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**The Physical Uplift of the Race: The Emergence of the African American Physical
Culture Movement, 1900—1930**

A Dissertation Presented

by

JOSEPH ANTHONY GUILLORY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2015

W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies

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JOSEPH ANTHONY GUILLORY

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Dedication

#TeamGuillory

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All praise to my God, through whom all of the things in my life have been possible. There were so many times that I have thought about quitting, but the determination and drive that you instilled in me kept me going.

I have to thank my family for fostering in me a spirit of achievement. Thank you for your love and support throughout this incredibly long journey. To my ridiculously beautiful and patient wife, thank you for enduring my mood swings, anxiety attacks, and restless nights. “Aquemini” forever!

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I cannot say enough about the generous folks at the libraries of UMass Amherst, Amherst College, Virginia Union University and Virginia State University. This simply would not have happened without you.

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ABSTRACT

THE PHYSICAL UPLIFT OF THE RACE: THE EMERGENCE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PHYSICAL CULTURE MOVEMENT, 1900—1930

MAY 2015

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Directed by John H. Bracey

My dissertation, “The Physical Uplift of the Race: The Emergence of the African American Physical Culture Movement, 1900—1930,” situates the early twentieth century of African American physical culture within a historical narrative that shaped philosophical viewpoints of African American urban community development. Previous inquiries of related topics attempt to describe a physical culture movement that was somehow separate and apart from the larger historical narrative of African people in the United States. My work does not continue in that vein. My objective is to illustrate how the black physical culture movement was primarily a reaction to African Americans’ new geo-political realities and communal aspirations as they began to establish communities outside of the rural South.

In part one of my dissertation I interrogate the relationship between the African-American physical culture movement and black social scientists’ investigations social issues that plagued the increasingly urbanizing black population at the turn of the twentieth century. I argue that black social reformers adopted aspects of the physical culture movement to remedy issues related to poor health, inadequate childcare,

inadequate education, and youthful mischief. I conclude this section by arguing that, despite their early achievements in spreading movement aims, on the eve of Depression era, black physical culture proponents began to compete with the spoils of their own success. This last point has great implications for modern African American student-athletes and the communities who support them.

In part two I analyze the black playground movement as a manifestation of “race adjustment” as depicted within the pages of Baltimore’s *Afro-American* newspaper. My first argument is that from 1909 to 1925, the *Afro-American*, which began as one of the most important black periodicals, became increasingly disillusioned with the idea of reaching an accommodation with the larger white population. This is evidenced by its evolving definition of the term race adjustment and the newspaper’s subsequent advocacy for race progress. My second argument is that the *Afro*, which had been known as an overtly political instrument for black self-determination, adopted as one of its principal campaigns the construction of playgrounds for reasons related to race advancement. I conclude by arguing that the struggle to erect playgrounds in black Baltimore unfolded in ways that differed greatly from the effort to establish playgrounds for white and European immigrant youth. My epilogue outlines some areas for future research.

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INTRODUCTION

My intention in writing this dissertation is to situate the emergence of African American physical culture in the twentieth century within a historical narrative that accounts for the philosophical viewpoints of those African Americans who tried to resolve the various social issues that affected a rapidly urbanizing African-American population between 1900 and 1930. I will illustrate how the emergence of the black physical culture movement was, in many ways, a reaction to African Americans' new geo-political circumstances and communal aspirations.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In part one I interrogate the relationship between the African-American physical culture movement and intellectuals' attempts to resolve many of the social issues affecting the growing black urban population. I argue that intellectuals adopted aspects of the physical culture movement to help them resolve many of the issues that hindered racial progress in American cities. My evidence shows that physical culture proponents advocated for the implementation of athletics into black schools, colleges, and community institutions because they believed that doing so would help to improve blacks' material conditions. I also argue that, despite their early achievements black physical culture proponents struggled to protect the movement from a results-driven sport consumerist takeover.

In part two I consider the significance of the black playground movement as a theme of race adjustment within the pages of Baltimore's *Afro-American Newspaper* from 1900 to 1929. My first argument is that during this period, the *Afro-American*, which began as a publication in line with Booker T. Washington's accommodationist approach, became increasingly disillusioned with the idea of a peaceful coexistence with

whites. My evidence shows that the dominant perspective in the *Afro-American* evolved away from a *moral suasionist* approach toward a more militant position. My second argument is that the newspaper adopted as one of its principal campaigns of race adjustment the construction of playgrounds for black communities. My evidence shows that despite community support, the African American playground movement in Baltimore, as covered by the *Afro-American*, was greatly impeded by white indifference and a lack of government sponsored financial support. This occurred despite what appeared to be much stronger support and effective equitable resource allocation for such purposes in other American cities. My evidence also shows that, in their advocacy of playgrounds, writers in the *Afro-American* became disenchanted with *moral suasionist* approaches to attract civic and private philanthropic aid. *Afro-American* writers evolved to adopt a more confrontational strategy of criticizing local authorities for neglecting this particular initiative of black community empowerment.

Despite the implications that its name suggests, this dissertation has very little to do with “sports” as the term is commonly understood. It is actually an interrogation of race politics within the context understood by students of black history as the era of Booker T. Washington. I explore the idea of uplift vs. adjustment in an attempt to decipher the intended motives of black play organizers and proponents of physical activity. I show that the physical culture movement was, in many ways a response to the research findings of black social scientific investigations revealed between 1890 and 1910. I will also show that aspects of the physical culture movement were developed in response to black community concerns. In an effort to engage Gaines’ research I hope to complicate the way that we view black social reformers and the motivations behind their

efforts to “improve the race.” I employ the term race adjustment as an alternative descriptor for the ways that black reformers’ responded to social ills that afflicted black communities. Despite the popularity of the term at the turn of the century, “race adjustment” has been widely unexamined by scholars of African American history.

The classic work by Thomas Jackson Woofter, *The Basis of Racial Adjustment*, shapes my understanding of this term. Woofter poses the following question: “What can we do to improve American life through better adjustment of our attitudes, our organizations, and our institutions to the Negro population, and what part can the Negro himself play in this adjustment?”¹ This question helps one to understand that the idea of race adjustment was multifaceted and that it involved a certain amount of social responsibility from both blacks and whites. Woofter carefully distinguished race adjustment from an attempt to solve so-called *Negro problems*. The problems associated with helping blacks to adjust to their new status as free laborers residing in urban locales demanded the attention of both groups. “The adaptations which the two races must make are mutual... race relations today present more tasks than problems, and these tasks of democratic racial action are also mutual.”² According to Woofter, “the white man’s tasks are those of self-control in difficult situations and of adjusting American institutions so as to give the maximum service in adding the belated race; the Negro’s tasks are those of self-development, of cultivating family life, industry, thrift, and moral stamina.”³ The

¹ Thomas Jackson Woofter, *The Basis of Racial Adjustment* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1925), preface.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

purpose of adjustment was to help what Woofter referred to as a “belated people” adapt to their role within the new social, political, and economic order. It is important to consider the fact that Woofter assigned blacks the task of self-development. This task, especially improving blacks’ physical health and moral stamina, appears to be rooted in a desire to improve and preserve the quality of African American life. Because of this, I will show that there are some instances where early twentieth century black physical culture should be evaluated within this category of race adjustment.

This motivation, of course, differs greatly from a desire to “improve the race” for the purpose of appeasing the white ruling class, as discussed by Kevin K. Gaines. Gaines’ *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* shows that racial uplift ideology was a controversial term wielded by elite blacks in an effort to combat anti-black sentiments and racial violence. He views uplift ideology as problematic because, in their espousal of uplift ideals, black leaders were at the same time giving credence to themes of white supremacy. Gaines argues that, “Through racial uplift ideology, elite blacks sought the cooperation of white political and business elites in the pursuit of race progress. Their social vision of blacks within American society was largely determined by those powerful whites who reasserted control over black and white labor by disfranchising blacks and poor whites after the democratic experiment of Reconstruction.”⁴ Gaines’ analysis is priceless because it shows that white racism and uplift ideology were inextricably linked, with the former doing much to shape the mode of resistance of the latter. Gaines also takes issue with the concept of self-help because,

⁴ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), preface.

though it “may have symbolized [blacks’] desire for independence and self-determination, this self-image obscured the extent to which self-help also functioned as an accommodation to blacks’ [non-citizenship] status.”⁵

Gaines situates the rise of uplift ideology within the context of blacks’ limited means to push for civil rights and their desperation to improve their societal positions. According to Gaines, “this says more about power, black vulnerability, and the centrality of race in the nation’s political and cultural institutions than it does about the motives or complicity of black elites.”⁶ Gaines’ takes efforts to show that his analysis is not an indictment on anti-racist efforts of black intellectuals or their white allies. He does, however, express that “the majority of writers and intellectuals inescapably drew on deeply problematic varieties of knowledge about race.”⁷ Of particular interest is chapter three, in which Gaines discusses African Americans’ attempt to combat racist imagery, like minstrelsy, with positive depictions of African American respectability. Gaines argues in this chapter that much of the uplift ideology was a reaction to minstrel stereotypes. “Because photography was crucial in transmitting stereotypes, African Americans found the medium well suited for trying to refute negrophobic caricatures. In addition, black painters, illustrators, and sculptors, along with writers of fiction, produced antiracist narratives and iconography featuring ideal types of bourgeois black manhood and womanhood.”⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 68.

Gaines' research reminds students of black history to keep at the forefront the motivations behind black-centered programs for community development. It also challenges us to remember that black powerbrokers were working to improve their own plights under the guise of "uplift," often times at the expense of dispossessed members of the race. He points out that when early twentieth century black leaders used moral suasion to quell anti-black sentiment, they often failed. The majority of white people were simply unwilling to accept blacks on equal terms and it was, therefore, futile for blacks to try to convince them otherwise. Although many African-Americans turned to moral suasion at the turn of the century, the racial violence that ensued in 1908 and 1919 provided a tremendous source of disillusionment. I mention this because I think it helps us to understand that regardless of their rationale, it would have been foolish for black physical culture proponents to think that exposing black children to athletic training would somehow improve race relations.

This dissertation draws attention to a major oversight in the historiography: *Those who write about sport don't understand black history. Those who understand black history don't care about sport.* In the case of the latter, students of black history miss a great deal when we fail to realize the significance of this cultural phenomenon and therefore the period in which it emerged. This will be explained at length in the subsequent pages of this dissertation. Let it suffice to say that my dissertation, rooted in the discipline of Afro-American Studies, is an attempt to "rescue" the intellectual analysis of black sport and physical culture from scholars in sport history, who,

inadequately define, discuss, and explain the significance of physical culture and athletics for people of African descent living in the United States.

The presumed appropriateness of studying the emergence of African American physical culture primarily within the field of American sport history has greatly limited our understanding of the academic value of engaging African American physical culture as a microcosm of African American life within the context of an emerging twentieth century American society. Discourse surrounding African American physical culture in the twentieth century is typically viewed as estranged, if not divorced from our understanding of African American community formation at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, studies of black athletic participation tend to follow certain academic trends greatly shaped by *presentists*' valuations of historical meaning. In other words, African American physical culture, when engaged intellectually, is typically brought to the fore for its usefulness in helping us understand the aspects of the African American physicality that most interest contemporary readership.

There is one problematic trend within sport history that deserves special mention. The concept of "muscular assimilation," put forth by Patrick Miller, serves as a metanarrative that influences the way many sport historians talk about sport within a context of twentieth century African America. In an essay titled "Muscular Assimilation: Sport and the Paradoxes of Racial Reform," Miller uses the example of Fritz Pollard to show how in a world where "Manhood was won on the field of athletic competition," a black player who excelled on the gridiron "could be promoted for a time to white

manhood.”⁹ Pollard’s successful college career unfolded during the so-called nadir of civil rights, which, for Miller, made his athletic career so meaningful. He explained this characterization by stating that:

Set against the backdrop of tightening racial restrictions in the South and mounting hostility toward black people nationwide, the rise of prominence of an African American athlete, magnified in the spectacles of northeastern college football, then multiplied by the victories won and records set by black champions in other sports, was perceived by many apostles of uplift and racial progress as a significant opportunity to open the eyes of white America to the qualities of character African Americans brought to the sporting arena.¹⁰

For Miller, black athletic success in white colleges “offered a measure of hope to those who sought to soften racial prejudice and advance the cause of social justice.”¹¹ He uses “muscular assimilation” as a concept to describe this hope, which he contends served as the dominant interpretation of black athletic participation in white sport institutions during the first half of the twentieth century.

Miller states that “the appeal to muscular assimilationism was as part of a broad-based dialogue that black activists endeavored to open with white America—in order to stop the dance of Jim Crow and replace that loathsome caricature with images of the skill, strength, and stamina that black athletes demonstrated in a variety of sports. He also says that, “After the turn of the century, some racial reformers embraced the proposition that black achievement in athletic competition not only helped ‘uplift the race’ toward mainstream standards and ideals, but would also cultivate pride in what blacks had

⁹ Patrick Miller, “Muscular Assimilationism: Sport and the Paradoxes of Racial Reform,” in *Race and Sport: The Struggle for Equality on and off the Field*, edited by Charles K. Ross (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 147.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

already accomplished and what they promised to contribute to the American pageant of progress.”¹² He maintains that athletic achievement coincided with the campaign to have the controversial film, *Birth of a Nation* banned from movie theaters, and with Carter G. Woodson’s establishment of Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and the *Journal of Negro History*. It also coincided with the emergence of Harlem’s “New Negro” Movement. All of these things, including sport, served as means to resist white supremacy.

Because Jack Johnson’s accomplishments in the ring were celebrated by members of the black intelligentsia, Miller places the black heavyweight champion within a context of black cultural resistance in saying that “The cultural front of black activism was inextricably linked to the politics of race in the United States...Black artists and intellectuals had long made the case that what they created made a major contribution to the advancement of *all* African Americans. In a similar fashion, muscular assimilationism resonated deeply for the heirs of Frederick Douglass and the allies of W.E.B. Du Bois, who in their most hopeful moments sought models within mainstream culture for a truly democratic society that acknowledged merit wherever it was demonstrated and drew no distinctions of creed or color.”¹³ Miller argues that the concept of muscular assimilationism followed the same rationale purported by Du Bois as the *Crisis* editor, who worked to dispel any ideas of black inferiority. Early twentieth century members of the black press challenge Miller’s association of Johnson with a larger effort among blacks to showcase talented members of the race. A writer for the

¹² Ibid., 148.

¹³ Ibid., 149.

Chicago Defender had this to say about Johnson's victory and its significance to the black community:

The race as a whole is glad the title of champion was retained. It is our aim to reach perfection in whatever line of endeavor we undertake. The champion represents us in the pugilistic field and in the pugilistic field alone, just as Corbett and Jeffries represent the white race, and while we are here let us emphasize the fact that when we are called upon for representatives in any line we reserve the right to do our own selecting, and resent the implication that a prizefighter represents us in any other way than we have stated.¹⁴

Though the evidence supports the claim that many blacks revered Johnson, the claim that black social reformers viewed his athletic prowess a symbol of race progress is unsupported by the historical record.

Miller also considers Edwin B. Henderson, the Du Bois ally and longtime supporter of black physical culture, to have been a proponent of muscular assimilationism. Miller suggests that, "Henderson enlisted athletic achievements in the larger quest for liberty, just as he exalted black champions as 'race men' alongside writers and artists and professors, lawyers, doctors, and entrepreneurs."¹⁵ He links Henderson's writings to a quote taken from an editorial featured in the Howard University newspaper in 1924 where the author argued that, "Athletics is the universal language." Miller argues that this idea of using athletics to "facilitate a universal brotherhood" was a sentiment shared by many black colleges. It motivated college administrators to create athletic programs at their respective institutions. The fact that so many black colleges and universities adopted organized athletic programs serves as

¹⁴ "Athletics in Universities," *Chicago Defender* (Chicago), 4 July 1914, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

evidence for Miller that “black collegians wanted to participate in national pastimes.”¹⁶ Their participation in these pastimes was meant to help “promote the cause of the race” as athletes served as symbols that “could be enlisted in the campaign to transform the dominant culture.”¹⁷

The concept of muscular assimilationism is an interesting conceptualization of black college athletes during the early twentieth century. Especially those who participated at predominantly white colleges. Even if the athletes did not explicitly state their desire to be viewed as helping the race to overcome racial bigotry or some pseudo-scientific claim, one can imagine how others could view them in such terms. Furthermore, on the surface, the spectacle of seeing a black athlete, particularly a boxer or track sprinter, compete against and defeat white opponents probably garnered a certain amount of community support when reflected in the black press. Despite its appeal, the notion of muscular assimilationism is not applicable to the circumstances of the overwhelming majority of black student athletes who participated in their respective sports from 1900 to 1930. Because they played behind the color line and within all-black institutions, most whites were completely unaware of their athletic prowess.

The concept is also problematic because it lends itself to the idea that African Americans created sport institutions for the purpose of advancing black civil rights. This is unsupported by the historical record. In fact, as I will explain below, black institutions began to support financially physical culture programs at the turn of the century in an effort to address series of social ills that affected black communities. It was not until the

¹⁶ Ibid., 155.

¹⁷ Ibid., 158.

mid 1920s that black interscholastic and intercollegiate sport began to attract spectators. One doubts that many whites attended the contest given the fact that immediately following world war there were a series of violent attacks against black citizens in several cities across the country.

Another criticism of the muscular assimilationism argument is that it suggests that less than 30 years after the end of slavery, blacks could or even would rely on their physical prowess to convince whites to grant them first class citizenship. I agree with Miller in thinking that black student athletes participating in football programs in northeast colleges challenged certain stereotypes about black people. I depart from him, however, in requesting that one qualify the term “student-athlete” in order to understand the significance of the event. Football, as a sport, attracted very little press. Football played at an Ivy League school, however, was very noteworthy. It was not the fact that black people played football that elicited public support and press coverage. It was the fact that black student athletes were capable of being admitted into a prestigious institution of higher learning and then, while they were there, earned coveted spots on well-respected football teams. It was their dual nature as both students and athletes that excited Edwin B. Henderson. The quote above from the *Chicago Defender* evidences the claim that black people were not overly impressed by one who was “just” an athlete.

A final critique of the muscular assimilationism idea is that it presupposes that the majority of blacks wanted to be accepted among whites within the dominant society. In reality, many blacks were just as disinterested in comingling with whites as whites were interested in mixing with blacks. Several writers who I discuss below were content with separate institutions so long as they received equal accommodations. Following the

enormous amount of racial violence in the early twentieth century, many blacks surmised that agitating for social equality with whites was a futile venture. In the case of Henderson, writing in the 1910s, it is important to distinguish between him believing blacks were capable of defeating whites and the claim that Henderson wanted blacks to compete against whites. Also, there is a huge difference between viewing sport as a means to foster universal brotherhood and the desire to use sport to cultivate the physical health of African-American students. As I will discuss below, black school and organization leaders definitely had a reason for creating athletic institutions. I strongly disagree, however, with the premise that that they did so in an attempt to create an image of blackness that was pleasing to the white ruling elite.

Though he does not consider the topic of black physical culture, Clifford Putney's *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880—1920* is an important text from which I have drawn a great deal of inspiration. Putney's work interrogates a particular form of physical culture within a specific community. He situates the rise of physical culture among white middle class men within a context of religious and progressive era reform. Putney argues that white middle class proponents of physical culture "hoped to energize the churches and to counteract the supposedly enervating effects of urban living" through "competitive sports, physical education and other staples of modern day life."¹⁸ Putney draws parallels between the United States and Britain, the latter being where Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley wrote novels that posited that the Anglican Church had grown "tolerant with physical weakness and

¹⁸ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880—1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

effeminacy.” Hughes and Kingsley countered this process by working to “infuse Anglicanism with enough health and manliness to make it a suitable agent for British imperialism.”¹⁹ According to Putney, there is evidence to suggest that American Protestant churches may have “fostered ill health, since they tended to view artificial exercise as an immoral waste of time. In addition, since the late seventeenth century Protestant churches in America have had more female than male adherents. This gender imbalance troubled antebellum Southern evangelicals, whose churches were frequently viewed as unmanly.”²⁰

Putney identifies Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist and entrepreneur from Chicago, who he credits with popularizing the idea that “religion and sports were compatible.” Putney distinguishes Moody from G. Stanley Hall who was less tolerant of women’s leadership in religious services. He considered that “disproportionate number of women in church” and the “‘feminizing’ influence that church women supposedly had on various aspects of Victorian religion” were problematic. Putney’s work is significant because he lists the factors that led to the emergence of muscular Christianity as well as the larger white-physical culture movement. One of the factors that led to its emergence was the male reaction to “women’s religious leadership” within the Protestant church. Additionally, with respect to the secular world, the larger physical culture movement was a reaction to the “feminization of American culture.”²¹ The decline of what became known as masculinity (a term whose general usage dates back to the 1890s) was

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

exacerbated by rising corporate influence, which positioned men into mid-managerial positions whose daily tasks required less physical exertion. In this way, the physical culture movement was a reaction to “overcivilization” of middle and upper class Anglo-Americans, who felt lower class whites and European immigrants’ muscular physiques better represented the trope of manliness. In addition to these, Putney suggests that the physical culture movement was men’s reaction to the growth of big business, “immigrant politicians, articulate suffragists, and powerful monopolists were on the ascendant.”²²

Putney’s research is an invaluable piece of scholarship for my project. By defining and articulating very clearly what the physical culture movement was for white middle class and upper class men, Putney’s work shows that the rise of physical culture was divided along ethnic, racial, gender, and class lines. There is no reason to think that it was predicated on the concerns of the general population. Whatever the physical culture was for the participants he analyzed, we might conclude that it was not necessarily these things for other men or women, or for other communities. His work beckons scholars from other intellectual perspectives who are privy to the pervasiveness of physical culture among other communities to analyze the emergence of the physical culture movements in other socio-political and ethnic contexts. Here in lies the motivation and purpose of my work. This dissertation investigates the rationale given for the emergence of the African American physical culture movement from 1900—1930. I argue that the African American physical culture movement was a reaction to the specific issues, concerns, and motivations, which affected African American urban communities.

²² Ibid., 5.

This argument is supported by the work of Nina Mjagkij, who looks at the way that African-American physical educators advocated true manhood, and the cultivation of mind, body, and soul, through their work in the black YMCA. Mjagkij's work is important because it is one of a few examples of African American history that seeks to understand the gendered experiences of African American men. Her work distinguishes the motivations of black YMCA workers from their white counterparts by pointing out how, "For them the attainment and display of proper manhood was more than a search for individual identity or personal fulfillment, it was also a crucial element in their struggle for racial advancement."²³ Following the Civil War, the National YMCA began to allow African American men "to join the Christian brotherhood on separate-but-equal terms." Spearheaded by the work of Canadian born William A. Hunton, who in joining the YMCA "became the highest-ranking black association official in the United States," black membership grew rapidly in the latter decades of the 19th century.²⁴ Mjagkij argues that black men in the YMCA negotiated the unequal treatment they received from white YMCA members who, in refusing to accept black as equals were, refused to acknowledge their masculinity, in ways similar to how the larger community chose to negotiate Jim Crow. "Adopting an accommodationist and gradualist approach, they decided not to challenge the YMCA's Jim Crow policy. It was better, they argued, to serve African Americans in separate associations and 'hope for a final adjustment...that

²³ Nina Mjagkij, "True Manhood: The YMCA and Racial Advancement, 1890—1930" in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* edited by Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

would be fair and Christina than to withhold services from the disadvantaged group until the millennium could come.”²⁵

Mjagkij distinguishes her subjects from Booker T. Washington’s plan of industrial education and W.E.B. Du Bois’ plan involving the “talented tenth” by asserting that, “black YMCA leaders insisted that ‘true manhood’ was the key to racial equality.”²⁶ It is at this point that I diverge from her work. Whereas Mjagkij suggests that the YMCA work somehow differed from that of black education proponents, my work looks for areas of intersection. My dissertation will show how educational leaders on both sides of the Industrial Model/Liberal Arts debate adopted physical culture as integral to their missions to advance the race. My evidence shows that YMCA and non-YMCA affiliated proponents of physical culture championed physical activity as vital to community centered goals of improving African American life.

Dominick Cavallo’s *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880—1920*, is another fantastic example of scholarship that seeks to explain a particular form of physical activity outside of the intellectual scope of sport studies. Cavallo’s preface states clearly that his “book is not a history of American sport or recreation. Nor is it a study of the role of team games in American society.” His book contains “little discussion of individual games and no analysis of the distinctions between play and sport.” He states that his only subject is what he calls “the movement to

²⁵ Ibid., 141.

²⁶ Ibid.

organize children's play, and its cultural and political implications."²⁷ Cavallo's intentions are to show describe the "efforts made by urban social reformers during the years 1880 to 1920 to transfer control of children's play from the children and their families to the state." He explains how, "To achieve their goal, reformers urged municipal governments to construct playgrounds where the play of city youngsters could be supervised and controlled."²⁸ He also explains why reformers' believed that "supervised play altered the personalities of young people, improved their abilities to deal with the pressures of city life, lessened ethnic conflict, and perhaps most important, changed prevailing perceptions of male and female sex roles."²⁹

Cavallo situates the effort to organize children's play within the child savers movement. He argues that "One facet of child saving during this period that blended public voluntaristic approaches to child welfare, and that has received little attention from historians, was the movement to organize the play activities of city children and adolescents on supervised, municipally owned playgrounds."³⁰ He chronicles the ways in which play organizers moved children's play into a structured environment where they could be supervised. "They viewed organized play as a vital medium for shaping the moral and cognitive development of young people. Equally important, organized play, particularly team sports for adolescents, was seen by reformers as an ideal means of

²⁷ Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880—1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), preface.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 1.

integrating the young into the work rhythms and social demands of a dynamic and complex urban industrial civilization.”³¹ Cavallo says that by 1910 child savers who were proponents of organized play successfully built thousands of city playgrounds in cities throughout the United States. “Social reformers, under the auspices of the Playground Association of America, founded in 1906, felt that these playgrounds would be a cure for a variety of festering urban maladies.”³²

Cavallo’s book is important because it reveals how a seemingly benign urban fixture has held great historical significance. His work also explains how the children of European immigrants and poor whites factored into Progressive reformers hopes of improving urban social conditions. Finally, Cavallo’s work is noteworthy because it shows how reformers, operating as child-savers, used organized play as an instrument of behavior modification designed to increase the rate of socialization among poor and ethnic communities. Most importantly, Cavallo’s work helps to provide a framework for students of black history to explore the role of race in the playground movement. His project does not provide much concerning the racial views prevalent among Progressive era reformers, especially among the group known as the child-savers, which then influenced their approach to black community concerns. But the work challenges students of black history to attempt to connect the emergence of playgrounds to other social initiatives designed to address issues related to urban black communities.

Geoff K. Ward, in his book, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy & Juvenile Justice*, points out that “duration, regional concentration, strategies, and

³¹ Ibid., 2.

³² Ibid, 3.

resources, distinguish the black child-savers from their more studied counterparts.”³³ Unlike the white child-saver movement, the black child-saver “movement began in the rural South, where most black Americans lived before World War II, and gradually spread, growing strongest in the cities of the North and West.”³⁴ Ward argues that the black child-saver movement was greatly influenced by “historical forces unique to the black world, including the Great Migration, racial uplift ideology, the standpoint of the ‘New Negro,’ organized movements for civil rights, and the [post-integration] period.”³⁵

The so-called *nadir* period, which coincides with the Progressive era, is aptly named because white Progressives typically took for granted ideas of black inferiority at the same time they showed a willingness to help lower-class whites and European immigrants. Although Wards’ book does not interrogate the role of the playground movement among African Americans, it helps to distinguish black Progressives’ motives from that of white Progressives. It also calls attention to an area of scholarship that has received very little treatment, namely the black playground movement. My work will show that African American leaders, operating within the Progressive era, consistently argued for access to supervised play spaces for their children. At the turn of the century, black communities found most white civic leaders and most white play advocates uninterested in opening up their play spaces for black children. As more black families moved to urban areas in increasingly large numbers, community leaders began to organize their resources to erect playgrounds in their respective communities. Plagued

³³ *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy & Juvenile Justice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7-8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 8.

by insufficient funds, however, black community leaders turned to white civic leaders and fervently advocated for black playgrounds as part of their larger platform for civil rights.

I have tried to grapple with the emergence of the African-American physical culture movement, which I place at the beginning of the twentieth century, by first seeking to understand the historical period into which the movement materialized. This period in American history is noteworthy because state sponsored groups tried to use government resources to improve society by challenging many of the statutes that government, during the previous period, created and enforced. Among those who saw the role of government as necessary to improving the material conditions of an increasingly urbanized population, there was disagreement. Issues of great importance ranged from labor issues to creating anti-trust laws; from the Americanization of immigrants to increased foreign intervention; from cultivating the physical development of the middle class white male body to sterilization efforts designed to eradicate socially undesired populations. Prohibition and women's suffrage also proved to be of great importance. Despite their differences, however, most reformers agreed "that some changes were necessary if the United States was to survive with its historic values intact."³⁶ Most Progressives also agreed that the social and structural issues faced by the country's increasingly urbanizing black population, then the country's largest ethnic group, were inconsequential to a model of twentieth century American progress.

³⁶ Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, eds. *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives vol. II, Since 1877*. New York: The Free Press, 1992, 217.

Scholarly attention devoted to understanding the initiatives of the Progressive Era has been greatly shaped by intellectual scope and racial perspective. Throughout the twentieth century, many historians operating through a lens informed by the racial status quo saw “progressivism as an attempt to deal effectively with many social and economic problems that grew out of industrialism and the resulting concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals and groups.”¹³⁷ In 1992, however, Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias posed a series of important questions that undermined this view. The first question asked, “who were the Progressives and what did they represent”? This is important given the role of race during the Progressive Era and how it has been treated. Recognizing those who have been included in the conversation about the Progressive reformers is extremely important because it informs our understanding of those left out of the conversation. Very few scholars have bothered to situate black reform initiatives or the black-serving reformers who contributed to the transition of black folk from a primarily rural population to a growing urban community within a 30-year period. This neglect has made it easy for the historical record to ignore reformers who addressed black concerns, or for us to talk about black progressives outside of our analyses of progressive goals, ideals, or obstacles.

Grob and Billias’ also asked, “Were the reforms that were enacted between 1900 and 1917 constructive?” The answer to this question requires that one first consider the subject of analysis. If one engages the experiences of African-Americans one must conclude that some reform efforts were positive, while many more produced mixed results. In many ways, some reform efforts were quite damaging. The answer is also

³⁷ Ibid., 229.

complicated by the nuanced issues related to gender, socio-economic and regional differences because of what we know concerning the implications of these categories on public policy. An example of this can be found in the history of reformers who relied on certain preconceived ideas about the primacy of “superior” beings as governors over the “feeble-minded.” Angie Kennedy’s research on the treatment of young black women who were considered feeble-minded showcases people’s willingness to consider involuntary sterilization as a plausible solution to perceived notions of racial inferiority.

Within the last forty years, only a handful of books have taken on these questions posed by Grob and Billias and applied them to their analyses of reform initiatives directed toward urban black communities. Two of the most prominent are John Dittmer’s *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era: 1900—1920* and David W. Southern’s *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform, 1900—1917*. Both texts offer profound interpretations of the intersections of race and Progressive era reform. The main idea of John Dittmer’s *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era: 1900-1920* is captured in the following quote: “To be black in Georgia was to fall victim to white oppression, to live each day in the shadow of violence.”³⁸ For Dittmer Blacks’ existence under the system of Jim Crowism was constantly undermined by legally sanctioned torment from their white oppressor. This torment, ironically, motivated blacks to look inward, causing blacks to create their own institutions “behind the walls of segregation.”³⁹

³⁸ John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era: 1900—1920*. Urbana: Chicago, 1977, 50.

³⁹ Ibid.

Within the framework of black self-help, Black Georgians developed programs to limit the spread of infectious disease that affected several members of the urban black community.

[Ghettos] created such health hazards that as late as 1917 the average life span for blacks was but thirty-five years, with high mortality rates due to tuberculosis, pneumonia, and infant deaths—causes directly related to environment. Often sanitation officials ignored disease-breeding conditions in black settlements and refused to force landlords to upgrade wretched housing.⁴⁰

The quote represents the almost dualistic approach to Dittmer's study. On the one hand it reveals blacks' communal efforts to address a particular concern associated with urban sanitation. On the other hand, it shows that this was only an issue because the city government refused to improve sanitation, a public good, for the black citizenry. One can interpret Dittmer's listing of so many black self-help institutions who organized to address health related issues in Georgia (The Organized Charities and Civic Settlement League; The Negro Civic Improvement League of Savannah; Gate City Free Kindergarten; Savannah Urban League) as evidence of the amount of neglect that the state of Georgia showed for the physical health of its black residents.⁴¹ Dittmer also discusses the moral reform initiatives of black-centered reform. Several texts that engage urbanization point to the vices offered to newly arriving black and immigrant populations. Whereas native born whites often asserted themselves to steer immigrant groups away from morally objectionable activities, they did very little to preclude African-Americans from such moral degradation. Here, again, blacks took the lead in

⁴⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁴¹ Ibid.

steering other blacks toward more “wholesome” recreational activities, condemning those—especially the young—who frequented dives, poolrooms, and dance halls.⁴²

Dittmer also examines the detrimental role that race played in some of the more influential elements of the Progressive era. Prohibition, like women’s suffrage, was a divisive issue during the context of the Progressive Era United States. Proponents for Prohibition relied on a coalition of extensive personal interest groups that pooled their resources to create a social movement for a constitutional amendment. Employers seeking a more reliable and compliant labor force; public officials seeking quieter and safer cities; proponents for the safety of women and children in the domestic sphere; and advocates for personal thrift came together to achieve a common goal. Racism also proved to be beneficial for Prohibitionists in that they could link alcohol consumption to the black aggression. White reformers in Georgia also exploited race in an attempt to achieve laws prohibiting child labor. Dittmer writes, “Since prejudice prevented blacks from working in cotton mills, reformers claimed that while Negro children were in school white boys and girls were working in the mills, turning into physical and intellectual cripples.”⁴³ This image invoked fear among white Georgians that blacks were going to overtake them by disrupting the racial status quo.

David W. Southern, in his book *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform, 1900—1920*, equates blacks’ struggle for civil rights as dwindling to an all time low during the era known for its Progressive reform. Rayford Logan’s description of black advancement, having been reduced to *nadir*, influences Southern’s perspective.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

This theoretical lens forms the basis for his analysis of black life in the midst of Progressive reform. Southern's thesis is supported by his discussion of the New South Movement, a failed experiment in joint investment between government and private investors that was designed to modernize the post-Civil War South. Proponents of the New South Movement presupposed that black people would continue to provide cheap and reliable labor. A compelling point Southern makes when discussing Progressive reformers' attitudes is that "everything in the education of progressives militated against them treating blacks as equals."⁴⁴ Most Progressive reformers adopted beliefs in a racial hierarchy that situated northern and western Europeans at the top of a white racial caste while eastern and southern Europeans were relegated to the bottom. Blacks, they felt, occupied an even more inferior position as members of an inferior caste. These assumptions about race "overwhelmed and muddled even the thinking of reformers most inclined to support the underprivileged and oppressed."⁴⁵

Dittmer and Southern both situate blacks outside of the scope of Progressive reform. Coupled with the fact that so many scholars have written about black-serving reformers through the prism of "self-help" or "uplift", it is tempting to situate the efforts to address the concerns of an increasingly urbanizing population outside of progressive era contextual analysis. These works are powerful because they do an tremendous job of explaining many of the ways that white social reformers responded to the threat of a black community whose societal position and communal sense of identity evolved over space and time. These books' collective scope provides an opportunity to investigate the

⁴⁴ David Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform, 1900—1917* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2005), 47.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

ways that black people attempted to overcome racial violence, bigotry and government neglect. This is the purpose of this dissertation. By describing the rise of institutionalized black physical culture, I will show how blacks responded to this so-called *nadir* period as agents and architects of their communal destiny.

CHAPTER 1
BLACK INTELLECTUAL THOUGHT AND THE IMPETUS FOR BLACK
PHYSICAL CULTURE, 1900—1930

Introduction

This chapter challenges prevailing themes that dominate historical accounts of African American sport. I argue that topics of African American physical culture should be understood within the contexts of the particular social, political, and economic circumstances that influenced their respective arrivals. I demonstrate the limitations of what I call the metanarratives of black sport history by tracing the emergence of the early twentieth century black physical culture movement. I contend that this movement was greatly influenced by the circumstances that inspired Rayford Logan to consider the historical period a nadir of black history in the United States. During this period, white social reformers developed welfare programs to help native-born whites and European immigrants adjust to their new lives in urban areas. At the same time, many of these white social reformers posited that African Americans were physically inferior and destined for biological extinction. They used these arguments to justify their refusal to help blacks address the social and economic issues that affected their communities. Black intellectuals and community leaders responded to this injustice by conducting their own social scientific investigations and by putting forth their own programs for social betterment.

Frederick Hoffman's Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro

In the late nineteenth century, one of the greatest challenges to black community development was white social scientists' manipulation of health statistics and other empirical data to support the belief that African Americans were an inferior race.

Advocates of scientific racism used this premise to justify black political disenfranchisement, social segregation, lynching, and sexual abuse. Moderate proponents of these ideas invoked Social Darwinism to explain why, if left alone, blacks would eventually succumb to their own degeneracy, and eventually become extinct.

Beatrix Hoffman's biographical account of Frederick L. Hoffman analyzes his life from his days of frustration, failure, and rejection in Germany to his illustrious career in the United States. F. Hoffman is best known for his work as a life insurance provider for the Prudential Life Insurance Company. In 1896, he authored the *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, which provided the justification for industry-wide insurance discrimination against African Americans. B. Hoffman wrote that F. Hoffman originally became interested in the economic impact of African American behavior when he read the "Vital Equation of the Negro," by Dr. Eugene R. Corson. The pamphlet was "part of a genre of medical writing purportedly demonstrating that health and mortality conditions for blacks were in decline."¹ Corson was one of several white pseudo-scientists who believed that, upon their emancipation, African Americans reverted to primitive behaviors that made them prone to disease, immorality and economic ruin. According to B. Hoffman, Corson's pamphlet inspired F. Hoffman to spend the rest of his life studying the economic significance of African American mortality.²

F. Hoffman first published his findings in 1892 after collecting statistics on African American disease and death rates. In "Vital Statistics of the Negro," Hoffman

¹ Beatrix Hoffman, Scientific Racism, Insurance, and Opposition to the Welfare State: Frederick L. Hoffman's Transatlantic Journey, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Apr., 2003), 158.

² Ibid.

proposed that African Americans were doomed by excessive mortality. He expounded on this theme in *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, published in 1896 by the American Economic Association.³ He was certainly not the first person to situate his beliefs of blacks innate inferiority within scientific rhetoric, “but his was the first book-length treatment of the subject and its sponsorship by the prestigious American Economic Association gave the racial extinction theory its largest audience yet.”⁴

African Americans reformers were alarmed by F. Hoffman’s conclusions because they led white civic leaders to assert that so-called “Negro Problems” had no viable solutions. According to B. Hoffman, “[F. Hoffman] did not use these tragic statistics to call for improvements. Instead, the author argued that racial health disparities offered conclusive proof of blacks’ inherent physical inferiority.” Hoffman argued that their inferiority would result in blacks’ eventual demise unless good-hearted whites saved them from their wretchedness. Hoffman’s solution “echoed the popular belief that blacks’ health conditions had been better under slavery.”⁵ His commentary directly influenced whites business owners and landowners in the South who profited from the exploitation of black labor through peonage and convict labor systems. Even though he claimed that slavery offered African Americans a better chance of survival, F. Hoffman “contemptuously dismissed” environmental explanations for blacks substandard material conditions. “Employment discrimination, poor housing and sanitation, and other social factors were peripheral to blacks’ fate. He believed the race was innately always

³ Ibid., 160.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 161.

determinative.”⁶ Following Hoffman’s lead, many white social scientists adopted similar ideas and neglected African Americans’ social concerns, at the same time that many of them devised plans to address the social needs of poor whites and European immigrants.

Unable to rely on white philanthropic aid, African American reformers resolved to negotiate progressive era perceptions of race progress when they adapted eugenicist’s ideas to create their own programs of race advancement. Michelle Mitchell defines eugenics as “a voice of progress throughout the early twentieth century, [that] sprang from Social Darwinism...Unlike its progenitor, however, eugenic theory held that through regulation of heredity, environment, and sexuality, racial stock could actually be improved.”⁷ Mitchell states that, “In the United States, the eugenics movement was based on classist, nativist, and racist assumptions and had obvious ideological limitations for people of African descent.”⁸ Limitations stem from the fact that, within the larger context of eugenics discourse, African Americans as a racial stock were undervalued. They were viewed as being among those race groups that threatened the successful reproduction of fit human beings. I agree with Mitchell’s point that, if they allowed traditional eugenics’ reasoning to dictate the parameters of their thoughts of race progress, African American reformers contradicted themselves when they invoked eugenics discourse. I depart from Mitchell, however, in arguing that black reformers overcame the limitations of the eugenicist framework when they reinterpreted parts of traditional eugenics discourse to fit their particular community needs. This process of

⁶ Ibid., 162.

⁷ Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 230.

⁸ Ibid.

redefining the eugenics movement resulted in black reformers successfully crafting solutions to problems that affected racial progress. The following section surveys the ways that black reformers responded to F. Hoffman's claims and the ensuing policies inspired by his research.

Kelly Miller's "A Review of Hoffman's Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro"

In 1897, Kelly Miller reviewed Hoffman's research and exposed it for its preconceived ideas concerning African Americans' mental and physical inferiority. Miller challenged Hoffman's claim of objectivity, which rested on the idea that, as German immigrant, he was free from personal bias of race in the United States. Miller wrote that Hoffman's "freedom from conscious personal bias does not relieve the author from the imputation of partiality to his own opinions beyond the warrant of the facts which he has represented. Indeed it would seem that his conclusion was reached from a priori considerations and that facts have been collected in order to justify it."⁹ Miller also called attention to Hoffman's principle conclusions, which he summarized as "the Negro race in America is deteriorating physically and morally in such manner as to point to ulterior extinction, and that this decline is due to "race traits" rather than to conditions and circumstances of life." Miller challenged this conclusion because its implications were so damning. "If a race does not possess the requisite physical stamina, it is impossible for it to maintain a high degree of moral and intellectual culture or compete with its more vigorous rivals in the race of civilization." Miller refuted Hoffman's conclusion first by pointing out that Hoffman relied solely on the Eleventh census, which

⁹ Kelly Miller, "A Review of Hoffman's Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro," 1897.

was generally understood as misleading. Miller then invoked the remarks of U.S. Senator Roger Q. Mills of Texas who criticized the census for its grave inaccuracies. According to Miller, “Whatever force there may be in the protest of the eloquent Texas Senator, applies with special emphasis to the colored element; for it goes without saying that errors in enumeration in the South would be confined mainly to the Negro race, and since the bulk of the race is confined to this section such errors would have a most disastrous effect upon its rate of increase as shown by the census reports.”

Miller challenged Hoffman’s conclusions by calling on statistical evidence, which revealed that, in fact, the African American population experienced an exponential increase in growth since the beginning of the 19th century. Miller contended that,

In 1810 there were 1,377,808 Negroes in the United States. In 80 years this number had swollen to at least 7,470,040, and that, too, without reinforcement from outside immigration. It more than quintupled itself in eight decades. Does it not require much fuller demonstration than the author anywhere presents to convince the ordinary mind that a people that has shown such physical vitality for so long a period, has all at once, in a single decade, become comparatively infecund and threatened with extinction?”¹⁰

Miller argued that if even if one took for accepted the census material as true, the data shows that the population increase of African Americans increased at a rate faster than the native born white population. Hoffman’s analysis ignored this fact and then tried to mask the influx of European immigrants as white Americans’ population growth. Miller attributes Europeans’ “full maturity and vigor in their productive powers” as explanations for overall growth of the white population, but then added a caveat. “If allowance be made for [European immigrants’] natural increase from 1880 to 1890 the white race

¹⁰ Ibid.

would show a decennial increase appreciably below that of the blacks.”¹¹ From this Miller concluded that, “If the Negro, then, is threatened with extinction, the white race is in a still more pitiable plight.”

Miller also criticized Hoffman’s views about African Americans moving to urban areas. Miller actually lauded Hoffman’s investigation of “The urban drift, the tendency to concentration, and the migratory movements of the black population.” He was intrigued by Hoffman’s data showing “that there are 13 cities in which the colored population exceeds 20,000, and 23 in which it exceeds 10,000 and that the rate of increase of the colored element in these centers is enormous—more than 30 per cent.” Hoffman found blacks’ “tendency to concentration in undesirable places” to be problematic.¹² He posited that this tendency supported his claim that blacks were inherently destructive. Miller agreed that the tendency to concentration in undesirable places was a major problem that threatened the vitality of black community. But he challenged Hoffman’s conclusion by suggesting that residential segregation—not race degeneracy—was responsible for blacks’ settlement in poor areas. Miller then considered Hoffman’s remarks about the large concentrations of black Americans residing in the southern Black Belt region. Hoffman concluded that the tendency of blacks to settle in racially homogenous areas only exacerbated blacks’ physical demise because they needed close contact with white culture if they were to have remotest chance of survival. To this claim Miller responded by saying that,

It is undoubtedly true that the Negro has not the initiative power of civilization. What race has? Civilization is not an original process with any race or nation

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

known to history. The torch has been passed from race to race a from age to age. Where else can the Negro go? The white race at present has the light. This concession is no reproach to the Negro race, nor is it due to any peculiar race trait or tendency.¹³

Miller elaborated on his point by juxtaposing black urban development to the material conditions of the Scotch-Irish, a group he contends is respected the “world over for their manly and moral vigor,” who resided in Appalachian region of the United States. Miller argued that, despite their perceived ingenuity and girt, the Scotch-Irish “have sunken to the lowest depth of poverty and degradation—a depth from which, without the assistance of outside help, they can be lifted nevermore.” He then asked, “Is this condition of depravity and inability of self-initiative due to ‘race traits and tendencies?’”

In “Is the Negro Threatened with Extinction” Miller asked, “is the death rate of the colored race higher than that of a corresponding class of whites subjects to the same moral and social environment?” He relied on statistical evidence to show that “This high death rate of the American Negro does not exceed that of the white race in other parts of the civilized globe. If race traits are playing such havoc with Negroes in America, what direful agent of death, may we ask the author, is at work in the cities of his own fatherland?”¹⁴ Miller’s interpretation of African American mortality rates led him to conclude that the high rate of death was “due to condition and is subject to sanitary check and control.” In other words, Miller believed that a major factor contributing to the mortality rate of African Americans was their inability or failure to incorporate habits of good hygiene in their communities.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

On the topic of social conditions, Miller lambasted Hoffman's interpretation of African Americans' church and school attendance. The data showed "that there is one communicant to every 2.79 of the Negro population, against one in every 3.04 for the whites. There were 1,288,736 pupils in the common schools and 34,129 in the higher schools, colleges and universities." Miller commented that, "Ordinarily these facts are regarded as the most wonderful evidences of progress which the world has ever witnessed on the part of a backward people. But not so with Mr. Hoffman." Hoffman doubted that African Americans' rates of church attendance and school enrollment implied anything concerning their potential longevity or communal progress. In response to Hoffman's use of prison record statistics to suggest that blacks' possessed criminal racial traits, Miller offered a multilayered rebuttal. "Before concluding that this preponderance of crime is due to "race traits," let us examine more closely into the circumstances of the case.

The discrepancy in the administration of the law in the South has undoubtedly some effect upon this relative showing." Miller also pointed to the fact that most blacks in the South who were accused of committing a crime were "too poor to employ competent counsel, [their] liberty and life are necessarily committed to incompetent hands." Miller pointed out how "a white man seldom receives punishment for assault, however, brutal, however unprovoked, however cowardly, be it maiming, homicide, or murder upon a Negro unless, forsooth, the assailant be some degraded creature disowned by his own caste." Miller also challenged Hoffman on the fact that criminal record of "the foreigner [was] a greater average than the native whites." Miller used this point to refute the claim that an influx of black residents to an all-white settlement necessarily

meant an increase in crime and a decrease in property values. In a regional comparison, Miller showed that the highest rate of criminal activity occurred in New England, which possessed the smallest concentration of black people. The area with the largest concentrations of black people, however, boasted the fewest number of crimes.

Miller reiterated his refutation of Hoffman's thesis by pointing out that the author's views in 1896 were inconsistent with his previously held interpretation of African American social problems. According to Miller,

The author is not only out of harmony with the general opinion prevalent among students of the Negro problem, but is also strangely inconsistent with his former self. The same author who in 1896, wrote: 'It is not in the condition of life, but in the race traits and tendencies, that we find the cause of excessive mortality,' in 1892 affirmed: 'the colored population is placed at many disadvantages which it cannot very well remove. The unsanitary condition of their dwellings, their ignorance of the laws of health, and general poverty are the principal causes of their high mortality.' The Frederick L. Hoffman of 1892, according to the general judgment, is much nearer the true analysis than the Frederick L. Hoffman of 1896.¹⁵

As will be seen below, Miller joined other black social scientists in the belief that blacks could solve many of their own social problems if and when they "conform [their lives] to the moral and sanitary laws...The first effects of emancipation are always harmful to the moral and physical well-being of the liberated class. The removal of physical restraints, before moral restraints have grown strong enough to take their place, must always result in misconduct." This position marked a key departure from white social reformers and civic leaders because unlike his white counterpart, Miller believed that African Americans could improve their material conditions. Miller advocated for more scientific analyses of African Americans and their material conditions. He anticipated that many African Americans would resent the publication of the inevitably disparaging statistics

¹⁵ Ibid.

when he wrote, “If all the ugly facts about any people were brought to light they would furnish an unpleasant record.” He invoked biblical imagery by pointing out that, “When the Savior told the woman of Samaria all that she ever did, a very unsavory career was disclosed. If all the misdeeds of any people or individual were brought to light, the best of the race would be injured and the rest would be ruined.”¹⁶

In 1917 Miller collaborated with Joseph R. Gay to publish *Progress and Achievements of the Colored People*. Their manuscript addressed several issues that affected rapidly growing urban African American communities. A major topic taken up was African American’ physical development. One of their articles called on African Americans to “Train Yourself For Life’s Work: Physical Development—Exercise for Pleasure and Profit—Uniformity in the Use of the Muscles—General and Special Muscle Training—Systematic Hardening of the Body—Various Kinds of Exercise—Key to Good Health and Mental Activity.”¹⁷ Miller and Gay argued that a healthy and developed body was essential to achieve success in other areas of life. They reasoned that, “In these days when good health and a companion physical development are so much in demand, you must train yourself for your life work in such a way as to merit a selection for the best positions.”¹⁸ They blamed poor physical training for the preponderance of physically deficient African Americans who were “often turned aside from a position where he might be mentally qualified. One look at him explains the reason for his failure to be given the opportunity. He is not physically developed.” The contended that, “The

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kelly Miller and Joseph R. Gay, *Progress and Achievements of the Colored Race*, 115.

¹⁸ Ibid.

times and the business undertaken by every man [are] strenuous. He must be prepared for hardships, and will never attain any good position if he carries that in his body or [face,] which indicates inability to stand the strain or liability to succumb under it.”¹⁹

Despite their gender exclusivist language, Miller and Gay wrote about and featured pictures of African American women college athletes and drill majorettes, which leads one to suggest that, language notwithstanding, the authors advocated for the physical development of both African American men and women. One can also infer from the passage that the authors also wrote to inspire leading classes of African American men and women to prepare to be chosen for the “best positions.” This notion of “looking the part” by developing the mind and the body, is not unlike the emphasis given to the development of physical bodies among white progressives during this time.²⁰

Miller and Gay joined other advocates of black physical culture who perceived physical activity as a tool that helped the race develop mental and physical fortitude. They called for mind-body preservation when they warned readers that, “Your physical nature is part and parcel of your intellectual condition.”²¹ Only those who possessed both qualities were properly adjusted. “The human body,” they maintained, “is developed by muscular exertion, and its good health and perfect growth depend upon the regular practice of some form of motion that will bring into use all the various parts of the system. “The man or women whose muscles are trained in line with the occupation

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ For more information on this see, Marie Griffith, “Apostles of Abstinence: Fasting and Masculinity during the Progressive Era, *American Quarterly*, vol. 52, No. 4 (Dec., 2000), 599-638.

²¹ Miller and Gay, *Progress and Achievements of the Colored Race*, 117.

pursued for a livelihood, is better fitted to become perfect in that occupation than one who does not take exercise, or not enough to keep his usable muscles well trained.”²² By emphasizing practice, Gay and Miller called on blacks to incorporate physical exercise into their daily routine as a means to achieve race progress.

In “The Way to Perfect Health,” Miller and Gay challenged African Americans to prevent disease by employing common sense. They reasoned that those “who should neglect the well-known principles of hygiene, because of faith that a good doctor could cure any resulting sickness,” were irresponsible. “The one who gets wet on a stormy day, fails to change his clothes, neglects the cold which follows, contracts pneumonia and dies, is not “removed by an all-wise Providence,” as so many resolutions of sympathy declare, but by his own folly. It is unjust to blame a wise and beneficent Power for such results. The household that suffers from typhoid, when drinking well-water drained from its own cesspool, needs sympathy, indeed, not only for the sickness but for the stupidity that placed the well and the infection side by side.”²³

Miller and Gay framed positive health habits within the context of race education. They deviated from hegemonic thinking in purporting that 1). Good hygiene is a learned behavior; and 2) that blacks could learn it. While they challenged hegemonic claims of race educability, their harsh language also condemned African Americans for “stupidly” ignoring the fact that poor hygiene increased the chance of disease and death. At the same time, this idea vindicated those African Americans who practiced good hygiene, but were treated as though they did not by white progressives who viewed poor hygiene an

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

innate “Negro trait.”²⁴ Miller and Gay situated good health as the basis for building race community when they expressed their belief that “health, hygiene and the kindred subjects command attention with equal force, from man and woman and child.”²⁵ The pursuit of wealth, they contended, could become a selfish endeavor that could spoil one’s relationships with other members of the community. The pursuit of improving one’s health, however, provided a source of good for the community and oneself. “Regular habits, careful living, sunny disposition, a clear head, a bright eye, a sound mind and a sound body give one a cheerful outlook on the world, enable one to use all his energies to the best advantage, guarantee that he will have real friends, assure happiness, and make of one a genuine success in life, whether with or without the prosperity that is very likely to accompany such qualities.”²⁶

In order to help readers develop good health habits, the authors instructed them on how to achieve optimal physical health through an extensive dietary and physical regimen. Their motive was to show African Americans that in order to achieve good health, they blacks needed to change their communal lifestyle. On African Americans’ dietary practices, the authors expressed their ideas about the positive and negative physical affects of common foods. One key issue they outlined was how water temperature influenced digestion.

²⁴ For more on this see Khalil Gibran Muhammad’s *Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010).

²⁵ Miller and Gay, *Progress and Achievements of the Colored Race*, 367.

²⁶ Ibid.

The considerable use of ice and iced drinks is to be avoided. Small quantities are of service in relieving thirst and vomiting, and in cooling the body when exposed to great heat. But since ice causes the mucous membrane of the stomach to become temporarily pale and bloodless, it checks or altogether suspends the flow of the gastric juice. Thus iced drinks at meals interfere seriously with digestion. Observe also that there is no truth in the popular notion that frozen water or ice is always pure. Water is not purified by freezing, and may be even more polluted than it was before.²⁷

This attention to something so meticulous as water temperature is significant because it shows how the authors combined biological science and social responsibility to put forth a practical edict on how to properly consume food as means of maintaining good health.

In “Clothing and its Relation to Health,” the authors showed how proper clothing attire fostered good health. They argued that,

Besides serving for covering and adornment and guarding the body from injury, the use of clothing is to health in preserving the proper animal heat in spite of external changes. In health the normal temperature of the body, ninety-eight to ninety-nine degrees Fahrenheit, is invariable. In order that this temperature shall be maintained with the least strain on the vitality, the clothing should be such that heat is not readily conducted to or from the body.

Cotton and linen keep off the direct rays of the sun and favor the loss of heat from the body, but being bad absorbers of moisture they are apt to interfere with evaporation from the skin, and cause dangerous chills.²⁸

The authors took for granted that their readers had enough means to choose a style of dress that was conducive to good health. Their presupposition, however, reveals that Miller and Gay envisioned an audience that had the economic means to improve their health conditions, but lacked the educational background to devise a plan of action.

²⁷ Ibid., 374.

²⁸ Ibid.

Another example of the authors' attempt to encourage African Americans to adopt habits that contributed to good health is found in their discussion of the importance of proper bathing. They argued that:

The dirt of the skin and underclothing consists of the sweat and greasy matters exuded from the pores, together with the cast-off surface of the skin itself, which is continually scaling away. The importance of frequent bathing will be better appreciated when we remember what are the functions of the skin, and the amount of solid and fluid matter excreted thereby. The quantity varies greatly according to the temperature and moisture of the air, the work done, and the fluids drunk, but is probably never less than five pounds or half a gallon daily, and with hard labor and a high temperature this amount may be multiplied many times. From one to two per cent of this consists of fatty salts, without taking into account the skin scales.²⁹

In this instance Miller and Gay took into account the varying lived experience among African Americans by acknowledging that lifestyle, diet, and means of labor dictated the degree to which one excreted waste. They suggested that, "No vocation in life makes frequent bathing unnecessary."³⁰ The authors asserted that farmers and miners, who "perhaps more than any other class of laborers, who are continually in contact with the earth, need the elevating influence, physical and spiritual, of a daily bath."³¹ Speaking to all African Americans, regardless of their occupation, the authors stated that, "From a moral and hygienic standpoint the matter of cleanliness, which is next to godliness, is of great importance, and it is fine evidence of intellectual progress and spiritual growth

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 377.

³¹ Ibid.

when men use more water and soap at the end of the day's work."³² They promoted proper bath by suggesting:

For purposes of cleanliness a bath without soap and friction is perfectly useless, and warm water is more effectual than cold. The shock of a cold plunge or sponge bath, however, has a powerful invigorating influence on the nervous system, and helps it guard against the risks of catching cold. The purpose of health and cleanliness alike will be best served by the daily bath with cold water and once a week with warm [...] It is dangerous to bathe after a full meal, and also when fasting. An hour or two after breakfast is a good time, but if one wishes to bathe earlier, a bit of food should be taken first. Again it is dangerous to bathe when exhausted by fatigue, but the glow of moderate exercise is a decided advantage.³³

Again, this description was predicated on the idea that their audience has access to clean and running water that can be warmed or cooled. Yet, it instructed readers how to bathe and when to bathe, which were both important factors to consider as a means of maintaining "perfect health."

Pertaining to sleep patterns as contributors to physical health, Miller and Gay wrote that, "Insufficient sleep is one of the crying evils of the day. The want of proper rest of the nervous system produces a lamentable condition, deterioration in both body and mind. This sleepless habit is begun even in childhood, when the boy or girl goes to school at six or seven years of age. Sleep is persistently put off up to manhood and womanhood."³⁴ Whether it was due to work schedule or other factors, Miller and Gay connected lack of sleep to poor physical health. Similar to their discourse on bathing,

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 379.

Miller and Gay took labor diversity into consideration in discussing the consequences of sleep deprivation. They declared that,

Persons who are not engaged in any severe work, whether bodily or mental, require less sleep than those who are working hard. Muscular fatigue of itself induces sleep, and the man who labors thus awakes refreshed. But brainwork too often causes wakefulness, although sleep is even more necessary for the repair of brain than of muscular tissue. In such cases the attention should be forcibly withdrawn from study for some time before retiring to rest, and turned to some light reading, conversation or rest before going to bed. A short brisk walk out of doors just before bedtime may aid the student in inducing sleep. Drugs should be avoided.³⁵

The authors contrasted the impact of manual labor and that of brainwork. The impact of manual labor is muscle fatigue, which promotes healthy sleep habits. Those who engage in brainwork, however, tend to stay mentally stimulated for long hours with no outlet for physical exhaustion. This precludes sleep. To help calm down, the authors recommended some form of physical exercise to mentally unwind and to prepare the body for sleep. This, according to Miller and Gay, was one more example of how physical activity contributed to the goal of achieving good health.

W.E.B. Du Bois and the Social Scientific Rationale for Improving Black Physical Health

In his 1896 sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.E.B. Du Bois identified the various social classes of black Americans in the Mid Atlantic city by drawing a link to their respective social environments and their available amusements. As is commonly found in Du Bois' work, one finds in the *Philadelphia Negro* a strong effort to differentiate classes of blacks into what is most appropriately referred to as ethnic groups. Each ethnic group, Du Bois argued, whether it be a member of the criminal class, the laboring class or the black elite, suffered from specific ailments.

³⁵ Ibid.

Whereas the lower classes suffered from a susceptibility toward criminal behavior, the black elite suffered from communal selfishness. Drawing on his notion of the “talented tenth,” Du Bois criticized the so-called black aristocratic class for failing to realize their responsibility to “serve the lowest classes.”³⁶ Within the context of his analysis of amusements, one can infer that Du Bois wanted the talented tenth to work provide positive recreational options for lower classes of blacks.

Du Bois, however, understood the limitations of this group. Although they occupied the highest economic position within the black community, “their uncertain economic status” made “it difficult for them to spare much time and energy in social reform.” Still, as the economic leaders of the black community, Du Bois believed that they should take the helm of creating positive activities for the black community in order to prevent members of lower classes from being led astray by costly amusements like gambling, sexual promiscuity, and other vices. Du Bois noted that the church played a central role in the lives of most people. Being conservative, however, the church leadership often forbade activities associated with dancing and inter-gender contact. With pressure from the church, limited economic resources, and a lack of viable options in the form of public amusement resulted in risky amounts of excessive free time, which Du Bois inferred was the cause of immoral behavior for all but the upper class.³⁷

The following year, Du Bois published “The Problem of Amusement,” in which he built upon his challenge to the black community, specifically the black church, to provide more resources to help its members adjust to the rapidly changing socio-cultural

³⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (New York: Cosimo), 2007, 317.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 320.

landscape of the emerging twentieth century. One of the areas of black life that he criticized was what he perceived to be a profound disregard for physical health. Privy to the contested health statistics, Du Bois believed the way to remedy this particular social ill was for community leaders to promote physical culture. He challenged community leaders to situate black physical development as concomitant to efforts to improve their intellectual development. He argued that, “athletic sports must in the future play a larger part in the normal and mission schools of the South, and we must rapidly come to the place where the man all brain and no muscle is looked upon as almost as big a fool as the man all muscle and no brain; and when the young woman who cannot walk a couple of good country miles will have few proposals of marriage.”³⁸ Along with intellectual training, Du Bois situated physical culture as an integral part of the mission to advance the race. Although most scholars of black history like to emphasize Du Bois’ ideas on blacks intellectual training, they often neglect to acknowledge that Du Bois’ solution to the so-called “Negro Problem” included a call for blacks to cultivate their physical health through athletic training. Du Bois challenged race leaders to “Watch that boy who, after a morning’s work, will not play; he is not built right. Watch the girl who can mope and sleep at recess time. She needs a physician. In these schools of primary grade especial attention should be paid to athletic sports. Boys and girls should be encouraged, if not compelled, to run, jump, walk, row, swim, throw and vault.”³⁹

³⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Problem of Amusement” in *Du Bois: Writing in Periodicals Edited by Others*, 38; *W.E.B. Du Bois on Sociology*, 236.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

In 1904 is Du Bois published “The Development of a People” where he scolded critics of African American communal advancement who were too quick to judge the race as degenerate before considering the circumstances of their lived experiences. Du Bois attributed this lack of sympathy to deep-rooted racial prejudice when he commented that, “[White Americans] sit and watch and moralize, and judge our neighbors or ourselves for-doomed to failure or success, not because we know or have studied these causes of a people’s advance, but rather because we instinctively dislike certain races, and instinctively like our own.”⁴⁰ He suggested that, “we must sit and study and learn even when the mad impulse of aimless philanthropy is striving within, and we find it easier to labor blindly, rather than to wait intelligently.”⁴¹

Du Bois hypothesized that “the basic axiom upon which all intelligent and decent men, North and South, white and black, must agree, is that the best interests of *every single American demand that every Negro make the best of himself* (italics Du Bois’).⁴² He also cautioned that it was erroneous to consider the problems facing African America as monolithic when he stated that, the problems facing the race were “as complex as human nature, and you do well to distrust the judgment of any man who thinks, however honestly, that any one simple remedy will cure evils that arise from the whirling wants and longings and passions of writhing human souls.”⁴³ Du Bois also cautioned against holding African Americans to an unfair standard, given that the majority of the group was

⁴⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Development of a People,” April 1904, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 4.

less than 50 years removed from slavery. He reasoned that, “if we are to judge intelligently or clearly of the development of a people, we must allow ourselves neither to be dazzled by figures nor misled by inapt comparisons, but we must seek to know what human advancement historically considered has meant and what it means today, and from such criteria we may then judge the condition, development and needs of the group before us.”⁴⁴ This indictment was directed toward Frederick Hoffman and other opponents of African American racial adjustment who coerced data to reach negative conclusions concerning the race problem.

At the same time, Du Bois denounced would-be allies who attempted to solve the Negro Problem by trying to address certain race issues while neglecting others. He concluded that,

No nation ever settles its problems of poverty and then turns to educating children: or first accumulates its wealth and then its culture. On the contrary, in every stage of a nation’s growing all these efforts are present, and we designate any particular age of a people’s development as (for instance) a struggle for existence, because their conscious effort is more largely expended in this direction than in others; but despite this we all know, or ought to know, that no growing nation can spend its whole effort on today’s food lest accumulation and training of children and learning of their neighbors-lest all these things so vitally necessary to advance be neglected, and the people, full-bellied though they be, stagnate and die because in one mighty struggle to live they forget the weightier objects of life.⁴⁵

Du Bois criticized those who thought it appropriate to “hasten that department and retard this” when choosing to take on certain issues while neglecting others as “mischievously wrong.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

Du Bois called attention to the physical conditions of a poor African American family to illustrate how important it was that plans to develop the race be multifaceted. He explained why such was the best approach when he asked his audience to imagine an economically meager African American household in the South. He illustrated “a little one-room box with a family of eight. The cabin is dirty, ill smelling and cheerless; the furniture is scanty, old and worn. The man works when he has no whiskey to drink, which is comparatively seldom. The woman washes and squanders and squanders and washes.” He described the couple as having stuck together for several years, perhaps without being married, “despite their quarreling.” He also imagined the couple having “five children, and the nameless child of the eldest daughter makes the last member of the family. Three of the children can spell and read a bit, but there’s little need of it. The rest of the family are in ignorance, dark and dense.”⁴⁷

Poor hygiene, drunkenness, over-crowding, sexual immorality, ignorance, and shiftlessness characterize the family’s existence. Du Bois attributed their “degradation and uncleanness” to learned behavior developed during slavery.⁴⁸ He contended that this culture of wretchedness could also be found in the “better house—a mother and father, two sons and a girl.” He described this phenomenon as follows:

They are hard-working people and good people. They read and write a little and, though they are slow and good-natured, they are seldom idle. And yet they are unskilled, without foresight, always in debt and living from hand to mouth. Hard pressed they may sink into crime; encouraged they may rise to comfort, but never to wealth. Why? Because they and their fathers have been trained this way. What does a slave know of saving? What can he know of forethought? What could he

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 13.

learn even of skill, save in exceptional cases? In other words, slavery must of necessity send into the world of work a mass of unskilled laborers who have no idea of what thrift means; who have been a part of a great economic organization but had nothing to do with its organizing; and so when they are suddenly called to take a place in a greater organization, in which free individual initiative is a potent factor, they cannot, for they do not know how; they lack skill and, more than that, they lack ideals!⁴⁹

According to Du Bois, not only is slavery responsible for African Americans' ignorance on issues relating to the twentieth century, it also robbed them of whatever knowledge associated with their pre-slavery cultures. Their ignorance was only exacerbated by emancipation because most African Americans, newly freed from slavery, lacked the skill-set for effective community building. "With Emancipation there came a second partial breaking with the past." He concluded that, though slavery was degrading, it provided several lessons in civility that provided a substitute cultural foundation. He asked black leaders to:

Discriminate between the good and bad in the past; he must keep the lesson of work and reject the lesson of concubinage; he must add more lessons of moral rectitude to the old religious fervor; he must, in fine, stand to this group in the light of the interpreter of the civilization of the twentieth century to the minds and hearts of people who, from sheer necessity, can but dimly comprehend it. And this man—I care not what his vocation may be—preacher, teacher, physician, or artisan, this person is going to solve the Negro problem; for that problem is at bottom the clash of two different standards of culture, and this priest it is who interprets the one to the other.⁵⁰

He wanted leaders to convince the masses to renounce poor life habits and to adopt habits more conducive to healthy living.

In 1906 W.E.B. Du Bois published *The Health and Physique of the Negro American: A Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University by the*

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

Eleventh Atlanta Conference. The report was a review of the findings presented at a reunion meeting of social scientists who first analyzed the physical and mental health of emerging African American communities in 1896. Du Bois served as the conference secretary. He and his colleagues, R.R. Wright, Jr., and Franz Boas, organized the meeting. Together with other conference participants, they revisited their original research findings concerning the health and mental capacities of African Americans. Through their collective efforts, the conference presenters successfully addressed health proclivities that affected African Americans while they repudiated prevailing pseudo-scientific ideas concerning African Americans' physical health and mental capacity.

One of Du Bois' contributions to the conference was his deconstruction of the myth of white racial purity. He refuted the claim that the ancient people who occupied the region now known as Europe were ethnically homogenous, constituting a monolithic white race. He wrote that, "It may smack of heresy to assert in face of the teaching of all our textbooks on geography and history, that there is no single European or white race of men; and yet that is the plain truth of the matter."⁵¹ The use of the term Aryan to describe the so-called European race was a misnomer that linked together otherwise unrelated people groups. According to Du Bois, "The primitive language, parent to all of the varieties of speech-Romance, Teutonic, Slavic, Persian, or Hindustanee—spoken by the so-called Caucasian or white race, was called Aryan. By inference this name was shifted to the shoulders of the people themselves, who were known as the Aryan race."⁵² Controversially, Du Bois argued that the so-called Aryans was not free of African

⁵¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Health and Physique of the Negro American*, 1906,13.

⁵² Ibid.

ancestry. He channeled Giuseppe Sergi who argued that it would be inaccurate to assume that African migration stopped at the Eastern or northern corner of the continent. Sergi, unlike other white anthropologists of the time, argued that civilization began in Africa and then spread outward, through the Mediterranean. This meant that characteristics of European culture were first African, then Afro-Mediterranean, and lastly Afro-European. Based on the evidence, it was irrational to suggest that rest of human civilization outside of Europe became more advanced while the characteristics of the so-called Teutonic race had somehow “remained true to its primitive characteristics.”⁵³

In “The Negro Race” Du Bois subverted the idea that African Americans were, of all the world’s races, easiest to distinguish. White anthropologists tried to reduce people of African ancestry to a single set of physical features (thick lips, woolly hair, dark skin). They also tried to limit Africans to a single geographical region (Sub Saharan inner Africa). White anthropologists’ efforts to simplify Africans served as a premise for labeling people of African descent an inferior race. Du Bois rebutted these claims by stating that “The Negro differs physiologically, rather than anatomically, from Europeans or the Asiatic.”⁵⁴ Though most Africans “looked” different from Europeans, biologically, they were no less fully human. He contended that, “The physical inferiority of the Negro race, if it exists at all, is insignificant, when compared to the wide range of individual variability in each race...That there may be slightly different hereditary traits seems plausible, but it is entirely arbitrary other than those of the Negro, because slightly

⁵³ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17.

different, must be of an inferior type.”⁵⁵ In talking about the diversity of African culture, Du Bois concluded that, “The entire Semitic and Hamitic population of Africa has in other words, a mulatto character which extends to the Semites outside Africa.”⁵⁶ In this way article, Du Bois challenged those white social scientists who belittled Africans and their contributions to the development of ancient civilization.

In “The Negro Brain,” Du Bois again challenged race-scientists who argued that (1) the size of the African Brain was smaller in weight and size than the brain of the European, and (2) that the variation in size proved that the Negro was intellectually inferior to the white race. Despite the absurdity to such claims, the prevalence of these ideas dominated social scientific discourse forced Du Bois to take them seriously. The significance of the context is often lost, but it is important to remember that it would have been insufficient for Du Bois to simply dismiss these claims as irrational. Fully aware of his task before him, he challenged pseudo-scientists on multiple levels.

First, he asserted that the race science investigators whose assertions relied on too small a sample (700-500 in the United States and 200 in Europe) to generalize the entire black race living in the Western hemisphere (approx. 20 million). Second, Du Bois rejected the investigators’ conclusions because the scientists did not take into account differences related to “age, stature, social class, occupation, nutrition, and cause of death; each of which separately or all together affect both the weight and structure of the brain.”⁵⁷ Third, Du Bois stated that the difference in brain mass among the races was

⁵⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 24.

insignificant when one considers the variance in brain mass prevalent in both races. And in cases where blacks claimed at least $\frac{1}{4}$ white ancestry, brain mass was equally great, if not greater than among the brain mass of groups who considered themselves white, English, or French.⁵⁸ Du Bois also refuted the notion that modern day African Americans evolved from a pure Negro stock. Du Bois reasoned that, given the history of the slave trade, one should consider the fact that people from all over the African continent were brought to the Americas, and because of this, there can be no pure Negro type. “Outside the question of what the pure Negro type is, the Negro-American represents a very wide and thorough blending of nearly all African people from north to south; and more than that, it is to a far larger extent than many realize, a blending of European and African blood.”⁵⁹

Du Bois broke the black race into categories. There were mulatto types, quadroon types, and white types with Negro blood. Within each of these categories were subcategories, each with its own description of physical appearance, stature, hair color, skin color, eye color, temperament, and personality. Similar to white eugenicists, Du Bois meticulously classified the black race into several categories. He departed from eugenicists, however, when he refrained from attributing to any one group any hereditary or environmentally deterministic claims. Instead, Du Bois attributed their differences to socialization. He dismissed the practices of white eugenicists when he stated that “it is naturally very difficult to judge between the relative influence of heredity and

⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

environment—of the influence of Negro and mixed blood, and of the homes and schools and social atmosphere surrounding the colored people.” This, he stated, was difficult because, “most of the blacks are country-bred and descended from the depressed and ignorant field-hands, while a majority of the mulattoes were townbred and descended from the master class and the indulged house-servants.” Du Bois argued that divergent cultures also contributed to the intellectual training of African Americans when he stated that, “The country schools since emancipation have been very poor, while the city schools are pretty good, and in general the difference in civilization between rural and urban districts is much more marked South than North.”⁶⁰

When speaking about the variance of “Negro types” Du Bois further undermined white racial scientists’ goal of preserving white racial purity. He pointed out that when white race scientists maintained that blacks threatened racial purity, they neglected to mention the root cause of racial mixture. Du Bois asserted that the process of amalgamation, generally, has never been prohibited. Within the institution of slavery, Du Bois asserted, gender politics combined with race to drastically shape interracial interactions. Du Bois posted that, “if slavery had prevailed the Negroes might have been gradually absorbed into the white race.” This would be the case because, under slavery blacks had no control over their physical bodies and black women had no control over their reproductive organs. Du Bois exposed the fact that, “Even under the present serfdom, the amalgamation is still going on. It is not then caste or race prejudice that stops it—they rather encourage it on its more dangerous side. The Southern laws against race marriage are in effect laws [that] make the seduction of colored girls easy and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 37.

without shame or penalty.”⁶¹ Demonstrating what Elsa Barkley Brown refers to as the politics of difference, Du Bois argued that within the racial caste system of slavery and Jim Crow, extreme efforts to preserve the sexual purity of white women was predicated on the sexual objectification of the black female body. Degrading myths concerning the *mulatto temptress* and the sexually immoral black female were interconnected to the idea of white female respectability. In fact, ideas of the former greatly influenced early twentieth century Americans’ understanding of the latter.

After calling attention to the complexities of the racial make up of both blacks and whites, Du Bois demonstrated that the group comprising of what he called “respectable” blacks employed a code of Christian morality to help protect the sexual virtue of African American women. This Christian morality also shielded the entire race from being mischaracterized as sexually perverse. Du Bois recognized that by exercising sexual restraint, these blacks guaranteed that at least one segment of the black population would lessen the occurrence of casual interracial sexual liaisons. Du Bois celebrated the “rising educated classes of blacks” for adopting a communal standard of “no amalgamation except through open legal marriage.”⁶²

In “Physical Measurements” Du Bois tested prevailing scientific opinions concerning potential links between physical differences and race superiority. Du Bois collected data from the Surgeon General, the McDonald study of school children in Washington, D.C., and a similar study of school children in Kansas City, Missouri.⁶³ His

⁶¹ Ibid., 38.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 50.

findings revealed that whatever differences existed between the physical measurements of black children and white children were attributable to differences in dietary limitations. A report on African Americans' dietary practices in Alabama, which was considered to be representative of the entire Black Belt, revealed that for African Americans, "The quantities of protein are very small; roughly speaking, the food these Negroes furnished one-third to three-fourths as much protein as are called for in the current physiological standards and as are actually found in the dietaries of well-fed whites in the United States and well-fed people in Europe." He did a transnational comparison when he pointed out that, blacks protein intake was "no larger than have been found in the dietaries of the very poor factory operatives and laborers in Germany and the laborers and beggars in Italy."⁶⁴ The Alabama study showed that blacks were not intellectually inferior to whites; they were malnourished. Poverty, not biology, explained why black children were physically underdeveloped compared to their more affluent white counterpart. This assertion directly challenged the eugenicist's assertion that physical measurements could reasonably determine one racial group's intellectual threshold.

Herbert A. Miller, a psychologist, analyzed the different perspectives concerning the intellectual development of African Americans and Native Americans, both of whom whites considered to be the least developed races. Miller analyzed two explanations for mental underdevelopment and found that, "The cause of the backwardness of the so-called lower races is variously attributed to the influence of environment of all sorts, and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

to natural incapacity.” Miller conceded that the environmental proposition was as much based on assumptions as was the proposition that took for granted blacks’ innate inferiority. Supporting the explanation of mental inferiority based on environmental conditions or the explanation that looked to *race traits* “involves a very different attitude towards the course of human development: the one assuming that, in general, equal results follow equal conditions, and that the apparent differences are due to unequal home training, economic conditions, and social ideals; the other, that, whatever the conditions, the possibilities are not the same.”⁶⁵

Miller also expressed his disapproval of white psychological evaluations of African Americans and whites, in large part because the two groups operated in and were subjected to very different circumstances. Miller posited that most social scientific approaches identified cultural differences that were not directly related to mental health. He distinguished a comprehensive field of psychology from a more restrictive field. The comprehensive field took into consideration “the total complex of mental life,” which included some elements that did not lend themselves to empirical study. He explained the difference as follows:

Any fact of the mind, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, is referred to this category. It cannot be scientific, for it does not lend itself to analysis. It is an attitude of the mind, which is the result of many psychic elements working together, plus the practical theory of the universe which the individual happens to hold. This varying combination of influences which shape every attitude makes classification impossible, and to call it psychology takes one but little nearer scientific explanation. The uncertainty of complexity makes it desirable to seek relatively isolated elements.⁶⁶

Speaking directly to the charge that African Americans or Native Americans lacked a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

capacity for morality, Miller wrote that, “To conclude, from the manifestations of immorality among the Negroes, or from their failure to recognize certain social conventions, that the Negro is incapable of morality or of adaptation to the social demand, is a conclusion based upon inadequate evidence. Morality and social adaptation are the result of the interpretation of the value of a situation, and not a necessary development of inherent capacity.”⁶⁷

Although Miller stopped short of saying that race characteristics did not exist, he insisted that some of the components that were *missing* from black culture were independent of race. For Miller, “It may be the uncivilized instead of the uncivilizable mind that is described.”⁶⁸ He criticized white anthropologists for basing “their conclusions as to the difference in race levels upon the degree to which they *suppose* the race to have evolved. Their teachings have been eagerly grasped by the general public as a scientific support of their belief that the Negro is inferior to whites.”⁶⁹ Through the more narrow form of psychology, however, Miller arrived at very different conclusions. Psychology “can aim to study the ‘immovable limitations,’ but it is utterly impossible for it to give a standard for measuring the social energy which is the force that makes most of the visible results.”⁷⁰ Miller used Du Bois’ double-consciousness to explain the “conditions of real life [that] indicates the impossibility of drawing psychological conclusions from practical reactions.” One could not reasonably compare the sentiments

⁶⁷ Ibid, 54-55.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 56.

of blacks and whites knowing that, for blacks, their views concerning their particular social position were due, “in part at least, to the consciousness of [their] social position.”⁷¹

Miller conducted his own psychological experiments to determine that most of the areas of analysis used to condemn African Americans’ mental health were unfounded. He did, however, concede that, “we do find some tendencies of divergence, and admit the possibility of many more. The complex of all these tendencies gives the temperamental tone, which obviously does characterize sexes and races. The differences, however, are of degree rather than of kind.”⁷² Most of the people Miller studied, race notwithstanding, fell into what he referred to as a “common space” of evaluation. This led him to suggest that whatever differences existed between blacks and whites were accidental, and would lose significance when some “spiritual affinity” or shared purpose brought the two groups together. He advocated better education in the areas of philosophy and science to get at “the universal and essential” qualities of human existence, so that shared purpose could be found. “The purpose of education and social progress,” he contended, “is to make the accidental give way to the essential, and to let each individual stand for his true worth to society; then the problems as they now confront us will cease to exist.”⁷³ Miller’s conclusion was in sync with Du Bois and other race reformers who believed that proper education would help whites better understand blacks while also helping blacks better conform to the positive cultural habits practiced by the dominant race.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 59.

⁷³ Ibid.

“The Increase of the Negro-American” confronted the Hoffman’s claim that African Americans would eventually succumb to their own degenerate nature unless they placed themselves under the supervision of their previous white overseers. He agreed with Kelly Miller who discovered that African American birth statistics were unreliable given that in many cases African Americans births were not recorded. Du Bois suggested that a more accurate way of determining the rate of increase/decrease of African Americans was to compare “the number of children with the number of women of child-bearing age.”⁷⁴ A survey of the data revealed that since 1850 (when such records were first recorded for African Americans), African Americans’ number of births exceeded the birth rate for whites. African Americans, Du Bois added, had been “by far the most prolific, the only exception being the Southern whites during the last decade, where increasing economic prosperity has increased marriages and children to an unusual degree, while storm and stress has harried the Negroes.”⁷⁵

“The Sick and Defective” interrogated claims regarding the propensity of various racial and ethnic groups to specific diseases. Scientific racists, speaking about African American health proclivities posited that, “The Negro even in the tropics is especially subject to all affections of the lungs. The black races have in general less fully developed chests and less respiratory power than the European race. They are consequently exceedingly sensitive to atmospheric changes, and are severely handicapped in any migration for this reason.”⁷⁶ Pseudo-scientists predicted that white people were more

⁷⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

likely to succumb to environmental diseases like malaria, while African Americans were more likely to fall to internal deficiencies like tuberculosis. According to Du Bois, however, the statistical data gathered from United States army, showed that between 1901 and 1904, the ratio of African Americans whose physical assessments were accepted or rejected by the army was higher than the ratio of whites accepted or rejected. Du Bois explained that, “There is among Negroes a constant excess of venereal disease among unsuccessful applicants, an excess of tuberculosis and poor chest development and a slight deficiency in stature. The whites exceed particularly in diseases of digestion, the nervous system, diseases of the genito-urinary system, deficiencies of sight, underweight, imperfect physique, heart disease, varicose veins, etc.”⁷⁷ Pneumonia (8.65 to 5.12) and Tuberculosis 6.41 to 4.41), comprised what Du Bois called “lung troubles,” were the main diseases that plagued African American soldiers more than their white counterpart. He attributed the occurrence of venereal diseases to behavior and/or environmental concerns. He, however attributed whites’ physical ailments to inheritable deficiencies. I doing so, Du Bois implied that, based on the Army statistics, whites, not blacks, possessed biologically inferior trait.

Du Bois also condemned Hoffman and others for attempting to link race to certain types of transferrable mental disorders. He analyzed the number of African Americans who were institutionalized for mental disabilities and noted that the available data was incomplete because it was based solely on the numbers of those were actually diagnosed and committed. He also noted that statistical evidence did not distinguish between

⁷⁷ Ibid., 68.

traditionally defined mental disorders and those who were considered “feeble-minded.”⁷⁸ Du Bois found that the proportion of institutionalized African Americans in the southeastern states and south central states was smaller than the actual number of institutionalized African Americans with respect to the larger population. Mental hospitals in places with small black populations like Delaware, West Virginia, and Kentucky, however, reported numbers of African Americans mental health patients that were much higher than their relative size within the larger population. Though the statistics were imperfect, Du Bois concluded that these statistics suggest “a ratio of insane to population among Negroes which equals if it does not surpass that among the whites.”⁷⁹

In a review of the death rate for those considered “colored,” which included both blacks and Native Americans, Du Bois admitted that the “colored death rate greatly exceeds the white,” although the number was improving. One of the reasons for this is because death rates for African Americans were not always recorded. Tuberculosis, or what was then called consumption, was the leading cause of death for African Americans in 1900 (485 deaths per 100,000 living African Americans). Pneumonia was the second leading cause of death (355 deaths per 100,000 living African Americans). Health statistics showed that in 1900 consumption was particularly harmful for black children (344 per 1,000 living colored children under 1 year of age and 112 per 1,000 living

⁷⁸ Feeble-minded- a catch-all term used irresponsibly by early twentieth century social workers that linked alcoholism, prostitution and timidity to genetic inferiority. For more information, see Angie C. Kennedy, “Eugenics, ‘Degenerate Girls,’ and Social Workers During the Progressive Era, in *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* February 2008, vol. 23, no. 1, pages (Sage Publishing), 22-37

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

colored children under 5 years of age). Du Bois attributed such high rates of fatal cases of consumption to the harsh climates of mid-Atlantic and northern cities. Between 1884 and 1890, the recorded number of lethal cases of consumption among African Americans in New York was 774.21 per 100,000 people. Among African Americans in Boston the number was 762.78 per 100,000 people. In 1890, the number of consumption cases among African Americans was 187.23 in Baltimore and 591.83 in Washington, D.C. per 100,000 people.⁸⁰

Opponents of black migration often argued that the death rate for African Americans was higher in the North than in the South. They claimed that blacks, being so accustomed to the southern climates, were incapable of adapting to the chilling winters of the North. Du Bois rebuffed this claim with statistical evidence showing “that of the large cities, the eight highest death rates are Southern cities—Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, Richmond, Norfolk, Va., Nashville, St. Louis and Atlanta. Thirty deaths per 1,000 seems to be the dividing line between the Northern cities and the Southern, most of the Southern cities having a rate above 30, while most of the Northern cities have a rate below 30.”⁸¹ He pointed out that Chicago reported fewer deaths than cities with black populations of comparable size (Charleston and Nashville). Likewise, New York City reported fewer African American deaths than its population rival in New Orleans. One key difference between northern cities and their southern counterpart is that cities in the North contained far fewer children than did cities in the South. When corrected for age difference, however, the statistical evidence still showed a higher death rate for African

⁸⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁸¹ Ibid., 83.

Americans residing in the South.

In the section dedicated to “Insurance,” the conference addressed the problem of life insurance discrimination. Several states passed laws that prohibited life insurance companies from discriminating against African Americans, but insurance companies defended their policies by manipulating mortality rates to show that African Americans residing in northern areas had a greater rate of death than their white counterpart. Proponents of insurance discrimination also argued that blacks were more likely to allow their policies to lapse, which then made it more difficult for companies to yield a profit.⁸² Conference members challenged called attention to the fact that native born whites and European groups who exhibited risky behavior or were economically underdeveloped were not held to the same standard. The conference took the position that such policies would be acceptable if they were used to discriminate against “Americans born in Germany or Ireland, or in the case of certain social classes or localities.”⁸³ Du Bois commented on the discriminating insurance practice by saying pointing to the fact that, “carried to its utmost logical conclusion it would contradict the very idea of insurance, viz., the distribution of the economic burden of the unfortunate or old on the shoulders of so many of their luckier fellows that the cost will be negligible.”⁸⁴ He recalled a report showing the actual results of life insurance companies, which revealed that, “the Negro makes a better showing than the Irish, nearly as good as the Germans, and better than the economic class of laborers in general. To be sure these Negroes were carefully selected,

⁸² Ibid., 91.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

but this fact only emphasizes the injustice which would have been done them had they been discriminated against merely on account of color, as the insurance companies so often do.”⁸⁵

Conclusion

One of the most important findings of the Eleventh Atlanta Conference was that blacks’ material conditions were improving. They lauded “an undoubted betterment in the health of Negroes: the general death rate is lower, the infant mortality has markedly decreased, and the number of deaths from consumption is lessening.”⁸⁶ The statistics, however, were not perfect and needed to be improved further. The conference recommended that existing health organizations begin to reach out to African American communities because “the health of the whole country depends in no little degree upon the health of Negroes.”⁸⁷ In the spirit of Du Bois’ “Problem of Amusement,” the Eleventh Conference pushed for blacks to take steps to improve their own physical health through preventative measures.

In 1910 Du Bois published the essay “The College-Bred Negro American” a social study of African American college students pursuing higher education. Du Bois analyzed an array of issues pertaining to black students’ academic performance. Of interest here is his remarks pertaining to the black students’ engagement with physical activity, where in which he concluded that “Tho they have looked well to their literary, religious and social training, they have had very little to do with athletics. Aside from

⁸⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

one or two baseball men and a football player the colored students have had very little interest in university sports. The athletic inactivity is due in part to the circumstances under which nearly every one of these students must acquire his education.” Du Bois’ analysis of black student engagement exposed the reality of the black students’ struggles to overcome insecurities and fears associated with being a racial minority in an unfamiliar and rigorous environment. Du Bois pointed to the fact that, “Aside from the disparity of their numbers it may be found that one of the great differences between white and colored students in the University lies in the circumstances under which each race accomplishes what it does.”⁸⁸

Although Du Bois understood why black students neglected athletics in their pursuit of higher learning, he lamented the fact that they resolved that doing well academically in a high-stress academic environment required them to neglect their physical health. He juxtaposed black students’ perception of physical culture as peripheral with that of their white counterpart who, relating better to their surroundings and facing less pressure to succeed, devoted time to other areas of their lives.

If it is more difficult for some colored students to rank high in scholarship from a standpoint of grades than it is for white students it may be owing to the fact that this excellence is not expected of them. Good work on the part of a colored student nearly always calls forth comment or even expressions of surprise. The white students do not necessarily have to meet a condition of this nature. [...] The white student can forgo any social demands with impunity and applause while he is at school. This is not true of the colored student; his social opportunities and obligations increase with his schooling. If he is not brave enough to ignore adverse criticism and remain loyal to his studies his scholarship must suffer.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The College Bred Negro,” 40.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Scholars who focus on Du Bois' educational ideas are right to assert that he prided education as integral to race leadership. These scholars must contend, however, with the fact that it is misleading to ignore the fact that Du Bois advocated physical training. "The College Bred Negro" supports the argument that he stood with African American proponents of physical culture who believed that African Americans should build strong physical bodies along with strong records of academic achievement. Further support for the idea that Du Bois promoted physical culture comes in the form of an announcement printed in *The Crisis* magazine in 1910, which informed readers about the publication of Spaulding's *Official Handbook*. The publication, edited by Edwin Henderson and William Joiner, reported histories and statistics relating to efforts to encourage athletics within the African American communities in the Mid-Atlantic States.⁹⁰ This announcement is noteworthy because it appeared in the section reserved for news pertaining to what Du Bois characterized examples of *social uplift*. In the next chapter I will reveal how closely linked the black physical culture movement was to the findings of black social scientific research. Drawing from the *Official Handbook* and other periodicals, I will show how to institutionalized athletics in schools and community institutions coincided with efforts to improve African Americans' material conditions.

⁹⁰ "Social Uplift," *The Crisis Magazine* (New York), December, 1910.

CHAPTER 2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCOLLEGIATE AND COMMUNITY LEVEL PHYSICAL CULTURE AND ITS CHALLENGE

The findings of black social scientists at the turn of the century extended to far reaching areas of black social and political reform. The area interrogated in this chapter is the ways in which black social reformers sought to rectify many of the social issues identified by black social scientists through institutionalized physical culture programs. Attention will be given to three areas. I will identify some of the most influential physical culture proponents working in the Middle states region of the United States and I will discuss their reasons for institutional development within a context of race improvement. I will also discuss the distinctions between amateur and professional sport as understood within the context of race adjustment. Finally, I will evaluate the impact of the black physical culture movement on the eve of the Great Depression, by judging its effectiveness in achieving its stated goals in the first 30 years of the twentieth century.

In 1901, the Virginia Normal and Industrial *Gazette* featured an article titled “Unfinished People,” which encouraged African American youth to become “well-rounded” citizens rather than excelling in one academic area or skill to the exclusion of others. “The average boy gifted with good, sound common sense, with a willingness to work, with an ambition to be somebody in the world and a determination to make the most of his opportunities, even though he shows no glint of brilliancy, everything considered, will win much more satisfactory and enduring success than many a so-called genius.”⁹¹ In the spirit of race adjustment, the paper cautioned African American youth

⁹¹ “Unfinished People,” *Gazette* vol. 7., no. 4, April (Ettrick: Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, 1901).

against overdeveloping in one or two areas. A testament to one's societal worth was her or his given utility in several different spheres. Ironically, the school dropped liberal arts from its adopted industrial training as a major part of its curriculum. The change in the institute's intellectual scope was reflected in the change of the school periodical's name, which became *Virginia Normal & Industrial Institute Gazette*. Despite the change in intellectual focus, the goal of race development through self-help initiatives remained a central feature of the periodical.

In the post-Reconstruction era white supremacists used violence to curtail black political and economic power. Educated and "spirited" blacks were constantly viewed as a threat to those who benefited from a cheap and docile labor force. Those blacks people who refused to acquiesce to the exploitative situation that characterized the South by fighting back were assaulted. Many were killed. In 1905 the *Gazette* considered the notion of masculinity within this context and it instructed young men to harness their aggression. The author stated that there was "some danger that we may underrate the gentler virtues when we highly esteem the sterner ones. But we remember, "the bravest are tenderest [sic]. A boy may possess a fist like a sledge hammer, yet have little of the fine sensitiveness and enthusiasm which constitute the basis of mental force."⁹² The author wanted young men to rely first on diplomacy, withholding force until it was necessary. "A man with grace of manner and unfailing politeness, plus force, is almost certain to carry all before him and sweep obstacles out of his path." As an expression of racial adjustment, this article provided a template for social engagement. The author

⁹² "True Manliness," *Gazette*, October 1905, Vol. 12, No. 2.

cautioned black males against resorting to anger or other costly emotions that might cause harm to them or to other blacks living in an oppressive environment.

In addition to offering sound advice for cultivating the right personality to survive Jim Crow, the *Gazette* also treated the importance of proper eating as part of physical culture. The *Gazette* encouraged healthy living in lieu of large-scale African American migration as a remedy to the afflictions faced by the black community. One of the reasons why African Americans left the rural South was to increase their economic earning potential. The negative impact that urban living had on African American health, however, made many black reformers critical of the opportunity costs of increased economic gain at the expense of one's health. The author wrote that, "There is nothing as profitable as health and long life. No money making proposition would as strongly appeal to a man as one to add a generation to the ordinary life, while preserving normal vigor."⁹³ The author was also influenced by the findings of black social scientific investigations. He wrote that, "Scientific investigations have, within the last century, shown how health may be preserved and life prolonged beyond the average duration of a years ago, and statistics show that the dissemination of such knowledge has actually and perceptibly lengthened the average lifetime." The author advised readers to consider several health rules as suggested by Sir James Sawyer, a noted English physician. The rules listed included:

Eight hours sleep. Sleep on your right side. Keep your bedroom window open all night. Have a mat at your bedroom door. Do not have your bedstead against the wall. No cold tub in the morning. No cold tub in the morning, but a bath at the temperature of the body. Exercise before breakfast... Daily exercise in the open

⁹³ "To Attain A Long Life," *Gazette*, vol. 14, No.2. Ettrick: Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, October 1907.

air. Allow no pet animals in your living rooms. Live in the country if you can. Watch the three D's—drinking water; damp and drains. Have change of occupation. Take frequent and short holidays. Limit your ambition. Keep your temper.⁹⁴

The author endorsed the list by stating that “on the whole, there is little doubt that they would be of great benefit to all.” The author urged readers to first employ these techniques before seeking more drastic measures to improve their physical health like migrating West to rid themselves of the complexities of urban living.⁹⁵

The *Gazette* revisited African American health in 1908 when it featured the article, “How Health Affects Ambition.” The author argued that there was a direct link between one’s health habits and one’s opportunities for success. When people were seen “doing little things, living mediocre lives, when they have the ability to do great things, to live grand lives,” they would be more successful “if they only could keep their health up to standard.”⁹⁶ Positive health habits yielded better output. “Vigorous, robust health doubles and quadruples the efficiency and power of every faculty and function.” Better health also improved human capital because it “clears the cobwebs from the brain, brushes off the brain-ash, improves the judgment, sharpens every faculty, increases the energy, [refreshes] the cells in every tissue of the body.”⁹⁷ The author contended that the opposite was true of poor health habits. “The ambition partakes of the quality and the vigor of the mental faculties; and a brain that is fed by poisoned blood due to vitiated air,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “To Attain a Long Life” *Gazette*, vol. 14, No. 2, October 1907.

⁹⁶ “How Health Affects Ambition,” *Gazette*, vol. 15, No. 2, Ettrick: Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, October 1908.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

to overeating or bad eating, or to dissipation, or a lack of vigorous outdoor exercise, can never do great things.”⁹⁸ That *Gazette* prided itself on training African American youth to become productive members of the community. It took the position that one needed to establish and then maintain positive health in order to achieve academic and professional success.

In 1910 the *Indianapolis Recorder* identified Edwin Bancroft Henderson, a physical education instructor in the D.C. public schools, as one of Washington, D.C.’s most influential black residents. The newspaper credited him with being the “originator of the movement’ for organized sports in schools, and ‘one of the best known colored athletes among promoters in the country.”⁹⁹ The *Recorder* saw Henderson’s work in the D.C. public schools as an extension of a larger program to advance the race in large part because of Henderson’s ability to frame athletics as an instrument to “promote a culture of discipline, character building, wholesome recreation, teamwork in pursuit of collective goals, and mitigate juvenile delinquency.”¹⁰⁰ Around the same time, Henderson and William Joiner, a faculty member of Howard University, published the *Official Handbook of the Interscholastic League of the Mid-Atlantic States*, a collection of informative essays showcasing the work of physical culture proponents in and around the D.C. area. In their forward, the Henderson and Joiner echoed Du Bois and Miller’s observations when they lamented the fact that “the vitality of the Negro youth is seriously

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Daryl Michael Scott, ed., *The Negro in Sports: A Reissue of the Classic Study of the African American Athlete* by Edwin Bancroft Henderson. An introduction by Al Tony Gilmore, xxv.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

undermined by the crowded city life.”¹⁰¹ They drew attention to the fact that, “Many young men leave our secondary schools and colleges to engage in strenuous work, amidst varying conditions, with bodies unsound and but few, if any, hygienic habits formed for life.”¹⁰² They believed that too little attention had “been given to physical education by institutions of learning for colored youths.” Their goal in publishing the *Official Handbook* was to “bring before the race some methods and efforts used and results obtained for the benefit of Negro youth by the Interscholastic Athletic Association of Colored Schools.”¹⁰³

Joiner and Henderson praised schools, religious organizations, and city and state government officials for “considering means to prevent racial degeneration and taking steps to have future generations of men healthful, strong and well-formed physical and mental beings.” They linked their mission to other efforts to improve the moral and material conditions of the race by arguing that in order to “preserve present health and to insure the future welfare of the race it is necessary that we build up a strong, virile youth.”¹⁰⁴ The authors challenged the race’s leading women and men to direct young male and female youth toward “paths to health and strength.” Athletics and sports, they

¹⁰¹ “Forward, ”*The Official Handbook of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle Atlantic States, 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 3.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

believed, provided black youth the resources needed to combat “the degenerating influences of modern civilization in a large way.”¹⁰⁵

The 1910 edition of the *Official Handbook* featured an article written by Robert N. Mattingly, the Director of the Department of Mathematics in DC Public Schools, who traced the origins of the Interscholastic Athletic Association, which served as the organizing body for amateur athletics in the Mid-Atlantic States. According to Mattingly, the organization emerged in response to blacks’ newfound material conditions as residents of urban America. The I.S.A.A. was “recognized as a power for good in the athletics of the schools and colleges for colored youth throughout the Middle Atlantic States.”¹⁰⁶ Mattingly pointed to the fact that within the Midwest and southern United States, where black educational opportunities were limited by segregated school systems, “the pupils of such institutions are not brought into competition with the representatives of the surrounding schools in the athletic meets under the A.A.U. and similar organizations.”¹⁰⁷ When black physical culture proponents discovered the positive attributes that athletics offered to their own communities, they decided to create their own institutions to address community concerns.

Segregation precluded interracial athletic competition in and around the D.C. metro area. Black athletic programs in the D.C. area wanted to rectify this by traveling to northern cities where schools would receive them in competition. In most cases,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Robert N. Mattingly, “History of the I.S.A.A.,” *Spaulding’s Official Handbook of the Mid-Atlantic States 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 15.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

however, urban blacks were too poor to spend monetary resources on extracurricular activities. The I.S.A.A., through fundraising and with the help of private donors, overcame this limitation enough to offset costs associated with travel, officiating, and other miscellaneous costs. Another major obstacle to the development of athletics within black schools was the lack of interest shown by the black community. Most black Americans were still unaware of its usefulness as an instrument for social and material advancement. Two of the most important functions of the I.S.A.A., then, were to educate the public and to promote athletics as a pedagogical tool that would benefit the race.

The Association was founded in 1906 when “public spirited men, teachers in the institutions of learning situated in Washington and Baltimore, met to devise means to provide the students in these schools a better field for athletic activities than they themselves had enjoyed while students of these same institutions.”¹⁰⁸ These “spirited men” were W.J. Decatur and W.A. Joiner of Howard University, Garret C. Wilkerson of M. Street High School, Robert Mattingly of Armstrong Technical School, E.B. Henderson, physical training instructor in the Washington public schools, and Ralph Cook of Baltimore High School.¹⁰⁹ One of the first decisions the association made was to expand the athletic opportunities within the area schools. Most schools already offered football and baseball, but the finite number of available spots in each sport excluded most students from participating. The group looked for ways to reach as many youth a possible and concluded they would engage area youth through track and field athletics. The

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Joiner also worked with Henderson to edit the Official Handbook. He later left Washington for Wilberforce University.

association chose Howard University as the center of athletic life and made its first project the construction of a track on Howard's campus.

The Association asked the Board of Trustees to help finance the track project for an estimated price of \$400. Although the trustees declined to help fund the project, they allowed the Association to lay the track themselves. They did stipulate, however, that Decatur and Joiner, the two members employed by the University, must oversee the construction. The track was completed in about 5 weeks by voluntary labor from students of the representative institutions. The remaining work was financed using the personal funds of the Association's members. According Mattingly, the association members were very generous. "At times the Association was in debt to its individual members in sums varying from \$10 to \$100, with no assurance, save their faith, that it would even owe them less."¹¹⁰ The sacrifice of the Association's founders proved invaluable because eventually league play developed enough to make the I.S.A.A. a self-sustaining organization.

In addition to the formation of interscholastic teams, physical culture proponents also sought to establish physical culture clubs. These institutions provided an accessible outlet for African Americans not affiliated with the schools and colleges or in instances where schools were unable or willing to provide physical culture opportunities for black students. Conrad Norman, another black physical culture proponent, chronicled the establishment of the Alpha Physical Culture Club of New York City. He demonstrated the clubs' mission by stating that the Alpha Physical Culture Club was organized in response to the "congested city conditions" which caused "fearful ravages caused by

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

pneumonia and consumption.”¹¹¹ Statistical evidence showed that “the mortality due to these diseases is greater proportionately among the Negroes in the North than among the whites.”¹¹² John Morgan, the club’s founder, believed that “tuberculosis cannot successfully attack a healthy pair of lungs.” Therefore, he and others asserted that physical exercise was “absolutely necessary” for respiratory health. Racial discrimination made it very difficult for blacks in New York to participate in physical culture programs provided by the city. Despite the fact that the black population in New York was large, and despite the fact that there were several outlets for “athletic clubs of all kinds, recreation centers, playgrounds, settlements, schools, etc., provisions were denied to African Americans.¹¹³

Alpha’s leaders chose to address these issues, which included race discrimination, by exposing the race to “scientific physical training.” The Alpha club, which began in 1904, first convened in a parsonage located on West 134th Street. The Club organized “regular exercises in calisthenics, talks on physical culture, and aerobics.”¹¹⁴ These activities helped to increase the Club’s popularity. Although Norman lamented the fact that the organization’s “growth was retarded by lack of suitable quarters,” he boasted the organization’s “yearly exhibition of gymnastic exercises,” which provided a source of “a public entertainment.” Alpha organized a track team that consisted of more than twenty

¹¹¹ Conrad Norman, “The Alpha Physical Culture Club,” *Spaulding’s Official Handbook of the Mid-Atlantic States 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 25-27.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

men. It also fielded “a first-class baseball team and two basketball teams.” Plans to expand, however, were hindered by “the lack of an adequate building” needed to house more activities. Alpha’s mission, as outlined in its constitution, was to “benefit...the members, not alone physically, but mentally and morally, through the physical.” Club leaders’ “ambition [was] to be an institution, identified with a positive effort for the benefit of mankind, and our people in particular, and imbued with altruism and unselfishness mixed with sound common sense.”¹¹⁵

Black physical culture proponents pointed out to other blacks the relationship between a strong mind and a healthy body. In “Training the Body for Health and Athletics,” Joiner and Henderson collaborated in an essay that encouraged readers to train their bodies as part of a larger program to promote physical health. They argued that, training “the body to withstand strain and fatigue and for motor skill should be natural and healthful.”¹¹⁶ Under the instruction of “competent advisors of a sound body, the individual should work off unhygienic habits and conditions for those of health and strength.”¹¹⁷ They stressed proper and healthy athletic training and shamed the “ignorant or careless athlete” who, “through dissipation, permits his vitality to run so low after a

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson, “Training the Body for Health and Athletics,” *Spaulding’s Official Handbook of the Mid-Atlantic States 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 37-39.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

siege of training that each course of conditioning leaves him a weaker man. They lauded the “lasting athlete” who, “between training periods, lives a clean, regular life.”¹¹⁸

Joiner and Henderson credited exercise as essential to strengthening muscle, to creating healthy tissue, to securing endurance, and to fostering vitality. They identified “walking, running, swimming, and wrestling” as the “best of all-around training exercises.” In their capacities as coaches, Joiner and Henderson instructed a diverse pool of aspiring athletes on proper methods of physical activity. To help athletes develop strong muscle-tone, they encouraged them to “work to near the fatigue point of the muscle with hard exercise; to get quick, pliable muscle, use light forms of exercise requiring speedy motion.” To aid with sport performance and to promote general health, Joiner and Henderson recommended “quick movements of moderate exertion.” This, they argued, was “far more serviceable in training than the old monotonous weight-lifting and heavy dumb-bell work.” Joiner and Henderson concluded by instructing readers to “cultivate good, clean habits of thinking and doing.”¹¹⁹ They demonstrated their belief that proper athletic training fostered moral discipline when they told readers to avoid smoking and other “bluffs at manliness because they “make the will power so weak that they cannot resist the more harmful and dangerous self-corrupting practices of immoral youth.”¹²⁰ They told young boys to resist “small temptations and thereby gain strength to resist greater ones. Keep from the habits and the actions of the rowdy athlete, who so often boasts that he does not need to train. Be a gentleman athlete and gain the respect of

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

all. Study yourself, read how others have trained, and map out a course for yourself, eliminating those features which do not result in benefit to you.”¹²¹

In a follow up article title, “Athletics in the Colleges,” Joiner and Henderson explained how the implementation of athletics into the nation’s black colleges helped to encourage students to become better race leaders. For most black colleges, education provided a means to an end and was not viewed as an end unto itself. School administrators struggled with college students who excelled academically at the expense of their physical health. Because most black colleges fostered racial progress, administrators took issue with the unattractive image of the intelligent student, but half dead, that inspired race pathos, not race pride. He was antithetical to college’s mission of producing educated *and* physically healthy women and men. Administrators appreciated the change that increased opportunities in athletics provided. Joiner and Henderson observed that the “sunken eye, the pallid brow, the languid gait—all these have passed as the marks of the college ideal, and in their place have come the laughing eyes, the rosy cheeks, the springy step—an entire body instinct with life and every nerve an fiber tingling with energy and action. The hero is broad-shouldered, high-browed and staunch-limbed, and the heroine is his sister, a veritable bundle of animation.”¹²²

A major issue of contention among early twentieth century black physical culture proponents was the threat of commercialization of athletics and its implications for race

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson “Athletics in the Colleges,” *The Official Handbook of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle Atlantic States, 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 49-51.

adjustment. As early as 1910, Joiner and Henderson distinguished amateur sport from its professional counterpart in an essay called “Professional vs. Amateur Sports.” The authors’ wrote the essay in an effort to teach “novice athletes and budding athletic managers the dangers of professionalism.”¹²³ They described, as the principle difference between amateur and professional athletics, the athlete’s motive for participation. “The amateur athlete usually engages in athletic games for physical benefits and bodily health and strength or for mental recreation and pleasure. Professional athletes are sportsmen for pecuniary gain. The high estimation of his fellow men for his physical accomplishments and good mental judgment, accompanied by some record token of the honor, is usually all the amateur seeks.”¹²⁴ Joiner and Henderson favored amateur sports, but conceded that, “Honest professional sport does exist.” “As a rule,” however, “when men put all their wits and strength into a contest to earn a livelihood, the ethics of the game usually is lowered; fair play generally is the lookout of the officials and not of the players; mean and unfair tactics are resorted to; spectators are hoodwinked; laying down, double-crossing and faking take the place of clean playing, and fairness of player to player and planers to public become a secondary condition.”¹²⁵ The authors condemned the “professionally inclined amateur” who “does great harm to sport by his dishonesty in

¹²³ _____, “Professional vs. Amateur Sports,” *Spaulding’s Official Handbook of the Mid-Atlantic States 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 52-53.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ _____, “Professional vs. Amateur Sports,” *The Official Handbook of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle Atlantic States, 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 49-51.

competing in one class for the popularity and the advertisement it brings and in taking money for his winnings whenever the chance affords.”¹²⁶ While Joiner and Henderson praised the physical educator who promoted the athletic ideals, they asserted that the “physical training professor who aims to produce winning teams or individuals at a sacrifice of health, strength and morals is worthy of contempt.”¹²⁷

Most of the articles featured in the 1910 edition of the *Official Handbook* focused on the emergence and progress of black-controlled athletic and physical culture institutions. “The Negro Athlete,” by Ernest Marshall, the physical director of Howard University, however, lauded the athletic achievements of black students who participated in university-sanctioned athletics in Northern universities. Marshall listed “Taylor of Pennsylvania and Marshall of Minnesota...Bullock of Dartmouth, Pinkett of Amherst, Ayler of Brown, Chadwell of Williams, Gray of Amherst, who was last year chosen third All-American half back by Walter Camp...Craighead of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, and Jones of Harvard” as possessing “the most sterling qualities.”¹²⁸ According to Marshall, their accomplishments are even more noteworthy when one considered the fact that there were so few black students attending northern colleges at that time. Their work, he maintained, “speaks well for all Negro athletes wherever they are.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ernest Marshall, “The Negro Athlete,” *The Official Handbook of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle Atlantic States, 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 69.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Many of the scholars who have written on early twentieth century black history have taken the position that early black physical culture proponents saw black athletic achievement at Northern (read white) colleges as an extension of a larger program for civil rights. Scholars like Patrick Miller and David K. Wiggins, for example, have argued that black reformers saw blacks' athletic participation in northern colleges as an expression of "muscular assimilation," where in which black student athletes used their bodies to dispel anti-black ideas that positioned them as inferior to their white counterparts. It may appear that Marshall's celebration of the black athletes supports this "muscular assimilationist" motif. On close examination, however, one sees that when Marshall interpreted these athletes' accomplishments, he viewed them as aiding the plight of athletic institutions at black colleges. He wrote that, "The manner in which the Negro has forged his way to the front in Northern colleges is sufficient to cause us to believe that in the near future the athletes of our Colored colleges in the South will rank among the best in the country."¹³⁰

Marshall lamented what he called the "obscure position of the colored athlete in the South." The success of black college athletes in northern institutions showed that, "our lack of familiarity with black athletic institutions had little to do with the skill of the black athlete. It was the "financial conditions of the schools, which make it impossible to develop those qualities shown by athletes of the first order."¹³¹ Marshall believed that the relatively unknown status of black intercollegiate athletics would be overcome when "our schools and colleges begin to give attention to the physical as well as to the mental and

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

moral development of the youth.” Once they could accomplish this, and once black athletic institutions repudiated what Marshall called “loose and disorderly methods” that detracted from institutional effectiveness, “we may expect to see the Negro reach a high mark in the athletic world.”¹³²

W.H.J. Beckett, the director of physical education in the black high schools of Baltimore wrote an article that interrogated “The Place of Athletics in Secondary Schools.” He echoed Marshall’s call for black schools and colleges to appreciate more the potential benefits of what he called “systematic work in athletics.”¹³³ He saw it as an effective weapon to combat the “feverish desire to become rich, learned, famous or idle” which had “overtaxed” the black community. The focus given to these pursuits was problematic for Beckett precisely because of the inverse relationship they had with people’s attitude toward physical exertion. He observed that in pursuit of these feverish desires many people dreaded “anything like physical exertion or outdoor recreation.” Beckett called on the public school to “awaken to the fact that [physical activity] is not only organized and maintained for the development of the mind but the development of the body as well.” This, he argued, was the “modern doctrine of the education of the complete man.”¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ W.H.J. Beckett, “The Place of Athletics in Secondary Schools,” *The Official Handbook of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle Atlantic States, 1910*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 71-72.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Beckett believed that it was axiomatic that athletics should play an integral part in the educational process. “The very fact that the boy desires to run, jump, to throw the ball and to enter into competitive contests where he can display his skill, justifies the opportunity that athletics present.”¹³⁵ The educational system that neglected athletics, containing the “school room, desk, workshop and routine work,” exacerbated the need for athletics. The “cramped and unnatural posture, and the greatly emphasized mental requirements necessitate a counteracting force such as this activity will provide.”¹³⁶ Beckett also supported athletics as a means of harnessing what he called surplus energy of male youths. “The boy of the high school age is passing through a period of development in which the body is maturing and nature desires activity, especially for the larger group of muscles: those that affect the heart, lungs, and excretory organs.” Athletics as “systematic work,” according to Beckett, would fulfill that need. In discussion of the socializing qualities of athletics, Beckett argued that physical activity provided an environment that would cultivate in its participants “such qualities as self-reliance, initiative, daring, promptness, and decision of action, which are traits essential to well-developed manhood.”¹³⁷ Participants would also learn valuable skills associated with “self-control, obedience, manliness, alertness, accuracy and judgment.”¹³⁸

Beckett joined Henderson and Joiner in distinguishing “systematic work in athletics” from other forms. In his vision for proper athletics, there would be “proper

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

supervision,” high standards of play, and organization of schedules. He would also “restrict the use of outside players on teams, [discourage] professionalism, destroy rowdiness [sic] at games, avoid excessiveness on the part of players and fraud in handling funds by managers.”¹³⁹ Beckett advocated holding athletic instructors accountable for their athletes’ attitudes toward athletics. Sanctioned athletics within the secondary schools, he argued, would “impress the athletic instructors with the fact that they should instill within the minds of their teams the spirit of clean, fair, honorable sport.”¹⁴⁰ Athletic directors would be responsible for teaching athletes to appreciate sport as an ideal, which, for Beckett, was “the germ of devotion to race and civic responsibilities.” He surmised that, “Athletics in secondary schools gains its fitting dignity when seen in its proper relationship to the well being and advancement of its boys in that which makes for healthful, vigorous individuals. The impelling motive being the development of manliness, bodily vigor and moral stamina.”¹⁴¹

Joiner’s tenure with the *Official Handbook* ended in 1911. Garnet C. Wilkinson replaced him and worked with Henderson to edit at least two more editions of the publication in 1912 and 1913. Their work was supplemented by other black periodicals that adopted the view that athletics was a useful means of promoting good physical health in urban black communities. In 1910 W.E.B. Du Bois included in the N.A.A.C.P.’s the *Crisis Magazine* a statement announcing the publication of Henderson and Joiner’s *Official Handbook* under the heading “Social Uplift.” The following year, Du Bois

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

introduced *Crisis* readers to the benefits of amateur sport by dedicating a special issue to the topic. The magazine featured several pictures of black student-athletes including an artistic representation of “The Late John B. Taylor” of the University of Pennsylvania whose caption read, “His record for the quarter-mile run still remains untouched.”¹⁴² A second picture captured the portrait of Young Men’s Christian Association Basketball Team at Washington, D.C. Its caption read, “This team was never defeated.”¹⁴³ A third picture captured Armstrong High School’s track and field team, its faculty advisers and the team's many trophies.

Henderson contributed an article to this special issue where in which he articulated the significance of African American student-athletes for race development. Speaking of black student-athletes who competed in athletics at predominantly white schools, Henderson commented that, “The colored college athlete of the past and present bears an enviable reputation. His athletic prowess has brought him fame, his skill and courage have gained for him the respect and admiration of thousands, and its is impossible to overestimate the effect of his career upon the minds of thousands of Americans who have seen him perform or have read of his doings.”¹⁴⁴ Speaking of those black student athletes who partook in integrated competition, Henderson bemoaned the fact that black student-athletes often encountered race prejudice and exclusion, even as they “earned” from their athletic prowess. David Wiggins, in his biographical article about Henderson’s contribution to the history of African American Sport, suggests that,

¹⁴² *The Crisis Magazine*, (New York) July 1911, 1.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

¹⁴⁴ Edwin B. Henderson, “The Colored College Athlete,” *The Crisis Magazine* (New York) July 1911, 115.

“Even when faced with unremitting racial discrimination, Henderson’s writings reflected an undying faith in the integrative functions of sport.”¹⁴⁵ One can infer from Wiggins that Henderson subscribed to an integrationist perspective. I agree that Henderson expressed his belief that blacks could perform as well or better than white student-athletes, and he certainly acknowledged and celebrated those student athletes who competed and excelled in predominantly white schools. I depart from Wiggins in his assertion that Henderson advocated or even preferred integrated competition—at least in 1911. In “The Colored College Athlete,” Henderson speculated that,

When competent physical directors and equal training facilities are afforded the colored youth the white athlete will find an equal or superior in nearly every line of athletic endeavor. The natural muscular development and vitality of the Negro of the South, if directed in channels of athletic activities, would lower many records now standing, and our leaders should grasp the situation and develop agencies to conserve the vital forces of the race.¹⁴⁶

One cannot underestimate the power of the color line or the power of the racist discourse that tried to undermine the work of black physical culture proponents who applied the principles of athletics and physical activity to the black community. In 1911 Henderson lived in a world that was governed by race separatism and all of the reaffirming hegemonic ideals that justified the system of Jim Crow. There is no evidence to suggest that he spent much time thinking about integrated competition. As the director of physical education, his principal objective was to improve the physical health of black youth. He, perhaps before anyone else, saw an opportunity for blacks to excel in

¹⁴⁵ David K. Wiggins, “Edwin Bancroft Henderson, African-American Athletes, and the Writing of Sport History,” *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America*, David K. Wiggins and Patrick Miller, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 271.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

athletics, but he took for granted that in doing so, the majority of blacks would compete in segregated forums. His reference to challenging whites was probably a reaction to doubters who tried to devalue his work by insensitively and inaccurately comparing it to physical culture programs developed to serve white Americans. Henderson, in his role as a social reformer, urged that, “Physical training, including athletics, should be a well-outlined course in every school for colored youth; it should not be thrown into the hand of inexperienced student control, but should be developed under the direction of a department of physical education.”¹⁴⁷

Henderson’s article also praised the founders of the Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle Atlantic States for organizing the institution “for the purpose of spreading the doctrine of sound health for colored people.”¹⁴⁸ He credited sophisticated athletic training conducted at the secondary level with training some of the nation’s top performing black athletes who went on to participate in intercollegiate athletics. Some of those men excelled to a degree worthy of earning a college letter, which Henderson described as “the highest honor that can befall an athlete.”¹⁴⁹ Henderson’s appreciation of the award is significant when one considers the award’s significance within an analysis of early twentieth century perceptions of middle class/elite masculinity. Henderson was bold to declare that, “many colored athletes” have achieved the distinction of earning a college letter at a time when the majority of white men in early urban United States were not college trained. Members of the so-called

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

inferior race were not supposed to assume an educational status reserved to the greatest members of the white race. And yet they did. At both white colleges and black colleges. Coupled with the pictures featured in the *Official Handbook*, the *Crisis* and other black periodicals, Henderson's statement could be viewed as subversive because he was essentially professing that several black males had reached a level of achievement that surpassed the great majority of their white American counterparts. Such is an incredible feat when considered within the context of Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and political intimidation of blacks in the South.

After celebrating some of the nation's standout African American college-trained student athletes who competed in white educational spaces, Henderson grieved the fact that black schools did not explore the positive attributes of physical education as fervently as white institutions, which had incorporated athletics into their respective curriculums in the nineteenth century. He criticized black schools for being "hampered through the general ignorance existing in regard to the value and place of physical education in institutions of learning."¹⁵⁰ Henderson, nevertheless, remained optimistic that when schools associated with the I.S.A.A. decided "to adopt rules of eligibility of players in line with more modern schools, and when athletics are assured a fitting place in the curriculum of school work, the Negro college athlete will measure stride for stride with the record holders of the world in all classes of athletic performance."¹⁵¹

Also in 1911, "The Sporting World," a column in the *Chicago Defender*, featured a public address from Mondy Robinson, the physical director of the Douglas Center

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 119.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Athletic Association. He stated, “to the public that physical culture is of very great benefit to the health and he would like to have more young men to join.”¹⁵² He was accompanied by Woods Hutchinson, who warned that, “Any system of physical culture which does not include at least from two to four hours gentle exercise a day in the open air, three square meals a day and nine hours of sleep is of the Evil One. So far as it passes its self off as a substitute for real exercise and fresh air, or encourages you to neglect these, it is a fraud and a failure.”¹⁵³ A few years later, Charles H. Williams, physical director of Hampton Institute, wrote in the *Journal and Guide* his praise for athletics for harnessing “the surplus energy of young men and women.”¹⁵⁴ Sports, he contended, had the potential to be a “powerful social force” that could help African Americans to develop the needed ‘soft-skills’ that promoted “a spirit of loyalty that cannot be so well developed otherwise.”¹⁵⁵

In 1915 V.N.&I.I. amended its curriculum to make physical culture a required course. By doing this, the institute changed the way it defined what it meant to be an educated African American. This had become common practices at several black institutions of higher learning where administrators showed their commitment to the idea that, in addition to possessing a practical education and exhibiting high moral character, a graduate of black institution of higher education was expected to possess a meticulous

¹⁵² “The Sporting World,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago) 15 April 1911, 6.

¹⁵³ Woods Hutchinson, “Exercise in the Open Air,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago) 16 December 1911, 2A.

¹⁵⁴ W. Anthony Aery, “Work of Expert Athletic Leader,” *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk) 18 November 1916, 7.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

devotion to optimal physical health. The change to the core curriculum at V.N.I.I. and other institutions represented a small victory for the proponents of physical culture who viewed athletics as a useful way to help students reach full personhood. W. Bacon, a physical culture supporter, described how the newly established Department of Physical Education fit into the institute's educational goals by stating that, "Modern educators have awakened to the fact that training of the body is just as important as the training of the mind. Robust health is necessary to attain high scholarship in school and to perform successfully the duties of later life. With this end in view considerable stress is laid upon well-regulated physical training."¹⁵⁶ The vision for the department of physical education, however, materialized much quicker than the funds needed to support it. In its infancy, the institute lacked the resources and facilities to organize an elaborate physical training curriculum. Most of the classes were held outdoors, which made training in the colder months difficult. Still, Bacon expressed great optimism for the direction in which the department was headed.

In 1921 the columnist responsible for "Athletic Notes" supported the campaign to establish a gymnasium, positing that the gymnasium was critical to the Institute's work in preparing race leaders, and He warned that the Institute was not adequately serving its students so long as there was no gymnasium in which to house classes and physical culture activities. The author argued that, "the usefulness of an individual, the contribution that the individual makes to the progress of the world is almost absolutely determined by the physical condition of the individual." He pointed to a major flaw with

¹⁵⁶ W. Bacon, "Physical Training," *Gazette*, Ettrick: The Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, October, 1915.

the educational programs of black institutions. Black students were encouraged to develop intellectually, while their physical health was often neglected. Black schools, according to the author, were setting students up to fail. He pointed out that, “it is quite possible for one to have immeasurable ability, to possess capacity and to know well the content of the courses of study, and yet to be a most consummate failure in life.”¹⁵⁷

The author spoke for other proponents of physical culture who wanted “to eradicate this very evident weakness from our program by so organizing our physical education program so that it will meet the very urgent demands made upon it and in its scope will take care of the physical needs of each student.” The author condemned the gym equipment owned by the Institute as being “entirely inadequate for the bulk and complexity of the world’s work that our students must help to do, if they are to stand shoulder and shoulder with other peoples of the world, in the great march of civilization.” The author encouraged readers by saying that, “lest our students shall have their usefulness retarded or curtailed, the Department of Physical Education of Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute begs the hearty cooperation and financial support of the alumni and friends of the Institute in helping to bring to the Institute a well-equipped gymnasium.”¹⁵⁸

As discussed previously, one of the strongest proponents of the black physical culture movement was the black press. Black newspapers across the country helped to publicize the work of playground directors, athletic administrators and athletic

¹⁵⁷ “Athletic Notes: A Well Equipped Gymnasium at V.N. and I.I.” *Gazette*, vol. Twenty-seven, no. 2. Ettrick: Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, July 1921, 21-24.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

participants to local and national audiences. In 1924 A.L. Jackson, a correspondent for the *Chicago Defender* described in “The Onlooker,” the role the *Defender* played “in the proper development of sport and morale among the younger generation of the Race in this city and in other sections of the country.”¹⁵⁹ According to Jackson, the *Defender* held a banquet in honor of the Chicago basketball championship runner up, a black team, who “by its conduct and playing ability had taken strong hold upon the imagination and affections of the Chicago public at large.”¹⁶⁰ The newspaper also arranged through its affiliate office in Washington, D.C. for an intersectional game between the Chicago team and a D.C. squad, another black team, which the Chicago squad won decisively. The *Defender* then arranged for the Chicago team to “see the president of the United States through the kind offices of Congressman Morton D. Hull and came home with fresh honors and new experiences such as are seldom possible for young men of their age.”¹⁶¹ Jackson lauded the support shown by the parents of the young men, who ensured their sons were well dressed and well behaved. Jackson’s report exalted the Chicago boys’ basketball team because they embodied the values that proponents of sports at the *Defender* sought to instill in black youth through organized amateur sports.

Jackson commented on the implications of the boys’ accomplishment for the larger mission of athletics within the context of race adjustment, by writing that, “We have a notion that as fast as we can develop a wholesome interest in clean sports and

¹⁵⁹ A.L. Jackson, “The Onlooker: Developing Sport, *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago) 3 May 1924, 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

athletics among our young men and women just so fast will we unload some of the sports and panders that appear at times to dominate the background as well as the imagination of our younger people.”¹⁶² He regretted that, many young African American girls and boys wait too long to “discover that the things which take one out into the open or which force one to measure strength, endurance and skill with worthy opponents” will be more advantageous than the “tinkle of jazz hands and the humid atmosphere of stuffy dance halls and gaming dens.”¹⁶³ Jackson did not “decry dancing and harmless amusements,” but he did suggest that “as a people we are putting altogether too much emphasis upon footless, expensive pleasures and getting the entire picture of life and its activities out of proportion...Moderation is a thing which one is forced to learn in training for athletic contests, and we as a people need a lot of lessons on that subject.”¹⁶⁴

In other cities black physical culture proponents struggled to generate public interest in youth athletics. The *Norfolk Journal Guide* urged its readers to support and encourage the efforts of the Booker T. Washington School Athletic Association. The purpose of the association was to “build up a standard of athletics that will be a credit to the school and community.”¹⁶⁵ The Athletic Association struggled in previous years largely because of “public indifference.” The *Journal and Guide* asked its readers to “Give the boys whole-hearted support by attending their events and dropping a dollar in

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ “Glimpsed Along the Way,” *New Journal and Guide* (Norfolk) 1 March 1924, 7.

their kitty once a while.”¹⁶⁶ Even though there was not as much interest in club athletics, college sport had apparently taken root among the local population. The newspaper tried to draw a link between the two institutions by telling community members that they could not expect black youth to become superior athletes capable of setting “athletic records at college unless we support them and encourage them now.” Despite the somber tone of the article, the *Journal and Guide* took solace in observing how “ambitious these young men and women are for athletic training and how indifferent the public is toward their ambitions.”¹⁶⁷

The Place of Girls and Women in the Black Physical Culture Movement

In her literature review essay, “Swept Under the Rug? A Historiography of Gender and Black Colleges,” Marybeth Gasman criticizes the absence of black women from discussions of the black educational experiences in the historical record. Gasman points out that the omission of black women as subjects is “especially troubling in light of the fact that throughout the history of black colleges, female students have been in the majority (with the exception of 1947, a year that marked the apex of enrollment by returning black male veterans).”¹⁶⁸ Standing in agreement with Gasman, I argue that scholars have not given adequate attention to the educational experiences of black women, especially in discussions of intercollegiate sport. The research of Rita Liberti and Pamela Grundy are rare examples of academic texts that analyze the ways in which black

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Marybeth Gasman, “Swept Under the Rug? A Historiography of Gender and Black Colleges,” in *American Educational Research Journal*. 2007, vol. 44: 760. Accessed September 11, 2010, 761.

women challenged Victorian tropes of femininity by participating in physical culture. Perhaps better than anyone else, Grundy's work speaks to the difficulties black girls and women experienced as they attempted to improve their physical health through physical culture while battling with odd interpretations of gender and race that served to defeminize them in relation to their white counterparts. In an attempt to add to Liberti and Grundy's work I argue that critical evaluation of primary source material shows that most community leaders supported physical culture as a space for female reformers to imagine new definitions of African American womanhood. In many cases, African Americans adopted the belief that black women should exert themselves physically through athletics as a way of improving their overall quality of life.

According to George William Lattimore, the first athletic club for women in the Brooklyn area was founded in 1910. Lattimore, who reported the work of the club in the 1911 edition of the *Official Handbook*, stated that the club was founded to provide opportunities for athletic competition for black female youth. It was very popular early and experienced rapid growth largely due to the popularity of the two sports it offered, basketball and track. The club's officers were "Miss B. Harris, president; Miss E. Mars, vice-president; Miss G. Moore, secretary; Miss E. Trice, treasurer; Miss M. Harris, general manager."¹⁶⁹ Lattimore's inclusion of the Spartan Athletic Club in his article is noteworthy because of the absence of women from the historical record. Many scholars of sport history have neglected to mention the role of women and girls in the early

¹⁶⁹ George William Lattimore, "Some Facts Concerning Athletic Clubs in Brooklyn and New Jersey," *Spaulding's Official Handbook of the Mid-Atlantic States 1911*, edited by William Joiner and Edwin B. Henderson (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1910), 45-53.

twentieth century black physical culture movement. Pictographic evidence shows, however, that by 1915, opportunities for girls and women in physical activity athletics existed at M. Street High School and Normal School No. 2 in D.C., West Virginia Colored Institute, and Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute and Hampton Institute in Virginia.¹⁷⁰

The Pittsburgh Courier showed its support for athletic work for black women by featuring a picture and statement from Binga Dismond, the 1924 world record holder in the quarter-mile event. The newspaper captured Dismond urging black women to “interest themselves in athletics” because “it promotes health, keeps one fresh and smiling.”¹⁷¹ A few years earlier, Ruth Arnett, the work secretary of the Indiana Ave. Y.W.C.A in Philadelphia, expressed her support for athletics as a way to combat what she perceived to be African American girls’ poor physical development. She lamented the fact that, “[Large] numbers of teen-age girls in the high schools ... have been excused from gym for some trivial excuse. She can’t run, she can’t hike, she can’t play tennis, captain ball or basketball, because ‘the doctor says her heart is weak’.”¹⁷² Arnett stated her belief that “the right sort of girl...is a tomboy.”¹⁷³ The tomboy “can run; climb a tree;

¹⁷⁰ For more information on the topic of women and the early twentieth century black physical culture movement see Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and the upcoming dissertation by Ava Purkiss of the University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁷¹ “Believes in Athletics for Women,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh) 19 April 1924, 18.

¹⁷² Ruth Arnett, “Girls Need Physical Education,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago) 10 December 1921, 10.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

wrestle. Or she can enjoy any kind of an active game. It is this type of girl who develops into a real woman. They come into their own in a physical way.”¹⁷⁴ Most girls never matured physically because they failed to perform “physical work.” “Every girl should look forward to the fulfillment of her sphere in life, but she can’t do it unless she develops herself into a splendid type of womanhood. Every girl can be strong and self-reliant if she is willing and is given the opportunity.”¹⁷⁵

Arnett’s ideas represented the complicated ways gender operated in early twentieth century black communities. When she advocated for a physically strong, capable, and independent women, Arnett departed from white middle class ideas of womanhood, which dominated early twentieth century standards of femininity. Her ideas rested on ideas of race propagation that reinforced a hetero-normative outlook of situating black women as mothers and wives who could bare children. She perceived of the ideal black woman as possessing a physical utility. She commented that, “The real man of today does not want the clinging-vine type of a woman: She is obsolete. He wants the woman who can be a real mate someone who can share his joys and sorrows and who is eager to enter into the big adventure with him as a pal, to share with him in the struggle for the big prizes that life holds for square, game fighters.”¹⁷⁶ Arnett imagined physical culture as a tool to cultivate women with a set of virtues that could anchor the race. She perceived black women as the centerpiece of a black community whose sustenance relied

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

heavily on women's fortitude. She advocated black physical culture for black female youth by asking African Americans to "encourage our girls to be 'tomboys.' Let them enjoy all activities of the [boys;] let them enter any game of sport and recreation that the boy enters. Let's teach them to be real girls! How can we expect the girls to measure up mentally if she doesn't physically?" She also invoked the mind-body connection by stating that, "Unless her body is well her mind can't be. Let's show our girls that our future depends upon them: that unless they are strong physically and mentally the future race can't be. Let's start a campaign for fitness. The all-around girl of today measures up mentally, physically and spiritually."¹⁷⁷

In 1926 Madam Roberta Creditt Ole wrote in her column, "Beauty Chats," a defense of women's athletics that encouraged women to join the physical culture movement as a way to achieve physical beauty. The rise of women's athletics reflected changing perceptions of women's freedom made possible by the early twentieth century women's liberation movement.¹⁷⁸ Ole surmised that, "Regardless of the validity of their political and industrial claims no one can question women's right to share in those benefits of health and strength brought by outdoor life and athletics."¹⁷⁹ Within the

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Following the ratification of the 19th amendment, women's activism waned as movement participants struggled to maintain political networks. In *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, Paula J. Giddings argues that after gaining suffrage rights for women in the north, few white women were willing to continue their efforts to defend voting rights for blacks in the South. The decline of the centralized movement, however, invited women to seek new definitions of liberty that focused more on individual freedoms of self-expression.

¹⁷⁹ "Mme. Roberta Creditt Ole, "Beauty Chats," *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh) 27 March 1926, 7.

context of women's liberation, physical culture provided black women new modes of expression that allowed them exert themselves physically without being "labeled masculine and unnatural." For Ole, athletics provided black women accessible ways to become more beautiful, so long as they were realistic in their fitness goals. She noted that, "A woman of 40 should not start with the strenuous excessive games that her daughter of 16 would start. External fat is unsightly and internal fat is dangerous. Fat women should take on exercise in easy grades: walking and bathing, and in the second steps of athletic progress, add running. Endurance and good form will qualify her for other sports."¹⁸⁰ If women took care not to over train, she felt some degree of physical culture was accessible for anyone who was interested. "As a matter of fact there is no excuse for any woman, unless tragically and abnormally blighted by deformity, not to be attractive looking. [...]" As a way of achieving good health and external beauty, Ole challenged black women to keep an open mind. "If you let yourself think you are unattractive, and do nothing to erase this thought or appearance you will suffer in consequence thereof; cut out forever a thought similar to this, 'I really can't make an effort at my age.' This very expression will prohibit your progress toward improvement." Ole concluded by encouraging black women to use sport as a way to "cultivate a love for the beautiful and make thyself look thy best at all times."¹⁸¹

In a follow up article, Ole took issue with women who resorted to starvation and toxic medicines to alter their physical appearance. Her comments were again part of a larger discussion of physical beauty, but this time she revealed that her ultimate goal was

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

to help African American women adopt grooming practices associated with good health. She stated that, “It is said that the boyish form, and the unhealthy stooped-shouldered figure have made thousands invalids, and even more untimely graves in this country. There is a normal weight for every person and when we foolishly strive to reduce it we are very likely to run into the danger of destroying our health, or shortening our days. The intelligent thing to do is to ascertain what your normal body weight should be, as well as to consider the height and stature of one’s mother and father.”¹⁸² In an effort to cover several bases, Ole also instructed mothers to properly care for their children. She encouraged mothers to bathe, feed, and expose children to “plenty of fresh air,” which she deduced were “the greatest factors in building our children for health and beauty.”¹⁸³ Ole also encouraged readers not to expose their children to cosmetics at too early an age. Instead, she asked them to “indulge them with athletics and out of door sports, thus building them to be wholesome and healthy, and beautiful, because they are natural.” Humorously, she added, “When youth is on the ebb, is ample time to assist nature. [Keep] youthful and beautify, with cosmetics.”¹⁸⁴

Continued Threat of Commercialization

The lure of professionalism threatened the physical culture movement from the very beginning. The rise of consumer culture in the early 1920s further complicated the role of athletics within the African American community as college programs became

¹⁸² Mme. Roberta Credit Ole, “Beauty Chats,” *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh) 1 May 1926, 7.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

increasingly more susceptible to the temptations of winning. By the 1920s, many blacks-including administrators came to see athletics as a marketable cultural enterprise to be exploited for economic gain. For proponents of black physical culture, however, professional sport represented a perversion. To reclaim athletics as a tool to promote racial progress, several community leaders spoke out. In 1920 Will Anthony Madden, writing for *Competitor Magazine* demanded that a clear line of distinction be drawn between amateur sports and professionalism. Commenting on the purpose of the athletic clubs, Madden wrote that, “It certainly cannot be said that they are athletic organizations in athletics to make money. No, it is for the purpose of perpetuating that lofty spirit of School Days; that good fellowship embracing all the ideals of the sportsman; that keeping alive the zeal and the zest of the days of boyhood; that and nothing more is the real idea behind the athletic club. And professionalism should be no part of it.”¹⁸⁵ Madden was not wholly antagonistic to professional sport. He allowed for it to exist so long as it met certain criteria. One of those criteria being that the professional basketball player should “promote his own following and not try and feast upon the clientele of the legitimate amateur club. There can be no middle ground between the amateur and the professional, nor can there be any contest of the two standards. The line draws itself and the duty of each is plain.”¹⁸⁶

In 1925, the *Gazette* interpreted the negative consequences of viewing sports as a source of entertainment. As college athletics programs grew, they came to rely heavily on

¹⁸⁵ Will Anthony Madden, “The Future of Basketball,” *Competitor Magazine* (Pittsburgh), January 1920, 68.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

fan support through ticket sales. During the interwar period, athletic directors and coaches began to fold under the pressures associated with creating a “win at all cost mentality.” Some black college programs went so far as to compromise the academic missions of their respective institutions by recruiting “ringers” who were older or academically ineligible in an effort to increase their chances of victory. The *Gazette* sought to distinguish athletics at V.N.&I.I. from this practice by writing that the “institution believes in athletics properly controlled. We have our athletic director and coaches to train our teams, because we feel that we are adding to the pleasure of the entire student body in staging intercollegiate contests as well as giving a valuable training to every student who has the time and inclination to engage in such activities.”

The controversies of intercollegiate athletics that emerged in the 1920s prompted school administrators of V.N.&I.I. to distance the athletic program from irresponsible competitors by articulating their rationale for sanctioning the sport. Thomas L. Puryear, the Dean of Men, wrote a defense of athletics in the “Athletic Review for 1925.” He stated that the “primary aim of athletics in any institution should not be to win games.”¹⁸⁷ It is for this reason that his “review of our athletic activity during the past spring shall not be centered about this frequently overstressed idea.”¹⁸⁸ Puryear situated athletics as a pedagogical tool when he wrote that, “Our prime aim is to point out the fundamental lessons taught by athletic engagements, and to attempt to properly evaluate them.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Thomas L. Puryear, “The Athletic Review for 1925,” *Gazette*. Ettrick: Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, July 1925, 21.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Puryear characterized athletics as possessing “fundamental lessons to teach” that were typically “overlooked or discarded” by those who placed competition above all other goals. “The teaching value of track and field athletics is often rendered obscure if not entirely impotent by the desire to place only those athletes in the contests who are reasonably sure of placing. There are definite character–determining lessons taught by track and field athletics that are not duplicated in a like degree in the whole realm of athletic activity.”¹⁹⁰ Puryear praised track and field because it required so much individual commitment. “The chief requisites of the individual who would compete successfully in track and field athletics is a combination of strength, agility, endurance, speed, and alert mind, and an accurate knowledge of one’s ability. From this succinct catalogue of requisites one is naturally confirmed in the condition that life without them is very incomplete.” These requisites were inextricably linked and the absence of one implied a major flaw to one’s personal development. Puryear wrote that, “Strength is founded upon physical development; and the mind is most alert, fertile and productive that has residence in a strong virile, healthy body. Where there is an absence of physical development, there must of necessity be a lack of strength, endurance, and mental development.”¹⁹¹ This, and not the chance of winning awards or money is why “we have encouraged our men to enter track and field athletics.”¹⁹²

L.F. Palmer, the principal of Huntington High School in Newport News, Virginia, reiterated Puryear’s comments in his discussion of the, “Control of Athletics Among the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

High Schools.” The growth and success of interscholastic athletics in Virginia in the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century did not occur without major consequences. Palmer lamented that the “overwhelming desire on the part of the public to have the home team win has influenced both pupils and school officials, in some instances, to resort to questionable tactics to win their games.”¹⁹³ The “ringers” discussed previously compromised the integrity of interscholastic sport, as “some of the schools’ boys have been enrolled for the sole purpose of playing on the athletic teams. They have not been required to attend classes, nor make grades, and their connection with the school ceased when the season ended. In other cases alumni and former athletic stars who had not attended school for years have been admitted to the teams to play against strong opponents.”¹⁹⁴

Palmer also took issue with the “subtle influence of the professional gambler who follows our high school games as the carrion bird follows a retreating army. These men, posing as friends of the school, when they see their winnings in danger will use every means in their power to influence officials to throw the game their way.” This was especially problematic when teams were officiated by men who were either “incompetent or vicious or both,” and may have yielded to “to this temptation and bring about such conditions that bid fair to destroy the proper conduct of athletics among our high schools.”¹⁹⁵ Behavior deemed to be “sportsmanlike” was also a problem that took away

¹⁹³L.F. Palmer, “Control of Athletics Among the High Schools” *Ettrick: Gazette*, July 1925, 14-15.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

from interscholastic sport. Palmer complained that it was typical for spectators and students to disrespect visiting teams by “subjecting the visitors to taunts and jeers and sometimes threatening them with violence.”¹⁹⁶ Palmer pointed out that “we can readily see that athletics among our high schools, instead of fostering honor, fair-play, and self-control in the students who participate in the games, is breeding low cunning, trickery, cheating, and contempt for truth and right.”¹⁹⁷ One major consequence of this hypercompetitive environment was the impact it had on interscholastic relations among school administrators. Palmer concluded that “where these evils exist, bitterness spring up among students of the contesting schools, and distrust among principals and teachers. In other words athletics among our high schools under these conditions is defeating the very purpose it is designed to serve.”¹⁹⁸

Another critique of professionalism came from the black press in 1929 when the editor of the *New Amsterdam News* instructed blacks to “Stop Racketeering Benefits Now!” He criticized people who viewed athletics as a “luxury and not a necessity.”¹⁹⁹ For him, treating sport as means to an economic end was “one of the most disgusting things that ever had its birth in this city.”²⁰⁰ Operating from a perspective of racial adjustment, the editor felt the race still needed to focus its energies on service and not

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ “Stop Racketeering Benefits Now!” *The New York Amsterdam News* (New York) 7 August 1929, 12.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

superficial achievement. He lauded several civic organizations that were doing serious work to promote community development. He scoffed at superficial publicity stunts performed under the guise of charity events by saying that “a benefit to get more money with which to play for empty glory is something that will never appeal to any man or woman with a thought for the advancement of the Negro.”²⁰¹ The editor distinguished race-centric organizations from organizations that exploited and trivialized racial achievement. He condemned an athletic spectacle involving a woman who set out to swim the English Channel. While other black newspapers reported the event, *The New Amsterdam News* “refused to take any part in the affair, believing that right at our very doors there were things more necessary to be met by the form of benefits, hence it would be inconsistent if we sat idly by and did not take the rostrum in denouncing those things which carry but momentary glory for a race.”²⁰²

In 1930 even W.E.B. Du Bois began to investigate the problem of commercialization by consulting with George W. Streater, a fellow Fisk graduate who would eventually go on to be the first black reporter for the *New York Times*, on the nature of black college athletics. Streater expressed to Du Bois that he felt passionately that “either our colleges ought to lay aside their hypocrisy or, as Heywood Brown suggested, determine a salary scale that would give the athletes a fair break in the profits.” Streater observed that most black colleges proposed that successful athletic teams were essential to their missions to attract college students. Winning games became an end unto itself, which made black colleges willing to compromise their academic

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

standards in order to attract the most gifted athletes. He abhorred their logic as being “stupid” and a “fallacy.” Streator found that the most gifted athletes seemed more interested in playing football than finding the “best school,” as evidenced by their tendency to hop around from school to school. Streator joked that a sign of their indecision was the fact that “their names appear in a different lineup with a frequency that suggests either that they are being hired or that they are highly susceptible to harmless invitations to enroll in our school where the Christian influence is greatest.”²⁰³

Streator took particular issue with Fisk’s recruitment practices. He told Du Bois that,

In addition to the matter involving the players and the coach who came in a body to Fisk from A.U., there were other cases as glaring. I was informed this week that one young man who had starred on a University of Southern California football team for three years decided to matriculate at Meharry. But a longing for more collegiate training found him enrolled at Fisk instead. He was also in the lineup. When Alabama State College got ready for her fall practice, she found her captain-elect enrolled at Fisk.²⁰⁴

According to Streator, Fisk was “not the only offender!” The number of games Fisk lost served as evidence that other black colleges on the school’s schedule employed the services of ringers. The extent to which athletic programs had gotten away from earlier ideals was incredible. According to Streator, “The C.I.A.A. rigidly enforces this rule with regard to its members. But as to athletes who have played a long stretch on non-association teams, it has no policy that I recall having heard of.”²⁰⁵ Although Tuskegee

²⁰³ Streator, George, Letter from George W. Streator to W. E. B. Du Bois, April 28, 1930, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312) Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

imposed an “old-age limit” rule, for most black colleges, “A man enters in the seventh grade and plays as long as the energy lasts. Seemingly there is no end to the courses he can take.”²⁰⁶ Fisk, according to Streator, devised to extend players’ eligibility by encouraging them to enroll in the graduate studies.

Streator informed Du Bois of the fact that black colleges paid student-athletes salaries by providing free board, and “special jobs that take care of everything.”²⁰⁷ He reported that, “in the rank and file of Negro colleges and ‘institutes’ the athlete may or may not spend more than the fall term at school.”²⁰⁸ Streator anticipated those who might argue that his critique of the black colleges was an unnecessary indictment of black colleges. As if he was implying that white schools were free from such practices. To the contrary, Streator told Du Bois that the offenses against the amateur rule at white schools reported by the Carnegie Foundation “scarcely scratched the surface” of a much more serious problem. White colleges, he maintained, had more resources at their disposal that allowed them to circumnavigate the rules against commercialization in more exaggerated ways. But he refuted his detractors by stating that, with respect to mischievous intent, the difference between black schools and their white counterpart was “in degree but not in kind.”²⁰⁹ The mission of the physical culture proponents had been compromised.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

In 1927, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* reported that, according to Dr. Louis L. Dublin, the statistician for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, African Americans' health conditions had improved significantly. The newspaper, reprinted Dublin's remarks, which asserted that African Americans were "here for good, and the years to come will probably see him playing an increasingly important and worthy part in the affairs of the country. His achievement in America will be ultimately recognized not only as the greatest experiment in racial adjustment ever undertaken by man, but as the most encouraging and gratifying episode in our national life."²¹⁰ Dublin attributed to African Americans' improved health conditions improved infrastructure, homes, and "intelligent leadership directing the energies of the young people into constructive channels."²¹¹ For its work in contributing to African Americans' positive adjustment to life in congested urban areas in the North and South, the physical culture movement deserves much praise. Using physical culture and athletics as a teaching tool, the women and men who devoted countless hours and financial resources to helped to offset what appeared to be several social problems that would have undermined the advancement programs of black reformers. In the 1920s, however, the black physical culture movement lost its momentum when proponents of black physical culture began to lose the battle against commercialization of college athletics. In the 1930s, athletics moved further away from "purist" forms when individual black athletes caught the attention of mainstream audiences who relied on their prowess for symbols of national strength.

²¹⁰ "Says Race Here to Stay," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk), 3 September 1927, 1.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

There would always be an element of athletics that remained true to tenants of early twentieth century black physical culture, but the zeal of winning proved too attractive for many black physical administrators and educators who became intoxicated with new found opportunities associated with viewing athletics as a business opportunity.

CHAPTER 3
THE TENETS OF RACE ADJUSTMENT WITHIN THE *AFRO-AMERICAN*, 1900—
1925

Introduction

This chapter analyses how the *Afro-American* newspaper employed the concept of “race adjustment” within its pages between 1900 and 1925. The historical newspaper used this concept to refer to several processes of adaptation African Americans underwent in their efforts to improve their material conditions within the context of the early twentieth century urban community formation. As an umbrella term, race adjustment encompassed issues relating to education, community development, voting rights, social equality, religion and physical health. It emerged as a topic of grave import in the late nineteenth century when African Americans migrated to American cities in the South, North and Midwest and enjoyed—often for the first time—relative freedom to build communities and to foster cultural self-expression.

Historians often refer to the period of 1900 to 1920 as the Progressive era. During this time many white reformers took interest in improving the lives of what they perceived to be underdeveloped urban populations. Many of these reformers identified that native-born whites and some European immigrant communities suffered from *redeemable* social issues. They hypothesized that these native-born whites and European immigrants could become productive citizens if given resources and opportunities to rise above their environmental or cultural limitations. Khalil Gibran Muhammad’s *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* shows that, despite their willingness to assist native-born whites and European immigrants, most white reformers were unwilling to help blacks improve their material

conditions.²¹² Many of these reformers took their cues from scientific racists in believing that blacks were doomed to a state of unredeemable wretchedness and therefore would be unresponsive to social change. Scientific racism was so influential that it even affected the small number of white reformers willing to serve black communities. This group of reformers wedded their racist views to a social reform programs designed to help improve African Americans' material conditions so that they could become a more industrious, yet still subservient to the dominant race.

James Anderson's *Black Education in the South: 1860-1935* shows how financiers of the Hampton-Tuskegee Machine comprised a small group of white reformers in the early twentieth century United States who advocated for a certain type of black education. Believing blacks to be an inferior race, proponents of the Hampton-Tuskegee Machine felt the only solution to the so-called race problem was for blacks to forfeit any claims to their newly awarded constitutional rights and to accept white social, political, and economic control.²¹³ In response to these realities, black reformers and their white allies took it upon themselves to articulate their own solutions to the problems that affected the race. Believing blacks to be fully human and fully educable, black reformers sought solutions that were predicated on black education and self-improvement. Programs varied and represented several ideological viewpoints. Some programs reflected accommodationist thinking that advocated moral suasion as a means

²¹² For more information see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 88—146.

²¹³ See James Anderson's *Black Education in the South: 1860—1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

of achieving gradual change. More radical programs boldly invoked the language of American freedom, and were used to demand immediate social change and first class citizenship.²¹⁴ Their political leanings notwithstanding, the black proponents of race adjustment ideals represented ideological viewpoints that collaboratively undermined hegemonic ideas espoused by white social reformers and scientific racists.

The Baltimore *Afro-American* began in 1892 as a church publication edited by Reverend William Alexander, who also served as the pastor of Sharon Baptist Church. Originally from Virginia, Alexander moved to Baltimore and quickly became involved in civil rights initiatives. Hayward Farrar, in his book, *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892—1950*, suggests that Alexander worked along side other socially and politically motivated blacks to provide themselves a forum on which to “publicize their protests as well as their church and business activities.”²¹⁵ Despite the *Afro*'s potential, however, sketchy business practices by its parent company, The Northwestern Family Supply Company, forced the *Afro-American* into bankruptcy. Desperate stockholders pillaged the newspaper's assets in an effort to offset financial losses. John H. Murphy, Sr., a former employee, eventually purchased its presses after they had been passed around to aspiring journalists looking to enter Baltimore's saturated newspaper market but failed to establish a core readership. Murphy paid for the presses a sum of \$200.00, and in doing

²¹⁴ See August Meier, *Negro Thought in America: 1880—1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966).

²¹⁵ Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American: 1892—1950* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 2.

so, he “irrevocably changed the *Afro-American’s* history.”²¹⁶ According to Farrar, Murphy brought to the *Afro* several years worth of newspaper experience.

When Murphy and his associates resumed circulation of the *Afro*, they began by publishing the *Afro-American Ledger*. If other newspaper companies, including the previous installment of the *Afro*, were failed to establish a base, why did Murphy and his associates succeed? According to Farrar, Murphy found financial support from members of the Baltimore’s black elite and middle class. He was also closely linked to the city’s black Christian community, which he converted into loyal subscribers. The most important reason for Murphy’s success, however, was the “newspaper’s timely and comprehensive news coverage that gave its readers news about themselves they could not find in Baltimore’s daily newspapers, which ignored or demeaned blacks.”²¹⁷ Here lies the *Afro’s* mission.

Murphy and his supporters “wanted a powerful black community free from white domination.”²¹⁸ They believed that by promoting black-centered reform they could achieve this goal. But what type of reform should they endorse? When blacks relocated to urban environments in the beginning of the twentieth century many struggled to adapt to their new surroundings. One of the obstacles they faced was hostility from native-born whites and European immigrants who feared and then lashed out against the African Americans they perceived as a new social and economic competitor. Blacks were also forced to contend with pseudo-scientific ideas that informed public policy which then

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

greatly restricted African Americans' access to needed societal resources. Scientific racism and the hegemonic ideas it created also made it difficult for blacks to find gainful employment, to locate decent housing, to gain access to quality food, and procure adequate healthcare.

In its first 25 years the *Afro-American* covered a range of issues as a way of creating a platform for social change. Ideologically, it was caught in between the Booker T. Washington's accommodationist paradigm and the more radical perspectives of the proponents of the Niagara Movement. Writers often took for granted that blacks must first demonstrate their commitment to race progress before appealing to white reformers for philanthropic aid. But they also criticized white civic leaders for their negligent attitudes towards race. Farrar says that the *Afro* adopted a racially moderate perspective in part because it did not want to contribute to the growing sense of factionalism within the Washington-Niagara debate.

The "Wizard of Tuskegee" died in 1915. Around that time race relations between blacks and whites reached a new low. Woodrow Wilson screened D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in the White House and segregated Federal buildings. And at the end of WWI, black servicemen returned home to see politically disenfranchised blacks in the South, anti-black sentiments throughout the country and racial violence-directed toward them in many American cities. The *Afro* responded to these changes by publicly supporting the Garvey movement. In the 1920s race adjustment in the form of nationalism and militant agitation enjoyed greater coverage. This chapter will show that, in a twenty-five year period, the *Afro-American* writers' became increasingly more

radical as they encouraged their readers to seek self-determination as the bedrock to creating an effective race adjustment platform.

Interracial Coalition Building as Race Adjustment

One of the key areas of race adjustment covered in the pages of the *Afro-American* was interracial coalition building. In the first decade of the twentieth century, writers commonly articulated plans for race improvement that took for granted black and white collaboration. Additionally, it was common for the *Afro-American* to publish the remarks of white liberal politicians who advocated for racial harmony. Increasingly levels of anti-black sentiment that corresponded with the growth of urban black neighborhoods in both the South and the North, however, tested blacks' commitment to race coalition building. This section reveals that following the end of the period of racial violence that includes the infamous "Red Summer," the *Afro-American* moved toward more radical ideas of race adjustment that no longer relied on interracial support.

In 1911, James H. Dillard, the president of Tulane University in Louisiana and also the head of the Anna T. Jeanes Fund, urged an audience comprised of white citizens to consider the legitimate complaints of blacks interested in improving their material conditions. According to Dillard, "Quiet work for improved conditions is more needed than loud talk. So much has been said and done which might cause irritation that the wonder is how peaceably the millions are going on about their business. It is only the dozens and hundreds about whom we hear trouble."²¹⁹ Dillard, who was a race moderate, advocated for "a basis of "gradual adjustment." He differed from other white reformers,

²¹⁹ "The Race Question South: Colored Citizens Have Just Cause for Complaint, Says Dillard," *The Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore) 25 February 1911, 7.

however, when he professed that he thought blacks had just cause to protest white racism. According to Dillard, blacks had the “right to complain of their treatment in the lower courts, which are the main courts for most of their people.” He also believed that blacks should criticize “the treatment which they too often receive from the employees of public service corporations, especially from the employees of common carriers, such as ticket sellers and car conductors.”

Additionally, Dillard posited that blacks should contest their lack of access to public education in south—especially in the rural districts. Lack of educational resources created a disparity in black education, which stifled the progress of both races. “The education of the masses must depend on the public schools, and our southern white people must learn that from every consideration of justice, as well as from every consideration of self interest, the masses of the race in the country must be brought out of the condition of ignorance and inefficiency.” Dillard recognized that whites were “too apt to generalize the Negroes as a mass and judge the whole by the worst types. On the contrary, the colored people of the south should be encouraged to have self-respect and race respect.”²²⁰ For Dillard, race equality would be achieved over time. In the short term, however, he felt that whites should recognize blacks as fully human with dignity within the framework of race separatism. One should note that the list of grievances he presented did not challenge segregated institutions. His comments demonstrate how some white progressives were willing to concede to blacks certain rights while leaving the overall system of Jim Crow intact.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Also in 1911, the *Afro-American* printed part of Booker T. Washington's analysis of the material conditions of the black, Chinese and Mexican populations of Arizona. Washington's remarks challenged certain xenophobic ideas that had been directed toward African Americans in the South when he stated that,

Sometimes people in this country speak of the Negro as an alien race, and frequently the suggestion is made that the country would be better off if the black man could somehow be shipped back to his fatherland in Africa. No one has suggested however, that the Negro while still living in the midst of the white civilization was so much of a foreigner that he could not be tried by the same law and in the same courts and according to the same moral and political standards as the white man."²²¹

Regardless of the race prejudice blacks faced in other parts of the country, Washington lauded Arizona, where blacks were provided a means to operate without having to assume an inferior position. Because they were allowed to compete for jobs without the threat of racial violence, some blacks experienced greater economic success. Washington praised the small group of affluent blacks who protected their social image from being tarnished by the immoral influence of blacks who did not embody the values associated with race advancement. He praised the "the general disposition among the leaders of the Negro people to consider the needs of their little community and take the measure to protect themselves against the danger which is likely to them from the drifting class, who are a greater menace in the case of colored people than that of any race in this country."²²² Washington praised Arizona for its unique opportunity to mold itself into a place where all members of its diverse population could live free from prejudice. He described the

²²¹ "Harmony of All Races in Arizona: Dr. Washington Talks of the Progress of the Negroes in Arizona," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 3 November 1911, 6.

²²² Ibid.

state by saying that, “Arizona has, in one respect all the advantage of the new country. It is not troubled by tradition. It has no past to live down. Its people have no fear of doing or attempting to do something that was not done or attempted in some other time or place.” It was imperfect. “I would not have people to believe that there is [not] any racial prejudice in Arizona, as elsewhere in this country; but as yet such prejudice as exists has not fixed itself in institutions, and the result is that black man, yellow man, and red man have in Arizona an opportunity which, if they use it properly will keep that state a free country in the broadest sense of that word for all time to come.”²²³

In an article titled, “A Southerners View,” a writer for the *Afro-American* offered his reflections on the comments taken from “an interesting report on the race question, by Dr. Charles Hillman Brough, chairman of the University Commission on the Southern Race Question.” The report was notable because in it, Brough argued that the “continued isolation of the Negro from various activities is harmful to both races, and also because it shows an attempt to get away from some of the anti-Negro policies of the South.”²²⁴ The writer appreciated the fact that Brough was working to “find a way for the poorer adjustment of conditions.” this was significant because other white southerners pushed their representatives in Congress to pass legislation that would further “degrade the race through the passage of prejudicial legislation.”²²⁵ The writer praised Brough’s progressive attitude, despite the fact that Brough also advocated for “Jim Crow cars” and called blacks “an alien and inferior race,” which the writer feared “will make the

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ “A Southerner’s View,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 6 February 1915, 4.

²²⁵ Ibid.

adjustment conditions more difficult.”²²⁶ These disparaging remarks, if internalized by blacks, could yield damaging effects on the psychological development of the race. The writer advocated for the mental and emotional stability of African Americans when He urged black leaders to expose both black and white southerners to examples of African American excellence “as necessary for a proper and lasting adjustment of matters. The Negro must not think for a moment that his is ‘an alien and inferior race,’ for that view renders practically impossible the realization of his claims for that recognition given other classes of American citizens.”²²⁷

The First World War altered the landscape of African Americans who concerned themselves with racial adjustment. As Black reformers and their allies struggled to accomplish their race adjustment goals, race bigotry continued to challenge their progress. Some black reformers posited that, if left alone, the two races would move slowly toward proper race adjustment. These reformers embraced the postwar era as one that would push social change along more rapidly. In 1918 a writer for the *Afro-American* posited that, “In the adjustment of things generally and particularly there must of necessity arise some degree of friction. As a matter of fact friction is an absolute necessity in moving things generally, without it scarcely anything moves. In the present adjustment of races, both in this country and elsewhere, there is naturally, going to be a considerable amount of friction before things get down to a solid foundation where all are going to move along together in perfect harmony.”²²⁸

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Editorial: “Our Part in the Adjustment,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 8 March 1918, 4.

Post World War racial hostility reflected whites' fear of black progress in an environment of extreme social change. Black military servicemen embodied what many whites considered too rapid of a change, and lashed out through racial violence. The writer lamented what he considered an act of terrorism because "when the Government is enlisting and drafting both white and colored men for service 'over there,' and when every man, woman and child is expected to "do his bit," it goes almost without saying, that every one who contributes in any way to the success of the war, must feel that in most respects that he is the equal of each and every other one who is doing the same." Through his service, the "colored private feels that as he is in the war to do his best, he is naturally the equal of every other private, whether he be black or white. The same is true of commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The colored officer expects the same courteous treatment from his white officer of equal rank, and will render the proper courtesy and obedience to those who are his superiors in rank, and he expects the same from those who are his inferiors in ranks, not necessarily inferior in other directions."²²⁹ The author lamented the fact that despite African Americans doing their part to help with the adjustment of the two races, whites chose to deny black servicemen their due respect.

In March of 1918 Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson appointed George E. Haynes, the black social scientist and first black graduate of the New York School of Philanthropy, to serve as the Director of Negro Economics following the courageous showing of African American military personnel in the First World War. Haynes oversaw an investigation conducted by James H. Dillard, President of the Jeanes and

²²⁹ Ibid.

Slater Funds for Negro Education in the South. Dillard linked racial violence against blacks to economic underdevelopment in the South. He showed that “The exodus of Negro workers had been the largest where lynchings and other forms of race friction had been the greatest. Later reports from the field indicate that such evils are retarding the efforts of the Department of Labor to allay labor unrest and to distribute properly the labor supply throughout the South.”²³⁰ The Department of Labor did not recommend any specific action, but Dillard showed that in several southern states where high rates of lynchings were reported, blacks previously residing in such states chose to leave. Within the context of race adjustment, Blacks abandonment of entire sections of the South also threatened the plights of the African Americans who remained because white southerners employed violent tactics in efforts to discourage further migration. This, of course, exacerbated migration to the urban South, the West and the North, where stories of economic prosperity enticed large numbers of blacks away from rural areas. Dillard asked affected areas in the South to collaborate with the federal government to suppress racial violence so that blacks would be less motivated to leave. “It is a duty to point out the effects of such evils and to state that only its total abolition will serve to replace unrest with contentment. In the fulfillment of this duty the Department urges universal as stance in promoting cooperation between the races for the harmonizing of their relations and for the vigorous and unfailing enforcement of the law.”²³¹ Dillard’s comments are best understood within a context of “New South” ideology, which was predicated on an

²³⁰ “Labor Head Makes Report: Says Lynch Law Causes Colored Exodus and Makes Adjustment Difficult,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 27 December 1918, 1.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

abundant and reliable labor force that a large semi-skilled black population would have provided.²³²

In May 1925 the *Afro-American* reflected on “Sidelights on the Race Problem,” an article written by Albert Guerard, the white novelist and social critic, who analyzed southern white racism against African Americans. One of the points the newspaper considered was the Guerard’s hypothesis that racial prejudice was a genetic quality rather than a learned behavior. “The lion cannot be tamed out of his thirst for blood. If race prejudice is on all fours with our other animal instincts, we needlessly waste our energies in trying to remove or to effectively modify it. If on the other hand, it is the result of social environment, then we may hope to fashion a program looking to its effectual medication or final removal.”²³³ Racial prejudice perplexed race reformers who believed that white’s increased access to education and an increased presence among civilized black people would undermine racial prejudice. The violence of the postwar era, however, altered their views.

Guerard believed that white southerners were committed to maintaining racial superiority. “Science has not yet uttered the final words, and probably can not do so for many generations to come. But the South has adopted the cherished dogma of the white

²³² For more information about push and pull factors that inspired the twentieth century great migration, see Bernadette Pruitt’s *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900–1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 2013. Look also at George Tindall’s *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University), 1967.

²³³ “A French Traveler on the Race Problem,” *The Afro-American* (Baltimore) 9 May 1925, 11.

man's innate, everlasting superiority as the basic creed of his social religion. He is not only willing to die for the belief that is in him, but is ready to kill the adversary who espouses the opposite contention." The inclusion of Guerard's analysis in the pages of the *Afro-American* reflected an ideological turning point for the newspaper that previously advocated moral suasion as a path to race adjustment. The *Afro-American* gestured to more militant action. According Guerard, "it is as useless to discuss this question with the Southerner as it is to argue about modes of baptism with a Baptist. But nothing is true because people believe it so, however passionate that belief may be. Indeed, the most passionate beliefs of history have been proved the most erroneous."²³⁴

Guerard said there was no difference in white racial attitudes about blacks in southern versus northern states. In reality, "there is nothing in the psychology of the Northerner that makes him one whit more tolerant of the Negro than his Southern white brother beyond the relativity of numbers. And why should we expect there to be another difference, if we believe that all of the prejudices and discriminations of observation rest upon an environmental basis."²³⁵ Guerard concluded that, despite the evidence, the cause of race adjustment was not totally impractical.

Those who take a superficial view of race relations are becoming pessimistic. The tide is running strongly against the Negro. Prejudice is on the increase and is spreading as the race advances in the scale of knowledge, possession and responsibility. Disenfranchisement, segregation, Jim Crow cars, lynching and the Ku Klux Klan seem to be convincing evidences that there can be no scheme of racial adjustment on the basis of democracy and brotherhood. But may we not take a broader and more comprehensive range of vision.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Guerard believed that the overt oppressive forces against black advancement signified the fragility of the white power structure. “There is every indication that the forces of race arrogance is making a desperate stand to perpetuate itself just as all arrogant regimes endeavor to do.” At best, the racist logic used to justify black oppression was a temporary ploy to delay the inevitable fall of ignorance and the rise in thinking of more socially evolved human beings. “The fact that these artificial barriers are being raised indicates quite strongly that those who build them are not quite certain of the validity of the natural racial antipathy to do the work which their preconceived theory requires.”²³⁶

In her book *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*, Michele Mitchell states that “Interracial discourse and politics were...in the process of transformation by the 1920s, a transformation that, ironically, began to occur as racial destiny concepts and strategies reached their apogee in Garveyism.”²³⁷ The black press, she contends, demonstrated this transformation, as writers of the *Competitor* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* increasingly identified themselves outside of the Black Nationalist framework. Mitchell argues that while Garveyite commentators lamented a ‘loss of all...racial identity,’ the black press “would invoke and promote Americanism on an increasing basis up to and after 1930.”²³⁸ Her characterization of the black press is noteworthy, but not exhaustive. Her analysis of the black press does not consider the perspective of the *Afro-American*, whose discourse concerning plausible

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004), 243.

²³⁸ Ibid.

political alternatives in the 1920s moves closer to Black Nationalism. An example of this is found in the article written by A.H. Maloney, the Trinidadian proponent of the U.N.I.A. and instructor of psychology at Wilberforce University, who analyzed the tenants of Garveyism within the context of racial adjustment. He evaluated the Garvey Movement based on its principal goals: “(a) The establishment of Empire in Africa. (b) Solidarity of Political Expression in Municipal, County, state and federal elections in the United States and similar policies in other parts of the world.” Maloney wrote, “Regarding (a) it is my opinion that the thing is both feasible and desirable. The Negro has to assemble his scattered cultural resources and focus them. His self-respect as well as the respect of other ethnic groups who have focused their cultures demand it.”²³⁹ Maloney’s conclusion concerning the feasibility of the Garvey Movement comes in the aftermath of the period of bloody racial violence brought about by the end of WWI. Horrific photos of lynchings committed during this period reveal that many black servicemen were tortured and ultimately killed—many who were still wearing their uniforms.

The massive racial violence committed against blacks between 1919 and 1925 forced many blacks to reconsider the likelihood that white people would ever recognize them as first class citizens. Garveyism provided an attractive alternative to the traditional plans of racial adjustment that made blacks dependent upon the good will of white people who consistently showed themselves unwilling to accept blacks as equals. Ironically,

²³⁹ Thomas Dabney, “Negro State Would Solve Race Problem Says ‘Force Teacher: Chapter VII,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 21 November 1925, 16.

Garveyism emerged at a time when the United States characterized itself as a melting pot.

Maloney challenged this characterization by stating that,

We are hearing a good deal in these days about the disintegration of ethnic bonds. Intermingling is gaining grounds with every advance in social intercourse and physical intercommunication. In all such opinions there is exposed a shallowness of discernment. The surface only is surveyed. Beneath the melee there is a matrix; a substrata and that you will find to be social and ethnic. Bonds of race are stronger than bonds of nation. Inborn attachment may be veneered but in crisis they are more potential than artificial attachments.²⁴⁰

Blacks, just like any other group, did not comprise a cultural monolith. Differences related to geography, occupation, denomination, and social status precluded the formation of one massive “community.” The adage that necessity yields innovation applies when one considers how tragedy and desperation motivated several blacks to reconsider their plight as part of a larger struggle for African self-determination. Maloney wrote, “There is no specific solution of the perplexing race problem. In fact, it is not a solution we want but efficient adjustment. And it is my candid conviction that such adjustment lies in the direction of racial governmental autonomy—not in the microscopic way as exemplified by little snobbish Liberia, but in a colossal enterprise at empire building.”²⁴¹ Maloney’s comments in the *Afro-American* revealed that some African Americans ditched their idealistic views of reaching racial harmony with whites and adopted a race adjustment program based on the premise that blacks should explore ideas of self-determination, not interracial cooperation, as key to the development of full personhood.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

Religion as Race Adjustment

Religion was another key topic of race adjustment that appeared the *Afro-American*. It played an important role in the process of identity construction for many African American communities. Black Christians prided themselves in exemplifying morally sound and respectable behavior. Christian morality helped to strengthen communities and it also gave blacks one of their most important strategies in their struggle to achieve racial justice. Many black reformers believed that they could earn many of their race adjustment goals if whites saw that respectable black communities were committed upholding the tenants of Christianity. Ironically, it was often white clergy who subscribed to white supremacist ideas and preached race hatred to their parishioners. This section shows how writers for the *Afro-American* reflected on religious ideas and how they were often employed within the context of race adjustment in the early twentieth century.

Rev. R.F. Campbell, a Presbyterian minister of Asheville, North Carolina posited in 1899 that, “The hope for peaceful relations between the two races in the future lies along the line of the adjustment established between the negro and the white man through the yard of slavery.”²⁴² A writer for the *Afro American*, finding fault with Campbell’s conclusion, refuted it, and put forth his own interpretation of how Christianity influenced African Americans’ adjustment. The writer took for granted the white Christian premise that slavery had been—at least in part—a positive good, when he wrote, “That there were many good, valuable and civilizing influences, the incidental outcome of the institution of slavery, on behalf of the negro, we have not the least doubt.” The inadvertent exposure

²⁴² “Negro Adjustment,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 29 Jul 1899, 2.

of slaves to Christianity was a silver lining to an otherwise dehumanizing situation. “While the institution of slavery was not intended as a moral and civilizing agency ... God in His Infinite wisdom and goodness brought much good out of such a debasing institution. To Him, therefore, and not to the system be all honor and glory.”²⁴³ The author’s characterization of the blacks’ encounter with Christianity removed whites as the benevolent agent and repositioned them as the guilty culprit in the process of blacks’ subjugation.

The writer argued that divergent ideas on race were reflected in black and white definitions of race adjustment, which represented competing interests. Campbell’s “‘adjustment’ implied a conscious innate inequality and inferiority upon the part of the Negro.” This adjustment left blacks in a state of “vitiating and debased manhood.” What resulted was a morally sound, but underdeveloped race of people.²⁴⁴ The evolution of black thinking within the first two generations following the end of the Civil War made “such an adjustment in the light of present environments ... simply an impossibility.” Campbell’s adjustment only worked for the enslaved black person who never knew freedom, and thus, had always seen her or his self as “dependent and a servant of a higher race of people.” With emancipation, however, African Americans were permanently changed, and could not acquiesce to such a racist program.

The author posited that because of the race progress blacks had already secured, they could only accept a program of race adjustment that positioned them as the social equals to white Americans, especially in those instances where the two groups claimed to

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

share a common faith. Blacks, according to the author, had “nothing in his heart but kindness and love for his white brother, but he is most unwilling to consider himself a step-brother. The only adjustment he can make is that suggested by the Law of Love.” The Law of Love to which the author spoke was rooted in an inclusive theological interpretation of the Old and New testaments. “‘All ye are brethren’ is the divine definition of the status of the Negro and the white man, and hence we would suggest in lieu of Mr. Campbell’s proposition, ‘The hope for peaceful relations between the two races in the future lies along the lines of a perfectly honest and honorable effort upon the part of each to fulfill the spirit of the law of Love as intimated in the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments.’”²⁴⁵

The author’s commentary was bold because he positioned her or his self as an authoritative voice in biblical exegesis when applying the concept of Christian brotherhood to race relations.

To be sure such an ideal cannot be reached by a short cut or in a few years, but it will be reached for there is no other solution of the matter. To gradually and slowly work up to such an idea, at least two things are indispensably necessary. (a) The ministers of both races, throughout the South, must in some way, touch each other, and learn more of the good in each other. A mutual growth in the knowing of each is vitally necessary. (b) Effort, patient, persistent, and intelligent must be made toward enlisting the public press on the side of the Law of Love.²⁴⁶

The writer, allowed for gradual change but charged that race adjustment within the United States, its successes and its failures, would reveal how committed blacks and whites were to the principles of Christianity. Each group would be evaluated on how well they each embraced the Law of Love. “To this very end has it been enunciated by

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Christ. The triumph of this law is absolutely inevitable. It works from within outward. By a policy of mutual forbearance and a putting forward, on both sides, of the good qualities in each, we thereby increase the material on which the Holy Ghost the Lord and Giver of life must act.” For the author, the term “Negro Problem” was a misnomer. He believed that “This present difficulty is far from being a test applied to the negro but it is rather a test of the so-called Christianity which each of us, white and colored, claim to possess.”²⁴⁷

Campbell argued that blacks were not unequipped and unprepared to take on “the duties and responsibilities of [their] new position,” as a justification for their subordination. The author suggested that at the end of the Civil War, white southern planters sinned when they abandoned blacks and left them to fend for themselves without having trained them to be self-sufficient. White southerners also sinned when they prevented Northerners “who came in the name of Jesus to get as closely as they could to these black people in order to help them and ameliorate their condition Jesus Christ operated in the closest touch among publicans and sinners in order to help them, and the men and women from the North were but following this divine example.”²⁴⁸ Because of their deliberate attempts to stifle blacks’ race advancement, southern whites were hypocritical when they espoused ideas of Christian fellowship to each other, but refused to recognize as part of their Christian family an African American community who had by-and-large proven its loyalty to the southern way of life.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

The moral and spiritual health of the black community was an important component of many racial adjustment programs. Black social reformers often positioned the black church as foundational to the salvation of the race, and church leaders typically served spearheaded community activism. E. Duke Venture's essay, "A Search for Men," asks members of the Methodist Episcopal Church to adopt new criteria for choosing its leaders. This, he felt, was the only way to improve the faith community. Venture reasoned that rapid social change brought about by early twentieth century innovation influenced circumstances in a way where "acquisitions of the present age have far outdistanced those of its predecessor in all that constitutes greatness, even the great men of the past are as dwarfs compared with present day intellectual giants, or as students and masters in their relation."²⁴⁹ He congratulated former black leaders for their contribution to race progress, but he disapproved of such leaders being allowed to continue leading influential institutions like the black church. He argued that to appoint them as faith leaders "would be an infringement upon their rights to retire into an obscurity and sleep from which only the sound of the trumpet of the resurrection of the dead shall awaken for the remorse of ignorance and incompetence would be insufferable to the extent of their refusal to accept their wonted composure."

The Methodist Episcopal Church operated in a tiered system. There was the local level, which was headed by the church pastor and a the state level, which was headed by a bishop. Each year, churches sent delegates from their local congregations to a General Conference where issues related to the larger church body were discussed. Churches selected a male member for candidacy for what was known as a General Conference

²⁴⁹ E. Venture, "A Search for Men," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 3 February 1912, 3.

delegation. By choosing a delegate, a congregation informed the other churches in the Conference that they considered that man to be in accordance with their ideals. Venture was bothered by the traditional way delegates were chosen. For years, the same delegates were selected to represent the churches at the General Conference without consideration of individual talents, church goals, or racial politics. Venture felt these men and their ideas for governing the church were archaic and antiquated. He charged that they stymied the spiritual growth and development of the race. Venture called on African Americans to “search for men” within the church who had the potential to serve as the next generation of church leaders. He seemed to anticipate a rebuttal to his call to action when he questioned if the conference had been successful in developing men to serve in the clergy since it was established shortly after the Civil War. To his own question he responded,

If it has not, or claim can only be made upon 3 or 4 men as possessing the quality of brain and intelligence necessary to represent us in a General Conference, our conference is a failure, all the money expended in efforts to prepare men for leadership, in the several schools from which our men have come, wasted, and the opinion that we are the best Negro Conference in Methodism in the world a flagrant error.²⁵⁰

Venture encouraged black Methodists to evaluate their church leaders, the continuity of the communities, to determine if they were still vibrant. He resolved that, “If we are in a rut, it was time we were getting out of it; if in bondage, we should break the chains; if in error, it is with us to redeem ourselves; forget the past and continue our “Search for men.”²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

Discourse surrounding race adjustment was quite unique in early twentieth century Baltimore because, demographically, Baltimore differed from most American cities. Industry in Baltimore had always relied heavily on skilled labor. Prior to emancipation, this meant that blacks in the city, free or unfree, were typically skilled laborers. These economic conditions help explain why, after the Civil War, the black population in Baltimore was so small. With very few blacks to compete against socially or economically, white city leaders in Baltimore surmised to implement a system of *de facto* rather than *de jure* segregation. Racial discrimination was a matter of custom and not law. Whites were able to rule over the black population through a system of benign neglect, which allowed some to suggest that the “the races have gotten along quite harmoniously together.” The overt signifiers of racial oppression found in other cities were less prevalent. “There has never been any need either for “segregation” or “jim crow” cars.”²⁵² This system worked well until black migrants settled in Baltimore and took advantage of the city’s lack of segregation ordinances. The culminating moment came when black “blockbusters” begin moving into historically white neighborhoods.

A writer for the *Afro-American* commented on the significance of the growing black community whose middle class values would eventually bring them into contact with white city residents. According to the author, “As this class increases it inevitably, as well as necessarily, effect the life of the great middle class of whites. In past years, this “new” class of colored people was so very small that it was, practically unnoticed.” This group differed greatly from the majority of blacks, who, according to the author, “were segregated in alleys and obscure streets.” The author posited that the smaller

²⁵² “Our Great Need,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 11 October 1913, 4.

group of blacks, now living in close proximity to whites benefited from the exposure to a different culture. He wrote that, “The effects of education, not simply letters, but that larger education derived from contact and association, are indicated, as... a desire to improve the conditions under which he is living. And the disposition upon the part of the Negro...is often misinterpreted as a desire of the Negro to enter into social relations with the white race.”²⁵³ The author assured whites that, “The Negro does not want to associate with the white people any more than the white people wish to associate with the Negro.”²⁵⁴

In this article, the author evoked values associated with thrift, hard work, temperance, education, and property ownership, which resonated with the Protestant ethic. As more African Americans improved their socioeconomic conditions, they were able to move away from the urban slums to which blacks were relegated. The author acknowledged white people’s desire to reside in racially homogeneous communities. He added that Blacks, too, wanted to live in their own communities. Circumstances in the city, however, produced a vibrant black middle class that could not be contained, especially if there were no segregation ordinance that prevented their settlement into other parts of the city. The author predicted that, in time, the size of the black middle class would contribute to “a steady elimination of the great masses who live in segregated discomfort.” The author wondered, however, how residents in historically white neighborhoods would receive this “new class” of blacks. He wrote that, “There is not the least doubt in the world but that this “new” class of Negroes desire a continuance of

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

peace and good will between themselves and their white neighbors. However, as desirous as they may be to [realize] such results they cannot stop their growth and return to the conditions from which they have been lifted.”²⁵⁵

In 1924, William N. Jones asked, “Where is Heaven?” in a challenge to the traditional Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell. Jones suggested that religious ideas had evolved since the Great Awakening, and the change could be seen in the decreased attention given to the ideas of the afterlife. He explained that, “we hear less of the pearly gates and golden streets in our churches and the burning hell of brimstone and fire has almost ceased to be a suitable text. Perhaps, after all, as this world approaches a state of general happiness men will not need an incentive to keep them in the straight and narrow path.”²⁵⁶ Taking the position that religious concepts were related to the transmission of power, Jones posited that the concepts of heaven and hell were used to shape people’s behavior. The threat of being sentenced to hell for immoral behavior deterred most people from being caught doing something immoral. He took for granted that, over time, people became more moral. This made the concepts of heaven and hell obsolete as a means of social control. Jones wrote added that, “Just as we have done away with human sacrifice and the burning of animals on pillars of stone called alters, we will do away with a number of present day beliefs as this world rocks merrily on.”²⁵⁷ In anticipation of backlash, Jones was sure to distance himself from atheism. He did suggest, however, that

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ William N. Jones, “Where is Heaven?” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 13 December 1924, 8.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

people should repudiate outdated religious or ideological relics and reorient their focus to their relationship with their Ultimate Concern.²⁵⁸ Jones assured readers that, “There need be no fear that casting off old shells means disaster, for we replace them with near and better shells. We will always have God, for whoever started this universe with all its myriad worlds and orderly procession, MUST HAVE BEEN A GOD.”²⁵⁹

In another article inspired by religious reform, “Mr. Parker” provided further evidence that the *Afro-American*’s position on spirituality was evolving. In his column, “Questions-Answers in Negro History,” Parker revealed that newspaper did not endorse a Eurocentric form of Christianity. In response to a question concerning the racial classification of the biblical figure Abraham, who is considered the patriarch of the Judeo-Christian faith, Parker acknowledged that common perceptions of Abraham depicted him as showing resemblance to a European. Parker, however, rejected this image and resolved that, “the Bible cannot be accepted as a final authority in matters of ethnology and race relations. Abraham was the common father of many Asiatic as well as African peoples and came from a Chushite country, Ur of the Chaldees. All legends, facts and myths concerning Abraham can make him nothing else but black”²⁶⁰ In response to a question about the African ascendancy of Christianity and “Mohammedanism,” Parker further distanced himself from mainstream religious thinking when he concluded that, “Mohammedanism is in the ascendancy and is gaining more

²⁵⁸ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

²⁵⁹ William N. Jones, “Where is Heaven?” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 13 December 1924, 8.

²⁶⁰ “Questions-Answers in Negro History,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 9 May 1925, 11.

converts than Christianity. Mohammedanism is more truly a black man's religion and appeals more strongly to the natives because it teaches and practices the absolute equality of all Moslems."²⁶¹

Education as Race Adjustment

The topic of black education was another area of race adjustment widely taken up by the *Afro-American*. In the early twentieth century, the newspaper surveyed many issues that reflected the topic's significance to the struggle to improve African Americans' material conditions. Overtime, its interpretive lens became increasingly rooted in a black conservative framework that privileged black self-help and cultural autonomy. In this section, I will demonstrate how the newspaper's increased reliance on black self-determination and the cultivation of autonomous institutions impacted its views on the intellectual development of what the *Afro-American* considered the future leaders of the race.

In 1911, the *Afro-American* reported that Arthur Schomburg and J. E. Bruce collaborated in a community effort to both exalt and preserve black history in New York City.²⁶² The two men organized a group of people whose mission was to gather "information from books and through correspondence of historical value to the Negro race." The group adopted the name "Negro Society for Historical Research" and it elected the John E. Bruce its inaugural president and A.A. Schomburg as its secretary-treasurer. The group chose Professor W.W. Weekes as its musical director, David B.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² See Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg: Black Bibliophile and Collector: A Biography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

Fulton its librarian, and W.E. Braxton its art director.”²⁶³ Membership was limited to 20 active members. Each member paid an initial amount of \$10 and then paid \$0.25 in monthly dues. The society relied on an international network of interested correspondents to provide “books, pamphlets, and valuable manuscripts written by Negroes and when opportunity presents to present and coming into possession which have a historical value or which will be useful for reference. These it will endeavor to dispose of to members of the race whom are interested in knowing what Negroes who wrote books fifty or a hundred years ago had to say and how they said it.”²⁶⁴ The society also collected “pictures, wood cuts, [and] photographs of Negroes here and abroad.”

One of the society’s initial challenges was trying to secure pictures of notable African Americans from early periods of American history. The group acquired a steel engraving of Nat Turner, which it contemplated reproducing and then selling to secure more resources to obtain more books. At the time of the group’s founding, Schomburg and Bruce had already acquired over 150 titles. Among them were such titles as *Letters of Phillis Wheatley*, *History of Black Phalanx*, *The Color of Solomon*, *Race Adjustment*, *Anthology of Negro Poets*, *Negro Patriots Revolution*, *The Cushite*, *The Octoroon*, *Origin and Objects of Freemasonry*, *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Negro Soldiers in the Rebellion*, *Intertemporary Values*, and *Abundance and Hard Times*.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Barnett Dodson, “Select Society for Research: Unique Plan by Which to Trace History of the Race: New Light on Old Subjects,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 2 September 1911, 2.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

In January 1913 J.H. Dillard spoke to a group in Charlottesville about many of the same issues taken up by the Commission. In a lecture titled “Race Adjustment in the South,” Dillard applauded the steps toward advancement blacks had taken since emancipation. He pointed to the economic acquisitions blacks made which included accumulating \$700,000,000 in wealth, the establishment of 57 banks containing deposits of at least \$52,000,000, and the ownership of 15,500,000 acres of property. Dillard reiterated his ideas of gradual adjustment but added that the realms of education and religion offered blacks immediate areas of self-improvement. On education, Dillard suggested that, “We must recognize that the education of the masses must depend upon the public schools and that these schools must be made more efficient by the introduction of home industries and by relating them to the life of the people. Justice demands a larger appropriation for this purpose. As conditions now are with the short term and inefficient teacher and the lack of supervision much of the money is almost wasted.”²⁶⁶

Dillard’s desired to see industry developed in the South. He knew that successful attempts at economic development required a skilled labor force. Public school curriculums needed to emphasize developing and implementing programs of education that were applicable to the material conditions of most of the students. Dillard’s comments on black religion were also critical to the issue of racial adjustment. He supported an educated black clergy who instructed its members to preserve their earthly bodies while also trying to preserve their souls. On this expounded on this issue by saying that, “In regard to the question of religious influence there is great need that an

²⁶⁶ “Scientific Study of Race Problem: Dr. James Dillard Delivers Lecture on Race Adjustment in the South,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 25 January 1913, 1.

effort be made to bring home to the minds of the Negro preachers the conviction that their religion is meant for this world as well as the next.” This point of emphasis was particularly important for African Americans who possessed the means to improve their material conditions, but neglected to do so because they anticipated the rapture. Dillard called attention to the “important and potent influence” of “the country preachers.” He resolved that, “Many of these are good men but the great majority have a false idea about the character of preaching that is most needed. Through these, if they were rightly instructed, the greatest improvement could be affected in the way of sanitation and cleanliness and thrift.”²⁶⁷ A properly educated black clergy could preach on matters that would improve the material conditions of the community. Physical health and economic conditions were two areas that Dillard charged black preachers to better instruct their members.

Dillard’s comments were not only for the black community. He also urged whites to reevaluate their perceptions of blacks as a group when he stated that, “We southerners generally like the individual Negro, will work with him, help him, joke with him, but in another mood we class all of them together, and are apt to judge the whole by the worst types. In my opinion it would be better for us and better for them that the colored people of the South should be encouraged to have self-respect...There will always be race problems, for reaches are different and the differences will persist.” Dillard conceded that social equality may never be realized, but he saw “no reason why the white people and the colored people may not continue to live in the South with a natural segregation,

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

and yet in mutual cooperation and good-will.”²⁶⁸ Dillard’s program for racial adjustment was rested on African Americans who aspired to race progress and a white population that reconsidered the societal benefits of allowing blacks to improve their communities in the areas of education, hygiene, and spirituality.

The death of Booker T. Washington in 1915 was, for many African Americans, a devastating blow to the larger mission of race progress. Washington had been the face of “industrial education,” a curriculum model he helped to spread across the globe. He was the trusted black confidant of some of the most influential white leaders in the United States, including President Theodore Roosevelt. Following his death, questions rooted in insecurities emerged concerning who would be Washington’s successor. The *Afro-American* published an article that introduced Moton to its readers, in an attempt to explain why “Major Robert Russa Moton, commandant of cadets at Hampton Institute, had been selected.”²⁶⁹ A selection committee chose Major Moton because the it decided that “The problem [of race adjustment] to be dealt with is a many-side one, and it has seemed wise to seek a solution of it that will bring to the work of Tuskegee another forceful personality.”²⁷⁰ According to the *Afro-American*, Moton was an ideal leader. The newspaper described him as being “of unmixed blood” and able to trace his ancestry back to African royalty. Moton commented on his ancestry by stating that,

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ “Moton New Head of Tuskegee: Commandant of Cadets at Hampton Elected To Succeed the Late Booker T. Washington,” *The Afro American* (Baltimore) 25 December 1915, 1.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

About the year 1735 there was a fierce battle. [Two] of the strongest tribes on the west coast of Africa. [Chief] of one of these was considered the most powerful of his time. He succeeded in overpowering his weaker rival and slaughtered and captured a great many of his band. This chief delivered to his sons dozen of these unfortunate survivors to be sold to an American slavery. The young African chief delivered these men to [the] captain of the chief and received his pay in trinkets. He was then asked to go out to the ship to see his wonderful sailing vessel. After he had inspected the ship, he was asked by the captain to dine. He said that they gave him some more food to eat and some strange things to drink, all of which he enjoyed so much he fell asleep. When he awoke he was chained to [...] himself had [been] sold, and the vessel was headed toward the United States.²⁷¹

The account undermined hegemonic perceptions of African Americans' supposedly inferior gene pool, which discounted them from claims of being *well born* or of *pureblood*. Moton counted himself among the best physical specimens of the human race.

The *Afro-American* also praised Moton as a good fit for Tuskegee because it supported his ideas on racial advancement. The newspaper quoted a commencement speech Moton delivered to the graduating class of Tuskegee Institute in 1912. He addressed the graduating class by stating that he believed that “the physical peculiarities of the Negro, which are perhaps the most superficial of all distinctions, are nevertheless the most difficult of adjustment.” He, however, did not “believe that a man’s color is ever a disadvantage to him.” Yet, he did believe that people of African descent would “very likely to find it an inconvenience in some places.” He conceded that race prejudice “is as much a fact as the law of gravitation, and it is as foolish to ignore the operation of one as the other.” Moton posited that, “Mournful complaint and arrogant criticism are as useless as the crying of a bay against the fury of a great wind.” He advocated, instead, for blacks to harness their communal energies toward more constructive endeavors. He advised that “The path of moral progress...has never taken a straight line. Though social change may

²⁷¹ Ibid.

not come as quickly some would like, he believed that “unless democracy is a failure and Christianity a mockery, it is entirely feasible and practicable for the black and white races in America, to develop side by side, in peace, in harmony, and in mutual helpfulness each towards the other, living together as ‘brothers without being brothers-in-law,’ each making its contributions to the wealth and culture of our beloved country.”²⁷²

Like many of his contemporaries, Moton’s plan for racial adjustment required a joint effort by both blacks and whites. He charged whites to release blacks from the constraints of racial prejudice, but he expected blacks to do their best to improve their conditions regardless of how whites viewed them. He invoked Christianity as the force that would soften the hearts of whites, while it also worked to correct the immoral and negative thinking among blacks. The successful program would be a Christian community that was comprised of both blacks and whites who shared the task of creating social responsibility.

In February 1914 John W. Abercrombie, Democratic representative of Alabama delivered the keynote address at the annual banquet of the Educational Society in Baltimore. His address, “The New Education from a National Point of View” situated the problem of black education within a larger conversation national unity. Abercrombie observed that, “Our policy relative to Negro education in the South...has to do directly with several perplexing problems, among which are the labor problem and the problem of the adjustment of the races... With us in the South the labor problem is largely a race problem, and for the same reasons the race problem is largely a labor problem.”²⁷³ These

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ “Intelligent Men Must Co-Operate,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 28 February 1914, 6.

labor issues stemmed primarily from white working class southerners' refusal to work alongside blacks. Another problem was white southerners' continued practice of barring blacks from joining labor unions. Furthermore, high rates of racially motivated violence compelled many African Americans to leave the South, which in turn, threatened the overall labor supply. Abercrombie pointed out that all of these things threatened the economic potential of the South. In 1914 southern agricultural production and mining played an important role in the nation's economic structure. Though he took for granted that adjustment would be difficult, Abercrombie also stated that it was in the best interests of the nation as a whole that a solution was reached. He believed that "if it is ever solved, the solution will come through the cooperative efforts upon the part of intelligent and patriotic representatives of both races and all sections. Great intelligence, unswerving loyalty, unfaltering patriotism, wisest discretion and untiring consecration will be necessary. There will be needed also much of toleration, patience, confidence, courage and true religion."²⁷⁴ Abercrombie called on men of special talents from both races to devise a plan for the two races to work together in the interest of the nation's economic health.

In 1917 the National League on Urban Conditions convened in New York to discuss "(1) Causes and consequences of the migration; (2) Present condition of this migrating; (3) What is to be done to aid the Negro's adjustment to his new environment." Moton, in assuming his coveted leadership position, attended this conference. Several other influential African Americans joined him. Of those listed were John Hope,

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

president of Morehouse College in Atlanta; Mary Talbert, the women's rights advocate and black woman's club organizer, Dr. George E. Haynes of the National Urban Conditions Among Negroes, and J.E. Moorland, who helped to found the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History with Carter G. Woodson. L. Hollingsworth Wood, the advocate for black and Quaker rights and one of the founding members of the American Civil Liberties Union, presided over the conference.²⁷⁵ Later that year, the *Afro-American* mourned the death of Hollis Burke Frissell, who succeeded General Chapman Armstrong as the principal of Hampton Institute. The *Afro-American* described Frissell as a man who "worked for the uplift of colored people and Indians, but one whose singular gifts were devoted to every movement destined to bring about the adjustment of relations between the races." The newspaper praised Frissell for bringing with him to Hampton his New England culture that he used to instill in his students a sense of "high mindedness." The *Afro-American* depicted Frissell's death as a major loss for both blacks and whites when it stated that, "In his death not only Negro education loses a strong friend, but the cause of education for the white South loses an earnest champion." According to the *Afro-American*, he "literally wore himself out in the service, and it is a tribute to him that the remarkable possibilities that Hampton has for future usefulness were foreseen by the alumni several weeks ago when they asked that the curriculum of the institution founded by the late General Armstrong and which gave to the world Booker T. Washington, be raised."²⁷⁶ Hampton was the flagship institution

²⁷⁵ "To Discuss Immigration," *Afro American* (Baltimore) 20 January 1917, 1.

²⁷⁶ "Hollis Burke Frissell," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 18 August 1917, 4.

for black industrial training, and aside from Booker T. Washington, Frissell was one of the most influential supporters of early twentieth century black education.

In February 1925, the *Afro-American* analyzed the article, “Has the Higher Education of the Negro Failed?” that was published in the *Educational Review* by Victor G. Cools. Cools, a West Indian educator, was trained in a Midwestern American college. He taught at many black colleges, and drew upon his experiences to write his article. The *Afro-American* bracket the fact that Cools was West Indian which, the newspaper argued, made him “apt to be more restless and radical, and chafes more keenly under the restrictions of American race prejudice.”²⁷⁷ The newspaper speculated that West Indian culture contributed to Cools more “radical or reformatory” approach. The *Afro-American* characterized Cools as part of a West Indian contingency that included Marcus Garvey, James Weldon Johnson, and W.E.B. Du Bois, all being “of West Indian derivation.”²⁷⁸

In his article, Cools criticized black education for growing stagnant. He posited that, the “several types of schools have gone on according to the formulas laid down in the earlier days.”²⁷⁹ While the *Afro-American* agreed with Cools that black education needed to be updated, it stopped short of saying that entire system had failed. The *Afro-American* commented on Cools’ assessment by conceding that, “it might well be said that during the last half generation the education of the Negro race has been carried on instead of up.” The number of black schools increased, but most of these schools were deficient. “There has been augmentation in bulk rather than increase in power.” The *Afro-*

²⁷⁷ “Has Higher Education Failed?” *The Afro American* (Baltimore) 14 February 1925, 9.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

American, however, rebutted Cools when it stated that, “the broad assertion that the education of the Negro has been a failure is but a part of the wholesale derogatory pedagogical opinion of the time.”²⁸⁰

The *Afro-American* resolved that, “The higher education of the Negro does stand in need of reshaping in light of the expanding needs of the race.”²⁸¹ This was in part due to the fact that the educational models employed at black schools carbon copies copied over from white-serving institutions. The academic programs, the newspaper concluded, “have been borrowed rather than adapted with many indications of misfit.” It granted that, “There are educational constants and variables. Those features which have to do with the fixed principle of science, the received laws of ethics, the appeal of basic human emotions have neither racial nor ethnic quality, but apply alike to every educational program.” There were other topics, however, “which have to do with the means of livelihood, the special conditions of racial or religious groups, whether such conditions are imposed from within or from without, their aims, ideals and aspirations in so far as they may be divergent from the social unity as a whole, call for special treatment by wise educational adaptation.”²⁸²

The *Afro-American* compared African American colleges to Catholic, Jewish, and White women’s colleges that were chartered to promote ideas particular to each ethnic/religious and gendered group. “There is no reason why Negro colleges and universities should not study to effect like sensible adjustment of curricula to special

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

racial needs.”²⁸³ The newspaper criticized black educators who spent too much time trying “keep up with the white Joneses.” Such “slavish imitation,” the *Afro-American* warned, “usually leads to grotesque maladjustment in pedagogy as in society.”²⁸⁴ Students at black colleges, unlike students at white colleges, were forced to prepare for a life of racial limitations. Therefore, the *Afro-American* determined that, “It would be at the height of folly for the Negro college to add a course in railroad administration merely because Harvard has put on such a course. The white student has a reasonable chance of entering upon railroad management. The Negro can hardly reasonably hope to rise above the level of the porter.”²⁸⁵ Despite these limitations, black college curriculums could “have sufficient range and richness without slavish and meaningless apery.”²⁸⁶

Although a culturally nuanced college curriculum was not always applicable, the *Afro-American* suggested that the way to improve the black college curriculum was for the black college to work to create a curriculum that reflected the black college’s overall mission, which was to train future black leaders. The newspaper concluded that, “The Negro who is to be the leader among his people needs a special knowledge of the history, tradition, hopes, aims and aspirations of the people whom he aspires to lead. Such teaching and such teachers can be found nowhere outside of the Negro college.” The *Afro-American* interpreted the special charter of the black college by distinguishing it from its white counterpart. “A standard American college of the orthodox Nordic type

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

can teach neither the Jew, the Catholic nor the Negro the aim and aspiration peculiar to the needs of his creed or his race. They can only give the broad general principles which the non-Nordic student must sift through the sieve of his own understanding and adapt it to the requirements of his own community.”²⁸⁷ The *Afro-American* took the position that the black college offered something particular, which, by the nature of its design, a Nordic college was not equipped to produce.

Community Development as Race Adjustment

A fourth area of race adjustment discussed in the pages of the *Afro-American* was community development. As seen above, the newspaper’s stance on the issue initially looked to white support, but over time, called for productive mobilization of community resources. This section demonstrates the *Afro-American* responded to the post WWI period by advocating for a form of African American community development that was rooted in community action and civic engagement rather than what the newspaper condemned as empty gestures of race diplomacy.

1910, C.T. Walker, a minister and advocate for interracial cooperation, delivered an address at the 37th international convention of the Young Men’s Christian Association of America (YMCA), held in Toronto. Walker was a “colored delegate” of the organization who addressed the convention on the topic of “Our Obligation to the Colored Man.”²⁸⁸ He illuminated African Americans progress in areas like education, land ownership, and religion. He conceded that more work was needed, but also posited

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ N. Barnett Dodson, “Plea for Uplift of Young Men: Much Enthusiasm Aroused at Annual Meeting in Canada,” *Afro American* (Baltimore) 19 November 1910, 7.

the organization and its white members had a role to play in the process of race adjustment. He distinguished “Practical Christianity as progressive and aggressive,” and he insisted that the “Y.M.C.A.’s responsibility in regard to the colored people grew out of the fact that all were members in the human family.” He believed that the “Y.M.C.A. had a duty to the colored man because he was an American citizen despite the constitutional amendments.” To help their cause, African Americans who left the rural South and moved to urban areas invoked moral suasion in an effort to impress white Christian reformers. Walker highlighted the fact that many African Americans, upon leaving the plantation South, worked tirelessly to prove their desire to join the societal mainstream. According to Walker, “When the country called for service the Negroes had forgotten the injustices and indignities heaped upon them. The Negroes were essentially a religious people, not given to skepticism, atheism, agnosticism nor trouble with higher criticism.” Walker praised African Americans, who, though “in a state of adjustment, ... determined to stay in America and help to build a big nation.” He characterized their passion in saying that, “they were confident of winning the Christ Spirit of loving instead of hating.”²⁸⁹ In concluding his address to the Y.M.C.A. members, Walker appealed to national conscience of the mostly American audience when he asked them to consider the importance of aiding the dispossessed within their own political borders before it sought to spread its reform efforts to other parts of the world.

The article, “Our Young People,” addressed the difficulty of locating morally sound recreational amusements in early twentieth century American cities. Within the context of rapid social change brought on by the Great Migration, the older members of

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

the community struggled to protect younger generations from certain activities considered dangerous and immoral. In some cases, older African Americans acted out of fear by prohibiting younger blacks from exploring new opportunities afforded them by their new urban environments. The *Afro-American*, viewing the wholesale rejection of amusement as problematic, used the following poem to illustrate how closed-minded attempts to protect one's children posed a danger to the child's development.

A mother's heart may prove a snare,
The child she loves so well;
Her hand may lead with tender care
Down the smooth road to hell
Nourish its frame, destroy its mind;
Thus do the blind mislead the blind.
Even with a mother's love.²⁹⁰

Granted, scientific racists and white reformers used crime statistics to demonize urban blacks. They also hypothesized that African Americans were too weak intellectually to behave responsibly in the midst of temptations brought about by crime, vice and immorality. The pervasive spread and the potential danger of these ideas influenced the minds of many black people who internalized these claims and began employ Christian purity and morality as a shield against racial stereotypes. In many cases, this amounted to the prohibition of even positive forms of urban amusement.

The *Afro-American* acknowledged the older generation's fears as valid and certainly well intentioned. But the newspaper wished older blacks to adopt a different approach. The article's author stated that, "Neither have we any lamentation for the youth of the race, or any special feeling with respect to a very dark future it. But, surely, there is genuine ground for the fear expressed, and the phenomena indicating such a trend

²⁹⁰ "Our Young People," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 19 Apr 1913, 4.

of affairs ought to be seriously studied and the needed lesson clearly pointed out. Most anyone can get up and indulge in lamentation. Weeping is a very easy act. But what we need is neither lamentation or weeping; but, rather, clear thinking, comprehensive analysis, followed by heroic treatment.”²⁹¹ The threat of criminality in urban cities was real. So, too, was the possibility that one’s child could be linked to such criminality. Yet, the writer wanted black migrants to develop constructive ways for its community to enjoy their time of leisure.

The writer dismissed those who claimed that African American youth who partook in wholesome amusement within the city were destined to be condemned. He invoked examples of race progress as evidence that blacks were, in fact, showing signs of adjusting to their new surroundings. “Certainly, at first sight, there were appearances which seem indicative of such decline.” These signs, however, were “thoroughly deceptive.” The writer assured readers that “there is no decline but steady advance all along the line. And when we have said as much it is far from us to imply that there are no serious situations to be improved and righted. There is much work to be done along every line; but certainly there does not exist any occasion for extraordinary alarm...”²⁹²

The writer’s conclusion rested on her or his trust in African Americans’ “moral and intellectual eye,”²⁹³ which afforded it a “natural adjustment” to rapid industrialization. Some older blacks were slower to change, and consequently tried to prevent younger blacks from deviating too far from tradition. Their efforts to save

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

community produced the opposite affect of causing many younger blacks to disassociate from the communal and spiritual life. The *Afro-American* warned black youth that, in doing so, they threatened to undermine efforts toward community building. The writer explained that, “The duty of a young educated Christian man, or woman is not to become indifferent, or careless, and drop out of activity in such Christian organizations, because he or she finds opposition to the dominance of correct and more enlightened methods of administration, but rather, like true Christian men and women to bear faithful witness to their convictions of truth and duty.” The writer encouraged younger blacks to remain part of the migrant communities and to work to win over their elders. “If we can be courteous, persistent, and determined in arguing our views because of fundamental conviction of the righteousness of the cause we represent, then in time, the effete and antiquated ideas of past generations will give place to that which ought and should obtain.”²⁹⁴

In 1917 Victoria C. Haley of St. Louis, Missouri spoke to a large audience at Bethel A.M.E. Church. Haley, who was the organizer of the National Association of Federated Clubs of Colored Women, proposed a plan for racial adjustment in light of the exodus of several blacks away from the rural South into other sections of the country. She stated her belief that, “The task of the race is one of special and perpetual adjustment...[And] while we are making criticism of our treatment in America it must be borne in mind that we are to safeguard the welfare of our own people by laboring directly among them, and correcting their evils and wrongs. For acceptability depends upon the

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

amount of honesty, sobriety and industry we carry into a community.”²⁹⁵ According to Haley, a successful racial adjustment program was predicated upon blacks’ ability to locate to new cities, to adapt to their new environments, and to show whites that they deserved to be treated fairly. In order to accomplish that task, she wanted African Americans to position themselves as morally upright, resourceful, and hardworking.

In 1923 William N. Jones lauded the residents of Harlem for making “deep-seated adjustments” that “in many ways [were] making a new history for the greatest of all concentration of Negro life.”²⁹⁶ Jones’ article can be interpreted as a celebration of African Americans successful display of fortitude in their effort to survive in one of the nation’s most challenging cities. According to Jones, “The fact that in New York City where the struggle for existence is more exacting and human competition keenest perhaps than in any other American commonwealth, Negro Harlem has been able to grow, raise its birth rate, lower its death rate and get such a firm preponderance of West Indians as cause the management employed a foothold in industries, professions and property owning has been due to many factors well worth considering by other communities.”²⁹⁷ Jones attributed the successful adjustment of the black community in Harlem to the wave of black migrants who, in 1923, had only recently arrived in the city. He noted that many of the successful business owners in Harlem previously resided somewhere in the West or the South. Their attraction to Harlem, Jones reasoned, could be explained by their past

²⁹⁵ Mrs. Haley Speaks on Negro Exodus from South,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 19 May 1917, 2.

²⁹⁶ William N. Jones, “New York City’s Colored Population on Way: Harlem Challenges American Democracy,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 15 June 1923, 9A.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

experiences with racial discrimination, which helped to shape their “race consciousness.”²⁹⁸ This, Jones said, formed the basis for the majority of black enterprise. Race consciousness also intermingled with the “democratic ideals of the original New Yorker” to develop among African Americans “a strong racial movement towards not only independent thinking but practical independent actions.”²⁹⁹

Jones also celebrated Harlem as a “Mecca for students,” because “all of the large schools and universities in New York admit Negro students on the same terms as others.”³⁰⁰ Increased access to higher education greatly impacted African American intellectual discourse on questions related to racial adjustment. Jones pointed out that “The intelligence of the student group in stirring the life of the community is becoming more and more pronounced. The recent trend of radicalism among a large group there expressed in the *Messenger Magazine* had its incipency in the study of social problems in some of the schools.”³⁰¹ Additionally, black student clubs positively impacted organizations like the N.A.A.C.P. in “becoming the arbiters of social customs.” That some of the images associated with the emerging Harlem Renaissance served to undermine adjustment efforts, Jones also praised black students for helping to create a “social fabric [that differed] from the well known New York night life.”³⁰²

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

In May 1925, “Searchlight,” a writer for the *Afro-American*, articulated the newspaper’s support of radical protest when he praised the American Federation of Colored Women for exposing “to the world the American brand of democracy—more correctly termed hypocrisy.” “Searchlight” wrote that, “Colorphobia, the curse of American civilization, was given a staggering setback the other evening, by the American Federation of Colored Women.” “Searchlight” credited the passage of women’s suffrage and the recent influx of African American youth into institutions of higher education for helping the race to accomplish its race adjustment goals. He believed that, “In the new order of things, the colored women and the colored students are showing the way to race adjustment in the ‘Land of the free and the home of the brave.’”³⁰³ “Searchlight praised Hallie Q. Brown, the president of the American Federation of Colored Women, who “told the world that segregation has no place in an International Council of Women; and the council, minus the Negro-hating-contingent, echoed the thought.”³⁰⁴ Brown’s comments signaled an alarm for foreign delegates who were unaware of the race problem in the United States. “Searchlight” reasoned that, “If this laudable stand taken by the colored women has no other effect, it has shown the foreign delegates how Negroes are treated in this country and has, undoubtedly, aroused sympathy for the Negro’s cause. It is an assured fact that the Negro’s only hope lies in his own efforts and such pressure as his foreign friends may bring to bear upon America.”³⁰⁵

³⁰³ “Searchlight,” “Women ‘Achieve’ and ‘Do’ While Men Wine and Dine,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 16 May 1925, 2.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

“Searchlight” challenged the traditional view of black male leadership when he credited black women as being responsible for achieving tangible goals in doing racial adjustment work. African American women activists “are going about their task in a peaceful but persistent manner, subduing difficulties and daring dangers. It is to the women of the race that we must look more and more for delivery from these perplexing and agitated questions of racial adjustment.” “Searchlight” dismissed black male reformers as ineffectual. He said that, “Men love to talk. Women love to do. While men are wining and dining, women are effectively achieving. The women are, indeed, our most successful social workers. They never tire.”³⁰⁶ As an example of them “doing” race work, “Searchlight” offered that the American Federation of Colored Women acted as representatives of the race when they “kept and efficiently managed Phyllis Wheatley Young Women’s Christian Association Building, in the National Capital, [which] stands as a monument tot the race.” According to “Searchlight” this gesture was “a lesson to the public that colored people do not always let their property run down, when they invade the best neighborhoods.”³⁰⁷ “Searchlight” also praised the American Federation of Colored Women for what he anticipated would be their future endeavors, in light of the newfound International support and their recently acquired right to vote. “Searchlight” cheered clubwomen’s effective use of the franchise by stating that the American Federation of Colored Women “demonstrated their unfailing tact in rejecting the vicious

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

practice of segregation. They have the ear and the eye of their foreign friends. They are sure to follow up their advantage.”³⁰⁸

Conclusion

In the first 25 years of the twentieth century, racial adjustment proved itself to be an ongoing project. African Americans witnessed several changes in the world, the nation, and especially in their own communities. Major events helped to shape, redefine, and then shape again the concerns that most affected black communal existence. The articles and essays that comprised Baltimore’s *Afro-American* reflect those changes. At the turn of the century, the *Afro-American* expressed a conservative message of race adjustment that instructed blacks to rely on Christian piety and patience while they awaited their white counterparts who, all the while, rebuffed blacks’ request for full citizenship.

The violent aftermath of WWI, Red Summer, coupled with the racial discrimination black migrants encountered upon arriving to the industrial North, persuaded once conservative race reformers to abandon ideas of racial adjustment that were predicated on the eventual realization of interracial cooperation. The Great Migration, the ratification of the 19th Amendment, and the increased number of college educated blacks all helped to create a foundation for black radicalism, which was reflected in the pages of the *Afro-American*. In the 1920s, the *Afro-American* responded to an increasingly segregated and racially hostile society that greatly diminished the possibility of racial adjustment through interracial coalition. The articles concerning race

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

adjustment featured in *Afro-American* provide evidence that the historical black newspaper moved closer to the ideological left.

CHAPTER 4
BLACK PLAYGROUND MOVEMENT AS RACE ADJUSTMENT WITHIN THE
AFRO-AMERICAN, 1910-1928

Section 1: W.H.J. Beckett and the Advocacy for the African American Playground
Movement in the *Afro-American*, 1909-1928

In addition to the areas of race adjustment discussed above, there was an additional area that proved to be of great significance to the newspaper's race adjustment platform. The African American playground movement, as covered by the *Afro-American*, was an integral part of African Americans' larger project of community development within the context of the early twentieth century. Proponents of playgrounds for black youth positioned the playground and the tenants of physical culture it supported as concomitant with race progress. Whereas other race adjustment themes have received much more scholarly attention, the black playground movement has largely been ignored.

In this chapter, I situate the African American playground within a context of race adjustment as articulated by the *Afro-American* newspaper. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how and why proponents of other race adjustment goals often included the playground movement in their efforts to help blacks adjust to their new urban locales. Race reformers also emphasized the need for more playgrounds in their advocacy for social change. The *Afro-American* is perhaps the best periodical through which to analyze the African American playground movement and its significance, because, as will be revealed below, the historic black newspaper invested its own resources to ensure that the black playground movement thrived. The following is a detailed analysis of how writers of the *Afro-American* situated the black playground as one of the most important tools to advance the race.

For a little over a year, W.H.J. Beckett authored “Athletic Notes,” a weekly column, where he reported news related to topics concerning the formation of sports teams, organized play initiatives, and the availability of recreational bathhouses. The column also helped public educators disseminate their ideas about the positive influence of athletics and organized play for African American youth. When interpreted through a lens of race adjustment, Beckett’s weekly column illustrates how the *Afro-American* used its resources to champion the cause of physical activity as a way to foster race continuity. Beckett began his column in December 1909 by encouraging youth to take up track and field. He then solicited financial support for the erection of gymnasium by telling readers that a new gym would help to preserve physical health. Beckett argued that, “the athletic field is equal in importance with the school house.”¹ He provided statistics relating to the creation of a public playground by stating that, “Fifty-seven out of one hundred of the largest American cities have public playgrounds. The total number in 1907 was 836, and the total acreage was 709, so that the average was less than one acre.” These numbers were staggering because, “In twenty-seven cities the playgrounds are supported from civic funds; in nine by private subscriptions, and in eleven cities by both private and civic funds. Baltimore is the latter group.” He resolved that, “Colored citizens should contribute to this fund since their children play.”²

¹ W. H. J. Beckett, “Athletic Notes,” *Afro-American Ledger* (Baltimore) 18 December 1909, 4.

² Ibid.

Beckett publicized the efforts made by the Druid Hill Avenue Y.M.C.A. to provide young African American boys with constructive leisure activities. Y.M.C.A. activities included bowling, billiards, and checkers. Program directors used them to steer boys away from the city's crime element. Beckett offered disparaging remarks for the city's bad influences. "Tell me what your boy plays and I will tell you his character. Listen to the language of any boy or girl at play, and you will have an index to his or her character. Dozens of boys are brought into the juvenile court because they play at real robbery and pirating. A dime novel arouses their fiery minds, and a bad and useless drama drags them along the road to hell."³

In January 1910, Beckett encouraged his readers pursue good health as a New Year's resolution. He instructed them to "Get out of doors and breathe fresh air."⁴ He told encouraged those interested in marksmanship about the shooting gallery constructed at the local Y.M.C.A. Beckett also celebrated Cassius Mason, a local youth, who had been "elected captain of the football squad of the Colored High School for the season of 1910." He remarked that soccer, which was growing in popularity among black youth in Baltimore, positively impacted one's health, and he cheered the fact that the Y.M.C.A. defeated the Alpha Physical Cultural Club, discussed above, in a basketball game by a score of 32 to 15. Beckett was actually one of two men who officiated the game.

Beckett applauded the positive affect of "the play instinct [which] offers a safety valve for the terrible pressure of our every day life." Despite this, he lamented that, "we

³ Ibid.

⁴ W.H.J. Beckett, "Athletic Notes," *Afro-American Ledger* (Baltimore) 1 January 1910, 4.

have not as yet learned how to manage it.”⁵ In an effort to recruit people to become playground directors, Beckett asked “Are there any institutions, public or private, that can teach it to those who have passed their school days?”⁶ Beckett advertised a training class for those aspiring to become playground directors, which was held at the local black high school. He then reminded readers to contribute to the building of a gym. The Public Athletic league, he reported, would match their contributions. “The Public Athletic League will maintain a gymnasium for the colored boys and young men if the colored people of this city will raise \$300 with which to equip a gymnasium. The League supports 28 gymnasiums for whites in this city, and it is believed that one or more colored would do an untold amount of good. Mrs. Estelle M. Wilson, Mrs. Adelaide Green and Mr. W.H.J. Beckett, have been authorized to solicit funds for the project.”⁷

In March of 1910 Beckett cautioned competitive athletes to be humble when he stated that “there is always one better than you.” He connected this whiff of wisdom to the upcoming Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson fight to determine the heavyweight championship of the world. It is unclear if his adage was directed at Jeffries or Johnson, as both men were known for their large bravados. Beckett advocated for the educational benefits of organized play when he wrote that “Children may be efficiently educated while playing and indulging in various forms of physical exercise quite as well as while engaged with books indoors.”⁸ He advertised a lecture to be held at the Y.M.C.A. on

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Walter's Public Bath that he expected it to be both "illustrative and educative."⁹ Finally, Beckett expressed excitement when he informed readers about ancient discovery that validated the work he and others were doing to motivate people pay more attention to their physical health. He reported that, "A Tibetan "Hand Book of Medicine," published 1,000 years ago, has been recently examined by the Russian Academy of Medicine, and it is found to contain many valuable truths that have been discovered by modern physicians. A few extracts from the ancient volume are given: "Number of bones in the human body, 360; number of nerves, 99; number of pores, 11,000,000. The heart is the king of the organs and the staff of life. The lungs embrace it not unlike a mother would a child." Beckett warned that,

Illnesses are due to man's malice, ignorance and inability to curb his passions, for these things interfere with the proper nourishment of the human organs. All unkind thoughts react upon the heart and liver. Methods for ascertaining the condition of a person's health were much like ... that are in use today—feeling of the pulse and looking at the tongue and taking the temperature. Baths, compresses and massage were advocated when needed.¹⁰

Beckett's cautionary words were directed at those African Americans migrants, who often neglected their physical health in pursuit of economic or even intellectual gain. Their efforts were futile if they were sought without consideration of one's physical health.

Later that year, Beckett encouraged his readers to take up swimming when he wrote that, "It is one of the best for constitutional vigor and muscular development."¹¹

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

He instructed his readers to use proper breathing techniques when walking around so as to limit their ingestion of air pollutants. He commented that, “the majority of people are too lazy to breathe; that is, to breathe properly and sufficiently. Take air in great, copious draughts—always through the nostrils... Mouth breathers are always shallow breathers; consumptives, as a rule, are mouth breathers”¹² Beckett also reported that physical educators were investigating ways to make football safer so that they could continue to employ it as a “vigorous, energetic, and healthful” pedagogical tool. While the American version of the game struggled with safety issues, the Australian version, or rugby, was deemed much safer. Beckett said the latter’s “method of open play prevents the game from closing up and the teams from personal encounter.”¹³ Beckett informed readers about the upcoming basketball game between the St. Christopher team from New York and the Washington, D.C. Y.M.C.A.

In April Beckett reported that the nation’s proponents of physical culture proposed an act to Congress that would authorize the United States Bureau of Education to study the extent to which organized play helped to “promote health and efficiency.”¹⁴ Physical educators argued that the “increased tendency to congestion of population in cities makes necessary greater and more systemic attention to the physical development of our children.”¹⁵ Physical educators aided Beckett’s advocacy when they argued that, “No vigorous race of people has long maintained a high state of civilization under

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ W.H.J. Beckett, “Athletic Notes,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 23 April 1910, 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

conditions that did not take into consideration the physical, as well as the mental and moral development of its youth. More attention needs to be given to the physical life of our race, for without it the greatest attainments hoped for can never be reached.”¹⁶

To help resolve blacks’ social issues, Beckett challenged the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. to establish initiatives to reduce the “poverty, the misery, sorrow, mourning, crime, suicides and inefficiency” that accompanied the alarmingly high number of black people in Baltimore who were chronically ill. “Both organizations should take up the problem of furnishing facilities for health and recreation of the boys and girls and adults of our race in this city.”¹⁷ Similarly, Beckett asked people in the community to donate to the playground campaign. He encouraged community members to buy interest-bearing shares of playground stock. “The dividends,” he said, “will be the satisfaction and joy the subscriber will receive by virtue of the higher standard of health, morality and civics to be developed among our children and youth.”¹⁸ The playground association provided free playground services for the city’s “children, girls, and young women. Seven playgrounds were reserved for black children. According to Beckett, 22,693 children were enrolled in the city’s playground program in 1909, “thus affording a healthful place for recreation.” The organization planned to expand its services by “enlarging their fields of operation and reaching a larger number of children.” Program success, however, required the financial support of both the black and white communities in Baltimore.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Beckett concluded with a whit of wisdom in support of physical culture: “Don’t forget that success in life depends upon a strong healthy body to carry out the plans laid down for its attainment.”²⁰

On April 30 Beckett praised the Dunbar Athletic Club for being active and for inspiring “awakening an athletic spirit among our young men.”²¹ He commented that “a trained man is worth a dozen untrained. Next, he asked his readers to “Help to make a race strong in body, mind, and character, by equipping a place where the growing boy and girl can play, thus strengthening and developing the necessary organs that maintain health.”²² Additionally, Beckett reminded readers that “out-door life is vital,” and “close to nature.” He asked readers to support the playground campaign by invoking the poem, “Give Us a Place to Play.”

Give US a Place to Play
“Get out,” yells the Cop, “Or I’ll soon put a stop
Ty your nerve rackin’ din, by runnin’ you in.
You won’t play on the street, when I’m on this beat,
So chase y’urself hence. Git away from that fence.”
An’ the Cop he’s the law an’ we’ve got to obey,
But he don’t tell us what ‘r where we can play.
“Git out,” yells the man when we kick his ash can,
Then he calls us vile toughs, an’ villains, an’ roughs,
An’ names if I said would knock mother down dead.
We run all our might, to get out of sight,
An’ bump into people who kick us away
And’ growl but don’t mention a place we can play.”²³

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ W.H.J. Beckett, “Athletic Notes,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 30 April 1910, 4.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

In July Beckett gleefully reported that, “The call to the out-of-doors, the recognition of the place of play in life, the use of vacation seasons, the growth of the movement for open air playgrounds and gymnasias, the large field of sport, the enthusiasm for athletics in schools and colleges, the demand for athletic reforms, the movement for pure food and pure drugs, the many “new thought” movements, the increasing amount of travel—all indicate that the physical element of life is emerging in recognition. Soon bodily weakness will be considered a crime. Life, power, energy and vitality depend for their supply upon a strong healthy body.²⁴ In a show of Beckett’s commitment to viewing athletics as a pedagogical resource, when reported the result of the Johnson vs. Jeffries fight, he discussed Jeffries’ defeat as testament to those men who, after achieving “good form” allow themselves to wane in their training. “A man must get in form and keep in form. There is no guarantee that he can regain once lost vitality. Jeffries evidenced that fact. A true man will never break training.”²⁵

The topic of playgrounds dominated the mid-July edition of “Athletic Notes.” Beckett promoted the pedagogical benefits of organized play by writing that, “Honesty, fairness, unselfishness, self-control and moral stamina,” Beckett stated, “are cultivated in the playgrounds.”²⁶ He took another opportunity to advocate for the city’s playgrounds by arguing that, “playgrounds are supplying a need and much good is being done. Parents, friends and those interested in the moral uplift of the community should visit

²⁴ W.H.J. Beckett, “Athletic Notes,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 9 July 1910, 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ W.H.J. Beckett, “Athletic Notes,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 16 July 1910, 4.

these playgrounds and lend your support.’²⁷ To those who lived sedentary lives, Beckett wrote that, “No man gets strong by sleeping and feeding alone. If he has worked his brain too hard, let him push his physical forces and put muscular strength back of his jaded mind and nerve. He cannot grow strong by stagnant inertia.”²⁸ He instructed readers to “Carry out a vigorous program for the summer. One that will force your heart and lungs into action, give snap and spring to the sinews and power to the muscles. Get every organ into action so that each part will perform its functions at its best.”²⁹

On July 30, 1910, Beckett’s column called for the “moral support of every citizen who believes in the education of the young.”³⁰ “The playgrounds,” wrote Beckett, “are filling an important place in the child’s life. It keeps the boys off the street and gives him something to do under wholesome influences.”³¹ In advocating for the full development of African Americans, Beckett also wrote, “What is a soulless body but a spirit? Don’t develop the spiritual side of life without the physical, for the soul needs help from body for development and as a means of expression.”³² Building a strong physical body, according to Beckett, also helped to prevent disease. Beckett wanted African Americans to act as agents in maintaining optimal health when he wrote, “The only way to suppress a disease is by fortifying the young with strong vigorous constitutions. Provide means

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ W.H.J. Beckett, “Athletic Notes,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 30 July 1910, 4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

for physical development and be not satisfied until adequate facilities are given to sustain racial vitality.”³³

The September 3 issue “Athletic News” was Beckett’s last issue. He left Baltimore when he was appointed as the instructor of physical culture at the St. Louis, Missouri High School. Speaking of his work in the city, the *Afro-American* described him as being “very active in athletics...He has been a regular contributor of Athletic Notes in the *Afro-American Ledger* for the past 18 months.”³⁴ During his short tenure, Beckett helped to promote organized play and community level sports in Baltimore and surrounding areas. His column was very optimistic about the potential work that could be done to improve African Americans’ physical health. Beckett also demonstrated the extent to which he saw organized play and athletics as resource through which African American youth could learn morality, respect, hard work, and mental toughness. “Athletic Notes” is an incredible example of the ways that the *Afro-American* championed physical culture as a useful resource that could help the race to solve its own problems in the absence of racially inclusive social reform initiatives.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Mr. W.H. Beckett Leaves for New Charge,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 3 September 3, 1910.

Section 2: The Black Playground Movement Campaign as Race, 1910-1928

After Beckett left, writers of the *Afro-American* continued to champion the cause of the African American playground movement. The articles featured in the pages of the newspaper from 1910 to 1929 followed the pattern outlined above, which showed how the *Afro-American* became increasingly more disillusioned with the possibility of interracial cooperation as it sought to develop a plausible race adjustment program. In this section, I will demonstrate how the *Afro-American* became increasingly more confrontational in its advocacy for increased playgrounds for black youth as part of its larger program to procure for black communities necessary resources that were vital to race advancement.

In 1910 Reverend Thomas M. Beadenkoff, secretary of the Public Bath Commission, and Dr. Harvey, pastor of Union Baptist Church in Baltimore spoke to the Ministerial Alliance of Grace Presbyterian Church on the topic of “Public Bath in America and Europe.” Beadenkoff stated that the Commission was working hard to promote confidence in public bathhouses. He maintained that as people’s material conditions improved, so too should their desire to access bath houses, parks, and playgrounds. He maintained that, “Every child of every nationality...ought to have public playgrounds and you ought to contend for them as well as parks. The public baths in Baltimore are as good as those at the Belvedere, and certainly offer something that cannot be obtained in the average home.” He told the crowd that, “As you move into better homes—and it gives me a thrill of delight every time I see your nice homes on Druid Hill Avenue—these movements for the extension of playgrounds, public parks and

public baths should meet your hearty support. Better homes and these things are worth contending for.”³⁵

Johnson encouraged African Americans to utilize bathhouses by showing the audience that the precedent for African American bathing was established in ancient civilization. Situating African American bathing within the biblical tradition, he posited that the “first bather was a Negro.” Johnson elaborated in saying, “I believe the Bible gives us... the first recorded instance of bath houses, and it was our race that played the part. The first bathhouse and bathing place was when Moses was drawn out of the water by Pharaoh’s daughter, a descendent of Ham and daughter of Misriam. The Hamites in Africa have always, so history tells us, believed in bathing as well as inventing. At no stage in the world’s history has the Negro not been in a civilized state, and I believe that in manly, quiet, gentlemanly way we are all we need to be. We must learn to appreciate sufficiently the characteristics of our own race.”³⁶

A few months later, the *Afro-American* praised Mayor William Jay Gaynor of New York for “pulling up the ‘keep off the grass’ signs in 30 New York parks and opening these bits and patches of greensward to walled-n and housed up children of the great city.” The signs were meant to protect the grass in city parks, but when Gaynor realized the importance of having designated play spaces for children, he amended the law. The *Afro-American* supported this gesture because it benefited African American children who desperately needed a safe place to play. The periodical also praised D.C. for providing even better accommodations for its youth.

³⁵ “First Bather was a Negro,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 23 April 1910, 4.

³⁶ Ibid.

It is one of the merits of Washington that it has so many acres and half acres of grass and so many miles of trees. There is greenery for all eyes and turf for the feet of little children. The games that give joy to youth are mostly forbidden on the public lawns, but tots can toddle on the grass and play hide and seek among the shrubbery.³⁷

The public parks did prohibit certain behavior, particularly that which was deemed unsafe or raucous. “Boys cannot play ball, “piggy-back,” duck-on-David, leap-frog, hare and hounds, etc. in the city gardens.”³⁸ Likewise, certain styles of play including “Parallel bars, swings, rings, ladders, jumping frames and the like,” were only permitted in designated play spaces. The *Afro-American* lauded these efforts because it desired to see similar accommodations made for African American youth in Baltimore.

The following month at the Ninth Annual Biennial Convention of Colored Women’s Clubs held in Louisville, KY, women activists emphasized the role of playgrounds in the development of black children. Elizabeth O. Carter of New Bedford, Massachusetts presided over a membership of around 150,000 and over 1,000 clubs. Among those present were “Mesdames Booker T. Washington, Lucy Thurman, Eva Jenifer, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Ida Joyce Jackson, [and] Mme. E Azalia Hackley. Talks included, “On Children” by Ida Nugent Paley of Norfolk, “Playgrounds” by Victorian Clay-Haley of St. Louis, Mother’s Responsibility in the Social Life of Her Child,” by Josephine E. Holmes of Wiley University, and “The Mother’s Responsibility in the Intemperance of Her Boys.”³⁹ The conference presentations demonstrated how African

³⁷ “Children and the Grass,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 4 June 1910, 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “National Force in Race Work: Biennial Convention of Colored Women’s Clubs a Success,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 30 July 1910, 3.

American women organized to promote self-help as social welfare. The presentations also demonstrated how pervasive the idea was that work to improve the race should privilege African American children. Finally, the conference presentations demonstrated the extent to which African American reformers believed that playgrounds could improve the physical, moral, and social health of African American youth. Two years later in Louisville, the local population showed its commitment to establishing playgrounds for its youth when its “Negro Outlook Committee” fought “for additional playgrounds for colored children of the city. Representatives of the committee petitioned the Park Board a few days ago to equip the lot of 16th and Baxter streets and to provide additional facilities to those in Baxter Square.”⁴⁰

In 1913, the *Afro-American* highlighted ways that social reformers in Baltimore worked to provide youth respectable, constructive, and fun recreational activities. In “Wholesome Amusement for the Children,” the author described how the Playground Association struggled to address this need.

The problem of trying to provide wholesome amusement and instruction for the children of the city during the summer months is being successfully met by the Children’s Playground Association. Not that the association is doing all the work that it desires to do, lack of finance being the drawback. The work includes white and colored children. At each playground there are swings, games for the delectation of the “kiddies,” and instruction is given in raffia work and other useful branches.⁴¹

The Playground Association, which was the umbrella organization for both white and black playgrounds in the city, was far from perfect. In its infancy, the Association often

⁴⁰ “They Want More Playgrounds,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 20 July 1912, 1.

⁴¹ “Wholesome Amusement for the Children,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 26 July 1913, 8.

allocated its already limited financial resources in ways that restricted access to playgrounds to African Americans who resided in certain areas of the city. African Americans, who relied on public accommodations, took advantage of what few parks they had. Those parks and their instructors are listed as follows:

Druid Hill Park, Mrs. Adelaide Green; Hill Street School Miss Delia Butler and Miss Cecilia Cornish; Mount Street School afternoon, Miss Delia Butler; Carey Street School, Mrs. Roberta Creditt; Jefferson Street School, Mrs. Helen Cooper and Miss Helen Fisher.⁴²

Another park was opened at Waesche Street School, and there was a proposal to build another playground at Colored High School, the Baltimore high school for African Americans.

In 1914 the *Afro-American* reported that African Americans in Nashville also joined the playground movement when they, in addition to requesting an additional fire company for the city's black population, also asked the city to construct more playgrounds for African American youth.⁴³ These requests were part of a larger initiative among African Americans in the South to seek better services to meet the growing demands of their respective communities. Eugene Kinckle Jones, the associate director of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Colored People, informed the *Afro-American* that several African American communities in the South were "cooperating in work for social uplift."⁴⁴ Jones reported that blacks in Savannah formed committees:

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "For Another Fire Company," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 13 June 1914, 1.

⁴⁴ "Social Service for the South: Plans for Uplift Received With Enthusiasm." *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 4 July 1914, 2.

to conduct big brother and big sister work, to promote recreational and amusement facilities for the young, to foster neighborhood improvement by parents meetings, inspections of yards and homes in interest of better garbage and trash disposal and cleanliness of homes, and also to cooperate with the local associated charities in providing relief for the poor.⁴⁵

The work in Savannah was noteworthy because it was a product of an interclass coalition, and not simply middle class reformers. According to Jones, “The significant thing about the movement in Savannah is that persons in all walks of life—business men, professional men, housewives, teachers and persons employed in domestic service—are combining their forces without friction or class distinction for the common welfare of all.”⁴⁶ In Augusta, Georgia, however, coalition building was limited to the affluent class. Still, it was a remarkable display of race consciousness that “fraternal organizations of the city and the professional classes have united in forming the Civic league, an affiliated organization of the Urban League.”⁴⁷ The Civic league supported three playgrounds along with urging “the chaperonage of summer outings and entertainments and are trying to secure colored visiting nurses to conduct campaigns against flies and other disease breeding insects and are responsible for friendly visiting in needy neighborhoods.”⁴⁸

The following year in Baltimore, “Professor Cook” called attention to the absence of African Americans from government sponsored plans to improve the material conditions of Southern populations. “He pointed out that playgrounds, parks, good schools and justice in the courts were to be given the race, and that associations operating

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

for ameliorating conditions confined their activities largely to the whites.”⁴⁹ Several mainstream organizations were, according to Cook, guilty of discriminating against blacks. “He criticized the Boy Scout movement for its indifference to colored boys and declared that such neglect meant that the white boys would grow up either with contempt or indifference to the rights of the Negro.”⁵⁰ The Boy Scouts, Cook concluded, were acting in ways that conflicted with their stated mission. “He pointed out that the Boy Scout movement was supposedly for developing the idea of the brotherhood of men and proving a positive factor in hastening the day of universal peace.”⁵¹ The state of Maryland, Cook contended, was particularly treacherous to the children of its black residents.

The condition of the Negro child will be perpetuated into his manhood if the white people choose that it shall be so. At every step the Negro has accepted the opportunity to change and better his condition, and at almost every step his course has been impeded by public opinion or legislation. The State should see to it that every child, as far as possible, should not only be induced to become a strong citizen physically, mentally and morally, but should insist and force the child to become so as a preventative.⁵²

Cook situated state sponsored support on the development of black children within a context of social welfare when he concluded that the black child had the potential to be either a public servant or a public nascence. The child who received state sponsored support to aid their development, which included increased access to playgrounds for the

⁴⁹ “Scores Community Neglect,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 15 May 1915, 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

cultivation of physical strength, would go onto to live a responsible life, rather than succumbing to social and moral decay.

In 1916, the *Afro-American* urged the black community to work together to pressure the city to provide swimming pools for African American children. After acquiring playgrounds for some of the city's black children, there was still cause for concern. Playground supporters advocated for swimming pools because they offered reprieve to the overbearing conditions of the summer sun during the hotter months. Additionally, supporters appreciated the way that rigorous swimming positively impacted the children's physical development. The *Afro-American* concluded that, "Now is the time to get together and push in order to have public swimming pools in service during the hotter days."⁵³

The following month, the *Afro-American* demonstrated the link between the physical culture movement and black criminality when it responded to a correspondent's challenge to articulate a plan to solve a major social issue. Previously the newspaper "made a statement concerning the unusually large number of indictments against colored people returned by the Grand Jury."⁵⁴ The correspondent asked the *Afro-American* to offer a solution that would reduce the number of African Americans facing legal punishment. The newspaper wanted to solve the social problems that plagued the black community, but added that, "At the same time we need to recognize that in applying a plaster, we have got to find the spot, and that it will do very little good to put it on dry, if

⁵³ "Baltimore, April 1, 1916," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 1 April 1916, 4.

⁵⁴ "Baltimore, May 27, 1916," *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 27 May 1916, 4.

the directions require “wet before using.”⁵⁵ The *Afro-American* did not want to make a futile effort by approaching these social problems without first understanding their root cause(s). It, however, was significant that so many African Americans resided in poor housing conditions. Likewise it was shameful that so many black children were left to entertain themselves without adult supervision.

The large number of colored people before the Grand Jury may be due to the poor housing conditions among the poorer classes, making for bad health and consequent inability to work. Perhaps the city is not using the proper preventative measures in keeping delinquent girls and boys out of the hands of the law. It can be that the lack of supervised [centers] of recreation that allows children to get the bad start in life rather than the good start. Many more factors might be mentioned but which one, or two or three ought to be attacked by us?⁵⁶

To answer this question, the *Afro-American* contended that someone should be assigned the task of managing the social welfare of the race. A task this great could not continue to be carried out by limited, albeit generous, time donations from individual people.

We have a number of earnest, sympathetic, Christian men and women engaged in the work of uplift, and they are doing it as well as their daily work will allow them, very often at a sacrifice to of their work upon which they depend for bread. But no matter how fine the spirit, how splendid the intention, welfare work must remain chaotic and inefficient as long as it is being carried out by laymen, who give part time and energy to it.⁵⁷

The *Afro-American* did not want to discourage individual efforts to provide community service. The plan, however, would have “the Day Nursery, the Maryland Home, Fresh Air Circle, Play Ground Association, Public Athletic League and the other charitable institutions that have to do with neighborhood improvement and betterment of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

delinquents organize under the direction of a paid expert on social reform.”⁵⁸ This person would be tasked with determining the root cause of the social problems that plagued the city and then devise “ways and means of applying the cure.” The expert on social welfare would be given a year to study the problems affecting African American communities in Baltimore. Afterward, “he would be expected to tell accurately of housing conditions, the number of unemployed; what classes of people produce the criminals and what crimes are committed.”⁵⁹

This plan of attack that the *Afro-American* proposed was based on similar strategies employed by New York, Brooklyn, Savannah, Nashville, Philadelphia, Louisville, St. Louis, Augusta, Atlanta, and Richmond, which were all “cities of large colored populations, [that] have made studies of welfare conditions under the direction of colored experts, and have federated or are federating their social institutions.”⁶⁰ The 2-year plan to improve the material conditions in Richmond was particularly inspiring. The *Afro-American* wanted:

1. To secure more wholesome and beneficial amusement for young colored people by means of more adequate and better supervised playgrounds and better regulated places of amusement.
2. To encourage more thorough preparation for work and greater efficiency at work on the part of those seeking employment.
3. To furnish to erring children helpful and sympathetic guidance after or preferably before their appearance at the Juvenile Court through the establishment of a system of Big Brother and Big sister oversight.
4. To organize the residents of the various Negro neighborhoods in order to keep houses and yards cleaner, and to secure better and cleaner streets and more adequate police protection.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

5. To effect a federation of the city's welfare movements so economies in administration may be [affected] and duplication of effort may be prevented—in other words—to secure to all of these organizations the usual benefits of genuine co-operative effort.⁶¹

The newspaper charged the black community to reflect honestly on the problems that affected their communities and then consider if they truly wished to improve them. If they did seek a change, they should “ask the National League on Urban Conditions to send its representative and talk the matter over. The League has such officers as Kelly Miller, R.R. Moton, of Tuskegee, and C.D. Hilles, and would be as glad to come as we are to have them.”⁶² The black community adopted the plan in July of 1916. The *Afro-American* then spoke directly to the charities that funded social programs for African Americans and begged them to relinquish their current methods of operation that were considered inefficient and ineffectual in order to pool their respective resources. “The present system of subscribing for the Fresh Air Fund, Provident Hospital, the Maryland Home for Friendless Children, Day Nursery and the Playgrounds, is not only a waste of time and precious effort, but it has the effect of providing adequately for one and inadequately for the other.”⁶³ Some charities benefited from a large donor base, which enabled them to finance their operational costs. Other social programs that were less popular, but no less important to the mission of improving the race, however, often struggled to make ends meet. Within the framework of a federation, each charity that

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

contributed to social welfare initiatives would be able to run most of their respective programs without fear of insufficient funding.

Playgrounds played an integral part in African Americans' mission to improve their social conditions. As stated above, the playground provided a safe place for children to play. It also provided black social reformers a way to direct youthful energy toward constructive activities. Finally, the playground provided physical educators a fun environment in which to expose children to physical culture. It did all of these things simultaneously—until one day it did not. In September of 1920, several people reported to the *Afro-American* that several acts of immorality were committed at the playground at the unstaffed Druid Hill Park in Baltimore. The newspaper conducted an investigation and discovered that, for three consecutive Sundays, neither a playground director nor a designated professional were present to supervise children. On a particular day, August 29, more than 75 boys and girls were “left to their own devices in a section of the park little frequented by automobilists or pedestrians...The fact that both sexes are allowed to use the swings together, misuse the benches and engage in unbecoming conversation caused unfavorable comment from several persons who casually passed the playground and led to the investigation.”⁶⁴

The *Afro-American* was also concerned that a police officer was not present to monitor the playground or to protect the children. This was an unsettling find because the community expected the police to be present.

During the week the playgrounds which are located in the further part of the park and adjacent to the sheep fold appear to have received adequate police protection,

⁶⁴ “Parks Incentive to Immorality: Playgrounds at Druid Hill Left Without Supervision or Police Protection on Sundays,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore), 24 September 1920, 12.

but on Sunday afternoon for the past three weeks between the hours of five and eight, no supervisors of playgrounds were present, and on only one occasion was a police seen in the vicinity.⁶⁵

The *Afro-American* felt compelled to bring this finding to the attention of parents and the park authorities, which were “apparently without knowledge” of a situation. Reporting the problems at Druid Hill Park was risky because the news in the wrong hands could have undermined the black community’s efforts to secure financial support for the construction of more playgrounds for the race.

The playground movement in Baltimore, however, did recover. Playgrounds remained an important aspect of the educational process. This was significant in light of a 1921 survey of the Baltimore city schools reported that every school reserved for African American children was “inadequately protected against fire, without needful space for pupils to play, and without artificial light sufficient to prevent eye strain on dark days.”⁶⁶ The survey commission ordered that 12 of the buildings be abandoned as soon as possible, and earmarked 3 more to be abandoned by 1924. The findings drastically impacted the black people of Baltimore whose children made up “nearly half of the public school enrollment or 5135 pupils.”⁶⁷ The commission recommended that \$2,053,000 be allocated for improvements and building new schools. This figure, a substantial amount in 1921, was dwarfed by the \$7,242,800 that was recommended for improvements and new schools for white students. “The per capita rate for both colored

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Survey Shows Up City Schools: Every Building for Colored Children Said to Have Inadequate Protection Against Fire, Board Asked to Abandon 12 Schools “As Soon As Possible,” Pupils in Cellar,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 18 February 1921, 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

and white is rated at \$400 per pupil.”⁶⁸ One of the more egregious findings of the survey commission was the fact that some African American children attended class in a cellar.

Conditions are ‘rotten’ declared Mr. Fitzgerald after seeing the cellar classroom which is reached by a passage way leading past the furnace room and toilets. His judgment was confirmed by other members of the committee after they had visited the mechanical drawing room and shops in the reconstruct stable in the rear of the main building, the portable building used for instruction in typewriting, and the dwelling house where the sewing and cooking classes are taught.⁶⁹

It was, no doubt, chilling for black parents to read that the school their child attended was deemed an “inadequate site: playground 3.9 square feet; inadequate fire protection and artificial lights. Heated by stoves, toilets outside. Should be abandoned.”⁷⁰

Later that year, the *Afro-American* featured an article that encouraged people in Baltimore to remain optimistic about the potential work that the city could do to improve African Americans’ material conditions. The article encouraged readers to “boost Baltimore” despite the writer’s own claim that, “Baltimore is not the best city by long odds. [It is] too far South. There are too many Southerners with their prejudice here [Its] streets are too narrow. [There] are not sufficient playgrounds, and so on down thru the whole list.”⁷¹ These challenges notwithstanding, the writer interpreted a proposed plan for more inclusion of African Americans in the city government as a sign of good things to come.

During the past year, the ambitious program for the city included a colored member on the School Board; a university for colored students supported by the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “Boost Baltimore,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 17 June 1921, 3.

state; representation in the state legislature, colored men on juries, on police force, and as members of the city fire department. No intelligent persons think for a minute that these things are wiped off the slate simply because they have not been accomplished.⁷²

The city failed to accomplish any of the goals featured on the list. The lack of success in these areas, however, did not deter the writer who posited that, “failure along these lines will afford the necessary stimulus to work harder towards the goal.”⁷³

In August of 1921, the Home Missions Council of the Federal Council of Churches wrote a statement of principle and recommendations that addressed the United States’ responsibility to African Americans’ racial adjustment. The Associated Negro Press reported that the statement was “regarded the most revolutionary action taken by a religious body in the entire history of the country.”⁷⁴ The Council of Churches was comprised of several protestant churches, which included 3,989,852 African American members. This demographic makeup likely provided a catalyst for this very strong critique of American racism.

In speaking therefore at this time for humanity and justice we voice the mind and conscience of both races. The present situation is a challenge to the churches charged with the promotion of the brotherhood of man, which look upon all men as entitled to a footing of equality of opportunity. This calls for preaching the duty of economic and community justice for the Negro, thus securing peace and good-will between the races. Beyond all else the present situation calls for confession on the part of Christian men and women of failure to live up to the standard of universal brotherhood as taught by Jesus Christ.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Church Council Says No Color Line in Wages: Statement of Recommendation of Home Mission Councils Created Sensation,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 19 August 1921, 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The statement called for the rendering of a social gospel, where in which white Christians would embody Jesus' teachings to influence public policy that affected the plight of African Americans. The Council urged the federal government to protect African Americans against lynchings and other forms racial violence. It also asked for "equal traveling accommodations, for colored people, and adequate playgrounds."⁷⁶

The following month, R.F. Pruitt, of the American Playground Device Company, wrote a letter to the editor, offering suggestions about creating playgrounds in the black sections of the Baltimore. Pruitt advised against building a swimming pool, which he thought was unneeded given Baltimore's proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. He also advised against creating lawn tennis courts, which were popular but impractical, given the limited land space. Instead, he advised that playground equipment be installed in one of the vacant lots.

If you could select a vacant lot with some trees on it and furnish some benches for the grown ups, and if you could afford it, have an experienced director who could give at least a part of the day to directing the play of both the old, and the young and you would find that this would have a great effect.⁷⁷

Pruitt encouraged the editor of the *Afro-American* to consider these suggestions because "The whole trouble with people is that they do not know how to play, and the larger cities have realized this, and are directing the play of the young, and the older people, and this movement is meeting with great success."⁷⁸ The inclusion of this letter suggests that the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "The Forum: Playgrounds for Residential Section," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 16 September 1921, 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Afro-American approved Pruitt's recommendation for more playgrounds and the notion that people should be instructed on the proper ways forms of recreation.

In 1922 the *Afro-American* applauded the black and white women who directed five of the city's playgrounds for African American children, and at the same time demonstrated the leadership roles available to women within the larger black physical culture movement. The *Afro-American* published the names of each playground director along with the name of the park she directed. Mrs. Norma Marshall and Miss Elizabeth Anthony directed the Druid Hill Park Playground. Mrs. Claudia Demand and Miss Myrtle Holmes directed the Perkins. Miss B. Morris, a white woman, managed Playground 101, which was located at Caroline and Jefferson Streets. Miss Martha Brown was her assistant. Miss E. Johnson assisted Miss Paris, a white woman, who directed Playground No. 112, which was located at Laurens and Calhoun Streets. Miss Edes, a white woman, directed Laurel Playground, Gwynn Falls, Md. No. 3. Miss Roberta Holmes and Miss Elizabeth Brown were her assistants. On average, the playgrounds reserved for black children saw approximately 250 daily.⁷⁹

In April 1923, the *Afro-American* celebrated the new editions to Wonderland Park, which was in the process of preparing for its season-opening. The park offered morally sound, family oriented, healthful recreation and "wholesome recreation."⁸⁰ Plans were also underway to provide social services for women and children. The park was

⁷⁹ "P.A.L. Runs Five City Playgrounds: Both White and Colored Women Are Directing Play Activities," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 14 July 1921, 9.

⁸⁰ "New Features Include Picnic Grove for Family Outings and Children's Playgrounds," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) April 1923, 9.

also “fenced in to keep out all undesirable elements.”⁸¹ It was updated to include new benches and picnic tables “so that families could come to the park with their lunches,” and a new water system that provided fresh drinking water. “One of the unfortunate conditions during previous seasons was the lack of pure drinking water. Recognizing this condition, the new management took immediate steps to install the new system.”⁸²

The park planned to install a playground and a “sand pile where little ones can play with their buckets and shovels to their hearts content.” Plans also included swing sets, seesaws, slides, and an athletic field. “The athletic field, however, will depend upon the support demonstrated by the Churches, lodges, and organizations which are planning picnics.”⁸³ The management team added to the committee of experts an “outing department” that was placed in charge with ensuring attendees received “picnic service.” “It is the desire of the management to have a picnic at the park every day during the season and the outing department will communicate with Churches, lodges and organizations of the city in an effort to book them up and give them service. An offer of a liberal share in the gross receipts will be made to these organizations.”⁸⁴ The park already featured a dance floor, which was among the things renovated. The *Afro-American* proposed that the “followers of the art of Terpsicore will glide about this season to the strains of Professor Ike Dixon’s orchestra of selected musicians.” Lastly, the managers of Wonderland Park wanted to stage free vaudeville shows along with

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

coaster rides, an “Aeroplane Swing,” a “Double Whirl, the Whip, the Ferris Wheel, and the Carrousel.”⁸⁵

In June of 1923, the *Afro-American* featured a warning to African American parents in an article entitled, “Vacation Problems.” Baltimore city schools were set to release students for summer vacation, and the newspaper understood that, “To many parents, especially those who for one reason or the other must be away from home during the day, this loss of school supervision brings serious problems.”⁸⁶ The *Afro-American* wanted parents to be mindful of the fact that “In the active period of child life every moment is of vital importance. Every act, every contact, every impulse of work or play plays a part in its final place in life. All the good effect of training given the child in nine months of schooling may be wholly destroyed by one week of lack of supervision during vacation.”⁸⁷ Crime, vice, and sexual impropriety remained constant threats to children’s potential, and the *Afro-American* urged parents to work with city organizations to ensure that such threats did not derail the potential success of the next generation. “Every agency, including more vigorous parental oversight, supervised playgrounds, boys and girls clubs, Y.W. and Y.M.C.A. activities, and camps should increase their activities during the vacation period.”

The summer months would have provided African American youth in Baltimore opportunities to make money to help offset household expenses, but such opportunities were few and far between. The newspaper lamented that, “unfortunately Baltimore has

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Vacation Problems,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 29 June 1923, 16.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

no agency whose special duty it is to open and find opportunities of employment for a large number [of] larger boys and girls who can and should work during the vacation.” The *Afro-American* asked the black owned businesses in the city to make “it a civic duty to provide some kind of apprentice work for at least one boy or girl during the vacation.”⁸⁸ The following month, the *Afro-American* published a list of civic events taking place in York, Pennsylvania that showed that African Americans in Pennsylvania also viewed the playground as site for community enrichment. Several people attended the Handy Civic Improvement Club festival, which took place at Moravion playground. Clara Johnson was the park director and Geneva McKenney was her secretary. The civic club donated an ocean wave and five swing sets for the playground, which were popular among the festival participants.⁸⁹

In August 1923 the *Afro-American* articulated the significance of playgrounds for black migrants when it published an excerpt of a speech by Rev. Frederick H. Butler, assistant secretary in charge of the Negro Development of the Epworth League in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Butler laid out his strategy to help black migrants adapt quicker to urban life.

I have urged that every effort be made to meet these people. They must not only fit into the industrial niche in their new environment, but also be developed along educational lines and in these things that fit them for good voting citizens. I would have playgrounds, gymnasias, educational classes, social work and all that enters into making a first-class citizen out of a man. I would seek co-operation with other agencies that are doing similar work in order to get better results. In

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “York, PA,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 27 July 1923, 10.

fact, I would have everyone feel that looking after the migrant is one of his duties.⁹⁰

The playground fit nicely into Butler's plan for adjustment because, for migrant children, the playground provided a means through which social reformers could instill ideas of physical culture and civility. Along with the gymnasia, the playground provided a means of introducing migrant youth to organized play and proper forms exercise. These things, according to Butler, would be important in the larger effort of helping the migrant population transition to life outside of the rural South.

In May of 1924, the *Afro-American* wrote concerning playgrounds that, "the real problem of childhood is primarily the problem of play. Proper facilities for recreation are as important as facilities for education."⁹¹ This served as the premise to the newspaper's challenge to Park Board of Baltimore, which, according to the *Afro-American*, "has not developed much as it should with the interest of children in mind."⁹² Public housing facilities did not provide children with sufficient play spaces, thus forcing them to play in the dangerously busy streets. Even though some parks existed, most were located in neighborhoods to which most blacks did not have easy access. The *Afro-American* argued that, "these [playgrounds and parks] should be scattered into the various neighborhoods and in waling distance.

The following month, the *Afro-American* revisited the issue of facilities by stating that, "Out of an approximate total of \$80,000 a year spent in conducting playgrounds and

⁹⁰ "Should Aid Migrants Says Rev. Butler," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 24 August 1923, 3.

⁹¹ "More Playgrounds Needed," *The Afro-American* (Baltimore) 30 May 1924, A9.

⁹² *Ibid.*

other athletics in the city during the year, only \$2,200 of this amount is spent for work among Negroes.”⁹³ This statistic represented the type of institutionalized discrimination to which the black community was already privy. The playground association found issue with the article, “although it was admitted that about one-fourth of its entire budget was spent among colored people.”⁹⁴ When asked why it had not allocated more resources to African Americans, “the League said it could not get a larger appropriation and it was unwilling to curtail its activities in the white schools.”⁹⁵ The extent to which the association favored the white schools is evidenced by the unfortunate fact that while the League spent \$600 for equipment at black schools, the state of Maryland spent \$1,600 to pay the salary of the white person assigned to oversee the black schools. To make up for the lack of wages, “funds for conducting baseball and basketball in the schools have been furnished for the last three or four years by the *Afro-American*, as was the also the outdoor swimming meet conducted last year at Druid Hill Park.”⁹⁶ In addition to poor funding, the *Afro-American* charged the P.A.L. with racial bigotry. In its office force of 16 men and women there is not a single colored one.”⁹⁷ The P.A.L was also guilty of refusing to allow African American women and men to develop work related to establishing playgrounds for their children.

The *Afro-American* later published an article showing that 230 playgrounds and recreation centers were accessible to African Americans throughout the country. There

⁹³ “P.A.L. Spends \$80,000 A Year,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 20 June 1924, 14.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

were also playground and recreational facilities that were open to both African Americans and whites. The Playground and Recreation Association articulated the significance of playgrounds for African Americans by saying that, “Public recreation facilities are especially needed by Negroes, who as a rule can get no recreation except the expensive and often degrading commercialized kind. Regular play together under leadership is training colored children and young people in teamwork and good citizenship.”⁹⁸ The Playground Association defended the call for more playground facilities for African Americans in explaining that, “Hundreds of Negro Neighborhoods are without recreation centers and thousands of colored children have no safe place to play.”⁹⁹ The organization established and maintained a staff of African Americans specialists that offered its services to American cities that were interested in creating playground facilities for their respective black communities. The Playground Association also organized a Community Service plan in 1919 that would have someone oversee programs in “singing and dramatics, games and athletics for young and old and usually social activities at a community center.”¹⁰⁰ Professor Ernest T. Atwell, Field Director of the Bureau of Colored work of the Playground and Recreation Association of America, was assigned the task of overseeing Community services initiatives for African Americans urban communities, which in 1923, amounted to 47 cities.

⁹⁸ “230 Playgrounds Open in U.S. for Colored Folks,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 6 June 1924, A2.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

In July, R.T. Lockett reported the ways that the playgrounds in New York were beneficial to city's African American parents. "Every day during the week between the hours of 9 and 4 the New York avenue city playground is crowded with local and visiting school children whose parents have found that the safe and organized play under trained and competent leaders has solved the problem of just what to do with the youngsters during the day."¹⁰¹ The number of children in attendance was indicative of the popularity of the playground among African Americans. It was even important to the white parents who also took advantage of the park's services. According to Lockett, "the attendance so far this year since the ground opened last week is the biggest that the present corps of teachers has had to deal with."¹⁰² Despite large numbers, four African Americans were employed at the park, and all supervised play activities. The park's popularity, no doubt, was aided by its use of athletics as a means of retaining students. The boys' baseball team and the girls' "Circle Dodge ball" both earned championship flags.

In August the *Afro-American* wrote a response to a plan to develop a more efficient system of playgrounds and parks in the city by urging that those plans be adapted to include plans to build parks in African American neighborhoods. The newspaper asked that a committee of African Americans be appointed to work with the Mayor to see to it that African Americans could access parks and playgrounds. The "shameful pittance" of \$4,000 out of \$769,000 of the total budget dispersed by the Public Improvement Commission was allocated to blacks. The absence of the African American

¹⁰¹ R.T. Lockett, "Children Crowd Playgrounds," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 18 July 1924, 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

representation on the Improvement Commission led the *Afro-American* to conclude that it had “little interest and welfare of colored children.”¹⁰³ The newspaper complained that none of the playgrounds reserved for African Americans were “adequately equipped.” It also claimed that Baltimore city blacks needed an athletic field that served both the playground league for blacks and the soon to be completed new high school for African American youth. The article concluded with an ironic appeal to the “separate but equal” policy of equal accommodations. According to the article’s writer, “while it is unfortunate that the Baltimore policy of Jim crow playgrounds make it necessary to carry this expensive dual system, the least that should be done is to give the colored citizens equal facilities.”¹⁰⁴

In September of 1924 Thomas J. Anderson, the Director of Boys’ Activities, Colored Playground in Washington, purchased ad space in the *Afro-American* to congratulate the leadership of the Baltimore city playground athletic league. Anderson asked the editor to “Permit me through the columns of your paper to express the unqualified thanks of Mrs. Rhodes and the boys of the Washington Playgrounds for the kind hospitality extended us during the inter-city track meet at Baltimore last week. The conduct of the meet left nothing to be desired.”¹⁰⁵ Anderson’s letter was a testament to the tremendous effort given by people at the newspaper and within the community to ensure a strong showing in competition. Anderson praised the Baltimore league’s

¹⁰³ “Playgrounds and Parks,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 8 August 1924, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “Washington Athletic Director Praises City’s Sport Spirit,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 5 September 1924.

“sportsmanship on the part of both athletics and officials.”¹⁰⁶ The inter-city meet spawned a rivalry, which for Anderson, was going to help to “further interests of amateur competition.”¹⁰⁷

In November of 1924, Dr. W.A.C. Hughes, the “head of the Negro work,” in addressing those who attended the annual meeting of the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension, urged ministers to help the plight of the southern black farmer, who in the mid 1920s on the brink of the Great Depression, was already feeling the effects of economic hardship. Hughes told the crowd that, “three out of every four Negro farmers in 1920 were either croppers, share tenants or cash tenants. Their families are usually scattered over the plantations and farms and usually live in cabins of one room and a “Leaner Kitchen.”¹⁰⁸ Poor economic conditions, coupled with social instability forced black farming families in the rural South to contend with several issues that threatened their survival.

Life is made hard by conditions growing out of inadequate nourishment, unsanitary living conditions, discriminations and sometimes base unfairness in social, economic and educational matters. These conditions and the fact that most of these people are hearing from their friends who have improved themselves by moving from the South, put on the leader of the South today a kind of responsibility for which the average minister is not prepared, however, much he can preach. Under conditions of this kind the unrest of the people cannot be assuaged by a hallelujah pulpit. Race relationships must be bettered and some of the finer things of life brought in.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ “Urge Radios For South’s Backwoods,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 29 Nov. 1924, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Hughes asked his colleagues in the ministry to preach a practical theology that instructed rural blacks on how to improve their material conditions. He also asked churches to pool their economic resources together with other agencies to provide needed aid to black farmers. Hughes wanted to provide rural blacks with radios that would serve as a tool that promoted education by allowing them to hear news exposing them to other parts of the country. He also wanted rural black preachers to be given the opportunity to undergo theological training “through summer schools.”¹¹⁰ He wanted black colleges to develop graduate programs for theological education. He asked that scholarships be provided for “men who will in all probability put in 3 years of training in one of these schools.”¹¹¹ Hughes had one stipulation for would-be graduates of the program: “That each man before leaving the school be asked to indicate what special type of work he proposes to develop in his community immediately following his return. The idea being that he will be prompted to specialize in some one or two things, for example, recreation, health, graded Sunday School, etc.”¹¹² Hughes asked black churches to also address issues related to African Americans who chose to leave the farm in search of new opportunities in urban areas. He wanted black churches to help improve poor housing conditions and to supply adequate childcare for working families. He also wanted increased access to playgrounds and settlement housing for migrant girls, and advice for newly arriving migrants in search of work and shelter.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Similar sentiments were expressed in April of 1925 when the *Afro-American* wrote that,

In the anxiety of the New Park Board to provide play spaces in every section of the city, the AFRO-AMERICAN reminds President Norris and his associates that there is not a single adequately equipped playground in Baltimore of easy access to colored residents. If the board cannot afford to purchase land adjoining some of the public schools for playground, there is Perkins Square, which can be furnished with swings, slides, and other equipment to keep the little folk out of the streets.¹¹³

In an article titled, "Playgrounds Again" the writer reported that in addition to community members urging for the construction of a playground for the African American community near Perkins Square, there had been no requests to build playgrounds for black residents in other neighborhoods. The article stated that "additional space is needed adjacent to the Dunbar School in East Baltimore and to the Laurens Street School, No. 112 on Laurens Street, in West Baltimore." The writer placed the onus on the community members themselves to see to it that proper play spaces be provided for their children when he stated that "It is the duty of the neighborhood associations in these sections as well as the parent-teachers associations to take the steps to secure the needed play spaces...Unless the neighborhood associations are intelligently active in urging the park board to provide play grounds, there is little likelihood of getting them. Anything worth having is worth asking for."¹¹⁴

In April of 1925, Mrs. Avonia D. Brown, wrote a letter to the editor, which asked "why, when mentioning playgrounds to be constructed nothing was said about even one

¹¹³ "City Playgrounds," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 4 April 1925, 11.

¹¹⁴ "Playgrounds Again," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 13 June 1925, A12.

for colored children?”¹¹⁵ According to Brown, there were no playgrounds available to children residing in East or South Baltimore. One park, the playground at Federal Hill Park, allowed black children to play there at certain times, but not others. Blacks had access to the park at Druid Hill Park, but it was too far to travel for black children residing in other parts of the city. The City Springs Park in East Baltimore prohibited black children from entering, excepting special situations. “If the attendant forgets and lets them in they have to sit on benches assigned or get out; while the equipment is used by every nation on the globe by those who are and those who are not naturalized citizens.” This blatant act of discrimination bothered Brown who felt that public accommodations should be provided for African American children if such provisions had been made for the children of European immigrants. After all, blacks in Baltimore were native born.

In June of 1925 the *Afro-American* revealed the extent to which members of the black community threatened the progress of black playground movement in Baltimore. Parishioners of churches located near a proposed playground site in Perkins Spring Square circulated petitions in an effort to halt playground construction on the grounds that a playground for children would compromise the beauty of Perkins Spring Square and would also distract church patrons during Sunday worship. The *Afro-American* rebutted the complaint by stating that

The square is being used at present as a playground, under a part-time women director, and the park board’s only proposal is to place equipment there, together with a full time director. Play there at present does not disturb church services for the simple reason that the playground is closed evenings and Sundays. So far as the beauty is concerned, which is more advantageous, to have a suitable place for

¹¹⁵ “The Forum,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 18 April 1925, 18.

children to play under proper direction, or to have them running the streets as at present under the wheels of auto traffic?

Baltimore's African Americans' communal struggle to establish sufficient playgrounds for all of its children had already proven frustrating, particularly when other urban black communities around the country experienced success. It was bad enough that the city's white leadership was unsupportive of the initiative, but the *Afro-American* expressed a special of disappointment when articulating its frustrations with efforts to stop the playgrounds that were driven by black community leaders. "It is indeed unfortunate in this day when forward-looking churches are building both playgrounds and community [centers] as adjuncts to their church proper, such a protest as this should be made. It is to be hoped in the interest of the public welfare and for the sake of the children they will withdraw their protests and back the playground project."¹¹⁶ The *Afro-American* continued to challenge playground opponents on July 4, when it featured a political cartoon titled, "Do We Need Playgrounds," that depicted several children, who, while playing in the street were struck by a crazed motorist. The picture's caption stated that, "Protest of Congregations of Perkins Square and Shiloh Baptist Churches is holding up a Municipal Playground on Perkins Square. Since making the protest, Shiloh has bought a new church in another neighborhood."¹¹⁷

In November of 1925, the *Afro-American* published an article that reflected an ideological turning point for the newspaper within the context of the playground movement. Concerning its pleas to the city for more resources for black playgrounds, the

¹¹⁶ "Let's Have a Playground," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 6 June 1925, 11.

¹¹⁷ "Do We Need Playgrounds," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 4 July 1925, 9.

newspaper broke from its tradition of moral suasion by employing a more militant approach in its appeal for racial justice. In “No Red Scare,” the writer confronted the hypocrisy of anti-communist factions that suppressed African American protest for first-class citizenship in the name of anti-communism but did nothing to protect African Americans from white tyranny and racial oppression. According to the author, “the way to make the Negro a better and safer element of our population is not to organize fights upon imaginary alien seducers, but to conduct an intelligent offensive against the real domestic menaces that embitter the Negro’s life and impel him to occasional acts of rebellion.”¹¹⁸ The author listed several grievances that pushed African Americans to adopt more aggressive forms of protest. He stated that, “One of these menaces is the unspeakable lynching practice. Others of the menaces are execrable housing conditions, under-education and grossly unfair discrimination in the matter of parks and playgrounds.”¹¹⁹ The author warned white civic leaders that they, and not the Soviet Union, were responsible for radicalizing the African American community because it was the city leaders, not the Soviets, who treated blacks as if they were an inferior race. “In these menaces [lies] the only real danger that the American Negro may become radical. If he becomes a radical it will be America’s fault—not Russia’s. The possible cause and the sure cure for such an infection are under our own control. The antics of our security-leaguers over Soviet-Negro complots merely serve to detract attention from the real source of danger—ourselves.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ “No Red Menace,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 7 November 1925, 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

In 1926, the *Afro-American* exposed the fact that the city of Baltimore spent a total of \$108,100.00 to purchase five sites for construction of playgrounds designated for white residents. Additionally the city allocated \$165,978.00 for additions to playgrounds of 12 white schools. This investment in the physical development of white children, however, did not spill over into the black community, which saw no new playgrounds and only one addition to the playground at School 106 totaling \$3760.00¹²¹ In Memphis, however, the Interracial Blue Book showed that the city's Chamber of Commerce took interest in improving race relations by establishing "a direct contact between Negro industry." At the same time, the Chamber established connections with "the Board of Education, the Park Board and other city commissions governing public departments which makes it possible for the group to have a direct say in public matters." The result of these networks included the "addition of \$100,000 to the city's appropriation already made for a colored high school...the placing into the city's budget of \$10000 for a detention home for juvenile offenders taken to the juvenile court. This gives Memphis what larger cities have failed to provide, a home where children who have committed petty offenses may be handled until tried in the juvenile court.... There were 28 classrooms added to the school facilities for colored children... Four supervised year round playgrounds have been put into operation under competent supervisors, with 12 vacation playgrounds to be added." Additionally, the Chamber's influence resulted in the

¹²¹ "Colored Schools Get One Tenth of School Loan," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 13 February 1926, 10.

removal of “objectionable terms such as ‘darky,’ ‘nigger,’ etc. from use in the daily press.”¹²²

In 1927, the Playground Athletic League held a baby contest at School 114 in Baltimore. The first place prize went to two-year old Calvin Coolidge Vaughn. The contest proved competitive, with Vaughn’s opponent trailing him by only 2 points when all the votes were counted. This contest was ideologically significant when viewed within the context of ideas that shaped the American eugenics movement. Daniel E. Bender’s *Perils of Degeneration: Reform, the Savage Immigrant, and the Survival of the Unfit*,” shows that the popularity of baby contests among white middle class communities spread in 1913 when Anna Steese Richardson, the National Chairman of the Department of Hygiene, “publicized baby contest as a way of improving the future of the race.” According to Bender,

Richardson brought national attention in the 1913 to the baby contests, but enthusiasm had already been growing, not only on the state fair circuit, but also in urban reform circles. Starting in 1912, settlement houses and related reform organizations held numerous better baby contests, spreading the gospel of safe milk, scientific upbringing, and moral living to the urban immigrant working class.¹²³

Richardson’s goal for promoting the baby contests was to “intercede in the divisive debate over the science of evolution.” She believed that with the “intervention of experts and the application of science...the immigrant poor might be saved from degeneration. And, given their belief that the traits of civilization might be passed on from parents to

¹²² “Business and Industry: Race Question in Memphis Follows Industrial Lines,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 17 April 1926, 18.

¹²³ Daniel E. Bender, “Perils of Degeneration: Reform, the Savage Immigrant, and the Survival of the Unfit,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Fall, 2008), pp.5-29. Oxford University Press. Accessed 08/01/2014 04:15.

children, these reformers believed that their work would not have to be repeated in each generation.”

Despite their popularity, the contests quickly died out. Bender explains their short-lived history by saying that:

The fact that the baby contests emerged with such popularity in 1912 and 1913, only soon to disappear is indicative of the paradox of their creation: they represented the height of a reform faith in their ability to reshape environment and, thereby, to better the race. The contests represented a moment of transformation and transition in emphasis from reform to eugenics. The contests demonstrate the delicate balance of reform. They posited the positive—eugenic—character of much of working class and immigrant racial stock all the while advocating extinction and segregation. In their effort to protect and forge virile manhood, the contests sought to separate the truly unfit from those immigrants whose degeneration could be reversed. Through the judging of babies and, more indirectly, of their mothers, the contests could separate those who were the victims of poor conditions and those who might be truly unfit.¹²⁴

Bender’s analysis shows how progressive reform and Social Darwinism came together in a complicated relationship. On the one hand white reformers posited that degenerate people should be sterilized or even culled. On the other hand these reformers were careful to separate the socially degenerate from those they deemed to be biologically dammed. Bender points out that the decline of the baby contests was in large part due to the fact that the two competing ideologies could no longer co-exist.

By the early 1910s, at the height of the popularity of better baby contests, these dedicated evolutionists were in an increasingly awkward position defending efforts to alter environment at a time when the accepted biology argued that only the mutation of germ plasm or selective breeding could alter heredity. The contests captured this ambivalence. On the one hand, the baby shows cast babies as tabula rasa; for most, the right environment would determine their racial status. On the other hand, the focus on infancy spoke to a growing importance of breeding. For many, the fitness of the babies on display had already been determined. There was little the judges or their reform sponsors could accomplish

¹²⁴ Ibid., 21.

beyond preserving or eliminating the unfit.¹²⁵

One potential reason why eugenicists abandoned the baby contests is because such events implied that social conditioning influenced human development. For those who had a vested interest in the idea that some races were biologically more fit than others, these contests undermined the underlying motive of eugenicists' arguments, which was to preserve white racial purity.

That same year, the playground for African American children at School 103 boasted a 300-child daily attendance record. The playground directors used their time with the children to instill values of morality, respectability, and civility. "When a child shows an inclination not to mix with the others the child is either reprimanded or sent home. Among other things the children are taught Folk dances. Health exercises, numerous games and have a Juvenile orchestra. Hand craft is also taught."¹²⁶ At certain times during the playground season, community members were invited to the playgrounds to witness firsthand the playground activities. Black social reformers used spectacles like the baby contests, education, and athletic competitions, to demonstrate how well the black population responded to programs predicated on the social theory of race progress. It is important that even though white social reformers abandoned spectacles like baby contests, black social reformers continued to employ them as a means of undermining the tenants of scientific racism.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁶ "Calvin Coolidge Wins P.A.L. Baby Contest: Directors Kept Busy at All Playgrounds," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 13 Aug. 1927, 20.

In 1928, Ernest T. Atwell, the director of the Bureau of Colored Work of Recreation Association of America, “urged the Urban League to stress recreation in its 1928 program, at its third annual meeting Wednesday night.” According to Atwell, Baltimore was behind Detroit, Memphis, and several cities in the “far South” in recreational activities. Atwell made a very vivid link between organized play and children’s development when he said, “Playgrounds are cheaper and better than jail.”¹²⁷ He supported positive amusement that was compatible with the “work being done by schools, churches and industrial agencies,” which was “being nullified by what people are doing with their leisure time.” In order to rectify the disparity, John R. Cary, president of the Urban League, declared that the league would appoint a committee to take up this matter.” Atwell also consulted with William N. Jones, who was vice-president of the Urban League, and had been a long time director of the municipal recreational work in Memphis, Tennessee.¹²⁸

At the end of the 1920s, African American religious reform was a common theme taken up by the *Afro-American*. In a letter to the editor, Louis Lindsey took the position that black communities should redirect their finances away from supporting so many churches toward financing public institutions that would greatly impact the lives of community members. Lindsey’s letter was a response to an article by V.T. Calverton, editor of the *Modern Quarterly*, on “Religion and the Negro.” He agreed with Calverton that, “the Negro has been handicapped by religion.” Lindsey criticized African

¹²⁷ “Recreation to be Stressed by Urban League,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 11 Feb. 1928, 18.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Americans for spending “millions and millions of dollars” in churches “and large sums ... paid to preachers.” He took issue with the fact that “People who are not more than able to buy food and clothing take their last dollar and put it into that church.”¹²⁹ Lindsey urged African Americans to spend money on things they *needed*. “We need money in schools, hospitals, homes, and community centers. Our teachers are poorly paid and we have but few hospitals for Negroes, and in some places where there are large churches there are hundreds of homes without baths and are poorly built. In some communities there are no playgrounds for children who are compelled to play in the streets.” Lindsey surmised that, “It is plain to see that the church and religion are not the things to better these conditions.”

About 70 per cent of the poor uneducated colored persons and about 30 per cent of uneducated whites are those who believe that to get on your knees and pray to God and then take a seat and wait will change these conditions. It is not the educated and professional white and colored persons that believe that way.¹³⁰

Lindsey believed that the amount of wealth generated by the black community was enough to resolve many of the social issues associated with city planning and economic discrimination. Unhealthy religious ideas, according to Lindsey distracted people from resolving their own issues. “Therefore, most of the Negroes and a good many whites of this country are handicapped because too much time and money is spent on religion.”¹³¹ Lindsey felt that a better use of both would be to invest in civic needs like job creation, parks, and playgrounds.

¹²⁹ Lindsey, Louis, “Thinks Community Needs Should Be Provided and Not More New Churches,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 31 May 1928, 6.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

In July, the *Afro-American* featured a picture of a desolate concrete square surrounded by several buildings that precluded natural air flow and, at certain times a day, sun light. The caption of the picture read, “In Baltimore They Call This a Playground.”¹³² In the picture, there is no playground equipment. There is only rubble and debris with which the children can play. The site, the schoolyard at Lockerman Elementary School 100, Saratoga and Mount streets—was one of the fourteen playgrounds opened by the city under the direction of the Public Athletic League. “100 centers of play were opened and reserved for white children including a recreation pier—32 park playgrounds and separate playfields for girls and boys.” The facilities created for white children differed greatly from what the city provided for black children. “Twelve other playgrounds for colored kiddies are bare of all equipment like this—not a swing—not a see saw, not a trapeze, parallel bar, slide board, wading pool—Not even a sand box.” The *Afro-American* wrote that, “You can get some idea of what Baltimore thinks of children by this picture.”¹³³

In what appears to be an attempt to generate controversy, the *Afro-American* published an editorial by Ralph Matthews, who questioned black people’s interest in building playgrounds for black youth. He wrote, “Pity the poor little Baltimore children. No, not because they have no equipment on the playgrounds, but because they need equipment to enjoy themselves.” For Matthews, the playground equipment was superfluous because when he was a child, “I can’t recall ever playing on a supervised

¹³² “In Baltimore They Call This a Playground,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 14 July 1928, 1.

¹³³ Ibid.

playground in my life and [if] I am not mistaken I think I had about as much fun as it was possible for a kid to enjoy.”¹³⁴ Matthews criticized the organized play curriculum of the city’s playground, which he called “mechanical.” He preferred spontaneous play, and disliked that which was designed by playground directors and social workers who limited children’s play to rigid rules. He scoffed at the “young woman or man who studied gymnastics and succeeded in kidding the officials into believing that they should be paid good money to show children how to play ring around the rosie.”

Matthews contended that youth play could be accomplished without incurring a cost for the taxpayer. He spoke nostalgically of playing with mud in the backyard instead of the “bleached granulated sand” found in sand pits. He also boasted that he played harder than any child as evidenced by his ability to wear out a pair of trousers. This, he did, using no equipment. Matthews did not object to the use of all playground equipment, however. He conceded that expertly assembled and securely fastened swing sets were an improvement from the very unsecure tire and rope on which he swung. Still he questioned if the swings provided more pleasure than their archaic predecessor. Matthews claimed that for him, play was a rather autonomous affair to which parents paid very little attention. For this reason, he failed to “see why it is so important that a kid of today should be so terribly putout if the Mayor, or the City Council or the Playground League or whoever attends to such things should fail to give him a merry-go-round and the like to play with.” He considered organized play beneficial for the paid supervisor, but he believed it to be a “helluva handicap” for the supervised child “forced to play Blind Man’s Bluff when you want to play Duck on the Rock, because the

¹³⁴ “In Darker Baltimore,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 28 July 1928, 6.

program for that hour calls for Blind Man's Bluff and the supervisor of supervisors might come along and bawl her out."¹³⁵ Matthews also challenged the great number of picnics that the playgrounds sponsored. Growing up, he only remembers having to attend one annual playground, which he considered a waste of time. Furthermore, he criticized organized play for stunting the imagination of the young child, who, left alone, would be forced to develop ingenuity as he thought of ways to entertain her or his self. He also considered organized play an example of how Americans' lives were becoming "too scientific."

No fooling, aren't we trying to make life too darn scientific and [complicated?] We eat by regulation, sleep a stipulated number of hours, our every act is governed by something prescribed by somebody and now we are even monkeying with our children's recreation. The adolescent period is the only breathing spell that an individual has between birth and demise that somebody isn't trying to meddle in one's business why don't we let the kids enjoy it unmolested?¹³⁶

In his own way, Matthews' editorial questioned the playground movement as an effective method of race adjustment.

Matthews' editorial inspired at least one person to write a letter to the editor. Writing under the pseudonym "Justice" a person protested his article by writing that it "Should Not Be Taken Seriously." "Playgrounds," according to the Justice, "Are a Necessity."¹³⁷ Justice saw Matthews' editorial as ill timed, given the current efforts to establish more playgrounds, and "selfish."

The writer may have found playgrounds and supervisors of play unnecessary for himself, but has he ever stopped to consider the hundreds of children in Baltimore

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ "Letter to the Editor," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 11 August 1928, 6.

whose mothers are forced to be away from home all day, often necessitating their children staying in the streets during the mother's absence. I have known of mothers who gave their children a few pennies in the morning to buy some lunch and turned them out 8 o'clock to divide their time between school and street until their turn in the evening. In the summer a supervised playground is a boon to these mothers.¹³⁸

The letter to the editor conveyed a perspective that is significant because it demonstrates how the playground served a communal function that transcended physical culture. Justice interpretation of the playground's relevance to the community lends toward a gendered analysis of the playground movement by denoting the fact that the playground provided free childcare to black families that struggled to make ends meet with and therefore needed both parents to work. Without them, black families, particularly black mothers, would be forced to choose between watching over their children and working to make money to support the family.

In the same issue, the *Afro-American* compared the progress of the playground movement in Baltimore to its counterpart in nearby York, PA. The newspaper reported that, "While all of the children in York, and the white children in Baltimore romp and play in comfortably equipped and adequately supervised play spaces, race children in Baltimore must either swelter in the alleys or limit their play to the confines of sun-backed brick areas where a very small sand bin, possibly with sand in it, is the only sort of "apparatus" in sight."¹³⁹ The *Afro-American* emphasized the fact that the York African American and white playgrounds were equally equipped with an array of enjoyable equipment.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ "Baltimore Behind York, PA. With Playgrounds," *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 11 August 1928, 19.

The playground leaders were well paid and assisted by several staff members. Play leaders “taught woodwork and other arts” and the materials were provided by the city. Another key difference between the playground movement in Baltimore and York was that whites in York helped the city’s black residents. According to the article, white citizens in York “gave a benefit entertainment for the purpose of raising funds with which to buy a fence to enclose the playground.” Additionally, “the Weaver Piano Company donated a piano for the occasion and the Laberta brothers, white, staged an exhibition bout of six rounds. Mrs. Joana Harris, supervisor of all the playgrounds, was an interested spectator.” White children aided in collecting money for the admission fee of 10 cents, and the selling of soft drinks, ice cream and watermelon. They did so, with what the newspaper described as an “energetic spirit.” According to the *Afro-American*, this spirit of progress and interracial coalition building was absent in Baltimore, which the *Afro-American* criticized for its lack of a “comprehensive playground program for its race children.” The playgrounds for black children had “fallen into a woeful state” so bad “that to designate them as playgrounds is little short of a misnomer.” Even sand had proven to be a hardship for playgrounds for black children. According to the *Afro-American*, “an AFRO reporter found children playing in South Baltimore in a pile of sand that brick masons were using for mixing mortar. It was the only sand that they had given them.”¹⁴⁰

In October, Joseph Jackson wrote a letter to the editor that once again situated the playground movement within a conversation of local politics. Jackson rejected local politicians’ belief that African Americans could be swayed to vote for a disingenuous

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

political candidate who supported a repeal to the 18th amendment. They faced so many more pressing matters that impacted the health of their communities. Speaking about black voters political consciousness, Jackson said he believed blacks were too smart to be fooled by this trivial campaign promise, for they knew that “there will be good liquor only for the rich and the poor certainly shall not get much of it.” Jackson argued that “Negroes do not need nor do they want cheap or plentiful liquor. They want employment, better wages and working conditions, better living quarters, playgrounds and parks as well as recreation centers.”¹⁴¹ According to Jackson, one candidate, Turkey Bruce, was not progressive minded. Jackson encouraged blacks to view Turkey’s comments as that of “antebellum Southern gentlemen who would keep the Negro in an abject place.” He saw Bruce’s promise to legalize alcohol as a trivial gesture.

A few months prior to the stock market crash that sent the country into the Great Depression, the Federation of Parent-Teacher Clubs, led by Laura Wheatley, asked the Board of School Commissioners to build a playground at Samuel Coleridge Taylor School, no.122, which was located near Druid Hill Avenue in an area known as “‘lung block’ because of the number of deaths caused by tuberculosis.”¹⁴² Similar to other places in the city, the area known as “lung block” was a dangerous place for children who, without adequate play spaces, were compelled to play in the street. A survey made by Wheatley’s organization found that in 1928, 2 children had been killed while 6 more were seriously injured after being struck by motorists. The proposal was well received.

¹⁴¹ “Letter to the Editor,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 27 October 1928, 6.

¹⁴² “School Board Would End ‘Lung Block,’” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 11 May 1929, 3.

“William L. Rawis, president of the board, stated that committees from the School and Park Boards, the Health Department, Public Improvement commission and the Bureau of Opening of Streets were working on the matter and that the School Board endorses the plan to wipe out the entire lung block for playground purposes.”¹⁴³ Unfortunately, the board only offered to finance a portion of the project because of limited funds.

The *Afro-American* continued its protest of unequal funding of black playgrounds in the article, “Private Athletic League,” which stated that, “The Public Athletic League is a misnomer. It should change its title to Private Athletic League in order to conform to its present program or else change its program to conform to its name.” The newspaper called the P.A.L. a “semi-public” institution that drew “appropriations of \$10,000 from the state, \$36,000 from the city, and \$55,000 from the city park board to foster athletics in public schools on public playgrounds and in the public parks.” It also accused William T. Burdick, “who boasts of his northern ancestry,” for leading the organization to “neglect the Negro as a part of the public. Dr. Burdick’s platform might be expressed: ‘Baltimore is in the South. The South does not believe in a square deal for the Negro. I am here to hold a job, not to buck race problems.’”

Ernest T. Atwell discovered that despite the \$250,000 the P.A.L. spent in excess of its budget, less than \$3,000 was spent on resources for African Americans. Burdick’s allocation of funds for the city’s 300th anniversary revealed how severely he misappropriated funds. The *Afro-American* exposed the fact that, “Dr. Burdick gets \$6,000 a year from the school board to direct athletics in Baltimore schools. The anniversary pageant of white school children was held in the Stadium, on Friday of the

¹⁴³ Ibid.

anniversary week. The pageant of colored school children—though none was actually held—was proposed to be held at Druid Hill park on Monday of the week following the anniversary celebration.”¹⁴⁴ Burdick also showed his indifference by providing for African American youth only one gymnasium and one playground.

The P.A.L. under Burdick’s leadership made no provisions for the “recreation of colored girls.” Burdick also employed only one black staff worker. According to a bi-racial committee organized to investigate the conditions of black playgrounds, the black playground should have been supervised by an African American playground director who oversaw 5 staff members. The *Afro-American* juxtaposed this statistic with Detroit, Michigan which “has ten colored year-round playground workers” comprised of both men and women. The newspaper called attention to the fact that Burdick had recently asked the city for an increase to his operational budget. *The Afro-American* confidently asserted, however, that it strongly doubted the city would “perpetuate the program of this PRIVATE Athletic League.” The newspaper doubted that the city would allocate \$10,000 of the taxpayers’ money to fund a project “when only some of the taxpayers may benefit from it.” The *Afro-American* urged the mayor to “hold up the appropriation for the league until he can hear the report of the bi-racial committee” that investigated the ramifications of Burdick’s unequal distribution of playground funds. The *Afro-American* also urged Burdick “to take a good look at the heart of the city of Baltimore. Perhaps he’ll find out that the city is eager to do much more for colored boys and girls than he has given it credit for.”

¹⁴⁴ “Private Athletic League,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore) 19 October 1929, 6.

Conclusion

The *Afro-American's* coverage of the first 15 years of the black playground movement reveals that black communities across the country advocated for public play spaces as fervently as they pushed for other social and civic needs. For this reason, scholars of black migration and community development should assess the significance of the African American playground movement within the context of black self-help and black institution building. The African American playground movement is an incredible example of African Americans' struggle for civic resources because their justifications for the inclusion of public play spaces encompassed a broad range of issues. I will emphasize two: First, playgrounds provided free childcare, which made it possible for African American migrant mothers to go to work—often times looking after white children—without fear that their own children were out roaming the city streets. Another interesting justification for black playgrounds articulated in the pages of the *Afro-American* was that the playground contributed to the promotion of black physical culture. Although coverage of black physical culture is not totally uncommon in the field of African American history, there are very few attempts to link black physical culture to early twentieth century race adjustment ideals. It is my hope that the above discussion will help to situate black physical culture as a topic of great import within the context of early twentieth century black community formation and struggles for self-determination.

EPILOGUE

Looking back on my initial studies of African Americans in sport, I am amazed by how little I knew. My ignorance was not for a lack of reading. But there was a lack of awareness of context found within most of the texts I consulted, and it is that lack of awareness that precluded further understanding. Those who study blacks in sport are familiar with the often-quoted excerpt taken from Michael R. Heintze's *Private Black Colleges in Texas*, which reads:

In 1901, Wiley College proudly announced:
The athletic sports are not only allowed, but encouraged. It is thought that the best education is that which develops a strong, robust body as well as other parts of the human makeup.¹

This quote has been used several times to illustrate that African Americans' relationship with sport reaches back several generations. At this point in my studies, the most interesting thing about this quote is not related to content. By now, even the reader of this dissertation is aware that most black colleges focused on athletics. What is astonishing to me, is that this quote has appeared in multiple sources and, in none of those sources, excepting this one, do the authors provide the reader with enough context to appreciate *why* Wiley thought athletics was important to its educational goals. Even Heintze features the discussion of athletics within the chapter analyzing student life, which tends to trivialize the importance of the subject.

This dissertation shows that athletic programs at black colleges were anything but trivial. In fact, considering the scarce resources available to black colleges, it is fair to assert that, athletic programs at black colleges were inextricably linked to the educational

¹ Michael R. Heintze, *Private Black Colleges in Texas, 1865—1954* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1985), 171.

goals of the institution. How else could institutions justify having them? In part one of this dissertation I showed that black physical culture proponents advocated for the creation of athletic programs, clubs, and events in direct response to research findings of black social scientists. Kelly Miller and W.E.B. Du Bois were among a small and dedicated group of black progressives who researched and analyzed data related to black urban living and found that, health statistics, crime reports, and literacy and employment rates all spelled blacks' eventual demise unless the negative consequences this data represented could be successfully countered. Although neither man was known for having cared much for athletics, both Miller and Du Bois specifically identified athletic training for its remediating qualities.

It deserves restating that early black efforts to create athletics programs and leagues have been depicted in the historical record as having been inadequate, primitive, or poorly organized. One asks: Inadequate or poorly organized compared to what? The white athletic institutions? Such comparisons are wholly absent from this dissertation. As a student of Afro-American Studies I was taught not to compare black and white institutions, unless doing so served to illuminate something meaningful about either or both groups. Besides, critical examination reveals that there is not much between the two groups to compare. White society, which was stratified, created athletic opportunities for the economically elite and middle class. Poor whites were generally barred from institutionalized training. African America, however, still operated within something akin to a caste system in early twentieth century, which means that black physical culture initiatives were much more accessible to the majority of the community's members.

There is also a distinct difference in the motivations leading to the creation of black vs. white physical culture. The latter was a means of reaffirming elite members of society. My dissertation shows that black physical culture, however, addressed community-centered issues related to poor health, poor self-confidence, inadequate childcare, as well as an unhealthy relationship between the mind and the body. This, I think, helps us to understand the competing perceptions of women's athletics found within black vs. white physical culture programs. I do not mean to suggest that the black physical culture movement was without chauvinism. In some ways it was very chauvinistic. But I do think that more inclusive perceptions of black women as communal members are responsible for the inclusion of black women as contributors to black physical culture activities. There is a need for much more research on this topic. As I illustrate in chapter 2, black women were at the center of the race's physical culture movement, often occupying leadership positions in both co-educational and women-led efforts.

Chapter 2 also shows how significant physical culture was to ideas concerning race education and leadership. One infers from black physical culture proponents that good health and proper instruction were linked. "Athletics" is something one did in school or at the community center. The "athlete" was one who was also a good student and a good citizen. This was the case until the late 1920s, when commercial interests encouraged the recruitment of less educated, but more highly skilled "athletes" who could ensure victory. When this happened, black physical culture proponents lamented their loss of influence and struggled to regain control. Though physical culture as an instrument for educational and civility enrichment lost prominence, it was never

completely suppressed. This is evidenced by the fact that one of its greatest advocates, Edwin B. Henderson, continued to spread ideas about physical culture as means of achieving other goals into the 1970s.

Part 2 of this dissertation situates the campaign for the erection of black playgrounds within the intellectual scope of race as adjustment. The writers of the *Afro-American* did a masterful job of illustrating how closely linked the playground movement was to ideas that seemed more relevant to race progress. I begin my discussion by framing the *Afro*'s definition of "race adjustment" as ideologically located somewhere between conservative and radical civil rights strategies. I argue that Booker T. Washington's relationship with the newspaper's owner, John Murphy is largely responsible for this. The *Afro-American* held this position until Washington died in 1915. Washington's death in 1915, however, is not the only reason why the *Afro* became more radical. Frustration with declining race relations in the 1910s, which culminated in "Red Summer" in 1919 left African Americans who may otherwise have identified with accommodationism searching for answers. Enter Marcus Garvey and the U.N.I.A. I show at the end of chapter 3 how writers in the *Afro* agreed with Garvey's ideas, even though *Afro* eventually rescinded its support for Garvey the man.

In chapter 4 I accomplish two tasks. First, I discuss the column "Athletic Notes," written by W.H.J. Beckett, which defined the playground movement's objective in light of the *Afro*'s race adjustment aims. I illustrate how African Americans requested that more playgrounds be built in the black community. Whereas native born whites and European immigrant communities may have viewed playground supporters with suspicion, black people became playground advocates because they saw how useful the

playground for stimulating youth development and providing inexpensive and reliable childcare. My second task in writing this chapter is to show how the playground was every bit as much a part of the *Afro's* platform for race advancement as was anything else. This is significant because sports writers and non-sports writers alike generally attempt to frame black sport institutions outside the larger cultural context of black America. This is a mistake, which only serves to undermine black playground advocates' commitment to the total development of the black community.

As extensive as my research is, this is by no means an exhaustive study. For example, I only look at the emergence of physical culture in Washington, Baltimore, and Virginia. Work is still needed that illuminates the emergence of black physical culture initiatives in the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Black community institution building in the trans-Mississippi River states consisting of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri also warrant investigation. Another topic that deserves investigation is the complex motivations black educators for introducing sport into their curricula. We have established that sport was no trivial matter. But it is still unclear if all black schools endorsed the physical culture movement's ideals. Might there have been some black school administrators who saw sport as entertainment?

Though this project ends in 1930, it has implications for understanding black athletic participation throughout the twentieth century. That said, I think it would be a worthwhile study to extend the investigations of black school, college, and community athletic institutions up to the 1960s and 1970s to see how administrators will respond to white schools' recruitment of black student athletes who would have gone to a black

school. At what point did black school administrators realize that desegregation threatened their schools' athletic success? A related question asks how did recruiting black student athletes in sports like basketball, baseball, and football change when opportunities for blacks to play professionally expanded? Finally, book length biographies should be devoted to understanding the lives and contributions of black physical educators and coaches like Eddie Hurt, the head football coach, basketball coach, and track coach at Morgan State College, Sylvester Hall, the football coach at Cardozo High School in Washington, D.C., and Jake Gaither, the highly successful football coach at Florida A&M. Black female physical educators and coaches also deserve further study. Despite their importance, few of their names come readily to mind. Nevertheless, their contributions to black physical culture during the interwar period and beyond deserve attention.

This list of topics not covered in this dissertation is encouraging because it gives me an outline for future research in a topic in which I am very much interested. I hope that other scholars will begin to appreciate the significance of these topics and will help me development a body of material reflective of the size and scope of this very important topic.

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