

CHARLESTON, 1919-1920 The Final Battle in the Emergence of the South's Urban African American Teaching Corps

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Septima Clark, a Highlander School-trained activist prominent during the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, recalls in her autobiography the frustration of having to leave her family in Charleston in 1916 for a teaching job on nearby St. Johns Island because, although a graduate of the local black Normal school, she could not gain a teaching position in her hometown.¹ Mamie Garvin Fields went to school in Charleston in the 1890s and remembers that her teachers tried to “drill into us . . . the Rebel tradition.” Students were frequently required to sing “ ‘Dixie,’ the whole school in unison. . . . Then they were fond of songs like ‘Swanee River,’ ‘My Old Kentucky Home,’ ‘Massa’s in de Col’ Col’ Groun’ . This is what they wanted to instill in us.”² The situation that both Clark and Fields recalled later in life was one of the most anomalous in the urban South during the early twentieth century: white teachers in Charleston, South Carolina, teaching in African American schools as a matter of adamant school board policy.

The circumstances in Charleston were particularly extraordinary because that city represented the last holdout in a drive urban African American communities were determined to win when not much else was winnable. Indeed, although marred by several problems of interpretation (including the erroneous implications of its title), Howard Rabinowitz’s pathbreaking article, “Half a Loaf: The Shift from White to Black Teachers in the Negro Schools of the Urban South,” is essentially correct in its conclusion that by the 1890s, African American public schools in the South were virtually wholly staffed by African Americans. Moreover, as the Atlanta *Constitution* put it in an 1887 article concerning the efforts in that city, “the white people are not trying to force colored teachers upon them [African Americans], for it is their own motion and desire that the movement to put colored teachers in . . . originated.”³

In some cities, the changeover—although not always from a completely all-white staff, as the presence of African Americans within the freedmen’s aid societies and as independent teachers in the South’s emerging systems in the early to mid-1870s has often been ignored—came fairly early. For example,

Memphis by 1875 had initiated an all-black teaching staff “from principal down,” as one petition had requested.⁴ Sometimes, the struggle involved complex political machinations, as in Virginia in the early 1880s. In this case, the insurgent Readjusters Party rewarded African Americans in Richmond for their political support by ousting the entire Richmond School Board and replacing it with members, including two African Americans, more receptive to placing black teachers in all four black schools citywide, not solely in the old, deteriorating Navy Hill facility. In 1883, the changes were made, and although black principals were subsequently removed when conservative Democrats regained office the next year—Richmond would not have an African American school principal again until 1933—the black classroom teachers remained, and several additional black teachers were added.⁵ In Atlanta, the process transpired over the course of the 1880s (and even can be traced back to an 1873-1874 petition), but by the 1887-1888 school year, black teachers were hired for the Summer Hill school, the last school building with black pupils but white teachers. The conversion was contentious to the end, with one school board member voting, as he put it, “Against the niggers!” the day the African American teachers for the Summer Hill school were formally hired.⁶

Throughout these struggles, the manifest and latent power of African American voting strength was a significant factor. As the so-called Redeemer governments returned to state power in the 1870s, they often battled with the African American electorate over their attempts to curtail spending on public education, but African Americans were savvy enough to realize that they might negotiate with the Redeemers to further particular aspects of the black political agenda, specifically the employment of black teachers in black schools. In this regard, the movement for African American teachers saw black communities form temporary political blocs with unexpected partners, such as conservative Democrats in Memphis and the Readjusters in Richmond.⁷

By the turn of the century, three decades of widespread African American demands for black teachers throughout the urban South had been almost uniformly successful: black public school teachers exclusively provided classroom instruction for black schoolchildren in virtually every southern city except Baltimore, New Orleans, and Charleston. The drive for black teachers was a singularly urban phenomena; there had been no comparable movement in rural regions since few white teachers had been able to establish a stable institutional presence outside of the larger cities of the South, and the few exceptions were almost entirely in private not public schools. The 1866-1870 Semi-Annual Freedmen’s Bureau reports by John Alvord, general superintendent of schools for the Bureau, consistently mentioned that the “interior” sections of southern states were particularly inhospitable to northern white missionary teachers, and the aid societies had disproportionately assigned their African American teachers to rural country schools.⁸ In Lynchburg, Virginia, as in Richmond and perhaps in a few other southern cities in the late nineteenth century, white teachers were in the high schools only, although in

most instances outside of Richmond the elementary school principals were black. (African American teachers did not replace white teachers in Richmond's Armstrong High School until 1915.)⁹ Baltimore in 1889 hired twelve black teachers for Colored Primary School No. 9, the first African American teachers in the city system. By 1907, all of Baltimore black primary schools were staffed by African Americans.¹⁰

In New Orleans, and especially in Charleston, the issue lingered into the 1910-1920 decade and became increasingly contentious. In New Orleans in 1906, the African American community had to engage in a fight similar to that raised by a group called the Powhatan Club in Richmond in the 1890s: the suggested replacement of all black teachers in the system by whites. Jobs and racial control were the central issues articulated by disgruntled whites. Although in New Orleans the issue was raised by two members of the school board rather than by private citizens as in Richmond, it was similarly summarily defeated. In 1912, black protest in New Orleans mounted. The particular cause was the placement of 24 young white women, all recent Normal school graduates, in the black schools. That school year, 1912-1913, four ostensibly African American schools had white teachers; including the new placements, whites totaled 31 of the 156 teachers in black schools. This notable increase generated considerable black community displeasure, which evidently had its intended effect: two of the schools with white faculties were switched to black teachers in 1913-1914, one in 1915-1916, and the last in 1916-1917.¹¹

In Charleston, South Carolina, the racist determination to keep white teachers in and black teachers out of black schools reached epic proportions. Particularly galling in the Charleston situation was both the long-standing tradition of education and school-going within the city's notoriously haughty African American community and also the presence of Avery Normal Institute, a well-regarded teacher-training facility founded in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War by the American Missionary Association and maintained by that organization through the 1940s. Also more than a little disturbing was the stance of Charleston's school officials, who literally fought the state of South Carolina for almost three decades to keep white teachers in place.¹²

Through the turn of the century, the city of Charleston maintained only two schools for African American youth: the Morris Street School, opened in 1867 and renamed Simonton in 1891, and the Shaw Memorial School, founded by the New England Freedmen's Aid Society (with funds from black soldiers) to commemorate the memory of Robert Gould Shaw, the young white colonel of the legendary 54th Massachusetts Regiment, who was killed with his African American comrades in the assault on Ft. Wagner, in Charleston harbor, in July 1863. In April 1874, with the dissolution of the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, the trustees of the Shaw Memorial Fund transferred the title of the building and grounds to the City Board of School Commissioners, a not uncommon practice in the early 1870s as the Freedmen's Bureau and many of

the aid societies either faded from the southern scene or substantially reduced their elementary school load. At first, the property was leased to the school board for ten years at one dollar per year, but in 1883, the lease was extended for ninety-nine years, with certain conditions, established earlier, remaining in force: that “the school house should be used for the education of colored children only,” that it would retain the name Shaw Memorial, and that “Negro teachers be used.” There were seven African American women among the ten teachers at Shaw Memorial at the time of the city’s first involvement in 1875. By 1900, only Sallie O. Cruikshank, Avery class of 1874, who started teaching at Shaw in 1875, and Ester F. Alston, also an Avery graduate, remained—the only two black teachers in the city’s public schools. Their presence was not by the choice of the Charleston School Commissioners.¹³

Starting in 1885, the year after completion of the final transfer of the Shaw school to city authorities, and continuing through the turn of the century, scattered protests challenged the exclusion of African American teachers from the African American schools. In 1885, ministers of five black churches in Charleston initiated what turned out to be an almost thirty-year protest when, certainly referring to Avery graduates, they declared, “It does not seem fair that after they have qualified themselves to become capable teachers, they should be shut out from the opportunity of instructing their own people.” More concerted efforts were undertaken in 1895 when black state representative Thomas E. Miller, the leading African American politician in the state and a central figure in the black teacher drive, submitted a bill to the South Carolina legislature to place control of black schools with black officials. Certainly, this proposal raised weightier issues than racial staffing patterns, but it was in line with African American autonomy demands and also a certain form of African American argumentation of the period that pushed white segregationists to fulfill completely the logic of their separation schemes. Although the proposed legislation failed to be enacted, in March 1896 another group of black ministers from Charleston traveled to the state capital in Columbia to lobby on behalf of Miller’s proposal and on behalf of the specific issue of African American teachers. In May 1899, representatives of the Negro Cooperative and Protective Union in Charleston submitted a petition to the city council deploring taxation without representation, adding that young, prospective black teachers should not have to leave the city to practice their craft and serve their people. On all counts, the council was unmoved.¹⁴

While little noteworthy activity transpired during the 1900-1910 decade, the issue of black teachers for black schools resurfaced in 1912, and over the next decade the topic was frequently discussed by the city school board. The following summaries, drawn from the Minute Books of the Charleston School Commissioners, illuminate the evolving issues. (Note, too, that in 1919, when the dispute came to its climax, there were three black schools in Charleston; two elementary schools, Shaw Memorial and Simonton; and one grammar school, the Charleston Colored Industrial School, opened in 1911, renamed

Burke Industrial School in 1920. With the exception of Shaw, the other African American schools were named after white former school commissioners.)

February 7, 1912: A. Burnett Rhett, Assistant Superintendent and principal of Memminger High School (the all-girl's secondary school that served as a Normal school for young white women) discusses "Adverse Legislation." Rhett informs the Board that Governor Blease has "deemed it proper" to protest against the employment of white teachers in colored schools. A bill was introduced to this effect in the state legislature. (He did not add, since several Board members likely would have known, that former Governor Tillman had proposed similar legislation in 1890.) Rhett adds that he has already gone to Columbia to "interview" the legislator who introduced the bill and ultimately an unfavorable report on the proposed legislation was made. No state-level action was taken and "probably it will die." Rhett closes his report stating, "We are prepared to do all we can to prevent its passage."¹⁵

June 4, 1913: The topic of transferring teachers from the colored schools to the white schools is discussed. Rhett, now superintendent of Charleston schools (he would continue as superintendent until 1946, combined with the principalship of Memminger until 1934), states that the "theory upon which the schools have been working is that young, inexperienced teachers should serve their apprenticeship at the Colored Schools, and that in case of a vacancy in the White Schools, preference should be given for this position to a teacher who has served her time in one of the Colored schools."¹⁶

February 6, 1914: A letter from State Senator Huger Sinkler to Board Commissioner Augustine Smythe, marked "Personal," is appended to the minutes of this meeting. In the letter Sinkler states that "I have been working industriously on Fortner Bill [proposed state legislation that would have made it a criminal offense for whites to teach in a black school] and have the situation well in hand. In my opinion the less agitation in Charleston about the Bill the better for its defeat."¹⁷ (Although the lower house of the state's General Assembly passed the Fortner Bill, it was never approved by the full legislature. As one member of the Charleston County delegation, quoted in *The State*, a Columbia newspaper, explained his opposition to the Fortner Bill: "It has been found necessary for the preservation of communities where negroes outnumber the whites to teach the negroes from the very beginning that they are inferior to whites. . . . If we should turn the teaching of negroes over to Yankee-educated negroes [referring to Avery Normal], nobody could predict the result.")¹⁸

April 5, 1916: A delegation of Colored Ministers from the Inter-Denominational Union appears before the Board and presents a petition with four points, including (a) to extend the course of study at the Shaw and Simonton schools through the sixth grade, since the current fourth grade level of preparation was "inadequate for the demands of good citizenship"; and (b) that "Negro teachers be employed in the public school of this city as soon as practicable." Spokesperson Rev. N.W. Greene, chairman of the group, asks for a conference on these issues. Though the board replies they intend to do "whatever" they can "at the earliest possible moment," no follow-up meeting is held.¹⁹

April 3, 1918: In reaction to the nationwide scarcity of teachers as a result of the U.S. entry in World War I, the Board discusses looking in to new sources for the supply of teachers. At present, as in years past, practically all teachers in the city

were graduates of Memminger. "In considering any scheme," Superintendent Rhett comments, "of improving the teaching force, we ultimately come back to the question of the white teachers in the negro schools. Teachers from other southern states will not teach in a negro school." The dilemma from the Board's perspective is that if teachers from outside of Charleston came to teach in the city, only Memminger teachers would teach in the colored schools, and few would then take the Normal course if the possibility of moving into the white schools was precluded. "The system of white teachers in the Colored Schools has as we all know certain advantages of first-rate importance."²⁰ (Though this provocative statement was not explained at this meeting, at a 1925 Board meeting Superintendent Rhett elaborated: "I have always been of the opinion that the reason why there was so little race friction in Charleston was that the colored children from a very early age were under the control and influence of white principals and teachers and were taught to look up to and respect white people.")²¹ No action is taken on this matter, though the unwillingness of prospective white teachers from outside of Charleston to teach in the city's black schools was confirmed at the June 5 meeting.²²

January 9, 1919: A special meeting is held regarding a "Petition of the Colored Citizens," calling for colored teachers. The petition was initially presented at the December 4, 1918 Board meeting, but discussion was deferred. The petition was read, and each of five members of the delegation argued in support. In the executive session that followed the public meeting, the Commissioners went on record as indicating that given a pending bond issue for school system improvements, "the Board is not in a position at present to change personnel," but afterward, the Board "hopes to give favorable consideration to this petition."²³

January 18, 1919: A special session is called to consider a suggested course of action "in connection with the movement for colored teachers in colored schools." The Board orders its vice-chairman and Superintendent Rhett to "appear before the proper authorities [in Columbia] whenever circumstances warrant" in order to *oppose* legislation proposed by the colored petitioners at the January 9 meeting.²⁴

February 3, 1919: A special meeting is called, with State Senator A. R. Young present by invitation. The purpose of the meeting is to consider "what further course should be pursued" with regard to proposed legislation [the Miller Bill] banning white teachers in Charleston's colored schools. The following resolution is adopted and a certified copy is given to Senator Young and also enclosed in a letter sent to two state officials: "Resolved: that on or before the Scholastic Year commencing September 1, 1920, that no white teachers shall be employed in the public schools in the city of Charleston to teach negro pupils, but that negro teachers will be employed to teach the negro pupils."²⁵

From the school's board's perspective, this resolution, clearly indicating defeat, meant that additional planning had to be undertaken to address the racial and bureaucratic politics of the implementation of black teaching staffs. A few more summaries from the Minute Books indicate the school board's perspectives on the considerations involved:

March 5, 1919: Planning is discussed to rush the construction of new school for white children to be staffed by white teachers transferred from the colored

schools. Also, Superintendent Rhett announces that he has asked the current principals of each of the three colored schools to send him a list of their six best teachers in order to establish eligibility rankings for transfers to white schools as vacancies occur. Provisions for securing colored teachers are also discussed, including the question of whether they will be appointed via interviews or through competitive exams. (Both criteria are eventually used.)²⁶

April 21, 1919: Superintendent Rhett recommends turning one of the colored schools over to colored teachers the upcoming fall term, September 1919, giving authorities an opportunity to see how things worked out in one school before all colored schools were placed under the new plan. He also announces that through an increase in the number of classes for white students and the ordinary number of resignations, the system should be able to take care of most of the teachers now employed in the colored schools: "Any white teachers in the particular school building to be turned over to the colored teachers who are not chosen [the best white teachers in the colored schools would be transferred to white schools first] will be transferred to vacancies created in the other two colored schools." (According to the 1919 *Yearbook* for the City of Charleston, during the school year ending June 30, 1919, there were 15 teachers at the Shaw School, 17 at Simonton, and 16 at Colored Industrial.)²⁷

May 7, 1919: The superintendent reports on several items concerning the arrangements for the colored schools. Of particular importance are, first, Rhett's recommendation to devise a salary scale for Negro teachers at 2/3 of the white salary schedule. The recommendation is based on his finding that southern cities customarily maintained an "entirely different" salary schedule for Negro teachers, with the range from 50-75% of the salaries for white teachers. Second, Rhett announces that none of the current white principals were willing to continue in their position with a colored teaching staff, although one would agree to do so provided he was given definite assurances that the following year he would be made supervisor of the colored schools or given the principalship of a white school. The Board decides to offer the principalship to this individual, Edward Carroll, following the superintendent's recommendation of future considerations. Carroll is a former principal at Shaw and has been an employee of the Charleston school system since 1881.²⁸

October 1, 1919: The Shaw School opened with a complete corps of Negro teachers and with Carroll as principal. Attendance is so large that another teacher is said to be absolutely necessary. (Attendance at Shaw was 861 in 1918; as of October 1, 1919 it was 1,141. According to the *City of Charleston Yearbook*, 17 Negro women teachers were employed in the system as of June 30, 1920, meaning that 15 African-American women were newly hired, joining the 2 African-American women already on the staff.) After other transfers from the colored schools over the summer, 6-7 white teachers formerly at Shaw were reported to be divided between Simonton and the Colored Industrial School.²⁹

While this recapitulation of the school board minutes demonstrates the group's curious blend of racist and bureaucratic thinking, struggling first to maintain the status quo and then to adapt to new conditions, it does not tell the story of the impressive mobilization of the black community around the demand for African American teachers, especially in the latter years of the 1910-1920 decade.

After the 1916 petition from the ministers representing the Interdenominational Union had been ignored for two years, the black community, now represented in part by a new and fast-growing chapter of the NAACP, began to move forward in a more concerted manner. Paralleling the striking growth in national membership of the NAACP during the later 1910s, the local Charleston chapter grew from twenty-nine to more than two hundred members between 1917 and 1919. The aging but still influential black politician Thomas E. Miller was recruited to the new campaign, as were, of course, local ministers.³⁰

Exasperated by the school commissioners' stalling tactics at the January 9, 1919, special meeting, by January 18 the black delegation had petitioned the state superintendent of education, the state legislature, and the governor requesting "relief from the uncalled for, unnecessary, unusual, abnormal conditions that surround the management, instruction, and teaching of the children of the aforesaid [Negro] race in the public schools of the city of Charleston." While the petition justified the change at least in part by the need for "reciprocity in love, affection, and sympathy between teacher and pupil," the committee knew that a mere pedagogical appeal would not move a hard-hearted southern state legislature. Rather, they culminated the petition in language that white segregationists could understand, specifically requesting that the state's Civil Code be amended such that "it shall be unlawful for a person of the white race to teach in the free public schools of South Carolina provided and set aside for the children of the Negro race." Although in its dispute with W.E.B. DuBois in the 1930s the NAACP national office would claim that the association had a spotless record opposing segregation, in this instance the local Charleston NAACP branch, assisted by the Columbia branch, unabashedly pushed for a segregation measure; African American artist Edwin A. Harleston, a founding member and president of the Charleston NAACP, was one of four African Americans along with Miller mentioned by name in the petition to the state. This drastic strategy must have signaled to all concerned the extent of the community's resolve. Miller, sent to Columbia by the black steering committee to lobby for the bill, solicited an up-country representative to introduce legislation to this effect; a hearing on the proposed measure was quickly scheduled before the House Committee on Education.³¹

As the school board minutes indicate, Superintendent Rhett and the board's vice-chairman went to Columbia to fight the bill. In addition to their own lobbying campaign, an ally, a low-country politician, began to spread the rumor that the petition did not represent the views of African Americans in Charleston generally but rather only the wishes of the city's uppity "mulattos." A similarly divisive tactic had been effective in the 1890s, playing on well-known intraracial divisions in the city's African American community around skin complexion and color consciousness. In this instance, however, the ploy backfired. In her autobiography, *Echo in My Soul*, Septima Clark recalls that

enraged some of the white citizens of Charleston and they shouted for all to hear that mulattoes—children of mixed blood—were the only ones who wanted Negro teachers for their children. The cooks and laundresses, they declared, didn't want their children to be taught by Negro teachers.

Continues Clark, "That's when I got into the fight. I volunteered to seek signatures and started visiting the grassroots people."³²

Mass meetings and a citywide signature drive energized the African American community. Within a fairly short time, sixteen mass meetings were called throughout the city, and canvassers obtained signatures from the heads of close to five-thousand households, representing almost 23,000 individuals, approximately two-thirds of Charleston's African American population. A typed, certified copy of the names was sent to Columbia and presented to the House Committee on Education at what the NAACP's *Crisis* understatedly called an "interesting" joint debate. The Charleston black delegation with Miller as spokesperson was given thirty minutes to present their case, as were the Charleston School Commissioners, who had three members present and Senator A.R. Young serving as their champion. The outcome of the debate was made clear in a January 31, 1919, letter from R.A. Meares, the state representative whom Miller solicited to propose the legislation, to Senator Young:

I am authorized by Thomas Miller, chairman of delegation of Negro petitioners from the city of Charleston . . . to say: that he agrees, in their behalf, to deferring action on the bill till the next session . . . for the purpose of your effecting an understanding on the part of the city board of school trustees . . . to provide the relief therein specified one year after the current scholastic year.

Three days later, Rhett sent the certified copy of the board's capitulation to the state legislature.

In September 1919, Shaw was staffed with African American teachers, and by September 1920, Simonton and Colored Industrial had black teachers as well. That school year, 1920-1921, the number of African American teachers in the Charleston public school increased to fifty-four women and one man, with, in addition, three black principals and two black vice principals. In June 1920, prior to the changeover at the latter two schools, Carroll was made supervisor of all colored schools, fulfilling his deal with Superintendent Rhett. As the board minutes opined, "The position which he [Carroll] has held has been necessarily a disagreeable and difficult one." For Rhett, ominously, the appointment was necessary to show "[African American] teachers and pupils that the white people still have an interest in the schools and an authority over the schools, which they are prepared to exercise." Carroll's office was placed at the Simonton School on a separate floor from that of the school's African American principal. All of the white men approached to accept principalships at the black schools had declined. Carroll remained as supervisor of colored schools until his death, in his office at Simonton, in 1925. He was replaced by

another white supervisor who served until 1944, at which time an African American supervisor was hired. With the opening of Buist Elementary in 1921, the number of African American teachers increased to sixty-nine, with four black principals. The first black Parent-Teacher Association in memory was organized at the Colored Industrial School in December 1920.³³

The drive for African American teachers in the African American schools of Charleston not only completed the emergence of the black public school teaching corps in the urban South, it exemplified in many ways a number of the themes and issues raised during the course of this sixty-year process. For example, as in the Charleston case, African American petitions and protests from the early emancipation period onward frequently mentioned black teachers' ability, and white teachers' inability, to enter into "sympathy" with black schoolchildren that "no one can enter so fully into the sympathy of the negro's condition as the negro himself."³⁴ This type of argument had several offshoots. On one hand, the insensitivity, or downright hostility, of white teachers was highlighted. A 1921 article in the *Crisis*, commenting on the situation in Charleston, said that the objection to white teachers had not been "because of their race." Too often, the article charged, the teachers were "not simply white" but rather "'southern' whites," who "believed in the inevitable inferiority of all Negroes, in the 'supremacy' of the white race, in the absence of all social contact between teacher and taught. . . ."³⁵

Direct evidence supporting this accusation can be drawn from the autobiography of Mamie Garvin Fields, mentioned earlier. Born in Charleston in 1888, Fields attended the Shaw School at age six, starting in the third grade, "that way I escaped the first two grades, which were crowded, crowded, crowded." Fields remembered Sally Cruikshank and Essie Alston as the only two African American teachers in the school and had especially fond memories of Cruikshank, who was later her sixth-grade teacher. Fields' memories of the white teachers at Shaw were mixed, however, recalling the few northerners in a much better light than others:

You could tell these northern teachers from our Charlestonians. For one thing, those from the North never punished us like the southerners did, the cane for this and the cane for that. Those from the South were always beating the children.

Fields had particularly unpleasant memories about one teacher from an "aristocratic" white family:

[Miss] Dessisseaux was a Rebel, a pure Rebel! Her job was to teach little children, but it seemed that she couldn't stand the little Black children that she had to teach. She always walked with an old-time parasol, rain or shine, and she used that parasol to make sure you didn't come too near her. If you wanted to say anything to her, she would say, "Come!" and stretch out her arm with the parasol in her hand. When you reached the end of the parasol, which was at the end of her arm, then she would say, "Halt! Right there! Now, what do you want?" Rough,

like that. . . . You had to talk to her from that distance, from out there. I can see her now, stiff, very frail, tall, frowning . . . at the Black children she had to teach.³⁶

Other examples cited by African American protestors follow the same pattern, such as white teachers in Nashville in the early 1880s who were said to have told their black pupils not to acknowledge them in public. An 1883 editorial in the Richmond *Dispatch* did little to stem African Americans' worries, asserting that there was nothing wrong with white teachers in the black schools since "the white teachers occupied the relation of master and mistress to the negro people."³⁷

Intraracial compassion, empathy, and understanding as criteria for effective teachers also included beliefs regarding, on one hand, race-based pedagogical techniques that only black teachers could employ, and, second, more often mentioned, African American teachers serving as role models—"the living text-book"—and thus providing encouragement for black students, presenting them with "lofty ideals." African American teachers were said to be able to foster new ambitions and aspirations while enhancing both attendance and motivation: "He [the student] is shown the highest and best in life and assured that he can obtain them as well as anybody else if he will only persist."³⁸

Another common feature of this campaign was the forceful affirmation of the availability of qualified African American teaching candidates. By the mid- to late-1870s and thereafter, graduates of black colleges, universities, and Normal schools formed a small but steady stream of aspiring young African Americans, increasingly women, seeking to enter the teaching profession.³⁹ Although the campaign for black teachers in black schools should not be diminished by characterizing it as merely a drive for jobs, the frustration over the refusal to place these individuals in the public schools, denying them employment as individuals, and, as the Charleston ministers mentioned in 1885, shutting them out "from the opportunity of instructing their own people" amplified African American determination. Again, these were distinctive features of the black political agenda in the urban South from Reconstruction onward since that was where many institutions of black higher education were located, where sizable black populations could sustain these often private institutions (with the exception of a few public high schools), and where a growing black middle class sought more prestigious forms of employment, particularly around social welfare issues involving the professionalization of self-help and racial uplift.

The interpretation of the drive for black teachers with regard to integration/segregation controversies can be approached at several levels. Certainly, the move by the Charleston African American delegation to request segregation legislation was an extreme tactic, but African American petitions and protests frequently referred to the rigidity of white demands for school segregation. An 1873 Memphis protest meeting, for example,

Resolved: that in view of the fact that we are prescribed by law to separate schools for our children upon the presumption of "inferiority," we respectfully ask that we have the benefit in full, and that every teacher from principal down be selected from the prescribed class.⁴⁰

Said another petition to an unidentified school board in Virginia in 1875,

We respectfully claim that if our children must be in separate schools, known and designated as Colored schools, then they should have colored teachers. If the commingling, and educational intercourse of colored and white pupils is contaminating, then why is not such with colored pupils and white teachers contaminating?⁴¹

Given the escalating calls among whites for an expansion and extension of segregation in all forms in the so-called "New South" of the 1880s, these types of rhetorical ploys were crafted for maximum appeal, whatever the true beliefs behind them. They also exploited the dilemma of segregation: whether separation was advocated as a tool of open and fragrant repression or whether it was demanded for reasons of race purity and integrity, in practice, it meant that whites lost some degree of oversight over African Americans. For some white southerners—racial paternalists, as Fredrickson has labeled them—this dilemma was particularly problematic. In this sense, then, African American arguments for black teachers that played off the "logic" of segregation can be seen as a crafty challenge to segregationists, no matter how "respectfully" requested. Implicitly underlying these arguments was a provocative dare to "put your money where your mouth is," a taunt that "if you want segregation in the schools, don't go half way" because the unarguable extension of segregationist policies in the education meant racially separate staffs, "from principal down."⁴²

To the extent, however, that several African American petitions and demands are framed as conditional—"if" black children are in separate schools, "in view of" ongoing segregation, and so forth—the question must be raised whether, in the absence of "prescribed" segregation, African Americans would so ardently have sought black teachers for their schools. In this regard, when, in 1875, the U.S. Congress passed the much debated Civil Rights Bill but deleted the controversial clause many interpreted as banning segregated schools, did this signal to African American communities that it was simply no use to fight for integrated education and that they should proceed to make the best of a bad situation?⁴³

The latter question can be easily rejected. African American demands for African American teachers predate the Reconstruction period, and it was more the case that by the early to mid-1870s and thereafter, a combination of factors fueled the movement and gave it added impetus: (a) mounting African American impatience as urban school systems in the South slowly took shape and a variety of obvious educational needs for black schools—including overcrowded

conditions, better facilities, and black teachers—were ignored; (b) the indisputable presence of qualified black teacher candidates; (c) the political pressure these candidates, along their families and communities, engendered in urban areas, particularly before the 1890s disfranchisement drives; and (d) the sense that the issue was exceedingly consequential (both symbolically and functionally), just, and both “logical” and “winnable.”

It is difficult to determine, with any measure of full confidence, the position of African Americans in the South on issues of integration or segregation. Most probably would not have been as direct as the individual who, arguing against the placement of the young novice white teachers in the New Orleans black schools, remarked in his letter to the *Crisis*, “there ought to be no semblance of social equality in our schools.”⁴⁴ But then again, it was not completely uncommon for some African Americans to make similar statements that over a century seem to be phrased in overly compromising language. In fact, given the context of the times and the white southern mania against black people seeking “social equality,” some African Americans often framed their support for all-black institutions as opposition to “social equality”; whites could not enjoy a victory if they denied African Americans something that African Americans did not want. As one black man frankly stated (when interviewed by a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1887) while circulating a petition for black teachers,

We do not want social equality with the whites, whether they are from the North or South. We do not believe in it. We want our own people to manage our affairs, and we want to establish our own circles in society and in schools and in relations. We will come to that finally, and the sooner we do it the better it will be for both races. A number of colored ladies gave a supper some time ago, and expected a splendid time. When asked about it, one of them said, “we had a right good time, and would have had a better time if some white preachers had not been there.”⁴⁵

V.P. Franklin, largely through an analysis of the hearings of the U.S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor in the early 1880s, presents considerable supporting documentation for his assertion that “Separate educational facilities were preferred by southern blacks, but they expected these facilities to be equal in quality to that provided at public expense for whites.”⁴⁶ This interpretation is relatively consistent with documents and accounts from the state constitutional conventions in the late 1860s, which are somewhat more equivocal but tend to go in the same direction. No doubt, there was strong unanimity of African American opinion against all forms of state-sanctioned de jure segregation. But that does not mean that the demand for black teachers in black schools was necessarily seen as contradictory. In North Carolina, a black delegate at the state’s constitutional convention, in arguing against an attempt to adopt a mandatory segregation clause, illustrated what seems to have been the consensus opinion among the African American participants at the several

conventions, explaining, too, the significance of the drive for black teachers in the development of his opinions:

I do not believe that it is good for our children to eat and drink daily the sentiment that they are naturally inferior to the whites, which they do in three-fourths of all the schools where they have white teachers. . . . I shall always do all what I can to have colored teachers for colored schools. This will necessitate separate schools as a matter of course, wherever it is possible, not by written law, but by mutual consent and the law of intent. For this reason I am opposed to putting it in the organic law. Make this distinction in your organic law and in many places you will have good white schools at the expense of the whole people, while the colored people will have none or but little worse than none.⁴⁷

A fair interpretation of the available evidence seems to support a point of view that many historians have overlooked: that is, although a certain portion of black communities in the South worried that calls for black teachers were “double-barreled” and that “there was separation enough,”⁴⁸ a more substantial portion took the position, “We don’t like it when *you* enact legislation to segregate *us*, but we reserve, through our right to self-determination, the prerogative to choose to organize self-help endeavors *of our own and for ourselves*, activities for our mutual benefit and which convey no stigma against others.” Included within these broad parameters was public schooling, though it should be noted that demands for greater African American representation in church hierarchies and for black faculty in private denominational as well as land-grant colleges and universities in the South was also strong.⁴⁹ Thus, any interpretation that hints, as Rabinowitz argues, that African Americans “accommodated themselves to the system of segregated schools” misses the point and neglects to consider that at least certain segments in African American communities could assert clear and overriding benefits to having black teachers in black schools while still decrying either segregated schools themselves and/or de jure segregation in other forms of southern life.

African American teachers for African American schools were the centerpiece of the black political agenda for education in the urban South. No other portion of that agenda was as vigorously or as consistently pursued until the salary equalization movement of the 1930s and 1940s, and even that drive seldom took on the grassroots character of black teacher campaigns. The importance of these campaigns was exemplified in Charleston, where the African American community was willing to go to extreme lengths in their determination to right historic grievances. The victories achieved were far more than “half a loaf.” In Charleston and elsewhere, the demands for black teachers in black schools encompassed the practicalities and visions of African American self-determination and autonomy in a racialized context in which the “future of the race” and the perceived pedagogical and social needs of black children converged.

NOTES

1. Septima Poinsette Clark, *Echo in My Soul* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), 60-61.
2. Mamie Garvin Fields with Karen Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places* (New York: Free Press, 1983), 45.
3. Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf: The Shift from White to Black Teachers in the Negro Schools of the Urban South, 1865-1890," *Journal of Southern History* 40 (November 1974): 565-94; *Atlanta Constitution*, June 18, 1887, 7.
4. Kathleen Berkeley, "The Politics of Black Education in Memphis, Tennessee, 1868-1881," in David N. Plank and Rick Ginsberg, ed., *Southern Cities, Southern Schools: Public Education in the Urban South* (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 199-211, footnote 33, 227; David Moss Hilliard, "The Development of Public Education in Memphis, Tennessee, 1848-1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1946), 115.
5. See Alruthus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926); Martha W. Owens, "The Development of Public Schools for Negroes in Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1900" (Master's thesis, Virginia State College, 1947); "Navy Hill School," *Virginia Star*, September 8, 1877; Ann Field Alexander, "Black Protest in the New South: John Mitchell, Jr., (1863-1929) and the Richmond Planet" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1972); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951): 94-8; Charles E. Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), 16-38; *31st Annual Report of the Superintendent of the Public Schools of the City of Richmond, Virginia for the Scholastic Year Ending July 31, 1900* (Richmond, VA: Clyde W. Saunders, 1901), 34-5.
6. *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1887, 7; Walter Bell (compiled), *Personnel Directory, 1870-1900* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Public Schools, 1973): unpaginated; Marcia Elaine Turner-Jones, "A Political Analysis of Black Educational History: Atlanta, 1865-1943" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1982), 35-44; Philip Racine, "Atlanta's Schools: A History of the Public School System, 1869-1955" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1969), 14, 35-7; Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," passim; David N. Plank and Marcia Turner, "Changing Patterns in Black School Politics: Atlanta, 1872-1973," *American Journal of Education* 95 (August 1987): 589, 590-3. Racine and Plank and Turner give the 1874 date as marking the first petition in Atlanta calling for African American teachers; Rabinowitz mentions a petition in 1873.
7. On the Redeemers return and retrenchment in educational funding, see Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (1934; rpt. New York: Octagon, 1966), 58-95; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 51-63. Particularly caught in the pinch were the remnants of the white northern aid societies. As one white veteran of the aid societies in Raleigh wrote to the governor in North Carolina in 1877, "there was an attempt made by certain of the colored people to throw out all the northern teachers from my school . . . and to put all colored teachers in." Quoted in Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," 580. These issues also caused considerable tensions in Memphis. See Berkeley, "The Politics of Black Education," 199-211.
8. See *Freedmen's Schools and Textbooks*, Vol. 1, John W. Alvord, *Semi-Annual Reports on Schools for Freedmen, Numbers 1-10, January, 1866-July 1870* (New York: AMS, 1980); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 207; Robert C. Morris, *Reading, Writing, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 91; Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), 127-8.
9. In 1915, five black men and ten black women were hired to supplant white teachers at the school, the name of which was changed to Armstrong High School in 1909 in honor of the founder of Hampton Institute. See C. A. Lindsay, "A Brief History of the Armstrong High School, Richmond, Virginia," *Virginia Teachers Bulletin* 7 (November 1930): 8-9.
10. W.T.B. Williams, "Colored Public Schools in Southern Cities," in *Ninth Annual Report of the Hampton Negro Conference, 1905* (Hampton: Institute Press, 1905), 27; Vernon S. Vavrina, "The History of Public Education in the City of Baltimore, 1826-1956" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1958), 229-33; T. W. Turner, "What the Colored Teachers of Baltimore Are Doing for Their Race," *Colored American Magazine* 13 (July 1907): 33-41; Luther Jackson, "A Brief History of the Armstrong High School, Richmond, Virginia," *Virginia Teachers Bulletin* 7 (November 1930): 8-9; Bettye C. Thomas, "Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1865-1900," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71 (fall 1976): 381-91.

11. *Crisis* 5 (November 1912): 9, 22-3; Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991), 206. See also, *Crisis* 3 (December 1911): 54.
12. See C. W. Birnie, "Education of the Negro in Charleston, South Carolina, Prior to the Civil War," *Journal of Negro History* 12 (January 1927): 13-21; Luther Jackson, "The Educational Efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau and the Freedmen's Aid Societies in South Carolina, 1862-1872," *Journal of Negro History* 8 (January 1923): 1-40.
13. Burchill R. Moore, "A History of the Negro Public Schools of Charleston, South Carolina, 1867-1942" (Master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1942), 8-9, 12; *Yearbook* (City of Charleston, 1886), 192; Edmund L. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, & Race Relations: Charleston's Avery Normal Institute* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 53, 113, 125; Walter B. Hill, "Family, Life, and Work Culture: Black Charleston, South Carolina, 1880-1910" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1989), 307; Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places*, 23-4, 42. Drago mentions that the second black teacher in the system along with Cruikshank was Martha C. Gadsen, an Avery graduate, class unspecified, while both Hill and Fields mention Alston, who was, according to Hill, an Avery graduate class of 1894. Cruikshank, said by Fields to be a sixth-grade teacher in the early 1890s, remained at the school until her death in 1932.
14. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 126; Hill, "Black Charleston," 308-9.
15. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 244, 1908-1913, February 7, 1912, 361-2.
16. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, June 4, 1913, 69.
17. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, February 6, 1914, 156-70.
18. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 127. See also I. A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 48.
19. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, April 5, 1916, 341, 353.
20. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, April 3, 1918, 493-4.
21. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 175.
22. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, June 5, 1918, 506.
23. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, December 4, 1919 and January 9, 1919, 539, 556.
24. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, January 19, 1919, 558.
25. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, February 3, 1919, 560-1.
26. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, March 5, 1919, 556-69. See also Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 653, 1919-1924, June 5, 1919, 3. Some twenty-seven black teachers took the competitive exam held on May 24.
27. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, April 21, 1919, 581-2. *Yearbook* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1919), 400.
28. Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books of the School Commissioners, Box 603, 1913-1919, May 7, 1919, 587.
29. Box 605, Board Minutes of Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, 1919-1924: June 5, 1919, 3; October 1, 1919, 50; Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 127, 175; *Yearbook*, City of Charleston, 400; *Yearbook, City of Charleston, 1920* (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1919), 435.
30. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 174-5; "Colored Teachers in Charleston Schools," *Crisis* 22 (June 1921): 58-60; Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 158; John F. Potts, Sr., *A History of the Palmetto Education Association* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1978), 37. Miller brought to the campaign impressive political credentials: school commissioner in Beaufort county, 1872; served terms in the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1876-1879 and in 1894-1896; elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1890-1891; first president of state's black land-grant institution, the State

Colored Agricultural and Mechanical College at Orangeburg, from 1896-1911; a founding member and second president of the state black teachers' association, 1904-1906.

31. "Colored Teachers in Charleston Schools," 58-9; Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 175. On the dispute with DuBois, see Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1970).

32. Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 131, 175; Clark, *Echo in My Soul*, 60-61.

33. "Colored Teachers in Charleston Schools," 59-60; Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, 175-7, quote on 177; Moore, "A History of the Negro Public Schools of Charleston," 41; *Yearbook*, City of Charleston, 1921, 398; Box 605, Board Minutes of Charleston City Board of School Commissioners, 1919-1924: June 3, 1920, 122-4; July 7, 1920, 135; January 4, 1921, 165; *Yearbook*, City of Charleston, 1922 (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1922), 453.

34. Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," 579

35. "Colored Teachers in Charleston Schools," 58.

36. Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places*, 42-5.

37. Rabinowitz, "Half a Loaf," 278; Alexander, "Black Protest in the New South," 56; *Richmond Dispatch*, November 6, 1883, quoted in Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia*, 123.

38. See R. R. Wright, "The Possibilities of the Negro Teachers," *AME Church Review* 10 (April 1894): 459-70; Josephine Silone Yates, "Lincoln Institute: An Ideal Professional Training School for Negro Teachers," *Colored American Magazine* 12 (January 1907): 26-31; Lena Jackson, "Intelligent Leadership," *The Broadcaster*, 9, no. 2 (January 1937): 29; Turner, "What the Colored Teachers of Baltimore Are Doing," 36, 41; Roscoe Conkling Bruce, "The Stimulus of Negro Teaching," *Colored American Magazine* 17 (July 1909): 13-4.

39. By 1871, there were an estimated eleven colleges and universities intended for African Americans and sixty-one Normal schools. By 1891-1892, the U.S. Commissioner of Education's report listed twenty-five colleges and universities for African Americans, with 791 collegiate-level students, and thirty-eight Black Normal Schools, with 3,551 students enrolled in the teacher-training programs. See Morris, *Reading, Riting, and Reconstruction*, 160; U.S. Commissioner of Education Report, 1891-1992, 864-5, 1234-7.

40. Hilliard, "The Development of Public Education," 148.

41. William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 42.

42. On the "new paternalism" and the dilemma regarding segregation, see George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 217-22.

43. Rabinowitz forwards this interpretation; see "Half a Loaf," 579. For comprehensive discussions of the school clause controversy, see Alfred H. Kelley, "The Congressional Controversy over School Segregation, 1867-1875," *American Historical Review* 64 (April 1959): 537-63; William Preston Vaughn, *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865-1877* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974), 119-41.

44. *Crisis* 5 (November 1912): 9.

45. *Atlanta Constitution*, June 16, 1887, 5.

46. V. P. Franklin, *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African-American Resistance* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill, 1984), 149-85, quote on 183.

47. Quoted in David Tyack and Robert Lowe, "The Constitutional Moment: Reconstruction and Black Education in the South, 1867-1954," in Tyack, Thomas James, and Aaron Benavot, eds., *Law and the Shaping of Public Education, 1785-1954* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 147.

48. Minutes of the American Association of Educators of Colored Youth, Session of 1894, held at Baltimore, Maryland, July 24 to 27, 1894, 21-7.

49. On these issues, see, for example, James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 262-95.