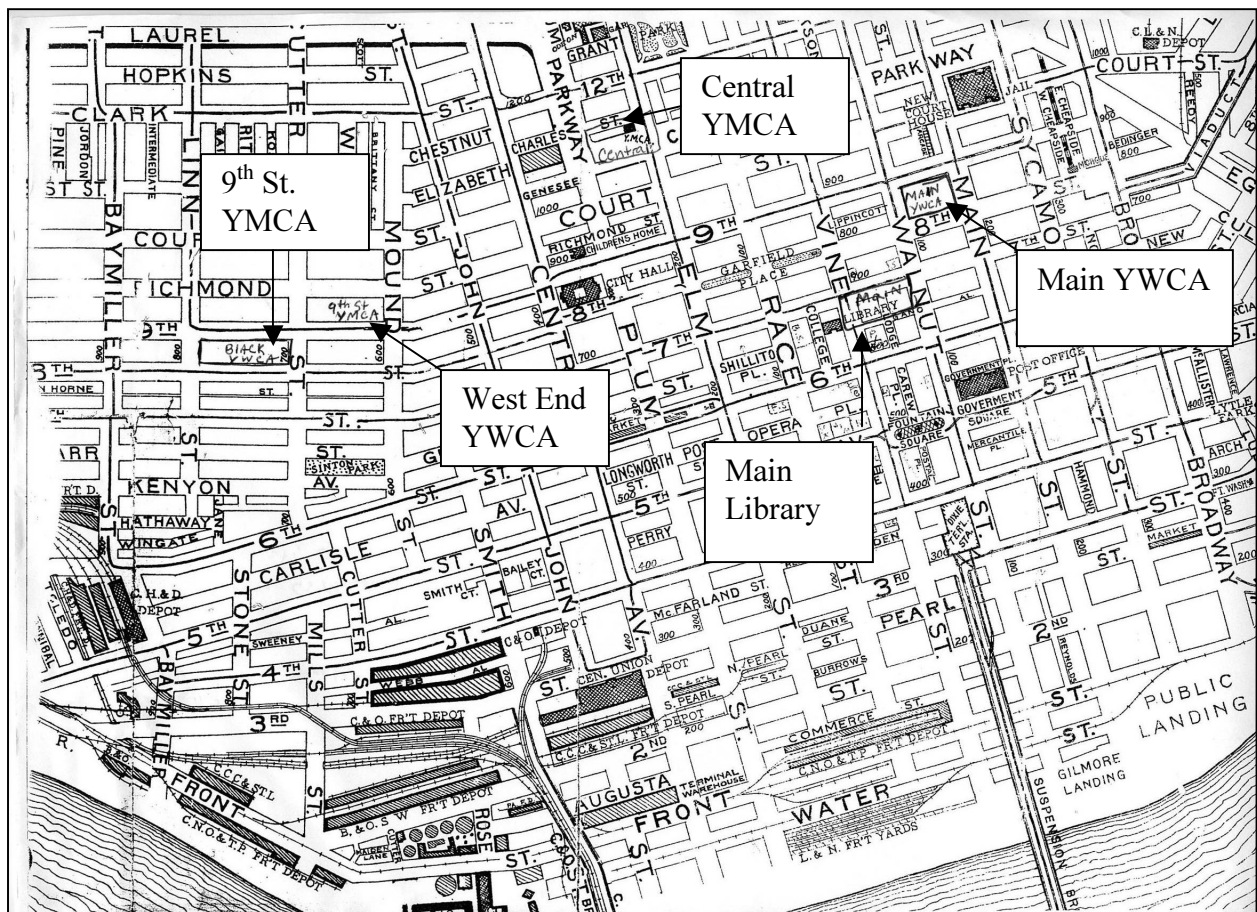


Figure 8: Mendenhall's Map of Cincinnati, 1937.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Report for March, 1935, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁰⁸ Mendenhall, *Map of Downtown Cincinnati*.

YMCA

The YWCA and the YMCA have long histories in the nation and in the local community as social-welfare organizations dedicated to improve the life conditions of adults through benevolent charity, education, and religious guidance. The Cincinnati Association was established in 1848, and from the outset it operated Mission Sunday Schools and Bible classes for the White men in the community. Its initial goal was the “recalling of sinners from the path of unrighteousness.”¹⁰⁹

The local Association was well connected to the national organization. Its representatives attended the national conferences and in 1856 hosted the National Association’s Second Annual Conference. Within a short time, the YMCA in Cincinnati, in accordance with the national trend, had broadened its defined purpose as

the improvement of the spiritual, mental, moral, social, and physical condition of young men by the support and maintenance of lectures, libraries, reading-rooms, social and religious meetings, and such other means and services as would conduce to the accomplishment of these ends not contrary to the teachings of the Bible.¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, everyone in the community was not able to make use of the valuable services offered by the Cincinnati YMCA. African Americans, in particular, were barred from participation. In 1874, the National Association began to be preoccupied with the question, “How to reach all classes of men?... ‘Classes,’ we learn, signified such groups as ‘college students, railroad men, Negroes, men in industry, and the foreign-born.’”¹¹¹ The YMCA’s policy of not allowing African Americans to participate in the late 1800s and early 1900s was typical of the times. African Americans were undaunted by this and thru their self determination formed

¹⁰⁹ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 33.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 35.

their own Association. “The YMCA refused Blacks active or associate membership, and after some young men established a segregated YMCA in Walnut Hills, the White Y, caused the Black organization to change its name to the Y.B.(oys)C.A.”¹¹² It was not until the 1900s, due to the urgings of the Negro Civic Welfare League and a financial incentive from philanthropist Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, that the Cincinnati YMCA took active steps to include African Americans in its organization.¹¹³

Rosenwald offered \$25,000 “to any city which would raise an additional \$75,000 for the construction of a Negro YMCA.”¹¹⁴ The National Association supported the formation of “Colored YMCAs” and as early as 1912 had appointed Dr. J. E. Moorland as the national secretary of the Colored YMCAs. He, along with local YMCA leaders like D. B. Meachum and various African American leaders in Cincinnati developed, plans for a YMCA branch that would serve African American males. After their plan had been approved, the planning committee still had the burden of raising the \$75,000 needed to secure the Rosenwald donation. Many of Cincinnati’s wealthier citizens, like the Meachums, donated money. The Cincinnati YMCA’s Board of Directors also raised money for the venture. But the \$15,248.19 raised by the African American community is of special interest because it provides further evidence of the self-help attitude possessed by this community. It has already been established that Cincinnati’s African Americans, as a group, were among the poorest groups, in the city, but in spite of their seemingly modest means, they willingly sacrificed to provide financial support to help develop their community.¹¹⁵ Considering that in 1912, the average African American occupied the lowest rung

¹¹¹ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 33.

¹¹² Koehler, *Cincinnati’s Black Peoples*, 103.

¹¹³ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 89-90.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹¹⁵ Koehler, *Cincinnati’s Black Peoples*; United States Government, *Thirteenth Annual Census*; United States Government, *Fifteenth Annual Census*.

on the occupational ladder, the fact that this community raised that amount of money is remarkable.¹¹⁶

Cincinnati's Colored Branch began operating in January 1913. It was Cincinnati's second YMCA branch and was initially located at Seventh and Plum Streets under the direction of H. S. Dunbar and Washington Simms. Though it is no longer in existence, the building erected as a result of the financial assistance from the Rosenwald fund was completed in 1915. The Colored Branch moved into the new building at 630 West Ninth Street on February 6, 1916. It was called the Ninth Street Branch and was situated "in an area of congested population amid the worst housing conditions of the city, in a community which had, on the whole, few opportunities for wholesome recreation."¹¹⁷ It was only a few blocks away from the Central YMCA that served the White community (See Figure 8 for a visual of locations between the Ninth St. YMCA and the Central YMCA.) Though it was not a community center per se, it did provide office space for many community agencies.¹¹⁸ Figure 9 shows picture of the Ninth St. YMCA (on the left) and the Central YMCA (on the right).¹¹⁹

African Americans played an active role in the leadership of the Ninth Street Branch. Dr. W. T. Nelson, an African American, was the first chairman of the Committee of Management for the branch. He was also the "first Negro to be named a member of any YMCA Metropolitan Board of Directors" when he was elected to the Cincinnati Board in 1919.¹²⁰ He served as a vice-president on the Board, a delegate to "the first YMCA National Council meeting in 1924; he was chosen Vice-President of that body. He has been Vice-President of the Ohio State YMCA

¹¹⁶ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Peoples*

¹¹⁷ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 92.

¹¹⁸ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association, Twenty Years of Service*, PAM 267.39 Y74, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹¹⁹ *Twenty Years of Service*, YMCA, PAM 267.39 Y74, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹²⁰ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 90.

Committee and Chairman of Colored work of the State of Ohio.”¹²¹ Another African American, Horace Sudduth, served as the chairman of the Committee of Management for the branch. He succeeded Dr. Nelson.¹²²



Figure 9: Left, Ninth St. YMCA, Right, Central YMCA

The Ninth Street YMCA was not the only YMCA open to African Americans during the 1930s and the 1940s. The Lockland Branch YMCA and the Walnut Hills Branch YMCA both provided services to the African American community. Their doors were open to men, women, boys, and girls. It is not clear what year the Lockland Branch, which was near Lincoln Heights began welcoming African Americans, but in 1953, Senger noted that “for years, [the Lockland Branch] provided for Negroes the only gymnastic facilities available in Hartwell, Wyoming, Lockland, and Woodlawn. Being a neighborhood center it was open to all members of the family

¹²¹ Ibid., 90.

¹²² Ibid.

without distinction of sex.”¹²³ The Lockland Branch, was initially started in 1914 as a “Community Extension type of program” under the name of the “Elmwood-St. Bernard Branch” and later known as the “Valley Branch.” This meant that the program was supported by the YMCA of Cincinnati but was not under its jurisdiction. The YMCA did not establish it as a branch until January, 1921.¹²⁴

The Community Extension program was formed for the industrial workers in Lower and Upper Mill Creek Valley. By 1919 the western side of Lockland had a very visible population of African Americans such that “certain citizens of Lockland formed a Playground Association to raise money for the purpose of providing wholesome recreation for the colored population of West Lockland.”¹²⁵ The African Americans in Lockland were credited with helping to establish the Community Building in November 1920. The building contained

a combined gymnasium and auditorium, a social and reading room, lobby and office space, a large room for informal recreation and club meetings, shower baths and washrooms....Because of the dearth of community facilities, [it] was used as a neighborhood center and as a meeting-place for various civic groups. It housed the Baby Health Clinic and Milk Station, the Antituberculosis Clinic, and similar organizations.¹²⁶

The Lockland Branch provided a service that had incalculable benefits for African Americans living in the Upper Mill Creek Valley.¹²⁷

Through the cooperative efforts of “The Boy Scouts, Public Recreation Commission, Coordinating Council, Mt. Zion M.E. Church, Young Women’s Christian Association, [and] the Young Men’s Christian Association,” the Nash Community Center was formed to “provide

¹²³ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 88.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 87.

wholesome character-building activities”¹²⁸ and it operated out of the Mt. Zion Church in Walnut Hills. By January, 1944, most of those agencies had discontinued their affiliation with the center and the YMCA in March of 1944 assumed responsibility for the center and established it as a branch.¹²⁹ The YMCA purchased a building on Melrose Avenue that served as the Walnut Hills YMCA Branch to accommodate all of the people who wanted to be members. The building featured three lounges, clubrooms, recreation or gamerooms, auditorium, gymnasium, locker-rooms, showers, and dining-rooms.¹³⁰ This branch was open to both sexes and served African Americans living in the Walnut Hills and South Avonlee area. This branch issued the following statement about its purpose,

To help boys and girls, men and women to be useful and worthwhile citizens; to encourage community pride; to help new residents become adjusted; to keep Walnut Hills a fine place in which to live; to instill in the people of this community a friendly attitude and a spirit of Christian brotherhood.¹³¹

African Americans via the “Colored Branches” were able to actively participate participants in the YMCA’s programming. Much of the YMCA’s programming was consistent across all the local branches of the YMCA. By the 1930s, the heavy emphasis on evangelism had been lessened and the mission was broadened to include many other aspects of life. The mission focused on improving the day- to- day quality of life for people in Cincinnati. It also made special provisions during war time to cater to the needs of the soldiers. Among other things, the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 109.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 109.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 110.

¹³¹ Ibid., 111.

YMCA offered residential living opportunities, employment placement, and educational opportunities.¹³²

The educational opportunities available through the YMCA were plentiful and varied. Religious instruction was a mainstay of the YMCA's programming prior to the 1930s. In 1932, the Department of Religion within the YMCA was disbanded. More than representing a shift in emphasis, this decision represented a shift in method. Instead of religion being compartmentalized, which was never the true intent of the YMCA when the Department of Religion, it became a function of every department. "The eventual abandonment of the department is perhaps best ascribed to a general conviction that, with religion permeating the entire work, every department should consider itself a religious department."¹³³ The central goal of the religious education was to "promote the application of religion to the concrete situations of actual life" and to actualize Christian philosophy.¹³⁴ This was accomplished through a variety of educational activities like Bible study, worship service, religious meetings, and personal counseling.¹³⁵

The Ninth Street Branch sponsored a Young People's Parliament at Camp Washington Simms, the YMCA camp established for African American boys, which offered a course in religious leadership training.¹³⁶ This training was a cooperative event between the YMCA and local African American churches. The Parliament was accredited by the Inter-national Council of Religious Education.¹³⁷

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 36.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 92; *Y-Messenger*, September 1948, 1, YMCA, 051 Y78.6. unb.per.

¹³⁷ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*.

Educational activities fell into three general categories: improvement of oneself on an intrapersonal level, improvement on an academic level, and improvement on a vocational level. The individual person was developed through physical activity, health education, and leisure-time activity. This was in keeping with the religious philosophy of the YMCA. The body was God's temple and everyone had an obligation to maintain its health. It also helped to curb idleness. Classes in physical exercise, specific sporting activities, healthful living, and crafts helped to accomplish that goal. At one time the purpose of the department was to produce high-caliber athletes. The Ninth Street Branch trained Ezzard Charles, the world heavyweight Boxing champion when he was a youth.¹³⁸

Academically the YMCA offered a wide range of opportunities, which included the Night Law School and Chase College. The Night Law School operated roughly from 1893 until 1953. It was an accredited bachelor degree's program and was the first of its kind in the United States. The Salmon P. Chase College was so named in 1943 but had functioned in some fashion since 1899 when classes offered by the YMCA were organized under the name of the McDonald Educational Institute. These classes included night elementary- level and high school level- subjects. The YMCA even operated an accredited high school until 1948. It was later designated as a college because it offered a degree in commercial science and functioned as other colleges did with fraternities, sororities, and yearbooks. Available records do not indicate if African American adults were given access to those programs in higher education. All of the branches to some degree offered lower level academic learning opportunities. National, state, and local conferences were another avenue of learning. The YMCA Young Men's Conference was a

¹³⁸ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*.

national conference “conducted for and by young men 19-25 years of age.”¹³⁹ “Through a discussion and small-talk format, they discuss issues considered to be important to them. Through the discussions they have a chance to hear what other young men think and how they deal with the issues which were being highlighted.”¹⁴⁰

Besides those programs of higher education, the education department of the YMCA offered vocational training. The YMCA organization sponsored an automobile school and taught classes in various trades: printer’s apprenticeship, electricity, stationary engineering, motion-picture projecting, advertising and salesmanship, show-card writing, and newspaper art and cartooning.¹⁴¹ The stationary engineering class through the Ninth Street YMCA was frequently advertised in *The Union* newspaper¹⁴² and *The “Y” Messenger*, a monthly publication of the Ninth Street Branch, also promoted the educational opportunities that were available at its branch. Its offerings during the fall semester of 1948 included home mechanics, understanding family life, public speaking, leading small groups, singing, photography, and entering the civil service. Figure 10 shows excerpts from the *“Y” Messenger*. Undoubtedly these courses represent a cross-section of subjects most useful in terms of vocational training and of general interest to the African Americans that it served. The courses were six weeks long and were promoted by the slogan, “Make your life richer through informal study.”¹⁴³

It is clear that African Americans participated in the YMCA programming through the Ninth Street Branch and Walnut Hills Branch locations, which was specifically designed for them, and through the Lockland Branch, which was made accessible to them. Available records

¹³⁹ “Young Men’s Conference at Dayton, O.,” Feb. 14, 15, 16, Central Parkway Branch “Y” News Vol. 1 (19), 2/1/1930, YMCA, 051 qy78.7 unb.per.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 75.

¹⁴² “Stationary Engineering Advertisement,” *The Union*, February 8, 1934, 2, “Advertisement for Classes,” *Y-Messenger*, September 1948, 1, YMCA, 051 Y78.6. unb.per.

do not reflect the extent that African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s accessed other branch locations or participated in activities sponsored by those branches. The other aspect which was clear was that the YMCA, through its varied educational programming, attempted to attend to the adults in a wholistic manner. Its programming considered the religious, the physical, the cognitive, and the economic.

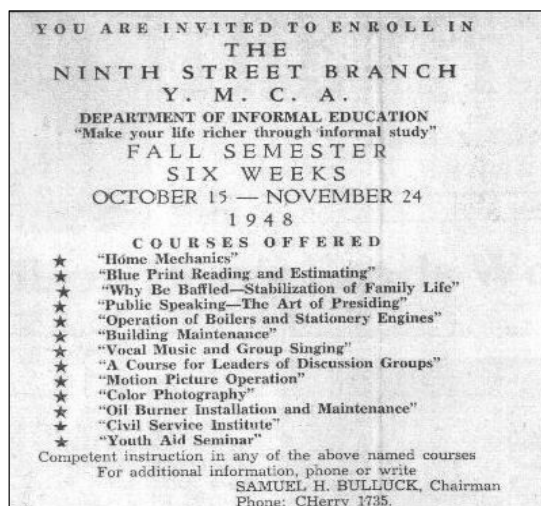
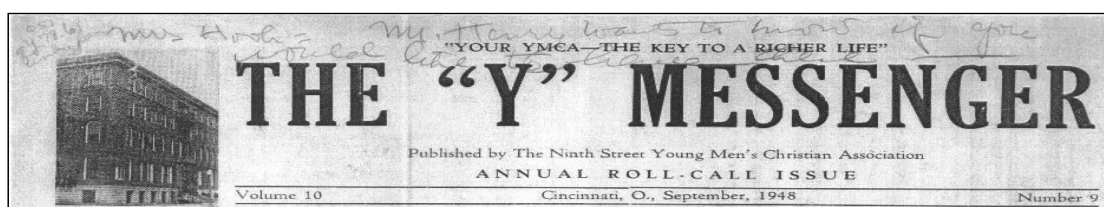


Figure 10: The “Y” Messenger

Both the YWCA and the YMCA offered educational opportunities to African American adults. The programs were designed to meet a wide range of needs within the African American community and were aligned with adult education’s liberal education philosophy. The YMCA “dealt with the needs and interests of Negroes with the view of accomplishing the same general

¹⁴³ “Advertisement for Classes,” *Y-Messenger*, September 1948, 1, YMCA, 051 Y78.6. unb.per.

ends as are sought by the Movement as a whole.”¹⁴⁴ The participants were provided cultural education that dealt with issues around African American history, culture, and life. In this way the YMCA and the YWCA in the African American communities were unique and culturally specific. When comparisons were made between the programming in the Colored and White YMCA, it becomes evident that a greater variety of vocational courses were offered at the White YMCAs. The courses in the Colored YMCAs helped to prepare the African Americans for lower paying jobs but the preparation courses in the White YMCAs represented a greater range of occupations.

African Americans participants in learning activities sponsored by the black church, the public library, the Division of Negro Welfare, the CMHA, the YMCA, and the YWCA had a broad range of course offerings. Programs through the church were consciously designed for the uplift of the African American community through the training for service and training for leadership. In most of the other organizations, the programming was not designed to move African Americans past the point of progress that that they had already reached. The occupational courses were typically for lower level jobs and the homemaking courses were condescending in that they presumed to teach topics like keeping a clean home and being a good mother.

It is not sure if these programs, which did have some African American leadership, were bound by the liberal education philosophy which restricted the development of a greater range of courses. It is possible that these program leaders felt that by attending to the liberal education philosophy that they were meeting the real needs of the community or perhaps they were not given the option of developing programs which fell out of the liberal education norm. Another explanation is that these program administrators were guided by middle-class values and felt

¹⁴⁴ Bullock, *Adult Education*, 387.

that they knew what was best for the lower-class population that they served. Regardless of which rationale may be more accurate, it was probably the case that African Americans, like Pastor Waldrop, took what they were given and made the best of it. Like Paul Lawrence Dunbar says in *We Wear the Mask*, “We wear the mask that grins and lies....Nay, let them only see us, while we wear the mask.”¹⁴⁵ African Americans often hid their true feelings and disguised the ultimate goal of their endeavors. They worked quietly behind the scenes, taking whatever part was offered to them and then they used that as a spring board of better opportunities. Or more often than not, because those better opportunities were not plentiful, they reconceptualized the meaning of the opportunities that they were given and saw past the limitations that they imposed to see them as sources of self-esteem and community pride.

¹⁴⁵ Dunbar, *We Wear the Mask*, 180.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATION

Social networks have historically been strong in the African American community.¹

These networks provided a mechanism through which African Americans learned. The following sections detail some of the learning that occurred via social networks.

Formal Academics: Lessons My Teacher Taught Me

Public evening high schools for more advanced learners served as educational outlet for African American adults and was one of the few venues in the community where activities were integrated. Pastor Waldrop was an adult student at East Night High School. He was in his forties when he started. He felt free to choose classes that were most beneficial to his goals and did not feel pressured to take courses that were not perceived as beneficial. The classes were integrated and for the most part he felt welcomed and comfortable. He recalled that the requirements for one of his classes was to write the national anthem twice and to sing it once. Pastor Waldrop, even at 95 years of age, has a deep bass voice that fills a room. After his singing, the class and the teacher were so impressed that they asked him to sing it again. After some cajoling and the promise that he would only have to write it once, he agreed. He said this experience made him feel like he was really part of the class.² Some classroom pictures featured in the night high school yearbooks showed African American students intermingled with European American students, while others showed African American students on one side and European American students on the other. Figure 11 illustrates how the students were integrated into the night school

¹ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do*; Williams, *Black Communities*.

² Pastor Waldrop, Oral History Interview.

program. It is not clear how well integrated the night high schools were but it is certain that African Americans learners were afforded the opportunity to advance their knowledge through the night high school program.



Figure 11: Top Picture: East Night High School, 1938, Zoology Class, Bottom Picture: East Night High School, 1938, Typing Class.³

The evening school program began in 1842 and operated during the winter months in the Eighth District School building. It was organized to “give ambitious workers the opportunity to

learn the arts and sciences.”⁴ The program was discontinued at various times because of the Civil War and lack of funding. Overall, “The citizens of Cincinnati realize the value of education. They appropriate money not only for those who are fortunate enough to go to school during the day, but also for those who are able to attend school only in the evening.”⁵ The program operated out of the Ninth District School building in 1893 and maintained continuous operations from that time. By 1903, the evening school program had become very sophisticated. Prior to that, the course of study was considered to be “loose.”⁶ It had expanded its course offerings as the term length was increased to eight months. It was recognized by the state superintendent of schools as a high school, and its graduates were able to enter the University of Cincinnati “without an entrance examination.”⁷

The night high school program expanded and was offered in different schools in the early 1900s. Woodward High School, Hughes High School, and Western Hills High School were some of the day high schools in Cincinnati but in the evening those high school buildings housed the night high school programs. They were called East Night High School, which was the first night high school (shown in figure 12, on the left⁸), West Night High School (shown in figure 12, on the right⁹), Western Hills Night High School respectively. The night high schools played “an important role in the great educational system of Cincinnati.”¹⁰ African American adults attended all of these schools. The night high schools in the Cincinnati Public School system replicated to a high degree the high school program available for day school learners. Not only did the night high schools provide the opportunity to take the same courses as were found in the day programs

³ *The Rostrum*, 1938, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴ *The Rostrum*, 1934, 22, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁵ *The Echo*, 1933, 29, Hughes High School Archive.

⁶ *The Echo*, 1932, 11, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁷ *The Rostrum*, 1932, 23, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁸ *The Rostrum*, 1931, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁹ *The Echo*, 1935, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

but they also offered a full range of extracurricular activities, which included sports, clubs, and the publication of yearbooks.¹¹

The evening high school format was molded and changed over time to better meet the changing needs of the learners. In 1928, the evening high school operated on the Five-Year Course format.

This required the night high school student to spend four evenings each week for five years, takes three subjects each year, and elects the other subject by a Friday evening or a Saturday afternoon class. Thus the pupil completes his course with sixteen full-day credits, and he becomes eligible to enter any university in the United States....It seems to mark a milepost in the advancement of education for the masses. Those who have worked under it believe it is by far the finest plan ever used in an evening school.¹²

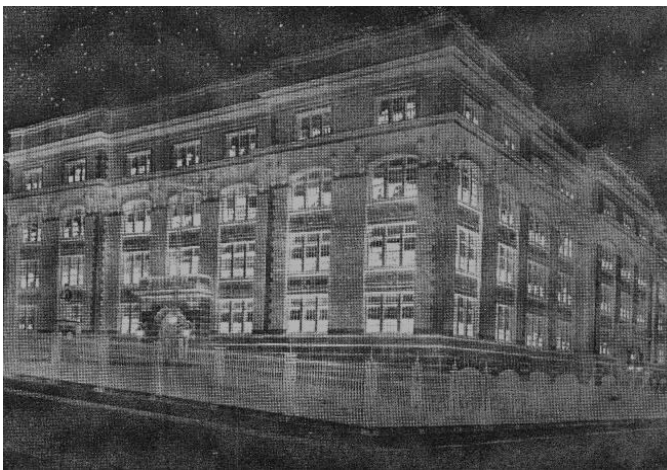


Figure 12: Left, East Night High School, 1931, Right, West Night High School, 1935.

¹⁰ *The Echo*, 1932, 11, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹¹ *The Echo*, 1932, 11, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

Around 1940 or 1941, in an effort to accommodate more students and to reduce costs, the evening high school program was reorganized. “Under the new system an evening student takes only one course in an entire evening. Courses meet either one, two, or four nights a week for thirty-six, twenty-four, or twelve weeks, respectively.”¹³ Under both formats the learners took a wide range of classes from fundamental subjects like English and math to elective courses like typewriting and salesmanship.¹⁴ The evening high school program had two primary goals. One was to provide adults with an opportunity to earn their high school diploma. Dr. Ray Lambert, principal of the West Night High School during the mid 1940s, said, “The program of the evening high school fills a distinct gap in our system of education. To many who, through no fault of their own, have been denied the privilege of graduating from the conventional high school, the evening high school satisfies an urgent need.”¹⁵ The other was to help adults make better use of their leisure time. The following was written in *The Echo*,

In the last decade of high industrialization the working day has been shortened. No longer does the workman spend twelve hours a day in the factory. More leisure is constantly being acquired. The domestic environment does not supply a method for its utilization. Therefore public educational institutions provide a series of courses that show people how to make use of their leisure time.¹⁶

Adult learners and administrators of learning programs recognized that progress within society necessitated changes in the way those who lived in the society were prepared for that society. The evening high school program was one vehicle through which adult learners attempted to prepare themselves for the changing societal trends. For example, the women

¹² *The Echo*, 1933, 29, Hughes High School Archive.

¹³ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1938-1940, 14.

¹⁴ *The Rostrum*, Cincinnati Historical Society Library, *The Echo*, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁵ *The Echo*, 1950, 3, Cincinnati Historical Society.

through the homemaking classes were said to “prepare and serve better meals, dress their families better, and manage more attractive homes.”¹⁷ It is clear that “the needs to be served by adult education are many....Most adults could profit from guided study and discussion of current problems and from recreational courses.”¹⁸ African Americans could choose the courses that they wanted to take and were not made to take courses that inevitably would have only prepared them for low-level occupations. The glass ceilings were still present but they were afforded the opportunity to academically prepare themselves for the occupation of their choice.

I reviewed all available annuals of West and East Night High from 1930-1949. A closer examination of West Night High School and the East Night High School during the 1930s and 1940s provided a more complete understanding of the experience that many of the African American students had. I noticed as I flipped through the pages of the West Night High School yearbook, *The Echo*, and the East Night High School yearbook, *The Rostrum*, was that the African American students were consistently present in a full range of classes and were permitted to sit anywhere within the classroom. They were not relegated to the back rows.¹⁹ This indicated that there was parity in the formal academic setting but this parity did not exist in extracurricular activities. These extracurricular activities were considered to be an instrumental part of the educational process. “Sacrifice, determination, devotion to knowledge, loyalty to civic duty and high fellowship; these are the words that embody the spirit of East Night.”²⁰ Fellowship with the student body outside of the academic arena was not something that was afforded to the African American students. These students were just as dedicated to learning as their European American counterparts as is evidenced by the demanding schedule all night high school students

¹⁶ *The Echo*, 1933, 66, Hughes High School Archives.

¹⁷ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1946-1947, 18.

¹⁸ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1940-1941, 22.

¹⁹ *The Echo*, *The Rostrum*, Cincinnati, Historical Society Library.

adhered to. Classes started at 7:30 or 8:30 and lasted about three hours and were held five or six days per week. However the African American students were not allowed to be full participants in the non- academic activities.

The annuals pictured African Americans in a variety of classes like botany, zoology, typing, English, and chemistry²¹ but they could scarcely be found anywhere else in the yearbook. Many pictures of student life, like candid snapshots of students outside of the classroom and group pictures of students in extracurricular activities were shown in the annuals, but African Americans rarely appeared in those photographs. They were left out of this phase of the night high school life, which was considered to be integral to the layer overall success of the students. The 1930 edition of the *The Rostrum* said,

Let us not fail to congratulate the students on their spirit displayed in the formation of the different clubs, societies, and extra classes. At these meetings, the spirit of the school is impressed upon the recruits to the ranks, enabling them to carry on in later years, as well as making possible the success of all affairs. The intimate association, after classes, in the meetings of these clubs, developes (*sic*) a sense of high fellowship and personal respect among the students.²²

The extracurricular component was deemed to be extremely important to student development and success, but African Americans were not granted the privilege of participating in the mainstream extracurricular activities. The night high school epitomized the Jim Crow character of Cincinnati. Cincinnati was not bound by de jure segregation, which allowed for the African American learners to have access to formal integrated academic opportunities. De facto

²⁰ *The Rostrum*, 1930, 69, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

²¹ *The Echo, The Rostrum*, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

²² *The Rostrum*, 1930, 69, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

customs, however, circumscribed the social life of these students at the night high schools, which resulted in their exclusion from extracurricular activities.

It is not known if these students met unofficially in some capacity before they opted to form their own student groups. But in 1938, the African American students at West Night High School formed the West Night Guild, and in 1937, the African Americans at East Night School formed the Hilarity Club. Figure 13 shows the Hilarity Club and West Night Guild, and candid shots of night high school life that do not include African Americans. According to the 1938, *The Rostrum*, “The Hilarity Club was organized for the first time this year. It consists of a group of Negro students who were anxious to have a club of their own, so that they could provide enjoyment for themselves in their own way.”²³

These students’ hunger for knowledge was fed by the academic program in the night high school academic program, but their thirst for acceptance and inclusion in other facets of student life was left unquenched until they sought a remedy through their own initiative. The African American adult learners were able to carve out a place for themselves in both the academic and extracurricular life of the night high school programs. Consistent with a lemons to lemonade mentality, African American night high school students rallied against the discriminatory social system by forming their own organization for socialization. Jennie Porter’s motto was, “Take what you have and make what you want.”²⁴ The African American night high school students, like those in the African American community at large, did this, as a form of resistance to Jim Crow. Through forming social networks they were able to enrich their learning experiences.

²³ *The Rostrum*, 1938, 71, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

²⁴ Grace and Hand, *The University of Cincinnati*, 105.

The experience of the African American student in the night high school did result in a greater amount of intermingling with European Americans in a somewhat social context. Unlike in the world of work, where the European American probably held a position of authority

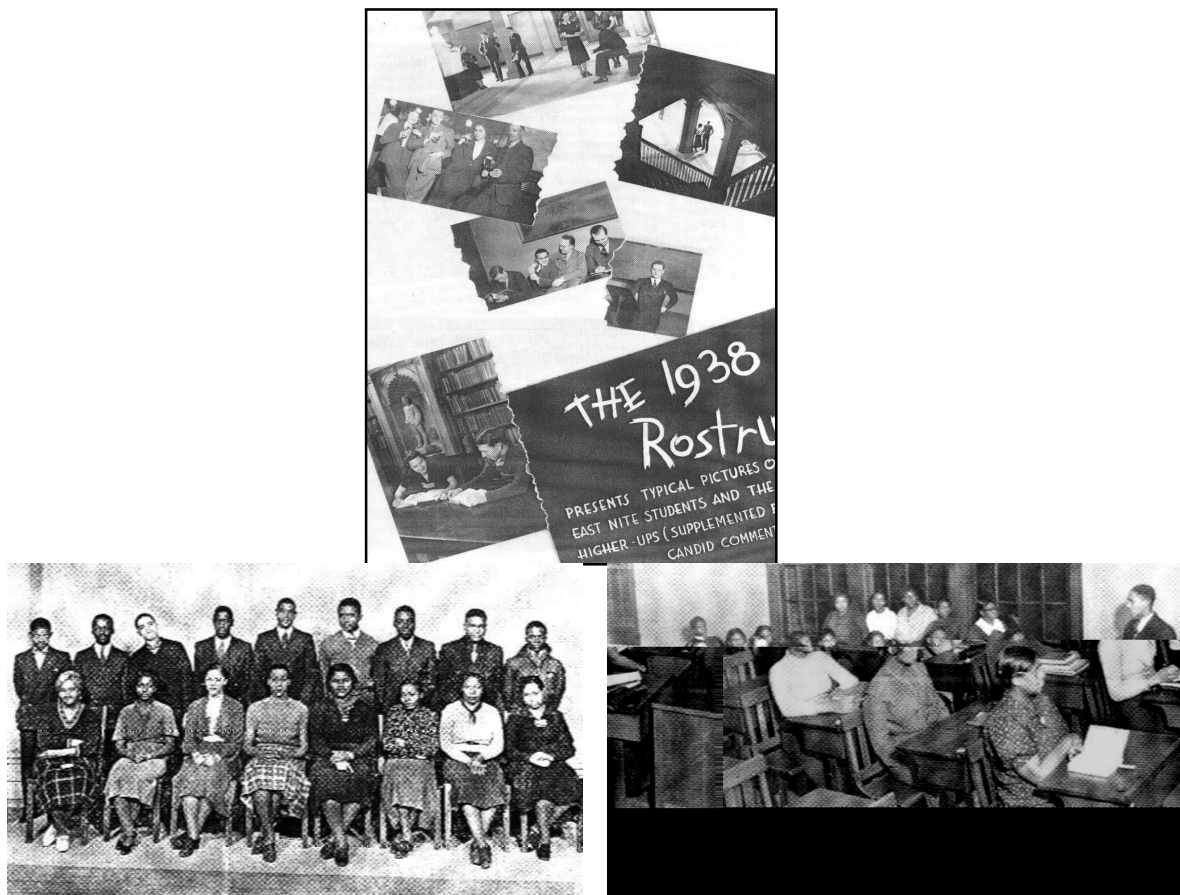


Figure 13: Top: Candid Shots from the 1938, *Rostrum*; Bottom left, West Night West Guild, 1938; Bottom right, East Night Hilarity Club, 1937²⁵

over the African American, the evening high school seemed to put them on more even footing.

This was probably not the norm for the social interactions between the two races. I can only

²⁵ *The Rostrum*, 1938, Cincinnati Historical Society Library; *The Echo*, 1938, Cincinnati Historical Society Library; *The Rostrum*, 1937, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

speculate on the psychological benefits that this may have had for the African American learner. If nothing else, I would surmise that African American learners felt a greater sense of self-efficacy and confidence to have a source of external validation of what they intrinsically knew which was that they were equal to Europeans in every way that mattered.

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass Elementary Schools were located in the West End and Walnut Hills respectively. Jennie Porter, the first African American female to earn a doctorate from the University of Cincinnati and the first African American female public school principal in Cincinnati, was the founder and first principal of the Stowe School.²⁶ She and Francis Russell, the principal of Douglass School, saw the colored schools as sources of pride for the African American community and believed their schools served a vital role in both “the formation of Black identity” and in becoming “vital, unifying community centers.”²⁷ Indeed, by the 1930s those schools had become community centers and provided services to the community that were beneficial to all ages.²⁸ By day they were “voluntary colored” schools for children and by evening they were evening elementary schools for adults. They also housed public branch libraries and hosted community events.²⁹

These evening elementary schools served African American adults and operated through the assistance from the WPA. Though there is a dearth of information about these schools, the Tenth Anniversary Souvenir Program for the New Douglass School in 1920 stated the “work varies from year to year according to the needs of the community. There have been three general divisions --Academic, Industrial and Recreational.”³⁰ Few records could be found that detailed

²⁶ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Peoples*, 107-108.

²⁷ Ibid., 128.

²⁸ Ibid., 128.

²⁹ Ibid., 128.

³⁰ Tenth Anniversary Souvenir Program, November 1920, 24, Douglass School, MSS 815, Folder 4, Cincinnati Historical Society.

the organizational structure or course offerings of the evening elementary schools during the 1930s and 1940s. One record indicated that “vocational classes in sewing, cooking, art needlework, architectural and mechanical drawing, and power machine sewing”³¹ were offered. In Figure 14 on the left shows the cover from Stowe’s 1939 Certificate Recognition Program and the on the right is an adult student who was attending a Cincinnati Public School adult elementary program.³²

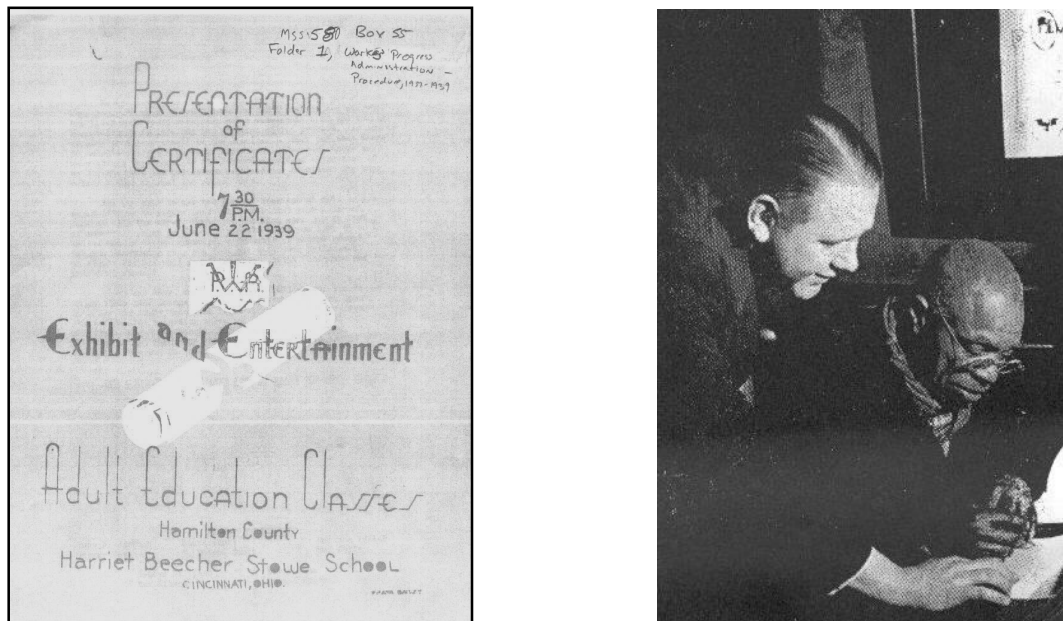


Figure 14: Program of the Stowe Adult Education Classes, 1939; Adult student in Adult Education Class, 1940-1941.

It is clear that CPS was aware of the need for further education for adults. The 1938-1940 Report of the Superintendent stated, “Enrollment in the evening elementary schools is small in

³¹ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1940-1941, 14.

proportion to the many individuals, both white and colored, who need this work, but all possible is being done with the present budgetary allotment.”³³ CPS responded to that need in the African American community by offering evening elementary school programs at both Douglass and Stowe. African American adults took advantage of these opportunities. Pastor Waldrop stated that “everybody went to night school,” and he remembers adult learners who attended the Douglass Elementary evening school. The concept of life-long learning was paramount to the promotion of the adult learning opportunities. The recognition program brochure for the 1939 adult education classes sponsored at the Harriet Beecher Stowe School said,

Are you able to use the English language as well as you would like or to figure correctly and budget your money so that it will buy more? Would you not find more joy in living if you could paint or play the piano? Would you like to be an active member of an orchestra, a dramatic or choral group? Can you stand upon your own feet and tell your fellow-men in simple English what you think about social, economic and political issues?³⁴

Program planners appealed to every facet of life in an attempt to draw learners to the programs.

Training for a trade

The Cincinnati Public Evening Schools not only served those who were seeking high school diplomas and other learning, but they also functioned to help Cincinnati’s citizens prepare for specific trades and occupations. These vocational programs operated in various locations like the night high schools, night elementary schools, industrial locations, and in schools that were labeled vocational high schools: Automotive High School, Building High School, Commercial

³² Presentation of Certificates Program, Stowe School, June, 1939, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 55, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library, Cincinnati Public Schools Office of the Superintendent, *Annual Report*, 22.

³³ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1938-1940, 14.

³⁴ Presentation of Certificates Program, Stowe School, June, 1939, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 55, Folder 1.

High School, Electrical High School, Mechanical High School, Printing High School, Tailoring High School, and the Sewing High School.³⁵ Training for a trade was a fundamental part of the adult educational landscape in Cincinnati. Many of these adults were looking to improve their financial condition through vocational retooling. Throughout the 1930s, African American adults in particular were hard hit by unemployment due to both a lack of available jobs and discriminatory practices that decreased the likelihood of them being hired for jobs in industry.³⁶

By the 1940s, Ollie Bolton said with the advent of World War II the employment situation for African Americans dramatically improved. “There were really no jobs and the war broke out in ’42 and that’s when the lids flew open and we were able to get jobs working for the government.” War time industry boosted the economy of the city. It created jobs and increased the number of people seeking vocational training. Women and men, alike were able to obtain vocational education in skills such as clerical and mechanical. Figure 15 shows a training class that women were able to participate in. On the heels of the Depression that had devastated many African American families, the creation of more jobs had the potential to positively impact the African American community.

Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) had the distinction, starting in 1940, of participating in the nation-wide War Production Training Program. The 1940-1941 annual CPS report said, “The nation needs trained workers to make the ‘planes and more planes’ and the ‘ships and more ships’ that the nation has been called upon to produce with a maximum of speed....This demand was unusually heavy in Cincinnati because of her pre-eminence in the machine tool industry.”³⁷

³⁵ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1938-1940.

³⁶ Koehler, *Cincinnati's Black Peoples*.



Figure 15: Training Class, 1946-47 CPS Annual Report³⁸

This program trained workers for work in war time industries like production of equipment, assembly of machinery parts, and maintenance of equipment and machinery. Within the first year of its participation in the War Production Training Program, Cincinnati Public Schools trained over 8,000 people who subsequently found employment.³⁹

The War Production Training Program had two major components: Defense Training Program No. 1 and the NYA Training Program. The Defense Training Program No. 1 offered two types of training. The first was aimed at the unemployed and was designed to give them “specific training to fit them for work in defense industries.”⁴⁰ The other type was geared toward employed people who needed additional training in their trades. The courses were typically 100 to 300 hours in length and were offered in a wide range of industries necessary for supporting the war efforts. Some of them were in machine tool work, electrical work, and sheet-metal work. Three of the programs -- automotive, aviation, and mechanical-- offered classes around-the-clock in eight-hour shifts, seven days per week. The records indicated that only men were allowed to

³⁷ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1940-1941, 12.

³⁸ Cincinnati Public Schools Office of the Superintendent, *Annual Report* 1946-47.

³⁹ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1941-1942.

⁴⁰ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1940-1941, 14.

participate in this program.⁴¹ The NYA Training Program was open to men and women who were already employed through the NYA. These men and women were between the ages of 18 and 25 and attended these classes in the afternoon in the junior and senior high school building for ten hours a week.⁴²

There were three program goals: “1. To provide training that will supplement the work experience being provided NYA enrollees; 2. To prepare NYA enrollees for new types of work essential to national defense; and 3. To develop civic and vocational intelligence.”⁴³ In addition to preparing the enrollees for defense industry employment, they could also prepare them for jobs in factories and for jobs that involved cooking for large groups, like the military. Women primarily enrolled in the factory job preparation courses. All of the expenses, including salaries, equipment purchase and use, and building rental for both programs were covered by the federal government.⁴⁴ Though these programs offered a means for thousands of learners to acquire vocational training, it is doubtful that these programs were able to fill the void for the majority of the undereducated in Cincinnati, many of whom were African American.

The 1940-1941 Annual Report of the Superintendent detailed the problems of overcrowding and insufficient space that the school system encountered as it attempted to deliver training to meet the needs of the nation.⁴⁵ Every conceivable accommodation was made to ensure that Cincinnati did its part in supporting the war effort. That report noted that “pride may be taken in the fact that the records of defense training in the Cincinnati schools is also a record of

⁴¹ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1940-1941, 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

democracy at work.”⁴⁶ Various interagency committees were set up to analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate all facets of the War Production Training Program offered through Cincinnati Public Schools. Agencies such as the Ohio State Employment Service, the W.P.A, and local businesses were members of the committees.⁴⁷

Vocational training through Cincinnati Public Schools sought to meet a variety of needs within the community. Through the support of the Government, especially during the war, they were able to accomplish that task. It is unfortunate that the public school records do not indicate the extent of participation by African Americans in vocational training. This information would have helped to establish whether or not parity in enrollment existed between African Americans and European Americans. Conjecture would suggest that parity did not exist. African Americans were permitted to participate but were probably not participating as much as they could have been. They were still not hired at the same rate as European Americans, and they were still given lower-tier jobs. African Americans could choose the courses they wanted to take and were not made to take courses that inevitably would have only prepared them for low-level occupations.

The glass ceilings were still present but African Americans were afforded the opportunity to academically prepare themselves academically for the occupation of their choice. Progress was being made but the fundamental problem of discrimination based on race remained unchanged during the 1930s and 1940s. Gerber said, “The Ohio color line was perforated. Thus a small percentage of Negro Ohioans had something approaching equal opportunity.”⁴⁸

Opportunities existed in education to prepare for higher-status jobs, but few job opportunities materialized for African Americans. The war created many opportunities, and increased upward mobility in occupations but for African Americans this simply meant they were able to obtain a

⁴⁶ Ibid, 13.

low-level job that was previously denied to them because it had been vacated by an European American who was able to obtain a better job.⁴⁹ More African Americans found employment during the war as opposed to those before the war but the positions were in low wage jobs and typically did not reflect the training the they had acquired.

Joe Gordon recalls that many college educated-men sought work as Pullman porters because they could not find work in their professionals fields and those that did often still had to supplement their wages with service work. He said,

I used to think back in those days is it worth it? They ain't making no money. Teaching school is respectable, but they ain't putting nothing in their pockets. I guess it wasn't a bad deal, I just couldn't see it. I thought they were seeing how much money they were making. That's not necessarily it. You have to have peace of mind. You go to school to do certain things not just to make a buck. It's how you make the buck that's important....Everyone can't be a professional. In those days Blacks had the service industry sewn up. Black people were basically service workers back in them days and they did a good job of it. Basically service workers, that what they did. What else could they do?⁵⁰

Other types of vocational training were available to African Americans. Some were more accessible than others, but most programs were willing to accept African American in very limited numbers. Trade apprenticeship programs, engineering cooperative programs, and college cooperative programs openly discriminated against African American adults. In spite of the barriers, African Americans were represented across a wide variety of occupations: teachers,

⁴⁷ Cincinnati Public Schools, *Annual Report*, 1940-1941, 14.

⁴⁸ Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 484.

⁴⁹ Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 484.

⁵⁰ Joe Gordon, Oral History Interview.

social workers, and civil service workers, just to name a few.⁵¹ It was rare that they were represented in these fields proportionate to their numbers in the general population in Cincinnati. The ministry and the police force were occupations that two of the elders in this study were able to enter.

The ministry was one occupation that was well represented by African American men. The ministry has historically been one of the few occupations that Black men, in particular, were able to enter. Pastor Waldrop received his calling to the ministry when he was in his late 30s. He recalled having the following conversation when he told, his friend, Dr. Creton, about his call.

Dr. Creton said, “What is your trouble?”

I said, “Well I’ve been called to preach.”

He said to me, “Do you have any education?”

I said to him, “I didn’t.”

He said, “Well you know you’ve got to have education now in order to lead people.”

Pastor Waldrop was troubled because he did not have much education. He was sent to work in his grandfather’s sawmills after having completed only the third grade. This did not deter him, however, from pursuing a career in the ministry. He moved his family to Cincinnati from Alabama and within a short period of time began attending East Night High School to prepare himself for the ministry. He took a variety of subjects including algebra and handwriting, but he felt that in order to be an effective minister he needed to be a proficient speaker and know about African American history. He made the following remarks about preparing for the ministry.

But in knowing how to present yourself, I came to know that I was in the ministry and I wanted to know how to speak and how to handle my voice and things of sort. I don’t

⁵¹ United States Government, *Census of the Population, 1930*; United States Government, *Census of the Population, 1940*; United States Government, *Census of the Population, 1950*.

think I went into any such learning as how to be a carpenter I just wanted to know how to be a really good talker and how to make speeches and things of that sort.

Pastor Waldrop was not able to complete the night high school program due to his obligations to work and family, but with the help of a private tutor, Miss Catherine, he was able to build upon the learning he had already acquired. He also attended a seminary in Louisville but due to the distance and expense, he was also not able to complete that program.⁵²

Pastor Waldrop persisted in attempting to acquire education throughout adulthood to better prepare himself for life in the ministry. He did not have as much as some others but he felt that God made up for any educational deficiencies he may have had. He said, "But God took what I had and what I was able to learn in school and He blessed it....This is how I came through." Pastor Waldrop is a story-teller. He told this story, which illustrates his entry into the ministry.

He let me see a squirrel and this squirrel on the ground was coming to this tree.... That squirrel was getting ready to jump over on this house. He had to jump like the distance from this wall further from this wall to that one [indicated that the distance was several feet]. I said, "Ain't no way it can make it." That squirrel run up the tree, right out on the limb, and I said, "Oh it made it." The Lord said, "It's not for you to see how you're going to land. Your job is to jump, your landing is in My hands."

And so it was with Pastor Waldrop. When he was called to the ministry with only a third-grade education, he could not see how he could accomplish becoming a minister. But through his unwavering faith and determination, he did. He is currently Pastor Emeritus at Zion Baptist in Glendale, Ohio. He was the active pastor there for over 40 years.⁵³

⁵² Pastor Waldrop, Oral History Interview.

⁵³ Ibid.

The Cincinnati Police Department had African American men on its force as early as 1884 but African American women did not appear on the force until 1947. At that time, two African American women were accepted into and graduated from the police academy. This was about two years after the first European American woman entered the force. Novella Nobles and Lillian Grigsby were those two pioneers and they alone represented African American females on the force from 1947 to 1965. When Lillian Grigsby left the force in 1965, another African American woman was hired at the request of Novella Nobles.⁵⁴

Novella Nobles is extremely proud of her distinction of being one of the first African American women to join the Cincinnati Police force. She happened into the division almost by happenstance. She was working at General Hospital as a clerk when she saw a posting for openings in the Youth Aid Bureau of the Police Department. This job appealed to her because she was a mother and this job involved working with children. More importantly, it would mean a 100 percent increase in pay. After passing the Civil Service exam, she entered the Police Academy and stayed with the force until 1973 when she took an early retirement. She had reached the glass ceiling in the force, because as a woman, she was not eligible to take promotional exams to advance in rank outside of police woman specialist which she had already attained.⁵⁵

She found the academy and the force overall to be a place where there was “no discrimination or anything, we were really welcomed.” Her superior officer even allowed her to work on the first shift, which was unusual for a new person in the department, because she had small children at home. While she was at the academy, she and the other two women who had been accepted, Lillian Grigsby and Helen Siler (an European American), typically stayed

⁵⁴ Novella Nobles, Oral History Interview.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

together. They sat near each other and took their breaks together. The academy was just like being in school. It was a lecture format that provided instruction on laws and procedures. There was also an experiential component that focused on learning how to shoot a gun. She sought outside instruction on how to drive car. These were all things she did not know about as an adult but were necessary parts of her vocational training. She received on- the-job training after leaving the academy. She shadowed more experienced officers who served as her mentors. She learned by doing.⁵⁶

She stressed that her treatment on the force was extremely fair and she did not feel discriminated against as an African American or as a woman and this may have been the case within her department but the force at large was certainly not free of discrimination. Furthermore, it seems odd that more African American women did not join the force after the entry door had been pried open by Novella Noble and Lillian Grigsby. For eighteen years African American women were either not interested or not qualified to join the police department. When Lillian Grigsby left, Mrs. Nobles purposely requested that another African American female be hired. This was necessary because she realized there was a high likelihood that the police force would not hire another African American female. Additionally, she was not able to advance in rank like the men in department because women could not advance beyond the rank of police woman specialist. It seems that the color line of the Cincinnati Police Department was perforated and that openings were regulated for some purpose that filled the needs of the department at the expense of potential African American female candidates. For whatever reason the doors to the academy remained closed to African American females for just short of twenty years after their historic entry in 1947.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Evening College of the University of Cincinnati

Post-secondary education was another form of adult education available to African American learners. Novella Nobles took a few evening classes through the Evening College at the University of Cincinnati, as did Ollie Bolton. Evening courses at the University of Cincinnati were initially designed to meet the needs of the undereducated learner who desired further instruction. The classes were open to anyone who worked during the day and was willing to participate in instruction during the evening hours. The *University of Cincinnati Catalogue* said, “Each year additional courses were offered to keep pace with the advancing needs and changing interests of varied groups of men and women in the community.”⁵⁷ Because of the high number of courses offered in various disciplines in the evening, the University of Cincinnati in 1938 organized a separate college, which was called the Evening College.

The University placed a premium on meeting the “needs and interests of the community”⁵⁸ and through the Evening College was able to offer a more structured program for learners unable to attend during the day. The *University of Cincinnati Catalogue* said, “Its program, therefore, includes instruction in the fields of commerce, engineering, applied arts and liberal arts. Through the Evening College, the facilities and resources of the University are made available to men and women in a form designed to meet their convenience and to serve their requirements.”⁵⁹ During the 1930s, the idea of education for the continued development of adults was in vogue and the municipal university believed it was important to have a program of adult education. This program was delivered through a series of formal classes, structured and informal lectures, and radio programming.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *University of Cincinnati Catalogue*, 1939, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

⁶⁰ McGrane, *The University of Cincinnati*, 182.

The Evening College's catalogue outlined the various groups of people who might benefit from attending. Besides the numerous learners who sought to complete a degree, the college appealed to those interested in professional continuing education, and those interested in acquiring knowledge for the sake of acquiring knowledge as a means of filling leisure time. Specific requirements stated that (1) if applicants were under the age of twenty, they had to be a high school graduate; (2) if they were over twenty, a high school diploma was not required but there must be a demonstration that "they are qualified, by training or experience, or by maturity, to pursue the studies for which they register"; (3) "Mature persons may attend one or more courses for the mental stimulation or because of the opportunity for creative expression which such courses provide." Only those students possessing a high school diploma were eligible to earn a degree. Those without a degree were eligible to earn certificates.⁶¹ McGrane wrote, "The average age of the students in the Evening College was twenty-six, but the range was from seventeen to seventy-five. Almost a fourth of the total number were above thirty years of age."⁶²

The Evening College was not free. Learners paid a minimum of \$21 and a maximum of \$45 for two semesters. The fee varied according to the number of courses that were being taken. In the early 1930s, more than 8500 learners, both male and female attended the Evening College. This included 801 college graduates, several hundred business executives and professionals, and 2500 mature persons who chiefly attended informal lectures.⁶³ The Evening College engaged in community service activities as well. It sponsored lecture series that were free and open to anyone in the community. One program was called "Education for Victory." It ran for five days and was a series of six informal lectures and discussions by prominent members of the Evening College faculty. The catalogue said, "All interested persons in the community are invited to

⁶¹ *University of Cincinnati Catalogue*, 1939, 18.

⁶² McGrane, *The University of Cincinnati*, 288.

attend any or all of the meetings. There are no tuition fees. Several of the lectures will be supplemented and illustrated by motion pictures in sound and color.”⁶⁴ The lectures dealt with various topics like understanding the war, dealing with home finances, women and their role in the war, finding the right job for one’s skills, merchandising for retail business owners, and developing good study habits.⁶⁵

Throughout the University Catalogues from 1930-1949, there was a heavy emphasis on being learner-centered. However, prior to 1934, African Americans were not even remotely connected to the university’s campus life. Grace wrote “their [African American] smiling faces do not grace the pages of the yearbooks, except in senior portraits. They have no charming anecdotes of extracurricular organizations, because those myriad activities that create colorful memories were closed to minorities in those days.”⁶⁶ Parity in this educational setting was fleeting. The students were alienated and isolated from the mainstream college experience.⁶⁷ There is not much documented about the Evening College experience for African Americans, but to the extent that the day college experience can be used as a barometer for it, it becomes clear that Jim Crow was alive and well at the University of Cincinnati.

For the most part, the African American learners were able to enroll in any program except engineering and business. An article in *Horizons* on Donald Spencer said, “African American students could not enroll for engineering or business degrees because co op education coordinators said industry would not hire them.”⁶⁸ They were not given co-operative learning opportunities, and professional positions were not accessible by them.⁶⁹ Discrimination was so

⁶³ *University of Cincinnati Catalogue*, 1939, 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 31, 41-42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 31, 41-42.

⁶⁶ Grace, *A Heritage to Live By*, 18.

⁶⁷ Grace, *A Heritage to Live By*, 18.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

real at the university that “some professors required minority students to sit in the back of the classrooms.”⁷⁰

In response to the Jim Crow discrimination, in 1934, five African American students, Donald Spencer, Valerie Spencer, Bill Jones, Harold Rhodes, and Roberta Henderson, formed a group known as Quadres, a name taken from the Latin which means four. Grace indicated that “they chose the name because their goals were four in number: to promote high ideals and scholarship, foster cultural enterprise, establish contacts to aid social life and encourage interracial harmony and participation on campus.”⁷¹ Though Quadres engaged themselves in numerous activities, they were best known for their theatrical performances, some of which were written by Donald Spencer. The group was active from 1934 to 1948 and was so popular that other established groups, like the YWCA’s Ovidans (a division of the YWCA on campus), disbanded and merged with Quadres so that they could present a united front on campus.⁷²

Donald Spencer and his wife, Marian Spencer, were active members of Quadres. Donald Spencer was the founder and Marian Spencer was the president in 1942. Both are longtime political activists. Marian Spencer was born in Gallipolis, Ohio and moved to Cincinnati to attend the University of Cincinnati with her twin sister. The importance of an education was instilled in her early in life. She recalls her grandfather as a

person we went to with every problem we had. He gave us more information than my mother was willing for us to have in our young years but we know that he was giving us his true picture of life. He said, “Get your education, your house may burn, you may lose

⁷⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

⁷² Annual Narrative Report for 1934 of Health and Education Activities, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2. Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

everything, but once it's [education] in your mind, you'll carry it with you all the rest of your life. So get your education.⁷³

Mrs. Spencer was the first African American woman vice mayor of Cincinnati and the first African American councilwoman in Cincinnati. Donald Spencer grew up in Cincinnati. He graduated from Walnut Hill High School in 1932 and was also a graduate of the University of Cincinnati. He taught at the Douglass School.

They both remembered Jim Crow being a prominent aspect of collegiate life for African American students and agreed that “there should not be privilege in being White.”⁷⁴ African American students could not be admitted to the Conservatory of Music, the College of Engineering, or the medical school. They could not sleep on campus, attend prom, or participate in campus activities.⁷⁵ Donald Spencer said, “We were not involved in any social life. That was one of the reasons why we hated to come to that school instead of going away to college, especially a Black college, where you could be involved.”⁷⁶ These were the types of things that Quadres fought for, and Mr. Spencer recalls that the fighting was hard work. He said, “This worked us pretty much to death, because most of us did not have time. Many of us were working and going to school, but we insisted on having some life that represented college life. This is what Quadres was all about.”⁷⁷

The African American students numbered fewer than one hundred which included the night school.⁷⁸ One of the lessons they learned at the University of Cincinnati was the power of activism. The students in Quadres learned through experience and worked as a group because

⁷³ Donald and Marian Spencer, Joint Oral History Interview.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Donald and Marian Spencer, Joint Oral History Interview.

they were determined to make the most of their college experience and to claim all of their rights as students. They agitated the system and demanded changes within the socially oppressive University of Cincinnati. Donald and Marian Spencer have been married for sixty-two years. Mrs. Spencer said they have been on the same page for sixty-two years especially when it came to agitating for societal justice.⁷⁹

Experience was my teacher: Other Relevant Learning Opportunities

The path toward learning in the Cincinnati area for African American adults took them to various types of institutions: library, YWCA, the black church, public night school, and their housing community. These opportunities represent formal or organized learning opportunities. African Americans were instrumental in the formation and the delivery of some of these activities and were persistent in attending. Other learning opportunities also existed for African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s. They have been grouped under the category of informal learning. Informal learning represents those experiences that may or may not have been deliberately sought and did not occur in traditional contexts like the classroom, conferences or organized small group discussions.

Social mentoring is an example of this and was commonly used as a form of learning for African American adults, especially women. Social mentoring involves learning from one's peers and elders. Like the African griots, community members were sought out and depended on for information and guidance. Social mentoring is a manifestation of communalism, a fundamental aspect of Africentric living. Communalism places great value on social relationships and recognizes the interdependence of the community at large with the individual members of the community. Colin's selfethnic reliance reflects this idea.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Colin, *Marcus Garvey*.

The African American communities in Cincinnati were somewhat isolated from the surrounding communities. The West End was self-sufficient and community members did not need to leave the area to satisfy their needs. They had many things in common and faced similar issues with regard to racism in the city. These points of commonality facilitated a sense of unity and understanding which provided the infrastructure needed for African Americans to pursue and persist in lifelong learning.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Cincinnati's African American community was composed of a mixture of southern migrants and native citizens. Cincinnati's African American community members purposefully reached out to each other. Ollie Bolton's mother died when she was a child and her father had to assume the responsibility of rearing her and her siblings alone. But she indicated that her father had a great deal of help from the community. The women in the community acted as surrogate mothers, and the teachers at Stowe Elementary took pains to check up on them to make sure they were "getting along" okay. This was a constant phenomenon even as she entered adulthood.⁸¹ Caring for the community was an obligation among educated African American women but even those who lacked formal education took on this responsibility in very practical ways.

Beulah O'Conner had a similar experience in the Valley Homes in Lincoln Heights. She was a young mother who was new to Cincinnati. She always considered herself to be an introvert. She felt somewhat isolated in Cincinnati because her family was so far away and her husband was busy working. An older woman acted as her surrogate mother in the Valley Homes. Often she would find herself sitting and listening as her unofficial mentor shared valuable life lessons, lessons she carried forward with her and incorporated into her life. Outside of the church, social mentoring was the only type of learning activity she could engage in because, as a

full-time housewife and mother of ten, she could not afford the time to attend formal learning activities.⁸² The importance of this type of learning cannot be overstated. For many African American women, formal education was not a practical option. Family obligations or finances prevented them from attending classes. Those obligations did not inhibit them from learning through other means. African American women took advantage of the informal learning experiences as they arose. Fellow community members were important sources of knowledge.

Lifelong learning through this informal route was typical in the African American community. Hezekiah Hamilton was a cross-country truck driver and spent a great deal of time on the road away from Cincinnati. He did his military service as a Tuskegee Airmen mechanic. During his tour of duty, he frequently confronted racism. He shared a story about how he had been set up to fail. The Tuskegee Airmen were given the old planes at first until they established their reputation as the unit that never lost a bomber.⁸³ One time he was assigned to work on a plane, and he couldn't figure out how to make it work. He described the problem to his uncle who suggested that he switch the parts around. He did this and it worked. His fellow European American soldiers did not want him or the other African Americans in his unit to succeed or "accomplish anything. Everything they said we couldn't do, we did it better and they couldn't understand how we did it."⁸⁴ To be successful, he had to rely on his community network to help him solve problems because he couldn't depend on help from his fellow European American soldiers who were not in his company. He did not have much formal education but he was continually learning through experience and through social mentoring. He recognized it as a

⁸¹ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

⁸² Beulah O'Conner, Oral History Interview.

⁸³ Hezekiah Hamilton, Oral History Interview

⁸⁴ Ibid.

source of information and tapped into it as necessary in order for him to complete his tour of duty.

Even though there were a number of educational opportunities in Cincinnati during this time, most agencies indicated that their ability to supply space and resources to meet the needs of the population was exceeded. Many people lacked the transportation needed to get to some of the formal programs. And even though most programs operated in the evening to accommodate the working adult, some people had families or other obligations that prevented them from attending. Finally, for many African Americans, Jim Crow made it extremely difficult to make progress in society. This was especially true in trades like plumbing. African Americans were not accepted into the apprenticeship programs; as a result, the school would not accept them because they would not have any way to do their apprenticeships. The local unions also practiced discrimination, which left many who desired those types of learning experiences with few options. It was a vicious cycle designed to bar African Americans from skilled positions. My great-uncle, Willie Davis, was one such individual. He refused to acquiesce to this type of discrimination and learned the plumbing trade through correspondence courses. Throughout the West End, he was known as “Mr. Fix It.”⁸⁵

The 1940s were a time when people pulled together for the greater good of the country. Soldier after soldier left Cincinnati to defend the nation. African Americans also were accepted into the Military but it was clear that for the most part it was not a Black man’s army. When Uncle Ted (Ted Moore) was drafted, he went to the Great Lakes Training Center. This was the Service School for Fireman but he never received the fireman training. “We just went through the basics of it. You know, the actual fireman, we never saw a water room on a ship.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Obituary, Willie Davis.

⁸⁶ Ted Moore, Oral History Interview.

Though his official job title was “fireman,” he was assigned to the Naval Supply Depot. According to Uncle Ted that was where 90 percent of the African Americans served their country. For 17 hours a day, he loaded and unloaded cargo in various locations all over the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, Okinawa, and the Philippines during World War II. In spite of the fact that his official training did not result in learning fireman skills, he felt that the experience had a learning benefit. “It learned me how to talk to people. How to act around people. And just in general it gave you a whole new, how you say that, just a new way of life.”⁸⁷

This was an unanticipated byproduct that proved instrumental to his development as a person. He was born in Alabama and described himself as a hot-headed fast-talker in his younger days. His experience in the military taught him a more effective way of dealing with people, especially people who mistreated him. He credits that experience in part for his success as a plasterer and drywall hanger. That job involved meeting and working with different types of people. Knowing how to control his temper and talk to people helped him make a good living in that trade. After his tour of duty, the military provided an opportunity for him to attend a formal-skills training program. He went to tailoring school for about eight months but he never worked within that trade.

Reading has traditionally been thought of as a mechanism for further learning. In a city dominated by de facto segregation and racism, it was important that African Americans had a dependable resource to read about things of interest to them and things that pertained to them. *The Union* served this purpose. It was the only African American weekly paper in Cincinnati during this time period. It ran from 1907 to 1952. Wendell P. Dabney, a prominent African American business man and civil rights activist, was the editor. He considered the newspaper to be “the best medium for dissemination of news, general advertising, and such publicity as has for

⁸⁷ Ted Moore, Oral History Interview.

its object the conveyance of information to the masses.”⁸⁸ Local businesses and agencies advertised in *The Union*, and African American society news was featured there as well. Beyond that, it was an invaluable resource of national, local, and civic information and information of educational value. One such article appeared in the *The Union*. It was titled “Training and Education.” It explained why it was important to have both. The author wrote, “The untrained are the first to be laid off. The uneducated never rise above themselves.”⁸⁹ Another article was titled “Ignorance is worse than slavery”⁹⁰ and it sums up the key goal of the periodical which was to emancipate Cincinnati’s African Americans from the stranglehold of mental imprisonment wrought by systemic racism and prejudice by keeping them informed of items of interest.

Pastor Waldrop said, “It’s not so much that I’ve learned through books but my experiences.... I’ve had several teachers.” He went on to speak about how through formal and informal learning, he acquired a piecemeal education. When he was unable to continue in the East Night High School, he sought out the services of a tutor. With the tutor’s assistance, he was able to make up for much of what he missed out on from having only acquired a third-grade education. He also felt that he learned from nature and deliberately went to his quiet places to see what lesson nature had in store for him. With those lessons, he used his determination to achieve what he wanted.⁹¹ He did not attribute his success to formal education, but it was an amalgamation of varied learning experiences that resulted in his successes in life. Taylor wrote the following for a *Union* article, “It is the use of the trained mind to learn, from people and

⁸⁸ Dabney, *Cincinnati’s Colored Citizens*, 190.

⁸⁹ Taylor, Training and Education, January 13, 1949, *The Union*, 2.

⁹⁰ Dabney, *The Union*, April 12, 1934, 5.

⁹¹ Pastor Waldrop, Oral History Interview.

circumstances as well as from books.”⁹² Pastor Waldrop said he doubts if adults in the twenty-first century could make it in life the way he did because contemporary times demand formal education and training. Seizing any opportunity as a learning opportunity was the way of adult education for African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s.

Social networks were critical to the education of the African American adult in Cincinnati. Social networks were powerful forms of resistance against a society that provided the barest of support to aid them in being successful in life. They provided the backbone needed to stand up against an oppressive society. Claude McKay in *If We Must Die*, said “If we must die—let it not be like hogs, hunted and penned in an inglorious spot....If we must die—oh, let us nobly die....Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!”⁹³ Groups such as Quadres, the Hilarity Club, the West Night Guild all recognized the power in unity and were determined to stand as a community together and fight for what they believed in. Even Novella Nobles sought security within the small band of women cadets in her police academy class. Hezekiah Hamilton recognized his social network as a vital information source. With that realization, he knew that he was never alone as he tackled the problems presented by the Air Force. The mentality that “it takes a village to raise a child” is a time honored facet of the African American community. It was this type of social support that African Americans sought out and relied on to be successful adult learners. It was this type of muscle power that gave them the strength to squeeze the juice out of the lemons for the lemonade. It was these supports that enabled lifelong learning through a system of community resources, outlets, and opportunity. For the African Americans it was the

⁹² Taylor, Training and Education, *The Union*, January 13, 1949, 2.

⁹³ McKay, *If We Must Die*, 246.

selfethnic reliance and self-determination of the collective community which allowed them to persist over the hurdles and stumbling blocks that had been placed in their path.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS: HITCHING A WAGON TO A STAR

African American adult education in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1930-1949 occurred within a racialized environment, the contours of which were shaped by the unique system of Jim Crow racism that occurred in that city. Giffin stated, “Jim Crow in Ohio was more sophisticated than that in states in the South.”¹ The South codified Jim Crow such that it clearly defined the boundaries between African Americans and European Americans. In Cincinnati, a de facto system of Jim Crow was in place. Ollie Bolton described it as sneaky, meaning that she knew Jim Crow racism was there but it was not as blatant as it was in the South. For example, she worked downtown and she and a White coworker, whom she called a close friend, would often walk around the corner to a department store called Shillito’s. Ollie Bolton said, “She would always walk a couple of steps ahead of me... That’s the way they were. They were sneaky. We were going shopping together and she would always be a few steps ahead going to Shillito’s.”² This sneakiness was pervasive throughout Cincinnati and manifested itself in social, occupational, and educational arenas. Cincinnati appeared to offer great opportunities and equality, but a closer look revealed that those opportunities were limited and were circumscribed based on race. Three themes surfaced relative to the African American adult learners’ experience with adult learning in Cincinnati, Ohio during the 1930s and 1940s. First, with the exception of the opportunities planned by organizations under the executive control of African Americans such as the black church, most planned organizational learning opportunities for African American adults were circumscribed by a system of racism that resulted in educational

¹ Giffin, *The Negro in Ohio*, 48.

opportunities being separate, inferior, and disempowering. Second, these educational and occupational opportunities that were under European American hegemonic control and their subsequent outcomes were often in tension with each other. The learning opportunities had benefits that were not intended by the program planners. Finally, the learning experiences of African American adults represented resistance to Jim Crowism in Cincinnati. This resistance can be seen in the African American organizations like the black church, Quadres, The Hilarity Club and the West Night Guild. Resistance was also in the very act of learning and how it was procured. The elders in this study revealed ways that learning occurred in their adult lives. They were acutely aware of Jim Crow and in unassuming ways resisted against it.

Separate and Unequal

The opportunities available in the African American community during the 1930s and 1940s were clearly a reflection of the times. Adult education, as an organized entity, was in its heyday and was flourishing as a field. Education for life was the centralizing theme. Stubblefield and Keane wrote, “Motives for diffusing knowledge and culture were diverse and included the desire for commercial gain, an intrinsic belief in the value of liberal education, and a conviction that knowledge, diffused to all segments of the population, would propel civilization forward.”³ Liberal education was abstract and based on the concepts of a “free market” and the “melting pot” in which every race and culture presumably were afforded the same opportunity to take advantage of its offerings. By not labeling the opportunities “For Whites Only,” AAEE through liberal education attempted to side step the question of racial inequality in the United States. But by not acknowledging the racial inequality and discrimination and by not actively developing programs to circumvent the racial status quo of the day, AAEE played a role in promoting it.

² Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

³ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 135.

That prevailing attitude of uncontested fairness through liberal education trickled down through the various levels of adult education. It manifested itself at the national level through AAAE, at the state and local levels through various councils, and at the community level through the organizations that administered programs. The overall structure and emphasis of adult education in Cincinnati was similar to the overall structure and emphasis in adult education nationally. Many of the organizations involved in adult education in Cincinnati depended on information from the AAAE to help inform their policies. The YWCA actively sought out publications like the *Journal of Adult Education* and used books like Eduard Lindeman's, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, to guide its thinking around adult education.⁴ It logically follows that adult education in Cincinnati during this period also succumbed to the same racist undertow that limited the effectiveness of the adult education enterprise in the African American community. This ideology, coupled with Cincinnati's system of Jim Crow resulted in segregated opportunities for adult education.

Community organizations like the black church, the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, the Division of Negro Welfare, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), the YWCA, and the YMCA played important roles in advancing the education of adults, and they functioned within segregated neighborhoods. Cincinnati's neighborhoods were drawn in broad strokes with a "color line." In Cincinnati, "racial housing patterns did not isolate Negroes from the community at large. There were no large ghettos in Ohio towns and cities, but Negroes populated certain streets or neighborhoods predominantly. Even those people who resided in Negro neighborhoods lived in close proximity to whites

⁴ Monthly Report, Second Report for May, 1935, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

because the Negro sections were small in land area.”⁵ African Americans lived in practically every neighborhood, though some had only minuscule representation, but the greatest numbers lived in the African American neighborhoods of the West End, Walnut Hills and Lincoln Heights. Because of this, organizations often operated programs that were close to each other so that African Americans and European Americans could have separate facilities. Libraries, YMCAs, YWCAs, and programs through CMHA all developed segregated programs that operated very close to each other.

This pattern of segregation, as Massey and Denton noted, was deliberate “and did not just happen; it was manufactured by whites through a series of self-conscious actions and purposeful institutional arrangements.”⁶ There were no rules that strictly forbade African Americans from using the facilities or attending programs that were not designed for them. African Americans had a good understanding of de facto segregation and it appears that most African Americans in Cincinnati did not use or attend those facilities.

Several of the elders talked about how acutely aware of “place” they were. Ollie Bolton mentioned that she could not go to a workplace party being sponsored by her White co-worker because it was being held in a White neighborhood called Dent. Her co-worker said, “Momma said you can’t come.” Ollie Bolton said, “They don’t have Negroes in Dent.” She went on to say, “I didn’t feel bad about it because I didn’t have no way to get out there anyway....And I would have not liked to have gone and had everybody laugh and be sneaking and paying me no attention. So it really worked out for the best.”⁷ Lillie Roberts and Hezekiah Hamilton also talked about knowing their place in Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s. Lillie Roberts did not go where she was not wanted, and she believed that she was not wanted anywhere outside of her

⁵ Giffen, *The Negro in Ohio*, 11.

⁶ Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 2.

West End neighborhood. In talking about interactions between African Americans and European Americans she said, “Everyone just had fun by themselves. They weren’t worried about the other people. They did their thing and you did yours.”⁸ Hezekiah Hamilton talked about knowing his place. He could play ball only in certain areas and knew that he was not welcomed in certain stores. Even after serving his country in World War II, he was still restricted from certain places and European Americans were still waited on first in line even if he had been standing in line first. Not much had changed from pre-war to post-war in terms of racial relations.⁹

The practical significance of this for adult education was that it influenced the choices that African American adults made while pursuing adult education. They were more likely to choose to attend programs in areas that were more welcoming to them, and the areas that welcomed them were more likely to be predominately African American and substandard to that provided in European American communities. This system of de facto segregation was understood by African Americans in Cincinnati and was resisted at varying levels.

I will use the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County as an example of how Jim Crow functioned and how African Americans resisted it. The public library functioned as “a community center, organizing clubs, offering lectures, and classes and providing space for group meetings.”¹⁰ In Cincinnati, the colored public libraries were inferior and lacking parity when compared to services available at the whited public libraries. African Americans theoretically had access to all of the branch libraries and the main branch in the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library system, but in a practical sense they were limited to the libraries in their

⁷ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

⁸ Lillie Roberts, Oral History Interview.

⁹ Hezekiah Hamilton, Oral History Interview.

¹⁰ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 143.

neighborhoods.¹¹ In this light, the ideal of liberal education was successful in that library services were made available to all, albeit in a segregated environment.

The problems with adult education with respect to Jim Crow manifested themselves not just at the local programming level, nor the national policy level, but also at a systemic institutional level. Institutional racism was at the core of the decision to use Carnegie funds to erect freestanding, multiroom structures with modern décor in the sections of Walnut Hills and the West End inhabited by White Cincinnatians,¹² while the branches for African Americans in those neighborhoods were one-room facilities located in elementary schools. This description of the Walnut Hills branch highlights the lack of parity between it and the Douglass Branch. The Walnut Hills Library occupied a

lot 150 X 140 feet, with a building of 99 x 74 feet and contains 228, 300 cubic feet....The auditorium in the basement seated 140 people and contained a green room, workroom, rest room, janitor's room, boiler room, halls and two toilets. The main floor contained the vestibule, delivery room, adults' reading room, children's reading room, reference room, librarian's office, telephone booth, and toilet. The second floor consisted of a committee room and an anteroom.¹³

Interestingly enough, the Douglass Branch was opened "only a few blocks from the Walnut Hills Branch...for the large settlement of colored people in the immediate neighborhood, which could not be cared for adequately at the larger branch."¹⁴ The Walnut Hills Branch had 10,495 books when it opened in 1906 while the Douglass Branch, which opened in 1912, started

¹¹ Savoti, *Women and Their Roles*, 31.

¹² Ibid, 30.

¹³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., 31.

with 2000 books.¹⁵ The disparities in the library system were glaring, and the rationale for the formation of a separate branch is questionable given that the Walnut Hills Branch was larger and better equipped. Figure 16 shows the exterior of the two libraries and the public entrance sign to the Douglass Branch has been magnified.¹⁶ It makes one wonder why the Walnut Hills branch with so much room and extensive holdings was too small to meet the needs of the African American community within Walnut Hills, especially considering that their population numbers were included in the population statistics for the overall neighborhood, and those statistics were used to justify the building of the Walnut Hills Branch.¹⁷

Locke noted that “in most of the special and auxiliary educational programs and services, such as libraries, vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and extension work in agriculture and home economics, the same low standards of Negro education prevail” as existed in primary, secondary, and higher education.¹⁸ African American adult education in the libraries was affected by Jim Crow racism. The service was separate and unequal, but African Americans adults took what was given them and used it to their advantage.

As an institution the Douglass School, which included the Douglass public library branch, was “Cincinnati’s leading center for the advocacy of self-help and solidarity...it became a community center.”¹⁹ With its all African American staff and emphasis on meeting the needs of the community, it was a site of resistance to Jim Crow racism. The colored public

¹⁵ Ibid., 28 and 31.

¹⁶ Photo titled “Walnut Hill Branch,” Walnut Hills Library Archives; Souvenir Program, New Douglass School, Douglass School, MSS 815, Folder 4, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

¹⁷ Savoti, *Women and Their Roles*, 27.

¹⁸ Locke, *Education of a Minority*, 313.

¹⁹ Gerber, *Black Ohio*, 452.

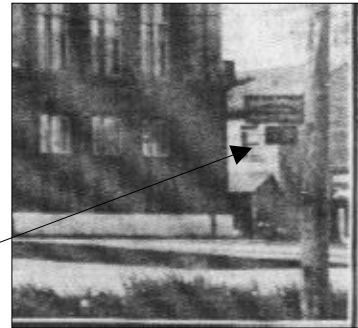
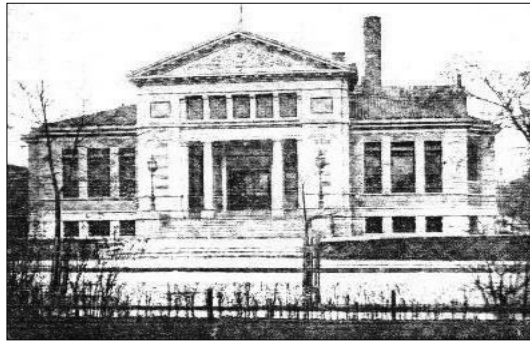


Figure 16: Top, Walnut Hills Branch Library, Bottom, Douglass Branch Library with Public Entrance Sign.

library branches in Walnut Hills and the West End were not as large or as well equipped as the non-colored branches in those neighborhoods but African Americans took advantage of the services offered in the colored branches. The records of the library indicated that both of the colored branches were over crowded and were unable to meet the needs of the African American community because of the overcrowding.²⁰ The continued pursuit of adult education through the library in spite of the inadequate resources was a form of passive resistance. African Americans more actively protested institutionalized Jim Crow in the libraries by going to the non-colored

²⁰ The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Decade of Service*, 50-52.

branches.²¹ Pastor Waldrop was an avid reader and a self-directed learner. His experience with the Walnut Hills Branch showed that he was willing to buck the established Jim Crow system by patronizing the non-colored branch.

The segregation was not in and of itself a negative quality. Siddle Walker felt that the segregated school system she investigated yielded positive experiences for those who attended.²² Ollie Bolton described the segregation in the West End and at Stowe School as a positive experience. “Stowe School was a black school but it was the best. It had good teachers who treated you like family.”²³ Lillie Roberts highlighted the sense of community that she saw in the West End. It was a self-contained community that had everything they needed. It was a place where black businesses flourished and African Americans felt at ease.²⁴ The major problem with Jim Crow segregation was not in separate services and facilities but in the fact that those services and facilities were inferior to what was provided for European Americans. The power of Jim Crow lay in the attitude that separate and unequal was acceptable for African Americans.

By tenaciously clinging to the idea of liberal education and taking at face value the misguided belief that its promotion would result in opportunities that were equally and fairly distributed among all American citizens, even those who were oppressed, AAEE displayed its racist nature. AAEE, in effect, set the tone for adult education in the nation. Its adopted policy of liberal education, which did not make special accommodations for disfranchised African Americans, ultimately resulted in learning that was separate and inferior for African Americans. Like the nation at large, AAEE accepted the racial status quo and was therefore part of the problem and not part of the solution to racial oppression and discrimination.

²¹ The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Decade of Service*, 50-52., Pastor Waldrop, Oral History Interview.

²² Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*.

²³ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

In addition to the problems of separate and inferior service that resulted from a learning program scaffolded by liberal education, there was also the problem of disempowering its non-dominant culture constituents through breeding conformity to Eurocentric based ideas. Liberal education by design disempowered oppressed populations because it did not attend to the unique characteristics and situations that affected the material reality of people who are oppressed. It reflected a Eurocentric knowledge base, worldview and lifestyle. It did not intend in a proactive manner to attend to the specialized circumstances of oppressed populations like African Americans. Stubblefield and Keane wrote,

African-American intellectuals such as Ira De A. Reid (1936) and Alain Locke (1989), while acknowledging that the different races and classes of society needed liberal education, argued for special programs to address the unique problems of African Americans as an economically and culturally disadvantaged group. In particular, they believed that black people could experience social transformation through education only if they derived inspiration and pride from knowledge of their distinctive cultural heritage.²⁵

This provides additional evidence of how adult education through AAAE was complicit in promoting racism in Cincinnati. AAAE was certainly aware of the oppressive conditions faced by African Americans in cities like Cincinnati and leaders such as Ira Reid and Alain Locke certainly made the national organization aware of the special circumstances faced by African American adult learners. But AAAE chose to ignore those circumstances and continued to pursue and promote an educational philosophy that differentially impacted the dominant and non-dominant cultures.

²⁴ Lillie Roberts, Oral History Interview.

²⁵ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 217.

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County also exemplified this problem of promoting learning with a Eurocentric base. It did provide some programming intended to “promote inter-racial understanding”²⁶ through its public lecture format and book lists, reading courses, adult vocational education classes which could have also promoted inter-racial understanding.²⁷ On the surface these formats had a ring of democracy because they were open to all people regardless of their education, money, or social status, but the extent to which the African American masses felt welcomed or could see themselves reflected in the materials in the programming offered in the non-colored public library branches was not able to be determined.

But if Pastor Waldrop’s unsuccessful attempt to borrow books on African American history serves as a barometer of inclusiveness, then the library did not register very high. The staff at Walnut Hills Branch Library told him that it did not have books on African American history, which he wanted to borrow. Since this branch was within walking distance of the second largest population of African Americans in the city, it is peculiar that it would not stock books dealing with African American culture and history. But Jim Crow in Cincinnati was a peculiar phenomenon in that at first glance it does not appear to have a significant influence because of the opportunities that were available but as evidenced by the overcrowding of the colored branches and the lack of culturally relevant materials at the non-colored branches, those opportunities were severely circumscribed.

Adult education, imbued with liberal ideas, bred social conformity by either not challenging the status quo or being sensitive to issues of diversity. Adult education in the 1930s and 1940s privileged the needs and worldview of White dominant society and attempted to cast other cultural group members into that mold. Organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, CMHA

²⁶ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Ten Year Report*, 27.

and the public library provided a range of learning activities that they felt would best meet the needs of the community but without community input these organizations were paternalistic to the community that they served. The library's selection of what should be read and learned validated the accepted Eurocentric social codes of the day, and the African American Y's hoped their programming would thusly shape the African Americans that they served.²⁸ They offered many physical education classes like dance and swimming, classes geared toward hobbies like sewing and playing bridge, classes in art and culture like singing and French, and Bible-study classes. Additionally, they offered classes dealing with family life, home management, hygiene, and health.

Some of the more disconcerting classes had goals that dealt with building character. The following was written in a West End YWCA annual report, "Located as we are, in the heart of the West End, surrounded by drabness and poverty, we have set up a goal for achievement of cleanliness."²⁹ Later in that same report, it stated that the

West End Branch and its purpose, which is to develop leadership among Negro women and girls of Cincinnati, is a challenge to the city of Cincinnati. The YWCA is the only organization in the city doing any character building work for Negro women and girls. Is it any wonder that we should constantly be striving to make you proud of this piece of work and of this challenge, which you have accepted? The West End Branch is yours and will make progress only as the whole Association moves along with it.³⁰

²⁷ Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Decade of Service*, 90-91; Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, *Ten Year Report*, 6.

²⁸ Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 111.

²⁹ Report of Progress of the West End Branch YWCA Given at Board Meeting, December 4, 1935, YWCA, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Societal Library.

³⁰ Report of Progress of the West End Branch YWCA Given at Board Meeting, December 4, 1935, MSS 619, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Societal Library.

A 1930 report commented, “It was pleasing to note how young mothers are learning to care for their children.”³¹ Liberal education and progressive reform devoid of input from the learners or attentiveness to the learner’s culture leads to social control, value-laden charges of rightness, and reproduction of the status quo.

The YWCA may have correctly identified problems within the West End community but given the underlying attitudes conveyed in the reports, it is doubtful that African American elders or community members were sought out as resources for combating the problems or that solutions rooted within their culture were considered. The tactics of the YWCA, as well as other community adult education agencies, typically failed to incorporate the wisdom that was housed within the community and instead sought solutions within the culture of the dominant class and race. The effectiveness of these organizations may have been greater had they looked to the community members for the assessment and possible solutions to the problem.

For instance, Locke noted that “correctly interpreted, it means simply that in educating adults we find that their vital, concrete, particular interests provide the strongest and most effective motivations for study....Of course for group-conscious minorities such an approach is more effective, such an appeal more intense, and the response is accordingly more positive.”³² He lambasted adult education for promoting an “educational policy of ignoring differences and stressing conformity.”³³ Adult education that centered on the needs of the group as opposed to the individual has a greater likelihood of resulting in adult education that is culturally relevant

³¹ West End Branch Report, May 1930, YWCA Manuscripts, MSS 619, Box 36, Folder 9; Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

³² Locke, *Reciprocity*, 419.

³³ Locke, *Reciprocity*, 420

and emancipatory. Reddick said, “Education may well be a tremendous force in the struggle against prejudice (or any other social evil) *if it is directed toward that goal.*”³⁴

Locke prepared a booklet called *The Negro in America* at the request of the American Library Association. The request was born from the “recognition of the growing interest in the American Negro as an individual, as a citizen, as a contributor to American life, and of an increasing desire upon the part of white people to see the problem of the Negro from the Negro’s own point of view.”³⁵ However social education³⁶ and culturally relevant education were not a part of the official AAAE agenda and were not vigorously attended to by most agencies of adult education in Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s. Locke’s booklet was the exception rather than the norm in adult education. Most of the education offered was separate, inferior and not culturally relevant. Black churches, and other African American controlled organizations and individuals like Pastor Waldrop purposely designed and sought out culturally relevant programming and materials that dealt with African American history and culture and defied the liberal education agenda as crafted by AAAE.

The fallibility of the liberal education idea was also prevalent in vocational education. By the 1930s and 1940s adult education programs clearly focused on the vocational education needs of communities. With the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 and the creation of the Federal Board for Vocational Education, adult education was thrust into dissemination of knowledge for work. Adult learning took place in trade schools, apprenticeship programs, and through correspondence study.³⁷ Cincinnati kept up with the national trends in adult education in terms of its vocational and liberal education offerings and methods of disseminating

³⁴ Reddick, *Adult Education*, 489.

³⁵ *Negro in America*, *Journal of Adult Education*, 471.

³⁶ Locke, *Reciprocity*, 419

³⁷ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 148.

knowledge.³⁸ A liberal education philosophy inevitably affected vocational education. Kohn wrote, “It seems idle to talk of a solution to the social and moral problems of America until cultural, physical, and economic opportunities are open to all citizens without respect to color.”³⁹ Liberal education by not actively advocating for equal opportunity was of little value to African Americans hoping to improve themselves economically. Bullock commented that the challenge of vocational education for African Americans was to make sure they were prepared for the jobs available to them while developing opportunities beyond what the racial status quo permitted.⁴⁰

The Division of Negro Welfare and other agencies determined that unemployment was a major problem in the community and designed programs to help alleviate it. Discrimination was rampant and it was difficult for African American to obtain jobs that were not considered to be low-tiered like domestics and laborers. Because of this, most of the training and preparation was for work that the Division of Negro Welfare believed African Americans might have success in getting. It created a double-thick glass ceiling. Society applied the first one by its discriminatory hiring practices and agencies; seemingly well-intentioned adult education programs applied the second layer by not providing training for employment that was atypical for African Americans.

The Household Club of the YWCA held various activities to promote vocational education from building skills to understanding the nature of work. One report stated, “The group is reading a playlet, *The Shoe on the Other Foot*, which is an interpretation of employer and employee relationships....Interest in household standards is increasing through discussions.”⁴¹ The YMCA developed programs for men to become stationary engineers. The average African American man did not have access to these types of programs. “To meet the

³⁸ *Journal of Negro Education*, 1945 Summer Edition.

³⁹ Kohn, *Negro Folk Education*, 312.

⁴⁰ Bullock, *Adult Education*.

special needs, the Branch has, for many years, conducted a class for men intending to take the examination required for Stationary Engineers.”⁴² Other classes prepared them for the racially defined occupations they would more than likely be forced to enter because of racism. “In cooperation with the city employment office a class in Household Engineering is being conducted. Many of the women who apply for work know very little about modern cleaning and household service.”⁴³ African American women had dominated domestic service in America ever since their ancestors were brought from Africa. It was ironic that they needed to have extensive training to cook, clean, and do laundry. The public schools and the University of Cincinnati Evening College also provided vocational education.

Available statistics do not indicate the extent to which African American were able to prepare themselves for professional and higher-tiered occupations. The majority of the opportunities in terms of both vocational education and occupational availability were for lower-tiered jobs. Joe Gordon saw first hand the poverty of options available to African Americans. Many workers in these lower-tiered jobs made very low wages and felt that their self-respect was compromised but with few options they had to accept what they could get and put up with the indignities of the position. Agnes Allen, my great-aunt who died at the age of 99, was known for promoting education. She believed that it did not matter what you learned, just as long as you became expert at it.⁴⁴ Part of making lemonade from lemons involved understanding the importance of being good at whatever you did and maintaining your integrity while doing it.

⁴¹ Report of Industrial Secretary, March, 1934, YWCA Manuscripts, Box 37, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴² Senger, *The Story of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 91.

⁴³ Branch Secretary Report, May 1931, YWCA Manuscripts, Box 37, Folder 2, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴⁴ Obituary, Agnes Allen, Personal Collection of Lisa Merriweather Hunn.

Pastor Waldrop and Novella Nobles accessed other learning venues to attain their career aspirations. Pastor Waldrop through a piecemeal process, acquired the public-speaking skills, the background in African American history, and Biblical knowledge to prepare for his career in the ministry. Novella Nobles joined the police force at a time when discrimination and Jim Crow had a significant influence in Cincinnati. She did not feel the sting of racism in the academy. She felt that everyone was treated the same. In fact, everyone was extremely helpful to her as she attempted to learn how to use a gun, drive a car, and understand the laws that she would be entrusted to enforce. She worked and was able to rise to the highest rank available to her as a female officer. Sexism, not racism, was the prejudice that most affected her career on the Cincinnati police force. Though racism did not limit her career on the force, racism and sexism undoubtedly inhibited other African American women because no other African American women joined the force from 1948 until 1972.

Opportunities available outside of domestic service, low-end manufacturing, and general labor were few and far between for African Americans and most adult education agencies in Cincinnati placed their vocational training emphasis on preparing African American men and women for these low-level jobs. Kohn, wrote, “The Negro problem appears by far the sorest spot in the moral and political texture of American culture. Many white persons live in abject poverty, but they have a definite hope that they or their children may rise to better standards of life. There seems no hope for the Negro. Even education does not help, for the economic world offers him no opportunity for higher and better remunerated position.”⁴⁵ Separate and unequal adult education was found throughout Cincinnati. Community organizations and vocational training sources both fell prey to Jim Crow racism.

⁴⁵ Kohn, *Negro Folk Education*, 312

The Resistance

The African American community in a variety of ways resisted the racist ideology implicit in AAAE's liberal education policy. This resistance occurred at the organizational level and through individual acts of resistance through learning. African American adult learners were never just passive recipients of adult education because they actively constructed educational opportunities that would be beneficial to those within the community. While most adult education agencies modeled their programs after the national adult education initiatives, some like the YWCA, YMCA, CMHA, and the Division of Negro Welfare developed some "educational programs in addition to and different from those encouraged by the Corporation."⁴⁶ Bullock in his 1945 review of YMCAs noted that they were for the most part segregated. The YMCAs for African Americans were modeled after the main organization but did not have program offerings as extensive as the main organization. He also found that they "dealt with the needs and interests of Negroes with the view of accomplishing the same general ends as are sought by the Movement as a whole."⁴⁷ This programming style was consistent with Locke's ideal of how adult education should function within society for non-dominant culture populations. Organizations in the community like the Ys, the Division of Negro Welfare, CMHA, and the black church did develop some programs that were culturally specific which made them inconsistent with the liberal education philosophy promoted by adult education. Public lectures on topics like unemployment, anti-lynching, and women's citizenship were among the lecture topics and programs on African American history and health also took place. One of the activities of the Division of Negro Welfare was "the constant study of Negro life in

⁴⁶ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 194.

⁴⁷ Bullock, *Adult Education*, 387.

cooperation with research organizations throughout the world for the purpose of obtaining data for future civic planning.”⁴⁸

The YWCA promoted interracial programming, although its branches were segregated. The YWCA justified its proclamation of being an interracial and intercultural organization because African Americans as well as European Americans attended its conferences. In Cincinnati, the African American YWCA and the other branches frequently sponsored joint programs, which resulted in the African Americans and European Americans socializing with each other. Height found that the “Negro branches are often limited in building facilities, program equipment and lack of personnel.”⁴⁹ In spite of the African American branches’ being separate and inferior to the YMCAs and YWCAs that catered primarily to White Cincinnatians, the African American Ys offered some liberal programming infused with culturally sensitive material. This attentiveness perhaps was a consequence of those YMCAs and YWCAs having African American leadership.

Even groups at the YWCA that were vocational in nature integrated racial and cultural education programming. One report stated, “This is a group of enthusiastic young women, some of whom are housewives and others employed in domestic work and industry. They voluntarily expressed an interest in knowing more about the Negro, and have selected the Negro from all angles as a project.”⁵⁰ African Americans consistently requested that resources available to them be used to provide educational opportunities that were relevant to their culture and life circumstances.

⁴⁸ Program Suggestions appended upon the Recommendations of Mr. Otto W. Davis, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 31, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

⁴⁹ Height, *The Adult Education Program*, 395.

⁵⁰ Report of Business and Industrial Secretary, November, 1931, YWCA Manuscripts, Box 37, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

This was also the case for CMHA. The interesting twist there was that because of Jim Crow, an African American and a European American administrator were hired to direct the activities in the Laurel Homes housing project. The African American administrator oversaw programming for the African American residents and the European American administrator did the same for the European American residents. Perhaps it was because of this that the African American residents had some programming that was relevant to their needs and had a greater say in what was offered to them.⁵¹ By making the knowledge accessible to African Americans, these organizations conformed to the liberal education idea promoted by AAAE but in some instances went beyond that idea to include programming that was culturally relevant. Infusing culturally specific knowledge this into the learning opportunities displayed resistance to the status quo.

The black churches were also avenues for culturally specific liberal based education. The churches not only offered Christian education, but also applied spiritual doctrine to every day living and offered leadership development, community service training, and cultural and political learning opportunities. These opportunities existed for both men and women and were not based in Eurocentric ideology. There were places of commonality or universality between African Americans and European Americans which was attended to by the church but it was in the places of divergence that the churches' influence was the greatest. Developing African Americans, especially women as leaders, was not commonplace in society but was an aim of the black church. The church sought to cultivate more men and women as leaders, as strong Christian ambassadors, and as teachers. Two of the women elders in this oral history project, Ollie Bolton and Beulah O'Conner, talked about being hand picked to attend conferences and to receive further training through the church. Emphasis on areas like leadership in the African American

⁵¹ 8th Annual Report, CMHA, 1941 Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority, MSS 682, Box 2, Folder 3, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

community helped the black church to stand apart from other agencies that accepted the Eurocentric version of liberal education without modifying it.

Black churches understood that in many cases they were the only outlets for African American cultural and personal affirmation. The black churches were attuned to the needs of their parishioners and offered learning opportunities to help meet those needs. The black church worked in conjunction with outside organizations to develop the programs within the church and for the greater good of the community; for example, programs during Negro Health Week and Negro History Week and programs that featured both national and local high profile speakers, both locally and nationally recognized. It also had learning programs of its own, like the Baptist Young People's Union and Sunday Schools.

Social mentoring as a way of learning how to be a mother, how to manage a household, and how to develop oneself as a person traditionally occurred within the African American community. This represented one of the forms of education developed within the African American community for itself and demonstrates its ability to educate itself in a manner consistent with the culture. This learning in and of itself was a form of resistance to Eurocentric defined curriculums and knowledge bases. Hezekiah Hamilton and Beulah O'Conner both looked to social mentors to guide their learning. For Hezekiah Hamilton, this bond was so strong and natural that he relied on it to help solve problems he encountered in military service. He said he never had much formal education and for the most part learned by doing and from social mentors like his uncle. His ability to learn and the amount of knowledge he possessed surprised many of the European Americans he dealt with in the service. They could not figure out how he

was able to accomplish the things he did. But for him, reliance on his uncle and experience were tried and true avenues for learning.⁵²

Beulah O'Conner relied on social mentoring as a mother of ten in the Valley Homes. She had many talks with her unofficial mentor there. Often these talks were unplanned and general in nature. She said, "We'd be talking. We'd just be talking," and in the course of these conversations she would learn something that was useful to her.⁵³ The Mothers' Clubs were a more organized version of social mentoring and were found in the YWCA and the CMHA but it is not clear how authentic the knowledge was that was taught in the clubs. That is, based on the archival information from the YWCA and CMHA, it appears that the information was not as helpful or practical as the information that Mrs. O'Conner received from her mentor. The information from those formal organizations was condescending and did not honor the practical experiences that these women brought to the table.

Self-directed learning experiences through reading papers like *The Union*, and lessons from personal experiences also defied and resisted liberal education mandates. African Americans were able to choose for themselves what they thought was important to know and to learn about and then could weigh that knowledge against other information that they had previously obtained to see how best to integrate that into their lives. These experiences often led to personal growth, advanced knowledge, and racial pride. Joe Gordon had worked hard to be the best Pullman porter that he could be. He took pride in his work and learned valuable lessons in the process, as did Uncle Ted, who turned his military experience into a lesson in "right living." That is, shortly after being drafted, he knew he was not going to receive an education in the service that would equip him with usable vocational skills. But what he did get from that

⁵² Hezekiah Hamilton, Oral History Interview.

⁵³ Beulah O'Conner, Oral History Interview.

experience was a lesson in how to be a “bigger man” and how to raise him above the level of those who try to oppress him and hold him down. He learned diplomacy, which he credited for the successes he attained in spite of Jim Crow prejudice after being discharged from the military.

Pastor Waldrop also refused to let his circumstances dictate the ultimate course of his life. He realized that insights and learning could occur anywhere if people allow their minds to be open to them. For example, as I watched an animated movie with my children, I heard one of the characters say, “The circumstances of one’s birth are irrelevant. It is what you do with the gift of life which determines who we are.”⁵⁴ This statement exemplifies the path through learning that Pastor Waldrop and many of the other elders in my study traveled. They took charge of their lives and made learning opportunities where others may not have seen any. It represents the attitude implicit in the idea of “When given lemons, make lemonade.” This was symbolic of much of African American adult education in Jim Crow Cincinnati.

Resistance to limited resources was also seen at the individual level. Pastor Waldrop provides the clearest example of this in his simple yet powerful act of patronizing the Walnut Hills library. He made a conscious decision to go to the Walnut Hill Branch Library even though the Douglass School Branch Library was just blocks away. He also did not blindly accept as a statement of fact that the Walnut Hill Branch did not have material on African American culture and history. He questioned them and pushed the envelop of resistance. He refused to settle for the overcrowded and differentially supplied facility on the African American side of Walnut Hills.

Pastor Waldrop’s decision to go to the non- colored library, the black churches purposeful and consistent use of culturally relevant programming, the request by African Americans to the community organizations for culturally specific programming, self-directed

learning activities and the use of social mentors to overcome the limitations posed by educational opportunities dictated by Jim Crow racism were forms of active but quiet resistance. Others chose a more visible resistance approach.

Organizations such as the like YWCA's university-based Ovidians, University of Cincinnati's Quadres, the West Night Guild and Hilarity Club of the night high schools were more visible forms of resistance. The Ovidians used their meetings as form of activist education. They educated their members on relevant issues and discussed strategies for combating Jim Crow racism at the University of Cincinnati. One strategy they employed was a demonstration in which three members of that group attended the University Junior-Senior Prom at the Netherlands Plaza. They used "this affair as a means of expressing a race consciousness since the racial issue was made paramount."⁵⁴ Quadres also did this at the University of Cincinnati and was active in promoting African American pride, history and culture.

Donald Spencer, the founder of the group, saw the need and organized the much-needed group for African Americans at the University of Cincinnati. The success of this group lay in the fact that it recognized racism and developed activities to combat it. It did not follow a liberal education approach such as that advocated by AAAE. The students in that group made bold stands against discrimination and worked to provide activities for those in the group that did not reinforce their then current social status on campus. They were not content to sit by silently and be complicit in the university's Jim Crow practices. Through Quadres they fought for changes at the University of Cincinnati. Quadres provided an experiential learning opportunity in civil protest. They often met in the homes of various members to educate, raise awareness about pertinent issues, and to develop plans for executing much needed changes on the campus. Protest

⁵⁴ *Pokemon, The First Movie.*

as a form of emancipatory education rooted in the African American experience, literature, and history provided the primary foundation for Quadres. By resisting they improved the quality of education that they were receiving and learned valuable life lessons as well. In many ways those earlier experiences with racism were experiential learning experiences that they modeled future protest on.

African Americans were active participants in deciding the course of their lives. Quadres at the University of Cincinnati, Hilarity Club at East Night High School and the West Union Guild at West Night High School, and the black church were all examples of this self-help and active resistance to Jim Crow racism in Cincinnati. This was activism theory balanced with practice. Discrimination often worked to limit the opportunities available to African Americans. So these learners had to work together as a community of learners to obtain what they felt they needed to help them be more successful and more fulfilled. To be sure, at an individual level, gains were made but the larger aim was for gains at the community level. This, however, represented only a small amount of the programming as most of the adult education programming in Cincinnati was driven by the dominant class value of individualism embodied by liberal and progressive education.

The black church, Quadres, culturally relevant programming through community organizations, social mentoring, and self-directed learning opportunities offered African Americans learning activities that were not fettered by liberal education's philosophy. The activities were highly attuned and attentive to the Jim Crow racism that abounded through Cincinnati. The power of working together, learning from each other and depending on each

⁵⁵ Report of Education Department, April 1934, Urban League, MSS 580, Box 31, Folder 1, Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

other represent the true value of social networking in education because it helped to build a communal knowledge base, which was more complete than any individual knowledge base.

African American adult education under the hegemonic control of European Americans was a function of Jim Crow whereas African American adult education designed by African Americans often was an act of resistance toward Jim Crow racism. These acts of resistance were seen in how they took the education that was provided and molded it into something that was useful to them. They also developed their own educational venues that worked toward dismantling the racial status quo that was so easily acquiesced to by AAAE at the national level, the Adult Education Council at the local level, and individual programs at the community level. African American adult education in Cincinnati occurred across many settings and consisted of varying topics. Often it occurred in neighborhoods where high concentrations of African American lived. Some were free of charge and others were for a fee. There was something for everyone: The rich, the poor, the young, the old, the undereducated, and the well educated. Ollie Bolton summed it up by saying, there were “many good opportunities, one only had to get out there and do it.”⁵⁶ And many of those opportunities became means of resisting Jim Crow racism.

African American adult learning activities in Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s were designed to meet the perceived and actual needs of the community, with rare exception were examples of the idea of liberal education, and took place against the backdrop of discrimination. “Adult education in the United States has not only done little to improve race relations but has never conceived of this as an objective of its endeavor.”⁵⁷ It has been established through just these few examples that the learning environment was discriminatory. The learning activities were prescribed in some instances to maintain social inferiority; in other instances, African

⁵⁶ Ollie Bolton, Oral History Interview.

⁵⁷ Reddick, *Adult Education*, 490.

Americans were just excluded; in still other instances, the structural environment was the culprit. Discrimination abounded in Cincinnati and filtered into the opportunities for adult learning for African Americans. In spite of the discrimination, African Americans were able to take what was offered to them and use it for the greater good of both themselves and their communities. Racism and discrimination were part and parcel to living and learning in Cincinnati but they were not the final determinates of the education and the impact that that education would have on African American learners. That was something that African Americans determined for themselves.

The Indictment

This study did not involve an in-depth critical analysis of contemporary times, but I feel I would be remiss if certain contemporary events were not highlighted. In many ways the Cincinnati of the early twenty-first century mirrors the Cincinnati of the 1930s and 1940s. A cursory glance reveals that the city is still fragmented by tensions attributable to race. Most recently in 2001, the city was rocked by a riot ignited by what many perceived to be excessive force by a White Cincinnati police officer, which resulted in the death of an African American male. Subsequently, the Cincinnati once named “the most livable city” was propelled into the national spotlight as a city fraught with racial discord. This incident ushered in on one hand a new crop of interracial initiatives, and on the other hand, the formation of city- wide boycotts and greater recognition of militant groups like the Black Fist.

Cincinnati, a city more than 200 years old, is still highly stratified according to race in terms of schools, neighborhoods, and, to a certain extent, occupations. These things are yet to be fully integrated. Inequities still exist in all areas. In light of those events, it seemed ironic that in June, 2002, when Cincinnati’s local television stations televised the groundbreaking ceremony of the Harriet Tubman National Underground Freedom Center. Cincinnati’s African American

citizens still crave social, economic, and educational parity. Perhaps the Freedom Center offers a vision of what Cincinnati hopes to become; and perhaps at the same time it is a reminder of what the Cincinnati should never have been. The adult educational opportunities of African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s were representative of this city in transition. They epitomized progress while at the same time resulted in stagnation. The same duality that exists in the Cincinnati today was manifested in the Cincinnati of yesterday.

This study showed that adult education as envisioned by AAAE resulted in African Americans continuing to long for social, economic and educational parity. The vision of liberal education, if it had been executed in a way that acknowledged and acted against social injustice, would have left a legacy of what adult education should have been: equal and fair. Instead it left a legacy of what it never should have been: unequal and unfair. Adult education was supposed to improve society but through liberal education it worked to perpetuate the status quo and reinforce the inequities that existed in society. Through an over reliance on liberal education without cultural specificity and without acknowledgement of the racially based injustices in society, adult education under the auspices of AAAE was just another racist institution in America in the 1930s and 1940s. Though its official policy did not overtly promote discrimination, the subsequent manifestations of the programming guided by it did, as seen in the community organizations in Cincinnati did. Those organizations, which were often under White dominant group control, offered separate and unequal learning opportunities to African Americans.

The power structure was such that African Americans and their culture were often left out of the official discourse of adult education in the 1930s and 1940s. The knowledge base and world view that were implicitly accepted were that of the European American dominant cultural group. Because of this, adult education as posited by AAAE for the African American

community was disempowering. Liberal education was a discriminatory policy promoted by AAAE and it limited African American adults educationally in the same way that national racist policies placed limits on African Americans socially, economically and politically. AAAE opted to hide behind the facade of equality created by its liberal education guiding principle that was supposed to “result in social stability,”⁵⁸ and “restore to individuals the power to make decisions about their lives.”⁵⁹ However social stability for African Americans turned out to be a euphemism for reinforcing the racial status quo and further consignment to a place of inferiority in American society. And individual decision-making power depleted of economics and political decision-making power had very little impact on the material conditions that most African Americans in Cincinnati lived in. By hiding behind that facade, AAAE was an instrument and adult education was a vehicle for racism and the oppression of African Americans in Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s.

The irony of adult education in the racialized context of Jim Crow Cincinnati was in spite of the racism and inequality, the African American community was able to forge a path to a better quality of life through leadership, cultural, and even vocational training. African Americans wore a mask while accepting the education that was intended to prepare them for the limited opportunities so those in power would not know what they planned to do with the education received. They made lemonade from lemons when they took what was given and what they were able to acquire under their own initiative to develop determined individuals, solid families and strong communities. And they refused to die without resisting as they touted their accomplishments in the face of Cincinnati’s Jim Crow racism and showed the true spirit of adult education and the power of life-long learning by living lives infused with courage, pride and self-

⁵⁸ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*, 193.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

fulfillment. In doing so, Cincinnati's African American women and men did the implausible during the 1930s and 1940s. They successfully bridged the gap between their stated objectives and the subsequent realization of those objectives thus allowing African American women and men to hitch their wagons to the stars.

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APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

African American adult education history has been subjugated to the history of European American adult education in the same way that African American history has been subjugated to European American history. European American history is so dominant that it typically does not even bear the label of “European American.” That part is taken for granted. The history that encapsulates the past experiences of other racial and cultural groups is formally named in accordance with the name of that group. Those histories, like African American History, Women’s History, and Native American History, appear as appendages and very rarely hold center stage in the general historical discourse if they are included at all.

Part of the problem, which is attributable to what historical methods are used and how those methods are used in data collection, is that the histories of non-European American people often fall victim to the “conspiracy of silence.”¹ Available historical material about non-European American people is typically not used or is inappropriately used during the historical reconstruction process. Furthermore, there are significant gaps in the material that is available. Approaching the reconstruction process from an Africentric perspective and using such a historical data collection method as oral history can help historians interested in capturing the past experiences of African Americans and can help them avoid some of the aforementioned problems. It offers one way of circumventing the problems of omission, being left out, and commission, being inaccurately portrayed.

¹ Franklin, *Race and History*.

This study was an oral history study on African American adult education. It was framed within an Africentric theoretical perspective. Okafor said, “Afrocentric research...seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data.”² An Africentric study compels the researcher to embrace a system of knowledge that differs from that of the dominant European American society, to acknowledge the values of African American culture, and to address in an active way the effects of European American oppression.³ To do this, the past experiences of African American adults must be maintained as the central focus. The historical sources used in the reconstruction must reflect those experiences and should include the voices of African American people. Material that has been previously used must be reevaluated from this perspective to make sure that accurate reconstruction occurs.

Historical researchers must actively look for ways to fill in the gaps commonly left by written historical sources. An oral history study is one way of filling in the gaps of the recent past. It is a method of inquiry that aligns with an Africentric theoretical perspective because it allows for the centering of the African American experience. This oral history study endeavored, through its ideological location and its emphasis on African American adult educational experiences, to add to the discourse surrounding the history of adult education and the larger history of education.

Africentrism and Subjectivity Statement

Historical studies have been pursued with great vigor for a variety of reasons. Franklin notes that some sought to uncover truth and correct falsehoods, while others sought to

² Okafor, *The Place of Africology*, 188.

³ Milam, *The Emerging Paradigm*.

masquerade contemporary rhetoric as history.⁴ Historians are compelled to maintain integrity as they go about the tasks of reconstructing history and should acknowledge that their positionality, values, and theoretical frames inherently influence these tasks. They affect what materials get gathered as well as how they are interpreted. In short, they politicize the process of reconstructing the past. Historians have an obligation to explicitly state what their theoretical frame, positionality, and values are so that those reading the constructed history can determine for themselves whether those characteristics unduly biased the narrative.

Toward that end, as an Africentrist, my job is to acknowledge the political and personal stance that I assumed as I collected data and constructed narratives. I started from the position that my elders (participants) have valued and valid knowledge about my research topic and must be held in highest regard because of their position, as elders, in the African American community. I acknowledged that I am intimately involved in the storied lives of these elders because their stories connected to me on a personal level.

This study originated from my desire to understand more about the adult education experiences that members of my family had during the middle 1930s. The idea for this study came from my reflections on my own family's history. I wanted to know more about their experiences with adult education. Having grown into adulthood listening to the stories told by my grandparents, their siblings, and cousins who were senior to me by 40 years or more, I knew that they were active lifelong learners. I was particularly intrigued by the life history of my grandmother, Lu Bell Coleman, her sister, Agnes Rea Allen, and her brothers, Willie Davis and Otha Davis. Unfortunately by the time this study came to fruition, three of them had passed on but left a rich and lasting legacy that confirmed their commitment to learning.

⁴ Franklin, *Race and History*.

My mother traced the family's history back to the early 1800s and surmised that my grandmother's parents were slaves or descendants from slaves. My grandmother's parents, George and Mary Davis, were sharecroppers, and in spite of or because of their humble roots, they placed a premium on education. We know that during the early 1900s when there was a tendency for boys to be sent to the fields to work rather than to school for book learning, they made sure all of their nine children went through formal education in childhood. My grandmother went on to college and taught school for a short time. My great-aunt and great-uncles also continued with formal and informal education when they were adults. My great-aunt, Agnes Allen, among other things, took speech at Sawyer Night School, completed training in home nursing, and completed a training for service course at the church. Willie Davis, my great-uncle, was not permitted to enter apprenticeship programs because he was African American, so through correspondence courses and his own ingenuity, he learned the electrical and plumbing trades. My other great-uncle, Otha Davis, also was a lifelong learner.

My grandmother was always involved in training through the church, as both learner and educator. During one of the oral history interviews I conducted, one of the elders, Ollie Bolton, asked me if I remembered a woman who went to my church. They had gone through various trainings together and worked together in the church district. The only such person I knew was my grandmother, and before I could even finish getting her name out of my mouth, Mrs. Bolton excitedly said that my grandmother was the person she worked with for all those years. She had so many fond memories of their time together and held my grandmother in such high regard that it made me beam with pride that I was related to someone whose life reflected a tradition of lifelong learning. Because of this, this oral history study resonated with me on a very personal

level. As a researcher, I had to make note of this. I made special efforts not to let my intimate involvement unduly bias the findings of the study.

Unfortunately, by the time the study came to fruition, I was only able to interview one member of my biological family. This was due to several being deemed ineligible because they did not live in Cincinnati during the specified period. Two of my family members passed away and, therefore, could not be interviewed, and one who would have qualified had been ill. Most of my participants were members of my social family. That is, I knew them through an affiliation with my church or through an affiliation with members of my social network. I realized that I needed to balance my reverence for them with my need to gather good data and to analyze it appropriately. I could not allow my personal relationships with them to skew my interpretations, but at the same time, I needed to appreciate that it was this very closeness to my subject matter that enabled me to analyze my data better. Polkinghorne describes this phenomenon well.

Meanings are not produced only by individuals who register certain experiences as connected to others. Cultures maintain a system of language and pass on to succeeding generations knowledge of the connections between signifying sounds and the things and notions they signify. Cultures also maintain collections of typical narrative meanings in their myths, fairy tales, histories, and stories. To participate as a member of a culture requires a general knowledge of its full range of accumulated meanings.⁵

By virtue of my membership in this cultural community, I was familiar with their general knowledge. As a child growing into adulthood, I was continually exposed to the stories and the histories. As a result of this prior association, a shared system of meaning existed between us that helped to enhance the collection, analysis, and final reporting of the data.

⁵ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 6.

Africentrism has been employed by a variety of disciplines such as history, psychology, sociology, communications, and education as a means of providing a culturally congruent response to understanding phenomena related to people of African descent. “Africentrism is the written articulation of indigenous African philosophy (an oral tradition) as embodied by the lived experiences of multiple generations of people of African descent.”⁶ It represents an ideology or way of viewing the world. Africentrism is the interpretive lens that was applied to the study design, data collection and data analysis. Who I am, the population I studied and my relationship with that group necessitated that I employ a culturally relevant lens so that I could understand the stories the elders told and construct an accurate narrative. This understanding is shaped by the particular sociocultural and historical context within which the elders lived and learned.

Africentrism sets forth the premise that there is a link between Continental Black Africans and the Diasporic Black Africans, which results in a shared value system and common historical heritage. It provides a belief system or a worldview that is consistent with the culture of the people of the Africa and the African Diaspora. Asante wrote,

We cannot truly be ourselves or know our potential since we exist in a borrowed space....Our relationship to the culture that we have borrowed defines what and who we are at any given moment. By regaining our own platforms, standing in our own cultural spaces and believing that our way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any, we will achieve the kind of transformation that we need to....⁷

Africentrism is not a monolithic entity. It has variations that are bound by five principles: Centeredness, communalism, interconnectedness, spirituality, and purpose. These variations

⁶ Merriweather Hunn, *Africentrism*.

⁷ Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, 8.

provided the interpretative lens that I used during this study. Centeredness, also known as centricity, is key to understanding Africentrism. Harris wrote that centricity “refers to a perspective that involves locating oneself within the center of one's cultural perspective.”⁸

Africentrism places Africa at the center of all phenomena related to people of African descent. It is as Okafor said the “idea that African ideals and values should be at the center of any analysis involving African culture and behavior.”⁹ For example, the history of slavery as relayed from an Africentric perspective would not be told exclusively from the vantage point of what Europeans did, but would include the many instances of resistance by African people and the experiences they had. By doing so, an alternative way of understanding slavery is posited and African American people are cast as subjects of history and culture and not as objects of “His-Eurocentric-Story.”¹⁰

For several generations, people of African descent have been relegated to the sidelines of humanity and humanities’ institutions by western societies. African American history and culture were essentially dismissed as either inconsequential or non-existent. Western nations, including the United States, are guilty of subverting African ideals and history, which perpetuates a sense of disconnection between African Americans and Africa. Other ethnic groups within America are supported to a greater extent in their quest to preserve their historical and cultural connections but this is not the case with Africans in America. Okafor said,

Africans are not known to cry wolf when others assert their Irishness or Jewishness. In fact, Chinatowns abound in America. No one complains about this fact; and in fact, no one should. These groups assert their self-consciousness [centricity] because it strengthens them; it makes them stronger Americans. Why then, one may ask

⁸ Harris, *Centricity*, 229.

⁹ Okafor, *The Place of Africalogy*, 699.

rhetorically, does the body politic respond with hysteria to the Africans quest for self-definition? Why is that which is a sweetener for others, a sour pill for the African? ¹¹

This passage demonstrates the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that hegemony works against centrality for African Americans. Eurocentrism leaves little room for “other” centrisms.

Africentric research methods require that African Americans remain centered in the research but support other non-dominant groups who seek to center themselves in research that focuses on them.

Communalism is the second principle of Africentrism. It “highlights the social interdependence of people.”¹² It posits “that individuals view themselves as being inextricably linked with others in their social milieu. There exists an emphasis on social bonds and mutual interdependence such that the good of the individual is closely intertwined with the good of the group.”¹³ They are intricately connected and bound to each other. It reinforces the idea that the fate of one is based on the fate of the other. There is a sense of accountability. The group has responsibilities for the individuals within it, and the individuals have a responsibility to the group. This awareness of responsibility and connection is at the heart of the concept of communalism. Karenga said, “It stresses persons in community acting with shared initiative and responsibility to collectively conceive and create a social order for maximum social solidarity and human flourishing.”¹⁴

The third principle that binds the variations of Africentrism is interconnectedness, or wholism. This interconnectedness embodies the idea of unity. It emphasizes unity as opposed to individuality and focuses on the whole as opposed to the individual parts. Interconnectedness

¹⁰ Hoskins, *Eurocentrism vs Afrocentrism*, 255

¹¹ Okafor, *The Functional Implication*, 189.

¹² Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, and Albury, 409.

¹³ Ibid., 411

reflects the wholistic nature of Africentric thought. Harris wrote, “This perspective is personalized, not objectified, therefore, there is no separation of the person from the self. The Africentric perspective affirms the multidimensionality and ambiguity of reality.”¹⁵ It is all encompassing and it is relevant to all aspects of life for African Americans. Africentrism does not compartmentalize the emotional self from the intellectual self or the economic sphere from the cultural sphere. As Asante said there is no distinction “between mind and matter, form and substance, ourselves and the world.”¹⁶

Spirituality is the fourth component of Africentricism. Spirituality is more than religious affiliation. It highlights the affective (feelings, non-cognitive based knowledge) as a source of knowledge. According to Schiele, “The Afrocentric perspective places considerable emphasis on an affective way of obtaining knowledge.”¹⁷ It also acknowledges that balance is the ultimate goal of relationships. Africentrism asserts that both balance and harmony are important in spirituality. Balance and harmony are achievable because of collective consciousness. Hill Collins offers a perspective of how this works. “By aggregating and articulating these individual expressions of consciousness, a collective and focused group consciousness becomes possible.”¹⁸

Spirituality is linked to interconnectedness because it is through the spirit that Black Africans and Black Africans of the Diaspora are connected. Asante said, “We respond to the same rhythms of the universe, the same cosmological sensibilities, the same general historical reality as the African-descended people.”¹⁹ Sheared speaks of this as polyrhythmic realities.²⁰ These polyrhythms reflect the multiplicity of reality and underscore the importance of

¹⁴ Karenga, *Toward the Multicultural University*, 57.

¹⁵ Harris, *Centricity*, 231

¹⁶ Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 81.

¹⁷ Schiele *Afrocentricity*, 153.

¹⁸ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 26.

¹⁹ Asante, *Afrocentricity*, . 2.

²⁰ Sheared, *Giving Voice*.

maintaining balance among them. Spirituality allows for the individuality of human beings while connecting those individuals to one another through their common realities.

The final component is purpose or agency. Purpose becomes the means by which African Americans navigate through problems such as racism and discrimination. Africentrism provides a prescription for action. One way it does this is by questioning the right of the dominant culture to legitimize all knowledge and those who produce it.²¹ The dominant culture is no longer viewed as the ultimate authority on everything and every culture. By repositioning African Americans as subjects and not objects, Africentrism shifts African Americans to the center of knowledge production. Hill Collins wrote, “Through the process of rearticulation, Black women intellectuals offer African-American women a different view of themselves and their world from that forwarded by the dominant group.”²² Africentrism is a philosophy of emancipation. It fosters resistance to negative connotations of African Americans. Asante said, “In every revolution, the people have first seized the instruments of idea formation....”²³ When the frame of reference changes such that it emanates from one’s cultural center, it becomes a means of liberation. “Isolate, define, and promote those values, symbols, and experiences which affirm you. Only through this type of affirmation can we really and truly find our renewal; this is why I speak of it as a reconstruction instead of a redefinition.”²⁴ Purpose is about deconstructing negative self-images and rebuilding the internal structures of the mind to reflect one’s intrinsic worth. Agency is exercised when Africentric historians reposition people of African descent at the center of the historical analysis and develop historical reconstructions that truly consider their experiences.

²¹ Asante, *Kemet*,. 15

²² *Ibid.*, 31

²³ Asante, *Afrocentricity*,.31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

In practice, according to Asante, Africentrism aims to do the following: “1) It questions the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical. 2) It demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multiculturalism and pluralism. 3) It projects a humanistic and pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, non Hegemonic perspective.”²⁵ These ideals should undergird the research undertaken by Africentric historians.

Three of the principles were particularly relevant to my study: centeredness, communalism, and agency. These principles anchored my thinking within the socio-cultural frame that the elders spoke from. It was easier for me to comprehend the importance of social networks by understanding that communalism was a core value in the Africentric view. Likewise the centeredness concept continually reminded me to stay within the learner’s experience. During the course of interviewing, one sometimes focuses too much on the interview guide and not enough on the rich stories that are unfolding. Keeping their experiences centered was one way of keeping myself on track with the ultimate purpose of the study: to write history with the learner’s perspective in mind. This principle was extremely helpful to me during the archival exploration and the subsequent write up of the data. It was easy to get off track and review things that were interesting but not germane to the story of African American adult education. Reminding myself about who was standing on the platform of the research helped the process of collecting data to go more smoothly. I appreciated the stories of resistance that unraveled. The interpretive lens that I employed alerted my senses to them as they were being told or while I was reading through the transcripts. Resistance manifested itself in a variety of ways so having an understanding of agency helped to identify the more subtle occurrences of it. These are just some of the ways that my Africentric lens impacted the study.

²⁵ Asante, *Afrocentric Idea in Education*, 173.

Africentric historians understand that the lens that they use to gather and analyze data changes the way that research issues like validity, objectivity, and neutrality are understood. Validity occurs when the data obtained is considered to be accurate and “true” and is obtained by remaining objective which required being detached and maintaining a sense of neutrality throughout the research process. However, as Asante said,

The Afrocentrist does not accept the European concept of objectivity because it is invalid operationally....I have argued that what often passes for objectivity is a sort of collective European subjectivity...The Afrocentrist speaks of research that is ultimately verifiable in the experiences of human beings, the final empirical authority.²⁶

Those traditional definitions of objectivity and validity are conceptually incongruent with an Africentric approach to data collection and analysis process. Africentrism stresses interdependency and communalism, which requires engagement not detachment. “Truth” is housed within the experiences of the people who are in the best position to communicate to the researcher what those experiences were. The goal of the Africentric historian is to understand the experiences of people through a collaborative effort.

Africentrism recognizes that the discourses of Eurocentric research methods incorporate, as Gee wrote, “a usually taken for granted and tacit ‘theory’ of what counts as a ‘normal’ person and the ‘right’ ways to think, feel, and behave.”²⁷ Africentric research methods become the venue through which the claims of normality and rightness are contested. They clear the path for knowledge claims based on conceptual frames that differ from the dominant Eurocentric theoretical center. The alternative theoretical center offered by Africentrism is therefore

²⁶ Asante, *Kemet*, 24-25.

²⁷ Gee, *Social Linguistics*, ix.

paramount when pursuing an historical study that focuses on the experiences of African Americans.

This was an oral history study that focused on the educational experiences of African American adults from 1930-1949. Because this study dealt with a population of people who, for a variety of reasons, had not left many written records, and because this study focused on the recent past, oral history interviews, alongside of archival work, were an appropriate means of collecting data. These methods offered the best means of gathering data pertinent to my research focus.

Understanding Oral History Studies

Historical research adds an important dimension to educational research. It is essentially a way of reconstructing the past, as opposed to ascertaining a list of facts about the past. Kyvig and Marty wrote, “History is far more than a remembrance of things past, though it certainly includes that. History represents a means of coming to terms with the past, of developing an awareness of previous influences, current conditions, and future possibilities.”²⁸ In the case of education, it reconstructs the various elements that composed the educational setting or learning environment so that present-day scholars, not only can better understand how education functioned in the past but also can develop an awareness about how education functions in the present. The educational setting may include such things as the curriculum, the instructors, the buildings, and the learners.

Obtaining understanding is key to all historical research, but this understanding is typically not universally accepted as the definitive description of the past. In fact, most educational historians maintain that many histories may be written about a singular past.²⁹

²⁸ Kyvig and Marty, *Local Schools*, vii.

²⁹ Butchart, *Local Schools*; Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*.

Historians are no longer seeking to uncover the hard-core facts that will tell the complete story of past time because they realize that this is a task that could never be accomplished. In all research the knowable is limited by the very sources used to aid in the knowing. Most historians hold the position that the history they write is partial and incomplete because the evidence used in its formation is also partial and incomplete. Thus the historian can tell only a small portion of the past's "true" story but can never tell the story in its entirety.³⁰

Educational historians, aware of the limitations imposed by the vastness of their subject area, the past, work to produce a record that expands our understanding, that reveals "truths," and that tells one particular story. It has been suggested that the "historical narrative might be best understood as the construction of a story about reality rather than as a direct representation of it."³¹ Therefore, the story that is ultimately told represents the historians' reconstruction of the past based on the information they chose to use in its formation. This reconstruction then becomes known as history.

The historical researcher is very much present in the making of history. Polkinghorne said,

The historian's purpose...is to try to construct as accurate and as complete an interpretation of the past as he can, in the light of the evidence he creates and uses....This requires mixing many kinds of sources judiciously, each contributing to the final result.³²

The accuracy of the story, the breadth of the story, and depth of the story depend on how thoroughly historians do their jobs. The historian's presence is inevitable, as is demonstrated in

³⁰ Butchart, *Local Schools*.

³¹ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 59.

³² Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 46.

the general histories that have been crafted for adult education.³³ Those historians were selective in terms of the sources they used in their reconstructions and in the final determination of what were included in their historical narratives. Those reconstructions were further compromised by the fact that they were typically based on written records, so oral cultures, like that of the Native American and African Americans, were rarely, if ever, accurately or thoroughly captured by such writers.³⁴ Perhaps for similar reasons, few historians have chosen to write narratives about African American adult learners in adult education choosing instead to focus on the African American educator, educational institutions, or adult education as a whole. The African American adult learner, who produced few written records, has not been well represented in the history of adult education. Oral history studies can help historians write the learner back into history.

Good oral history studies typically use two historical methods: archival exploration and oral history interviews. Archival exploration is typically seen as the benchmark tool of historians. Archival exploration has been likened to the work of detectives in that it involves searching for evidence by “exploring every possible source of information, following each clue, and even using a healthy amount of intuition.”³⁵ Brundage wrote, “Historians ...depend upon the tangible remains of the past for source materials.”³⁶ Though this evidence can take many forms, it is the written form that has dominated as a key source for contemporary historians.

This evidence, also known as a source, can be either primary or secondary. A primary source is a source that is developed contemporaneously with the event, and a secondary source is

³³ Adams, *Frontiers*; Grattan, *In Quest*; Kett, *The Pursuit*; Knowles, *A History of the Adult Education*.

³⁴ Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education*

³⁵ Butchart, *Local Schools*, 33.

³⁶ Brundage, *Going to the Sources*, 14.

one that is developed subsequent to the event.³⁷ Primary sources include original correspondence, diaries, and census reports. Secondary sources would be textbooks and dissertations. These sources can be found in a myriad of locations. The evidence compiled from archival exploration has been referred to as an accidental collection.³⁸ This is because the surviving sources chosen by any historian do not represent the whole of evidence produced during that time. What ultimately survived and what ultimately is discovered is in many cases happenstance. There is a paucity of existing evidence available when juxtaposed with what was originally available.

Oral history interviews will serve as another source of data for this study. Oral history is defined by Louis Starr as “primary source material obtained by recording the spoken words -- generally by means of planned, tape-recorded interviews-- of persons deemed to harbor hitherto unavailable information worth preserving.”³⁹ It was touted as a means of reconstructing the history of common people. The *Annales d'Histoire Economique Et Sociale* was a historical journal founded in 1929 by the French. It represented a movement away from event-focused history that preoccupied much of historical writing to a history of everyday experiences. “The traditional concern with events was replaced by a search for society's *mentalités*, the way of life and values that persisted despite major upheavals.”⁴⁰ The French historians concluded that the past became understandable only through understanding the mundane activities of everyday life. Oral history is one means of unearthing these types of activities.

Oral history is a human interaction research enterprise. It is a collaborative process in which both the participant and the interviewer play an active role. They are co-constructors of

³⁷ Butchart, *Local Schools*.

³⁸ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

³⁹ Starr, *Oral History*, 40.

⁴⁰ Brundage, *Going to the Sources*, 9.

the data.⁴¹ This aspect of the oral history method can be both beneficial and detrimental to the process. Hoopes stated, “The greatest advantage of oral history over written documents is that the historian actively participates, as interviewer, in creating the oral document, and therefore he can try to get the information he needs.”⁴² The interviewer guides the interview by asking questions but, the participant’s response determines the form that the succeeding questions will take. Interviewers can ask questions that help to clarify what was said, to expand on what was said or to move the interview forward into another topic area.

Good interviewers know which type of question to ask and when to ask it. This makes each interview unique and allows the participants a high degree of control over how the data is constructed. It allows them to tell their story in their own way, which is a positive aspect of oral history studies. The skilled interviewer understands the importance of establishing a good rapport and trust, in addition to asking good questions.⁴³ Ritchie observed, “As the only historians who deal exclusively with the living, they have to be convivial enough to establish rapport with the interviewees, to put them at ease and encourage candor.”⁴⁴ Interviewers must be aware of how their personality, culture, and social norms may affect the collaborative process.

The collaborative process can be negative if interviewer and participants’ attributes, like culture, race, class, and age, are not carefully attended to in the interview and during the analysis. These attributes affect what is said and how it is heard. Polkinghorne said, “Historical narratives are a test of the capacity of a culture’s fictions to endow real events with the kinds of meaning patterns that its stories have fashioned from imagined events.”⁴⁵ That is to say that how one remembers an event or time is affected by the value or meaning the individual attached to it. The

⁴¹ Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 11.

⁴² Hoopes, *Oral History*, 12.

⁴³ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*.

⁴⁴ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, xi.

culture from which the narrator comes influences this value and meaning. Information that is more closely aligned with one's socio-cultural perspective is more likely to be remembered and woven into the narrator's tale.

Lack of cultural knowledge can serve as a barrier to communicating and understanding the informant.⁴⁶ These cultural barriers may be formed on several bases such as race, class, gender, language and age. Who the researcher is in relation to the informant is of critical import to the data collection process. It may lead to one being overly sympathetic and the uncritical acceptance of oral testimony in the case of shared backgrounds. If the backgrounds are different or conflicting, it may lead to an antagonistic interview stance. Yow stated, "We must attempt to move beyond our own self-schemas, focusing the interview not on what is important to us in our lives, but what is important to our interviewees..."⁴⁷ This does not preclude the researcher from pursuing information deemed pertinent to the research agenda. But it should heighten the researcher's awareness about the amount of control that they exert during the interview. Interviewers should constantly examine their own biases and prejudices to insure that they do not hinder the informants from telling their stories in the fullest way possible and to avoid missing the opportunity to probe to get a better picture of the past.

Not all historians accept oral history as a valid source of historical evidence. Some of the criticisms leveled at oral history center on its objectivity, reliability and validity but like in Africentric theory, these research terms must be reconceptualized. Oral history's ability to be objective is questioned because "when historians describe evidence as 'objective', they mean not only unbiased but also unchanging.... 'Subjective' suggests a partial and partisan point of view,

⁴⁵ Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 62.

⁴⁶ Henige, *Oral Historiography*.

⁴⁷ Yow, *Do I Like Them Too Much*, 73.

less reliable because it is subject to alternation over time."⁴⁸ Oral history purports to do neither of those things. Oral history is a dynamic process that is neither unbiased nor unchanging because the oral history testimony is a reflection of what the participant remembers, the depth and breath of what the participant is willing to share, and the passage of time which can change way the phenomenon is remembered.

Validity is contextual. It is dependent upon the socio cultural frame, this history, and one's worldview. The definition of validity does not hold across cultures. This is why it is important to understand the worldview that the participant holds as well as your own. It would be detrimental to apply a socio cultural framework that is incongruent with the population or area that one is hoping to understand. By using Africentrism, I feel that I have chosen a worldview that is compatible to the elders and the subject that I am interested in understanding better because of the shared system of meaning that it creates.⁴⁹

In terms of reliability if it is defined by replicability, oral history could not measure up to a written document which is the same each time one reads it. If reliability is redefined as the consistency of the story over time then oral history testimonies are in fact reliable. Over repeated interviews, the participant may not recall the same set of facts but the heart of their story remains consistent. Ritchie noted, "Some interviewees recall events that took place decades ago...[they] can still speak authentically about events far in the past."⁵⁰ Interviewers can aid in the recall of memories by being knowledgeable about people, places, and events that may have occurred during the time in question, by using aid like photos and yearbooks. Memories can be tainted by subsequent events and how participants feel about those facts may change over time as they mature and experience other things. This in turn may affect the way the participants tell their

⁴⁸ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 7.

⁴⁹ Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*; Sheared, *Giving Voice*.

stories. According to Henige, "A well-recognised tendency of advancing age is to idealise the past, to see it largely through that most notorious of prisms, the rose-coloured glass."⁵¹ Ritchie notes,

People regularly reevaluate and reexplain their past decision and actions. Just as historians rewrite history to incorporate new evidence and fit different theories, individuals use the insights gained from current events to help them make sense out of experiences. There is nothing invalidating about this reflectivity, so long as interviewers and researchers understand what is occurring and take it into account.⁵²

The validity or "truth" and the objectivity of the oral history testimony also raise concern among those historians who discount oral history as a credible method of historical data collection. Like qualitative sociology, anthropology, and feminist theory which have rejected "the old notions of objectivity,"⁵³ oral history accepted a redefined definition of objectivity as "(1) the collection of all information, including the subjective, bearing directly on the research question and (2) the critical examination of the evidence with the methods of examination themselves under scrutiny."⁵⁴

Factors like participant selection, transcription protocols, and accuracy of the testimony can affect the validity. Oral historians do not use random sampling. As such the results generated from the research are not viewed as generalizable to the larger population. Dougherty claims that "most historians lack guiding principles for whom we choose to interview and why. Much of our work is based upon the simple method of snowball sampling....Unknowingly, we often narrow our analyses by interviewing participants within the same social and political circles as the first

⁵⁰ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 11.

⁵¹ Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 46.

⁵² Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 13.

⁵³ Yow, *Do I Like Them Too Much*, 69.

contact, thus excluding alternative perspectives.”⁵⁵ Oral historians try to obtain a purposeful sample of informants who are believed to harbor information that would help to flesh out the historical narrative. Validity is established through the selection of appropriate informants.

The transcript will never be able to capture all that is recorded on the tape. Things like tone, volume, pitch, and non-verbals affect the meaning of the words themselves. It is nearly impossible to include all of the elements of the speech act in the transcript. What is ultimately recorded in the transcript reflects not only the selectivity of the informant but also the subjectivity of the researcher.⁵⁶ Portelli said, "The transcript turns aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies changes and interpretation."⁵⁷ The oral historian will never be able to gather the full story from the informant because the memory that is ultimately recalled reflects just a partial piece of the historical episode. The interview with that informant is, after all, just one data source of many that will be used to reconstruct the past. The fact that a participant can only supply a partial piece of the puzzle does not obliterate the veracity or accuracy of the evidence produced. What the informant can and cannot or will and will not remember greatly affects the oral historian's data collection. Issues related to long-term memory versus short-term memory, the process of selecting and retrieving memories and the impact of subsequent events on memories are all issues that the oral historian must contend with in practice and theory. These are issues that a well-trained oral historian should be aware of prior to entering the oral history study.

Oral historians must be aware of the limitations of the tools that they use, when they interpret and reconstruct the past. This awareness is not just limited to oral historians but is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁵ Dougherty, *From Anecdote to Analysis*, 712.

⁵⁶ Henige, *Oral Historiography*; Moss, *Oral History*.

⁵⁷ Portelli, *What Makes Oral History Different?*, 64.

required for any researchers regardless of the methods they have chosen to use. Oral history, like other historical methods, has its shortcomings. These can be overcome by enlisting the strategies that are endorsed in historical research. The task of oral historians is the same as any other historians. They must verify the authenticity of the source, determine the positionality of the source, and understand what was the purpose of the source. This includes looking for internal consistency, seeking confirmation in other sources, and being aware of potential biases.⁵⁸ The Oral History Association has published Evaluation Guidelines⁵⁹ which are available to assist researcher doing oral history work. They help to ensure that the highest level of professional integrity is maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Historians, as part of the interpretative process, decide what evidence to use and not use, as well as, how to construct the narrative based on the evidence chosen. Moss stated,

“Analysis is the process by which form and order are brought to the chaos of evidence about the past, to bring meaning and understanding not only to the individual historian but to many people with differing subjective views of reality. Analysis requires accounting of all evidence, of all levels and kinds available to the historian.”⁶⁰

The historian also has the responsibility of deciding on the validity and reliability of the sources by making judgments about their genesis, authenticity, and accuracy.⁶¹ During the interpretative process, multiple factors, individually and in concert, exert an influence on the final narrative. Howell and Prevenier wrote, it "is not simply about assembling and ordering facts. It is as much art as science, as much intuition as technique, always some of each."⁶²

⁵⁸ Butchart, *Local Schools*; Henige, *Oral Historiography*; Moss, *Oral History*; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

⁵⁹ Oral History Association, *Evaluation Guidelines*.

⁶⁰ Moss, *Oral History*, 112.

⁶¹ Butchart, *Local Schools*; Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*.

⁶² Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 88.

Historical interpretation and writing is characterized by a sense of artfulness. Brundage said, "However much the practice of history seems to involve the systematic application of certain skills, there are wide, important areas of both research and writing that call upon the creative spirit."⁶³ This creative spirit is displayed when historians discover a novel way of interpreting the past and in the construction of the final narrative, which often reads like a story. It is during this interpretative process that the past is reconstructed.

The Africentric theoretical frame required that this research focus be on the experiences of those who actually lived the experience. According to Bekerie, it involved the act of "subjectifying" as opposed to "objectifying", which has historically been the way that people of African descent were studied. "Afrocentric theory is a theory of transformation. It is a theory of knowing and acting. It is a theory of being a subject."⁶⁴ It emphasized that the elders from that community were not objects to be studied but rather that they are co-producers of data. In doing so, the production of knowledge became an active process that was reflective of both the participant and the researcher. Oral history permitted the centering of the African American elders' experiences and Africentrism provided historically interpretive lenses for the data collection and the analysis process. Oral history is a method that has been utilized with great success by many scholars in investigating African American educational history.⁶⁵ Furthermore, it shares a natural congruence and a theoretical compatibility with Africentrism.

Study Design

This oral history study focused on the educational experiences of African American adults in Cincinnati, Ohio, from 1930-1949. Because this study dealt with a population of people who, for a variety of reasons, have not left many written records, and because this study focused

⁶³ Brundage, *Going to the Sources*, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Bekerie, *The Four Corners*, p. 148.

on the recent past, oral history interviews, alongside of archival work, were appropriate means of collecting data. These historical methods offered the most suitable means of gathering data pertinent to my research focus. The purpose of this oral history study was to provide a descriptive account of adult education for African Americans in Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1930s and the 1940s. The following research questions were addressed: 1. What adult educational opportunities were available to African Americans during this period?; 2. To what extent were these opportunities influenced by racism?

Participants.

Participants in this study had to be African American elders who were at least 80 years old at the time of the interview. Additionally, these elders had to have lived in Cincinnati sometime between 1930 and 1949 as an adult. The final requirement was that the elders had to have had at least one adult learning experience between 1930 and 1949. This may include, but was not limited to, vocational training, self-improvement classes, community-based learning, or self-directed learning activities. Because I was interested in understanding the nature of adult education during the 1930s and 1940s in Cincinnati. African American adults who came into adulthood after 1940 or migrated to Cincinnati after 1949 were deemed ineligible for this study.

Thirteen African American elders were interviewed. Six of the thirteen were over the age of 90. Five were men and eight were women. Ten were born in the South and had migrated to Cincinnati. One was born in Cincinnati. The remaining two elders were born in other northern cities. All levels of education were represented among the elders. All but one had some type of formal childhood education. Two did not complete grade school. Four did not complete high school. Six graduated from high school. Three had some college and one graduated from college and completed some graduate schoolwork.

⁶⁵ Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*; Shircliffe, *We Got the Best of Both Worlds*.

Occupationally, the participants worked in the following capacities: house wife/full-time mother, Pullman porter, retail saleswoman, truck driver, drywall construction man, executive secretary, policewoman, minister, warehouseman, and mailroom clerk. Three of the elders did not meet the requirement of having at least one adult education experience during the 1930s or 1940s. Data from their interviews were used to help to further conceptualize life in Cincinnati during that time period. Five additional informational interviews were conducted with such people as a former African American senator from Ohio, the head historian for the Harriet Tubman National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the organizer of African American Cultural Day on the Square, two African American women from Cincinnati who did not meet the criteria for the study but knew a great deal about Cincinnati during the 1930s and 1940s, and Donald Spencer who joined the interview while I was interviewing his wife, Marian Spencer.

The African American elders in this study were identified via an informal, word-of-mouth network. Sources, such as my family and church, were tapped to recruit the elders. More specifically, I approached my great-aunt about participating in my study, and she agreed to do so. My mother, Gloria Wallace, the former secretary for our church, Beulah Baptist, suggested several church members and people affiliated with the church who met the criteria. I gained four participants from that source. With permission from my pastor, I sent recruitment letters to various African American Baptist and AME churches in Cincinnati. Three of the churches responded and as a direct consequence of this recruitment effort, two elders were identified who agreed to participate in the study. Indirectly, as a result of an informal interview with the organizer of the “African American Cultural Day on the Square” who was an elder that did not meet the criteria for my study, I gained two participants. With the help of my grandmother, Ethel Merriweather, I was given access to the Ministers’ Wives and Widows group. The president of

the organization provided me contact information for members who were over the age of 80. I interviewed two people from this group. In talking about the study with other family members and friends, I was referred to two other elders who consented to being in the study.

Eligible elders were approached either in person or by telephone and, after I described the study to them were asked to volunteer. I scheduled meetings with them in their homes or at another location of their choosing. Due to factors relating to age and energy level, the oral history interviews were scheduled for a maximum of 90 minutes, though if they desired to continue beyond that time, I was willing to accommodate them. The interviews ranged from one hour to a little over two hours, and all were completed within one session. A basic demographic questionnaire was completed at the onset of the interview (Appendix C), and an interview guide composed of open-ended questions designed to invited description (Appendix D), was also used to gather data. Probes were used when appropriate (Appendix E). The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Archives.

I asked the secretary of the churches on my recruitment list and the elders if they had any records from the 1930-1949 period. Three elders had documents: Hezekiah Hamilton, Marian Spencer, and Ollie Bolton. Mrs. Spencer and Mrs. Bolton had various certificates as well as some photographs. Hezekiah Hamilton had documents detailing the work of the Tuskegee Airmen. I also contacted a variety of community agencies like the NAACP, Urban League, Cincinnati Public Schools, YWCA, and YMCA. The NAACP did not have any records prior to 1950. The Urban League receptionist informed me that the Cincinnati Urban League did not form until 1948 so they did not have records covering the time period I was interested in. Cincinnati Public Schools did not know where such information would have been kept if it was

kept at all. The YMCA had a small collection of materials that I was able to review at the Main Branch on Central Ave. The YWCA archived all of their material with the Cincinnati Historical Society Library. The Cincinnati Historical Society Library proved to be the best source for archival material. I was able to obtain information on a number of organizations as well as access some copies of *The Union*. The public library was also a good source for archival material and general historical data. I also was able to obtain information from the University of Cincinnati Archives and the Hughes High School archive. I reviewed manuscript collections, yearbooks, and annual reports.

During the review of the data, assumptions were made; for example, if the organization or program did not expressly identify African Americans as a target group, or if the physical location of the program was not located in an African American neighborhood, then the assumption was made that it was not “open” to African American participation. For instance, the Division of Negro Welfare sponsored various programs that dealt with such topics as employment, education and health. The parent organization, the Community Chest, had almost identical programs running at that time. It was clear that the target population for the Division of Negro Welfare was African Americans but the programs offered by the employment, education, and health divisions of the Community Chest did not appear to include African Americans in their target population. The other divisions of the Community Chest did not sponsor any programs in African American neighborhoods. While it was not explicitly stated that these programs were developed for the dominant culture’s population, it stands to reason that de facto segregation was in place at the Community Chest. Similar phenomena could be seen in organizations like the YMCA, YWCA, and the public library. For that reason, I only included

data that specifically mentioned that African Americans were participants or data on programs that occurred in African American neighbors

Analysis

“The historian's basic task is to choose *reliable* sources, to read them *reliably*, and to put them together in ways that provide *reliable* narratives about the past.”⁶⁶ A sense of creativity was employed as I analyzed and attempted to retell the “story” I had uncovered during the oral history study. I kept in the front of my mind the importance of “subjectifying” as opposed to “objectifying” the African American elders who participated in the study. That desire to maintain creativity in the study did not automatically negate the need for me to use a systematic process for organizing the information. I used a spreadsheet to help organize the archival and interview data. I used a process similar to inductive analysis,⁶⁷ which involved carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts and archival materials. During the course of those readings, I “listened” for the voices of my participants so that I could accurately tell their stories. I looked for patterns and then imposed meanings on them based upon what I believed the interviews and archival documentation were saying as a whole.

One of the major shortcomings of the study was selection bias, which occurred as a result of relying on personal contacts to get names of potential participants and by the time-period restriction. I was not able to get a wide breadth of experiences in part because most of the elders in the study had very similar backgrounds. The bulk fell in lower-income brackets and had strong affiliations with the church. Most were not able to share personal experiences of formal adult learning. They were familiar with different programs but they did not participate in them. In many instances I only had one elder who had participated in a particular adult learning activity,

⁶⁶ Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 2.

⁶⁷ Charmaz, *Grounded Theory*; Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

like the night high school. If I had taken a different approach to recruitment, it is possible that I might have had a group of participants with a more diverse set of adult learning experiences and greater representation from the various learning venues.

Because my study involved the period of 1930-1949, I was limited to participants who would have been 40 years old or younger then. Few of the elders in my study were of adult age during the 1930s. Most were in their twenties during the 1940s. To be sure, there are some elders over the age of 100 who could have shared with me their adult learning experiences in the 1930s and 1940s, but I was not able to locate them. The bulk of them in that age group are no longer alive. So this picture of adult learning is skewed by age. It is possible that the learning activities older African Americans participated in might have been different and more varied than what I uncovered in this study. Even among the elders I interviewed, I learned that that they were much more active in pursuing adult learning when they were older and not as busy with working and family. The women in particular seemed to be much more involved in club activities in the 1950s.

My future research will not be as broad. I will identify a learning activity and then try to find a reasonable number of people who participated in that activity and would be willing to share their stories with me. I would also at some point like to do some comparative work such as comparing similar programs in different cities or across different time periods. There is still much more history to be written about African American adult education. I encourage other historians to be proactive in including the learners' voices because they have compelling stories to tell that would greatly enrich the field of adult education.

APPENDIX B

ELDER BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Ollie M. Bolton was born on March 12, 1918 in Eatonton, Georgia. She migrated to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1938 when she was a small child. She graduated from high school and attended evening school- business college for 1.5 years. She worked as an executive secretary. She was interviewed on April 8, 2003.

Joe Gordon was born in 1917 in Carbondale, Illinois. He graduated from high school. Prior to 1943, he was a shoe repair apprentice. After 1943, he worked as a Pullman Porter (railroad dining car waiter) and then he worked in hotel restaurant management. He also was in the service during World War II. He was interviewed in March, 2001

Mary Johnson was born in 1907 in Montgomery, Alabama. She moved to Ohio in 1938. She worked as a vegetable girl but she was primarily a housewife. She was interviewed on March 6, 2001.

Thelma Cheatham was born May 30, 1910 in Pleasant Ridge, Ohio (Suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio). She graduated from high school and worked as a domestic. She was interviewed on 1/13/2003.

Hezekiah Hamilton. He was interviewed on February 26, 2002. He is 90 years old and was born in Alabama. He was homeschooled for a few years but says that his formal education was limited. He was a truck driver and a member of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Theodore Moore (Uncle Ted) was born on September 27, 1920 in Montgomery, Alabama. He completed school through the 11th grade. He worked as a plasterer and drywaller. He served in the military during WWII. He was interviewed in March 2001.

Novella Noble was born in Georgia and was over the age of 80. She moved to Cincinnati as a child. She graduated from high school and later went through the police academy in the late 1940s. She was one of the first African American policewomen in Cincinnati, Ohio. After her career as a policewoman, she worked with Mary Kay Cosmetics. She was interviewed on April 5, 2003.

Beulah O'Conner was born February 24, 1920 in Henderson, Kentucky. She graduated from high school and was valedictorian of her class. She migrated to Cincinnati, Ohio in November of 1945. She was a housewife and stay-at-home mother. She was interviewed on January 29, 2003.

Lillie Roberts was born on November 30, 1922 in Gainesville, Georgia. She migrated to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1924 when she was a child. She completed the 9th grade. She was a homemaker and she also worked as a laundress and cafeteria worker. She was interviewed on February 10, 2003.

Emma Smith was born on February 12, 1915 in Ferristown,, Kentucky. She completed the 11th grade. She traveled a great deal with her husband who was a musician. Her primary occupation was as a hat shop manager. She was interviewed in March, 2001.

Marian Spencer was born on June 28, 1920 in Gallipolis, Ohio. She graduated from high school and migrated to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1938. She obtained a B.A. in English from the University of Cincinnati in 1942 and did some graduate school work at Xavier University in Journalism. She is a former member of city council. She was interviewed on March 27, 2003.

Cast Steele, Sr. was born on August 19, 1908 in Montgomery, Alabama. His mother taught him at home. He did not have formal education in childhood. He started working in a sawmill at the age of 15. He migrated to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1944. He had two primary occupations. He worked as a truck driver for a building company and he worked at the Union Terminal as a mail sorter. He was interviewed on August 29, 2003.

Pastor Richard Waldorp was born in 1911 in Alabama. He completed school through the third grade. His primary occupation was a church pastor. He is pastor emeritus at Glendale Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Informational interviews were conducted with Emily Spicer on March 6, 2003, Margurite Hall on March 24, 2003, Mrs. Thomas, organizer of the African American Cultural Day on the Square, on January 14, 2003, Carl Westmoreland with the Harriet Tubman National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, and Former Senator William Mallory.

APPENDIX C

ELDER PARTICIPANT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Date of Birth:

Hometown:

Year Migrated to Cincinnati:

Occupation:

Educational Level:

Gender:

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) Describe what it was like growing up in your hometown.

Probe for specific details: names, location

- 2) Tell me about your childhood education

Probe for specific details: names, locations

- 3) Tell me about an adult learning experience that you had while living in Cincinnati, Ohio between 1930-1949.

Probe: What purpose(s) did your learning experiences serve?

Probe: Was this experience affected by your race? If so, how?

- 4) Tell me about an adult learning experience that you had while living in Cincinnati, Ohio between 1930-1949.

Probe: What purpose(s) did your learning experiences serve?

Probe: Was this experience affected by your race? If so, how?

APPENDIX E

EXCERPT FROM TRANSCRIPT

Beulah O'Conner:

L: Concentrating on the period of 1945, when you first came to Cincinnati and 1949, a four year period. What type of activities, if any, did you participate in that involved learning, Did you go to Sunday School?

O: Yes, I went to Sunday School. I went to church. I went to Bible Study and I had an opportunity to go to college but it wasn't as easy then. You couldn't get loans and grants like you can today and especially if you were Black. So I didn't extend my education any further than the 12th grade. Most of my time was spent taking care of the children. I went to church. I always went to church.

L: I have an idea of Sunday School in terms of my own growing up, and attending Sunday School as an adult. What was Sunday School like in the mid 1940's in terms of the subject matter?

O: It was pretty much like it is today. I told my Sunday School teacher not long ago. Some of the lessons we are having today, we had them then. It seems like they just have certain scriptures that they use for Sunday School lessons. And we had a very, very good Sunday School teacher. She was my 6th grade teacher in the elementary school and she was my Sunday School teacher and she was very good. Her name was Annette C, Brown and she was uh Aunt to Roscoe Brown. You know the movie star, Roscoe Brown. He does Shakespearian work, very articulate. He use to come to our school and I loved to hear

him talk. And he's still living today. And let's see W.C. Handy is one of my mother's cousins. They very seldom mention that but that was the woman who was the mother of his children. I guess they are still alive in New York. They fared pretty well. They are older than I am. So they're pretty old. And so you know, I enjoyed life. I really did. I didn't bother anybody and seemed like nobody bothered us too much. No Ku Klux Klan or anything like that in Henderson.

L: And once you got to Cincinnati did you experience anything like that?

O: No, I didn't. Cause, I didn't. I guess, I didn't extend myself. I tell you I stayed at home. You can't imagine and I still do to this day. I'm a very private person, I guess, I don't know.