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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE BLACKBOARD AND THE COLOR LINE:
MADELINE MORGAN AND THE ALTERNATIVE BLACK CURRICULUM
IN CHICAGO'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1941-1945

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
MICHAEL HINES
CHICAGO, IL
AUGUST 2017

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I owe an incredible debt of gratitude to the many persons who have shared their time and expertise in order to help see this project through to completion. First, I would like to thank my parents, Michael and Teresa Hines. Since I was a child they have shown me seemingly endless reserves of patience, kindness, and love. Their enthusiasm for each new passion I developed or adventure I embarked upon equipped me with the unshakable certainty that I have something of importance and worth to offer the world. Their constant encouragement and steadfast faith has carried me through moments of doubt and allowed me to stay the course.

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For Bessie, Mary, Ollie, and Betty

There is nothing more powerful than a people, than a nation, steeped in its history. And there are few things as noble as honoring our ancestors by remembering.

Lonnie G. Bunch III

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

On November 5, 1943, Edward Butler, a private serving abroad in the U.S. Army, sent a letter by Victory-Mail from his station in North Africa. The letter was not to a sweetheart or family member back home as might be expected, but to a schoolteacher in Chicago, Illinois whom he had recently heard of, Mrs. Madeline R. Morgan. Butler took the time to write Morgan because her work held out the possibility of learning about a subject about which he was greatly interested, his own history. As he put it, “I just read an article about you and your work. I[’m] writing to you to find out if I can get a copy of the Negroes History which was mention[ed] in Newsreel Magazine.”¹ Butler was eager for the opportunity to learn about his heritage, an experience he had been denied in his own primary education. He admitted, “It is something I didn’t learn in school. But would like to learn it now.”² Even some 3,000 miles removed from Chicago, Butler recognized the importance of Morgan’s work, and felt a desire to see it himself.

Butler was not alone in finding Morgan and her work worthy of attention. She would receive thousands of requests during the early and mid-1940s from teachers, principals, school district officials, teachers’ associations, civic groups, lawmakers, religious leaders, soldiers, and civil rights activists, each in some way tied to the same work Butler referred to in his letter, the *Supplementary Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies*, a K-8 history curriculum

¹ Edward Butler, “Letter to Madeline Morgan, November 5, 1943,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [manuscript], 1941-1945, United States, World War II Miscellaneous Collection, Chicago History Museum.

² Ibid.

that was among the first black history texts approved for use in the public schools of a major U.S. city. Officially adopted by Chicago Public Schools on May 28, 1942, the *Supplementary Units* were part of the official curriculum of 353 schools, both majority white and majority black, throughout the city. At a time when representations of African Americans in school textbooks were almost without exception biased and white writers and publishers “found it almost impossible to depict...African Americans as important contributors to the American story,” Morgan’s work praised African American achievement, ingenuity, and ability, and insisted that blacks were a people with a profound history and an integral piece of the nation’s past.³ As she stated in the note to teachers included in the units, “[The Negro] has contributed to every phase of American history. In adventure, science, education, art, music, war, and labor, he has played a part.”⁴ In her clear insistence on black humanity and worth, Morgan offered a conscious critique of the traditional curricula of her day, and helped set the foundations of the more inclusive histories of the later twentieth century.

The *Supplementary Units* were recognized as significant curricular innovation during the 1940s, and were even heralded by the Chicago Urban League as “one of the finest approaches to improvement in racial relations ever attempted.”⁵ Yet discussion of this groundbreaking curriculum in subsequent research in curriculum history has been almost nonexistent. The

³ Stuart J. Foster, “The Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Textbooks.” *History of Education Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1999): 263.

⁴ William Johnson, Leo Herdeg, and Mary Lusson, *Supplementary Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies Grades 1-2-3: Negroes in American Life*. (Chicago: Chicago Bureau of Curriculum, 1942), 1. Although their names are not listed as primary authors, Madeline Morgan and Bessie King along with the staff of the Bureau of Curriculum are credited as having “prepared” the *Supplementary Units* below Johnson, Herdeg, and Lusson. It is ironic that the district should have failed to credit Morgan and King, two African Americans, for their work in fostering the greater inclusion of black identity within the curriculum.

⁵ Fletcher Wilson, “How Chicago Teaches Whites to Respect Negroes and Negroes to Respect Themselves,” *PM*, Sunday, September 5, 1943, 15.

purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the development, adoption, and impact of the *Supplementary Units* in order to put both the units and their author into the larger context of history of education and curriculum studies.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this project is: What do the development, adoption, and impact of the *Supplementary Units for the Course of Study in Social Studies* tell us about efforts by African American educators to create curricula inclusive of black experiences and perspectives in the first half of the twentieth century? Sub-questions include:

1. What contexts led to the creation of the *Supplementary Units*?
2. How did the units construct black identity? How did this portrayal compare to other social studies curricula from this time period, both black and white?
3. How were the units implemented at the classroom level, and what was their overall impact both in Chicago and elsewhere?

Theoretical Framework

In order to answer these questions, I adopt a theoretical framework drawn from Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT scholarship seeks to render visible the ways in which racism and white supremacy operate in society, often hidden beneath institutional claims of meritocracy, colorblindness, objectivity, and racial neutrality. Because it adopts the position that white supremacy is a normalized part of U.S. society instead of rare or aberrant, CRT is a powerful tool for scholars seeking to understand the ways race and education intersect in American life. It demands the recognition that schools and schooling in this country and many others remain deeply implicated in the maintenance and normalization of white supremacy at the expense of

people of color. Thus, a CRT lens “offers a way to understand how ostensibly race neutral structures in education – knowledge, truth, merit, objectivity, and ‘good education’ – are in fact ways of forming and policing the racial boundaries... .”⁶ Analyses based in CRT seek to show the ways in which racism limits the educational experiences of minority children, and in return how these efforts have been resisted and overcome. In particular, two ideas from CRT explained below, *counter-narrative* and *interest convergence*, are central to this project.

The American system of public education has been, from its very inception, a part of the system of institutions through which white supremacy has been maintained in the American context. Because of this legacy, the official school curriculum, the material receiving official sanction and deemed valuable enough to teach in any given period of American history, has often amounted to a *master script* or *master narrative*, an account that either distorts or omits the voices of minorities and to a lesser extent those of women and the poor. As Ellen Swartz argues, the official curriculum often “silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily by legitimizing dominant, White, upper class, male voicings as the ‘standard’ knowledge students need to know.”⁷ As a result, depictions of African Americans, when present at all, have historically depicted blacks as either simple and childlike or brutish and threatening, leaving little doubt in either case that they were unequal and inferior to whites. Carter G. Woodson recognized the deleterious effects of this type of education when he stated, “The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has

⁶ Daria Roithmayer, “Introduction to Critical Race Theory in Educational Research and Praxis,” in *Race is Race isn’t: Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Studies in Education*, ed. Laurence Parker, Donna Dehyle, and Sofia Villenas (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 4.

⁷ Ellen Swartz, “Emancipatory Narratives: Rewriting the Master Script in the School Curriculum.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no.3 (1992): 341.

accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of others.”⁸ Using a CRT framework, I root this dissertation in the observation that the official curricula of U.S. public schools has historically been a “culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script.”⁹ This in turn allows me to question how people of color responded to systems of education that were built to further their oppression.

One response to the epistemology of white supremacy imposed by the official curriculum has been the struggle of black academics, educators, and intellectuals to produce *counter narratives* that challenged and upended assumptions of the black inferiority. The presence of such *counter narratives* is visible at the turn of the twentieth century in the emergence of a movement of intellectuals and educators who strove to create histories of black America that challenged negative and stereotypical portrayals, instead emphasizing black humanity, agency, and intelligence. These texts were more than simple validation and esteem building exercises, offering instead “a critical social commentary that called into question the existing racial discourse.”¹⁰ Early architects of such *counter narratives* included well-known figures such as Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Dubois, Ana Julia Cooper, Horace Mann Bond, Edward Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, John Hope Franklin, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Charles

⁸ Carter G. Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, 1933), xxxiii.

⁹ Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Just What is Critical Race Theory, and What’s it Doing in a *Nice* Field Like Education?” in *Race is Race isn’t: Critical Race Theory and Qualitative Studies in Education*, ed. Laurence Parker, Donna Dehyle, and Sofia Villenas (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 21.

¹⁰ Anthony L. Brown, “Counter-Memory and Race: An Examination of African American Scholars’ Challenges to Early Twentieth Century K-12 Historical Discourses.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 79, no.1 (2010): 63.

Wesley, Lela Amos Pendleton, and Merl R. Eppse, along with scores of lesser known academics, lay historians, and K-12 educators. These figures produced hundreds of pieces of curricula, textbooks, lesson plans, and articles aimed at creating a new historical discourse around black people. Alana Murray has termed these specific *counter narratives* made by black historians who sought to “critique the normative structure of the dominant historical narrative” the *alternative black curriculum*, a framework other scholars including Anthony L. Brown, LaGarret J. King, Ryan M. Crowley, and Christopher Davis, have productively utilized to discuss black curriculum writers and their work in the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹ Throughout this dissertation, I use both the more general concept of *counter narrative* and the specific *alternative black curriculum* to analyze the contributions of Madeline Stratton Morris to curriculum history.

A second central idea from CRT that frames my analysis of Morris and her work is that of *interest convergence*. A core principle of CRT, interest convergence problematizes thinking around how policies of racial progress occur both historically and in the contemporary present. Instead of viewing these moments as the result of beneficent actions taken in the pursuit of racial justice, critical theorists instead point out that progress for blacks is only allowed when whites in power believe that their interests are served first and foremost. As Derrick Bell states, “Even a rather cursory look at American political history suggests that in the past, the most significant political advancements for blacks resulted from policies which were intended to serve, and had the effect of serving, the interest and convenience of whites rather than remedying the racial

¹¹Alana Murray, *Countering the Master Narrative: The Development of the Alternative Black Curriculum in the Social Studies, 1890-1940* (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2012), 2.

injustices against blacks.”¹² Bell cites several examples of the principle in action, from the emancipation of black slaves enacted in order to save the military prospects of the Union during the Civil War, to the desegregation of American schools in the *Brown v Board* Supreme Court case, in which the U.S. State Department filed amicus briefs urging the Court to push desegregation in order to strengthen U.S. position against Soviet accusations of racism and inequality which had undermined U.S. influence in the third world.

In this dissertation, interest convergence provides a framework for discussing how the *Supplementary Units* gained approval and adoption within Chicago Public Schools. The adoption of the *Supplementary Units* cannot be explained as the result of pressure from the black community or white allies; indeed, evidence suggests that these groups had not only recognized but vocally opposed the racist and exclusionary nature of history curricula within Chicago for decades with little success. However, the early 1940s saw America engaged in a total war with fascist powers abroad. Education, like every other part of American society, was enlisted in this war effort. As part of the duty of the schools to promote patriotism, programs for intercultural and interracial understanding sprang up across the country as schools and districts were encouraged to promote tolerance in order to suppress factionalism potentially discouraging to the war effort. In Chicago, Superintendent William H. Johnson and his administration transformed every aspect of the curriculum to meet the needs of the war effort. As a result, a curriculum that in another period may have been ignored as only beneficial to the city’s black students, the *Supplementary Units*, came to be seen by Johnson and others as a means of improving race relations and good feeling at a moment of national crisis. Johnson and Morris thus found

¹² Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56.

themselves at the center of an interest convergence covenant in which the addition of black contributions to the official curriculum was allowed due as much to its intended benefits for whites as its impact on the black community.

Thesis

This dissertation argues that the black history curriculum *Supplementary Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies*, was part of the *alternative black curriculum* movement of the early twentieth century, which sought to represent black people and their heritage in ways that countered the explicit and implicit biases of the official curriculum of the period. The adoption and use of the curriculum within Chicago Public Schools during the early to mid-1940s marks an example of *interest convergence* between the black educators like Morris and white school district heads who saw the curriculum as a means of bettering race relations, a reaction to the societal instability brought to light by the Second World War.

Methodology

The methodology for this this project is documentary analysis. As a historian, I define documents broadly to include a range of formal and informal texts such as school curricula, photographs, public addresses, textbooks, course listings, school board minutes, grade records, yearbooks, personal correspondence, newspaper articles, academic publications, and the records of civic groups and societies. Throughout my research I have engaged with each of these sources individually, and also put them in conversation with one another in order to build a context for drawing conclusions. This method of situating documents in relation to one another means that the “inaccuracies and distortions of particular sources are more likely to be revealed, and the

inferences drawn by the historian can be corroborated.”¹³ I have paid particular attention to the themes or subjects which occur repeatedly or are referenced across multiple documents.

In approaching the analysis of archival documents, historians tend either to begin with some specific question or set of questions in mind, or to let questions emerge organically throughout the research process. These two approaches are usually referred to as “problem oriented” and “source oriented” respectively, but in reality the two are often mixed as even the most well-developed initial research questions are changed, narrowed, and clarified in reaction to the source material as the research process unfolds.¹⁴ In approaching material for this project, I began with a “problem oriented” approach dictated by my initial research questions, but took caution to be open to new directions as they arose. As a result, the research questions changed slightly as the project continued, and new questions arose as the dissertation developed.

The central set of documents I analyze are the *Supplementary Units* themselves, and for this process I relied on a series of close readings. First, I conducted an initial page-by-page reading of the documents, in which I assessed the curricular content including the topics, events, stories, people, and places covered, and how this material is presented, what different genres of literature are used, and what questions, activities, and resources accompany each lesson. After this initial reading, I returned to look at the curriculum as a whole in order to identify broad themes, topics, and approaches that appear consistently throughout the work. Lastly, using an *alternative black curriculum* framework, which posits that curricula provided “a place for many African American scholars to reconstruct a new narrative about African American history and

¹³John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 66.

¹⁴ Ibid. 55-56.

experience,” I examine whether and to what extent the *Supplementary Units* incorporated topics and motifs which were prevalent in the work of other black curriculum writers identified with this movement including positive portrayals of the African continent and its civilizations; attention to black military exploits and heroism; resistance to slavery; and blacks as inventors and intellectuals.¹⁵ This process helped establish how Madeline Morgan’s work fit into the larger context of African American education during her time.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter One provides a brief overview of the status of Chicago’s African American community in the early twentieth century. The chapter argues that what sociologists and researchers of the time referred to as the color line, the set of discriminatory practices both legal and extra-legal which kept Chicago’s African American community isolated geographically, socially, and economically, also affected the education of black children by keeping relegating them to the most undesirable schools, limiting access to resources, and imposing a curriculum which denied their basic humanity and worth. Paying particular attention to history texts, the chapter shows that black students were exposed to curricula which regularly omitted their presence from the historical record, or included them only as broad and grossly inaccurate caricatures and stereotypes.

Chapter Two focuses on Madeline R. Morgan, the creator of the *Supplementary Units*, tracing her childhood in Chicago’s black belt, her education at Englewood High School, Chicago Normal School, and eventually Northwestern University, and her early career as a social studies teacher within the Chicago Public Schools. This chapter argues that Morgan’s education and

¹⁵ Brown, “Counter-Memory and Race,” 63.

formative experiences led her to affiliate with organizations like the Phi Delta Kappa sorority and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which emphasized and promoted the study of black history and its integration into school curricula at the primary and secondary level. This exposure would eventually lead Morgan to the decision to craft her own proposal for making black history a part of the curriculum of Chicago's Public Schools.

Chapter Three seeks to understand why Morgan's proposal for the addition of material dealing with black history to the curriculum of Chicago Public Schools met with support from Superintendent William H. Johnson and others within CPS. The chapter argues that the answer lies in the broader context of the impending entry of the U.S. into the Second World War. As the war loomed ever larger in the minds of policymakers, America's schools were tasked with spurring on patriotic zeal and decreasing factionalism that might pose a threat to the war effort. In terms of history and social studies, this task was pursued through a new focus on intercultural and interracial studies, most prominently associated on a national level with the cultural gifts model of Rachel Davis Dubois. In Chicago, as William Johnson sought to refit the curriculum of CPS in order to put it on war footing, he saw the *Supplementary Units* and their acknowledgement of black achievement as a way to bolster both black patriotism and a means to downplay racial divides within the city.

Chapter Four delves into a content analysis of the *Supplementary Units* in order to better understand how they constructed black identity. The chapter argues that the *Supplementary Units* are prime example of the *alternative black curriculum* in history, engaging with several themes that have been noted by previous scholars of this movement including emphasizing the advanced state of African societies before European contact, the connection of African Americans to a

global diasporic community, explicit attention the realistic portrayal of slavery and resistance in the new world, images of blacks as inventors and artists, and the image of the black soldier and black military heroism.

Chapter Five deals with the impact of the *Supplementary Units* both at the micro level of individual classrooms and students, and the macro level of local and national policy. Using the reactions of school district leaders, administrators, academics, and the press, this chapter contends the *Supplementary Units* were highly influential on a national level. Second, the chapter finds that the *Supplementary Units* could be effective starting points for conversations about race and class using the reactions recorded by teachers and students as they worked through the curriculum.

Research Considerations

In choosing to center my research methods on the historical analysis of documentary sources, several considerations must be addressed. The first of these concerns the evolving and incomplete nature of the archive. Only a fraction of the material produced in any historical period survives long enough to become part of the historical record. In addition, materials are preserved, edited, saved, or disregarded for specific reasons. Some documents, like the records of a school board or committee with an interest in internal record-keeping, or a politician with a goal of self-promotion, are far more likely to be preserved and to find their way into a collection than are pieces of student work from an elementary school classroom or the private thoughts of a teacher stowed away in a personal journal. These problems of “selective deposit” and “selective survival” and reminds us that in the end the historian “is likely to have only a small proportion of

the relevant documentary sources actually available for study.”¹⁶ Given the fact that the sources presented here are necessarily partial and potentially biased in terms of the types of accounts privileged, I have approached the material with a critical eye, being especially attentive to which voices are present and which are missing. For the current project, this has meant putting the voices of children and rank-and-file teachers alongside those of administrators, civic leaders, and journalists wherever possible.

Another consideration, more specific to curriculum studies, is the need to separate the curriculum as intended, which consists of the written lessons, activities, and readings, from the curriculum as enacted, which consists of how teachers and students actually made use of and drew meaning from the material. Historically, the implementation of educational policies at the level of individual schools and classrooms has often been difficult to assess, and educators, far from simply acting out instructions from above, have alternately “welcomed, improved, deflected, coopted, modified, and sabotaged” new policies and reform efforts at different points in time and in different locations.¹⁷ There is no reason to doubt that these same complexities extend to the *Supplementary Units*, and how they were received and utilized within the classroom. There is some evidence of how teachers and students applied the *Supplementary Units*, including importantly, the records of teacher Grace Markwell analyzed in Chapter Five, but even this is limited and allows only tentative conclusions about the fidelity with which teachers used the materials Morgan and her co-workers created.

¹⁶ Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 58-59.

¹⁷ David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: One Hundred Years of Public School Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 9.

A final consideration is the need to address my own place as a researcher in relation to this work. The construction of a historical narrative, from the topics we regard as interesting or worthwhile, to the choice of sources and methods of analysis, to the conclusions drawn from the available evidence, involves the subjectivity, personality, passions, and frames of reference held by the particular historian. As a result “few historians today would argue that we write *the* truth about the past. It is generally recognized that written history is contemporary and present oriented to the extent that we historians not only occupy a platform in the here and now, but also hold positions on how we see the relationship between the past and its traces.”¹⁸ At no point in the process do we stand completely or objectively outside our work. Because I approach this work from my own specific “platform in here and now,” it is necessary to examine how I come to this work and the assumptions, interests, and dispositions I bring to it.¹⁹

I am an African American educator, from a family of teachers and social workers which includes my mother, aunts, and grandmothers. As such I have an interest in how African Americans as a group have negotiated the American educational system, one which was historically designed without their use or benefit in mind. I am also interested in how African American educators, the vast majority of them women, used their positions to challenge this system, and to effect change for themselves and their students. Finally, as part of a School of Education responsible for training and preparing teacher candidates, I am interested in how this historical knowledge can be applied to current conversations regarding race and education in

¹⁸ Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge: 2006), 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

order to help build more inclusive classrooms where multiple perspectives are presented and valued.

CHAPTER ONE

“THIS IS THE WORK OF THE COLOR LINE”: BLACK CHICAGO AND SEPARATION IN COMMUNITIES AND CLASSROOMS IN THE MIGRATION ERA

Introduction

It is impossible to know whether Eugene Williams could feel himself crossing the line. Had he been on the shore it would have been easy to locate himself, to sense the danger surrounding him, but in the heat and boredom of a midsummer 1919 afternoon, he had chosen to go for a swim along the beach of Chicago’s Lake Michigan. He began at 27th Street, which by the “tacit understanding” of both Blacks and Whites had been informally relegated as an area “reserved for Negroes.”¹ Yet, as he became unmoored he had drifted south towards 29th Street, which, though still adjacent to a predominately Black neighborhood, was claimed by Whites because of its easily accessible beachfront. As he moved towards the 29th Street beach and crossed the “imaginary boundary extending into the water,” Williams might have made out an argument on shore between some Black and White youth on the beach.² As the argument intensified, stones and other projectiles were thrown by the opposing sides, some striking the water around him. Panicked, the 17-year-old found a rail tie to cling to. Eventually exhausted and unable to swim back to shore, and as Black witnesses protested, struck by a stone thrown by a White man from the shore, Williams lost his grip and sunk into the lake, drowning to death.

¹ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot in 1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 4.

² Ibid.

Blacks on the beach demanded the arrest of the man they claimed threw the stone that ended William's life, but the officers on scene refused. As news of the child's death spread, it sparked rioting that would rage throughout Chicago's South and West Sides for almost a week, costing 38 more lives and leaving 537 injured and another 1,000 homeless.³

The paroxysms of violence that swept Chicago in the wake of Eugene Williams' death were unique in their sheer intensity. However, the causes of this violence, the increasing social, political, economic, and geographic isolation of the city's growing Black population, were not. Hundreds of thousands of Blacks had migrated to Chicago from the rural South during the period from 1915 to 1940, eager to find economic and social equality and opportunity. These new arrivals helped build a vibrant and active Black community on the city's South Side, centering on the neighborhood known as Bronzeville or the Black Belt, which extended from the city's business district or "Loop" Southward to 53rd Street. Yet, even as Chicago offered new opportunities, it also presented familiar obstacles.

Blacks had hoped in moving North to escape the indignities of "color line," which was "drawn rigidly" in the South through the psychological and physical terror of Black Codes, lynching, Jim Crow laws, and the segregation and fiscal starvation of Black schools.⁴ In the North, however, they found that the color line, while not as clearly drawn, was equally dangerous, especially as it hardened in response to the influx of new Black migrants during and after the First World War. These boundaries ran, invisibly but powerfully, through neighborhoods, job markets, places of recreation and amusement, and importantly, schools. In

³ Ibid. 1.

⁴ Ibid. 231.

order to understand the social and political context that led Madeline Morgan to create her *Supplementary Units*, it is important to grasp the position of Chicago's Black community during the migration period, and how the color line, which impacted every facet of Black life, extended into the education of Black children.

The Great Migration

The Great Migration, the seismic shift in Black population from the rural South to the industrial cities of the North and Midwest, constituted an unparalleled demographic change for many cities including Chicago. Between 1910 and 1920, Chicago's Black population rose from 44,103 to roughly 109,594, an increase of some 148.5%. By comparison, the White population of Chicago, during the same period, and including both native-born and foreign immigrants, increased only 21%.⁵ Unlike prior smaller migrations, which had chiefly drawn from Upper South and border states, the new migrants of the 1910s and 1920s came predominately from the states of the Deep South, including Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, and Texas. While the motivations for moving North were as varied and complex as the individuals and families who made up the migration themselves, historians have generally categorized the various push and pull factors into the broad categories of economic and social causes.

Economically, the system of debt peonage known as sharecropping was becoming increasingly untenable for large numbers of Blacks during the early 1900s. The economic system from which a majority of Blacks earned their living, cotton production, was hit with a series of shocks during the opening decades of the twentieth century. The invasion of boll weevil, which moved upwards from Mexico in the late 1800s finally reaching the Southern United States in

⁵ Ibid. 106.

1903, decimated cotton production, and tightened the credit markets that Southern landowners relied on for access to capital.⁶ Adding to the chaos was poor weather, a series of droughts and floods during the 1910s that made the market even more unpredictable and devastated soil already exhausted from the continuous single concentration on a single cash crop. Black sharecroppers, at the most vulnerable and lowest rung of this system, felt the effects of this instability the most profoundly.

At the same time that this economic strain gained increasing urgency in the South however, new opportunities were beginning to form in other regions of the country. In the industrial cities of the North, where employers had generally preferred the labor of European immigrants to that of Blacks, the First World War had dramatically reduced the number of new workers arriving. With the entry of America's military into the conflict, still more industrial jobs became available, and new sources of labor including native-born White women and Southern Blacks were called on to help fill this void. The war thus offered an opportunity that would not have otherwise arisen for Blacks to come North with the expectation of better paid industrial work.

While the economic causes of the migration were powerful, they cannot completely explain what drove Blacks to leave their homes and familiar surroundings and uproot their families in order to pursue life in the North. For this, we must consider that migration was an active choice, which often represented a kind of protest, an "aggressive statement of dissatisfaction" with the human conditions endured in the South as well as its economic

⁶ J.R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 29.

exploitation.⁷ When Blacks chose to leave the South, they did so because it was a place where they were denied access to the “prerequisites of American citizenship,” including the right to vote, to be tried fairly in courts of law, to live free from physical threats and constant danger, to protect themselves and their loved ones from sexual assault and rape, and to send their children to equal schools.⁸ As the nationally distributed Black newspaper the *Chicago Defender* put the matter, the South was a land of “blight, murdered kin, deflowered womanhood, wrecked homes, strangled ambitions, make believe schools, roving gun parties, midnight arrests, rifled virginity, trumped up charges, lonely graves, where owls hoot and friends dare not go.”⁹ Interviews conducted in the 1920s revealed many reasons for coming North, among them the ability to “feel free,” “voting,” the chance to “make a living,” and simply to feel “more like a man.”¹⁰ To migrate North, to come to Chicago, Detroit, Lansing, or Gary, was to take a step in seizing equal opportunity both socially and economically, and towards that end Blacks, once arrived in the city, made significant strides.

As Chicago’s Black community was increased in size, diversity, and political and economic power, it increasingly met with White fear and resistance. The most visible example of this resistance came in the form of the restriction of Black settlement to the near South Side Black Belt, an area 1.5 miles across and 7 miles long, bordered by Cottage Grove Ave on the east and Wentworth Ave to the West. Blacks were hemmed in by restrictive covenants that

⁷ Ibid. 38.

⁸ Ibid. 8.

⁹ “A Chicago ‘Nigger’ Preacher, a ‘Feeder’ of the ‘Little Hells,’ Springs up to Hinder our Brethren Coming North,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 23, 1917, 1.

¹⁰ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 98-99.

prohibited owners from reselling or renting homes to Black buyers, redlining practices that made home loans inaccessible, the unwillingness of White realtors to sell homes to Blacks outside of what they considered acceptable neighborhoods, the intimidation of athletic clubs, youth gangs who patrolled the edges of White neighborhoods with bottles, rocks, and knives, and bombs, and by neighborhood associations, 175 strong by World War II, which worked to blacklist realtors who worked with Black families and to buy out any Black person who managed to purchase a residence. These conditions combined to keep Blacks geographically confined in a way that other newly arrived groups were never subjected to. As a result, as sociologists Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake explained in their groundbreaking work *Black Metropolis*, Blacks, no matter their education, income, or social standing, were “not finally absorbed in the general population” but forced to remain in “the least desirable residential zones...unable to freely expand or scatter.”¹¹ In contrast, as historian Thomas Philpott stated, “foreign workingmen and their children had to stay in the shabbiest neighborhoods only so long as they remained poor.”¹² The same forces that inhibited Blacks from freely moving outside the confines of specific neighborhoods would also be responsible for the increasingly segregated nature of schooling within the city.

Black Education in Chicago

Since the beginning of the migration, educational opportunity had been a major impetus for the movement of families and individuals Northward. The migration itself was demographically a young phenomenon and migrants were often either families which already

¹¹ Horace R. Cayton and St. Clair Drake, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 17.

¹² Thomas Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991), 117.

included young children or young adults who planned to form families. When asked what advantages they sought in coming North, the opportunity for better education was among the most common replies given by migrants. As new arrivals enumerated the benefits they hoped to enjoy in Chicago, education figured prominently in statements like, “The schools for the children, the better wages, and privileges for colored folk;” and “More enjoyment; more places of attraction; better treatment; better schools for the children;” and “Privileges, freedom, industrial and educational facilities;” or simply “Liberty, better schools.”¹³ The expectation of migrants that Chicago would be supportive of their educational aspirations would have been a stark contrast to most Southern states, in which support for Black education was almost nonexistent. The 1930 census, for instance, recorded information on teacher salaries from fifteen Southern states and the District of Columbia, and found that per capita \$10.32 was spent on teachers for each White child while only \$2.89 was spent for each Black child. Southern magazines and newspapers, in searching for the remedy for the exodus of Black labor, even admitted to the chronic underfunding of Black schools.¹⁴ The Atlanta Constitution, a White news organ proclaimed, “There is scarcely a doubt that the educational feature enters into it... Georgia, as well as other Southern states, is undoubtedly behind in the matter of Negro education, unfair in the matter of facilities, in the quality of teachers and instructors, and in the pay of those expected to impart instruction.”¹⁵ A White supervisor of rural schools in another state put the matter more bluntly, “The Negro schoolhouses are miserable beyond all description.

¹³ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 100-101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 82-83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

They are usually without comfort, equipment, proper lighting, or sanitation.”¹⁶ In many towns throughout the South, a basic elementary education was difficult to come by for Black children, and high school or beyond nearly impossible. Chicago, with its legally integrated schools, compulsory attendance laws, longer school terms, and more highly trained teachers and administrators, seemed to offer a panacea for these ills. The reality, however, would be far more complicated, as the color line ensured that Black families struggled to gain access to quality education even in Chicago’s less restrictive environment.

Chicago, unlike a majority of school systems in both the North and South, had a tradition of integrated education that stretched back before the Civil War. A large portion of Chicago’s early settlers had come from the Northeastern states, bringing with them liberal and abolitionist political stances, and the resulting mix of “New England morality and municipal fiat,” ensured that the city’s early schools would be open to all children.¹⁷ Chicago’s first established school system in the 1830s followed state ordinances limiting school to White children, city ordinances in 1849 and 1851 broke with the state and opened the public schools to students regardless of race or color. By 1861, there were 212 Black students attending the city schools, and when the first high school was constructed in 1856, one of its early graduates was a Black girl named Mary E. Mann.¹⁸

This pattern of integrated schooling was disturbed briefly during the Civil War, when democratic victories in local elections in 1863 led to the passage of an ordinance requiring the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Christopher R. Reed, *Black Chicago’s First Century: 1833-1900*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 11.

¹⁸ Philip T.K. Daniels, “A History of Discrimination against Black Students in Chicago Secondary Schools,” *History of Education Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1980): 148.

construction and maintenance of separate schools for Black pupils. However, community response, including vocal protests from Black parents and the support of White allies made the act short-lived and it was repealed by 1865.¹⁹ The year 1874 brought additional legal protections, as the state of Illinois passed “An Act to Protect Colored Children in Their Rights to Attend Public Schools,” which prohibited “all directors of schools, boards of education, or other school officers” from excluding students on the basis of color.²⁰

However, while local and later state ordinances meant that the majority of Blacks in Chicago in the pre-migration period were educated in racially mixed settings, they were not proof of an enduring commitment to equality or acceptance. In reality, the relatively small numbers of Blacks in the city of Chicago throughout the 19th century meant that integrated schooling was a non-issue for most White residents, and when it did arise it concerned only a handful of Black children whom Whites believed could be safely educated in White schools. These conditions, which allowed for the existence of integrated schooling in Chicago, would change dramatically with the onset of the Great Migration.

As the Black population of Chicago expanded during the early 1900s, the tolerance of White Chicagoans to the principle of equal and integrated schooling would be tested. As the Black population expanded during the migration, their proportion of the city’s school age population also increased dramatically. Under these conditions, which saw many schools shift demographically from almost entirely White to equally mixed or even majority Black, White support for integrated schools, which had been “relatively reliable when the Black population

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

was small” declined dramatically.²¹ Although legal segregation never became a reality, owing to legal precedent and uneven public sentiment, several policies evolved throughout the 1920s to keep Black and White students and teachers separate in actuality, and by the 1930s segregation became the norm for the vast majority of Chicago’s Black students.

The first policy that contributed to the rise of segregated schooling was the manipulation of attendance boundaries by school officials. Attendance maps were, theoretically, drawn to make sure that students attended the schools in closest proximity to their place of residence. Yet in reality boundaries were often changed so that schools whose student populations would have been racially mixed were assigned to either majority Black or majority White neighborhoods. Important here is the fact that although much of Chicago’s school segregation flowed from the larger inequalities of the segregated housing market, school officials’ actions were not a simple reflection of neighborhood population. In essence, “school administrators’ actions produced more racial separation than occurred merely from the combination of the housing ghetto and the neighborhood attendance structure.”²² Schools were sites that worked create to racial separation, not only through the use of district boundaries, but through several subsequent strategies as well.

Another strategy implemented to separate students whose attendance zone placed them in the same school was to utilize a branch school. Branch schools were often created when lowered enrollments made maintaining administrative staff for two schools in the same area untenable. One school would become a branch of the other, and administration and decision making would be centralized to the main school site. For example, in the 1920s, Fuller Elementary became a

²¹ Michael Homel, “The Politics of Public Education in Black Chicago, 1910-1941,” *Journal of Negro Education* 45, no. 2 (1976): 184.

²² Michael Homel, *Down From Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools: 1920-1941* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 34.

branch of Felsenthal, a school within the same racially mixed attendance district. In theory, the populations of both schools should have reflected the racial balance of the surrounding neighborhood, but instead Fuller became almost entirely Black as the Chicago Commission on Race Relations reported, “the principal, who is a believer in separate schools, places the large majority of the Negro children in Fuller School.”²³ Fuller Elementary, which received less resources than its parent school, was located in a neglected building, and lacked a playground space, was used to keep Black students out of the main campus of Felsenthal.

In addition to the gerrymandering of zones of attendance and branch schools, permissive transfers also provided a mechanism for White families to escape demographically changing school sites. To secure a transfer request, families needed to appeal to the school district directly and provide reason why their student should not attend the school in his or her attendance area. However, there was no concrete criteria for what constituted an acceptable rationale for granting a transfer request, and White parents were often granted transfers for no greater reason than their unwillingness to attend school with Blacks. Thus, “White students living near Black areas could avoid the inhabitants by transferring to other schools.”²⁴ Black families also appealed for transfers, citing the overcrowding and neglect of many majority Black schools, but these requests were denied in most cases. Even when Black students secured transfers, they often found themselves recalled to their original schools at a later date without justification, which could be even more damaging because it meant that sacrificing the hard work of a semester or more.

²³ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 242.

²⁴ Daniels, “A History of Discrimination,” 157.

The combination of changed attendance boundaries, the use of branch schools, and unequal transfer policies combined to relegate the majority of Black students to increasingly segregated schools. In addition to being racially isolated, these schools were often the oldest and most under-resourced in the city. A 1920s study using the *Directory of the Public Schools of the City of Chicago* found that of the twenty schools with the largest Black populations, only 23% had been built since 1900. In comparison, of the district's 235 White schools, this percentage was 56%. The oldest for either list was Moseley Elementary, which was predominately Black, built in 1856 half a decade before the start of the Civil War. Fifteen of the twenty buildings lacked a bathroom, only sixteen contained a lunchroom, and only three had a separate gymnasium spaces, the rest either having none or having a combined space utilized for multiple purposes.²⁵ These conditions had real consequences for students learning and at time their physical safety and health. In 1936, some seventy students at Hayes Elementary, built in 1867, contracted trench mouth, a severe gum infection caused by the build-up of bacteria in the mouth, which leads to bleeding ulcerations.²⁶ In 1938, the south wing of Colman Elementary, which had been built in 1887 and was badly in need of repair, burned to the ground, leaving 1560 pupils without adequate space to attend classes.²⁷ Parents and students at Colman had demonstrated for years, petitioning the Board of Education to make repairs to the building before the fire finally forced them to act. These and other examples led Black Chicagoans to question the commitment of the city to educating their children safely and well.

²⁵ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 242-243.

²⁶ Michael Homel, "The Politics of Public Education in Black Chicago," 180.

²⁷ Ibid.

Although informal school district policies along with changing demographics led to increasing segregation and isolation for Black youth, the process proceeded at different rates in different neighborhoods due to the intensity of racial conflict and community feeling. Because of this, many Black students throughout the period attended schools that were in some way mixed, but integrated buildings did not automatically ensure equal treatment. To begin, racial conflicts between students at mixed schools was a constant concern. Although conflicts were fairly limited at the elementary level, in high school began students began to develop greater signs of animosity and antipathy. At Tilden High School, for example, located just west of the dead line of Wentworth Avenue, White students harassed and assaulted Black students who made the mistake of enrolling. Two of the Tilden boys who participated in this effort remarked, “About thirty colored boys registered at Tilden last fall, but we cleaned up on them the first couple of days and they never showed up again. We didn’t give them any peace in the locker room, basement, at noon hours, or between classes.”²⁸ Even absent physical altercations, students in racially mixed high schools kept an often times uneasy distance from one another.

If Black students could manage to endure the physical and psychological harassment which often came with attendance at a majority white school, they still found themselves on the relegated to the margins of school life. Social activities such as clubs or dances were deeply segregated even in mixed schools. As the principal of one high school stated, “The colored never come to social affairs. They are so much in the minority here that they leave all the clubs to the whites.”²⁹ Unable to socialize freely with other their peers or participate in various clubs and

²⁸ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 254.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

societies, Black students were unable to enjoy the enriching extracurricular experience that White students took as commonplace. Unfortunately, Blacks had little recourse in these instances, because any attempts at integrating activities would have met resistance from teachers, staff, and administrators, who were nearly entirely White.

Although the population of Black students dramatically increased during the migration period, there was no corresponding increase in the ranks of Black teachers or administrator. The first Black principal in Chicago Public Schools was not hired until 1928. Prejudice in enrollment practices severely limited the numbers of Black teacher candidates admitted into Chicago Normal College. Those who made it through CNC and passed the teacher's examination faced other barriers. The Board of Education, which was responsible for teacher assignment, often refused to place Black teachers in heavily white schools, reducing their employment opportunities and relegating many Black teachers to the purgatory of the system's substitute rolls for permanent posts in the relatively few Black schools. This could take years, however, because even at schools with a majority of Black students, most of the staff positions were still reserved for Whites. Even after Black teachers were assigned to a school, principals held the power to reject teachers for minor offenses or with no explanation at all, a power they often exercised in order to keep Black teachers out of their staffs. Black teachers recognized the precariousness of any school assignment they might receive. As one stated, "All he's [the principal] got to do is say, 'I don't think you'll be very happy at our school.' You take the hint. Because if the principal decides you're going to be unhappy, you will be, don't worry. No question about that."³⁰ Facing

³⁰ Howard S. Becker, "The Career of the Chicago Public Schoolteacher," *American Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 5 (1952): 473.

these realities Black teachers could expect to be placed, if at all, in schools which were among the lowest performing and the least desirable in the city.

White teachers were mixed with regard to how they interpreted Black students and their performance in Chicago's classrooms. Black students were often stereotyped as being, sometimes contradictorily, physically aggressive, overly playful, difficult to manage, childish, difficult to discipline, and less academically inclined. These basic assumptions had not changed by 1952, when white teachers interviewed in a sociological study agreed that the lowest and most difficult category of students was composed of the poor and "all Negroes" whom they associated as being "slum children, difficult to teach, uncontrollable and violent in the sphere of discipline, and morally unacceptable on all scores."³¹ The reasoning behind these conclusions varied from a supposed natural absence of "understanding" or "sticking qualities" among Black students, to the deleterious effects of poor education and South and limited opportunities.³² Whether they considered Black students pitiable victims of circumstance or naturally inferior, these biases often left Black students unchallenged or completely ignored. One example of these low standards were the frequent reports made by teachers that Black children needed to have their tasks "presented as play" and be "jollied along" in order to make an academic progress. The Chicago Race Commission writers found these reports odd "in view of the frequent complaint of the children from the South that the teachers in Chicago play with them all the time and did not

³¹ Ibid. 471.

³² The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 270.

teach them anything.”³³ Clearly the expectations of White teachers, whether justified or not, affected their exchanges with Black students.

Black Representation in Chicago Social Studies Curricula

If White instructors and school officials needed support for their own racist attitudes, they would have needed venture no further than the approved curricula and textbooks they relied on in order to structure their courses. The stories and experiences of Blacks as well as other minorities were regularly omitted, downplayed, or distorted in Chicago’s schools. This pattern was particularly evident in the social studies. These courses presented an image of the past in which Blacks and their forebears contributed nothing of importance or use to American society. These messages were transmitted not just through teacher attitudes but through the curricula and materials used to teach social studies, especially textbooks. The textbooks of the pre-Civil Rights era often reinforced the notion that “Negroes were racially inferior to whites and that the deserved no equal place in American society.”³⁴ Any coverage dedicated to issues such as African civilizations, slavery, emancipation, the Civil War, or race relations was tainted by this underlying assumption. A look at some examples of textbooks approved by Chicago Public Schools for the 1933-1934 school year reveals that these texts almost without exception reinforced racist and bigoted attitudes towards Blacks.

A first theme that emerges in the texts is the complete omission of Sub-Saharan Africa and its civilizations as worthy objects of study. Instead, Western European culture, customs, and history, are studied exclusively and in relative isolation, with little information provided on

³³ Ibid. 247.

³⁴ Stuart J. Foster, “The Struggle for American Identity: Treatment of Ethnic Groups in United States History Text Books.” *History of Education Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1999): 265.

events taking place concurrently in other parts of the globe. For example, *America's Roots in the Past*, a textbook authored by Daniel J. Beeby, a principal at Oglesby public school in Chicago, begins with the confident assertion that “the history of our civilization began not in America, but in Europe” and that the major task of American history was to “discover, if we can, what it inherited from its European parents and grandparents.”³⁵ In order to trace this cultural inheritance, Beeby’s unit includes chapters on European history including “The Feudal System,” “The Roman Empire,” and “How the Greeks Became the Teachers of the World.” The unit then concludes with discussion questions, the first of which is “What can we Americans learn about our own civilization by studying the history of Europe?”³⁶ Nowhere in these chapters would Black students have learned that people of their own race played any part in setting the stage for American greatness. Similarly, *The Story of Our Country* by Ruth and Willis Mason West begins by framing America as an extension of European civilization. The book’s first unit, entitled “Europe Finds a New World,” includes sections on ancient Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe, culminating in a chapter in which “The White Man Finds America.”³⁷ Thus, from the outset, American history is deemed as synonymous with the history of White settlers who can trace their lineage back to Western Europe.

One African civilization that does receive coverage in both texts is ancient Egypt. Both Beeby and West and West praise the Egyptians for their development of systems of writing, farming techniques, and architectural achievements. Yet although Egypt is included in these

³⁵ Daniel J. Beeby, *America's Roots in the Past* (Chicago: Charles Merrill Co., 1927), 2.

³⁶ Ibid. 12.

³⁷ Ruth West and Willis M. West, *The Story of Our Country* (Chicago: Allyn and Bacon, 1935), v.

texts, it is consistently positioned as a part of the Western world and not discussed in an African context. Thus West and West are comfortable putting their section on Egypt in the chapter entitled “The White Man in the Old World,” claiming it rhetorically and imaginatively as part of the European tradition.³⁸ A graphic titled “The Steps in Man’s Progress” also included in West and West contains vignettes of different stages of history stretching in an unbroken chain from “The World War” back to “The People of the Nile,” and encourages students to connect Egypt directly to modern America and Europe by asking “Where does American history begin?”³⁹ Textbook authors were willing to admit that what they deemed civilization had begun in the far off reaches of North Africa. Yet they conceptualized Egypt as part of a European tradition which moved quickly and inexorably westward to Greece, Rome, Western Europe, and eventually America.

When Africans from outside of Egypt show up in these histories, it is usually in their apologetic depictions of American slavery. Slavery, when mentioned in American history texts of the 1930s, is portrayed as most often as a necessary and even beneficial institution. This is accomplished in a number of ways. One was to emphasize the idea that Africans’ innate inferiority made them unfit or unable to care for themselves. For example, Casner and Gabriel’s *Exploring American History* described slaves as “ignorant and careless,” the exact opposite of the “wise planter.”⁴⁰ According to Casner and Gabriel, slaves were unable to complete even rudimentary tasks without the guiding hand of their owners, and were even liable to break valuable tools if not properly managed. Because they were slothful and indolent, the writers

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. 29.

⁴⁰ Mabel B. Casner and Ralph Henry Gabriel, *Exploring American History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), 398.

argued, slaves usually deserved whatever punishments they received. One text proclaimed confidently that only “disobedient and lazy slaves were flogged,” while another rationalized such violence by concluding that unfortunately slaves “sometimes had to be driven to their tasks with the lash.”⁴¹ In these accounts, slavery is a necessary system maintained for the benefit Whites and Blacks themselves, who cannot shoulder the burdens of freedom.

While the violence that formed the basis for the slave system was depicted as a necessary evil brought on by the slaves themselves, textbook writers preferred not to dwell on negative accounts at all. Instead, schoolchildren of the 1930s learned that, for the most part, plantations were idyllic communities where slaves worked happily under the care of benevolent masters. A description of slavery in the Mid-Atlantic in *America’s Roots in the Past* by Daniel J. Beeby exemplifies this type of narrative:

On the tobacco plantations of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, the slaves were usually treated kindly. The climate was healthful, and the labor of growing tobacco was easy. The work was so simple that it was well suited to unskilled workers. Even when an overseer was employed to direct the slaves, the work was more or less under the master’s observation, as he usually lived on his plantation the year round. In winter the slaves’ life was easy. Their work consisted of clearing a piece of land, cutting wood for the fireplaces of the master’s mansion, and caring for the livestock.⁴²

Beeby goes on to explain that the slaves were provided with “plenty of plain food,” chickens and gardens that were “their own property,” and living quarters that, while rudimentary, were “probably better than those of the first settlers of Virginia in Plymouth.”⁴³ Overall then, the slavery is represented as a social arrangement which benefited all involved on almost an equal basis.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Beeby, *America’s Roots in the Past*, 309-310.

⁴³ Ibid. 310-311.

While the evils of slavery are downplayed in these textbooks, the suffering of Southern Whites at the hands of abolitionists, the federal government, and ex-slaves during the Civil War and reconstruction period are magnified and fetishized. Abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison are portrayed not as freedom fighters but as extremists who took their rhetoric too far and pushed the nation into war. For example, Casner and Gabriel critique Garrison by claiming that he “paid no attention to the fact that slavery had been handed down from colonial times and that no man living in the United States in his day was responsible for it.”⁴⁴ They go on to blame “the bitterness and unfairness” of Garrison and the other abolitionists’ attacks on the South for being a major force in pushing the nation into war.⁴⁵ Thus responsibility for the war is shifted onto a small group of extremists who could not leave well enough alone.

Accounts of the Civil War itself fare no better. The authors depict the war as a struggle in which both sides were equally right and noble and slavery is an afterthought, as “the Southerner fought for his state, his home for his family” while “the Northerner fought for his country.”⁴⁶ In descriptions of the burdens of war, emphasis is placed on Southern Whites, especially women, and their heroic efforts to support their cause. On the other hand, Blacks are once more made secondary characters, either as faithful servants who remained loyal to their masters or childlike oafs who fell into the protection of the Union forces. No mention is made of the approximately 200,000 Blacks who saw military service in the war, or of the innumerable slaves who chose to risk their lives in the chaos of war to escape into Union-occupied territory. Instead the focus is

⁴⁴ Casner and Gabriel, *Exploring American History*, 442.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 482.

kept squarely Whites in the Southern states. Casner and Gabriel end their chapter on the war with the poem “The Conquered Banner,” an elegiac ode to the Southern cause that includes lines such as “Furl that Banner! True tis gory, Yet ‘tis wreathed around with glory, And ‘twill live in song and story, Though its folds are in the fust.”⁴⁷ This “lost cause” telling of the Civil War ascribes the Union and the Confederacy with equal virtue, subsumes the importance of slavery as a cause for the war, and again relegates Blacks to trivial players in the historical drama.

While the justification of chattel slavery, the denigration of Black and their abolitionist allies, and the whitewashing of the Civil War are shocking, they were far from aberrant. In her study of portrayals of slavery in some sixty-five middle and secondary school textbooks written between in early 1900s, Leah Washburn found the same types of stereotypes were pervasive. She concluded that during the 1930s and 1940s textbooks generally employed “racial and gender stereotypes to present a positive view of the slave system,” presented “justification for the slave system by appealing to the needs of the market” and portrayed abolitionists “as radicals.”⁴⁸ If this pattern held true for representations of slavery, it only worsened in depictions of Reconstruction and race relations after the Civil War.

Reconstruction was depicted as a cruel period of “negro rule” in which Southern Whites were the victims of cruel retribution at the hands of the Northern government and freedmen. Casner and Gabriel relate to students that the South was ruled during Reconstruction by an alliance of Blacks and Northerners and proclaimed, “The Negroes were ignorant and most of the

⁴⁷ Ibid. 499.

⁴⁸ Leah Washburn, “Accounts of Slavery: An Analysis of United States History Textbooks from 1900-1992,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 25, no. 4 (1997): 477.

carpetbaggers were rascals.”⁴⁹ West and West express the same reading of Reconstruction, emphasizing the helplessness of Southern Whites in the face of “disorders from the lawless bands of ex-slaves roaming about their homes” and “the corruption of the carpetbag government.”⁵⁰ This supposed overzealousness of the North in its punishment of the vanquished Confederacy was used to justify Jim Crow legislation, the systematic stripping of Black rights including the franchise, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan who are depicted as the saviors of Southern society. Casner and Gabriel depicted the Klan as a brave gathering of Southern White men who organized to “fight the evils that surrounded them” and “frightened the Negroes and warned the carpetbaggers.”⁵¹ Similarly, West and West describe the Klan as a “secret society” whose members, “dressing like ghosts in masks and long White robes...rode about at night warning the terrified Negroes to behave themselves and let government affairs alone.”⁵² The Klan’s campaigns of terrorism, murder, and intimidation, which included the lynching of thousands of Blacks, were given tacit approval through in these texts.

The patterns of omission and marginalization established in the coverage of earlier periods of American history were also extended into the discussions of Black achievement and contemporary race relations contained within textbooks. After Reconstruction, Blacks are once again ignored in discussions of modern political, social, and economic realities in the U.S. West and West, for example, whose last unit, entitled “America Faces New Task,” covers

⁴⁹ Casner and Gabriel, *Exploring American History*, 503.

⁵⁰ West and West, *The Story of Our Country*, 383.

⁵¹ Casner and Gabriel, *America’s Roots in the Past*, 503.

⁵² West and West, *The Story of Our Country*, 383.

contemporary issues in science such as the development of new travel and transportation technologies, social movements such as women's suffrage and child welfare campaigns, and political issues such as the first World War and ensuing Depression, make no mention either of individual Blacks or of Blacks as a social group in any of these chapters. The impression left by the textbook is that once freed from slavery, Blacks faded into the background of the American story, accomplishing and contributing little if anything since the late nineteenth century.

The full impact of the prejudiced depictions, marginalization, and outright erasure of Blacks from Chicago's social studies textbooks in the 1930s is impossible to measure. Yet the results were very real as textbooks, in this era as well as our own, communicate a type of "state-approved civic truth," a narrative of national history and identity that is widely accepted or agreed upon.⁵³ The accounts relayed throughout these textbooks consistently demean Blacks, portraying them as intellectually inferior, morally debased, and socially and politically unworthy. Students, whether Black or White, would have been exposed to these ideas, which wore the veneer of official, settled fact and approved knowledge due to its approval and promotion by the school system as credible accounts of American history.

Conclusion

Between 1915 and 1940, Blacks faced several interlocking problems with regard to race and schooling. The demographic shift engendered by the Great Migration had greatly increased the population of Black families and Black students in the city. Many times it was the promise of better schools in the North that convinced families to migrate; Chicago, whose schools, in which relatively greater resources were dedicated to black students than in the Southern states, and

⁵³ David Tyack, "Monuments between Covers: The Politics of Textbooks," *American Behavioral Scientists* 42, no. 6 (1999): 922.

which boasted a tradition of integration stretching back to the antebellum period, was a particularly attractive destination. Yet, partially in reaction to this influx of migrants, race-based educational discrimination intensified, mirroring and many times preceding segregation in housing and other aspects of communal life.

Physically and geographically isolated, Black students were consigned to dilapidated buildings with fewer amenities than majority white schools, given fewer resources and financial supports, and assigned teachers and administrators who many times held contempt for their academic aspirations. Finally, the curriculum itself left Blacks on the outside of the story of the nation's mythic past and current progress. Black students "learned a white oriented curriculum, from white teachers who were frequently prejudiced and almost universally un-attuned to Black culture, sensibilities, and concerns."⁵⁴ The color line, which affected all aspects of Black life, from employment to home ownership to political inclusion, thus extended into education in deep and fundamental ways. As the Black community struggled to grapple with the color line, many would call for changes to the city's schools, their enrollment policies, choices in buildings sites, funding, and curricula. One of the leaders of this movement for change was Madeline Morgan, who used her ambition, education, social status to formulate a means of addressing the disparities of Chicago's social studies curriculum.

⁵⁴ Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 256.

CHAPTER TWO

“KNOWLEDGE IS ONLY POWER IF IT IS PUT INTO ACTION”:

MADELINE MORGAN AND THE ALTERNATIVE BLACK CURRICULUM

Introduction

In a letter dated January 13, 1944, Madeline Morgan sat down to provide a rough sketch of her life and major undertakings. Three days prior, she had been asked for information about herself for the Northwestern University *Alumni News*, who had become aware of her through stories in the Associated Negro Press dealing with her work as an educational activist and curriculum writer. After confirming for Ora Macdonald, the acting editor at Northwestern, that she was in fact “the Madeline R. Morgan referred to,” Morgan went on to give a short biography centering on her educational background and the clubs and associations in which she took part.¹

Morgan’s short account of her life up to 1944 reveals a great deal about her background. Her education included some of the most prestigious institutions the city had to offer, including Englewood High School, the Chicago Normal College, and Northwestern University, where she earned both a B.S. and M.A. in Education. In addition, she included post graduate course work completed at the Lewis Institute and the University of Chicago. Her organizational background was equally impressive, a tightly connected web of women’s clubs, religious congregations, sororities, civil rights groups, and academic and scholarly societies that included “Member of the Mu Chapter of the national sorority of Phi Delta Kappa (*was local Basileus for 3 years),

¹ Morgan, Madeline. “Letter to Ora McDonald, Northwestern Alumni News, January 13, 1944.” Alumni Biographical Files. Series 51/14. B11ox 1576. Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL.

NAACP member, Urban League member, National Council of Negro Women member...”² These two strands, one based in formal education and training and the other in community activism, came together to inform Morgan’s politics and pedagogy.

Morgan’s educational training and organizational experiences equipped her with the skills and dispositions to take on the project of introducing Black history into the Chicago Public Schools. Her pedagogical approach, molded at Chicago Normal College and Northwestern, centered on a progressive belief in the ability of education to act as a lever of social change. This faith was applied by Morgan to the question of racial uplift, where she also drew on the thought and practice of the Black community organizations in which she worked, finding positive visions of black identity and history that she incorporated into her own curricula.

Education and Early Activism

Born in Chicago in 1906, Madeline Robinson was the oldest of five children. Her father was John Henry Robinson, an elevator operator who migrated to Chicago from Ronceverte, West Virginia. Her mother was Stella Mae Robinson, a native Chicagoan. The household lived at 3736 Dearborn Street, on the western edge of the Black Belt, and Madeline first attended school at Farren Elementary. Although the neighborhood surrounding Farren was 69% black in 1922, the school population was 92% African American, suggesting the informal modes of racial segregation discussed in the previous chapter.³ Farren, like many schools where African Americans formed a majority of the student body, was an older building, constructed in 1898, yet

² Ibid.

³ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 242.

it was relatively well-appointed, and Robinson would have had access to a bathroom and lunchroom, as well as an assembly hall on the third floor and combined gymnasium.⁴

After Farren, Robinson was enrolled in Englewood High School. This is surprising given that her address put her well within the attendance boundaries of Wendell Phillips High School, which was both majority African American and located in the heart of Bronzeville at 39th Street and Prairie Avenue. Englewood by comparison was much further away at 62nd Street and Stewart Avenue, in an area south of the Black Belt which was almost entirely white. The racial composition of the school reflected that of the neighborhood, as Englewood High School recorded a student body that was only 6% black in the early 1920s when the Chicago Commission on Race Relations made its investigation.⁵ Englewood would then have been a foreign environment for a child raised and educated within the familiar surroundings of her own community, both geographic and racial. The exact reason for the choice to enroll Robinson at Englewood is not clear, but the Robinson family was probably one of a handful of African American families who, concerned about the overcrowding and poor conditions at Phillips, somehow pled their case to the Board of Education and obtained a transfer. Englewood offered the promise of better educational opportunities, more up-to-date resources and facilities, and less crowded classrooms. Yet the full benefit of these resources would have been difficult to attain for African American students, who were constantly made to feel separate and inferior within the school community.

⁴ Ibid. 243.

⁵ Ibid. 252.

White teachers and administrators' attitudes towards black students at Englewood can be summarized by the comments of its dean, reported to the Chicago Commission Race Relations. While the administrator initially gave the sunny assessment that "white and Negro children mingled freely with no sign of trouble or prejudice," he quickly added that, "if more Negro children came to the school the spirit would change."⁶ Thus if the presence of African American students was to some extent tolerated, it was only because their low numbers did not threaten the racial order of the institution. Under these conditions black students found themselves able to join some school activities, like orchestra, literary societies, and athletic teams. Yet the free mingling of white and black students had definite limits. For instance, at school dances or class parties the Dean reported that "five or six colored children" would always attend and were "welcomed by the white."⁷ While they talked to their white classmates in between songs, however, the black students heeded social prescriptions and "always danced together."⁸ Although students mixed in certain prescribed ways, interaction that brought white and black students into close social contact, especially of a nature that could be potentially sexual or crossed gender lines, was unacceptable. The case of one of Robinson's classmates, Ellis Reid, serves as an example.

Reid was an excellent student by every account, an active participant in the school's R.O.T.C., where he was on the verge of being promoted to the rank of major. On December 5, 1923, he was placed as a guard for a performance of a school play, instructed by his superior officer not to allow anyone to pass through his assigned entrance once the program began. When

⁶ Ibid. 252.

⁷ Ibid. 254.

⁸ Ibid.

a white girl approached him during the middle of the performance and asked to be let in, Reid refused her entry as he had been instructed. The girl then attempted to walk past him, but Reid blocked the door with his arm, forming a physical barrier.

In return for the unpardonable breach of “insulting a white girl,” Reid was attacked by a gang of six white students, and barely managed to escape by hiding in a cloak room and exiting through another door.⁹ The matter only worsened for Reid when the school’s administration became involved. Instead of protecting Reid, Principal James E. Armstrong instead gave tacit approval to the actions of Reid’s attackers by sending Reid home for an indefinite period without the benefit of an investigation. Ultimately Armstrong, in an effort to appease white students and parents, dismissed Reid from the school entirely. Armstrong admitted that Reid was “a fine boy” and “faithful student” caught in a situation “for which he is not entirely to blame,” but justified his dismissal as a move made to save the school from the possibility of a race riot.¹⁰ The message to other students like Madeline Robinson must have been clear enough. Black students could not expect fair treatment at Englewood, regardless of their position or talent, especially if they acted in ways that suggested they felt themselves the equals of their white classmates.

In addition to the marginal place they occupied within the school community, Englewood’s handful of Black scholars also faced the indignity of being taught curricula which routinely described them as a distinctly lower tier of humanity than their white classmates. A *Chicago Defender* article from 1928, only three years after Morgan’s graduation, shows that the social studies texts in use at Englewood reflected many of the same prejudices she would seek to

⁹ “Principal Admits He Used Czarlike Power in Case of Student,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 22, 1923.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

address in her own career as an educator. The *Defender* printed several passages taken directly from the textbook, Henry William Elson's *History of the United States*, which contained many of the explicitly racist arguments common in textbooks of the period. With small caveats for leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Blacks are described in familiar terms, as a "listless, aimless class who aspire to nothing" and who are for the most part "content to live in squalor and ignorance."¹¹ Elson also mirrors the majority of textbook writers in his assessment of Reconstruction as a failure, and his assurance that "nature" had separated the races socially and intellectually, making any attempt at integration or social equality "worse than folly."¹² Elson's paternalism leads him to conclude that while nature and history have conspired to destine Black to remain a lower caste in American society, this is a positive as they will at least be "quite safe and their happiness quite secure under the white man's government."¹³ Thus the official curriculum of Englewood supported and reified an unstated school culture of racial bias and antipathy.

In January of 1925, Robinson graduated from Englewood. She left with both important academic skills and firsthand understandings of racial prejudice and its impact on Black students. After Englewood, she chose to apply to Chicago Normal College, which she attended between 1926 and 1929, following the elementary teacher training course. The program was divided into three years of study, each broken into two 20-week semesters. Each semester was composed of 460 hours of in-class time. During the first year, courses concentrated on academic content, with titles such as "English 11, Composition for College Needs" and "Social Studies II, Brief Survey

¹¹ "Chicago School Advocates Southern Hates," *The Chicago Defender*, January 7, 1928.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

of the Social Institutions.” The second year moved into studies of pedagogical techniques and included classes like “General Psychology,” “Educational Measurements,” and “English 18, Teaching of Reading in the Primary Grades.” The third and final year continued with the emphasis on pedagogy and also included significant student teaching, completed in the first term of the second semester and lasting 10 weeks.¹⁴ Outside the classroom, Morgan seems to have taken advantage of other opportunities for involvement on campus. She became part of the Women’s Athletic Association, which sponsored the many women’s sports teams including basketball and tennis, and the Fellowship Club, which organized social activities on campus.¹⁵ She also found time for romance, marrying Thomas Morgan in 1926. Even with these major life events, however, Morgan completed her courses on time, graduating on April 12, 1929.¹⁶

The social studies curriculum Morgan learned at Chicago Normal College included a survey of social institutions, courses in U.S. economic and political organization, and social studies teaching methods. These courses took a progressive stance that focused on the social studies as a means to develop democratic citizenship, and tied together academics and action in the world outside the classroom. For instance, the course Economic Organization listed as its most important outcomes “honesty, thrift, and the wise use of public property” and the “functioning of these principles in the lives of the individuals.”¹⁷ Similarly, the Political Organization course stressed that the student should be cognizant of his “privileges and

¹⁴ “Chicago Normal Course Announcement for 1928-1929: A Statement of the Organization and Courses of Study of the Chicago Normal College,” Chicago Normal College Records, Box 1, Folder 2. Chicago State University, Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁵ “Emblem, 1928,” Chicago State University, Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁶ “Chicago Normal College Graduates: Class of April 12, 1929” Chicago State University, Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁷ Ibid. 25.

responsibilities” as a citizen and “take an active part so far as is possible in every democratic group of which he is a member.”¹⁸ Overall, the History and Civics department stressed that “open mindedness,” a “progressive spirit,” and “a will to be a factor in constructive social activities” were the goal for its teachers.¹⁹ Morgan’s later work would attest to the fact that she kept these progressive ideals at the center of her pedagogy, and applied them in new ways to discuss issues of race and representation which mattered most to herself and her students.

Morgan graduated from Chicago Normal College in 1929, but it would be nearly four years before she began her teaching career in earnest. While it is unclear what work she took on during this period, it is likely, knowing the trajectory of many other teachers during this period, who saw their opportunities to practice limited by the financial constraints of the Depression, that Morgan was employed at least part-time as a substitute teacher. On May 3, 1933, however, Morgan finally received a more permanent assignment, to Emerson Elementary School, at 1700 W. Walnut Street in Chicago as a 6th grade social studies. Even as she began her career, Morgan also continued to develop her skills as an educator.

In the fall of 1933, Morgan began studies at Northwestern’s University College located at the McKinlock campus in downtown Chicago. The University College, established in the spring of that same year, had its roots in the part time coursework offered for working professionals on afternoons, evenings, and during summer sessions by the School of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences. By the early 1930s, these classes had become extremely popular and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 24.

“attracted close to 1000 registrants,” creating the impetus for a new school.²⁰ The location of the University College, along with the schedule of classes offered, appealed to practicing educators like Morgan. In addition, the content of the courses attracted educators because it was slanted heavily towards the practical application of educational theory, reflecting the commitment of the larger School of Education to the principles of the progressive movement.

If Morgan’s time at Chicago Normal College had begun to build her character as an educational progressive, her time at Northwestern extended and completed this process. The dean of the School of Education during the 1930s, Ernest O. Melby, was an avid progressive of the Social Reconstructionist camp or faction. The Reconstructionists challenged Progressive educators to descend from the heights of academic theorizing and become actively involved in the issues of power, inequity, and societal reform that, with the depression, by the mid-1930s were roiling the nation. As George S. Counts, one of the movement’s leaders, stated, “If Progressive Education is to be genuinely progressive, it must... face squarely and courageously every social issue, come to grips with life in all of its stark reality, establish an organic relation with the community, develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare...”²¹ Counts and other Social Reconstructionists saw teachers as active players in connecting education to broader social struggles, and encouraged educators to see themselves in this light: “That the teacher should deliberately reach for power and then make the most of their conquest is my firm conviction. To the extent to which they are permitted to fashion the curriculum and procedures of the school they will definitely and positively influence the social attitudes, ideals, and behavior

²⁰ Harold Williamson and Payson Wild, *Northwestern University: A History 1850-1975* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1976), 194.

²¹ George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York: John Day Company, 1932), 9.

of the coming generation.”²² This faith in the power of the teacher to build a new social order through their students was one that Morgan returned to repeatedly throughout her own work.

As dean, Melby made certain that the progressive and Reconstructionist ethos became central to Northwestern’s School of Education. Northwestern became deeply tied to Teacher’s College in New York, a Reconstructionist bastion where Melby himself had studied and from which he recruited six faculty members to work at Northwestern during the 1930s. Melby was also on the Board of Directors for the leading Reconstructionist mouthpiece, *The Social Frontier*, which was edited by George Counts at Teacher’s College. Through these connections, Melby showed his staunch commitment to the idea that “the school was the primary vehicle for reforming society.”²³ It was an idea that Madeline Morgan would have been exposed to early and often as she began her work in the classroom.

Morgan’s time at Northwestern coincided with the first years of her teaching career, and as she developed the outlook that would form the basis of her pedagogical career she took classes directly from Melby himself, including a course in Educational Leadership and Teacher Development, as well as from other faculty members well-versed in the Social Reconstructionist principles. While Morgan never labeled herself a Social Reconstructionist, her early work as a teacher reflected some of the principles of progressive education and Social Reconstruction, especially a concern with connecting the school and the community, adapting the curriculum to address the real world needs of her students, and a faith in the power of education and educators to take up an emancipatory role in addressing social ills.

²² Ibid. 28.

²³ Bruce Colwell, “The Study of Education at Northwestern University, 1900-1945: Institutional Conflicts of Mission and Men” (Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1988), 220.

At Emerson, Morgan applied a pedagogical approach that mixed progressive philosophy and a deep concern for her students and their communities. The most telling example of this approach was her Emerson School Bank Project, for which she received city wide praise. Morgan was concerned that her students, some 95% of whom were in homes which relied on W.P.A. jobs or relief for basic necessities, were not receiving encouragement to spend and save money wisely. As she put it, “There is obviously a need of information about saving as a social necessity that can be managed within their budgets.”²⁴ In response to this need, Morgan set about devising an “experience unit,” which adhered to her progressive ideals of connecting schooling to the larger world, the promotion of values of democratic citizenship, and functional use of education to motivate social change.²⁵ Along with her students, she set up a fully functioning school bank at Emerson, complete with students trained as tellers, clerks, cashiers, managers, a president, and guards. The project unfolded in several phases and incorporated a multidisciplinary approach wherein students researched the past and present of banking, took a field trip to the First National Bank of Chicago, built a functioning bank with a teller’s cage from shop materials, composed essays and poems on the national recent financial panics, and diligently calculated deposits and withdrawals from their bank site. Soon what began as a class project was opened to the entirety of the school and the community beyond.

In the first year, 1937, over 151 students used the Emerson School Bank. The dedication of the students was impressive and Morgan noted that many “have chosen a bank account in

²⁴ Madeline Morgan, “Emerson School Bank Project” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 7, Folder 25], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

preference to candy and pickles.”²⁶ Beyond current students, earlier graduates often returned to reopen accounts in order to continue saving. Families also became involved, as Morgan wrote. “Often parents send money to be deposited in order to buy clothing for their children at Christmas time. Some parents have written notes asking for a withdrawal in order to buy food or coal.”²⁷ Morgan credited the success of the project, which by 1939 had grown to 217 depositors and over \$170 in total savings, to its connection to the real world of social problems. Because it was “modeled after the adult world” she believed, it taught students “valuable social attitudes” and cemented them with “direct knowledge” and participation.²⁸ Ultimately, her goal was to change the social reality of her students, in this instance by equipping them with the skills to become more intelligent consumers. As she put it, “I sincerely hope that...this project will have made their lives economically better than it otherwise would have been.”²⁹ Morgan’s teaching reflected a faith in progressive and even Reconstructionist principles, especially the use of education to address social ills.

The Alternative Black Curriculum

Given her faith in education as a tool for progressive social change, and the experiences of racial segregation and discrimination that marked her childhood on Chicago’s South Side, it is not surprising that Morgan began to develop her pedagogy as a potential force for combating racial injustice. Throughout the 1930s, as she developed as a teacher and an intellectual, Morgan began to stress the importance of education as a tool for racial progress and championed efforts

²⁶ Ibid. 1.

²⁷ Ibid. 4.

²⁸ Ibid. 5.

²⁹ Ibid.

to extend greater educational opportunities black students. Among her archived papers is a 1936 public address entitled “Are Negroes Intellectually Free,” where Morgan addressed the limited opportunities for advancement that black students faced, arguing that, “The denial of educational opportunities to the Negro American is one of the greatest weaknesses of our Democracy.”³⁰ She cited statistics from surveys that showed the gap in per pupil expenditures for white and black students in ten southern states, which averaged “\$17.04 for Negro children and \$49.30 for white children.”³¹ However, Morgan did not stop with her indictment of southern inequality, but reminded her listeners that opportunities were constrained and denied in the North as well. She noted the fact that black academics were barred from white universities, black doctors could not access clinical training at white hospitals, and black teachers were rarely allowed to advance into school leadership. The compounding of these effects, the closing off of avenues to learning and advancement, meant to Morgan that blacks in the North as well as the South remained hindered. However, in the face of the “discrimination, restrictions, exploitations, and varied subtle and direct forms of persecution,” blacks confronted, Morgan articulated a vision of an education which could be used for intellectual, and eventually social, emancipation.³²

For Morgan, as for the Social Reconstructionists, education held the potential to play a prominent role in the amelioration of societal inequalities. However, unlike the social Reconstructionists, for whom race never played a central role, Morgan grasped that the full spectrum of inequality included not just economics and politics but also the racial apartheid in

³⁰ Madeline Morgan, “Are Negroes Intellectually Free,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 4, Folder 1], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 4.

which she and other black Americans lived. Education would arm the next generation with the mindsets and models needed to overcome all of these inequities. As she stated, “We cannot build a future, but we can build men and women who can think and break down the traditional past.”³³ Morgan envisioned education as tied directly to action and activism: “Let us encourage our young people to seek knowledge not for the sake of knowledge but in order to increase his or her ability to do something. Knowledge is only power if it is put into action.”³⁴

As a social studies teacher, Morgan became convinced that part of this process of building new men and women was the necessity of presenting them with models, both past and present, of black accomplishment. Morgan believed that, “Through the medium of history and biography much can be revealed concerning the Negro’s contribution to the development of America,” and that black teachers had a responsibility to “keep before our youth the evidence of things that have been developed by Negroes.”³⁵ Because these examples were not readily available in the traditional curriculum, Morgan and others like her were forced to devise their own means of engaging in this work. As she began to look for ways to use history and social studies as a tool to help mold her students and through them society at large, she joined a growing body of similarly minded scholars, teachers, and curriculum theorists working to define curricular orientation that spoke to the experiences and needs of black Americans.

The early twentieth century saw the development of black history from a small and largely unrecognized endeavor to an organized field of study. A generation of university-trained

³³ Ibid. 6.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Madeline Morgan, “The Study of Negro History,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 4, Folder 33], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 3, 5.

black scholars, along with lay historians, and teachers and administrators at the K-12 level, began to create curricular materials which refuted the demeaning stereotypes which abounded in traditional history texts and filled in purposefully omitted facts concerning the black experience. Edward A. Johnson, a principal and educator in Raleigh North Carolina, published his own history of blacks in America in 1891 after observing, “The sin of omission and commission on the part of white authors” who “studiously left out the many creditable deeds of the Negro” in their histories.³⁶ Johnson provided his textbook in order to present “facts without bias or prejudice,” such that, “the race for which these facts are written, following the example of the noble men and women who have gone before, level themselves up to the highest pinnacle of all that is noble...”³⁷ Similarly, Lela Amos Pendleton, a D.C. schoolteacher and active clubwoman, published *A Narrative of the Negro* in 1912, which she described as “a sort of ‘family story to the colored children of America,’” written for students in the early elementary grades.

In addition to administrators and schoolteachers, professional academics also began to produce materials on black history specifically for use in K-12 classrooms. Merl R. Eppse, Head of the Department of History and Political Science at Tennessee A&I State in Nashville, was “one of the first educators to write an American history textbook for school use that presented the history of blacks in the United States in an integrated manner.”³⁸ Eppse penned three major textbooks on black history including *The Negro Too, In American History* (1938), in which he

³⁶ Edward Johnson, *A School History of The Negro Race in America From 1619 to 1890 With a Short Introduction as to the Origins of the Race; Also a Short Sketch of Liberia* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1890), 3.

³⁷ Ibid. 5.

³⁸ Murray Nelson, “Merl R. Eppse and Studies of Black in American History Textbooks” (conference report, American Education Research Association, 1988), 85.

aimed to give “a continuous story of constructive contributions of the Negro.”³⁹ This initial book was reissued and updated several times, and two more volumes followed: *A Guide to the Study of the Negro in American History* (1938) which served as a rough statistical guide to those interested in black history, and *An Elementary History of America with Contributions of the Negro Race* (1939) which he co-authored with fellow historian A.P. Foster.

Renowned social scientist and author W.E.B Dubois, also realized the importance of building a pedagogy that focused on liberating black youth from what he termed the “propaganda of history.”⁴⁰ Referring to the lack of African American representation in elementary and high school history materials, Dubois noted that a student of his day would, “in all probability complete his education without any idea of the part which the black race has played in America.”⁴¹ Attempting to change this reality, Dubois, as president of the NAACP, oversaw the creation of *The Brownies’ Book*, the first children’s magazine in the nation to be targeted at black youth, which ran from 1920-1921. Among the goals he expressed for the new publication was that it would “make colored children realize that being ‘colored’ is a normal beautiful thing” and make them “familiar with the history and achievements of the Negro race.”⁴²

The Brownies’ Book included stories, poetry, games, columns, current events, illustrations, letters, and photographs, which focused on introducing young black readers to their cultural legacy. The material had an indelible effect on readers like Pocahontas Foster of Orange,

³⁹ Merl Eppse, *The Negro Too in American History* (Nashville: National Publication Company, 1943), xi.

⁴⁰ W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935), 711.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 713.

⁴² W.E.B. Dubois, “The True Brownies,” *Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* 18, no. 6 (October 1919): 286.

New Jersey, who was convinced that she did not like history until she read the *Brownies' Book* and discovered her heritage: “Since I read the stories of Paul Cuffee, Blanche K. Bruce and Katy Ferguson, real colored people, whom I feel I do know because they were brown people like me, I believe I do like history, and I think it is something more than dates.”⁴³ Although the *Brownies' Book* itself was short lived, DuBois continued to be a staunch advocate for the importance of black history both in his individual work and his role with the NAACP.

While each of these figures contributed to the growth of black history as a field, by far the person most influential in terms of setting the directions and methodologies of the new black history movement, was Carter G. Woodson, aptly referred to by his peers as the father of Negro history. Woodson, the son of former slaves who became the second African American to earn a doctorate from Harvard University, made it his life's mission to collect and disseminate information regarding the history of black Americans, which he believed could work as both a means of “instilling cultural pride and self-esteem in African Americans” and “combating racial prejudice by exposing white society to Africans’ and African Americans’ monumental contributions.”⁴⁴ Through countless reports, studies, journal article, speeches, conferences, and textbooks, Woodson laid out an intellectual framework which was picked up and elaborated on by black educators throughout the country.

Although Woodson has been credited far more for studies aimed at collegiate and adult audiences, Woodson was greatly concerned with creating and popularizing accounts of black history geared towards younger readers. He authored several textbooks, including *The Negro in*

⁴³ Diana Johnson-Feelings, ed., *The Best of the Brownies' Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 54.

⁴⁴ Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 1.

Our History (1922), *African Myths Together with Proverbs* (1928), *Negro Makers of History* (1928), *The Story of the Negro Retold* (1935), *The African Background Outlined* (1936), and *African Heroes and Heroines* (1939), each of which sought to reframe and correct mainstream history curricula by including black accomplishments. Aware of the difficulties of working to correct prejudices and preconceptions once they were formed, Woodson instead aimed to confront the problem at its root. Dedication to this ideal was suffused throughout both Woodson's personal endeavors and organizations like the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which he help found.

Numerous historians, including Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, Elena Swartz, Charles Mills, Jeffery Synder, Anthony Brown, and LaGarrett King, have analyzed and connected the efforts of early black curriculum theorists, employing terms and ideas such as multicultural education, counter-memory, counter-narrative, revisionist ontology, and re-membered history. However, Alana Murray offers the most concise articulation of this movement with her conception of an *alternative black curriculum*, an overarching “framework that directly challenged European hegemonic discourse,” with regard to the historical representations of black people.⁴⁵ She argues that this vision of black history was based on eight separate themes, most clearly articulated in Woodson's seminal text *The Miseducation of the Negro*, but present in the works of other authors as well, spanning not only textbooks but teachers journals, academic publications, plays, and encyclopedias. These principles included:

- a.) a counter-response that stressed the importance of African civilizations such as Abyssinia, Nubia, Kush, Mali and Ghana.

⁴⁵Alana Murray, “Countering the Master Narrative,” 2.

- b.) a counter-response that stressed the importance of African American contributions, such as the value of slave labor in building the key infrastructure of the early United States.
- c.) a recognition for the role Africans and African Americans have played in shaping the political culture of the United States. African American educators of Woodson's time argued that the voices of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and other key black leaders should be studied along with the Founding Fathers.
- d.) a defense of black labor. For example, scholars wanted to acknowledge the tradition of entrepreneurship in the black community.
- e.) a Pan-African vision which linked African American struggles with the struggles of people of color from other parts of the world. For example, African American activists stressed the role of the Haitian Revolution in shaping a black identity in the Western Hemisphere.
- f.) an inclusion of stories of resistance and rebellion to slavery.
- g.) a discussion about the impact of race and racism.
- h.) an inclusion of white allies in the struggle against racism.⁴⁶

These basic themes present in the work of black authors from college campuses to primary schoolhouses.

As Madeline Morgan began to develop her interest in black history as a tool for social change, she was exposed to this *alternative black curriculum* in several ways. As a schoolteacher, Morgan was a college educated white collar professional, in a city where only small handful of blacks, male or female, could hope to rise to such status. This made Morgan part of what Dionne Danna has referred to as the “black elite,” the small cadre African Americans whose social position, education, and affiliations put them on the frontlines of social change.⁴⁷ As part of this black professional class, Morgan belonged to a tightly-bound web of organizations, among them Brean Baptist Church, the National Council of Negro Women, the N.A.A.C.P., and the Urban League. However, it was her membership in the ASNLH and the national teaching sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, through which Morgan found the resources to

⁴⁶ Ibid. 57.

⁴⁷ Dionne Danna, “Thriving in the Midst of Adversity: Educator Maudelle Brown Bousfield’s Struggles in Chicago, 1920-1950,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 78, no.1 (2009): 3.

construct affirmative visions of black life and history that set the stage for her own experiments with school curricula in the 1940s.

Chicago's black elite was one of the largest and most vibrant in the country during the 1920s and 1930s. The sheer size and concentration of Chicago's black population during the migration period meant that the black metropolis was an intense site of cultural, intellectual, and economic production. As Davarian Baldwin has stated, "Chicago's black entrepreneurs, war veterans, laborers, artists, entertainers, politicians, and intellectuals" were engaged in the creation of a "separate economic and institutional world" during the 1920s and 1930s. Not only did this self-reliant black community build its own organizations and establishments, it also began to exert influence on the larger city of Chicago, especially politically, as the black vote became a "precious commodity" for any politician wishing to rise to power in the ever-changing landscape of local government.⁴⁸ With Chicago such a hotbed of black self-determination and influence, it is of little surprise that it was also the birthplace of the early twentieth century's most important organization for the spread and popularization of black history.

The single most important organization of the early twentieth century in terms of offering a challenge to mainstream conceptions of black history was the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, or ASNLH. The association was founded in Chicago on September 9, 1915 by Carter G. Woodson. Morgan became a member of the ASNLH in the early 1930s and remained affiliated with the organization throughout her life, even serving as its president from 1970-1977. The ASNLH concerned itself with promoting the teaching of black history in primary and secondary grades as much as in the colleges. In 1933, for example, the organization

⁴⁸ Paul M. Green and Melvin G. Holli, *The Mayors: The Chicago Political Tradition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 117.

formed a 12-person committee on education which Woodson advised, and which was tasked with addressing the question “What we should teach the Negro child about himself and others in relation to himself?”⁴⁹ The committee included members from several different strata of the field including six representatives from high schools, four from colleges or universities, and one each from the U.S. Office of Education and the New York Public Library. This mixed committee made several recommendations, including the promotion of the study of “ancient, medieval, and modern Africa” among schoolchildren, that schools be pushed to adopt textbooks which “without bias, portray the history of all people,” and that principals and teachers should work to develop “graded exercises” and “curricula” to support these ends.⁵⁰ The ASNLH not only encouraged this work however, it also served as a platform and resource for teachers to carry these ideas into action.

A major reason for the ASNLH’s focus on the importance of black history in the primary and secondary schools was the democratic nature of its organization and membership. While most academic organizations during the early twentieth century were effectively closed to those who had not obtained a PhD, the ASNLH welcomed members from a broad spectrum of the African American community including, “lay historians, ministers, secondary and elementary school teachers, businessmen, and the black community as a whole”⁵¹ In this environment, schoolteachers took active part in setting organizational goals and priorities. Schoolteachers served on committees, organized the association’s annual conferences, fundraised for speakers

⁴⁹ “What We Should Learn,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 25, 1933, 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement*, 45.

and events, and authored articles which were carried in the *Journal of Negro History*, the organization's mouthpiece, throughout the early decades of the organization.

One sign of the significant role which primary and secondary schoolteachers played within the ASNLH is the creation of the *Negro History Bulletin*, founded by the association in 1937. Less purely academic in focus than the *Journal of Negro History*, the *Bulletin* offered Black history meant for mass consumption. As an ASNLH pamphlet stated of the *Bulletin*, "While this periodical is sponsored by the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, it is an organ of the schools-something for the children. It has resulted from needs which have been disclosed among those who are trying to base the education of the Negro upon the Negro himself."⁵² Schoolteachers set the tone and direction of the periodical and formed a majority of the editorial staff. Soon the *Bulletin* became "an arena in which black women, mainly schoolteachers and social activists, could articulate their concerns about educating black youth, reforming American society, and uplifting the masses of their people."⁵³ The *Bulletin's* popularity and use by Black schoolteachers in Chicago is confirmed by references the number of references to its use at many of the predominately black schools in the city. For example, in 1942 the *Defender* reported that 75% of the teachers at Forrestville, 50% at Douglas, and 100% at Doolittle subscribed to the *Bulletin*.⁵⁴

While the *Negro History Bulletin* acted as a space for sharing resources and strategies for teaching Black history at the primary and secondary level, another major ASNLH creation would

⁵² "ASNLH, Annual Meetings and Anniversary Celebrations, 1935-1940," Hall Branch Papers [Box 5, Folder 45], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁵³ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement*, 99.

⁵⁴ "The Development of the Study of Negro History in Chicago," *The Chicago Defender*, February 7, 1942, 15.

become synonymous with the effort to popularize and democratize the study of Black history for broader audiences. Negro History Week, the precursor to Black History Month, established in 1926, was a weeklong celebration held in mid-February of each year and included plays, pageants, banquets, and lectures dedicated to the promotion of black history and heroes. As with the *Negro History Bulletin*, it was “schoolteachers, mainly black women” who formed the backbone of Negro History Week celebrations in cities throughout the country, as they “raised funds in their communities and had their students compose essays on famous black and events in black history.”⁵⁵ Largely because of schoolteacher support and buy-in, Negro History Week expanded into a nationwide movement celebrate in cities throughout the country.

By the mid-1930s, Negro History Week celebrations began to receive the significant support and attention of Chicago’s Black community. Teachers and administrators at schools such as Wendell Phillips, Doolittle, McCosh, Dunbar, Coleman, and Copernicus each planned and executed lessons and activities. Many of these schools had Negro History clubs, like the one organized in 1937 by teacher Florida Sanford at Douglas, which helped coordinate efforts and plan the program of events for the week. Another active club was that of Wendell Phillips High School, which was headed by Maudelle Bousfield, the city’s first African American principal. Through the efforts of teachers, students, parents, and community members, Chicago’s Black community proclaimed that, as the Defender stated, “Self-knowledge is the most important factor for racial growth, for it is the back-drop upon which races focus their current history.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement*, 50-51.

⁵⁶ Mavis Mixon, “The Development of the Study of Negro History in Chicago,” *The Chicago Defender*, February 7, 1942, 15.

However, as crucial and successful as the *Bulletin* and Negro History Week were, the ultimate goal for Woodson and the ASNLH was still not within reach.

For all its popularity among the black community and among faculty and staff at many predominately black schools, the impact of Negro History Week was limited in several regards. First, although starting in 1935 superintendents sent memos to principals “urging the celebration of Negro History Week” each year, there is little evidence that the celebration received any institutional support in terms of funds or resources to help carry out Negro History Week plans.⁵⁷ The celebration was not a mandatory component of the school curricula, and administrators and teachers were left to their discretion to choose how, and whether, to take part. Also, because the celebration was only a week long, it was too brief to effectively counter the overwhelmingly racist textbooks and lessons students were exposed to consistently throughout the remainder of the year. Woodson and his colleagues recognized as much. Negro History Week was a pragmatic move on the part of Woodson and the ASNLH, as a “stepping-stone toward the gradual introduction of black history into the curricula of education institutions...throughout American communities, black and white.”⁵⁸ When Madeline Morgan succeeded in making Black history an official part of Chicago’s curriculum, on a year-round basis and for both black and white schools, she would be working to fulfill this ambition, and would have the personal support of Woodson and several other ASNLH members.

As central as ASNLH was, it was not the only organization through which Morgan and other black teachers promoted their own ideas about black history and culture. Morgan was also

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement*, 49.

deeply involved in Phi Delta Kappa, a national sorority of educators who shared a common interest in promoting sisterhood amongst teachers and leading active campaigns on issues of child welfare. The Mu Chapter was first established in Chicago in 1931 by regional director Mamie Brown of Charleston West Virginia, and Rebecca Young, a transplant from Baltimore and who served as head of the new Chicago chapter in its first year. Membership quickly grew among Chicago's Black female teachers, as the Mu Chapter served as both a social club where Black female educators could gather to support one another, and an academic organization priding itself on promoting education in the greater community. Inducted into the Mu Chapter of the sorority in January 9, 1937, by 1941 Morgan was elected to position of Basileus, the leader of the Chicago region.

Throughout the 1930s the Mu Chapter would support black education in Chicago in numerous ways, hosting talks on educational issues and frequently publishing articles in the Chicago Defender dealing with new findings or campaigns. They supported talented Black students like Marjorie Robinson, a valedictorian of Morgan's alma mater of Englewood High School, who with their financial support became "a brilliant student at the University of Chicago."⁵⁹ The same year, the sorority also raised enough funds to provide "a two week trip to Lincoln Center Camp near Milton Junction, Wisconsin, for little Lizzette Rhone during the summer," an experience that few black families in Chicago could afford on their own, and one that the seventh-grade Rhone was ecstatic to receive.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ "Phi Delta Kappa Sorors Plan Educational Confab," *The Chicago Defender*, October 17, 1936.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

In addition to fundraising and scholarships, the organization also served to create as a network of support for other educators. One of these, honored by the Mu Chapter at a dinner in the late 1930s, was Maudelle Bousfield, Chicago's first black principal, who subsequently became a close friend of Morgan's. A professional and personal mentor, Bousfield would serve on the advisory committee for the *Supplementary Units* only a few short years later, reviewing the finalized pieces before they were released throughout the school system, and speaking in support of the new project at public events. As Morgan recollected in a speech at St. Edmund's Episcopal Church decades later, "In 1941 Mrs. Bousfield was the most articulate sponsor, supporter, and consultant of a program, little known but now universally accepted- Negro History. Mrs. Bousfield was my constant guide and counselor in the crucial years of 1941 and 1942."⁶¹ Both women agreed on the potential of black history to, and that it should serve primarily to "give the Negro child an appreciation of his own worth and dignity as well as the worth and dignity of others."⁶² Phi Delta Kappa thus forged connections which would be critical to the success of Morgan's later efforts.

Not surprisingly, the Mu Chapter also supported the study of Black History, often partnering with other community organizations in order to do so. For instance, during its 1938 celebration of the national sorority's "Better Health, Better Character" week, the Mu Chapter "presented a check to the George Cleveland Hall Library, to purchase two books pertaining to

⁶¹ Madeline Stratton, "Public Addresses, [Maudelle Brown Bousfield] (St. Edmund's Episcopal), 1967," Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 4, Folder 14], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 3.

⁶² Ibid.

Negro History.”⁶³ The Hall Library, established in 1932, was the intellectual center of Chicago’s Black community. Its head librarian Vivian A Harsh, along with children’s librarian Charlemae Rollins, oversaw adult and child centered programs which included “storytelling sessions, book and drama clubs, Negro history clubs, and black history and art exhibits, plus a series of lectures and book reviews that underscored black contributions to literature and the arts.”⁶⁴ As *The Chicago Defender* stated, “In speaking of Negro history in Chicago one must acknowledge the debt Chicago owes to the George Cleveland Hall public library and to Ms. Vivian Harsh...Harsh has built up a library of books on the history of the Negro that is unparalleled in the Midwest.”⁶⁵ Morgan’s involvement with the Hall Branch would play an important role in her subsequent efforts to construct black history curricula, as she used the library and its vast Negro history collection as her primary research site for the writing of the Supplementary Units.

The Mu Chapter also brought Morgan into contact with another important figure in black history education in Chicago, Samuel B. Stratton. Speaking at a Phi Delta Kappa sponsored event at Good Shepard Church in 1940, echoed the words of Woodson and others by reminding his audience of parents and teachers that “the acts of Negro heroes and heroines are built into the fabric of our own nation.”⁶⁶ This focus on the central place of black people in the American story was not new for Stratton, a history teacher at DuSable High School and leader of the DuSable History Club, which met regularly at the Hall Branch Library to engage with speakers and

⁶³ “Sorors Plan for Character Week,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 4, 1938.

⁶⁴ Anne M. Knupfer., *The Chicago Black Renaissance and Women’s Activism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 61.

⁶⁵ Mixon, “The Development of the Study of Negro History,” 15.

⁶⁶ “Study Negro History’ Says Stratton to Group,” *The Chicago Defender*, December 28, 1940.

discuss newly published historical works. A career educator who began his career at age 16 in a one-room, ungraded schoolhouse in the Gee Chee region of South Carolina in 1913, Stratton had returned to education after his service in World War I allowed him to take advantage of the Rehabilitation Act to pursue a degree at University of Chicago. Remembered by students as “one of that little band of educators who managed to instill racial pride, dignity, and respect in to many, many generations of young people by making Negro history an unofficial part of the curricula” Stratton’s ideas meshed well with Morgan’s own. A match for Morgan in the intensity of his civic activism which included N.A.A.C.P, Urban League, and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, the two became professional allies, and eventually romantic partners, marrying in 1946. Between individuals like Woodson, Stratton, Bousfield, and Harsh, and organizations like the ASNLH, and Phi Delta Kappa, Morgan had amassed a considerable wealth of resources and personalities to draw from during the 1930s. Now all that stood missing was an opportunity to put these resources to work.

The American Negro Exposition

By 1940, Morgan was a veteran teacher, a pedagogical progressive who believed that education generally and the social studies in particular could work to fundamentally transform society. She was also actively involved in community organizations that promoted the study of black history as a vehicle for empowerment and the improvement of relations between the races. Still these separate ideas and experiences had not yet coalesced into a definite plan of action. The inciting incident for this shift would come from a singular event held in Chicago which aimed to showcase the best possibilities of the progressive spirit, the promise of education, and racial pride and uplift: the 1940 American Negro Exposition, also known as the Negro World’s Fair.

During the interwar period, especially during the economic depression of the 1930s, city halls and statehouses across the U.S., often with federal assistance, had revived the Victorian era idea of world's fairs as a means of providing inspiration and rebuilding the confidence of American citizens in the democratic institutions that many saw as crumbling around them. From Cleveland to New York, Chicago to San Francisco, Dallas to San Diego, the fairs and "century of progress" expositions articulated a positive vision of the future filled with prosperity brought about by new technological advances. They also buttressed Americans' lagging sense of patriotism by acting as pieces of public history, constructing inspiring narratives about the nation's past character and accomplishments. The fairs often commemorated traditional national heroes like Lincoln or Washington, or celebrated the local history of the cities which hosted them, rousing visitors to look backwards even as they imagined the future. Thus, the fairs were "sunk deeply in an ideological cement that stressed America's historical progress towards becoming a promised land of abundance."⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this act of public myth-making, which shared many of the educative and social goals of the histories that populated school textbooks and history curricula of the period, made the experiences of Black Americans invisible in similar ways.

While the world's fairs painted an affirmative vision of America's past, it was one from which Black were scoured almost completely. The 1933 Chicago Century of Progress exposition is a prime example of this pattern of exclusion. Although Chicago's Black leaders, most vocal among them Claude Barnett, the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, congressman Oscar DePriest, and the Chicago chapter of the NAACP, campaigned for an inclusive fair that represented the

⁶⁷ Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 9.

contributions of all ethnicities to the city, these calls feel mostly on deaf ears. A few exhibits depicting Black life, such as the reconstructed cabin of Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, a Black man who had been the city's first non-native inhabitant in 1779, found their way into the exposition. Yet these small victories were outweighed by the overwhelming number of exhibits that hewed to traditional racist caricature to depict Black Americans and their African forebears. For example, at the "Darkest Africa" concession, patrons could pay fifty cents to watch Black dancers writhe rhythmically in mock African garb, and marvel at Captain Callahan, a white man who had supposedly been castrated at the hands of African savages in the Congo. Adding even more insult to these offensive exhibits was the treatment of Black patrons who came to the fair, who were often denied service at the fair's restaurants and concessions, and even refused wheelchair service from white attendants. The world of tomorrow offered by the 1933-34 fair, then, was built on a firm edifice of racial caste and a collective memory that cast Black as either savages or slaves. However, only seven years later Madeline Morgan and her colleagues would enter a much different exposition, one that would inspire her to action.

The impetus for the 1940 American Negro Exposition came originally from James Washington, a Black businessman and real estate developer, who was the first to campaign for a celebration in Chicago to mark the 75th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Working with local Black leaders and the small but vocal group of Black legislators in the Illinois general assembly, Washington succeeded in gaining support from the state in the form of a \$75,000 grant. Even with these funds, however, the exposition was on uneven ground financially until an unexpected turn brought federal support in the form of Department of Agriculture secretary Henry Wallace who, seeing the event as a way to bolster Black loyalty and patriotism at a time

of instability at home and the threat of war quickly developing abroad, “committed all branches of agriculture to exhibit in Chicago at a cost of \$40,000; suggested contacts in other departments and agencies; including labor, commerce, and social security, and the alphabet agencies of the New Deal; and laid the groundwork for a matching federal grant of \$75,000 to exposition organizers.”⁶⁸ Suddenly, with the backing of the federal and state government amplifying the ambitions of local Black organizers, the exposition became a national platform. Black artists, educators, and intellectuals used this stage to broadcast their own narrative of the nation’s past and present, one that flew in the face if the Century of Progress exhibition seven years prior.

The American Negro Exhibition opened at 1:30 p.m. on July 4, 1940 at the Chicago Coliseum, with the opening bell rung by President Roosevelt himself from his Hyde Park home in New York and transmitted electronically via telegram. The federal government maintained exhibitions from the Department of Labor (whose robotic Mechanical Man gave a recorded speech on the future of skilled workers), the Federal Works Agency, Department of Agriculture, Civilian Conservation Corps, and National Youth Administration, and Department of Health. These federal exhibits were meant to remind onlookers, as the Federal Works Agency stated, of the “contribution of the Federal government to the social and economic progress of the American Negro.”⁶⁹ It was a message specially crafted for an audience still climbing out from under the unequal effects of the depression.

In addition to the federal exhibits, Black businesses, colleges and universities, Greek societies, civic and self-help groups both national and local all made contributions to the

⁶⁸ Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 22.

⁶⁹ American Negro Exposition, *American Negro Exposition, 1863 1940: Chicago Coliseum-July 4 to Sept. 2: Official Program and Guide Book* (1940). <https://archive.org/details/americanegroexp00amer>, 20.

exposition. A sports exhibit showed a documentary film on “Negro Achievements” and lauded the accomplishments of Joe Louis, Henry Armstrong, and Jesse Owens. The literary exhibit featured a small library of books for and about Black Americans, and guests might even be lucky enough to have a book signed by luminaries like Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, who both participated in signings and book talks. At the journalism display, guests could see the mastheads of over 230 Black newspapers from around the country. In the education exhibition, onlookers learned about the background of the Tuskegee Institute, Fisk, Howard, and Hampton. Even foreign countries like Liberia sent displays to showcase their economic and political systems. In total, some 120 individual exhibits were included in the exposition, a remarkable accomplishment reflecting the dedication of Black communities across the country to realizing the ambitions of the exposition’s planners.

Beyond the more informational exhibits, there was also room for art and entertainment. The exposition’s South Hall included the arts collection which, with over 300 items on display, including works by Henry O. Tanner, Malvin Gray Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, Palmer Hayden, and Horace Pippin among others, was one of the most comprehensive and impressive showings of black art ever constructed. If the South Hall was one for contemplation, the North Hall was all action, home to the exposition’s 4,000 seat theatre which showed films during the day, and at night was given over to dance and drama with productions of the Chimes of Normandy and the Cavalcade of the Negro, a musical march through the history of Blacks in America composed by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes.

The overall effect of the exhibits, films, performance, and artworks on the thousands of observers who made their way to Chicago between July 4 and September 2 of 1940 is

unimaginable. The Black press heralded it as singular moment in the history of the race. As one observer noted, the twenty-five cent admission was a quite a steal since for the price, “a Negro couldn’t purchase as much pride and glory in himself...anywhere in the world.”⁷⁰ Part of this pride and glory came specifically from the opportunity to recast American history in light of the contributions of Black Americans, a point which was central to the design and execution of the exposition. Wherever Black looked in the exposition they saw their histories reflected in photo, mural, film, and other media.

The moment exposition attendees stepped foot onto the exposition’s 171x305-foot main floor, they were met with the central Court of Honor. In the middle of this display stood a fifteen-foot replica of the statue of Abraham Lincoln found in the Illinois Statehouse in Springfield. Surrounding the sculpture were 33 dioramas, each “three feet high, four feet wide, and almost two feet deep,” showcasing scenes from Black history.⁷¹ The themes presented often aligned with the alternative black curriculum Woodson and others were pioneering during this period. These included depictions of Black military valor (Crispus Attucks, the 100th Calvary at San Juan Hill, Black soldiers decorated for valor during WWI), and the reclamation and promotion of African civilization (reproductions of the Temple of Kharnak and the Sphinx, Ethiopians using the first wheel-based irrigation systems). As the director of the exhibit Erick Lindgren stated, the purpose of these displays was to give an impression of “the Negro’s large

⁷⁰ “Dustin’ Off the News,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1940, 2.

⁷¹ “Lincoln Tomb Replica to be Fair Feature: Dioramas, Murals, and Photos to Portray History of Race,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1940.

and valuable contributions to the progress of America and the world.”⁷² These exhibits were far different from the dark and primitive Africa on display at the 1933 World’s Fair.

Above the dioramas, occupying space on the balcony floor and overlooking the main exhibits, were murals of William Edouard Scott, an internationally acclaimed painter who trained at the Art Institute of Chicago as well as the Julian Academy in Paris. The murals, much like the diorama pieces, represented themes of Black progress. They included depictions of Black political participation (Frederick Douglas debating the question of slavery, the first seven Black congressmen elected during reconstruction), the struggle for educational and intellectual attainment (a scene of a black family attempting to educate themselves by candlelight before being interrupted by the Klan), and Black military valor (a series of 4 murals depicting black service in WWI, Ben Davis graduating West Point, Shaw’s Black Regiment, and York, who travelled with the Louis and Clark Expedition). Through its dioramas, displays, murals, paintings, and exhibits, the Negro Exposition created a compelling vision of the history and potential progress of the race. Many of the 250,000 attendees who passed through the exposition hall between July and September of 1940 left with a desire to extend on this vision, including Madeline Morgan.

Morgan visited the Negro Exposition repeatedly during its 60-day run in the summer of 1940. She found herself enthralled by the expositions depicting the history of Blacks in America. As she later wrote, “When the Negro Exposition met in Chicago in 1940, I was greatly interested and impressed by the contributions that had been made by Negroes in science, health, art, and

⁷² American Negro Exposition, *American Negro Exposition*, 9.

literature to American life.”⁷³ Yet the wealth of information available within the walls of the exposition also called into stark relief the absence of such materials in classrooms throughout the city of Chicago, where they might do the most to inspire Black students and families. Morgan stated that she “began to dream and hope for the time when Negro boys and girls would be given an opportunity to read about the achievements of our leaders.”⁷⁴ Soon, Morgan decided to act on these dreams and hopes, utilizing the resources she had at her disposal from both the world of education and Black activism.

Morgan knew that any effort to integrate Black history into the Chicago Public Schools curriculum would need to be well organized and approached carefully. She was aware that prior appeals by the Black community had fallen on deaf ears: “From time to time various pressure groups have expressed a desire to blend Negro Achievements into the school curriculum but met with no success. However, after attending the National Negro Exposition, I began to think about the possibilities of such a venture.”⁷⁵ Although Morgan initially considered making a personal appeal to the Board of Education, she quickly decided that she would stand a better chance if she worked to garner the interest and support of other likeminded educators and experts. To accomplish this goal she called on the same networks of Black activism she had relied on throughout her career.

As Basileus of the Chicago chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, Morgan was already in possession of a potential platform to share her ideas. She called a meeting of her sorority sisters

⁷³ Madeline Morgan, “Chicago School Curriculum Includes Negro Achievements,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 1 (1944), 120.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “Untitled (Cooperation on Social Studies Curriculum),” n.d. Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 3, Folder 8], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 6.

in order to put the topic up for discussion amongst her peers. Another meeting soon followed, and this time the sorority was invested enough to invite an outside speaker. As Morgan noted, “A renowned Negro historian, Dr. Carter G. Woodson who received his doctorate in philosophy from Harvard University, was visiting Chicago, and we invited him to our second meeting to discuss the various angles of the problem with us.”⁷⁶ The presence of Woodson at this meeting is highly important. The noted author and academic, founder of the ASNLH (of which Morgan was also a member), and force behind Negro History Week would have been an invaluable source of information for Morgan and her colleagues, and most likely had a role in convincing them to move forward with their plans. After the second meeting, a committee was formed to begin to look for reference materials and gather findings.

A few months later a third meeting was held, at which point the women felt confident enough to compose a letter to the Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, Dr. William H. Johnson. The letter began by asserting their desire to see Black history take on an expanded role in Chicago’s school curricula: “A group of teachers in colored districts wish to secure your approval for an experimental project in the study of Negro History in the Chicago Public Schools.”⁷⁷ The purpose of this project would be, in Morgan’s words, to “acquaint the young citizen with information concerning Negro life...develop greater race consciousness and pride” and “make the young citizen intelligent concerning his own background.”⁷⁸ Morgan’s arguments here fell back on the logic of education for democracy she had learned at Northwestern and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “William M. Johnson (Supt. of Chicago Board of Education), 1941-1945,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 6, Folder 17], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 1.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Chicago Normal College. In much the same way that she had justified the Emerson Bank Project three years earlier, Morgan framed this new project in terms of the need to cultivate students who could actively contribute to a democratic society. She referenced the migration of Blacks to the city, reminding Johnson of the “continued influx of underprivileged people to our city” and warned that without proper education these young people would become “a menace rather than an asset to the well-being of Chicago’s community life.”⁷⁹ In order to make sure this did not occur, Morgan’s plan would give students positive models to aspire to, and ultimately, “heighten the standards of culture among our young Negro citizens.”⁸⁰ Using the various aspects of her background then, Morgan deployed the language and logic of citizenship and democracy in a way which supported her call for racial pride and historical consciousness.

Morgan ended the letter by assuring Dr. Johnson that she and her sorority stood ready to take up the challenge. Confident in her own networks and resources, she stated, “Many of the teachers who favor such a plan are members of the Mu Chapter of the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa...If you are favorably inclined toward such a proposal we will gladly plan complete units and offer a bibliography accessible to children and teachers.”⁸¹ With the letter sent, Morgan and her colleagues had directly asked for an expanded place for Black history within Chicago’s Public Schools. The answer they received would be based on events and interests not just within the schools, but the city, and the nation as a whole.

⁷⁹ Madeline Morgan, “Madeline Morgan to Dr. William H Johnson, February 6, 1941,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 6, Folder 17], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

“SELF-PRESERVATION EXACTS A ONENESS IN MOTIVE AND IN DEED”:

INTEREST CONVERGENCE, WARTIME TOLERANCE,

AND THE SUPPLEMENTARY UNITS

Introduction

On February 6, 1941, when Madeline Morgan signed and sealed her letter to William H. Johnson, the Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, she could not have known what sort of response to expect. Chicago’s existing history curricula, and the prior failed attempts at protest that Morgan referred to in her notes, would have certainly suggested a less than warm reception awaited her. Surprisingly, however, soon after Morgan’s initial letter, she was called for an in-person meeting with Dr. Johnson. This interview, in which Morgan presented her plan of action, took place at 4:30 pm, on March 21, 1941. It must have gone exceedingly well, because the next day at 3:00 pm another meeting was scheduled, this time involving not only Superintendent Johnson but also Elinor C. McCollom, the principal of Emerson Elementary, and Mary G. Lusson, the Director of the Curriculum for the school district. At this second gathering, several crucial decisions were made.¹

The first was that a committee should be formed to oversee the new curriculum project. This body eventually included McCollom as chairman, along with two other principals, Lois C Morstrom of Ross Elementary, and Ruth Jackson of Coleman Elementary, who was the only

¹ Madeline Morgan, “Supplementary Units, Calendar of Events, 1941” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 1], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

black principal in Chicago at the elementary level. A second major resolution was that Madeline Morgan would be granted an extended leave from her regular classroom work in order to fully focus on the new project and given license to choose an assistant to aide her. As she put it, “I was subsequently released from my teaching duties to go to work on this project, with my chosen assistant Mrs. Bessie King.”² Mrs. King, another teacher at Emerson Elementary, was also an active member of Phi Delta Kappa, and Morgan’s selection of her sorority sister for this undertaking showed the extent to which she continued to lean on the networks of support within the black community. As she explained in an internal letter to her sorority sisters, when given the opportunity to choose her assistant there was simply no choice: “Of course I chose a soror, Bessie S. King.”³ By March 31, 1941, Morgan and King were ready to begin the work that would dominate the next year of their careers, emerging with the *Supplementary Units for the Course of Instruction in the Social Studies* by the summer of 1942.

Before analyzing the Supplementary Units themselves, it is important to untangle why Morgan’s unlikely request, which might have just as easily been ignored by Johnson, instead elicited his acceptance and strong support along with the resources of his administration. The most straightforward answer would seem to be that Johnson and others within Chicago Public Schools were an especially enlightened and progressive force, dedicated to a vision of racial equality that aligned with Morgan’s own goals of equal representation for black history. Yet, although part of the argument of this chapter is very much concerned with Johnson, particularly

² Madeline Morgan, “Chicago Schools Teach Negro History,” *The Elementary English Review* 21, no. 3 (March 1944): 105.

³ Madeline Morgan, “Letter From Morgan to Sorority Members, May 19, 1942,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 9, Folder 46], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

his deeply involved and technocratic leadership of the Chicago school system, and his often-innovative approaches to curriculum development, there is little evidence to support the contention that either Johnson himself or his administration were particularly liberal when it came to issues of race and representation. As a letter from one of Morgan's Phi Delta Kappa sorority sisters objecting to a dinner honoring the superintendent indicated, Johnson's tenure on the whole was not marked by radical shifts in policy with regard to black education:

“Just imagine... half day school for our Negro children not as much as we get in Miss [issippi]. It is about as hard for a Negro to get into Normal as it is for him to go to heaven. We get all of the trash on the South Side as principals and the worse [sic] white teachers because they know they are only teaching little niger [sic] children and can loaf half the day and you know that Dr. Johnson approves of these things.”⁴

Given the slim evidence of Johnson as a consistently progressive force for black educational equity, there are other more compelling explanations for his support of Morgan and her goals.

Instead of seeking to explain Johnson's enthusiasm for Morgan's plan as an outcome of particularly elevated racial thinking, I suggest that Johnson's decision was an example of *interest convergence*, a principle first outlined and applied to racial discourse by Derrick Bell and other Critical Race Theorists in the 1980s. According to Bell, the enactment of racially progressive policies throughout our nation's history has most often been caused by contexts that drive whites in powerful positions to feel their own interests are best served by such policies. According to Bell, it is this “perceived self-interest by whites rather than injustices suffered by blacks” that “has been the major motivation in racial-remediation policies.”⁵ As whites in power seek out their own self-interest, the fulfillment of black calls for justice is at times an incidental and

⁴ “Anonymous (Criticizing dinner for Supt. Johnson), 1942,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 6, Folder 1], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁵ Bell, *Silent Covenants*, 59.

secondary outcome that occurs only if black and white interests converge on the same policy or point. Of course, the presence of multiple interests does not negate the role played by black activists and progressive organizations, whose actions can and do influence racial policy. The interest convergence perspective does however suggest that the remediation of racial injuries or injustices is rarely the sole driving force behind major changes in policy. Bell has shown the pattern of interest convergence at work at several key historical moments including the Emancipation Proclamation, the new amendments added to the nation's Constitution during the Civil War, and the abolition of slavery in the northern states. Perhaps the most famous example, however, is his use of interest convergence to complicate the narrative surrounding the Brown v Board decision, reframing it as an act of anti-communist Cold War policymaking instead of a watershed of racial progress.

In the context of the Supplementary Units, deploying an interest convergence lens allows us to see several reasons for Dr. Johnson's support of Morgan and her work beyond any personal dedication he might have possessed towards racial equality. Johnson's decision mirrored campaigns on the national level to build racial tolerance and understanding during the late 1930s and early 1940s. With the shadow of war abroad came concomitant calls for schools to foster a sense of patriotism and unity on the home-front. These factors provide the most persuasive explanation of why Morgan was given a platform to develop her ideas, and eventually to see them implemented throughout CPS.

Wartime Tolerance

At 4:45 a.m. on the morning of September 1, 1939, German forces invaded Poland, fulfilling the worst fears of the Allied European powers and plunging the continent into the

Second World War. Although the U.S. remained, at least officially, a neutral party, America was faced with the possibility of large-scale armed conflict abroad for a second time. It was a prospect that divided Americans of all backgrounds deeply, and the black community was no different. Some blacks supported the U.S. involvement out of patriotic commitment. Yet, others questioned what blacks stood to gain by participating in the war effort. As they saw it, the U.S. was once again asking the blacks “to sacrifice and die for democracy abroad” while Jim Crow, segregation, and discrimination in employment, education, and housing meant they “continued to be denied democracy at home.”⁶ These feelings intensified after the passage of the Selective Service Act of 1940, which instituted a draft but failed to meet the hopes of black Americans for an integrated military.

The thought that black men would be conscripted to fight again in an army that remained staunchly segregated provoked “disbelief and anger across black America.”⁷ Blacks knew that segregated units meant that they would see little action on the battlefield and instead be relegated to menial positions as laborers, cooks, and stewards. Beyond the controversies over military service, blacks and other minorities also faced labor discrimination on the home front, which barred them from taking advantage of the economic surge created by the growing defense industry. These tensions over labor and the treatment of black soldiers led to violence and riots in several major cities throughout the war years, including Detroit, Newark, and Harlem. It became increasingly clear that if left unchecked, these conflicts could endanger black support for the war altogether.

⁶ Rawn James Jr., *The Double V: How Wars, Protest, and Harry Truman Desegregated America's Military* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 85.

⁷ Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 23.

As minority groups demanded America live up to its own democratic values before professing to defend them elsewhere, U.S. politicians and policymakers responded by looking for ways to promote national unity while patching over the racial and ethnic divides that threatened the war effort. In his fireside chats with the nation, regular radio broadcasts that drew millions of listeners, President Roosevelt repeatedly took up the theme of tolerance and unity, declaring that the war demanded, “national unity that can know no limitations of race or creed or selfish politics.”⁸ Roosevelt did not just call for unity, however, he reframed the war itself as a struggle to save “freedom and tolerance and respect for human rights,” which characterized the U.S. and its allies, from the threat of “destruction” and “slavery” presented by the fascist states.

Similarly, the Office of War Information, or OWI, established in 1942, took up a strategy of promoting the war as a battle “for democracy and tolerance” and “against fascism and intolerance,” and communicated this message through posters, film strips, comics, and newspapers.⁹ The result of these efforts was the articulation of a new rhetoric of Americanism in which racial, ethnic, and religious differences were to be subsumed under the banner of democratic pluralism. This doctrine was meant both to assure minority groups that their communities were valued and to convince the majority of Americans that acceptance of racial and ethnic “others” was and had always been a hallmark of the strength of American society. As one OWI official remarked, “By making this a people's war for freedom, we can help clear up

⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “February 23, 1942, Fireside Chat 20: On the Progress of the War” *Miller Center, University of Virginia*, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/february-23-1942-fireside-chat-20-progress-war>.

⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “October 12, 1942, Fireside Chat 23: On the Home Front,” *Miller Center, University of Virginia*, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/october-12-1942-fireside-chat-23-home-front>.

the alien problem, the Negro problem, the anti-Semitic problem.”¹⁰ This message was spread through the press, civic organizations, and religious groups, but it was the schoolhouse, more than any other American institution, that had the reach and the capability to disseminate the new gospel of tolerance and unity.

The nation’s schools were a powerful tool for developing tolerant and accepting attitudes in young citizens and, by extension, their families and communities. U.S. Commissioner of Education J.W. Studebaker proclaimed that “teaching tolerance” was “a major problem” that U.S. schools needed to address as part of the war effort, and praised districts that instituted “school assemblies and instruction in general leading to racial and religious tolerance and understanding.”¹¹ He urged “members of school boards, school officials, and teachers of the United States” to “give immediate attention to the problem of adapting school curricula and schedules to ensure meaningful and adequate treatment of the ideas, aims, and spirit of democracy.”¹² This new wartime mission for American schools inspired teachers and administrators to create and implement programs and lessons on the values of tolerance and unity in classrooms throughout the country, spurred on by coverage in teachers’ journals and newspapers and the support of anti-prejudice organizations.

Tolerance education as it emerged in the 1930s and 1940s drew from several sources. Social scientists dating back to the 1920s had challenged the theories of inherent or biological difference between races that lent bigotry the veneer of scientific authority. Franz Boas, the

¹⁰ Richard Polenberg, *One Nation, Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938*, (New York: Penguin, 1980), 54.

¹¹ J.W. Studebaker, “Teaching Tolerance a Major Problem in 1939,” *The Clearing House* 13, no. 5 (1939): 266.

¹² *Ibid.* 304.

initial creator of the field of American cultural anthropology, used science to argue that differences usually ascribed to race had nothing to do with innate or hereditary racial characteristics, and instead were the result of cultural factors. This central idea was expressed by Boas both within and outside of the academy as through his production of speeches, scientific studies, books, and newspaper and journal articles.

In addition, Boas' work was carried on and popularized by his students Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, each of whom also contributed heavily to developing modern understandings of race. For instance, Benedict's educational pamphlet *The Races of Mankind* argued that all humans shared a common ancestry and point of origin, that notions of racial superiority or inferiority had no basis in fact, and that there were "no immutable laws of nature that make racial intermixture harmful."¹³ Building on Benedict, Boas, and Mead, several organizations including the Council on Intolerance, the Council on Intercultural Relations, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews emerged during the 1930s and 1940s worked to spread this new understanding of racial equality, and as World War II loomed these groups saw their arguments met with even broader acceptance within broader society and in schools.

While Boas, Mead, and Benedict provided the intellectual underpinnings of tolerance education by outlining a new understanding of race and difference, the movement that most directly shaped how tolerance education looked in primary and secondary schools was the "cultural gifts" model developed by educator and social activist Rachel Davis Dubois. Dubois, who founded the Service Bureau for Education in Human Relations in 1934 (later the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education), originally developed her program in anti-prejudice

¹³ Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish, *The Races of Mankind* (New York: Public Affairs Committee Inc., 1946), 14.

education during the 1920s as a response to the nativism and xenophobia she had seen directed against minorities, especially white ethnic immigrants, as a teacher in Woodbury, New Jersey. A fervent pacifist, she believed that the key to peace both nationally and internationally was the appreciation of difference. This appreciation could be accomplished by the “spread of accurate knowledge concerning the ideals, traditions, and experience of other peoples,” which would lead to greater empathy and understanding between cultural groups.¹⁴ For Dubois, learning about the “gifts” or “contributions” that racial and religious minorities and immigrants had made to the nation’s history would lead to increased tolerance between groups.

Dubois rested her pedagogical approach on a mix of what she referred to as intellectual, emotional, and situational strategies meant to confront and change student conceptions about difference. The process usually began with an assembly at which students were presented with speakers from a different race or cultural group, meant to gain student interest and emotional investment. As Dubois stated, “We found that when a young Japanese woman demonstrates the beautiful Japanese flower arrangement, or an outstanding Negro author reads selections from the Negro poets, the students have a reaction that they cannot gain by merely reading or by other more or less purely intellectual experiences.”¹⁵ Once the initial assembly came to an end, the next few weeks were spent in more intellectual pursuits involving classroom research projects, discussions, and lessons designed to build student knowledge. Finally, at the end of the process, which usually totaled about a month, the students themselves took to the stage in a second assembly where they showcased their learning.

¹⁴ Rachel Davis-Dubois, “Developing Sympathetic Attitudes Toward Peoples,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 9, no. 7 (1936): 389.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 392.

This second assembly was critically important for Dubois, because she believed the opportunity to perform skits, songs, dances, and readings from another culture helped students see their world from different points of view. As she observed at one such performance, “The students who played the roles of Italian immigrants, telling of why they came to America, actually lived, for a brief while, the lives of those immigrants.”¹⁶ After the successful completion of this brief episode in “vicarious living” as Dubois termed it, students met to debrief the experience, often with members of the cultural group that had previously studied, thus gaining “an opportunity to put into practice their new attitudes.”¹⁷ By meeting members of other communities, whether sharing a basketball game with a team of Chinese children or having tea with a young rabbi, Dubois reasoned students could see for themselves that although different in many ways, their cultures shared more in common than not with people they once thought strange.

Dubois’ cultural gifts approach gained traction throughout the 1930s, especially in New York, where she established her Bureau for Education in Human Relations. With the rising threat of war in Europe, many teachers and administrators looked to modify the cultural gifts approach by emphasizing how the contributions of different groups ultimately served the purpose of strengthening America and its principles of freedom and democracy. Thus “at the outbreak of war professional educators seized the cultural gifts movement, and with minor modifications, held it up as the most promising strategy to reduce racial tensions through public education.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Zoe Burkholder, “From ‘Wops and Dagoes and Hunkies’ to ‘Caucasian’: Changing Racial Discourse in American Classrooms during World War II,” *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2010): 335.

Direct accounts from teachers in the late 1930s and early 1940s provide plentiful examples of the many adaptations and applications of the “cultural gifts” model in the schools.

One such account came from high school English teacher Albert V. DeBonis, who wrote to the publication *The English Journal* in 1941 to describe his attempts to teach his students the “ideal of tolerance for all races, creeds, and minority groups....”¹⁹ His lessons rested primarily on having his class read various short selections arranged by objectives, including “the meaning and the practical application of the ideal of tolerance...the contributions of various groups to America...and backgrounds of these groups.”²⁰ Selections included stories by William Seabrook on the lives of Polish Americans, Ernest L. Meyer’s reflections on the German American community of Milwaukee, and Zora Neale Hurston’s pieces about southern black life. DeBonis then asked his students to write narratives, expository articles, plays, and sketches based on themes such as “The American Way,” “Why My Father Came to America,” “Good and Bad Traditions,” and “The Other Fellow” to show their learning.²¹ Through these efforts, DeBonis, like many other teachers of his era, was convinced that he was fulfilling his duty to teach tolerance and democracy.

Perhaps the most far-reaching example of the wartime adoption of tolerance education was the program “Americans All-Immigrants All.” The radio series, which spanned 26 separate 30-minute episodes airing weekly on Sunday afternoons between November 13, 1938 and May 7, 1939, was a coordinated effort between the Department of Education, CBS Radio, and

¹⁹ Albert V. DeBonis, “Tolerance and Democracy: A Program for the English Class” *The English Journal* 30, no. 2 (1941): 123.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.* 128.

DuBois's Service Bureau for Intercultural Education. The program's stated purpose was to "promote a more appreciative understanding of our growing American culture through the dramatization of the contributions made by the many groups which are a part of it."²² In order to meet this goal, series writers and producers created episodes on "The Slavs," "The Negro," "The Jews," "The French and Netherlanders," "The Irish," "The Orientals," and other ethnic groups.²³ Fearing that the lessons on individual groups might put too much emphasis on difference and thus fuel ethnocentrism, producers also included composite episodes on topics like "Winning Freedom" and "Upsurge of Democracy," which showed citizens of different backgrounds uniting and cooperating in service of overarching American ideals.²⁴ With its mix of patriotism and tolerance education, "American's All-Immigrants All" achieved success and nearly unanimously praise. By the end of its run, over 80,000 letters from listeners had been sent to Washington in response to the series. Further extending its reach was the fact that the programs were made available in recorded form, and made their way into classrooms as part of tolerance lessons in schools in cities throughout the country including Chicago.

While liberal whites like Dubois formed much of the impetus behind the tolerance education movement, many black educators also expressed support for these efforts. Black intellectual leaders such as W.E.B. Dubois, who became close friends with Rachel Davis Dubois and often corresponded with her to exchange advice and support, recognized that by connecting national defense to the ideals of racial equality they already championed, tolerance education

²² U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Education, "Americans All-Immigrants All" (Washington D.C., U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Education: 1939), 2.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

provided a tool for couching old debates in new terms. Similarly, black primary and secondary teachers found the wartime emphasis on tolerance useful as, “the war generated opportunities for black teachers to discuss the defining principles of democracy, the civil rights of all citizens, and the dangers of racial discrimination in a way that would have been impossible a few years earlier.”²⁵ Much as a the “Double V” campaign for political and social rights tied military victory abroad with a second victory over Jim Crow discrimination on the home front, tolerance education offered an opportunity to push forward educational equity for blacks under the banner of national unity and patriotism. Yet as expedient as the tolerance movement might have been for black activists and educators, their goals remained distinctly their own.

Intercultural or tolerance education and the *alternative black curriculum* shared many similar goals including the eradication of racial prejudice. Many times, materials created by Woodson, Dubois, and other pioneers of the *alternative black curriculum*, with their emphasis on black achievement in the arts, literature, and other fields, seemed right at home in tolerance education and were often applied or used as sources for tolerance lessons. However, even though these two movements often intersected, at the root they articulated different understandings of the larger purposes of anti-prejudice work. For the white academics, tolerance education was meant to “reduce prejudice, to develop interracial understandings” and especially important during the war years “to foster a shared national American culture.”²⁶ This focus on shared culture often meant that tolerance education materials purposefully avoided uncomfortable and divisive topics like segregation, Jim Crow, and housing discrimination. Instead tolerance

²⁵ Zoe, Burkholder, “‘Education for Citizenship in a Bi-Racial Civilization’ Black Teachers and the Social Construction of Race, 1929-1954,” *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 2 (2012): 345.

²⁶ James A. Banks, “African American Scholarship and the Evolution of Multicultural Education,” *Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 3 (1992): 279.

education provided a pluralism which was “safe and relatively easy for white audiences, for it required no sharing of political power.”²⁷ For black educators concerned with black political and social enfranchisement, this meant that tolerance education could only be helpful to a limited extent.

For the black educators and activists engaged in building the *alternative black curriculum*, the central focus was less on creating unity at all costs and more on “creating accurate images of African Americans, empowering African Americans, and building African American institutions.”²⁸ These goals necessitated an engagement in the very questions which tolerance education took lengths to avoid. As Harvard professor Ralph J. Bunche stated, black education sought to arm blacks with the means to “fight the terrific battles which must be waged in order that they may win economic and political justice.”²⁹ Even when black scholars created materials that resembled those used in tolerance education, they understood these efforts as laying a necessary groundwork of race pride as part of a larger struggle. For example, “despite the similarities between Negro history week and cultural gifts celebrations, Woodson’s aims differed from those of his white colleagues, for he hoped not only to reduce anti-black prejudice...but also to promote black social, political, and economic advancement.”³⁰ For black educators then, cross-cultural understanding and the reduction of prejudice were necessary but in no way sufficient to creating the kinds of change they sought.

²⁷ Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 212.

²⁸ Banks, “African American Scholarship and the Evolution of Multicultural Education,” 279.

²⁹ Ralph J. Bunche, “Education in Black and White,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 3 (1936): 358.

³⁰ Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement*, 210.

By the early 1940s, the movement for tolerance education had begun to make major inroads in American schools. Eager to “distinguish American race relations from the antagonisms in Europe,” educational leaders argued that prejudice and intolerance were anti-American concepts, and that acceptance and celebration of the contributions of all groups was a hallmark of democracy.³¹ This pluralistic vision helped set the stage for the acceptance of other more inclusive curricula like the Supplementary Units. Yet, while black educators, Madeline Morgan among them, benefited from the climate created by the movement for tolerance education, their work should not be considered a part of this movement. Black scholars maneuvered within the space created by the tolerance education movement, but did so with a firm understanding of their own goals and desires.

Tolerance Education in Chicago

In Chicago, as nationally, black support for the war effort was not a foregone conclusion. Many black Chicagoans remembered the disappointment they felt in the wake of the First World War, after which they found that their service and support of democracy had done little to ameliorate their political and economic disenfranchisement at home. Lucius C. Harper, a writer for the *Chicago Defender*, expressed the thoughts of many blacks in Chicago and around the country when he proclaimed that the growing antagonism in Europe was “not a black man’s war, this is the same old war of markets and colonies and imperial expansion. The Negro people have nothing to gain on the side of either England, France, or Germany.”³² In Harper’s estimation,

³¹ Ibid. 256.

³² Lewis C. Harper, “It’s the People Who Should Vote: War or No War,” Dustin’ off the News, *The Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1940, 2.

blacks would get “nothing back” from supporting a new war effort, “save war debt, and a few new Jim Crow laws,” results they were all too familiar with already.³³

Even as it became clear that America would enter the war and that blacks would be compelled to take part, resistance and protest continued as the black community fought to make sure that its service came with guarantees for increased equality. A young Chicago labor organizer, Ernest Calloway, joined hundreds of other young black men in refusing his draft order, stating, “I cannot accept the responsibility of taking the oath upon induction to military service under the present antidemocratic structure of the U.S. Army.”³⁴ Calloway was willing to face detainment until such time as his sacrifice for his country could “be made on a basis of complete equality.” Black Chicagoans also embraced the Double V campaign started by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which encouraged a two-front war against fascism abroad and racism at home. As Chicagoan Frieda Whibby wrote in a letter to the editor published in the *Chicago Defender*, blacks needed to win “victory in the war and victory at home,” which meant working for “equal opportunity, good homes” and “just pay.”³⁵ With black Chicago’s support for the war a tenuous matter, it is no surprise that campaigns meant to bolster patriotism, interracial cooperation, and tolerance emerged in the city streets and the city schools.

The promotion of tolerance, unity, and intercultural understanding that accompanied the Second World War found its way to Chicago in several forms. The most obvious was the support of federal and local leaders for the 1940 Negro Exposition discussed in the previous chapter. The

³³ Lewis C. Harper, “If War Comes, What are we Fighting For?” *Dustin’ off the News*, *The Chicago Defender*, July 12, 1941.

³⁴ “Youth Makes Issue of Army Race Policy,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 11, 1941.

³⁵ Frieda Whibby, “Vote for Victory,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 2, 1942.

words of policymakers who were influential in supporting the Exposition repeatedly show a strong connection between the appreciation and celebration of black contributions to American society and the need to reinforce ideas of patriotism and unity in the face of the conflict abroad.

Illinois Senator James M. Slattery, for example, framed the story of black Americans as an example of the triumph of western civilization. “The story that is told at the Exposition... is a reassurance of Christian progress that is sorely needed in these days when some of us, beholding events on other continents, are wondering if our civilization has been in vain.”³⁶ Slattery went on to explicitly link the progress of black Americans in the years since slavery to the unique blessings of American democracy, stating, “None of the American miracles of our day offers stronger proof of the essential rightness of our American system than the progress of the American Negro which is celebrated and exemplified in this Exposition.”³⁷ Slattery’s speech ended by exhorting others to follow the example of black Americans in their support for American democracy, and by extension the war effort: “In this hour we need for all Americans the intense patriotic devotion of the Negro... In the hour of peril the American Negro has never failed his country. He will not fail it now.”³⁸ Slattery’s comments clearly spoke to the multiple purposes of the Negro Exposition: for black organizers, it was a historical pageant dramatizing the best of the race’s progress, and for white officials, a means to stir patriotic feeling in both the black and white communities at a time when those energies would soon be called on.

³⁶ American Negro Exposition, *American Negro Exposition, 1863-1940: Chicago Coliseum-July 4 to Sept. 2: Official Program and Guide Book* (1940), <https://archive.org/details/americanegroexp00amer>, 20.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Similarly, Chicago mayor Edward Kelly, who spoke at the opening day ceremonies, mixed his praise of black Americans with calls for their continued loyalty to the spirit of so-called “Americanism.”³⁹ To Kelly, the exhibits of black accomplishment in the arts, literature, science, and history not only proved the capabilities of black Americans but their great faithfulness to American ideals. “You may spell Afro-American with a hyphen if you will; but there is no hyphen in the Negro’s allegiance to America.”⁴⁰ Kelly closed his speech by confidently asserting that even in the present period of national crisis, “America will find in her Negro populations no Fifth Columns of subversion and destruction but...a regiment of strength and loyalty.”⁴¹ His words directly equated black Americans as a whole to a military body, which he hoped to mobilize to the defense of American democracy.

Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture and soon to be Vice President of the United States, was tasked with preparing the closing address for the exposition. Echoing the schoolteachers throughout the country who made tolerance education part of their lesson plans, Wallace emphatically linked tolerance and the war effort, stating, “One of the most effective ways to fight fascism and Nazism in this country is to fight class, religious, and racial discrimination in the United States,” and concluding that there was “no better way to rearm democracy.”⁴² The link was not only commented on by the exposition’s proponents, but also by its critics, like the communist publication *Fighting Worker*, which derided what it saw as an

³⁹ “President Roosevelt Opens Exposition: Roosevelt Pushed Button, Opens Local Exposition,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 13, 1940, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² “Wallace Attacks ‘Scapegoat’ Idea,” *New York Times*, September 3, 1940, 7.

insincere play for black support. “The exposition was arranged and financed by the New Deal and its Negro henchmen precisely in order to make palatable the War Deal role today in world politics...The whole exposition was enveloped with propaganda for patriotism.”⁴³ Whether patriotism, propaganda, or both, the message of wartime tolerance was a significant force in drawing the support of white policymakers to the Negro Exposition. A city that only a few brief years earlier had denied blacks a meaningful role in the Century of Progress Exposition was now ready to acknowledge, at least symbolically, black contributions and calls for equality. Similarly, the Chicago Public Schools would also incorporate the language of wartime tolerance into its programs and curricula.

Seated among the city and state officials at the exposition’s opening was William Johnson, Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools. By 1940, Johnson had been Superintendent of the public schools for four years, gaining the position after the prior Superintendent, William Bogan, fell ill and ultimately died in office. Johnson, who had been one of five assistant superintendents and was assigned to oversee the high schools, was a logical if not popular choice to fill Bogan’s role. A native Chicagoan, Johnson had been educated at Beloit College in Wisconsin, then Northwestern University, where he finished his bachelor’s and completed his master’s degrees, and finally the University of Chicago where he earned his Ph.D. Beginning his career in Chicago Public Schools as teacher and head of vocational guidance at Lane Tech in 1924, he soon moved into administrative roles, first as principal of the Daniel Webster Elementary in 1925, and then as principal of newly constructed Volta Elementary in 1928, both on the city’s South Side.

⁴³ “Negro Exposition Front for New Deal War Plans,” *Fighting Worker*, October 1, 1940, p. 3. University of Michigan, Labadie Collection.

In each of these positions Johnson was noted for his efficiency, attention to detail, and meticulously hands-on style of leadership. However, some also saw the young prodigy as a careerist whose ambition overshadowed his commitment to education. For example, Bogan, who served as Johnson's principal at Lane Tech early in his career, referred to Johnson as an "opportunist without much concern for the children he taught."⁴⁴ Some of this backlash may have been due to Johnson's ambition and his relative youth, but much of it can also be attributed to Johnson's lack of interpersonal skills. He maintained a detached and somewhat cold demeanor, and while he was a talented organizer and administrator, his dedication to his own vision of constant improvement meant he could give short shrift to opinions he considered unfounded or wasteful. These aspects of his personality bought him few friends, but they helped spur his rapid ascension to the upper levels of Chicago's public school bureaucracy and positioned him well for consideration after Bogan's departure.

As superintendent, Johnson continued to showcase the intense focus on methodological and curricular improvement that had gained him notoriety at the lower levels of administration. Under Johnson's administration in the late 1930s and early 1940s, several innovative projects were nurtured. He streamlined the district's systems of record-keeping and pioneered the use of permanent academic records that followed students between grade levels and helped teachers and administrators serve their particular needs more effectively. These methods in turn became "a prototype for many educational systems" in other cities around the country.⁴⁵ At the primary level, Johnson's administration pioneered the use of manuscript writing instead of cursive for

⁴⁴ Theresa Mary White, "Coping with Administrative Pressures in the Chicago Schools' Superintendency: An Analysis of William Henry Johnson, 1936-1946" (Dissertation, Loyola University Chicago, 1988), 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 129.

students in the early grades to ease the teaching of reading and writing, moved early elementary teachers away from using percentage grades to record progress towards instead using satisfactory and unsatisfactory marks in order to take into account student effort, and required kindergarten teachers to cycle up with their student through the second grade in order to increase students' feelings of security and safety. Johnson also eagerly pursued the use of new educational technologies like radio and film. During a polio outbreak in September 1937, for example, he utilized radio to reach over 315,000 Chicago students with programming in core subjects like English and Math, matching lesson plans and activities printed in the Chicago daily newspapers, and a hotline at the board of education to answer parent concerns and questions. Johnson's drive and adaptability were also evident in his policies towards the city's high schools, where he focused on vocational education. He introduced placement counseling services to help connect older students to potential employers, and also initiated the use of speech pathologists and set up the first speech center in Chicago public schools to help students with speech related disabilities.

In order to enact these various proposals, Johnson set up several new departments within Chicago public schools. The first were forty-five demonstration centers scattered throughout the city that acted as professional development sites for teachers and administrators, where they were trained in the application of new methods and procedures. In order to create new pieces of curriculum effectively and quickly, Johnson also regularly called on groups of handpicked teachers with expertise in various subjects to work at the Bureau of Curriculum. This arrangement allowed the teachers to work with the full resources of the district, and at the same time allowed Johnson to carefully inspect and approve of their work. If Johnson's tenure was

marked by an openness to change and adaptation, nowhere was this approach more visible than in the years after 1939, as he sought to put the Chicago public schools on war footing.

Under Johnson, Chicago Public Schools adapted its curricula, teaching methods, extracurricular activities, and materials to bolster patriotism and commitment to the war effort. These new goals, broadly termed Americanism, impacted every aspect of the school system. As Johnson stated, “Like a grand old oak which has its roots deeply imbedded and spread in its native soil, Americanism diverges throughout the entire school curriculum. Emphasized in all the grades, it is an all-inclusive yet elusive field in which intangibles are developed.”⁴⁶ Among the manifestations of Americanism in Chicago’s Public Schools were victory gardens, war savings stamp and bond programs, fundraising drives, efforts to promote goodwill between American students and those in allied countries, especially in central and South America, conservation campaigns, and the promotion of ROTC and other military induction programs.

In the social studies, Americanism was defined by efforts to shore up students’ knowledge of and respect for the American way of life, comprised of lessons on American history, values, and freedoms. The goal of these efforts was to clearly communicate to students “why America’s institutions, its past history and development under American leaders, and its social heritage are worth holding onto and worth preserving.”⁴⁷ For teachers, the fight against the Axis powers was more than a clash of armed combatants, it was a war of ideals and ideologies. They sought to contrast the freedoms and liberty of American democracy with the oppressive regimes of the totalitarian states. The stakes in this battle could not have been higher. As Johnson

⁴⁶ Board of Education, City of Chicago, *The Chicago Public Schools in Wartime: Published as the Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools for the School Years 1941-1942, 1942-1943* (Chicago: Board of Education, 1943), 19.

⁴⁷Ibid. 20.

stated, “teachers are bending every effort and using every device to make clear that this is the culmination and perhaps the end of the age-old struggle to attain and secure for all time the rights of the common man; that freedom and liberty for all nations are to survive over ruthless tyranny.”⁴⁸

Among the freedoms teachers insisted separated America and its allies from their enemies was the open acceptance of different cultures and races. This message was reinforced to students in several ways, including plays, radio broadcasts, and monthly Americanism bulletins sent to each school principal that “developed the meaning of tolerance and the obligation of tolerance of race, religion, opinion, and custom, which is imposed by the Constitution of the United States.”⁴⁹ This message of wartime tolerance promoted by the Chicago Public Schools explains in large part the commitment of Johnson to the development of the Supplementary Units.

Although a record of Johnson’s initial thoughts with regard to the Supplementary Units is not available, statements he made after their completion and introduction into the curriculum support the assertion that Johnson saw the units primarily as an effort to solidify black patriotism and interracial cooperation in service of the war effort. In an article published in September 26, 1942, for example, Johnson justified the Supplementary Units by appealing to the themes of democracy, tolerance, and American exceptionalism. Using language similar to that of the proponents of tolerance education, Johnson stated that, “we know that the American Negro has made appreciable contributions to our America’s greatness... We plan to have pupils in our

⁴⁸ Ibid. 186.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 27.

public schools learn about these contributions just as they do about other groups and individuals who built this nation.”⁵⁰ For Johnson, the new material on black contributions would serve dual purposes. For white students, Johnson believed the material would foster greater understanding of their black neighbors and classmates. For black students, the units would be a source of racial pride that could be directed towards patriotic and militaristic ends. Thus, for Johnson, black students needed to learn the material the units presented because it would show them that “the Negro is serving his country today, and will be ready and willing to serve it in the future as the need arises.”⁵¹ In fact, much of Johnson’s article harps on the theme of black military participation and the “splendid record” of black soldiers and seamen in the First World War. The connection between black history and the war effort is made even more explicit in a passage from Johnson’s report to the Board of Education for the years 1941 to 1943. In it, he outlines curricular changes in social studies, and particularly the adoption of the Supplementary Units, stating,

The current struggle demands that America use all of its human and natural resources. This in turn requires that a total unity never before perpetuated in this free country be perpetuated. The social studies are teaching that there is no place for pettiness and intolerance of race, religion, or politics. Self-preservation exacts a oneness in motive and in deed. Illustrative of this point are the Supplementary Units for the Course of Study in Social Studies, published in 1942, which are devoted to the contributions of the American Negro to the cultural life of the nation.⁵²

Thus Johnson related the ideas of tolerance, patriotism, and racial co-operation in a manner consistent with Wallace, Slattery, Roosevelt, and other white policymakers. For Johnson, unlike

⁵⁰ William Johnson, “The Negro in History Books,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 26, 1942, A30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Board of Education, City of Chicago, *The Chicago Public Schools in Wartime*, 186.

Morgan, the incorporation of black history into Chicago's school curricula was not an end in itself, but a means to attain the unity of purpose required by a country at war.

Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that Morgan's unheralded success in promoting black history within Chicago Public Schools was the result of an interest convergence covenant, one in which black achievements received recognition within Chicago Public Schools' not because of a new dedication to racial equity and justice, but because stability and racial harmony were priorities for policymakers chiefly concerned with the war effort. To understand Morgan's success, it is imperative to appreciate that her work was part of a larger program of Americanism, instituted during the war years and aimed at improving intergroup and intercultural understanding. Had Morgan's proposal not come at a moment marked by "increased public tolerance for minority rights ... due in part to the wartime emphasis on American unity in the face of a common enemy,"⁵³ it would have been much more difficult for her to have gained a foothold within CPS.

A 1946 report of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, which had originally been formed by Mayor Kelly in 1943 at the height of the war as the Commission on Race Relations, makes the ties between wartime tolerance and the Supplementary Units clear. In its section on education the commission mentioned that 1945-46 had been marked by the continuation of several successful strategies meant to "increase intergroup understanding" including the use of "Americanism Bulletins," the broadcast of the "Americans All, Immigrants All" series through the Radio Council, and "the Unit in Negro History" which was "now a

⁵³ Selig, *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement*, 256.

required part of the teaching materials for social science and history in the elementary schools.”⁵⁴

The Second World War had created an unlikely opening in which Morgan’s ideas could be heard and shared. It was what she did with that opportunity that would be truly remarkable, however, as Morgan brought the voice and ideals of the *alternative black curriculum* into the mainstream of Chicago schools.

⁵⁴ Thomas H. Wright, *Human Relations in Chicago: Report of the Mayor’s Commission on Human Relations for 1946* (Chicago: Mayor’s Commission on Human Relations, 1946), 31.

CHAPTER FOUR

“PRAY THAT WE MAY DO A WORTHY PIECE OF WORK”:

THE SUPPLEMENTARY UNITS AS ALTERNATIVE BLACK CURRICULUM

Introduction

On May 14, 1942, William Johnson sent a letter to the Chicago Board of Education outlining his plans to unveil a new curriculum based on the achievements of black Americans. “About a year and a half ago I appointed a committee whose function it was to make a study of the achievements of the Negro and his contributions to American life,” Johnson stated, going on to name the committee members, with the three principals, McCollom, Jackson, and Morstrom, listed first, followed by the teachers, Morgan and King.¹ Johnson also trumpeted the involvement of the advisors King and Morgan had sought out as “outstanding authorities in the field of Negro achievement and contributions,” including Dr. Melville Herskovitz and Dr. J. Bascom of Northwestern University, Dr. Fay-Cooper Cole and Dr. Avery Craven of the University of Chicago, Dr. Charles Wesley of Howard University, Dr. Walter G. Johnson of the University of Illinois, and of course Dr. Carter G. Woodson, listed simply as a “Researcher in Negro History.”² Johnson announced that the product of these efforts, a finished curriculum, would be officially released during a small ceremony and tea on Thursday, May 28, 1942, at Emerson Elementary School, where he noted “the committee members will also be in attendance, and will

¹ William Johnson, “William M. Johnson (Supt. of Chicago Board of Education), 1941-1945,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 6, Folder 17], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

² Ibid.

be prepared to answer questions concerning their work.”³ Johnson ended his note to the board by emphasizing his conviction that the new curriculum would be an important step for Chicago’s Public Schools: “Again I hope you will be present, for I believe this will be a momentous project of great significance to the Negro of Chicago.”⁴ At almost the same time, Madeline Morgan, similarly convinced of the great potential of the *Supplementary Units*, was also busily engaged in gathering support for the new curriculum.

Five days after Johnson’s communication with the board, Morgan sent a letter of her own to the national sorors of Phi Delta Kappa. She began by reminding her sisters of the project at hand. “Perhaps you know that Dr. William Johnson, Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools is making it possible for Negro achievements to be blended into the Curriculum of the Chicago Public Schools.”⁵ While Johnson’s letter failed to mention the fact that the initial idea and the vast majority of the work had been performed by two classroom teachers, opting instead to highlight male university-trained educational experts, Morgan could frankly tell her sisters that “this project idea was presented to Dr. Johnson by me in March 1941.”⁶ Although she reasserted herself and her sorority sister Bessie King as the primary force behind the curriculum, Morgan also expressed appreciation for Johnson’s vision in accepting their proposal, especially given the fact that it was a unique and unheard of dedication of resources to black history: “Nowhere in the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Madeline Morgan, “Letter to Phi Delta Kappa Sorors, May 19, 1942,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 9, Folder 46], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁶ Ibid.

United States has such a project been authorized for city-wide study.”⁷ Because of the unique nature of the project, Morgan encouraged her sorority sisters to send letters of support directly to Johnson and McCollom, and to the Board of Education. “I hope that their offices will be flooded with telegrams and night letters of race appreciation.”⁸ Morgan ended her letter with a special request to her sorors to avoid creating any publicity until after the ceremony, and asking them to “pray that we may do a worthy piece of work on May 28.”⁹

The *Supplementary Units*, which would first see use in classrooms throughout Chicago in the fall of 1942, were indeed a praiseworthy effort. The curriculum was divided into three sections covering grades 1-3, 4-6, and 7-8, respectively. At each level, the materials were closely aligned to the normal sequence of study for primary social studies for Chicago Public Schools, but provided additional readings detailing the involvement of African Americans. Information was presented using short biographies, non-fiction entries and fictionalized stories, poetry, and in some instances songs, which were listed by their record number. Because King and Morgan were both classroom teachers with years of experience at the elementary level, they made a concerted effort to keep the complexity of the text and vocabulary appropriate to their student audiences. At the end of each selection, summary activities and questions for class discussion were provided, along with lists of suggested additional readings for both students and educators. Overall, the organization of the units was meant for ease of use in classroom instruction, where teachers were to add the information in the units to their already existing social studies plans.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The content of the *Supplementary Units* was focused and purposeful, often directly refuting the negative language and stereotypes associated with depictions of blacks in earlier history textbooks. Yet Morgan and King, like other black scholars and curriculum writers, were not simply interested in refuting negative imagery. They also created their own narratives, as “for these scholars it was not simply about identifying the myths, distortions, and omissions in African American history, but also about offering a counter-memory or new narrative about the past.”¹⁰ This counter-memory or *counternarrative* is what Alana Murray has identified as the *alternative black curriculum*, and Morgan and King’s work aligned with the principles this curricular movement in several key respects.

First, the authors frequently cited information gathered from authors and organizations which formed the vanguard of the *alternative black curriculum*. Morgan and King cite periodicals like *Crisis*, the *Negro History Bulletin*, *Journal of Negro History*, *Negro World Digest* and *Journal of Negro Education*. In addition, they reference textbooks like Woodson’s *The Negro in Our History*, Benjamin Brawley’s *Negro Builders and Heroes*, and Eppse and Foster’s *An Elementary History of America*. The choice to build their own text starting from these sources speaks to Morgan and King’s intention of to create a curriculum which foregrounded black perspectives and concerns.

Second, Morgan and King presented material which spoke to each of the major themes of the alternative black curriculum including: the importance of African civilizations, the importance of African American contributions especially slave labor to the infrastructure and political culture of the early United States, stories of resistance and rebellion to slavery,

¹⁰ Brown, “Counter-memory and Race,” 56.

discussion of race and racism and the inclusion of white allies, the defense of black labor, and the linking of African American history with a larger pan-African vision which connected African Americans to other people of color around the world. Each of these elements found expression throughout the *Supplementary Units*.

The Dark Continent

Within the *Supplementary Units*, Morgan and King confronted and countered several myths associated with black history. Among the largest of these was the myth that sub-Saharan Africa and its peoples lacked advanced societies and that their descendants in America had no heritage to speak of. As Anthony L. Brown states, early twentieth century social studies curricula based their discussions of Africa on two premises, “The first, a prominent sociological theory, was that African Americans had no connection to the cultural, religious, and social mores of Africa. The second was the justification of African Americans’ inferiority through the depiction of Africans as uncivilized natives.”¹¹ This narrative was detrimental in two ways, first by acting to legitimate and excuse the lack of information on Africa in traditional textbooks, and second by de-culturalizing and disconnecting current day black Americans from their culture and instead presenting them as a people without history. Morgan and King, like other writers active in crafting the *alternative black curriculum*, counteracted these myths by providing information on the achievements of specific African nation states and kingdoms.

In the units built for 1st-3rd grades, students are introduced to African civilizations through a section on Dahomey, a West African kingdom. Almost immediately Morgan and King began to undermine stereotypical portrayals of Africans. Throughout, they describe Africans in

¹¹ Ibid. 60.

almost entirely positive terms. “The African Negroes are very interesting people. They are brave, strong and proud. They work very hard.”¹² These statements run counter to the stereotype of Africans as lazy, weak, or childlike. Specifically, the theme of Africans as dedicated and hardworking emerges several times in the text. Students learn that African farmers “get up early to go to the fields,” that they “work together,” and that between defending his produce from rainy seasons, birds, and insects “the African Negroes have to work very hard for a living.”¹³ Equally important, Morgan and King also emphasize African invention and genius in the ways they adapt farming techniques to their environment, from the slanted roofs of their huts which drain storm water, to the crop rotation practiced to make sure that the soil is never exhausted, to the intricate weaving and pottery made by women for commercial and ceremonial purposes. A small paragraph is given specifically to ironworking, which credits Africans for inventing this technology, “Mr. Woodson says that the African people were the first to work with iron. They were the first to heat and purify iron ore.”¹⁴ This remarkable technological innovation which changed the course of human history could now be ascribed to the genius of black civilizations.

Beyond providing material on the culture and day to day lives of people in Dahomey, Morgan and King are also careful to present Africans not as unknowable others, but as very similar to people the world over. One means of doing this is to remind students of the multiplicity of shades and hues found among African peoples, “some of them have dark brown skin. Most of them however, have light brown skin. Others have yellow skin. Some of them have

¹² William Johnson, Leo Herdeg, Mary Lusson, *Supplemental Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies Grades 1-2-3: Negroes in American Life* (Chicago: Chicago Bureau of Curriculum, 1942), 11.

¹³ Ibid. 12-13.

¹⁴ Ibid. 14.

thick, woolly, hair while some of them straight hair.”¹⁵ These physical descriptions of Africans as varied and individual undercut depictions of dark skinned cannibals and warriors. Throughout the unit on Dahomey, Morgan and King draw parallels between life in Africa and life in the United States, stating that “the men, women, and children like to wear jewelry just as we do,” “they sing together just as our choirs sing,” and “African children play games just like ours.”¹⁶ Students are thus provided with an image of a culture which, although different, is similar to their own in important ways.

The subject of African civilization reappears in the 4th-6th grade units. This time the subject is covered in greater depth and includes several nations or kingdoms. Morgan and King begin by confronting the common understanding of Africa as the dark-continent. “Often we speak of Africa as the ‘dark continent.’ For many years it was the dark-continent because it was not known. It was the land of mystery- a land of terror and black magic.”¹⁷ While Morgan and King acknowledge this way of thinking about Africa, they quickly declare that this concept has been proven incorrect and outdated. “Now we know better. Explorers have traveled all over Africa. They tell us of the beautiful things they have seen; of gorgeously feathered birds, of strange and brilliant flowers, and of deep blue lakes. Historians tell us of thrilling happenings in the lives of the African people.”¹⁸ Having positioned the idea of the dark-continent as an

¹⁵ Ibid. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid. 12.

¹⁷ William Johnson, Leo Herdeg, and Mary Luson, *Supplemental Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies Grades 4-5-6: Negroes in American Life* (Chicago: Chicago Bureau of Curriculum, 1942), 25.

¹⁸ Ibid.

outdated myth disproven by modern science, the authors proceed, to delve into the histories of several African kingdoms.

Morgan and King begin by surveying the accomplishments of several medieval African nations which they refer to collectively as the “old kingdoms.”¹⁹ These include the city states of Timbuktu and Jenne, which, readers learn, were seats of learning whose influence stretched “throughout northern African, Spain, and the Near East.”²⁰ In response to a dominant narrative that insisted that African culture outside of Egypt had given nothing of value to the western world, Morgan and King showed ample evidence that “these old kingdoms and cities influenced the civilization of the ancient world” through their connections with peoples in southern Europe and throughout Mediterranean.²¹

Morgan and King also described the Ashanti Empire. They detail the rich and vibrant life within its many towns and urban centers, its advanced political and economic systems, and highly developed cultural life. In an interesting passage, they put their young readers in the place of explorers who first brought back stories of the Ashanti to European ears: “Indeed when the first British visited the Ashanti capital in 1817, they were amazed at the grandeur of the court. They gazed with astonishment at the gorgeous silk umbrellas, the thousands of soldiers, the beautiful silken robes of the attendants, and the skillfully made swords, cans, and jewelry of pure gold.”²² It is not difficult to imagine that elementary school students in Chicago would have had

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid. 25-26.

a similar amount of astonishment reading and learning about the black kingdoms of staggering wealth and sophistication for the first time.

Although they included many kingdoms from central and North Africa, most of the material in the Supplemental Units is dedicated to the kingdoms of the West African coast which included “Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Angola, the deltas of the Niger and Congo Rivers, Gabon, Benin, and Loango.”²³ This decision was made purposefully. Morgan and King state that since most of the slaves brought to the New World came from this region of Africa, learning about these kingdoms will enable students to understand the history of blacks in America more deeply. This is something, the authors state, that other groups have long been able to do with regard to their own ancestry: “There are many European groups who came to America to live. All of them know something about their ancestors and the countries from which they came. They are justly proud of their heritage. However, because for so long Africa was the dark continent, little was known about the lives of the ancestors of the American Negro. Now that more is known we can learn more about them.”²⁴ Morgan and King suggest that since science and exploration had brought more information to light, the connections between blacks in America and their counterparts in Africa could be more fully told.

The cultural and historical links between West Africans and African Americans is reinforced by throughout the unit. Morgan and King tell their readers that West Africans taken in slavery passed down cultural markers including words, songs, and religious practices, not just to their descendants in America but to those in Haiti and Brazil and elsewhere. African Americans

²³ Ibid. 25.

²⁴ Ibid. 26.

students, who had previously told that they were a people without a legitimate history, could now locate themselves as part of a diasporic community with roots along the West African Coast and branches throughout the New World. Moreover, the authors insisted that although the old African kingdoms had been colonized they were not gone, and much of the old splendor of the cultures remained: “Today many of the kingdoms are under European control, but the Africans keep much of their own way of living and governing.”²⁵ For black students, the connection to a living history would have been especially meaningful.

As with the units for 1st-3rd grade, Morgan and King spend the majority of their time describing culture and life in Dahomey, with the understanding that it is a kingdom that exemplified many common elements found in other West African societies. They trace the political organization of the kingdom from the smallest compounds, to villages, to provinces, and eventually the central government headed by the king and his attendants. They also explain the economic system, and the workings of the guild system through which weavers, ironworkers, potters, and other craftsmen are apprenticed, trained, and overseen. The high status accorded women is highlighted, as is their control of the knowledge of pottery, one of the largest principal crafts. Lastly, the authors discuss music and art, and special mention is made of the city of Benin. Not only are the intricate war canoes, ceremonial pipes, spears, and tools of the Beni detailed, the student is also encouraged to see these item for him or herself, as “there are a few bronze pieces from Benin in our own Field Museum and Art Institute.”²⁶ Students and teachers

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. 35.

were thus left not only with basic information, but with suggestions for extension activities to supplement the readings.

Black Explorers and Adventurers

Just as Morgan and King made clear the contributions of African and its civilizations beginning in the ancient and medieval world, they also addressed the role blacks had played in the exploration and settlement of the new world of the Americas. Part of the standard 4th-6th grade course of study included a unit on “How the Spirit of Exploration Carries On,” which told the stories of several famous European explorers from the Age of Discovery through the current day. Morgan and King paired this unit with their own section on “Negroes in Discovery and Exploration,” which brought to light the stories of blacks who played major roles in these significant expeditions.

The section begins with a description of Alonzo Pietro, who captained the ship Nina during Columbus’ legendary voyage of 1492. Morgan and King recount that Pietro and his crew braved brutal storms and high winds which wrecked one of the other ships in the company while at sea. Yet through these challenges Pietro piloted his vessel safely to the West Indies. If this did not prove his bravery, the authors then relate that when Columbus’ crew revolted, sailing to Spain without him, Pietro stood by his captain: “Only the ship ‘Nina’ was left to carry Columbus and the sailors back to Spain. Alonzo Pietro, the black captain, piloted the ‘Nina’ back to Spain.”²⁷ Pietro’s inclusion positioned the history of blacks in the New World as a story of heroism and survival.

²⁷ Ibid. 16.

Similarly, Morgan and King include several more stories of blacks who accompanied major white explorers. Included were Nuffo de Olano who along with Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean and explored what it now Panama, and the large number of blacks who explored and conquered Mexico under Cortez. Also mentioned is Estevancio, a black explorer who was part of Narvaez's expeditions in the American Southwest. Estevancio survived many challenges during his time with Narvaez, and took part in many dangerous missions including an expedition find the Seven Cities of Cibola in what is now northern New Mexico. Although his insatiable curiosity eventually cost him his life on this last mission, he is credited with "discovering both Arizona and New Mexico," important pieces of the Mexican and later American nation.²⁸

The short unit ends with the more contemporary story of Matthew Henson, a black adventurer who accompanied Admiral Perry on his exploration of the North Pole. Morgan and King make sure to include the fact that by the time he began to work for Perry, Henson was already an experienced traveler having left school at fourteen to go to sea and seen many destinations including, "China, Japan, the Philippines, Africa, France, and Russia."²⁹ They also paid attention to Henson's character, presenting him as an ambitious and studious figure who "would always do the things he was told to do and a little more" and would "always read to find out more about the tasks assigned to him."³⁰ Thus Henson is presented as an equal partner to Perry in the *Supplementary Units*, a fearless and intelligent explorer able to brave bitter cold, blizzard, and treacherous conditions and at last plant the flag of the United States onto the very top of the world.

²⁸ Ibid. 18.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Throughout their unit on black explorers, Morgan and King emphasized the fact that blacks had taken part in the formation of the new world from the very beginning. Moreover, they once again overturned stereotypes by presenting black men as knowledgeable, courageous, selfless, and capable. The black explorers whom they identified were, Morgan and King insisted, “as full of adventure as the men with whom the travelled.”³¹ This insistence on blacks as people possessing agency and intelligence carried over into Morgan and King’s representations of slavery and the men and women who fought to end it.

Slavery and Abolitionism

In taking on the topics of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, Morgan and King confronted what, by the 1940s, had become a well-developed and widely accepted historical narrative that disregarded the horrors of the slave system, romanticized antebellum plantation life, looked at the eventual fall of the Southern slaveholding regime as the defeat of a noble lost cause, and equated black political enfranchisement in the wake of the war as an assault on white virtue. In short, textbook authors engaged in a host of “racial and gender stereotypes” in order to “present a positive view of the slave system.”³² Morgan and King worked assiduously to counter many of these components of the dominant narrative. They presented stories of rebels and runaways, freed men and fearless abolitionists, focusing their story on the struggle of blacks to make real the same promises of freedom others took advantage of in the new American nation.

One way in which Morgan and King challenged the dominate narrative regarding slavery was by refusing to ignore the slave trade and the violence of the system that brought slaves to the

³¹ Ibid. 20.

³² Wasburn, “Accounts of Slavery,” 477.

Americas. In most white-authored history texts, including those used in Chicago Public Schools, students were simply told that Africans were brought to America to work as slaves. Morgan and King, in comparison, described the means by which this occurred, including the capture of slaves through intertribal war and kidnapping expeditions in which the weak or defenseless were stolen from their homes. “Kidnapping raids were often made on villages while the men were away at war and many of the victims of such raids were young people. Slave hunting expeditions became the common method.”³³ Similarly, Morgan and King did not shy away from describing the perilous conditions slaves were forced to endure as they made their way from the West African coast to the Caribbean and North America. The description of the middle passage offered by Morgan and King attests to the horror of the experience.

The ships on which the slaves were brought over were crude wooden vessels. They were much too small to bring in comfort and health the large number of slaves that came on each trip. The slaves were put in chains which prevented them from escaping or causing trouble. Because of the crowded, stuffy ships many of the slaves died before the end of the journey. Contagious diseases often broke out. Smallpox was one of the common and dreaded diseases. A captain counted on losing one-fourth of his cargo and frequently he lost many more.³⁴

This passage helps give readers a more accurate sense of the conditions of the slave trade, and counteracts the assumption that slaves were treated humanely. Morgan and King note that because of these horrible conditions, slaves often took part in uprisings and were “likely to take revenge at any moment.”³⁵ The picture of docile and happy slaves was thus replaced with men

³³ William Johnson, Leo Herdeg, and Mary Lusson, *Supplemental Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies Grades 7-8: Negroes in American Life* (Chicago: Chicago Bureau of Curriculum, 1942), 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

and women yearning for freedom as Morgan and King stated, “They were not satisfied as slaves. They wanted to live and work as freemen.”³⁶

Other strategies for challenging the traditional narrative of slavery emerged in Morgan and King’s discussions of plantation life. The workings of the plantation system are discussed twice in the *Supplementary Units*, once in the 5th grade and again in the 7th grade materials. White-authored history textbooks of the period usually portrayed slavery as an idyllic institution, in which both slaves and masters were contented and happy. Much of this myth rested on the belief that the work slaves performed was not in reality all that difficult or taxing. Instead slaves are shown as childlike dependents, whom slave masters care for in beneficent fashion. The way in which Morgan and King describe the plantation structure however, differs from this appraisal, instead providing evidence that their labor was in no way ancillary but central to economic development of the southern states and the U.S. as a whole, and that slaves were not contented with their lot.

In the 7th grade units, Morgan and King take aim at the myth that slave labor contributed little to the development of the nation. They state, “Few people realize that slave labor helped to build America,” and that although “slavery itself was an ugly system, . . . the nation benefited from it nevertheless.”³⁷ Elsewhere, the authors point out that “the south could not have developed without this form of labor” and that “slaves and cotton became the means of building great fortunes.”³⁸ These comments align with Murray’s description of the alternative black curriculum in which black educators stressed the “importance of African American

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 6.

³⁸ Ibid. 10.

contributions, such as the value of slave labor in building the key infrastructure of the early United States.”³⁹ Beyond describing the central place of slave labor in the U.S. economy, Morgan and King also described the wide range of tasks slaves performed, dispelling the notion that slaves were only unskilled farm laborers.

Morgan and King also use their descriptions of slavery to engage in another facet of the *alternative black curriculum*, the “defense of black labor.”⁴⁰ In the 5th grade section on plantation life, Morgan and King describe the duties of planters, overseers, and slaves. Instead of describing slaves as lazy, inept, and childlike, the authors instead emphasized their skill and ability. They remark that slaves not only worked in the fields but also acquired many trades. “They learned to be carpenters, masons, wheelwrights, coopers, blacksmiths, sailors, typesetters, miners, engineers, mechanics, jewelers, and silversmiths. Some slave mechanics could not only build but also draw plans, make contracts, and complete a house.”⁴¹ Not only were slaves often skilled craftsmen, Morgan and King insisted, they were also inventors. When the *Supplementary Units* cover the cotton gin, for instance, the authors reveal that it was slaves themselves who pioneered the technology: “Slaves had experimented with certain appliances for the separation of the seed from the cotton.”⁴² Morgan and King state that a U.S. patent officer named Henry Baker observed that “when the appliances were observed by Eli Whitney, they were assembled by him

³⁹ Murray, “Countering the Master Narrative,” 57.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Johnson, Herdeg and Lusson, *Supplementary Units, Grades 4-5-6*, 10.

⁴² Johnson, Herdeg and Lusson, *Supplementary Units, Grades 7-8*, 12.

into the cotton gin.”⁴³ By describing the range of occupations slaves performed, many of which required craftsmanship and specialized knowledge, Morgan and King dignified the physical and mental labor of slaves. However, they did so in a way which refused to glorify the institution itself, and dealt with the violence which underlay the slave regime.

When detailing plantation life, Morgan and King refused to paint a singular narrative of an idyllic old south. Instead they told students that conditions varied widely, and that “some of the masters were harsh and unfeeling; some were kind and humane; others were indifferent.”⁴⁴ To show this range the authors provide two examples, one the Fairdale plantation in Tennessee and the other the plantation of Colonel Lloyd in Maryland, where Frederick Douglas was born and spent his early childhood. On the Fairdale plantation, the better of the two, the slaves were allowed to tend small gardens of their own after their day’s work, were furnished with new clothing and shoes twice a year, regularly visited by physicians, and were spared the use of whipping in most instances. This description, although not nearly as saccharine as white textbooks of the period which emphasized the paternalism of planters and the grateful loyalty of slaves, includes many of the elements which white authors relied on to argue the benefits of the slave system.

If Morgan and King had ended their discussion of plantation life with Fairdale, they would have closely approximated the standard narrative of slavery. However, they used the plantation of Colonel Lloyd to offer a sharp counter point to this story. At Lloyd’s plantation, the reader is told, the slaves lived in “scattered huts,” which were “filled to overflowing with slave

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 10.

families.” As a result, the slaves were “dirty and ill kept.”⁴⁵ Food consisted of “pickled pork” and “Indian meal” and very little of even this.⁴⁶ Work began at day break and lasted unabated until it was “too dark to see.”⁴⁷ Morgan and King not only described these conditions, they also focused on the violence which underlay them. “Whipping was the order of the day, and no one, woman or child, old or young, was safe from it.”⁴⁸ In white-authored history textbooks, physical punishment was described as little used or justified as a fitting punishment for disobedient or recalcitrant slaves, yet Morgan and King depict this assault and abuse as fundamental and indiscriminate part of the experience of slavery.

Morgan and King not only refused to act as apologists for slavery, they also constructed a new view focused on men and women who defied the slave system, whether runaways, rebels, free blacks, or abolitionists. The *Supplementary Units* make several mentions of slaves who managed to escape and find better lives in the north. As Morgan and King tell their audience, “a very large number of slaves freed themselves by running away to the northern states and Canada.”⁴⁹ In addition to these efforts, the *Supplementary Units* also deal with slave revolts and uprisings.

The *Supplementary Units* emphasized the presence of free people of color before the Civil War, a subject that received scant attention in standard history texts. Whether through escaping their former masters, being granted freedom in a will, or purchasing their own freedom,

⁴⁵ Ibid. 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 12.

Morgan and King reminded readers that, “not all Negroes were slaves. Some of them, like Benjamin Banneker of colonial times, were never slaves. Others became free in various ways.”⁵⁰ Although Morgan and King state that these men and women were often only “half free” because of restrictions which kept them from voting, holding public offices, or participating in local militias, they emphasized that this did not stop many free blacks from attaining some measure of financial and social independence. The *Supplementary Units* relate the stories of prominent businessmen like Joseph C. Casey and William Platt of Western New York who both became involved in lumber mills, inventors like Henry Blair of Maryland who patented a corn harvester, and industrialists like Robert Gordon of Virginia who became wealthy through managing several successful coal mining operations. Morgan and King used the stories of these prosperous free men and women to complicate the assumption that all blacks had occupied subservient positions in antebellum society.

Lastly, abolitionists also appeared in the *Supplementary Units*. In traditional textbooks of the period, abolitionists were depicted as menaces or fanatics, whose actions helped rip the country apart by eroding the middle ground between the reasonable citizens of the North and South. However, in the *Supplementary Units* they are seen as the moral conscious of their nation, men and women who embodied the best characteristics of the American tradition: “They lectured, started newspapers and worked in any way they could for the cause of freedom. The abolition of slavery became the life work of many brave people, both white and colored.”⁵¹

Morgan and King described the work of key actors in the abolitionist movement. These included

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. 13.

figures like Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman, along with lesser known contributors like William Still and David Ruggles, free black men living in the north who became involved in committees for the protection of fugitive slaves.

In addition to showcasing the agency of black abolitionists in aiding their own people, the *Supplemental Units* also praised the work of white abolitionists. The inclusion of white allies in the struggle against racism, one of the key Murray's key tenets of the *alternative black curriculum*, is shown through this choice. Morgan and King relate the stories of lawyer Isaac Tatum Hopper, newspaper editor Benjamin Lundy, speaker and organizer William Lloyd Garrison, and others who believed that "slavery was a moral evil that would severely handicap the nation."⁵² The authors included a quote from the masthead of the *Liberator*, Garrison's antislavery publication, which summarized the stance of the abolitionist cause, "I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. . .urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest--I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch--and I will be heard."⁵³ In the *Supplementary Units*, the abolitionists are portrayed as characters of conviction and faith, models for any reader seeking to find the best of American values.

The Civil War and Reconstruction

In discussing the Civil War, Morgan and King sought to center the experiences of black people. As they stated, "The story of the battles of the Civil War is a familiar one. Less familiar

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

is the story of the Negro in the war.”⁵⁴ This lack of inclusion and information implied that, “Negroes did nothing, or at the most, very little, toward their own freedom.”⁵⁵ In the *Supplementary Units*, readers learned that blacks were actively involved in the war effort, both in the south, where the forced labor of slaves helped erect confederate defenses, and in the north, where free black men and women at once heeded the call to support the union effort. The service of the 186,000 black troops who took up arms for the north is recognized, including regiments who took part in the battles of Port Hudson near New Orleans, and those who acted as part of the Army of the Potomac which fought in battles near Richmond and St. Petersburg, Virginia. Morgan and King paid special attention to the actions of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first black regiment to see action, who earned lasting fame for their part in the siege of Fort Wagner in South Carolina. Students were reminded in the “things to remember” section at the end of the chapter that “negro troops rendered gallant service” during the war and “won many friends by their bravery in the service of their country.”⁵⁶ These exploits, which were usually overlooked in history text that were included in the *Supplementary Units*.

The period of Reconstruction also found a reworking in the *Supplementary Units*. According to white-authored history texts, both northern and southern, Reconstruction had largely been a failure. In this narrative northern carpetbaggers and freed blacks exploited the aftermath of the war to terrorize Southern whites. Freed blacks, according to white historians, did not possess the intelligence and wherewithal for self-governance and were quickly relegated

⁵⁴ Ibid. 16.

⁵⁵ Lawrence D. Reddick, “Racial Attitudes in American History Textbooks of the South,” *The Journal of Negro History* 19, no. 3 (1934): 246.

⁵⁶ Johnson, Herdeg and Lusson, *Supplementary Units, Grades 7-8*, 37.

back into a place of social subservience, much to their own good. In the *Supplemental Units*, Reconstruction remains a troubled period for the nation. Morgan and King argue that emancipation came as a cultural and political shock to the South, one that caused a great deal of instability on all sides. Yet instead of blaming free blacks themselves for the difficulties endured during the tumultuous period, the *Supplementary Units* instead place the responsibility on the U.S. government who freed slaves but left them “without homes, and without means of support.”⁵⁷ Even under these circumstances, however, Morgan and King quickly turn the story positive, as they choose to focus on the gains made by blacks since the 1870s. They offer a cavalcade of individual biographies meant to show “some of the people who made great achievements in the face of many handicaps,” including Booker T. Washington, Alain Locke, Mary McLeod Bethune, W.E.B. Dubois, Jan Matzlinger, Mordecai Johnson, and Henry Ossawa Tanner. The *Supplementary Units* also described black institutions of higher learning like Morehouse, Howard, and Tuskegee.⁵⁸

Blacks in Military Service

Situated as they were as a product of wartime tolerance-building efforts in the public schools, it is not surprising that the *Supplementary Units* have a great deal to say about black military service in the nation’s history. U.S. school curricula of this period traditionally silenced or ignored the contributions of black soldiers, “the most powerful way to place the African American soldier outside the U.S. narrative of progress was never to acknowledge that they

⁵⁷ Ibid. 17.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 18.

served on the battlefield.”⁵⁹ This overall trend has seen points of interruption, however, in which the sacrifices of black soldiers are acknowledged, at least temporarily, to aid in some present crisis which demands the use of black bodies in military action. Due to the need to stoke black support for the Second World War alluded to by William Johnson and others, Morgan and King were given the opportunity to present a counter narrative, already well developed inside the black community, which corrected the inaccurate or missing picture of black soldiers in traditional school texts. However, the same context also limited the amount of critique they leveled at the treatment of black soldiers in American society and the implications of this treatment for race relations more broadly.

Historically, military service has been linked conceptually to ideas of citizenship, masculinity, and freedom. As King, Crowley and Brown state, “Modern democracies consider the citizen soldier a primary actor in protecting democratic values and individual liberties.”⁶⁰ Because of this understanding of military sacrifice as one of the purest embodiments of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the issue of who is allowed to serve in this capacity and how they acquit themselves in such service has also been a proxy for who can lay claim to the status of full citizen. Traditionally this has meant that although African Americans have had a long and distinguished record of military service their efforts have been questioned, maligned, and ignored as a way of signaling that blacks themselves, no matter their sacrifice, remained outside of full inclusion in American society. On the other hand, black historians and educators like Woodson felt a driving need to preserve and spread knowledge of black military valor not only because to

⁵⁹ Anthony L. Brown, Ryan M. Crowley, and LaGarrett J. King, “Black Civitas: An Examination of Carter Woodson’s Contributions to Teaching about Race, Citizenship, and the Black Soldier,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 39, no. 2 (2011): 292.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 278.

fill the void in the historical record, but to give blacks another tool with which to dismantle the logic of racial caste that kept them outside of the mainstream of American life.

Morgan and King's materials follow in Woodson's tradition by extolling the service of black soldiers in a way that refutes assumptions of black inferiority. In the introduction to their 8th grade unit "Negroes in Military Life," they declare, "It is not very often that stories are written about colored soldiers. However, they have fought bravely in every war in which our country has taken part."⁶¹ The authors then give brief examples of black military service in the American Revolution, where Crispus Attucks became the "one of the first men to shed his blood for American freedom," and Peter Salem, another black, was declared a hero by his compatriots at the Battle of Bunker Hill.⁶² They touch on the War of 1812, in which black units from New York fought under the command of Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, and the Spanish American War, where black regiments "among the first to be ordered to the front" took part in the Battle of San Juan Hill.⁶³ These examples showcased the extent to which black servicemen had been active in some of the most significant American military campaigns.

Because of the recency of the events, the largest part of the section on black military service concentrates on the First World War. Morgan and King first sketch the breadth of black participation in the war effort, noting that blacks served, "In the Infantry, Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, Cavalry, Engineer Corps, Signal Corps, Medical Corps, Hospital and Ambulance Corps, Aviation Corps (in the ground section), Veterinary Corps, Stevedores Regiments, and Labor Battalions" and that "Sixty of the men who went to France served as chaplains and over

⁶¹ Johnson, Herdeg and Lusson, *Supplementary Units, Grades 7-8*, 40.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

350 men served as Y.M.C.A. secretaries.”⁶⁴ Next, the unit moves on to the heroism of individual black units including the 369th Infantry who served as part of the 161st French Infantry while overseas. This regiment awarded the French War Cross for their efforts in taking the German town of Sechault, and individual soldiers also received the American Distinguished Service Cross.

One of these men, Sergeant Butler, rescued an American Lieutenant and five other soldiers who had been captured by a German raiding party. Morgan and King credit the rescue to the “quick thinking” of Butler, who managed to capture a German officer and negotiate a prisoner exchange.⁶⁵ Two others, Henry Needham and Henry Johnson, of the same regiment, were awarded for their singlehanded defense of an American position against overwhelming odds, as Morgan and King state, “These fearless men fought twenty Germans who had come to attack a company of colored troops. They were engaged with the twenty for about an hour before their own men came to their rescue.”⁶⁶ These depictions of black soldiers as daring and courageous in the defense of their country were the antithesis of the stereotypes associated with masculinity.

Not only did Morgan and King praise the actions of black soldiers as a whole, they also pinpointed the sacrifices made by black soldiers from the Chicago area, men and women who provided tangible and living examples of black military heroism. Included in the units is the story of the Eight Illinois National Guard Regiment, known during the war as the 370th United States Infantry. This company saw action in the Argonne Forest of France and participated in the

⁶⁴ Ibid. 41.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 42.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Allied advances which finally broke the German army and lead to the conclusion of the war. The unit was comprised of black soldiers and, a rarity for the period, also included a black officer, Colonel Franklin A. Denison, a prominent attorney from the Chicago area. Although he, like many other black officers, was not allowed to lead his troops in battle, Morgan and King applauded his approach to training and preparing his men: “His excellent military methods proved to the War Department that he was a competent officer. He was the only colored colonel who was permitted to command his regiment until they reached France.”⁶⁷ The inclusion of black officers, men trusted with the responsibility to direct and lead others, provided a powerful example of black ability within the *Supplementary Units*.

Beyond Colonel Denison, the stories of several other veterans are recounted by Morgan and King. These include Sergeant Matthew Jenkins, who received the Distinguished Service Cross and French Cross of War, Lieutenant William Warfield, who received the French Cruix de Guerre and American Distinguished Service Cross, and Captain James H. Smith, who received the Cruix de Guerre for initiating a raid on a German machine gun nest which resulted in the capture of the heavy artillery pieces which became “the prized property of the colored troops.”⁶⁸ Beyond simply describing the actions of this regiment, Morgan and King also informed their readers that the Eighth Illinois headquarters was still located in Chicago and that the street it sat on, Giles Avenue, was a memorial to a Lieutenant Giles who had made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. At a time when black veterans received little thanks from their country beyond what their own communities could offer, and often returned home from combat only to grapple with

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 43.

racial apartheid and oppression, the recognition of their service in the *Supplementary Units* rendered the actions of these soldiers visible to a larger audience both within and outside of the black community.

Conclusion

Analysis of the content of the *Supplementary Units* reveals that they were without question part of the broader tradition of *alternative black curricula* produced by historians working in the early portion of the twentieth century. Morgan and King refuted stereotypes and racist caricature, and more importantly presented a new discourse around black identity based on themes such as: the value of African civilization and the diasporic connection between west Africa and blacks in the new world; realistic depictions of slavery; the Civil War and Reconstruction; and the crediting of black Americans for their historical contributions to the nation as soldiers, statesmen, inventors, intellectuals, and cultural icons. As in other works from the *alternative black curriculum* tradition, these elements were brought to bear in a deliberate and well organized manner in order to challenge stereotypes and fundamentally “alter the racial meanings associated with Blackness.”⁶⁹ Moreover, Morgan and King saw this new presentation of black history and identity not just as a means of correcting the distortions of the historical record, but as an active step towards addressing current racial injustice in the present As Morgan stated, “It is my firm belief that this educational method...will bring about a change in the kind and quality of attitude in our American family and gradually bring about a change in interracial as well as racial behavior.”⁷⁰ For Morgan, the adoption of the *Supplementary Units* had the

⁶⁹ King, “When Lions Write History,” 2.

⁷⁰ Madeline Morgan, “Chicago Schools Teach Negro History,” 109.

potential to be an educational watershed in Chicago and beyond. The next chapter explores the impact of the *Supplementary Units* in order to parse out the effects of the curriculum in cities and classrooms.

CHAPTER FIVE

“ERASING THE COLOR LINE FROM THE BLACKBOARDS OF AMERICA”:

THE IMPACT OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY UNITS

Introduction

The morning of December 16, 1943, saw the students of Miss Grace Markwell’s 5th grade class, room 214 of the Gross School in Brookfield, Illinois, in rapt attention. That morning, as they were engaged in their usual social studies unit on the Boston area, their teacher had chosen to present a biography of Jan Matzlinger, inventor of the shoe lasting machine. The students had been struck, quite literally, speechless by the story of a Negro inventor. After a few minutes, one boy finally broke the silence with the words, “Read it again, please.”¹ The Matzlinger story was one from the *Supplementary Units* crafted by Madeline Morgan and Bessie King, and as Ms. Markwell’s class read more material from the units they also began to become interested in the author herself.

Markwell, who had recently begun working with Morgan at the Illinois Council for the Social Studies, was able to read them a recent story from *PM* magazine which profiled Morgan. The students’ curiosity, and perhaps skepticism – “Did she write the stories you read?”, “Are there really Negro teachers?”, “What are they like?” – eventually led them to ask for permission to write Morgan.² In the subsequent letter, they informed Morgan that “when Miss Markwell told

¹ Grace Markwell, “Interracial Possibilities” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 6, Folder 26], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 4.

² Ibid.

us she knew you, we were surprised and delighted to think that she knew someone so famous,” and that they believed “your contribution is as important as those about which you have written, because you are helping children of your race be proud of their color, and helping us to want to help and give them a chance to learn, to work and to show what they can do.”³ They closed the letter by inviting Morgan to visit, promising to meet her at the train station should she apprise them of her travel plans, and assuring her that she would “find a warm welcome” should she come to Gross School.⁴

The curiosity, skepticism, and keen interest of students in Markwell’s class, both in the content of the units and their creator, were repeated by the many individuals and groups who engaged with the units after their initial release in 1941. This included teachers and teacher associations, principals, school boards and district heads in several cities throughout the U.S., religious and social organizations involved in tolerance building efforts, academic journals, the press, individual parents, and even soldiers on the front lines of the Second World War. In measuring the impact of the *Supplementary Units*, we must account for the various reactions of these individuals and groups, which by the mid-1940s, had indeed made Morgan quite famous, and led to the recognition of her work and its merits.

However, we must also look to discover, as much as it is possible to recover, what effect the *Supplementary Units* had at the classroom level. Morgan wrote with the dual purpose to “extend information about Negro American” and to “make Negro Americans proud of their

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

cultural heritage.”⁵ Assessing the effectiveness of curricular reforms is a difficult task. The divide between the curriculum as intended and the curriculum as implemented has been remarked on by many curriculum scholars and poses a very real challenge to those concerned with how curriculum is used on the ground. In this case, that initial difficulty is increased by the historical nature of the reform and the limited availability of evidence of the curriculum in practice. However, there is some material, including, most importantly, student reactions from some of Miss Markwell’s classes, which point the ways in which at least some students and teachers used the *Supplementary Units*. Although we must be cautious elsewhere, these materials along with Markwell’s notes allow us to draw tentative conclusions.

Responses to the Supplementary Units

Between the years 1942 and 1945, The *Supplementary Units* and their authors Madeline Morgan and Bessie Smith received the praise of a multitude of groups and individuals concerned with varying agendas of building of interracial tolerance, supporting the war effort and patriotism, and promoting educational equity. The first institutions to explicitly champion Morgan’s work, however, were the African American-led organizations whose support had initially led her to conceptualize her project. Even before the curriculum had been released, Phi Delta Kappa, the teacher’s sorority for whom Morgan served as Chicago Basileus and whose sisterhood included her research partner Bessie King, was busy organizing its support for the *Supplementary Units*. After the official adoption of the curriculum, the sorority was one of the first bodies to officially recognize the *Supplementary Units* as an important educational accomplishment.

⁵ Madeline Morgan, “Negro History and American Democracy,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 4, Folder 35], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 1.

On Friday, June 12, 1942, only a few short months after the curriculum was officially adopted, the national arm of the sorority organized a dinner in support of the units and honoring Supt. Johnson.⁶ The dinner, held at the Women's Club of Chicago, was an impressive gathering that boasted some 300 guests representing the leading black organizations of the city as well as the leadership of Chicago Public Schools. This list included Frazier Lane, director of the Chicago Urban League, Oscar C. Brown of the NAACP, Willard M. Payne of the Negro Chamber of Commerce, Fannie Baxter, president of the Northern District Association of Colored Women, prominent black attorneys Earl B. Dickerson and Oscar Brown, Principal Maudelle Bousfield, Morgan's mentor and confidant, and Samuel Stratton, the history teacher of DuSable High School and leader of the DuSable History Club.⁷ Perhaps a harbinger of the far-reaching notice the *Supplementary Units* would soon command, President Franklin Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt also extended their support through a telegram that was read during the proceedings. The evening was an impressive show of solidarity and support comprising a cross section of Chicago's black progressive leadership.

Although the guest of honor was Superintendent Johnson, who delivered a keynote address and received gratitude for his implementation of the curriculum, there was no confusion that, as the Defender reported, "the original idea of the departure in teaching history...was broached by Mrs. Madeline Morgan" or that Morgan and King had together "chiefly conducted the research work."⁸ Photographs from the evening show Morgan speaking to the assembly, and

⁶Namuh Brascher, "Honor School Chief for New History Course Plan," *The Chicago Defender*, June 20, 1942.

⁷"Chicago Public Schools, Dinner for Supt. Johnson," Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 7, Folder 1], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁸ Brascher, "Honor School Chief," *The Chicago Defender*, June 20, 1942.

seated prominently alongside Supt. Johnson and Emerson Principal Elinor McCollom (Fig. 1). As she spoke to the mixed audience of black and white professionals and leaders, it would have been clear that the celebration was as much centered on her own efforts as those of Johnson and others at Chicago Public Schools.

In addition to the dinner at the Women's Club of Chicago, Phi Delta Kappa also took another unprecedented step in honoring Morgan and King's contributions as curriculum writers. In February of 1944, at a luncheon at Lucy D. Slowe Hall in Washington D.C. with over 150 educators from throughout the country present, Morgan and King were again honored for their accomplishments.⁹ This time, however, Morgan became the first recipient of a newly created National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa Achievement Award, which was given "in recognition and encouragement for meritorious achievement."¹⁰ National Basileus Gertrude Robinson was on hand to present Morgan the award, and King also received a certificate of honor and a ceremonial key. On this occasion, the keynote address was given by Carter G. Woodson, who "stressed the significance of the accomplishments of the honored guests."¹¹ This recognition from Woodson was a continuation of earlier support the *Supplementary Units*, which he had championed since Morgan first invited him to discuss the possibility of attempting such a project with her sorors in the late 1930s. Not only had Woodson himself been an avid supporter of the curriculum since that time, his organization, the ASNLH, also continued to provide Morgan opportunities to share her work.

⁹ "Sorority Honors Chicagoans," *The Chicago Defender*, March 4, 1944.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the ASNLH had, since its inception, maintained strong ties to black primary and secondary and school teachers. They formed a significant portion of the ASNLH membership, helped popularize its national campaigns like Negro History Week, and expressed themselves in its publications the *Negro History Bulletin* and the *Journal of Negro History*. Additionally, the voices of black teachers were regularly part of the ASNLH's yearly meetings. Morgan, a member of the organization since the 1930s, took advantage of the unique platform the ASNLH offered. When the association met for its 28th annual conference, held October 29 through 31 of 1943 in Detroit, Michigan, Morgan was on hand. That Saturday at 10 a.m., she participated in a session titled "How We Study the Negro."¹² True to the democratic make-up of the ASNLH membership, the panel was presided over by a high school principal, Charles A. Daly, and included both a university-level academic, Mrs. Constance Ridley Heslip, instructor in Race Relations at the University of Toledo, and a secondary teacher, Herman Dreer of the St. Louis Public Schools, as presenters alongside Morgan who was herself a teacher in the primary grades. Morgan's presentation, "The Study of the Negro in the Chicago Public Schools," centered on her role as co-author of the *Supplementary Units*, and was well-received as "a convincing account of what is now being done systematically in Chicago to give the Negro the same place in the curriculum as that provided for the study of the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton."¹³

Morgan's success in advocating for black history within Chicago's schools must have struck her listeners as a particularly impressive feat, because the next morning, during the

¹² Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, "Proceedings of the Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, held at Detroit, Michigan, October 29-31, 1943," *The Journal of Negro History* 29, no. 1 (1944): 2.

¹³ Ibid.

general session, Morgan's work again came up for comment, and the association "unanimously voted to invite the attention of other school systems to the commendable step made in the study of the Negro in Chicago under the stimulus of Mrs. Madeline R. Morgan and to urge upon educational authorities elsewhere to emulate this example."¹⁴ At a conference that that year included addresses and presentations from luminaries such as Woodson protégé Lorenzo Johnston Greene, Charles H. Wesley, Horace Mann Bond, and John Hope Franklin, Morgan had managed not only to be heard but also gain a significant amount of praise from others involved in the work of producing and popularizing spreading black history. This recognition would translate into broader acceptance within the black academic community. Between 1943 and 1944, Morgan published a rapid succession of pieces in prominent black academic journals, including *Negro Digest* and the *Wilberforce Quarterly*, detailing her work and the impacts of the *Supplementary Units*. Perhaps the most important of these was her publication in early 1944 in the *Journal of Negro Education*, the flagship publication of the Bureau of Educational Research at Howard University.

The years 1943-1944 saw steadily increasing demand for the *Supplementary Units* from a number of different sources. As Morgan stated in a public address, "since the inclusion of Negro achievements in the Social Studies curriculum of the Chicago Public Schools approximately 2000 sets of the units have been sent outside Chicago."¹⁵ Among those interested in Morgan's model were the school boards of "Los Angeles, Cal – New York City—Cincinnati, Ohio – Indianapolis, Indiana – Portland, Oregon – New Haven, Conn – Detroit, Michigan – Newark N.J.

¹⁴ Ibid. 3.

¹⁵ Madeline Morgan, "Negro History and American Democracy," 7.

– Boston Mass – Topeka Kansas and St. Louis Mo.”¹⁶ Like Supt. Johnson in Chicago, many of the school and district leaders who wrote to Morgan were concerned with stemming the possibility of racial tensions brought on by the war and promoting a sense of patriotism and unity within their institutions. A letter from Robert Hill Lane, Assistant Superintendent of the Los Angeles Public Schools, made this concern clear. The brief and distressed letter read simply, “Here in Los Angeles, with its tremendous Negro problem, we have heard of your success in developing work units for children which reflect the achievements of the Negroes during the past two decades. We are very anxious to see and use your materials. May we have copies?”¹⁷

Another example of this type of concern was sent by Laura J. Ladance, principal of Public School No. 8 in Delawanna, New Jersey, who wrote to Morgan on September 20, 1943. Ladance began her letter by stating that, “We have very few colored people in our city. In fact all of them living here attend this school with the exception of about four. We have about 20.”¹⁸ Even though Ladance believed that relations between the races were generally positive at her school, she admitted that “in the face of other events which have happened in other sections of the country,” she was “more anxious than ever to keep things on a harmonious basis.”¹⁹ For Ladance, the *Supplementary Units* would primarily be a means of quelling any potential racial unrest and ensuring peace within her student body. She asked Morgan whether it would be

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Robert Hill Lane, “Letter from Robert Hill Lane to Madeline Morgan, November 29, 1943,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 20], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

¹⁸ Laura J. Ladance, “Letter from Laura J. Ladance to Madeline Morgan, September 20, 1943,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 20], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

¹⁹ Ibid.

possible for her school to “secure copies of the pamphlets used in Chicago” and promised to put them to good use, even admitting, “After all, very few of us know very much about ‘Negro Culture’.”²⁰ Morgan, ever responsive, sent the requested materials on September 27, 1943, only a week after she received the request.

Perhaps the city with the most pressing need to calm racial antagonisms during this period was Detroit, Michigan, an industrial city in which competition between southern and eastern European immigrants, native-born whites, and African American migrants from the South created a “racial and ethnic tinderbox” that exploded during the summer of 1943.²¹ On the night of Sunday, June 26, an argument between blacks and whites involved in a traffic accident at Belle Isle, a popular park and recreation center on the Detroit River, turned into violence that soon spread to surrounding neighborhoods. In the rioting that ensued, black and white motorists were pulled from vehicles and beaten, crowds on both sides hurled rocks and other projectiles in the city streets, and public conveyances ceased operations for fear of crossing between the battle lines established black and white neighborhoods. On Monday, thirteen of Detroit’s elementary schools were closed as “thousands of pupils were either kept at home by frightened parents or were taken home after word of the rioting spread.”²² In the end, peace was restored some three days later, after a declaration of martial law and the imposition of a strict curfew enforced by the state militia under orders from Governor Harry Kelly. By that time, however, 34 lives had been lost and hundreds of others had sustained injuries. In the months after the disturbance, the city

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Anne-Lise Halvorsen and Jeffery Mirel, “Intercultural Education in Detroit, 1943-1954,” *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 3 (2013): 363.

²² “Detroit Death Toll Reaches 15 in Clashes: Martial Law Declared by Governor as City Cops Fail,” *The Chicago Defender*, June 26, 1943.

would turn to its schools as one means of attempting to build better relations between communities. Among those it turned to was Morgan, who had experienced of the Chicago riots decades earlier, and who was now in a position to offer her knowledge in the aftermath of this latest tragedy.

In response to the 1943 riots, the civic and educational leadership in Detroit struggled to find ways to ensure progress in bringing the city's warring factions into some semblance of harmony. Superintendent Warren E. Bow appointed an Administrative Committee on Intercultural and Interracial Education on November 2, 1943 with the mission of developing, "the knowledge, understanding, and attitudes that make for good race relations."²³ The Committee, which included teachers, supervisors, and principals, directly cited the riots as its major motivation, as "the need for developing intercultural understanding, particularly interracial understanding, was sharpened and dramatized...by the race riots of June 1943."²⁴ The Committee looked across the country for models to emulate, reporting that they "studied carefully the plans and programs in other cities"²⁵ and were especially impressed by the work being done in "Springfield, Massachusetts, and Chicago, Illinois."²⁶ As further evidence suggests, when the committee came to Chicago, they had a very clear idea of where to look for expertise on the subject of intercultural education.

²³ "Detroit Public Schools, Interracial Policy, 1945," Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 9, Folder 1], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 2.

²⁶ Ibid.

On February 8, 1944, only three months after the Detroit committee was formed, one of its top members, Marion Edman, an associate professor at Wayne University, sent a letter to Madeline Morgan. In it, he described the intention of the committee to send a delegation including himself and Ms. Loretta Fitzpatrick, principal of the Hutchins Intermediate School, to the American Association of School Administrator's conference later that month, and their desire to use the occasion to glean what they could about intercultural and interracial education by observing Morgan at work. Edman was candid with Morgan, and admitted that "we shall be most deeply indebted to you for any help and suggestions which you can give us for getting information which will be of value to our own program here in Detroit."²⁷ Although there is no record of the conversations between Morgan and the Detroit committee which certainly followed, Morgan's name is included as a consultant in the plans drafted by the committee later that year along with luminaries such as Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, and Rachel Davis Dubois, whose cultural gifts approach was nearly synonymous with intercultural education at that time. This evidence makes it clear that Morgan played a role in helping craft the changes in curriculum, professional development, and teacher training which eventually made their way into Detroit's public schools and showed the Detroit Board of Education's commitment to "a policy of racial and ethnic equity in the schools and an intercultural education curriculum that supported that policy."²⁸

Morgan's fame was further spread by a pair of publications in national popular magazines that helped familiarize thousands of readers with her work. The first was a piece in *Time*

²⁷ Marion Edwan, "Letter from Marion Edwan to Madeline Morgan, February 8, 1944," Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 20], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

²⁸ Anne-Lise Halvorsen and Jeffery Mirel, "Intercultural Education in Detroit, 1943-1954," 363.

magazine. Published under the title “Brown Studies,” the article starts by describing on of the “interesting lessons” being taught in Chicago Public Schools through the *Supplementary Units*, where first grade students learned about diversity through a story in which a white child encounters black policeman and learns that “in our country we have many types of helpers.”²⁹ As the article continues it is revealed that, “As first graders learn about Negro policemen and Pullman Porters, other primary pupils (white and colored) are being told of Negro contributions to civilization, U.S. History, the war effort.”³⁰ Although brief, the piece does reveal two important aspects of the *Supplementary Units*. First is that, at least in this example, the curriculum seems to have been reaching the classroom level with both white and black students. Second, as the article makes clear, the Units were “woven into the general class material,” instead of being taught separately, a goal which Morgan herself wrote was critical to successfully implementing her ideas.³¹ The *Time* article praised Morgan, noting that the “person who originated this program and got Chicago’s Board of Education to okay it is a handsome 36 year old Negro teacher, Madeline R. Morgan” and extolling her unique qualifications and educational background.³² The editors of *Time* were convinced of the effectiveness of the plan, and applauded the fact that other cities like New York were also looking into similar programs of instruction.

The second piece was a three-page feature from *PM* magazine, a popular weekly newspaper based in New York City. This story began by noting the recent racial unrest

²⁹ “Brown Studies,” *Time*, June 21, 1943, 48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

throughout the country and offering Chicago as a counter example, “After race riots in Detroit and elsewhere the old ferment of discontent burbled ominously in Chicago’s crowded Negro sections, but there was no violence.”³³ A major reason for the relative lack of interracial hostility in Chicago, the article posited, was that black and white leaders had been working behind the scenes to use education to “remove the yolks of segregation and discrimination,” and that “studies toward that end” had been “quietly introduced into Chicago’s public school system last year.”³⁴ The article went on to profile Morgan, discussing her childhood and education, her teaching career, her creation of the *Supplementary Units*, and their introduction into Chicago’s schools.

Articles like those in *PM* and *Time* brought the *Supplementary Units* to the attention of those outside the field of education, including some religious and civic organizations involved in tolerance campaigns. Morgan received correspondence on September 13, 1943 from Shirley Lebeson of Minneapolis, Minnesota, who had heard of Morgan “thru the article which appeared recently in *PM*’s pictorial review,” requested copies of the units for her work with a group of black children at the city’s Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House.³⁵ Similarly, on October 20, 1943, Arthur Schoenfeldt of the Maine Unitarian Association wrote to Morgan, requesting 14 sets of

³³ Fletcher Wilson, “How Chicago Teaches Whites to Respect Negroes and Negroes to Respect Themselves,” *PM*, Sunday, September 5, 1943, 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Shirley Lebeson, “Correspondence, Shirley Lebeson (Phyllis Wheatley Settlement, Minneapolis, Minn.), 1943” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 17], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

the *Supplementary Units* for use and promising to reimburse any expenses that might arise.³⁶

Closer to home, another religious leader, Sister Mary Agnese of Chicago's Providence High School also wrote to Morgan after hearing one of her public addresses. Sister Mary Agnese requested materials for use with "a large group of our girls who are willing to be educated."³⁷

In addition to educators, activists, and community organizations some of the most powerful testaments to Morgan's work came from members of the armed forces stationed both at home and abroad. Morgan received several letters from soldiers throughout the war years, such as Captain Herbert Aptheker, of the 791 Field Artillery Battalion, stationed at Fort Jackson in South Carolina who stated that he would "appreciate very much" receiving a copy of her work.³⁸ The same sentiment was expressed by Private Edward Butler, who wrote through V-mail "to find out if I can get a copy of the Negro History which was mention in Newsreel Magazine" adding, "it is something I didn't learn in school. But would like to learn it now."³⁹ Butler closed his message by stating that he would "be glad when we are called Brown soldier instead of Negro soldier. We are fighting and working for the same cause as everyone else from the states."⁴⁰ As Butler's comments show, even as Morgan battled to fill in the historical record with black

³⁶ Arthur Schoenfeldt, "Correspondence, Maine Unitarian Association (Rev. Arthur Schoenfeldt), 1943" Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 18], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

³⁷ Sister Mary Agnese, "Correspondence, Sister Mary Agnese (Providence High School), 1944" Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 14], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

³⁸ Herbert Aptheker, "Correspondence, Herbert Aptheker, 1945," Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 14], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

accomplishments which had would otherwise have been excluded, the disregard for black service and contributions to the nation had not subsided.

Another serviceman, Morton Brooks, wrote to Morgan from Italy on December 16, 1943. He explained that, nearly three months after its initial publication, “The September issue of the New York newspaper *PM*, to which I am a devoted subscriber, reached me at this base.”⁴¹ In it, Brooks found the feature article on Morgan and her work, which struck him as a significant step in the direction of better race relations, an objective which he deemed critical to the survival of the nation itself as “the moral and physical deterioration which inevitably comes to a nation split along racial lines are bound to affect all of us, white and black alike.”⁴² As with Butler and Aptheker, Brooks requested copies of Morgan’s *Supplementary Units*. However, as he made clear later in the letter, he intended the materials not for his own use, but for two young nieces in his charge.

Were I at home I would be using all my influence by persuasion and precept, to teach these children love and understanding of other human beings. I would, if I were there, be teaching them to look beneath the surface manifestations of a sick and bitter society for the greatness and dignity of all people of all races. But I am here, on necessary business, too far in space and time to explain what must seem strange and disturbing in their expanding universe. My letters to them are puny attempts. Too often I sound preachy and dull even to my own ears. That is why I am asking for your help.⁴³

Brooks finished his emotional appeal by asking promising to, in accordance with Morgan’s advice, either send the units directly to his nieces or read them first himself and work the information into his letters to the home-front. Brooks believed that he was contributing to

⁴¹ “Correspondence, Morton Brooks (Italy), 1943,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 2, Folder 15], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Morgan's efforts, in that they were both working, as he put it, "each in his own way, for the better world in the making."⁴⁴ Brooks' letter shifts the focus from the impact of the *Supplementary Units* on the level of cities, civic organizations, districts, and school systems, to the individual students who were the intended audience of the lessons. The success or failure of the *Supplementary Units* ultimately rested in its capacity to develop attitudes of pride, tolerance, and inclusivity in students much like Brooks' own nieces. It is to this impact that we now turn.

The Supplementary Units in the Classroom

The central object of the *Supplementary Units* was to change the attitudes of students, both black and white, towards the place of blacks in American society. The problem, in Morgan's eyes, was that students could not develop the correct attitudes towards blacks with the paucity of information presented in the standard curriculum. In the absence of accurate information, and sometimes no information at all, prejudice was allowed to go unchecked. Morgan believed that, "Intolerance toward Negroes is caused by incomplete views. The underlying facts involved are seldom presented and students are not aroused to a real point of interest."⁴⁵ The stories of black achievement included in the *Supplementary Units* were meant to provide this missing information, and serve as a basis for students to reconsider and eventually alter their existing views of race. Although Morgan admitted that reeducation of this type would be difficult and time consuming, owing to the fact that the inaccurate views of many students had been reinforced both in their schools and in their homes, she was also confident that progress could be made and that, "beginning early in childhood and through continued effective

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Madeline Morgan, "Chicago Schools Teach Negro History," *The Elementary English Review* 21, no. 3 (March 1944): 109.

educational methods, year after year, teachers can develop wholesome attitudes with the result that many of the youths of today who will be in key positions fifteen or twenty years from now will have a different attitude toward Negro Americans.”⁴⁶ As the *Supplementary Units* were adopted both in Chicago and elsewhere, Morgan’s belief in the power of education to address and ameliorate prejudice would be put to the test in hundreds of classrooms.

Although the local and national attention the *Supplementary Units* garnered in academic circles, the popular press, and among the education policy makers and administrators was and is impressive, the real work of changing attitudes and outlooks happened in individual classrooms as teachers implemented the units with their students. Though the voices of teachers and students appear with less frequency in surviving materials concerning the units, there is enough material to draw some basic conclusions about the effect of the *Supplementary Units* in classrooms.

The first is that, for black students, the units served as an affirmation of their individual worth and their place within the American society. As the units neared completion, for example, Morgan and King went to several schools in order “to observe reactions, interests, and vocabulary difficulties.”⁴⁷ While they noted that students, both black and white, showed interest in the stories and were often surprised to learn about black contributions to American life, the comments of black students were deeply personal as students connected the heroes they learned about in the units to their own sense of self. The reactions of black students, which Morgan quoted in a 1944 article published in the *Elementary English Review*, included comments like, “I didn't know that Negroes had done such outstanding things in American wars,” “I am proud to

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 107.

know that I'm a Negro,” “We feel uplifted when we learn that our race is doing something,” and “We don't need to feel ashamed of the Negro race.”⁴⁸

If black students felt vindicated or affirmed by the material in the *Supplementary Units*, white students met the stories of black Americans with keen interest and enthusiasm. In the same article, Morgan noted that white teachers using the units commented that their students often asked why they had not learned these stories before, or simply sat in awed silence when the stories were read to them. Many times, it seems this initial shock gave way to a desire to know much more about black historical figures. As one teacher stated:

The children knew so little about Negroes they were inspired to do research of their own. They wanted to talk about Negroes all day every day. I couldn't do that so I had to organize a Negro History Club. I asked the children to save their findings and questions either for the regular history period or the Negro history club.⁴⁹

This interest, Morgan believed, would serve as a foundation for new understandings and eventually appreciation for different races and cultures. During a later unrelated lesson on racial tolerance, a student from the class above made much the same conclusion when he stated that, “Maybe white children will become more tolerant when they study the achievements of the Negro.”⁵⁰ While it is not possible to make broad generalizations, evidence from at least one classroom does provide an example of just such an outcome, the classroom of Grace Markwell.

The most detailed account of the *Supplementary Units* at the classroom level comes from Grace Markwell, a white social studies teacher in Brookfield, Illinois, who recorded her experiences using the units with her fifth, sixth, and seventh grade classes. Located 13 miles

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

southwest of Chicago, Brookfield was extremely racially isolated. Markwell noted that her students' exposure to blacks in their everyday lives was extremely limited and that, "The only contact children have with Negroes is on public conveyances and those encounters are chiefly of the servant class."⁵¹ Even though Markwell herself strove to create, in her words, "an appreciation for peoples of cultures differing from our own," she noted that these efforts met with little success in changing student attitudes.⁵² This pattern changed when she was introduced to Madeline Morgan and her work.

Like many other white educators drawn to the *Supplementary Units*, Markwell's interest initially reflected with the state of American society prompted by the war abroad. In a public address entitled "Interracial Possibilities," she begins by stating, "I share the view of many serious minded persons, that the American Negro, through no fault of his own, is one of the major challenges on the 'home front'."⁵³ Markwell believed that part of establishing better race relations was to bring blacks to the table, one of her major frustrations being that she had, "listened to panels, roundtables, seminars, lectures, and just plain discussions...and, in most cases, it has been a group of our own race, trying in isolation, to solve the problem."⁵⁴ One of the groups guilty of such isolationist tendencies, Markwell observed, had been the Illinois Council for the Social Studies, of which she was a member. Markwell set out to change this reality, suggesting a project for the "promotion of better racial understanding through interracial

⁵¹ Grace Markwell, "The 'Supplementary Units' in the White School," Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 5, Folder 20], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 1.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Markwell, "Interracial Possibilities," 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

cooperation” as a possible project for her elementary teachers’ committee. However, when the project was adopted, and Markwell made chairman, she realized she was wholly unprepared to take on the challenge alone and as a result, “there was but one thing to do—begin the quest for some sympathetic Negro teacher who would work with us.”⁵⁵ That teacher, as it turned out, would be closer than expected.

In searching for a suitable mentor in race relations work, Markwell soon learned about Morgan and her work. “I made several inquiries and to each came one and the same answer, Madeline Robinson Morgan, who had written the materials on the Negro in use in the Chicago schools.”⁵⁶ After conducting her own research on Morgan, Markwell was likewise impressed by Morgan’s accomplishments, and decided to ask for her help, to which Morgan “graciously consented.”⁵⁷ Morgan and Markwell finally met soon after at Morgan’s home, where, in Morgan’s kitchen over bacon and eggs, the two laid out plans not only for a the Council Committee but also for Markwell to use the *Supplementary Units* with her students in Brookfield and record their reactions, an experiment she was “eager to try” in her own classroom, and which she recorded in a document entitled, “The ‘Supplementary Units’ in the White Classroom.”

Markwell started by surveying the attitudes of her classes towards blacks, and quickly concluded that, “in general, they thought that Negroes were inferior to white persons, unclean, always fighting, dangerous and lazy.”⁵⁸ However, after her use of the *Supplementary Units*, she noted definite changes. In the papers her student composed after listening to some of the stories

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 2.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 2.

⁵⁸ Markwell, “The ‘Supplementary Units’ in the White School,” 1.

from the units and their ensuing discussions, they made comments such as, “I thought them bad, but they are not,” “I thought them dirty, but some are very clean,” “I thought colored people were slopped, uneducated, now I know that they are nice,” “I thought them unfriendly, but they aren’t,” and “I thought them different, but it is only the color of their skin.”⁵⁹ Markwell concluded that these results provided “basic proof of the superiority of materials planned especially for schools by one who knows the Negro and the child, over that usually available and generally in use.”⁶⁰ Her use of the *Supplementary Units* had given Markwell a means of spark some of the changes she wished to see in her students’ attitudes on race.

Interestingly, Markwell did not stop here, but transferred her students’ newfound interest to discuss contemporary issues of race relations with her students, including housing discrimination. After discussing housing conditions in Chicago, and how practices like redlining forced blacks into certain areas of the city, her students again began to change their opinions. Where many of her students had begun by expressing beliefs such as, “Negroes just like to have their own town and don’t want us to come there,” by the end of the discussion they understood that certain laws constrained the areas where blacks were allowed to buy or rent properties.⁶¹ Importantly, because her students had begun to view blacks differently, they now saw restrictions in housing as unwarranted: “As our interest developed and they realized that... certain Negroes, whom they had come to admire, would not be permitted to live in neighborhoods outside the area, their resentment flamed and they were rather vehement in their denunciation of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the practice.”⁶² Perhaps the examples of accomplished black individuals, many of whom hailed from Chicago, provided through the *Supplementary Units*, gave Markwell’s students concrete examples of persons who might be negatively affected by housing discrimination, and in turn the students decided that such discrimination was unacceptable.

Markwell continued to push her students on the issue of housing, by posing the question of whether they would now, after all that they had learned, be willing to have black families as neighbors in their own communities. This critical question brought the issue of integration out of the abstract and presented it to students as a personal decision. Of the seventy-six students Markwell surveyed in her classes, sixty-five said that they would be willing to have blacks as neighbors. Their responses, including “I could learn more about them” and “They would be kind and friendly,” echoed some of the positive descriptions of black Americans contained in the *Supplementary Units*.⁶³ One of the students, identified by Markwell only by the first name of Judy, responded, “I like Negroes and would like to learn more about them, but I just haven’t been with them enough to get used to their dark skins.”⁶⁴

Although the responses were overwhelmingly positive, there were still students who expressed doubt or discomfort with the idea of blacks as neighbors. Markwell noted that six of the negative answers she received were “indefinite, giving no reason,” suggesting that some students were either unable or unwilling to express why they still opted for racial separation. Others did share their thoughts, however, with comments like “I would not feel safe,” “I would feel funny,” “Other families might move in and spoil the neighborhood,” and “I like them, but I

⁶² Ibid. 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

think that they would rather be with their own kind.”⁶⁵ These remarks show that the *Supplementary Units*, while acting as an important basis for conversations about race, were no panacea. As Morgan herself had observed, the process of reeducating students about race meant undoing assumptions that students brought to the classroom with them, reinforced in many instances by their families, schools, churches, and communities. Even with this in mind, the fact that a large majority of Markwell’s students seem to have been ready to accept blacks into their community is remarkable and speaks to the effectiveness of Markwell’s teaching along with Morgan’s materials. Even more impressive was that this desire for interpersonal contact soon moved from conversation to reality as Markwell’s students invited Madeline Morgan herself to visit Brookfield.

Even though her students had found the stories contained in the *Supplementary Units* interesting and enlightening, as Markwell progressed in her use of the units she could not help but feel that one story was missing, “I was sure that for my pupils the story of greatest value had been omitted from the stories Mrs. Morgan wrote, that of the author. I had that story!”⁶⁶ Using the news coverage of Morgan in PM magazine, and her own experience soliciting Morgan’s input and advice for the ICSS, Markwell gave her students an impression of the woman whom she had come to respect on both a professional and personal relationship. The students responded with enthusiasm: “Questions came thick and fast. ‘Does she talk over the radio?’ ‘Does she talk to schools?’ ‘Can we ask her to talk to us?’”⁶⁷ The last of these queries led Markwell’s fifth grade class to write a letter inviting Morgan to Gross School, an offer that Morgan accepted,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Markwell, “Interracial Possibilities,” 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 4.

coming to Brookfield to speak at an assembly which had to be expanded to include both the fifth grade and upper grades because of the intense attention it drew.

A reception committee made up of school mothers, students, and photographers met the Chicago contingent at the station. Besides Morgan, two other teachers, Mrs. Powell of Wendell Phillips High School and Mrs. Evans of Hartigan Elementary, came as speakers and shared their experiences with Markwell's classes. The students were thus introduced to black women who fit few of the stereotypes to which they were accustomed. Here were professional women, teachers, who could speak of their college and graduate school experience, trips abroad, and social and political work at home. The impression on the students must have been profound, as Markwell recorded the comment of one student that, "I forgot she was colored when she talked."⁶⁸ Markwell summarized the new perspective the assembly imparted on her students: "My pupils will think twice before they condemn all Negroes to the ranks of the undesirable. The word Negro now means to them Mrs. Morgan, Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Evans, and others whose contributions have made the world a better place for all of us."⁶⁹ Not only did Markwell's student learn from these teachers, however, they soon set up ways to learn from other students as well.

After the assembly in Brookfield, Markwell's classes began a letter exchange with the classes of Mrs. Lavinia W. Evans, the teacher from Hartigan Elementary School in Chicago who accompanied Morgan on her visit to Gross School. Based on Markwell's impressions, it seems

⁶⁸ Ibid. 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 7.

that Evans shared much in common with Morgan and Markwell in terms of her education, formative experiences, and the depth of her civic and religious involvement.

Mrs. Evans of Hartigan Elementary School came out for the evening. She too, is a graduate of the University of Chicago. In grade school she was the only colored child and there were few Negroes in her high school. She is very active in the work of the Good Shepherd Church and is a member of the board of the Phyllis Wheatly [Phyllis Wheatley] Home for Working Girls.⁷⁰

Because of these similarities, Markwell felt that their “personalities ‘clicked’ at once and we have had various happy experiences since.”⁷¹ Markwell later noted that her interactions with Evans and Morgan had brought her to the realization that, “If we make opportunities to associate with colored people of similar interests and economic and cultural background, we are surprised at the ease with which our interest turns to friendship.”⁷² The statement is telling both in terms of Markwell’s acceptance of blacks as potential friends and equals, and the extent to which she limits this vision of inclusivity to persons who she feels are similarity situated socially and economically. Still, her enthusiasm seems genuine, and as she stated later she felt that the relationships, with both Morgan and Evans, were one of the most valuable aspects of her use of the *Supplementary Units*. “Evaluating the program (and school teachers evaluate everything) the greatest gains have been mine, rich personal contacts and warm friendship.”⁷³ This connection between educators provided a basis for exchange between their students.

The relationship between Evans and Markwell, which Morgan fostered, led to several contacts between the students of Hartigan and Gross schools. Evans herself recorded one such

⁷⁰ Ibid. 5.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 7.

⁷³ Ibid. 8.

experience in comments made for the Illinois Council for the Social Studies, of which she subsequently became a member. When asked about interracial work going on in her school, Evans noted that, “Of course the ‘Supplementary Units’ are an integral part of the curriculum” and also added, “I am planning to take our Student Council members to Brookfield to see the Eight Grade Play, ‘Penrod.’ My principal feels that there is much to be gained from the visit. The trip will give our children a chance to see other neighborhoods as well as learning more about the city in which they live.”⁷⁴ On Markwell’s side, she noted that her class was “happily preparing for a visit from ten of Mrs. Evans’ pupils on May 25, and I am taking some of mine to the Hall Branch Library May 27.”⁷⁵ The classes also exchanged invitations to their mutual commencement exercises.

Overall then, Markwell credited the *Supplementary Units* not only with expanding her students’ knowledge about black history, but with helping spark a change in their views on race and a desire on their part to know more with regard to race relations within their own community and others. Out of this interest Markwell’s students organized an extracurricular club to learn more about black history, created a scrapbook of their findings for display at a school open house, and visited the Hall Branch Library with its large collection of black history resources. Most interestingly, they began to establish ties to black students and teachers outside Brookfield, asking them for more information on various topics. In Markwell’s eyes, the *Supplementary Units* had provided a foundation not just for interracial learning, but real contact and conversation across geographic and racial boundaries.

⁷⁴ Illinois Council for the Social Studies, “Interracial Cooperation,” Madeline Stratton Morris Papers [Box 9, Folder 14], Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, Chicago Public Library, 7.

⁷⁵ Markwell, “Interracial Possibilities,” 6.

Conclusion

Although we cannot draw definitive conclusions about the impact of *Supplementary Units*, the available evidence presented in this chapter makes several points fairly clear. The units engendered a great deal of enthusiasm, both from academic and nonacademic groups, and in both the black press and mainstream white publications. They struck many observers as, in the words of Frazier Lane of the Chicago Urban League, “one of the finest approaches to improvements in race relations ever attempted.”⁷⁶ For black educators, academics, and civic and social groups, the units were a vehicle for empowerment and inclusion that they had been denied in the standard curriculum. For white educators, politicians, and district heads, they held out a means of promoting unity and smoothing over racial problems brought to the surface by the war, using education instead of more direct forms of social agitation. As a result, the units were requested by hundreds of schools, districts, organizations, and individuals across the country.

Inside the classroom, the use of the *Supplementary Units* was up to individual teachers, each of whom would certainly have approached the material with their own unique set of preconceived ideas and various priorities. However, the comments recorded by Morgan illustrate that at least to many black students, the units served as much need affirmation of their presence as an integral part of the American story. In addition, Markwell’s experiences weaving stories from the units into her own social studies lessons prove that the material could act as a powerful starting point for helping students gain a broader appreciation for black accomplishments in the nation’s past, along with a desire to know and learn from and exchange with their black peers, including their own peers in the Chicago area. Even though the *Supplementary Units* did not,

⁷⁶ Fletcher Wilson, “How Chicago Teaches Whites to Respect Negroes and Negroes to Respect Themselves,” 15.

indeed could not, wipe the color line away completely, it is clear that their use did significant work towards this end.

CONCLUSION

On July 18, 2016, in Cleveland, Ohio, as the Republican National Convention took place on the stages and platforms in the massive Quicken Loans Arena below, CNN news anchor Chris Hayes and a panel of guests debated the political outlook for what was to become one of the most vicious and vitriolic presidential campaigns of recent memory. Looking over the audience gathered to hear the Republican platform, Charlie Pierce of *Esquire* magazine characterized the Republican base as “old white people,” and pointed to the glaring lack of diversity in the massive stadium.¹ A fellow panelist, Representative Steve King, a Republican from Iowa, defended the homogeneity of the audience and by proxy his party by calling into question the very need for such diversity. King stated, “This 'old white people' business does get a little tired, Charlie,” then went on to challenge him, inquiring, “I'd ask you to go back through history and figure out, where are these contributions that have been made by these other categories of people that you're talking about, where did any other subgroup of people contribute more to civilization?”² The rest of the panel gasped in shock, and after a moment Hayes regained enough composure to ask, “Than white people?”³ King, not backing down, responded, “Than, than Western civilization itself. It's rooted in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the United States of America and every

¹ Philip Bump, “Rep. Steve King Wonders What ‘Sub-Groups’ Besides Whites Made Contributions to Civilization,” *The Washington Post*, July 28, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/07/18/rep-steve-king-wonders-what-sub-groups-besides-whites-made-contributions-to-civilization/?utm_term=.672d699d9a78.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

place where the footprint of Christianity settled the world. That's all of Western civilization.”⁴ As the other panelists exploded into comment, Hayes was forced to cut to commercial break to avoid all-out chaos.

While King’s comments were shocking, they were hardly new. The insistence that American history can be equated with the story of white or European colonization, settlement, and expansion, and that other groups have played little part in this story is identical to the logic used by white textbook writers in the early twentieth century to ignore and discount the stories of minority groups. While expressed less openly today, thus the shock expressed by the members of the panel at Rep. King’s comments, this narrative still exerts a powerful influence on the way we approach our national past. More importantly, because “narrative habits, patterns of seeing, shape what we see and aspire to,” the impact of this dominant narrative extends into the present, framing the bounds of current-day discussions of race and place in American society.⁵

Yet if narratives created by dominant groups tend to reinforce their own privilege and provide a schema in which their “superior position is seen as natural,” *counter narratives* crafted by marginalized or subaltern groups can disrupt this pattern.⁶ They can work to give voice to the suppressed and devalued, build shared bonds between members of ostracized groups, and even challenge those in power to rethink their own prejudices by “destroying the mind-set—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a backdrop of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, ed. Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado (Temple University Press, 2013), 72.

⁶ Ibid. 71.

which legal and political discourse takes place.”⁷ Black educators have for decades understood the power and promise of this type of *counter narrative*, and the *Supplementary Units for the Course of Instruction in Social Studies* are a prime example of a particular type of *counternarrative*, the *alternative black curriculum*.

In analyzing the *Supplementary Units*, it becomes clear that they mark an exceptionally strong example of the themes, constructs, and ideas of the *alternative black curriculum*. Morgan and King built on the work of W.E.B. Dubois, Leila Amos Pendleton Carter G. Woodson, A.P. Foster, Lucy Craft Laney, Merl Eppse, and other architects of this proto-black studies movement. They created a curriculum that validated black dignity and humanity and subverted the dominant narrative of American social studies texts during this period. Morgan and King presented material that showcased the sophistication and development and African civilizations; engaged with the inhumanity of the slave trade and the bravery of the abolitionists and runaways who fought its cruelty; praised the heroism of black soldiers who sacrificed in defense of the ideals of a nation that refused to recognize them; and highlighted the modern-day black inventors, artists, and entrepreneurs who continued the proud legacy of their forebears. Through the pages of the *Supplementary Units*, students, both white and black, were challenged to reconsider the most basic narratives of American history.

This dissertation has shown that Morgan’s work should be recognized as significant both in the development of history and social studies as school subjects, and in curriculum studies more broadly. Traditionally, curriculum studies as a field has been “a field by Anglo-Western men about Anglo-Western men,” slow to recognize and include the contributions of blacks and

⁷ Ibid.

other minorities as educators and theorists.⁸ This singular focus on figures like Horace Mann, Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and George S. Counts, albeit with the more recent addition of a few female theorists like Hilda Taba and Maria Montessori, projects a mono-vocal perspective that ignores the experiences of other groups. Recent research has shown that black scholars have been actively developing and articulating their own unique curricular outlooks and orientations for over a century. Because of the place blacks occupy at the margins of American society, these curricular orientations at times intersected with and at times opposed or challenged larger mainstream curricular movements, as “the way African Americans have developed their views on education, and especially the curriculum” was always inextricably “connected to their socio-political realities.”⁹ Recognizing the ways in which black curriculum writers fashioned their ideas is a critical task for curriculum studies. Because “African American educators’ contributions to the fields of curriculum and social studies have not received full credit in helping educators and researchers understand how curriculum developed in various racial and ethnic communities” research into these stories, “provides the field with fresh perspectives and new research trajectories that identify new persons and organizations outside the mainstream that contributed to curriculum knowledge.”¹⁰ The integration of the stories of black curriculum theorists to curriculum studies can help scholars better understand how mainstream curriculum

⁸ Bernadette Baker, “The History of Curriculum of Curriculum History? What *is* the Field and Who Gets to Play on it?,” *Curriculum Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 113.

⁹ William Watkins, “Black Curriculum Orientations: A Preliminary Inquiry,” *Harvard Education Review* 63, no. 3 (1993): 322.

¹⁰ LaGarrett J. King, “‘A Narrative to the Colored Children in America’: Lelia Amos Pendleton, African American History Textbooks, and Challenging Personhood,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 84, no. 4 (2015): 529.

movements developed, how minorities interpreted and reacted to them, and how minorities created their own curricula.

Equally important, bringing the *Supplementary Units* to the foreground of curriculum studies also allows us to focus on the critical but often overlooked role of black women in the creation and articulation of new curricular movements, especially in history and social studies. Black female historians during the early twentieth century faced barriers of sexism and racism, and “although black men’s work never received the proper recognition from academia, black women’s academic production was even more obscured.”¹¹ However, the absence of recognition from within academy did not stop black women from exerting significant influence on how history was conceptualized and taught especially at the primary and secondary levels. Acting in their capacity as teachers, school founders, clubwomen, journalists, and novelists, these “self-taught” and “self-proclaimed” historians contributed scholarship that was “insightful, accessible, and practical.”¹² Madeline Morgan stands among this early cadre of black female historians. Although her advanced degrees were not in history, Morgan skillfully drew support from black female activists in organizations and institutions like the DuSable History Club, George Cleveland Hall Library, Phi Delta Kappa, ASNLH, the Chicago Urban League, and the NAACP in order to gather material and expertise. These connections allowed her to build a history curriculum that received praise not only within Chicago, but nationally and internationally as well.

¹¹ Pero G. Dagbovie, “Black Women Historians from the Late 19th Century to the Dawn of the Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 3 (2004): 243.

¹² *Ibid.*

Building from these two insights, the need for studies that highlight black curricular orientations as well as scholarship that speaks to the unique role of black women as creators of curriculum and curricular movements, several directions for additional research seem promising. First, scholars should continue to investigate lesser-known black curriculum theorists and their contributions. Whereas existing research has focused on prominent national figures like Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Dubois, new projects should look to the rank and file educators who spread and further developed the initial ideas of these seminal figures. Much of this work was done by the black women who formed the vast majority of black primary and secondary teachers during this period, as well as served as the backbone for organizations like the ASNLH, which promoted the study of black history. The story of how these women created alternative curricula for their students in order to fill the silences and counter the misconceptions found in the dominant narrative should be more fully analyzed. In addition, the role of black women's organizations and sororities as places of curricular experimentation and development should be addressed. These organizations were networks linking the talents and abilities of black women educators on a local and national level, and played an important role in disseminating new pedagogical and curricular knowledge.

Second, future scholarship might also fruitfully compare the efforts of black educators in the early twentieth century to shape curriculum to similar efforts in the present day. Just as Madeline Morgan and her contemporaries faced history and social studies curricula designed to purposefully exclude their perspectives and experiences, educators from minority backgrounds face similar obstacles today. For example, Tara J. Yosso has noted that contemporary history textbooks continue to “distort, omit, and stereotype the histories of communities of color” and

that “barring textbooks or teachers that bring a multifaceted version of U.S. history to the curriculum, students have little access to academic discourses that decenter white upper/middle class experiences as the norm.”¹³ Scholars like Yosso, who seek to build a critical race approach to curriculum in order to “challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions” and “direct the formal curriculum toward social justice” should look to the long history of curricular activism and engagement exemplified by Morgan and her peers.¹⁴

The success with which Morgan challenged traditional curricular narratives around black identity has major implications for present scholars and educators. It points to the fact that classroom teachers from minority backgrounds have been and continue to be sources of major curricular reform, creating and coalescing new bodies of knowledge and pedagogical practices. Instead of seeing themselves as powerless or shut out of discussions about curricular organization and content, Morgan and other black female educators found ways to insert themselves and their priorities into the conversation. This took a knowledge of what resources to call on, what political and social leverage to exert, and how to best navigate the systems and structures in which they found themselves. Thus, the victories achieved by Morgan and educators like her provide valuable models and practical frameworks for educators engaged uncovering “the oppressive and marginalizing power of schools” and challenging them to instead support curricula which “emancipate and empower.”¹⁵

¹³ Tara J. Yosso, “Toward a Critical Race Curriculum,” *Equity and Excellence in Education* 35, no. 2 (2002): 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 102-103.

After her success with the *Supplementary Units*, Madeline Morgan continued to be a force for change. She taught social studies in Chicago's public schools for Emerson, Drake, A.O. Sexton, and Dixon schools over the course of decades. After her retirement in 1968, she also taught at the college level for Chicago State University, Triton College, Mayfair College (now Truman College), and Governor's State University. Outside the classroom, her community organizing continued unabated as she became the president of the Chicago chapter of the National Council of Negro Women, a post she held from 1946 to 1948. She also continued her long allegiance to the NAACP and ASNLH, becoming president of the latter from 1970 to 1977. Through all of these activities, she remained a committed advocate of black history and fought for its place in the classroom, a dedication that led her to research and create her own textbook, *Negroes Who Helped Build America*, published in 1965. Joseph Penn, the Supervising Director of the Department of History for the Washington D.C. Public Schools, wrote in his preface to the text, "When you finish this book and look about you at the activities of the Negro American, you will know that he is not a newcomer to our country's history."¹⁶ This sense of validation and inclusion of the black experience is what Morgan aimed for in all of her endeavors.

Morgan's life and work were dedicated to the use of education as a tool of liberation and empowerment. The *Supplementary Units* form an important piece of this larger work. They speak to the success of black educators in promoting an *alternative black curriculum* in history and social studies in the Pre-Civil Rights era. They also serve as an example of how the activism of rank and file teachers can impact policy far beyond the walls of their classrooms and schools.

¹⁶ Madeline Stratton, *Negroes Who Helped Build America* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1965), vi.

Lastly, they serve as inspiration to current and future educators, regardless of background, who seek to use the curriculum to advance social justice and equity.

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